

THE KEY TO SOLVING CHURCH PROBLEMS: EXALT GOD RATHER THAN MAN

Commentary on the Book of 1 Corinthians

by Paul G. Apple, April 2009 (rev. July 2024)

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE OF CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION BRINGS GOD'S WISDOM TO BEAR ON THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS THAT ARE ROOTED IN MAN'S PRIDE AND SELFISHNESS

“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord . . .” (1:31)
“So then, let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you . . .
And you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.” (3:21,23)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Preaching Christ ... to center attention on Jesus Christ
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

GENERAL:

Chuck Swindoll: First Corinthians contains a frank discussion of the church and the issues that impacted real people in the first century. The Corinthian church was corroded with sin on a variety of fronts, so Paul provided an important model for how the church should handle the problem of sin in its midst. Rather than turn a blind eye toward relational division and all kinds of immorality, he addressed the problems head on. In his bold call to purity within the Corinthian church, Paul made it clear that he was willing to risk the good opinion of some in order to help cleanse the sin that tainted the church. . .

Corinth was a large, international metropolis, filled with people from different backgrounds. Idol worship to gods such as Aphrodite was particularly prominent in the city, though Corinth contained numerous temptations far beyond her temples. In this sense, Corinth was very much like a modern urban area, containing unending opportunities to engage in sinful behavior without any apparent consequences.

Such a community clearly had a negative influence on the Corinthian church. But notice that Paul's instruction to the believers was not to retreat from their city. This was not Paul's vision for the church then or now. Instead, he directed us to live out our commitment to Christ ever more faithfully in the midst of nonbelievers. Paul expected that we Christians would shine our light into the dark places of their world by worshiping in a unified community that was accountable to one another. He expected that we would settle our problems internally, that we would encourage one another in the pursuit of purity, and that we would strive together by holding tightly to the hope of our bodily resurrection to come.

Andrew Naselli: God's people must mature in purity and unity. The church in Corinth (the people, not the place) needed to mature in purity to counteract the Greco-Roman society's worldly values, and they needed to mature in unity to solve conflicts within the church. All the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians stem from embracing Roman society's impure values, and embracing those impure values results in disunity in the church. So correcting the impurity is the way to correct the disunity. Another way to say that God's holy people must mature in purity and unity is that they must mature in love.

Dan Nighswander: Life in Corinth in 50 CE was hectic. The busyness of a prosperous port, a productive agricultural region, and a manufacturing center drew a multitude of people from many parts of the Roman Empire. With the added attractions of the Isthmian Games, an active artistic community, and the practices of most religions known in the Mediterranean region, the city overflowed with activity, energy, and diversity.

There were a few Christians among its citizens—new Christians. They had been introduced to Jesus by an itinerant missionary, whose name was Paul. Eighteen months after his arrival, Paul moved on, and the believers in Corinth tried to carry on with their newfound faith. They were helped by occasional correspondence with Paul and by other

visiting teachers. They were influenced by many other factors: experiences with other religions, social conventions and expectations, personal ambitions, economics, interpersonal relationships—all the stuff of life. Their understanding of Christian faith and their practice of it was flawed in many ways.

Why should we care about this stumbling assortment of Jesus-followers? First, for us who also follow Jesus, these are our people, and we are curious about them. But more urgently, we care because we and they have so much in common. Any Christians who experience division over loyalty to different leaders, any who find it hard to agree on sexual ethics or to live up to them, any who experience conflict between their theological convictions and their social context, any who debate gender roles or worship styles, any who live with spiritually arrogant fellow church members—all these will find common ground with believers in Corinth. . .

First Corinthians is a **letter**. It is not a narrative, though it contains pieces of narrative. It is not poetry, though it includes sections of poetry. It is not law, though there are some legalistic injunctions and discussions of legal matters in it. It is not a systematic theology or a philosophical essay, though it is deeply infused with theological convictions and shaped by philosophical views. It is better not to call this letter an “epistle,” as that now uncommon term suggests something outside of normal correspondence. It is simply a letter.

This fact profoundly shapes our approach to understanding 1 Corinthians. It tells us that this is (1) a unit of communication (2) in written form (3) that was written in specific circumstances (4) as part of an ongoing relationship (5) between two parties.

Richard Hays: To discern how the word comes to us through this ancient letter, we must be alert to discovering imaginative analogies between the world of the letter and the world we inhabit. While recognizing that 1 Corinthians is not written to us, we learn to read it as though it were. We project ourselves imaginatively into the faraway life of the Corinthian congregation and thereby learn to see our own lives in strange and challenging new ways. The act of preaching (or teaching) such a text in the church requires us to create a metaphorical overlap between then and now and to listen expectantly for God’s truth. Since it is God’s truth for which we listen, however, our work of interpretation must never be confused with mere imaginative cleverness on our part; we can read someone else’s mail as God’s word to us only because God has chosen—oddly, we might think—to convey ongoing guidance to his people through the finite medium of this specific text. So the church confesses, and so we preach. **Interpretation, then, always involves a dialectical process of distancing ourselves from the text enough to see its foreignness and then allowing the text to draw near again and claim us.**

Gordon Fee: Thus, the picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were almost certainly at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate

amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient. This is what this letter attempts to do.

Daniel Akin: Church life can be messy business. It's messy because the church is filled with people, which means it is filled with sinners. There are no perfect people or perfect churches. Everyone has flaws, defects, and weaknesses. Perhaps no church exhibited this more than the church in Corinth in the first century. Although its members had been sanctified, called to be saints, enriched in grace and gifts, and called into fellowship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ (1:1-9), the congregation was a carnal, sinful mess. It was a mess theologically, practically, and morally. People were divided, since the cult of personality had taken over (1:10-17). Sexual immorality was being tolerated (5:1-13; 6:12-20). Believers were suing believers in civil court (6:1-11). There was confusion about God's design for marriage and singleness (7:1-40), Christian liberty (8:1-13), attire for worship (11:2-16), the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), spiritual gifts—especially the gift of tongues (chs. 12-14)—and the doctrine of bodily resurrection and its implications for the resurrection of Jesus (ch. 15). This, then, is not the kind of church that testifies to the lost world about the power and beauty of the gospel. No, as **Warren Wiersbe** well says, the church at Corinth was “a defiled church, a divided church, a disgraced church!” (*Be Wise*, 25).

Roy Ciampa: 1 Corinthians has much to say to the modern world. No book in the New Testament, even Paul's letter to the Romans, does more to explain the grace of God, the lordship of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The contribution of the letter to the practical knowledge of God is immense. Not only is its ethics searching and rigorous, but its theology, especially of the cross, announces the end of the world as we know it. In addition to supplying concrete answers to many problems which have comparable manifestations today, on subjects as diverse as leadership, preaching, pluralism, sexuality, and worship, 1 Corinthians models how to approach the complexity of Christian living with the resources of the Old Testament and the example and teaching of Jesus. Above all, it shows the importance of asking, How does the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which envelop the letter in chapters 1 and 15, teach us to live?

Nonetheless, **John Calvin** was right to describe 1 Corinthians as “no less difficult than valuable.” It is, in fact, one of Paul's most difficult letters. Many factors weigh against a confident and appropriate reading of this ancient text. It is far removed from our world in terms of language, geography, economics, social customs, and religious practice. It talks with little or no explanation of human wisdom, law courts, prostitution, meat markets, and pagan worship, not to mention head coverings and baptism for the dead. It apparently treats an assortment of topics in no particular order. It carries forward a conversation, but what the other parties were saying is no longer available. To make matters worse, far from arriving at a consensus, modern biblical scholarship throws up rival interpretations of the letter, and an arsenal of critical methods each boasts of its superior potency.

To read the letter for all its worth we need to answer three questions, which in turn make up the main sections of the introduction to this commentary:

- (1) What were Corinth and the church of God in Corinth like?
- (2) Who was Paul and what were his aims in writing to the Corinthians? And
- (3) how then should we read 1 Corinthians?

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

Dr. Daniel Wallace:

I think that Dr. Daniel Wallace does an excellent of providing a background study so I am going to refer you to his work.

http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1203

Hampton Keathley IV:

Introduction:

Corinth was a strategically located Roman city on the main land route between East and West and was the crossroads for several sea routes. Corinth was famous for its intellectual and material prosperity and was honored with being the capitol of Achaia. It also became famous for its corruption. As Guthrie says, “Its name became a byword for profligacy.”

Paul began his ministry in Corinth on his second missionary journey under much opposition (**Acts 18:6-17**), but he was able to convert several influential people and consequently remained for about one and a half years in Corinth.

He left Corinth and traveled to Ephesus. The city’s corruption had its influence on the church and Paul heard of the problems and divisions in the church. It is from Ephesus that he wrote and sent this letter to Corinth in about 53 A.D.

Chuck Swindoll: Paul’s **authorship** of this epistle is widely accepted in the scholarly community, though it was not the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian people (see **1 Corinthians 5:9**). We know that the Corinthians misunderstood an earlier letter from Paul (**5:10–11**), though that letter has not survived. Therefore, it is Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians that we know as 1 Corinthians—the first letter to the Corinthians that God inspired.

Four years prior to writing the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, the apostle had spent eighteen months in Corinth, so he was intimately familiar with the church and many of its congregants. The recipients of the letter must have understood the letter’s significance, not only to their own circumstances but for the church worldwide. In AD 95, Clement, the bishop of Rome, wrote a letter of his own to the Corinthians in which he invoked the authority of Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians. Only a few decades after its origin, this letter to the Corinthians had traveled outside of Corinth and was considered authoritative beyond its initial Corinthian context.

Paul had been in Ephesus for more than two years on his third missionary journey when he received a disturbing report of quarreling within the Corinthian church, a report he received from people associated with one of its members, Chloe (**1 Corinthians 1:11**). The church he had founded so recently (**Acts 18:1–17**) had already developed deep divisions, a situation that required immediate action. Paul penned his letter in AD 55, just as he was planning to leave Ephesus for Macedonia (**1 Corinthians 16:5–8**).

Mark Taylor: Paul's contentious relationship with the Corinthians produced the most extensive correspondence between an apostle and a local church preserved in the New Testament. As a result we know more about the inner workings of this Christian community than any other and possess a rich storehouse of Paul's theology, a thoroughgoing application of the gospel to a litany of real life situations, such as the wisdom of the cross and church leadership, the perils of sexual immorality and idolatry, marriage and divorce, evangelism and worship, and the greatest enemy of all, death. In 1 Corinthians we encounter a church still beguiled by the wisdom of the world, and we see Paul's firm commitment to mold their thinking and behavior into conformity with who they are in Christ, those set apart from the world to be God's holy people. Paul unashamedly reminds them of his manner of life in Christ and calls them to reject worldly values and to replace them with the values of the cross. In a nutshell, Paul teaches them (and us) how to live in this present world in community with other believers and in relation to unbelievers in light of the age to come. In 1 Corinthians we learn as much about Paul, if not more, than we do about the Corinthians as he fulfilled his apostolic mission to bring the light of the gospel to the Gentiles.

John MacArthur: This epistle was most likely written in the first half of A.D. 55 from Ephesus (**16:8, 9, 19**) while Paul was on his third missionary journey. The apostle intended to remain on at Ephesus to complete his 3 year stay (**Acts 20:31**) until Pentecost (May/June) A.D. 55 (**16:8**). Then he hoped to winter (A.D. 55–56) at Corinth (**16:6; Acts 20:2**). His departure for Corinth was anticipated even as he wrote (**4:19; 11:34; 16:8**).

The city of Corinth was located in southern Greece, in what was the Roman province of Achaia, ca. 45 miles W from Athens. This lower part, the Peloponnesus, is connected to the rest of Greece by a 4-mile-wide isthmus, which is bounded on the E by the Saronic Gulf and on the W by the Gulf of Corinth. Corinth is near the middle of the isthmus and is prominently situated on a high plateau. For many centuries, all N-S land traffic in that area had to pass through or near this ancient city. Since travel by sea around the Peloponnesus involved a 250 mile voyage that was dangerous and obviously time consuming, most captains carried their ships on skids or rollers across the isthmus directly past Corinth. Corinth understandably prospered as a major trade city, not only for most of Greece but for much of the Mediterranean area, including North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor. A canal across the isthmus was begun by the emperor Nero during the first century A.D., but was not completed until near the end of the nineteenth century.

The Isthmian games, one of the two most famous athletic events of that day (the other being the Olympic games), was hosted by Corinth, causing more people-traffic. Even by

the pagan standards of its own culture, Corinth became so morally corrupt that its very name became synonymous with debauchery and moral depravity. To “corinthianize” came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery. In **6:9, 10**, Paul lists some of the specific sins for which the city was noted and which formerly had characterized many believers in the church there. Tragically, some of the worst sins were still found among some church members. One of those sins, incest, was condemned even by most pagan Gentiles (**5:1**).

Like most ancient Greek cities, Corinth had an acropolis (literally, “a high city”), which rose 2,000 feet and was used both for defense and for worship. The most prominent edifice on the acropolis was a temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Some 1,000 priestesses, who were “religious” prostitutes, lived and worked there and came down into the city in the evening to offer their services to male citizens and foreign visitors.

John Gregson: The city of Corinth, Greece, was the chief city of Achaia proper; it was located on an isthmus between Aegean and Ionian Seas fifty miles west of Athens. Corinth was a thriving commercial city and a very wealthy one. It was notorious for its luxury and moral corruption, particularly in the worship of Aphrodite. In the classical Greek *to corinthiazesthai* (to act or behave like a Corinthian) meant to practice fornication which was polite Greek for "go to the Devil." The Temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinthus (a mountain 1,500 feet in elevation above the city) had a thousand consecrated prostitutes (*hetroduli*). Its citizens were interested in literature and the arts, especially rhetoric and philosophy. Paul lists some of the city's characteristic sins-- fornication, adultery, effeminacy, homosexuality, stealing, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling (abusive speech) and swindling (**6:9, 10**). . .

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in response to an inquiry that they had made earlier. In fact, Paul's first letter to the church was apparently lost, and it was necessary to write I Corinthians to answer some questions the members wanted answered. Apparently a committee of three, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (**16:17**), had arrived from the church with questions and problems within the church. The problems addressed in the letter were as follows: partisan factions (**1:10 - 4:17**); incest (**5:1 - 13**); seeking justice in law-suits before pagan judges; (**Chapter 6**); marriage and celibacy (**Chapter 7**); food offered to idols (**Chapter 8**); the veiling of women (**11:1 - 16**); the Lord's Supper, (**11:17 - 34**); spiritual gifts (**Chapters 12-14**); the resurrection (**Chapter 15**), and personal greetings and concluding exhortations (**Chapter 16**). Some "of the household of Chloe," had brought an alarming report about some factions and strife in the church as well as the prevalence of fornication heading up in an outstanding case of incest. **Morris** quotes **James Moffat** who wrote, "The Church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was in the Church, as it ought not to be" (p. 25).

<http://www.geocities.com/jwgregson/cor/1corint.htm>

James Boyer: If Paul were to write a letter to the evangelical, Bible-believing churches of late twentieth century America, I believe it would be much like I Corinthians. Their world was like our world: the same thirst for intellectualism, the same permissiveness

toward moral standards, the same fascination for the spectacular. And their church was like our churches: proud, affluent, materialistic, fiercely eager for intellectual and social acceptance by the world, doctrinally orthodox but morally and practically conforming to the world.

Andrew Naselli: The city of Corinth was infamous for its **wickedness**. Pagans in Corinth valued celebrities (especially impressive public speakers), status, greed, immoral sex, flaunting of personal rights at the expense of others, and idolatry. Those are the kinds of sins Paul addresses in this letter. It is not surprising that the church in Corinth was still embracing the city's worldly values to some degree, because the church there consisted of new believers – those who had believed for three years at most – who had grown up in that pagan context. Paul had founded the church (**Acts 18**) and cared deeply about its commitment to the gospel and Christian living.

The city of Corinth was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC but was rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar. At the time Paul wrote this letter, the city was still controlled by Rome. Corinth soon became a major city in the Roman Empire for the following reasons:

- It was the capital city of the province of Achaia and thus the residence of the governor,
- it was a prosperous city because of its location between two gulfs;
- it was a strategic city because it was located on the main land route between the north and the south,
- and it was a large city with nearly 800,000 residents, including a large Jewish population.

Charles Hodge: Paul's relation to the church in Corinth was in some respects peculiar. He was not only the founder of the congregation, but he continued in the closest relation to it. It excited his solicitude, called for the wisest management, tried his patience and forbearance, rewarded him at times by signal evidence of affection and obedience, and filled him with hopes of its extended and healthful influence. His love for that church was therefore of special intensity. It was analogous to that of a father for a promising son beset with temptations, whose character combined great excellencies with great defects. The epistles to the Corinthians, therefore, reveal to us more of the personal character of the apostle than any of his other letters. They show him to us as a man, as a pastor, as a counsellor, as in conflict not only with heretics, but with personal enemies. They reveal his wisdom, his zeal, his forbearance, his liberality of principle and practice in all matters of indifference, his strictness in all matters of right and wrong, his humility, and perhaps above all, his unwearied activity and wonderful endurance.

Kay Arthur: Sin abounded in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth...The Corinthians were intrigued by Greek philosophy and captivated by the disciplined training and athletic events held at the Isthmus. At one time the city was home to at least 12 pagan temples. The people desperately needed to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, the One crucified for sinners. The worship ceremonies carried out by a thousand temple prostitutes connected with the temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love) bred blatant immorality throughout Corinth....Prostitutes openly plied their "wares," and meat markets thrived on

sales from the sacrifices offered in the temples. The Corinthians ate well, satisfied their sexual urges without condemnation, flirted with the wisdom of men, and did all they could to keep their bodies as beautiful as those of the Greek gods. They loved to listen to great orators. For the 250,000 citizens (not slaves) there were almost two slaves per person. What more did Corinth need? Freedom! Freedom from sin and death. God met that need by blocking Paul at every hand on his second missionary journey (cf **Acts 16:6, 7, 8**) until he received the Macedonian call "*Come and help us.*" (**Acts 16:9**) After establishing the Corinthian church, Paul eventually went to Ephesus, where he stayed for three years. From there he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian believers, who so desperately needed help and correction. It was sometime between A.D. 52 and A. D. 56.

In summary, Corinth was a city with a prevalent pagan influence and a plethora of perversions (**1 Cor 6:9, 10**) but despite these apparent obstacles to the Gospel, the Spirit enabled Paul to plant a church in the center of vice and idolatry on his Second Missionary journey (**1 Cor 3:6, 10; 4:15; Acts 18:1–7**).

David Garland: Few Christians could have been unaffected by the dominant culture surrounding them, even if they assimilated its values only subliminally. Most, if not all, of the problems that Paul addresses were hatched from the influence of this setting. Values that were antithetical to the message of the cross – particularly those related to honor and status so basic to the Greco-Roman social system, in which power manifesting itself in ruthlessness and self-advancement is thought to be the only sensible course – percolated into the church, destroying its fellowship and its Christian witness as some members sought to balance civic norms with Christian norms. Secular wisdom – which reflected the code of conduct of the social elites, who jostled one another for power, prestige, and popularity – had its hold on members of the church. Its values played havoc on Paul's attempt to build a community based on love, selflessness, and the equal worth of every member. Corinthian society was riddled by competitive individualism, and this ethos spilled over into the relationships in the church as wealthier members competed for followers. Socially pretentious and self-important individuals appear to have dominated the church. It is likely that they flaunted their symbols of status, wisdom, influence, and family pedigree and looked down on others of lesser status. They appear to have wanted to preserve the social barriers of class and status that permeated their social world but were nullified in the cross of Christ. For some, the Christian community had become simply another arena to compete for status according to the societal norms.

PURPOSE OF WRITING

David Malick:

Message Statement: Out of a heart of love, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to cease exalting themselves in accordance with natural wisdom, and to limit themselves in accordance with the wisdom of God – the Crucifixion.

Hampton Keathley IV:

Paul's purposes for writing the Corinthians were several.

- His first purpose was to deal with several moral problems and the divisions that had formed as people had divided into fan-clubs and were proclaiming themselves followers of Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ (1:10).
- His second reason was to deal with several questions that had been asked in a letter the Corinthians had sent to him (7:1).
- A third purpose that appears throughout the book is Paul's defense of his apostolic authority.

All of these issues can be related to a problem with pride, and thus in 1:27-29 we have what may be the thesis statement of the book:

... but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

Paul will develop this idea in several different ways to deal with their root problem of pride. They had their eyes on external things like eloquence, social status, ascetic practices, etc. and Paul explains that those things mean nothing in God's kingdom.

Anthony Thiselton: The content of our epistle makes it clear that Christians in Corinth still carried over into their Christian existence many of the cultural traits that characterized their pre-Christian culture. This is almost always the case in a diversity of cultures. No doubt when he thanks God quite genuinely for their gifts of "speech," which could sometimes but not always be wise speech and includes "all kinds of knowledge" (1:5), Paul has in mind among other things their potential for traveling to other cities of the empire with the gospel, and communicating it with initiative and articulate persuasion. But there were also serious reverse sides. Of these we may mention especially the problems and destructive tendencies set in motion by

- (a) a drive toward competitiveness, self-achievement, and self-promotion;
- (b) an attitude of self-sufficiency, self-congratulation, and autonomy and entitlement to indulge freedoms; and
- (c) the tendency to overvalue gifts of "knowledge," "wisdom," and "freedom" over and above more basic gifts in everyday life such as love and respect for others.

Paul Gardner: In our view Paul confronts a church of converts both from Judaism and from paganism. However, both groups lived in the same city and worked in the same business, social, and religious environment. That environment provided ample pressure on all to compromise in many areas of life. The **seeking after knowledge and sophistry**, and the **desire for community status**, belonging, and acceptance formed a formidable temptation. Without much deliberation, the wisdom and knowledge of the Christian faith, with their background in the Old Testament and their prominence in the grace-gifts, could quickly be accommodated to pagan values. As society sought markers and indicators of status and specially **prized knowledge and wisdom**, so did some of the Corinthian

Christians. The only answer from Paul's perspective had to be a return to the gospel he had preached with its center in Christ crucified and the living out of the love that Jesus had modeled.

In this commentary, and again in common with several commentators, it is suggested therefore that the main underlying issue that Paul addresses concerns the **possession of wisdom and knowledge**. We will argue that the Corinthians regarded these as spiritual gifts and gave them a significance and importance that caused **spiritual arrogance** among some. In one way or another this gave rise to much of what Paul addresses. Paul's response is to **return to the humbling centrality of the gospel message** in which Christ is preached as the crucified Lord. In the end, while Corinthian arrogance "*puffs up*," it is only love that will reflect true commitment to the crucified Lord (**8:1; 13:1–13**). It will be seen that much of this epistle concerns standing in the community and before God in one form or another. For Paul, pride should have no place in this. Questions of status are not to be answered by appeal to God's gifts of wisdom, knowledge, or any other. Humble worship of the Lord and the humble building up of the church are what matters.

American Baptist University: What does Paul's pointed comment in **1 Cor 4:18-19** "*Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power*" indicate about his general attitude towards the Corinthians and the Corinthians' attitude towards him at the time of writing? Based on this how would you interpret Paul's general purpose in writing his letter?

Paul's comment indicates that he believes that the Corinthians or at least some of them are resistant to him and for this reason are not likely to be open to what he has to say in his letter. One should interpret what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians on the assumption that he believes that his readership is hostile to him personally. For this reason, Paul would see his general purpose as overcoming the hostility that has developed since he was last in Corinth.

<http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/NTIntro/1Cor.htm>

Leon Morris: Paul's purpose, then, in writing this Epistle, is principally to set right disorders which the Corinthians took lightly, but which he regarded as grave sins. Secondly, he wrote to answer some questions put to him. Thirdly, he wrote to give some doctrinal teaching, particularly on the resurrection.

Ray Stedman: **1 Corinthians 1:9** is the key verse of First Corinthians. The rest of the letter centers around it. It is a statement that God had called them to a very important relationship, and, by implication, here at the very beginning of this letter we learn that this is the reason for all of the problems in the Corinthian church. **They had not understood the implications of their calling**, and the relationship they personally and individually had with Jesus Christ himself.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

Paul Gardner: Apart from the obviously practical messages of the letter, it is also replete with episodes of **great theological depth**. It contains Paul's longest exposition on the **nature of love** as the marker par excellence of true faith, through to his longest theological treatment of the **resurrection**. Above all, perhaps, the reader cannot fail to see how underlying everything that Paul writes is his humble and total commitment to a *theologia crucis*, "to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2). Communicating and upholding this gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is Paul's "compulsion," laid upon him by God (9:16–17). Here he expounds and applies that gospel, sometimes even drawing upon his own Christian experience to illustrate the implications of its content for the individual believer and for the church. His application of the gospel to the church's life is offered at times with joy and encouragement but also at times with strong admonition, as he reveals his grave concern for a people who have easily been drawn back into the "wisdom of this age" (2:6).

Richard Hays: Christology -- Because Paul's letter to the Corinthians deals primarily with their **behavioral problems** rather than with doctrine per se, the central place of christology in Paul's thought can sometimes be overlooked in studies of the letter. Yet from beginning to end Paul interprets every issue in light of "*the testimony of Christ*" (1:6). Paul's gospel is fundamentally the story of Jesus crucified and raised from the dead (2:2; 11:23–26; 15:3–5), and he insists that the identity of the community must be shaped with reference to this story. God has redefined "*wisdom*" through Christ's death and resurrection (1:30), and the meaning of love is exemplified in him (8:11; 11:1). The christology of the letter does not emphasize Jesus' death as a means of atonement for sin; rather, Paul highlights Jesus' role as the initiator of a new apocalyptic age, the precursor of a new humanity set free from death (15:20–28). The exact relation between Jesus Christ and God the Father is not spelled out in 1 Corinthians; some passages express Christ's subordination to God (3:23; 11:3; 15:28), while others link them together in the closest possible relation (8:6; 12:4–6). In any case, it is impossible to understand this letter without attending carefully to Paul's insistence that **Jesus Christ has defined the new cosmic situation in which we live and move** -- and that his self-sacrificial death defines the pattern for the life of the community. . .

The transformation of power and status through the cross. As we shall see throughout the letter, Paul repeatedly argues that the gospel overturns the world's notions of power and social standing. Those who acclaim a crucified Christ as Lord find that God has chosen what is "low and despised" in the world to "reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1:28–29). This has earth-shaking implications for the social structure of the community of Christ's people. As the body of Christ, they are linked together -- rich and poor, slave and free -- in a network of mutual love and concern. Old status distinctions no longer count "*in the Lord*," and all power relations must be reinterpreted in light of the cross. The Corinthians had some difficulty grasping this vision (e.g., 11:17–22, 27–34), but Paul insists that it is a necessary entailment of the gospel.

John MacArthur: Although the major thrust of this epistle is corrective of behavior rather than of doctrine, Paul gives seminal teaching on many doctrines that directly relate to the matters of sin and righteousness. In one way or another, wrong living always stems from wrong belief. Sexual sins for example, including divorce, are inevitably related to disobeying God's plan for marriage and the family (7:1–40). Proper worship is determined by such things as recognition of God's holy character (3:17), the spiritual identity of the church (12:12–27) and pure partaking of the Lord's Supper (11:17–34). It is not possible for the church to be edified faithfully and effectively unless believers understand and exercise their spiritual gifts (12:1 – 14:40). The importance of the doctrine of the resurrection, of course, cannot be overestimated because if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then preaching is empty and so is faith (15:13, 14).

In addition to those themes, Paul deals briefly with God's judgment of believers, the right understanding of which will produce right motives for godly living (see 3:13–15). The right understanding of idols and of false gods, in general, was to help the immature Corinthians think maturely about such things as eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols (8:1 – 11:1). The right understanding and expression of genuine, godly love was mandatory to right use of the gifts and even to right knowledge about all the things of God (13:1–13).

So Paul deals with the cross, divine wisdom and human wisdom, the work of the Spirit in illumination, carnality, eternal rewards, the transformation of salvation, sanctification, the nature of Christ, union with Him, the divine role for women, marriage and divorce, Spirit baptism, indwelling and gifting, the unity of the church in one body, the theology of love, and the doctrine of resurrection. **All these establish foundational truth for godly behavior.**

J. Sidlow Baxter: Paul as an Example

It is a superb apologetic when a Christian leader lives so close to His Lord that he can counsel his hearers not only to "Do as I say" but "Do as I do."

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Loyalty in message, method and motive, | ii. 1-5. |
| 2. Soundness in founding and building, | iii. 10-23. |
| 3. Fidelity as a trustee of saving truth, | iv. 1-6. |
| 4. Endurance of tribulations for Christ, | iv. 9-16. |
| 5. Considerateness of weaker brethren, | vi. 12, viii.13. |
| 6. Foregoing of proper rights and dues, | ix. 12-18. |
| 7. Self-denial for the saving of souls, | ix. 19-23. |
| 8. Self-discipline in body and behaviour, | ix. 27, x. 33. |
| 9. Self-restraint in public assemblies, | xiv. 18-20. |
| 10. Self-abnegation and active gratitude, | xv. 9-10. |

Gordon Fee: The future that has begun and absolutely conditions present existence still awaits its final consummation. But such a future is as certain as life itself. Again, this certainty has been guaranteed by the resurrection. Just as God raised up the Lord, so he

will raise us up (6:14; 15:1–28). Christ is the firstfruits, God’s own surety of the full harvest. When Christ comes again, not only will he raise the dead and transform the living, but by these events he will also have finally destroyed the last enemy, death itself (15:24–28, 54–57).

But neither the certain future nor the reality of eschatological existence in the present means that one has already fully arrived. Death is ours (3:22), but some still die (11:30); the present and future are ours (3:22), but the paradigm of present ethical life is our crucified Messiah (4:10–13). Thus, Christian life is paradox, apparent contradictions held together in tension. The guarantee rests not in present circumstances, but in the absolute certainty of the future that has already determined our present existence as well. The whole of our letter must be understood as flowing out of this essential framework (see on 4:1–5; 6:1–6; 7:29–31; 15:12–28, 35–38).

Related to the eschatological framework just noted is Paul’s insistence on **radical obedience to Christ** as the norm of Christian existence. If Romans and Galatians make it plain that one is not saved by way of the law, this letter makes it equally plain that the saved are expected to live out their lives in obedience to the “*commandments of God*” (7:19) and the “*law of Christ*” (9:21). If such obedience is not required for entry into faith, it is nonetheless expected as the outflow of faith.

Paul understands Christian ethics in terms of “becoming what you are,” a perspective that emerges in 1 Corinthians in a number of ways. He is never short on the imperative, but he always sets it in the context of God’s prior action on our behalf in Christ. Thus Paul commands the Corinthians to clean out the old leaven that they may become a new loaf, because in Christ our Passover they have already become a new loaf (5:7–8); they cannot go to the prostitutes because their bodies have already been set apart for Christ through his resurrection and they are already one S/spirit with him (6:14–17); they must cease acting as in their former pagan way of life or else they will not inherit the kingdom, but at the same time they are reminded that such were some of them and they are so no longer through Christ and the Spirit (6:9–11). . .

Perhaps the single greatest theological contribution of our letter to the Christian faith is Paul’s understanding of the **nature of the church**, especially in its local expression. If the gospel itself is at stake in the Corinthians’ theology and behavior, so also is its visible expression in the local community of redeemed people. The net result is more teaching on the church here than in any of Paul’s letters.

Two great images predominate. First, the local church is **God’s temple** in Corinth (3:16–17). With this imagery Paul makes several points:

- (a) As the temple of God they are expected to live as God’s alternative both to the pagan temples and to the way of life that surrounds them. Indeed, this is precisely the concern throughout so much of the letter, that there are so many gray areas that the Corinthian Christians are hardly distinguishable from the Corinth in which they live (cf. 5:1; 6:7; 10:32; 14:23).

(b) What makes them God's temple is the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst. Thus, in contrast to the mute idols that surround them, they are themselves the sanctuary of the living God by the Spirit. And when God's Spirit is manifested among them by prophetic utterance, pagans will have their hearts searched and judged and they will come to recognize that God is among his people (14:24–25).

(c) So sacred to God is his temple that those who would destroy it—as they are doing by their quarrels and worldly wisdom—will themselves be destroyed by God (3:17). This understanding of their existence as a people among whom God is powerfully present by his Spirit makes possible our understanding of 5:1–13, where the church is purified by removing the incestuous man, yet he himself will experience salvation through such an action. Apparently being removed from such a community will lead to his repentance.

Second, the church is the **body of Christ** (10:17; 11:29; 12:12–26). With this image Paul makes essentially two points:

(a) Underlying the imagery is the necessity of unity. As with the preceding image, the key to this unity is their common experience of the Spirit (12:13). Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, they are one in Christ through the Spirit. Precisely because they are one body in Christ, the rich must cease abusing the poor at the Lord's Table (11:22, 29); and those who are more visible may not say to the less visible, "we have no need of you" (12:21–26). God has so arranged the body that all the members are essential to one another.

(b) But his greater concern with this imagery is the concomitant necessity of diversity. Rather than the uniformity that the Corinthians value, Paul urges that they recognize the need for all the various manifestations of the one Spirit. Otherwise there is no body, only a monstrosity (12:15–20).

Robert Hughes: Key problems and truths:

- Wisdom and Foolishness
- Knowledge
- The Weak and the Strong
- Arrogance and Boasting
- Judge, Test and Examine
- Edification
- Authority
- World
- The Cross of Christ

Adequya: Church Discipline -- One of the least discussed issues among Christians is church discipline. Yet, one may say that one of the most important and explicit passages on church discipline in the New Testament, and particularly in the letters of Paul, is found in **1 Corinthians 5:1–13**, where he discusses the problem of an incestuous brother. Paul makes it clear that the community mediates the demands of the gospel and its reflection on the life of the group, urging the Corinthians to take appropriate disciplinary

measures. Discipline preserves the integrity of the church. Therefore, the church bears the responsibility of maintaining holiness within the body. Judgment and discipline come from the community, and so does forgiveness.

Craig Blomberg: All of the major problems in the Corinthian church can thus be viewed as stemming from one or the other of these two outworkings of dualistic thought -- either asceticism or hedonism. In the latter category naturally appear sexual immorality (**chap. 5; 6:12–20**), eating food sacrificed to idols (**chaps. 8–10**), and drunkenness at the Lord’s table (**11:17–34**), all of which indulge bodily appetites. Other alleged manifestations of freedom in Christ -- asserting one’s own rights with little regard for others -- probably belong here as well: lawsuits (**6:1–11**), flaunting social convention with respect to head coverings (**11:2–16**), and competition and chaos in the exercise of spiritual gifts (**chaps. 12–14**). In the former category clearly appear the promotion of celibacy behind **chapter 7** and the disbelief in the bodily resurrection behind **chapter 15**, which both deny the potential goodness of the body and its desires. Here too probably belong the inflated claims to knowledge and wisdom, as immaterial attributes, which exacerbated the divisions addressed in **chapters 1–4**.

From a theological point of view, this cluster of errors may be labeled an “overly realized eschatology.” “Realized eschatology” refers to the blessings of God’s kingdom that are available to believers in this age. Overly realized eschatology thus implies that the Corinthians saw all of the blessings of the age to come as available to them immediately, without an adequate appreciation of the gap that still remained between what they were and what they would be only after Christ’s return. From a behavioral point of view, we may label this phenomenon overly “triumphalist.”

STRUCTURE

Hampton Keathley IV: Outline:

I. Introduction (1:1-9)

II. Reproof of Their Sin (1:10 - 6:20)

A. Divisions in the Church **1:10 - 4:21**

B. Lack of Discipline in the Church **5:1-13**

C. Litigation in the Body **6:1-8**

D. Lack of Purity **6:9-20**

III. Reply to Their Questions (7:1 - 15:58)

A. Concerning Marriage **7:1-40**

B. Concerning Meat Sacrificed to Idols **8:1 - 11:1**

C. Concerning Public Worship **11:2 - 14:40**

D. Concerning the Resurrection **15:1-58**

IV. Conclusion (16:1-24)

A. Giving **16:1-4**

B. Paul's Visit **16:5-9**

C. Treatment of Timothy and Apollos **16:10-12**

D. Greetings and Benediction **16:13-24**

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1199

J. Sidlow Baxter: Jesus Christ Made Unto Us Wisdom

I. REPROOF – CONCERNING SCHISMS (i. – vi)

(The Corinthians were factiously glorying in men – i.12.)

- Ch. i.** Man-exalting schisms (**verses 10-17**) wrong because salvation by the Cross sets aside man’s wisdom altogether (**verse 18-31**).
- ii.** Man-exalting schisms wrong because the true wisdom imparted by the Spirit, not by man (**verses 5-13**).
- iii.-iv.** Man-exalting schisms wrong because human teachers only stewards: power is of God (**iii. 5, 6, 21, iv. 1**).

II. REPLIES – CONCERNING PROBLEMS (vii – xv.)

(The Corinthians had written Paul about problems – vii.1)

- Ch. vii.** Reply concerning marriage and celibacy.
- viii.-x.** Reply re meats. The principle (**viii**); Paul’s example (**ix**); Scripture warning (**x**); issue (**x.23-xi. 1**).
- xi.** Reply on sex propriety in the assembly (**verses 2-16**) and general behaviour at the Lord’s Table (**verses 17-34**).
- xii.-xiv.** Reply re spiritual gifts. Dispensed by the Spirit (**xii**); poor without love (**xiii**); prophecy the best (**xiv**).
- xv.** Reply concerning resurrection of Saints. Relation to Christ’s (**verses 1-19**); the prospect (**verses 20-34**); the body (**verses 35-49**); the “*mystery*” (**verses 50-58**).

Paul Gardner: Outline

I. Introduction to the Letter (**1:1–9**)

- A. The Greeting (**1:1–3**)
B. Thanksgiving (**1:4–9**)

II. Paul’s Dismay at the Lack of Unity (**1:10–17**)

- A. A Plea for Unity among the Corinthians (**1:10–12**)
B. A Plea to Turn to Christ and His Purposes (**1:13–16**)
C. Paul Followed Christ’s Call to Preach the Gospel (**1:17**)

III. A Radically Different Perspective Shaped by the Cross (**1:18 – 2:5**)

- A. The Word of the Cross (**1:18–25**)
B. Illustrated in the Calling of the Corinthians (**1:26–31**)
C. Illustrated in Paul’s Preaching (**2:1–5**)

IV. Mature Christians Pursue God’s Wisdom (**2:6–4:21**)

- A. Paul Proclaims God’s Wisdom (**2:6–13**)
B. God’s Wisdom Characterizes Those Who Are “Spiritual” (**2:14–16**)
C. The Corinthians Are Spiritually Immature (**3:1–9**)
D. Wise Leadership Acts with Spiritual Discernment (**3:10 – 4:21**)

- V. Lack of Spiritual Wisdom Has Led to Grievous Sin (5:1 – 6:20)
 - A. A Case of Incest Must Be Resolved (5:1–8)
 - B. Community Identity Requires Holiness (5:9–13)
 - C. Lawsuits between Christians Must Be Resolved without the Courts (6:1–8)
 - D. Community Identity Requires Holiness (6:9–11)
 - E. Immorality is Incompatible with Union with Christ (6:12–17)
 - F. Community Identity Requires Holiness (6:18–20)

- VI. Marriage, Celibacy, Divorce, and Widowhood in Relation to Community Status (7:1–40)
 - A. Married and Unmarried Should Pursue God’s Calling (7:1–24)
 - B. The Benefits of Remaining Unmarried (7:25–40)

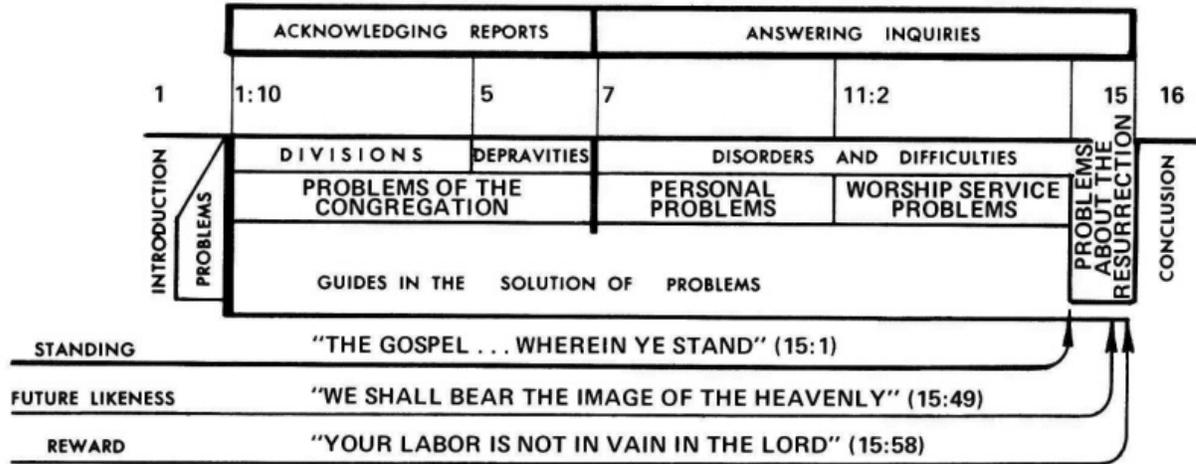
- VII. Status, Knowledge, Freedom, and Food Offered to Idols (8:1 – 11:1)
 - A. Knowledge and Love Contrasted (8:1–3)
 - B. Knowledge concerning the Existence of “gods” and “lords” (8:4–6)
 - C. Knowledge regarding the Eating of Idol Food in an Idol Temple (8:7–13)
 - D. Status and Rights Should Be Subordinated for the Sake of the Gospel (9:1–27)
 - E. Israel’s Abuse of Spiritual Gifts Provides a Warning (10:1–13)
 - F. Covenant Allegiance Matters (10:14–22)
 - G. Seek Only the Neighbor’s Good and Bring Glory to God (10:23 – 11:1)

- VIII. Status, Public Worship, Freedom, and Grace-Gifts (11:2 – 14:40)
 - A. The Conduct of Husbands and Wives in Public Worship (11:2–16)
 - B. The Conduct of the Church at the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34)
 - C. Spiritual People and the Function of Their Grace-Gifts in the Church (12:1–31)
 - D. The Status of Spiritual People is Authenticated by Love (13:1–13)
 - E. The Proper Function of Grace-Gifts in Public Worship (14:1–25)
 - F. In Public Worship All Activity Must Build Up the Church (14:26–40)

- IX. The Gospel of the Resurrection of Christ and His People (15:1–58)
 - A. The Facts of the Gospel Secured by the Resurrection of Christ (15:1–11)
 - B. The Truth of the Resurrection (15:12–34)
 - C. The Resurrection Body: Continuity and Discontinuity (15:35–49)
 - D. The Necessity of the Transformation of the Body (15:50–58)

- X. Closing Instructions and Comments (16:1–24)
 - A. Instructions for the Collection (16:1–4)
 - B. Paul’s Travel Plans (16:5–9)
 - C. Note about Timothy and Apollos (16:10–12)
 - D. Various Exhortations (16:13–18)
 - E. Greetings in the Lord from Others (16:19–20)
 - F. Paul’s Own Closure to the Letter (16:21–24)

Irving Jensen: 1 CORINTHIANS – PROBLEMS OF A LOCAL CHURCH



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1 CORINTHIANS

Between Heaven & the Red-Light District

Introduction (1:1-9)	DIVISIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Over the Message •Over the Messengers 	DISORDERS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Toleration of defiant sin •Legal disputes •Casual sex 	DIFFICULTIES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Marriage, divorce and singleness •Personal rights and freedoms •Worship and spiritual gifts 	DEFECTION: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •From the Gospel and the Resurrection •From their commitment to giving 	Conclusion (16:5-24)
	1:10-4:21	5:1-6:20	7:1-14:40	15:1-16:4	
RESPONSES TO REPORTS		ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS			
...from Cloe's household (1:11)		...from the Corinthians' letter (7:1; 16:17)			
Written by Paul from Ephesus to Corinth, ca.AD 55 (16:8)					
PURPOSE: to confront their problems directly and honestly so that what they are in Christ will affect how they think and live as Christians					

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CHART 37: Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:10–6:20						
INTRODUCTION, 1:1–9	BODY OF THE LETTER, 1:10–15:58					CONCLUSION, 16:1–24
	PAUL ADDRESSES HIS CONCERNS BASED ON REPORTS RECEIVED, 1:10–6:20					
	Major Divisions in the Church 1:10–4:21			Massive Disorder in the Church 5:1–6:20		
Visibility of Divisions 1:10–17 Exhortation to Unity 1:10 Report from Chloe's People about Divisions 1:11–12 The Folly of Partisan Division in Christ 1:13–17	Misconceptions about the Gospel Message 1:18–3:4 The Gospel Contrary to Human Wisdom 1:18–2:5 <i>The Folly of the Cross</i> 1:18–25 <i>The Folly of the Corinthians' Election</i> 1:26–31 <i>The Folly of Paul's Preaching</i> 2:1–5 The Gospel Conveys the Wisdom of God 2:6–3:4 <i>The Spirit Reveals God's Gospel Wisdom</i> 2:6–16 <i>The Carnal Understanding of the Corinthians</i> 3:1–4	Misconceptions about the Gospel Ministry 3:5–4:21 Servant Workers in God's Field 3:5–9a Builders of God's House 3:9b–17 <i>The Imagery Amplified</i> 3:9b–11 <i>Charge to Prepare for Accounting</i> 3:12–17 Christ is Head of All His Workers 3:18–23 Proper Regard for Apostles 4:1–21 <i>Servants Judged by God Alone</i> 4:1–5 <i>Sacrificial Marks of True Apostles</i> 4:6–13 <i>Appeal to Imitate Paul's Attitude</i> 4:14–21	The Utter Lack of Church Discipline 5:1–13 The Need to Expel the Notorious, Incestuous Man 5:1–5 Paul's Argument for Expulsion: The Analogy of Passover 5:6–8 Clarification on Interaction with Immoral People 5:9–13 <i>Not Isolation from Outsiders</i> 5:9–10 <i>But Separation from Unrepentant Brothers</i> 5:11–13	The Tragedy of Christian Lawsuits 6:1–11 Shame on the Church for its Christians' Litigation 6:1–6 Shame on the Litigant for Going Before the Courts 6:7 Warning to Wrongdoers of God's Judgment 6:8–10 Encouragement from the Gospel to Pursue Holiness 6:11	The Toleration of Immorality 6:12–20 Bodily Appetites Do Not Justify Immorality 6:12–13a A Theology of the Body & Sexual Purity 6:13b–17 The Command to Flee Immorality and Its Rationale 6:18–20 <i>The Admonition</i> 6:18a <i>The Unique Defilement of Immorality</i> 6:18b–20	PAUL ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS THEY HAVE WRITTEN TO HIM, 7:1–15:58

OUTLINE OF 1 CORINTHIANS

THE KEY TO SOLVING CHURCH PROBLEMS: EXALT GOD RATHER MAN

“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord . . .” (1:31)
“So then, let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you . . . and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.” (3:21, 23)

BIG IDEA:

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE OF CHRIST’S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION BRINGS GOD’S WISDOM TO BEAR ON THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS THAT ARE ROOTED IN MAN’S PRIDE AND SELFISHNESS

(1:1-9) INTRODUCTION: GOD’S CALLING LEADS TO EXPRESSIONS OF THANKSGIVING ROOTED IN DIVINE GRACE

A. (1:1-3) GOD’S CALLED SAINTS NEED TO HEED THE MESSAGE FROM GOD’S CALLED APOSTLE

1. (:1) The Divine Calling of the Author
2. (:2) The Divine Calling of the Recipients
3. (:3) The Calling or Divine Provision of Spiritual Resources

B. (1:4-9) THANKSGIVING IS ROOTED IN GOD’S FAITHFULNESS AND FOCUSES ON THE GIFTS OF GOD’S GRACE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

1. (:4) First Expression of Paul’s Thanksgiving:
Appreciating Past Reception of the Gift of God’s Grace
2. (:5-7a) Second Expression of Paul’s Thanksgiving:
Applying Present Sufficient Resources of the Gifts of God’s Grace
3. (:7b-8) Third Expression of Paul’s Thanksgiving:
Anticipating Future Revelation of Jesus Christ

I. (1:10 – 6:20) ADDRESSING PROBLEMS UNDERMINING THE UNITY AND HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH -- THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST REINFORCES THE WISDOM OF GOD

WHICH PROTECTS THE CHURCH FROM PRIDEFUL DIVISIONS AND DISORDERS

Church Unity: Paul's response to the verbal reports of problems in the church at Corinth

A. (1:10 – 4:21) DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH – EXALT GOD RATHER THAN MAN

1. (1:10-17) Problem of Divisions: Loyalty to Christ Cements a Church Together -- Churches Need to be Unified around the Simplicity and Power of the Gospel Message (the Cross of Christ) Rather than Loyalty to One Particular Preacher

2. (1:18 – 4:5) Two Protections Against Divisions in the Church

a. (1:18 – 2:16) Effective Communication of the Wisdom of God by Powerfully Preaching the Crucified Christ = Exalting God rather than Man

1) (1:18-25) The Power and Wisdom of the Word of the Cross

2) (1:26-31) Divine Election Leaves No Room for Man's Pride

3) (2:1-5) The Effectiveness of Preaching Derives from its Focus on the Crucified Christ and Its Dynamic of the Power of God

4) (2:6-8) The Mystery Aspect of the Wisdom of God Is Rooted in the Cross

5) (2:9-16) The Holy Spirit Directs the Communication and Understanding of Divine Wisdom

b. (2:17 – 4:5) Egoless Construction of the Church of God by Following the Blueprint of the Wise Master Builder = Exalting God rather than Man

1) (3:1-4) The Danger of Sectarianism – Childish Sectarianism is an Unnatural State for the Believer and Stunts Spiritual Growth

2) (3:5-9) Sectarianism Defeated by Giving All Glory to God -- All of the Accolades for Spiritual Ministry Should Go to God Who Causes the Growth -- Not to the Particular Servants Laboring Together on God's Behalf

3) (3:10-15) Divine Blueprint for Spiritual Construction -- The Hard Work of Spiritual Ministry Can Reap Eternal Rewards When We Build Wisely on the Proper Foundation

4) (3:16-17) The Sanctity of the Local Church as the Temple of God – Because the Local Church is God's Holy Sanctuary, Anyone Who Damages It Will Be Punished Accordingly

5) (3:18-23) God's Wisdom Always Trumps Man's Wisdom --
Two Foolish Mistakes that Undermine God's Wisdom and Cause Division
within the Local Church:

- Thinking too Highly of Self
- Thinking too Highly of Any Prominent Leaders

6) (4:1-5) Performance Review for Christian Ministers --
The Judgment of the Lord is All that Matters When It Comes to Ultimate
Accountability for Christian Ministry

3. (4:6-21) Power to Discipline those Causing Divisions in the Church
 - a. (4:6-13) Exposing Arrogant Pride and Self-Sufficiency --
Boasting in Particular Prominent Preachers Demonstrates Arrogant Pride and
Self-Sufficiency
 - b. (4:14-21) Embracing Tough Love --
Effective Spiritual Leadership Aggressively Confronts Sin and Provides Just the
Right Balance of Nurture and Discipline for the Need of the Moment to Achieve
the Desired Change in Behavior

B. (5:1 – 6:20) DISORDERS IN THE CHURCH – REPLACE ARROGANCE WITH GOD'S WISDOM

1. (5:1-13) No Tolerance for Sexual Perversion --
Church Discipline Must Be Enforced Against Sexual Immorality
2. (6:1-11) Civil Suits Undermine the Unity and Testimony of the Church
 - a. (6:1-8) Church Competent to Judge Internal Legal Disputes
 - b. (6:9-11) Clear Distinction between Believers and Unbelievers –
No Exceptions When it Comes to Qualifying for God's Kingdom --
Unconverted Sinners Have No Part in God's Kingdom -- a Transformed Life
Should Produce Transformed Living
3. (6:12-20) Glorifying God in Your Body Supports the Unity, Holiness and Testimony
of the Church

II. (7:1 – 14:40) ANSWERING QUESTIONS REGARDING PROPER PERSONAL AND CHURCH CONDUCT -- THE GLORY OF GOD REINFORCES SELF DENIAL AND LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN IN ALL AREAS OF CONDUCT

Christian Practice: Paul's response to the specific questions contained in the letter he received
from Corinth

“Now concerning” -- *peri de* -- marks the introduction of each new question or major topic
(7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1) -- (also found in 16:1; 16:12)

A. (7:1-24) CONCERNING SEXUAL PRACTICE IN MARRIAGE AND THE APPROPRIATENESS OF DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

1. (7:1-7) Married Couples Must Maintain Sexual Relations --
Both Celibacy and Marriage Are Legitimate Gifts of God, but a Consistent Pattern of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage Must Be Maintained to Protect Against Immorality and to Express Mutual Submission
2. (7:8-16) Singleness . . . Marriage . . . Divorce --
Different Situations Call for Different Divine Instruction Regarding Singleness, Marriage and Divorce
3. (7:17-24) Bloom Where You Are Planted --
Embrace with Contentment God's Sovereign Providential Dispensation of Your Outward Circumstances as You Focus on Serving Christ to the Max

B. (7:25-40) CONCERNING ADVANTAGES OF REMAINING SINGLE

Staying Single Has Much to Commend Itself . . . but Marriage is Still a Valid Option

C. (8:1 – 11:34) CONCERNING QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES, THE VOLUNTARY RESTRICTING OF OUR LIBERTIES AND THE UNSELFISH NATURE OF THE MINISTRY

1. (8:1-13) Christian Liberty Must Not Violate Christian Love --
The Controlling Factor in our Decision Making Regarding Debatable Areas of Christian Conduct Must Be Love
2. (9:1-27) First Century Practice: the Apostle Paul set Aside Personal Rights for Loftier Goals
 - a. (9:1-4) Financial Support in the ministry --
Spiritual Ministers Deserve to be Adequately Supported but Also Have the Freedom to Refrain from Demanding Such Rights
 - b. (9:15-18) Preaching Without Pay --
Sometimes Gospel Ministry Involves Yielding One's Right to Financial Support
 - c. (9:19-23) Identifying with the Lost for the Sake of the Gospel --
The Goal of Winning Souls Drives Us to Restrict Our Freedom in Ways that Would Serve Others in Love Rather than Offend Them
 - d. (9:24-27) Two Motivations for Disciplined Christian Living --
The Value of the Eternal Prize and the Danger of Disqualification Motivate Disciplined Christian Living in the Warfare against Sin
3. (10:1 – 11:1) Further Particulars: Christian Liberty does not Extend to Association with Idolatry
 - a. (10:1-13) OT Example from Israel in the Wilderness –
Take Heed Lest you Fall -- Persevere to the End --
Inclusion in Spiritual Privilege No Guarantee of Participation in Spiritual Salvation

b. (10:14-22) Don't Mess with False Religions --
Members of the One Body of Christ Can Have No Association with Idolatry

c. (10:23 – 11:1) Situational Ethics -- When Can I Eat Meat Offered to Idols? --
The Exercise of Christian Liberty Must Be Governed by Loving Sensitivity and
Appropriate Response to the Specific Situation

4. (11:2-34) Free-spirited Prohibitions: Correcting Abuses Where Proper Decorum
Needs to be Maintained

a. (11:2-16) Correcting Abuses Regarding the Veiling of women

b. (11:17-34) Correcting Abuses Regarding the Lord's Supper

D. (12:1 – 14:40) CONCERNING THE PROPER EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

1. (12:1-31) The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts Working Together in the Church

a. (12:1-11) Understanding Spiritual Gifts --

The Variety of Expression of Genuine Spiritual Gifts Will Consistently Exalt
Jesus Christ and Build Up His Body

b. (12:12-31) One Body of Christ . . . Many Diverse but Interdependent
Members . . . All Significant and Essential --

The Healthy Functioning of the Local Church Depends on Every Member
Fulfilling Their God-Gifted Role

2. (13:1-13) The Necessity, Nature and Supremacy of Love in Exercising Spiritual Gifts
-- Spiritual Ministry Must Flow Through the Channel of Love

3. (14:1-40) The Proper Regulation of Spiritual Gifts

a. (14:1-26) Considerations Regarding Prophesying and Speaking in Tongues in
the Church --

Gifts that Edify the Church (Such as Prophecy) Must Take Priority over the Gift
of Tongues

b. (14:26-40) Orderly Church Services --

The Orderly Pattern for Worship Leadership in the Church Involves Multiple
Gifted Men Promoting the Goal of Edification

III. (15:1-58) ARGUING FOR THE NECESSITY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD -- THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST REINFORCES THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE SAINTS WHICH MOTIVATES PERSEVERANCE IN FAITHFUL SERVICE

Core Doctrine: Paul's response to two mocking questions regarding the resurrection of the
physical bodies of believers

A. (15:1 – 15:19) THE RESURRECTION: FACT VS FUTILITY

1. (15:1-11) The Core of the Gospel Message --The Historical Fact of the Resurrection Established --

The Faithful Proclamation of the Gospel -- Focused in the Death and Especially the Historically Attested Resurrection of the Person of Jesus Christ -- Accomplishes Salvation by the Grace of God

2. (15:12-19) Absurdity of Denying the Resurrection of Dead Saints -- Seven Futile Ramifications of No Bodily Resurrection of the Dead

B. (15:20 – 15:34) THE RESURRECTION: VICTORY VS FUTILITY

1. (15:20-28) Victory in Jesus -- The First Fruits Guarantee the Full Harvest -- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Guarantees Ultimate Triumph

2. (15:29-34) Futility Apart from the Resurrection -- Doctrine Matters -- No Resurrection . . . No Christian Motivation -- Denial of the Resurrection Would Kill All Motivation for Christian Baptism, Spiritual Service and Holy Living

C. (15:35 – 15:58) THE RESURRECTION: BELIEVABLE AND GLORIOUS

1. (15:35-49) Link Between Our Mortal Body and Our Transformed Resurrection Body

2. (15:50-58) The Final Victory over Mortality -- Transformation of the Body Equips All Believers for Glory

(16:1-24) FINAL THOUGHTS: CLOSING APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATIONS AND GREETINGS

A. (16:1-4) FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

B. (16:5-12) FINAL ITINERARY ISSUES

C. (16:13-18) FINAL EXHORTATIONS

D. (16:19-24) FINAL GREETINGS AND FAREWELL

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3

TITLE: SALUTATION: APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION FOR THE SAINTS

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S CALLED SAINTS NEED TO HEED THE MESSAGE FROM GOD'S CALLED APOSTLE

BACKGROUND TO THE EPISTLE:

Dan Nighswander: Corinthians is a letter. That observation helps us to know how to read it and what to look for as clues for understanding. This awareness is especially useful in the letter opening, the thanksgiving section, and the closing. In the opening, the first three verses, we expect to see three characteristics of a typical letter—and we do see them. However, what catches our attention is not the conformity to a standard format, but rather the specific content and the nuances found within the format.

These opening sentences express some profound convictions about the nature of the Christian assembly, about believers, and about Paul. Here we read that Paul does not work alone: *our brother Sosthenes* is a cowriter. The sentences address not only the whole Corinthian Christian community but also *all those . . . in every place* for whom Jesus Christ is *both their Lord and ours*. Collective and plural forms of words throughout the opening draw attention to the corporate community of faith, as does the blessing from both the Father and the Son of the Holy Trinity.

Prominent in the opening is an understanding of call: Paul is *called* to be an apostle; the believers are *called* to be saints; believers *call* on the name of Jesus.

Finally, Paul says that the believers are *sanctified* and *called to be saints* (NIV, *his holy people*). The behaviors, attitudes, and convictions that we learn about in this letter stretch our understanding of what it means to be sanctified/saints/holy. Already in these opening words we see a signal that these kinds of issues need to be addressed and will be in the rest of the letter. . .

Because he wrote the letter for a particular occasion to a particular assembly, Paul did not explain all the background to what he wrote. It was not necessary to provide details of which they already knew, except to make a brief identifying reference to a quotation or an issue, as we will note at several points in this commentary. His teaching and advice are contextual. It is quite possible that if he had written to a different context, even on the same matters, he would have written differently. This is one of the interpretive questions that we readers in a much different context of time, place, culture, assumptions, and experience need to discern as we read this letter.

I. (:1) THE DIVINE CALLING OF THE AUTHOR -- DIVINE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY LENDS CLOUT TO PAUL'S INSTRUCTION TO THE SAINTS

A. Author = Apostle Paul

“Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God”

1. His Identification

- a. Paul’s pre-Christian Roots
 - Upbringing
 - Persecution of the church
- b. Paul’s Conversion on Road to Damascus
- c. Paul’s Connection with the Church at Corinth

2. His Apostolic Calling

- a. Concept of a “Calling”
 - Implies Divine Initiative and Determination
 - How does this relate to our spiritual giftedness and role in the church?
 - How did this relate to Paul’s tent-making role on different occasions?
- b. Apostolic Function and Credentials
 - Basic Mission of Apostle
 - Foundational in the building of the church
 - Nature of Apostolic Authority
 - Credentials of Apostle
- c. Representative of the Head of the Church = *“of Jesus Christ”*
- d. Divine Initiative and Determination
 - “by the will of God”*

Mare: Here he refers to it [his apostleship] because his authority has been challenged (cf. **1 Cor 1:12** and **9:1-27**).

Paul Gardner: To have been “called” (*κλητός*) by God to be an apostle of “Christ Jesus” and thus to have a foundational role in proclaiming, interpreting, and demonstrating the gospel of Jesus Christ in his life might have been regarded as an arrogant claim, even a boast. Yet the Corinthians’ complaint about Paul was that he was not like this, and his bearing was hardly that of a person who had the “authority” of Christ. In fact, Paul was not boastful. Rather, he presented the gospel in weakness of speech (**1:17**) and also through what appeared to be a weak life (see **2 Cor 10–11**). In doing this he both spoke and lived out the message of Christ, following in his footsteps and even in his sufferings. This opening is, then, a **strong claim to authority** founded in both God the Father and in Jesus Christ. Paul will develop further the nature of this calling as he speaks against the divisive Corinthian view of power and wisdom.

B. Companion – Accompanied/Assisted by Brother Sosthenes – Family Intimacy Also Lends Clout to These Instructions to the Saints

“and Sosthenes our brother”

Principle: Differing roles of authority in the church do not compromise equality of brotherhood in terms of personal relationships in the church of Jesus Christ.

Principle: Paul's ministry is always portrayed as part of a larger team effort, not as a one man crusade.

Probably the same individual identified in **Acts 18:17** as ruler of the synagogue at Corinth during Paul's first visit there. Thus you would have two former Jewish leaders, former opponents of the church of Jesus Christ, who are not united as brothers in their concern for the saints at Corinth. (see Zondervan Pict. Ency of the Bible)

Lenski: In associating himself with this brother Paul conveys the idea that the voice of apostolic authority here unites with the voice of brotherly solicitude and that each is represented in a person who is known to the Corinthians.

Richard Hays: "*Sosthenes the brother,*" mentioned as co-sender of the letter (**1 Cor. 1:1**), is probably the same person described by Luke in **Acts 18:17** as a leader of the synagogue in Corinth. According to that account, he was roughed up by a crowd of Corinthian Jews who were frustrated by the decision of the Roman proconsul Gallio to ignore their complaints against Paul. Why they picked on Sosthenes is not clear in the Acts narrative; perhaps if he had not already become a Christian convert he was at least perceived as sympathetic to Paul. By the time of the writing of this letter—two to four years later—Sosthenes was apparently with Paul in Ephesus, sharing in Paul's missionary work. If he was a notable Corinthian convert who had suffered for the gospel, he might have been a person of some influence among the Corinthian Christians. Thus, though he is not mentioned again in the text, his appearance in the salutation perhaps lends some additional weight to the appeals that Paul will make throughout the letter. This is the first indication of a fact we will note repeatedly: Paul employs considerable political tact in addressing the touchy situation in the Corinthian church.

II. (:2) THE DIVINE CALLING OF THE RECIPIENTS – HOLINESS SHOULD CHARACTERIZE THE CHURCH OF GOD BECAUSE OF THEIR INTIMATE CONNECTION TO THEIR LORD JESUS CHRIST

A. Application to the Local Church at Corinth

"To the church of God which is at Corinth"

- the church belongs to God . . . not to the Apostle Paul
- Significance of membership in local church
- Context of situation in Corinth

Paul Gardner: Right at the start Paul reminds them that they are God's church. "The church does not 'belong' to any of its in-groups or leaders, but to God."

Craig Blomberg: The recipients of the letter are the Corinthian Christians. They probably comprise **several house-congregations**, but Paul addresses them as a collective whole, “*the church*” or assembly of those God has saved.

Richard Hays: Even in the opening address of the letter, Paul places the church at Corinth and its particular concerns within a much wider story, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a network of communities of faith stretching around the Mediterranean world. The importance of this broader framework will emerge as the letter proceeds. We will see that Paul chides the Corinthian Christians for their prideful presumption that their spiritual freedom liberates them from accountability to others: “[D]id the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?” (14:36). The answer is, of course, that the word of God has reached many and that the Corinthians must see themselves as part of a much larger movement, subject to the same Lord whose authority governs the church as a whole. They are not spiritual free agents. The church of God that is in Corinth is just one branch of a larger operation.

B. Identified as Saints

1. Historical misuse of this term by Roman Catholic Church

MacArthur: A saint, as the term is used in the New Testament, is not a specially pious or self-sacrificing Christian who has been canonized by an ecclesiastical council.

2. Sanctified by Virtue of Our Union with Jesus Christ

“to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus”

Perf passive participle

Grosheide: God has sanctified them. He has liberated them from the unclean world and has put them in a relationship to Himself whereby they might have intercourse with Him (**Jn. 17:19; 1 Thess. 5:23**).

3. Saints by Calling (and by Nature)

“saints by calling” (same root word)

Richard Hays: This does not mean that the Corinthians have some special vocation that sets them apart from other Christians; rather, they—along with all other Christians—are set apart from a confused and perishing world, marked by God as God’s people. Paul regards all the members of all his churches as “*the saints*,” the elect of God.

Anthony Thiselton: Paul does not imply that Christians are already morally perfect. Another writer well expresses the point that “the church is a school for sinners, not a museum for saints.” Nevertheless, Christian discipleship involves striving to become that which in terms of status God has already given. Practical holiness entails being transformed in Christ-likeness and goodness day by day. This is living out in practice what belonging to God means.

C. Application to the Universal Church

1. Extends to All Believers Without Exception

“with all”

Ethnic Background -- Gentile vs Jew

Gender -- Male vs Female

Age -- Young vs Old

Social Class -- Rich vs Poor

Not limited by Time – back then or today

2. Not Limited by Physical Location (John 4:24)

“who in every place”

3. Common Faith = Distinguishing Characteristic of Believers

“call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

- Background from earliest times – concept of Progressive Revelation

Gen. 4:26

- Background from days of Abraham

Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33

- Background from Psalms of David

Ps. 116:4

- Characteristic of Believers in Church Age

Romans 10

- Characteristic of Believers in the day of the Lord

Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21

What do we call on Jesus for?

For Salvation, Deliverance, Provision, Guidance, Protection . . .

Connection to Prayer – the lifeline for believers

Significance of *“the name”* = the character

- need to get to know Jesus Christ better so we can better call on \

His name

Hodge: To call upon the name of any one is to invoke his aid.

4. Common Allegiance

“their Lord and ours”

[Alternative translation would connect these genitives to “their place of worship and ours”]

Cannot have a possessive or exclusivistic approach as if our particular local church or denomination has some special claim on the Lord

How can people take a stand against “Lordship salvation” and claim that calling on the name of Jesus bears no connection to a willingness to own Him as our Lord and God? Call to Holiness and conformity to the divine will and character runs throughout the epistle.

Anthony Thiselton: No Christian, or group of Christians, possesses a monopoly of the presence, wisdom, or power of Christ.

III. (:3) THE CALLING FOR DIVINE PROVISION OF SPIRITUAL RESOURCES -- GRACE AND PEACE SUM UP THE UNIVERSAL NEED OF SAINTS

A. Two Essential Provisions

Gordon Fee: In a sense this sums up the whole of Paul’s theological outlook. The sum total of all of God’s activity toward his human creatures is found in the word “*grace*”; God has given himself to them mercifully and bountifully in Christ. Nothing is deserved; nothing can be achieved: “’Tis mercy all, immense and free.” And the sum total of those benefits as they are experienced by the recipients of God’s grace is found in the word “*peace*,” meaning “well-being, wholeness, welfare.” The one flows out of the other, and both together flow from “*God our Father*” and were made effective in human history through our “*Lord Jesus Christ*.”

Adewuya: Paul then wishes the Corinthians *grace and peace* (v. 3). Grace has to do with both the favor that God bestowed upon the Corinthians at salvation and the continuing power to sustain their Christian life. Peace is the result of the believer’s relationship with God. Peace does not necessarily imply the absence of trouble, but the calmness and assurance that derive from the knowledge that God is always in “control,” no matter what. He is in charge.

1. “Grace”

Paul Gardner: The word “*grace*” (χάρις) is one of the most loved of all Christian words. Its origins lie in the idea of favor. In Classical usage it could refer to the favor of the gods. As it is used in the New Testament and specially by Paul, however, it often becomes effectively a shorthand for all God’s loving care for his people and for all that believers receive from God and the Lord Christ, especially their salvation. In modern Christendom, the English word “*grace*” is normally understood as referring to the entirely undeserved mercy and forgiveness of God toward sinful humanity that issues from his love and from his purposes to redeem a people for himself. However, it is important to realise that the word itself (χάρις) is embedded in the terminology relating to the giving of gifts. Indeed, on occasion its most natural English translation will simply be “*gift*” (cf. **1 Cor 16:3**), or “*act of giving*” (**2 Cor 8:6–7**; NIV: “*grace of giving*”). Gifts can indeed be utterly undeserved, but they can also be given for a whole variety of other reasons. For example, they can be given to people by way of

reciprocation for a gift received, or given to a person to curry favor, or because someone has done something to deserve it. In understanding this, it becomes important to examine carefully the context, which alone may reveal whether such gift-giving is in some sense deserved or undeserved. Frequently this will be tied into the relationship between the giver and the one receiving the gift. In an outstanding treatise on the subject of gift and grace, **John Barclay** has demonstrated how varied can be the meaning of this word, even in relation to God's various giftings of his people. That grace that is given without reference to the recipient's status, worth, or otherwise he refers to as "incongruous" grace. In **v. 4** the word is defined in relation to the saving and sustaining work of God in Christ, the Lord. Here it surely carries the sense of an undeserved gift that elicits great thankfulness from the apostle as he sees among them the gift of God in their calling, in what he has given them for the encouragement and benefit of the church, and in the way God will ensure they are found "not guilty" on the day of the Lord (**v. 8**).

2. "Peace"

Morris: It is not simply the absence of strife, but the presence of positive blessings. It is the prosperity of the whole man, especially his spiritual prosperity.

Anthony Thiselton: The Greek translation of the Hebrew *shālōm* denotes an objective state of well-being. In a distinctively Christian context this includes most especially a state of harmony with God, who is the source of peace or well-being.

B. Two Reliable Providers

1. Ultimate Source

"from God our Father" – our inclusion in the family of God

2. Mediating Channel

"and the Lord Jesus Christ" – our allegiance to the head of the Church

Hodge: These infinite blessings suppose an infinite source; and as they are sought no less from Christ than from God the Father, Christ must be a divine person.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do we view to be our unique *calling* in promoting the kingdom of God?
- 2) How can believers with as many problems and conflicts as the Corinthian believers be viewed as *saints*? Does this diminish the import of that term?
- 3) In what ways do we actively *call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*? In what ways does this short passage support the deity of Jesus Christ?

4) Do we slide right over that familiar call for “*Grace and Peace*” or do we rest in the sufficiency of those divine provisions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Sometimes, however, it is important to establish one’s right to speak authoritatively on a subject. A person, for instance, who has no medical degree or training or experience would never get a hearing at a conference on medicine. A person’s credentials give some indication as to whether or not what he has to say should be taken seriously. Paul did not mention his apostleship in order to gain honor as an individual but to gain respect as a teacher of God’s Word. He was not an apostle by his own appointment, or even by the church’s appointment, but by God’s appointment – **by the will of God**. At the outset he wanted to establish that what he had to say was said with God’s own authority. Since his message was so corrective, this was of great necessity.

Hodge: The companions of the apostles, whom he associated with himself in his salutations to the churches, are not thereby placed in the position of equality of office and authority with the apostle. On the contrary, they are uniformly distinguished in these respects from the writer of the epistles. . . Very probably Sosthenes was the amanuensis of Paul in this instance, and Timothy in others.

Lenski: In these greetings the term *caris* or *grace* takes the place of the secular *caireiv*, “*that ye rejoice,*” and denotes the undeserved *favor Dei* as it is in God’s heart together with all the gifts of that favor, especially such as pertain to the persons involved. Thus “*grace to you*” means: May God and the Lord give you an abundance of his undeserved gifts!

And *eirene* is the Hebrew *shalom*, the German *Heil*, and denotes the condition that results when God is our friend, and all is well with us. The objective condition of “*peace*” is always the fundamental thing which, of course, also has accompanying it the subjective feeling of peace, namely rest, satisfaction, and happiness in the heart. The condition is constant and essential, the feeling may or may not always be present.

Mark Taylor: Paul elaborates more on the **recipients of this letter**, the church of God in Corinth, than he does in any of his other letters. His description of the believers in Corinth is replete with Old Testament imagery and phrases, and he addresses the church as a whole without any mention of its factions or leaders. In addition to the usual identification of the church’s location, Paul describes the recipients as “*those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This last phrase does not identify other co-senders (the whole church) or a second group of recipients to whom the letter was written. Paul simply asserts that the Corinthians are God’s holy people by calling, as are all other believers everywhere who call on the name of the Lord. The statement that Jesus is both “*their Lord and ours,*” reminds the Corinthians of their solidarity with other believers

and prepares the way for the exhortation to unity in **1:10**. To “*call on the name of the Lord*” is an Old Testament expression for the worship of Yahweh as the God of Israel, which in the New Testament context refers to an acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ, the confession of all believers.

Charles Spurgeon: The Corinthians were what we should call nowadays, judging them by the usual standard, a first-class church. They had many who understood much of the learning of the Greeks; they were men of classic taste, and men of good understanding, men of profound knowledge; and yet, in spiritual health, that church was one of the worst in all Greece, and perhaps in the world. Amongst the whole of them, you would not find another church sunk so low as this one, although it was the most gifted. (“*Confirming the Witness*,” 133)

Leake: 3 Components of Letter (9/10/06)

I. (:1) The Writer – 4 Things About the Author

A. Name = Paul – not disputed as the author

B. Title = Apostle of Jesus Christ

One sent out on behalf of another person to speak for them; commissioned and gifted by Christ;

Strict Qualifications:

- personal eyewitness of resurrected Christ
- teach with the authority of Christ
- perform genuine miracles
- Preach the gospel and establish the church
- Foundational – so very rare; not present in church today – **Eph 2:19-20**

Greatness = in whom you represent; not in yourself

C. Appointment – not voted in; didn’t pursue it (cf. **Gal. 1**)

D. His Companion = Sosthenes –

Corinthians knew for sure which brother this was; not a co-author; traveling companion of Paul

II. (:2) The Recipients – 3 Basic Descriptions

Background: City of Corinth

- Where was it
- What was it like?
 - commercial port
 - political importance
 - religious importance
 - Aphrodite = goddess of love and beauty
- Where and When written? On Paul’s third missionary journey about 55 AD
- Why Written?
 - Chloe’s people gave a report (**1:11**); correct and re-orient them
 - answering various questions church had raised – starting in **7:1**

A. They were a Local Church

- What is a church? – “*called out*” group; “*assembly*”

Acts 20:28 – owned by God; purchased with His own blood; cannot be owned or manipulated by the rich

B. Sanctified in Christ Jesus / Saints by Calling

“*setting apart*” something for God – Perfect Passive Participle – they didn’t set themselves apart; happened in the past with abiding results for the present

Positional or Initial Sanctification (vs. Progressive Sanctification)

Based on this, how should they now act?

A Holiness that is not achieved but received as a gift of grace;

Located in Christ

All believers are saints – **6:1; 16:1**

You don’t get to be a saint by your behavior – these believers were worldly and immoral; yet Paul called them to live up to their Definitional description of saints;

All believers have a divine vocation = saints

C. Part of the Universal Church

We are connected to all believers; not intended as a circular letter; you’re just one dot on the map; get in step with what God is doing throughout the world;

We don’t want to be just an “independent church” but be knit together with other like-minded churches;

Importance of local church membership – no such thing as just attendees;

Is Jesus your Lord and Master = key to whether or not you are really a Christian

III. (:3) Greeting

A. Grace to you

Wishing God’s help to you; wants them to rely on Him

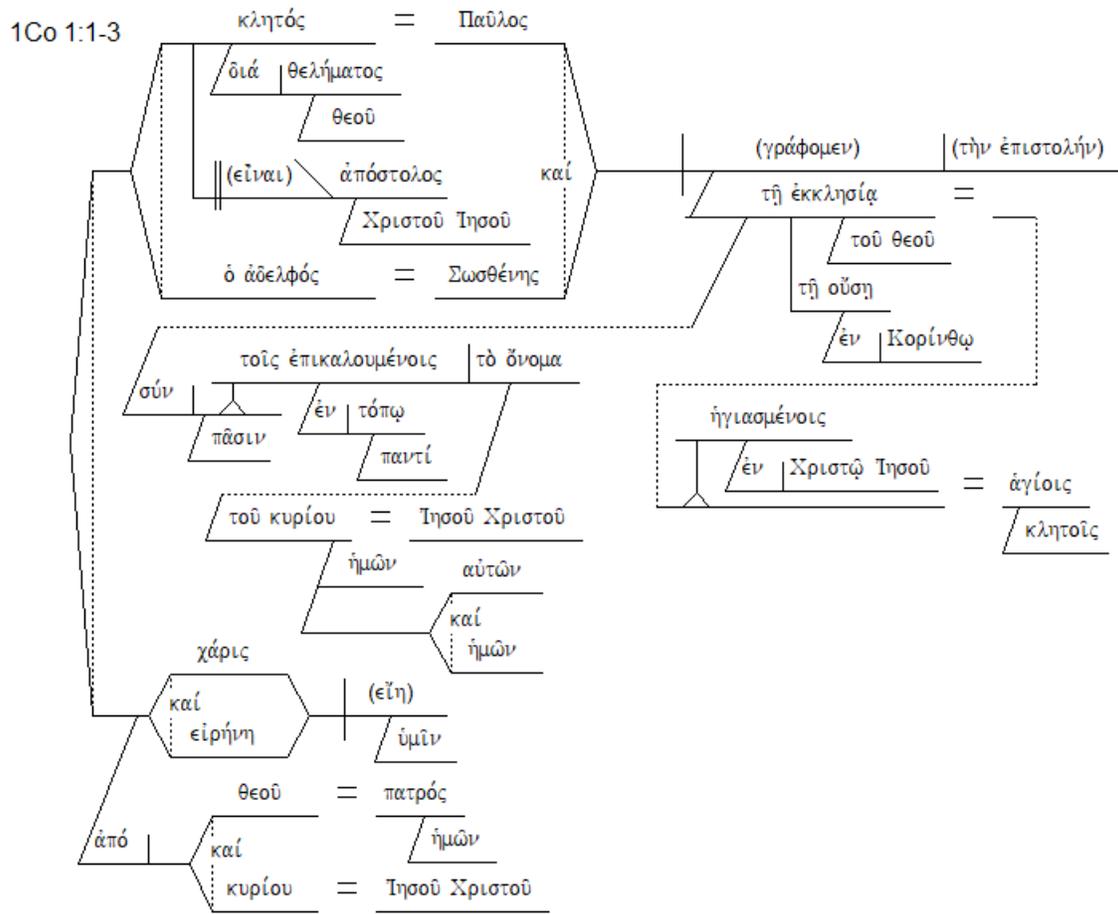
B. Peace

Not just the absence of war; inward prosperity;

Father and Son linked together – distinct, yet one

Note: “*Christ*” used 4 times in these 3 short verses – everything we have comes from our relationship to Christ

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1: 4-9

TITLE: THANKSGIVING: WE CAN COUNT ON GOD'S GRACE BECAUSE GOD IS FAITHFUL

BIG IDEA:

THANKSGIVING IS ROOTED IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND FOCUSES ON THE GIFTS OF GOD'S GRACE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

[THREE EXPRESSIONS OF PAUL'S THANKSGIVING FOR THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS – ALL ROOTED IN THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD]

INTRODUCTION:

Thankfulness for **God's grace** – in our own life and in the life of our fellow believers – should be the constant refrain on our lips. The Apostle Paul reminds these conflicted Corinthian saints of the blessings of God's grace (past, present and future) in association with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our assurance of continued participation in this privileged family relationship is based not on our own performance but on the faithfulness of God – the one who sovereignly and effectively called us into fellowship with His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gordon Fee: Paul's thanksgivings generally follow the same pattern: (1) give thanks, (2) to God, (3) always, (4) for the recipients, and (5) for certain reasons, which are then elaborated. . .

Even though what comes next (vv. 4–8) forms a single, somewhat convoluted, sentence, the apostle's **flow of thought** can be easily traced. The verb "*I thank*" controls the whole. The **grounds** for the thanksgiving are stated up front (v. 4, "*for grace given you in Christ*"). Paul next (v. 5) elaborates the grounds in terms of some **specific gifts**, which also serve as **confirmation of the gospel** among them (v. 6). As a result of God's confirming the gospel among them in this way, they lack no gift available in the present age as they await the final consummation at the coming of Christ (v. 7). The final clause (v. 8) then brings the sentence to a fitting conclusion by shifting the focus from past "graces" to what God will yet do for them at the final eschatological event, namely "*confirm them completely to the end.*" The whole is then set off with the **concluding exclamation** (v. 9), which emphasizes the **faithfulness of God** to accomplish the future glory (of vv. 7–8) in light of their prior "*calling.*"

Mark Taylor: The extended thanksgiving in 1:4–9 captures Paul's profound gratitude to God for the grace given to the Corinthians in Christ. The NIV punctuates 1:4–9 into five sentences, but in Greek the paragraph is structured around two main clauses:

- "*I thank God*" (1:4) and
- "*God is faithful*" (1:9).

Richard Hays: Paul characteristically opens his letter with a **word of thanksgiving** for the community to which he writes. This thanksgiving section artfully foreshadows many of the issues that Paul will address in the letter as a whole. Three theological themes stand out in the thanksgiving section of 1 Corinthians:

- (1) the grace of God, who is the giver of all the gifts enjoyed by the Corinthian church;
- (2) the eschatological framework of Christian existence; and
- (3) God's call to community in and with Jesus Christ.

Dan Nighswander: Paul uses the thanksgiving to introduce some theological teaching, some ethical exhortation, and some expression of pastoral concern to set a prayerful context for what follows and to introduce the topics to be addressed in the rest of the letter (**O'Brien:** 12–15, 261–63).

Like an overture in a musical composition, the thanksgiving introduces the themes to be developed later and the circumstances of writing. In this section we thus get our first glimpse of the issues that Paul will address and a hint of the approach that he will take in dealing with them.

In the thanksgiving section of **1 Corinthians**, Paul highlights the Corinthian interest in speech and knowledge, gifts with which they have been especially endowed by God. Paul also identifies the ethical and eschatological context that determines the value of these gifts and the community context for exercising them. . .

Paul introduces several issues in the thanksgiving that will draw more extended discussion in the letter that ensues. The tone of the thanksgiving is a strategic preparation for what follows. Coming to the thanksgiving, as we do, with some awareness of the messy, complicated, and shameful behavior that will be exposed in this letter and the sometimes chiding, even scolding, tone that Paul uses to address the Corinthians, we may be inclined to read or hear these words as ironic, perhaps even sarcastic. However, that would be a misunderstanding of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian assembly (**O'Brien:** 113–16).

The **tone** of the thanksgiving, especially if read as if for the first time, without “reading back” what is to follow, is encouraging, affirming, inviting. Paul is sincere in giving thanks for these people and in recognizing their strengths. He has, after all, been the one to call them to faith and to nurture them in faith over an extended period. His passionate concern, evident even in his correction that follows, is here expressed positively. His pastoral heart longs for their well-being and for a warm relationship of shared faith and affection with them. Therefore he draws the contours of divine grace, eschatological hope, and the fellowship of the faith community before he launches into the difficult and risky work that forms the body of the letter.

I. (:4) FIRST EXPRESSION OF PAUL'S THANKSGIVING: APPRECIATING PAST RECEPTION OF THE GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE – GIVEN IN CHRIST JESUS

A. Looking Upwards -- Consistent Emphasis on Thanksgiving

"I thank my God always"

Paul starts off almost every letter with this customary tone of thanksgiving. No one can perform this function of giving thanks for us. We are personally responsible to offer up thanksgiving on a continual basis to our God. This tone is not conditioned on our external circumstances but on the greatness and goodness of our gracious God.

David Garland: Paul cultivates a thankful spirit and refers to his regular habit of giving thanks "*always*," that is, at every opportunity (**Thiselton** 2000: 89; cf. 15:58), for this church. He did not suddenly think of them when he began to send this letter. After reading the Corinthian correspondence, one might wonder what Paul could find about them for which to give thanks. Many observe that giving thanks that they are enriched with gifts is surprising since this letter reveals that they have misunderstood and perhaps misused them. **Fee** (1987: 36) corrects views that assume that Paul indulges in sarcasm by noting that he "recognizes that the problem lies not in their gifts, but in their attitudes toward these gifts. Precisely because the gifts come from God, Paul is bound to give thanks for them." The focus of his thanksgiving falls on what God graciously has done among them in Christ, not on their own particular qualities (cf. 4:7). He gives credit where credit is due, to God, the source of these eschatological blessings (**Brown** 1995: 67 n. 5). **This reference to God's grace given to them undercuts any egocentric pride in their spiritual achievements.**

B. Looking Outwards -- Conflicted Corinthians Still the Object of Thanksgiving

"concerning you"

Paul has much to say to them in the way of correction. But their genuine reception of the gospel and union with Jesus Christ makes them first and foremost objects of thanksgiving and participants in mutual fellowship.

C. Looking Inwards – Critical Spiritual Resource

"for the grace of God"

All of the fruit of changed lives flows from God's grace operating in our heart.

Herries: Grace is divine favor given by God to His children. In **1 Cor.** Paul speaks of grace as a power given by God to the believer that enables him to live the Christian life.

Bill Gothard: Grace is a dynamic power or desire given by God to help you do things His way.

D. Looking Backwards to Their Conversion

“which was given you”

No place for pride; no allowance for division; no personal merit or reliance on one's abilities or achievements

E. Focusing on Christ

“in Christ Jesus”

Every spiritual blessing we enjoy flows to us in association with Christ Jesus. He is both the Gift and the Giver. He is our Savior and our very life that we now share.

Stamps: The thanksgiving establishes a shared spirituality which is distinctly **Christocentric**; in so doing, it establishes the basis upon which the sender and recipients relate through the letter.

Robert Hughes: Paul continually stressed the role of Christ and God. The Father was the source of all gracious acts, and the Son was the means through which those acts were realized.

II. (:5-7A) SECOND EXPRESSION OF PAUL'S THANKSGIVING: APPLYING PRESENT SUFFICIENT RESOURCES OF THE GIFTS OF GOD'S GRACE – HAVING BEEN ENRICHED IN CHRIST JESUS

A. Overall Spiritual Enrichment in Association with Christ

“that in everything you were enriched in Him”

You lack nothing that you need for spiritual success and fellowship

Herries: One of the problems of the Christian life is an Inferiority Complex -- this is caused by one thing only = Comparison

Paul Gardner: The prominence of “*wisdom*” and “*knowledge*” in Greek society and, indeed, in some Jewish wisdom traditions may help us understand why the Corinthians seemed to have especially emphasized these gifts. Perhaps they came to regard these grace-gifts as the Christian equivalent of the very things that their own society most valued. There the art of rhetoric was highly valued. The power of persuasion and the use of logic were prized forms of communication. As **Munck** argued, probably correctly, what Paul encountered was a compromised and distorted gospel, centered on a Corinthian theology owing much to “a mixture of philosophy and sophistry typical of that age.” Here, he says, we meet a “popular . . . mixture of philosophy, religion and rhetoric.” More recently **Winter** has examined the first-century Sophists and their influence on the world into which Paul was writing in considerable detail. He maintains that the Corinthians had absorbed much of the sophistic attention to careful rhetoric, wisdom, and knowledge and that Paul's teaching is specifically countering this tendency. Thus, from these early verses of the epistle the emphasis on God's gifts of

wisdom and knowledge must be seen against a background in which such skills are to be admired and are indications of a status possessed by an elite. Knowledge of the gods and of spirituality was highly regarded. Later, Paul will show how **distorted** the Corinthian understanding and use of these gifts really was. **For now, he simply thanks God for what they have received from the riches of his grace.**

B. Two Specific Areas of Spiritual Enrichment

1. In All Speech

Just as Christ came into this world as the pre-existent Word (*logos*) and fully revealed God, believers can both evangelize and edify with the various gifts of utterance in communicating spiritual truth.

David Garland: Paul will make a distinction between rhetorical eloquence, glossolalia, and prophecy (forth-telling). The first he depreciates. He did not proclaim the mystery of God to them in lofty words of wisdom, yet his preaching was effective (2:1–4). His words were not instructed by human wisdom but by the Spirit because he was interpreting spiritual things (2:13) and because the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power (4:20). The act of speaking in the tongues of mortals or of angels, when it is not suffused with love, Paul discounts as loud clanging (13:1). Silence is sometimes preferable (14:28). Prophecy is the most valuable because it builds up the church rather than just the individual (14:1–12) and can lead others to faith (14:20–25).

2. In All Knowledge

Believers are not looking for some new esoteric knowledge that would only puff up, but need to be reminded of the heart of the gospel message regarding our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. This experiential knowledge that focuses on our relationship with Christ is mocked as foolishness by the Greeks, but is sufficient for our spiritual growth and vitality.

Anthony Thiselton: perhaps the greatest surprise is that Paul genuinely and generously thanks God for the very gifts that caused him the greatest problems in Corinth: divisions, disappointments, competitive comparisons, and the illusion of being self-sufficient or “special” in a self-affirming sense. Later he will warn them that knowledge (v. 5) too often “*inflates*” the ego or “*puffs up*” the self (8:1; cf. also 14:4). Yet Paul holds on to the positive potential of such gifts, and he gives thanks for them. If they are used in accordance with Christ-centered criteria and love (expounded in **chs. 12–14**), these gifts (v. 7) may constitute a positive blessing to the church as a whole.

Robert Hughes: Why did Paul single out the gifts of speech and knowledge (1:5)? He planned first to note the **source** of those gifts. Then, on that basis, he would draw out the **implications** not only for the Corinthians’ incorrect use of speech and knowledge concerning the leadership factions, but also for all the other problems. Their basic problem concerned a misunderstanding of what true speech and knowledge were, and how they should be properly used.

C. Changed Lives Confirm the Validity of the Gospel Proclamation

“even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you”

Mark Taylor: The Corinthians’ enrichment in spiritual gifts validated the genuineness of their reception of the gospel message, that the *“testimony about Christ”* had been confirmed among them.

D. Application to Sphere of Spiritual Gifts – Assurance of Sufficiency

“so that you are not lacking in any gift”

Therefore, the Corinthians should not feel inadequate and be susceptible to grasping after other so-called impressive gifts that have nothing to do with their enrichment and edification associated with their conversion to Christianity.

Daniel Akin: The believing community does *“not lack any spiritual gift”* (v. 7). Indeed, in Christ we get all that we will ever need to be pleasing to God and effective for God. This occurs the moment one is saved, not later in the Christian experience. So, **Calvin** says it is *“as if [Paul] had said, ‘The Lord has not merely honored you with the light of the gospel, but has eminently endowed you with all the graces that may be of service to the saints for helping them forward in the way of salvation’”* (*1 Corinthians*, 57). Oh, how rich is the believer in Jesus. Nothing is missing. Nothing lacking. He provides all we need.

III. (:7B-8) THIRD EXPRESSION OF PAUL’S THANKSGIVING: ANTICIPATING FUTURE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST – THE CHANNEL OF GOD’S GRACE AND THE GOAL OF OUR CHARACTER TRANSFORMATION

A. Keep Your Eyes on the Goal

“awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Robert Gundry: *“The revelation of our Lord, Jesus Christ”* will happen at *“the end,”* which equates with *“the Day of our Lord, Jesus Christ”*—in other words, the day when he comes back in a full display and exercise of his lordship (compare **1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:10**; **2 Thessalonians 2:1–12**). *“Who will also confirm you until the end [so as to be] unaccusable in the Day of our Lord, Jesus Christ”* assures the Corinthians that their *“eagerly awaiting”* that revelation is well justified. They’ll be confirmed—that is, well-established in Christian faith—just as *“the testimony about the Christ has [already] been confirmed among [them].”* As a result, no one will be able to accuse them of apostasy when the Lord returns.

Paul Gardner: The waiting *“until the end”* (ἕως τέλους) refers to the time of Christ’s *“revealing”* (v. 7b). At that time the Corinthian Christians will be established *“unimpeachable.”* In other words, by God’s grace in Christ Jesus they will be free of any charge when Christ returns to judge. *“The day of our Lord”* is drawn from Old Testament texts. The prophets warned about the day with some foreboding. Joel talks of

“sounding an alarm” and of people who should “tremble” for the “day of the Lord is coming.” Ezekiel and Amos refer to it as the time when God will return **to judge and vindicate his name**. Paul’s Christ-centered eschatology awaits that day as the day when Christ will return to judge and to save. He refers to it again in **1 Corinthians 5:5**.

David Garland: Being enriched with **grace-gifts** does not mean that they have arrived (Fee 1987: 36). He intimates that **more is to come in Christ**. Now they await (ἀπεκδέχομαι, apekdechomai, used of the end time in **Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20**) the revelation of Jesus Christ. The goal of the adventure to which God has called them still lies in the future (**11:26**), when tongues will cease and knowledge will become outmoded (**13:8**). Those who are being saved can expect salvation; those who are perishing, wrath (**4:5; 15:23; 1 Thess. 1:10**). The period of waiting in a world whose foundations and structures are crumbling (**7:31**) is marked by cries of “*Lord, come!*” (**16:22**). Waiting requires purifying the purposes of the heart so that church members will not be exposed as frauds on the day of judgment (**4:5**) and will be braced to face the shame of public vilification (**4:11–12**) and the dangers from formidable foes (**15:30–31**). Instead of standing on their dignity as those enriched with speech and knowledge, they should be standing on tiptoe in anticipation of what is to come when God will establish or confirm them as blameless on the day of the Lord. The time of waiting is placed under the shield of God’s faithfulness (**1:9**; cf. **10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24**).

Robert Hughes: Their gifts were an “awaiting time” phenomenon. The Corinthians were not yet at the end of their labors and were not yet filled or reigning in the kingdom (see **4:7–8**). The placing of grace and the gifts of God into a temporary waiting period was foundational to the point Paul would make in **13:11**. The Corinthians had not forgotten the goal of this age, the return of Christ. But **they had forgotten the present-day implications of His return**, and in doing so they had overestimated the worth, function, and point of their gifts.

B. Keep Your Confidence in Ultimate Christlikeness

“who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Anthony Thiselton: Christians are invited to rest securely on God’s promise that he will keep us “to the end” (v. 8). Such freely promised security may meet with three different responses: from some, doubt; from others, presumption; from still others, trustful faith.

Martin Luther writes, “Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times.... It makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all his creatures” (*Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, 1522).

David Prior: **God’s faithfulness** extends to that day, and beyond it into the fullness of eternity. He will keep his people blameless in that day: that is, when the secrets of people’s hearts are disclosed and we might have had legitimate fear of being finally found guilty before him. God will ensure that absolutely no charge or accusation is laid against his people, whether by human beings or by Satan, the great *‘accuser of our*

brothers' (Rev. 12:10, margin). On that day it will be plain to all that it is God who justifies, and that those whom he has justified he has also, in the selfsame act, glorified (cf. Rom. 8:33). It is Jesus who matters on that day; it is his day; he calls the tune; he determines the issues. Because we have been called to share in Jesus, we share in his supremacy on that day. We are not under judgment for sin on that day.

David Garland: Christian existence depends entirely on **God's faithfulness** (cf. Phil. 1:6), not on individual giftedness. "*Faithful*" (πιστός, pistos) is placed first in the clause in 1:9 for emphasis. Paul stresses the faithfulness of God in 10:13 in the context of recalling the wilderness traditions. God tested the people so that they would learn to rely only on God (Deut. 8:2), but these traditions reveal "that the human situation was hopeless if the one who first chose the Israelites did not remain faithful to them" (P. Gardner 1994: 154). It is an implicit warning against any false security; their boast can be only in God (1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17). Everything in their lives depends on God's faithfulness and Christ's lordship.

IV. (:9) ANCHORING ONE'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS – UNITED WITH JESUS CHRIST

A. Our Guarantee of Perseverance in the Faith

"God is faithful"

Robert Hughes: Paul was speaking to solve problems, one of which was how the Corinthians perceived themselves and their leaders. **Verse 9** pointedly exposed the foundation of their self-understanding. All hopes for religious success had to focus on

- (1) the judgment of the day of the Lord, not on their present human evaluations of worth or blame; and
- (2) the Father's faithfulness to the ongoing process of confirmation.

Paul centered their self-image and hope in the grace and faithfulness of God.

B. Our Family Fellowship

"through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son"

Paul Gardner: It is that **calling** "*by him* [God]" into a covenantal relationship with the Lord to which Paul now refers. The passive voice (ἐκλήθητε) reminds the reader that sharing in the blessings of God's community (his church) only occurs through his **sovereign work of calling**. This is the goal of God's work with his people, that they should have "*covenant participation*" (κοινωνία) with the one who has all authority, "*Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

Mark Taylor: "*Fellowship*" means much more in Greek than it does in current English idiom. In Pauline usage the term carries the idea of **participation** and **sharing**, expressed also as being "*in Christ.*" Their calling into participation with the Son sets the stage for the opening exhortation of the letter body to follow in 1:10, where Paul addresses the looming problem of a divided church, which is the antithesis of those called into intimate union with God's Son.

C. Our Lord and Savior

“Jesus Christ our Lord”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does our approach to God and our intercession for other believers reflect a consistent tone of thanksgiving?
- 2) Do we suffer from an inferiority complex or are we fully assured that God’s grace has enriched us in all the ways sufficient for us to live in fellowship with His Son?
- 3) Do we have an eager anticipation for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ?
- 4) Are we confident in the faithfulness of God to confirm us unto the end and ultimately transform us into the likeness of His Son?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lenski: Paul loves to begin his letters to congregations with a statement of his gratitude for their spiritual well-being. This is an entirely natural way of beginning a letter and resembles many of our letters to friends when we hear that they are doing well. The introduction to the present letter is certainly marked with praise. But the passives show that this is praise for what God has wrought and not for anything the Corinthians have done. This fact is quite significant for an understanding of the body of the letter, which has much to criticize in regard to the Corinthians.

Hodge: When we remember on the one hand how great is our guilt, and on the other, how great is our danger from without and from within, we feel that nothing but the righteousness of Christ and the power of God can secure our being preserved and presented blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus.

MacArthur: We are saved because God wanted us saved, and we stay saved because God does not change His mind about that desire. We had no part in God’s original desire to call us, and we can do nothing to change it. If He called us when we were lost and wretched, He surely will not cease to be faithful to that call now that we have come into fellowship with His Son. The work *koinonia* (**fellowship**) also means partnership, oneness. We are secured to glory by being one with God’s beloved Son. We entered the kingdom by grace and we will be kept in the kingdom by grace.

Piper: Do you see the connection between the call of God and the faithfulness of God? The point of the connection is this: if God has called you, then his faithfulness obliges

him to keep you -- to keep you persevering in faith. (Same in **1 Thess. 5:23f.**) But why? Why is the faithfulness of God at stake in the perseverance of those whom he has called?

If the call of God is just an invitation to come and enjoy the fellowship of his Son, then God's faithfulness doesn't oblige him to keep us there if we try to leave. No, the reason his faithfulness is at stake in our perseverance -- the reason he is committed to keeping us in the faith -- is because his call is the outworking of his choice that we should be brought to glory. "*Those whom he predestined he called and those whom he called he justified, and those whom he justified he glorified*" (**Romans 8:29-30**).

What is at stake in our perseverance is God's purpose of election (**Romans 9:11**). That's why his faithfulness is at stake. If God has chosen us for himself (**Eph. 1:4**), if he has destined us for glory (**1 Cor. 2:7**), then his faithfulness commits him to keep us in the faith. For outside the faith there is no fellowship with God and no glory.

Stedman: The word for "*enriched*" is the word from which we get our word "plutocrat." They were rendered plutocrats, spiritually. They had a wealth of enrichment, and Paul points out that it was in two particular areas, in the word and in knowledge. The word for "*speech*" here is really the word *logos*, the word of God. This is his first admission to them -- that they were recognized, avid Bible students. They understood the Bible. They did not have the New Testament as we have it -- it was not written yet -- but they had among them New Testament prophets who were preaching and teaching the same truth that we have in the New Testament. Therefore, they had all the truth available to them that is available to us. They were knowledgeable in it, Paul says . . . Yet . . .

- They were suffering divisions because they had lost sight of the Lordship of Jesus.
- They were immoral because they had forgotten that the members of their bodies were the members of Christ.
- They were in lawsuits with one another because they had failed to see that Jesus was judge of the innermost motives of the heart.
- They were quarreling because they had forgotten that others were members of Christ's body and, therefore, they were members one of another.

All that the apostle does to heal the hurts at Corinth is to call them back to an awareness of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jeffries: [despite the failures of the Corinthian believers, Paul recognized that] he or she remains a "work in progress." God will continue the transforming process in the lives of all those who have been called by Him to be saints, even when our stubborn disobedience -- the old Fundamentalists called it "back-sliding" -- seems to be "undoing" His work of grace. Why was Paul still thankful for this heretical, stubborn, ungrateful, materialistic, rebellious group of weak Christians? Because he knew that the work God had begun in each of them would not be abandoned by their heavenly Father.

Goins: Verse 7 begins by affirming the tremendous spiritual potential that God had given the Corinthian Christians. Later in the letter Paul is going to devote three whole chapters to the understanding of spiritual gifts and their place in the life of the church, because the Corinthian Christians lacked proportion and balance in estimating and using these gifts. It was the most exciting, dynamic, gift-filled church you can imagine, but it was a church out of control. But here in this early thanksgiving section, I am convinced that he is rejoicing that they are not lacking in any gift. He is trying to encourage them with the realization that God has held back no resource that would help them to do his work and to be his church in the city of Corinth. . .

Knowing how our story ends means we can live in the present with confidence. Paul wanted to assure his Corinthian brothers and sisters in Christ, right from the beginning of the letter, that their future was as secure as the promises of God. We can be guilty of a kind of spiritual hand-wringing, acting as if we're engaged in a lost cause at times. We can act as if some of the spiritual reversals in our lives are permanent. But our hope is based on the activity of God, and that allows us to believe that whatever our circumstances, we truly are born to eternal life.

Richard Hays: Teachers and preachers in the church would do well to learn from Paul's way of framing the church's identity. We are apt to think of the church's life and mission on a small, even trivial, scale. We tend to locate the identity of our communities within some denominational program, or within local politics, or within recent history. But Paul urges us instead to understand the church in a **cosmic frame of reference** that points toward the final triumph of God's righteousness, the setting right of all things in Jesus Christ. When we understand ourselves as actors within that epic drama, we undergo a crucial shift of perspective. On the one hand, the stakes are raised. Our actions belong to a larger pattern of significance than that of our own lives, and the church's obedience to God's will matters urgently, because it is part of God's strategy for the eschatological renewal of the world. On the other hand, at the same time, we can gain a better sense of proportion about our own striving and failures, for God is faithful, and it is God who is at work in calling us and preparing us for his gracious ends. Thus, by reading the opening passage of the Corinthians' mail, we can learn to see ourselves within the story of God's grace in such a way that despair and pride and petty conflict should fall away.

Leake: Protection Against Identity Theft:

Introduction: Christians must be alert to a certain form of identity theft. Satan is against us and wants to steal our identity in Christ. He tries to convince Christians they are not truly who God has said we are – casting doubts in our minds about who God says we are. We must anchor our identity in divine revelation. Who are we? Let God our Creator answer that question.

Review from vv 1-3.

Our identity is not tied in with the world. We are a called out assembly. We are connected to Christ. We are saints.

Paul's Opening Thanksgiving (:4-9) - still part of the Introduction to the letter

Background: How the church at Corinth got started – 2nd missionary journey; cf. Macedonia Call; **Acts 18:1-11**; 18 month ministry there in Corinth starting in about 50 AD;

Strength and continuity of Paul's prayer life – “*always*”

God's grace and the work in Christ that God is doing here saturates this section;

Don't get overbalanced in dwelling too much on the failures of the Corinthians; God was at work here; Paul trying to build the church up; not just blasting them; reminding them that there is power for godly change;

7 IDENTIFYING TRUTHS FOR ALL CHRISTIANS:

I. (:4) Identifying Truth #1 – We were Given Grace by God

Grace that comes from God; they received it; salvation grace emphasis here;

Favor with God which we don't deserve;

only given in Christ Jesus = the location = our identity = united to Christ; we are only branches in the vine

Corinthians struggled with self-sufficiency and pride and boasting = why they needed this emphasis on grace and Christ; Christ = our address = where we live

II. (:5) Identifying Truth #2 -- We Were Enriched by God

God's riches at Christ's expense

God has plenty of riches to bestow on whom He wants

Rom. 11:33; Phil. 4:19

In every category of life; in every way – specifically brings out 2 areas

- Speech – teaching, preaching, prophecy, tongues, evangelism, exhortation – the speaking forth of the truth; outward expression

- Knowledge – broader than a specific spiritual gift of knowledge; every kind of insight and understanding; inward conviction

They did not always use their knowledge and speech in the proper way; not always with love;

III. (:6) Identifying Truth #3 -- We Were Confirmed

A little harder to understand

A testimony that Paul had borne about Jesus Christ among them = the gospel about Christ; seen to be true; substantiated; confirmed

Confirmed in two ways:

- their changed lives = walking in the same way Christ walks

- existence of spiritual gifts among them – all of the evidence of Christ at work in them; all spiritual ministry among them; spiritual dynamic at work

IV. (:7A) Identifying Truth #4 -- We Were Given Sufficiency

“*Gifts*” – refers to broader reference than just spiritual gifts

Cf. **Ephes 1:3**

Don't keep asking God for what He has already given us

Our problem is not lack of resources, but weakness of faith;
Speaking of our collective sufficiency – not lone ranger sufficiency;
Our church has been fully equipped to do what God wants to do through us.

V. (:7B) Identifying Truth #5 -- We All As Christians Await Jesus

Present Tense – continual attitude of expectation

Participle connected to main verb = “*Enriched*” with God’s grace with the result that we should have a longing to see Him and give Him thanks; earnestness, eagerness – not just passively waiting; Our citizenship is in heaven;

Anticipating full salvation including the redemption of our bodies;

Unsaved person only has God’s wrath in his future – **1 Thess 1:10; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20-21**; Our focus should be on the coming of Christ

How much do I really want to see Christ?

(cf. illustration of little dog freaking out over his desire to chase squirrels . . .)

We have a Certain Hope – **Titus 2:11-13; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:13** – you can’t wait for something if you are not confident it is going to happen; this doctrine of bodily second coming of Christ is essential for orthodoxy

VI. (:8) Identifying Truth #6 -- We Will Be Preserved to the End

God the Father is the one Preserving us;

Same word “*confirm*” used above; this is a confirmation in the future – unto the end;

Doctrine of the Perseverance of the saints; doesn’t mean that believers won’t have struggles; cf. Peter whom the Lord prayed for regarding his faith; Christ interceding for us (**Rom. 8**);

God will sustain my faith in Christ – **Matt. 24:13**; he who endures to the end . . .; **1 Cor. 15:2**; some people have only a superficial type of faith

Heb. 10:38 – those who shrink back to destruction – **Rev. 3:21; John 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24; 1 Thess 3:11-13**; God is preserving us

That day of the Lord is coming – not Satan’s day; not our day; not man’s day;

Amos 5:18-20 – crushing of God’s enemies = religious hypocrites in this context;

1 Thess 5 – as a thief in the night

Rom. 2:5 – His righteous judgments will be revealed; but we will be preserved blameless

VII. (:9) Identifying Truth #7 -- We Have Fellowship With Jesus

“*Faithful*” = certain to do all that He has said He will do;

Our Rock; we are saved because God wants us saved; He continues to ensure that salvation;

Deut. 7:9 – the Faithful God; **2 Tim. 2:12-13**; God can’t deny who He is; can’t break His promises – He has chosen to be faithful; **1 Thess 5:24; Rom. 3:3**; God will complete the job He began in us

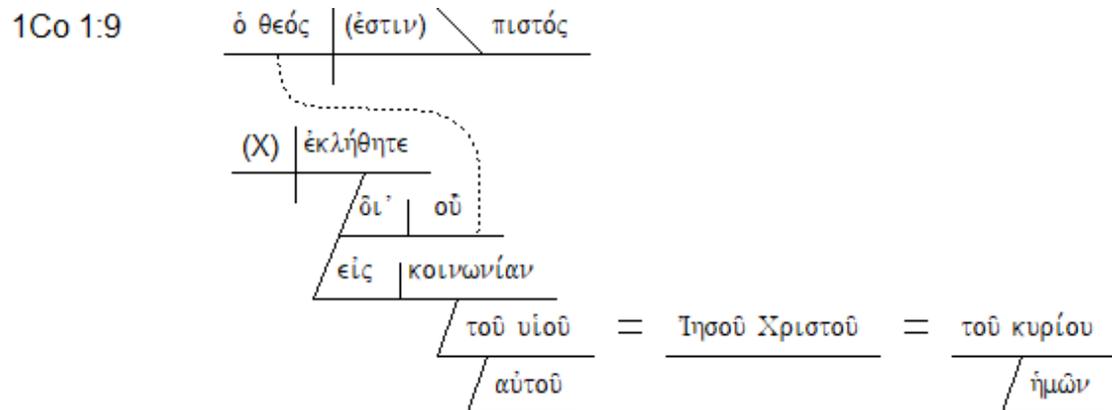
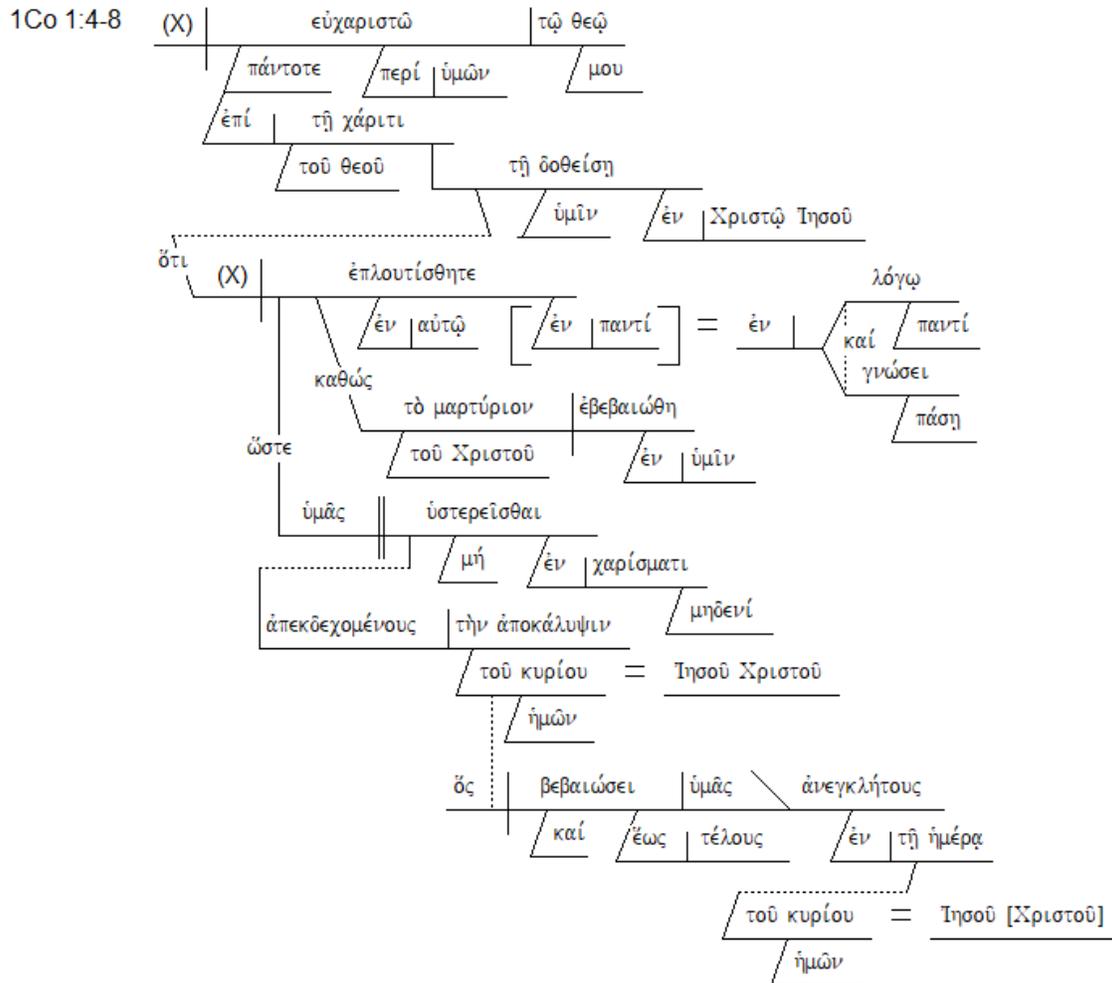
“*fellowship*” = the whole common life we share with Christ – commonality, partnership, communion – we pray together, worship together, witness, learn, minister together, etc.

Gal. 2:9; 2 Cor. 6:14-15 – we can’t have fellowship with unbelievers

Conclusion:

These identifying characteristics should have an impact on how we live

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

TITLE: *PROBLEM OF DIVISIONS: LOYALTY TO CHRIST CEMENTS A CHURCH TOGETHER*

BIG IDEA:

CHURCHES NEED TO BE UNIFIED AROUND THE SIMPLICITY AND POWER OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (THE CROSS OF CHRIST) RATHER THAN LOYALTY TO ONE PARTICULAR PREACHER

INTRODUCTION:

Divisions in the church undermine our testimony and replace submission to Christ with prideful agendas. The ministry gifts have been given to the church for the glorification of Christ – not for the formation of preacher fan clubs. The temptation is to divert our dependence upon our invisible Lord to some visible impressive figure. But we all need to focus our attention on the substance of the gospel message – especially on the cross of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Too often churches strive for unity by trying to galvanize loyalty around the leadership of one strong leader personality instead of focusing dependence upon the true Head of the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for all of the elect to bring us spiritual life and gift all of us all with the privilege of mutual ministry that can bring great glory to God. We need strong preachers and dynamic leadership – but that leadership must always be channeling our devotion and dependence to Christ in a unified focus. That is why the proper functioning of the plurality of elders is such an essential cornerstone to the health and vitality of the local church.

Craig Blomberg: Paul introduces in **verses 10–17** the key for promoting unity and avoiding divisiveness -- **focusing on Christ** rather than exalting human leaders. In so doing, we are driven to the cross, which should also promote humility rather than arrogance and rivalry. When we recognize the cross and all it stands for -- the atoning, substitutionary sacrifice of the God-man for sinners in need of salvation, vindicated by his bodily resurrection and exaltation -- we have identified the cluster of complementary and fundamental truths that must forever form the core of Christian faith.

Dan Nighswander: This letter has one overarching purpose: to persuade the Christians in Corinth to come together in faith and action and purpose, united by their spiritual connection in Christ (**1:2, 4** et al.). Paul pleads, exhorts, appeals, urges, and implores them to do so.

The **body of the letter** begins with a statement that sets out its intention. The rhetorical name for this statement is the thesis statement. In this case, it is not an idea to be argued and defended but rather an outcome that Paul seeks. Some scholars believe that **1:10** is a thesis statement for the first four chapters only, but **Margaret Mitchell** (198–200) has argued persuasively that it serves as a **thesis statement for the entire letter**. She shows

that it is characteristic of deliberative argument that the thesis statement should lay out a desirable course of action, which in this case is a call for stability and unity among the believers. The thesis statement uses politically loaded terms and, characteristic of Paul's theological anchor, appeals to our Lord Jesus Christ as the basis for that course of action.

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: Paul expresses his dismay at the lack of unity in the church and pleads with the Corinthians that they should be united in thought and purpose. Nothing less than this is required by the gospel of the cross of Christ that Paul has preached among them.

I. (:10) UNITY IN CHRIST IS THE GOAL FOR HIS CHURCH

A. Appeal to Church Unity (viewed as Family Unity)

“Now I exhort you, brethren”

Making an urgent appeal to them as a family member

Paul Gardner: Here it seems most likely that Paul is using the word with a connotation of “**firm encouragement**.” In a firm but loving manner, reflecting the gift and calling of apostleship that is specifically his, he desires to build the Corinthians up in Christ. He will later argue that the grace-gifts, such as prophecy, are given so people can learn from each other and be built up and “*encouraged*” (παρακαλέω; **14:31**). This is how he approaches those to whom he writes. Here the word is translated “*urge*” to communicate not harsh rhetoric from the one with power but **the firm request of one who loves his family**.

B. Authority for Church Unity = the Head of the Body

“by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

C. Affirmation of Church Unity – Requires a certain mindset

1. Positive: Stay on the Same Page

“that you all agree”

Doug Goins: The first positive appeal is that they agree, or literally, that they all speak the same thing. This term is an idiom from classical Greek. It was always used to describe political parties or communities that were free from factions; all agreed on what the party platform was, and there was no competition. We commonly hear the same kind of language today from Democrats and Republicans who call for party unity, because disunity undermines their effectiveness. So Paul is calling the Corinthian Christians to make up their differences and let go of their party slogans.

John MacArthur: For a local church to be spiritually healthy, harmonious, and effective, there must, above all, be doctrinal unity. The teaching of the church should not be a

smorgasbord from which members can pick and choose. Nor should there be various groups, each with its own distinctives and leaders.

Dan Nighswander: It would be wrong to assume from the repeated use of same that Paul wanted to achieve uniformity of thought and of action. Rather, he wanted to restore relationships that had been severed through divisions. We should think of the musical term **harmony, not unison**. Thus it is appropriate to speak, as **Mitchell** does, of the “**rhetoric of reconciliation**.”

2. Negative: Avoid Choosing Up Sides

“and that there be no divisions among you”

Roy Ciampa: The **fundamental theme** of the letter is sounded in **1:10**. . . Everything that follows, especially in **1 Corinthians 1:11 – 4:21**, must be understood as an elaboration of this appeal. Paul, writing to a community torn by divisions (schismata), **calls for unity**. . . Paul had left the Corinthian community in a relatively harmonious condition; now he has learned, to his dismay, that quarrels are splitting the church.

Anthony Thiselton: A key word in this passage is *splits* (v. 10; Greek *schismata*). We risk losing the point if we translate the Greek by a more formal word such as *divisions*, for these are not divisions of doctrine. **Welborn** observes that the problem is “a power struggle, not a theological controversy” (*Politics and Rhetoric*, p. 7). The word **split** (in the Greek) denotes a tear in a fishing net that needs to be mended (**Mark 1:19**), or a *rending apart* that has to be “*put back to order*” (**2 Cor. 13:11**). The word may be used metaphorically of a political divide. In the Fourth Gospel the preaching of Jesus provokes a *split* among the crowd of hearers (**John 7:43; 9:16**). It is very serious when **splits** or tears appear in the church. Since Paul calls the church Christ’s body, it is almost as if this power play tears apart the limbs of Christ (**1 Cor. 12:27**; cf. **11:18**).

David Garland: The proclivity toward **factiousness** was present in Corinth long before Paul appeared, and the new converts apparently continued to manifest this competitive spirit in their interactions with their fellow believers after their conversion. Several factors contributed to a party-minded spirit: social stratification, personal patronage, philosopher/student loyalty, and party loyalties fostered by urban alienation (**Oster** 1995: 50). The rips in the fabric of their unity (cf. **12:25**) could have been caused by any number of things and should not be attributed solely to theological differences.

3. Positive: Exercise Harmonious Discernment

*“but that you be made complete in the same mind
and in the same judgment.”*

MacArthur: The basic idea is that of putting back together something that was broken or separated so it is no longer divided. The term is used in both the NT and in classical Gr. to speak of mending such things as nets, broken bones or utensils, torn garments, and dislocated joints. Cf. Ro 16:17; Php 1:27.

Anthony Thiselton: Paul does not require uniformity or replication in every detail of doctrine, but a noncompetitive attitude that sets aside all hint of power play. **J. B. Lightfoot** suggested “free from factions” or “making up differences” (*Notes*, p. 151). Polyphonic harmony does not require dull unison but contributes to the beauty and coherence of the whole. The thrusting, competitive culture of the city of Corinth since its refounding as a Roman colonia in 44 B.C. makes it all the more certain that **competitive power play** on the part of one group against another was the root problem in the church.

II. (:11-13) UNITY IS COMPROMISED BY FOCUSING LOYALTY ON A PARTICULAR PREACHER RATHER THAN ON CHRIST

A. (:11) Report of Divisions in the Church at Corinth

“For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you.”

Dan Nighswander: The Corinthians had sent Paul a letter (**7:1**) in which they named several questions on which they invited Paul to comment [*What the Corinthians Wrote*, p. 372]. They expected the three men entrusted to carry the letter—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**16:17**)—to elaborate on the questions and to fill Paul in on other matters happening in the assembly [*What the Delegation Reported*, p. 374]. . .

for Paul’s reliance on a report from her people to carry the weight of his argument, it was necessary for him to believe that she and her people were credible sources of information and would be recognized as such by the assembly. By naming his independent source, Paul served notice to the congregations that they could not restrict or control the information he received and that he would address the shameful behaviors the members did not want him to know about as well as the more “respectable” issues that they had identified.

Mark Taylor: Some think that since Paul was in Ephesus at the time of the writing of the letter, Chloe may have been a wealthy Asian with business interests that required her representatives to travel to Corinth. We do not know for certain that she was a believer, but it is probable since she had a presence in Corinth and was known to the church, even if through her business agents. The report itself regarding the Corinthian quarrels does not come from Chloe but rather from her household.

Adewuya: The gravity of the divisions is shown in the use of the word “*contention*” (Greek *eris*). In its original usage, it always referred to **disputes that endanger the church**. The word points to quarrels and is the hot dispute, the emotional flame that ignites whenever rivalry becomes intolerable. It is listed as one of the **works of the flesh** in **Galatians 5:20** of which Christians should have no part.

B. (:12) Repetition of Misdirected Allegiance

1. Widespread Problem

“Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying,”

Points out to us today the natural human tendency of all of us to want to align our dependence with some visible, appealing figure. This was not some isolated problem affecting just pockets of people in the church. Everyone was at fault regarding this issue (or at least it was widespread enough that Paul was not just singling out some isolated groups).

Daniel Akin: What do I mean by the phrase “**cult of personality**”? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says it refers to when “a public figure (such as a political leader) is deliberately presented to the people of a country as a great person who should be admired and loved” (“Cult of Personality”). Most discussions relate the concept to politics, often with negative connotations. Tragically, this idolization of a person can work its way into the church with devastating consequences. Churches might put a person on a pedestal that belongs only to Jesus.

Adewuya: The point is, the Corinthians were in danger of giving to mere human leaders that **ultimate allegiance** which belongs to Christ alone, as their only Savior. As Paul will put it in **4:1**, the Corinthians should think of Paul and his fellow apostles simply as servants of Christ, to whom the mysteries of God are committed and who are responsible to him.

Mark Taylor: What is crystal clear is that a **party spirit** plagued the church in Corinth, and their boasting in men contradicted the very essence of the gospel. The root problem was **pride**, the worst of sins, especially for those identified with a crucified Christ.

2. Loyalty to Paul

“*I am of Paul,*”

This must have been especially distasteful to the Apostle Paul who found that his preaching of Christ had not produced the desired effect of dependence upon Christ.

Roy Ciampa: That Paul himself had been unaware of the existence of a “Paul party” -- indeed, that he thoroughly disapproves of such an idea -- shows that these slogans have probably **arisen spontaneously** within the Corinthian church, without any direct encouragement from the leaders whose names were being bandied about. Despite many scholarly speculations, it is not possible to assign a distinct ideological program to each of these factions. Indeed, Paul’s remarks here suggest that the emergent factions may be created more by personal allegiance to particular leaders than by clearly defined theological differences.

David Garland: The Paul group is assumed to be composed of loyalists to Paul who formed to counter the developments of other groups that tended to denigrate him. They affirmed his special role as father, planter, and builder of the community. If it consisted only of those baptized by Paul, it would have been comparatively small, though presumably comprising the leading households. If such a group exists, Paul is not

gratified that they champion him. He does not try to strengthen their hand but undercuts supporters and rivals alike.

3. Loyalty to Apollos
“and ‘I of Apollos,’”

Roy Ciampa: Apollos, according to **Acts 18:24–28**, was a learned Jew from Alexandria who was deeply grounded in Scripture and who “*taught accurately the things concerning Jesus*” with great passion and eloquence. He had already been operating as a Christian preacher at Ephesus before coming into contact with representatives of the Pauline mission.

David Garland: Is it coincidental that Paul’s references in this section to baptism (**1:14–17; 3:6**), rhetorical eloquence (**1:17–25; 2:1–4**), spirituality (**2:6–16**), and building on another’s foundation (**3:10–15**) correlate with the description of Apollos in Acts?

4. Loyalty to Cephas
“and ‘I of Cephas,’”

David Garland: Murphy-O’Connor (1996: 277) surmises that the members of this group were Jewish converts who found it difficult to assimilate into a predominantly Gentile community.

Gordon Fee: Whatever some meant when they said, “*I follow Cephas*,” it had not brought about **theological divisions** in the church. Despite the opinions of many, not a single item in 1 Corinthians explicitly suggests a Judaizing faction in the church; and in the one issue that might point to such, namely that of food sacrificed to idols (**chaps. 8–10**), Paul explicitly says that those who are “*defiled*” by the Corinthian “gnostics” are people who had formerly been accustomed to idols (**8:7**) and are therefore clearly Gentiles. This is not to say that Peter had not left his mark on some in the church, but it does not seem to have been an indelible, or visible, theological mark. More likely there is a **personal allegiance factor** here, involving some who had been converted and baptized under his ministry, or perhaps the issue is related to Paul’s apostleship vis-à-vis that of Peter.

5. False Spirituality
“and ‘I of Christ.’”

This problem presupposes that the believers at Corinth were exposed to large doses of ministry from multiple preachers.

Roy Ciampa: Most puzzling is Paul’s disapproving reference to those who say “*I belong to Christ*.” Is that not what every Christian should say? In context, it would seem that some of the Corinthians must have been claiming Christ as their leader in an **exclusivistic way** (“We are the ones who really belong to Christ, but we’re not so sure about you”). Such a claim might be coupled with a boastful pretension to have direct

spiritual access to Christ apart from any humanly mediated tradition. Indeed, it is not hard to see how some of the Corinthians might have developed just such a position on the basis of Paul's own preaching (cf. **Gal. 1:11–12**). Paul sees, however, that when "*I belong to Christ*" becomes the rallying cry of one contentious faction within the church, Christ is de facto reduced to the status of one more leader hustling for adherents within the community's local politics.

Doug Goins: The fourth party named was the Christ party. These were the purists, those who sounded the most spiritual. It was probably the worst of the four parties. There was a self-righteous smugness about these folks. They basically said, "We don't need human leaders at all. Jesus is the head of the body, and we'll just listen to him. We're not going to listen to Paul or Apollos or Peter." This group would have been religiously intimidating in the life of that fellowship, claiming superiority in Bible study and prayer and worship. These were folks you would have heard saying, "The Lord spoke to me on this matter...." They were spiritual elitists who were unwilling to submit themselves even to the apostolic authority that Jesus Christ had defined and put in place for the church. They were just as divisive as the other three groups.

Another Option:

Jeffries: There may or may not have been a "Christ" faction at Corinth.

"There was absolutely no punctuation in Greek manuscripts and no space whatever between words. [**1 Corinthians 1:12**] may well not describe a party at all. It may be the comment of Paul himself. Perhaps we ought to punctuate like this: 'I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephas -- but I belong to Christ!' It may well be that this is Paul's own comment on the whole wretched situation. "If that is not so and this does describe a party, they must have been a small and rigid sect who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Corinth. Their real fault was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them. It may well describe a little, intolerant, self-righteous group."

- **William Barclay:** The Letters to the Corinthians

But **Morris** says the Greek structure makes this alternative interpretation unlikely.

C. (:13) Response to the Problem Focuses on Centrality of Jesus Christ

David Garland: Paul attempts to undermine this partisan spirit with three questions. The questions underscore the lunacy of exalting one leader over another when they all have been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (**1:9**).

1. Unity of Christ – Proper Focus on the Person of Jesus Christ

"Has Christ been divided?"

David Prior: The wholeness of Christ -- Paul is asking the Corinthians, with all their division, 'Do you suppose that there are fragments of Christ that can be distributed among different groups? If you have Christ, you have all of him. Jesus cannot be divided.' We cannot have half a person, as though we said: 'Please come in, but leave

your legs outside.’ This, incidentally, throws light on such common phrases as ‘wanting more of Christ’. It cannot be; we should rather be allowing Christ to have more of us. We are the disintegrated ones whom Christ is gradually making whole, so that we become more like him – integrated and entire. The same argument applies to wanting more of the Holy Spirit. If he is personal, a Person, than we either have him living within us or we do not; again, our desire and prayer should be for the Holy Spirit to have more of us. . .

On these three grounds – the wholeness of Christ, the cross of Christ and the Lordship of Christ – Paul appeals to the Christians at Corinth to express their God-given unity in Jesus Christ. We, like Paul, are under orders to proclaim the gospel (17), and so to preach it that in no way do we detract from the cross of Christ. It is very easy to do the latter, notably when we pander to the wisdom of the world.

2. Cross of Christ – Proper Focus on the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ

“Paul was not crucified for you, was he?”

Paul Gardner: Paul will expound the impact of the message of the cross in more detail in vv. 18–25, but here he reminds his readers that the defining event for Christians, and for the existence of the church itself, was **the death of Christ**. Elsewhere Paul elaborates upon the death of Christ “*for us*,” but all would have known that in his death Christ paid the price for the sin of believers. As he died on the cross, he represented all his people, and in the sacrifice of his life for the sin of his people, he took upon himself the judgment they deserved. Only Christ was crucified, and therefore he alone is the redeemer, the sacrifice, and the head of the church. For those who have found salvation in Christ, it is an absurdity therefore to call themselves followers of some local church leader, however prominent or great such a person might be. In today’s world, which also lays much store in status and in the charismatic styles of certain church leaders, this is an extremely powerful reminder of what the church is all about. It is about following the one who was crucified for us and alone is Lord in the church. It is for this reason that Christians are baptized into his name rather than into anyone else’s.

David Prior: We all come together to the Lord’s Table as sinners redeemed by his blood; we there acknowledge the disunity caused through our sin and guilt, then gratefully and joyfully celebrate our unity in forgiveness and cleansing. There is no single truth more eloquent or productive of true unity between Christians than the cross of Christ.

3. Baptism in the Name of Christ – Proper Focus on the Meaning of the Symbolism of the Sacraments of the Church Commanded by Christ

“Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Sad that this area of baptism has developed into one of the most divisive areas in the church.

Roy Ciampa: Paul regards this situation as **scandalous**. Consequently, he poses a series of **biting rhetorical questions (v. 13)**. The first of these questions (“*Has Christ been divided?*”) would be more precisely translated, “*Has Christ been divided up and parceled out?*” The community’s dissension has created an absurd situation, Paul suggests, in which Christ is treated as a commodity or a possession to be haggled over. Thus, the one body of Christ (an image that will appear explicitly later in the letter) has been fragmented into interest groups. Even more telling are the next two questions, which make the point that no merely human preacher can ever be the basis for the church’s faith and unity. The form in which these questions are posed in the Greek indicates that they are rhetorical questions that demand a negative answer: “*Paul wasn’t crucified for you, was he? Or you weren’t baptized in the name of Paul, were you?*” The community’s life before God depends entirely on Jesus’ death on a cross (cf. **11:26; 15:1–3**), and the Lord into whose dominion the community has been transferred in baptism is Jesus Christ alone. The church is saved and sustained only in the name of Jesus. When this truth is kept clearly in focus, petty rivalries and preferences for different preachers are seen in their true light: They are simply ridiculous.

David Prior: To be baptized in (*eis*, literally ‘into’) the name of someone was to have one’s life signed over to that person, to come under his authority and to be at his beck and call. Paul makes the self-evident point that the Corinthians had, in baptism, become the possession of Jesus Christ -- and of nobody else. He was clearly very sensitive to the possibility of people regarding themselves as his own disciples.

Mark Taylor: That Paul **repudiates personal allegiances** by asking rhetorically, “*Was Paul crucified for you?*” and “*Were you baptized into the name of Paul?*” is not at odds with his later instruction to “*imitate me*” (**4:16; 11:1**). In all instances he is **turning their focus to Christ**. Paul’s qualification in **1:17** that Christ sent him to preach the gospel, “*not with words of human wisdom,*” sets the stage for his exposition of God’s wisdom versus human wisdom in **1:18 – 4:13**.

III. (:14-17) UNITY IS PROMOTED BY FOCUSING ON THE CENTRAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH = THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL IN ALL OF ITS SIMPLICITY AND POWER

A. (:14-16) The Central Mission Is Not: Trying to Compete For Disciples

“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.”

Craig Blomberg: Here is perhaps another clue to the nature of the rivalries: these young Christians may have been idolizing the particular leaders who first brought them to the Lord. We know Apollos preached in Corinth after Paul did (**Acts 19:1**), and it is quite possible that Peter or some of his disciples did as well. Crispus is most likely the synagogue ruler of **Acts 18:8**. Gaius is almost certainly the host of the church whom Paul praises in **Romans 16:23** (and to be distinguished from the recipient of **3 John**).

Of Stephanas we know nothing else except that which is told in **1 Corinthians 16:15–17**.

David Garland: I propose another view to explain the **inclusion of these two names**. Possibly, these two wealthier men were at the root of the controversy as leaders of house churches. It is hard to imagine how persons with their wealth and influence did not have something to do with the disputes. They came from different backgrounds—one Jewish, the other a Gentile God-fearer—and this difference may have fueled strife. By mentioning them by name as those whom he baptized in Corinth, Paul may be reminding these two men of the circumstances of their coming to faith in Christ (cf. **Philem. 19**). They are both on the same level. He employs a strategy of indirectness to maneuver delicately around sensitive and perhaps bruised egos to avoid causing them to lose face publicly and to promote rapport.

B. (:17) The Central Mission Is: the Proclamation of the Gospel = Focused on the Cross of Christ

1. The Apostolic Priority = Preaching the Gospel

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel”

The church can so easily be diverted from its fundamental mission.

This section is not to minimize the proper importance of baptism. Paul is not saying that the believers did not need to be baptized – only that he did not need to be the one administering it.

Charles Ryrie: Though Paul did baptize some, it is clear from this statement that he did not consider baptism necessary for salvation.

Adewuya: Was Paul saying that baptism was unnecessary in **verses 14–17**? Absolutely not. One should by no means interpret or understand these verses as such. Paul simply placed the proper emphasis where it belongs -- that is, the preaching of the gospel (see **v. 17**).

Robert Gundry: But why did Paul baptize anybody at all if Christ didn’t send him to baptize people? The question is wrongly framed. Baptism as such isn’t at issue. **Baptism in Paul’s name is at issue.** Christ didn’t send him to gain a personal following by baptizing people; but he did send Paul to proclaim the gospel, which has to do with *“the cross of the Christ,”* not with anything having to do with Paul. (Incidentally, *“send”* is the verbal counterpart of *“apostle”* in **1:1**.) Both philosophy (which means “love of wisdom”) and eloquence (“speech”) were highly prized—indeed, celebrated—in Greece and throughout Greco-Roman culture. So if Paul had proclaimed the gospel with eloquently expressed wisdom (*“wisdom of speech”*), a Corinthian audience would have attributed their conversions to his abilities as a philosopher and orator and for that reason would have declared subservience to him en masse. As it was, only a fraction of believers had, against his intention, declared subservience to him.

2. The Apostolic Methodology = The Foolishness of Preaching – Simplicity of Spiritual Wisdom

“not in cleverness of speech”

Contrast this with present day marketing emphasis in evangelicalism; The wisdom of the world accomplishes nothing for the sake of Christ.

Dan Nighswander: With the qualification that he preached not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power (**1:17b**), Paul introduces the first of his arguments with the Corinthian assembly: **the cross of Christ, not human wisdom -- however brilliantly articulated -- is the central value of Christian faith.**

Paul Gardner: Looking now at what Paul says in this passage and how he contrasts this “*wisdom of speech*” with the “*word of the cross*” (v. **18**) and the “*wisdom of God*” (v. **21**), we see that Paul is arguing that the gospel itself simply turns the way that the world views wisdom on its head. The cross of Christ, understood as the “*gospel*” -- the full revelation of God in Christ -- carries within itself the ultimate “*wisdom*,” that is, the mind and plan of God for this world. It also carries within itself the “*power of God*” (v. **18**). Human teachers and preachers are but the vessels that carry God’s powerful message. Clever rhetoric will simply serve to obscure the power of God’s word. To elevate the manner of delivery is to give a profile to the one who preaches, and this is not the focus of the gospel. Conversely, to elevate the content (the “*wisdom of God*”), which is the plan of God in Jesus Christ, inevitably diminishes the human voice that brings the message. Therefore, in sending Paul to preach the gospel, Christ gave him a task that, as with John the Baptist before him, would mean that he would always be decreasing while Christ would always be increasing (**John 3:30**). No doubt Paul would have joined with John in saying, as Christ was exalted, “*This joy of mine is now complete*” (**John 3:29** ESV).

3. The Power of the Cross

“so that the cross of Christ would not be made void”

Tragic when believers do not apply the message of the gospel with its freedom from the bondage of sin to their own everyday lives; a divided church is a weak and powerless church

Charles Hodge: During the apostolic age, and in the apostolic form of religion, truth stood immeasurably above external rites. The apostasy of the church consisted in making rites more important than truth.

Daniel Akin: The power is in the preaching of the cross! If an impressive delivery overshadows the preaching of the good news, then the cross will be emptied of its power. The power of salvation is never in the messenger. The power of salvation is always in the message, the gospel, the cross of Christ.

Mark Taylor: For Paul, the effectiveness of proclamation lay not in the manipulative rhetorical devices of the speaker but rather in the persuasive message of the cross proclaimed in the power of the Spirit (2:1–5).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are Christians called in this passage to *agree* on everything? What is the sphere of agreement that is in view? (I like the famous quote: “If two people think exactly alike on everything . . . then one of them isn’t thinking!”)
- 2) What has been the cause of church *quarrels* and divisions that you have witnessed in your experience? How could the different sides have moved towards agreement in Christ? Does this passage have anything to say in favor or against the existence of specific denominations?
- 3) How can Paul say that Christ *did not send him to baptize* . . . when that was clearly part of the Great Commission?
- 4) What examples do we see today of preachers relying on *cleverness of speech* rather than on the simplicity and power of the message of the cross?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: Now, church unity is a very important matter, and, because of its significance, Paul puts it first in the list of problems he has to deal with here at Corinth. Many of the other problems were flowing out of this division within the congregation. Here in **verse 10** he briefly shows us the ground of unity, and the nature of unity in a church. The ground, of course, is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*I appeal to you,*" he says, "*by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Their relationship to Christ was the unifying factor of the church. There is no other name big enough, great enough, glorious enough, and powerful enough to gather everybody together, despite the diversity of viewpoint and the differences of background or status in life, than the name of Jesus. That is why the apostle appeals to it. He recognizes that we share a common life if we have come to Christ; we are brothers and sisters because we have his life in us. He is the ground, always, of unity. And more than that, we have a responsibility to obey him, to follow his Lordship. Therefore, the only basis upon which you can get Christians to agree is by setting before them the Person of the Lord Jesus, and calling them back to that fundamental base. This is what Paul does here. . .

But yet the apostle says they are to be of the same mind. Now, how could that be? I think the letter to the Philippians helps us here, because in that passage I just quoted

from, Paul goes on to say, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*" (cf, **Phil 2:5**). He then goes on to describe for us the mind of Christ, which is a willingness to give up rights and personal privileges and give in and take a lower place. . .

There were, first of all, the loyalists who said, "We are of Paul. He started this church. We came to life in Christ by Paul, and Paul is the one we're going to listen to above all others." So undoubtedly there was a big group that followed Paul.

Then there were the stylists, those who were attracted by the different kinds of preaching, and they had especially been drawn to Apollos. From the book of Acts we learn that Apollos was an outstanding orator in a world that loved and appreciated oratory. He was a rhetorician who was especially capable in the allegorical style of teaching of the Old Testament. I am sure there were many in Corinth who were saying, "Oh, I love to hear Apollos! He's a great preacher, a warm, capable, eloquent man, who can make the Old Testament come alive!"

Then there were the traditionalists (there always are), those that say, "Well, I don't know about Paul or Apollos. Let's get back to the beginnings. Let's go back to Jerusalem. We are of Peter." (Peter, evidently, had been through Corinth and had preached there.) So they said, "When Peter came, we really felt that we were on solid ground. After all, he was one of the first apostles that Jesus himself called." So they were splitting and arguing and quarreling over the relative merit and authority of these various teachers.

There was still a fourth group, and in some ways I think they were probably the worst. They were drawing themselves up and saying, "Well, you may be of Paul or of Peter or of Apollos, but we are of Christ! We go back to the Lord alone. What he says we'll listen to, not Paul or Peter or anyone else -- it makes no difference to us." With that spirit of self-righteous smugness, they were separating from the rest, dividing up the congregation and quarreling with one another over these things. . .

The first thing Paul says is that it tends to chop up Christ and parcel him out as though his person and his work came in various packages, thus you lose perspective of the whole of Christian theology. When you follow one man you are getting a view of Christ, but there is no teacher in the church who has ever come along -- including the Apostle Paul himself -- who has ever had a totally complete view of Christ. That is why we have four gospels, because not even one of the disciples who was with the Lord was capable of giving us a complete enough view of Christ. It took four viewpoints to report his earthly life and ministry accurately enough to us. God, therefore, has designed that there be many teachers, many preachers, many viewpoints, in a church. In the body of Christ at large there are many who can make a contribution to the understanding of Christ. If you limit yourself to one speaker or one teacher and feed only on him, you are getting a distorted view of Jesus Christ; you are chopping Christ up, dividing him and taking one little portion as one man reports it and ignoring the rest, thus your view of Christ is deficient and unable to satisfy you as it was intended to do.

Now, the second thing Paul says is, "*Was Paul crucified for you?*" There he indicates that the problem with cliquishness is that it tends to overemphasize the significance of the human leader. It builds him up too much; it makes him a rival, to some degree, of the Lord himself. People begin to think things about him that are not true, and expect things from him that he is unable to deliver. You only have to listen around you today and you find outstanding leaders being held up by their congregations as almost the equal of the Lord himself in their value to the church. We tend to deify men, and people look at them as if they can do no wrong, can made no errors, that they know everything and can settle all questions. I have had to do some degree of battle with this myself. I have had people say to me, "Oh, Mr. Stedman, when you speak I see so clearly! I hang on every word you say. Whatever you say, I believe." (I have been trying for a long time to get my wife to accept that!) But that is a very dangerous attitude, and yet we tend to think of people as being the channel by which deliverance can come to our heart.

John Piper: The burden of the message this morning concerns the goal of Christian unity and its relationship to the cross. The text is **1 Corinthians 1:10-17**. What I would like to do is

- 1) describe the nature of the disunity that Paul is dealing with here; then
- 2) examine how he undermines the basis of that disunity and attempts to build a foundation for unity; and
- 3) look at the goal of unity and see what the nature of it is. . .

So evidently what is happening in the church at Corinth is that the people were beginning to polarize behind their favorite teacher. They isolated particular qualifications or strengths of their favorite teacher and began to brag about them. They elevated these characteristics to the point where they derived some sense of superiority from claiming this particular teacher as their own. . .

And the other effect that this truth should have on us is to remind us that our sin is so great that we needed to be saved by nothing less than the horrid execution of the Son of God, and so did our teachers! To boast in a man, to puff him up and to puff ourselves up on his coattail, means that we have forgotten the dreadful condition we are all in without a crucified Savior. The cross breaks the back of all boasting. And so the cross undermines the deepest basis of disunity and lays a new foundation for unity. . .

In other words, it's no big deal who baptizes you. The issue is, what name was solemnly and prayerfully pronounced over you as you were baptized. Did you identify with Christ at that moment or did you identify with a preacher? You contradict the meaning of your baptism when you brag about the man who put you under the water. He is nothing compared to Christ. And not only that, but the very meaning of baptism was death to self and life to God! What a travesty then to make baptism a means of asserting that old self of pride and boasting!

The way Paul attacked this problem was to teach Christian doctrine -- Christian truths -- and to apply them to the Corinthian situation. Namely,

- Christ is not divided; he is one.
- Believers possess all things in him, not just the little distinctives of their favorite teacher.
- No teacher was not crucified for you; Christ was.
- You were not baptized into a preacher's name; you were baptized into Christ's name.
- True teachers of the gospel don't try to win converts or party members by preaching with self-enhancing flourishes of eloquence; they die to themselves in preaching Christ crucified.
- God is the one who produces all spiritual fruit and should get the glory for the results, not man.

John MacArthur: It is not that believers are to be carbon copies of each other. God has made us individual and unique. But we are to be of the same opinion in regard to Christian doctrine, standards, and basic life-style. The apostles themselves were different from one another in personality, temperament, ability, and gifts; but they were of one mind in doctrine and church policy. When differences of understanding and interpretation arose, the first order of business was to reconcile those differences. Ego had no place, only the will of God. . .

The inevitable result of such party spirit is contentions, quarrels, wrangling, and disputes – a divided church. It is natural to have special affection for the person who led us to Christ, for a pastor who has fed us from the Word for many years, for a capable Sunday school teacher, or for an elder or deacon who has counseled and consoled us. But such affection becomes misguided and carnal when it is allowed to segregate us from others in the church or to decrease our loyalty to the other leaders. It then becomes a self-centered, self-willed exclusiveness that is the antithesis of unity.

Spirituality produces humility and unity; carnality produces pride and division. The only cure for quarreling and division is renewed spirituality.

Leon Morris: Some at least of the Corinthians were setting too high a value on human wisdom and human eloquence in line with the typical Greek admiration for rhetoric and philosophical studies. In the face of this Paul insists that preaching with wisdom of words was no part of his commission. That kind of preaching would draw men to the preacher. It would nullify the cross of Christ. The faithful preaching of the cross results in men ceasing to put their trust in any human device, and relying rather on God's work in Christ. A reliance on rhetoric would cause men to trust in men, the very antithesis of what the preaching of the cross is meant to effect.

Gordon Fee: Paul's argument with them, therefore, three things needed to be squared away:

- (1) their radical misunderstanding (or confusion) about the nature of the gospel;
- (2) their misguided perception as to the nature of the church and their teachers—and the latter's relationship to the gospel; and
- (3) his need to accomplish both of these while both reasserting his own authority among them and yet not destroying the very thing he has argued with them as to the role of leadership. The reassertion of his authority, of course, is crucial to the whole letter, since his very ability to pronounce authoritative judgments on their behavior is dependent on this.

R.C.H. Lenski: The combination of human wisdom with the gospel makes the gospel itself of none effect, kenos, "empty," without inner reality or substance. The gospel would not only lose some quality or some part of itself; it would evaporate entirely and leave only a hollow show of gospel terms and phrases. Instead of saying that the gospel would be made void and empty, Paul writes "the cross of Christ," because this is the very heart of the gospel. If the cross is cancelled or lost, the entire gospel is gone. On the cross Christ died for our sins, and this is in brief what "the cross" signifies: atonement for sin and guilt, reconciliation with God, forgiveness and peace blood-bought. Everything else contained in the gospel radiates from this vital center. If this center is blotted out, all the rays emanating from it are dissipated in everlasting night.

Thomas Leake: 4 Strategies to Deal With Disunity

Introduction: 1:10 - 4:21 – section dealing with sin of **Disunity** = one of the main weapons Satan uses to derail the local church; sin rooted in spiritual pride

Context: Remember our common bond in Christ from **1:9**

I. (:10) Exhort Unity – 3 Exhortations for the brethren (family context):

A. All Agree = "*say the same thing*"

Get on the same side; emphasize common identity in Christ

B. No Divisions = a pulling away, ripping, tearing between people

Not physically separated, but cliques, sharp disagreements; not theological in nature but identifying with different elite leaders; personality groupings; not supported or promoted by the leaders themselves, but by the flock; Greeks valued skill in oratory; Corinthians gave that too much weight

C. Be Made Complete = mend, fix, bring back together

Genuine unity, not organizational conformity; allows for diversity of giftedness; Philippians 2 type of unity;

Application: No group in the local church should form around one leader or ethnic group; Each person responsible to take initiative to cross through diversity

II. (:11-12) Expose Disunity (when it comes); 4 Sets of People

A. Paul Group – founder and original builder of church at Corinth

Quiets his cheering section first; very wise to address this group the hardest

B. Apollos – powerful speaker; attractive personality

- C. Cephas/Peter – a more weighty apostle
- D. Christ Characters – some were actually saying this; Paul does not commend them; essentially they were putting down all the other groups; acting pridefully like the others; might have been claiming no need for spiritual teachers

Transition: Disunity cannot be ignored; must be dealt with strongly;
Difficult letter for the church to receive

III. (:13-16) Expel Errors – 3 Simple Questions

- A. Has Christ been divided?

Gets at the heart of the matter; only one body of Christ;
The error of carnal divisions expelled by the unity of Christ

Matt. 12:25; Teaching doctrine does not divide . . . it actually unifies

- B. Paul was not crucified for you was he?

Allegiance cannot be to Paul; there is only one Mediator

- C. You were not baptized in the name of Paul were you?

Launches him into discussion of baptism; what better shows your allegiance?
(Not a defense verse for infant baptism; Question: Can a non elder perform baptism?)

IV. (:17) Express Priorities – transition verse to next section

Baptism = Secondary to the Preaching of the Gospel;

You were saved before you hit the waters of baptism

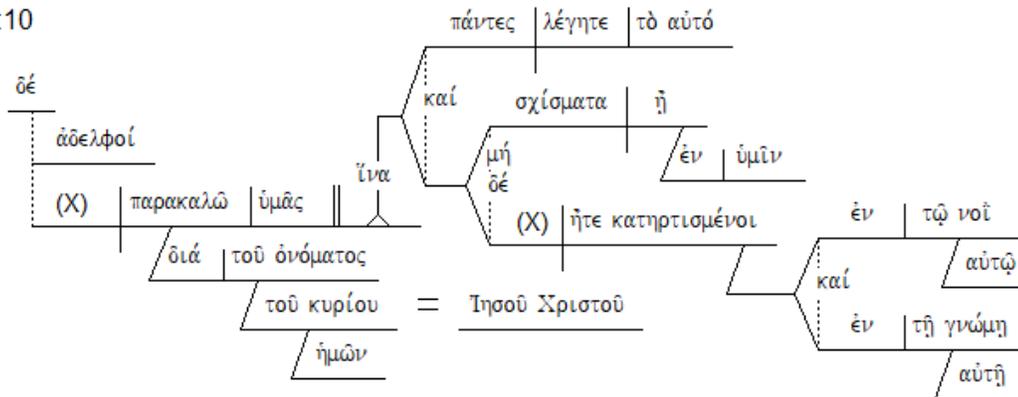
Gal. 6:14 – boast only in the cross;

Preach the Word that focuses on Christ;

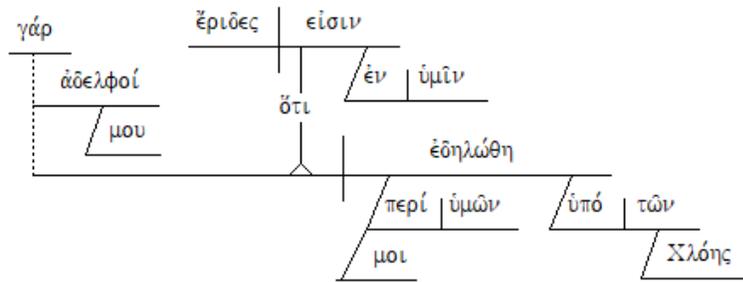
A United Church brings a United Witness and a United Praise to Christ

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

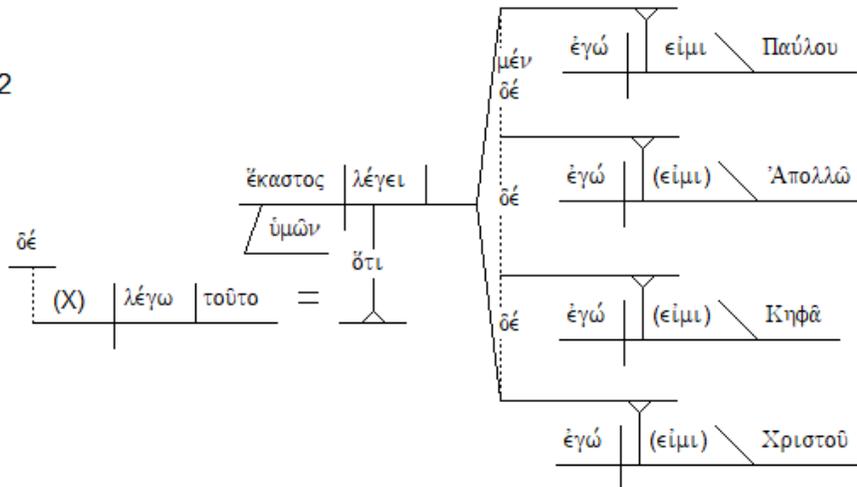
1Co 1:10



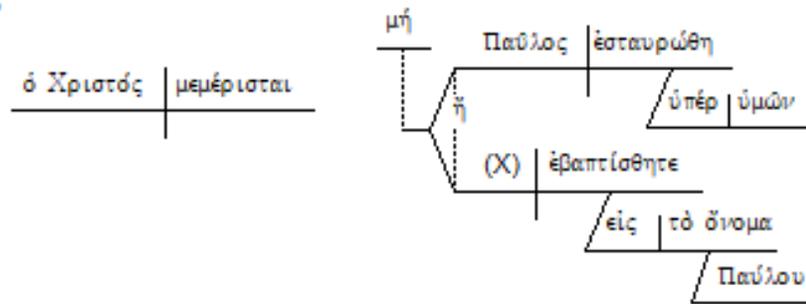
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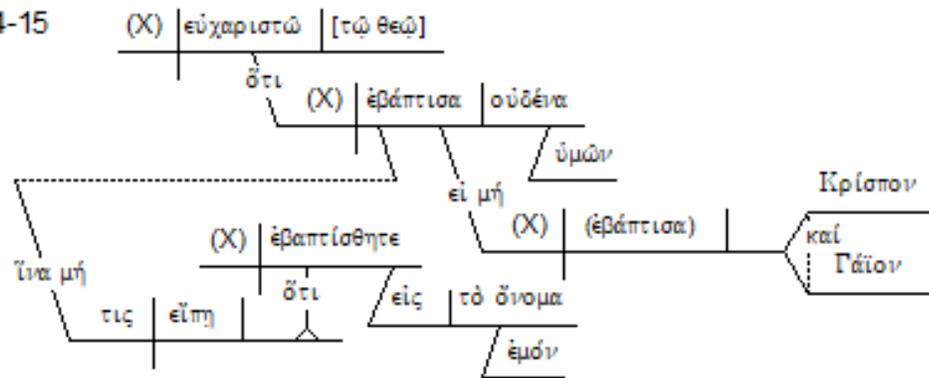
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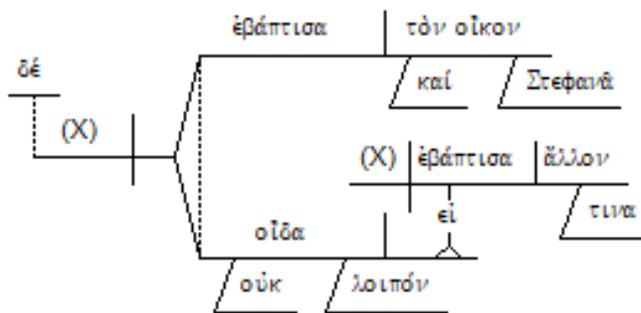
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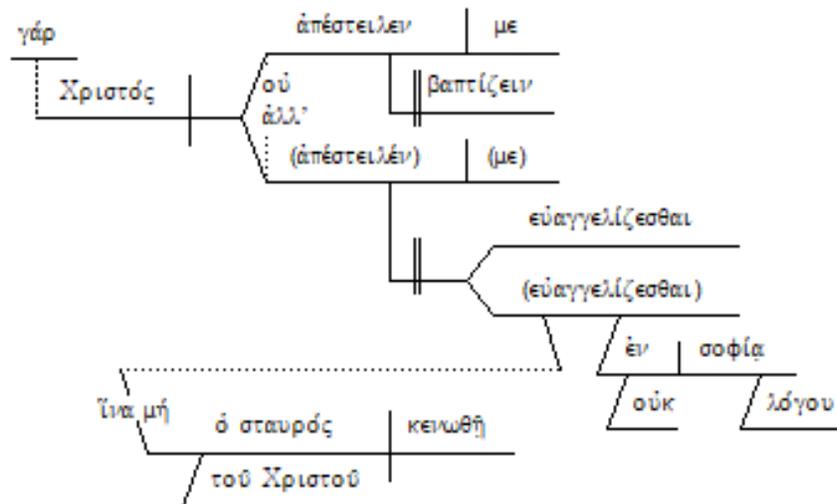
1Co 1:14-15



1Co 1:16



1Co 1:17



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

TITLE: *THE WORD OF THE CROSS -- TRUE POWER AND WISDOM*

BIG IDEA:

ONLY THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED IMPACTS MAN WITH THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Man pridefully asserts his own supposed strength and exalts his own worldly wisdom. He tries to formulate a religion where he can call the shots and approach God on his own terms. He imagines that he can control his own destiny and he relies on sophisticated rhetoric to conceal the lack of substance in his philosophic argumentations. But the message of the cross – the simple historical truth of Christ crucified – is the only message that can deliver sinful man from his lost condition of alienation from a Holy God. The unsaved will continue to mock at the humiliation of the cross as symbolizing only weakness and foolishness. But to those who believe the message of Christ crucified speaks of the power and wisdom of God.

Gordon Fee: (1:18 – 2:5) -- Having set up the contrast in the preceding sentence (v. 17) between the “wisdom of logos” and the preaching of the cross, Paul now moves to a series of arguments that will have this contrast as its point of reference. The Corinthians’ “boasting” in mere humans in the name of wisdom ultimately impacts the nature of the gospel itself. In a series of three paragraphs, therefore, Paul tries to get these believers to see that their own existence as Christians, especially with regard to their Christian beginnings, stands in total contradiction to their present “boasting.”

Each of the paragraphs is predicated on the same reality, namely that the message of the cross is not something to which one may add human wisdom, in any form, and thereby make it superior; rather, the cross stands in absolute, uncompromising contradiction to merely human wisdom. The cross in fact is folly to wisdom humanly conceived; but it is God’s folly, folly that is at the same time God’s wisdom and power.

Adewuya: In the immediately preceding section (1:10–17), Paul had appealed for unity in the church. He now moves on a different argumentative tack, launching into an extended discussion in which, on the one hand, he elucidates the significance and meaning of the cross and, on the other hand, shows that the prideful confidence of the Corinthians on human wisdom is contrary to the gospel. The basic theme of this section of the letter is the opposition between human/worldly wisdom and the “*word of the cross*” or “*God’s wisdom*.”

David Garland: In 1:18–25, he reproclaims **the message of the cross**. It is the power of God to absorb all the blind rage of humanity and to avert its deadly consequences, but humanity, Jew and Greek alike, fails to recognize that truth because it does not fit their categories. Six citations of Scripture appear in 1:18 – 3:23 (1:19, 31; 2:9, 16; 3:19, 20).

All make the point that humans “cannot grasp God’s wisdom through their own wisdom” (cf. Gärtner 1967–68: 216).

Mark Taylor: Through careful repetition and parallelism, three main themes emerge in this unit:

- (1) the proclamation of the cross,
- (2) the two basic human responses to the gospel message, and
- (3) the decisive triumph of God’s wisdom over the wisdom of the world.

All three themes appear in the first two verses (1:18–19), which are then restated in various ways with elaboration in the remainder of the paragraph.

Paul Gardner: Paul’s main thesis in this section is presented in v. 18, though the entire section (1:18 – 2:5) offers an extended development of v. 17. In vv. 18–21 the **power of the gospel** is regarded, as it were, from God’s perspective. The world regards the word of the cross as folly, but people divide into two classes as they respond in radically different ways. Paul writes that it is God’s intention, by means of the folly of the message of the cross, to thwart those who feel they might reach God by means of their own wisdom (vv. 19–21). He supports this by appeal to Scripture (v. 19) and an allusion to Scripture with **three forceful rhetorical questions** (v. 20). Verse 21 further develops the point (ἐπειδὴ γὰρ) that in God’s wisdom the world did not come to know him in its own way but that, in the same event of preaching, people who believe are saved. Despite these two responses purposed by God, the next subsection reveals that the gospel will be and must be preached to all (both Jew and Gentile; vv. 22–24). In a series of contrasts Paul shows that among Jews and Gentiles there will be a negative response. He carefully balances the negative reaction of some Jews to the negative reaction of some Gentiles (v. 23). Jews look for signs and to them a crucified king is a stumbling block. Gentiles look for wisdom and to them a crucified king is folly. In contrast, those who are *called* (κλητοί) will encounter the **wisdom and power of God** (v. 24). Verse 25 uses comparative clauses to summarize this section by showing that God’s way of salvation has revealed how much wiser and stronger he truly is than are human beings. This opens the way for Paul to turn to the example of how God’s wisdom has actually been put into effect among the Corinthians themselves (vv. 26–31).

Richard Hays: In this part of the letter, Paul makes no explicit reference to the problems at Corinth; the theme of divisions in the church does not reappear until 3.1–4.

Nonetheless, he is artfully laying the **theological groundwork for his critique of the Corinthians’ divisiveness**. As we read through this section, we begin to see Paul’s diagnosis of the **root causes** of the Corinthian conflict. They are caught up in rivalries because **they glory in the superficially impressive human wisdom of this age**. They are boasting about their own possession of wisdom and rhetorical eloquence—or at least they are infatuated with leaders who manifest these skills. God, however, has revealed in Christ another kind of wisdom that radically subverts the wisdom of this world: God has chosen to save the world through the cross, through the shameful and powerless death of the crucified Messiah. If that shocking event is the revelation of the

deepest truth about the character of God, then our whole way of seeing the world is turned upside down. Everything has to be reevaluated in light of the cross.

I. (:18) THE RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED DIVIDES ALL MEN INTO TWO OPPOSING CAMPS

A. Same Message for All Humanity = Christ Crucified

“For the word of the cross”

Gordon Fee: The “*for*” that begins this sentence ties it to what has immediately preceded (v. 17) as an explanation of the final clause in that sentence.

B. Two Opposing Responses – Only 2 Groups of People in the World

1. Those Who are Perishing Mock the Message

“is foolishness to those who are perishing”

David Garland: Since the cross represents painful death and profound humiliation, it calls into question the conventional wisdom about power and the divine. The ancients took for granted that deities possessed power, and the degree of their power determined their ranking in the pyramid of gods. In the cross, that pyramid is turned upside down. The most powerful God appears to be the most powerless. The cross makes hash of all secular and religious attempts based on human wisdom to make sense of God and the world. Victory is won by giving up life, not taking it. Selfish domination of others is discredited. Shame is removed through divine identification with the shamed in a shameful death. God offers a new paradigm that makes the experience of shame the highest path to glory and honor (**Stansbury** 1990: 472). What makes the story of the cross even more offensive to humans is that it is not simply the foundation of human redemption but is also to become the way of life for believers. They, too, will endure the wounds from slander, mockery, and affliction as they live for others (**4:8–10; 2 Cor. 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:24–29**).

2. Those Who are Being Saved Experience the Power of God

“but to those who are being saved it is the power of God”

Note Pres. Tense – ongoing process, pathway that these 2 groups are on

Anthony Thiselton: Hence what stands in contrast to God’s power is not merely weakness. Indeed, Paul will later talk of power-in-weakness. The contrast is with **folly**, because folly leads to striving that is **ineffective, fruitless, and empty**. That this characterizes those who are on their way to ruin (v. 18) logically fits with this. The ineffectiveness and emptiness of foolish journeying (on their way to renders Paul’s important choice of a present participle, *in process of* ...) lead to the nothingness of an abyss in which the self is “*lost*.” **Folly brings self-destruction**. However, Christian believers for whom the proclamation of the cross becomes an **effective reality** (*the power of God*) are turned away from such a fate and find themselves by God’s grace on

the way to salvation (another carefully chosen present participle that denotes a continuing process).

II. (:19-21) GOD STANDS OPPOSED TO THE WISDOM OF MEN

A. (:19) God Will Ultimately Destroy Human Wisdom – Prophecy from Isaiah

*“For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’”*

Richard Hays: We will understand the full force of Paul’s meaning only if we note the wider context from which the Old Testament quotation comes. In Isaiah, the passage is a judgment oracle against Judah, whose political and religious leaders are trusting in their own wise and “realistic” plans to protect the kingdom by making a military alliance with Egypt, rather than listening to the word of the prophet and trusting in God. Isaiah’s point is that God-talk is cheap and that God’s action will shut the mouths of the wise talkers.

Gordon Fee: Paul now moves on to argue that this folly of God, with its message of the cross, is in fact God’s way of doing what he said he would do: set aside and destroy human wisdom. For Paul to say “*for it is written*” is sufficient argument. Scripture has already spoken to this issue; God is now merely bringing it to pass. With these words the Corinthian believers are thus brought face to face with the first of six OT citations in the argumentation that follows, all of which appear to have been chosen to give scriptural support to Paul’s basic point throughout—the sheer folly of mere humans trying to “match wits with God,” as it were.

Anthony Thiselton: People are wrapped up in illusions of wisdom while living in folly. The cross now becomes a sifting criterion that exposes the difference between folly lived in an illusion of wisdom and a humble, realistic appropriation of the true wisdom of God, which is effective in leading to salvation. Through what is proclaimed concerning a crucified Christ (v. 23, not at this point a triumphalist Christ) God exposes the folly of the foolish and the effectiveness of true wisdom (vv. 20-21).

B. (:20A) Human Wisdom Cannot Refute the Wisdom of God

*“Where is the wise man?
Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?”*

David Garland: three types of tertiary scholars:

- the rationalistic scholar,
- the Jewish legal expert, and
- the rhetorician (**Judge** 1983: 11).

Mark Taylor: Paul probably does not have fine distinctions in mind with these three categories but employs a series of terms that are typically associated with the learned of this world, that is, **the experts or professionals**.

John MacArthur: Paul paraphrased **Is 19:12** where the prophet was referring to the wise men of Egypt who promised, but never produced wisdom. Human wisdom always proves to be unreliable and impermanent (cf. **v. 17; Pr 14:12; Is 29:14; Jer 8:9; Ro 1:18-23**).

David Garland: What do these three categories of persons have in common? They are all perceived as professional experts. Paul skewers those who refract their search for truth through the lens of human wisdom and derive their status from their expertise. These who have made it their goal to search for “truth” greet with skepticism anything that does not match their own prejudgment of what truth is. God’s truth, revealed in the cross, fails to meet the intellectual elite’s criteria, so they reject it and settle for their own humbug. These questions parallel Jesus’ thanksgiving to God for hiding “*these things*” from the wise and learned and revealing them to “*babes*” (**Matt. 11:25**). Something about the mentality of those who regard themselves as wise and learned makes them liable to self-deception and inimical to God’s revelation. The humble, who count for nothing, on the other hand, are frequently more disposed to being helped and taught. Is this why Christ calls blessed those who are poor, meek, mourning, hungering, and persecuted while the world calls happy those who are rich, exalted, laughing, feasting, and domineering?

C. (:20B) God Has Exposed the Foolishness of Human Wisdom

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

David Garland: By contriving a means of salvation that is impenetrable to human wisdom and does not meet its criteria of solid evidence and sound reasoning, God made human wisdom useless.

Robert Gundry: “The wise [man]” is one who thinks a crucified Christ makes no logical sense. “*The scholar*” is one who thinks a crucified Christ makes no scriptural sense. “*The debater*” is one who thinks a crucified Christ makes no rhetorical sense. That is to say, such a Christ lacks appeal. “*Belonging to this age*” describes “*the debater*” as thinking in terms of the here and now rather than in terms of what’s coming at “*the revelation of our Lord, Jesus Christ*”—in other words, as short-sighted. By implication, “*belonging to this age*” probably applies also to “*the wise*” and “*the scholar*.” In effect, God’s having “*made foolish the world’s wisdom*” and having “*delighted to save those who are believing*” answer the three questions beginning with “*Where?*” The wise man, the scholar, and the debater fall into the category of the foolish and unsaved. “*The world*” consists of unbelieving human beings. “*God has made foolish the world’s wisdom*” by providing salvation through a means that seems like foolishness to them but is in fact his wisdom. And he did so not just because “*the world didn’t know God through [their] wisdom,*” but because it was “*in God’s wisdom*” that they didn’t know him that way. In other words, he wisely determined that they wouldn’t, lest they take to themselves credit for knowing God.

III. (:21-25) ONLY THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION

A. (:21) Only the Mocked Message of the Cross Can Bring Salvation

1. Method Ordained by the Wisdom of God

“For since in the wisdom of God”

2. Failed Method of Human Wisdom

“the world through its wisdom did not come to know God”

3. Method Pleasing to God = The Mocked Message of the Cross

“God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

David Garland: The message is God’s, and it is conveyed by means that look weak, foolish, and unimpressive to the world. Carrying a placard announcing the crucified Messiah as the glory of God (**Gal. 3:1; 2 Cor. 4:6**) in simple unadorned words makes the herald look foolish in the eyes of the world. But such “*foolishness*” reveals that God, not the messenger, is to be credited for saving those who believe that message.

B. (:22-24) Christ Crucified Is the Power of God and Wisdom of God – Despite What Mockers Might Say

Mark Taylor: Although Paul still distinguishes between Jew and Gentile in **1:22–24**, the categories of real significance are “*those who are perishing*” and those “*who are being saved*” (**1:18**), or those who believe (**1:21**) and, by implication, those who do not, or those who deem the message of the cross to be a stumbling block or foolishness (**1:23**) and those who are “*called,*” for whom Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom (**1:24**).

1. (:22) The World Seeks Different Solutions

Adewuya: Paul’s fundamental theological point is that if the cross is God’s saving event, all human standards and evaluation are overturned. Instead of being instruments of salvation, the signs demanded by the Jews and the wisdom sought after by them are stumbling blocks and foolishness respectively.

a. Jews Seek Power in Signs

“For indeed Jews ask for signs”

Gordon Fee: This reflects Jewish messianic expectations. God had acted powerfully in their behalf in history; the promised Messiah would restore the former glory by acting powerfully on their behalf once again. “Show us a sign,” they repeatedly demand of Jesus, “authenticate yourself; validate your messianic credentials with powerful displays.” And who can blame them? They had been down a long time and were looking for a mighty deliverer. They knew how God had acted in the past -- with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Their idolatry was that they now had God completely figured out; he would simply repeat the exodus, in still greater splendor.

David Garland: Jews who demand signs expect God to verify religious claims with compelling proofs, as was done in Israel’s past history. The sign they wanted was something “apocalyptic in tone, triumphalistic in character, and the embodiment of one of the ‘mighty deeds of deliverance’ that God had worked on Israel’s behalf in rescuing it from slavery” (Gibson 1990: 53). They get a “sign from above in the cross,” but they defame it as blasphemy. The cross does not part the sea for the people to cross in safety and then drown the pursuing enemy. Instead, it splits the temple veil, and only those who see with faith can see the defeat of the enemy. Paul is not attacking Jews as such but a problem endemic to all those who expect God to provide to their satisfaction visible confirmation before they will risk faith. He attacks those who audaciously presume to demand proofs and “then maintain critical distance and draw whatever conclusions from the data that happened to suit their inclinations” (Geddert 1989: 68).

b. Gentiles Seek Wisdom in Powerful Oratory and Argumentation
“and Greeks search for wisdom”

John MacArthur: Gentiles wanted proof by means of human reason, through ideas they could set forth, discuss, and debate. Like the Athenian philosophers, they were not sincere, with no interest in divine truth, but merely wanting to argue intellectual novelty (Ac 17:21).

David Garland: It is more likely that Paul chooses this word because he regards the chief characteristic of Greek culture to be the **search for wisdom**. According to Aristotle (Eth. nic. 6.7.2 [1141a]), wisdom is the most perfect of the modes of knowledge. “*Seeking*” may allude to the groping search of the pagans for God (Acts 17:27; Wis. 13:6). But “wisdom here has more to do with social status and influence than it does with a particular theological position” (Pickett 1997: 54). Paul critiques the social values, honor and power, associated with “wisdom” and not its content (Pickett 1997: 55). To be sure, those riddled with pride will reach false conclusions about God, but Paul’s main point is that the message of the cross puts all human pretensions to shame and upends the traditions and cultural values of both Jews and Greeks—and, we might add, of the Romans as well. God’s work can be grasped only by faith (1:12; 2:5; 3:5).

2. (:23a) We Preach Christ Crucified – There is only one solution
“but we preach Christ crucified”

3. (:23b) The World Mocks the Message of the Cross

a. Mocked by the Jews
“to Jews a stumbling block”

David Garland: From a Jewish standpoint, a crucified Messiah was an oxymoron, which becomes a major stumbling block (σκάνδαλον, *skandalon*) because Scripture brands anyone hanged on a tree as accursed of God (Deut. 21:23). In Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho 31–32, Rabbi Trypho remains unpersuaded by Justin’s attempt to prove

from **Dan. 7** that Jesus was the Messiah and responds, “Sir, these and suchlike passages of scripture compel us to await One who is great and glorious, and takes the everlasting Kingdom from the Ancient of Days as Son of Man. But this your so-called Christ is without honour and glory, so that He has even fallen into the uttermost curse that is in the Law of God, for he was crucified.” For those who think that God must be mighty and strong, not weak, the cross is “an affront to God’s majesty” (Engberg-Pedersen 1987: 562). It is insulting “to link God with weakness” (P. Lampe 1990: 121).[16] The cross also dashes cherished hopes of temporal triumph and world supremacy.

b. Mocked by the Gentiles
“and to Gentiles foolishness”

Daniel Akin: Knowledge was their pride, their idol. Heirs to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the Greeks lifted sophists (traveling teachers of wisdom), popular rhetoricians, and debaters as the celebrities of the day. How could an ignorant Jew, crucified as a criminal, compare to their intellectual titans? What a joke, many no doubt thought. To such persons, the preaching of Christ crucified was not acceptable. Therefore, the cross was a “*stumbling block*” (Gk. *skandalon*), an offense to the Jews, and “*foolishness [morian] to the Gentiles [ethnē]*.” It was utterly unimaginable to them. It was a message to be rejected and ridiculed for its lack of power and its foolishness.

4. (:24) The Elect Experience Christ as Both the Power and Wisdom of God
“but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”

C. (:25) The Mocked Message of the Cross Far Exceeds Any Human Wisdom and Power

1. The Wisdom of God – Mocked as Foolishness
“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men,”

2. The Power of God – Mocked as Weakness
“and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

David Garland: The manifestation of God’s power and wisdom is to be seen in God’s crucified Christ, who dies to save the foolish and the weak (Schrage 1991: 189). Believers trust that the cross is something that God has done, and since it expresses God’s will, it must be an expression of God’s wisdom and power. That trust bridges the gap between Jew and Greek, who become one in Christ, and reveals that God’s so-called foolishness and weakness are wiser and stronger than the so-called human wisdom that drives wedges between people. The result of God’s wisdom does seem quite outlandish. Gentiles respond to the gospel of a crucified Jewish Messiah, preached by a battered and unimpressive Jewish apostle, creating a community in which Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female stand together as equals before God.

Paul Gardner: The point of the verse is that what God is and what he does cannot be compared with what humans might be or do. In fact, God turns the ways of men and

women on their head, for he is wiser than could ever be imagined or conceived, and he is stronger in bringing his plans into effect than could ever be envisioned. Nothing will thwart him, even when his plans incorporate the supposed weakness of the crucified king. This conclusion is arrived at by use of comparisons.

Mark Taylor: The final verse of this unit recaps Paul’s initial argument about God’s wisdom in the cross of Christ, and points forward to the next section with emphasis on God’s strength (power) in weakness. The phrase “*foolishness of God*” occurs for the first time, recapping the “*foolish gospel*” theme of the entire paragraph. This is also the first mention of the “*weakness of God*,” a key term in the next two units (**1:26–31; 2:1–5**), describing both the Corinthian believers and Paul. Although **1:25** functions as a summary of **1:18–24**, grammatically, it most likely relates back directly to **1:23**, “*We preach Christ crucified.*” In other words, Paul preaches a crucified Messiah because this supposed foolishness of God is wiser than men, and his apparent weakness is stronger than men. **Barrett** comments, “What God has done in Christ crucified is a direct contradiction of human ideas of wisdom and power, yet it achieved what human wisdom and power fail to achieve.”

Daniel Akin: Paul concludes his argument by noting the **paradox of the gospel of a crucified Savior**. He uses two phrases we would not expect: “*God’s foolishness*” and “*God’s weakness.*” We know that God is neither foolish nor weak. But the cross looks both foolish and weak to the world. Nevertheless, in reality, it is power and wisdom for salvation. It is how God saved us and how he will judge sinful humanity. By the cross God outsmarted the wise and overpowered the strong. God’s seemingly foolish and weak thing is wiser and more powerful than anything mere mortals can come up with. Truly, the cross is what all who are being saved rejoice and boast in (**1:31**). We need nothing else. We want nothing more. It is all we need today and forever.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do preachers lose confidence in the effectiveness of preaching the gospel message and resort to other tactics to try to win people to Jesus Christ?
- 2) How is this passage an encouragement to witness to other regardless of their response?
- 3) How have we experienced Christ to be the power and wisdom of God in our own lives?
- 4) What are the implications on our philosophy of education?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Taylor: Within the framework of these three main themes, four features of **1:18–25** deserve further comment.

- First, the term “*wisdom*” carries **both positive and negative connotations** in Paul’s use. In the same verse he speaks of the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God (**1:21**). In order to grasp the gist of Paul’s argument it is unnecessary to locate this “worldly wisdom” with a particular historical expression or belief system. The chief concern is the nature of the two contrasting wisdoms; one is “of the world” and the other is “of God.” Paul is countering a value system, a particular “worldview.” Just as there are essentially only two categories of people, those who are perishing and those who are being saved, so also there are only two kinds of wisdom, the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world.
- Second, Paul **cites the Old Testament** for the first time in the letter in **1:19** that launches a series of scriptural quotations that play a large role in the argument through **3:23**. All citations support Paul’s point that God’s wisdom and human wisdom are mutually exclusive.
- Third, the **first person plural** appears for the first time in the letter in **1:23**, “*We preach Christ crucified*,” in contrast to the first person singular in **1:17**, “*Christ sent me to preach*,” setting up an alternating pattern of singular and plural references throughout the argument of **1:18 – 4:21** by which Paul conveys that he is one among other duly appointed heralds of the gospel.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the function of **1:18–25** in the overall argument **lays the foundation for Paul’s ethical exhortations** to follow. The death of Jesus, which is “*for us*” (see **1:13; 5:7; 6:20; 7:23; 11:24**) and “*for our sins*” (**15:3**) impinges on Christian behavior. The cross is presented “as both the way of salvation and the way of life.” The cross is both the remedy for past sins and the basis of Christian identity. In this initial section, which has to do primarily with Paul’s exhortation to unity (**1:10–17**), the approach to factions in Corinth is precisely the same as his approach to the brewing problem of disunity in the church at Philippi (**Phil 4:1–2**), where he urged them to take up the same attitude of Christ, who humbled himself to death on a cross (**Phil 2:5–11**). **The cross is the interpretive framework for Christian living.**

Ray Stedman: But the cross was particularly needed in Corinth, as it is needed in our American churches, because the word of the cross is the cure for all human division. . .

First, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. The word “folly” here literally means “silly.” It is silliness, absurdity, nonsense, to those who are perishing. If you have ever tried to witness to somebody who has a sense of sufficiency about himself, who feels that he is a self-made man -- and he worships his creator -- you have discovered the folly of the cross. To come and tell such a man that all his efforts and all

his impressive record of achievement is worth nothing in God's sight, that it does not make him one degree more acceptable, that it is nothing but wasted effort, you will immediately run into the offense of the cross. He will call that doctrine silly, absurd: "You mean to tell me that all this impressive array of human knowledge and wisdom that has been accumulated for centuries, with all the great achievements of mankind in the realm of relief of human misery and the technological advances of our day, that all that is absolutely worthless? Nonsense!" That is what they said in the 1st century and that is what they say today. . .

How much should we trust the wisdom of men? How much reliance should we put upon the ability of men to solve their own problems in whatever realm or dimension of life we care to investigate? (This is a particularly helpful passage to students at school.)

Scripture says there is something faulted about human wisdom -- it does not know how to use truth. All truth discovered through human knowledge is misused, abused, twisted, distorted, and, therefore, we end up worse off than we were before. Now, I think this needs to be said today in a university community such as we have right here. It needs to be especially emphasized because so many Christians begin to worship human wisdom and to feel that secular writers know more about some of these matters applying to the use of knowledge than Christians do. And there is no question that many secular writers do know a great deal more about the discovery of truth than do many Christians. But what we must clearly understand, and what this great passage will help us understand, is that when it comes to the application of truth, secular minds are juvenile, for the most part. They are twisted; they do not know what to do with their knowledge, and so are a lot of Christians who follow along these same paths and who have not approached the use of truth from the revelation and the wisdom of the Word of God.

Steve Zeisler: The Corinth of Paul's day, as we have already seen, was a fiercely competitive, immoral, high-energy place. The church which had been established in Corinth, unfortunately, began to take on many of the negative characteristics that were true of the culture around. That is so often the case with many churches today: they don't look or act very different than the society in which they are planted. The Corinthian Christians, as a result, were often competitive, immoral, and sensually-minded. Paul's corrective letter to the church at Corinth therefore is very valuable for Christians today. . .

What produces the divergence, the break in the road that sends people on different ways, is the preaching of the message of the cross, the message of God's love for mankind in Christ, the dastardliness of sin, the certainty of death and judgment, and then, miraculously and mercifully, God's substitution of himself to atone for our wickedness. That is the "word of the cross," and that is what produces the responses Paul has outlined: eternal death or eternal life. . .

The problem with the wisdom of the world, as **verse 21** so clearly declares, is that it does not lead to a knowledge of God. It does not have power to direct one who is

perishing from the path leading to death to the path that leads to righteousness and life. And the reason it fails to do so is that it ignores God, the source of all life, wisdom and truth. No matter how knowledgeable are the sages and opinion-makers, failure to deal with the source of all knowledge is a recipe for failure.

Doug Goins: This phrase, "*the word of the cross*," means a couple of things in the New Testament. First, it refers to the historical fact of the crucifixion of Jesus. That event teaches us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died a death wherein the penalty of our sin was placed on him, making it possible for salvation to be extended to those who believe in him. But in our passage, "*the word of the cross*" suggests the judgment the cross makes on human efforts to be righteous and wise. Paul will later refer to this as the offense of the cross. The cross is offensive because our highest aspirations, our tremendous human potential, our best motivations, our human wisdom, our good intentions, all pale in comparison to the beautiful life of sinless perfection of Jesus Christ. Christ was the wisest man who ever lived. Yet he was placed under the judgment of God and suffered a horrible, shameful death. And that is judgment on every one of us, from the brightest and best to the dullest and worst. As Christians we can never forget the judgment of the cross on our loyalty to human leaders, our pride, our false wisdom. The cross has to be a powerfully controlling image for the life and health of the Christian community. We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross.

In **verse 19** Paul quotes **Isaiah 29:14** to prove that this contrast between choosing to trust God and choosing to trust human wisdom is nothing new. Indeed, human-centered wisdom will be overthrown by God, it's always the way he works. God is never dependent on human ingenuity. The historical context for **Isaiah 29** is the time when Judah was under siege by the Assyrian armies under Sennacherib. King Hezekiah called in the political and military leaders to discuss the crisis. Human wisdom said that the only way the nation was going to survive was to enter into a mutual defense treaty with the pagan superpower to the south, Egypt. Hezekiah listened to the counselors. The problem with that strategy was that it left God, their defender and protector, out of the picture. The people of the nation were not wholehearted in their confidence in godly wisdom, either, and so they too trusted the advice of the military-political alliance.

Isaiah 29:14 was God's response through the prophet Isaiah to this political-military brain trust and to the people who believed in it: He would deliver the nation on his own terms without any help from the so-called intellectuals. **Second Kings 17** tells us that God did exactly what he said he would do. He needed no human help. He set aside the cleverness of the wise. Paul illustrates the word of the cross with this story from the history of the Hebrew people of how God works, especially in terms of human redemption.

**Thomas Leake: THE HIDDEN GREATNESS OF THE CROSS –
THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS IS ANTITHETICAL TO WORLDLY
WISDOM**

Introduction: Dangers of secular education; but not opposed to education; tension between true and false wisdom

Context: Section dealing with factions in the church at Corinth;

Verse 17 is transitional and hits on two main points developed in next sections:

- Preaching of the Cross is incompatible with human wisdom (**1:18 – 2:16**)
- (**3:1 ff**) Role of Church Leaders

Examine a number of Upside-Down statements:

I. WISE SPEECH VOIDS THE CROSS (:17B)

Forms of word “*wisdom*” used 16 times in **chapters 1-2**;

How can the cross be voided? = to make empty, to deprive of substance, not accomplish anything – refers both to content and style;

We must keep the message of the cross clear, and pure and simple

II. A FOOLISH CROSS DELIVERS MANKIND (:18)

The power is in the gospel message – not in the preacher

III. A GOD WHO ACTIVELY OPPOSES THE WISE (:19-20)

God has always been opposed to human wisdom;

Def. of Philosophy: “A blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that is not there.”

Unbelievers accuse us of being narrow-minded; but they are certainly not open to the truth.

God has made foolish all the wisdom of this world – Why? So he gets all the glory.

IV. THE EDUCATED NEVER LEARN (:21A)

The world and its wisdom is controlled by forces of evil (**Eph. 2:2**);

The limits of their understanding and the folly of their system = they are educated but left ignorant about what is really important;

Unable to teach any subject from the correct foundation of the fear and knowledge of God;

All of their accomplishments will perish – like sand castles that will be wiped out by the waves of God’s wrath;

God has designed to trap men in their pride and knowledge and lock them into destruction even while they are boasting;

God has made human wisdom useless and worthless – **Rom. 1:22**; man is judicially blinded by God.

Education is not our Messiah.

V. GOD IS PLEASED TO BLESS A FOOLISH MESSAGE (:21B)

Not a sophisticated message, but simple, direct and clear;

Authoritative announcement to the world that there is salvation only in Christ;

Believing = hearing + understanding + accepting as true + personally trusting and casting oneself on the mercy of God

VI. GOD PROCLAIMS A MESSAGE HE KNOWS PEOPLE DON’T WANT TO HEAR (:22-23)

They will think that it is foolishness – but preach it anyway;
Don't adapt or change the message;
- Jews demand a sign – great sign = resurrection and still they don't believe; God is under no obligation to cater to the doubts of man;
Cf. signs of an apostle performed by Paul as well
- Greeks diligently search after wisdom
- Why was this message so offensive? A stone in the way; an insult to the Jews; did not want to think that their Deliverer hung on the shameful cross; offensive because that's what God thinks of our lives and our sin – **Gal. 3:13** – made a curse for us;
God will reject man if he clings to his sin
Where's the preaching of the cross today? Cf. message of accommodation
The Cross is a radical thing – Where is the pain and the shame of the cross?

VII. A REJECTED MAN IS THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD (:24)

So there is no reason to change the message;
Who are “*the called*”? = “*believers*” in v. 21; = “*us who are being saved*” in v.18; God does the calling and saving; we do the believing; Not the same as God's general call to all mankind to repent and believe the gospel; this is His effectual calling;
He chooses some; He does not choose all; Very simple – why do people have an issue with it??
Only the cross brings true wisdom and power – works for whoever believes

VIII. A WEAK AND FOOLISH GOD IS GREATER THAN MAN (:25)

The worst that God could be imagined to be is way better than the best man could ever be

Rom. 11:33-34; Rev. 7:12

You can mock God's wisdom all you want; it still beats you

(#IX and X in next lesson)

James Boyer: To the Jews who want a “*sign*” (i.e., a demonstration, a proof of power) the cross is a stumbling block, an offense. A crucified Messiah is a mark of weakness, not of power. To the Greeks, who want wisdom and philosophy (i.e. something sensible, something rational), the cross is foolishness. It doesn't make sense, it is stupid. It is like offering to a university group today some executed criminal as savior of the world. But to us, who are called from among both Jews and Gentiles, the crucified Christ is both. He is the power of God and the wisdom of God; wisdom because this message makes sense, and power because it works.

Robert Gromacki: Paul did not honor their requests (**1:23**). The connective “*but*” shows the contrast. He *preached*; he did not perform sign miracles for the Jews in the synagogue, nor did he discuss rational proofs with the Greeks. His message contained what men needed, not what they wanted. He preached “*Christ crucified*.” The double reaction to the message was similar, yet different. The Jews regarded it as a “*stumbling block*” (literally, a “*scandal*,” *skandalon*) because they thought that the Messiah would bring political victory and live forever (**Matt. 27:42; John 12:34**). The same word is

used for “trap” or “snare” in the papyri. The Gentiles regarded the message as foolishness. They viewed a crucified criminal – which Christ was under Roman law – as morally offensive and as an evidence of physical weakness. How could the blood of such a person remove sin, give righteousness, and guarantee hope beyond the grave? To them, it was absurd.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God displays his power and subverts worldly wisdom by bringing salvation through the message of a crucified Savior.

I. The Word of the Cross Separates the Lost and Saved (1:18).

- A. It is foolishness to the lost.
- B. It is the power of God to the saved.

II. The Wisdom of the Cross Highlights the Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom (1:19-21).

- A. It reveals the impotency of prideful people (1:19-20).
- B. It reveals the inadequacy of prideful ideas (1:21).

III. The Witness to the Cross Is a Hindrance to Some but the Power of God to Others (1:22-25).

- A. Some reject and ridicule the cross (1:22-23).
- B. Some receive and rejoice in the cross (1:24-25).

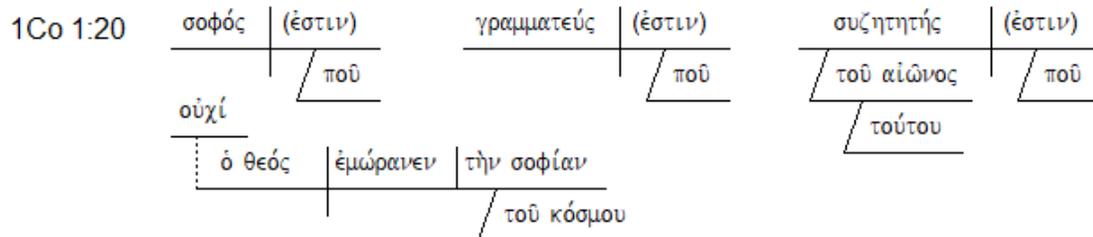
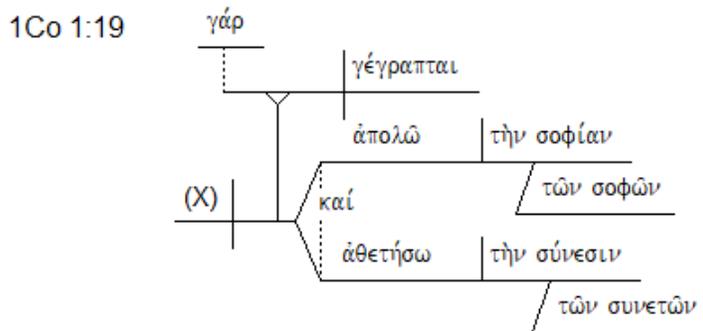
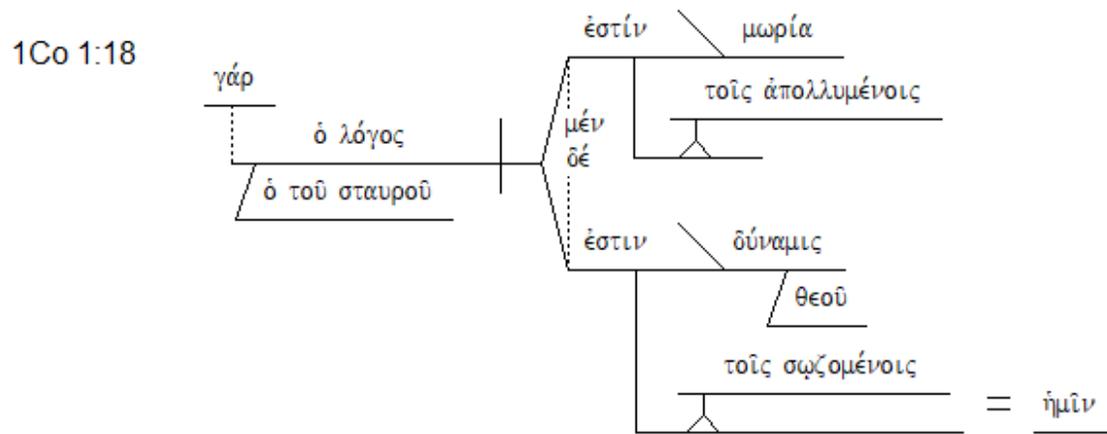
The cross of Christ is the great divide between the saved and the lost.

The Saved	The Perishing (Lost)
Power	Weakness
Wisdom	Foolishness
Eternal Deliverance	Eternal Destruction
Power and Wisdom	Stumbling Block and Foolishness
Wisdom of God That Saves	Wisdom of the World That Condemns
Heaven	Hell
Righteousness	Unrighteousness
Sanctification	Uncleanness
Redemption	Slavery
Boast in the Lord	Boast in Self

Paul Gardner: The Word of the Cross (1:18–25)

1. It Destroys the Wisdom of This World (1:18–20)
2. It Saves Those Who Believe (1:21)
3. It Must Be Preached to All (Jew and Gentile) (1:22–24)
 - a. It Is a Stumbling Block to Jews and Folly to Greeks (1:22–23)
 - b. It Is the Power and Wisdom of God to the Called, Jew and Gentile (1:24)
4. It Reveals the Folly of Human Wisdom (1:25)

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31

TITLE: *DIVINE ELECTION LEAVES NO ROOM FOR MAN'S PRIDE*

BIG IDEA:

THE DIVINE INITIATIVE IN ELECTION NULLIFIES MAN'S PRIDE SO THAT GOD GETS ALL THE CREDIT

INTRODUCTION:

How does the world evaluate people? On the basis of intelligence, strength, power, economic standing, accomplishment, etc. None of these matter when it comes to salvation. In fact they tend to be a hindrance rather than a help because man needs to come to grips with his spiritual bankruptcy before he can embrace the free gift of salvation offered by God's grace. The Corinthians had been aligning themselves with various preachers based on their personalities and styles. The Apostle Paul exposes the foolishness of these prideful distinctions by showing that the ground is level at the foot of the cross and there is no room for any boasting in man.

Gordon Fee: To further his argument that the gospel he preached stands in direct contradiction to human expectations about God, Paul turns from the content of the gospel to the existence of the Corinthians themselves as believers. Not from the world's "beautiful people," but for the most part from the lower classes, the "nobodies," God chose those who would make up God's new people. Thus they are themselves evidence of the divine foolishness that confounds the wise. This paragraph scarcely flatters their self-exaltation; it thereby serves all the more to demolish their boasting in mere humans. "*Boasting*" is the new theme that is picked up here, not only because that is what they were doing by their quarrels over their leaders, but also because it is the main theme of the passage from **Jeremiah (9:23–24)** that serves as the framework for the argument.

The paragraph opens by reminding them, most of them at least, of their own humbler origins (v. 26); in the next sentences (vv. 27–28) this is turned into a theological statement, in which God's choosing people like them is asserted to have the same design as the cross itself—to save them, but at the same time to "*shame*" and "*nullify*" the very values in which they are currently boasting. The election of such people reveals the ultimate divine intent (v. 29): to obliterate completely all human grounds for "*boasting*"—based on self-sufficiency—and thereby to cast one completely in trust upon the living God (v. 31). This was made possible through the work of Christ, whom God made to become the true "*wisdom*" for us, in that he effected redemption for us, thereby making us right with God (v. 30).

Doug Goins: What Paul is saying to these people is, "You know what sort of people you were when God called you out of sinful darkness into the light of salvation. You know that he didn't accept you as his child because you were brilliant or wealthy or powerful, because most of you weren't at all. And those of you whose lives were defined that way

were saved in spite of those positions, not because of them. If anything, they were obstacles between you and God's grace." The reality is that position and wealth and influence really can be hindrances, keeping people from the sense of need that leads to salvation.

Robert Gundry: Lying behind God's call is his selection of the world's foolish, weak, and unpedigreed things (compare **Romans 8:29–30**). Not only will no flesh boast in God's sight. Also, again at the Last Judgment, God will shame the worldly wise and powerful and well-pedigreed by making apparent his having selected, not them, but the world's foolish and weak and unpedigreed, to which Paul adds for emphasis "*the things that are treated as nothings*," so that they "*don't [even] exist*" so far as the world is concerned. He even adds that God has selected them "*to incapacitate the things that do exist*," that do count in the world's estimation. "*The things*" refers to people, but the **neuter gender** represented by "*things*" stresses the qualities of peoples as wise or foolish, powerful or weak, well-pedigreed or unpedigreed, existent or nonexistent by human standards.

Dan Nighswander: Salvation is a **gift of grace** granted at God's initiative, not a human achievement. Paul's intent here is to **elaborate on the understanding of grace** (see also on **1:3**), which has the dual impact of

- (1) underscoring the initiative of God rather than of humans (see also on **3:1-7** below) and
- (2) equalizing the status of all who are in Christ (**v. 30**).

Ben Witherington (118) captures the significance of this for the circumstances of this letter.

An adequate theology of grace undercuts any thought of earning salvation. Salvation in Christ is not a human self-help or self-improvement scheme, but a radical rescue from a form of slavery out of which one cannot earn or buy one's way. Paul must establish this theology of grace at the very outset of his arguments because it is on the basis of that theology that he will undercut all factors that promote factionalism. Grace is not only the great unifier but also the great leveler in the Christian community, which if taken seriously nullifies the importance of all cultural devices used to create social stratification.

No doubt the Corinthians had initially accepted that the crucified Christ was the means and guarantee of their salvation, but subsequently they had returned to the values that prevailed in the surrounding culture. Perhaps because they realized the shame inherent in faith based on so foolish an event as a crucifixion, they sought to make it respectable by cloaking it in wisdom that could compete with the wisdom of other faiths and philosophies (**Fee: 71**). So they had taken to boasting (which represents, in contrast to shame, not honor but shamelessness) about their accomplishments (**1:29; 4:7**) and their gifted leaders (**3:21**), they were puffed up (**4:7**) and arrogant (**4:18, 19**).

Paul Gardner: In **1:26–31** he addresses the (strange) impact of the gospel on the Corinthians themselves. God in his wisdom did not choose those that might have been expected to be chosen. The Corinthians embody in their number people who lack

learning, status, or power. Yet God chose them, and they came to faith. They can only boast in the Lord, for this has happened by his power.

Mark Taylor: The main point of **1:26–31**, which extends the argument of **1:18–25**, is that **God’s choice of individuals is consistent with the message of the cross**. Both exclude human boasting and both defy human wisdom. By human standards the Corinthian church consisted primarily of the foolish, the weak, and the insignificant. The mention of their calling in **1:26**, along with the threefold emphasis on God’s choosing (**1:27–28**) and the assertion that it is “*because of him that you are in Christ Jesus*” (**1:30**) places strong emphasis on the **sovereignty of God** in salvation and leads to the conclusion that the Lord is the only proper object of boasting (**1:29,31**). As in **1:18–25**, Paul appeals to Scripture (**1:31**), which supports the claim that human criteria are of no consequence to God. There are two equally likely sources of the citation, **Jer 9:22–23 (LXX)** and **1 Sam 2:10 (LXX)**, both of which may have influenced the vocabulary, structure, and theme of **1 Cor 1:26–31**.

David Garland: In the context of his denunciations of their divisions, he makes his case: Since all of them were nothing before their conversion, how can any of them think that they have become more special than others when in Christ?

I. (:26-29) THE DIVINE INITIATIVE IN ELECTION TURNS UPSIDE DOWN THE SCALE OF HUMAN MEASUREMENT – SO THAT MAN GETS NO CREDIT FOR SALVATION

A. (:26-28) Whom Did God Choose?

1. (:26) God’s Election Not Based on Man’s Scale of Measurement

a. Call to Reflection

“For consider your calling, brethren,”

James Boyer: In this section Paul shows that the gospel is foolish when judged on the basis of the type of people who receive it.

Richard Hays: God has not called Caesar or persons of senatorial rank to represent the gospel in the world; instead, he has called this **motley assembly** which embraces freedmen, tradespeople, and slaves—along with a few people of higher standing (hence “*not many*,” rather than “*none*”). The mixed socioeconomic status of the church was one of the most striking features of the early Christian movement. Then, as now, voluntary societies tended to be socially homogeneous. The fact that the early Christian assembly brought together people of diverse rank and background who acknowledged one another as “*brothers and sisters*” (v. **26**) was one of its distinctive characteristics. (As we shall see, precisely this socioeconomic diversity may also have been one of the causes of trouble in the Corinthian church.)

b. Count By Category

1) Not Many Wise

“ that there were not many wise according to the flesh,”

2) Not Many Strong
“*not many mighty,*”

3) Not Many Significant
“*not many noble.*”

2. (:27-28) God’s Election Turns Things Upside Down

a. Nullifying Human Wisdom

“*but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise,*”

Leon Morris: “*put to shame*”, i.e. by the contrast between the estimate the wise form of themselves and that which God’s choice reveals.

b. Nullifying Human Strength

“*and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong*”

c. Nullifying Human Significance

“*and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are*”

Leon Morris: *Katargeo, bring to nought*, is not easy to translate. It occurs twenty-seven times in the New Testament and is translated in seventeen different ways in AV. . . Basically it means something like “*to render idle*” or “*inoperative*”, and all its usages derive from this. Here the meaning is that the *things which are not* render completely ineffective the *things that are*.

Richard Hays: In Paul’s view, the relatively low status of most of the Corinthian Christians is a sign of what God did in the cross and therefore is doing in the world: overturning expectations. God is creating his new community out of unimpressive material precisely to exemplify the power of his own unmerited grace. The social composition of the church is an outward and visible sign of God’s paradoxical election.

Paul Gardner: The final purpose clause of the series parallels the previous two clauses in **vv. 27b** (“*to shame the wise*”) and **v. 27d** (“*to shame the strong*”). Paul says God has chosen in this manner “*to bring to nothing* [or ‘destroy’] *the things that are*” (ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ). This verb (“*to bring to nothing*”; καταργέω), like the verb “*to shame,*” indicates judgment and destruction in a number of biblical contexts. These ideas are more explicit in **2:6**, **6:13**, and especially **15:24** where the word is examined in greater detail. The preaching of Christ crucified completely upends what the world values. Through this gospel God works his purposes of salvation and judgment. He raises up that which seems foolish and weak and “*nothing*” in the world’s eyes and judges (brings to shame and nullifies) that which the world deems of value.

B. (:29) Why Did He Choose in That Way?

“so that no man may boast before God.”

Richard Hays: What is the **purpose** of the sign? Paul’s answer is clear and emphatic: *“so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:29)*. It is axiomatic in the Old Testament that no human flesh (the word that Paul actually uses in v. 29) can stand before the awesome holiness of God or contribute anything that God needs. All self-assertion must melt away before the flame of God’s presence. Accordingly, God has elected to shame the wise and powerful of the world by creating an eschatological community made up of people whom the world scorns; this is an illustration of God’s apocalyptic action of abolishing *“the things that are”* and bringing a new creation into being ex nihilo (*“out of nothing,”* v. 28). That point is underscored in *verse 30*: God is the source of the very existence of the Corinthian community; they have been brought into being by God in Christ Jesus.

David Garland: Boastful Corinthian Christians are no different from their pagan fellow citizens obsessed with exalting themselves and trying to leapfrog over others to attain honor and prominence. Arrogance and contempt for others were at home in Corinthian society and seem to have a secure place in the church as well. . .

Throughout the biblical narrative God consistently chooses the most unlikely figures, and Paul maintains that God has continued this pattern in choosing the believers in Corinth. **Hays** (1997: 32) thinks that Paul’s statements parallel Hannah’s prayer (**1 Sam. 2:1–10**) and Mary’s song of praise (**Luke 1:46–55**), which acclaim God, who *“raises up the poor from the dust”* and *“has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.”*

II. (:30-31) THE DIVINE INITIATIVE IN ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS THE ALL-SUFFICIENT WORK OF GOD – SO THAT GOD GETS ALL THE CREDIT FOR SALVATION

A. (:30) How Did God Accomplish Our Salvation?

1. Summary: Salvation is God’s Work – Not Man’s

“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus,”

2. List of God’s Spiritual Provisions in Christ Jesus

a. Wisdom – this has been the focus of this passage

“who became to us wisdom from God,”

S. Lewis Johnson: Due to the construction of the Greek sentence, it is clear that **wisdom** is the dominant word, and that the nouns **righteousness**, **sanctification**, and **redemption** amplify and explain wisdom. Wisdom here, then, is not practical wisdom, but positional wisdom, God’s wise plan for our complete salvation. Righteousness is forensic, the righteousness given in justification, or that which Paul expounds in **Rom 1:1-5:21**.

Richard Hays: There is no such thing as wisdom apart from covenant relationship with God (righteousness) that leads to holy living (sanctification) made possible by God's act of delivering us from slavery (redemption) through the cross. Those who are in Christ participate in this covenantal reality. That is what Paul is saying to the Corinthians who revel in their possession of the divine *sophia*.

David Garland: The metaphors have been assimilated from the OT but have undergone transformation when refracted through the lens of Paul's Christian faith. He does not discuss what they mean, because he must assume that the Corinthians are already familiar with the concepts. "Righteousness" refers to the state of having been acquitted and sharing Christ's righteous character. When they are arraigned in God's court, God will not judge them on the basis of what they are but as those who are guiltless in Christ Jesus. "Sanctification" refers to the state of holiness, which they have only in Christ Jesus and which allows them into the presence of God. "Redemption" refers to the state of being delivered from sin and its penalty (**Rom. 3:24–25; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14**).

Gordon Fee: The metaphors themselves lack what we might ordinarily consider logical sequence (i.e., "redemption" brings about our "righteousness" [= right standing with God], followed by "holiness"). But that misses Paul's present concern. These are not three different steps in the saving process; they are rather **three different metaphors for the same event** (our salvation that was effected in Christ), each taken from a different sphere of our human existence and each emphasizing a different aspect of the one reality (cf. **6:11**). The fact that he uses nouns to describe this event, rather than verbs, is dictated by the fact that they stand in apposition to the noun "*wisdom*."

- b. Righteousness
- c. Sanctification
- d. Redemption – emphasis on future glorification

Ray Stedman: Redemption is the restoration to usefulness of something that has been rendered totally useless. Have you ever pawned anything? I have. You put something in hock and you get some money (never anywhere near what it is worth) from a pawnbroker. That object of value is useless while it is in pawn. It sits there gathering dust on the shelf, or in the shop window, absolutely useless until it is redeemed. But when you go back and pay the redemption price, you restore it to usefulness. Now, that is what redemption is all about, and that is what God is doing with us; he is restoring us to usefulness. We, who in the process of sin have been rendered virtually useless, are gradually being restored. The day will come when it will be complete, body, soul and spirit, and God will open up to us an avenue of service such as we have never dreamed of because at last we have been made useful once more.

Robert Gundry: Confirming that God is the source of this righteousness, consecration, and redemption is the foregoing description of wisdom as originating “*from God.*” For if righteousness, consecration, and redemption make up the ingredients of this wisdom, then they too **must originate from God** because they’re God’s. In accordance with preceding statements concerning the cross, “*Christ Jesus became for us wisdom*” in and through his crucifixion. “*For us*” means “*in our case and for our benefit.*” “*Righteousness*” describes God’s saving us as the right thing for him to do because we’re in Christ Jesus. “*Consecration*” describes God’s saving us as segregating us from the world to be sacred to him because we’re in Christ Jesus his Son as others are not. And “*redemption*” describes God’s saving us as **liberating us** because we’re in Christ Jesus, liberating us according to this context from enslavement to the world’s foolishness.

Anthony Thiselton: Righteousness (v. 30) is used not to denote a level of moral achievement but God’s acceptance of one whose standing has been “put right with God.” Similarly, sanctification does not denote here a state of advanced moral or spiritual growth, but the status of belonging to God, or nearness to God. Redemption does not denote deliverance into some autonomous freedom, as **Deissmann** urged. It denotes rescue from hostile structural forces, including sin as a power of bondage, to a new state in which the redeemed belongs to Christ as the Lord who has purchased the redeemed. We explain this point more fully in the comments on **6:20**, “*You were bought with a price.*” All of these terms point to a **new status** and **new security** as accepted members of Christ’s household or family.

Mark Taylor: Thus Paul reminds the Corinthians that they owe everything to God, that their very existence as the people of God is predicated on the activity of God in Christ. There are grounds for boasting but only in Christ’s redemptive work.

B. (:31) Why Did He Save us in That Way? (Jer. 9:23-24 quote)

“*so that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’*”

Anthony Thiselton: In Greek literature, characters “*glory in*” what gives them most delight. Odysseus glories in his cunning, and Achilles in his strength. Christians find their ground of delight in the Lord rather than in qualities or supposed achievements of their own.

Paul Gardner: We have noted from the context of **Jeremiah 9:23–24** reasons why Paul should have turned to this text beyond just the mention of “*boasting.*” In **9:12**, Jeremiah questions who may be “*wise*” enough to understand what the Lord is doing with Israel. The Corinthians seem by their actions not to have understood what God has done with them. In the end, all participation in God’s church, all belonging, all status before the covenant Lord is entirely “*because of him [God]*” (v. 30). There is therefore a legitimate boasting. There can be no self-glorying, for all glory is due the Lord.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of people are in your local church? Are they largely the elite of this world?
- 2) In what areas do we struggle with pride? How can we rely entirely on God's resources and realize the futility of our own resources?
- 3) Have we not only **put off** boasting in self, but actively replaced that demonstration of pride with **putting on** aggressive boasting in the God of our salvation?
- 4) List as many privileges as you can come up with from Scripture that are associated with our position "*in Christ Jesus.*"

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God saves people of humble origins so that they only boast about him.

I. God Calls the Unlikely (1:26).

- A. He seldom calls the intelligent.
- B. He seldom calls the influential.
- C. He seldom calls the important.

II. God Chooses the Unimpressive (1:27-29).

- A. He chooses the foolish (1:27).
- B. He chooses the weak (1:27).
- C. He chooses the insignificant (1:28).
- D. He chooses the despised (1:28).
- E. He chooses the nobodies (1:28-29).

III. God Changes the Unworthy (1:30-31).

- A. Wisdom delivers us from sin's perspective (1:30).
- B. Righteousness delivers us from sin's penalty (1:30).
- C. Sanctification delivers us from sin's power (1:30).
- D. Redemption delivers us from sin's presence (1:30).
- E. Boasting in the Lord delivers us from sin's pride (1:31).

Ray Stedman: God deliberately chooses the weak and the obscure and uses them in great power to remind us that it is not status, prestige, bigness or money that makes ministry for God effective.

I remember in my early Christian life reading of the life and ministry of Dr. George Washington Carver, the outstanding Negro scientist, who in the early part of this century was used of God in great ways among the black people of the South. Dr.

Carver, a great believer and a choice servant of God, said that one day he prayed, "Lord, teach me the secrets of the universe." He said God said to him, "George, that is too big a subject for you. I want you to take a peanut, that is more your size, and work on that." So he began to explore what was in the peanut, and now it is a matter of record that he found over 325 different uses for it. He revolutionized the technology of the South. That is why our present President of the United States made his living by peanuts and the technology that followed the discoveries of George Washington Carver. God used that simple, humble believer to open secrets of the universe that he hid from everyone else. . .

Now, why is God against human boasting? We are all experts at it, but God does not like it. Why? Well, surely the reason is not that he is jealous of us; he is not simply trying to put anyone down. No, the answer is that human boasting is always based on an illusion, but God is a realist. Those who boast in themselves or in their abilities are always thinking they have some power in themselves that will make them succeed, and God knows that that is a lie. They are deceiving themselves; they are living in a fantasy world.

Therefore, the kindest thing God can do is to find a way to puncture that sinful pride, collapse that platform of prestige, and shatter that illusion of self-sufficiency. That is what he does, and he does it by using the obscure and the weak and the things that are regarded oftentimes as foolish. . .

Paul then sets forth for us in another beautiful passage the secret of true wisdom. What is it? It is the ability to recognize that though you may have little of what the world thinks it takes, if you have Jesus, and have learned to count on his power moment by moment, you have the secret of true success. Now, many Christians know that in their minds, but they do not act on it when the moment for action comes, and, therefore, they act like anybody else. The whole purpose of the Scriptures is to teach us to walk in a different way, to live by a different power, and to do so with respect to everything we do. The simplest tasks are to be done in the power of Christ.

John Piper: More than anything else in the world, God hates human pride.

Proverbs 6:16-17 says "*There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him. . .*" and the first one mentioned is "*haughty eyes.*"

In **Psalm 101:5** David speaks for God and says, "*The man of haughty looks and arrogant heart I will not endure.*"

Proverbs 16:5, "*Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the Lord.*"

Isaiah 2:11, "*The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.*"

Jeremiah 50:31, *"Behold, I am against you, O proud one, says the Lord God of hosts; for your day has come, the time when I will punish you."*

Jesus said in **Luke 16:15**, *"What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."*

And in **Acts 12:23** it says that an angel of the Lord struck Herod so that he was eaten with worms and died because when he received applause from the people he did not give God the glory but took it for himself.

God hates human pride. And this is the root problem in the church at Corinth. Let's take a quick survey of the letters to Corinth to see if this is so, and also to see just what pride is. Ask these two questions as we go: is pride the root problem at Corinth, and what actually is pride?

1 Cor. 1:29 - *"so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. . ."*

1 Cor. 1:31 - *"Therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'"*

1 Cor. 3:7 - *"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."*

1 Cor. 3:21 - *"So let no one boast of men."*

1 Cor. 4:6 (at the end) - *". . .that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another."* (The end of verse 7 -) *"If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"*

1 Cor. 4:18 - *"Some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you."*

1 Cor. 5:2 - *"And you are arrogant!"*

1 Cor. 8:1 - *"Knowledge puffs up, love builds up."*

1 Cor. 13:4 - *"Love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude."*

2 Cor. 1:9 - (Hardship comes even up to the brink of death) *"but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."*

2 Cor. 3:5 - *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God."*

2 Cor. 4:7 - *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."*

2 Cor. 12:9 - "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ might rest upon me."

It is not hard to see that the root problem in the church at Corinth is pride. And it is not hard to see either what that pride is.

- It is boasting in self and not the Lord.
- It is taking credit ourselves for what God alone can do.
- It is relying on self and not God.
- It is feeling sufficiency in our own strength and not in God's.
- It is the disinclination to admit that we are mere earthen vessels so that another gets the glory.
- It is the unwillingness to admit weaknesses that may accent the power of Christ.

David Prior: In seeing God's wisdom in the way in which he operates, it is worth noting also that it is in his love that he **resists the proud**. He saves only those who are humble enough to turn to Jesus Christ to save them, and he longs for all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (**1 Tim. 2:4**). God is constantly and deliberately bringing proud people to their knees, so that they can enter his presence in repentance and faith. People who glory in their intelligence and insight will be put to shame by those who, by worldly standards, are ignoramuses but who know God in Jesus Christ. Immensely powerful people are shown up in all their vulnerability by the impressive inner strength of very weak individuals who love God. Insignificant and very ordinary people often get under the skins of the wealthy and the influential, who would normally ignore and despise them. In these and other ways human pride is punctured by the wise love of God.

Doug Goins: In **1:1-25** Paul was challenging the Corinthian Christians that behind their struggle to get along was an overconfidence in human resources and human wisdom. In this respect, we're really no different from the Corinthians. We live in a place of culture, wealth, power, and beauty, just like Corinth. We're much too impressed with human accomplishment. And beneath a veneer of intellectual sophistication, our culture is in a state of moral decay. Paul reminded the church in Corinth that unlike the surrounding Corinthian culture, they were to live on the basis of the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of men. These are the two themes that are contrasted throughout the first four chapters of this letter.

Verse 25 ended with a ringing proclamation: "...*The weakness of God is stronger than men.*" God on his worst day is far greater than we are on our best days. All the human resources we can muster are no match for his power and greatness.

Now Paul goes on to prove that God does indeed work through weakness. First, in **1:26-31** he asks the Corinthians to take a hard look at themselves and remember who they are and where they've come from as Christians. Then in **2:1-5** he asks them to look at him and remember what the year and a half was like when he ministered among them. He points out that they as a people were not very clever or bright, and that his ministry of teaching and preaching among them was not very persuasive. So the fact that they're Christians at all proves that God works through weakness-how else could the church of Christ in Corinth be explained? . . .

What Paul is saying in these two verses is that God's wisdom is paradoxical. In human thinking, strength is strength, weakness is weakness, intelligence is intelligence. But in God's economy some of the things that seem the strongest are the weakest, and some of the things that seem the weakest are the strongest. Some of the things that seem the wisest are the most foolish. As I said before, the paradox isn't an accident; God designed it that way. The most simple, uneducated, untalented, clumsy believer who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior, who faithfully and humbly follows his or her Lord, is immeasurably wiser than the brilliant Ph.D. who scoffs at the gospel. The simple believer knows forgiveness, love, grace, life, hope, the word of God, and God himself. That simple believer sees into eternity. The unbelieving Ph.D., on the other hand, knows nothing beyond his books, his own mind, his own resources, his own experience. And from God's perspective, he is the one who can't be considered anything but foolish. The world measures greatness by many standards-intelligence, wealth, prestige, position, power-things that God has determined to put at the bottom, according to the apostle Paul. God reveals the greatness of his power by demonstrating that it's the world's nobodies that are his somebodies. . .

In **verses 30-31** Paul states this positive reason why he's chosen folks like us. He addresses two issues that our culture is obsessed with, identity and self-worth. **Verse 30** talks about the identity that is a gift from God in Jesus Christ: "*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption....*" What God wants is for us to find our identity completely in Jesus Christ. In fact, we've been given every resource we need to live lives of purpose, influence, wholeness, and effectiveness in him. In **Ephesians 1:3** the apostle Paul says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ....*" We can substitute the word "resources" for the word "blessings." Since every believer is in Jesus Christ, we have all been given resources in the person of Christ. There are four words that describe the resources that we have in him: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Let me expand those for you briefly.

Lowery: For Christ alone personified the wisdom from God (v. 30) and in Him the Corinthians experienced righteousness, that is, justification (**Rom. 4:24-25**), holiness, that is, sanctification (**2 Thes. 2:13-15**), and redemption, that is, glorification (**Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30**). In the wisdom of God the plan of salvation was accomplished by a

crucified Christ hidden from the wise and learned but revealed to simple believers (cf. **Matt. 11:25-26**).

John MacArthur: We are often tempted to think that it would be wonderful if such-and-such a great athlete – or brilliant scientist, popular entertainer, or world leader – would become a Christian. But Jesus did not think this way when He chose His disciples. Some were probably well known in their local circles and perhaps a few of them were well off financially. But He did not choose them for their wealth or influence, and in His training of them He did not try to capitalize on any such things. None of them had anything so great that he was not ready to leave it to follow Christ. . .

According to God, the greatest man who ever lived, apart from Jesus Himself, was John the Baptist. He had no formal education, no training in a trade or profession, no money, no military rank, no political position, no social pedigree, no prestige, no impressive appearance or oratory. Yet Jesus said, “*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist*” (**Matt. 11:11**). This man fit none of the world’s standards but all of God’s. And what he became was all to the credit of God’s power.

**Thomas Leake: THE HIDDEN GREATNESS OF THE CROSS –
THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS IS ANTITHETICAL TO WORLDLY
WISDOM**

(continued from last lesson)

IX. GOD CHOOSES THE LESSER THINGS, NOT THE GREATER (:26-28)

Look back to the time when you were called into Christianity – the group at Corinth was not very impressive by the world’s standards – 3 types of people:

- foolish = the average Joe
- weak = not very impressive
- the base (bottom of the barrel) and the despised – like slaves, prisoners, etc.

God must have had a bad church growth strategy – He picked all the rejects!

How should this impact our evangelism strategy? We spend too much time going after the wrong groups of people

Beware of the church that makes sports heroes and entertainment stars its spokesmen

Is. 41:11

X. TRUE RELIGION IS NOT ABOUT US BUT ABOUT CHRIST (:29-31)

God will not allow a little created bit of dust to stand before Him and boast; **Ps. 94:2-4**; All of our blessings come to us by our connection to Christ; and it is all God’s work and not man’s that puts us into connection with Christ;

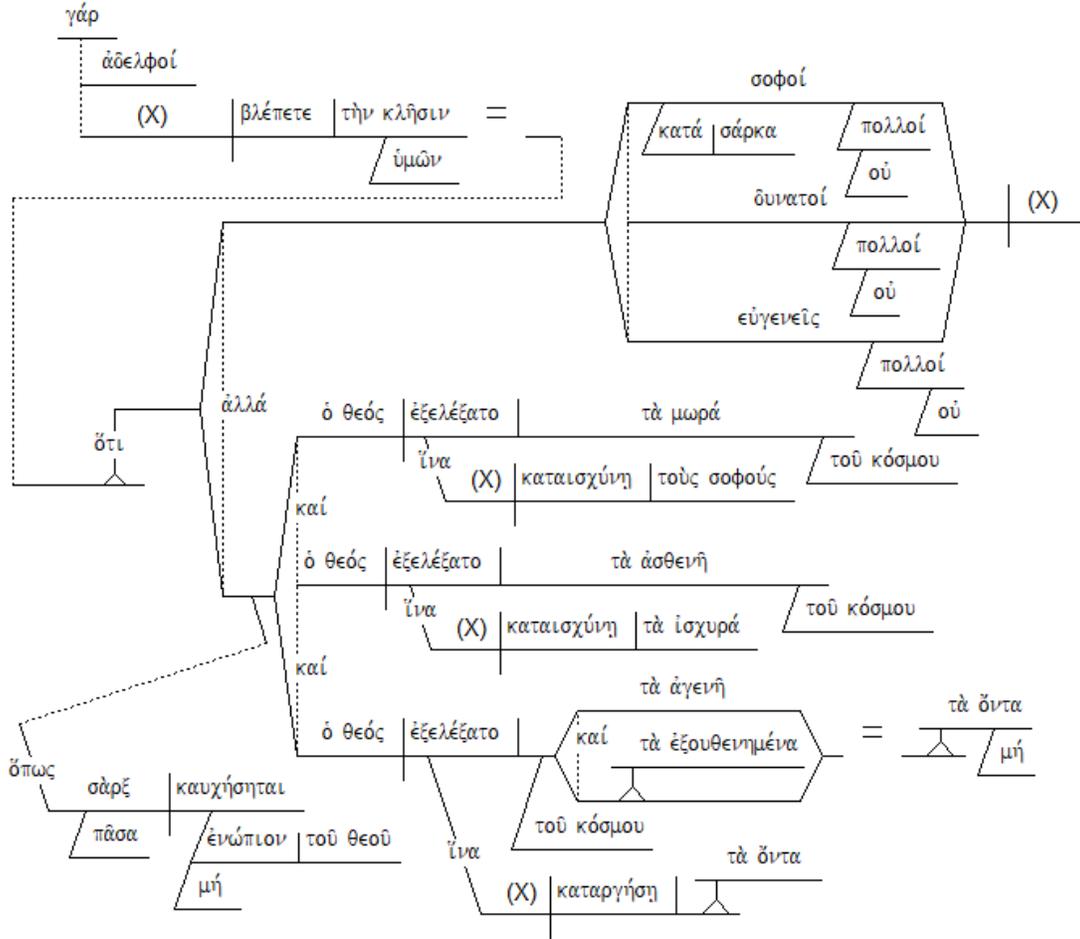
Cf. Hannah’s example of bold boasting in the Lord – **1 Sam. 2**

Ps. 5:11; Ps. 34

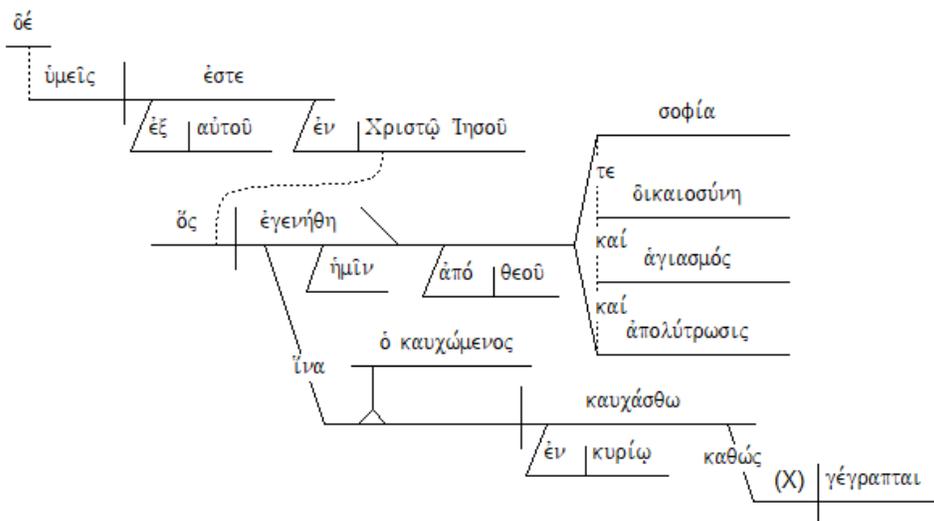
The humble believer looks at the cross and sees the wisdom and power of God and boasts in that.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

1Co 1:26-29



1Co 1:30-31



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

TITLE: *POWERFULLY PREACHING CHRIST*

BIG IDEA:

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREACHING DERIVES FROM ITS FOCUS ON THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST AND ITS DYNAMIC OF THE POWER OF GOD RATHER THAN FROM THE ELOQUENCE OR PERSONALITY OF THE PREACHER

INTRODUCTION:

What makes for an effective sermon or for a powerful preacher? What makes one sermon fall flat while another has tremendous impact in the lives of people? What are the criteria we should use in evaluating preachers? The Apostle Paul has been criticizing the Corinthians for placing too much stock in the personality of individual preachers. He has already stripped aside all reliance upon human wisdom to get to the core of the fundamental message of the gospel – the cross of Christ. Now he points to his own example of what constitutes powerful preaching.

Gordon Fee: Thus, not only the means (the cross) and the people (the church in Corinth), but also the preacher (Paul) declare that God is in the process of overturning the world's systems. At the same time, of course, the entire paragraph has a strong **apologetic overtone**. Paul's own ministry has been justified before them by way of its results among them. . .

In every possible way Paul has tried to show them the folly of their present fascination with wisdom, which has inherent within it the folly of self-sufficiency and self-congratulation. Thus not only the message itself (**1:18–25**) and the recipients themselves -- you (**1:26–31**) -- but the preacher himself (me!) whom God used to bring them to faith had to **reject self-reliance**.

Robert Hughes: The important distinction was between the mode of the ministry and its content. Paul's mode was in weakness, but his content brought the power of God. The implications were clear. The Corinthians were involved in a lifestyle that could only build faith in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God. Which would they choose, flashy style or divine power?

David Garland: He amplifies his disavowal of wise speech broached in **1:17** to argue, "The messenger is like the message" (**Edwards** 1895: 43). Preaching is not competitive rhetoric (**Thiselton** 2000: 107). God's spiritual power overrides and invalidates strategies of manipulative power and self-assertion where the desire to win applause trumps the obligation to speak the truth. **Pascuzzi** (1997: 32 n. 51) suggests that Paul may have distanced himself "from the seductive rhetoric that only obfuscates, and is moreover inadequate to express, the stark reality of the cross which is God's power forcing upon Christians a whole new order to which they must submit." **Friedrich**

(TDNT 3:716) comments, “Christian preaching does not persuade the hearers by beautiful or clever words -- otherwise it would only be a matter of words.” Attempts to accredit the gospel in a worldly show of wisdom actually discredit the gospel. Paul did not purvey the empty, ephemeral wisdom of this world but disclosed the eternal truth of God’s wisdom encapsulated in the cross, and the Corinthians were persuaded because of God’s Spirit and power.

Mark Taylor: In **2:1–5** Paul describes the content, the manner, and the results of his preaching during the time of the establishment of the Corinthian church. Having shown that God’s wisdom upends human wisdom in the proclamation of a crucified Messiah (**1:18–25**), which is further illustrated in God’s choice of the foolish and insignificant things of the world (**1:26–31**), Paul now describes his own ministry among them as a ministry that exemplified the wisdom of God (**2:1–5**). He did not come to Corinth preaching with all the embellishments of human eloquence and wisdom but rather as one bearing witness to Christ crucified (**2:2**; cf. **1:23**). In short, Paul’s manner of preaching and way of life was consistent with the message he preached.

Paul Gardner: Though weak, fearful, and not coming to Corinth with the great rhetorical skills that many in Greek society might have expected, Paul’s gospel proclamation demonstrated both God’s Holy Spirit and the power of God in such a way that people came to faith. Thus, in himself and in the fact that people have come to faith, Paul offers further proof that God’s wisdom prevails over that of human beings.

I. (:1-2) THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREACHING DERIVES FROM ITS FOCUS

A. (:1) Not on Human Wisdom or Eloquence

“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.”

Contrast the approach of Madison Avenue advertising via the media;
Contrast much of the approach of TV evangelists

Charles Hodge: *The testimony of God* may mean either the testimony which Paul bore concerning God, or God’s own testimony, i.e. what God had revealed and testified to be true. “*The testimony of God*” is, in this sense, the gospel, as in 2 Tim. 1, 8. The latter interpretation best suits the connection, as throughout these chapters Paul contrasts what reason teaches with what God teaches. He did not appear as a teacher of human wisdom, but as announcing what God had revealed.

Gordon Fee: Those who seek wisdom may sound as if they are involved in a noble affair; in reality they are engaged in various forms of self-congratulatory, and therefore divisive, competition over “excellence” of speech, rhetoric, or profundity, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Adewuya: Paul chose a **simple delivery of a powerful message**. This is not to say that he was muddled or badly prepared. Rather, his message was always given greater importance than his method of delivering it. Concerning wisdom, Paul could be regarded as a scholar of the highest order, but he never sought to display his scholarship when preaching. Good preaching does not consist of words that draw attention to the preacher's personal attainments or cleverness of voice, but words that point to the presence and activity of God. It does not express what the hearers love to hear, but inspires the hearers to turn to God. The mystery of God is the message that the Corinthians did not understand before, It is here explained by Paul and illuminated by the Holy Spirit (**2:10–14**). The mystery that Paul preached relates to Christ and the cross. As Paul showed earlier, both the Jews and Greeks had no clue concerning the significance of the cross.

B. (:2) But on the Crucified Christ

“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

Craig Blomberg: In short, the Corinthians came to faith by **focusing on the cross of Christ** which seemed so foolish to everyone else. They must now return to that focus rather than splitting the church by magnifying human leaders.

II. (:3-4) THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREACHING DERIVES FROM ITS DYNAMIC

A. (:3-4a) Not of Human Personality or Charisma or Powerful Oratory

1. Not Humanly Impressive in Charisma of Appearance

“I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling”

2 Possibilities:

- sense of human inadequacy coupled with overwhelming sense of awe in being used by God; tremendous responsibility on his shoulders
- inner fears, some form of human frailty referred to elsewhere as his thorn in the flesh, etc.

In either case Paul needed divine encouragement and faith in the power of God and the enabling work of the Holy Spirit to carry out his mission to the Gentiles

Charles Hodge: here the whole context shows he refers to his state of mind. It was not in the consciousness of strength, self-confident and self-relying, that he appeared among them, but as oppressed with a sense of his weakness and insufficiency. He had a work to do which he felt to be entirely above his powers.

Paul Gardner: Paul knows that God has deliberately called him despite his many inadequacies, fears, failings, and weaknesses to proclaim the gospel. What Paul has come to realize is that this is actually part of his calling. God has chosen a person like him in order that Christ crucified will be the one who is seen and heard rather than the messenger.

2. Not Humanly Impressive in Sophistication of Utterance

“and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom”

Gordon Fee: He deliberately avoided the very thing that now fascinates them, “the persuasion of wisdom.” But his preaching did not thereby lack “persuasion.” What it lacked was the kind of persuasion found among the sophists and rhetoricians, where the power lay in the person and the delivery. Paul’s preaching, on the other hand, despite his personal appearance and whatever its actual form, produced the desired results, namely it brought about the faith of the Corinthians.

B. (:4b) But of Divine Power and the Working of the Holy Spirit

1. Spirit Energized

“but in demonstration of the Spirit”

2. Power Packed

“and of power”

Robertson: The demonstration is that which is wrought by God’s power, especially His power to save man and give a new direction to his life. As it is all from God, why make a party-hero of the human instrument?

III. (:5) THE GOAL OF PREACHING SHOULD BE TO ESTABLISH THE PROPER FOUNDATION FOR VITAL FAITH

The proper focus and dynamic are critical in establishing this proper foundation for faith.

A. Not a Foundation of Human Wisdom

“so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men”

B. But a Foundation of Divine Power

“but on the power of God.”

Robert Gromacki: Paul was not after superficial decisions; rather, he desired genuine, God-produced experiences in the lives of his listeners.

Mark Taylor: The final clause, “*so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power,*” is, in substance, a recasting of the climactic statement of the previous unit, “*Let him who boasts boast in the Lord*” (1:31). If we take into account the summarizing statement of 1:18–25, that God is wiser and stronger than men (1:25), taken together, the three concluding statements of each unit in 1:18 – 2:5 provide a succinct summary of Paul’s main emphasis throughout.

Gordon Fee: With the concluding purpose clause (v. 5) the argument that began in 1:18 now comes full circle. The message of the cross, which is folly to the “wise,” is the saving power of God to those who believe. The goal of all the divine activity, both in the cross and in choosing them, and now in Paul’s preaching that brought the cross and them together, has been to disarm the wise and powerful so that those who believe must trust God alone and completely. Thus, as the citation from Jeremiah concludes the second paragraph (vv. 26–31), so this paragraph concludes: “so that your faith might not rest on [human] wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Paul Gardner: God’s power alone is to be the basis for faith in Christ. It is all of grace. “Faith” (πίστις) is about trust and commitment to Christ. It is the God-empowered result of the “speech and demonstration” of Christ crucified. It thus has an objective content yet also indicates the internal response that has taken place in the transformation of believers. As **John Murray** has put it, “Faith itself is the whole-souled movement of the person in entrustment to Christ.”

As Paul draws this example to an end, he brings everything back to **God and his power**. Paul was a living example of how God is involved at every stage in drawing people to himself. The best of clever argumentation may draw some to the preacher but not to Jesus Christ. Paul shows that a message that is folly to many and a stumbling block to others has been presented in a manner that seems to reflect the message: devoid of rhetorical flourishes and sophistication and of powerful signs. The messenger himself is weak and fearful. Given that the content of the message, the way in which it is communicated, and the person doing the communication will not be well regarded in the eyes of the world, then the results of his initial visit to the city (“when I came”; v. 1) can only be attributed to the power of God and the working of the Holy Spirit. It is God who has taken the word of the good news of Christ and has applied it in power through his Spirit in the lives of those who are being saved.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are people attracted to different preachers? What criteria do people use to evaluate preachers?
- 2) What makes for a Christ focused message? Must every sermon contain explicit testimony to the essentials of the gospel message – including the significance of the crucifixion of Christ?
- 3) Do we tend to be more impressed by the style of the preacher or the content of the message and its impact in terms of changing our heart and conforming our will to the will of God?
- 4) What types of emotional manipulation can tend to yield superficial decisions rather than genuine faith commitments to the message of the gospel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: The church preaches the simple gospel message of Jesus Christ because God's power and God's wisdom are in the cross.

The Cross Reveals the Power of God (2:1-5).

- A. The method must be simple (2:1).
- B. The message must be clear (2:2).
- C. The messenger must be dependent on God (2:3-4).
- D. The motive must be sincere (2:5).

Paul Gardner: A Radically Different Perspective Shaped by the Cross -- Illustrated in Paul's Preaching (2:1-5)

- 1. The Manner of His Preaching (2:1)
 - a. Not with Lofty Speech
 - b. Not with Wisdom
- 2. The Content of His Preaching (2:2)
 - a. Only Jesus Christ
 - b. And Him Crucified
- 3. The Manner of His Preaching (2:3-4a)
 - a. In Weakness
 - b. Not in Words of Wisdom
- 4. The Results of His Preaching (2:4b-5)
 - a. A Demonstration of the Spirit and power
 - b. A Faith Resting on God's Power

Ray Stedman: In the book of Acts we are told that after he had been in Corinth for a few months the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision and strengthened him and said to him, "*Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, ... and no man shall attack you to harm you,*" (cf. **Acts 18:9-10**). That is a revelation of why Paul was afraid. He was afraid he was going to be beaten up as he had been in other cities. He was afraid because of personal pride. He was afraid of being branded as a religious fanatic. He did not like those feelings, nevertheless he faithfully began to talk about what God had said in Jesus Christ.

Soon there was a second visible result. Paul calls it the "*demonstration of the Spirit and [of] power.*" As Paul in this great sense of weakness told the facts and the story out of the simple earnestness of his heart, God's spirit began to work and people started coming to Christ. You read the account in Acts. First, the rulers of the synagogue turned to Christ, and then hundreds of the common, ordinary, plain, vanilla people of Corinth began to become Christians. Soon there was a great spiritual awakening, and before the city of Corinth knew what had happened, a church had been planted in its midst and a ferment was running throughout the city.

John Piper: We know from Paul's letters that he was a profound thinker and that he could use language powerfully. But the point he is making here is that he did not preach the gospel with the hope of appealing to the worldly, unspiritual admiration of those things. He did not want people to respond because of his oratory or his intellect. . .

Now what does all this have to do with the cross of Christ? That Paul is trembling and fearful, that he is weak and unimpressive, that he avoids flourishes of oratory and intellectual ostentation -- what's all that got to do with the cross? . . .

I think what it means is that whatever else he knew, whatever else he spoke about, and whatever else he did, he would know it and say it and do it in relation to Christ crucified. This brings us back to where we started. He will not let the cross become a historical relic. He puts it at the center of his everyday work and relationships.

Craig Blomberg: **First Corinthians 2:1–5** must be read in its larger context to avoid serious misrepresentations of Paul in particular and Christianity in general. Rhetorical criticism is increasingly demonstrating how well-trained in literary artistry Paul was. **Verse 1** cannot be taken absolutely, because **1 Corinthians** itself is very carefully crafted, using numerous devices designed to try to persuade Paul's readers of his message. Paul is thus "willing to employ human eloquence, for this is intrinsically neutral, as long as it remains subservient to the message of the Gospel and the divine work of the Spirit." But even in this qualified use he distances himself from many of his contemporaries, as he argues "against that method of preaching which employs literary figures not as a means to convey better the message of the Gospel, but as ornamentations intended to please and amuse the congregation." Nor does this paragraph give preachers the right not to prepare their messages thoughtfully. But it reminds us that **homiletical techniques alone do not prepare us to preach with spiritual power**. Only when the Spirit first convicts us from a given text do we then have the right to preach it to others. . .

"Rhetoric" in the medium of oral monologue may not be the primary medium of manipulative communication today. A closer parallel might make certain uses of music and lighting, electronic simulation, or whatever might divert attention from Christ and the cross to the antics and style of the speaker. Sometimes this might be bullying or wheedling. Against this, Paul declares that his only resolve was to proclaim Christ, and Christ crucified (v. 2).

Jeffries: So, then, Paul has made his case for the vital importance of the pure essence of the gospel – the cross of Christ -- being preached. But three critical elements in the proclaiming of and the receiving of the Good News must come together in order for the message to be manifested in the power of God:

- a. the message of the gospel - the cross of Christ;
- b. the faithful proclamation of the unadulterated gospel by those called by God to do so; and
- c. the anointing power of the Holy Spirit.

Doug Goins: First of all, Paul said he was not trusting in sophisticated rhetorical devices. Paul's teaching and preaching while he was in Corinth were not patterned after the styles of communication that the Corinthians loved so much, "*superiority of speech*" and "*wisdom*." The New International Version translates the phrase "*eloquence and superior wisdom*." **C. K. Barrett** writes: "The two nouns are close together in meaning, for 'eloquence' literally means 'rational talk.' And 'superior wisdom' literally means 'worldly cleverness.' They represent the outward and inward means by which men may commend a case, effectiveness of language, and skill of argumentation." Paul refused to give the people what they wanted in terms of communication style.

Second, in the first clause of **verse 2**, he refused to show off his theological knowledge, philosophize, or psychologize. He didn't encumber the message with Paul Tillich vocabulary. He himself was a gifted rabbi, one of the greatest minds of his age. He probably knew four or five languages. And yet he refused to compete with the articulate philosophers of Corinth or show off his credentials. . .

Third, in the beginning clause of **verse 4**, Paul didn't try to persuade with a powerful, compelling delivery. Paul's plain way of speaking was not compelling. In **2 Corinthians 10** Paul admits that he wasn't a very impressive public speaker. I thought of the way modern-day athletes say, "Show me what you've got!" If the itinerant philosophers and teachers of Corinth had said to Paul, "Show us what you've got!" he would have said, "I don't have much, actually. I choose not to compete with you." They depended on their powers of persuasion to gain followers. But Paul says, "I am not a salesman. I will not use emotional manipulation or theatrics. I am an ambassador. I proclaim truth."

Proclaiming the cross by the power of the Spirit

In the second half of **verse 1** Paul tells us the first of the four things he did do among them. He uses two important words: "*proclaiming*" and "*testimony*." Proclaiming was a simple announcement of fact, not the modern usage in which proclamation is a big, showy thing. And the word "*testimony*" takes us into the courtroom. It's a clear summary of the facts. When he chose to proclaim a testimony of the gospel of God, he was just making an objective statement of what was true as he taught the word.

The second thing he says he did, in **verse 2**, is center exclusively on the person and work of Jesus Christ. "*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*" Remember the concern he expressed earlier in **1:17,18** that the message not be diluted: "*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" Paul's message was the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ the divine Savior and his accomplished work of the cross. "Christ plus nothing" was Paul's consistent message in all of his preaching, teaching, and writing.

The third positive statement is in **verse 3**. This is wonderful, gutsy, amazing transparency for somebody in public leadership: "*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.*" What Paul is doing is summarizing the **feelings** that he struggled with when he first arrived in Corinth. He had known about the reputation of the city before he got there: how intellectual it was, how depraved the culture was, how licentious the lifestyle. He had just come from a disappointing time in Athens. Earlier he had been driven out of Thessalonica and beaten in Philippi. He was tired and fearful and lonely. Even after a period of immediate fruitful ministry, with some people coming to faith in Christ, the book of Acts tells us that Paul was still very discouraged. .

Finally, Paul describes that result in **verse 4**: "*And my message and my preaching were...[a] demonstration of the Spirit and of power....*" Paul understood that he had to depend on the Holy Spirit for results, not his own skills or sensitivities. In spite of Paul's weakness and fear and trembling, he shared the message of the power of the cross, the gospel. The Holy Spirit took that message, delivered in weakness and humility, and began to change lives. Paul was not the persuader. That was the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul was the proclaimer of what was true. It was straightforward and simple: He just told the truth and trusted God for results.

Faith in God's power

Paul explains in **verse 5** why he did it this way: "*....That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*" Paul is saying, "I didn't come to you Corinthians with human wisdom, because I knew that if I came that way, that's what you would trust, and that's useless. You would invite me into your heart as Savior instead of Jesus. I came to you in my own weakness, but in God's power. And what happened? You trusted God's power, and it changed your life."

Robert Gromacki: Before he had preached his first message in Corinth, Paul had determined that his content would be a simple, clear, and frank presentation of both the person of Christ, including His deity, humanity, and messiahship ("*save Jesus Christ*"), and His redemptive work, involving the death and resurrection ("*and Him crucified*"). To do this, Paul "*reasoned*" (*dielegeto*, **Acts 18:4**), "*persuaded*" (*epeithen*, **Acts 18:4**), and "*testified*" (*diamartyromenos*, **Acts 18:5**). This was no mere statement of facts; his message conveyed spiritual, Biblical, and logical arguments. Logic, divine not human, can and must saturate our sermons and witness.

Charles Hodge: In these verses, therefore, we are taught:

1. That, the proper method to convert men in any community, Christian or Pagan, is to preach or set forth the truth concerning the person and work of Christ. Whatever other means are used must be subordinate and auxiliary, designed to remove obstacles, and to gain access for the truth to the mind, just as the ground is cleared of weeds and brambles in order to prepare it for the precious seed.
2. The proper state of mind in which to preach the gospel is the opposite of self-confidence or carelessness. The gospel should be preached with a sense of weakness and with great anxiety and solicitude.

3. The success of the gospel does not depend on the skill of the preacher, but on the demonstration of the Spirit.
4. The foundation of saving faith is not reason, i.e. not arguments addressed to the understanding, but the power of God as exerted with and by the truth upon the heart.

John MacArthur: Human words of wisdom, no matter how impressive and persuasive, would have robbed the gospel of its power. He saw no place for calculated theatrics and techniques to manipulate response. Many have responded to an emotional appeal, without a true knowledge and conviction of God. Paul did not do that kind of preaching. He surely would have gotten a wider and more receptive hearing, but his hearers would have been left in their sins and without a Savior. . .

Paul had great natural abilities, but he did not rely on them. Even the human words and wisdom of an apostle could not save a person. He did not want his hearers to identify with his own wisdom, which could give them only another philosophy, but with God's wisdom in Jesus Christ, which could give them eternal life. . .

Charles Spurgeon said:

The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul.

Thomas Leake: 3 POWERFUL AREAS OF PAUL'S EXAMPLE

INTRODUCTION:

Def. of Expository Preaching: let's God speak to us from the text rather than the preacher inserting his ideas; exposes the meaning of the text; covers all of Scripture;
Def. of Powerful Preaching: unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit to impact lives through the Word of God;

Context: Paul continuing the same themes from **Chapter 1**

Explaining **1:20** here in more detail from his own example of how he brought the gospel to Corinth

If Christ is the wisdom of God, why would we preach anything else?

Weak, worldly preaching looks impressive but has no power

I. PAUL'S POWERFUL MESSAGE (:1-2)

A. How He Did Not Come

1. *Superiority of speech*
2. *Superiority of wisdom*

Concept of elevation; lofty, high (**1 Tim. 2:2**); grand speech

Not against excellent articulation

But his demeanor was humble and his speech plain

Rejecting the type of pompous speech that elevates the preacher rather than the message;

Not trying to distinguish himself philosophically or rhetorically

B. How He Came – Preaching “*Christ Crucified*”

What does Paul not mean here:

- not that every message must just focus on the particulars of death of Christ
- not that every message must be strictly an evangelistic focus to non-believers
- not a statement of anti-intellectualism
- not saying he did a lousy job in Athens and this is the way to preach

Uses this phrase as a summation of focusing on Who Christ is and What He accomplished; Paul preached the whole counsel of God; this was not a new strategy but his ongoing strategy reflected in all of his preaching

II. PAUL’S POWERFUL METHOD (:3-4)

2 Options:

- fearful
- sense of inadequacy

Maybe a combination of both; certainly Paul depended on God for fruit and success in the ministry; involved a reverence for God; sense of overwhelming task to evangelize the Gentiles in such a wicked city; aware of his own flesh

Paul acted as a witness in a courtroom

We don’t enjoy our weakness; but God works through weak and trembling instruments;

This is not a message saying we cannot persuade men

Paul depended on the Spirit of God to bring about powerful impact in lives of others;

Context is not one of miracles, but the changed lives (**1 Thess 2:13**)

“demonstration” = legal term – proving something – power of God was working at Corinth

III. PAUL’S POWERFUL MOTIVE (:5)

“*so that*” = purpose statement

All people have faith in something

Divine persuasion must be at work; not human

Not trying to utilize some type of grand Crusade type of event with its emotional appeals

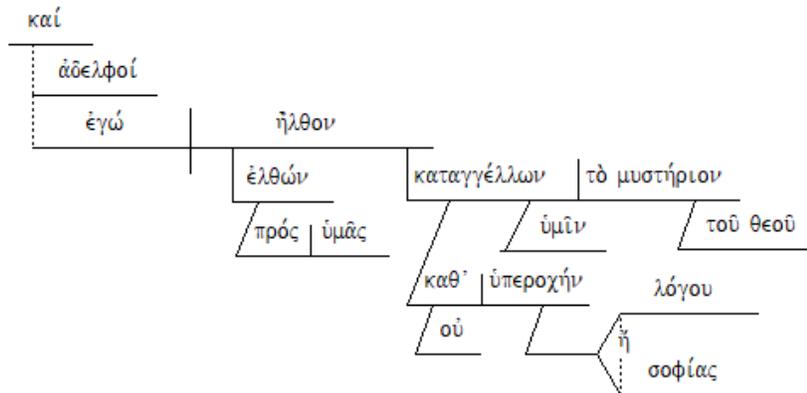
Persuading with God’s truth

CONCLUSION:

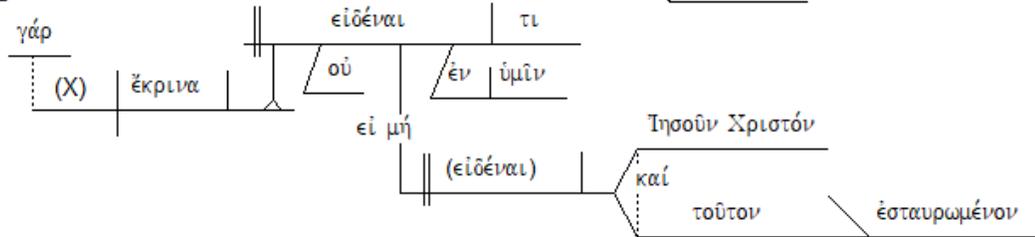
This expository preaching is not just another style of preaching; we must develop a conviction that we will only support this type of preaching.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

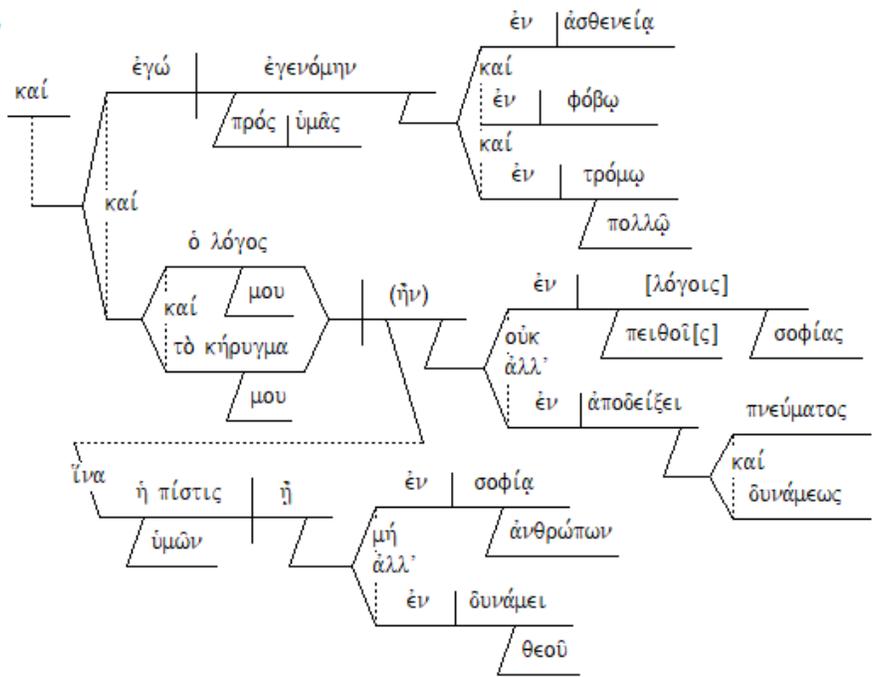
1Co 2:1



1Co 2:2



1Co 2:3-5



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2: 6-8

TITLE: *THE MYSTERY ASPECT OF THE WISDOM OF GOD ROOTED IN THE CROSS*

BIG IDEA:

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS ONLY FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION:

Even though God is in the business of revealing truth to His chosen ones; never forget that the unsaved have no capacity to understand spiritual truth. This should actually be a tremendous encouragement to believers. We appreciate our privileged position of having been predestined to be blessed with an understanding of God's program for salvation. We also have a better perspective on the blindness and opposition of the rulers of this age.

This section is part of the overall emphasis on the need for Christian unity. The Corinthian believers had been aligning themselves with different preachers on the basis of human wisdom criteria (who sounds most impressive, who speaks most eloquently, etc.) rather than focusing on the message of the gospel and the person of Christ. They needed insight into the true wisdom of God and how it operates.

James Boyer: The contentious spirit which was being manifested in the church at Corinth was due to a wrong conception of the gospel. Evidently, they were thinking of the gospel as another of the philosophical movements of the day and were comparing it and its advocates with others as a type of rival philosophy. Paul has made clear that the gospel is far from being another philosophy. It is, in fact, foolishness. Now, however, he changes his approach. Actually, the gospel is not foolish at all. It is wisdom, but an entirely different kind of wisdom. **He goes on to show in what sense the gospel is wisdom.**

Gordon Fee: The gospel of the crucified Messiah is wisdom all right, he affirms, but not of the kind they are now pursuing. True wisdom is indeed for those who are "*spiritual*," meaning for those who have the Spirit, who has revealed what God has really accomplished in Christ. Because they do have the Spirit, and thus the mind of Christ, they should have seen the cross for what it is -- God's wisdom -- and thereby have been able to make true judgments. But by pursuing *sophia*, they are acting just like those without the Spirit, who are likewise pursuing wisdom but see the cross as foolishness. The net result—and the irony—is that they are "spiritual," yet "unspiritual"; they are pursuing "wisdom," yet missing the very wisdom of God.

Mark Taylor: Even though the interpretation of this section hinges on a number of factors, Paul's overall intent becomes clear in the strong rebuke in **3:1–4** of the Corinthians' factious behavior, recalling the whole reason for the lengthy discussion of

God's wisdom in the first place (cf. **3:4; 1:12**). Paul affirms that he (and others) do indeed speak wisdom but not as the Corinthians suppose.

- First, there are important questions raised by key terms in **2:6–3:4**. Who are the “*mature*” (**2:6**), the “*spiritual*,” and the “*natural*” man (**2:14–15; 3:1**), the “*worldly*” (**3:1**), and the “*infants*” (**3:1**)? Are these Pauline terms, Corinthian terms, or both in the sense that the Corinthians have taken up but misconstrued Paul's language? To what extent, if at all, does Paul employ irony?
- Second, what is the content of the “*wisdom*” that Paul and others speak? Is it the gospel, something different from the gospel, or something different yet related, such as the fuller implication of or application of the gospel?
- Third, how do the “*mature*” and the “*infants*” (**2:6; 3:1**), along with the metaphors of “*milk*” and “*solid food*” (**3:2**), relate to this wisdom?
- Fourth, what is the relation of this passage to analogous passages in Ephesians and Colossians that employ similar language regarding wisdom?
- Fifth, what does this passage have to say about spiritual maturity, that is, what constitutes a “*spiritual*” person in Paul's view? While the Corinthians may have defined maturity in terms of knowledge, Paul is far more interested in defining maturity according to behavior in community. The passage aims at defining who is mature/wise and who is not. At the present time, based on their internal rivalries, the Corinthians are not.

Robert Hughes: “*Among those who are mature*” (**2:6**) equaled those who were spiritual and did not walk like “*men*” (**3:1, 3**). Notice the development of the identity of the mature. They were called mature (**2:6**); spiritual ones (**2:13**); not “*natural*,” or carnal (**2:14**); and again, spiritual ones (**2:15; 3:1**). The mature person's knowledge was the wisdom of God's ways in Christ, especially the cross. The truly spiritual and mature person was **rooted in the word of the cross**. But God had predestined that wisdom to result in “*our glory*” (**2:7**). That was the glory that came from receiving the “*Lord of glory*” (**2:8**). God had provided a way of true glory. Why did the Corinthians insist on the path of human glory and boasting?

The rulers, by contrast, heard the message of wisdom (**2:8**) but did not “*accept the things of the Spirit of God*” (**2:14**). Paul pointed out that the rulers of his age had no share in true wisdom because it was embodied in a mystery from which the rulers were excluded.

Andrew Noselli: God has revealed his wisdom only to persons with the Spirit. ‘After explaining why he did not speak “*a message of wisdom*” to the Corinthians when he entered Corinth (vv. 1-5), Paul qualifies that he actually does impart a different kind of wisdom to believers. Instead of imparting a worldly wisdom that seeks power and prestige, Paul imparts God's wisdom of a crucified Messiah. That is a “*mystery*” – something God had hidden but now has revealed. God did not reveal his wisdom to this age's rulers; he revealed it to his people through the Spirit (not through clever human rhetoric). God's people do not have the spirit of worldly wisdom but have God's Spirit of true wisdom.

David Garland: The wisdom he speaks among the **mature**, then is not a more sophisticated instruction for the gifted few. It is the same wisdom he speaks to all concerning **God's redemptive purposes for humankind** revealed in the cross (**1:18; 2:2**). It is spoken to beginning and advanced Christians alike. . . He is still remonstrating with them about their divisions and is making the case that they disclose a **spiritual immaturity** that fails to grasp the deep things of God embodied in the cross. Their behavior reveals that they are influenced more by human wisdom than by God's wisdom. Since Paul does not divulge who among them is "*mature*," the readers must decide for themselves whether they qualify or not.

SIX INSIGHTS INTO THE WISDOM OF GOD AND ITS MYSTERY ASPECT

I. (:6A) GOD'S WISDOM IS ONLY APPRECIATED BY THOSE WHO ARE RECEPTIVE TO THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature"

Richard Hays: At **2:6**, Paul pivots sharply on the word "*wisdom*," which is highlighted by the word order of Paul's Greek: "*Sophia, however, we do speak among the mature...*" Is it wisdom you want? All right, he says, let's talk wisdom. This strategy of **ironic reversal**, abruptly coopting a term which has been previously the opposition's keynote, is a characteristic Pauline argumentative move.

Anthony Thiselton: There is one kind of so-called wisdom that is pretentious, self-affirming, and seeks to operate by means of human achievements; and there is a God-given, received, revealed wisdom that nurtures and directs the life of the people of God, and (in sometimes hidden ways) also the world as God's creation.

Wisdom – emphasized by position in the text (direct object of the verb placed first in the Greek sentence); this is what we speak – not the type of human wisdom that has no power (described in **2:1-5**), but God's Wisdom.

Telios – the perfected ones; having reached their end; Not perfect people; Difficult issue to precisely pin down who comprises this group – obviously the unsaved Jews and Gentiles who regard the wisdom of God as foolishness are excluded;

Richard Hays: For Paul, being *teleios*, being a **spiritual grown-up**, is defined

- in terms of concern for upbuilding the community (**1 Cor. 14:20**),
- in terms of submission to God's will for service in community (**Rom. 12:2** -- see the context), and
- in terms of pressing on toward conformity to the example of Jesus (**Phil. 3:15**; cf. **Col. 1:28**; **Eph. 4:13**).

Options:

1) are all the elect included here (since the context of the message preached is the cross of Christ – not some esoteric doctrines) cf. **Charles Hodge, MacArthur**, etc. or

2) some subset of *telios* believers (in contrast with those spoken of at the beginning of **chap 3** -- cf. **1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15**) = those who are submitted to the Spirit of God and thus able to receive the spiritual teaching which the Spirit of God seeks to communicate; in this context it would include all who are actively growing – even if they are fairly young in the faith – it has more to do with their heart attitude of allowing God's Word to accomplish its intended goal in transforming their lives –

I would favor this view in light of the direct context of **Chap. 3**. It should include all believers – but Paul is making the point that some believers are not responding to the Spirit like they should and therefore do not recognize the wisdom of God for what it is.

* * * * *

John Piper: I think **verse 13** gives the answer, but there is a translation problem here. The Revised Standard Version says, "*We impart this (divine wisdom) in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit,*" or more literally "*to those who are spiritual.*" If this is correct then the "*mature*" of **verse 6** are explained as the "*spiritual*" of **verse 13**. We speak a wisdom among the mature, that is, we interpret the wisdom revealed by the Spirit to spiritual people. . .

A second reason I think **v13** refers to spiritual people who are the same as the mature in **v6** who receive God's wisdom, is that in **3:1** "*spiritual people*" are contrasted with babes in Christ. "*And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as to fleshly (or carnal), as to babes in Christ.*" It is clear that being a babe is the opposite of being "*mature*." But in **3:1** the opposite of being a babe is being "*spiritual*." Therefore being mature and being spiritual are probably the same. So one answer to the question, Who can receive the wisdom of God which we speak? is **the mature, that is, the spiritual. . .**

He means a person who is led by the Spirit of God and bears the fruit of the Spirit. We know this from **Galatians 5:16 - 6:1 . . .**

This was a surprising discovery for me, namely, that the prerequisite for grasping the wisdom of God is not a certain level of intelligence, or education, or experience. The prerequisite is moral, not intellectual. It has as much to do with what you love as with what you think. Not education but sanctification is what makes one receptive to the wisdom we speak. Not natural ability but spiritual humility opens a person to the wisdom of God.

* * * * *

The Apostle Paul proclaimed the exact same message of God's Wisdom to everyone – the unsaved, the saved; the immature believer, the mature believer. He might have had a different emphasis – but it was always God's Wisdom. But only the spiritually

receptive believers could appreciate God's wisdom. The same message can have different levels of meaning to different levels of maturity: a milk level and a solid food level.

There are many obstacles to receiving the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit:

- Pride
- Sectarianism
- Fleshly and rebellious living
- Attraction to the things of this world which are enmity to God
- Failure to confess and turn away from sin
- Being hearers only of the Word of God and not doers

David Garland: Paul's use of the terms "*mature*" and "*infants*" shows that **gradations** do exist among Christians (Oster 1995:81). But the distinction is between juvenile Christians who fail to incarnate the cross by nursing jealousies and stoking rivalries, and the "*mature*" who accept God's foolishness as wisdom and the world's wisdom as foolishness. Being spiritually adult means recognizing and embracing God's wisdom in the cross and knowing that it invalidates the wisdom of this age. Paul rejects any esoteric wisdom that would sever some believers from other believers who lack this wisdom. The wisdom of this age creates a stratified society of elites and inferiors. By contrast, the wisdom of the cross emphasizes human solidarity. **Under the cross, all must stand together.**

Mark Taylor: The Corinthians may have considered themselves mature and wise, and, as those who had believed the message of the cross and received the Spirit, they were mature and wise. The term itself, in principle, can refer to all believers, who have received the message of the cross, but the Corinthians' behavior was not in keeping with who they were in Christ as the letter so ably demonstrates. While Paul does not advocate a two-tiered gospel, a distinction in different "classes" of believers, he does recognize stages of growth in Christlikeness as manifested in the fruit of the Spirit.²⁴⁰ Paul does not advocate a wisdom beyond the cross, but he does urge the Corinthians to embody the message of the cross. The Corinthians' failure to live out the reality of the cross in their relations to one another deemed them as mere "*infants*" in Christ. **Maturity is related to behavior, living out the paradigm of the cross in love, rather than knowledge.**

II. (:6B) GOD'S ETERNAL WISDOM BEARS NO CONNECTION TO THE TRANSITORY HUMAN WISDOM OF THIS TEMPORARY AGE

"a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away"

God's Wisdom did not originate or develop from human wisdom; in fact it is not compatible at all with this age or world system. Therefore, you cannot expect to study philosophy or psychology or religion from the best intellectual thinkers of this age and thereby come to an understanding of God's wisdom.

Doug Goins: In **verses 6-10a** Paul lists four aspects of this wisdom of God. First, **verses 6-7** say that the wisdom of God is **eternal, not transitory**. It doesn't originate in this passing world, with the rulers of this age. It originated before time began in the mind of God. Human wisdom is transitory because, Paul says, its creators are passing away. One of the consistent characteristics of worldly wisdom is that it has a very short shelf life. The current thinking in psychology and sociology will soon be set aside for newer theories.

Steve Zeisler: To begin, what is the nature of the wisdom that is from God? God's wisdom, says Paul in **verse 6**, is distinct in that it is unlike the wisdom of the "*rulers of this age who are passing away*." The wisdom of the world is short-lived; it does not have any staying power. God's wisdom, on the other hand, will never pass away, is the inference here. It is eternal; its truth will never fade but will grow more and more impressive with time.

Robert Gundry: "*The wisdom of this age*" means the wisdom which thinks in terms of the here and now rather than in terms of what's coming at "*the revelation of our Lord, Jesus Christ*" -- in other words, wisdom that's short-sighted and therefore inferior to God's foolishness (compare **1:20, 25**). "*The rulers belonging to this age*" likewise means rulers who are ruling only **temporarily**. Paul mentions them here to make a contrast between their political power and "*God's power*" in "*the speech about the cross*" (**1:18**). "*Who are being incapacitated*" indicates their growing loss of power -- despite their having crucified Christ -- through the effective proclamation of God's wisdom, and also looks forward to their complete loss of power at "*the revelation of our Lord, Jesus Christ . . . in the Day of our Lord, Jesus Christ*" (**1:7-8**).

Craig Blomberg: The "*rulers*" refer at least to the religious and political authorities of the day, comparable to Caiaphas and Pilate, who crucified our glorious Lord (**v. 8**). But they may also refer to demonic powers behind the opposition to the gospel (cf. **Eph. 2:2**, in which Satan is the "*ruler of the kingdom of the air*"). "*Coming to nothing*" at the end of **verse 6** thus refers to the ultimate transience of this age and its powers (cf. NRSV: "*doomed to perish*").

III. (:7A) GOD'S WISDOM IS SOURCED ONLY IN GOD (AND MUST BE REVEALED BY HIM – as we will see later)

"but we speak God's wisdom"

A. Preachers are a Channel for the Ongoing Communication of God's Eternal Wisdom

B. But it is God's Wisdom . . . not the Preacher's

Emphatic placement of "*God*" before "wisdom" in the Greek here

Gordon Fee: (:7-8) – In these two sentences Paul elaborates the two sides of the preceding sentence (v. 6). The first (v. 7) explains the nature of God’s wisdom that made it impossible for the wise of this age to grasp it; the second (v. 8) repeats the failure of the “*rulers*” in terms of their responsibility for the crucifixion.

IV. (:7B) GOD’S WISDOM HAS A BUILT-IN, TIME-DELAY MYSTERY COMPONENT

A. Mystery Aspect of God’s Wisdom

“in a mystery”

John MacArthur: This term does not refer to something puzzling, but to truth known to God before time, that He has kept secret until the appropriate time for Him to reveal it.

Craig Blomberg: The word *mystery* in the New Testament most commonly refers to components of the gospel **once hidden but now revealed**. The concept of a crucified Messiah was not clearly understood in Old Testament times and was still not grasped in Paul’s day by those who rejected Jesus (v. 8). But this should not cause surprise; Isaiah himself had prophesied unexpected wonders surrounding God’s coming salvation for his people (**Isa. 64:4; 52:15**, quoted and paraphrased in v. 9). And all along God had planned these wondrous events for the benefit of those who would respond positively (v. 7b). The Holy Spirit who brings people to Christ now reveals to them what once was unknown (v. 10a).

Charles Hodge: The word always means something into which men must be initiated; something undiscoverable by human reason. Whether its being undiscoverable arises from its lying in the future, or because hid in the unrevealed purposes of God, or from its own nature as beyond our comprehension, is not determined by the signification of the word, but is to be learned from the context.

Richard Hays: Paul’s language is indigenous to Jewish apocalyptic thought, where the “*mysteries*” concern the concealed will of God, which is to play itself out in the historical unfolding of the eschatological events of judgment and salvation. These mysteries are revealed to the elect through the mediation of the prophet or seer. (See, for example, **Dan. 2:27–28**: “*No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed [through Daniel] to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days.*”) In the case of Paul’s specifically Christian apocalyptic, God’s purpose in decreeing this mysterious salvation through the cross was “*for our glory*” (2:7). Thus, the concealed wisdom of the cross points, in a way that Paul does not explain here, to the future eschatological redemption, God’s gracious bestowal of glory upon the elect people (cf. **Rom. 8:17, 29–30; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:17; Phil. 3:20–21**).

B. Hidden Aspect of God’s Wisdom

“the hidden wisdom”

No longer hidden to God's elect, but still hidden to those under the dominion of Satan for the god of this age has blinded their minds and hearts.

C. Eternal and Sovereign Aspect of God's Wisdom

"which God predestined before the ages"

How can someone say they don't believe in predestination?

This word stresses the plan of God and the sovereignty of God.

David Garland: One of Paul's firm convictions is that the cross was not plan B; it was decided on beforehand (*προώρισεν, proōrisen*). Paul sweeps across the range of God's plan for human redemption through Christ, moving from "*before the ages*" to the end of the ages with his reference to "*our glory*" (**Matt. 25:34; 1 Pet. 1:4**). "*For our glory*" points to the Christian's resurrection (**15:40–42**) and participation in God's end-time salvation, eternal life (**Rom. 2:7**). Jesus is already the Lord of glory (**Phil. 2:9–11**), and those who are in Christ are destined to share in his glory. But Paul makes clear in **Rom. 8:17** that those who expect to be glorified with Christ (cf. **Rom. 8:18, 21; 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 2:12**) must suffer with him. They are "*to be conformed to the image of his Son*" (**Rom. 8:29**), which includes "*always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies*" (**2 Cor. 4:10**; cf. **Phil. 3:10–11**). This transformation process has already begun as the Christian is made new (**2 Cor. 3:18**). Christians already experience the glory to come, and will do so in an ever increasing way until they come to the final glory (**Fee 1994: 319**).

D. Glorification Aspect of God's Wisdom

"to our glory"

Dan Nighswander: Paul is not here making a point about the contrast between glory that accrues to God and that which is granted to humans. Rather, he is contrasting the glory that God grants to all believers over against the individual glory that some of the Corinthian Christians were claiming for themselves in comparison with other Christians (including Paul) based on their presumed spiritual maturity and wisdom.

Charles Ellicott: "*The Lord, whose essential attribute is glory*"

God's wisdom will ultimately conform us completely to the image of His Son – in love, in purity, in holiness.

Robert Grosheide: The glory of the believers is an essential part of God's decree. Not only did God fix His wisdom, He also ordained that this wisdom would bring glory to us who are Christians. The rulers of the world, on the contrary, will perish.

Doug Goins: The wisdom of God is for our glorification, our personal benefit. Glorification means to make us just like Jesus, to completely finish the process of sanctification. God's wisdom was given to define for us who we were created to be. No matter what we feel like right now, finally, by the end of our lives, we will be the kind of people we want to be. We'll be just as loving, merciful, patient, kind, strong, and

self-controlled as Jesus. We'll become glorified men and women, filled with the grace and beauty of Jesus Christ. That is the ultimate goal of salvation.

V. (:8A) GOD'S WISDOM CANNOT BE COMPREHENDED BY HUMAN WISDOM (OR POWER OR WEALTH)

“the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood”

David Garland: The wisdom of this world is not simply the skillful marshaling of arguments to persuade others. It is **malevolent**. It **opposes God**, and it **crucified Christ**. **N. Wright** (1986: 116) observes, “The ‘rulers and authorities’ of Rome and of Israel—as **Caird** points out, the best government and the highest religion the world at that time had ever known—conspired to put Jesus on the cross.” *These rulers did not recognize him to be “the Lord of glory.”* They also did not even know that the wisdom of God exists as something radically distinct from their own wisdom (**Reiling** 1988: 203). Their ignorance is nothing new. Those who claim to be in the know have always been clueless about God’s ways (cf. **Dan. 2:27–28**) and always resist any move to oust them from their thrones. But the crucifixion was not an unfortunate case of mistaken identity. Their knee-jerk reaction is to kill, and the rulers knew full well what they were doing. They did not know, however, that they were playing into the hands of God and that their evil butchery would lead to their undoing and humanity’s salvation. Evil always bungles things in the end, and the cross exposes its futility and folly.

VI. (:8B) GOD'S WISDOM WILL BE VINDICATED BY THE RETURN OF THE LORD OF GLORY

“for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”

Steve Zeisler: The wisdom of this world does not make good judgments about life. The wisdom of God, on the other hand, attributes worth to that which is truly worthy.

Johnson: Paul linked glory with the crucified Lord, an utter paradox to both Jews and Gentiles (**1 Cor. 1:23**) who nonetheless unwittingly (**Luke 23:34**) took part in that central act of God’s plan of salvation.

Gordon Fee: As Paul will develop more fully in Colossians and Ephesians, in the singular the term “*mystery*” ordinarily refers to something formerly hidden in God from all human eyes but now revealed in history through Christ and made understandable to his people through the Spirit. The seeds of this idea are sown here for the first time in Paul; in particular it embraces **the ultimate paradox**—the crucifixion of “*the Lord of glory*” (v. 8).

Robert Gromacki: The title for Christ, “*the Lord of glory*,” is a proof of His deity. God is depicted as “*the God of glory*” (**Acts 7:2**) and “*the Father of Glory*” (**Eph. 1:17**). The “*King of glory*” (**Ps. 24**) is none other than Christ. The fact that He was crucified demonstrates His human nature. Thus, the perception of divine wisdom involves the

recognition of the hypostatic union, the union of two natures (divine and human) within the single person of Christ.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does wisdom characterize my speech?
- 2) How receptive am I to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit?
- 3) What role does secular education play in providing us insight into the mind of God?
- 4) Why does Paul use here the title for Christ of “*Lord of Glory*”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: Mature Christians Pursue God’s Wisdom (2:6–4:21)

- A. Paul Proclaims God’s Wisdom (2:6–13)
- B. God’s Wisdom Characterizes Those Who Are “*Spiritual*” (2:14–16)
- C. The Corinthians Are Spiritually Immature (3:1–9)
- D. Wise Leadership Acts with Spiritual Discernment (3:10 – 4:21)

Robertson: The “*wisdom of God*,” therefore, comprises primarily Christ and Him crucified; the preparation for Christ as regards Jew and Gentile; the great mystery of the call of the Gentiles and the apparent rejection of the Jews; the justification of man and the principles of the Christian life; and (the thought dominant in the immediate context) the consummation of Christ’s work in the “*glory of us*.” The Epistle to the Romans, which is an unfolding of the thought of **1 Cor. i. 24-31**, is St Paul’s completest utterance of this wisdom.

John Piper: (:6-13) Paul was answering at least four questions about “*the wisdom we speak*,” which I would like to answer with him. I think it would be helpful to answer them in this order:

- 1) Who cannot receive or know this wisdom?
- 2) Who can receive and know it?
- 3) How is it imparted from God to this group?
- 4) What is it?

To these I add my own at the end: So what? What difference does it make to me or you if we know this wisdom or not? . . .

In answer to our first question then (Who cannot receive or know the wisdom of God which Paul speaks?) our answer would be: people who are so enamoured by the wisdom that leads to power and acclaim that they do not recognize Jesus as the Lord of

glory - these cannot receive God's wisdom. It is not simply being in a position of power that closes one off to this wisdom - God has chosen to save powerful people and to give some of his people earthly power. It is not having power but hunger for power that blinds a person to the glory of God in the suffering Messiah. It is not having acclaim among men but hungering for that acclaim that makes Jesus as He is unbelievable.

Ray Stedman: Here he is declaring the **sinfulness of man's wisdom**. He says there is a wisdom which is hidden from the eyes of a proud, self-sufficient world, a secret wisdom which they know nothing about. It has been in existence since the foundation of the world, but man in his pride cannot reach it or understand it. And, because he lacks this, the knowledge that he does have actually leads him astray and he ends up committing the most tragic and atrocious blunders. When Paul speaks of the rulers of this age he does not mean only those who are of noble birth. He means the leaders, the philosophers, the great thinkers, these clever men who pride themselves on being able to recognize greatness when they see it. They would certainly know another philosopher, they would recognize a great thinker, or a great leader.

And yet, so blinded are they with their own conceit, that when truth incarnate stood before them, when the Son of God himself, the Lord of glory, stood in front of them all they could shout in their blindness was, "Away with this fellow, this agitator, this trouble-maker! Crucify him! That is all he is worth." From this fatal flaw in human knowledge stems all the strife and cruelty and violence of all the ages.

David Prior: We never, therefore, move on from the **cross of Christ** – only into a more profound understanding of the cross. “Paul does not have a simple gospel of the cross for babes, and a different wisdom-gospel for the mature. All Christians are potentially mature in Christ, though only some are actually what all ought to be.”

This secret and hidden wisdom of God is, therefore, nothing more nor less than Jesus Christ and him crucified. Though hidden and secret for generations, he has now been revealed as the Son of God and as the Saviour of the world. The word *secret* (Greek *mystērion*) has a double stress: human beings cannot penetrate the secret, but God has in his love unlocked it to those who humble themselves before him. It remains secret and hidden to those who still rely on human wisdom. “The three great sources of human knowledge – seeing, hearing and thought – alike fail here. Hitherto this wisdom has been a mystery, a thing hidden. Now God has himself revealed it.” He has revealed it through the Spirit (:9–10).

Thomas Leake: 4 TRUTHS ABOUT TEACHING THE BIBLE IN ANY AGE

Introduction:

No need to adapt our bible teaching to postmodernism or pluralism or any other ism – despite the nature of today’s culture (limited attention span, visually oriented, entertainment focused, etc.) We still can be authoritative and preach with confidence because our message is the timeless Word of God. No conformity to the spirit of the age; we reject the world’s wisdom as foolishness

Context:

1:20 – “*God has made foolish the wisdom of the world*”

2 Illustrations of this main point:

- 1) God chose the non impressive people rather than the impressive
- 2) Personal example of how the Apostle Paul originally brought the gospel message to Corinth
 - Paul was not personally prominent
 - The focus was on the message of the Cross

Natural man does not have the capacity to understand spiritual truth

I. (:6A) Bible Teaching Imparts God’s Wisdom

The Apostles and NT prophets are the ones doing the speaking here; recorded in the NT so that we can proclaim the same message today

II. (:6B) Bible Teaching Is Desperately Needed

We have a message that contradicts the age; the upper echelon of society does not get the message; this age is being abolished, coming to nothing; God is bringing an end to it; If we start sounding like the world, we no longer have a message to proclaim

III. (:7) Bible Teaching Reveals a Mystery

Def. of *Mystery*: not riddles; not something vague or mysterious; but a secret that only God can know – but He has chosen now to reveal; this was a secret that God had held on to for a very long time; but now it is openly proclaimed

- **Rom. 16:25-26**
- **Eph. 3:8-9**
- **Col. 1:26**
- **1 Cor. 15:51-52**

3 aspects of this Mystery:

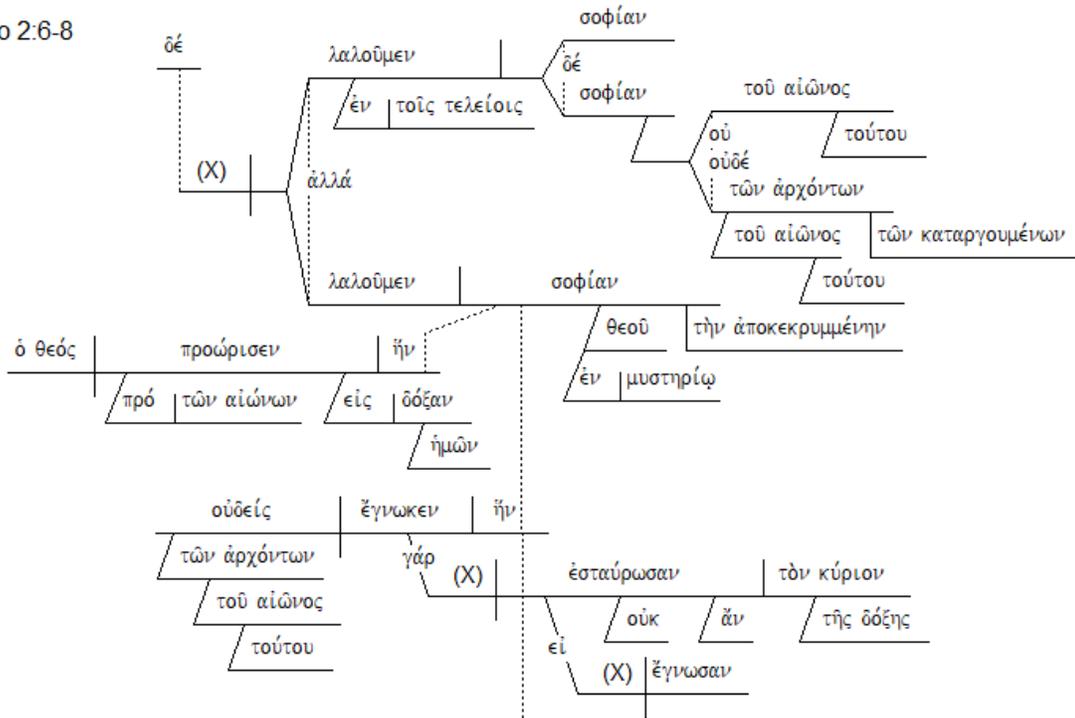
- Hidden still to those who are perishing
- Predestined before the ages – so fixed that it can’t be changed
 - The Cross was not an afterthought but in God’s plan from the beginning
- For our glory – not for our shame; God has always had a plan for our glory –
 - Phil. 3:21** – Are you looking forward to glory?

IV. (:8) We Teach the Bible Even Though the World is Blind to its Message

How do we know they didn’t get it? They killed Wisdom and the Lord of Glory = unfathomable; you have the smartest people in the world doing the dumbest thing imaginable

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

1Co 2:6-8



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2: 9-16

TITLE: SPIRIT TAUGHT TRUTH --
SPIRIT REVEALS . . . SPIRIT INSPIRES . . . SPIRIT ILLUMINES

BIG IDEA:
**THE HOLY SPIRIT DIRECTS THE COMMUNICATION AND
UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE WISDOM THROUGH THREE
FUNDAMENTAL PROCESSES**

INTRODUCTION:

Remember the promise of the Lord to His disciples before he left them:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. . . . But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.” –

John 14:16-17; 16:13-14

Here Paul is explaining how all of that works **by the agency of the Holy Spirit**. These promises were made to those apostles who would be the authors of Scripture. Then he makes application to how people either understand and accept the God’s wisdom or reject it as foolishness.

Gordon Fee: As with much that immediately preceded (in **1:18 – 2:5**), what comes next is full of bite. The Corinthians, enamored by wisdom and thinking of themselves as “*spiritual*” (= “people of the Spirit”), are less than enchanted with Paul’s message, which they regard merely as “*milk*.” With fine irony Paul demolishes these various misperceptions and false boastings. The gospel of the crucified Messiah is wisdom all right, he affirms, but not of the kind they are now pursuing. True wisdom is indeed for those who are “*spiritual*,” meaning for those who have the Spirit, who has revealed what God has really accomplished in Christ. Because they do have the Spirit, and thus the mind of Christ, **they should have seen the cross for what it is** -- God’s wisdom -- and thereby have been able to make true judgments. But by pursuing *sophia*, they are acting just like those without the Spirit, who are likewise pursuing wisdom but see the cross as **foolishness**. The net result -- and the irony -- is that they are “*spiritual*,” yet “*unspiritual*”; they are pursuing “*wisdom*,” yet missing the very wisdom of God.

The argument, which is in three parts, can be easily traced:

(1) Paul begins (**vv. 6–10a**) by setting forth the **nature of God’s wisdom** in terms of the basic contrast between those for whom it was destined and those who cannot perceive it. God’s wisdom, predestined by God to bring us to glory,

was therefore held “*as a mystery*” (= secret), hidden from the present age and its leaders.

(2) He then goes on (vv. 10b–13) to explain how believers are let in on the secret, and why others are left out. We have received the Spirit, who knows the mind of God and has revealed to us what God is doing in the world.

(3) The final paragraph (vv. 14–16) concludes by reaffirming all this in terms of “natural” and “spiritual” people, that is, as the NIV rightly has it, persons without or with the Spirit.

John MacArthur: The Holy Spirit is the Trinity’s agent of transmission and communication. The first step of His transmission of God’s truth is revelation. As a member of the Godhead, the Spirit knows the mind of God perfectly. . . The truths of His Word God revealed through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the divine author of Scripture. He used many human agents, but the message is entirely His. . .

The process of the Spirit’s transmission of God’s truth is called inspiration. His truth cannot be discovered by man; it can only be received. In order to be received, something must first be offered. God’s truth can be received because it is freely given.

The *we’s* and the *us* of **verses 12-13** (as in vv. 6-7, 10) do not refer to Christians in general but to Paul himself. God’s Word is for all believers, but was revealed only to the apostles and the other writers of Scripture. Only those men properly can be said to have been inspired. . .

The third step in the Spirit’s transmission of God’s truth is that of illumination. . . God must open the eyes of our understanding before we can truly know and rightly interpret His truth. His truth is available only to those with a regenerate spirit and in whom His Spirit dwells, for only the Spirit can illumine Scripture. Just as the physically blind cannot see the sun, the spiritually blind cannot see the Son. Both lack proper illumination.

(:9) PRESUPPOSITION: DIVINE WISDOM CANNOT BE KNOWN APART FROM THESE THREE VERY IMPORTANT PROCESSES

A. God’s Wisdom Not Discoverable by Man

“but just as it is written,

‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,’”

Thomas Leake: Combination quote; not an exact quote – **Is. 64:4; 65:17; 52:15** – clustering a number of OT ideas; an exact representation of OT teaching – man’s mind and heart cannot probe into the mind and heart of God; eliminating all of the 5 senses; all of the forms of philosophic empiricism as well as the recorded experiences of others.

John MacArthur: Do you find anything in this context about heaven? Is he talking about heaven here? He's talking about **ignorance**, isn't he? He's not talking about Christians not being able to know what heaven's like, he's talking about unbelievers not being able to know what salvation is like. That's his whole point.

B. God's Wisdom Designed to Impact the Heart of Man

"And which have not entered the heart of man,"

Thomas Leake: *Heart* = focus of rationalism and the mind; human intelligence or contemplation; can't understand ultimate truth this way

Mark Taylor: The citation emphasizes the hiddenness of God's plans and the incapacity of humans to know them, which sets up the emphasis on the revelation of the Spirit to follow in the succeeding verses (**2:10–13**).

C. God's Wisdom Brings Unimaginable Blessing to His Children

"All that God has prepared for those who love Him."

Leon Morris: The glories that come to believers are not haphazard, but are in accordance with God's plan from of old.

Richard Hays: Whatever the source of the quotation, its sense is clear: God's way of bringing salvation to the world through the cross was hidden from all human understanding, but God had "*prepared*" this plan from before the foundation of the world for those who love him. It is perhaps significant that Paul brings love into view here: the Corinthians might have expected Paul to say that God has prepared all these things "for those who know him." For Paul, however, we relate to God not primarily through knowledge or wisdom, but through love. This is a theme to which Paul will return later in the letter.

Dan Nighswander: We cannot determine Paul's source for this purported quotation, but Paul does say that the eschatological hope is reserved for those who love God. It is not special knowledge of God, but rather love for God, expressed in appropriate behavior (see **1 Cor 13**), that determines who is blessed by God and who is cursed (*Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord, 16:22*). The contrast between knowledge and love is restated in **8:1**: *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*.

Daniel Akin: Paul's words in **verse 9** are often read at funerals to speak about the wonderful glories that will be ours in heaven. However, in context, Paul is not talking about what will be ours in the future but **what belongs to believers right now**. Paul brings together several Old Testament texts (**Isa 64:4**; also **Isa 52:15**; **65:17**; **Jer 3:16**). They demonstrate that **humans could never learn the wonderful wisdom of Christ crucified on their own**. No eye, ear, or heart could conceive (ESV, "*imagine*") such a thing. God had to reveal it. He has revealed it "*for those who love him*." Rationalism cannot reason to God. Empiricism cannot locate God. But as **John MacArthur** puts so

well, “What man cannot find God has given. Man cannot come to God on his own, but God has come to him” (1 Corinthians, 62).

Gordon Fee: Paul thus argues: “We speak God’s wisdom, salvation through Christ crucified, which none of the rulers of this age understood; but even as it is written: What no one could see, hear, or understand about God’s ways, these are the very things God has prepared for those who love him.” The next part of the paragraph goes on to explain how those who love God do understand the divine “wisdom.”

I. (:10-11) PROCESS #1 – REVELATION TO THE WRITERS OF THE NT BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Dan Nighswander: The Corinthians valued the rational wisdom expressed in the eloquent rhetorical style that philosophers taught, especially the Sophists (Winter 1997). Therefore Paul goes to some length to assert that God’s wisdom is **revealed by the Spirit**, not by human invention. This is the first extended discussion of the activity of the Spirit, which will be elaborated later in the letter, especially in **12:3-13**. Here the focus is on the **Spirit of God functioning as the communicator and revealer of God**.

Paul Gardner: In [verse 10] Paul insists that the deep things of God include the very revelation that Paul has been talking about, the self-revelation of God in Christ crucified. The Spirit alone can penetrate the depths of God’s purposes and his self-sacrifice in Christ. He alone enables people to understand something the rulers of this age are unable to comprehend. Grammatically, the preposition “to us” (ἡμῖν) is emphatic in its position, while “these things” is brought forward from the quotation of Scripture. The quotation thus completes the previous discussion but serves also to introduce the next section concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in this revelation. By using “us” with emphasis here, Paul seeks to bring on side all the Corinthian Christians, but especially to identify them with “those who love him [God].” “We” therefore stands in direct contrast with those mentioned in v. 8 to whom what is hidden has remained hidden. . .

The (Holy) Spirit fully knows God. He alone has access to and understanding of the deep things of God. However, in the same way that “God’s wisdom in a mystery and hidden” (v. 7) did not refer to some special revelation shared with a few “spiritual” people, neither does the term “depths” (τὰ βάθη). They are not the deeper content of the mystery religions or some gnostic special knowledge. They are things shared with all those who have the Spirit (v. 12), those who love God, that is, **all Christians**. The Spirit “searches all things” (πάντα ἐραυνᾷ) in the sense that he seeks out and knows what is the plan and purpose of God. He does this to communicate it with and activate it among “those who love him” (v. 8).

A. Revelation To Whom – Identification of the Recipients of Revelation

“For to us”

B. Revelation By Whom – Identification of the Originator of Revelation

“God”

C. Revelation How – Explanation of the Process of Revelation

“revealed”

Mark Taylor: The fact that God has revealed his plan to us through the Spirit once again strikes at any notion of boasting or self-sufficiency, which is critical to Paul’s overall argument (recall **1:29–31**).

D. Revelation of What – Content of Revelation

“them”

C. Revelation Through Whom – Focus on the Crucial Role of the Holy Spirit

“through the Spirit”

Robert Gundry: With *“through the Spirit”* Paul lays claim for himself and other Christians to **new revelation communicated by God’s Spirit** and supplementing the Old Testament Scriptures as represented by the quotation taken from Isaiah. The Spirit’s investigation of *“all things”* implies that those Scriptures contained only some things which God wanted his own to know, and that new revelation in the gospel makes up for the old omissions. *“Investigates all things, even the deep things of God”* portrays the Spirit as a kind of detective, explorer, or researcher who just because he’s the Spirit of God can plumb the depths of God’s predetermined wisdom. This portrayal carries an assurance of the new revelation’s authenticity. Paul then elaborates this assurance, the elaboration starting with an analogy.

3 Arguments Supporting the Role of the Spirit as the Agent of Revelation

1. Argument from Function – Only the Spirit can plumb the depths of God

“for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”

David Garland: Paul shifts his focus to the means by which God reveals heavenly truth that is naturally unknowable. How can something that has no place in the human heart be made known? How do humans cross the divide between the world and God? These can happen only through God’s Spirit, who searches all things, even the depths of God. Human creatures do not have access to these things and do not even have the grammar or vocabulary for them until it is graciously bestowed by God’s Spirit.

2. Argument from Human Illustration – No one else knows our thoughts but us

“For who among men knows the thought of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?”

3. Argument from Divine Application of the Illustration – Only the Spirit knows the thoughts of God

“Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”

Craig Blomberg: The contrast between those who possess the Spirit and those who do not (vv. 10b–16) begins with a **syllogism**—a **three-part argument** in which two premises, if true, logically entail a particular conclusion (vv. 10b–12).

(1) The major premise observes that only a person’s own spirit or mind knows that individual’s thoughts unless he or she chooses to disclose them to someone else (v. 11a), an affirmation which is true for God as well as humanity (vv. 10b, 11b). “Search” (v. 10b) thus equals “*knows the thoughts of*” (v. 11b).

(2) The minor premise reiterates that Christians have God’s Spirit living in them (v. 12a). “*The spirit of the world*” (v. 12a) refers to fallen, human nature and ideologies, not to anything more directly demonic.

(3) The conclusion logically follows then that Christians can know God’s thoughts, at least to the extent that his Spirit graciously reveals them (v. 12b).

Adewuya: Paul goes on to provide an illustration that will show that the spiritual wisdom and truths of God can be understood only through the Holy Spirit, just as human wisdom needs the human spirit to understand it. So no one truly comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God: The conclusion is that only the Holy Spirit can reveal God’s wisdom and truth to humankind. In contrast to some other kind of spirit, through which some might try to know God’s wisdom and truth (like the spirit of the wisdom of this world [1 Cor 1:20; 2:6; 3:19]), believers have received the Spirit who is from God -- as such, they can now understand and know the gifts that are bestowed on them by God.

II. (:12-13) PROCESS #2 -- INSPIRATION OF THE CANON OF THE NT HOLY SCRIPTURES BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

A. NT Writers (Apostles and Prophets) Possess the Spirit of God

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God”

Paul Gardner: Paul continues building his argument that there are two classes of people who must be distinguished: those following “*the spirit of the world*” (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου) and those who have received “*the Spirit of God*” (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). God is the one from whom the Spirit comes. This is a primary focus of differentiation: What “spirit” does a person have? The differentiation is neither to be based on a social status nor on the “wisdom” the world counts as valuable. It is not to be based on who has received gifts from the Spirit such as “knowledge” or “word.” All Christians are the “mature” and “*those who love God*” and must therefore be those who “have received the Spirit of God.” The aorist “*received*” (ἐλάβομεν) looks back to the time when they came to faith as, for example, in **Galatians 3:2** and **2 Corinthians 11:4**. All of this leads to a completely different mindset and approach to life for the Christian. It will be a way of existence, as Paul has already begun to show, that focuses on Christ and recognizes that all that a Christian has and is depends on God’s work alone, upon grace.

It is this differentiation based on which spirit a person possesses that will allow Paul to talk about what is or is not “spiritual.” It will also allow him to begin to address questions of maturity of Christian life and ethics without dividing Christians into those who are “superspiritual” and those who are not (something the Corinthians seemed keen to do).

B. NT Writers Know the Body of Truth God Wants Communicated

“so that we may know the things freely given to us by God”

C. NT Writers Were Inspired by the Holy Spirit to Communicate that Truth

“which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”

Importance of verbal, plenary doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture

Richard Hays: The conclusion of all this is summarized in **2:13**: Paul and other Christians can speak now about the identity of God not because they have received advanced philosophical instruction or lessons on rhetorical declamation but because they have been **taught by the Spirit of God** how to speak of God through the word of the cross. The obscure phrase *“interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual,”* which could be translated in several different ways, should probably be understood as one more ironic dig at the self-styled Corinthian pneumatikoi: If you were really as spiritual as you think you are, Paul suggests, you would understand that our rhetorically unembellished speech about Christ crucified is the message that comes from the Spirit of God.

Another way to put Paul’s point is that the truth about God is revealed not through philosophy but through prophecy, not through rhetoric but **by revelation**. The *“deep things of God”* (**2:10**; cf. **Dan. 2:22**) are not arcane Gnostic trivia; rather they are the secret saving purposes of God for the whole world, now laid bare by the Spirit’s disclosure that the wisdom of God is made known through the cross.

Anthony Thiselton: The Spirit explores the depths of God’s very Self. Only thereby can the Spirit convey the heart and mind of God-in-Christ authentically. We need not read a dualism of self and spirit into v. **11**. Paul’s main point is well summed up in the axiom widely associated with **Karl Barth**: “God is known through God alone” (Church Dogmatics, II/1, sect. 27, p. 179). **Athanasias** made broadly the same point: there is no natural “kinship” between “the Spirit and the creatures.... The Spirit is from [Greek *ek*] God” (Letter to Serapion 1:22 in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 26:581).

God’s wisdom is *“secret,”* or known only to God (**v. 11b**) in the sense that talk of “spirituality” and “wisdom” comes to nothing unless God’s Holy Spirit activates the message of the cross and brings it home afresh. Hence Paul employs language which the Spirit teaches, interpreting things of the Spirit to people of the Spirit (**v. 13**).

Daniel Akin: The Spirit instructs us with his **spiritual words**. Today we have this wonderful gift of “spiritual words” in the Bible. We have an obligation to pass on the wonderful, spiritual words of Holy Scripture to others. A good teacher will gladly honor the teachings of his or her Master.

III. (:14-16) PROCESS #3 -- ILLUMINATION OF THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF BELIEVERS BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

A. (:14) Natural Man Does Not Understand or Appreciate God’s Truth

(refers to all of the unsaved = those who do not possess the Spirit of God)

1. Cannot Appreciate God’s Truth Because He Considers it Foolishness

*“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,
“for they are foolishness to him”*

John Piper: Paul implies that the natural man can construe the meaning of the gospel because when he does he calls it foolishness. The things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man not because he can’t see their meaning but because he sees it and regards what he sees as a waste of time. The problem in **verse 14** is not a lack of clear speech nor a lack of intellectual power to interpret. The problem is that when the word of the cross is clear and the intellect of the natural man has interpreted it adequately he regards it as foolishness. . . the problem is the moral inability to assign the right value to it.

Daniel Akin: The natural person is spiritually dead (**Eph 2:1**). There is no spiritual life within these people. They lack the necessary spiritual equipment to correctly process spiritual truth. **Tom Schreiner** writes,

It is not that unbelievers cannot mentally grasp or comprehend the message of the gospel . . . they are unable to understand the truth and significance of the gospel because such things can be discerned only through the Spirit.
(*1 Corinthians*, 84–85; emphasis in original)

They can hear the message, but they cannot translate it as spiritually valuable and wonderful. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, but they don’t have him working on them.

Commenting on the natural person, “*the person without the Spirit*,” **John Piper** says one’s “basic problem is not an intellectual inability to construe the meaning of Paul’s message; the problem is the **moral inability** to assign the right value to it” (“*How the Spirit Helps Us Understand*”). This explanation helps us to understand what Paul means in the latter part of **verse 14**. The gospel of “*Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (**2:2**) is once again deemed as “*foolishness*” (Gk. *moria*) to the person without the Spirit. On a certain level, such can understand it, evaluate it, and consider it. But they will determine it is “*foolishness*” (MSG, “*silliness*”). The reason they don’t appreciate the gospel is clear: the natural person “*is not able to understand it since it is evaluated [ESV, “discerned”] spiritually.*” The natural person without the Spirit cannot “make appropriate ‘judgments’ about what God is doing in the world” (**Fee**, *Corinthians*, 2014,

125). The natural person can read the Bible, hear the gospel, and weigh its meaning. However, without the work of the Spirit, he or she will never boast in it (**1:31; Gal 6:14**). They will never see it as beautiful, precious, and valuable. They are blind to its beauty, deaf to its melody, and insensitive to its fragrant aroma.

2. Cannot Understand God's Truth Because He Lacks the Illuminating Work of the Holy Spirit

"and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

Gordon Fee: Paul's argument has now been brought full circle. He began by insisting that his message was in fact an expression of wisdom—God's own wisdom, revealed as such by the Spirit. He at least -- in contrast to the merely *psychikos* person, the mere human being without the Spirit -- understands the mind of Christ. As those who possess the Spirit, the Corinthians also potentially possess that same mind. However, as he will now point out, their behavior betrays them. They do, but they don't. The concern from here on will be to force them to acknowledge the folly of their "wisdom," which is expressing itself in quarrels and thereby destroying the very church for which Christ died.

B. (:15-16) Spiritual Man Understands and Appreciates God's Truth

(refers to all of the saved = those who do possess the Spirit of God)

1. (:15) Appreciates God's Truth Because He Has Discernment

"But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one."

Craig Blomberg: Here, therefore, he is thinking primarily of being unjustly evaluated by non-Christians (or by Christians employing worldly standards), who have no authority to criticize believers for their misbehavior, since they themselves do not accept the standards they employ in making their judgments. Christians, on the other hand, may legitimately evaluate the truth or error of non-Christian beliefs and behavior, although their primary concern should be to keep their own house in order (**5:12–13**).

Paul Gardner: This sentence has received various explanations. However, if, as we have suggested, there is a genuine problem among the Corinthians that they are judging each other and considering some to be more spiritual than others, then Paul is here affirming that Christians, who are spiritual people because they have received the Spirit, cannot be judged by others. Once more, this suggests the verb "*judge*" has a forensic sense here, and Paul intends something quite similar to what he writes in **1 Corinthians 4:3–5**. There Paul is clear that the Corinthians are making judgments about him. To them he responds with the theology of this verse. "*It is the Lord who judges me* [ἀνακρίνω]. *Therefore, do not judge anything . . . before the time, before the Lord comes*" (**vv. 4–5**). In effect Paul writes something along the lines of what he says in **Romans 8:33**: "*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*" At present in **chapter 2**, Paul is pointing out the difference between Christian and non-Christian. As he enters the next stage of his argument in **chapters 3** and **4**, he will apply

the same lessons to people who make judgments against each other within the church. Another quotation from Scripture concludes the chapter.

Adewuya: The person who has God’s Spirit is not subject to judgments by one who does not have the Spirit. This directly relates to Paul’s situation—the Greek philosophers and the sign-seeking Jews may mock and jeer, but they are both incapable and unqualified to judge the message of Paul and other Christians who have the mind of Christ because they do not have the Spirit of God and cannot judge spiritual truths. Unlike the Corinthians who, as a result of their so-called wisdom, were causing divisions, those who have the mind of Christ are not focused on special wisdom or experiences, but on community life. The mind of Christ is characterized by death to selfish ambitions, humbling of oneself, and giving oneself to others. Having the mind of Christ enables Christians to think about life the way that Jesus himself did, with the keen ability to observe what goes on around them and act appropriately. It engenders compassion for the less privileged and suffering, kindness for the destitute, and courage to stand up to the rich and powerful when necessary.

2. (:16) Understands God’s Truth Because He Possesses the Illuminating Work of the Holy Spirit = the Mind of Christ

*“For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct Him?
But we have the mind of Christ.”*

John Piper: The Spirit enables us to appraise things with their true value, but when natural men appraise us they will always go wrong. Why? **Verse 16:** Because apart from the Spirit no one thinks or appraises like the Lord, but we who possess the Spirit have the mind of Christ. We have begun to view and assess things the way Christ does. Therefore we do not reject but receive the things of the Spirit even when they mean death to self; because now we know what is really valuable.

Mark Taylor: Paul’s **conclusion** in **2:16**, based on **Isa 40:13**, amplifies not only the previous statement (**2:15**) but also provides a succinct summary of the unit as a whole; God’s ways are inscrutable (**2:9**), yet his hidden plans have been revealed through the Spirit (**2:10**). The implied answer to the question raised by Scripture, “*Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?*” is, of course, “No one.” Yet in response to the question, Paul states surprisingly and boldly, “*But we have the mind of Christ.*” Strikingly, Paul does not say, as he does in **2:12**, “We have received the Spirit that comes from God,” but rather, “*We have the mind of Christ,*” which, in context, is synonymous with God’s hidden wisdom. One cannot help but note the **strong trinitarian focus** in Paul’s interplay with the Old Testament text. Furthermore, the reference to the “*mind*” of Christ recalls Paul’s initial exhortation in **1:10**, “*to be of the same mind.*” **Garland** notes that Paul particularly appeals to the mind of Christ when a community is rent by divisions (cf. **Phil 2:1–5; 4:2**).

Paul Gardner: To have “*the mind of Christ*” (νοῦν Χριστοῦ) must be defined by the context here. It is the summary statement of a lengthy argument. Paul has shown that this “*mind*,” this understanding or knowledge, is something all Christians should have

because they have the Spirit. It stands in direct contrast to the mind of this world, which judges people on their abilities, their status in the community, their prowess in communication, and so on. The mind of Christ is one that has understood that Christ crucified is what life is all about. That is, the Christian life is to be one of humility and one of accepting that all that Christians may have is by grace and from God. The mind of Christ does not make superficial judgments about people, for that is Christ's work on the last day. The mind of Christ is able to discern that which is of God's wisdom and that which is of the world's wisdom. In other words, this mind is one that is in tune with the "*wisdom of God*" to the extent that it follows the Lord's will rather than human will. It is truly "to think God's thoughts after him."

Richard Hays: Once again Paul concludes a section of his argument with a clinching quote, this time from Isaiah 40:13 LXX. Isaiah's rhetorical question "*Who has known the mind of the Lord?*" presumes a negative answer: "*No one.*" Thus, on one level, the quotation reinforces Paul's point that the natural mind is incapable of understanding God's designs (cf. **Rom. 11:34**, quoting the same text). At the same time, however, the quotation also suggests a second, quite different point. The LXX phrase "*mind (nous) of the Lord*" translates the Hebrew phrase "*spirit (ruach) of the Lord.*" Given the whole context, it is evident that Paul understands the terms "*mind*" and "*spirit*" to be synonymous. Because he also understands "*the Lord*" to be Jesus, and because Christians have received the Spirit, he can move forward to his final audacious claim: "*We have the mind (=spirit) of Christ.*" Therefore, in a real sense, it has been given to us to know the mind of the Lord. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Answer: We who have received the Spirit know it, because we, unlike the world, have the mind of Christ. This formulation restates in more striking language what was already explained in **verses 10–13**.

David Garland: "*The mind of Christ*" does not refer to some mystical ecstasy (contra **Weiss** 1910: 68–69) but is related to "sobriety, watchfulness, faith, hope, and life, not ecstasy" (**Willis** 1989: 118). According to **Willis** (1989: 118), it refers "to believers having their outlook shaped by an awareness of Christ." He thinks that **Phil. 2:5** provides an important clue for "understanding the meaning of the '*mind of Christ*' in **1 Cor. 2:16**." This argument shows how Paul's conclusion ties in with the disputes that cause him to entreat them to be of the same mind (**1:10**). **Willis** (1989: 119) asserts, "Based upon other Pauline usage and the immediate context, then, the appeal 'to have the mind of Christ' does not mean to think Christ's thoughts after him, nor to have ecstatic experiences, nor to knowing proper dogma. The '*mind of Christ*' is not focused upon special wisdom or experiences, but on **community life**." The "*mind of Christ*" refers to **Christ's obedience**, and Paul appeals to it as a paradigm for Christians to follow: "*And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them*" (**2 Cor. 5:15**). **Brown** (1995: 145) asserts, "To have '*the mind of Christ*' is to have a cruciform mind." It requires putting to death selfish ambitions, humbling oneself, and giving oneself for others. Paul particularly appeals to this mind of Christ when a community is split by dissensions (**Phil. 2:2–5; 4:2**). The Corinthians' divisions reveal that they are not living the way Christians, taught by the Spirit and endowed with the mind of Christ, should live. They

were called into existence by the word of the cross, and they are to embody the word of the cross in all their relationships. Grindheim (2002: 708) summarizes well Paul's point: "To be spiritual . . . is to have apprehended the word of the cross in such a way that it has transformed the entire existence of the believer into its image—to a cruciform life, a life characterized by self-sacrificing love, and where power is manifest through weakness."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage encourage us in our witnessing?
- 2) What are some of the things that God has prepared for those who love Him?
- 3) What is our responsibility in this process of illumination?
- 4) How do we answer those who claim they need no teachers or time spent in study of the Word because the Holy Spirit can just speak spiritual truth to them directly?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: How a person thinks and lives will reveal whether he or she has the Spirit and is growing in maturity in Christ.

I. The Natural Person Does What Comes Naturally (2:14).

- A. The natural person does not accept spiritual things.
- B. The natural person does not appreciate spiritual things.

II. The Spiritual Person Does What Comes Supernaturally (2:10-13, 15-16).

- A. The spiritual person is informed by the Spirit (2:10-11).
- B. The spiritual person is instructed by the Spirit (2:12-13).
- C. The spiritual person is given insight by the Spirit (2:15).
- D. The spiritual person is made incomprehensible by the Spirit (2:15-16).

III. The Carnal Person Does What Comes Unnaturally (3:1-4).

- A. They are weak spiritually (3:1-2).
- B. They are willful in sin (3:3-4).

David Prior: The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the instruction, illumination and enabling not only of apostolic messengers, but also of those who hear them. Those who have not received the Spirit (14, Those who are unspiritual) do not have the resources to recognize, appreciate or welcome what the Spirit wants to impart through his messengers. In verses 12–14 Paul thus uses six important verbs to describe

the ministry of the Spirit in those who teach and those who hear the gospel: the former he enables to know, to declare and to explain; the latter he enables to receive, to understand and to appreciate. Without such ministry from the Spirit there can be no communication and no growth into maturity: the truth is incomprehensible and the things of the Spirit are even regarded as foolishness (14).

Ray Stedman: Now here is this great Being of God in our universe, this fantastic Being of infinite wisdom and mighty power. How can we know anything about him? Paul's answer is that we cannot, except he discloses himself to us. You cannot find out God by searching. Man by wisdom does not know God. Man by investigation of all the natural forces of life will never find his way to the heart of God. Only God himself must disclose himself, must open himself to us. That he has done by means of the Spirit of God -- the Spirit has come to teach us about God. The Lord Jesus himself appeared as a man in order that we might have a visible demonstration of what God is like. The simplest answer to the question, "What is God like?" is to say he is like Jesus, under all circumstances. But it is the work of the Spirit to show us what Jesus is like. Jesus said, "*He will take of the things of mine and show them unto you,*" (cf, **John 16:14** KJV). You can read the record of the Gospels, and read the historical record of Jesus, but the living Lord does not stand out from the pages merely by reading them. It is as the Spirit illuminates those pages and makes them vivid and real that you find yourself confronted with the living, breathing Christ himself. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. . .

As you know, one of the major arguments of our day is over the question of the inerrancy of scripture. People are asking afresh today, "Is everything in the Bible true? Does the Bible speak with authority in every realm of life? Is it true in what it says about scientific, geographic, and astronomic matters, etc? Or is it true only when it tells you how to get to heaven?" I think that question is answered by Paul's statement here. He says that when the apostles began to speak and to write the Scriptures, they did so by words taught by the Holy Spirit. I do not think he meant by that that the Spirit of God dictated the Bible to them. Oftentimes evangelicals are accused of believing in a dictation theory, but that is not what Paul is saying here. What he is really talking about is a process by which the Spirit of God awakened the minds of the apostles to understand truth, and they chose their own words to express it so that every apostle's personality comes through in the words that he uses. And yet, in a strange and wonderful way, those words which the apostles chose are words that God himself approved. Therefore, they come from him, not in a direct, but in an indirect sense.

Paul says to Timothy, "*All scripture is breathed out from God,*" (cf, **2 Tim 3:16**). If that is true, then it comes from a God who cannot lie, a God who makes no mistakes, a God who sees the end from the beginning, so every word in Scripture is true. As the apostles wrote these things down, therefore, we can trust what they had to say. . .

There is the process. It begins with the indwelling of the apostles, then the illuminating of the apostles' minds, the preaching of the apostles in words chosen by the Spirit, the indwelling of every believer by belief in the word that the apostles preached, and the

illuminating of the mind of each believer to understand truth as it fits his or her life directly.

John Piper: What is this wisdom. We have seen two definitions. Now we need to put them together.

1. In past weeks we have seen the definition given in **1:23-24**, Over against the wisdom of the world that serves to stir up boasting, he says, "*We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" So what is the wisdom of God? Christ crucified, and the preaching of Christ crucified.

2. The other definition of God's wisdom is given in **2:7-9**. **Verse 7:** God decreed this wisdom for our glorification. And **verse 9** says that it is something no eyes has seen nor ear heard nor man ever dreamed of, namely, what God has prepared for those who love him. So in both **verses 7 and 9** the wisdom of God is the revelation of what is in store for believers in the age to come -- something unimaginably great!

Now how do these two aspects of God's wisdom fit together -- the preaching of Christ crucified and the hope of unimaginable glory? **Verse 8** gives the clue: "*None of the rulers of this age understood this (wisdom of God); for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*"

Here the two things are brought together: the crucifixion and the Lord of glory. What the rulers of this age could not and cannot see is that the path to glory is through the cross. This is the wisdom of God that is foolishness to men -- the inheriting of an unimaginably glorious future in the presence of God, obtained by pride -- abandoning faith in a scorned, weak, foolish-looking, crucified Jewish teacher who was the very Lord of glory.

The reason (**v. 7**) Paul calls this wisdom of God a "secret and hidden" wisdom is that the relationship between the age of glory and the humiliating execution of the Messiah was not fully revealed until the days when Christ and his apostles began to unfold it. But now it is being revealed by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and they are imparting it (**v. 13**) to others -- to us. . .

Not only is the wisdom of God a gift because it comes through revelation (that's the point of **verses 9-13a**); it is also a gift because the ability to recognize it as wisdom and receive it is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul ends **verse 13** by saying that he interprets spiritual truths (which I take to mean "*the wisdom of God*," the revelation he has received from the Holy Spirit -- which is why it is called spiritual) -- he interprets spiritual truths to "*those who possess the Spirit*," or literally, "spiritual people". It's the same words used at the beginning of **verse 15**, "*the spiritual (man).*"

In other words the last part of **verse 13** seems to say that the only people who are willing and able to receive what Paul has to teach are spiritual people, that is people who have the Holy Spirit. . .

When it says at the end of **verse 14** that the things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned it means that what a natural man needs is the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart to liberate him from his irrational pride and free him to own up to the wisdom and power of the cross of Christ. Without the Spirit, we are so rebellious against the cross and against the Lord of glory that we will not cannot recognize the truth and beauty of a crucified Christ.

Jeffries: "Inspiration is that mysterious process by which God worked through the human prophets without destroying their individual personalities and styles, to produce divinely authoritative writings."

- **Norman Geisler** and **William Nix:** A General Introduction to the Bible

Thomas Leake: (vv.9-14)

Introduction:

Sectarian spirit in Corinth was a real problem – based on worldly thinking and worldly wisdom; Paul dealing with that – Goal of unity in the church and maturity; Evangelical church today saturated with a man-centered style of ministry; We need a message to deal with that ugly beast; See the folly of the “Market Driven Church” of today – addressing the felt needs of people and marketing your church along those lines; Based on a misunderstanding of the power of God and how He works in the church today

Vs. 9 = controlling thought of passage = “*all that God has prepared for those that love Him*” (= Paul’s definition here of believers) – cf. **Matt. 25:34**

How does anyone know what these great and glorious things are?

Why is it set up that way?

I. (:9) Negatively: How you can’t know it

World’s knowledge of no help; man incapable of discovering God’s truth on their own; trying to discover truth apart from dependence on God would be a sinful process in itself;

II. (:10-11) Positively: How does God reveal these truths?

Through the Holy Spirit – not talking about the human spirit here, but the Spirit of God; Only the Holy Spirit reveals ultimate truth;

Who does the Spirit tell? Believers in God

Spirit bridges that knowledge gap; makes that connection from God to man;

Matt. 11:27

Paul expounds the Spirit’s qualifications – *the Spirit searches all things*

“to examine, investigate, probe” – present tense – constantly doing this

Spirit is omnipresent and all-knowing and searches out even *the depths of God*;

What does that include? All that God is and all that God knows and all that He

determines and plans and prepares ... **Rom. 11:33** – true for us, not for the Spirit;

Dan. 2:22; Job 12:22; Ps. 92:5

Illustration – taking something we do understand and trying to give us understanding; your thoughts are your thoughts; we might know the patterns of someone we know well ... but not their deepest thoughts

III. (:12-13) Why is it that some Understand? There are some who receive the Spirit Who Knows

How do I know what I know?

Who are the “we” here? True that all believers have received the Spirit of God – secondarily Paul has all believers in mind; but primarily here it is the apostles and prophets of the NT – they are the ones directly receiving revelation directly from Spirit of God and commissioned to pass it along to others; writing it down in Scripture; We have not received the spirit of the world = attitude, prevailing thought of the day; not a direct reference to Satan (but he is behind such thinking); otherwise we would be just like everyone else in this world;

We did receive the Spirit from God; welcome; receive in – came to the NT apostles and prophets in a teaching sense; revealed his own thoughts to them

Purpose: so that we would know; knowledge is a gift to us from the Spirit of God; Process of how the Spirit of God brought that wisdom to man – combining spiritual with spiritual – God’s spiritual thoughts and plans are combined with carefully chosen spiritual words that we can then read and understand; Inspiration must extend to every word of Scriptures

3 Processes God uses to bring His truth to man:

1) Revelation = that which is revealed to a prophet or apostle; may come in form of dream or vision

2) Inspiration = the prophet would either speak or write down those words to communicate that truth to others; **1 Peter 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16**

3) Illumination = we are constantly involved in this step; an insight from previous revelation that was inspired and available to you to study; Spirit of God teaches us inwardly – but not a new revelation; eyes to see the light of Scripture
These 3 processes work together

IV. (:14) Why don’t some receive the truth? They have rejected spiritual truth
Natural man = all unsaved; do not have the Spirit of God; only able to draw on normal, natural resources; a man of the flesh; no heavenly insight; no illumination; only natural sight; looking at life in a limited sense – that is putting it nicely – sees everything upside down; devoid of the Spirit; not that they are uneducated – but shut out because of pride and unbelief; **James 1:21**

He has not the power or capability to receive spiritual truth; not just that he won’t, but that he can’t; emphasis is on his inability

Blind can only beg for sight! If you just don’t get it – here is the reason; humble yourself; believe in Christ and cry out to Him for the grace gift of insight; If you cry out to God and repent He will forgive all your sins;

We don’t know whom God has elected, so bring the message to all

Thomas Leake (2:15 – 3:4)

Introduction: How carnal can a Christian be? And for how long??

Refutation of the doctrine of the “carnal Christian” developed by Chafer and Dallas Seminary; a prominent teaching that someone can be a believer with no changed life; no fruit at all; therefore what is needed is some type of second blessing or dedication of the life or commitment to Christ as Lord when He has only been Savior = bad theology; Need a proper understanding of 3:1-4 to refute this

3 DESCRIPTIONS OF MEN

I. The Natural Man (2:14) = without the Holy Spirit = all the unsaved

Unresponsive to God; needs the new birth; thinks God’s wisdom is foolishness; no capacity to receive and understand God’s wisdom; Only the Spirit can impart life (**1 Pet. 1:3**); new birth caused by God

Not a reform of your old life; **2 Cor. 5:17** = new creation

Holy Spirit imparts God’s life into the human soul; unsaved has a soul already ... but it is unresponsive to God

II. The Spiritual Man (2:15-16) = indwelt by the Holy Spirit = all the saved

A. His Title / Designation

Not some special category or subset of believers; but describes all believers

B. His Activity – What does he do?

Discerns, investigates, evaluates all things; appraises them; then passes judgment; sees everything differently and clearly; the fog has been lifted; new life; new eyes; new understanding; Application: Don’t go to unbelievers for our education

C. His Distinction

Unbeliever doesn’t know what’s going on in my life; we are appraised by no one (no unbeliever); world didn’t know or understand Christ; ended up hating Him and will hate us as well

D. His Capabilities = We have the mind of Christ

Review of the process of revelation/inspiration/illumination = how God’s thoughts become recorded in the Scriptures as words and come into our minds where we understand through the illumination of the Holy Spirit – thus we have the mind of Christ

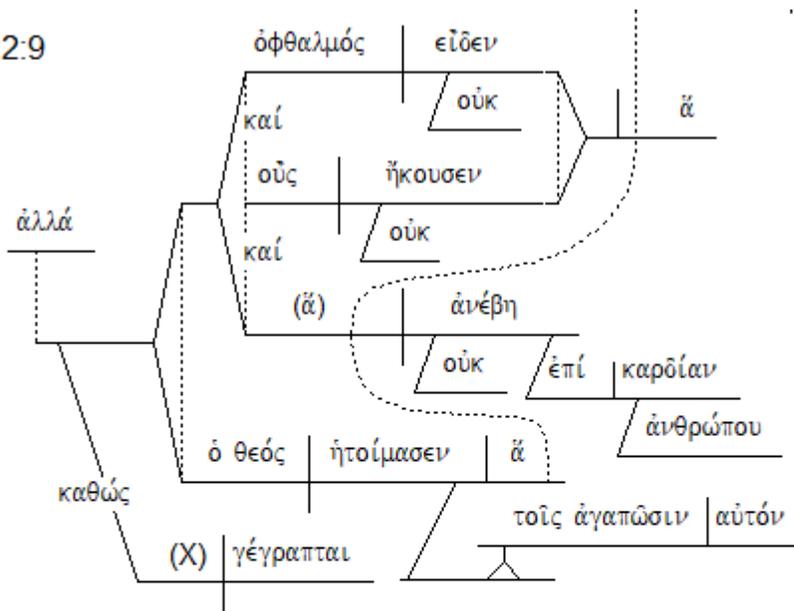
Is. 40:13 quote

Speaks to the sufficiency of the Scriptures for Christian living

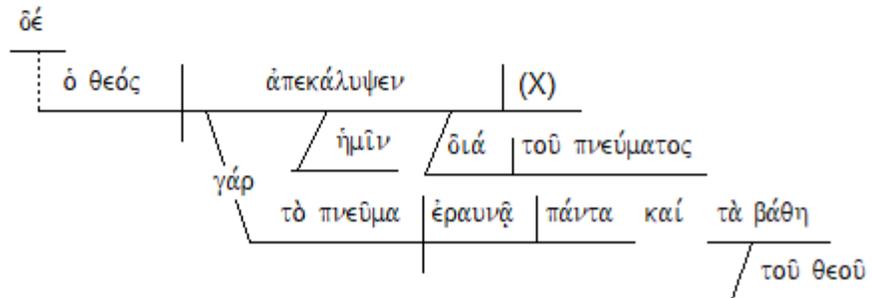
III. The Carnal / Spiritual Man (3:1-4 – next message)

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

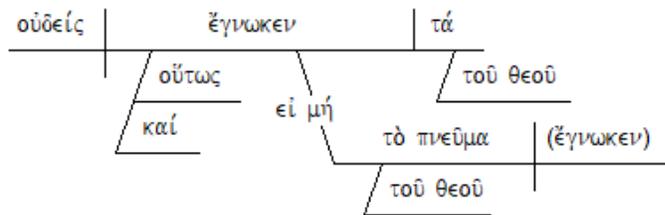
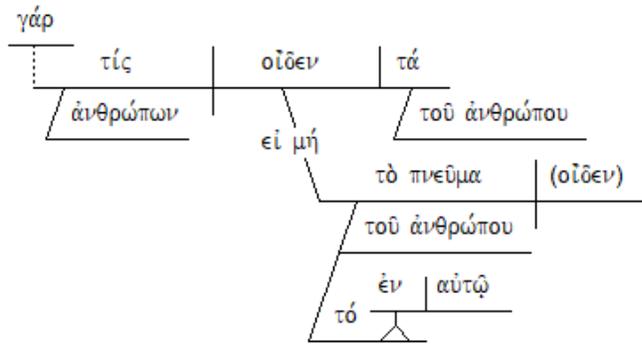
1Co 2:9



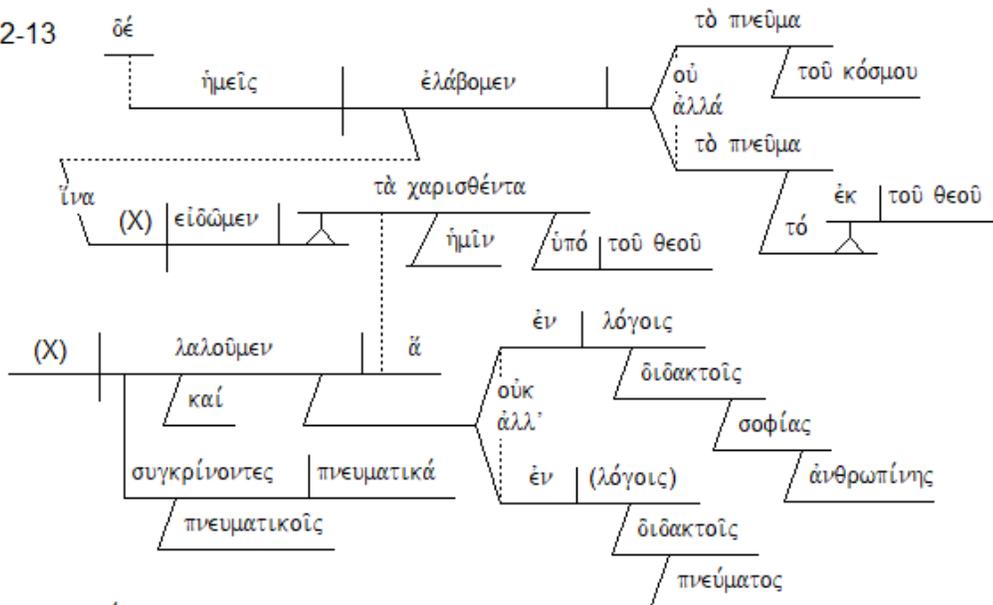
1Co 2:10



1Co 2:11



1Co 2:12-13



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

TITLE: THE DANGER OF CHILDISH SECTARIANISM

BIG IDEA:

CHILDISH SECTARIANISM IS AN UNNATURAL STATE FOR THE BELIEVER AND STUNTS SPIRITUAL GROWTH

INTRODUCTION:

Mark Taylor: In **3:1** Paul drops the comparison between the “*man without the Spirit*” (natural man) and the “*spiritual man*” (**2:14–15**) and pinpoints **a different contrast** between those who are “*spiritual*” and those who are “worldly—mere infants in Christ.” That he is addressing believers is clear from the designation “*in Christ*.” The Greek term translated “*man without the Spirit*” is reserved for unbelievers and refers to those who do not accept the things of the Spirit of God, who consider spiritual things as foolishness, and who are not able to know the things of God (**2:14**). Paul does not say that the Corinthians are not spiritual, only that he was not able to speak to them as spiritual. In principle they are spiritual by virtue of their reception of the Spirit of God, but in practice the designation “spiritual” is not an appropriate term for them in their present condition. In context the opposite of “spiritual” is “infant,” which means that “**spiritual**” is synonymous with “**mature**” (**2:6**). **Paul is seeking to adjust their attitudes and change their behavior.** As a direct application of his exposition of God’s wisdom for the mature (**2:6–16**), Paul retorts that he cannot speak to them as spiritual (mature) because of their **childish behavior** evidenced by their jealousy and quarrels.

David Prior: We have already noted Paul’s lament (**1**) that the church at Corinth was not in any sense **spiritual**. ‘*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*’ – yes; ‘*and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*’ – yes (**12:13**). But following the Spirit’s direction, walking in the Spirit’s power, demonstrating the unity of the Spirit? Certainly not. The Corinthians themselves reckoned that they were very spiritual, that they were wise and mature Christians, not least because of a multiplicity of spiritual gifts on view in their life together. But Paul is firm: *And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people.* He does not hesitate to call them *brothers and sisters*, but he has to call them also *people of the flesh* (**1, 3**), *merely human* (**4**). In fact, he calls them *infants*; *babes in Christ*, certainly, but still in their nappies (or ‘diapers’, as Americans say), hardly able to speak any words at all in terms of real wisdom from above.

Adewuya: Imagine an adult, a grown person, who behaves like a baby! A person who has never developed, who is growing old, but not growing up! Imagine further that the lack of growth is neither genetic nor forced upon the person. Rather, it is actually an intelligent choice to remain a baby! To choose to never grow! Imagine, if you will, a fifty-year-old woman turning up for work with a bib around her neck, a pacifier in her mouth, and her favorite toy underneath her arm! What would it be like to see a sixty-

five-year-old man surrounded by toys? Ridiculous, one would say. And so it is. What Paul says in this chapter is worse than these examples. The Corinthians have the power of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and the riches of grace, all at their disposal. But they willingly refused to grow and to mature. **They chose to remain as babes.**

Daniel Akin: Many have misunderstood these verses. So, let me provide a simple list of what they mean and what they don't mean. Let's start with what they don't mean:

- They don't mean you can accept Jesus as Savior but reject him as Lord.
- They don't mean you will never bear tangible fruit as a Christian.
- They don't mean you can become an unbelieving believer.
- They don't mean you can live your Christian life no differently than a non-Christian.
- They don't mean you can sit on the throne of your heart with Christ at your feet.
- They don't mean that though we are saved without works, we may have a faith without works.

Now, here's what they mean:

- Christians can be slow to mature in their faith without proper nourishment.
- Christians can sometimes act like spiritual babies when they should act like spiritual adults.
- Christians need to be reminded of the basics of the gospel even as they grow in their depth of understanding the gospel. The gospel is both milk and meat!
- Nominal Christianity is inauthentic Christianity.
- Spiritual backsliding is possible, but it should not be permanent (see **1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:16-21**).

Paul Gardner: In **3:1–4** Paul shows that their jealousy and divisions are unacceptable and are behavior that belongs to the world of the flesh rather than the world of God's Spirit. To do this Paul introduces a **new contrast**. Now the spiritual people themselves are referred to as "*babies*" (**3:1**; *νήπιος*). The contrast formerly was between those who were believers (the spiritual) and those who are not (the unspiritual). Now this contrast is between what spiritual people (believers) ought to be, and how they actually appear in Corinth. They are part of the family, but they have a lot of growing up to do!

Anthony Thiselton: [Paul] is pointing out that their competitive, self-seeking jealousy and strife undermine and contradict evidence of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying activity in their lives, and their identity as people of the cross. Since they are self-contradictory, Paul can describe them only in **self-contradictory language**, as if they did not possess the Spirit at all. They contradict their baptism into the cross and their transformation through the Spirit. They remain centered on [them]selves and behaving like any merely human person (**v. 3b**). They indulge in destructive power play: "*I, for one, am one of Paul's people*"; "*I, for my part, am for Apollos*" (**v. 4**).

I. (:1) SOME BELIEVERS REMAIN SPIRITUAL INFANTS IN THE AREA OF DISCERNMENT FOR AN EXTENDED TIME

A. Context = Family of Christ – not talking about unbelievers here
“*And I, brethren,*”

David Garland: For the first time in the letter he criticizes the church directly and sharply, but he cushions his rebuke by addressing them as brothers and sisters (cf. **1:26, 2:1**), which conveys **solidarity** (Kistemaker 1993: 100).

B. Capacity for Discernment Not Consistent With Spirituality and Maturity
“*could not speak to you as to spiritual men,*”

C. Capacity for Discernment Limited by Carnality and Immaturity
“*but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.*”

Gordon Fee: The word used here, *sarkinoi*, emphasizes especially their humanness and the physical side of their existence as over against the spiritual. The change to *sarkikoi* (v. 3) only adds to the blow. They were not only “*of the flesh*” when Paul first was among them, but even now their behavior is “*fleshly*,” a word with clear ethical overtones of living from the perspective of the present age, therefore out of one’s sinfulness. Furthermore, *sarkinos* is not a synonym for the *psychikos* used a few sentences before (**2:14**). The change is deliberate. The adjective *psychikos* had just been used to describe the person totally devoid of Spirit, who could not even follow Paul’s present argument because the whole would be folly to such a person. Because the Corinthians had received the Spirit, he could not call them *psychikoi* -- even if they were acting that way. So the shift to *sarkinoi* is fitting in every way. He avoids accusing them of not having the Spirit altogether, but at the same time he (with bite, to be sure) forces them to have to face up to their true condition.

II. (:2-3a) FLESHLY LIVING LIMITS ONE’S ABILITY TO PROCESS DEEPER SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

A. Restricted to a Diet Appropriate for an Infant

“*I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not able to receive it.*”

John MacArthur:

“*milk*” -- Not a reference to certain doctrines, but to the more easily digestible truths of doctrine that were given to new believers.

“*solid food*” – The deeper features of the doctrines of Scripture. The difference is not in kind of truth, but **degree of depth**. Spiritual immaturity makes one unable to receive the richest truths.

Alternate View:

Mark Taylor: Commentators understand the comparable metaphors of “*milk*” and “*solid food*” differently, depending on the interpretation of the content of Paul’s “*wisdom for the mature*” (see **2:6**). The metaphor itself was commonly employed in the ancient world to refer to elementary versus advanced teaching, an image that depicted

progression in knowledge. In the New Testament the metaphor carries this apparent sense in **Heb 5:12–14** (cf. also **1 Pet 2:2**). If the same holds for **1 Cor 3:2**, then milk represents Paul’s initial missionary preaching centered on the cross and solid food portrays more advanced teaching, God’s wisdom that unveils the meaning of the cross.

Others suggest, however, that this meaning is difficult to maintain contextually in 1 Corinthians. In other words, the view that Paul’s initial instruction in the gospel (milk) proclaimed the cross and that the Corinthian’s behavior prevented him from moving to more extensive, advanced instruction misses Paul’s intention. To be sure, the Corinthians failed to make progress, but it was **not a failure of knowledge but a failure to comprehend and incarnate the wisdom of the cross**. The evidence for this was their strife and jealousy. By referring to “*solid food*” Paul uses their language that means that the contrast in this case is not between two different diets but between “the true food of the Gospel (whether milk or meat), and the synthetic substitutes which the Corinthians have preferred.” **Paul knows only one kind of wisdom, Christ and him crucified**. It is not that Paul does not or cannot give them wisdom in the form of solid food; it is that they do not recognize what he gives them to be wisdom. Paul wants them to abandon their present behavior so that they can appreciate the milk for what it really is, “*solid food*.”

B. Problem is Fleshly Living

“Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly”

John Piper: So what is it about a person that makes them unable to digest solid food? It's pride. Or to put it positively, the organ that properly digests solid food is humility. As long as a person is still largely influenced by a spirit of self-exaltation he is not able to digest solid food. The throat of pride is too narrow and unpliant to handle the solid food. . .

What then is solid food? Notice that it is not something that takes more intellect to grasp. What it takes is less jealousy and strife, less pride and self-assertion. The solid food is not for smart people. It's for humble people -- people who have stopped pursuing the pleasures of self-confidence and self-exaltation and self-determination – people who now want only to boast in the Lord and give him all the glory for whatever good there is in the world and in their lives.

John MacArthur: There is no difference at all between the truths of a spiritual milk diet and a spiritual solid food diet, except in detail and depth. All doctrine may have both milk and meat elements.

III. (:3b-4) SECTARIANISM DERIVES FROM JEALOUSY AND PRODUCES STRIFE IN THE CHURCH – DESTROYING UNITY AND STUNTING SPIRITUAL GROWTH – CHECK OUT WHETHER YOU HAVE THE SPIRIT

A. Signs of Carnality

1. Root Indicators: Jealousy

“For since there is jealousy”

David Garland: Paul lists jealousy (ζήλος, zēlos) and strife (ἔρις, eris) as companion works of the flesh (**Gal. 5:20**) and as works of darkness, things that gratify the desires of the flesh (**Rom. 13:12–14**). Treating the church community as an arena in which to maneuver and advance their personal status reveals that they are controlled by human motives (cf. **15:32**) and the purely human order of things (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε; *kata anthrōpon peripateite?* literally, “are you not walking according to man?”). They act no differently from the rest of Corinthian society (**Winter 2001: 40**). He exploits a common theme that factionalism is a “human failing” (**M. Mitchell 1993: 82**), which then testifies to their spiritual deficiency. A divided spiritual community is, for Paul, untenable.

2. Surface Indicators: Strife

“and strife among you,”

Signs of the Holy Spirit would be in contrast to these traits:

- the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, not the individual
- the Holy Spirit promotes peace and unity in the body

Ray Stedman: Now the mark of spiritual babyhood, Paul says, is “jealousy and strife.” Where you have Christians who are still baby Christians and who are all too long in that condition, you will always have divisions, factions, strife, and breaking into little cliques and groups in the Church. This arises out of a sense of competition.

B. Carnality Should Trigger an Examination of Whether You Possess the Spirit

1. Fleshly = Unnatural State for the Believer

“are you not fleshly,”

2. Not Manifesting the Spirit = Danger Zone

“and are you not walking like mere men?”

Mark Taylor: For the Corinthians to behave in this manner is “acting like mere men” (**3:3**), a phrase that is repeated in **3:4** and is the equivalent of “walking according to the flesh.” Paul stops short of calling them “natural” (cf. **2:14**, “the person without the Spirit”), but his use of the term “man” comes close. They are acting no different from people who belong to the world, human beings who tend toward strife and envy.

Factionalism gives evidence of a fleshly mindset rather than the “mind of Christ” (2:16).

C. (:4) Sectarian Spirit Makes Us No Different Than the World of the Unsaved

“For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”

John Piper: But let's not treat continued immaturity as unimportant. It could be a sign that no true spiritual life was ever present and that the professing Christian is only a natural man after all. This is very rarely for us to decide. But it is our responsibility to warn the careless drifter, as Peter says to make his calling and election sure, by trusting in Christ TODAY and following him in the obedience of faith.

Adewuya: Verse 4 brings us back to the actual state of the Corinthian Christians, with their divisive preferences for individual apostles and ministers. Paul's example of himself and Apollos, who shared in the ministry at Corinth (**Acts 18:1–28**), was needed to show the Corinthians that they had a distorted view of the Lord's work. Whenever they thought of God's work in terms of belonging to or following a particular Christian worker, they were simply acting on the human level and taking sides just as the world does. The Corinthians were probably captivated by the outward manners of Paul and Apollos, rather than their teaching. Apollos was more eloquent than Paul. Their preferring one to another on such an account proved that they were merely human—led by their senses and mere outward appearances, without being under the guidance either of reason or grace.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where have you seen evidences of a spirit of sectarianism in your own life? In the church?
- 2) What affects your level of discernment of God's truth?
- 3) How would you characterize the milk of God's Word vs. the solid food?
- 4) What are some ways to guard against sectarianism creeping into our thinking or into the church?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Hays: The Corinthians have reproached Paul for failing to provide sufficiently advanced instruction in wisdom. Paul replies with a direct shot at their self-proclaimed status as *pneumatikoi*: “*I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.*” The metaphors used here (adults vs. infants and solid food vs. milk) are stock language in relation to philosophical and religious instruction throughout the ancient world. The assumption is that spiritual progress can be graded and that a different sort of curriculum is appropriate to each level of maturity. Thus, Paul is not coining fresh categories in order to classify the relative spiritual maturity of his readers; rather, he is **turning the tables** on the spirit-enthusiasts, placing them at the bottom of their own scale of religious achievement rather than at the top,

where they suppose themselves to belong. They consider themselves mature and spiritual, but Paul replies with a put-down: sorry, **you remain immature and fleshly**. How can he say that of them? His answer demonstrates how dramatically he wants to redefine their understanding of spirituality: “*For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving [literally “walking”] according to human inclinations?*” (v. 3). . .

When we read the passage this way, we see that it would be a grave mistake to use **3:1-2a** as if it provided a Pauline warrant for ranking individuals within the church on a scale of spiritual advancement. Paul is using the Corinthians’ own elitist language ironically to execute a reversal of perspective -- a reversal homologous with what God has done to “*the wise*” through the cross -- to shake the Corinthians out of their infatuation with elitist spiritual experience. Thus, by the time we arrive at **verse 4**, we see that Paul has brought the “*wisdom of the cross*” powerfully to bear as a critique of his Corinthian readers.

Robert Gundry: Again the affectionate address “*brothers*” softens a criticism of the Corinthian believers (compare **1:10**); and as in **2:12–16**, “*Spiritual people*” refers to people who’ve received the Holy Spirit because of their believing in the crucified Christ. But though the addressees have all received the Spirit and therefore are Spiritual (see especially **2:12; 12:13**), Paul says he can’t speak to them as to Spiritual people. Their behavior doesn’t correspond to their possession of the Spirit—rather, to their being made of flesh (“*fleshy*”), which represents frailty (here, moral frailty in a broad sense). The thought of frailty leads to “*infants*,” weak as they are, and contrasts with “*the mature*” in **2:6**. “*In Christ*” describes these infant-like adults as Christians despite their fleshiness. The analogy to infants leads in turn to Paul’s having given the addressees “*milk*” to drink, as though he were a lactating mother (compare **1 Thessalonians 2:7; Galatians 4:19**, which seem to rule out a present comparison of himself to a male nurse who in the ancient world fed infants with goat’s milk). The milk stands for Paul’s earlier exposition of the gospel concerning the crucified Christ. The “*solid food*” that Paul didn’t feed them because of their inability to eat it represents further teaching that would make no sense to Christians whose behavior doesn’t correspond to their possession of the Spirit. “Not even now are you yet able, however; for you’re still fleshly” brings the addressees’ past inability contrastively and therefore emphatically into the present so as to highlight a problem that needs solving forthwith, the problem of ongoing splits in the Corinthian church. But this time “*fleshly*” (which differs from “*fleshy*”) stresses the influence of moral frailty on behavior more than moral frailty as the makeup of people who are misbehaving.

Ray Stedman: We live in a democracy, therefore, people think of the church as a democracy, as though the final authority rested with the people. You get congregational government instead of what the Scriptures describe as a body of which there is a Head who is a living Being, present among us, who is the final authority and has the right of planning and programming within the church. And because the government is turn like a hierarchy with a president at the top, or a business is run like a hierarchy with a chairman of the board and all the other people in varying varied ranks of insecurity and

insignificance below them, so the church is run that way. The pastor is exalted to be the head and all the others fall in the varied ranks below him. This reflects the thinking of the world, natural thinking, which is destructive to the church. . .

He is careful, however, to indicate they were not unregenerate after he had brought them to Christ. He calls them "*brethren*," and he says they are "*babes in Christ*." They are "*in Christ*," but they are babies. That is the problem. Paul was in Corinth a year and a half and he preached to them and taught them, but in all that time they never advanced very far beyond babyhood. They were still governed by the thinking of the flesh. So, in the second part of this section, where he refers to the flesh again twice, he uses a slightly different word. It is not *sarkinos* here, but *sarkikos*, which comes from the same root but it means, "**dominated by the flesh**." The Latin word for flesh is *carne* and that is why in some versions this is called "carnal." "You are carnal; you are dominated by the flesh; your thinking is fleshly, not fleshy, but fleshly," . . .

In chapters five and six of the letter to the Hebrews (the section is unfortunately broken by the chapter division there), you have a very helpful explanation of what these terms mean, (cf, **Heb 5:11 - 6:8**). This was the problem with the Hebrews too. They were spiritual babies; they had not grown up; they had a case of arrested development. That passage uses the word "*milk*" as well. It says, "You need milk," (**Heb 5:12b** RSV). Well, **what is milk?** **Hebrews 6** tells us that it is the elementary doctrines of Christ, and it goes on to list them for us:

The first one consists of evangelistic preaching, i.e., telling people how to become Christians. One of the most dangerous and, I think, deadly things in the church is the habit that thousands of churches have gotten into of preaching the gospel over and over every Sunday morning. People never grow up; they never get out of spiritual babyhood because all they hear is how to become a Christian. Now that is all right for babies; that is what helps them become Christians and leads them to Christ and established them, but evangelistic preaching is milk.

Hebrews goes on to say that teaching concerning rituals like baptism and laying on of hands (probably for healing), and all this emphasis on physical healing, rituals and ceremonies are part of the milk that babies need. It is not yet meat, the strong food that is required for maturity.

Hebrews 6 tells us also that truth about the resurrection and the last judgments, about prophesy and eschatology, all this is milk. It is designed to get them started in the Christian life, but it is no way to build maturity as a Christian. Yet, across America there are thousands and thousands of churches that spend their whole teaching period, year after year, in investigating more about rituals, ceremonies, baptisms, prophecy and prophetic matters, and evangelizing. That is milk.

What is meat?

Meat is preaching that unfolds the full riches and magnificence of the gospel so that

people grow up. They stop being children, as Paul says in **Ephesians 4**, "...no longer to be children, tossed to and fro and carried about every wind of doctrine," (**Eph 4:14** RSV). That requires the meat of the word.

John Piper: The problem with this contrast between the natural person and the spiritual person [**chaps. 1-2**] is that it passes over the people who are not in either of these categories. It talks in terms that are all white or all black -- natural, without the Spirit at all, or spiritual in the sense of being mature (**2:6**).

So now in **3:1-4** Paul goes on to make some more distinctions. He distinguishes between Christians who are spiritual in the mature sense and Christians who are "*fleshly*" or "carnal." Why?

I think to guard one kind of person from despair and to guard another kind from presumption. The text is hopeful to the spiritual struggler and warning for the casual drifter. . .

So the term "*babes in Christ*" in **3:1** contrasts with "**the mature**" in **2:6**. And the term "*men of the flesh*" (or: "*fleshly*") in **3:1** contrasts with "*the spiritual person*" in **2:15**.

Now we have three categories of people. First there is the "*natural person*" in **2:14** -- the person who has no spiritual life and who can't recognize anything compelling in the gospel. Second, there is the "*spiritual person*" in **2:15** or "*mature*" person in **2:6** -- the person who is so deeply controlled by the Holy Spirit that he can receive and value any level of Biblical truth. And third, there is a group of people in between whom Paul calls not spiritual and not natural, but "*fleshly*," or "*babes in Christ*."

Warren Wiersbe: The immature believer knows little about the present ministry of Christ... He knows the facts about our Lord's life and ministry on earth, but not the truths about His present ministry in heaven. He lives on 'Bible stories' and not Bible doctrines."

Jeffries: [**Signs of Maturity**]

I will become filled with His truth. This will not make me "smarter," though I will gain Scriptural knowledge. It will not swell my ego with pride, although God will make use of my maturity in ministry toward others.

Yet a powerful and observable effect will be wrought in me as I abide in God's Word. The illuminating power of the Holy Spirit will re-orient me time and again to the cross of Jesus Christ and so will cause me to be ever more often reminded of the fundamental equality of all believers when measured against the attributes and character of God.

Spiritual maturity will pour forth from my life in genuine humility.

When I am in congregation with God's people, that humility will manifest itself in unity.

John MacArthur: From **1:18** through **2:16** Paul points out that the Corinthians were divided because of worldliness, because of their continued love for human wisdom. In **3:1-9** the apostle shows them that they also were divided because of the flesh, because of their continued yielding to the evil in their humanness. He shows the cause, the symptoms, and the cure.

I. The Cause of Division: The Flesh

So a Christian is not characterized by sin; it no longer represents his basic nature. But he is still able to sin, and his sin is just as sinful as the sin of an unbeliever. Sin is sin. When a Christian sins, he is being practically unspiritual, living on the same practical level as an unbeliever. Consequently Paul is compelled to speak to the Corinthian believers much as if they were unbelievers.

II. The Symptoms of Division: Jealousy and Strife

Jealousy is a severe form of selfishness, begrudging someone else what we wish were ours. And selfishness is one of the most obvious characteristics of babyhood. An infant's life is almost totally self-centered and selfish.

III. The Cure for Divisions: Glorifying Christ (:5-9)

Thomas Leake (2:15 – 3:4) Are There Spiritual and Carnal Christians?

Introduction: How carnal can a Christian be? And for how long??

Refutation of the doctrine of the "carnal Christian" developed by Chafer and Dallas Seminary; a prominent teaching that someone can be a believer with no changed life; no fruit at all; therefore what is needed is some type of second blessing or dedication of the life or commitment to Christ as Lord when He has only been Savior = bad theology; Need a proper understanding of **3:1-4** to refute this

3 DESCRIPTIONS OF MEN

I. The Natural Man (2:14) = without the Holy Spirit = all the unsaved

Unresponsive to God; needs the new birth; thinks God's wisdom is foolishness; no capacity to receive and understand God's wisdom; Only the Spirit can impart life (**1 Pet. 1:3**); new birth caused by God

Not a reform of your old life; **2 Cor. 5:17** = new creation

Holy Spirit imparts God's life into the human soul; unsaved has a soul already ... but it is unresponsive to God

II. The Spiritual Man (2:15-16) = indwelt by the Holy Spirit = all the saved

A. His Title / Designation

Not some special category or subset of believers; but describes all believers

B. His Activity – What does he do?

Discerns, investigates, evaluates all things; appraises them; then passes judgment; sees everything differently and clearly; the fog has been lifted; new life; new eyes; new understanding; Application: Don't go to unbelievers for our education

C. His Distinction

Unbeliever doesn't know what's going on in my life; we are appraised by no one (no unbeliever); world didn't know or understand Christ; ended up hating Him and will hate us as well

D. His Capabilities = We have the mind of Christ

Review of the process of revelation/inspiration/illumination = how God's thoughts become recorded in the Scriptures as words and come into our minds where we understand through the illumination of the Holy Spirit – thus we have the mind of Christ

Is. 40:13 quote

Speaks to the sufficiency of the Scriptures for Christian living

III. The Carnal/Spiritual Man (3:1-4)

A. What Paul does NOT mean:

Not saying that this group is just men of the flesh = unsaved;

- clearly he calls them *brethren* in this passage;
- cf. 1:2 where despite their evidence of carnal living and serious sins they are described as owning Christ as Lord of their lives;
- by virtue of calling them infants in Christ – acknowledges they have been born into God's family

B. What DOES Paul mean here?

They are walking AS mere men; therefore Paul in some sense has to treat them as if they did not have the mind of Christ [or at least very limited capacity to discern spiritual truth]

Their practice is not matching their spiritual reality; these are saved individuals here; it was quite a rebuke to call them fleshly in their practice; like selfish little babies; nobody likes a seven year old baby

They had been taught by the best = Apostle Paul himself; but still couldn't digest the meat of the Word

No one denies that true believers can act carnally for a time – Question is How Carnal and For How Long??

But they must evidence some fruit of a changed life or there was never any root;

Only 2 categories: either in Adam or in Christ – no third category

Evidences against the “carnal Christian” category popularized by Scofield Study Bible

- 1) Corinthian church only been around for 4-5 years – so not like they had been mired in carnality for 35 years with no evidence of fruit
- 2) Paul certainly expected some greater level of maturity from them; expected spiritual growth; this state (even for relatively young believers) was unnatural
- 3) 5:11 – This person who had sinned so grievously was designated as a “so-called” brother – Paul willing to open up for question the genuineness of his faith
- 4) Not carnal through and through; you can point to some evidence of a changed life Cf. 6:9-11
- 5) By the writing of 2 Corinthians the church had experienced godly sorrow; genuine repentance; changed heart; etc.

- 6) **2 Cor. 13:5** – admonition still to test yourself to see whether you are in the faith; Paul perhaps still unsure of some of them
- 7) **6:9-11** – Direct statement that people who persist in these types of sinful mindsets and activities are not saved – flies in the face of the “carnal Christian” view; cf. **Ga. 5** and **Eph. 5**
- 8) Argument from silence – Paul never exhorts them to seek some type of second blessing or dedicate themselves to the Lordship of Christ, etc.

Conclusion: Sometimes trust in the Lord and a changed life will be slow to come and difficult to see ... but it will be there

Cautions:

- 1) Don't be fooled if you don't see any evidence of a changed life – don't be naïve in just assuming someone is a believer
- 2) Don't be too quick to call someone a non-believer; be humble and careful and balanced and realistic in our discernment

James Boyer: In the preceding section Paul has divided men into two classes, the Natural Man and the Spiritual Man. But as a matter of fact, when Paul came to speak of the Corinthian Christians he couldn't treat them in either of these two groups. They were not spiritual as described in the preceding verses. . . Neither were they natural. He uses the word “*brethren*” to describe them, a term which makes it plain that they were believers. He calls them “*babes in Christ*” and in fact they are among those addressed earlier in the epistle as “*them that are sanctified.*” So to describe the Corinthians he creates a third category; an abnormal, unnatural one, one that shouldn't exist at all, and one that is the object of his criticism. He speaks of them as “carnal.”

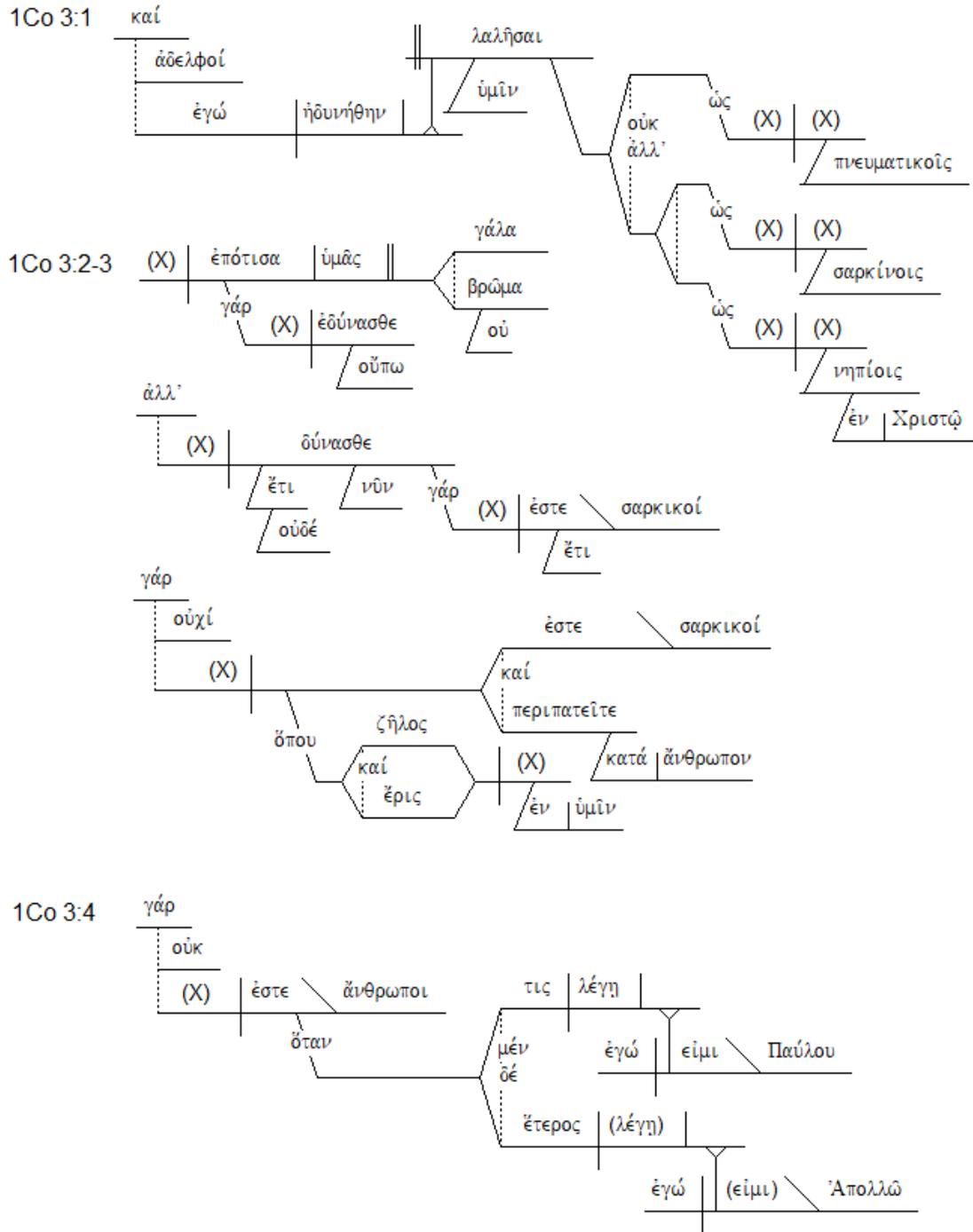
The word carnal means “fleshlike,” displaying the character of one who lives after the old, sinful, fleshly ways. In Paul the flesh is often used as the opposite of the spirit. The Christian life is described as a conflict between the flesh, and the spirit (**Gal. 5:16-25**). Hence, these Christians at Corinth are to be understood as those who are losing that conflict, allowing the flesh to dominate.

The proof of their carnality is in their actions (**vv. 3-4**).

- (1) Their divisiveness proves their carnality.
- (2) Their likeness to the natural man proves their carnality; they “*walk as men*” (**v. 3**).

The carnal state is a **foreign state**, one that should never be the experience of any child of God. It becomes a reality only when the believer gets out of the plan that God desires for him, fails to mature, and allows his former natural ways to dominate.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3: 5-9

TITLE: *SECTARIANISM DEFEATED BY GIVING ALL GLORY TO GOD – THE CHURCH IS GOD’S FIELD AND ALL MINISTERS HIS SERVANTS*

BIG IDEA:

ALL OF THE ACCOLADES FOR SPIRITUAL MINISTRY SHOULD GO TO GOD WHO CAUSES THE GROWTH -- NOT TO THE PARTICULAR SERVANTS LABORING TOGETHER ON GOD’S BEHALF

INTRODUCTION:

Paul is not saying that we should refrain from expressing appreciation and rendering respect and honor to those who minister the Word of God and perform the servant work of evangelists and teachers and under shepherds. But God needs to get all of the credit since the work is ultimately His. He deserves the loyalty and dependence – which would be idolatrous if placed on any Christian minister. He warns against ascribing ultimate credit or building loyalty at the level of the individual Christian minister.

You would think that it would be impossible for believers to lose focus and put Christian workers up on a pedestal. But that is exactly what had been happening in Corinth. The problem had not been the fault of any lobbying for popularity on the part of the ministers, but the people themselves were looking at the messenger rather than the Lord Jesus who was being faithfully proclaimed.

Richard Hays: His main line of argument in **chapter 3** no longer focuses on the cross. Instead, he relentlessly emphasizes that **the church belongs to God:** God brought it into being, and God will judge it. The human instruments that God has used to raise up the church are merely servants of God’s larger purpose. Therefore it is foolish for the Corinthians to choose sides and pit one leader against another. Indeed, it is worse than foolish: it is destructive and dangerous. Those who build with arrogance and false wisdom are compromising the integrity and holiness of God’s plan for bringing the gospel to the world. Thus, they are courting God’s wrath and judgment.

This section is structured around three metaphors for the church:

- the church as God’s field (vv. 5–9),
- the church as God’s building (vv. 10–15),
- and the church as God’s temple (vv. 16–17).

Paul moves fluidly from one metaphor to the next to make related but different points about the identity of the Corinthian church and its leaders. The final part of the chapter (vv. 18–23) first recapitulates the earlier teaching about wisdom, folly, and boasting and then concludes with a powerful affirmation that not only the church and its leaders but everything else in creation finally belongs to God.

Craig Blomberg: **Verses 5–9a** clarify another problem with the Corinthians’ divisiveness. Not only is their behavior diametrically opposed to a focus on Christ

crucified (the point of **1:18 – 2:5**), but it also ignores the fact that all Christian leaders are merely “*servants*” (**v. 5**) with relatively equal and insignificant roles to play compared to the role God plays in causing his church to grow.

Dan Nighswander: The agricultural image of planting and watering (**3:6-9**) makes several points. The least of these is that **Paul’s work takes priority**, since planting comes before watering. The assertion that those who work in God’s field will each be rewarded according to their own labor may be intended to imply that Paul deserves a higher wage. At the least, it challenges anyone who might have dismissed his leadership by claiming their own unique and essential role in establishing the assembly.

Stronger than a claim of priority is the claim that Paul and Apollos were **equally servants whose work was essential to the establishment of the congregation**; without the planting of the seed, there would have been nothing to water; without watering the seed, it would not have germinated and grown. The two leaders—and by extension all other leaders as well -- work together for a common purpose. They are all God’s servants, working together, and Paul will not allow quarrelsome members to drive a wedge between them.

The most important point that Paul wants to make -- far more important than rehabilitating his own reputation as a leader or correcting the invented competition between himself and Apollos -- is that neither he nor Apollos nor both of them together could cause growth to happen. That power belongs to God alone. The workers who plant and water are nothing, he writes; **the only one who matters is God**. This means that God is the initiator of the faith community and the source of its power. It further means that Paul and Apollos and the others are servants of God. God not only generates the growth but also owns the field and directs the workers. Paul will shortly make explicit the point that is implicit here: that the master of the servants is the only one with authority to judge, pay, or commend the servants (**4:1-5**; see also **3:13-15**).

Gordon Fee: This paragraph picks up directly from the rhetorical questions that concluded the presenting paragraph (**vv. 1–4**). Besides evidencing a misapprehension of the gospel itself, the Corinthians’ slogans bespeak a totally inadequate perception of the church and its ministry. They are boasting in their individual teachers as though they could “belong” to them in some way. With the present analogies, Paul sets out to disabuse them of this misperception regarding “**leaders**” in the community of faith.

Apollos and Paul are “*only servants*,” he asserts (**v. 5**), and by implication, therefore, not “*masters*” to whom they may belong. But he does not pursue that implication as such; rather, he takes up the imagery of “*servant*” and places it in the familiar setting of the farm, where God is at once both responsible for growth (**vv. 6–7**) and the owner of the field (**v. 9**). The point of the analogy is finally pressed in these last two clauses. Both workers and farm belong to God, who is therefore the one to whom all are accountable. But in making that point, Paul also stresses both the unity and diversity of the laborers. Their aim is one, the harvest; but they have **differing tasks** (**v. 8**). With

this part of the analogy Paul thus also affirms the ministry of Apollos and absolves him of any personal role in the quarrels.

Adewuya: No Christian worker is ever to be idolized. Indeed, those who are idolized can become instruments for fragmenting the work of God. Believers are to realize that Christian workers are simply God's servants -- agents through whom people believe in Christ. The word *diakonoi*, from which we get "*deacon*," has also been translated "*minister*." It is properly used for attendants and waiters, those who serve others. God has not called Paul and Apollos to be masters of the Corinthian Christians. They were to serve them and meet their needs. Here again, we see the self-effacing attitude of Paul. He was the one who sowed the seed of the gospel in the region. However, he neither overestimates his own labors, nor detracts anything from the real excellence of Apollos as a workman. Instead, Paul ascribes to God the full glory, as the giver of all good. As in the natural so in the spiritual world, he says. It is by the special blessing of God that the grain sown in the ground brings forth thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. It is neither the sower nor the waterer that produces this strange and inexplicable multiplication; it is God alone. **God alone should have all the glory.** The seed is his, the ground is his, the laborers are his, and all the produce comes from himself. Ministers are instruments in God's hand. They depend on God's blessing, to make their work fruitful. Without this they are nothing; their part is so small that they hardly deserve to be mentioned.

Paul goes on to make a twofold emphasis. On the one hand, Paul and Apollos, though exercising different roles, are **both engaged in the one mission** -- both have to be commissioned to propagate the gospel. They were both meant to labor to promote the glory of God in the salvation of the souls of the Corinthians. The question, then, is this: "Why should the Corinthians be divided with respect to Paul and Apollos, while these apostles are intimately united in spirit and purpose?" Although their functions are different, nevertheless, they are united. On the other hand, **each one is to be rewarded according to his labor.** Each one is responsible to God. There is, therefore, no need for competition. Perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated than in Jesus' parable of the ten slaves and ten pounds (cf. **Luke 19:11-26**). In that parable, Jesus shows that God has called each of us. He has gifted us and equipped us for the work of ministry. And he has work for us to do. This is true for every believer in his church. None is excluded from having a place of service in his kingdom. We all have kingdom work! And whosoever is faithful to the work he or she is called to do will be accordingly rewarded. It is instructive to note that both in the parable of Jesus and Paul's discussion here, reward is not according to the measure of success. Rather, it is according to the labor of each, that is, **according to faithfulness.**

Andrew Noselli: Church teachers are merely God's servants. The Lord assigns specific tasks to them. In this case God used Paul and Apollos to explain the gospel to the Corinthians. The metaphor of growing crops in a field illustrates how foolish it is for the Corinthians to rank God's servants according to what job God has given them or to give allegiance to one over against others. The servant who plants the seed and the servant who waters it are not that important. They are just farmhands. Only God actually causes the seed to grow. Servants work as a team with the same goal. They are

not competing against each other. They are coworkers belonging to God. In the final sentence, Paul changes the metaphor from farming (church = field) to construction (church = building) in order to transition to **verses 10-17**.

5 REMINDERS OF THE UNIQUE, SOVEREIGN ROLE OF GOD IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

We need these same reminders today.

I. (:5) REMINDER #1: CHRISTIAN MINISTERS ARE ONLY SERVANTS

“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.”

Don't forget the crucial distinction between

- the Many Ministers and
- the One Lord over all.

Should servants get the glory? Obviously not. What happens when spiritual leaders get too big for their britches?? Study **1 Samuel**. What happens when the flock gives too much attention to a particular Christian preacher? The strength and depth of faith and dependence on the one Good Shepherd is undermined. Churches which focus the public ministry of the church in just the giftedness of one individual are especially susceptible to putting that person up on a pedestal. But even in the context where multiple ministers exist there can be a fleshly tendency to align oneself with the individual personality rather than with the corporate body of Christ.

Paul Gardner: In this next section Paul takes himself and Apollos by way of example. He will show that there is no rivalry between them as leaders, for they are God's fellow workers. He starts with two rhetorical questions that set up the next few verses. The first point Paul makes is that he and Apollos are “*servants*” (διάκονοι). Secondly, he says each was given (assigned) his work by the Lord. The use of “*to each one*” (ἐκάστῳ) prepares the way for a number of points that Paul will wish to make through this letter, of which he and Apollos serve as examples.

- First, they have different callings and assignments of gifts, as he will show in the verses that follow (cf. **9:15–17**).
- Secondly, each of them has been “*given*” what they have by God. Later, he will show that this is in fact true of all Christians. In **12:4–11** Paul will insist for everyone that there are varieties of gifts and yet to each one a service has been given. He will also insist that such assignments are all given by God and through his Spirit.
- Then, in **12:29** he will also make it clear that not all have the same roles within the church but that God has appointed all of them.

A. Reexamine Your Perspective Towards Your Christian Ministers

1. How do you view the erudite preacher Apollos?

2. How do you view the gifted Apostle Paul?

R.C.H. Lenski: The Corinthians are making party heads of these men and each party glorifies its man to the detriment of Christ and the gospel.

B. Recognize Their Role as God's Servants in Guiding Us to Faith

John Piper: That means, the power that brought you to faith did not and does not reside in them. It flows through them. We may certainly be thankful for the copper pipes in our house, but what gives us life and refreshment is the water that comes out of the spigot. The waiter may be courteous and winsome, or crabby and inattentive, but if the food gives life and joy, that ultimately, is what counts.

Paul and Apollos are not saviors. They are not the gospel. They are not the Holy Spirit. They are not the source of power. They are not God. **They are table-waiters.** And the faith that happens when the food of God's word is served, happens through them, like a canal, not from them like a spring. So don't think of them as originators. They don't originate. They deliver. **They serve.**

C. Refocus on the Primacy of the Lord who Gives Opportunities to Minister and Blesses the Results of Such Ministry

God gives the giftedness and grace and opportunity and fruitfulness to each minister as He intends. Ministry is a distinct privilege and comes by way of divine appointment so that no man can boast.

II. (:6) REMINDER #2: ONLY GOD CAN PRODUCE SPIRITUAL FRUIT

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

Don't forget the crucial distinction between the secondary role of the exercise of a variety of spiritual gifts and the primary role of God who alone can initiate and develop spiritual life and growth

Are planting and watering necessary? Yes . . . but not anything apart from the behind-the-scenes work of God.

A. Secondary Role of the Exercise of a Variety of Spiritual Gifts

1. Role of Evangelists / Church Planters

2. Role of Teachers / Preachers / Under shepherds / Disciplers

B. Primary Role of God

Robert Hughes: "God was causing" (3:6) showed the leaders' dependency upon and limitation to Christ's gift. They were not self-sufficient workers for God. To sum up:

Who were these great Christian leaders? Compared to God, nothing. In the church, any success was a gift (“*the Lord gave,*” **3:5**) from God alone. Paul then used an illustration from agriculture (**3:6**), and **verse 7** provided the moral. The figures of **3:6** derived from the “*gave ... to each*” concept (**3:5**). Think about the reality behind the figures, and relate it to the concern regarding ministry. Paul said to boast only in the Lord (**1:31**) and throughout stressed that **God was the source of their gifts**. He now added the most powerful truth, that **God caused the growth (3:7)**. All watering and planting would be futile if there were no growth.

III. (:7) REMINDER #3: ALL OF THE GLORY BELONGS TO GOD

“So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”

Don’t forget that all of the glory and credit and loyalty and dependence belongs not to the many secondary ministers but to the One Sovereign Lord

A. Christian Ministers are Nothing in Themselves

B. God is Everything – When It Comes to Producing Spiritual Fruit

Paul Gardner: Paul thus offers a wonderful and humbling reminder to all that God’s work continues with or without us. Yet his words also offer great encouragement that, in his grace, God does use his people to further his work. On the one hand, ministries in God’s church are not what make it all “happen”; on the other hand, God has given each person the enormous privilege of taking part in the work of the master farmer.

Mark Taylor: **God’s work is always behind the scenes**, and even when human work is finished, God’s work continues. Paul is not claiming that human endeavors are of no consequence whatsoever. God himself has assigned certain tasks to those who work in the field, and as Paul will warn in **3:10–15**, using the metaphor of a building, each minister must construct the building with proper materials. **Verses 16–17** explicitly warn the church leaders (and others) of the dire consequences of inflicting damage on God’s temple.

Gordon Fee: Paul and Apollos do have **essential tasks** to perform, for which they will receive their own rewards. But they have **no independent importance**; from the perspective of ultimate responsibility for the Corinthians’ existence as the people of God, Paul and Apollos count for nothing. Without God’s prior activity bringing them to faith and causing them to grow, there is no church at all. Hence the point is clear: Stop quarreling over those whose tasks are nothing in comparison with the activity of God. **Focus on God alone**, for God alone saves and sanctifies -- it is only God who makes things grow!

IV. (:8) REMINDER #4: STRESS TEAMWORK NOW; REWARDS WILL COME LATER

*“Now he who plants and he who waters are one;
but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”*

Don't forget that all Christian ministers labor on the same team but their individual reward will be dispensed equitably by God rather than by man

Not a time for competition, envy, strife, etc. But still each minister must be careful and diligent how he labors ... as developed in the next section (vv. 10-15).

A. One Team . . . Many Gifts / Functions

- teamwork is the emphasis for now – one Master; one goal
- variety of different gifts are still essential

Daniel Akin: God makes the assignments and “*gives the growth*” (v. 7). However, how we serve matters. What we do and why we do it matter. Our service to Christ is essential and meaningful, even to the “*intentions of the hearts*” (4:5). God's servants are teammates, working with one another. We are not in competition with one another. I like the way **Vaughn and Lea** put it: “Paul notes the **essential unity** between planter and waterer (v. 8). They are one in the aim, result, and motivating power of their work. They are **allies** and not rivals” (*1 Corinthians*, 41).

B. Individual Rewards – Dispensed Equitably by God after the Job Is Finished

- ministers are not looking to the people for accolades and rewards;
- not serving as man-pleasers

V. (:9) REMINDER #5: GOD OWNS IT ALL

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

Don't forget that God owns it all – whether the agents of Christian ministry or the product of that ministry

The local church is God's church – He owns it all.

A. God Owns the Agents of Christian Ministry

B. God Owns the Product of that Ministry – 2 Analogies

1. From Agriculture – The Farmer cultivates the crop – “God's field”

Emphasis on life and growth

2. From Construction – The Builder constructs the building – “God's building”

Emphasis on effort and cohesiveness

Charles Hodge: Union and fidelity in labour are required of those engaged in tilling the same farm, or in the erection of the same building; and they are no less required in those

engaged in cultivating the vineyard of the Lord, or in erecting his temple. The apostle drops the former, and carries out the latter figure. [into the next paragraph]

Richard Hays: Paul is saying to his readers, then and now, “No, don’t you understand that the whole field belongs to God and that we are called to work together to bring in the eschatological harvest? Individual leaders are insignificant; they are just field hands.”

Paul Gardner: The “*you are*” (ἐστε) is again emphatic and contrasts with “*we are*” in v. 9a. Paul’s point is that the very ones who are so proud and so judgmental of each other and their leaders are fields and buildings that need much work. It is the “*building*” (οικοδομή) metaphor that will now come to the fore and continue to be touched on throughout the epistle. Paul will talk of each person needing to “*build up*” (οικοδομέω) the others in the fellowship, and this will be a theme he introduces in the next few verses. This brings Paul’s example from and comparison with his own and Apollos’s ministries to a close. He will move next to examine the nature of this “*building*” ministry.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In this light, how do we view radio personalities and famous Bible teachers? How do we view those who preach the word to us at our local congregations?
- 2) When we think of the term “Christian minister” do we think in terms of humble service or exalted privilege?
- 3) How are we encouraged by the knowledge that spiritual fruit ultimately depends on the work of God?
- 4) What comes to mind when we think of Christian preachers and teachers united in working side-by-side with God as *fellow workers*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: So it is not the people who are important, it is the God who works through the people. Therefore, to give glory to men as though they were all-in-all (honor is one thing that is right to give to those to whom honor is due), but to give glory to men and to exalt one as more important than another is wrong. Paul says we are equal. He says, “*He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor,*” i.e.. they are equally in need of the grace and the power of God.

Finally, his view is that all of us share the same high privilege. He says, "*We are God's fellow workers.*" Isn't that amazing? Nothing is more important in all of life than that. Think of the privilege of your being a fellow-worker with God in this day and age. When at last it is all over, and we stand before the King, the greatest honor that ever will have been accorded us is the honor that we have of bearing his name and being an instrument of his grace where we live, where we work, in our family.

Paul Gardner: Christians can easily nod to this idea of **servanthood** as what should characterize their lives without it making any difference practically in how they live.

- First, Paul knows that servanthood is something that is a foundational truth of the gospel. It is not an optional extra. Since Christ was a servant, so his people must be servants.
- Secondly, Paul sees servanthood as tied up with God's calling, just as it was for Christ. This means that it will take on different practical forms for different Christians, depending on their calling. Paul planted and Apollos watered, but both did this in obedient service to the Lord's calling. Because this is the way servanthood works itself out, it becomes clear why divisions among Christians or the putting one person on a pedestal above another should never happen in the church.
- Thirdly, there is a unified mission that constantly provides the framework for each person's obedience and service according to their calling. The mission is the building up of God's people. This is why each is given grace-gifts and why each is said to be a member of the body. Thus, each member, however lowly they are humanly speaking, has significance in the church and in God's work in Christ.

John Piper: Seven statements that Paul makes about himself and Apollos and God.

1. We are servants, but God alone is Master.
2. God is the object of your faith not us; we only point to him.
3. We did not make ourselves servants or make you converts, God did.
4. Apollos and I planted and watered but God alone can create spiritual life.
5. Apollos and I amount to nothing compared to God.
6. Apollos and I are not competitors but allies with a common goal, and in the end God will give us our rewards, not you.
7. We are workers on the farm and the building, but God owns it and us.

In summary, then Paul's answer to why there was pride and boasting and jealousy and strife at Corinth is that they were putting man where God belongs and failing to see the all-pervasive sovereignty of God.

Doug Goins: It is an understanding of the fundamental equality of all Christians, including Christian leaders in particular, as Paul mentions himself and Apollos. It's also a call to turn away from looking at ourselves and our needs and our demands, and focus on the Lord. His name shows up six times in the last five verses. He is the only one worthy of glory. When our attention is focused on him, there will be no place for jealousy or strife or self-centered competition. When his mighty presence and power fill our awareness, we're not going to focus on ourselves or on human leaders or factions.

Leon Morris: “*ministers*” – It is a word which stresses the lowly character of the service rendered. It accordingly ridicules the tendency to make much of preachers. Who would set servants on pedestals? The real work was done by God, as *by whom*, which is really “*through whom*”, shows. Paul and Apollos are nothing more than instruments “*through whom*” He does His work. These ministers could work only as the Lord gave to them.

David Garland: In these verses Paul makes the point that both he and Apollos are servants who belong to God, whose different tasks come from God, and whose success depends entirely upon God. Though Apollos apparently was not part of Paul’s mission team, and Paul is sensitive about breaching another’s sphere of labor (**2 Cor. 10:12–16; Rom. 15:18–21**), he readily acknowledges that Apollos carried forward the work he began in Corinth. He understands their ministries to be complementary under God. They, like all ministers, are to be regarded as equals, though performing different tasks. **Kuck** (1992a: 164) notes that in four parallel statements Paul places the emphasis on God and the servants’ dependence on God:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3.5 Apollos and Paul are servants. | God assigned them the task. |
| 3.6 Paul planted, Apollos watered. | God was giving the growth. |
| 3.7 The planter and the irrigator are nothing. | But God who gives the growth
[is everything]. |
| 3.8 The planter and irrigator are equal. | [God] will give them their individual
reward for their toil. |

John MacArthur: It is appropriate that God’s faithful servants be appreciated and encouraged while they are on earth. But they are not to be glorified, set apart, or made the center of special groups or movements.

Paul and Apollos were but *God’s fellow workers*. It was not their own ministry that they worked in, but His. What divine companionship! It was God’s church in Corinth, not Paul’s or Apollos’s or Peter’s. The believers there were God’s field, God’s building, and His alone. And the glory for any good work done there, or anywhere, is also His alone.

David Prior: Division, rivalry, jealousy arise in the church because certain leaders lord it over the flock and God’s people often love to have it so; it is less demanding, less disturbing. Authority in the church, truly Christian authority, comes from those who lay down their lives for their brothers and sisters in service and availability. Any other authority is worldly authority and is to be rejected.

Although the major thrust of these verses is to diminish the importance of individual leaders, it is worth pointing out that Paul does not fall into the trap of dismissing the

parts played by Apollos and himself as irrelevant. Indeed, he stresses that through the ministry both of himself and of Apollos the Corinthians had come to faith in God (5, *Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each*). They are insignificant compared with God himself, who gives the growth (7), but they are vital to the divine scheme of things. Each has his distinctive work to do, and that work requires strenuous toil (cf. 15:10) for him, as indeed it does for every Christian (15:58). So each individual's contribution to the work of God is **essential**: 'Paul forbids the man either to assert himself against the community or to merge himself into it' (Barrett).

Thomas Leake: Ten Lessons About Spiritual Leadership (continued in next message)

I. A Spiritual Leader is a Servant

1 Cor. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:5

- Test of leadership = is he serving others in the local church?
- Must be a teachable person

II. A Spiritual Leader is a Servant Furthering the Faith of Others

- Test of leadership = whom has he been discipling?
- teaching in his own home
- involved in evangelism

III. A Spiritual Leader is a Minister Appointed by God

- the Lord grants the spiritual gifts and opportunities for ministry
- What about calling into full-time Christian ministry??

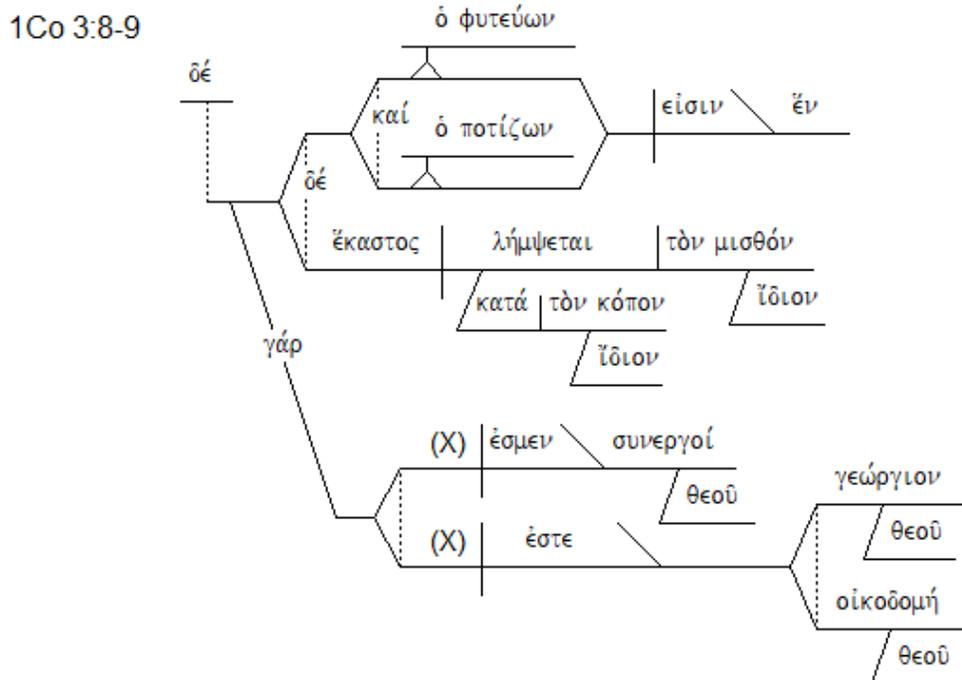
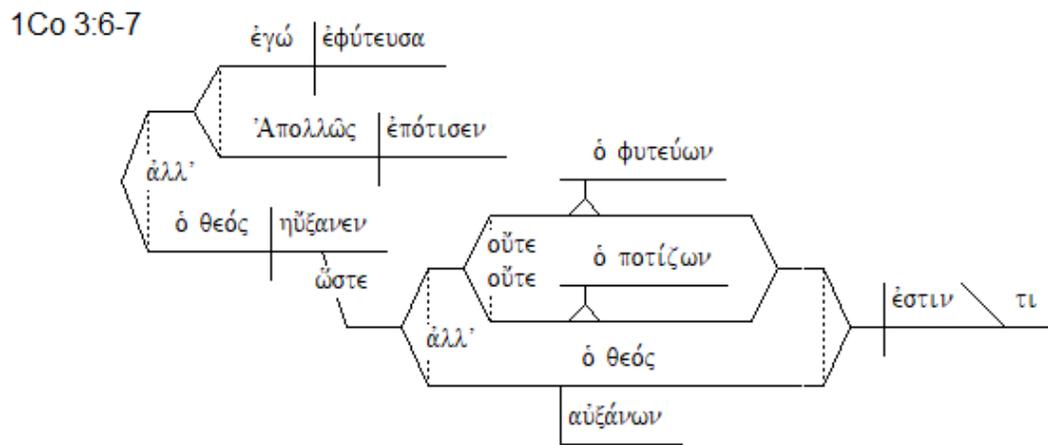
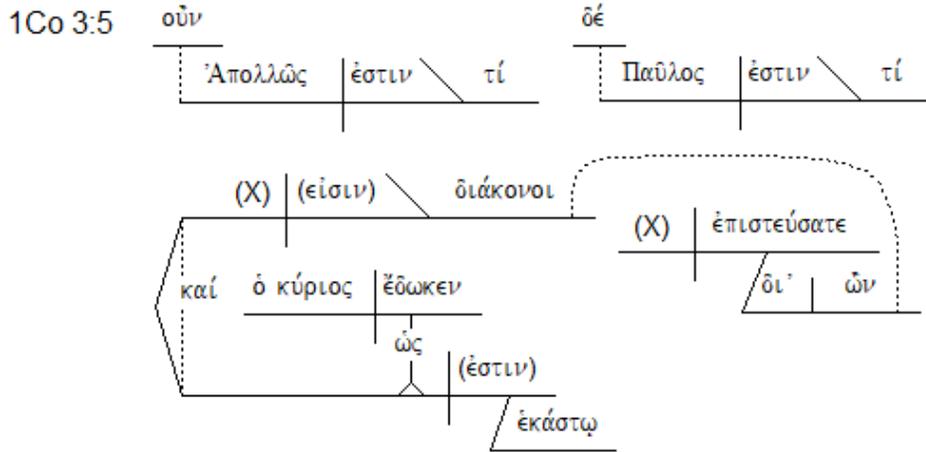
IV. A Spiritual Leader is a Worker Relying on God's Power

- must rely on the power and sovereignty of God
- takes the pressure off us; gives a sense of relief; leader should have sense of personal inadequacy

Greg Allen: Now; you'll probably remember that the Corinthian church had a real problem with this whole matter. They had been imitating the Corinthian culture around them in overly-elevating their teachers. They were acting toward their spiritual leaders in same the way that the world around them was acting toward the popular philosophers and celebrity teachers of the day—and were dividing themselves under their favorite teachers in a very 'carnal', a very, man-centered, very 'fleshly focused' sort of way. It was all very severely hindering their spiritual growth.

What Paul endeavors to do in this passage is to solve the problem of the divisiveness within the Corinthian church over its preachers by putting those preachers in proper biblical perspective. It's really remarkable how he does this. He places the Lord Jesus in the top position and calls these believers to set their focus on Him. He calls them to remember that they themselves -- as an assembly of believers formed into a church family -- are the Lord Jesus' cultivated field. They are, if you will, His 'farm'. And he affirms to them that he and Apollos -- and the apostle Peter, and their other leaders or teachers or preachers—are to be properly seen only as '*servants*' who work on the Lord's farm as his divinely appointed 'farm-hands'.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

TITLE: DIVINE BLUEPRINT FOR SPIRITUAL CONSTRUCTION

BIG IDEA:

THE HARD WORK OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY CAN REAP ETERNAL REWARDS WHEN WE BUILD WISELY ON THE PROPER FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION:

Remember in the last paragraph Paul had introduced the two analogies for Christian workers: that of a farmer and that of a builder. Here he extends the **construction analogy**. Church ministry in this text is compared to a large building project. The spiritual leaders are charged with taking care how they build so that they will produce quality results which will last and pass the fiery test. Future rewards are promised to those who stay true to the foundation of Jesus Christ and the apostolic model of ministry.

Gordon Fee: At the end of the preceding analogy Paul made an abrupt change of metaphors (to “*God’s building*”), which he now sets out to elaborate. At the same time, though dealing still with the same general topic of the church and its leadership, he clearly shifts emphasis. Picking up the theme of each one’s being “*rewarded according to their own labor*” (v. 8b), Paul is concerned to warn, in the strongest possible language, those who are currently “*building the church*.” The paragraph opens with the imagery itself (v. 10a), followed immediately by the warning (v. 10b). After returning to his own role and emphasizing again the heart of his gospel -- Jesus Christ (v. 11) -- Paul then uses the imagery in striking fashion to urge them to build with imperishable materials (vv. 12–13) because there will come a day when each person’s work will be tested and the reward of each thereby determined (vv. 14–15).

Richard Hays: With the final words of **verse 9**, Paul shifts to a **new metaphor**. “*You are God’s building*.” This allows him to direct attention to a new focal concern: **the urgency of constructing the church with integrity**. In this new metaphor, Paul compares himself to a head building contractor who has carefully laid the foundation of a building and then let out the rest of the work to subcontractors. If their work is not “up to code,” or if they fail to use suitable materials, there will be dire consequences.

We might think of what happens in California earthquakes. Some buildings that have been properly constructed to withstand the shocks remain standing, while others that have not been built according to sound principles of seismic engineering come tumbling down, with sometimes tragic results. Rather than earthquake, Paul uses the image of fire, a traditional Old Testament image for God’s judgment, but his point is the same: A cataclysm is coming that is going to test the structural integrity of our construction work, so we should build with great care. Our building should not be hasty, nor just for show; we must build our community solidly from the ground up in a way that is designed to endure.

Craig Blomberg: The end of **verse 9** belongs with **verses 10–15** as the start of a new paragraph. The NIV omits the Greek “*you are*” which prefaces “*God’s building*.” Just as Paul has described the church and its leaders with an agricultural metaphor in **verses 6–9a**, he now does so by turning to the world of construction (**vv. 9b–17**). Here again God’s sovereign guidance comes to the fore (**v. 10**). Paul likens himself to an “*expert builder*,” literally a “*wise master-craftsman*” or “*chief-engineer*.” Paul deliberately chooses the word for “*wise*” to contrast his godly wisdom with the Corinthians’ misguided claims to wisdom. The word for “*builder*” is the word from which the English “*architect*” derives, but in Greek it referred not so much to the one who drew up a blue print as to the on-site supervisor. The foundation of any truly Christian edifice must, of course, be the cross-centered gospel of Jesus Christ (**v. 11**).

Andrew Noselli: Church teachers must take care how they build God’s church. Once a church is established, one cannot lay the foundation again. The foundation is the gospel of Jesus the Messiah (**v. 11**). On judgment day, God will display the quality of every builder’s work and will judge each builder accordingly (**vv. 12-15**). . . Church teachers must build in line with the gospel and not deviate from it. Otherwise, the structure will be unstable. . . Building with perishable materials is building a church with motives and methods that are not gospel-centered. God will reward his servant who build with the right materials (cf. **4:5**), but he will not commend those who build with the wrong ones (cf. **Mt 25:21, 23**).

I. (:10-11) SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST FOLLOW THE DIVINELY REVEALED PATTERN FOR CHURCH MINISTRY – 4 REQUIREMENTS:

A. Humble Reliance on the Grace of God

“According to the grace of God which was given to me”

- Different gifts; different callings; different opportunities
- Individualized grace
- Faithfulness is required for all (**4:2**)
- Aggressiveness in trusting Christ for His enablement rather than burying our talents (cf. parable of the talents)
- No room for pride or boasting in human accomplishments
- No running away from ministry or bailing because God’s grace is sufficient

Paul Gardner: The participle in the attributive position indicates the **gift nature** of God’s grace (τὴν χάριν . . . τὴν δοθεῖσάν). Given the meaning of “*grace*,” this expression seems redundant, but Paul has just been insisting that the whole work is God’s, and this now reinforces the point that anything he has done is all because of the grace he has received from God for this work. There may be a slight sense of irony in describing himself as a “*wise master builder*.” It is the nature of wisdom and what it looks like that is part of the dispute between Paul and the Corinthians. However, “*wise*” (σοφός) here may simply indicate being “*skilled*.”

B. Skillful Labor in Accordance with God's Wisdom

"like a wise master builder"

Distinction between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world continues to flow through this epistle to the Corinthians. Expediency is not the standard. God's ways are not our ways. The type of leadership model derived from the business community will not cut it.

Word from which we get "architect" – but here used in an expanded sense as the one who faithfully carries out the master blueprint plans as a good general contractor.

Ray Stedman: Paul calls himself here "*the wise master builder*," and the word for master builder, *architectron* is the word from which we get our word "architect." But he really uses this word in a different sense than we use the word "architect" today. To us an architect is the man who thinks up the building. He conceptualizes it; he designs it; he sees it in his mind's eye; he plans it, and programs it, and draws the designs for it. In that sense, of course, God is the architect of the church. The Lord Jesus said, "*I will build my church*," (**Matt 16:18**). He has conceived it; he has designed it; he has planned its structure; he has programmed its activities, and he continues to do so, so he is really the architect in that sense today.

C. Careful Construction in Accordance with the Apostolic Pattern

"I laid a foundation and another is building on it.

But each man must be careful how he builds on it."

- **Rom. 15:20** – Paul called to do pioneering work; the apostle of the Gentiles
- No selfish ambition
- Spirit of teamwork rather than competition
- There is a biblical pattern to follow; the apostles followed that pattern

Be careful in the sense of:

- communicating the whole counsel of God accurately and faithfully
(**2 Tim. 2:2**)
- following the biblical ministry model – not relying on the marketing techniques of the world
- keeping the focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ

Doug Goins: The second half of **verse 10** reminds us that a foundation is supposed to support something. In the case of the church, it's a spiritual building. Paul is concerned that those who continue the work that he started work as faithfully and effectively as he did. They've got to draw on God's gracious resources and reflect God's spiritual wisdom. Paul is referring particularly to evangelists and pastors and teachers in the church, but the principle applies to every single believer. All of us to some extent represent the gospel by what we do. Our life and our witness with each other must be grounded in the Lord Jesus and in his word.

D. Zero Deviation from the Supreme Standard = the Church's One Foundation = Jesus Christ Her Lord

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

1 Pet. 2:6; Eph. 2:20

Concept of a plumb line

R.C.H. Lenski: When Paul writes that he "*laid a foundation*" in Corinth he means only that he began the work in that place. Laying a foundation in this sense is in contrast with the erecting of the superstructure. . . A vaster thing is meant by the one and only foundation that Paul says is "*lying*", a present tense, lying permanently and forever. Paul says nothing about him who laid this foundation or how it was laid. . . They shall also note what this foundation, is, namely "*Jesus Christ*."

Robert Gundry: For a builder to gather a personal following would be to contradict the foundation already laid -- that is, Jesus Christ -- with the superstructure of the builder's personal following. "*For no one can lay another foundation*" doesn't mean merely that no one should. It means that Jesus Christ is the only foundation possible for a church (compare the comments on **Matthew 16:17-19**).

Warren Wiersbe: The foundation is laid by the proclaiming of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The foundation is the most important part of the building because it determines the size, shape, and strength of the superstructure. A ministry may seem successful for a time, but if it is not founded on Christ, it will eventually collapse and disappear.

II. (:12-13) THE QUALITY OF ONE'S MINISTRY WILL BE TESTED AND REVEALED

A. (:12) Two Contrasting Types of Building Materials

"Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw"

Anthony Thiselton: Paul presses a further analogy within this analogy: builders may use combustible or fireproof materials. To the latter category belong gold, silver, and costly stones; but wood, hay, and straw would go up in smoke if the building caught fire. This provides a forceful and unforgettable parable of the pathos of work that cannot stand the test of the fire of the last judgment, and of the everlasting significance of what is built of solid quality upon the true foundation of Christ.

Presented from most costly to least costly; **key is ability to endure fire**

1. High Quality – permanent, valuable, uncommon
 - a. gold
 - b. silver
 - c. precious stones

2. Low Quality – temporary, useless, very common, highly combustible

- a. wood
- b. hay
- c. straw

The problem will not be with the foundation – that is solid;
Look at the effort and cost involved in doing things the right way;
You can't be cutting corners in the ministry;
These kinds of materials refer to the various doctrines, the modeling of those doctrines via a life of holiness, and the ministry motives and methods employed.

Thomas Leake: the continuous teaching; not mixing in worldly philosophy and methodology; the foundation being built upon is the doctrine about the person of Christ

Doug Goins: Paul speaks of human wisdom, the spirit of the world, and words or speculations. The wisdom of the world is a common-sense view of life. It's the constantly changing opinions and traditions and philosophies and social theories that our race manufactures.

David Garland: The materials represent the **quality** going into the construction of the building. Some are excellent builders, using materials of exceptional quality; others are less so, using materials of inferior quality. Some materials will endure; others will not (**Lindemann** 2000: 85).[15] This last option best represents Paul's intention. What makes for **imperishable building materials** for building the church? The wise master-builder laid a solid foundation, and his message of Christ crucified is the standard by which to evaluate all other builders and their materials (**Yinger** 1999: 216–17). Those attempting to build with human wisdom construct a flimsy house of straw.

B. (:13) Testing By Fire Will Reveal the Quality of the Work

“each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.”

Speaking of judgment day for believers – not to determine their eternal destiny – but the nature of their rewards. This is commonly referred to as the *bema* seat judgment.

Doug Goins: When the glorified Jesus appeared to the apostle John on the island of Patmos, John described him in the Revelation as having eyes that were like a flame of fire, having a burning intensity, evaluating. Our loving Lord Jesus, who is passionately committed to the life and health of the church, will examine our building activity and materials and sort out the bad and the good, what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh, what is built on God's revealed eternal word and what is built on the current human philosophies swirling around us.

Adewuya: With Paul's eschatological framework that permeates his writings (cf. **Rom 2:5, 16; 13:12; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6; 1 Thess 5:2–9; 2 Thess 2:2**), it is

clear that the “day” refers to “*the day of the Lord*” (**1 Thess 5:2**), the day of the second coming of Christ (cf. **2 Thess 2:2**). Paul’s vision of final judgment agrees with those of the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament (**Amos 5:18, 20; Mal 4:1**).

Gordon Fee: “*Fire*” was a natural motif that came to be associated with judgment; it occurs throughout the literature of Judaism, especially in the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. The imagery can refer either to “purifying” or to “testing.” The language here, as well as its further application in what immediately follows (**vv. 14–15**), makes it clear that Paul’s concern is the “testing” quality of fire. It will not “purify” the worker (see on **v. 15**); rather, it will judge one’s workmanship to see whether it has been made of “quality” material. . .

It is one of the most significant passages in the NT that warn—and encourage—those responsible for “*building*” the church of Christ. In the final analysis, of course, this includes all believers, but it has particular relevance, following so closely as it does the preceding paragraph (**vv. 5–9**), to those with teaching/leadership responsibilities. Paul’s point is unquestionably warning. It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, “pop” psychology, managerial techniques, relational “good feelings,” or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such “building” (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it.

I. (:14-15) ONLY MINISTRY THAT STANDS THE TEST OF FIRE WILL QUALIFY FOR FUTURE REWARDS

2 Categories when it comes to Rewards:

A. Spiritual Leaders Who Qualify For Future Rewards

“If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.”

Paul Gardner: Paul’s view of that end-time reward coheres well with Christ’s own teaching in the Gospels. There the work of the gospel and faithfulness to the calling to follow Christ are to be rewarded. Several parables and some paraenetic passages directly address the matter. In **Matthew 5:12** Jesus teaches that those who are persecuted should rejoice because “*great is your reward [ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν] in heaven.*” Parables like that of the faithful steward in **Matthew 25:23** conclude with the same idea: “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master*” (ESV). Other passages such as **Matthew 6:1** and **Luke 6:35** also speak to rewards. So, while it is not entirely clear what Paul imagined as he anticipated the crown and rewards, it is probably well summed up by Jesus’s words: “*Enter the joy of your master.*” Part of that joy will be the viewing of the work that has survived the judging fire of the last day. The very sight of the Thessalonian or Corinthian church on that last day, standing before the Lord, may indeed be what Paul imagines in **4:5** when he refers to the commendation or praise (ἔπαινος) from God.

Serving the Lord faithfully in the good work of disseminating the gospel in word and in life brings the rewards of which Paul and Jesus speak. Paul well summarizes this in **Colossians 3:23–24**: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*

Perhaps “*loss*” lies in the exact opposite direction: poor work will simply disappear from before the teacher’s eyes. The sorrow and sadness of seeing that a life’s work has achieved little or nothing for the Lord and his gospel will be devastating. The challenge is vital for all Christians. We may imagine that some of today’s leaders who have replaced a theology of the cross (Christ crucified) for a triumphalist, preacher-centered church may find, however large the church has grown, that even though their people have been saved by God’s grace, nothing remains at the judgment day at which the minister can look and say, “Ah, by God’s grace, I had a hand in that!” As Paul has shown, the work that will survive and stand at the last day is that which has been built appropriately on the “*foundation*” (θεμέλιος; **3:10–12**). That work, and that alone, will truly be the work of God’s grace delivered through his people.

B. Spiritual Leaders Whose Efforts at Ministry Were Wasted Because They Failed to Follow the Divine Blueprint

“If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

John MacArthur: No matter how worthless, no believer will forfeit salvation.

Mark Taylor: The main point, however, is that God’s verdict is comprehensive, definitive, and final. There are no revisions possible because God knows comprehensively all motivations and intentions of the human heart.

Robert Grosheide: The teachers who build badly may be believers. They build on the good foundation without having the intention of destroying the work of God, and although they are guilty by reason of the lack of permanency of their work, their state before God may be secure. Here again Paul assumes that there are teachers at Corinth who lead the church in the wrong direction.

Thomas Leake: Misuse of passage – not talking about a carnal Christian who produces zero fruit his whole life; not speaking of purgatory; no second chance to start over and build it right

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is involved in Jesus Christ being the foundation of the church?

2) How do we know right now whether we are building with gold, silver and precious stones? Is it right to be concerned with the level of future rewards we will receive?

3) How does this passage speak to the tendency of believers to evaluate right now the quality of the ministry work of others?

4) What type of “*loss*” will the believer suffer who has built with wood, hay, and straw? Will there be emotional disappointment as well? Will these believers be happy in heaven?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: Re His person, his life, his doctrines, his teachings, his resurrection, his ascension, his return by means of the Holy Spirit to make himself universally available among us, his coming return in person from heaven -- all that is included as part of the foundation. The teachings concerning Jesus were given to us by the apostles, but they focus on the person of the Lord. Every church that departs from teaching about Christ and his work, his person and his resurrection, begins to slide away from the foundation and soon becomes tottery and wobbly. It becomes filled with many forms of weakness and failure and finally collapses and crumbles into nothing. Every individual who is not built upon that foundation will find his life crumbling and failing ultimately. So our Lord is to remain always present as the foundation of the church, the God and Lord of the universal church, the head of the local body manifesting his presence, his power and his guidance throughout that body and the Master and Savior of every individual heart which has come to know him. That is the foundation.

That foundation, of course, basically consists of the Scriptures. They are the foundation of the church. They were given to us by the apostles and as such they constitute the unshakeable foundation. That is why every church, either local or universal, or any individual who does not base his life upon the Scriptures soon begins to waver and wobble; they find inconsistencies and weaknesses. Today we hear the words "Jesus" and "Christ" used in many ways that are not reflected in the Scriptures, but the only foundation that God ever recognizes is the apostolic Christ, the one given to us, the Jesus who is reflected in the Scriptures. "No other foundation can any one lay," Paul says. That is the foundation, and this is why we must keep Jesus central in all things. . .

Are our lives going to be lived on the basis of gold, silver and precious stones, growing out of that revelation of God by the Spirit, or are they going to reflect the empty, vain philosophies and speculations of the world around so that we live only for pleasure, fame and power instead of being an instrument of the living God?

Martha Snell Nicholson has put it in this little poem with which I close:

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And He shows me His plan for me,

The plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way, and I see

How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will
Will there be grief in my Saviour's eyes,
Grief, though He loves me still?

He would have me rich, and I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing
Down the paths I cannot retrace.

Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
With the tears that I cannot shed;
I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
I shall bow my uncrowned head...

Lord of the years that are left to me,
I give them to Thy hand;
Take me and break me, mould me to
The pattern Thou hast planned!

John Piper: What that means is that the foundation must control the materials used in the superstructure. Otherwise the connection between **verses 10 and 11** makes no sense. Does it make sense to say: Watch out what kind of windows you use because the foundation is Christ! Watch out what kind of roof you build because the foundation is Christ? Watch out what kind of wiring you use because the foundation is Christ! Yes it does make sense if the foundation controls the shape and quality of the building.

David Hoke: But those who are faithful in their work in the Kingdom shall receive a reward. There will be a prize for the faithful in Jesus. The Bible speaks of definite rewards, or "*crowns*" which await us. There is the "*Crown of Life*" for those who love Jesus and endure temptation (**James 1:12**). There is the "*Crown Incorruptable*" for those who discipline their lives in the race (**1 Cor. 9:25**). There is the "*Crown of Rejoicing*" for those who are soul winners (**1 Thess. 2:19**). There is the "*Crown of Righteousness*" for those who love His appearing (**2 Tim. 4:8**). And there is the "*Crown of Glory*" for those who faithfully shepherd God's flock (**1 Peter 5:4**).

What does it mean to receive a "*crown*"? Does this mean we'll receive a literal crown to go on our heads? If these crowns are a symbol of something, what would that be?

Well, a crown is given to those who rule. To have a crown is itself symbolic of the reality of authority and rule. Kings have a crown. Queens have a crown. They're given this crown at their coronation, when they're installed officially in office.

Now that's very interesting, because the Bible has much to say about ruling and reigning with Christ. In Revelation there's a promise of rule to those who overcome. Jesus says to those who have been faithful in little that they shall be made ruler over much. Perhaps here these crowns refer to various kinds of rule available in the age to come.

David Holwick: TRIAL BY FIRE

I. Testing time.

- A. Final exams are soon approaching in school.

- B. God's final exam is also approaching.
 - 1) He will assess our lives in detail.
 - 2) He looks at us as if we are building contractors.

II. Building from the ground up. 3:9

- A. Church is in view, more than individuals.
 - 1) Each of us is making our contribution to God's house.
 - 2) What one of you does, reflects on all of us.

B. Jesus is only foundation. 3:11

- 1) If foundation is weak, building won't stand.
 - a) King Store and massive basement walls.
 - b) Jesus is a firm foundation.
- 2) Jesus is required - not just one answer among many.
 - a) Only name for salvation. **Acts 4:12**
 - b) No one gets to Father except through Jesus. **John 14:6**

III. "Be careful how you build..." The structure is up to us.

- A. The Christian life is open-ended potential.
 - 1) Are we content to rest in our salvation?
 - a) Or do we intend to build ourselves up?
 - b) Most Christians exhibit little growth.
 - 2) New office buildings at Roxbury Mall.
 - a) Look good on outside, but an empty shell.

- B. Different building materials.
 - 1) Gold, silver, precious stones alludes to materials of Solomon's Temple.
 - 2) Wood, hay and straw are easily consumed.
 - a) (3 pigs and Big Bad Wolf)
 - 3) What we do for God lasts, rest does not. Perishes.

IV. How to build with quality in the Christian life.

- A. Know your God.
 - 1) Bible is our blueprints.
 - a) Nightmare in college - I realize I have final exam in

- a class I never attended, and didn't read material.
 - b) Do we read God's material?
 - c) Disciplined Bible study is surest way to grow as a believer.
- 2) Prayer keeps us in God's power.
- a) Most people talk about prayer, more than they pray.
 - b) If prayer seems remote, challenge God to reveal what he can do.

B. Watch your inner life.

- 1) Mexico City earthquake - buildings looked the same, but substandard building practices and materials caused some to collapse. [Building demolition: only a few supports need to be knocked out.]
- 2) Moral impurity causes many Christians to fall.
 - a) Sin that is not checked only grows worse.
 - b) After a while, you will feel no pangs of guilt but the damage will still be there.
- 3) Challenge yourself to do what Jesus would do in everyday circumstances.

James Boyer: What do these six kinds of building material represent? Certainly the context makes the primary application to people. They represent persons being built into the church. This is not to be understood, however, as a mere adding of another brick to the wall by getting another convert to Christ. Remember, these people are “*living stones*.” They themselves grow, so that the temple grows and is edified as its people grow. Thus, the minister’s work is twofold: He builds (1) by getting new people into the building, and (2) by getting those in the building to increase in stature and maturity. And since both of these tasks are accomplished by a ministry of teaching, there is some truth to the interpretation often encountered in the commentaries that the works here refer to the *doctrines* of the church leaders. Doctrine, however, is involved only secondarily, as it affects persons.

R.C.H. Lenski: Paul considers three classes of builders:

- 1) those who are truly wise (**v.10**)
- 2) those who are unwise and introduce wrong material although they do not leave the foundation;
- 3) those who are fools and destroy God’s temple (**vv. 16-17**)

The eventual fate of these three classes Paul also indicates.

Ken Alford: ETERNAL LEGACIES AREN’T BUILT FROM COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS.

Here are four considerations of choice concerning combustible Christianity.

I. There is only one choice concerning life’s FOUNDATION (1 Corinthians 3: 10-11).

A. The foundation for life’s work is Jesus Christ. We see this in the parable of the wise man who built his house upon a rock (**Matt. 7: 24-27**). Jesus Himself said that no one

could come to the Father but by Him (**John 14: 6**). We are told that there is no other name for salvation (**Acts 4: 12**).

B. Now, in all or any of these manifestations the matter of first importance is the foundation. A church, or a building, is no good if the foundation is no good, and in this case the apostle is very clear to make sure that we understand who that foundation is. He does not leave it to debate; we do not have to argue about it; it is stated as plainly as it can be. (*God's Builders* by **Ray C. Stedman**, June 4, 1978)

II. A believer chooses the CHARACTER of his life structure (1 Corinthians 3: 12-13).

A. The Christian is warned to "*take heed*" how he builds. Most of life's choices may be reduced to the issue of whom one is going to please: himself or the Lord. A major temptation is to yield to the urges of self.

B. Materials of life structure are temporal or eternal.

1. Worldly things are temporal (**1 John 2: 15-17**).
2. Fleshly things are temporal (**Galatians 6: 8**).
3. Devilish things are temporal (**Matthew 25: 41**).

C. The structure of our lives will be tested by the examination of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5: 10**). The examination of Christ is compared to a fire that reveals the nature of materials thrown into it. If one's life is built with wood, hay, or stubble, these are temporal materials that cannot endure the presence of God's consuming glory. The eternal materials, on the other hand, are compared to the qualities of gold, silver, and precious stones. These are the elements in a life structure that are consistent and compatible with God's glory. They will withstand the examination of Christ.

D. There is a sense in which every one of us who is possessed of the Spirit of God builds upon this foundation. We all touch one another; we build into other's lives; we affect everyone by the way we live and the way we think, the apostle called our attention to that. How are you building on the foundation? What materials are you using? Is it the wood, the hay and the stubble of human wisdom, the love of status, the seeking for ambition and prestige by which the world is characterized? Is this what you are building for and with? Or is it with the truth revealed in that secret and hidden mystery of God, truth about yourself, about humanity, and about history? Is that what you are building on? Is that what you are building with? That is the question. (**Ray C. Stedman** in *How to Destroy a Church*, June 11, 1978.)

III. There is no choice in what will OUTLAST one's life (1 Corinthians 3: 14-15).

A. Did you ever watch a winning team at the end of a game? Do you notice what they do? Why, they go crazy! Grown men jump on each other's backs; they pound one another, and hug one another, and even kiss one another. They jump up and down like little kids in a candy store. Why? They are filled with joy because the efforts they put forth produced results; it was satisfying to them. That was their reward.

Did you ever watch the losing team? They slink off; there is no jumping around and slapping one another on the back. No. Sadness and gloom prevail; they are ashamed because all their efforts were to no avail. It was all wasted effort.

Now, all of us shall have some of both in our lives. There is nobody who is a Christian who will not have some degree of gold, silver and precious stones because God guarantees it by having come into our lives as Christians. But there can also be a lot of wood, hay and stubble too, built upon the philosophy of the flesh instead of the Spirit. John says, "Let us so live that we shall not be ashamed before him at his coming," (cf, **1Jn 2:28**.)

What is your life going to count for? (*God's Builders* by **Ray C. Stedman**, June 4, 1978)

B. Every one of us here is investing his life in something. You cannot live without making an investment. What is it in? Will it be permanent? Will it abide? Will it stand the test? In the great day when all the universe sees things the way they are, will you be filled with joy that your life was invested in what stood the test and contributed to the glory of the Lord himself? Or will you be ashamed that you wasted all these years making an impression on men and teaching and influencing others to do so, and it was all burned up in the fire -- saved, but as though you had to run through the flames and lost everything besides? (*God's Builders* by **Ray C. Stedman**, June 4, 1978)

IV. The local church has been chosen by God as His building (1 Corinthians 3: 9, 16-17).

A. The local church is the place of God's dwelling, or, His Temple. The second person references in **verses 16** and **17** are plural, and indicate that the Holy Spirit not only indwells believers individually, but also chooses to live among them corporately. Whenever we gather, He is there.

B. [Because the nature of God is holy, His building, by design, is also meant to be holy.] Well, how do you damage the church? How do you corrupt the congregation? I think the answer is clear from the context -- we have been looking at this all along. Corruption takes place when someone introduces the wisdom of the world into the life style and the practice of a congregation. If someone individually chooses to begin to live according to the wisdom and the practice of the world, he begins to corrupt and damage the church. He is building with shoddy material, with wood, hay and stubble which will not stand the test of the fire and therefore he is marring the building of the church. When someone seeks to make the church impressive and powerful by the methods and the standards of the world, he is fulfilling this very thing -- corrupting and damaging the church. So whoever suggests a compromise with the spirit of the age is fulfilling this dangerous thing, especially when he does so at the expense of the teachings of our Lord himself. (**Ray C. Stedman** in *How to Destroy a Church*, June 11, 1978.)

C. God is protective of His building (that is, you).

Daniel Akin: We need to understand several theological truths about this text and others like it.

- This is a judgment of service, not salvation.
- This is the judgment seat of Christ for believers (**2 Cor 5:10**), not the great white throne judgment of unbelievers (**Rev 20:11-15**).
- This judgment will be impartial and perfect.
- This judgment involves the quality of our work, not its quantity.
- This judgment will evaluate both actions and motives (**1 Cor 4:5**).

Christ will judge what we taught, believed, and lived before others. Ministers of the Word and leaders in the church will be held to a higher standard of responsibility and judgment.

Just as there are degrees of punishment in hell (**Matt 11:20-24**), there will be **degrees of reward in heaven**. However, no believer will be jealous, envious, or unfulfilled. The Puritan **Thomas Watson** said it well:

And let me tell you, the more labour you have put forth for the kingdom of heaven, the more degrees of glory you shall have. As there are degrees of torment in hell (**Matthew 23:14** [KJV]), so of glory in heaven. As one star differs from another in glory, so shall one saint (**1 Corinthians 15:41**). Though every vessel of mercy shall be full, yet one may hold more than another.
(*A Body of Practical Divinity*, 632)

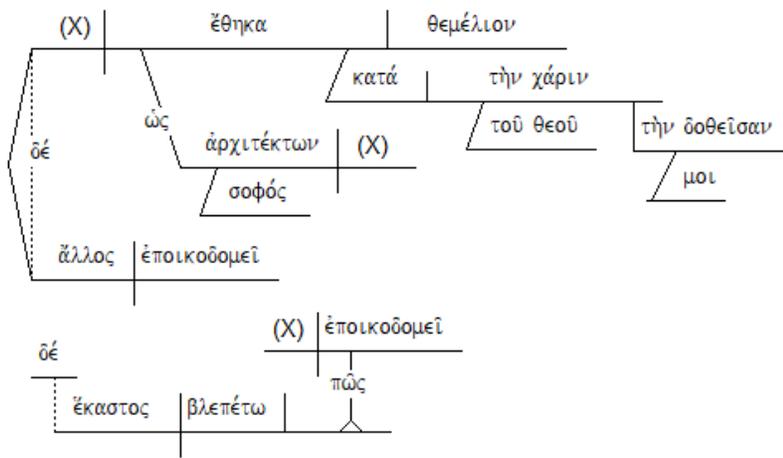
Thomas Leake: Ten Lessons About Spiritual Leadership

(continued – 1-4 last message)

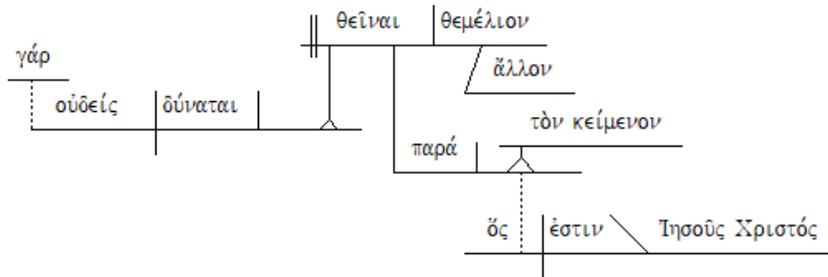
- I. A Spiritual Leader is a Servant (:5)
- II. A Spiritual Leader is a Servant Furthering the Faith of Others (:5)
- III. A Spiritual Leader is a Minister Appointed by God (:5)
- IV. A Spiritual Leader is a Worker Relying on God's Power (:6-7)
- V. A Spiritual Leader is a Team Player (:6-7)
- VI. A Spiritual Leader is a Paid Worker (paid by God) (:8)
- VII. A Spiritual Leader is a Hard Worker (:9)
- VIII. A Spiritual Leader is a Wise Builder (:10-11)
- IX. A Spiritual Leader is an Accountable Builder (:12-13)
- X. A Spiritual Leader is an Eternal Builder (:14-15)

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

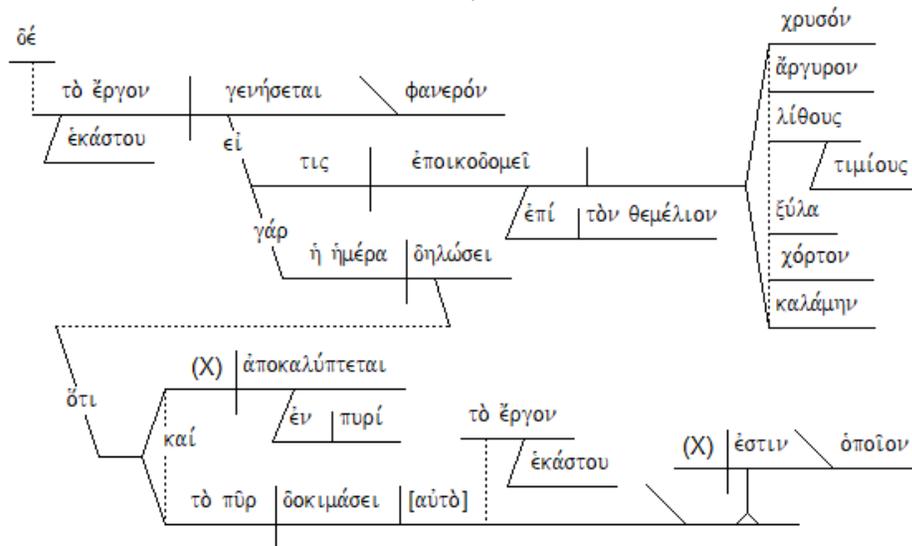
1Co 3:10



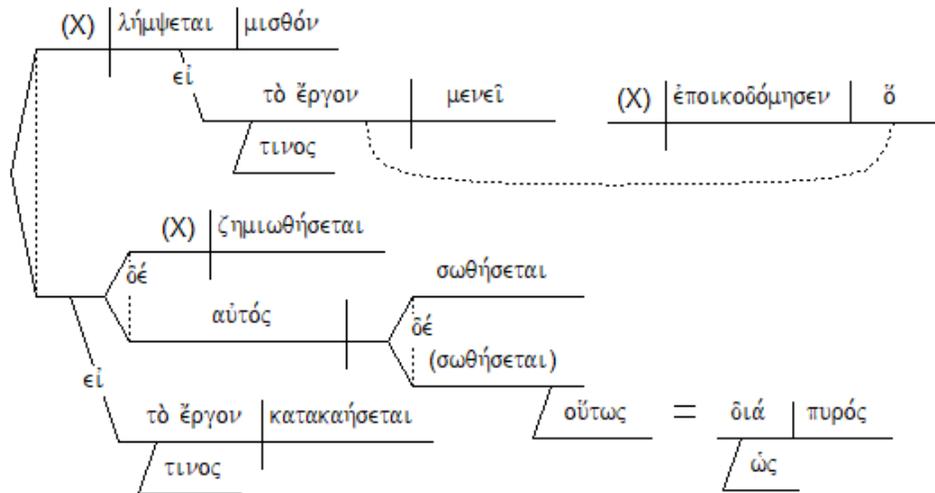
1Co 3:11



1Co 3:12-13



1Co 3:14-15



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

TITLE: THE SANCTITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

BIG IDEA:

BECAUSE THE LOCAL CHURCH IS GOD'S HOLY SANCTUARY, ANYONE WHO DAMAGES IT WILL BE PUNISHED ACCORDINGLY

INTRODUCTION:

But there is a far more dangerous threat to the integrity and health of a local church than the use of poor construction materials by spiritual leaders (**3:10-15**). The Apostle Paul takes up the thread from **vs. 9** where he had referred to the church as “*God’s building*.” Now he shows that it is a very special building = **the temple of God**. There are those ravenous wolves (whether from outside or from within) who would seek to destroy the flock of God. These would seem to be unsaved individuals who preach false doctrine and introduce the wisdom of the world in place of the wisdom of God. Because the church is a temple of God and indwelt by His Spirit, anyone who damages (corrupts / destroys) it will be punished accordingly. Here in **verses 16-17** he deals with the most extreme consequence of the worst type of divisions = sin that would end up destroying the local church.

Richard Hays: Paul’s third metaphor may be understood as a development of the previous one. The community is not just any building but in fact the Temple of God, the place **where God’s Spirit dwells**. It is crucial for interpreters of this text to understand that the verb and the second person pronoun in **verse 16** are **plural**: “*Do you not know that you [plural] are the Temple of God and that God’s Spirit dwells in you [plural]?*” The image here is of the Spirit dwelling not in the individual Christian (cf. **6:19**) but in the **gathered community**. In focusing on the church, this metaphor is fully consistent with the other metaphors in **chapter 3**. . .

In order to grasp the full audacity of this claim, we must remember that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing and active. For Jews like Paul, the Jerusalem temple had been understood as the central locus of the divine presence in the world. Thus, when Paul now transfers this claim to the community of predominantly Gentile Christians in Corinth, he is making a world-shattering hermeneutical move, decentering the sacred space of Judaism (cf. **John 4:21–24**). How can Paul possibly assert that the church has replaced the Temple? He believes that the Spirit of God is present in the community and that the community is now the place where praise and worship are rightly offered up to God. The Spirit of God no longer can be localized in a sacred building: it is to be found in the gathered community of God’s elect people in Christ.

Adewuya: The Corinthians must understand how special they were, and how their status as the temple of God demanded a particular kind of leadership and lifestyle.

Furthermore, the imagery of the metaphor drives home the point that the divisive loyalties that plagued the church were not only contrary to the nature of leadership that is required in the church, but also were contrary to the nature of the church itself. The church is God's project. The imagery of the temple should force the church to think of how much of the presence of God is experienced when its members gather together, and to reflect seriously on what it means to be a holy community in an unholy world. A situation where members of the church bicker on such things as where to place a pulpit or a flowerpot, or where to sing contemporary songs or old hymns, belies the true nature of the church as **one holy people**.

David Garland: It is a startling declaration to identify the community in Corinth gathered in their cramped, diminutive house churches as the temple of God. Compared to the grand temples in Corinth and the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, they appear rather ramshackle. But the image of them as God's temple harks back to the **foolishness of God** and the **theme of unity**. Paul is not trying to make the case that they are the new spiritualized temple of the last days, replacing the Jerusalem temple (contra **Gärtner** 1965: 57–58; **Héring** 1962: 24; **Conzelmann** 1975: 77). **Lanci** (1997: 5) shows that both Jews and Gentiles would have understood a temple under construction by diverse persons with diverse talents to be a **metaphor for unity**. **Lanci** (1997: 5–6) writes, “For all sorts of people throughout the Mediterranean, some temples functioned as potent images of unity, and an advertisement (to potential adherents) of the deity's influence.” Paul cites the Spirit as the epistemological key for understanding the wisdom of the cross in **2:10–16** and now credits the indwelling Spirit as the key to their unity (see **Kuck** 1992a: 186–87).

Gordon Fee: In the two preceding paragraphs Paul has been trying to correct the Corinthians' false view of church leadership, by redirecting their focus from the teachers themselves to God, who owns all and whose alone they are. At the same time he must correct their understanding of the nature of the church itself. Thus the argument now takes another slight turn, in which Paul carries the preceding imagery (**vv. 9b–15**) a step further by specifying the kind of building that he and the others have been erecting, namely God's temple in Corinth. With this imagery he does two things:

- (1) he tries to help the Corinthians to see the nature and significance of their being God's people in Corinth, and
- (2) by picking up the immediately preceding imagery of judgment (**vv. 13–15**), he sternly warns those who are in process of destroying the church by their divisions.

Thus he presents us with this remarkable imagery describing the nature of the local church, as well as with the strongest warning in the NT against those who would take the church lightly and destroy it by merely worldly wisdom, accompanied by divisiveness.

I. (:16) THE CHURCH MUST BE REGARDED AS GOD'S HOLY SANCTUARY

A. Tone of Foundational Truth

“Do you not know?”

Every Christian expected to understand these basic truths and live accordingly.

Paul Gardner: *“Do you not know?”* (Οὐκ οἶδατε) is a rhetorical question, but he certainly expects them to agree with what he says. He uses this question (Οὐκ οἶδατε) on a number of occasions in this epistle in a way that appears slightly **sarcastic**, given that some think they are superior to others because they have *“knowledge”* (8:1). The question usually introduces a section in which Paul is especially concerned about their practice or behavior in the Christian life. It often occurs where he makes a theological statement that **they should know but appear to be ignoring in the way they live**. The main impact of the rhetorical device, however, is that it makes it clear that Paul regards what he is saying as foundational theology to be accepted by all, even if some at Corinth have apparently missed the point.

Lowery: the first of 10 occurrences of the clause in this letter (cf. 5:6; 6:2-3, 9, 15-16, 19; 9:13, 24; each time it introduces an **indisputable statement**).

B. Two Descriptions of the Church as God’s Holy Sanctuary

Paul Gardner: Here is the **ultimate argument for unity**. They are one temple that belongs to God (θεοῦ is a possessive genitive), and together they are the place where the one Spirit dwells. But this is also the ultimate argument for building well. They are building the place where God dwells. This probably carried all the connotations of the care with which the Solomonic temple had to be built. This image is more likely than that Paul was picturing the building of pagan temples in Corinth. Thus, Paul demonstrates that the divisions, factions, and disputes about leadership are not just a sad episode in a church’s life but fundamentally represent a failure to understand the significance and nature of the local church as God’s temple. Thus, Paul’s fourth and final conditional clause is the strongest.

1. Temple of God

“that you are a temple of God”

The building is not the church; but the believers are.

Second person plural used throughout this section – not just talking about an individual believer.

2. Dwelling Place for God

“and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

Not just dwells in you individually (which is true for all believers; no second act of grace involved; but here regarded as true of the local church corporately)

Implications of the church being God's Holy Sanctuary:

- We are not your own; we belong to God (**1 Cor. 6:19**)
- We must remain separate from idols (**2 Cor. 6:16**)
- Glory of God should shine forth from His temple
- We should experience the presence of the majestic and holy God
- We should walk worthy of your calling in the fear of God
- We have direct access to God and privilege of worship and service
- We should live lives of complete dedication and surrender (**Rom. 12:1-2**)
- Attitude of Thanksgiving and Humility for tremendous privilege

Gordon Fee: His immediate concern is not to assert that the Spirit dwells in each of them, true as that would be for him (cf. **6:19**), but that the Spirit of God “*dwells in your midst*” when they have assembled together for worship. That is, Paul is here reflecting on the church as the corporate place of God’s dwelling, who, when gathered in Jesus’ name, experienced the **presence and power of the Lord Jesus in their midst (5:4–5)**. Again, as earlier (**2:10–13**; cf. **2:4–5**), the Spirit is the key, the crucial reality, for life in the new era. The presence of the Spirit, and that alone, marks them off as God’s new people, God’s temple, when assembled in Christ’s name in Corinth.

II. (:17) ATTACKS AGAINST THE CHURCH WILL BE PUNISHED ACCORDINGLY BY GOD WHO JEALOUSLY GUARDS HIS HOLINESS

A. Destructive Attacks Will Come

“If any man destroys the temple of God”

Why would someone even want to do this? Instrument of Satan.

Daniel Akin: A focus on entertainment, false conversions, preaching a watered-down gospel, spending resources on fancy programs or impressive buildings, weak preaching, acceptance of gossip and materialism, lack of prayer, loss of missions and evangelistic passion, and much more will drain a local church of its life.

B. Appropriate Punishment Will Be Dispensed

“God will destroy him”

Serious threat; sounds like much more than just the loss of reward for believers.

Craig Blomberg: These are clearly different people (potentially some of the patrons or local leaders of the Corinthian factions) from those who used poor building materials in the previous paragraph. Here people are trying to tear down the structure! Understandably, God’s response will significantly differ as well: he “*will destroy*” (i.e., eternally condemn) them.

Tony Monaghan: Talk about a threat! That's how seriously God considers the sin of division within the church. He will avenge his church himself. And so we read,

Prov. 6:16 "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, 19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers."

It was a capital offense in the Old Testament to defile the temple, and surely Paul is picking up upon that idea here.

Lev. 15:31 "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst."

God simply won't allow it. It shall not go unpunished.

<http://www.covenantcommunityopc.org/The%20Temple%20of%20God.htm>

C. Standard of Holiness Must Be Applied

1. Applied to the temple as the Sanctuary of God

"for the temple of God is holy"

Paul Gardner: The addition in this verse to what Paul is saying is his description of the temple as "holy" (ἅγιος). It has certainly been implied throughout this section. Where God is, that place is always holy. The "temple" (ναός) contained the "Most Holy Place" (e.g., **Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2**) and attention is now drawn to this. The sacrilege that would be involved in destroying this needs no further comment. The severity of Paul's warning is established.

2. Applied to the Corinthian Believers as the Temple of God

"and that is what you are."

Implications of living in accordance with our Holiness . . .

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we constantly need to be reminded about basic Christian truth regarding our privileged standing before God?
- 2) What do we learn from studying the OT accounts of the Holy of Holies that we can apply to the church being the temple of God?
- 3) In what ways do false teachers and false shepherds and church members attempt to destroy or seduce or compromise or lead astray their local church? What are some of their tactics?

4) What are the implications in my life for being held to the high standard of the holiness of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Deffinbaugh: Don't Tamper with the Temple --

A person can "*defile the temple of God*" by doing the things for which Paul rebukes the Corinthians.

- One can defile the temple by dividing it up into little groups and factions.
- One can defile the temple by forsaking the simplicity of the gospel and seeking wisdom elsewhere.
- He can defile the temple of God by sexual immorality (**chapter 5**) or by taking a brother to the law court (**chapter 6**).
- God's temple can be defiled by divorce (**chapter 7**) or by causing a weaker brother to sin through the insensitive use of your rights as a Christian (**chapters 8-10**).
- One can defile the temple of God by misconduct at the Lord's Supper and the meeting of the church (**chapters 11-14**).
- One can also defile the temple by false teaching (**chapter 15**).

R.C.H. Lenski: Paul does not say how he conceives this destroying. We shall not go far wrong when we say that, if the Corinthians themselves are God's sanctuary because of the indwelling of the Spirit, he destroys this sanctuary, be he teacher or layman, who by lies and deceptions drives the Spirit out of the hearts of the Corinthians and fills them with the spirit of the world. . .

Paul's statement really involves a syllogism. Major premise: Whoever destroys the sanctuary of God, God will destroy him, for his sanctuary is holy. Minor premise: You Corinthians are holy and God's sanctuary. Conclusion, implied: Whoever destroys you, God will destroy him. The verb may mean either "destroy" or "corrupt" as the context determines. We have no English verb that has this double sense.

Charles Hodge: As in the Jewish temple, in its inmost recess, the Shechinah, or glory of God, was constantly present, and conferred on the building its awe-inspiring power, and rendered any profanation of it a direct offence to God; so does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Church, the profanation of which by false doctrine is therefore sacrilege.

Mare: Paul states (**v.17**) that anyone who actually destroys or tends to destroy (i.e., defile or damage) God's temple will be destroyed by God (cf. **Lev 15:31**). The reason is clear: God's temple is holy, sacred, set apart (**Isa 28:16; Rev 3:12**). God in his justice and holiness cannot allow part of his holy work to be damaged without bringing retribution.

Ray Stedman: Well, how do you damage the church? How do you corrupt the congregation? I think the answer is clear from the context -- we have been looking at this all along. Corruption takes place when someone introduces the wisdom of the world into the life style and the practice of a congregation. If someone individually chooses to begin to live according to the wisdom and the practice of the world, he begins to corrupt and damage the church. He is building with shoddy material, with wood, hay and stubble which will not stand the test of the fire and therefore he is marring the building of the church. When someone seeks to make the church impressive and powerful by the methods and the standards of the world, he is fulfilling this very thing -- corrupting and damaging the church. So whoever suggests a compromise with the spirit of the age is fulfilling this dangerous thing, especially when he does so at the expense of the teachings of our Lord himself. . .

This happens when a church insists on having a hierarchy in the government of a congregation -- someone at the top, someone in authority over everyone else. This is wrong, as our Lord said. "*Among the Gentiles they are in authority over one another, but it shall not be so among you,*" he said (cf, **Matt 20:25-26**). Yet how widely that has been ignored and how many churches still today have brought in the hierarchical structure of the world's government into the church. As a result the church is severely damaged by it.

This happens when a church permits the lax moral standards of the world to go unjudged within the congregation. (Paul is going to deal more with this as he comes into the next chapters.) It is happening all around us today. Sexual practices widely tolerated in the world are admitted into the church and Christians allow themselves to practice these kinds of things. This damages the church and tears it apart; it destroys and mars what God is doing.

This happens when you substitute secular insights and secular authority for guidance in the matter of counseling and discipline problems in a church. This is happening widely in our day. Much of secular counseling is designed to build up the flesh, to make people self-confident. This whole business of Transactional Analysis and Transcendental Meditation is based on the secular view of life, and the church forgets that the secular viewpoint is narrow and limited. It does not take in the whole factor of human life and make-up as God has made man to be. Apart from that understanding, operating only on that very narrow, limited viewpoint, severe damage is done to people in counseling. Although there may be momentary or temporary help, they are locked into a plateau from which they cannot emerge, and this is a way of damaging the church.

I think one widespread way of damaging the church today is to allow a congregation to drift into a "mechanical" worship. Perhaps nothing is more deadly than to permit people a kind of outward compliance with the matters of worship and service without any inward, heartfelt commitment to it. That will destroy a church.

When Paul wrote to the church at Colossae he saw them severely threatened by three things that were coming into the Church in their worship together:

1. One was **formalism**. They were going through ceremonies and rituals in a set way as though that was what God was after and not the change of heart that these things represented. That formalistic pattern of worship is a destructive thing to the life of the church that God is seeking to build.

2. The second thing was **emotionalism**. Many of the Colossians were caught up in a kind of a mystical experience. They were talking about these things and they had forsaken, therefore, clinging to the Head of the body, which is Jesus himself. That was destroying the church, as it does in many places today.

3. And the third thing was an **asceticism**, a legalistic spirit that was taking pride in its dedicated heart and its willingness to give up so many things, to go in for fasting and beating the body, and not touching certain things. They were glorying in that fact. The apostle saw the church being threatened, choked and sabotaged by these kinds of practices.

Doug Goins: How do we damage or corrupt the church? Looking back at the context to this point, the Corinthians had introduced the wisdom of the world into their decision-making and their teaching. It was hard to tell what was Biblical and what was the secular philosophy of Corinth in that church. They had allowed fleshly competition to defile their fellowship. And they ended up treating each other no differently than any nonbelievers in pagan institutions would. We're going to see in the chapters ahead that there were ugly legal battles between members of the church. There were power struggles in leadership, with teachers and prophets battling for preeminence, position, and influence in the church. The church had permitted lax moral standards to go unjudged within the community; they were living with serious immorality and nobody was saying a word. Their corporate worship life was out of control. Personal experience had become the most important thing in worship, and self-indulgence was the rule.

But the good news, the logic of the appeal that Paul is making, is that they don't have to continue living out these destructive attitudes and behaviors. Paul's motive in writing this is to remind the Corinthian Christians of who they are. They don't have to live in contradiction to their true identity as God's holy ones.

I believe that one of our desperate needs in the church is to recapture this vision of what God intends us to be. Most of us tend to take our life together too lightly. Seldom do we sense that our church can be an experience of community that is so powerfully indwelt by the Spirit that it is a genuine alternative to the pagan world that surrounds us.

In closing, let me ask you three important questions, going back through this passage. The first one has to do with the issue of foundation. Jesus Christ is the foundation. Are you committed to Jesus Christ alone and to his apostolic word as the only foundation for our church? Or do we need Christ crucified plus other foundational issues on which to build our church?

Let me ask you about this issue of the process of building the superstructure. What kind of workmanship and materials are you building into your brothers and sisters in this church? Have you become invested in building materials that won't stand the test? I remembered last week as I was studying this, the wasted effort that I put into several human systems based on worldly wisdom, especially in my earlier years in ministry. These were philosophical, managerial, and psychological systems that became far more important to me than the gospel itself. They were relational wood, hay and stubble. The ironic thing is that I've seen all that modern wisdom swept away by newer combustible materials.

The last question concerns this issue of the nature of the church, our identity. Do you take the church and your identity as a saint, a holy, set-apart one in this holy temple of God, as seriously as he does? The good news is that we don't have to go on living with the Corinthian casualness Paul has exposed here. We must examine our hearts and see what is Corinthian and what is Christian, what is from below and what is from above.

Adrian Dieleman: There are two Greek words that Paul could have used for "*temple*." One is "*hieron*," which includes the entire temple area and structure on Mount Zion: the inner and outer courts, the walls, the storage places, and even the selling booths. The other, the word that Paul uses, is "*naos*." "*Naos*" is used of the sanctuary itself, consisting of the Holy place and the Holy of Holies.

The sanctuary, the *naos*, is where God lives. Here is the ark, here is the cherubim; here lives His Name, His Glory, His Power. From here comes His revelation for the people. And from here the people receive blessing and salvation. The sanctuary, the *naos*, is where God dwells with mankind and moves among them. The sanctuary, the *naos*, is where God fellowships with men and women and where they can enjoy His presence.

The church is God's temple, God's *naos*. What does this mean? This tells us three things about the church. First, this tells us that the church is where God dwells. She is His sanctuary. In her is His Name, His Glory, His Power. From here – or through here – comes God's revelation for His people. Here God dwells with man and man fellowships with God and enjoys His presence.

The church, the people of God, the congregation of believers, form the temple of God, His dwelling place. But many people don't believe this. They think that if God is living anywhere on earth, it has to be in a ten million dollar building, or a crystal cathedral, or a magnificent edifice set on a hill-top. "Not so," says Paul, for "you yourselves are God's temple."

The church is God's temple, God's *naos*. Second, this tells us that the church is indwelt by the Spirit of God. The Bible teaches us that where God's Spirit is, there is the temple. That's why Paul can say, "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you*" (1 Cor 3:16). A church indwelt by the Spirit is a church abounding in gifts and fruit, a church that ministers within and without the body, a church that grows and increases and matures.

The church is God's temple, God's *naos*. Third, this tells us she is the body of Christ. More than once Jesus identifies the temple with His body. In an argument with the Jews, Jesus said, "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*" The Jews scoffed at this because they didn't understand that the temple he had spoken of was his body (**John 2:19-21**).

"*You yourselves are God's temple.*" The church is being identified as the body of Christ. What happened to Him happens to her. That's why Paul can say elsewhere that with Christ she suffered, with Him she died, and with Him she was raised. And, someday, with Him she will be glorified.

The church is God's temple, God's *naos*. And God's temple, says Paul, "*is sacred.*" God's temple is holy. God's temple is special, set apart, consecrated, not used for ordinary things.

Think, for a moment, of the Old Testament tabernacle. The tabernacle and its furnishings were pronounced holy by God, set apart. They were not to be touched by mere humans. And the priests could touch them only after they were cleansed, washed, and dressed in white. Remember the death of Uzzah? King David was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem on a new cart pulled by oxen. Uzzah took hold of the Ark to steady it when the oxen stumbled. Scripture says, (**2 Sam 6:7**) *The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.* Uzzah touched a holy thing, something set apart by God, something he had no right to touch.

The church is God's temple, God's *naos*. And God's temple, says Paul, "*is sacred.*" The congregation, in other words, is holy, set apart, reserved for God and His use. Of course she is sacred because in her God dwells, she is indwelt by the Spirit, and she is the body of Christ. But many people don't believe this. They want to believe that if anything is holy, it is a place, a building.

<http://www.trinitycrc.org/sermons/1co03v16-17.html>

Mark Copeland:

I. HOW MIGHT ONE DESTROY THE TEMPLE OF GOD?

A. THROUGH RELIGIOUS STRIFE...

1. This was the problem that existed at Corinth - **1 Co 1:10-13**
2. It prevented many members from receiving spiritual meat - **1 Co 3:1-2**
3. It left such members in a state of carnality - **1 Co 3:3-4**
4. Paul warned the churches of Galatia of the dangers of strife - **Ga 5:15**
-- **Where religious strife exists, the temple of God is being destroyed!**

B. THROUGH DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINES...

1. Peter warned of the destructive influence of false teachers
- **2 Pe 2:1**
2. Causing many to follow their destructive ways - **2 Pe 2:2-3**
3. Paul also warned of those who lead many astray - **Ac 20:29-30**
4. The Spirit also expressly warned of such an apostasy –
1 Ti 4:1-3
-- **Where false teaching occurs, the temple of God is being destroyed!**

C. THROUGH SLOTHFUL SERVICE...

1. The slothful person is a brother to one who is a great destroyer - **Pro 18:9**
2. The devastating effect of sloth can be vividly illustrated
 - a. By Solomon, in the book of Proverbs - **Pro 24:30-34**
 - b. By the illustrating the church as a wagon, where some help by pulling or pushing, while others simply go along for the ride, making travel difficult through their dead weight
3. Thus the need for diligent, fervent service to the Lord - **Ro 12:11**
4. Instead of sluggishness, we ought to serve with faith and patience - **He 6:12**
-- **Where slothful service is found, the temple of God is being destroyed!**

http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/1cor/1co3_16.htm

Thomas Leake:

Introduction: Evangelicals have not had a high view of the church; tend to have less formal and more transient connections to their local church; have reacted against Roman Catholicism with its excesses of traditionalism and sacramentalism; What has been lost is the importance of the sacraments, of church discipline and membership requirements.

I. (:16) The Exceptional Nature of the Church

“Don’t you know” – tone of Rebuke; they should know these truths;

God is omnipresent; but He chooses to make His presence manifest at certain special places and times – cf. in the Heavens where His glory is manifested in a special way (**Rev 5:13; Acts 7:55**)

Why does God need a temple on earth? So that God can dwell with people – track the history of God meeting with people

- **Gen. 3:8** – regular time and place for meeting
- until the Fall when man was removed from the presence of God
- **Ps 16:11; Is. 59:2; Gen. 8:20; 12:7**
- significance of the altar = where God connected with man in his sinful state

- Significance of the Tabernacle = portable and mobile – **Ex. 25:9**
 - **Heb. 8:5** – a blueprint of heavenly reality
 - **Ex. 40:34-38; Lev. 10:2**
- If you mess with the presence of God = serious matter; end up burned
- **2 Chron. 7:1-2**
- Immanuel = bringing the presence of God down to man; pitched a tent and dwelt among men so we could see glory of God – **John 1:14; Col. 2:9**

How did the church become the temple of God? On Day of Pentecost when after body of Christ (= temple of God) was crucified and raised and ascended to heaven, Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on the church; now we house the presence of God; only believers are the channel for how people can connect to the presence of God (**Eph 2:19-22**)

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit corporately; we all fit together.

Cf. many false temples in Corinth; we are to be Holy = set aside to God for His purposes, His use.

Holiness not defined by externals; but a matter of the heart and mindset and practice daily; a burning passion to see Christ exalted in our lives; getting along with others in the body of Christ; not fighting each other.

II. (:17) The Extraordinary Defense of the Church

Keyword = “*destroy*” – used for ruining a house, a marriage; seducing a virgin; spoiling milk; mixing colors

Speaking of something that goes way beyond just the shoddy workmanship and no rewards of **vs. 15**.

Universal church is ultimately indestructible; but here talking about the local church – **Ezra 7:23; 2 Kings 23:19ff**

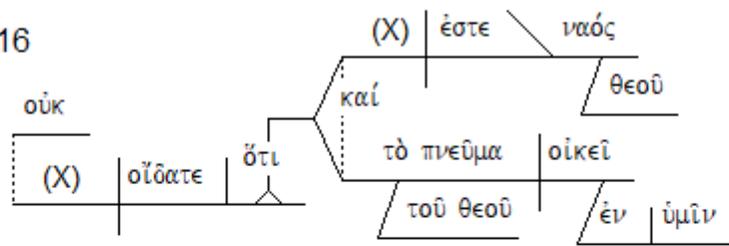
There is Violence in zeal for God

Apostle Paul felt great grace and mercy of God because he had been actively trying to destroy the church of Christ.

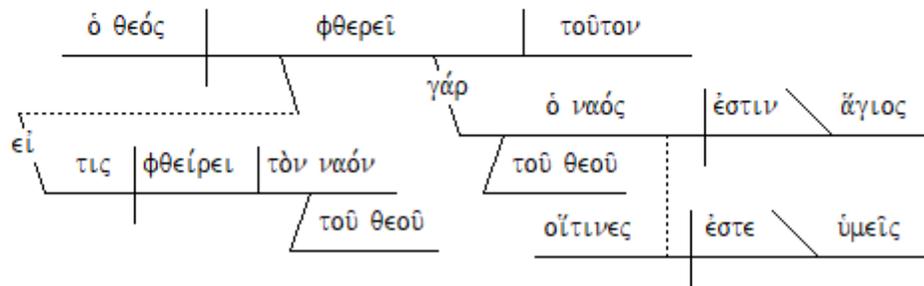
Don't tamper with God's holy Word either.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

1Co 3:16



1Co 3:17



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

TITLE: GOD'S WISDOM ALWAYS TRUMPS MAN'S WISDOM

BIG IDEA:

TWO FOOLISH MISTAKES THAT UNDERMINE GOD'S WISDOM AND CAUSE DIVISION WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH

INTRODUCTION:

In this section Paul has already shown how the church must be built on the wisdom of God rather than human wisdom. His goal is to combat divisions that were forming in the church of Corinth where believers were dividing into factions based on their attraction to the preaching style and personality of specific gifted leaders. There were also false teachers whose motive was to destroy the temple of God (the church) by substituting their own religious philosophies for the authoritative Word of God. The only safeguard for the church was to humbly rely on the revealed wisdom of God as contained in Scripture. This approach stands directly in opposition to the sophisticated educational and philosophical and psychological systems of human wisdom.

This message has application to unbelievers who need to renounce their worldly thinking in order to be filled with God's wisdom as well as to believers who need to guard against worldly wisdom infiltrating and harming the church.

David Prior: Those who are truly wise in God's sight are those who deliberately reject such worldly wisdom and adopt an attitude to people and to things which everyone else will call foolish (**18**). This attitude sees nothing as grounds for boasting, because everything and everybody is a gift from God to undeserving sinners – including apostles and teachers like Paul, Apollos and Cephas, not to mention the whole wide world, life and death, the present and the future. So it is totally out of place to boast about people and things which, quite undeservedly, have been placed in our laps by a lavishly generous God. Indeed, concludes Paul, the fact that they belong to us as gifts of his grace must be held firmly in the context that we belong to Another – to Christ himself: *you belong to Christ* (**23**).

Warren Wiersbe: Fallen, sinful humanity tends to be afflicted with one of two great sicknesses.

- One is pride and the feeling of self-sufficiency,
- and the other is insecurity and the feeling of inferiority.

Both groups seek to heal their problems by **boasting**, either in themselves or in others. Both problems are evidence of self-deception, which Paul warns us about in **3:18**. At this point, the only cure for these deadly illnesses is the grace of God found in Christ and him crucified. Grace cures pride and insecurity. Grace will lead you to humility: I need help. Grace will lead you to the cross: there is help. Both will lead you to boast, not in yourself or any mere human but only in Christ. All things are yours in him. Be wise in the eyes of God and look to and boast only in Jesus.

Dan Nighswander: Verses 18-23 recapitulate what has already been written, serving as a summary, lest the main points be lost in the detail. Paul reiterates that

- (1) human wisdom is different from God's wisdom and does not impart status in the faith community (underscored with supporting quotations from **Job 5:13a** and **Ps 94:11** [slightly modified]);
- (2) it is futile to boast about human leaders, for all members of the assembly have equal claim on all who have been and are its leaders and teachers; and
- (3) in any case, the leaders and their teachings all are subordinate to Christ [crucified], and that Christ [and the congregation] belong to God.

What is new in this passage is the **personalization of the challenge**. Earlier, Paul had asked abstractly and rhetorically, *Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age?* (1:20), but now he personalizes the point: *If any [singular] of you [plural] think you [singular] are wise . . .* (3:18 NIV). To believe oneself wise is deception, Paul declares; and it is self-deception, it is not perpetrated by "outsiders" who have come into the assembly to deceive the believers (Fee: 163n445).

Paul Gardner: In 3:16-17 Paul had shown the danger of destroying God's temple through bad workmanship that is not in accord with its foundation, Jesus Christ. The next section draws together what Paul has been saying and makes his application specific. It falls naturally into two parts, with the flow of Paul's thought indicated by his use of five imperatives.

The first section (3:18-23) is introduced with an imperative ("*let no one deceive himself*"; v. 18), which returns the thought to the comparison of "wisdoms." The Corinthians are asked to be honest in their self-assessment. Self-deception can only be overcome by facing up to the reality that what is wise in the world's eyes is foolishness to God. Two further imperatives drive the point home: "*Let him become a fool*" (v. 18) and "*Let no one boast*" (v. 21a). Those who think they are wise in the world's eyes should first become fools to become truly wise. Any who wish to boast in human leaders should remember they belong to Christ.

The second section (4:1-5) shows that ultimately only God commends wise leadership. It is introduced by another imperative that exhorts the Corinthians to think about apostolic leadership in terms of service for Christ. These servants must be found trustworthy, but they are accountable to their "lord" and him alone. Paul's application by means of a fifth imperative in the series is that it is not for them to judge. The Lord will reveal all when he comes.

Leadership Must Be Seen in the Light of God's Wisdom (3:18-23)

- a. Let Them Not Be Deceived (3:18)
- b. Let Them Become "Fools" (3:19-20)
- c. Let Them Not Boast in Their Leadership (3:21-22)
- d. They Belong to Christ (3:23)

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Worldly wisdom fuels competition in the church and causes Christians to forget they have everything in Christ.

I. Do Not Deceive Yourself; Know What True Wisdom Is (3:18).

II. Remember, God Sees Every Action and Knows Every Thought (3:19-20).

III. Enjoy Every Blessing of God Because All Things Belong to You (3:21-23).

I. (:18-20) FOOLISH MISTAKE #1 – THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF SELF

David Garland: Those who are wise in their own eyes have not yet come to terms with the fact that they still have to reckon with God, who makes human wisdom look foolish. Paul assumes that human judgments are inherently skewed until they are set aright by God’s Spirit. Consequently, humans must empty themselves of their own wisdom to be filled with God’s wisdom (**Calvin** 1960: 80)

To make this point, Paul cites two passages from Scripture. The first, from **Job 5:13** (see additional note), pictures a hunter stalking prey and capturing it. God catches the crafty with their own craftiness (*πανουργία*, *panourgia*), a term Paul uses negatively elsewhere (**2 Cor. 4:2; 11:3; Eph. 4:14**). They are too clever for their own eternal good and always get trapped in their own schemes and ambitions. Ironically, this quotation proves its point, since it comes from Eliphaz, whose “wise” counsel is ultimately discredited. The second quotation, from **Psalm 94:11** (93:11 LXX), asserts that the Lord knows our thoughts and that they are futile. Paul adds to the quotation the thoughts “*of the wise*” (cf. **Ps. 94:8**). Although God’s wisdom is hidden to humans except through revelation (**2:16**), human thoughts are not hidden to God. **Fee** (1987: 152) makes the important observation that these verses form a counterpoint to **1:18–25**, where Paul declares that what God does looks foolish to the world. Here the tables are turned, and what the clever think and do looks foolish to God. The command “*Let no one boast in humans*” (**3:21a**) resonates with the companion motifs that no one is to boast in the presence of God (**1:29**) and that one can legitimately boast only in the Lord (**1:31**; cf. **Gal. 6:14**). Boasting in leaders not only divides and destroys community, but also glorifies oneself before God—a foolhardy thing to do.

A. (:18a) Clear Warning – Human Wisdom Is Attractive and Seductive -- (Exalt the Word of God and the Foolishness of the Cross Rather than Human Wisdom)

“Let no man deceive himself.”

It is an easy sell for Satan to try to convince men that their own opinions have merit and that they can rely on their own powers of logic and argumentation.

B. (:18b) Consistent Antidote: Acquiring God’s Wisdom Requires Forsaking Human Wisdom (this antidote works for everyone, everywhere, all time)

1. Pride Associated with Human Wisdom (“*knowledge puffs up*”)
“*If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age*”

Gordon Fee: They think of themselves as wise, as having arrived at knowledge (8:2), and as being spiritual (14:37). That is precisely their problem. And in each case Paul must disabuse them of such opinions; otherwise the church is up for grabs. . . . Paul is an eschatological man, and this age is under God’s judgment and on its way out (cf. 1:20, 27–29; 2:6, 8). . . . God’s people must abandon confidence in the securities of the present age; they must trust in God’s folly -- “*such a person should become a ‘fool’*” — and thereby become truly wise. Nothing new is said here; this is simply the preceding argument (1:18 – 3:4) reinforced.

2. Humility Required for Acquiring God’s Wisdom
“*let him become foolish that he may become wise.*”

Richard Hays: In the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 3, Paul reprises the themes that he has developed in the letter up to this point. The themes of wisdom and folly are revisited in 3:18–21a, with a couple of new twists. This time, rather than merely making descriptive statements about what God has done to confound the purveyors of human wisdom, Paul pointedly summons his readers to **examine themselves** and respond: “*If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise*” (v. 18). Here, he says in effect, is a **self-diagnostic test**: Do you think that you are wise in this age? If so, this message is for you. In order to become wise, you are going to have to give up your “*wisdom.*”

C. (:19-20) Clinching Explanation: God’s Wisdom Always Trumps Human Wisdom

Richard Hays: Paul once again appeals to Scripture in verses 19–20 to demonstrate the futility of human wisdom. This time, however, rather than repeating any of the texts he cited earlier (1:19; 1:31; 2:9; 2:16) he adduces two completely different texts (**Job 5:12–13** and **Ps. 94:11**)—thereby heightening the impact of his assault on wisdom by suggesting the wider range of Scripture’s witness in support of his case.

1. Thesis Stated
“*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God*”

Robert Gundry: “*The wisdom of this world* [that is, of unbelievers, who consider the proclamation of Christ crucified to be foolishness] *is* [itself] *foolishness alongside God*” in the sense that God, the all-wise, considers it foolishness. The quotation of **Psalm 94:11** then explains why he considers the world’s wisdom to be foolishness. He does, because he recognizes it to be what it truly is: “trickery” and “contrivances” designed to win fame and fortune by means of philosophical eloquence. And he describes the contrivances as “inconsequential” because they bring no benefit in the long run, that is, for eternity (compare the “loss” of “a wage” in 3:14–15).

Daniel Akin: The world delights in power and might. God works in weakness and suffering. The wisdom of this world mocks the cross. The wisdom of God glories in the cross. In terms of ministry, God works through servants, not superstars. He works through the nobodies, rarely the somebodies (**1:26-29**). God operates in a great reversal of values and norms. This is true wisdom. Don't be deceived and led away from the wisdom of the cross. The crucified life must accompany us all the days of our lives (**Mark 8:34**). The crucified life gives us new eyes through which we can see clearly.

2. Thesis Supported from 2 OT Quotes – “For it is written”

a. (**Job 5:13**) Catches the Crafty

“He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”

b. “*and again*” (**Psalm 94:11**) Frustrates the Futile

*“The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise,
that they are useless.”*

II. (:21-23) FOOLISH MISTAKE #2 – THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF ANY PROMINENT MEN (NOTABLE TEACHERS, SPIRITUAL LEADERS, ETC.)

Adewuya: The following question is always asked: **who do you belong to?** Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that they neither belonged to him nor to Apollos. It is not right for a church to replace the word of God with human wisdom and leaders. Men or women, committees, executives, and board members must never be allowed to take over the leadership of the Holy Spirit. God provides human leaders for his church. They are to build up the whole church in a spiritual way. However, when the churches or individual believers become enslaved, as it were, to human leadership (something I have seen to be prevalent in Africa, and particularly in my home country of Nigeria), they not only miss the blessing of God, but they mar the work of the churches, and this cannot be done with impunity.

Craig Blomberg: **Verses 21–23** highlight a final reason for the futility of such attitudes: the Corinthians have everything they could legitimately need or want in Jesus. Indeed, Paul turns their slogans upside down. They do not belong to human leaders; those leaders, as servants (**v. 5**), belong to them, as does everything else in creation, present and future, inasmuch as they are in Christ who shares in all the Father's sovereignty (cf. **Rom. 8:38–39**).

Richard Hays: We might expect the chapter to end at this point, but Paul instead offers a final rhetorical flourish in **verses 21b-23**. In order to appreciate the impact of this conclusion, we need to know that it was a universal maxim of Greco-Roman popular philosophy—particularly among the Cynics and Stoics—that “**the wise man possesses all things.**” For example, the great Roman orator Cicero, describing the philosophy of the Stoics, writes as follows: “Then, how dignified, how lofty, how consistent is the character of the Wise Man as they depict it! ... Rightly will he be said to own all things, who alone knows how to use all things” (De Finibus 3.22.75). Or again, Paul's

contemporary Seneca repeatedly quotes the dictum that “all things belong to the wise man,” and devotes a long discussion to refuting objections to this claim (De Beneficiis 7.3.2–7.4.3). So when Paul declares, “*All things are yours*” (1 Cor. 3:21b), he appears to be making a major concession to the Corinthians’ self-identification as *sophoi*. By now, however, we will not be surprised to discover that the concession is tactical and ironic. Paul continues, “*all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas.*” If you are really wise, Paul suggests, why are you saying “*I belong to Paul*” and so on? In fact, Paul and all those other leaders should belong to you! Then, after just a slight pause to let that thrust sink in, Paul expands the list of things that belong to the Corinthians: not just the leaders, but the world or life or death or things present or things to come! If you are really wise, Paul reiterates in **verse 22**, “*all belong to you,*” just as the philosophers say. Now a longer pause for effect, and then the last devastating twist: “*And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*”

A. (:21a) Clear Warning – Our Natural Tendency is to Place Undue Dependence on Specific Visible Human Leaders

“*So then let no one boast in men.*”

Doug Goins: The point is that if we give ultimate authority to any human being in our lives, even someone who is spiritually sensitive, trustworthy, and mature, we're being much too limiting. We are to no longer place our confidence in the impact that human beings can have on us.

D. A. Carson: It is wrong because the focus is wrong; the concentration is on some human being and not on the Lord God . . . the second reason why it is wrong to boast about some human leader or other is that it cuts you off from the wider heritage that is rightfully yours. (*The Cross*, 85–86)

Paul Gardner: Any “*boast*” will only ever be in the Lord himself for those who truly have understood the message of Christ crucified. Paul’s aim is unity, but this means above all understanding God and his ways, and so he returns to his theological basis once more as he states why any human dependence upon human wisdom must be eliminated from the thinking of God’s people. The next sentence begins with “*for,*” indicating the reason for not boasting in human leaders and their ways.

B. (:21b-22) Consistent Antidote: Embrace all that God has Provided for All Believers

(this antidote works for everyone, everywhere, all time)

1. There are No Second Class Believers – So no need to choose up sides
“*For all things belong to you*”

You are just missing out on the riches of all that God has provided for you when you focus attention on loyalty to one key leader.

David Gardner: The Corinthians were claiming too little, since “*all things are yours.*” They possess all things, however, only because they belong to Christ. Their relationship to apostles and teachers comes under the scope of the lordship of Christ, just as their possession of the world does (Byrne 1987: 85). Christians do not belong to those who passed on and interpreted the foundations of the faith, or to those who founded their community, or to those who baptized them. None of these persons was crucified for them, and they were not baptized in their name (1:13). Consequently, they should not say, “*I belong to Paul,*” but, “*Paul belongs to me.*” That puts teachers in their proper role as servants (4:1). He expands the list beyond ministers, however. They do not belong to life, as if this life were all there is; nor do they belong to death, as if death brought an end to the Christian’s life in Christ. Christians are not in bondage to the things that are, or to the things to come (cf. Rom. 8:38). In setting up a chain, he argues that all things belong to them because they belong to Christ and because Christ belongs to God, who is sovereign over all things. As Thiselton (2000: 327) explains it, “The Christian shares in the Lordship of Christ whereby creation and the church are restored into cooperative agencies for the well-being of humankind and for the glory of God-in-Christ, set within the providential dimension of the new order in Christ.”

2. Delineation of these precious “all things”

- a. “*whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas*”
- b. “*or the world or life or death*”
- c. “*or things present or things to come*”

Paul Gardner: Paul returns to his illustrative list of leaders, mentioning Peter again for the first time since 1:12. This mention of Peter probably simply serves to draw everything together. It is unlikely, as noted above on 1:12, that there was a specific group of people following Paul or Peter. What is noticeable here is how expansive and wide reaching this list is. Paul moves his readers far beyond thinking of particular leaders to thinking about what is the total inheritance of God’s people. Instead of the individualistic approach of saying something like “I am of Paul,” the church is told, “*All things are yours!*”

3. Repeating the Theme: There are No Second Class Believers
“*all things belong to you*”

Doug Goins: Twice he makes the powerful statement, “*...All things belong to you....*” Either this is some exaggerated religious cliché or it’s literally true. And in fact we have riches that we don’t understand or take advantage of. We sell them much too short. We’re willing to give them up to follow some human leadership or some human opinion or theory. In the New Testament there is a consistent pattern of emphasis on the truth that because we have life in Jesus Christ, we have everything. Paul writes in **Romans 8:16-17**, “*...We are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ....*” He also says in **8:32**, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?*”

There is no limitation on what will give us a life of health and wholeness. God has given us every resource that we can imagine in this inheritance with Jesus Christ.

Gordon Fee: These final words come close to doxology: “*All things are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.*” As already noted, this affirmation serves as the ultimate theological basis for what has preceded. It serves also as its proper qualification. Paul’s point is not that “all things are yours” willy-nilly, or selfishly, or in the same sense as they were to the Stoic, who regarded “possession of all things” as making one “self-sufficient” -- and therefore ultimately independent and self-centered. “*All things are yours*” because you belong to Christ; and all things are his (cf. **15:23–28**). Thus it is only in Christ that the believer possesses all things; but in him the believer does indeed possess all things.

C. (:23) Clinching Explanation: Focus must ultimately be on Boasting in the Headship of Christ and the Fatherhood of God – not Boasting in Man

“and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”

Warren Wiersbe: “How rich we are in Christ! If all things belong to all believers, then why should there be competition and rivalry?” (*Be Wise*, 50).

Dan Nighswander: Paul continues, saying that the readers and their leaders belong to Christ and ultimately to God (v. **23**). In the face of that realization, the ground of their quarrelsomeness is swept away, and they are left in humbled recognition of their self-deception (v. **18**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the fundamental presuppositions of those who embrace worldly wisdom?
- 2) What type of suffering and rejection is involved in becoming a fool for the sake of Christ?
- 3) What can we learn from the OT example of Haman in the book of Esther regarding how God turns the craftiness of the schemers back on themselves?
- 4) How can we address our insecurities with the knowledge of all that we possess in Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R.C. H. Lenski: But the real danger that lurks in this conceit of deeming oneself wise is not so much in being filled (subjectively) with a false idea concerning oneself but in the

fact (objectively) that this worldly wisdom detracts from Christ and thus destroys that on which all salvation and all true wisdom depend, namely the cross of Christ, **1:17**. Hence also the way in which to escape the dangers of this conceit is not by trying to supplement the world's wisdom by adding some of the wisdom of Christ to it, or vice versa, but only in utterly casting aside the spurious wisdom, in no longer holding to any of it, and thus in actually becoming a fool.

Tom Leake: (vv. 18-20) The Foolishness of Educated Unbelievers (2/25/07)

Introduction: Problem with unbelievers = something has happened to their thinking at a fundamental level; to be an unbeliever is actually against Reason; This will be an apologetic message (not apologizing for the gospel)

Apologetics = Companion of Evangelism; Why we believe what we believe

Basic False Presupposition of Unbelievers = You ought to be thinking for yourself; don't let anyone else tell you what to believe

Mankind intended by God to be rational and logical; but Reason not intended to be Supreme; only way we can know ultimate truth = revelation of truth from the Supreme Being to a lesser mind; God must tell men things he cannot figure out for himself; Man was created to be Dependent in his own thinking

Satan's message has always been: "Don't listen to God . . . Think for yourself".

God is not real impressed with the independent thought process of man in his educational pursuits.

Some inside the church at Corinth had embraced worldly thinking; this led to divisions and problems.

The thinking of God's people must first be correct in order to have healthy relationships

Two Simple and Direct Components to Approach to Ultimate Truth

I. (:18) God's Commands – there are two presented here

A. "*Don't Deceive Yourself*" – Renounce Self-Deception

2 Thess 2:3 – false teachers can deceive; **2 Cor. 11:3** – Satan is the master deceiver;

Rom. 16:8 – others can deceive us

Here talking about Self-Deception

Illustration of American Idol – ultimate self deception – somebody needs to tell these people they cannot sing.

When it comes to eternal truth and your eternal destiny, self deception is a major problem.

Theme repeated to the Corinthians: **8:2; 14:37**

The worldly wise can try to pass themselves off as balanced, objective, open-minded, humble, reasonable – but they have the spirit of "I already know" – when you confront them with God's Word, they show their true colors quickly – become quite close-minded.

Def. of a Humble Mind = when it bumps into the Mind of God it submits

B. "*Be a Fool*"

Must understand the context of this command – who it is addressed to and why; God not commanding people to be stupid.

You must admit that of yourself you do not know the truth.

1) Renounce your human wisdom

Start all over to be filled with the wisdom of God.

2) Submit your mind to Divine Revelation

Revelation from God does not eliminate Human Reason, it establishes it; only the Bible can bring us the Mind of God.

3) Accept what you yourself might think to be foolish

Prov 3:7-8 – “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding*”

4) You will have to go in the direction of the Wisdom of the Cross that does not have a lot of prestige associated with it (**1:18-23**).

“*We preach Christ crucified*” – never change the message; not out to give people what some survey says they want.

Must kill your Pride; involves an emptying process – get rid of wrong presuppositions and base thinking – Where is the wisdom of men?? Amounts to nothing.

II. (:19-20) God’s Reasons

A. *God is the Standard* – Calls the world’s wisdom foolishness

All kinds of evidence (fulfilled prophecy, archaeology, etc.) – but in the end it is a circular argument – but God knows and He has revealed the truth

Only the Mind of God can give certainty on spiritual issues.

1:25 – God turns around this statement – you must choose sides; there will soon come a time when you will have to reckon with God whether you want to or not; there will no longer be any patience with independent thinking.

Scientists cannot measure the age of the earth without making some presuppositions; these are essentially guesses and are not equal to science.

What does God know?? Who is He?? **Prov. 3:19; Dan. 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:25; 1 Sam. 2:3**

B. *Two Supporting Facts*

1) God Catches the Wise in Their Craftiness

Image of hunting; grips them with death grip using their very own arguments turned against them – **Jer. 2:19; Ps. 5:10** [example of Haman on gallows]

2) God Knows Their Reasonings = Judges them to be Vain = empty, leading to nothing;

Quoted from LXX

Heb. 4:13 –nothing catches God off guard

Conclusion: The beliefs of unbelievers are arbitrary and inconsistent; listen to them; understand what they are saying; play that back to them and challenge their own inconsistent logic; they are advocating what they want to be true

Prov. 26:5 – **Geisler** has book on *Christian Apologetics*

Key = What are you going to do about Jesus?

Key verse = **John 7:17** – you must place your faith in Christ; God will reveal to you the veracity of His revelation [self-authenticating]

John Piper: First in **verses 18-20** Paul gives at least two reasons why we should give up boasting in men, particularly in the wisdom of men, either in ourselves or vicariously in our favorite teacher.

The first reason is that the wisdom of man that supports human boasting is not really wisdom, but foolishness. **Verse 18b-19a:** "*If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.*"

We saw all this spelled out in chapter 1, especially **verse 18:** "*The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.*" And in **verse 25:** "*The foolishness of God is wiser than men.*" So if you want to be really wise, Paul says, wise in God's eyes, you have to believe things and do things that the world will regard as foolish -- that a crucified Jewish teacher is the Lord of the universe; and that the way to joy is the Calvary road.

The world's wisdom that supports boasting and accents man's self-sufficiency, is no wisdom at all. So don't boast in men.

The second reason to give up boasting in men is that it is a dead end street. **Verse 19b** (a quote from **Job 5:13**) "*He catches the wise in their craftiness,*" and (a quote from **Psalms 94:11**), "*The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.*" In other words the wisdom of man may get him to the moon, but it gets him know where in what matters most: his relation to God. Human wisdom feeds pride and pride drives a person away from God. And what is there away from God? A snare and futility. A dead end street.

So those are the two reasons for not boasting in men that come before the command in **verse 21a**. The wisdom of the world is not really wisdom but folly, and it's a dead end street. If you ponder what it is about this worldly wisdom that makes it foolish and futile the answer of **verses 18-20** is that it is self-exalting. You can see that in **verse 18b:** "*If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.*" So the problem is that people who are exalting themselves: thinking themselves wise in this age.

So in **verses 18-20**, the root of boasting seems to be an inflated view of one's own wisdom, or perhaps of one's teacher's wisdom. And so Paul opposes it by saying that you are not as wise as you think you are and your supposed wisdom is a dead end street.

Now this is very different from what we see in **verses 21b-23**. Paul is also giving reasons for not boasting after his command not to boast, but it looks as though the root of the problem is very different from the root in **verses 18-20**.

The reason Paul gives in **verse 21b** for not boasting is this: "*For all things are yours.*" This is strange at first thought. It sounds reassuring, comforting. But the reasons for not boasting in **verse 19** and **20** were threatening: "*God catches the wise in their craftiness.*" And: "*The thoughts of the wise are futile.*" The tone is one of warning and alarm.

But the tone now after the command not to boast (in **v. 21b**) is reassuring; it's full of relief and hope.

The first argument goes like this: Don't boast in men because man's wisdom is folly and God traps people who take that path (**v. 19**). The second argument goes like this: Don't boast in men because all things are yours (**v. 21**).

In the first argument the root of boasting seems to be self-exaltation ("I am wise in the eyes of the world!" **v. 18**). But now what is the root of boasting in this second argument in **verse 21b**?

Suppose you are standing in the hall bragging about your Sunday School teacher and putting another teacher down, and I walk up to you and say (trying to paraphrase Paul's argument here), "Why do you feel the need to talk like that? Don't you know that everything in this universe is yours? Don't you know that every teacher in this church belongs to you – and the world and life and death and present and future?"

What's the root of boasting that I am trying to sever in saying that? What am I assuming -- what's Paul assuming -- about the cause of boasting when I say, "Don't you know that all things are yours? You don't need to boast in man"?

I think Paul is assuming that the root of boasting is a feeling of insecurity. In other words, Paul pictures the boasters as people who feel threatened or endangered by hostile or hopeless circumstances. They feel that some other teacher besides their own might shine brighter and call some of their distinctives into question. They feel that the world and unknown future events and death itself are menacing. And so they try to shore up their security and by touting their own wisdom or the wisdom of their leader.

And so Paul says that the problem is that they don't realize the massive -- and I mean massive -- security of belonging to Christ. Why stoop to boast in men when all things -- absolutely all things -- are yours? Which I think means (on the basis of **Romans 8:28** and **32**) all things work together as your servants for your good.

Now let's try to put these two arguments together. How do they fit? Is Paul talking about two different people? In **verses 18-20** is he talking about a person who feels self-sufficient, and in **verses 21-23** about a person who feels insecure? Does he have two different kind of people in view: one cocky and the other fearful?

I don't think so? There is no indication of that in the text. He warns the self-sufficient who proudly boast in men how foolish and dangerous that is (**vv. 18-20**); then he tells

them not to boast like this (v. 21a); and then without any turn to another group he says in v. 21b, "*For all things are yours.*"

So how can the same people be addressed as though the root of boasting were both cocky self-sufficiency and fearful insecurity? I think the answer is found in the first line of **verse 18**: "*Let no one deceive himself!*"

Cocky, self-sufficient people, who boast in the wisdom of men, have deceived themselves. How? By denying their deeply rooted insecurity. These aren't two kinds of people in this text. They are one kind of people driven by two contrary forces held together by the glue of self-deception.

One force is a built-in sense of insecurity, and vulnerability, and fear in a world beyond their control and threatening to their happiness. This comes with our creaturehood and is compounded by our sin. Everyone of us has it. The other force driving these boasters is the feeling that we have got things under control -- that man is the master of his fate, that human wisdom will suffice to solve our problems, that we have got it all together -- or we know someone who does!

And the glue that holds these forces together in one heart? Self-deception. "*Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.*"

So when Paul wants to dismantle the soul-destroying, community-rending, God-dishonoring pride at Corinth he must do at least two things not just one thing. He must overcome the deception of human self-sufficiency, and he must solve the problem of human insecurity. That is what he is trying to do here in this text.

Let me put it another way. Human pride is rooted in two kinds of self-deception. One is the deception that I can handle my own problems. And the other is the deception that nobody can handle my problems.

Or to put it another way, there are two ways for the pride of man to dishonor Christ. One is to feel no need for him. And the other is to feel your need is so great he can't meet it. The one says, I don't need a crucified Christ to help me. The other says a crucified Christ can't help me. The one looks strong. The other looks weak. Both are demeaning to the grace of God.

Why? Because the grace of God means these two things: 1) we do need help, let's admit it. And 2) the help is there, let's accept it. Grace always means these two things: humility, we do need help; and encouragement, the help is there.

Indictment and deliverance! That's the work of saving grace! Indictment: "If you think you are wise become a fool!" Deliverance: "All things are yours!"

Watch Paul the master-pastor and counselor bring his counsel to a great God-centered end.

To the self-sufficient he says, "Your wisdom is folly. Give it up. Become a fool. Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of God."

And then to the fearful and insecure and threatened he says, "Boasting in men is a cheap substitute for inheriting the universe. Don't you realize that I have made all things to serve your joy.

- Every teacher exists for your benefit.
- The whole world in all its secular corruption conspires in vain against your soul, for Christ has overcome the world (**John 16:33**).
- The sting of death is gone your last enemy unwittingly must serve your entrance into glory.
- Nothing present and nothing future can separate you from the love of God.
- Those whom he justified he will glorify.
- 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him freely give us all things?'"

And just to make sure that we don't make this grace a ground for boasting in ourselves, Paul adds in **verse 23**: "*And you are Christ's.*" In other words, the only reason any of these benefits comes to us is because we are his. Christ has made all the universe to exist for our joy, because we exist for his. Therefore let him who boasts boast in the Lord! Not in man.

But Paul the master-pastor and counselor is not yet done dealing with the problem of pride. He takes us out of our deception of self-sufficiency. He lifts us up to see the universe as our inheritance. He takes us higher yet to see Christ as the source and goal of it all. But there is one more step. The chapter ends with the words, "*And Christ is God's.*"

In the end Jesus Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father and God the Father will be all in all (**15:28**). "*From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever and ever*" (**Rom. 11:36**).

Ray Stedman: I will never forget in my own life, as a young Christian many years ago, hearing George Beverly Shea sing the words for which he became famous. They spoke volumes to my own heart along this line.

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold.
I'd rather have him than have riches untold.
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.
I'd rather be led by his nail pierced hands
Than to be a king of a vast domain
And be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.*

That is what Paul is talking about. Never mind what the world thinks, never mind what the world says, for the wisdom of the world will prove to be foolish in the end.

Doug Goins: In these first three verses Paul warns them not to be deceived by what appears to be wisdom but really isn't. There are three sobering realities, one in each verse, about worldly wisdom. The first point that Paul makes in **verse 18** is that worldly wisdom leads to self-deception: "If any man thinks that he is wise in this age...." Imagine how much conflict in our church could be avoided if each of us was not so impressed with his own wisdom. It's self-deception, Paul says, to believe that we are wise in terms of any contemporary human wisdom. **C.K. Barrett** writes, "Self-deception is the common fate of those who mistakenly fancy themselves wise; deluded in this, they are deluded in many other matters... They estimate wisdom by the wrong standards. Such men need to take new standards and reverse their judgments." That reversal of judgment is the point Paul makes in the clause "...Let him become foolish...." That means that we are to repent of intellectual pride, to recognize that human wisdom, including our own, is foolishness apart from God. As long as we consider ourselves wise in terms of prevailing standards, it's impossible to become wise in God's ways.

In the last message we defined worldly wisdom as common sense, as the theories of natural man, as fleshly speculation or competing opinions about truth and lies, about reality and fantasy. . .

Paul tells us something else about this wisdom in **verse 19**. He quotes **Job 5:13**: "*He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness.*" It's not just foolish, it's also dangerous. Craftiness means sneakiness, plotting. It looks wise, but it has a hidden agenda. The good news in that quote from Job is that God can see through it. God can thwart the plans of the crafty wise men of the world who have hidden agendas at work. Again, **C.K. Barrett** writes, "The wise are like cunning beasts of prey for whom the hunter is nevertheless too clever."

Paul goes on to point out another sobering reality about worldly wisdom in verse 20. It's totally inadequate to bring us to God, not just initially in salvation, but in understanding God's heart and mind, God's design for human relationships and how we're to live life. The quote, "*The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless,*" is from **Psalms 94:11**. In the context of that verse the psalmist thunders against the intellectually elite and politically powerful. He calls these people who pride themselves on their intellectual prowess "stupid" and "senseless." He says, "*The Lord knows their reasonings.*" The Greek word for reasonings that Paul uses in his paraphrase is

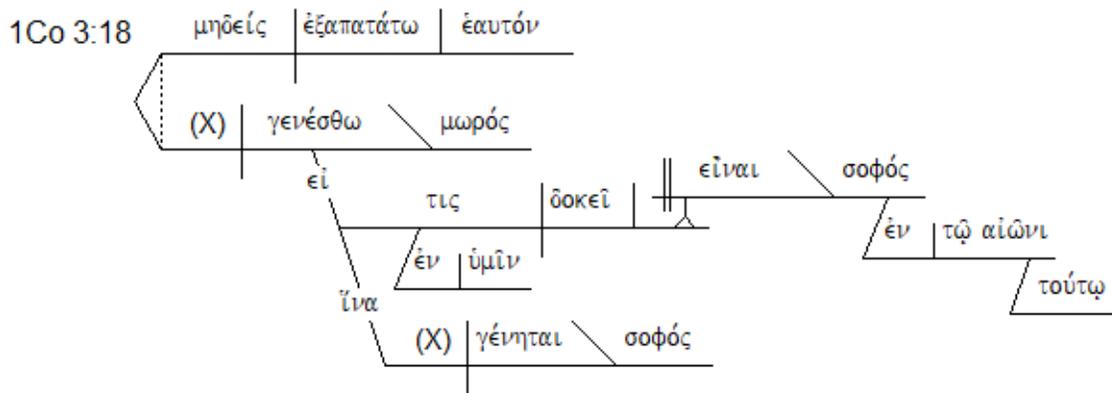
dialogismos, from which we get the word dialogue. The wisdom of the world can be very dialogical or conversational; it can sound very reasonable. But God says at the end of **verse 20** that it ends up being useless. The Hebrew word for *useless* in **Psalm 94** means a puff of air, a little wisp of wind that dissipates. The wisdom of the world won't endure the test of time. . .

The following powerful quotation from **John Stott's** book *Essays in Evangelical Ethics* captures the kind of vision that the apostle wants for the Corinthians, and that he would want for us today. It is the vision of who God is, the breadth of his plan for us, his wisdom, the expansive view of how we ought to live life:

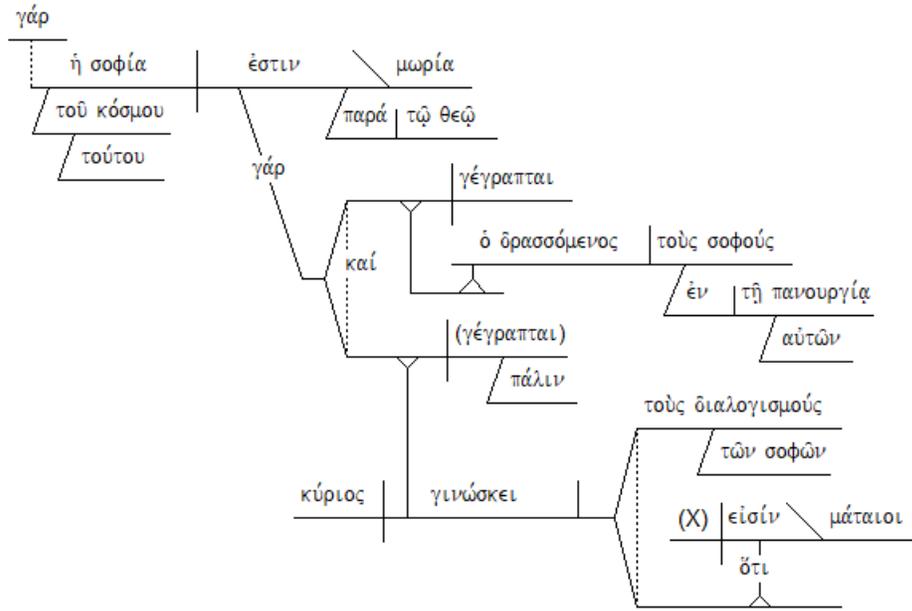
"The vision we need is the vision of God himself; the God of the whole biblical revelation; the God of creation who made all things fair and good, and made man male and female to bear his image and subdue his world; the God of the covenant of grace who in spite of human rebellion has been calling out a people for himself; the God of compassion and justice who hates oppression and loves the oppressed; the God of the incarnation who made himself weak, small, limited and vulnerable, and entered our pain and alienation; the God of resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, and so of universal authority and power; the God of the church or the kingdom community to whom he has committed himself for ever, and whom he sends into the world to live, serve, suffer and die; the God of history who is working according to a plan and towards a conclusion; the God of the eschaton, who one day will make all things new.

There is no room for pessimism here, or for apathy either. There is room only for worship, for expectant faith, and for practical obedience in witness and service. For once we have seen something of the glory of our God, and of the greatness of his commission, we can only respond, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'"

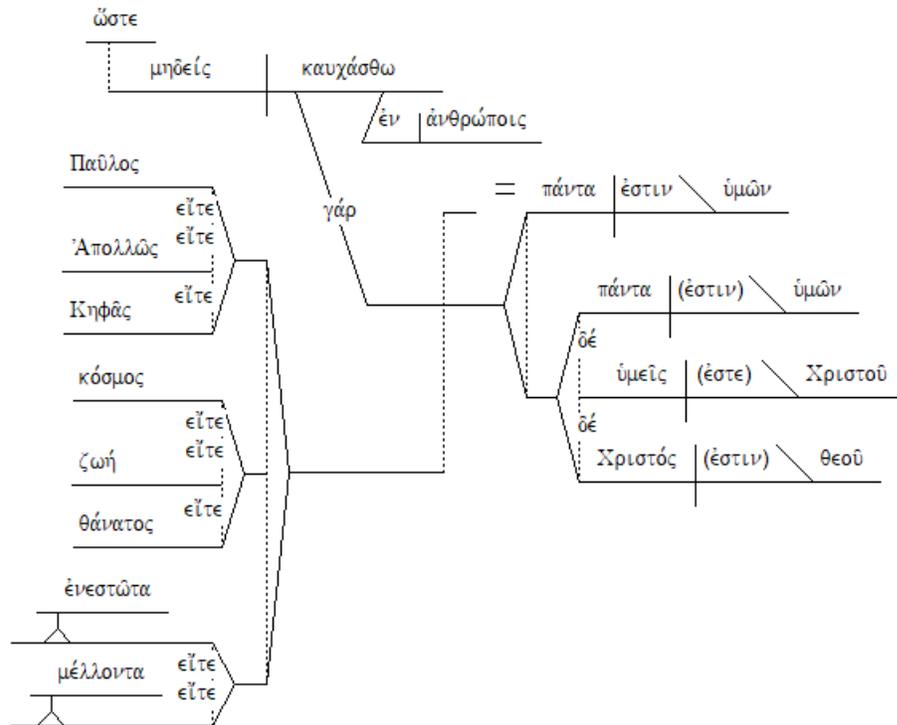
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



1Co 3:19-20



1Co 3:21-23



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

TITLE: PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTERS

BIG IDEA:

THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD IS ALL THAT MATTERS WHEN IT COMES TO ULTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:

We all are used to performance reviews at work. We are used to receiving them – might not like them all that much – if we supervise people, we are also used to giving them. We have a set of criteria that we use to measure performance. Some standards might be more objective and easier to evaluate . . . others are more subjective and take into account a variety of intangible attributes. The Corinthian believers had wrongly established themselves as judges over the effectiveness of the gifted preachers in their church. This had caused them to align with particular personalities in a manner that was divisive. Paul settles the issue decisively by pointing to the ultimate accountability of the Lord when He returns to evaluate the job done by His servants. Faithfulness will be the standard. And the scope of judgment will extend to “*the things hidden in the darkness*” and “*the motives of men’s hearts.*” There is the prospect of great reward and praise in that day; but let no one usurp the Lord’s prerogative of judging His own servants. Christians have an unhealthy bent towards being judgmental in critiquing those who are publicly ministering the Word of God by preaching and teaching. We are charged to be like the Bereans in making sure that the message is in line with the whole of Scripture. But we are not allowed to judge on the basis of motives or personality preferences.

He is not saying that Christian ministers have no earthly accountability within the governance of the local church. He is not saying that we should not examine our own hearts before the Lord and correct any deficiencies brought to light by our conscience as informed by the Holy Spirit. He is addressing the issue of ultimate accountability. How will one minister stack up against another at the end of the day? Why is it wrong for Christians to take it upon themselves to try to judge the ministry work of others when they have no oversight over those ministers? How can Christian ministers become complacent and overconfident if they put too much stock in their own self-evaluation of their own ministries? The one who examines us is the Lord = the one who knows all about us – even to the motives and hidden thoughts of our hearts. When He returns, He will give out the rewards that are appropriate.

Richard Hays: Paul reintroduces the **servant metaphor** here (cf. **3:5**), but now with a different purpose. In **3:5–9**, his point was that God’s servants are all serving a single common purpose; in **4:1–5**, however, his point is that he and the other apostles, as God’s servants, are **accountable to no one but God**. The thing that matters is not whether they are winning popularity contests among the Corinthians but whether they

are **trustworthy** (*pistos*, **4:2**), that is, whether they are following their master's instructions. Thus, their status as servants sets them free from having to court favor in the church. This may seem paradoxical to us, but within the social world of Paul's time, his point was perfectly understandable: Servants or slaves of powerful masters often enjoyed positions of considerable delegated authority, being charged with major administrative responsibility for affairs of the household. Paul's image of the steward (*oikonomos*, **4:1**) evokes this picture of the slave-in-charge. (In a world where there are no longer slaves in charge of big households, we might think analogically of the foreman in charge of a construction crew or the chief of staff in the White House.) The same picture of the trustworthy servant appears in a parable of Jesus: "*Who then is the faithful (pistos) and prudent manager (oikonomos) whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives*" (**Luke 12:42–43**). To be a "*servant of Chnst*" (**1 Cor. 4:1**) is, in Paul's symbolic world, a position of privilege and authority. Thus, Paul uses this image to **assert his independence from the Corinthians' judgments of him and his exclusive accountability to the Lord.**

Mark Taylor: In **4:1–5** Paul recounts how human judgments are a very small matter to him. In saying this he is not trying to challenge the Corinthians in an arrogant way as though he is beyond human scrutiny, nor does it seem that his primary motivation is personal self-defense, a response to those in Corinth seeking to judge him.³⁸⁵ Rather, Paul's chief aim is related to the command of **3:21**, to persuade the Corinthian believers to cease from boasting in men, whether it be Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or their local leaders. Paul wants the Corinthians to become imitators of him as he imitates Christ (**4:6–13, 16–17**) and to understand that the only examination that counts is God's judgment on the Day of the Lord. God alone appraises and discerns accurately the motives of the heart. All human appraisals, including self-appraisals, always fall short. For this reason final judgments must be withheld until the Lord comes (cf. **3:13–17**) when God will bring to light the secret things of darkness and will expose the counsels of the heart. The only "praise" that counts is the praise that comes from God.

I. (:1) THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER – TWOFOLD JOB DESCRIPTION

"Let a man regard us in this manner"

How should Christian ministers want others to view them? What type of job description have the leaders of the church written for themselves? What are they trying to accomplish?

A. Servants of Christ

John MacArthur: Paul expresses his humility by using a word lit. meaning "*under rowers*," referring to the lowest, most menial, and most despised galley slaves, who rowed on the bottom tier of a ship (**9:16**; see **Luk 1:2**; **Ac 20:19**).

Anthony Thiselton: The two Greek words are suggestive in emphasizing respectively the menial service that a relatively low-level slave may give to his or her master, and the management role that a slave who may administer a household, an estate, or a business on behalf of his or her master may equally provide. . .

Paul combines the two themes of the genuine honor of serving and of the need to be responsible and worthy of trust in handling the Lord's affairs. This entails a faithful dispensing of what God has given, not a self-constructed theology of affirmation or self-glory. A chemist or pharmacist is required to administer whatever medicine is prescribed, not to substitute supposed "improvements." Ministry may involve taking delegated responsibility to execute a given purpose.

Paul Gardner: Leaders are servants who work for Christ, and so they should be regarded in this way. "*Servants*" and "*stewards*" (4:1c) both introduce clauses in apposition to "*us*" (hence the accusatives in Greek). The word "*servant*" (ὕπηρέτης) is not used elsewhere in Paul's writings. In 3:5 Paul used a more common word (διάκονος). The word here can simply mean "subordinates. But as the second phrase shows, Paul's thought centers on **servicing Christ in his household.**

Gordon Fee: Thus apostles are to be regarded as "*servants of Christ*," reemphasizing their humble position and their belonging to Christ alone; at the same time they are "*stewards of God's mysteries*" (NRSV), emphasizing both their trusted position and their accountability to God.

B. Stewards of the Mysteries of God

Doug Goins: Paul has already introduced us to the mysteries of God. In 2:7 he is talking about his teaching ministry in Corinth: "...*We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory....*" This mysterious, hidden wisdom isn't understood by the natural man apart from Jesus Christ. It can be known only through divine revelation. It is the Biblical deposit of truth that contains the secrets of life. So a teacher or a preacher in this household of faith is to take God's revealed word and dispense it to the household. We're to administer all of it, to hold nothing back.

James Boyer: The word "*mystery*" in the Bible denotes something which can be known only by revelation. It is not something that can be figured out from reason. It must be told. Christ's servants have been entrusted with a treasure of great truths, previously not known to men but now made known in the gospel. It is their responsibility to administer these treasures according to the instructions and the will of their giver, God.

Craig Blomberg: "*The secret things*" (v. 1b) are "*the mysteries*," as in 2:7—those aspects of the gospel once hidden but now revealed, and centering on the cross of Christ.

Paul Gardner: Paul seeks to achieve two ends at the same time. He must make it clear, firstly, that he and the other apostles or leaders are servants of Christ, and therefore people should not look to them as some form of guru who is to be followed because of their great giftedness or communication skills. They serve a “*Lord*” (vv. 4 and 5) and are answerable to him for their work. But, secondly, he must keep the way open to being able to exercise a genuine apostolic leadership among them. These two clauses taken together help Paul achieve that. They stress that he is a servant, takes orders, and is there to serve Christ and his church. Yet they also reinforce that, as in any household where there would have been many servants, Paul holds a **position of oversight**.

II. (:2) THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE CHRISTAIN MINISTER = FAITHFULNESS = THE ONE ESSENTIAL STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT

“In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

A steward is responsible for the capable administration of the property of another; hence **faithfulness** is the primary standard of evaluation.

- **2 Tim. 2:2**
- **Acts 20:27**

Gordon Fee: Not eloquence, nor wisdom (nor “initiative,” nor “success”—the more standard contemporary requirements), but faithfulness to the trust, is what God requires of his servants. For Paul this means absolute fidelity to the gospel as he received it and preached it (cf. **15:1–11**). His intent, of course, is not to provide a general maxim for Christian ministry—although it is still the only valid criterion—but to set up the singular criterion by which God alone could be his judge and which would therefore rule out the Corinthian “examination” of him and his ministry.

III. (:3-4) THE REVIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER:

A. By Other Believers -- Inconsequential

“But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you,”

Ray Stedman: **Stuart Briscoe** says there are three kinds of congregational pressure --

1. There is adulation, which swells the head;
2. There is manipulation, which ties the hands; and
3. There is antagonism, which breaks the heart.

Preacher needs to guard against getting prideful as well as getting discouraged by the comments of others.

Paul Gardner: The Corinthians, in line with their society, have been seeking after status and stature in the community that were based on deeply false assumptions about what it is to be spiritual. While they have looked to what grace-gifts leaders have received, to rhetorical abilities and the like, Paul has shown them another way, God’s way.

David Garland: He does not assume that the examination by the Corinthians will result in a negative fitness report. It also could be positive. His point, however, is that it makes no difference what the conclusion is, whether he is judged to come up short or lauded with praise. Neither verdict carries weight with God; and, consequently, it does not carry weight with him. He hopes that they will learn to share this attitude.

B. Any Element of Society – Inappropriate / Irrelevant

“or by any human court”

Society can be very unkind in their characterization of preachers.

C. By Self -- Inadequate

“in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted”

John MacArthur: Paul’s own sincere evaluation of his life did not acquit him of all failures to be faithful.

Paul Gardner: Paul’s **self-awareness** is not what finally counts. It is simply a guide as he seeks to be faithful. What counts is the judgment of God, and for that he must rely on God’s mercy and grace. It is interesting here and in the next verse to note that he uses the title “*Lord*.” As the covenant Lord who “*comes*” (v. 5), he alone has the authority to pronounce judgment.

David Prior: The essential ground for Paul’s clear conscience is the fact that God ‘*justifies the ungodly*’ (Rom. 4:5) by virtue of the cross of Christ. So, when Paul says in verse 4 that, because there is nothing on his conscience, he is not thereby justified, he is actually pointing to the only grounds of justification and the only source of a clear conscience – Jesus Christ and him crucified. No wonder he made that the kernel of his preaching.

D. By the Lord -- Indispensable

“but the one who examines me is the Lord”

Daniel Akin: One of the most egregious aspects of judgmentalism is that we put ourselves in the place of God, who is the rightful Judge of us all. **James 4:12** makes this clear: “*There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*” Paul develops this principle in light of how the Corinthians carnally evaluated the worth of different leaders in the church. Paul could not care less about any human assessment. Ultimately God will render an accurate and final judgment of each person’s service.

Paul places things in proper perspective when it comes to how others see him and his ministry for Christ and the church. First, “*It is of little importance to me that I should be judged by you.*” Paul knows what they say about him. He knows their opinion of him.

He considers it, but it does not consume him. Second, it does not matter to him if he is judged by “*any human court.*” Their opinion doesn’t matter all that much either. Anticipating what Paul will say in **verses 4-5**, **Mark Taylor** writes, “A human ‘day’ in court is quite insignificant in comparison with the judgment day of God” (*1 Corinthians*, 114). Third, Paul boldly states, “*I don’t even judge myself.*” He explains what he means in the following verse: “*For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. It is the Lord who judges*” (v. 4). **Tom Schreiner** writes,

Paul is not “*conscious of anything against myself*” (CSB), but his own subjective assessment of his ministry is not decisive, for it is the Lord who gives the definitive word, who assesses (*anakrinō* again) how faithful Paul has been in his ministry. Since the Lord assesses, it follows that he is also the one who “*justifies*” (*dedikaiōmai*) and acquits. Paul reflects, then, on the final day, the day when the Lord will judge ministers in terms of their faithfulness to their stewardship. The Corinthians, then, should not presume to render final judgment on the effectiveness of ministers or anyone else before the time of the final judgment -- the day the Lord returns. The Corinthians are engaging in an assessment of ministers, but they must desist since their knowledge of others is limited and partial. (*1 Corinthians*, 99)

Paul seals his argument in **verse 5** with a command and a theological observation. He commands, “*Don’t judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes.*” Paul bases this command on a theological principle: It is the Lord “*who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the heart.*” Christians are not to make judgments now because they are the wrong judges and because they judge at the wrong time. The Lord is the only rightful Judge, and his second coming signals the right time. This principle also implies that record of our work for Jesus does not end at death! It continues into the future, for good or evil, by how our lives affected others. This realization is an especially somber reality for the servants and managers of Christ.

The theological principle gets to the core of Paul’s concern. Divine judgment, and only divine judgment, will accomplish two things: it “*will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness*” and “*reveal the intentions of the heart.*”

Andrew Noselli: Do not presumptuously judge church teachers, Paul indicates in **1 Corinthians 1:10 – 3:23** that the Corinthians should regard church teachers not as they would a rhetorician but as Christ’s servants. A master would entrust something to a servant, and the servant’s job was to faithfully manage that charge. Paul’s standard of success was not praise from others but whether he faithfully did what his Master commissioned him to do. The Corinthians should not self-righteously judge Paul, because the only judgment that ultimately matters is when God will flawlessly examine his servants after the Lord returns. Those who serve God are accountable only to God. It encourages God’s faithful servants to know that God will graciously praise them – unlike people who presumptuously judge them.

IV. (:5) THE REWARD FOR THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER = COMES ULTIMATELY FROM THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD

A. Proper Time for Ultimate Accountability

1. Not Now = Premature

“Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time”

Mark Taylor: This, of course, does not demand the suspension of all judgment in the present so that there is no discernment whatsoever. Paul explicitly renders judgment against the incestuous man in the next chapter (see **5:3–5**). He asks the Corinthians in **5:12**, *“Are you not to judge those inside?”* And in **6:1–11** he scolds them for taking matters before the secular courts rather than before believers. In **4:1–5**, Paul is speaking of the evaluation of one’s ministry, of faithfulness to the master in the assigned task. Even here there is the necessity of some discernment provided that due consideration is given to its fallible and limited nature before the final judgment.

2. At Christ’s Return = Judgment Seat for Believers

“but wait until the Lord comes”

Adewuya: Paul shows the absurdity of the Corinthians’ eagerness to evaluate his work and that of his fellow workers. If Paul exercises such restraint in evaluating his own work, how much more ought the Corinthians to abstain from such rash judgments? Paul implies that the Corinthians were already judging. Therefore, Paul tells them to wait until the proper time -- that is, the time of the Lord’s return. God has the right to judge, and he will do so. He will bring to light what darkness hides and disclose our inward motives. Those who have been faithful in the service of their Master will receive praise from him when he returns. Paul was confident. He does not think that the outcome of judgment will be negative. He has been faithful. When a minister can focus on the judgment seat of Christ, where he or she is confident of giving an account of his or her ministry before an all-knowing Lord, he or she can discount the tainted and biased criticisms of others.

B. Pervasive Scope of Ultimate Accountability

1. Examining Private and Unknown Areas (as well as Public Ministry)

“who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness”

John MacArthur: Because Paul speaks here of *each man’s praise*, I do not believe *things hidden in the darkness* refers to sins or anything evil, but simply to things presently unknown to us. The passage emphasizes that every believers will have praise, no matter what his works and motives, because *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1)*. All Christians will have some reward and some praise. Who will receive much and who will receive little only God knows. But once the wood, hay, and straw are burned away, the gold, silver, and precious stones will remain to be eternally rewarded.

2. Examining Heart Motives

“and disclose the motives of men’s hearts”

Anthony Thiselton: What is hidden in the present is not only the value of supposed success or failure, but especially **hidden motivations**. The Greek more strictly states that what will be revealed is the wishes or acts of will that proceed from the heart. But heart regularly denotes the seat of desires that lie beneath the surface of the mind (*our inward motives*, REB). . .

That God alone judges human secrets constitutes both a reminder of human accountability before God and a liberating release from trying to make interim self-assessments on the basis of fallible judgments from the self and from others.

C. Personal Praise from the Divine Judge

“and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.”

Richard Hays: Paul’s point is simply that they have arrogated to themselves the right to pass judgment on his work in a way that is inappropriate to their position and impossible for any human being on this side of the parousia. As **C. K. Barrett** notes (104), the most important words in the final sentence of the paragraph are the first and last: *then* (**not now**) each one will receive commendation from *God* (**not from human judges**). The business of praise and blame belongs to God.

David Garland: Paul now specifies what the reward is that he only alluded to in **3:8** and **3:14**. It is praise from God (cf. **Rom. 2:29; 1 Pet. 1:7**). While some today with more materialistic longings might prefer something tangible, receiving praise was one of the highest goals in the ancient world (**Kuck** 1992a: 209; cf. **DeSilva** 2000: 24–27). It helped identify one’s place in society. Praise bestows honor; blame heaps dishonor. **Kuck** (1992a) cites many examples from Greco-Roman literature of persons longing for praise in the afterlife. In the Corinthian context, we may infer that the congregation went to extremes in bestowing praise on individual teachers or leaders for their wisdom while berating others. It resulted in the friction dividing the church. Paul intends to drive home the point that ultimate praise comes from God in the judgment, and it is the only praise that matters.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do we learn from the ministry of Christ about being both a *servant* and a *steward*? What parables of Christ teach us important principles about these two roles?
- 2) Why does Paul not consider himself “*acquitted*” if his conscience was clean?
- 3) What are some instances where I have been involved in *passing judgment before the time* on the Lord’s public ministry servants?

4) Why is it so important to minister from pure motives for the glory of God rather than from any type of selfish ambition?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Ministers are servants God will hold accountable for their good and bad service when Christ returns.

- I. A Minister Is a Servant of God (4:1).
- II. A Minister Is a Manager of the Mysteries of God (4:1-2).
- III. A Minister Will Ultimately Be Judged Only by God (4:3-5).
- IV. A Minister Will Receive His Reward from God (4:5).

Ray Stedman: When I use the term "minister of Christ," I am not speaking of the traditional concept of a full-time employee of a church who is kept around to do the preaching, the teaching, the counseling and to run the mimeograph machine. Unfortunately that is a widespread concept of what the pastor ought to be and I run into it in many places.

This concept, of course, is totally unknown in the New Testament. The idea of having a single pastor, the pastor, is an unbiblical imposition that has come into the church within the past 250 years. A minister of Christ in the New Testament churches was anyone, anyone, who by virtue of a gift of the Spirit was a preacher or a teacher of the Word of God. That is what Paul is talking about here.

There is a sense in which we are all ministers of Christ. Every Christian is in the ministry -- I have said that many times. But there is a special sense -- Paul is dealing with it here -- of those who have the gift of teaching or preaching ("*prophesying*" as it is called in Scripture), and their function within the body of Christ. There are dozens of ministers like that in every church. In fact, here at PBC, since we have stressed some of these things for a long time, there are probably scores, if not hundreds, of people who fulfill the qualifications and the characterization of ministers of Christ as Paul is speaking of them in this particular passage.

Well, how are we to look at people like that, and what are we to think about them? Paul deals with this first.

Who are these people? Should we call them bishops? Are they wardens, as the Episcopalians call them? Are they doctors, rabbis, popes or even senior pastors?

Well, you do not find those titles in the Scriptures. (Bishops are referred to, but not in the usual sense that we think of them today. Bishops were not in oversight over more than one church. They were the equivalent of elders and overseers.)

The word the apostle uses here is a very remarkable one. He says, "*We want you to look at us as servants of Christ.*" The word for servant is the Greek word *huperetes*, which literally means "an under-rower."

Now everyone in Corinth understood what that word meant. Corinth was where the war galleys of the Roman Empire crossed through the isthmus that separated the Ionian Sea from the Aegean Sea, and the Corinthians knew that the lowest deck of a war galley was made of single rows of benches on both sides of the ship where the rowers sat. Then on a little deck raised up above them all, so that each rower could see him, was the captain of the ship. It was the rowers' task to row according to what he said. If he wanted the ship to move then they were to row; if he wanted them to stop they had to stop instantly. Their whole business was to obey his orders. Now, that is the word that Paul chooses to describe those who are teachers, preachers and ministers of the Word of God within the congregation of the Church. They are "under-rowers" of Christ.

Gordon Fee: The application of this paragraph to the contemporary church seems self-evident. On the one hand, it is a word to those in the church who are forever "examining" their ministers, and who in any case tend to do so on the wrong grounds. Corinth is not the only church that ever became disillusioned with its minister because he or she lacked enough "charismatic" qualities. But God's Word to us is that faithfulness, not success, is what is required of God's servants. On the other hand, although not intended so by Paul, by implication it is also a word to those who preach and teach, that they recognize themselves as "under trust." Their "trustworthiness" is finally going to be judged by the Lord himself, on the grounds of their being faithful to the trust itself, the gospel. In that hour none of one's self-evaluations as to one's worth in the kingdom is going to count for a thing, only our faithfulness to the gospel itself.

Doug Goins: What matters to Paul is how the Lord Jesus Christ evaluates him. (When he says "*the Lord*" he always means Jesus.) Paul follows the counsel that he gave to his spiritual son Timothy when he said, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God....*" (**2 Timothy 2:15**). We serve people spiritually in our teaching and preaching only when we're faithful servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Jesus Christ alone is the judge of the true spiritual value of that ministry. He is the only one who has the right to judge, because he is the master of the household, and we are all servants and stewards together under him. He is the only one who completely understands why ministry is being done. All we can see in each other is our external behavior. But the Lord knows our hearts, our motives, our inward intentions. That's what is crucial. We are very presumptuous when we judge external behavior in one another. We cannot fully understand the motives of others.

Another reason that we're not to evaluate the teaching ministry of other people or even our own is that any judgment that we make now is **premature**, "*before the time.*" Paul says, "Wait until Jesus comes back. At the second coming of Jesus Christ we will all stand before his judgment seat." Remember **3:13**: "*...Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it [that will be the appropriate time], because it is to be*

revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." On that day there may be a lot of high-profile teaching ministries that we thought were incredible that turn out to be wood, hay, and stubble. And the ministry of a Sunday School teacher who spent thirty years laboring in the obscurity of the same four-year-old Sunday School class may be gold and silver and precious stones. God's timing for judgment and evaluation is perfect; ours is premature. Remember, this evaluation, the judgment seat of Christ, comes at the end of the age, not at the end of the meeting.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Thus the Corinthians must take their leader off the pedestal on which they had placed him (or her). Even apostles are mere men, who have been chosen and appointed by God to be His servants, and to whom He has given authority to serve as "*stewards of the mysteries of God.*" These words are pregnant with meaning, but we will only mention several important nuances. First, the apostles are servants. Servants do not own things; they are owned by their Master. As servants, the apostles did not own or possess their followers as the false teachers seemed to do, and as their followers even boasted ("*We are of ...*"). As stewards, the apostles had a certain authority to act in behalf of their Master, but they are still slaves, servants of Christ. As slaves and stewards, the apostles are not intent on pleasing men (see **Galatians 1:10**), but on pleasing the Master. The Lord is their Master, and He will be their Judge. They will give account to Him for their stewardship, and the standard for judgment is their faithfulness in fulfilling their stewardship. . .

Paul instructs the Corinthian saints to cease judging their fellow servants because they do not have sufficient data on which to base a judgment now. The arrogant, boastful Corinthians who are judging actually think they are wise enough to judge in God's place. They base their judgments on outward appearances, a very dangerous thing to do (see **Luke 16:15**). No wonder we will soon find Paul insisting that all do not possess gifts which produce visible results (**1 Corinthians 12:29-30**). These are the gifts the boastful Corinthians hold in such high esteem, because those granted such gifts are able to produce visible results, and thus judged spiritually superior by their fellow-saints.

One thing remains vague in what Paul says, something we must infer from the context: what are the Corinthians judging about which they are told to cease passing judgment? It seems evident that it is making a final and decisive judgment on the success and quality of the ministry of an apostle of our Lord. Paul warns these Corinthians (who are themselves "*servants*" of Christ) not to keep on passing judgment on the service of those servants who are apostles, and in so doing condemning apostolic leadership, while choosing to follow a particular favorite leader. Just who these individuals are becomes more and more clear as Paul's epistles fill in further details.

Thomas Leake: (:1-4) **How to Have and Keep a Healthy Christian Self-image**

Introduction: popular song lyrics: "Please tell me Who I am ..."; Identity Crisis in many people's lives; each of us needs a clear and confident understanding of "Who I Am."

Cf. other biblical references to self-image

- **Is 41:8-9** nation of Israel = "*my servant*" – identifies where the nation came

from, where it is going and what is its mission
- **1 Pet. 2:9** – the church; **1 Jn. 3:2**; **1 Cor. 3:16** – God wants us to know who we are;

In speaking to the church at Corinth, Paul was correcting a spirit of spiritual elitism

3 Insights From Paul's Self-Image as a Minister – apply how he thought about himself to how we should think about ourselves

I. (:1) I Need to Have a Christ-Centered View of Myself

Our culture has made a virtue out of selfishness; infatuation with self; what is best for me;

What image of Paul should we have? What drives him?

A. Concept of being a *servant of Christ*

Phil. 2:3 = A low mind – contrast message of Robert Shuller and Norman Vincent Peale;

Rom. 3:10-12

- concept of under-rower – different word than Paul used in **1 Cor. 3:5** = waiter on tables

Think of the worthiness of the one we are serving = Christ – **Mark 9:35**; **Phil. 2:17**

B. Concept of being *stewards of the mysteries of God*

Truth that God had once hidden but now has revealed

II. (:2) How I Live Affects My View of Myself

“*trustworthy*” = faithful, reliable, dependable

How do I obey Christ, listen to Him and fulfill His will?

One who stays on task; carries out the will of His master.

1 Cor. 1:9 – God is faithful to us; expects us to be faithful to Him

1 Pet. 4:10

How should we evaluate preachers?? How smart they are? How funny? No – How faithful are they?

Matt. 25:21

III. (:3-4) I Need to Guard My Self-Image by Blocking 3 Potential Evaluators

A. Not you Corinthians

Shocking statement – we place so much importance in what others think of ourselves

B. Not by any Human Court

Yes, he knew what others were saying about him ... but that did not unduly encourage or discourage him; because ultimately all that matters is what God thinks

C. I don't even examine myself

Yes, he listened to his conscience; but he understood the limitations of such self-examination

Thomas Leake: (:5) 3 Reasons We Should Not Judge Others

Introduction: Discernment is a good thing if exercised appropriately; **1 Jn 4:1; 1 Cor 14:20**; there is a right kind of judging and a wrong kind of judging; can be a blind spot for bible-believing Christians; on the other hand, the unsaved and the immoral and false teachers will throw up the false complaint: “Don’t Judge me”

I. We are Limited in Our Perspective

The only complete and competent judge = the Lord; we cannot even judge others or ourselves accurately; Timing is a key element of when to judge

This passage deals with:

- How we should judge
- What we should judge (and what we shouldn’t)
- When we should judge

Any judging now would be premature and inadequate; we need to wait for return of Christ; don’t usurp His judging role – **James 4:11; Luke 6:37; Rom. 14:13**

What is Wrongful Judging?

- Judging with incomplete information – **Prov 18:13**; need to first get all of the facts; don’t just listen to one side of the story – **James 1:19; Prov 18:2; Prov 18:17**
- Showing partiality – **Deut 1:17; 16:18-20**
- Accepting the testimony of only one witness – **Deut 19:15; 1 Tim. 5:19**
- Judging unseen motives – it is appropriate to judge external words and actions that are visible and can be compared to God’s standard as revealed in the Scriptures; **5: 12-13** – this is our duty; **6:2-3; 14:29** – we need to pass judgment on prophets = use the Word of God to detect error

Wrong Judging emerges from Sinful Attitudes:

- Pride of knowledge
- lack of concern and love for others
- impatience
- fear of discovering the truth about the one you love (maybe they are wrong)
- jealousy

Wrong judging ruins oneness and leads to all sorts of sinful problems in relationships, in the church, in the workplace, etc.

The media thrives on wrongful judging.

Destroys relationships and trust.

(Illustration: teenage kids will shut down if parents are overly critical)

II. Christ’s Greater Judgment is Coming

Now is not the judging season but rather the time to wait and suspend judgment; **1 Cor. 16:22; 3:10-15; John 8:15-16** – even Christ did not come to Judge at His first coming; but He will at His second coming – **Jn 5:22; Acts 17:31; Rev 1:7** (in fact the whole book of Revelation)

2 Aspects of Christ's Judging in the last days:

1) General – He will judge those things we can't fully see now; emphasis seems to be on good things since the result will be praise – **Eccles 12:14; Rom 2:16; Matt 12:36**

2) Particular – The disclosing of motives of men's hearts; this is necessary for correct judgment; we should perform everything for the glory of God

Jer 17:9-10 – the Lord will judge even the tricky, deceitful heart

This type of judgment is the prerogative of the Lord alone

III. Christ's Judgment Will Settle All Things

3:8; 3:14 – individual judgment; specific praise for you; **2 Cor. 10:18**

Do we anticipate this judgment as a source of shame or comfort?

All wrongs will be righted; pride will be humbled; we don't have to go around trying to make everything right.

Don't pick on others about the little things; keep things in perspective.

7 Things I can do to Stop Judging Wrongly:

1) Recognize when my thoughts are starting to turn towards critical judging

2) Ask the Lord to help me focus on my own problems and sin areas so that I would be correcting those

3) Recognize that there are many things I do not know about that particular person or situation

4) Make sure my opinions and convictions are based on the Scripture and not just man-made rules

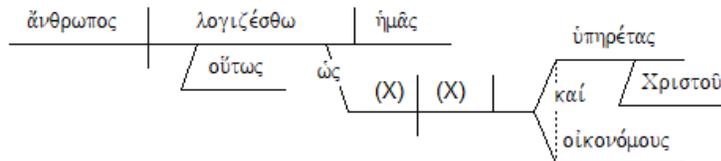
5) Think about reversed roles – how would I want to be treated or viewed

6) Cultivate a humble heart that increasingly knows the depths of my own sin

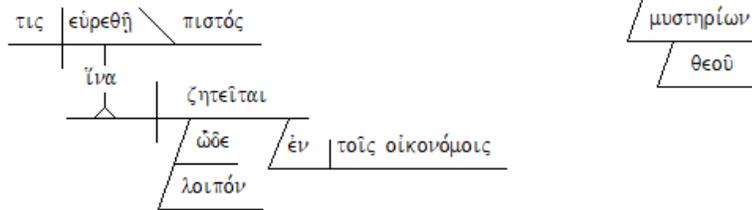
7) Rest in God's perfect judgment that will come when Christ returns

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

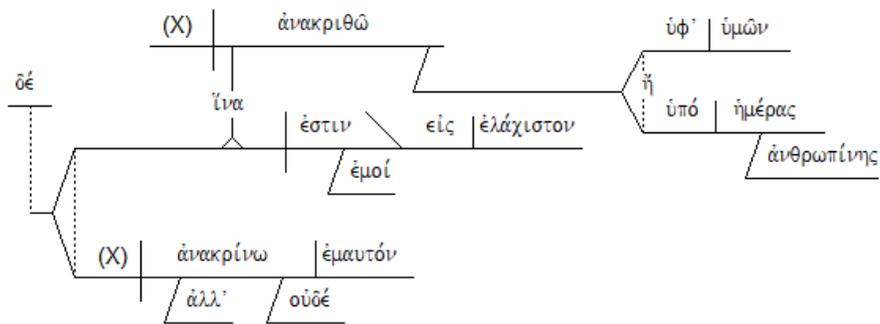
1Co 4:1



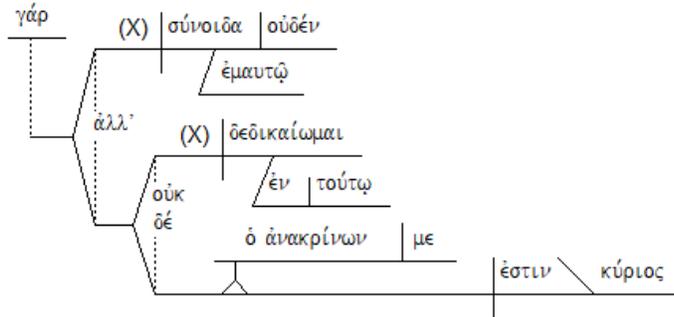
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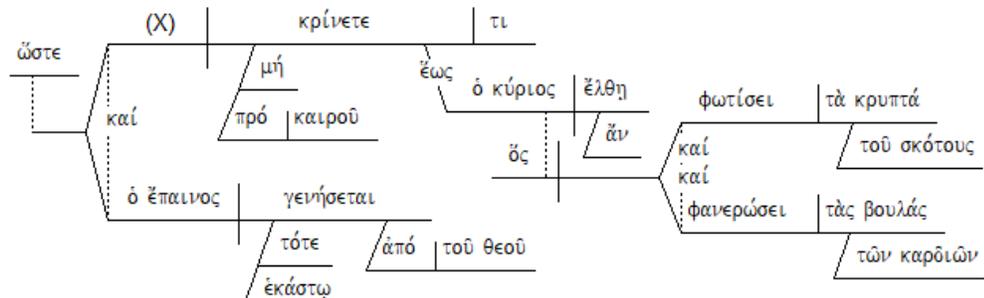
1Co 4:3



1Co 4:4



1Co 4:5



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:6-13

TITLE: EXPOSING ARROGANT PRIDE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

BIG IDEA:

BOASTING IN PARTICULAR PROMINENT PREACHERS DEMONSTRATES ARROGANT PRIDE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

INTRODUCTION:

Christians often play the game of “Look at whose camp I am in! We are followers of Dr. John MacArthur; we are disciples of C. J. Mahaney . . .” Even though the Apostle Paul and Apollos effectively taught the truth and were not trying to develop a personal following, the example of the Corinthians shows that believers can make the mistake of rendering undue praise to the preacher. The resulting schisms become a source of pride and competitive boasting. People become self-sufficient and complacent in their intellectual understanding and preoccupied with their own gifts and ministries rather than transformed by radical obedience to the Word of Truth that is being proclaimed. Instead of becoming more Christ-like, they become more arrogant and judgmental. They look with disdain at the humble sacrifices of servant leaders that are not bearing the type of externally impressive results that might be consistent with the world’s benchmarks for success. Paul employs scathing sarcasm to expose their self-deception.

Gordon Fee: The section is dominated by two themes: **their pride (vv. 6–8, 10)** and **Paul’s weaknesses (vv. 9, 11–13)**, the clue to which lies with the final, intentionally devastating question in the first paragraph, “*and if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not*”?

Mark Taylor: The intent of the lengthy discourse regarding the cross and human wisdom has been to bring the Corinthians into conformity with what the Scriptures say about human wisdom (**1:19,30; 2:9; 3:19–20**), to reject all tendencies to become inflated with pride in human leaders, which has led to their rivalries and divisions. The Corinthian problem of arrogance must cease.

In light of their proud stance toward human leaders and their love of human wisdom, Paul offers a stiff rebuke in the form of stinging sarcasm. Apostolic suffering stands in sharp relief to the Corinthians’ pride. There are things that they need to learn from Paul and other apostles. Since genuine apostleship is measured according to the standard of the cross, Paul compares the present realities of apostolic service over against the present state of affairs in Corinth and by doing so shows just how far they have missed the mark. From their own point of view, they are full, rich, and reigning (**4:8**)! But to this frame of mind Paul sarcastically retorts, “*How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!*” The apostolic perspective is radically different. A life measured by the cross holds to a profoundly different standard. God has put the apostles on display as men condemned to die. In a series of emphatic contrasts Paul sizes up the Corinthians to see how they measure up to the cruciform way of life

(4:10). Apostolic life is far from the ease and comfort coveted by the world; presently the apostles “have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (cf. **2 Cor 11:16–30**).

Paul Gardner: Paul and Apollos as Models to Imitate (4:6–21)

a. The Corinthians Are Arrogant (4:6–8)

- (1) They Set One Person above Another on the Basis of Gifts (**4:6**)
- (2) They Fail to See That All Have Received Gifts from God (**4:7**)
- (3) They Think They Have Arrived (**4:8**)

b. The Apostles Have Been Humbled by God (4:9–13)

- (1) They Are like a “Spectacle” of Those Sentenced to Death (**4:9**)
- (2) They Are to Be Contrasted Dramatically with the Elitists (**4:10**)
- (3) They Suffer in Many Ways (**4:11–12**)
- (4) They Are Regarded like Scum (**4:13**)

**I. (:6-7) EXPOSING ARROGANT PRIDE –
IN LIFTING PREACHERS UP ON A PEDESTAL AND BOASTING IN ONE
AGAINST ANOTHER**

A. (:6) Exposing the Prideful Practice of Preferring Specific Prominent Preachers

Paul Gardner: Paul has shown how he and Apollos work in Christian ministry together. Paul has even been prepared to put himself in the dock by way of example in **4:3–5**, not because the Corinthians were so antagonistic to him but because he wanted them to see the broader eschatological context of his ministry. How he fulfills his calling and uses his gifts will be judged by his Lord. So Paul now urges the Corinthians to think again. They should look at Paul and Apollos and see a **theology of the cross**, a theology that is **humble**. They should see men who are sometimes humiliated and understand that this is true discipleship. Anything less goes far beyond what Scripture ever tolerates or points toward.

1. Reviewing How Christian Ministers Should be Viewed

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes”

- (**1:17**) as messengers sent by God to preach the gospel (not to baptize a band of loyal followers)
- (**2:1-5**) as those preaching Christ crucified rather than relying on superiority of speech or wisdom
- (**2:13**) as those speaking Spirit-revealed thoughts in words taught by the Spirit
- (**3:5-10**) as servants and farmers and builders
- (**4:1-2**) as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God

Paul still considers them as *brethren* despite all of their flaws;
His goal is to edify them – not to tear them down

Robert Gundry: the figurative application of “*these things*” refers to the application there to Paul and Apollos of farmwork and temple-building as figures of speech for their evangelistic labors.

David Garland: is clear from all of these arguments about the meaning of μετασχηματίζειν is that Paul wishes to avoid upbraiding anyone in Corinth by name. By applying the argument to himself and Apollos, **he makes it to be applicable to all leaders in the church.** **Chrysostom** has a better feel for what Paul is doing. Paul assumes that the Corinthians esteem both himself and Apollos, and by using himself and Apollos as examples, he helps them to accept the lesson. Had Paul said, “As for you who deem yourselves so worthy of admiration and examine and judge others,” there might have been a knee-jerk resistance to his reprimand. Paul explicitly says in **4:14** that he does not wish to shame them and instead admonishes them as his beloved children. By using aliases rather than fingering the real culprits and by stressing that his depreciation of the role of leaders as servants extends also to himself (“*What, then, is Paul?*” **3:5**), he allays potential resentment and makes it easier for them to swallow the medicine (**Chrysostom**, Hom. 1 Cor. 12.1; cf. **D. Hall** 1994: 145). Paul has persons other than Apollos in mind when he warns about how other workers build upon the foundation he laid—some using good materials, and others, shoddy (**3:10–17**). The Corinthians have an example in the harmonious relationship between Paul and Apollos (“*in us*”) and need to adjust their attitudes toward one another accordingly. In sum, he uses the example of himself and Apollos to help them learn how properly to evaluate the stature of leaders in the church.

2. Renouncing the Schismatic Pride of Party Loyalties

a. The Apostolic Example = Don’t Go Beyond the Scriptures

“so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written”

The Sufficiency of the Scriptures – Sola Scriptura;
Anything beyond that where you try to enforce man-made rules and your own opinions and preferences is legalism.

Gordon Fee: In other words, in case they have somehow missed it, he now expressly tells them that he has been carrying on the argument with its various images about himself and Apollos so that they might learn something, and as a result desist from their current “*pride in persons.*”

David Garland: A fifth approach interprets it as a reference to the OT. This is the most likely solution because Paul uses the verb γέγραπται (gegraptai) thirty times, excluding **4:6**, to introduce citations from Scripture and never anything else. To be sure, it is an unusual way to refer to Scripture. Some explain that it was possibly a slogan cautioning against any departure from Scripture and was a rabbinic adage (**Robertson and Plummer** 1914: 81; **Ross** 1970–71: 217), a phrase coined by Paul (**Hooker** 1963–64b: 132), or a

phrase known or used by the Corinthians (Brun 1931). It could be a general reference to the spirit of the OT (Edwards 1885: 102): “that you learn by us to live according to Scripture” (RSV). But it is best to regard the saying as referring to the five quotations from the OT, all introduced by γέγραπται, cited in the first three chapters: [1:19, 31; 2:9; 3:19, 20].

Mark Taylor: If the Corinthians would live within the boundaries of Scripture, then they would not boast in men, the specific point made by Paul in 3:21 following the use of Scripture in 3:19–20.

b. The Apostolic Example = Ministry Teamwork not Ministry Competition

“so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”

We need each other; don’t become arrogant and puffed up in preferring one over another;

Plurality of elder system of church government and multiple gifted men involved in the public teaching ministry should help to promote this spirit of teamwork

John MacArthur: **Arrogant** (*phusioo*) literally means to “puff up (KJV), inflate, blow up.” The term was used metaphorically to indicate pride, which is having an inflated view of oneself. Paul uses that word four times to describe the Corinthian believers (see also 4:18, 19; 5:2) and three other times to warn them against pride (8:1; 13:4; 2 Cor. 12:20). The meaning of pride basically is “I’m for me.” When everyone is pulling first of all for himself, fellowship and harmony are torn apart in the process.

Daniel Akin: (:6-7) -- Paul continues to plead for unity in the church. His plea began in 1:10 and will conclude in 4:21. The Corinthians were in turmoil because they misunderstood the nature of the Christian message (the gospel of Christ and him crucified as the wisdom of God), the role of the Christian minister (a servant), and the attitude of the Christian minister (humility). Paul, one final time, will try to put the ministries of himself, Apollos, and the apostles in proper perspective. If he is successful, the church will unite for gospel advancement. If he fails, their witness will be compromised, and their future effectiveness will be fatally harmed.

Richard Hays: Having developed a series of metaphors for understanding the identity of the church and its relation to Paul and other leaders (3:5 – 4:5), Paul now shifts into a mode of literal explanation. No longer does he speak through figures; he explicitly discloses what he has been aiming at and **confronts the Corinthians with the charge of behaving arrogantly**. “The argument has reached the moment of truth” (Fee, 166).

Regrettably, the key transitional sentence (v. 6) contains several obscurities that have caused many readers to get bogged down and miss what Paul is saying. Presumably, the meaning was perfectly clear to the Corinthians; our problem is that we lack information that was taken for granted by Paul and his original readers. It is possible, however, to

form a definite understanding of Paul's meaning through a careful reading of the passage. . .

by speaking about himself and Apollos, Paul has been speaking metaphorically; in truth, he is driving at something else entirely. This is a critical point. It means that we will utterly misunderstand Paul's argument if we think that the real problem at Corinth was a power struggle between Apollos and Paul. Everything Paul has said indicates in fact that the relationship between Apollos and himself is harmonious. Nor is there the slightest evidence in the context that Paul perceives any conflict with Cephas or his adherents. . .

The cumulative force of these [Scripture] citations is unmistakable: the witness of Scripture places a strict limit on human pride and calls for trust in God alone. What would it mean to go "*beyond*" (*hyper*) this witness of Scripture? It would mean, quite simply, to boast in human wisdom by supposing that we are, as it were, smarter than God. . .

The problem at Corinth is **internal rivalry within the community**, fostered by prideful claims about the possession of wisdom and rhetorical skill. The verb "*puffed up*," a vivid image to describe the Corinthians' problem with excessive self-esteem, appears here for the first time in the letter; we will meet it again in **4:18–19; 5:2; 8:1; and 13:4**. (In the last two cases, the image is set in opposition to love). In Paul's view those who are puffed up should be pricked and deflated by the witness of Scripture. Throughout the opening chapters of the letter, he has spoken with studied indirection about Apollos and himself as **examples of authentic collaborative service, boasting only in the Lord**, as Scripture teaches. The Corinthians should take the hint and "*learn through us*" what it means to live in accordance with Scripture. But just in case they have missed the point, Paul now makes it explicit (**4:6–7**): **Stop boasting and competing with each other.**

B. (:7) Exposing Underlying Attitudes of Arrogant Pride via 3 Simple Questions

Gordon Fee: The "for" that connects these questions with the beginning sentence (v. 6) indicates that Paul is about to give reasons -- by way of rhetoric -- why those who are "*puffed up*" against him are out of place. Their pride in persons reflects **a lack of proper perspective, a lack of gratitude**. The Fall has given us all too high a view of ourselves, with a correspondingly low view of others. Instead of offering humble thanksgiving for gifts received (see on **1:4**), the Corinthians have allowed the gifts to become a sign of status and a source of dissension. With these questions, then, Paul is trying to help them regain perspective.

Richard Hays: The rhetorical questions in **verse 7** ought to have a devastating impact on the wisdom-boasters.

1. Attitude of Superiority

"For who regards you as superior?"

Mark Taylor: The sense of the phrase, in context, seems to be “Who elevates you to a place of rightful boasting? Who has given you the right to assume a position of such arrogance? Who makes these determinations about your exalted status?”

2. Attitude of Ungratefulness

“What do you have that you did not receive?”

David Garland: Nothing is inherently theirs, so they cannot be arrogant and boastful (**P. Marshall** 1987: 205). They must learn to imitate Paul, who says, “*What is Paul?*” -- merely a servant (**3:5**) who has been graced by God (**3:10**; cf. **15:10**). Divine grace levels the ground for all and requires gratitude and humility in response. One cannot boast about being a worthy recipient of grace.

Mark Taylor: The second and third questions go together. Paul reminds them that there is absolutely nothing that they presently have that they did not receive. The question emphasizes the undeserved grace of God, which is the very ground of their existence in the first place. Everything they possess came from God (cf. **1:5**; **3:10**), which rules out all boasting. All that they have comes by virtue of their relationship to Christ (**3:23**). Paul has transformed the slogan “*I belong to Paul*” (**1:12**) to “*Paul and others belong to you*” (**3:22**) to “*You belong to Christ*” (**3:23**) to “*You don’t have anything that you did not receive!*” (**4:7**). The third question, “*If you received it, then why are you boasting as though not receiving?*” goes back to the heart of the issue of human wisdom and the theme of boasting (**1:29–31**; **3:21**). To boast implies human achievement and fails to recognize the free grace of God.

3. Attitude of Boasting in Self

*“And if you did receive it,
why do you boast as if you had not received it?”*

R.C.H. Lenski: The three questions asked in v. 7 are short and have the intention of puncturing their bubble of pride and the further intention of bringing the Corinthians down to the level of true Christian humility. But they needed still more.

Gordon Fee: In case they miss the point, Paul drives the second question home with a third, which assumes the answer “nothing” to the second: “*And since you did receive it [i.e., it was neither deserved nor earned], why do you boast as though you did not?*” Here is the telling word. Their “*boasting*” is sure evidence that they have missed the gospel of grace. Instead of recognizing everything as a gift and being filled with gratitude, they rather possessed their gifts—saw them as their own—and looked down on the apostle who seemed to lack so much. Grace leads to gratitude; “wisdom” and self-sufficiency lead to boasting and judging. Grace has a leveling effect; self-esteem has a self-exalting effect. Grace means humility; boasting means that one has arrived. Precisely because their boasting reflects such an attitude, Paul turns to irony to help them see the folly of their “boasting.”

II. (:8-13) EXPOSING SELF-SUFFICIENCY – THINKING YOU HAVE ALREADY ARRIVED WHILE DESPISING THE HUMBLE SACRIFICES OF GENUINE SERVANT LEADERS

A. (:8) The Delusion of Self-Sufficiency = A Wrong View of Their Own Condition -- They Wrongly Thought They Had Already Arrived

Gordon Fee: As a contrast to the stance of gratitude and humility urged by the preceding rhetorical questions (v. 7), Paul now begins a series of **antitheses** between them and himself, to which **shame** is the intended and only suitable response. With three staccato sentences, the rhetoric punctuated by asyndeton, Paul goes straight to the heart of the matter. The words are full of biting irony, attacking their own view of themselves (cf. **Rev. 3:17**), which is at once true and false. It is true in the sense of what he affirmed in the opening thanksgiving (**1:5**) and will affirm again later on (**12:13**), that in Christ they have all drunk deeply of the Spirit and have been enriched with every kind of Spirit gifting. But such gifts must be forever humbling, since they finally lead to a discipleship that goes the way of the cross, not the way of a false triumphalism.

Daniel Akin: Paul is brutal in his **sarcasm**: “*You are already full* [ESV, “*have all you want*”]! You are already rich! You have begun to reign as kings without us.” But—and here is the brutal truth—Paul responds, “*I wish you did reign, so that we could also reign with you!*” (v. 8). He wished their perspective was correct. He wished the kingdom were present in all its fulness and glory. But it wasn’t. If they needed proof, they need only look at the apostles. Paul says, “*For I think God has displayed* [ESV, “*exhibited*”] *us, the apostles, in last place, like men condemned to die*” (v. 9). The apostles were not first. They were last. They were not thriving. They were dying. And the deaths they were dying were not taking place privately or in secret, as what follows makes clear.

1. Sarcastic Parody of Their Self-Sufficient Complacency

Laodicean Syndrome (**Rev. 3:14-22**)

Gordon Fee: The three verbs attack not just their pride in general, but specifically their view of spirituality, which reflects an “overrealized” eschatology. Paul’s perspective, which he shares with the rest of the NT writers, is one of “already but not yet” held in tension; theirs is one of “already” with little room for “not yet.” Having received the Spirit, they have already arrived; for them spirituality means to have been transported into a whole new sphere of existence where they are “above” the earthly, and especially “fleshly,” existence of others. Thus, “*already you have all you want*,” a verb that means to eat to the full. Not only do they boast in what is a gracious gift, but they are “satiated” with their gifts, including “wisdom.” “*Already you have become rich!*” (cf. **1:5**), a second metaphor for spiritual giftedness. In both cases they are gifted indeed, but not in the way they think.

- a. Resting in their satiated state – ignorant of their need
 “You are already filled,”
- b. Rich in their spiritual condition – blind to their poverty
 “you have already become rich,”
- b. Reigning in their own myopic millennium – deceived regarding their standing in the kingdom
 “you have become kings without us;”

2. Ultimate Goal = Co-Reigning . . . Not Lording it Over Others

“and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.”

Anthony Thiselton: It is no accident that in vv. 8-10 Paul employs a rhetoric of irony that takes up self-descriptions common to triumphalist, self-congratulatory, religious experience in a number of religious cults of the time. In Hellenistic-oriental cults converts could be overwhelmed by a new sense of power and status: “Many . . . felt that they could do anything: they were kings (1 Cor 4:8), they were in the Spirit, they were emancipated” (Nock, St. Paul, p. 174). That Paul is in fact using “biting irony” is demonstrated by his parenthesis, *If only you did!*

B. (:9-13) The Delusion of Self-Sufficiency = A Wrong View of the Ministry of Others -- They Failed to Value the Apostolic Contribution

1. (:9) Overall Summary: Dead Men Walking = a Spectacle for all to see

“For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”

Gordon Fee: The final sentence of the preceding verse sets up the contrasts of the rest of the paragraph, contrasts not only between them and himself, but also between their opposing views of apostleship—and discipleship. **Paul has not in fact entered the time of reigning**, and neither by implication have they. This latter point, however, is not his immediate concern. Rather, he first sets forth in its starkest form the evidence that he and the other apostles have not yet begun to reign. To do so he uses the figure of those condemned to die in the arena. We apostles are like them, he says, not like those who have the places of honor in the box seats.

David Prior: For people who, like the Corinthians, are concerned for their own status, reputation and popularity, authentic Christian ministry is immensely difficult to accept, let alone to embrace. The truth that God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness gets through to us very slowly. To be a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals (9) goes against the grain, because it means being constrained to live our lives under the critical, often scornful, scrutiny of all and sundry.

Adewuya: Paul continues the irony that began in **verse 8**. Paul replies that in his opinion -- he speaks mildly, using the expression "*it seems to me*" -- God has not placed the apostles in as great a position as the Corinthians think they themselves are in. The irony is that the Corinthians were trying to "*reign*," while their spiritual fathers and examples were far from "*reigning*." The Corinthian Church felt it had reached the pinnacle of **spiritual attainment**. The church was **self-satisfied**; so it was not aware of any spiritual hunger. They even thought that they have **surpassed their teachers**.

2. (:10) Comparisons to Highlight the Difference Between Selfless Ministry and Ambitious Pride

Gordon Fee: The contrasts begun in the preceding sentences (**vv. 8–9**), in the context of eschatology, are now resumed in an extraordinary way. With three antitheses similar to those expressed earlier on (**1:26**), Paul sets the Corinthians and himself (and other apostles) in bold relief, again with total irony.

David Garland: "*Wise*" versus "*fools*" picks up the theme of the divine foolishness versus the foolish wisdom of the world (cf. **1:18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27**). "*Strong*" versus "*weak*" picks up the theme of divine weakness versus the supposed strength of this world. Paul's understanding of the relationship between weakness (**1 Cor. 9:22**) and God's power emerges most clearly in **2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9; 13:4**. Since Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God, those who are weak in him experience the same divine power (**2 Cor. 13:4**). The third antithesis, "*esteemed*" versus "*dishonored*," recalls his assertion in **1:26–28** that God chose the dishonorable to shame the honored. The apostles' spiritual status contradicts their sociological status (**Schrage** 1991: 343). If the Corinthians, however, are "*wise*," "*strong*," and "*honored*," they must be kowtowing to the world's standards, which brings into question whether they are truly Christ's.

a. Fools For Christ

"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ"

b. Enduring Weakness

"we are weak, but you are strong"

c. Foregoing Honor

"you are distinguished, but we are without honor"

3. (:11-12a) Catalog of Apostolic Sacrificial Sufferings for the Cause of Christ

"To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty,"

"and are poorly clothed,"

"and are roughly treated,"

"and are homeless;"

"and we toil, working with our own hands;"

Robert Gundry: The apostles' "*hunger[ing] and thirst[ing]*" contrasts with the Corinthians' being gluttoned like kings, comparatively speaking, with food and drink. The apostles' "*go[ing] naked*" contrasts with the royal attire worn by the wealthy kings to whom Paul likens the well-dressed Corinthians. The apostles' being "*pummeled*" by persecution as slaves were pummeled by their masters (**1 Peter 2:20**) contrasts with the unpersecuted Corinthians' reigning like kings over others. The apostles' being "*unsettled*" contrasts with the Corinthians' king-like settledness in a palace, their palace consisting of the prosperous city of Corinth. And the apostles' exhausting manual labor, despised as it was by the elite, contrasts with the Corinthians' king-like uppitiness (whatever their actual occupations).

Paul Gardner: His list of sufferings is revealing. Today, to talk of "suffering for the gospel" tends to refer to persecution or occasionally to privations that missionaries make as they travel. But here Paul puts together all the sufferings that are related to his life as an apostle. In other words, he does not distinguish between grades of suffering. For example, the beatings are not more significant than having to work for his own support. He describes the general unpleasantness of life that distinguishes him from the well-honored citizen of Corinth, who would not be beaten and would not have to work with his own hands.

Craig Blomberg: Some of these result from hostility to the gospel, some from the arduous lifestyle of an itinerant minister in antiquity (cf. **2 Cor. 11:23b–29**).

Gordon Fee: With these concluding sentences Paul now abandons irony for straight talk. This **tribulation list**, which spells out in detail the "dishonor" that attends Paul's apostolic ministry, reflects a common phenomenon in antiquity. Such lists can be found elsewhere in Paul himself, as well as in Stoic philosophers, Jewish apocalyptists, Josephus, the Greek biographers and historians, and the later Gnostics (cf. also **Heb. 11:33–38**). What Paul has in common with such lists is the phenomenon itself, plus an incidental use of language here and there. The content of this list is adapted both to his circumstances as a missionary of the gospel of Christ and to his struggles with the Corinthians. The great difference between this list and its companions in 2 Corinthians is the didactic purpose of this one. As the following explanation (**vv. 14–17**) will go on to say, this is a model in kind, if not in specifics, of what the Corinthians also are to be.

David Garland: Time references ("*until the present moment*," **4:11**; "*until this very day*," **4:13**) frame a list of six hardships, three responses to abuse, and the conclusion stating how such abused persons must look to the world. The present is a time of suffering, not glory. Paul likens apostles to maltreated strangers (**P. Marshall** 1987: 211) and the have-nots. Their hunger and thirst (**Phil. 4:12**) contrasts the Corinthians' satiety. Being "*naked*" (**Rom. 8:35**; **2 Cor. 11:27**) is a hyperbolic reference to being "wretchedly clad" (**Seneca**, *De beneficiis* 5.13.3). Being "*cuffed about*" refers to being struck like a slave (cf. **Mark 14:65**; **1 Pet. 2:20**); the blows are those "offered as insults . . . and accompanied by verbal abuse" (**Fitzgerald** 1988: 143 n. 89). Being homeless (cf. **Matt. 8:20/Luke 9:58**) identifies them as wanderers. A man who works with his hands is assumed by the elite to be toiling in lowly tasks that exclude any attention to

higher things (**Plutarch**, Pericles 2.1). The verb κοπιᾶν (*kopian*) implies exhaustive labor.

4. (:12b-13a) Godly Example of Righteous Response to Persecution

“when we are reviled, we bless;”

“when we are persecuted, we endure;”

“when we are slandered, we try to conciliate;”

David Garland: Though apostles are reviled, persecuted, and slandered, they respond as Christ did, with blessing, endurance, and conciliation (cf. **Rom. 12:14; 1 Pet. 2:23; 3:9, 15–16**). Like their Lord, apostles are objects of contempt, and Paul concludes the list with two almost synonymous terms of abuse that sum up the world’s opinion of apostles. Περικαθάρμα (*perikatharma*) refers to that which is removed by cleaning—the filthy residue or scum (**Thiselton** 2000: 364). Περιψήματα (*peripsēma*) refers to the scrapings that are scrubbed off something, and **Thiselton** (2000: 365) translates it as “the scrapings from everyone’s shoes.” These are popular forms of self-deprecation (cf. Ign. Eph. 8:1; 18:1; Barn. 4:9), but many have noted that the words were used for human victims in rituals designed to ward off evil through an expiatory sacrifice. Worthless persons, such as condemned criminals, were chosen to be sacrificed vicariously for the purity of a city (**McLean** 1996: 107; cf. **Lietzmann** 1949: 21, 173; **Hauck**, TDNT 3:430–31; **Stählin**, TDNT 6:84–93; **Barrett** 1968: 112–13; **Hanson** 1974: 32–36; **P. Marshall** 1987: 213). **Stählin** (TDNT 6:90–91) offers four arguments for this connotation in this context:

- (1) the association of πάντων (*pantōn*, *of all*) with an individual or individuals perishing for a whole city;
- (2) the connection of the verb γίνεσθαι (*ginesthai*) to the language of the formula pronounced over the victim to transfer guilt;
- (3) the affinity of the image with the description of apostles being a public spectacle (**4:9**); and
- (4) the idea of the accursed conveying a blessing to their persecutors.

The word picture would depict the apostles as looking like scapegoats and despised sin-offerings; but, in truth, they are bearers of reconciliation for the world and give their lives for the good of all persons. **Hauck** (TDNT 3:431) thinks that this image would suggest that they are an “expiatory offering, that which is contemptible, and that which is to be thrown out.” **Conzelmann** (1975: 90 n. 49) argues, however, that the phrase as “near death” cancels out this interpretation, since the apostles do not die, and that Paul simply applies common terms of abuse to the apostles. Frequently, it is impossible to know exactly what associations words might have had in the minds of authors and listeners. I translate these terms simply as **reproaches** but allow that Paul might have intended to evoke pictures of vicarious suffering for others.

5. (:13b) Complete Rejection by the World

“we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.”

Gordon Fee: These concluding words hold together as a single piece, beginning and ending on the same note: “*To this very hour/up to this moment.*”

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 13b** introduces a measure of hyperbole. Ironically, the Corinthians’ view of Paul too frequently matches that of the non-Christian world. “*Scum*” and “*refuse*” both refer to that which is removed by a process of cleaning -- dirt, filth, garbage. Some have tried to see allusions to sacrificial language of the Old Testament here but these are not demonstrable. “*Up to this time*” comes at the end of the sentence in Greek and closes this paragraph by implying that the fullness of the kingdom has not yet arrived, contrary to the claims of many in Corinth. In short, whereas the Corinthians think that their relatively prosperous conditions reflect God’s blessing, Paul points to his sufferings for the sake of the gospel as a more accurate measure of Christian faithfulness.

Mark Taylor: The world’s opinion of the apostles may be summed up in two phrases, translated by the NIV as “*scum of the earth*” and “*refuse of the world,*” terms used metaphorically for anything **contemptible**. Apostles were regarded by the world as the most **detestable** of all people, but, as such, the apostles incarnated the scandal of the cross.

John MacArthur: **Verses 9-13** can be summarized by four words: spectacles, fools, sufferers, and scum. Those words describe Paul’s condition in contrast to what the Corinthians considered their condition to be. They thought they had everything in themselves; he knew he had nothing in himself.

Richard Hays: In a sense, Paul is throwing down the gauntlet for his readers. If you really want to belong to Christ, he says, look at me: this is where it leads, this is what it looks like. This is a powerful word for the church in our time. To belong to Christ is not a way of assuring success or a trouble-free life; quite the opposite. Paul had a successful life before he was called by God to his apostolic vocation; to become a proclaimer of Christ crucified meant giving all that up (cf. **Phil. 3:4–11**). The image of the suffering apostle should be held clearly before our eyes, and then we should ask ourselves: Are we sure we want to belong to Christ and share his way?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the ways that believers today go beyond what is written in the Scriptures and try to enforce their opinions and preferences on others? How do people ascribe more honor to pastors and preachers than is appropriate?
- 2) How do we evidence a spirit of superiority in how we discuss the ministry of others or different churches or denominations?

3) Are we willing to minister after the pattern of the Apostle Paul and be viewed as fools for the sake of Christ?

4) Do we respond to slander and persecution and abuse with the type of love and concern for others shown by the apostles?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Because Christians have received every good thing from God, they should avoid superiority, expect opposition, and live humbly.

I. Be Careful about Being Proud about Whom You Follow (4:6-7).

- A. Don't pit one servant of God against another (4:6).
- B. Don't forget everything you have is a gift of grace (4:7).

II. Be Careful about Being Arrogant about Who You Are (4:8-13).

- A. Before the world and angels, we are condemned (4:8-9).
- B. Before the world and angels, we are a spectacle (4:9).
- C. Before the world and angels, we are fools (4:10).
- D. Before the world and angels, we are weak (4:10).
- E. Before the world and angels, we are dishonored (4:10).
- F. Before the world and angels, we are hungry (4:11).
- G. Before the world and angels, we are thirsty (4:11).
- H. Before the world and angels, we are poorly clothed (4:11).
- I. Before the world and angels, we are roughly treated (4:11).
- J. Before the world and angels, we are homeless (4:11).
- K. Before the world and angels, we are mere laborers (4:12).
- L. Before the world and angels, we are reviled (4:12).
- M. Before the world and angels, we are persecuted (4:12).
- N. Before the world and angels, we are slandered (4:13).
- O. Before the world and angels, we are scum (4:13).
- P. Before the world and angels, we are garbage (4:13).

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul does something very similar in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians. The Corinthians have a problem of divisions in the church, divisions based upon undue attachment to a particular leader, one that leads to the rejection (or at least disdain) of other leaders. The leader they follow is a great source of pride to these cultic cliques. They boast of belonging to a particular person as their leader. Paul first deals with the matter in principle, contrasting the gospel, weak and foolish in the eyes of the unbelieving world, with the false wisdom and power of those who are considered leaders in the secular world. . .

In a general way, these Corinthians have become arrogant in behalf of one against another. In **verse 7**, Paul becomes much more specific: the Corinthians have become

arrogant against the apostles. **Verses 7-13** are a graphic description of how the Corinthians look at themselves and, in contrast, how they look at Paul and his fellow-apostles.

Paul raises three very crucial questions in **verse 7** which, if answered correctly by the Corinthians, will expose the seriousness of their self-deception and sin. Paul first asks, “*Who regards you as superior?*” Who is their judge? If the Corinthians are so high and mighty, who thinks this? Is it the unbelieving community? God is their judge, not the corrupt Corinthians of that day. Paul asks yet another question: “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” Do the Corinthians boast in their abilities? Where did these abilities come from? If they were given, and they were, then they were given by God. If the Corinthians are boasting in their God-given gifts, then they are boasting in God’s place. They have the wrong judge, and they have the wrong object of praise. Men have taken the place of God.

There is then a third and final question: “*If all that the Corinthians possess is a God-given gift, then how can they boast, as if it were not a gift?*” The Corinthians think themselves so wise. They are arrogant and boastful. Yet, if they are so wise, how can they be so foolish as to take credit for something they were given, as though they were not the recipients of a gift? They have forgotten -- or worse yet, they have forsaken -- grace. These all-wise Corinthians are self-deceived.

Gordon Fee: Paul took seriously that his sufferings and weaknesses were a genuine participation in Christ himself. For him discipleship entailed **fellowship in the sufferings of Christ (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10)**; but that did not mean that one must suffer in order to be a genuine disciple. His own lot, and that of so many with him, entailed great suffering as the direct result of belonging to Christ. So much was this so that he considered it the norm (cf. **1 Thess. 3:3; Phil. 1:29**). But this norm was first of all theologically predicated -- on the “great reversal” that God had already effected through the cross. Thus for Paul discipleship meant “*sharing in the sufferings of Christ,*” not in its expiatory sense but in its imitatio sense (**v. 16**) -- being in the world as Christ was in the world. Christ was really like this; those who would follow him must expect that they, too, will be like this.

John MacArthur: The Corinthians had gone far beyond scriptural respect for ministers and had developed factions that were virtually sects. As is often the case, the leaders were exalted for the followers’ own sakes, not for the leaders’ sakes. The leaders were not a party to their glorification but were simply used as a focal point for the Corinthians’ own pride. In fact, the humble example of their leaders was rejected; thus Paul had to remind them of his own humility and that of Apollos. The factions gave the Corinthians a means to become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

Thomas Leake: 6 Signs of Sinful Pride (:6-8)

Introduction: Illustration about medical surgery; the Word of God is the surgical tool that can cut us open and expose our pride; goal is spiritual health.

- 1) Going Beyond the Scriptures
- 2) An Arrogant Posture Towards Others
- 3) Thinking Oneself Superior
- 4) Ungratefulness
- 5) Boasting in Self
- 6) Self-Sufficiency

Thomas Leake: 3 Commitments we must make to be a Fool for Christ (:9-13)

Introduction: We must learn from the personal example of Christ what is involved in living a Cross-centered life (that will seem foolish to the world) in contrast to the Corinthian believers; How far am I really prepared to go in following Christ?

1) (:9) Accept Your Humble Role in the World

Corinthians took an elitist position; viewed themselves as already reigning; image is of a victorious military procession with captured prisoners brought back in chains under the sentence of death to be killed by wild animals in the coliseum

Acts 9:15-16; significance of angels watching what is going on –

1 Pet 1:12; 1 Tim. 5:21; 1 Cor. 11:10

A lot of suffering associated with being a follower of Christ (reigning comes later)

Mark 9:35; Rom 8:36-37

2) (:10) Be Distinguished From the World

“We” / “You” – pronouns are emphatic in the Greek by position.

Problem = when Christians want to look good to non-believers;

Wear mocking as a badge; be willing to be a fool for the sake of Christ;

Not out to make the gospel socially acceptable;

Don't join compromisers or excuse them.

3) (:11-12) Endure Poor Treatment by the World

Present tense – still going on

- 6 Hardships the apostles endured

- 3 Responses – not bitter; not giving up = Christlikeness

a) blessing not cursing – **1 Pet. 2:23; Luk 6:27-28**

b) enduring persecution – not quitting; not compromising

middle voice – hold oneself up

c) answer kindly when slandered

- Gained 2 Reputations from the world

a) scum of the world = that which is removed by cleaning

b) dregs of all things = the scrapings

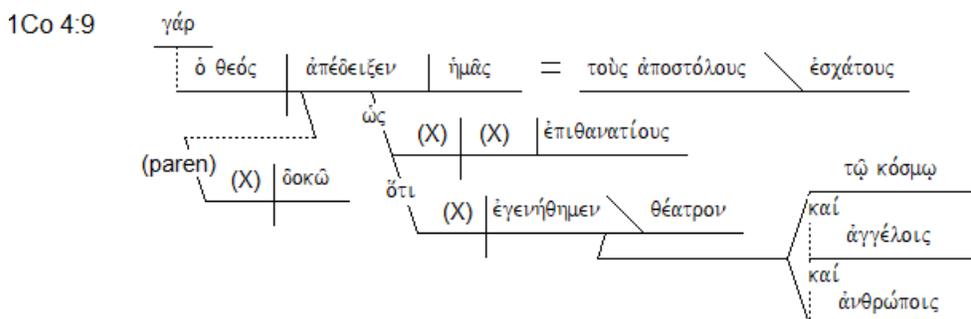
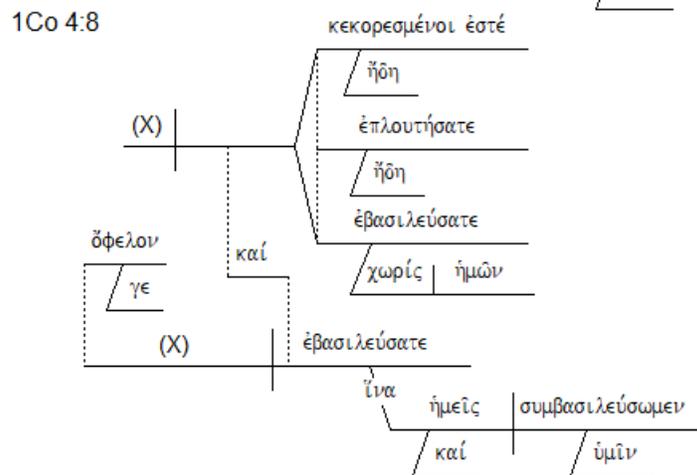
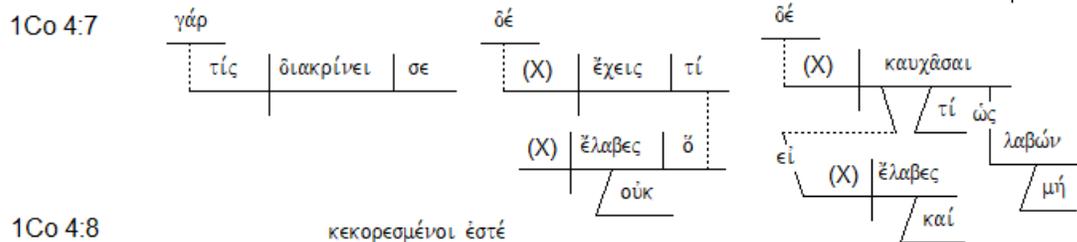
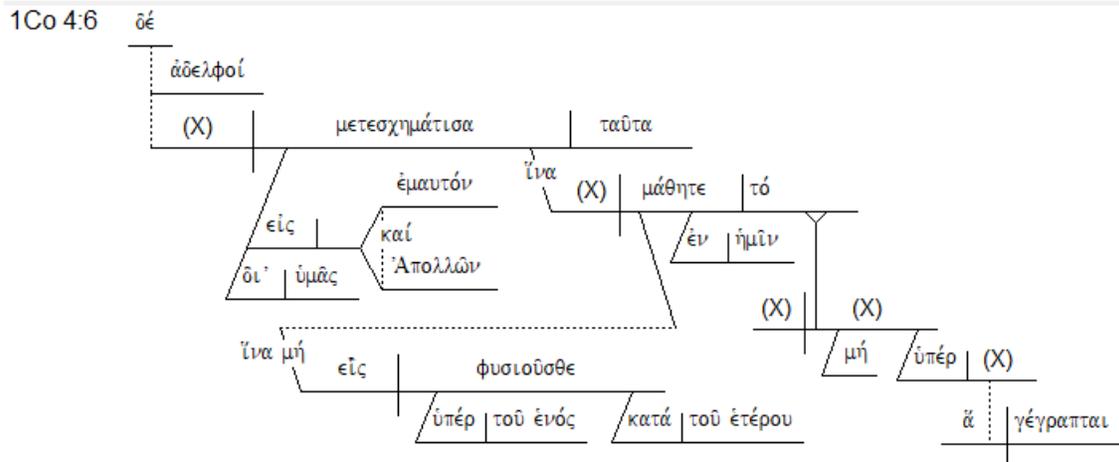
Conclusion: **2 Cor. 11:21-29** – look at what Paul endured for the sake of the Cross;

Isaiah 52-53 = not a pretty picture; we sadly have more in common with the Corinthians than with the apostles.

Charles Hodges: The Corinthians were not to think of their ministers more highly than the Bible authorized them to think. . . The followers of Apollos exalted themselves over

those of Paul, and those of Paul over those of Cephas. One exalted himself above another and against him. He not only thought himself better than his brother, but assumed a hostile attitude towards him.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

TITLE: TOUGH LOVE

BIG IDEA:

EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AGGRESSIVELY CONFRONTS SIN AND PROVIDES JUST THE RIGHT BALANCE OF NURTURE AND DISCIPLINE FOR THE NEED OF THE MOMENT TO ACHIEVE THE DESIRED CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR

INTRODUCTION:

Sin in the church of Jesus Christ cannot be ignored or swept under the carpet. It would be wrong to imagine that things will just correct themselves over time. Look at the tragic outcome in the life of the prophet Eli for failing to properly discipline his sons. The Apostle Paul deeply felt the burden of nurturing each church along the treacherous pathway of spiritual growth and maturity with all of the pitfalls and opposition along the way. Here he is concluding his lengthy section on contrasting the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. He has just exposed the arrogant pride and self-sufficiency of the Corinthians who were undermining his pastoral example and ministry foundation. They had taken their eyes off of their crucified Savior and were boasting in schisms centered around various prominent personalities in the church.

This section provides a casebook example of how to effectively perform **nouthetic counseling** (after the pattern described by **Jay Adams** in *How to Help People Change*). “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness . . .” (**2 Tim. 3:16**). Certainly all of these four elements can be traced through Paul’s interaction with the Corinthians as he seeks to correct them and restore them to vibrant spiritual health.

Richard Hays: Paul’s tone changes abruptly in **verse 14**. Having scolded his readers devastatingly, he reaches out to embrace them as his “*beloved children*.” When he says that he is not trying to shame them, he means that his aim is not to disgrace them but to **correct their behavior**. This image of fatherly correction is deeply imbedded in Israel’s wisdom tradition: It is the role of the father to reprove and chasten his children to bring them into the disciplined way of knowledge and obedience (e.g., **Prov. 3:11–12; 13:24; 19:18**). The “*rod*” that Paul brandishes in **4:21** (not a “whip,” as in NIV), is the “*rod of correction*” that the Old Testament sages believed a father should use to drive away folly from the heart of the immature (**Prov. 22:15; 23:13–14**). Thus, even if Paul has had to use severe rhetoric, his severity has had a fatherly purpose, and he now seeks to reassure the Corinthians that he is acting out of love and concern for them. His hope is that they will recognize the error of their ways and accept the welcoming gesture that he offers in **verses 14–15**. . .

Given the present turmoil and division in the Corinthian community, however, Paul is not able to end this section of the letter on a kind and encouraging note. He has received

discouraging reports (1:11) not only that the community is divided but also that some of the Corinthians, supposing that Paul is not coming back -- he had, after all, by this time been gone for several years -- have become “*arrogant*” (the same word that was translated “*puffed up*” in 4:6). We have already seen that their arrogance is based on their pretensions to possess wisdom, but there is also a clear suggestion here that they are explicitly repudiating Paul’s authority. Presumably they have gained new ideas from other sources that they regard as being more spiritually sophisticated and rhetorically polished. In a breathtakingly bold conclusion to this section of the letter, Paul calls their bluff and threatens unnamed but ominous consequences if they persist in their rebellion against his authority. When he arrives, there will be a showdown: He will “find out not the rhetoric [logon] of these puffed-up ones but their power.” . . .

Paul concludes this section of the letter, then, by placing the choice back in the hands of the Corinthians. If they continue on their present course of boasting and resisting Paul’s authority, he will be forced to administer stern discipline when he appears in Corinth; on the other hand, if they acknowledge his authority and repent of their boasting, he will be able to come with gentleness. By sending this letter ahead, he is giving them fair warning and allowing them time to get their affairs in order. Much will depend, then, on how they react to the more specific directives that he is going to give them in the rest of the letter.

Paul has at last brought to a close the opening section of the letter. He has exhorted the Corinthians in numerous ways to turn away from their boasting in human wisdom and to seek to be reunified in the service of the one God to whom they all belong, who is ultimately their one judge. In the chapters that follow, he will seek to build on the foundation of these opening chapters in a way that will decisively reshape the community’s understanding of its identity in Christ—and, therefore, its behavior.

Mark Taylor: Paul’s purpose is not to demean them but rather to admonish them since he is their spiritual father. The father/child metaphor reminds the Corinthians of Paul’s role as the founder of the community and brings a measure of balance to their understanding of Paul’s previous use of servant language in 3:5 – 4:5. The metaphor affirms the **familial relationship** they enjoy “*in Christ*” and Paul’s responsibility to warn them of spiritual dangers and sets the stage for the key exhortation in 4:16, “*I urge you to imitate me.*” The father image is appropriate for what Paul wants to do in this section: **admonish, exhort, and, if necessary, discipline (4:18–21).**

The focus of 4:14–17, which is closely linked to 4:6–13, is apostolic imitation. To this point in the argument Paul has established that his ministry among them embodied the wisdom of God (2:1–5, 13–16; 3:10), that he and other apostles are living examples of Christ crucified (4:9–13). In 4:17 he explains that he sent Timothy for the purpose of reminding them of Paul’s manner of life in Christ. Again in 11:1 Paul will exhort the Corinthians to “*follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*” The cross is the measure of genuine apostleship, but it is also the standard of all things Christian (4:17). The Corinthians must embrace the wisdom of the cross exemplified by the apostles in order to rid themselves of arrogance that leads to divisions and other vices. In the

concluding verses of this section, **4:18–21**, Paul admonishes the arrogant yet again and warns that he will come and discover how effective they are for the kingdom of God. But how will he come to them; “*with a whip, or in love with a gentle spirit*”?

Andrew Noselli: Paul gives a fatherly appeal to imitate him (**vv. 14-17**), and he tells the Corinthians that he plans to return (**vv. 18-21**). He pastorally follows up on his rebukes in **verses 1-13** by shrewdly reasserting his apostolic authority. The heart behind his rebukes is to warn or correct the believers in the same way a wise and kind father shepherds his beloved children without causing them to feel bitter or resentful. As the one who planted the Corinthian church, Paul is their spiritual father. In ancient times, sons imitated the vocation of their fathers. Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate him as their role model by living in light of God’s wisdom of a crucified Messiah and not in light of worldly wisdom. In particular, the Corinthians must mature by not dividing over church leaders. Paul commissioned Timothy to help the Corinthians connect what they know with how they live. Some arrogant Corinthians think Paul will not visit them again, but Paul promises to return and confront them. They arrogantly belittle Paul, but they are like a chihuahua crazily barking at a s Doberman pinscher. God’s wisdom and power contradict worldly wisdom and power (cf. **2Co 12:9**). Paul appeals to the Corinthians like a father might to his misbehaving children: would you prefer a hug or a spanking?

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: The church needs spiritual fathers to live exemplary lives and provide gentle, firm correction to help others mature in Christ.

I. Spiritual Fathers Have a Unique Relationship with Their Children (4:14-15).

- A. They care for us (**4:14**).
- B. They gave us birth (**4:15**).

II. Spiritual Fathers Provide an Example to Follow (4:16-17).

- A. We imitate them (**4:16**).
- B. We follow their teaching (**4:17**).

III. Spiritual Fathers Confront Us When We Sin (4:18-19).

- A. They confront our sinful attitudes (**4:18**).
- B. They confront our sinful actions (**4:19**).

IV. Spiritual Fathers Correct Us as Needed (4:20-21).

- A. They provide spiritual perspective (**4:20**).
- B. They provide spiritual discipline (**4:21**).

THREE TACTICS PURSUED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL IN HIS NOUTHETIC COUNSELING OF THE CORINTHIANS

Definition of “**nouthetic counseling**”:

The three ideas found in the word nouthesia are *Confrontation*, *Concern* and *Change*.

To put it simply, nouthetic counseling consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.

<http://www.gateway-biblical-counseling.net/definition.html>

I. (:14-15) TACTIC #1 = CONFRONTATION -- HIS AGGRESSIVE APPROACH -- THE PREROGATIVE OF A SPIRITUAL FATHER TO ADMONISH AND CORRECT ERROR

Def. of **Prerogative**: an exclusive or special right, power or privilege (Webster's)

A. (:14) His Fatherly Role Motivates Him to Confront Sin

1. Context for this Confrontation

"I write these things"

Look especially at the previous paragraph covered in **4:6-13**

Paul Gardner: "*These things*" (ταῦτα) refers to all that Paul has said thus far, not just the last few verses. Two contrasting purpose clauses follow. First, Paul speaks negatively. The participle provides the purpose clause (ἐντρέπων). He does not write to "*shame*" them. (Note this is not the verb καταισχύνω that was discussed in **1:27** with its connotations of God's judgment.) In a status-conscious community in which appearances matter more than they should, Paul wants to be clear that he is not deliberately seeking to make them feel "put down." His intention is not publicly to insult or demean them in front of each other or before the world. His intention throughout has been to seek to help them see that their "belonging," their status, is safe and secure, yet "in Christ" this will be seen in ways that the world does not recognize. In today's terminology, their "self-esteem" should not lie in what they look like, what gifts they have received, or how sophisticated their speech and behavior are. It should be found simply in the grace and love of the Lord. So Paul does not write to undermine them as people, but rather to warn them as his "*dearly loved children*" and as one who is their "*father*" in Christ (v. **15**).

With a strong adversative Paul says, "*but rather* [ἀλλά] . . . [I write] *to warn*" (νουθετῶν, another purpose participle). This verb "*to warn*" or "*admonish*" (ESV) is used in a variety of contexts, but is used elsewhere of what a father does for his children (see **Wis 11:10** LXX). In this sense, such warnings are not threats but words and actions designed to help a person mature as behavior changes.

Paul's gentle pastoral heart is on view for all to see here. It is one of the sadnesses of the modern world that our tendency is always to equate genuine love with softness of speech and character. Paul's true love for these people is to be seen at its clearest in the verses that have preceded this. Here we see Paul's understanding that as one who is loved by them and as one who loves them, his words will hurt. So he reinforces and builds on the relationship that alone actually allows him to be able to say what he has

said and still receive a hearing. If they did not actually grant this relationship, then Paul's words would fall on deaf ears.

2. Goal for this Confrontation

- a. Negatively – “*not to shame you*”
- b. Positively – “*but to admonish you*”
word from which we get “*nouthetic*”

3. Tone for this Confrontation = Father-Child Love Relationship

“*as my beloved children*”

- writes out of a heart of loving concern
- it is appropriate for him to address their behavior issues
- he writes with the authority of a father

Gordon Fee: The people in his churches are his “*children*” because they are his converts (v. 15; Phlm. 10); and because they are his children in this sense, he can exhort and encourage (1 Thess. 2:11), or chide (2 Cor. 6:13; 12:14; Gal. 4:19), or appeal, as here.

John MacArthur: Despite their fleshly, even sometimes hateful immaturity, Paul always looked on the Corinthian believers with affection (cf. 2 Co 12:14, 15; Gal 4:19; Php 1:23-27; 3 Jn4).

B. (:15) His Fatherly Role Should Motivate the Corinthians to Receive His Counsel

1. Limitation of Role of Tutors

“*for if you were to have countless tutors in Christ*”

2. Uniqueness of Role of Father

“*yet you would not have many fathers*”

No, you only have one legitimate father.

[Illustration: Julie has been in many plays; many different actors have played her father; I always made it a point with her that I was uniquely “Father #1!”]

Gordon Fee: Having called them his “*dear children*,” Paul proceeds to make use of this imagery in two ways:

- first, in this first sentence, to reestablish his unique, and therefore authoritative, relationship to them as their founder;
- second, in the follow-up sentence (vv. 16–17), to urge them to conform their behavior to the “*father’s*” example.

3. Privilege of Role of Soul Winner

“*for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.*”

- spiritual father in Christ
- power of the proclamation of the gospel message
- as a result, he certainly deserves their obedience – as long as what he is asking is consistent with following Christ = transition to next point
- “Who’s your Daddy?”

II. (:16-17) TACTIC #2 = CONCERN – SHARING HIS LIFE EXAMPLE -- THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AND MINISTRY METHODOLOGY WORTH EMULATING

A. (:16) Key Exhortation: Imitate the Apostle Paul (as he imitated Christ)

“I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.”

Paul’s life and ministry methodology were consistent with his teaching;
 What spiritual mentors have provided helpful examples for us?
 What are the limitations of such models?

Paul Gardner: Paul’s concern is that the Corinthians imitate him in the sense that they follow both his teaching and his practice in whatever life they have been called to lead. Paul wants their lives to reflect the saving gospel of Christ, and that means not a life of triumphalism, elitism, sophistic arrogance, or status seeking but rather **a life that reflects the crucified Christ.**

David Garland: It is natural for children to take after their fathers (D. Stanley 1959: 872), and Paul regards “his life worthy of imitation because it is defined by the ‘word of the cross’” (Pickett 1997: 59). The image of pupils imitating their teacher also was widespread (Lindemann 2000: 114–15). It should be remembered that these first converts had no precedents or heritage to coach them on how to live out the radical demands of the gospel. They had only Paul’s verbal instructions and what they could witness firsthand of his own behavior and attitudes. Paul’s request that they imitate him, however, strikes many today as egotistical, but such criticism should dissipate when one traces what he could expect them to imitate. They are to give up their hankering for high status and accept the lowliness that Paul models. They are to welcome being regarded as fools for Christ, and as weak and dishonored. They are to return abuse with blessing, slander with conciliation, and to endure persecution (4:10–13). They are to recognize that all that they are and have comes to them as a grace-gift from God (3:10) and that they are not inherently extraordinary (4:7). They are to think of themselves as no better than menial field hands (3:5) and servants (4:1) awaiting God’s judgment to determine if they were trustworthy (4:5). They are to rid themselves of all resentments and rivalries with co-workers so that they can toil together in God’s field (3:5–9). They are to resist passing themselves off as wise or elite by using lofty words of wisdom or aligning themselves with those who do and to rely instead on the power of God that works through weakness, fear, and trembling (2:1–4). The ultimate aim is not to be Paul-like, but Christlike (11:1). The Corinthians are to imitate him only insofar as his behavior corresponds to the gospel (cf. 4:9–13, his suffering; 9:19, his becoming the slave of all; 2 Cor. 12:9–10, his weakness; 2 Cor. 12:12, his patience).

B. (:17) Reinforced by the Personal Ministry of Timothy

1. Choice of Sending Timothy = Paul's #1 Clone

"For this reason I have sent to you Timothy"

They are getting Paul's best representative – His ace card.

Anthony Thiselton: We have identified two ways in which Paul exhibits pastoral care: his desire for the readers' good and his personal involvement or empathy with them. The "*father*" image necessitated a wider exegetical discussion. Now we identify a third way. As pastor and father, Paul expresses his care not only through his talk but also **through his walk** (in rabbinic terms, not only *haggadah* but also *halakhah*); not only through his words but also through his life and actions. He sends (or has sent) Timothy in his place until he himself can return to them in person (vv. 17-19), and they may witness not only his beliefs but also his "*ways*" (NRSV) or patterns of life (v. 17), which are consistently taught in every Christian congregation (v. 17b).

Craig Blomberg: Because of his unique relationship to this congregation as their church planter and the one responsible for leading many of its members to the Lord, Paul has a unique responsibility and authority to oversee their spiritual growth. He would like to be personally present again to model correct Christian living, but he believes the Lord wants him to stay on in Ephesus a little while longer (1 Cor. 16:8-9). So he has sent Timothy as his personal surrogate (cf. 16:10-11; Acts 19:22), who will hopefully overcome his timidity and arrive soon.

2. Commendation of Timothy – Properly mirrors this father-son bond

"who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord"

3. Christ-Centered Focus of Paul's Example

"he will remind you of my ways where are in Christ"

4. Consistency of the Apostolic Example

a. All places

"just as I teach everywhere"

b. All churches

"in every church"

- No cultural accommodation
- There are certain non-negotiables in following Christ

Paul Gardner: Paul is teaching nothing that would not have been taught by any of the other apostles. The phrase "*just as everywhere*" (καθὼς πανταχοῦ) is adverbial, modifying the present verb "*I teach*" (διδάσκω). Paul insists that there is nothing novel in what he seeks of the Corinthians. This way of life is exactly what he has taught in all the churches that he has founded. In Paul's writings the word "*church*" (ἐκκλησία)

normally refers to the local church, but here we see how Paul's thinking does not easily separate the local from the wider group of churches. The church as a whole, in all its gatherings, is to be characterized by a lifestyle, a morality, and an attitude toward others that reflect the Christ she worships, the Christ "*crucified*."

III. (:18-21) TACTIC #3 = CHANGE -- HIS CONFIDENCE IN DEMANDING CHANGE -- THE POWER TO DISCIPLINE SIN AND OPPOSE ARROGANT OPPOSITION

Craig Blomberg: With **verses 18–21**, Paul closes this four-chapter section of his letter with a **final warning**. He is coming soon, Lord willing (cf. **1 Cor. 16:5–7**), even though some in Corinth are claiming that he is not (**vv. 18–19a**). He agrees with them that talk is cheap but disputes their claim that "*his letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing*" (**2 Cor. 10:10**). If he speaks gently to them in person, it is out of love (**v. 21b**). But if necessary he will come, metaphorically speaking, with a rod (NIV "*whip*"), just as faithful fathers in Paul's day made guarded use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool for their children.

What ultimately counts, however, is the presence of genuine spiritual power, as befits the presence of God's reign (**vv. 19b–20**). This **kingly power** must not be narrowly conceived. It consists of the edifying manifestation of spiritual gifts, of winning people to Christ and disciplining them, of moral living, and of appropriate humble self-assessment, all in striking contrast to the regal roles the Corinthians thought they were playing (**v. 8**).

A. (:18) The Challenge of Arrogance

"Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you."

B. (:19-20) The Confidence of Spiritual Power

1. (:19a) Personal Presence of the Apostle Paul – subject to God's leading
"But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills"

2. (:19b) Prideful Pretenders – exposed as powerless
"and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power"

Gordon Fee: Now he threatens the arrogant. When he returns, will they have merely logos, or will they also be able to demonstrate the dynamis of God in their worldly wisdom? They claim to have the Spirit; will they evidence what for Paul is the crucial matter, namely the powerful, dynamic presence of the Spirit among them to save and to sanctify (cf. **5:1–5**)? Obviously he has little fear of the outcome of such a confrontation!

3. (:20) Spiritual Power – in submission to the kingdom of God
"for the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power."

Paul Gardner: The basis on which Paul will call their bluff is the nature of the kingdom of God itself, which manifests the power of God through the Spirit of God. The adversative (ἀλλά) and lack of verb intensify the contrast and make it terse. Paul is speaking of **God's dynamic rule**, his reign in kingly power, and the fulfillment of his purposes of salvation that will one day reach the great consummation in the return of the King himself. Paul takes the idea of "*the kingdom of God*" as a given when writing to the Corinthians. Herein lies the source of the power of which he has been talking. This kingdom has been inaugurated by King Jesus, the Messiah. One day when "*the end*" comes, Christ will deliver "*the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power*" (15:24–25 ESV). The present rule of Christ among the people will only be seen if the power of God is evident in the church.

When Paul comes to Corinth, he will be seeking to discover evidence that God in Christ is at work through these leaders. He fears that their grace-gifts, abused to buy them status and honor within the community, will offer no such evidence. The irony is that real evidence will be offered as people's lives are so changed that they become Christ-like and even "apostle-like," as has been described earlier. It is in weakness, in being the scum of the earth and yet living for God and his rule that kingdom power will be manifest. This is what Paul desires to see, and so he ends with a statement that is regarded by most as harsh or heavy-handed.

C. (:21) The Call for Decision

1. You Make the Call

"What do you desire?"

2. Two Options

a. Rod of Loving Discipline

"Shall I come to you with a rod?"

b. Peacefulness of Loving Gentleness

"or with love and a spirit of gentleness?"

Craig Blomberg: Parental love earns the right to discipline—hence **verses 18–21**. Paul warns us that our behavior ought to match our words. If not, then corrective action is required. Yet this corrective action must have the proper balance. All love without discipline produces a pampering permissiveness that leaves its recipients spoiled and still in their sins. Yet discipline untempered by love produces a harsh authoritarianism that drives people away from the church, and often from God, the minute they have the chance to escape.

Daniel Akin: Paul concludes with two rhetorical questions that would certainly get the church's attention.

- First, "*What do you want?*" The idea is, what would you like me to do? How I respond will depend on you and how you respond to my letter.
- Second, "*Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*" The Message paraphrases: "So how should I prepare to come to you? As a

severe disciplinarian who makes you walk the line? Or as a good friend and counselor who wants to share heart-to-heart with you? You decide.”
The children would prefer hugs and kisses, not discipline! Paul would prefer the same. The key will be their response. Paul loves them as his children. He will do whatever he must. He loves them too much to let them go on acting like fools and embarrassing themselves. After all, he is a good father!

Gordon Fee: At the end he has finally also **reasserted his authority** over them, but even here he concludes by using paternal imagery, not apostolic authority -- a father correcting recalcitrant children, not an apostle wielding divine authority. The clear implication is that they have no choice but to give heed to what he is saying. Their behavior, as well as their theology, needs both correction and redirection.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have you applied these tactics of nouthetic counseling? Did you cover all of these bases? What was the result?
- 2) When have you been too slow to confront sin in your family and what were the consequences?
- 3) What type of example do you have to commend to others? How visible and accessible is your life to others?
- 4) Are you equally willing to apply the rod of discipline as to fellowshiping in love and gentleness – depending on the situation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: The **first principle** we looked at (at the conference) was that, in dealing with another person, you should try to convey some sense of confidence and love first. Never wipe out somebody: "If you are going to act this way I don't want anything to do with you again. Get out of my sight." Paul never does that. He never says, "I don't want to have anything to do with you Corinthians again." Rather, he says, "You are my beloved children." At the point of sharpest censure, you find this term of deepest endearment. Isn't that amazing?

The **second principle** was: Present a model. Notice how Paul does that here -- "Be imitators of me. I sent Timothy to you to remind you of my ways in Christ. I do not want you to follow what I say; I want you to follow what I do." Now, that troubles a lot of us. Many people think Paul is conceited when he says that. But he is not. He is recognizing the universal psychological principle that people will always follow what

you do, not what you say. You can talk your head off to people, but, if your life does not reflect what you say, they will not follow you. They will pay no attention to it, because coming through all the time is that non-verbal communication that is saying, "Yes, I am saying all this to you, but it is not really very important because I do not bother to do it myself." You have no right to talk if you do not do what you say. Many parents have kidded themselves into thinking they were teaching their children right when they told them what to do, but never did it themselves. The child picked up all the vibes that were coming through, and did just like the parents did. So the second principle is: Present a model.

The **third principle** was: Preserve liberty. That is, do not box someone in so they have no choice in the matter. Allow them to have a choice as to what they do or do not do. Notice how Paul does that here. "*I admonish you,*" he says. "*I do not command you; I admonish you. I urge you, but the choice is yours. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness? You have the liberty to choose.*" What an important principle that is. Everybody resists being compelled to do things, but Paul does not threaten sanctions or punishment. He simply says, "You have the choice to make, and it is up to you to choose."

And then the **last principle** was: Confront realistically. That is, strip off all the illusions and bring things down to the way they are. That is what Paul says, "*When I come I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.*" What is the fruit of your life? Jesus said, "*By their fruits you will know them,*" (cf, **Matt 12:33**). Do not listen to their words. Many a person has been deceived by the smooth talk of someone who leads him along with deceptive words that sounded wonderful. But the thing to do is to ask, "What has happened as a result of all these good words?"

Doug Goins: The word in **verse 14** that is translated "*admonish*" can also be translated "*warn*." It's what a father does in hopes that his children will see the error of their ways and change. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament makes this comment about the word "*admonish*": "The word carries the idea of having a corrective influence on someone while not provoking or embittering." It implies counsel and appeal. His desire isn't to criticize and punish, but to admonish and encourage. In this appeal to follow his corrective instruction he conveys a wonderful confidence that they can change and that they will want to. There are many people who will criticize. That's what "tutors" do. They don't have a personal, relational, familial interest in you. What Paul wants is for the Corinthians to grow up more fully in the image of Jesus Christ, seeing life the way he does. . .

Paul's appeal here is very wise, because there is no real spiritual growth until each of us personally, volitionally responds to the correction of the word of God. The Lord Jesus desires that each one of us be fully alive, vital, and truly effective for him. He wants to destroy our complacency. He wants to change our illusion of having arrived and of needing nothing more. He wants to replace our sense of self-sufficiency with his own sufficiency. The Lord Jesus desires white-hot, passionate intimacy with us, not just

lukewarm congeniality, or being on pleasant speaking terms with him. He wants us to passionately be in love with him. The apostle Paul has appealed to us with great sensitivity, clarity, and gentleness. The Lord Jesus is equally gentle in his appeal in **Revelation 3:20**: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.*" Jesus says, "Let's have a meal together. I would love that sort of intimacy with you."

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul's intent is to come as quickly to Corinth as he can. His desire is that the saints there have heeded his written warnings and made right the things in which they are wrong. If such is the case, Paul can expect to come and be warmly received, forgetting the sins of the past. But if there is no repentance, if those who oppose him persist, Paul will come in power, and he will then use his apostolic authority to deal with them. The eloquent speech of these leaders will not be enough when Paul arrives, for he will expose their lack of real spiritual power.

David Lowery: Though Paul loved the Corinthians he knew that a loving father did not shy away from discipline (cf. **Heb. 12:7**). If it were needed, he would wield a whip (*rabdos*, a "rod"). From the Greco-Roman point of view this "rod was a symbol of discipline executed by one in authority.

Thomas Leake: 5 Insights into the Heart of a Spiritual Father

Introduction: Privilege of becoming a spiritual father; Paul is expressing his heart for the new believers under his care

Matt 23:5-12 – Different context here – applies to false teachers taking on lofty titles; does not contradict this passage.

1) (:14) A Spiritual Father Lovingly Admonishes

3:1-3 – using strong language; **4:7, 10**

Some Dads wrongly shame their kids – **Eph 6:4** = speaking down, demeaning
Paul's intent = to admonish = "*to put to mind*," exhort to change, bringing the truth to bear; a loving confrontation to benefit and change the other; other NT usages:

Acts 20:31 – night and day for space of 3 years; both publicly and house to house; with tears

Col. 1:28 – admonishing and teaching go hand-in-hand; goal is maturity

1 Thess 5:14 – unruly need admonishing; those who are not listening or responding

Dads need to do this whether they think it will work or not; you cannot take a hands-off approach.

We all need to learn to receive admonishment as good children

2) (:15) A Spiritual Father Cherishes a Special Relation to His Children

Contrast the role of a tutor vs role of a father

Definition of the gospel

1 John 3:1 – we are children of God – birthed by the Holy Spirit: **Tit 3:5**; **1 Pet 1:23**

Nothing wrong with a tutor = glorified babysitter; guardian of boys to protect them,

keep them out of trouble; take them back and forth to school; only the upper class could afford.

Unique status as father – **Titus 1:4**

Am I being faithful to sow the gospel message??

- pray for opportunities to witness and be sensitive when God presents them
- Help with ministering to the visitors at church
- Carry tracts and literature and CDs and use them strategically
- Invite unsaved person to church
- Get involved in new evangelism ministries that are offered
- live a consistent example among your own children = your first harvest field

3) (:16) A Spiritual Father Wants His Children to Be Like Him

“Be imitators of me” 11:1 – “just as I am of Christ”

Use of *parakaleo* – exhort – **1:10; 14:31; 16:15**

They did not have a chance to see Christ in person, but they had the Apostle Paul to imitate.

We need to be a copy of what is good; Paul not being proud here

Corinthians needed a servant type example – **4:1**

“you shall be holy for I am holy”

Our model of discipleship involves the entire church – not just limited to following the example of one person

4) (:17) A Spiritual Father Wants His Children Taught Correctly

- Sent Timothy because he was trusted; faithful to Paul’s ways

Prov 10:1; 1 Tim 1:2; Acts 16:1-3; Acts 18:5; 1 Cor 16:10-11; 2 Cor 1:19;

Sent as an example; but sent on a teaching mission – children tend to forget and need to be continually retaught = requires great patience **2 Tim 4:2**

- Consistent teaching; same in all of the churches; not singling out the Corinthians and expecting something special of them – 1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; 14:33 (cf. mantra of some pastors today = “you will not hear any sermons here”)
- Spiritual heart of a pastor = same as that of a nurturing father – **1 Pet 5:1-2; Ezek 34:2**; What good is a father who doesn’t teach his children or a shepherd who doesn’t teach his flock? – **1 Tim 4:15; Deut 8:3**
- Must teach every word, not just the popular ones – **Job 23:12**; must have greater allegiance to the Word of God than to anything else

5) (:18-21) A Spiritual Father Holds His Children Accountable

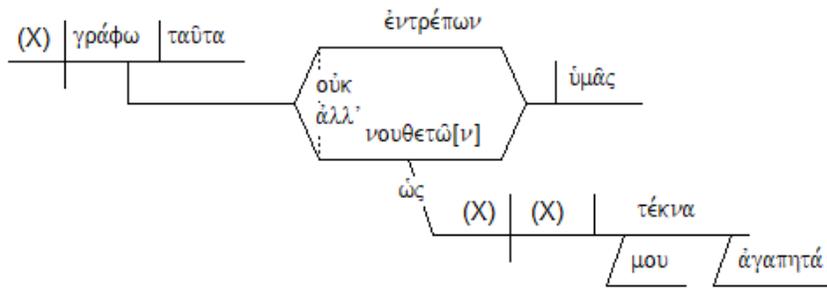
- They arrogantly think that Paul is not coming; maybe he is scared of them; maybe that is why he is sending Timothy;
- Title: “Just wait until Daddy gets home”
They are not getting away with things – **1 Cor 11:34; 16:3** – no doubt that Paul is coming;
- *“if the Lord will”* is not a softening of Paul’s resolve; just submission to God’s will
- *“I will find out”* – direct confrontation; talk is cheap
- *“words”* = human wisdom and teaching; as opposed to the message of the Cross

which has power in it – **1 Cor 2:4**

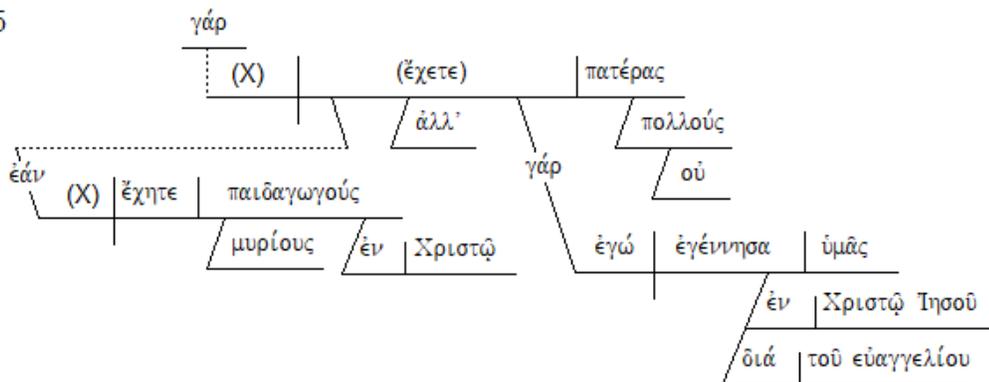
- “power” – not a fascination with miracles; not emotionalism but power to change lives (**1 Thess 1:5**)
- present aspect of the kingdom of God – Col 1:13; 4:11 – transferred into that kingdom and workers right now; it is a spiritual reality
- resurrection power – **2 Cor 5:17** – How do drunkards turn into disciples? How do worldly toads turn into godly princes? **Phil 3:7-11** – power to turn the greatest persecutor of the church into its greatest Apostle and proponent; **Rom 14:17**
- the choice is theirs – but having Paul not come is not an option; they had underestimated Paul and his resolve and his spiritual power

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

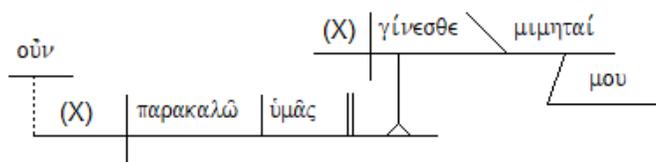
1Co 4:14



1Co 4:15



1Co 4:16



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

TITLE: NO TOLERANCE FOR SEXUAL PERVERSION

BIG IDEA:
CHURCH DISCIPLINE MUST BE ENFORCED AGAINST SEXUAL PERVERSION

INTRODUCTION:

The failure of the Christian church to enforce church discipline against sexual immorality in its midst has severely compromised its inner health and outward testimony. Tolerance has become the modern virtue; but apparently tolerance was very much in vogue back in the Corinthian church as well. The Apostle Paul calls God's people to take sin seriously and to understand the devastating impact of allowing sexual immorality to go unjudged. "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*" The urgency of the situation calls for immediate intervention on the part of the Apostle Paul and clear direction to the Corinthian church.

Gordon Fee: With his opening sentence (5:1) Paul clearly turns to address a **new issue**, a case of incest that is being at least tolerated, if not actually condoned, among the community of believers. The new topic is conceptually so unlike what has preceded that most scholars see the two sections as related only in terms of how Paul knew about the situation—that this, too, had been reported to him (5:1; cf. 1:11). But that seems to overlook some of the linguistic ties between this section and the conclusion of the preceding one (4:14–21), especially

- (1) the "*arrogance*" of "some" (4:18–19) and the arrogance of the church in what follows (5:2, 6), and
- (2) the lack of "*power*" among the arrogant (4:19–20) vis-à-vis the "*power of our Lord Jesus*" (5:4).

These may give more logic to the sequence than one might perceive at first glance and would probably be more immediately perceptible if we didn't have chapter and verse numbers(!). In the final paragraph of the preceding argument Paul finally reasserted his apostolic authority, in the context of those who were "*puffed up*" against him and his "*coming very soon*" in order to find out their "*power*." What seems to be at stake in the next three sections (5:1–13; 6:1–11; 6:12–20) is the crisis of authority that was a large part of what lay behind the preceding long argument (1:10 – 4:21), and especially the authority of Paul vis-à-vis the "*arrogant*" who were responsible for leading the church in its new direction, both theologically/behaviorally and over against Paul. . .

The argument itself and its overall point are basically easy to determine. The opening sentences (vv. 1–2) state what Paul knows about the problem and give his basic solution to it: they are to **put this man outside the believing community**—a command that is repeated no less than four times (vv. 2, 4–5, 7, 13). In a passage that is full of exegetical difficulties (vv. 3–5), he then outlines how and why they are to carry out the expulsion,

and in the succeeding paragraph (vv. 6–8) he offers by way of analogy his own theological basis for it. He then returns to the church’s attitude (vv. 9–13) and ties it directly to their misunderstanding or disregard of his former letter, in which he had already spoken to these matters. He offers a clarification that concludes the argument as it began: They are “*to judge those inside*” and in some fashion to expel the incestuous man from the believing community.

David Garland: The root problem is their spiritual arrogance combined with moral laxity. Since Paul directs all of his commands to the church body, we can infer that he is more vexed with the congregation than he is with the culprit. The man is committing an odious sin, but they have permitted the person guilty of such sin to continue as a member in good standing without taking any disciplinary action. If they are the temple of God (3:16–17), the presence of this sin in their midst completely befouls its sanctity. Paul wants to puncture their inflated arrogance, to shake them out of their blasé attitude toward this sinful conduct, to purify the community of the contagion, and to create a situation that drives home the seriousness of the man’s sin and his need for repentance.

Carl Laney: The church that neglects to confront and correct its members lovingly is not being kind, forgiving, or gracious. Such a church is really hindering the Lord’s work and the advance of the gospel. The church without discipline is a church without purity (Eph. 5:25-27) and power (cf. Josh. 7:11-12a). By neglecting church discipline a church endangers not only its spiritual effectiveness but also its very existence. God snuffed out the candle of the church at Thyatira because of moral compromise (Rev. 2:20-24). Churches today are in danger of following this first-century precedent. (*Biblical*, 354)

Robert Saucy: Church discipline in all its forms was given by the Head of the church for the health and welfare of the body. To avoid its practice when necessary for the sake of reputation or what is really a false unity can only lead to a sick and weak church life. (*The Church*, 126)

Mark Taylor: Chapter 5 divides into two sections. In 5:1–8, Paul acknowledges that immorality is being reported among the Corinthians, confronts their complacent attitude toward the sin, and directs the church to carry out appropriate disciplinary action. In 5:9–13, Paul clarifies a misunderstanding from a previous letter regarding associations with immoral people and concludes with a final injunction to expel the wicked man from the community. There are four directives to take decisive action regarding outrageous sin in their midst (5:2,5,7,13). There are three issues at hand:

- (1) the sin of the offender,
- (2) the corporate responsibility of the church toward the sinner, and
- (3) their present arrogance.

Ultimately Paul’s concern is for the purity of the church, which is God’s sacred temple inhabited by the Holy Spirit (3:16–17).

I. (:1-5) APOSTOLIC INTERVENTION – SEXUAL IMMORALITY CANNOT BE TOLERATED IN THE CHURCH

A. (:1) Shocking Report of Sexual Immorality Tolerated in the Church

“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.”

1. Public Nature of This Perversion – reported to the Apostle Paul

2. Immoral Nature of This Perversion – *porneia* – general word for any type of sexual immorality: fornication / adultery / homosexuality / etc. (cf. English word “pornography”)

David Prior: We recall that Corinth was a sex-obsessed seaport. Hardly a Corinthian convert would have been left uncontaminated, directly or indirectly, by sexual immorality of one kind or another. Its tentacles would have clung tight and its poison run deep. In such a context it would have been very tempting to compromise the Christian position, either by judgmental expressions of horror at sexual deviation or by easy-going tolerance. . .

It was a case of incest, and even pagan thinkers were appalled by it.

Although Paul has such a distinctively unpleasant problem presented to him, the nub of the matter is contained in the more general word translated *immorality* in **5:1**. The Greek word is *porneia*, which has the literal meaning of ‘resorting to prostitutes’. In Corinth the priestesses of the temple to Aphrodite were sacred prostitutes and the practice of *porneia* was particularly prevalent in such an atmosphere. The word came to mean, by consistent New Testament usage, **any sexual behaviour which transgresses the Christian norm**, that is, all premarital, extramarital and unnatural sexual intercourse. ‘The word is used in a comprehensive sense, including all violations of the seventh commandment.’

3. Shocking Nature of This Perversion = Incest

- condemned by even the unbelieving Gentiles
- sex with the man’s stepmother
- Present tense for a continuing relationship

John MacArthur: This sin was so vile that even the church’s pagan neighbors were doubtless scandalized by it. The Corinthians had rationalized or minimized this sin which was common knowledge, even though Paul had written them before about it (**v. 9**).

Steve Zeisler: Notice, finally, that the woman involved in this relationship is never mentioned. The reason is that she probably was not a believer. Paul is very clear in saying (**vs.12, 13**) that a non-believer will be judged by his or her specific refusal to know God. It is not the business of the church to judge non-believers.

James Boyer: The least that can be said is that they were living together as man and wife.

Gordon Fee: But in this instance the problem is not just *porneia* in general. Paul seems to have had trouble with that previously in Corinth and addressed it in an earlier letter (v. 9). What exercises him in this instance is that the form of *porneia* they are tolerating is of a kind that was not tolerated “*even among pagans*,” people whose moral standards were not otherwise high in the biblical sense: namely (lit.) “*a man has his father’s wife*,” which the NIV has rendered correctly (in a contemporary idiom), “*A man is sleeping with his father’s wife*.” The problem is **incest**, a man taking a wife of his father other than his own mother and “*having*” her sexually in an ongoing relationship.

Mark Taylor: The Old Testament condemned incest, but so did Roman law. The fact that even pagans disapproved of the sin allowed Paul to appeal to a universal norm of decency and added all the more to the shame of the Corinthian attitude and lack of disciplinary action.

B. (:2-5) Contrasting Responses of the Corinthian Church vs the Apostle Paul

1. (:2) Arrogant Tolerance on the Part of the Corinthian Church

“You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”

- a. Wrong Attitude – Arrogance vs Mourning
connection to previous context of spiritual pride in chap. 4

Mark Taylor: The only possible response to the circumstance should have been corporate mourning and the removal of the unrepentant sinner. The term used here for mourning occurs in other contexts indicating genuine anguish of soul over sin, whether one’s own sin or the sin of others. Paul uses the term again in **2 Cor 12:21** to refer to his grief “*over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged*” (cf. also **Matt 5:4; Jas 4:9**). The term is used in **Mark 16:10** of those who mourned the death of Jesus and three times in Revelation (**18:11,15,19**) for the grief one experiences over an enormous loss.

- b. Simple Solution – Remove the transgressor

Robert Gundry: Instead of getting puffed up despite having in their midst a fornicator such as even pagans wouldn’t tolerate, they should have mourned because of having him in their midst. We don’t know why they didn’t mourn as they should have, though it’s a good guess that the man was one whose wealth and influence people in the Corinthian church depended on. Maybe they met in his home. Whatever the case, mourning suggests sorrow over a death, and a moral death has indeed occurred. So the church should have buried the incestuous man, so to speak, by removing him out of

their midst the way a corpse, decaying as it does, is removed through burial. Paul is speaking of a social burial: **ostracism**.

David Garland: It is more likely that Paul speaks of their **boasting despite the immorality rather than because of it** (Clarke 1993: 76–77). This statement should be connected to his previous remarks in **4:6, 18, 19** chiding them for their “*puffery*.” How can they boast when they have such blatant and outrageous immorality in their midst? Paul registers the irony that “a church so confident and arrogant could be guilty of tolerating incest in its midst” (Clarke 1993: 76). Godet (1886: 242) comments, “Even this fact has not suffered to disturb the proud self-satisfaction which he has already rebuked in the Corinthians in the previous chapter, or to make them come down from the celestial heights on which they are now walking to the real state of things” (so also Weiss 1910: 125; Robertson and Plummer 1914: 96; Allo 1935: 116; Barrett 1968: 122). Findlay (1910: 807) claims that Paul bursts the Corinthians’ inflated opinion of themselves “with this crushing fact, no intellectual brilliance, no religious enthusiasm, can cover this hideous blot.” They are not puffed up because this man flouts taboos, but in spite of it. The problem, then, is not that they applauded this incestuous relationship but that they ignored it (Clarke 1993: 87). Paul’s seeks to rid the church of this ruinous sinner and their ruinous pride alike.

David Prior: Such a situation highlights three needs: for discipline (**5:2b–13**), for clear convictions (**6:9–11**) and for purity (**6:12–20**), all of which must be centred on Jesus Christ.

2. (:3-5) Decisive Judgment on the Part of the Apostle Paul –

Six Lessons from this Enforcement of Church Discipline by Paul:
(these verses are one long sentence in the Greek)

- a. Emphatic Intervention – pronoun emphasized by word order in Greek
“For I, on my part”
- b. Connectivity of the Universal Church by the Spirit of God
“though absent in body but present in spirit”
- c. Urgency of Rendering Judgment
“have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present”

[contrast when it is appropriate and necessary to render judgment vs when we are warned against judging others]

David Garland: After noting his **spiritual presence**, he announces with an emphatic ἐγώ (*egō*; placed first in the sentence) that he has already judged the one guilty of this sin. The perfect tense (κέκρικα, *kekrika*) implies that this judgment still stands when they read this letter. The “*already*” (ἤδη, *ēdē*) perhaps hints of impatience. As their founding apostle he takes full responsibility for their behavior even when absent, and he

gives a swift, summary judgment—there can be no extenuating circumstances, and he offers no provisos. He fully expects them to confirm that judgment and to seal it with **immediate and decisive action** when they next assemble. Procrastination is inexcusable.

- d. (:4) Power of Authority Delegated from the Head of the Church
*“In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled,
and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus”*

Gordon Fee: Part of the problem, after all, is a **crisis of authority** in the church. Paul is hereby speaking a prophetic judgment on the perpetrator of this deed; but his authority is not his own. Rather, as in his most recent (preserved) letter (**2 Thess. 3:6**), he speaks *“by the authority of our Lord Jesus”* (**Moffatt**). . . To do something in someone’s name is **to act with that person’s authority**, which is precisely the point of Paul’s concern here.

- e. (:5) Severity of the Judgment – this is serious business --
*“I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan
for the destruction of his flesh”*

John MacArthur: *“Deliver”* is a strong term, used of judicial sentencing. This is equal to excommunicating the professed believer. It amounts to putting that person out of the blessing of Christian worship and fellowship by thrusting him into Satan’s realm, the world system. . . The unrepentant person may suffer greatly under God’s judgment, but will not be an evil influence in the church; and he will more likely be saved under that judgment than if tolerated and accepted in the church.

Paul Garland: *“Handing over”* concerns a formal judgment of putting the man outside the community. As **Robertson and Plummer** write, “The offender is sent back to his domain.” A person who sins in this way needs to be placed among those who belong to the realm of darkness, even if he himself will ultimately be restored. His behavior is not fitting for *“the kingdom of God”* (**4:20**), and so he can have nothing to do with the Lord’s people while he maintains his evil position. It was noted in discussion of the opening ten verses of this epistle just how vital to Paul’s thinking is his view of the lordship of Christ. This man was not obeying the Lord Jesus Christ, and so, until he repents, he must live in the world where another lord holds sway.

“destruction of his flesh” -- [One possible view] -- Fleshly actions would be those which are not God-serving but self-serving, and ultimately done in service of Satan. If we understand “flesh” in this way, then Paul—saying that his purpose is the salvation of this man’s spirit—may be intending that this “handing over” is so that the ways of the flesh will be destroyed. That is, he believes that immersion once again in the world, rather than remaining in the Christian community, will indeed lead to repentance. Repentance will then be seen in a changed life in which the flesh, that is, the behavior and life of darkness, is destroyed.

Robert Gundry: Though Paul has used “fleshy” and “fleshly” figuratively for human weakness (3:1, 3), elsewhere in 1 Corinthians “*flesh*” has to do with **physicality** (1:26, 29; 6:16; 7:28; 10:18; 15:39, 50; see also 10:10 for physical destruction); and the present contrast with “*spirit*” favors a reference to physicality here too. (“*The spirit*” can hardly refer to the Holy Spirit, for it would make theological nonsense to say he “*will be saved.*”) So “*the flesh*” refers to the incestuous man’s physical flesh, which will decay away, leaving only his bones; and “*the spirit*” refers to his human spirit, which will be saved “*in the Day of the Lord*”—that is, when Jesus returns as Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15–5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2) -- by being given a new body in resurrection (see especially 6:13–14; 15:35–57; 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:4). “*For the destruction of the flesh*” then refers to a **premature death**, much as Paul will later say that some have fallen ill and even died for having desecrated the Lord’s Supper (11:29–30).

Mark Taylor: South observes that the most widespread critical understanding of this passage is what he calls the “**curse/death**” **interpretation**, meaning that “Paul is enjoining the pronouncement of a curse on the offender in question with the expectation that he will die as a result.” The evidence for this view, as summarized by South, includes:

- (1) alleged parallels with Greek and Jewish curse formulae that Paul drew on and used in the context of church discipline;
- (2) examples of the curse/death phenomenon in the New Testament itself, such as the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11, and, more significantly, Paul’s reference to the death of some Corinthians due to their behavior at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:30);
- (3) the force of the meaning of the Greek term translated “*destruction*”; a very strong word used in the LXX to denote utter ruin, and
- (4) the use of curses in connection with the **death penalty** in the Old Testament.

Anthony Thiselton: Many interpret the destruction of the fleshly (Greek *sarx*) to denote physical illness and death. But if it denotes death, how does this sentence aim at the offender’s final salvation? This would assume that Paul refers to some postmortal period for repentance. In Rom. 8:5-9 and in numerous other passages Paul uses *sarx* (“*flesh*”) to denote not physical being but a mode of life lived in pursuit of its own ends, in an attitude of self-sufficiency, without reliance upon God (cf. Rom. 8:5-9). Paul envisages that the offender, bereft of the approval and support of the community, will find his self-sufficiency and self-reliance eroded until he comes to reach a change of heart.

- f. (:5b) Goal of the Judgment – tough love
“*so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”

II. (:6-8) CORRECTIVE INSTRUCTION – IMMORALITY COMPROMISES THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH AND MAKES A MOCKERY OF OUR WORSHIP

A. (:6) Need for Corrective Instruction

1. Attitude of Sinful Pride

“Your boasting is not good”

2. Neglect of Obvious Principles – Sin Spreads Quickly

“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?”

Remember the sad example of Achan – **Joshua 7-8**

Gordon Fee: Their major problem lay with their not taking this matter seriously, neither the evil itself nor their danger of being thoroughly contaminated by it.

David Garland: Leaven, to be distinguished from yeast, was made by keeping back a piece of the previous week’s dough, storing it in suitable conditions, and adding juices to promote the process of fermentation, much like sourdough (**Mitton** 1972–73). This moldy dough could go bad and become a contaminant, which explains why it was a fitting symbol for the infectious power of evil. This image was widely understood (cf. **Matt. 16:6; Gal. 5:9**). **Plutarch** (Quaestiones romanae et graecae 289F) wrote that leaven “is itself also the product of corruption, and produces corruption in the dough with which it is mixed; . . . and altogether the process of leavening seems to be one of putrefaction; at any rate if it goes too far, it completely sours and spoils the dough” (see also **Pliny the Elder**, *Naturalis historia* [Natural History] 18.26). A piece of bad leaven will pass on the taint to the next batch and so on. The only way to break the chain of baking bacteria-laden bread was to ditch the whole batch and start afresh. Applied to this case, the metaphor conveys that this man’s sin brings greater harm than simply being a bad example for others or generating bad publicity; it likens his sin to a toxin that will **infect and ruin the whole community**.

B. (:7) Separation From Sin Should Characterize the Church

*“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump,
just as you are in fact unleavened.*

For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”

Adewuya: Paul presents the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread as a type pointing to Christ and fulfilled in him. Thus, Paul can say that Christ has been sacrificed as our Passover lamb. Christ is the fulfillment of the old order. The moral cleansing signified by the annual cleansing of the household of old leaven is already eternally accomplished by Christ. Therefore, Paul can assure his readers that they already are unleavened dough.

C. (:8) Sincerity and Truth Should Characterize our Life and Worship

“Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Ray Stedman: Judgment permits the celebration of Christian deliverance and liberty.

James Boyer: Here Paul draws a lesson from the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed the observance of Passover. For seven days after Passover the Jews ate no leavened bread. Their law required that they remove all leaven from the household. . . . As it was unthinkable for a Jew to keep Passover without observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so it is unthinkable for a Christian to claim Christ as his Saviour from sin and to go on living in sin.

Robert Gundry: In this context *purity* means sexual morality, and *truth* means correspondence in conduct to the way God looks at us in Christ, that is, as morally clean.

David Prior: One persistent, flagrant sinner who remains accepted without discipline within the Christian fellowship taints the whole body. Just as the Jews had to celebrate their deliverance from bondage with no leaven, so Christians must continually celebrate their deliverance from sin without any compromise with the very things from which they have been set free. Otherwise, the whole worship and community life of the Christian church becomes a charade, full of insincerity and falsehood.

Paul Gardner: Just as the Passover festival had to be celebrated in an appropriate way that reflected properly what God had done through the sacrifice for and redemption of his people, so it should be for the church. Their lifelong celebration should be as a holy people, separated from the nations, not contaminated with the old leaven of immorality and the ways of their former existence but having all that “*cleared out*” (v. 7; ἐκκαθαίρω). . .

In summary, Paul’s call is to a holy life in which God’s people celebrate his goodness and their calling as people who are “*sanctified in Christ Jesus*” (1:2). The transformation is so radical that it is likened to the new start experienced by the Israelites at the exodus and remembered in the Passover sacrifice and celebration. There can be no going back to the past, no compromising with the past life, no tolerating evil in the midst of the community. There must also be an active commitment to godly, sincere, and truthful living since the redemption that led to their belonging to this covenant community came at great cost. “*For Christ our Passover lamb was sacrificed.*”

III. (:9-13) CLEAR INJUNCTION (WITH SIMPLE CLARIFICATION) – ENFORCE CHURCH DISCIPLINE AGAINST IMMORAL BROTHERS

“Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

A. (:9) Earlier Reminder of Clear Injunction

“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people”

B. (:10-13a) Simple Clarification

1. (:10) What Paul did not mean = not talking about unbelievers (Outsiders)

“I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.”

David Prior: Paul is talking about five areas of behaviour – sex, money, possessions, drink and the tongue – in which consistent transgression of Christian standards calls for discipline. It is obvious that the Christian church today is under a powerful obligation to be utterly distinctive in sexual behaviour.

2. (:11) What Paul actually did mean = Talking about professed believers (Insiders)

“But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.”

Gordon Fee: Paul is not advocating that only the sinless can be members of the Christian community; rather, he is concerned about those who persist in the very activities from which they have been freed through the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (v. 7). Followers of the crucified Messiah (**1:18**) belong to the new era; their lives have been invaded by the Holy Spirit. They are therefore to “*celebrate the Feast*,” that is, to live out on a continuing basis the ethics of the new people of God. They are to look like their Lord in their behavior, for which purpose the example of the apostle has been given to them (**4:16–17**). Because in Christ all things are new by the Spirit (**2 Cor. 5:14–17**), those who belong to Christ must put off their former way of life (**Col. 3:5–11**). Those who persist in that former way of life, not meaning those who simply struggle with former sins, essentially do not belong to this new community. By their own actions they have opted out; the community must distance itself from such people for its own sake.

Ray Stedman: There you have the world characterized for you:

- The sins of the body (immorality),
- The sins of the mind or heart (the attitudes, greedy and grasping), and
- The sins of the spirit (idolatry, another god.)

The offense against yourself, the offense against your neighbor, and the offense against God himself -- those are the characteristics of the world.

David Garland: Each of the 6 categories referenced is addressed in 1 Corinthians:

- (1) Sexual immorality (**5:1**; also **6:9, 13-18; 7:1-6**)
- (2) Greed (**6:1-11**)
- (3) Swindling (robbers; **6:1-11**)
- (4) Idolatry (**chs. 8;10**)
- (5) Verbal abuse (slanderers; **1:18 – 4:21**)
- (6) Drunkenness (**11:21**)

Craig Blomberg: To drive home this point, Paul generalizes and lists several serious sins in addition to sexual immorality (**vv. 10–11**). “*The greedy and swindlers*” should

be taken together to refer to those who were seizing “someone else’s property by force,” perhaps anticipating the problem of **6:1–11**. “*Idolaters*” is Paul’s general term for all who worship false gods. “*Slanderer*” should be translated “*reviler*” and may refer particularly to those who oppose and mock God’s duly ordained authorities. “*Drunkard*,” like the other terms in these lists, implies one whose lifestyle is consistently characterized by such behavior. Not only must the Corinthians remove from their fellowship people who repeatedly refuse to repent of their sins, they must not even associate with them in intimate social gatherings outside the church, such as table fellowship.

3. (:12-13a) Different Judges for Different Folks

*“For what have I to do with judging outsiders?
Do you not judge those who are within the church?
But those who are outside, God judges.”*

C. (:13b) Reiteration of Clear Injunction = Enforce Church Discipline

“Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

Adewuya: Echoing the language of **Deuteronomy 17:7**, Paul urges them to root out the wrongdoer from their community (**v. 13**). The responsible exercise of this discipline sometimes calls for the exclusion of an errant member from the fellowship, and it is precisely that sort of situation that the Corinthians are facing now. Paul’s words in this chapter may sound harsh, coming as they do from the author of the hymn to love in **chapter 13**. What has become of the love which keeps no score of wrongs? Yet the contemporary church urgently needs a reminder that **discipline is an essential ingredient of love**. Perhaps the reason that the modern church does not exercise discipline is due in part to its failure to see sin as a great threat to its spiritual health, or in part because people consider excommunication as too harsh and an unloving act.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why might the Corinthians have been proud and arrogant in this situation?
- 2) What obstacles do church leaders reference to try to excuse their failure to enforce church discipline? How would you respond to those objections?
- 3) What are some examples in your experience (family, church, etc.) where you have seen the multiplying impact of sin and its devastating effects (when not decisively dealt with on a timely basis)? Why is there a different standard in terms of associating with sinning Christians vs non-Christians?
- 4) Why does the church put a special emphasis on the sin of sexual immorality but not address with similar severity the other sins listed in parallel fashion in **vs. 11**? When have you seen church discipline enforced against covetousness or idolatry?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Christians must lovingly confront sin through church discipline to preserve the church's holiness and to rescue the sinner's soul.

- I. Neglecting Church Discipline Invites the Ridicule of the World (5:1).
- II. Pride Instead of Sorrow Leads Us to Ignore Church Discipline (5:2).
- III. Church Discipline Must Be Exercised Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the Good of the Whole Body (5:3-5).
- IV. The Absence of Church Discipline Will Lead to the Church Being Infected with Sin (5:6).
- V. Church Discipline Is Grounded in the Redemptive Work of Christ (5:7-8).
- VI. Church Discipline Must Be Exercised in the Community of Faith, Not the World (5:9-11).
- VII. God Judges Those on the Outside While We Judge Those on the Inside (5:12-13).

Paul Garland:

A. A Case of Incest Must Be Resolved (5:1-8)

1. The Action the Church Should Take (5:1-2)
2. The Process of Expulsion (5:3-5)
3. The Theological Basis for This Action (5:6-8)

B. Community Identity Requires Holiness (5:9-13)

1. The Church Is Not to Concern Itself with the Immoral of This World (5:9-10)
2. The Church Must Concern Itself with the Immoral in Its Own Number (5:11-13)

Chuck Lawless: 11 Reasons Churches Don't Practice Discipline:

1. They don't know the Bible's teaching on discipline.
2. They have never seen it done before.
3. They don't want to appear judgmental.
4. The church has a wide-open front door.
5. They have had a bad experience with discipline in the past.
6. The church is afraid to open "Pandora's box."
7. They have no guidelines for discipline.
8. They fear losing members (or dollars).
9. They fear being "legalistic."
10. They hope transfer growth will fix the problem.
11. Leaders are sometimes dealing with their own sin.

Ray Stedman: These great Greek cities, such as Corinth and others, were given over to the casual acceptance of sex outside of the marriage relationship. As you know, there

was in Corinth a temple devoted to the worship of sex, the temple of Aphrodite. Therefore, it was the common thing for Christians to be tempted in this area. Many of them had indulged themselves in constant sexual liaisons before they became Christians and it was difficult for them to break these habits. If we think we have difficulty in these areas living in California today, we are no different at all than these Corinthians. .

It is rather interesting that even in our own day the most degrading epithet that anybody can apply to another is to suggest that he is sleeping with his own mother. That shows how still today incest is regarded as a terrible thing even in the pagan world. . .

They were boasting and glorying in their tolerance of this condition, as many people do today. They have a mistaken feeling that, rather than showing condemnation and judgment on this, the church ought to express understanding of the pressures and the difficulties of living in a world like we have today, and to say nothing about this: Let the individual work it out on his own. This is what was happening in Corinth. They thought they were showing love and understanding by their attitude of casualness toward this.

There are four clear, definite, practical steps to take here when immorality is present:

- 1) The first one is: There must be a right attitude. We must mourn and feel grief instead of harsh, critical judgment or tolerant, casual love.
- 2) The second step is: There must be a right basis for discipline. . .
- 3) So step number three in this passage we are looking at is: There must be a right action. . .
- 4) it should be for a right purpose . . .

Robert Grosheide: The purpose of this whole chapter is to disclose the grave sin of the church. It is the church more than the sinner which is spoken of. The church is guilty and has to correct herself and do what is required.

John MacArthur: One of the greatest protections from sin that we have as Christians is simply focusing on our Lord and on the sacrifice He made for us. To understand that His death for sin applied to us calls us away from sin and to a clean break with the old ways is to understand the sanctifying work of the cross. It is impossible to be occupied with this truth and with sin at the same time.

Steve Zeisler: Perhaps we can draw an analogy with fruit flies. If a single female fruit fly were introduced into this county, the fruit harvest could be devastated. The fruit fly does its work invisibly, reproducing in massive numbers and destroying valuable crops. Leaven works in the same way. Paul charges the Corinthians that they are an arrogant people. One rotten apple among them was threatening to rot all of the other apples and they had to do something about it. They were clean and unleavened, the Lord having paid a price for them. If they were to have an impact for good on their world, they had to be willing to make the hard choice to clean out the leaven, to not put up with it any longer.

Paul calls the Corinthians to worship in "*sincerity and truth*" (**verse 8**). He is not speaking of perfection, but of sincerity. Rather than hide and pamper their sin and allow it to fester, they should be willing to deal with it. **David Prior** writes of these verses, "The world is waiting to see such a church, a church which takes sin seriously, which enjoys forgiveness fully, which in its time of gathering together combines joyful celebration with an awesome sense of God's immediacy and authority."

Doug Goins: In the remainder of the chapter, beginning in **verse 3**, Paul is going to explain how and why they must face into the problem. He gives three reasons why we need to take sin among us very seriously.

- In **verses 3-5** it's for the sake of the individual. Their very soul is at stake.
- In **verses 6-8** it's for the health and life of the church, which is the holy temple of God. We are saints of God, the called-out and sanctified ones.
- And in **verses 9-13** it's for the sake of the lost world around us.

James Boyer: Authority to take disciplinary action against a wayward member must rest on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and is to be exercised in an officially called congregational meeting at which there is present the voice of the apostle through the Word of God, and the conscious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself as head of the church.

Thomas Leake: Tolerating Sexual Immorality in the Church

Introduction: The subject of Sex is not taboo; not a bad word; but actually much written about it in the Word of God. God knows how to make life exciting. We need to understand God's pattern for physical intimacy = one man dedicated to one woman for a life of intimacy.

Take a look at the various perversions of sex which the world has created – fornication / adultery / homosexuality / etc.

Our Duty to Deal with Sexual Sin in God's Church – 6 Realities that teach us not to tolerate sexual sin in the church"

Context: connection between **4:6** and **5:2** is the matter of spiritual pride

Sins of the Mind lead to sins of the Body;

Paul is correcting the entire church (not primarily addressing the sinning brother)

1) (:1) The Reality of Depravity within the Church

- truth of the behavior was well known
- **Acts 15:19-20; 1 Thess 4:3** = abstinence program!
- **Lev. 18:8** – shame, disrespect involved in this incestuous behavior

2) (:2) The Reality of Disregard of the Congregation – 3 Reactions

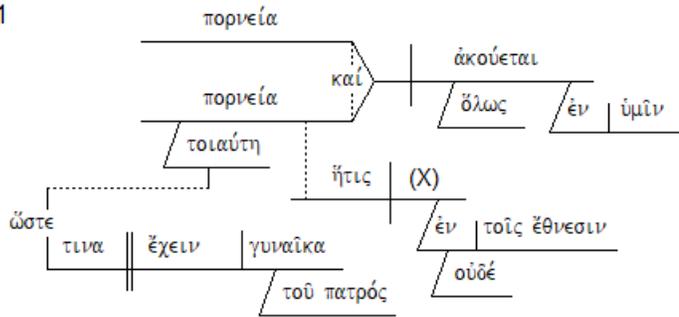
- a) Became Arrogant
- b) Did not Mourn
- c) Did not Judge His Act and Remove Him

3) (:3-5) The Reality of the Decision of the Apostle – God takes sin seriously

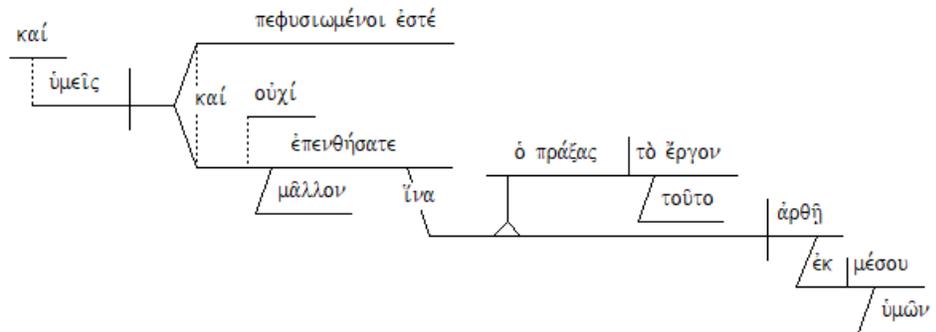
- note Paul's Determination – emphatic "I" by Greek word order
- Spirit of God present in life of Paul and in Corinthian church – so they were connected via the Spirit of God in the realm of their spirit; more than just thinking and praying about them
- Perfect tense – Paul had judged them already and that judgment stands
- not judging what he has no right or ability to judge; but judging what he ought to judge (actions that were observable)
- we need to make a big deal out of what God makes a big deal out of; and not major on minor areas of personal conviction or even legalism
- people of God must respond as God responds

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

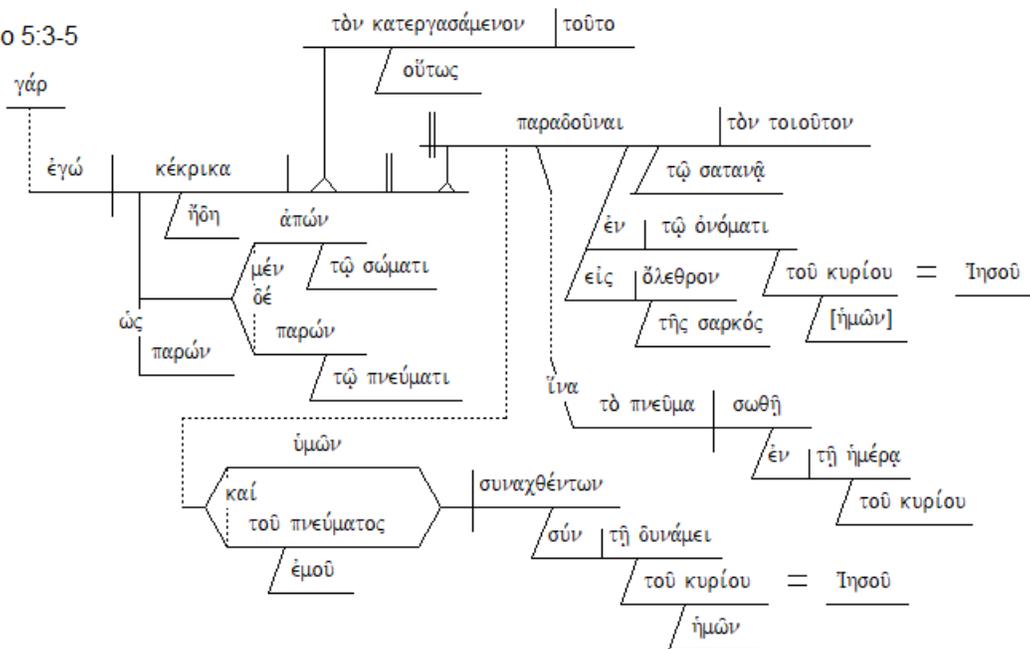
1Co 5:1



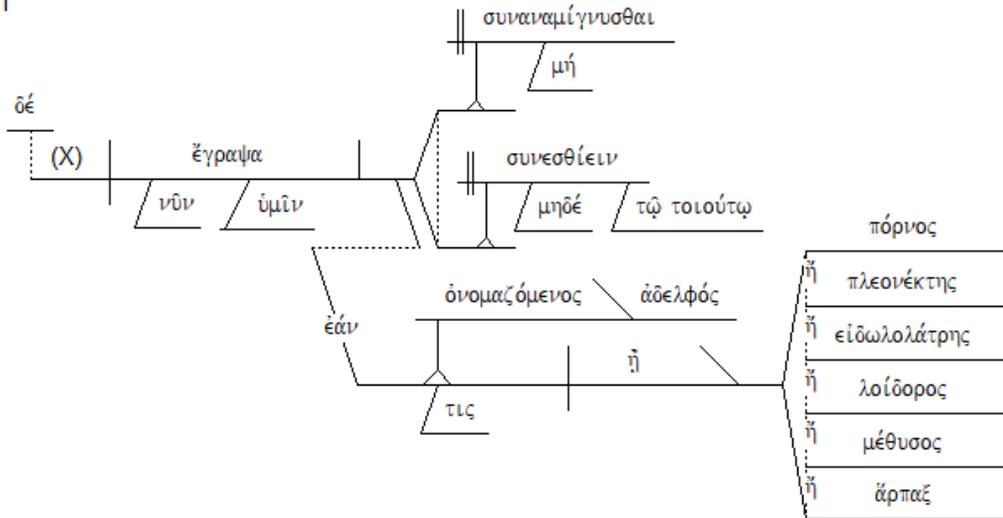
1Co 5:2



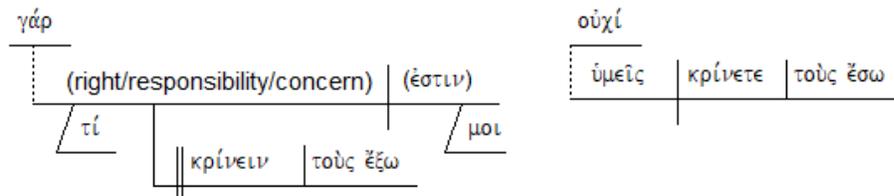
1Co 5:3-5



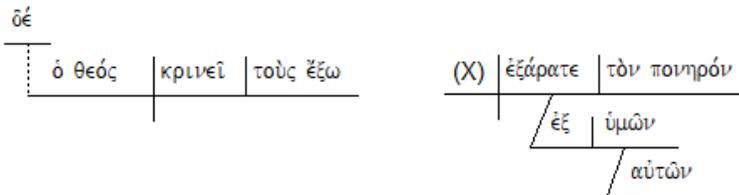
1Co 5:11



1Co 5:12



1Co 5:13



TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8

TITLE: CHURCH COMPETENT TO JUDGE INTERNAL LEGAL DISPUTES

BIG IDEA:

BELIEVERS SHOULD NEVER SUE FELLOW BELIEVERS

INTRODUCTION:

Remember the book written by **Jay Adams**, *Competent to Counsel* – that laid a lot of the groundwork for the basis for nouthetic counseling. Adams made the argument that believers would be wrong to submit to the counseling of unsaved psychologists. Instead believers have the resources they need to confront the most serious problems of life – the resources of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul argues in this passage that the Church is *Competent to Judge* as well. Why would we ever consider taking a fellow believer to court and submit to the “wisdom” of unsaved judges? This would be damaging to the testimony of Christ.

We live in a society that goes to court at the drop of a hat. Look at the number of lawyers ... the backlog of court cases ... the ridiculous amounts of some of the settlements for damages, etc. Look at how people demand that their “rights” be protected and have the expectation of compensation if they are wronged in any way. Look at how this contributes to the high cost of liability insurance.

Some commentators want to temper Paul’s tone in this passage and say that believers should try to avoid suing fellow believers. But the clear import of the teaching is that believers should never sue fellow believers! Remember the context from chapter 5 where believers were reminded of their responsibility to judge among themselves. “Not only is the church to judge in matters of morality, but in other matters having to do with everyday life (civil situations).” (**Gil Rugh**)

Richard Hays: Paul is upset with the Corinthians because they are failing to act as a community, failing to take responsibility for one another. Just as they have failed to discipline the incestuous man, so they are failing to take responsibility for settling their own disputes; consequently they are taking their legal cases before unbelievers (**6:6**), whom Paul calls “*the unrighteous*” (**6:1**). In other words, they are going through the normal channels of the civil courts in Roman Corinth. The judges in such courts are “*unrighteous*” (*adikoi*) in the sense that they do not belong to God’s covenant community. Thus when the Corinthian Christians take one another to court, they are declaring primary allegiance to the pagan culture of Corinth rather than to the community of faith. This action breaks down the boundaries of the church and damages its unity. . .

In all likelihood, the members of the Corinthian church who were initiating civil proceedings against their fellow Christians were among the more privileged and powerful members of the community, whereas the defendants in such suits were likely to be the

poorer members. This is consistent with a pattern that emerges elsewhere in the letter (see especially **11:17–34**): the wealthier Corinthians were “*shaming*” those in the church who were of lower status and lesser means. This background information -- none of which had to be explained to the original readers -- helps us to interpret Paul’s stern rebuke to the litigators: “*When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous [pagan high-status Corinthian judges, who will be biased in favor of the wealthy] instead of taking it before the saints? ... I say this to your shame*” (**6:1, 5a**).

Anthony Thiselton: Paul saw seeking judgment at a court where there is questionable justice (**v. 1**) as audacious (*How dare you?* **v. 1**). It amounted to an attempt on the part of a Christian to use superior economic or social power to manipulate a more vulnerable fellow believer into losing the dispute (**vv. 6-8**). Unlike his earlier, gentler remonstrance in **4:14-21**, Paul wants that person to feel ashamed (**v. 5**).

Adewuya: It is neither unusual nor necessarily sinful to have differences of opinion. What matters is the attitude that may be developed and, consequently, expressed due to the differences. This is the issue at stake in this chapter. Paul expresses dismay at the thought that a believer who had a grievance against another should go to law, instead of having the matter resolved within the Christian community. Paul’s shock is expressed in his statement “Does he dare?”—that is, “How dare he?” or “How in the world could that be?” For Paul, such an attitude is an admission of Christian failure as well as a lack of understanding of the nature of the Body of Christ. Paul’s sharp rebuke shows that the action was incompatible with Christianity. Although not overtly stated here, at issue among these believers is the problem of love and forgiveness. The settling of inter-Christian differences by going to court was contrary to the best interests of the individual family and church. There are times when questions of law are involved when it is necessary to determine the legal action to be taken. Paul did not forbid such. What he was saying was that it was wrong for two Christians to become so involved in acute misunderstanding that they want to go to a heathen court to decide who was right.

David Garland: Paul focuses his attention on the church for their conspicuous failure to resolve disputes between themselves. This failure grieves him for several reasons. This lawsuit breeds enmity and factionalism and will inevitably reduce the church to an assortment of rival tribes. It undermines any claim of the church to be God’s end-time community. It torpedoes their witness to outsiders of God’s love. It will bar the plaintiffs from inheriting the kingdom of God if they are guilty of wronging and defrauding others.

Paul Gardner: Judgment in civil legal cases requires the practice of wisdom. Can it be that those who claim to be wise are unable even to help guide members of their own church as to what is fair or just? Where is the wisdom they so flaunt if they have to go before unbelievers for judgments even on minor civil cases? In **6:9–11** Paul makes it clear that their lack of discernment raises serious questions about their status before God. Again, the irony of this must not be lost. They take pride in their status and power, which they regard as secured in the manifestation of their gifts, especially their wisdom and knowledge. This is why Paul reminds them of what he had said at the start of the epistle:

their status is dependent on God's grace. The use of the passive tenses in v. 11 helps make the point.

Main Idea: Christians are saints, and their community should reflect who they are. Their divisions and the ease with which they resort to a worldly court system are both wrong. As inheritors of the kingdom of God, they should reflect their God-given status in their love for each other and in using their grace-gift of wisdom in a godly way to resolve any legal problems between members.

Lawsuits between Christians Must Be Resolved without the Courts (6:1–8)

1. Because They Will Eventually Judge the World (6:1–3)
2. Because They Are Supposed to Possess Godly Wisdom (6:4–6)
3. Because This Action Reveals Their Unrighteousness (6:7–8)

Community Identity Requires Holiness (6:9–11)

1. The Unrighteous Do Not Inherit the Kingdom of God (6:9–10)
2. The Righteous Have Been Changed by God (6:11)

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Christians should avoid greed and selfish disputes that defame the church because Jesus has radically saved and changed them.

I. Suing a Fellow Believer Is Inconsistent with Our Future Responsibilities (6:1-3).

- A. We will be judges over the world (6:1-2).
- B. We will be judges over the angels (6:3).

II. Suing a Fellow Believer Is Inconsistent with How the Church Should Work (6:4-8).

- A. The church should be able to handle matters like these (6:4).
- B. The church's witness to unbelievers must not be compromised (6:5-7).

Mark Taylor: Paul's argument in 6:1–11 is threefold.

1. First, Paul expresses shock and outrage and reprimands them for behavior not fitting the people of God who will one day judge the world and angels and for taking matters of this life before the secular courts (6:1–6).
2. Second, Paul explains that the very presence of lawsuits among believers is a moral defeat for all involved. Nobody wins in this situation (6:7–8).
3. Third, Paul issues a final reason for his rebuke accompanied by a strong warning (6:9–11). The “unjust” will not inherit the kingdom of God. On what basis should a believer take a matter before someone who has no inheritance in the kingdom of God?

Furthermore, the Corinthian believers are no longer “unjust” because they have been “*washed, sanctified, and justified*.” Again, the indicative of what they “are” lays the foundation of how they must behave.

I. (:1) ENTERTAINING THE QUESTION OF TAKING ANOTHER BELIEVER TO COURT EXPOSES PRESUMPTUOUS PRIDE

A. Universal Application to the Church of Christ

“Does any one of you”

Not just giving some local advice that applies only to certain special situations

B. Unsettled Grievance vs Another Brother

“when he has a case against his neighbor”

- assumes that this is not just some frivolous complaint but a serious and legitimate (at least in the mind of the plaintiff) grievance
- not talking about spiritual differences but about matters of property and civil law; things that people might normally sue someone over
- neighbor (lit “*another*”) in this context indicates another believer

C. Unthinkable Choice of Venue

“dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”

Lawsuits common practice in Corinth.

Paul expressing **shock**; look at that word “*dare*” – emphatic by position in the Greek **6:9** -- these *unrighteous* are not destined for the kingdom of God; stand in contrast to the saints; carries a moral connotation as well (**Rugh**)

David Garland: The verb “*dare*” (τολμᾶ, *tolma*; cf. **2 Cor. 10:12; 11:21; Jude 9**) is placed at the beginning of the sentence to thunder his indignation over this turn of events—what gall they have! Suing one another before pagan magistrates is something Paul considers a horrid breach of Christian fellowship that could stem only from brazen insolence. How dare anyone do this! . . .

Evidence indicates that the civil courts of this era were less than impartial and that substantial **corruption** did exist. They were not held in high esteem by the masses, who did not have equal access to them. **Winter** (1991a: 563–64) thinks that the term “*unjust*” specifically applies to the character of the honorary magistrates who presided and the juries who pronounced verdicts—they were open to bribery and biased toward the powerful. **Dio Chrysostom** (Or. 8.9) complains that in Corinth there were “lawyers innumerable perverting justice.” **Cicero** (In Verrem 1.1.1) opens his speech to the jury (and judges) in the prosecution of Verres by citing the rumors throughout Rome and foreign lands that “the courts will never convict any man, however guilty, if only he has money.” **Apuleius** (Metam. 10.33) derides judges as “gowned vultures” and claims that “all our judges nowadays sell their judgments for money.”

The wealthy were able to take unfair advantage of this judicial system by exercising their prestige and influence. One’s breeding, social standing, and reputation for character -- one’s persona -- also tilted justice in favor of the elite. The poor always had the cards stacked against them in the courtroom. **Pliny the Younger** (Ep. 9.5) commends the new governor of Baetica in Spain regarding his administration of justice for “maintaining

consideration for the best men.” He advises him to continue to “maintain the distinctions between ranks and degrees of dignity.” Social standing weighted the scales of justice; and if that did not work, bribery could tip the balance.

II. (:2-6) EVALUATING THE OPTION BETWEEN A SECULAR COURT AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE SAINTS SHOULD BE A NO-BRAINER

A. (:2) Reminder #1 – The Saints Will Ultimately Judge the World – Argument from the Greater to the Lesser

1. Statement of the Obvious – Doctrine 101 class

“Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”

This is a huge responsibility; clearly delineates a great chasm between believers and non-believers; speaking of responsibility of believers in coming kingdom.

2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21 – we share the authority of His rule; **20:4**

Paul Gardner: Paul’s **eschatology** frames his argument here. The future status of both groups, the “*saints*” (ἅγιοι) and the “*unrighteous*” (ἄδικοι; **v. 1**), is in mind in vv. 2–3 where the “*saints will judge the world*” and “*judge the angels*” and in **v. 9** where the “*unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom.*” The one group has standing within God’s community; the other group is outside.

2. Simple Argument – Based on Competency

“If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?”

Craig Blomberg: “*Trivial cases*” (**v. 2**) does not mean that the Corinthian litigation did not involve serious offenses, merely that **all** human litigation is trivial when viewed in the light of Judgment Day.

B. (:3) Reminder #2 – The Saints Will Ultimately Judge the Angels

1. Statement of the Obvious

“Do you not know that we will judge angels?”

Gil Rugh: **Heb. 1:14** -- in the millennial kingdom, all the angels will be subject to believers in glorified bodies as well; angels serve on our behalf even right now – who are destined for the fullness of salvation; **Heb. 2:5-9**; we should be living right now in the light of this truth; no problem judging trivial matters of this life right now.

David Garland: Paul’s purpose in these verses is not to articulate doctrine about the saints’ role in the final judgment of the world and the angels but to point out a disturbing inconsistency between what they will be doing at the end of this age and what they are doing now. It is probable that he wishes only to remind the Corinthians of their glorious end-time destiny when they will be given dominion even over the angels. In that day, the current state of affairs will be radically reversed. For example, Paul says that now, in this present evil age, he is a spectacle both to the world and to angels (**4:9**). In the end time,

however, things will be upended, and he will join with the saints in judging both the world and the angels. The promise of that future should control all that Christians do in the present. They should appreciate that the ἄδικοι (*adikoi*), to whom they are now taking their petty complaints, will be completely excluded from the kingdom of God and not crowned with glorious status.

2. Simple Argument – Based on Argument from the Greater to the Lesser
“How much more matters of this life?”

Paul Gardner: So Paul develops his argument **from the greater to the lesser**. With three rather sarcastic-sounding rhetorical questions followed by a summary exclamation, the point is driven home. The “*saints will judge the world,*” so surely as “*saints*” they are competent to judge minor civil cases (κριτηρίων ἐλαχίστων). The saints will also “*judge the angels*” (ἄγγέλους κρινοῦμεν), so how much more should they be able to judge “*cases pertaining to this life*” (βιωτικά)! The argument is made more personal as Paul specifically identifies the Corinthians as “*the saints*” (“*by you*” [ἐν ὑμῖν] in v. 2), thus still identifying them, even in their wretched inadequacies of understanding, as covenant participators “*in Christ.*” Similarly, in v. 3 Paul makes the application personal as he now identifies with the Corinthians in their status as eschatological judges, using the first-person plural (κρινοῦμεν). In this way, the argument from the greater to the lesser reaches its climax. If these Corinthian Christians will even judge angels one day, how much more should they be able to solve minor cases that arise among the people of God.

The power of this argument from eschatology could hardly have been lost on the Corinthians. The end time to which Paul refers reveals a complete reversal of the current scene, in which he has described even the apostles as “*made a spectacle [by God] to the world, to both angels and men*” (4:9). The true status of believers is not at once apparent to this world or even to angels anymore than Christ’s kingship was at once apparent when he walked this earth or went to the cross. But just as Jesus lived in a manner befitting his status as the Son of God and Messiah, so Christians should live in a manner befitting their status as God’s people (in the present) and as those who will one day rule and judge. For the time being, that status is best seen in the preparedness of the Christian, out of love for the brother or sister, to suffer wrong.

C. (:4-6) Clear Conclusion: Avoid Taking Your Fellow Brother to Court

1. Because Believers are More Competent to Judge

*“Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters,
appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!
I say this to shame you.
Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough
to judge a dispute between believers?” (NIV)*

Many different interpretations suggested for the difficult text in vs. 4.
Pagan judges would have no standing in the church ...

Does not require a jury of 12

John MacArthur: [Verse 4] is a difficult verse to translate, as suggested by the widely varying Eng. Renderings. But the basic meaning is clear: when Christians have earthly quarrels and disputes among themselves, it is inconceivable that they would turn to those least qualified (unbelievers) to resolve the matter. The most legally untrained believers, who know the Word of God and are obedient to the Spirit, are far more competent to settle disagreements between believers than the most experienced unbeliever, void of God's truth and Spirit.

Craig Blomberg: Now Paul is prepared to shame the Corinthians. Their litigation incenses him even more than their factiousness, because it so fundamentally compromises their witness before a watching world quick to ridicule and reject the church on such occasions.

2. Because the Testimony of the Church is at Stake

“but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?”

Believers should be characterized by love, forgiveness and reconciliation. We should be the experts at putting up with one another and yielding our rights. We certainly don't want to air our dirty laundry in front of unbelievers who do not possess the wisdom of God or the insight from the Holy Spirit.

III. (:7-8) ENGAGING IN SECULAR LAWSUITS RATHER THAN YIELDING YOUR RIGHTS TO YOUR FELLOW BROTHER CANNOT PRODUCE A GOOD OUTCOME

A. Suing a Fellow Brother Automatically Makes You a Loser

“Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another.”

Paul Gardner: They have “*already*” (ἤδη), that is, even before considering the results of any court case or the damage they are doing to the community, suffered a “*complete defeat*” (ὄλως ἥττημα). But in what sense have the Corinthians suffered defeat by taking out lawsuits against other brothers? The defeat may here refer to a “failure” in the sense of a failure to perceive what their status is before God and what is the nature of their inheritance in Christ. This is the way the word (ἥττημα) is used in **Rom 11:12** where Paul expounds on what Israel has failed to understand and receive of its inheritance in Christ. In this sense, it is indeed “moral failure.” (Christians should never have been fighting each other anyway, and they have revealed their self-centeredness, pride, and lack of concern for the community.) Yet it is more than this. It is also a **complete failure of spiritual wisdom and insight**. Like Israel in **Romans 11**, the Corinthians have failed to see their true inheritance of the kingdom of God with all its blessings. These blessings make any win at court pale into insignificance. In fact, the way they are pursuing their grievances leads them into the same unrighteousness and the same wrongdoing and defrauding so typical of the world around them. Both the moral and the spiritual failure involved in taking brothers and sisters to court means, says Paul, that the people going to

court, believing they are the ones who have been wronged, have themselves now wronged and defrauded “*even [their] brothers [and sisters]*” (καὶ τοῦτο ἀδελφούς).

David Garland: No matter who wins or loses the lawsuit, all lose spiritually. Their litigious spirit betrays a moral deficiency (Godet 1886: 293) and reveals the triumph of selfishness over love -- something Paul addresses in **chapter 13**. The upshot is the complete loss of any sense of brotherhood in the community. Litigation by its very nature promoted enmity from the slander that was part and parcel of a trial and could only have fueled the church’s factionalism. Church members who were clients of one of the parties would have to side with their patron, if they were to remain clients, over against a fellow Christian.

B. Suffering Injustice Should Always Be the Preferred Option

“Why not rather be defrauded?”

Jeffries: In the kingdom, when a dispute arises between believers, the primary goal of resolution is not justice but reconciliation.

Difficulty: both believers convinced they are right and refuse to accept the adjudication of the believer appointed to do the judging; won’t be a problem if we have the attitude of willing to be defrauded.

Mark Taylor: It is far better to suffer wrong, to be cheated, than to tarnish the reputation of the gospel before the unbelieving world and to wrong another believer. How believers act in relation to other believers is a major emphasis in **chaps. 8–14**.

Robert Gundry: The questions, “*Why not rather let yourselves suffer injustice? Why not rather let yourselves be defrauded?*” imply that at the Last Judgment the suffering of present injustice and of present defraudation without resort even to an ecclesiastical court will turn out to be a victory in God’s court. Because of this implication, Paul expresses astonishment that fellow Christians are perpetrating injustice on each other in pagan courts by means of lawsuits that defraud the losers of their rightful property.

C. Suing a Fellow Brother Automatically Puts You in the Wrong

*“On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud.
You do this even to your brethren.”*

Matt. 5:38-42; Rom 12:17-19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2

A family should be able to work things out within the family

Paul Gardner: **Verse 8** begins with the strong adversative (ἀλλά) and takes Paul into the most forceful part of his argument. The fact of the matter is that at least one member of the church, and perhaps more, has actually gone to court. Given the likely injustice of the system and the way it was used to enhance status and exercise power, this must have inevitably led to the weaker or less powerful person suffering wrong and even being

defrauded. “*Even*” (τοῦτο) is used to particularize the matter at hand. That “*saints*” should do this to “*saints*,” given the eschatological reality, is unbelievable.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would this apply to situations of divorce where a secular court must get involved? Is this a strong argument for a “no divorce” policy among believers?
- 2) Where had the Corinthians been taught previously that they would ultimately judge angels? What type of judgment is involved if the fallen angels have already been identified? What will be the relationship between believers and angels in the coming millennial kingdom?
- 3) Why do we resist the concept of yielding our rights and willingly allowing ourselves to be wronged in this life? How does the message of 1 Peter provide instruction for us in this regard?
- 4) How have you seen the testimony of believers and of the church be damaged by such lawsuits? Where have you seen families torn apart by legal disputes?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Boyer: There is no real break in the context through **Chapters 5 and 6**, and by implication this also is a moral problem (cf. the inclusion of covetousness among the lists of sins in **5:10, 11; 6:9, 10**). The sins of impurity and covetousness are kindred sins. Both were prevalent at Corinth, both are destructive of society, both are basically selfishness, and the lamentable lack of church discipline in Corinth allowed both to flourish.

Andrew Noselli: Four aspects of the historical-cultural context are noteworthy:

1. First, the disputes Paul condemns regard civil law and not criminal law.
2. Second, in first-century Roman society, the type of people who took others to court had high social rank. A person could sue their social equal or inferior. It is easy to imagine a rich Corinthian Christian taking advantage of a poorer Christian in this way (cf. **11:17-34**).
3. Third, magistrates and jurists who handled first-century Roman civil litigation were notoriously corrupt. The whole judicial system favored the elite – those with the most power, influence, and wealth.
4. Fourth, civil litigation resulted in factionalism and rivalry, not unity. What often motivated civil litigation was not justice but retaliating one-upmanship – humiliating an adversary and proving one was socially superior.

William Barclay: The Greeks were naturally and characteristically a litigious people. The lawcourts were in fact one of their chief amusements and entertainments. In a Greek city every male citizen was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great deal of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law. Not unnaturally, certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious tendencies into the Christian church; and Paul was shocked.

Jeffries: This stands in stark and sad contrast to Luke's inspiring portrait of the earliest church.

References:

Acts 2:44-47 [NLT]

And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity -- all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32 [NLT]

All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had.

David Holwick: The Case for Lawsuits.

- A. The Old Testament is very concerned about justice.
 - 1) Law courts are set up for our good.
 - 2) Many laws concern fairness and justice.
 - 3) Judged by God's standards, not bribes or favoritism.

- B. Jesus - parable of woman who pesters judge for justice.

- C. Paul himself used human courts.
 - 1) Defended his faith before Gallio in Corinth. **Acts 18:12-16**
 - 2) In Philippi, he referred to his rights as a Roman citizen.
 - 3) Appealed to court of Caesar. (Ended up getting executed.)
 - 4) Principle - gov't (and courts) instituted by God. **Rom 13**

- D. Passage is limited to Christian-against-Christian lawsuits.
 - 1) Lawsuits are permissible with non-believers.
 - a) However, allow biblical values to direct every action.
 - 2) Lawsuits are permissible when the motive is justice, not pride.
 - 3) Lawsuits are permissible when no shame is brought to Christ.
 - a) We should not air our dirty laundry in public. **6:6**
 - b) Glorifying God must be our highest priority.

Difficulty with text for modern Christians.

A. Most commentaries try to find "permissible" cases.

1) Basic thrust here is **avoiding lawsuits**.

B. We must face up to fact we operate by world's system.

1) Be defrauded - it would drive us nuts. **6:7**

a) Our world full of injustice.

We long for simple justice - more jails, more police.

Hard for us to accept being wronged.

b) "People's Court" and Judge Wapner.

Good guys are supposed to win.

2) We are materialistic.

a) Focus on property.

b) Focus on "rights."

Gil Rugh: Paul's concern has to do with believers availing themselves of the local legal system to settle disputes among themselves. He addresses the issue of the damage done to their testimony before unbelievers who become witnesses to their disagreements and disputes. As a result of sin we have all become self-centered and self-focused, concerned with our own rights. We want to seek redress for the wrongs done unto us, real or imagined. Caution: Governing authorities ordained by God and designed for a good purpose (this would include the legal system). Paul's concern is not with the legal system per se; but with the conduct of believers availing themselves of this legal system when it comes to grievances against fellow believers.

John MacArthur: Believers who go to court with believers are more concerned with revenge or gain than with the unity of the Body and the glory of Jesus Christ. . . If two Christian parties cannot agree between themselves, they should ask fellow Christians to settle the matter for them, and be willing to abide by that decision. The poorest equipped believer, who seeks the counsel of God's Word and Spirit, is much more competent to settle disagreements between fellow believers than is the most highly trained and experienced unbelieving judge who is devoid of divine truth. Because we are in Christ, Christians rank above the world and even above angels. And by settling our own disputes, we give a testimony of our resources and of our unity, harmony, and humility before the world. When we go to public court, our testimony is the opposite.

Thomas Leake: When Brother Wrongs Brother --

Introduction: Overall theme of 1 Corinthians = Corrections in the Church; We don't like dealing with conflict for the most part. "The best armor is to keep out of range." But offenses will come at some point in time; it is unavoidable. Paul not concerned here with correcting who was causing the offense, but rather making sure that we deal with the reaction to the offense correctly.

Thesis: We should never choose to go to court against our Christian brother or sister.

I. (:1-4) The Shock

Are you nuts? Have you lost your Christian mind?

The situation in Corinth was that a business type of dispute would develop and the injured party would take the other person to court = bema seat in the Agora where the sitting judge would hear the case and render his verdict. The issue was not whether justice would be administered but what that process would communicate about the corporate church and Christianity. Petty squabbles in the church should be a piece of cake. To go before the unrighteous (not that they were all morally corrupt as judges, but they were unsaved and devoid of the wisdom of God) contradicts who you are as holy ones.

II. (:5-8) The Shame

For the Corinthian church, that shame has lasted down through the generations. In **4:14** Paul apparently did not write to shame them; but in this context he felt he had to. **Verse 6** is the crux of the passage. You have elevated the status of the unbeliever and lowered the status of believers. You have dragged the name of Christ in the mud. You have let down the entire team.

Clarification:

- not saying that believers can never sue unbelievers
- not saying that you can always avoid going to court – sometimes you are dragged there by the other party
- it is necessary to defend your rights as Christians and citizens so that the gospel can go forth freely (the Apostle Paul appealed to the court system in this way)
- but in that case make sure you are using the court system to reflect positively on the church

Simple teaching: we should never choose to go to court against our Christian brother or sister; but the application can become complicated in our day when people might not even belong to a local church.

III. Two Solutions

A. (:5B) Find a Wise Man in the Church who can Adjudicate

Prov. 2:6 – one who will be able to make proper distinctions; weigh the evidence; render a balanced and impartial verdict.

Where does he get this type of wisdom? Not from his education; not from the world; not even from his years of experience; But from the Lord who gives it in His Word; study the Word; **Psalm 119**

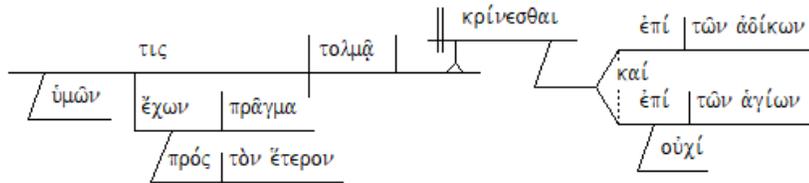
B. (:7B) Radical Solution = Be Wronged; Be Defrauded

The real answer is Love; **1 Thess. 4:9** vs. **1 Cor. 13** – the Corinthians needed Paul to spell out for them what love truly involves; Love does not take into account wrongs suffered; an accounting term; don't keep records in relationships; it is not merely about getting justice for your situation; Paul emphasizes the importance of Christian relationships; view the conflict not a personal battle, but a spiritual battle.

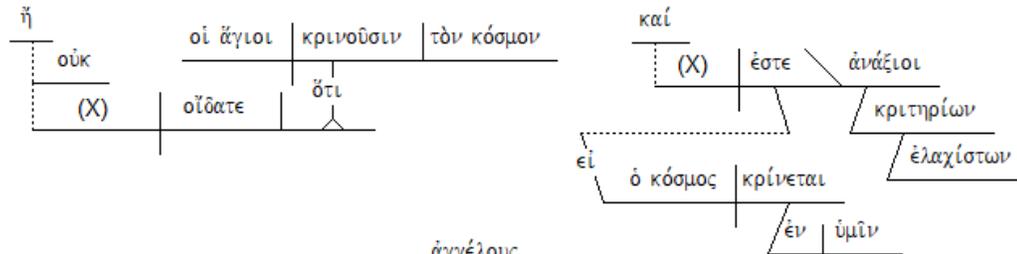
How often must we forgive? Not just seven times, but 70 X 7 (unlimited);
 When we are reviled, we need to bless

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

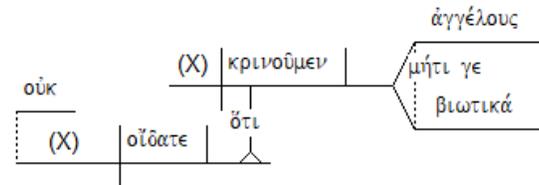
1Co 6:1



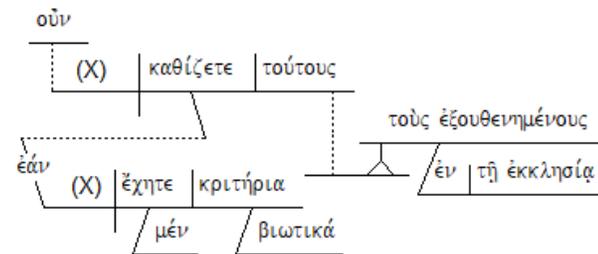
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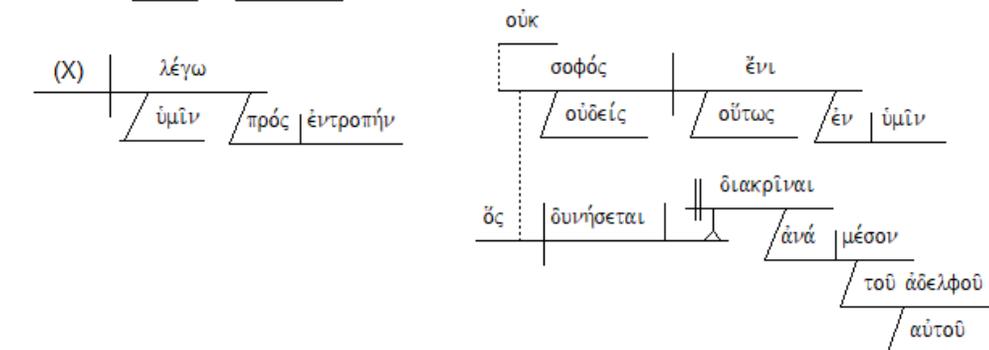
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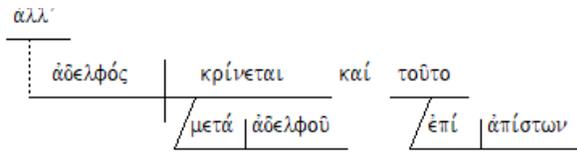
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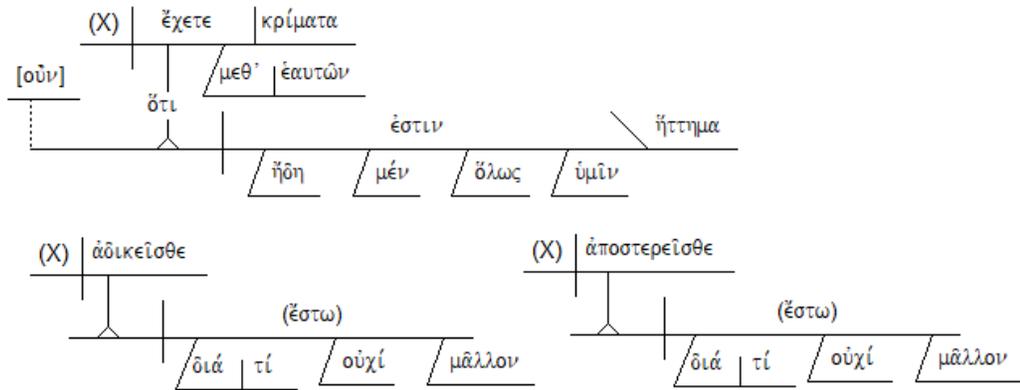
1Co 6:5



1Co 6:6



1Co 6:7



1Co 6:8



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

TITLE: WHO'S IN . . . WHO'S OUT? -- NO EXCEPTIONS WHEN IT COMES TO QUALIFYING FOR GOD'S KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:

**UNCONVERTED SINNERS HAVE NO PART IN GOD'S KINGDOM –
A TRANSFORMED LIFE SHOULD PRODUCE TRANSFORMED LIVING**

INTRODUCTION:

Dealing today with the biggest question of all: **Who qualifies** for entrance into God's Kingdom and enjoyment of all Kingdom Blessings? There was much fuzzy thinking and denial of reality among the Corinthians just as there is much fuzzy thinking and denial of reality in our culture today. Paul was urging the Corinthians to take sin seriously. It was unthinkable that a converted believer who was now consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ could persist in the types of sins mentioned here. When one sees clearly the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, why would one ever consider submitting conflicts between believers to the adjudication of the unrighteous?

How does this section mesh with the overall context?

Ray Stedman: What ties this section with that which has gone before is found in the word in **Verse 8**, "*But you yourselves wrong*," and the word in **Verse 9**, "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*" Those are the same basic root words. What Paul is really saying is, "Look, when you are so aggressive in defense of your own rights that you take another brother to law before a secular court, you are wronging that brother. Even though you may be right in your cause, you are wronging your brother, and that wronging, that unjust action, gives rise to the question, 'Have you yourself ever been justified before God?'" That is what Paul is saying. To treat another unjustly makes one ask if you have ever been justified, and he says the unjustified, the unrighteous, the unregenerate cannot inherit the kingdom of God if they are committed to these things that he lists as a lifestyle.

Now he surely does not mean that those who have been involved in these things cannot be saved, for he goes on to say, "*such were some of you*"; they have come out of it. But what he is saying, very clearly, is that these things cannot be continued as a lifestyle for Christians. Conversion makes a visible difference, and if it does not, there is room to question whether there has ever been a conversion.

Robert Gundry: "*Don't be deceived*" suggests that the Corinthians have been deceived, or are in danger of being deceived, into thinking that their conduct doesn't matter to their inheriting God's kingdom. So Paul lists various sorts of unrighteous people who won't inherit it. The Corinthians can then judge for themselves whether their conduct rules them in or out of the inheritance.

David Garland: The implication is that Christianity not only offers a completely new sexual ethos and a new ethos regarding material possessions but also brings about a complete transformation of individuals. God's grace does not mean that God benignly accepts humans in all their fallenness, forgives them, and then leaves them in that fallenness. God is in the business not of whitewashing sins but of transforming sinners (Fee 1993: 39).

William Barclay: Here Paul breaks out into a terrible catalogue of sins which is a grim commentary on the **debauched civilization** in which the Corinthian Church was growing up. There are certain things which are not pleasant to talk about, but we must look at this catalogue to seek to understand the environment of the early Christian Church; and to see that human nature has not changed very much. . .

The proof of Christianity lay in its **power**. It could take the dregs of humanity and make men out of them. It could take men lost to shame and make them sons of God. There were in Corinth, and all over the world, men who were living, walking proofs of the sheer re-creating power of Jesus Christ. The power of Christ is still the same. No man can change himself, but Christ can change him.

Richard Hays: We should remember, however, that Paul's present purpose in **1 Corinthians 6** is not to set up new rules for sexual behavior but to chastise the Corinthians for taking each other to court. All the items in the list of **verses 9–10** are merely illustrations of what the Corinthians used to be prior to their coming into the church. But a life-transforming change has occurred: "*you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God*" (v. 11). In light of this **transformation**, they ought to stop acting like *adikoi* by taking their property disputes into courts where the powerful can take advantage of the less influential members of the community. Unless we keep this basic aim of the argument in view, our reading of and preaching on this text will become severely out of focus.

Andrew Noselli: Paul's warning supports the main charge (vv. 1, 4) – wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul basically is saying to the believers, "Do not think you can get away with an unrepentantly sinful lifestyle. You are acting like the unrighteous. Do not think you can live that way and still be a citizen of God's kingdom. Unrepentantly sinful lifestyles do not characterize citizens of God's kingdom."

THERE ARE ONLY TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE:

I. (:9-10) THOSE WHO DON'T QUALIFY FOR GOD'S KINGDOM = UNCONVERTED SINNERS = THE UNRIGHTEOUS – NO EXCEPTIONS – NO SURPRISES

A. (:9a) General Characterization of Who is Excluded from God's Kingdom

1. No Surprise

"Or do you not know"

Common expression in 1 Corinthians – cf. our similar expression to our children:
“Don’t you know any better? Of course you do!” **Gil Rugh**

2. Universal Standard – Stated in General Terms

“that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

Charles Hodge: The tendency to divorce religion from morality has manifested itself in all ages of the world, and under all forms of religion.

David Prior: This **inheritance** is here likened to (and contrasted with) the **Promised Land** which awaited God’s people under the old covenant. That earthly inheritance was subject to natural disasters, invaded by hostile enemies, marauded by wild beasts, and generally something of a problem for the people of God to contain, let alone fully to enjoy.

In spite of all the difficulties facing the people of Israel in claiming their promised inheritance, they were under a divine obligation to **exterminate every alien influence** both in the land and in their own community life. The same summons comes to the people of God under the new covenant: *our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled and unfading*: there is nothing inherently corrupt or corrupting in the kingdom of God: nor will anything of that nature be allowed to enter it. The two cannot mix. The unrighteous cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because God is altogether righteous. The unrighteous actually exclude themselves from the kingdom of a righteous God. They exclude themselves by their own chosen behaviour. Because God’s kingdom reflects his own character of righteousness and compassion, those who insist on living by different standards will not be there. Paul is not talking about isolated acts of unrighteousness, but about a whole way of life pursued persistently by those who thus indicate that they would be aliens in the kingdom of truth and light.

a. Definition of “*the unrighteous*”

described earlier in **6:1** as those contrasted with *the saints*;
contrasted with believers in **6:6**;
only 2 groups of people

Leon Morris: *Unrighteous* is without the article in the Greek, the stress being on the character of these people, and not on the unrighteous as a class. People of this kind are excluded from the kingdom.

b. Concept of “*inherit*”

(Error of **Joseph C. Dillow** in The Reign of the Servant Kings – See below in the Notes section)

Inheritance derives from family relationship – not meritorious works.

c. Identification of “*the kingdom of God*”

The kingdom that Christ will establish on earth when He returns; new birth is requirement for entrance (**John 3**) – We are not yet in the kingdom physically. Destiny of unbelievers is the eternal fire of **Matt. 25:41** -- **Gil Rugh**

B. (:9b-10) Specific Characterization of Who is Excluded from God’s Kingdom

1. Danger of Deception

“Do not be deceived”

Do not presume upon the doctrine of God’s grace and wink the eye at sin; Do not water down the impact of what God says in this passage. It is difficult for us to explain some individual case testimonies . . . but here is what God says about who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul Gardner: Herein lies the power of Paul’s argument. It is possible for people to be deceived about their status. Paul’s command to these church members is brief and to the point: “*Do not let yourselves be deceived!*” (μη̄ πλανᾶσθε; also **15:33**). They should know that their life and works provide an important indicator to them of their community status. The holy distinctiveness of God’s people must be clearly evident to all. Paul laid the groundwork for this particular point about the danger of self-deception back in **3:18**: “*Let no one deceive himself*” (ἐξαπατάω). There, like here, the issue concerns their standing in the community and what is needed to survive on the last day (**3:12–15**). They deceive themselves by relying on their (worldly) wisdom, which is foolishness with God (**3:19**). Here, their lack of wisdom has led them to be worldly in their approach to all that is “unrighteous.” After listing some of the behaviors that may be apparent among those who are unrighteous and repeating that they will not inherit the kingdom of God (vv. **9c–10**), Paul argues that **Christians should be changed people because of the work of Christ in their lives (v. 11)**.

2. Universal Standard – Illustrated by Ten Specific Sinful Practices

Reveals who are the unrighteous by position and practice

a. *Neither fornicators*

James Boyer: one guilty of any sexual immorality

John MacArthur: by unmarried persons in particular

Gil Rugh: There is no safe sex outside of marriage because God will call you to account for it. . . The real problem is not AIDS, but Hell – fear God!

b. *Nor idolaters*

Idolatry and immoral sex very closely related in Corinth

Daniel Akin: “*Idolaters*” refers to those practicing perhaps the most basic and fundamental of all sins (see **Exod 20:3-6**). They give status and position to people and things that rightly belongs only to God. **Schreiner** points out idolatry is repeatedly addressed in the New Testament (**Rom 1:18-25; 1 Cor 5:10-11; 10:7,14; Gal 5:20; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5; Rev 21:8**).

c. *Nor adulterers*

James Boyer: a particular kind of fornicator, referring to infidelity within the married state

Heb 13:4 – God will judge fornicators and adulterers – make no mistake

d. *Nor effeminate*

James Boyer: probable that it is used in the technical sense of a man who submits to homosexual relations, a passive homosexual

Daniel Akin: “*Males who have sex with males*” refers to both passive homosexual participants (Gk. *malakoi*) and active homosexual participants (Gk. *arsenokoitai*). In spite of cultural accommodation and liberal reinterpretations, the Bible is consistent in its condemnation of homosexuality as sinful and contrary to the design and plan of God (see **Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Tim 1:10; Jude 7-8**). Jesus spoke to this issue as well in **Matthew 19:4-6**. (For an excellent treatment of the issue, see **Gardner, 1 Corinthians**, 264–69.)

e. *Nor homosexuals*

James Boyer: *abusers of themselves with mankind* (KJV) . . . The vividly descriptive term which Paul uses in the original Greek (“*one who goes to bed with a male*”) makes the meaning distinct.

John MacArthur: Effeminate and homosexuals both refer to those who exchange and corrupt normal male-female roles and relations.

Scripture could not be clearer that such practices are immoral – not some type of alternative lifestyle that should be accepted and accommodated by society.

f. *Nor thieves*

James Boyer: those who steal by stealth, the sneak-thief, as compared with a robber who steals by force

g. *Nor the covetous*

James Boyer: a greedy, grasping person, one who is always after more.

h. *Nor drunkards*

By inclusion in this list it is obvious that Scripture treats alcohol and drug addiction as sinful behaviors rather than medical disorders. Despite any amount of genetic predisposition, the individual is viewed as accountable for his choices leading to whatever degree of bondage is experienced.

i. *Nor revilers*

James Boyer: one who speaks harshly, reproachfully, uses abusive language

Daniel Akin: “*Verbally abusive people*” (ESV, “*revilers*”) are those who use harsh and abusive language to mock or scoff or even slander others.

j. *Nor swindlers*

John MacArthur: *Swindlers* are thieves who steal indirectly. They take unfair advantage of others to promote their own financial gain. Extortioners, embezzlers, confidence men, promoters of defective merchandise and services, false advertisers, and many other types of swindlers are as common to our day as to Paul’s.

3. Exclusion from God’s Kingdom
“*will inherit the kingdom of God*”

Again, this is a blanket statement – **no exceptions.**

**II. (:11) THOSE WHO QUALIFY FOR GOD’S KINGDOM = SINNERS
CONVERTED BY THE POWER OF THE TRIUNE GOD = THE RIGHTEOUS –
NO EXCEPTIONS – NO SURPRISES**

A. Pre-Conversion State

“*Such were some of you*”

Gordon Fee: The structure of the sentence seems certain. It begins with three verbs, each introduced with the strong adversative “*but*,” which gives additional force to the “**once you were, but now you are not**” emphasis of the sentence. As before (1:30), the three verbs are primarily **metaphors of salvation**, each expressing a special facet of their conversion in light of the preceding sentences: they had been “washed” from the filth of their former lifestyles expressed in the preceding list; they had been “sanctified,” set apart by God for holy, godly living that stands in stark contrast to their former wickedness; though formerly “unjust,” they had been justified, so that now being right with God they may inherit the kingdom that before they could not. Each of the verbs is thus chosen for contextual, not dogmatic, reasons; and their sequence is theologically irrelevant. “*Washed*” probably comes first because it most naturally

follows the “filth” of the vice catalogue. Finally, since the three verbs refer to the same reality, and since each of them has “*God*” as the implied subject, the two prepositional phrases are to be understood as modifying all three verbs. Paul’s understanding of the living God as **Triune** found in these sentences is therefore difficult to escape, even if the explication of that reality does not appear until later. Indeed, along with the implicit theology found in John’s gospel, passages like this one are the “stuff” out of which the later articulations are made. For Paul, God has effected salvation “*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit.*”

B. Process of Conversion – What Happened? Tremendous Transformation

1. Cleansed and Forgiven of Your Sins

“but you were washed”

There was a lot of filth and defilement and guilt associated with our sins;
This washing was pictured in baptism.

Gil Rugh: Don’t you feel like you need a bath after you go through the listing of these sins?

Isaiah 1:18

John MacArthur: Refers to new life, through spiritual cleansing and regeneration (cf. **Jn 3:3-8, 2Co 5:17; Eph 2:10; Tit 3:5**).

2. Consecrated to God

“but you were sanctified”

Set apart from our sins and this evil world and Satan and consecrated as clean vessels to the Lord.

John MacArthur: This results in new behavior, which a transformed life always produces. Sin’s total domination is broken and replaced by a new pattern of obedience and holiness. Though not perfection, this is a new direction (see **Ro 6:17, 18, 22**).

3. Considered Righteous

“but you were justified”

Imputation of the righteousness of Christ

Should these three actions be taken as generally synonymous or be treated with individual significance? While all wrapped together in the process of conversion, it seems best to give each term its specific emphasis.

John MacArthur:

- Washed speaks of new life, of regeneration . . .
- Sanctified speaks of new behavior. . .
- Justified speaks of new standing before God.

C. Powerful Agency of the Triune God

1. Redemption Accomplished by Christ

“in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”

On the basis of His authority and work

2. Redemption Applied by the Holy Spirit

“and in the Spirit of our God”

The Spirit is the one who has baptized us into the body of Christ

Charles Hodge: These clauses are not to be restricted to the preceding word . . . they belong equally to all three of the preceding terms.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage give hope to believers that the Holy Spirit can deliver them from the bondage of any type of sinful habit or practice?
- 2) How does this passage refute today’s characterization of certain sinful lifestyles (such as drug and alcohol addiction) as medical diseases or of other sinful lifestyles (such as homosexuality) as merely an alternative morally neutral lifestyle?
- 3) How can someone’s false and unfounded profession of faith be exposed as counterfeit?
- 4) How is the work of the Trinity involved in the accomplishing of our conversion, justification and sanctification?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Suing a Fellow Believer Is Inconsistent with New Life in Christ (6:9-11).

- A. It forgets who we were before Christ (6:9-10).
- B. It forgets who we are in Christ (6:11).

Verses 9-10 constitute what we call a **vice list**. It is similar to **Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-6; and Colossians 3:5-9**. They address the believer’s nature and lifestyle before accepting Christ and also the eternal destiny of those who never trust Christ and thus are never regenerated or justified.

These Corinthians were living like the unrighteous, and they needed to be reminded that “*the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom*” (1 Cor 6:9). They will not escape eschatological judgment. They will not enjoy the new heaven, the new earth, or the new Jerusalem (Rev 21–22). They will not spend eternity with God. Tragically, their eternal destiny is “*the lake of fire*” (Rev 20:14-15).

John Paul Miller: In this passage, Paul affirmed twice that the unsaved would “*not inherit the kingdom of God*.” This judgment is based both on the unbeliever’s position (6:9a) and practice (6:10b). The inference is evident. Why should Christians who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17; Gal. 4:7), submit themselves to those whose character and conduct will prevent them from entering into the kingdom? <http://www.calvarysbd.com/pdf/1cor.pdf>

John MacArthur: The kingdom is the spiritual sphere of salvation where God rules as king over all who belong to Him by faith. All believers are in that spiritual kingdom, yet are waiting to enter into the full inheritance of it in the age to come. People who are characterized by these iniquities are not saved (v.10). While believers can and do commit these sins, they do not characterize them as an unbroken life pattern. When they do, it demonstrates that the person is not in God’s kingdom. True believers who do sin, repent that sin and seek to gain the victory over it.

Joseph C. Dillow -- Erroneous Position:

He tries to argue that this group of sinners represent saved Christians who have forfeited the blessings of the **inheritance of the kingdom**. They are still allowed entrance into heaven on the basis of having been justified by faith, but they forfeit the rewards associated with inheriting the millennial kingdom blessings. His reasoning is as follows:

“there are two kinds of inheritance presented in the New Testament. All believers have God as their inheritance but not all will inherit the kingdom. Furthermore, inheriting the kingdom is not to be equated with entering it but, rather, with possessing it and ruling there. All Christians will enter the kingdom, but not all will rule there, i.e., inherit it. . .

We are told in v. 9 that the ‘*wicked*’ (Gk. **adikoi**) will not inherit this kingdom, and in v. 1 the same word is used for non-Christians (cf. 6:6). In fact, the contrast between the righteous, **dikaioi**, and the unrighteous, **adikoi**, is common in the New Testament, and those whose lives are characterized by **adikia** are in some contexts eternally condemned. But this kind of argument assumes that **adikoi** is a kind of technical term for those lacking the imputed righteousness of Christ. The illegitimate identity transfer is committed to import the contextually derived suggestion of one kind of consequence of being **adikos** into the semantic value of the word. However, it is a general term for those (Christian or non-Christian) lacking godly character. Both Christians and non-Christians can be **adikoi**. In fact, in 6:8 the apostle declares that the Corinthians are acting like **adikoi** (he uses the verb form, **adikeo**) just like the non-Christians of v. 1.”

Leon Morris: The tremendous revolution brought about by the early preaching of the gospel is implied in the quiet words, *and such* (actually a little stronger, “*these*”) *were some of you*. It was no promising material that confronted the early preachers, but people whose values were exactly the opposite of those of Christ. It had required the mighty power of the Spirit of God to turn people like that away from their sins, and to make them members of Christ’s Church.

Doug Goins: This final verse is wonderfully hopeful. The behaviors that he listed in **verses 9-10** characterized the pre-Christian lives of many of the Corinthians, but that old life is not who they are now. They have left those patterns behind. So there is every hope that they can stop suing each other.

I love Paul's logic here. When Paul wants to motivate or encourage people to action, his favorite appeal is, "Become what you really are. You aren't living like it, but it's your identity." And what are the Corinthians? Three things: First, they have been washed. That speaks of their new life in Jesus Christ, of God's work of regeneration or re-creation. Listen to how Paul describes it in **Titus 3:5**: "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*" In **2 Corinthians 5:17** he writes, "*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*" Finally, in **Ephesians 2:10** he says, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...*" We are washed to a new life.

The second thing Paul tells the Corinthians about their identity is that they are sanctified. That speaks of the sovereign act of God in making them his people, setting them apart for his intended purposes, which God promises they will fulfill; they will become everything that he has set them apart to become through sanctification.

Third, he uses the word "justified." This is one of Paul's favorite words for what God does to make people his children. Whenever Paul uses it in the past tense it's almost synonymous with sanctification. God finished a work in you to make you his own.

These Corinthians have experienced **spiritual transformation**, Paul reminds them. It was done in the name of Jesus Christ, by his authority and power, the authority that he won through his death on the cross in obedience to his Father, through the resurrection that his Father accomplished, and through his glorification and ascension to the right hand of the Father. That transformation that has happened in the past and that they can count on in the future is based on the authority of Jesus Christ and on the power of the Spirit of God at work in them. Their passionate commitment to their personal rights can be broken. God can humble them before each other. He can change them from an aggressive, competitive, rights-oriented community into people who are willing to give up their rights for the good of the whole, people who care more about the salvation of the world than their own personal possessions.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul has a very different view of the relationship of the past to the present than that popularly held by many psychologists and psychiatrists today. In the psychological world of our day, what one was in the past determines what he is in the present. This is why so much time and money is spent digging up the past. It makes a great excuse for sin in the present. Paul's thinking is just the opposite for Christians. What we were in the past does not determine what we are today, because the cross of Christ separates us not only from our sins but from our past. Christ stands between us in the present and us as we were in the past. What we were is not what we are. The cross of Christ is the reason why we can be now what we were not then. The cross of Christ is the reason Christians cannot and must not be crooks. It is not because Christians cannot sin, but because they must not sin. For a Christian to be a crook is for a person to return to that wicked state from which he (or she) was delivered by the grace of God in Christ.

When we were saved, we were completely saved, severed from our past identity and given a new identity. We were washed, cleansed of our sin and our guilt. We were sanctified, set apart from sin unto holiness. We were justified, legally declared righteous through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed to us by faith. All of this transpired in the name of Jesus Christ.

Gordon Fee: For Paul there is to be the **closest possible relationship between the experience of grace and one's behavior that evidences that experience of grace.** Paul himself is as concerned as anyone that the latter (right behavior) should not be perceived as coming first or as leading to the former (the experience of grace). But those who concern themselves with grace without equal concern for behavior have missed Paul's own theological urgencies by several furlongs. It is precisely for these reasons that the warning texts in Paul must be taken with real seriousness. Security in Christ there is, to be sure, but it is a false security that would justify sinners who have never taken seriously "*but such were some of you.*" That is to whitewash the sinner without regeneration or transformation; Paul simply would not understand such theology.

What is most often missing in such theologies is the central ingredient in Paul, the **transforming work of the Spirit.** And in his case that is not simply to be understood as theological jargon. It is rather predicated on the Spirit's coming into the world, signifying the turning of the ages, so that the realities of the future are already at work in power in the present age. The Corinthian problem was not with their experience of the Spirit, but with their misunderstanding of what it meant to be Spirit people. Our problems are usually of another kind. The Spirit belongs to the creed and to our theology but is all too often left there, so that the Spirit's genuinely transforming and empowering work is often left until the Eschaton, rather than experienced in the process of arriving there.

George Whitefield: cf. his message on **Justification by Christ** from this text <http://www.biblebb.com/files/whitefield/gw046.htm>

The words beginning with the particle *BUT*, have plainly a reference to something before; it may not therefore be improper, before I descend to particulars, to consider the

words as they stand in relation to the context. The apostle, in the verses immediately foregoing, had been reckoning up many notorious sins, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, and such like, the commission of which, without a true and hearty repentance, he tells the Corinthians, would entirely shut them out of the kingdom of God. But then, lest they should, on the one hand, grow spiritually proud by seeing themselves differ from their unconverted brethren, and therefore be tempted to set them at nought, and say with the self-conceited hypocrite in the prophet, "Come not nigh me, for I am holier than thou;" or, on the other hand, by looking back on the multitude of their past offenses, should be apt to think their sins were too many and grievous to be forgiven: he first, in order to keep them humble, reminds them of their sad state before conversion, telling them in plain terms, "*such* (or as it might be read, these things) *were some of you*;" not only one, but all that sad catalogue of vices I have been drawing up, some of you were once guilty of; but then, at the same time, to preserve them from despair, behold he brings them glad tidings of great joy: "*But ye are washed; but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.*"

Gil Rugh: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3306111142>

Our position and practice are distinct, but must not be separated from one another. . . Don't turn the grace of God into licentiousness. . . Their conduct didn't reflect what Christ had done in their lives. . . They (the Corinthians) were proud and arrogant because of their exalted position in Christ. . . Those who are born of God cannot live the same way as those who are children of the devil. . . Our conduct reveals what we are in our being. . . Nobody too sinful – the washing, sanctifying and justifying are sufficient for anyone; **Rom. 6:16**. . . Our position and practice are not perfectly conformed; nor are they radically unformed. Only two kinds of people: slaves of sin and slaves of righteousness. . . Someone living in sin – challenge them: "What makes you think you are a believer?" I have to take God's Word even over your testimony.

Thomas Leake: (:9-10) Why Most Americans are NOT Headed to Heaven --

Introduction: Not anti-American; but not hard to find fault with our nation;

Matt. 7:13-14; 21 – many false professions of allegiance to Christ will be exposed;

God demands repentance and faith in Christ alone = an Exclusive Gospel message; the

New Birth is essential and it will always result in a transformed life;

Exclusive Salvation = a hated doctrine by the world – **John 14:3-6**

(Quote from Billy Graham in interview with Robert Shuller on the radio where he denies the exclusivity of the gospel)

Only the type of faith in Jesus Christ that results in a transformed life will get you to heaven; cf. publishing a list of cuts from the football team = who did not make the team

I. The Exclusive Kingdom

The kingdom of God is not for everyone!

Concept of *Inheriting* – **Ex. 32:13** = come into possession of it; **Ps. 37:9-11** speaks of a future inheritance

Def. of *kingdom of God* = the place where God reigns supreme – **Ps. 93:1-2** – in one

sense God reigns over all things eternally (**Ps 99:1; 115:3**) – this is the broad sense of God’s kingdom; but used in this context in a much narrower sense = God reigns through His Son in mediatorial fashion over mankind who are believers – speaking of the Millennial Kingdom on earth; same as the kingdom of heaven in Book of Matthew; in the spiritual sense in the church we have already entered into that aspect of the kingdom: **Col. 4:11; Matt. 24:14; Acts 28:31; Col. 1:13; Rev. 19:15** – but the physical millennial reign is still coming; in another sense the kingdom of God also encompasses God’s reign in heaven for all eternity – **1 Cor. 15:50 ff** – this is still future as well
You are either in or out of the kingdom

II. The Excluded People

The *Unrighteous* = Unbelievers will not make it in = they are disobedient to God in their behavior; defined by their practices;

Starts with the arrogance of Unbelief;

This sample list deals with sins of chronic behavior (not just a momentary lapse);

Paul repeats 6 from previous chapter and adds another 4 vices;

There is a connection between *idolatry* (having a wrong concept of God) and the various expressions of sin;

Homosexuality (Rom. 1) = the clearest example of how a wrong mindset leads to unrighteous behavior;

This is not an exhaustive list – **Gal. 5:19-21; Ephes. 5; Reve. 21:7-8** – the destiny of the unrighteous = the lake that burns with fire – No exceptions;

1 John 3:4-10 passage is key and very parallel to this passage in 1 Cor.

Believers can commit these same sins – but only as an exception to the pattern of their lives; the one given over to these sins is not a believer – no matter what they profess; not talking about anyone losing their salvation; but an indication they were never saved in the first place

III. The Necessity of Exclusion – Why must it be this way (by inference)

A. This is what the Scripture says – **1 Jn. 2:4** – this is clear

B. What is a Christian if he is not a Follower of Christ?

How did Jesus Himself live?; you can’t have a non-disciple disciple

C. The Kingdom of God is by nature a Holy Kingdom – **1 Pet. 2:9**

D. This is what true biblical conversion is = it always leads to a changed life

Thomas Leake: (:11) How Sinners Turn Into Saints – The Theology of Biblical Conversion

Introduction: Baptism is very significant – believers giving testimony to how God has worked to change their lives; but the theology expressed in these testimonies can be very poor – that is OK, because these are babes in Christ; but we need more than a testimonial understanding of what conversion is; we need the biblical theology;

Paul is reminding the Corinthians: you were converted;

Their basic problem = Pride – don’t boast; your arrogance is not good . . .

Paul first chops down their pride . . . then has to be careful to build them back up; they need to understand their conversion better and live in light of it

Answering 7 Questions About Biblical Conversion:

1. Why is Conversion Needed? *“such were some of you”*

“and” is omitted at the beginning of this verse by NASV translation – connects this verse to previous verses = the list of specific sins in **vs. 9-10** = pre-conversion life; Imperfect tense shows they had persisted in these sins – **Ephes. 2:1-3, 11-12**; (Believers should wear t-shirts saying “Yes, we are trying to convert you!”); **Matt. 18:3** – everyone must be humbled and converted leading to a transformation of life (cf. convertible car = just the top is changed back and forth); Contrary to book by **Max Lucado**, God doesn’t like sinners and think that they are so special; Yes, He cares for us; but the Cross tells us what God thinks of our sin; God has indignation every day over sin

2. Is Genuine Conversion Possible? Or is it just pie in the sky

Great hope in this verse – they were no longer living in these sins; no psycho therapy was available back then for them; they had no Freud; **Titus 2:11-12**; we have to believe in God’s power to save and transform; “I can’t help it ... it is an addiction” = just an excuse
God saves from the guttermost to the uttermost
Rom. 8 – *the Spirit of God is putting to death the deeds of the body*

3. What exactly is Biblical Conversion?

“but” – repeated 3 times in this verse for emphasis
This verse is all about change and transformation – a radical departure from your past; we looked earlier at the greatness of sin; now we need to look at the greatness of the transformation; an abrupt about-face
Grudem def. of Conversion = Our willing response to the gospel call in which we sincerely repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation;
Repentance and faith = 2 sides of the same coin – **Acts 26:20** – Repent and turn to God – the sinner is very aware of his conversion; **2 Cor. 7:10** – a godly sorrow;
Many examples of conversion: **Acts 3:19; 8:30-40; 9:4-5; 11:20-23; 14:15; 15:3**
Man is active in making that real choice
Cf. the Prodigal Son
OT illustrations of conversion – **Is. 55:6-7; Ezek 33:11**

4. How does Man’s Conversion Relate to God’s Work?

1 Cor. 6:11 describes in detail what God does, not what man does (repentance and faith are just implied here) – Conversion is a work that is done mysteriously together – man’s part and God’s part; but man’s part is only made possible by God’s part; people can only convert when God is doing a work in their heart
3 Works of God which accompany the conversion of man – don’t view these as chronological steps or stages – they all happen simultaneously

a) **Washing** – sin is dirty; we need cleansing; new life

We Americans like to be clean; this is a complete cleansing; positional truth; past tense; God is the one who accomplished the work; **Acts 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21** – water baptism cannot accomplish this (only picture it); some people can

be baptized but never be washed; **Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:4; Acts 3:26; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25** – Conversion not possible apart from the initiating work of God; God has to grant the repentance; **John 6** – the drawing work of God; **Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8-9; Matt. 13:11**; repentance and faith not granted to everyone – **Acts 18:27; 1 Cor. 12:3; Acts 16:14** shows the divine and human side working together;
Not talking about self improvement;
Regeneration must take place first – below the conscious level; then conversion takes place at the conscious level; Repentance and faith must be rooted in God’s initiating work of regeneration

b) Sanctifying – sin contaminates; we need to be set apart to God for His special purposes; **Lev. 22:32-33; 2 Chron. 36:14; 1 Chron. 23:13; Ex. 28:4; 30:31**; we are not special in ourselves, but in Christ
Passive – God did the work; not looking at a process here but at positional sanctification; instantaneous; Corinthians had a lot more growing to do; **Acts 26:18; Ex 19:6; Lev. 20:26; 1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 10:10**; positional must lead to practical; you are to live what you are; we can’t imitate the world

c) Justifying – sin brings guilt; legal term; picture serious setting of courtroom; How can people reject the fear of the Lord as the ultimate Judge? **Rev. 4:5** = unimaginable scene; Act of God whereby He declares an unrighteous person to be righteous based on the imputed righteousness of Christ; **Rom. 3:28** – not us adding love to our faith; we add nothing; Christ had to do all the work; **Rom. 4:1-5**
Rom. 5:1 – “*having been . . .*” Not “*hopefully will be . . .*”

5. How is Conversion Accomplished? 2 prepositions used here – Location or Means – but the meaning essentially the same

a. *in the name of the Lord Jesus*

all that Jesus is; includes His authority – **Luke 24; Acts 4:12** – not by any other name

b. *by the Spirit of God*

Acts 2:33; Ps. 19:7; Rom. 3:20; Eph. 5; John 17:13

6. How is Conversion Misunderstood Today?

Cf. course on evangelism taught at Willow Creek – How to be a Contagious Christian – stems from a wrong view of conversion; failure to understand the sovereignty of God; we can’t come up with a method or gimmicks to get people into the kingdom; People don’t need gimmicks; they need the power of the gospel
Entire Trinity involved here; speaks to the power of God

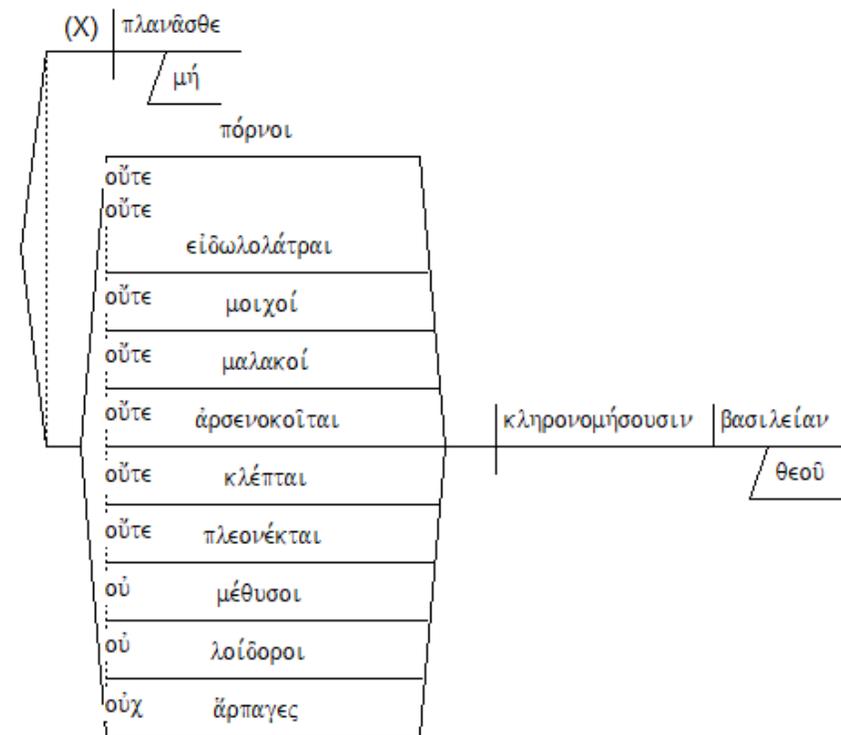
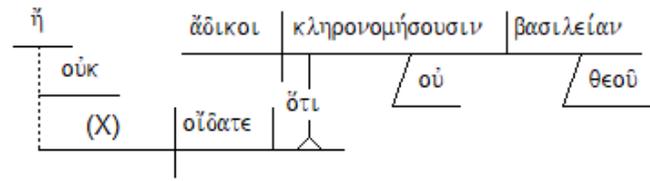
7. What are the Evidences of Conversion? (the Results or Effects)

2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 2:19; 3:9-10; need to persevere in the faith

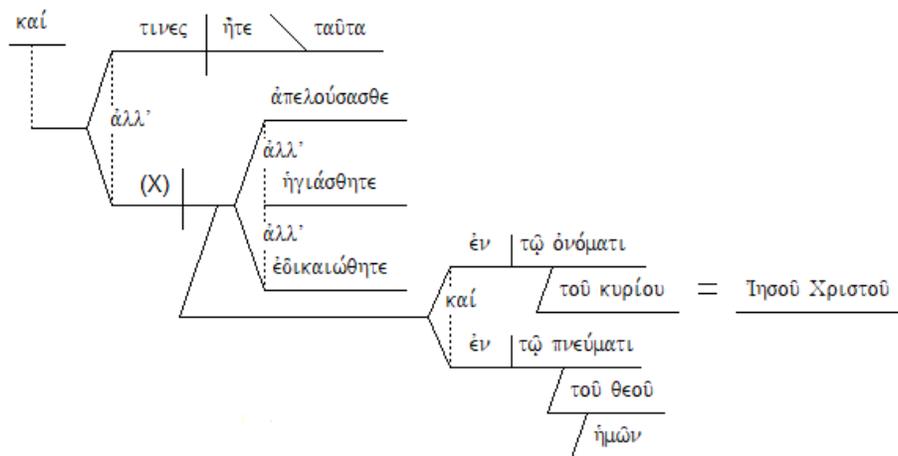
This is Genuine conversion; not Counterfeit; accept no cheap substitutes

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

1Co 6:9-10



1Co 6:11



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

TITLE: GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY

BIG IDEA:

EIGHT GUIDELINES TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS TO GLORIFY GOD IN OUR PHYSICAL BODY

INTRODUCTION:

Paul has been talking about the subject of avoiding sexual immorality; but this passage has a much wider application to how believers should view the physical body which the Lord has provided. Sometimes we get so caught up with the discussion of what happens with our spirit that we act as though the body is inconsequential. When you see the importance that God places on the resurrection it is evident that the physical body is quite important indeed. We have the opportunity to yield the members of our body as instruments to sin or as instruments of righteousness to glorify the Creator who has redeemed us with the precious price of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ understood **the importance of His physical body:**

“But a body you have prepared for Me . . . behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do your will, O God.” We need to actively harness our physical body to be the instrument by which we carry out the will of God here on this earth.

Adewuya: What is freedom, and how does it relate to sexual purity and the believer’s use of his or her body? These are the issues Paul is about to address in this section.

First Corinthians 6:12–20 addresses a case of **fornication** (a broad term used for all forms of sexual impurity) in the Corinthian Church. The Corinthians have failed to exercise sexual purity (**6:13–20**), once again thinking that their freedom in Christ meant license to sin (**6:12**). But since they had been bought at great cost, and their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, they ought not to go beyond the bounds of true grace.

Anthony Thiselton: Paul chooses to elaborate on how freedom and self-discipline relate to each other to anticipate how his readers might seek to sidestep his warnings about manipulative and immoral conduct: “We are free from the law, Paul!” But, he insists, such license contradicts what it is to be “*in Christ*.” “Freedom” is not unqualified license to gratify the desires of the self, not least because the new Christian self has a new identity as a new creation “*in Christ*.”

Gordon Fee: The net result is one of the more important theological passages in the NT about the human body. It should forever lay to rest the implicit **dualism** of so much that has been passed off as Christian, where the body is rejected, subdued, or indulged because it is of no significance for -- or is even a hindrance to -- “real salvation,” which has to do with the “soul.” At the same time in the current self-centeredness of so much of Western culture, Paul’s emphasis could stand to get a radical new hearing: that our individual bodies do not belong to us alone in a selfish, self-centered way; rather they

belong to Christ, purchased by him through redemption and now indwelt by the Spirit so as to be God's own sanctuary. Thus Paul here individualizes the metaphor used earlier regarding the church (3:16–17). There, the body of believers gathered in Christ's name was seen as God's temple, God's dwelling place by the Spirit. Here, Paul reenvisioned that reality **for individual believers**.

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: Christians belong to the Lord who bought them at a price. They must recognize that they have been incorporated into one body with Christ. Therefore, what they do with their bodies matters before the Lord. Any form of **sexual immorality** indicates an abuse of the body and an obscuring of community holiness.

Immorality Is Incompatible with Union with Christ (6:12–17)

1. Christian Freedom Has Its Boundaries (6:12–13)
2. The Body is Not for Sexual Immorality but for the Lord (6:13–17)
 - a. The Body Is for the Lord (6:13)
 - b. The Lord Will Raise the Body (6:14)
 - c. Bodies Are Members of Christ and Not to Be Joined to Another (6:15–17)

Community Identity Requires Holiness (6:18–20)

1. Sexual Sin Is Sin against the Body (6:18)
2. The Body Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19)
3. The Body Is to Glorify God (6:20)

1. (:12a) PURSUE WHAT IS PROFITABLE, NOT JUST ALLOWABLE – IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR NEW CHRISTIAN LIBERTIES

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.”

Richard Hays: The idea of giving up their personal prerogatives was objectionable to many of the Corinthians. Indeed, their conception of “wisdom” placed great emphasis on personal freedom. Their watchword was, “I am free to do anything.” This was their justification for numerous practices that Paul found troubling. In the final part of chapter 6, therefore, he attacks the roots of their community-destroying insistence upon autonomy. The argument is a little difficult to follow, because Paul here adopts the diatribe style, in which he constructs an imaginary dialogue between himself and his Corinthian hearers. To understand the line of argument, we must reconstruct the different voices in this imaginary conversation. . .

The case of the incestuous man (1 Cor. 5:1–13) may have represented an extreme instance of such thinking, but Paul's forceful argument in 6.12–20 suggests that he has heard reports of a similar attitude among many of the Corinthians with regard to matters of sexual conduct. Apparently some of them were **going to prostitutes** and contending that such conduct was harmless. To the modern reader, this may seem surprising, but we must remember that the social world of the ancient Corinthians differed greatly from ours. Prostitution was not only legal; it was a widely accepted social convention. “The

sexual latitude allowed to men by Greek public opinion was virtually unrestricted. Sexual relations of males with both boys and harlots were generally tolerated” (Talbert, 32). Thus, the Corinthian men who frequented prostitutes were not asserting some unheard-of new freedom; they were merely insisting on their right to continue participating in a pleasurable activity that was entirely normal within their own culture.

In order to counter this attitude, Paul opens the next section of the argument by quoting a series of three Corinthian slogans, each followed by his own counterslogan in rebuttal (6:12–14).

Corinthians:

1) “All things are lawful for me.”

2) “All things are lawful for me.”

3) “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food. And God will destroy both one and the other.”

Paul:

But not all things are beneficial.

But I will not be dominated by anything.

The body is meant . . . for the Lord, and the Lord for the body
And God raised
the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

There is some guesswork involved in reconstructing this dialogue, because the ancient Greek manuscripts do not use quotation marks. The translator must decide where Paul is quoting a slogan and where he is offering his own rejoinder.

A. What Things are Now Lawful that were not previously lawful under the OT Mosaic economy? What truly are our Liberties in Jesus Christ?

B. What Things May Not Be Profitable even though Lawful? And Why?

2. (:12b) AVOID ANY ADDICTIONS (MASTERIES) THAT WOULD COMPROMISE OUR FREEDOM TO GLORIFY GOD IN OUR BODY

“All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

A. How can what is Good or Pleasurable or Allowable or Lawful actually become Bad for Me?

B. Is Jesus Christ the Lord over every area in my life and every appetite of my being?

3. (:13) AVOID ANY IMMORALITY – RESPECTING THE HOLY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE LORD

“Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord

is for the body.”

A. Certain Physical Appetites are Only Temporary (for this life)

Paul Gardner: Paul’s concern is that the relationship of stomach to food and vice versa is not the same as the relationship between the body and sexual immorality (“*the body is not for sexual immorality*”; v. 13c). The stomach and food work together for a specific purpose until God destroys both at the end of life. But the body also works for a specific purpose within God’s creative order and that is “*for the Lord.*” The body has been created with a special relationship that is as close to the Lord as the stomach’s relationship is close to food. As **Wright** says, “In the present time the ‘body’ is the locus and means of obedience, and as such is to be ‘presented’ to God the creator for his service.” What God has created should be used for the purpose given by God. Most definitely, the body was not created for sexual immorality (πορνεία).

Paul’s teaching at this point is broad. The body is truly significant in the purposes of God; therefore, any sexually immoral act involving the body is wrong. There can be no dualism in which the body, as matter, has no existence or significance beyond the phenomenal. This is not the worldview with which Paul works. In **chapter 15** he will speak of the present body and the future body, to which he also refers here in v. 14. There is both continuity and discontinuity. One is described as perishable and the other as imperishable (15:42), yet both are “body.” It is the Lord who was raised by God, and so it is truly we who shall be raised in the future “*by his power,*” that is, God’s power (v. 14). It is the body that must put on the imperishable and the immortal. It does not become something other than “*body.*”

Nonetheless, Paul speaks here about more than just continuity with the future and that the body will not be destroyed. He says that it is *for the Lord*. That is, just as the body is not designed for immorality, it is designed for union with Christ and for being joined to the Lord (v. 17) and for bringing God glory (v. 20). The Lord is for the body in the sense that Paul develops in the next few verses, that is, that the Spirit indwells the body (v. 19) and that the Lord unites it with himself so that the person is “*joined*” to him (v. 17).

David Prior: Before giving his rich exposition of a truly Christ-centred attitude to the body (*sōma*), Paul dismisses a diversionary tactic about the stomach (*koilia*) – probably presented in the form of another catchphrase bandied about by those who were attempting to justify each and every physical indulgence. He deals abruptly with their slogan by making it plain that he is not thinking about stomachs or bellies at all. There is all the difference in the world between food, which is digested by the stomach and passed out through the bowels, and sexual intercourse, which affects the whole person and cannot be dismissed flippantly as a purely physiological phenomenon.

B. Our Body is Designed as an Instrument to Glorify God for All Eternity

Warren Wiersbe: Sensuality is to sex what gluttony is to eating; both are sinful and both

bring disastrous consequences. . . . Sex outside of [heterosexual] marriage is destructive, while sex in marriage can be creative and beautiful. (*Be Wise*, 71)

C. Therefore Immoral Sexual Union has far-reaching implications

David Roper: "*Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food*"--another contemporary saying in Corinth. They were saying that nature demands satisfaction. If you're hungry, you go buy a hamburger. That is a perfectly legitimate position. But you cannot infer from it that because you have a sexual drive you must immediately fulfill it. Because both food and the stomach are temporary, but the body is not. The body is not for immorality. God has a higher purpose for it. "*The body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.*" Just as a perfect body was created for Jesus Christ and became an instrument through which he displayed the character of the Father, so a body is given to us to be used not as a plaything, not as an object for self-gratification, but as an eternal instrument through which we can declare the glory of Jesus Christ.

4. (:14) LIVE A TRANSFORMED LIFE – CONSISTENT WITH THE RESURRECTION PROGRAM GOD HAS REVEALED

“Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.”

A. The Resurrection of the Physical Body of Christ has Significance for Us

Mark Taylor: The fact that the body will be raised from the dead has enormous implications for present behavior. God will do away with food and the stomach, but God raised up Jesus and he will also raise believers by his power (cf. **15:43**). The destiny of the body stands in direct contrast to the destiny of “*food and the stomach.*” The latter will be destroyed, but the body will be raised from the dead. The body was not meant for dishonorable purposes but rather for God’s glory (**6:20**). As the argument continues, Paul shows that there is the closest possible correlation between Christ and those who belong to him. What happens to Christ, happens to those incorporated into Christ (cf. **Rom 6:4; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20**).

B. Our Resurrection Will be Accomplished by the Same Power and is Therefore Certain

C. Therefore How we Use our Bodies Matters to God

5. (:15-17) AVOID SPIRITUAL ADULTERY (SEXUAL IMMORALITY) – RESPECTING THE PRECIOUS UNION WE HAVE WITH CHRIST

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is

one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

Craig Blomberg: Verses 15–17 form a syllogism (a three-part argument with two premises and a conclusion that necessarily follows):

- (1) The bodies of Christians are members of Christ himself.
- (2) Sexual intercourse unites two human beings (as taught already in **Gen. 2:24**).
- (3) Sexual intercourse with a prostitute, therefore, unites the members of Christ with that prostitute.

A. Our Union with Christ Extends to Our Physical Bodies

B. Defiling Our Physical Bodies (Via Sexual Immorality) Should be Unthinkable

Os Guinness: This [the one-flesh relationship in marriage] is the ideal that judges all the rest of Christian sexual ethics in the Scriptures. That is what is behind every prohibition in this area. Why should not men sleep with animals? Why is adultery wrong? Why are homosexual practices wrong? Why is pre-marital intercourse wrong? Simply because there is **no true oneness** and therefore there should be no one-flesh either. And that is precisely what Paul is arguing here. The point is not that some Corinthian Christian was sleeping with a prostitute; Paul could just as easily have said, 'He who joins himself to the good-looking housewife down the street' or 'She who joins herself to the good-looking athlete down the stairs.' He says 'he' because in Corinth it was men who tended to have double standards; and he says 'prostitute' because in Corinth that was the particular problem. But the true problem was that there was **intimacy without intention**, and there was **communion without commitment**.

C. The One Flesh Relationship of Sexual Union Has Spiritual Implications

Richard Hays: The whole argument presupposes that sexual intercourse cannot be understood merely as a momentary act that satisfies a transient natural urge. Instead, it creates a mysterious but real and enduring union between man and woman. In support of this claim, Paul cites **Genesis 2:24**: "*The two shall be one flesh.*" The union of a member of the church with a prostitute is disastrous for the Christian community precisely because it creates a real bonding with her; therefore it creates an unholy bond between the Lord's members and the sinful world. The result is both defilement and confusion.

6. (:18) FLEE IMMORALITY IN LIGHT OF THE UNIQUE DANGER AND DEFILEMENT IT POSES

"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."

A. There is Only One Way to Fight Sexual Immorality = Flee It

Paul Gardner: The only way of dealing with this immorality is to run in the other direction as if fleeing an enemy. Immorality is the domain of a different lord, and it is dangerous to go there since it leads to judgment. Perhaps Paul recalled Joseph's flight from Potiphar's wife in **Genesis 39:12**; leaving his coat in her hand, Joseph "*fled and went outside*" (ἔφυγεν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἔξω).

B. Sexual Immorality Presents Unique Dangers and Defilement

David Roper: I think it is because in sexual sin we prostitute our bodies by using them for a purpose other than that for which they were intended. So such sin defiles the body in a way that no other sins can.

Ray Stedman: That is why fornication is different from other sins. Here again Paul is reflecting on what we have just commented on that human nature is different than animal nature. It has a unique capacity: it is this marvelous capacity to hold God, to be intimately related to the greatness and the majesty and the glory of God, to have God in you. That is the temple -- God dwelling in something transforms it into a temple. But fornication defiles that temple. It offers the temple to another. It brings the body of that person who is the temple into a wrong union and therefore, it is basically the sin of idolatry. That is why in Colossians and other places the apostle links together "*covetousness, which is idolatry.*" He means sexual covetousness, the desire for another person's body, is a form of idolatry.

Now only idolatry, the worship of another god, the substitution of a rival god, defiles the temple. That is why fornication has an immediate and profound but subtle effect upon the human psyche. It dehumanizes us. It animalizes us. It brutalizes us. Those who indulge in it grow continually more coarse, less sensitive, have less regard for the welfare of another, more self-centered, more desirous of having only their own needs met -- "To hell with the rest." That is what fornication does.

Bob Deffinbaugh: How is sexual sin uniquely a sin against the body, while other sins are just sins we commit in the body? Let me seek to illustrate this by using the analogy of a fine automobile. If I owned a magnificent Rolls Royce, there are many ways I could sin in that car. I could, for example, exceed the speed limit. I would be sinning in the car, but not sinning against it. If I were to rob a bank and use the Rolls for a getaway car, I would once again be sinning in the car. But if I needed a load of cow manure for our flower garden, and I opened the doors and shoveled that manure into the car to transport it from the barnyard to my home, that, my friend, would be sinning against the Rolls Royce.

Anthony Thiselton: In what sense is inappropriate sexual union more clearly a sin **against one's own body** than, for example, drunkenness, gluttony, or suicide? At first sight this appears to corroborate suspicions that the Christian and Pauline traditions are harsher about sex than other aspects of life. But this is not the case.

First, the comment that every other sin ... is done outside the body might well pick up the misleading theological slogan used, as we have noted, in Corinth to suggest that Christian conduct is really a “private” and “inner” affair relating to the soul or spirit, not to the body. This verse addresses and rejects this suggestion.

Second, *body* (*sōma*), unlike the term *flesh*, denotes the human self in its wholeness and its relation to other selves. So it is arguable that in sexual acts the mind, body, and whole person are involved, and the self shapes its identity not in isolation but in relation to another self with which it interacts in mutuality. In twenty-first-century idiom, we might say that this area involves higher stakes at a more “personal” level than many other examples from the list involve.

Third, **William Loader** has recently explained this difficult phrase on the basis of the tradition of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) that sexual intercourse “brings into being a new reality” (i.e., that of one flesh). “Sexual intercourse actually changes people by creating a new reality: oneness with another person, as **Gen. 2:23** is understood” (*The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament*, pp. 90-92). This LXX text, he observes, forms the basis of Paul’s argument in **vv. 12-20**.

7. (:19a) LIVE A CONSECRATED LIFE – CONSISTENT WITH THE PRESENCE OF THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT WHO MAKES OUR BODY A TEMPLE (AND EMPOWERS US)

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?”

A. Our Physical Body Has become a Sacred Temple Housing the Very Presence of God

Gordon Fee: What Paul seems to be doing is taking over their own theological starting point, namely that they are “spiritual” because they have the Spirit, and, probably to their dismay, is redirecting it to include the sanctity of the body. The reality of the indwelling Spirit is now turned against them. They thought the presence of the Spirit meant a negation of the body; Paul argues the exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their present bodily existence is God’s affirmation of the body.

B. Do Nothing to Grieve the Indwelling Holy Spirit Who has been given as a Gift from God

8. (:19b-20) GLORIFY GOD IN OUR BODY BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED SO THAT WE BELONG TO GOD

“and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

A. We Belong to God

Richard Hays: The key idea for Paul’s argument at the end of **chapter 6** is not a particular theory about the mechanism of atonement, but the affirmation that we belong to God and not to ourselves (cf. **Rom. 14:7–9**). From this fundamental theological truth follows the closing exhortation: “*Therefore glorify God in your body.*” That is Paul’s climactic argument against fornication with prostitutes: our bodies, which belong to God, should be used in ways that bring glory to God, not disrepute. It is by no means a question of individual freedom, as the Corinthian slogan asserted. The distance between the Corinthian *sophoi* and Paul may be measured precisely by the distance between **6:12** and **6:20**. They say “*I am free to do anything*”; Paul says “*Glorify God in your body.*” **Their argument focuses on the rights and freedoms of the individual; Paul’s focuses on the devotion and service owed to God.**

B. We Have Been Redeemed with a Precious Price

Anthony Thiselton: The final master-stroke comes in v. **20**: *For you were bought with a price.* This verse alone would question the conventional notion of being redeemed as a slave in order to be free. **Deissmann** commended and popularized this unduly influential view for too long. **Dale Martin** and others rightly argue that purchase by another, or being bought with a price, signifies **transference of ownership** from one master or “lord” to another. The Christian is not purchased out of slavery simply to gain some new autonomous “freedom” in which he or she faces the world on their own. In such a situation they face every hazard alone, and might even face becoming enslaved again to a worse master. Christ purchases or redeems men and women as his. Henceforth it is he who has them in his care. **They belong to Christ.**

C. We Need to Glorify God in Our Body

Paul Gardner: Paul has put forward five arguments against Christian toleration of sexual immorality, and he has done so by showing the significance and purpose of the body:

- (1) the body is for the Lord,
- (2) our bodies are members of Christ,
- (3) we are one spirit with him,
- (4) our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and
- (5) we were bought with a price.

The final command is thus virtually inevitable. To “*glorify God*” (δοξάσατε, an aorist imperative) means to draw attention to God so that honor may accrue to him. However, Paul adds “*in your body*” (ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν). Here “*in*” (ἐν) may be taken instrumentally, “*with your body.*” This imperative contrasts with the previous “*flee sexual immorality*” (v. **18**). The use of the body for immoral purposes serves one lord, while the Christian should use his or her body in the service of the one who bought them with a price. Setting the glory of God as the goal of all the body’s activity would have prevented this church from tolerating any form of immorality, whether the case of incest, homosexuality, prostitution, or other. The first step for the Corinthians was to

remember the place of the body in God's redemptive purposes. God will raise his people bodily through his power, for the body is a member that belongs to Christ. Meanwhile, the body is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where have we chosen in our life to forego pursuing certain activities that are lawful for us in Christ in order to maximize what might be profitable for our Christian growth or the growth of others?
- 2) What areas do we need to guard against the indulgence of our appetites or the exercise of our freedoms so that we don't allow something to have mastery over us?
- 3) Why does Paul place such importance on the resurrection of the physical body? (cf. **chap. 15**)
- 4) In what sense are sexual sins different from other sins?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God purchased our bodies by the resurrection of Christ and united us with him so that we would be his temple and glorify him.

- I. God Has Principles for My Body (**6:12-13**).
- II. God Has Plans for My Body (**6:13-14**).
- III. God Has Protection for My Body (**6:15-18**).
- IV. God Has Proprietorship of My Body (**6:19**).
- V. God Has Paid for My Body (**6:20**).

David Prior: **Paul's five truths about the body** can be summarized as follows:

1. The purpose of the body in the Lord (**13**).
2. The resurrection of the body in the Lord (**14**).
3. The interaction of the body with the Lord (**15-17**).
4. The habitation of the body by the Lord (**19**).
5. The redemption of the body by the Lord (**19-20**).

Each truth contradicts the mood of his contemporaries and is worth examining more fully.

Ray Stedman: What Are Bodies For?

The legalist looks at life and he says, "Everything is wrong unless you can prove from a verse of Scripture that it is right." That is legalism. It is a negative approach to life; it clamps a prohibitive hand upon everything that is fun and says it is all either illegal, immoral or fattening.

But New Testament Christianity comes at it differently. It says everything is right: God made the earth and everything in it and everything is right except what the Word of God labels is wrong. That is an entirely different point of view, opening the whole world to exploration and discovery and enjoyment, except for a very limited part that Scripture clearly labels wrong. . .

Liberty is liberty only, the apostle insists, when it is balanced between two extremes. These people in Corinth were saying, "The Law is an extreme; it makes a rigid demand on my life that I and nobody else can live up to." And that is true -- the Law is an extreme. When you begin to understand the impact and import of the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, you find that they are so easily and quickly broken there is not an individual in the world that has ever lived up to them except the Lord Jesus himself. The Law is an extreme, Paul says, "You are right, but license is an extreme too." Feeling that the reaction to being under the Law is to be free from all law and doing whatever you like, that too, Paul says, is an extreme, and you have lost your liberty when you fall into it. "*All things are lawful,*" he quotes, "*but they are not helpful.*" The moment your liberty begins to hurt you or to hurt someone else, you have fallen off into license, and you are in the same kettle of fish that you were on the other side.

"*Further,*" Paul says, "*the things that are not helpful are always enslaving. I will not be brought under the power of anything.*" Notice how he is balancing truth so beautifully here. The things that hurt you always have a tendency to be habit forming. Have you noticed that? You tend to keep on doing them. They hurt you because they are fun. They give you a certain degree of pleasure, and that is why you do not mind the hurt so much, but that degree of pleasure is habit-forming, either physically or emotionally or in whatever way. . .

The body, apart from its digestive apparatus, has a reason and purpose in God's program, therefore, digestion is temporary. But sexuality is much more profound and touches us at a much deeper level. Sexuality, according to the Scriptures, pervades our whole humanity. It touches us not only in terms of the body, physical, but in terms of the soul, the psyche, and our social relationships with one another. Even more profoundly, sex is something that characterizes and touches us at the level of the spirit as well. . .

He points out that God has a purpose for the body beyond this present life. He says, "*The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*" Notice the parallel there. They were saying, "'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.' They are obviously designed to be together, and that is right." And they were right about that. Paul says, "All right, now carry it further: the counterpart to the human body is not sex expression; it is the possession of the Lord himself -- that is what your bodies were made for. There is a dignity about humanity that is far greater than any animal can claim. Humanity is made to be indwelt by God." That is the most exciting, the most remarkable, the most revolutionary teaching in the Word of God: We were made to be indwelt by God himself!

The body was made for the Lord and the Lord for the body. This is incredible truth, when you begin to understand what Paul is really saying here. Therefore, you cannot compare it to any kind of relationship between the stomach and food. And, as Paul brings out, God has a purpose for the body: He is going to raise it up. He raised up the body of the Lord; he will raise us up also. Sexuality that penetrates our whole being will not be expressed on the physical level in the resurrected body, but it will have its expression on the soulish and the spiritual levels. God has a purpose for it in the life to come. That is why we are given physical sex. It is designed to teach us what we are like, who we are, what our role is.

John Piper: Some of the Corinthians had a view of the body that made what they did with it morally indifferent. In **1 Corinthians 5:2** they actually boasted about an act of incest in the church. In **11:21** some of them even got drunk at the Lord's Supper. They reasoned: the body and food and drink and sex are going to be destroyed in the end. There will only be free spirits. So, the body does not matter. You can eat and drink and have sex any way you like because the body is morally irrelevant. It's what you know and think that really counts (**8:1-3**).

Paul opposed this view with all his might. He gave them a new and radically different slogan: "*The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body.*" The body is not just going to be destroyed; it is going to be raised. The body is not morally indifferent. It is for the glory of God. ("I Will Not Be Enslaved") . . .

When Christ paid the price for his people, he bought our bodies. So let me try to show you from this passage of God's word what this means. What would it mean for you if you were to accept the gift of God's price and trust him with your life--your soul and your body?

It would mean six things.

1. It means that the Lord is for the body and not against it. . .
2. It would mean that your body becomes the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.
3. It means that your bodies would be raised from the dead. . .
4. It means that you do not have to be mastered by anything but God. . .
5. You would not use your body for immorality. . .
6. Your bodies are for the glory of God. . .

Gil Rugh: "*Profitable*" = Primarily: how will this benefit or edify others?
Characteristic of sin = it dominates and enslaves someone. These 2 issues should put restraints on my behavior. This body belongs to the Lord and is the place where the Lord wants to manifest His character. Certain bodily functions may have limited use related to this life; but the body itself transcends this life. (**Phil. 3:10ff** – the resurrection power) Our body is included in God's redemptive plan.

vv.15-20 "*Do you not know*" = 3 divisions to make the arguments to support **vv.12-14**:

1) (:15) *Your bodies are members of Christ* (not just our spirit) (**Ephes. 1** – *surpassing greatness of His power*); our sufficiency for living godly lives; **Gal. 2:20** – *Christ lives in me* (more than me living for Christ); the life of Christ being lived through our body right now; Inconceivable and completely appalling that we would take the members of Christ and join them to a prostitute

2) (:16-18) That same marriage relationship of oneness (much more than just a physical connection) is established when a man visits a prostitute – no such thing as casual sex or one night fling; a bond of oneness has been established; we treat matters of immorality too lightly; this is a serious matter for anyone – but especially when a Christian is involved – taking that which is inseparably joined to Christ and joining it to this immoral bond; we cannot separate what is done with our body from our spirit; Keep on running from immorality; we don't run because we don't want to – there is pleasure in immorality; don't provide any opportunities

3) (:19-20) Your body is a temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit; true of every believer; (3:16 – talking about the corporate body of the church); You belong to God; you were bought with a price; you were slaves of sin; you have become slaves of righteousness; **Rev. 5:9**; you can't do what you want with “your body” – it's not yours; Positive command: Glorify God in your body; **1 Thess. 4:3**; the God who indwells me empowers me

Bob Deffinbaugh: The Relationship Between Spirituality and Sexual Morality – The immorality Paul deals with in our text is sexual immorality. Specifically, Paul addresses sexual immorality with a prostitute. It seems this particular form of immorality is widely accepted as normal and moral, as well as legal. We should remember that prostitution in Corinth is a “religious act of worship.” Corinth takes pride in the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which has 1,000 cult prostitutes. In the name of religion, men can indulge their fleshly appetites. The Greeks have a proverb about the city of Corinth, which tells us much of its moral decay: “It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth.” Those who are worldly wise use the verb “to corinthianize” to describe an act of immorality. “Corinthian girl” was a synonym for a prostitute. For a Corinthian saint, concluding that whatever is legal is also moral leaves him a great deal of latitude. There isn't much he can't do under this definition of morality. . .

Verses 12-20 give the biblical basis for sexual morality, and specifically why sexual immorality is wrong for the believer. **Verse 12** explains why sexual immorality is wrong for the Christian: it is an obstacle to one's spiritual growth. **Verses 13-20** demonstrate that immorality is an offense against God:

Verses 13-14 Sexual immorality is an offense against God

Verses 15-17 Sexual immorality is an offense against the Lord Jesus Christ

Verses 18-20 Sexual immorality is an offense against the Holy Spirit

David Garland: In the introduction (6:12–14), Paul makes two assertions:

(1) Christians have a newfound freedom, but that freedom should orient them toward doing those things that are beneficial and away from doing those things that can ensnare them and then dominate their lives.

(2) Christ's lordship lays claim on the Christian's body that is destined for resurrection, and Christians are not free to do with their bodies whatever they please. They are to be dedicated to the Lord.

These opening declarations are buttressed by three further arguments.

The first argument (6:15) contends that the Christian's body is an organ of the body of Christ. Every relationship in life is affected by this union with Christ. To have sexual relations with a prostitute is to be guilty of what is unthinkable, to snatch away a member of Christ and join that member to one personifying rebellion against God.

The second argument (6:16–18) makes the case that all sexual relations create a one-flesh union. An unholy union with a prostitute, representing the powers of chaos and death (cf. **Rev. 14:8**), violates the spiritual union with Christ and is a sin against the body.

The third argument (6:19–20) makes the case that the Christian's body is the shrine of the Spirit and that Christians are not their own but have been transferred to God's ownership. Consequently, not all things are permitted. Being slaves of God, they may not do whatever they wish. The only goal of Christian existence is to bring glory to God (cf. **10:31; Rom. 3:23; 15:7; 2 Cor. 1:20; 4:15; Eph. 1:12, 14; Phil. 1:11; 2:11**).

John MacArthur: Three of the evils of sexual sin:

- 1) it is harmful to everyone involved
- 2) it gains control over those who indulge in it
- 3) it perverts God's purpose for the body

James Boyer: The Sacredness of the Body (vv.15-20)

- 1) Our bodies are the members of Christ (vv. 15-17)
- 2) Our bodies are permanent (v. 18)
- 3) Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 19-20)

Thomas Leake: 8 Theological Truths About the Body

Introduction: Some facts to demonstrate the complexity of the human body; proof that God created the body; could not have come about on a random basis over time. We are incomplete without our body.

Look at the parallel structure in this passage – symmetrical relationships;

Paul is warning in particular against the use of the body in any type of sexual sin; but the application has a much wider sphere of reference

Key Idea: Glorify God in Your Body

1) All things are lawful for me

(NIV translation of “*permissible*” is not that good here)

Not talking about the Roman law or natural law; but the law of God;

Not saying that every type of action is allowable because it is ultimately forgivable;

There are definitely things that God approves of and things that He prohibits; the context is important; **1 John 3:4** – unlawful things are still unlawful – don’t take this verse in the wrong way;

The context must indicate what type of restriction is in view here = Paul is talking about the ceremonial aspects of the OT Mosaic law which no longer apply to believers in the new dispensation of the church age who are under the New Covenant;

Cf. **Lev. 11** – spells out which animals are clean (and can be eaten) vs. unclean (and can not be eaten) – but now we have entered a new era – **Mark 7:18-19**;

Ex. 31 speaks of the necessity of keeping the sabbath day holy (speaking specifically of Saturday) = a sign of the Mosaic Covenant; very strict rules for observance; very severe penalty for disobedience = death; **Col. 2:16-17** shows that this law no longer applies to us today; Paul is writing as a Jew who understands the nature of Progressive Revelation;

1 Cor. 10:23-33 – Paul repeats this same phrase twice and applies it to eating certain things formerly banned; the old restrictions have been lifted in Christ;

Now in Christ work is lawful on the sabbath; play is lawful; sex is lawful; the Christian life is not intended to be viewed as primarily restrictive; we have been set free for freedom – **Gal. 5:1**;

Throughout church history various aberrations have developed that failed to grasp this important principle:

- **Asceticism** = harsh treatment of the body as the pathway to spirituality; cf. **Col. 2:23** – Paul deals with this error (John the Baptist must be looked at for his unique role – not as normative)

- **Dualism** = everything tangible and visible is evil; crept into the church from Greek philosophy; this system of thought has impacted our thinking today;

The resurrection of Christ’s physical body is an integral part of the gospel message; emphasized more than his substitutionary atonement; likewise our bodies will be raised up from the dead;

We do not want to define Holiness in terms of non-essential external (those who don’t do X, Y or Z).

I need this body; it is God-given and important.

2) But not all things are profitable

Paul is qualifying the first truth; not rebutting it.

Not just talking about outright sin like sexual immorality – that obviously is not profitable; in fact it is destructive. Paul has a wider context in mind.

Translation of same Greek word:

- **2 Cor. 8:10** – *advantageous*

- **2 Cor. 12:1** – *profitable*

- **John 18:14** – *expedient*

Some things which are allowed you still should not do because it doesn't profit you; doesn't profit others; doesn't advance the kingdom of God

Cf. Christ fasting for 40 days

We need to apply wisdom to our new freedom

Sometimes where God's law does not constrain us, we need to constrain ourselves.

When and Why?? **3 Principles:**

a) When it is more profitable to express our love for others than to work out our freedoms

1 Cor. 8:1; 10:23; 12:7

Our liberty must be qualified by love – **Gal. 5:13-14**

b) When it is more profitable to advance the kingdom of Christ than to express my freedoms

1 Cor. 7:35 – our society is basically selfish; we pamper ourselves

c) Same as point #3 below = We are not to be mastered by anything

3) We are not to be mastered by anything

play on words here – concept of authority, right; don't be overpowered; I don't want those things to have supremacy over me!

Paul dealing with becoming enslaved to these pleasurable things;

Tone of Determination! I will not be mastered . . .

Speaking out of confidence in God – not boasting in arrogance or in self reliance;

Psychology calls these addictions; Bible calls them mastery

Prov. 23:19-20 – restrict your freedoms where you need to; importance of accountability to other believers

Rom. 6:14; 8:13; 1 Cor. 9:26-27

Master your appetites; don't be mastered by them

4) Bodily desires are only temporary

God designed both food and stomach and they work well together; good idea; but in the future life this existing relationship will be made inoperable;

Will we still eat in our resurrected bodies? Complicated question – Christ ate in His resurrection body; **1 John 3:2** – we will be like Him; **Matt. 8:11**; food will be enjoyed but not needed for nourishment and sustenance

5) There are inappropriate uses of the body

One is mentioned here = immorality; like poison when it enters into your system; getting pleasure without the partnership; it is selfish and wrong – **Matt. 15:19; Gal. 5:19; Ephes. 5:3** -- Wanting what you want Now; linked to greed;

Col. 3:5 – linked to idolatry; **1 Thess. 4:5; Rev. 2:14; 20; 9:21**;

“But it's my body . . . I'll live the way I want” – It is not your body – the Creator made it; He will destroy it; your Mom didn't make it; we are caretakers of our body;

Not that sex is wrong; we are a two-part being = a body and soul = a unit; **1 Cor. 7:2**;

Prov. 5 – “*rejoice in the wife of your youth*”;

Cf. Hollywood headlines – these people are not experts on relationships

6) The body is for the Lord

Dative of Advantage – for the service of the Lord and His purposes; Instrument He uses; a temple consecrated; dedicated to honor and praise of God; God indwells it; what happens in the body affects the soul;

Cf. martyrs = gave their life; cf Paul – suffered greatly for Christ **2 Cor. 11:25; Esther 4:15-16** – putting her life on the line for the kingdom;

Mary: *Behold the bonds slave . . . may it be done unto me . . .*

Christ: giving up His body;

Don't pamper your body but prepare it for service; Buffet your body; Say No to your body; present your body to the Lord at the beginning of the day; be willing to serve even when the body hurts

7) The Lord is for the body

Especially show in the resurrection; my God cares about my aching body – very comforting; **Ex. 33:19** – the Goodness of God; **Deut. 30:9; 1 Chron. 16:34; Ps. 34:8; 36:7-9; 52:9; 73:1; 100:5; 145:9; James 1:17**

Then why am I sick, injured, suffering?? Because God is against sin – **Rom. 8:22-23**; pain at present; but the redemption of the body is ahead; God will make all things new

8) There is a glorious future for the body (:14)

Reincarnation is inferior to resurrection – Why would you want that?

Acts 2:27 – the body of Jesus was important to God – He would not let it see decay; **Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:1-3** = resurrection in the OT

John 6:39-40; 11:25; Acts 24:14-15; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15: 12-22; 2 Cor. 4:14; Phil. 3:10-11; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 11:17-19; Rev. 1:17-18; 20

Guaranteed resurrection; the Jews took very good care of the body at death; prepared it for waking up at the resurrection

What type of body will it be?

Not perishable, powerful, shine with brightness; be able to move about freely without wings; no decay;

Compare God having to judge the body of some – Lot's wife; people in Noah's day;

May that not be you! Give Him your body now!

The first resurrection is blessed;

The second is unto damnation = torture in the lake of fire forever;

Please God in our body

Thomas Leake: 10 Myths About Sex

Introduction: Nobody likes to be lied to; Satan is the father of lies

1) Sex is purely a private decision

We are joined to Christ; don't dishonor Christ; public implications of this private act

2) God is unconcerned with my sex life

Live and let live; what's the big deal?

Body = temple of Holy Spirit; Sex is a beautiful and powerful drive; designed by our Creator; celebrated in **Lev. 18**; Song of Solomon;

Even the land is concerned with sexual perversion and knows better and will spew out offenders; note that one of the 10 Commandments = Thou shalt not commit adultery

3) There is nothing wrong with casual sex

Vegas: What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas

But sex creates a special union; not come and go as you please;

You cannot casually have children; sex should follow a promise of a life of commitment

4) We should test sexual compatibility before marriage

If you have the parts and they work, you have compatibility;

Why did arranged marriages in different cultures work so well??

Picture is one of glueing people together – you don't experiment with glue.

5) You can practice safe sex

Only 2 categories = Sanctified sex or immoral sex

Immorality always carries with it spiritual harm; cf. how smug people are who are engaging in these sins; no fear of God

6) Flirting with sex is not bad, just the act

Flee immorality is the only option = Run, keep running, don't look back.

Drastic measures are required; not mild adjustments – **Rom. 13:14; 2 Tim. 2:22**

Powerful fire – easily lit and hard to extinguish;

Don't try to rationalize your behavior

7) Sexual sins are just like every other sin

Text does not say that it is the worst sin; but it does unique damage; violates your own body; not a sin to be trifled with

Confess; get it out in the open

8) Since others get away with it, so can I

They didn't really get away with it! **Gal. 6:7**

God knows when someone messes up in His tabernacle

9) Since all my sins are forgiven, no big deal if I commit sexual sin

You are not your own; redeemed with a price; need to be a servant of righteousness

10) I can't help sexual sin – I'm addicted

“*Glorify God in your body*” would be a cruel command if there was no hope and no power for obedience

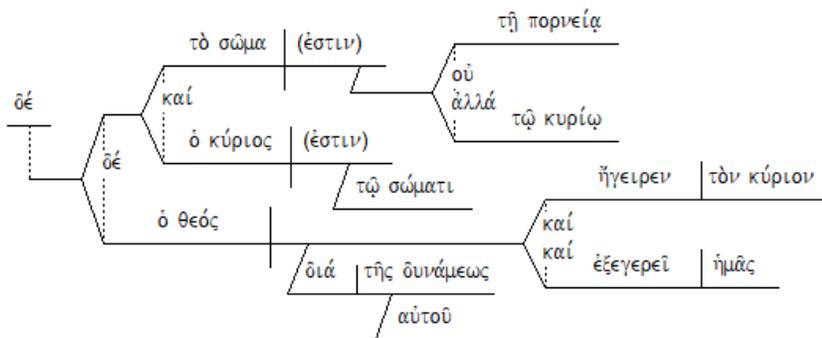
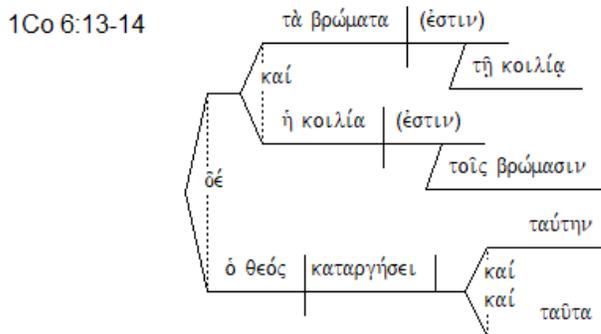
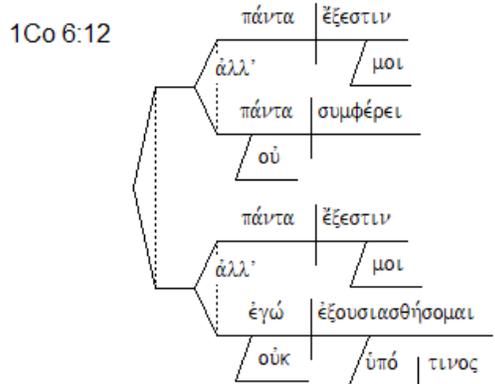
For the Christian, there is a greater Master than the Master of sin;

As we compromise we drift and our conscience is seared; we move away from God;

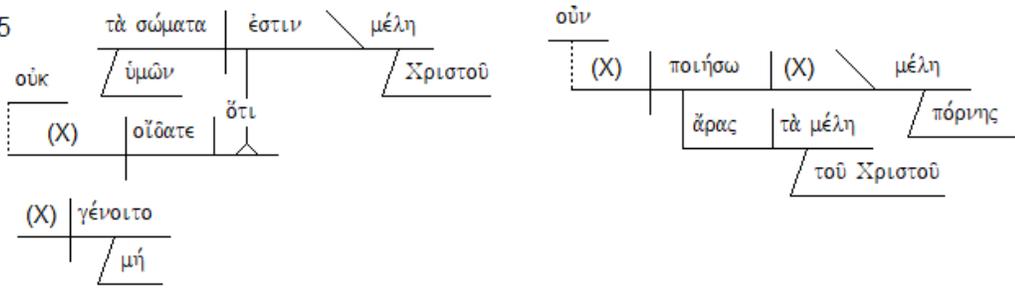
Prodigal Son = God delights to receive us back; but better not to drift away

Conclusion: The Cure for lies = the Truth

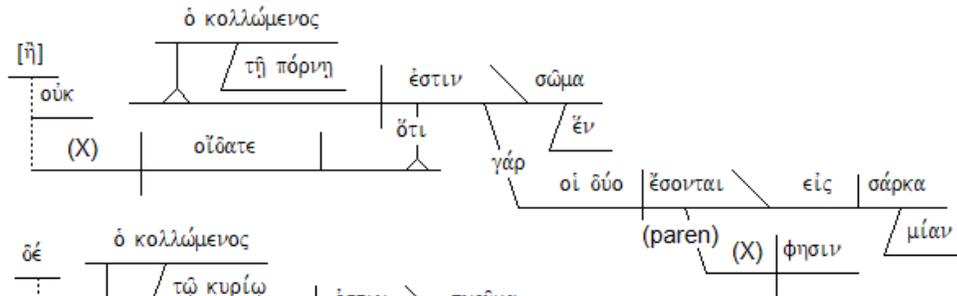
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



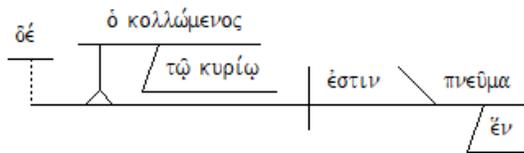
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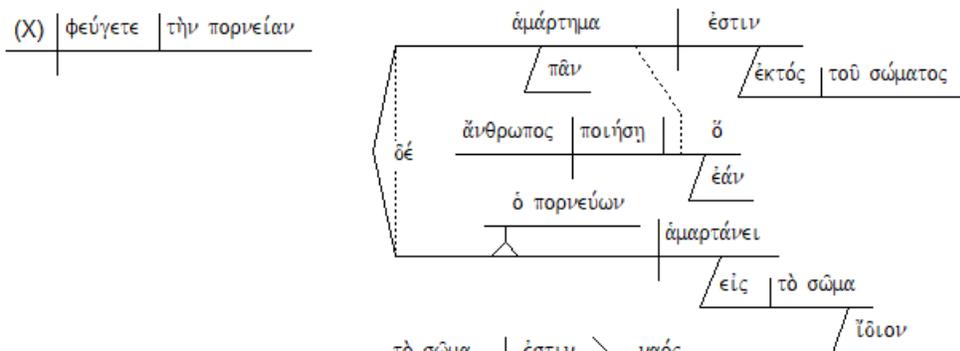
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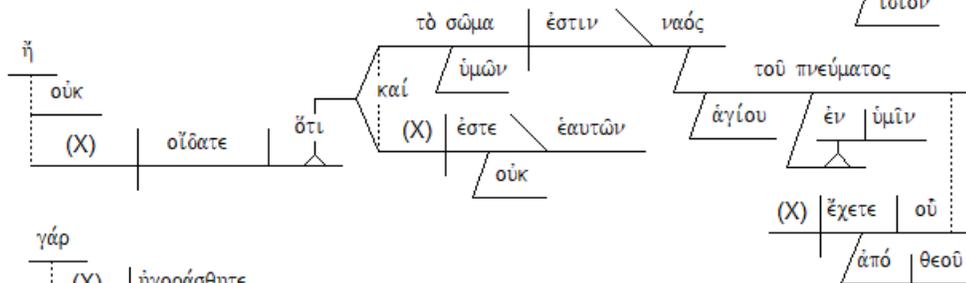
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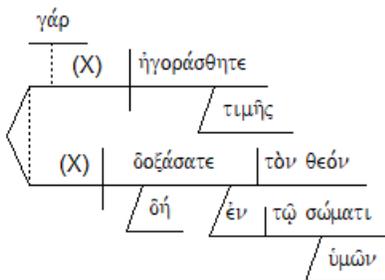
1Co 6:18



1Co 6:19



1Co 6:20



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

TITLE: *MARRIED COUPLES MUST MAINTAIN SEXUAL RELATIONS*

BIG IDEA:

BOTH CELIBACY AND MARRIAGE ARE LEGITIMATE GIFTS OF GOD, BUT A CONSISTENT PATTERN OF SEXUAL INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE MUST BE MAINTAINED TO PROTECT AGAINST IMMORALITY AND TO EXPRESS MUTUAL SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION:

Temptation to **Immorality** is all around us. Apparently, this was true for the Corinthians back in Paul's day just as it is true for us today. After the hormones kick in for a young man, the clock starts ticking and the intensity of the temptation and need for self-control increase dramatically. Some individuals have been granted the gift of celibacy from God. They still need to exercise self-control. But marriage is equally a gift and provides the God-ordained context for sexual relationships – between one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant union. But even that does not make one immune from sexual temptation. There still must be that growth in intimacy and the sharing of one's life with one's partner along with the discipline of self-control.

How do you know whether you have the gift of celibacy (or the calling to stay single and minister from that standpoint)? Even if you have not been married for twenty years, do you ever come to that point of conviction where you have confidence that God desires for you to remain single your entire life? *“Each man has his own gift from God.”* (I am thankful for my gift!)

Robert Gundry: It appears that just as sexual promiscuity characterized some Christians in Corinth, sexual abstinence characterized others. Where promiscuity abounds, reactive abstinence often follows. Abstinence in the Corinthian church precluded marriage for some and prevented sexual intercourse within marriage for others. So the Corinthians' letter to Paul brought up the topic of sexual abstinence.

Gordon Fee: This first section is basically a response to some who have argued for cessation of sexual relations within marriage on the basis of their slogan: *“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”* At least three such situations are addressed:

- (1) Paul begins (vv. 2–7) by forbidding the practice of depriving a marriage partner (probably husbands) of sexual relations (which may explain why some of the latter are going to the prostitutes [6:12–20]);
- (2) later (vv. 10–11) he forbids those who would eliminate the problem of sexual relations altogether by separating from a believing spouse; and
- (3) at the end (vv. 12–16) he speaks to the “rest,” those who have an unbelieving spouse, and makes basically the same ruling: the Christian should not initiate a divorce.

David Garland: To understand Paul’s argument, it is important to start with the recognition that he **addresses specific difficulties** that have developed in Corinth and is not presenting a marriage manual or his systematic thoughts on marriage. **Osiek and Balch** (1997: 104) correctly protest that Paul “was not a Stoic philosopher or a Christian theologian writing generally about marriage in order to shore up Greco-Roman or American urban society. We have instead his pastoral argument against some particular Corinthian Christian ascetics’ rejection of their sexuality.” He is not antimarriage, nor does he disparage sexuality. He knows marriage to be a divine institution in which the two become one flesh. As marriage was applied in the OT as an image for the relationship between God and Israel (**Isa. 50:1; 54:6–7; Jer. 2:1–2**), so Paul uses it as an image for the relationship between Christ and the church (**Eph. 5:21–33**). In this letter, he does not begrudge that Cephas, the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord have wives and travel with them on their mission sojourns (**9:5**). He too could exercise that right. In **11:7–9**, he assumes that marriage is normative. Paul does not devalue marriage only as a venereal safety valve for incontinent, noncharismatic people, providing them a lawful outlet for expressing their sexual urges. Instead, he relativizes its significance “in the face of the nearness of the coming kingdom and the new estimation of the earthly life coupled with it” (**Ridderbos** 1975: 312; cf. 7:7, 26, 32, 40).

Some fault Paul for saying nothing here about love between husbands and wives or the “richness of family human experience in marriage and family life” (**Bornkamm** 1971: 207–8). Such a discussion is omitted because it is not at issue. In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Paul is preoccupied with the sexual part of marriage because that is the problem in Corinth (**Furnish** 1985: 46). His statement that those who marry commit no sin (**7:28**) suggests that others were saying quite the opposite. This view is confirmed if the opening statement in **7:1** is not Paul’s own declaration about sexuality but a citation of a Corinthian position. Paul’s personal choice of celibacy is clear and would have been well known to the Corinthians. He lives out his calling in Christ as one who is celibate and thinks that it is a preferable but not superior calling (**7:7, 26–28**). He does not seek to make everyone conform to his own personal gifts and insists that the physical side of marriage not be curtailed by misguided spirituality (**7:2–5**). Celibacy is the best course only for those who have the gift of celibacy (**7:8**). It is not for every Christian, but the requirement of sexual purity is. Those who attempt to become celibate for utopian reasons only open the door of temptation to fornication. Paul affirms that the sexual relationship, which is integral to marriage, is fully compatible with the Christian life.

I. (:1) SHOULD SEXUAL INTIMACY BE WITHHELD IN MARRIAGE?

A. Context = Corinthians Raising Some Key Questions

“Now concerning the things about which you wrote”

Maybe some were advocating celibacy on much too widespread a basis; taking a legalistic approach – that given the seriousness of sexual immorality, let’s just rule sex as taboo and move on ...

Apparently they were not too squeamish to put this question in writing; they were very frank about the need to have clarity regarding sexual issues.

Gordon Fee: With the words “*Now for the matters you wrote about,*” Paul moves on to the second part of the letter, **his response to the letter from Corinth**. . . Rather than a friendly exchange, in which the new believers in Corinth are asking spiritual advice of their mentor in the Lord, their letter was much more likely a response to Paul’s previous letter mentioned earlier (5:9), in which they were taking exception to his position on point after point. In light of their own theology of “S/spirit,” with heavy emphasis on “*wisdom*” and “*knowledge*,” they apparently have answered Paul with a kind of “**Why can’t we?**” attitude, in which they are looking for his response.

Ray Stedman: You will remember from the first part of this letter that there were three young men who had come from the church in Corinth to Ephesus, where Paul was, bringing with them a report on the conditions of the church. (Their names, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, are given to us in the last chapter of this letter.) They also brought with them a letter from the church, asking the apostle certain questions.

B. Characterization of Celibacy as a Good Thing – But within Marriage?

“It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

Three views:

1) Traditional View –

Good to remain celibate if possible and not marry unless that would create undue sexual tension leading to temptation.

2) New Scholarly Consensus – [this is the view I am taking]

Paul is responding to the perspective of the super-spiritual Corinthians that somehow it is good to refrain from sexual relations even within the marriage context.

3) Newer Alternative Perspective --

Paul is responding to the perspective of the super-spiritual Corinthians that certain kinds of sexual activity should be abstained from – specifically sex motivated by pleasure or passion rather than for the sole purpose of procreation.

Anthony Thiselton: What kind of people in Corinth would advocate **total abstinence** from sexual union, either as a constraint upon those already married (especially if we translate the Greek *gynē* as wife rather than woman) or as advice not to marry at all? We may recall the point of the argument about “*the body*” in **6:12-16**. Some tried to argue that “spirituality” had nothing to do with bodily actions, but was an inner, private state of mind or “*knowledge*” (*gnōsis*). Such “gnostics” either disdained the body as a domain of no consequence or disdained it as unworthy of concern for “spiritual” people. The former led to license; the latter to ascetic self-denial. Paul utterly rejects both as unchristian. “*The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit*” (6:19) and is “*for the Lord*” (6:13). Some in Corinth, however, insisted that “the spiritual” should avoid sex.

David Garland: The pattern of citing a catchphrase and then immediately rebutting it appears in **6:12–13**; **8:1–4**; and **10:23**. Paul’s strategy in this chapter, as in **chapter 8**, seems to be to start his argument by quoting a Corinthian position “as if he agrees with it” and then to add “strong qualifications to its use” (Yarbrough 1985: 93). He does not want to reject celibacy out of hand, since he considers remaining single the better course for unmarried Christians (**7:8–9, 27, 32–35, 40**). But he clarifies that it is not the only viable option for the Christian. He cites the Corinthian position only to correct its dangerous misapplication. If celibacy is chosen for the wrong reasons by those with the wrong capabilities, the results can be disastrous. For those already married, however, celibacy is not an option. It recklessly opens the door to Satan, making one vulnerable to the wanton ways of their city, and is utterly unfair to the spouse.

Gordon Fee: Here is another expression of their “spirituality” with its negative attitude toward the material world and the body (see on **6:13**; cf. **15:12**). In such a case, their position would have gone something like: “Since you yourself are unmarried and are not actively seeking marriage, and since you have denounced *porneia* in your letter to us, is it not so that one is better off not to have sexual intercourse at all? After all, in the new age which we have already entered by the Spirit, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Why should we not ‘be as the angels’ now? Besides, since the body counts for nothing, if some wish to fulfill physical needs, there are always the prostitutes.”

Paul Gardner: [Explaining Position #2] Some Corinthians seem to espouse a dualism that regards abstinence from sexual intercourse (in marriage) as of spiritual value. Paul denies this. “*To touch*” (ἅπτεσθαι) a woman refers to having sexual relations with her. The verb is used in this way in **Ruth 2:9** (LXX) where Boaz orders the young men not to sexually molest Ruth as she gleans, and in **Proverbs 6:29** (LXX), which speaks against adultery with a neighbor’s wife.

Mark Taylor: (Explaining Position #3) In a world where there was significant debate about whether pleasure and passion were acceptable motivations for sexual relations, or whether sexual relations should be engaged in solely for the purposes of procreation, it is quite remarkable that this particular euphemism is consistently used for sexual relations motivated by pleasure or passion rather than procreation (or reason or marital friendship, which would also have been acceptable motivations for some Stoics).”

Ciampa and Rosner suggest that the preferable translation of **7:1b** would be, “*It is good for a man not to use a woman for sexual gratification,*” or “*It is good for a man not to have sex with a woman for the sake of pleasure.*” Paul would agree that certain kinds of sexual activity should be avoided, thus his limited agreement with their statement. He refutes, however, the view that married couples should avoid sex motivated by pleasure or passion, something idealized in the Scriptures in the Song of Solomon. Thus, in **7:2**, Paul emphasizes both the need to avoid immorality and to meet the normal, appropriate needs of one’s spouse.

II. (:2) SEXUAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE MARRIAGE CONTEXT ARE GOD'S PROVISION FOR AVOIDANCE OF IMMORALITY

A. Context = Pervasive Pressure of the Temptation to Immorality

“But because of immoralities”

John MacArthur: Marriage cannot be reduced simply to being God's escape valve for the sex drive. Paul does not suggest that Christians go out and find another Christian to marry only to keep from getting into moral sin. He had a much higher view of marriage than that (see **Eph. 5:22-23**). His purpose here is to stress the reality of the sexual temptations of singleness and to acknowledge that they have a legitimate outlet in marriage.

David Garland: He is not offering reasons why people should marry but arguments why sexual relations in marriage are binding on spouses and why sexual abstinence in marriage is both impractical and inappropriate. . .

“Let each one have his own wife or her own husband” does not advise everyone to marry. The verb *“to have”* is used in **7:12, 13, 29** to refer to the state of being married, but that meaning does not apply here (contra **Weiss** 1910: 171; **Robertson and Plummer** 1914: 133; **Yarbrough** 1985: 97; **Caragounis** 1996: 547–48; **Oster** 1995: 161). Otherwise, Paul would contradict himself in **7:8–9** when he asserts that celibacy is a workable ideal for those who feel no compulsion to marry (cf. **7:38**). The danger he wants to preempt is **immorality**, and he is fully aware that simply urging people to get married will not solve the problem of sexual sins. Married persons can violate their marriage (**6:9**). The state of marriage alone is not enough to guard against outbreaks of immorality.

The verb *“to have”* was also used as a **euphemism for having sexual intercourse** (see the LXX of **Exod. 2:1–2; Deut. 28:30; Isa. 13:16**; see also **Matt. 14:4; Mark 6:18; 12:33; John 4:18**). The immediate context, with the reminders about what is owed in marriage, the assertion that husbands and wives have authority over one another's bodies, and the command not to deprive one another, makes clear that the phrase *“let each one have his own wife or her own husband”* refers to **sexual relations within marriage**, not getting married. Paul later discusses marriage for those who are single (**7:8–10, 25–40**). Here, he enjoins couples to fulfill their marital obligations to one another to avoid any danger that partners with celibacy suddenly thrust upon them might seek to satisfy their sexual urges in illicit ways. . .

Although Paul may seem to imply in this verse that the only value of conjugal love is that it averts fornication, we must remember that he is reacting to a particular context in which persons are attempting to become asexual. He is not writing a theology of marriage or of sexuality. Some Corinthians may think that by renouncing worldly pleasures they will be able to rise to new spiritual heights. Paul demurs. He sees them entering territory filled with snares and traps that will only lead to their moral downfall.

B. Characterization of Monogamous Marriage as a Good Thing = God's Provision

*“each man is to have his own wife,
and each woman is to have her own husband.”*

Interesting TV interview this past week – reporter embedded in polygamous Mormon community in Arizona. He interviewed all segments of that community. Very disturbing to see how the truth can be twisted and then the biblical roles of husband and wife impugned as a result.

This verse clearly spells out a one-to-one relationship; and that is one husband to one wife; no allowance for same sex unions; no allowance for masturbation or any other sexual perversions.

Wayne Mack: Sexual relations within marriage are holy and good (**Heb. 13:4**). God encourages sexual relations and warns against the temptations that may arise from deprivation or cessation. . . . Sexual relationships are equal and reciprocal. (principles quoted from **Harry H. McGee**, M.D., in the booklet, *“The Scriptures, Sex and Satisfaction”* – quoted by **Mack** in Strengthening Your Marriage)

Gordon Fee: When the clauses are taken at face value, however, giving all the words their normal usage, then Paul is saying No to their slogan as far as married partners are concerned. Thus he means: “Let each man who is already married continue in relations with his own wife, and each wife likewise.” And that means a **full conjugal life**, which is what Paul will now go on to argue in detail. Even though not specifically enunciated here, this is the first in a series of admonitions on “**Stay as you are.**”

III. (:3-5) THE CONSISTENT PATTERN OF SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE MARRIAGE UNION MUST BE MAINTAINED

A. (:3-4) Sexual Relations in Marriage Involve Mutual Obligations and Rights

1. (:3) Both Spouses Have an Obligation to Sexually Satisfy One Another

*“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife,
and likewise also the wife to her husband.”*

Robert Gundry: The obligation to give his wife sexual satisfaction frames her similar obligation; and another “*likewise also*” points up the equality of obligation over against a culture of male-domination.

Gordon Fee: The **language of obligation**, literally “the payment of what is due,” implies that married couples are indebted to one another sexually. Such language has often been found offensive, both by the ascetic (who sees abstinence as a higher good) and the “liberated” person (who sees “obligation” as a demeaning way to speak of such a relationship). This usage, however, is to be explained in light of what follows immediately, where some are in fact depriving their spouses of sexual relations. Although not primarily a duty, there are times when the duty aspect needs to be heard

for the sake of the marriage. And Paul's emphasis, it must be noted, is not on "You owe me," but on "I owe you."

2. (:4) Both Spouses Have a Right Over Each Other's Body

"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."

Wayne Mack: Pleasure in sexual relations (like pleasure in eating or in the performance of other bodily functions) is not forbidden but rather assumed when Paul writes that the bodies of both parties belong to one another (cf. also **Prov 5:18-19** and **Song of Solomon**). . .

Sexual pleasure is to be regulated by the key principle that **one's sexuality does not exist for himself or for his own pleasure, but for his partner**. . . Every self-oriented manifestation of sex is sinful and lustful rather than holy and loving. Homosexuality and masturbation thereby are condemned along with other self-oriented activities within marriage. In sex as in every other aspect of life, it is "*more blessed to give than to receive*." The greatest pleasure comes from satisfying one's spouse. . .

The principle of **mutual satisfaction** means that each party is to provide the sexual enjoyment which is "*due*" his or her spouse whenever needed. But, of course, other biblical principles (e.g., the principle of moderation), and the principle that one never seeks to satisfy himself but his partner in marriage always regulates the frequency in such a way that no one ever makes unreasonable demands upon another. Requests for sexual satisfaction may never be governed by an idolatrous lust, but neither may such regulation be used as an excuse for failing to sense and satisfy a partner's genuine need.

David Garland: One can extrapolate from this that Paul believes that love should govern the marriage relationship and that spouses should not treat one another as objects for sexual self-gratification. In marriage, one gives up complete self-determination and must seek to please the partner. The sexual relationship in particular requires mutual sensitivity, loyalty, care, and tenderness.

David Prior: The Corinthians had grown accustomed to asserting their rights with such tenacity that they were constantly parading their sense of being defrauded in the public courts. To have Paul talk to them bluntly about not defrauding their marriage partners about conjugal rights must have really cut them down to size, or, to use a metaphor more apt for Corinthians, pricked the balloon of their arrogance.

B. (:5) Depriving Your Partner of Sexual Relations Only Proper in Special Circumstances

"Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Wayne Mack: Sexual relations are to be regular and continuous. No exact number of times per week is advised, but the principle that both parties are to provide such adequate satisfaction that both “*burning*” (unfulfilled sexual desire) and the temptation to find satisfaction elsewhere are avoided. . .

There is to be no sexual bargaining (“I’ll not have relations unless you . . .”) Neither party has the right to make such bargains.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Unfortunately, I have known of situations in which “prayer” was the excuse of one mate for avoiding sex with the other. Who can be more pious than one who gives up sex for prayer? And who can be so unspiritual as to criticize anyone for neglecting their sex life to enhance their prayer life? It is the ultimate spiritual “lion in the road” (to use an expression from the Book of Proverbs). A “lion in the road” is a compelling reason (excuse) for avoiding what one really doesn’t want to do. If the truth were known, a healthy sexual relationship between a man and his wife may facilitate a richer prayer life. I say this on the basis of Peter’s words in **1 Peter 3:7** “*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*” Surely “living with one’s wife in an understanding way” includes the sexual relationship. A sexually frustrated and irritated mate is not a good prayer partner.

David Garland: Prayer and married sexual relations are not mutually exclusive, just as prayer and eating are not mutually exclusive. For various reasons, one may decide to be abstinent during a time of devoted prayer, just as one may decide to fast during a time of prayer. But neither abstinence nor fasting is a requirement for prayer. Just as occasional fasting does not denigrate eating, occasional abstinence does not denigrate sexuality. If Paul were to give any hint that the sexual relations somehow impair one’s spirituality or diminish one’s ability to pray, he would only play into the hands of those who may have exalted celibacy as “good” or as a means of reaching a higher spiritual plane. They could counter, “If Paul thinks that abstinence might be advantageous for such short-term spiritual inspiration, why would a permanent renunciation of coitus not optimize a deeper walk with God?” He recognizes instead that times arise when one is so overwhelmed by spiritual concern that retreat in prayer is expedient. He would surely agree with **1 Pet. 3:7** that one’s prayers are hindered by mistreatment of a spouse, not by sexual activity with a spouse (cf. m. Ber. 2:5). The spiritual life does not cut a person off from the natural order of creation, and religious devotion is not to become a pretext for withholding sex from one’s spouse.

David Prior: If shared prayer is fundamental to Christian marriage, then Satan will do his worst in undermining it. Any honest survey of the prayer life of Christian couples would establish two common factors: one, that couples often find praying together the most difficult part of their whole relationship; two, that it is the husband particularly who encounters the greater problems in getting down to prayer with his wife. The reasons for this are not obvious, and are complicated at best. Equally, if true giving to each other in sexual intercourse is the essence of a union where God has joined two

individuals together, then Satan will do his worst in inhibiting, spoiling, and robbing it of its purity and its fulfilling potential. Satan is always active in a Christian marriage, to quench shared prayer and to reduce the joys of sex to his own, debased, level.

IV. (:6-7) CELIBACY (OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE) REMAINS A GOOD THING FOR THOSE WHOM GOD HAS SO GIFTED

John MacArthur: Paul was very aware of the God-ordained advantages of both singleness and marriage, and was not commanding marriage because of the temptation of singleness. Spirituality is not connected at all to marital status, though marriage is God's good gift (see **1 Pet 3:7**, "*the grace of life*").

A. (:6) Marriage Not Commanded

"But this I say by way of concession, not of command."

B. (:7a) Celibacy = Paul's Personal Preference

"Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am."

David Prior: Paul was "*the apostle to the Gentiles*" and that unique vocation required complete freedom to move unimpeded by interpersonal considerations, let alone responsibilities for a wife and family.

C. (:7b) God's Calling and Giftedness = the Determining Factor

"However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that."

Gordon Fee: [Refers] to that singular gift of freedom from the desire or need of sexual fulfillment that made it possible for him to live without need for marriage at all.

Therefore, despite personal preference for his own status, Paul recognizes that his celibacy is a **charisma** ("*gracious gift*"), not a requirement; and this places the whole question on an entirely different plane. They were urging celibacy for the married, using his situation as part of the reason for it. But Paul says No; celibacy is for the celibate, and as such it is strictly a matter of charisma. Such gifts can neither be reduced to principle, nor can any one of them be required across the board for all, as apparently some were trying to do. . .

In the present context he is both affirming his own celibate (and single) status and denying that those who are already married may also be celibate (**vv. 2–6**) or "*become single*" (**vv. 10–16**). They are to "*remain as they are.*" But before he addresses this latter item, this reference to his own situation has caused him first of all to reflect on how that affects some others who are "*as he is*" but without his gift (**vv. 8–9**).

David Garland: Understanding celibacy as a **grace-gift** has three implications.

First, celibate existence is **not a matter of personal preference**, nor is it a meritorious

feat of self-mastery for which one can take credit. It comes from “the unattainable grace of God” (Schrage 1995: 72). This idea directly contrasts with Philo’s view (Spec. Laws 1.29 §149) that “the opposite of desire [*ἐπιθυμία, epithymia*] is continence [*ἐγκράτεια, enkrateia*], the acquisition of which is a task to be practised and pressed forward by every possible means as the greatest and most perfect of blessings promoting personal and public welfare alike” (see also Spec. Laws 2.32 §195). Paul converts *ἐγκράτεια* from a virtue, as promoted by moral philosophers, to a charisma bestowed by God (see Conzelmann 1975: 120). The power to control oneself comes from God, not from oneself (so also Wis. 8:21).

Second, Schrage (1995: 73) points out that Paul understood gifts to be given by God for building up the body of Christ. In this case, he believes that the one who is single may be **able to give more ardent service to Christ (7:34)**. If remaining single is driven by selfish concerns—for example, to use it as a yardstick to measure one’s imagined spiritual status or to gain independence from any obligations to a spouse—it no longer can be regarded as a gift.

Third, Paul sets the example for those who may be blessed with a particular gift not to expect everyone else also to show evidence of it. His gift of celibacy is **not determinative for others who have differing gifts** (P. W. Gooch 1983: 62, 66). He does not want them trapped in a vow that goes against their nature and that they cannot fulfill. Whether celibacy is advisable for those who are now unmarried depends on how they honestly answer this question: How has God formed their nature?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) On what basis do Catholics maintain that their clergy must remain celibate? How would the Apostle Paul have addressed that issue?
- 2) Is Paul saying that marriage was just instituted as a safeguard against immorality?
- 3) Should husbands have a greater right to sexual satisfaction than their wives?
- 4) How does a person who is currently single but desires to be married remain content during this stage of life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Singles and married couples must follow God’s design and pursue faithfulness according to their gift.

I. God Has Helpful Principles for Those Who Are Married (7:1-5).

- A. Pursue purity (7:1-2).
- B. Pursue partnership (7:3-4).
- C. Pursue prayer (7:5-6).

II. God Gifts All of Us according to His will (7:7-9).

- A. Some are gifted for singleness (7:7-8).
- B. Some are gifted for marriage (7:9).

Genesis 1–2 teaches us that God gave us marriage for procreation and partnership.

Song of Songs teaches us our Lord gave us sex in marriage for pleasure. Paul teaches the gift of sex in marriage is also for purity. Our sex drives are strong, especially in our youth. Unfortunately, sexual temptation is everywhere. To protect and honor the purity God intends for sexual expression, men and women should find satisfaction exclusively with their mates. This is God's good design for sexual expression and enjoyment. Sex is not bad. Sex is not dirty. By the design of God, it is good and pure within the covenant of marriage between a man and woman. **Ray Ortland** highlights four biblical principles for sex in marriage:

- 1. freedom (**Prov 5:18**),
- 2. sensitivity (**1 Pet 3:7**),
- 3. agreement (**1 Cor 7:5**), and
- 4. exclusivity (**Exod 20:14**)

("What's Allowed in Married Sex?"). Sex in marriage is normal, and it is good.

David Garland: After the introduction of the topic in **7:1**, Paul's argument in **7:2–5** falls into a **chiastic** structure, which reveals that his concern about the danger of immorality is paramount:

- A But because of fornications (**7:2a**)
 - B Let each one have his own wife or her own husband (**7:2bc**)
 - C Let the husband fulfill his sexual obligations to his wife (7:3a)
 - D and likewise the wife to her husband (**7:3b**)
 - D' The wife does not have authority over her own body but her husband (**7:4a**)
 - C' and likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body but his wife (**7:4b**)
 - B' Do not deprive one another . . . (**7:5ab**)
- A' because of your lack of self-control (**7:5c**)

Ray Stedman: Question #1 on their list seems to be something like this: "In view of the sexual temptations we face in Corinth, is it perhaps better to take a vow of celibacy, to renounce marriage for life, and to withdraw from all contact with the opposite sex?" And Paul's answer is given to us in this very first verse: "*It is well for a man not to touch a woman.*"

Now that question probably arose from the difficulty that some were having with handling their sexual drives. They were living in a sexually-oriented society, very much

like what we have in California today. They were facing exposure to temptation in these areas every time they turned around, just as we do today, and some of them were reacting, and saying, "Well, rather than struggle all the time, why not just forget the whole thing and get away from the opposite sex and live as a monk?" (They did not use that term then, perhaps, but that is what it has come to mean.)

You will recognize that this is an attitude that is commonly felt and held. This gave rise to monasticism in the Middle Ages, a very popular practice at that time. People withdrew from all contact in this area, viewing sex itself as defiling, dirty, and unworthy. They viewed the celibate state as a higher level of spirituality. They moved out of the world and built monasteries where men could live among themselves and women could live among themselves in a way that would remove them from all contact, and hopefully (they thought) all struggle in this area. But it did not work, and it never will work. It never is God's intention for the sexes to live separately -- he made them in the beginning to be together. Monasticism proved to be a disaster, as it always proves. You cannot run away from drives that are within you, and Scripture recognizes this.

This question of theirs expressed the idea that, since sex drives create so many problems, it is best to get away and forget it all, and the apostle's answer is that there is nothing wrong with celibacy; it is all right to be single. He stresses that right at the beginning. Nevertheless, he says, because of fornications and the temptations that abound, marriage is preferable in a climate like Corinth. Some have taken that to mean that Paul had a very low view of marriage -- that it was a kind of "second best" state of affairs -- but, when people feel that way, they have missed the whole thrust of this passage; they have ignored the context around it. . .

Here the apostle says **three things about sex within marriage**. They are very important things, and we will take them one by one:

The first one is suggested here in these opening two verses. **Sex within marriage, the apostle says, does permit relief from sexual pressures.** Now he does not suggest that you should get married in order to be free from sex drives. That should not be the major reason for marriage, and no part of Scripture ever teaches it as such. What the apostle is saying is that, when you are married, it does free you in this area. It helps to be married when you live in a sex-oriented society. . .

Having said that marriage is a way of relieving sexual pressures, Paul now says something else very significant. He says **sex in marriage is designed of God to teach us something about ourselves, and to fulfill a missing need in our partners.** You see this in **Verses 3-5**: . . .

Not once does he ever suggest that you have the right to demand sex from your mate. What he says is that what you have the right to do is to give him or her, as a gift from you, the fulfillment of these sexual desires -- and the responsibility you have is not to your mate, but to the Lord to do so. It is a matter that Paul puts on the basis of the

relationship that a believer has with his or her Lord, and it is the Lord who asks us to give this gift to our mates in marriage, and thus to make it a basis of mutual fulfillment and satisfaction. In other words, sex in marriage is a gift that you are to freely offer to each other. It is not a selfish, self-centered satisfying of your own desire.

Now he says a third thing about sex in marriage that is very important, **Verses 6 and 7**:

I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. (1 Cor 7:6-7 RSV)

In other words, what Paul is saying is that **sex in marriage manifests a special gift of God**. Marriage itself is a gift from God, just as singleness is, and some have one gift and some another, but both express some unique quality about God himself that is intended to be manifested by that state.

John Piper: Satan Uses Sexual Desire

1. CELIBACY IS A GIFT TO BE CELEBRATED. . .

Paul was so completely committed to a life of celibacy that he longed for everyone to have it. But the reason he loved the single life is exactly the opposite of why many people today love singleness and will even break up marriages in order to be single again. Today singleness is cherished by many because it brings maximum freedom for self-realization. You pull your own strings. No one cramps your style.

But Paul cherished his singleness because it put him utterly at the disposal of the Lord Jesus. No wife and children had to be taken into account when the mission for Christ was dangerous. No money had to be spent on clothing and educating little Paul junior. No time had to be taken preserving and cultivating his relation to his wife. . .

2. CELIBACY IS NOT FOR EVERYBODY . . .

3. MARRIAGE IS A DAM AGAINST THE FLOOD OF FORNICATION AND ADULTERY. . .

He does not say that getting engaged is the solution to sexual temptation. He does not say that a verbal commitment prior to marriage justifies the act of sexual intercourse. He says, "If your desire for sexual relations with your fiancé is that strong, go ahead, get married. Marriage is God's appointed dam against the flood of fornication in the world. You can't commit fornication after you are married.

But you can commit adultery. Which is why Paul goes on to show that marriage is also meant to be a dam against adultery. **Verses 3-5** . . .

Besides frequency of sexual relations and attractiveness to each other, satisfaction also depends, in the third place, on the overall quality of the relationship. If there is anger or

bitterness or resentment or hurt feelings, we don't usually touch each other, let alone embrace. . .

4. SATAN USES SEXUAL DESIRE.

There is a very simple truth at work here: the more strongly we feel sexual desire the more susceptible we are to being deceived that it is not wrong to satisfy it through fornication or adultery or masturbation. This same truth holds in all the areas of our lives: the stronger our desire for some satisfaction, the more vulnerable we are to being deceived about what is right and wrong in the way we try to satisfy that desire. . .

The only way to fight the lie of sinful pleasure is with the truth of righteous pleasure. When you come to know God fully -- that "in his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore," then you will have conquered Satan once for all. He is a liar and has no power over those who know God in truth.

Stee Zeisler: I believe Paul was once married. It is therefore safe to say that he is not writing here as a theoretical observer, as it were, of marriage. Although it is obvious from this and others of his writings that he was not married during the years of his Christian ministry, as a one-time member of the Sanhedrin of the Jews, marriage would have been a requirement for him. Some have felt that the apostle's wife abandoned him when he came to faith in Christ. He later speaks in this chapter of an unbelieving spouse who will not consent to live with his mate. That, perhaps, was an experience which he himself suffered. In any case, Paul is quite at home writing about sex and marriage. . .

To ensure your mate's sexual fulfillment, it is necessary to talk, to listen, to know, to understand and spend time with him or her. In order to do what the apostle Paul commands here, husbands and wives need to be willing to learn all the other wisdom that makes marriage function and flourish. In this pithy word of advice to married couples, the apostle is opening the door to his readers' learning to be lovers at every level, because one thing is contingent upon the other. Paul's counsel requires one to listen, to communicate, to be sensitive, in order to give the gift that one is commanded to give.

Doug Jeffries: Paul enlarges his consideration of the issue of celibacy in v. 3-6 and in so doing must have surely surprised his readers with his frank discussion of married sex. It is clear that some in the church at Corinth were of the opinion that married couples who were completely dedicated to God's service should abstain from sexual relations even within their marriage. Paul can imagine only a very limited role for such abstinence.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Sex and the Spiritual Christian

The ascetics of the Corinthian church have over-reacted to the immorality of that day, concluding that all sex is dirty and should be avoided, even within marriage. When Paul says, "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman,*" I think he is repeating the position held by the Corinthian ascetics. This was their slogan. Paul repeats the statement, not because he agrees with it in its entirety, but because he agrees with it in part. He will

shortly set out to clarify the circumstances in which celibacy could serve a beneficial purpose. I am going to advance to **verses 6-9** at this point to suggest just how sexual abstinence could be beneficial. I do this because the main thrust of **verses 1-7** is to address the role of sex within marriage. Later verses will expand upon the benefits a celibate lifestyle can produce. . .

I understand celibacy to be the conscious choice to control one's sexual desires and to remain single so that one's gifts and calling may be more effectively utilized. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Apostleship, along with other gifts, was bestowed upon Paul at the time of his conversion. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Paul to carry out his calling if he had been married and the father of a number of children. Can you imagine a family man going from city to city, living in one home and then another, sometimes being self-supporting, and other times living on the gifts of others? Can you see Paul's wife and family being cast into prison with him, or being left alone without any support? Celibacy was the ideal state for a man like Paul, who had his gifts and calling. I think that is what Paul means when he says, "... *each man has his own gift, one in this manner, and another in that.*" We might paraphrase Paul's words in this way: "Each man has his own gifts and calling, which are carried out in one manner or another, some serving God through marriage, and some serving Him through remaining single." Some ministries are conducted much better in the context of marriage and the family. Paul would have trouble, for example, showing hospitality. Whether one chooses to marry or to remain single should be determined on how that person's gift and calling can best be fulfilled. For some, this will mean marriage (and all that comes with it, like the pleasures and responsibilities of sex); for some it may mean celibacy (with the freedom and undistracted life that comes with it).

Staying single (and thus sexually inactive) may be the calling of some. If it is your calling, it is for the glory of God and for the promotion of the gospel. But the single life and sexual abstinence is not the rule, as Paul knows. And so in **verses 2-5**, we find Paul speaking of the role of sex in marriage. . .

Sexuality and spirituality are very closely related. Paul calls for each of us who knows God through Jesus Christ to elevate our sexuality to the standard God has set, to make sexuality an expression of our spirituality to the glory of God, and ultimately for our good.

James Boyer: To marry, or not to marry, is not a matter of right and wrong, of duty, of commandment. Either state is permissible. God has given no command. . . Some have the gift of foregoing the blessings of married life for the sake of the kingdom of God (cf. **Matt. 19:10-12**). Others have the gift of being married and establishing a home, serving God in that way. The decision as to whether a person should get married or not should be made in the light of the gift which God has given him.

Richard Hays: Paul's response to the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 7:1-7** comes with clarity and force: No, he says, those who are married must not declare a moratorium on sexual relations! "*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise*

the wife to her husband” (v. 3). The first reason for this was already suggested in **verse 2**: “*because of cases of sexual immorality.*” The spouse who “*deprives*” his or her partner of sexual intimacy may be preparing the conditions for Satan to tempt the partner into *porneia* because of the difficulty of self-control (cf. v. 5). And, as Paul has already explained at length, *porneia* is damaging to the community of faith as a whole.

But Paul now goes on in **verse 4** to offer a second reason more profoundly related to the character of marriage itself: “*For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.*” This was a commonplace view in the ancient world. Paul’s next sentence, however, must have struck many first-century hearers as extraordinary: “*likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*” Here Paul articulates a view of marriage that stands as a challenge to views ancient and modern alike. The marriage partners are neither placed in a hierarchical relation with one over the other nor set apart as autonomous units each doing what he or she pleases. Instead, the relationship of marriage is one of **mutual submission**, each partner having authority over the other. Regrettably, Paul does not pause to develop the wider implications of this remarkable idea. His immediate concern is focused on the problem at Corinth: in marriage, he insists, there is to be no unilateral withdrawal—nor even a mutually negotiated withdrawal!—from regular sexual intercourse.

In **verse 5**, however, he does offer **one concession** to the Corinthians’ desire to seek special spiritual disciplines. Temporary short-term abstinence is permissible if it is undertaken “*by agreement*” (the Greek *ek symph nou* means literally “with a common voice”—notice the etymological root of the English word “symphony”) of husband and wife together. The purpose of such an arrangement is to allow the partners to devote themselves to prayer, but Paul is insistent that they must come together again after the fixed time, in order to avoid the danger of temptation. This allowance for **temporary abstinence** is the “concession” to which Paul refers in **verse 6**, though he makes it clear that he is not at all commanding such a practice.

Thomas Leake: Answering 5 Strategic and Fundamental Questions about Marriage (7:1-16)

Introduction:

Review of the overall argument of the book of 1 Corinthians – **Corrections in the Church**. **7:1** marks a transition as Paul calms down a bit and the tone changes to less rebuking.

Note: When Paul says certain things came from him rather than as a command from the Lord he does not mean that what he says what not inspired and authoritative. He is only referring to the verbal teaching that Christ gave while on the earth.

Note the repeated use of *peri de* to introduce various sections of the book (**7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12**)

Context: Dealing with issues of sex and marriage flowing out of the end of **chapter 6**. It is difficult to pinpoint the specific circumstances to which he was addressing his

pastoral counsel; but this is not systematic theology designed to cover all of the aspects of marriage. Maybe the different groups were applying types of pressure on the other groups – married vs. singles. Maybe some of the married were advocating some type of ascetic refraining from sexual relationships even in marriage. Celibacy had certainly become attractive to a certain group.

Major principle: **stay as you were called. All states have their place.**

Questions for us to try to answer:

- What was Paul teaching them in their situation?
- What underlying principles can we glean?
- How can we apply these principles to our situation today?

Question 1: (:1) Do Christians have to marry?

Cf. pressure from ascetics to stay single vs pressure from Jewish emphasis on the need to marry;

“*Good*” does not mean the only good or even the highest good;

“suitable, appropriate, pleasing” – It is OK to marry; permissible

From Genesis we learned that it is not good for man to be alone; but it should not be our goal to get every single person married! Apostle Paul testified that he was able to accomplish much as a single man (**1 Cor. 9:5**).

Question 2: (:2, 9) Why get married?

(For those already married, too late to revisit this question!)

Marriage is the more general condition that applies to most of mankind. Celibacy is more of the exception to the rule. **1 Tim. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:4**

Some groups were more ascetic and overly restrictive; some groups were more loose; problem was there was pride in both camps – viewing their state as superior; putting others down; making man-made rules; some were viewing sex as carnal and filthy – even in marriage; legitimate concern for immoralities in Corinth – **Prov. 5:15-23**; importance of channeling sex into the proper channels

But there are other reasons to get married not covered in this context:

- partnership, companionship – so you think and act as one person
- picture the relationship between Christ and the church – husband must learn to Love; put aside selfishness; wife must learn to submit and obey
- procreation – passing the faith from generation to generation (**Ps. 127:3**)
Deut. 6:11 – shows how much we should be talking about God’s Word

Note: no legitimacy to claims of homosexuals – biology should be proof enough ... but apparently it is not – marriage is between one man and one woman for life

Question 3: (:3-5) What is God’s Design for Married Partners

Mutual sharing and intimacy; a oneness; celibacy is wrong for married partners; each has a duty to give his/her body to the other partner; not just a good thing but an

obligation; an equality of the sexes in terms of how Paul treats the subject – very striking for their culture; radical from the Roman male point of view

Possible Problems that may need to be addressed:

- Physical problems – see a doctor
- Emotional issues – relax; be patient; love conquers fear
- Celebrate physical romantic love (cf. Song of Solomon) – don't ignore it or treat it as something bad
- Selfishness – often the male partner is just interested in getting what he wants; women can be treated as sex objects
- Some people just treat romance as a waste of time; but it enhances the overall oneness of the marriage relationship
- Some abuse or traumatic experience earlier in life – Can't keep living as a victim; must realize that God's instructions are for your good and designed to help you, not hurt you; believe that you are a new Creation in Christ; trust Him in your situation
- All excuses deny God's power and resist God's will

The 1 Exception to regular pattern of sexual relationships in marriage:

Prayer – the spiritual pursuit of God; intense focus on God; **Ps. 63:1**; but only for a time and only by mutual consent; what type of burden would apply here? **Ex. 19:9-15** – not for an extended time like months

Concession applies to what antecedent?? “*This*” I say – what does “this” refer to?

- the time of prayer itself
- more likely = **vs 2** – Paul not commanding believers to marry

Question 4: (:7-9) What Factors should I weigh before getting married?

1) How can I best serve God? Married or Unmarried?

Paul probably never married (although some think that he was a widower). But not anti-marriage. “I wish that you were like me” = in a good state; not an inferior position; Paul certainly got a lot done for the kingdom of God; **7:32** – undistracted devotion to the Lord; Don't just assume you need to be married

2) What gift do I have from God? Marriage = the norm

Being single, satisfied and productive = a gift from God

How can I determine this?

- Do I burn with passion?
- Do I have self control over my passions?

Our society puts a lot of pressure on singles to get married.

3) What are the times in which I live?

7:26 – persecution in the air at Corinth; would present difficulties for wife and children; times of unrest; cf. Jewish regulation that a man was not allowed to go off to war until after 1 year of marriage

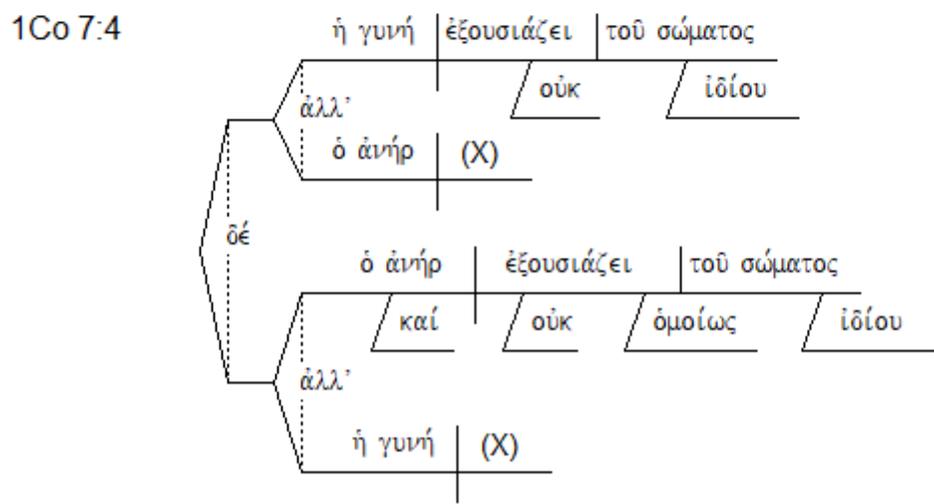
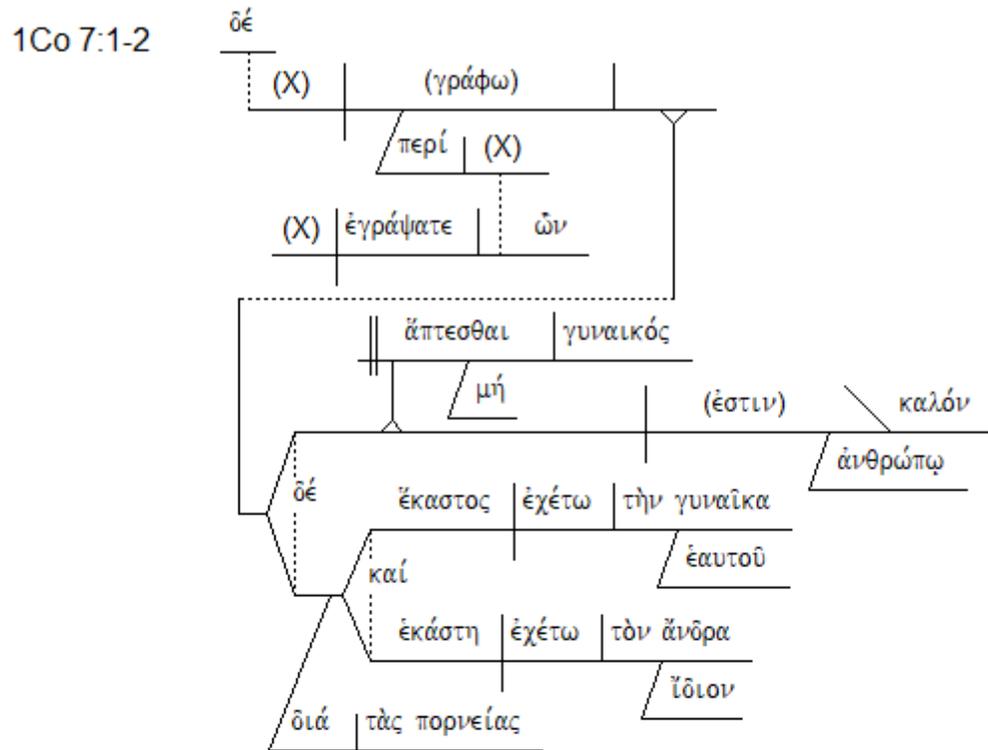
4) What about some personal issues?

- How old and mature am I?
- Am I ready as a husband to provide for and take care of a wife?
- Where am I going to live?

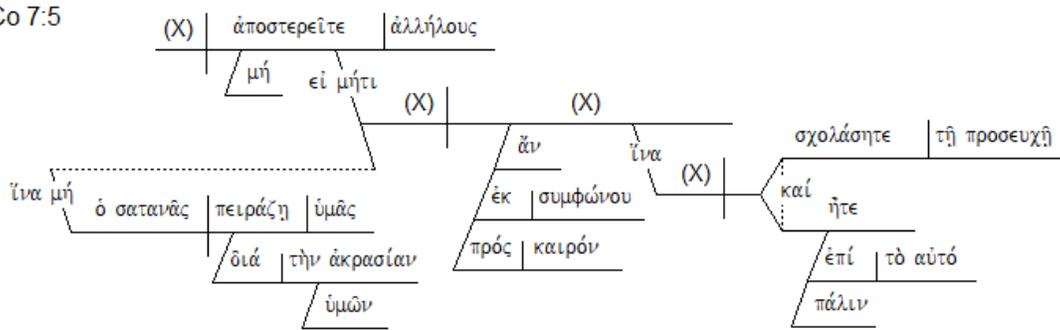
Only 1 restriction = **vs. 39** – must marry in the Lord; not to an unbeliever; needs to have a clear testimony in word and deed; great freedom within that one constraint; Marry whomever you want! Not some mystical attempt to determine the perfect dot of God's will; Trust God's instructions for marriage

Question 5: (:10) When is Divorce and Remarriage Allowed?

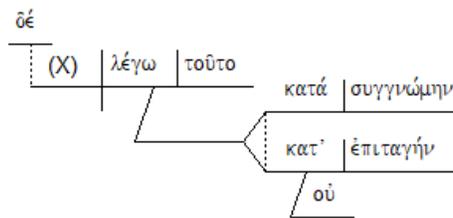
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



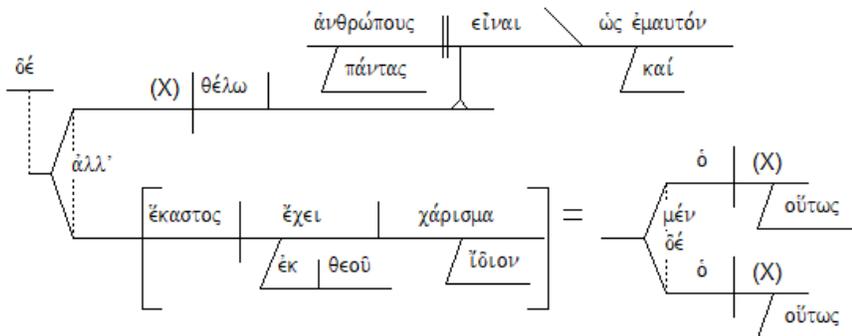
1Co 7:5



1Co 7:6



1Co 7:7



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

TITLE: *SINGLENESSE . . . MARRIAGE . . . DIVORCE*

BIG IDEA:

DIFFERENT SITUATIONS CALL FOR DIFFERENT DIVINE INSTRUCTION REGARDING SINGLENESSE, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

3 GROUPS ADDRESSED:

I. (:8-9) INSTRUCTIONS TO THE UNMARRIED AND TO WIDOWS – EITHER SINGLENESSE OR THE MARRIED STATE MAY BE A VIABLE OPTION

A. (:8) Value of Remaining Single and Devoted to the Lord's Service

1. Source of This Instruction

"But I say"

These instructions came from Paul by inspiration rather than merely repeating the earthly teaching of Jesus – but both types of instruction equal in authority

2. Subjects of This Instruction

"to the unmarried and to widows"

"Unmarried" – 2 Possibilities

a) **More restricted sense** -- **MacArthur** argues that the *"unmarried"* refers only to those formerly married (in contrast to the *"virgins"* of **vs 25**) and thus would be those who had been "legitimately divorced" (as distinguished here from *"widows"*) ...

Variation of this view – **Richard Hays**:

The word *"unmarried"* (agamoi) is used here to refer specifically to **widowers**, not in a generic fashion to include all those who are not married. (Paul's advice to other classes of non-married persons—the divorced and the not-yet-married—is given separately in **vv. 11** and **25–38**). Thus, this counsel, like most of the other directives in the chapter, is carefully balanced and directed equally to men and women: in this case, men and women who have lost a spouse to death. Apparently Paul classes himself within this group, telling them that it is well for them to remain *"as I am,"* i.e., unmarried. This is the only hint in Paul's letters that he might once have been married—as would have been normal, indeed virtually mandatory, for a Jewish man of his time who was devoted to the study of Torah (**Acts 22:3**; **Gal. 1:14**; **Phil. 3:4–6**; cf. the later rabbinic teaching that "He who is twenty years old and not yet married spends all of his days in sin" [b. Qidd. 29b]). Paul's marital history and status, whatever it may have been, was no doubt known to the Corinthians; consequently, he need offer no further explanation here. His purpose is simply to advise widows and widowers to remain as they are (note the contrast to **1 Tim. 5:14**).

Gordon Fee: Several items favor the suggestion that *agamois* should be translated “widowers”: First, since being “widowed” in antiquity created special problems for women, most cultures had a word for widows; however, they did not always have a word for the male counterpart. Greek has such a word, but it appears seldom to have been used, and never in the koinē period, in which *agamos* served in its place. Second, since throughout the entire passage Paul deals with husbands and wives in mutuality (12 times in all), it would seem to fit naturally into the total argument to see that pattern here as well. After all, if *agamois* refers to all the unmarried, then **why bother to add widows?** Third, this word appears again (in v. 11) for a woman separated from her husband, and in the next section (v. 34) in contrast to the “*virgin*” (one who was never before married), indicating that in his regular usage it denotes not the “unmarried” in general, but the “**demarried**,” those formerly but not now married. On balance, therefore, “widower” seems to be the best understanding of the word here. That would also especially help to explain the presence of such advice at this (otherwise unusual) point in this context, where all of the cases in the present passage (vv. 1–16) deal with those presently or formerly married, while the later passage (vv. 25–38) takes up the issue of the never-before married.

Mark Taylor: If the term “*unmarried*” denotes a widower, some see in this passage a hint that Paul was once married since he advises to “*remain as I am*.” That Paul would have been married at some point in his life would have been consistent with his Jewish heritage. The evidence is not conclusive, however, and ultimately we cannot know for sure. It is clear that Paul was not married at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians, and there is no trace of a wife or child anywhere in Acts or Paul’s letters. It is best not to read beyond the evidence that we have and simply confess that **we do not know**.

b) **Broader application** -- **Lenski** argues for its broader application: “The term ‘*unmarried*’ really includes all individuals mentioned in this first group, yet *kai* adds ‘*widows*.’ This conjunction is often used thus to single out a part from a whole in order to give it special attention. Widows might, indeed, have special reasons for thinking their state a sad one and thus for desiring to have it changed.”

And if you do not allow for divorce as a “legitimate” option, then divorced individuals would not be included here.

Paul Gardner: The word “*unmarried*” (ἄγαμος) appears only in this chapter within the New Testament. Here it seems to refer to both men and women, while in v. 11 it refers to divorced women and in v. 32 to unmarried men and in v. 34 to unmarried women. It has been suggested that the word in v. 8 may refer only to single men generally or, more specifically, to widowers in the light of the following mention of “widows.” However, Paul’s discussion proceeds to examine examples of single men and women who should not marry or who might be best to marry and, even though it is not

immediately apparent why he should specify “*widows*” right here, it seems to make more sense of the whole argument if “*unmarried*” is regarded as **a general description of all single people**.

David Garland: If Paul applies the word for the general category of the unmarried, **why does he single out widows** from this group? In **7:39–40**, he again gives special instructions to widows, and he may have believed that widows were particularly useful to the church’s ministry when they dedicated themselves completely to it and if the church could support them (cf. **1 Tim. 5:3–16**; see **Godet** 1886: 330). On the other hand, he may have highlighted their case simply because there were more widows than widowers and they faced more serious economic problems by remaining single (**Schrage** 1995: 94). Paul offers them spiritual encouragement to remain unmarried.

3. Substance of This Instruction

“that it is good for them if they remain even as I.”

B. (:9) Freedom to Marry and Protect Against Sexual Temptation

*“But if they do not have self-control, let them marry;
for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*

Again this is not comprehensive teaching or systematic teaching covering all of the reasons to marry; His emphasis in this section has been dealing with sexual temptation and the physical aspect of the relationship.

L. Alexander: “Burning” is one of a range of metaphors (wounding, captivity, drowning) used in the novels to describe the **irresistible force of passion**: and it is a sensation associated as much with the legitimate loves of hero and heroine as with the unregulated passions of the various tempters who seek to assault their chastity. Paul’s metaphor of sexual desire as “*burning*” (**7:9**) is commonest in the novels and in Greek erotic poetry.

Gordon Fee: Paul is not so much offering marriage as the remedy for sexual desire for “*enflamed youth*,” which has been the most common way of viewing the text; rather, marriage is to be understood as the proper alternative for those who are already consumed by that desire and are sinning.

Bob Deffinbaugh: The satisfaction of our God-given sexual desires within the context of marriage is wholesome and good. There is no intrinsic merit in the suppression of sexual desire. If sexual fulfillment (a definite “good”) is voluntarily set aside for the purpose of ministering to others, even as our Lord did, then celibacy is better. If one’s service as a celibate is one of constant preoccupation with sexual desires, marriage is the better way. It is surely better to marry and be sexually pure than to fall into sexual immorality.

II. (:10-11) INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE UNITED IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE – DON'T DIVORCE YOUR SPOUSE

(Both spouses are believers here since their situation is contrasted with the next group which deals with mixed marriages – a believer with an unbeliever)

Richard Hays: If continuing sexual relations are mandatory for Christian husbands and wives, might some of them seek an escape route into celibacy by means of divorce? Had this perhaps already been occurring in Corinth? Or had the issue of divorce arisen for other, more ordinary, reasons? Whether prompted by a concrete instance or not, Paul articulates a general norm in **verses 10–11**: Christian wives and husbands should not divorce one another.

A. (:10) Stay Married

1. Source of This Instruction

“I give instructions, not I, but the Lord”

Paul here is repeating and emphasizing (still by inspiration) teaching that the Lord had given personally during His earthly ministry.

Richard Hays: This is one of the very few places that Paul appeals explicitly to a teaching of Jesus in support of a directive to his churches (see also **9:14** and perhaps **1 Thess. 4:15–17**). Although the wording here is different from that found in the Gospels, Paul is certainly alluding to the tradition that Jesus had forbidden divorce (**Mark 10:2–12; Matt. 5:31–32; Matt. 19:3–12; Luke 16:18**), an unusual stance more stringent than anything found either in Judaism or in Greco-Roman culture.

2. Subjects of This Instruction

“But to the married”

3. Substance of This Instruction

“that the wife should not leave her husband”

“and that the husband should not divorce his wife”

David Prior: Paul’s fundamental approach to the question of Christians getting divorced is, therefore, very simple: ‘Don’t. The Lord has expressly forbidden it; so do not even allow yourselves the luxury of entertaining it as a possibility.’ If this is the express command of the Lord, it does no good whatsoever mentally to flirt with what is so clearly beyond limits. If, as not infrequently happens, a Christian couple think they have made a mistake in getting married, then it is important for them to accept the authority of the Lord’s teaching and to apply themselves to their relationship, in the conviction that, if they work at it, God can make it new and vital.

Bob Deffinbaugh: When Paul forbids terminating the marriage, he forbids **both separation and divorce**. All too often, I hear Christians acknowledge that divorce is forbidden, and then proceed to encourage someone in a troubled marriage to separate. Their thinking is that divorce is one thing, and separation is quite another. I believe Paul

clearly differs. Paul employs two different terms in **verses 10 and 11**, when he forbids the termination of marriage. In the NASB, the first term is translated “*leave*,” with a marginal note which indicates the literal meaning is “*depart from*.” The same term occurs at the beginning of verse 11. This same word is employed by our Lord in His teaching on divorce: “*Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*” (**Matthew 19:6**, emphasis mine). But when Paul speaks specifically to husbands at the end of **verse 11**, he employs a term which is rendered by the expression, “*send her away*” (with a marginal note indicating the alternative, “*leave her*”). In the vernacular of our times, **Paul is forbidding women both separation and divorce.**

B. (:11) Don’t Compound the Sin Problem

“(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband)”

Only 2 Options:

- Remain single
- Be reconciled to your husband

Otherwise she also commits the sin of adultery ... Reconciliation is only an option if neither has remarried.

Richard Hays: Paul says nothing here, however, about whether the spouse who has been abandoned is free to remarry. The major concern of his pastoral counsel is to prevent either partner from initiating divorce.

David Garland: In Paul’s Jewish tradition, a wife who has been divorced and has married another is forbidden to her former husband (**Deut. 24:4; Herm. Man. 4.1.8**; see also **2 Sam. 16:21–22; 20:3**). If there was to be a reconciliation, she must remain unmarried. The assumption behind this instruction is the same as in the teaching of the Lord: **the marriage bonds remain intact** regardless of what steps spouses might take to end the marriage.

Gordon Fee: The wife who may happen to divorce her husband may not use her present unmarried condition as an excuse for remarriage to someone else. If she does in fact desire to remarry, she must “*be reconciled to her husband*.” This is in keeping with Paul’s view expressed elsewhere that for believers marriage is permanent, from its inception until the decease of one of the partners (**7:39; Rom. 7:1–3**). Thus the priorities of the directive are clear: she is to remain as she is and not divorce her husband; but if she were to disobey this first directive, then she must again remain as she is and not commit adultery by remarrying someone else. If she does not like her new unmarried status, then she must be reconciled to her husband.

III. (:12-16) INSTRUCTIONS TO BELIEVERS WITH UNBELIEVING SPOUSES – MAINTAIN THE MARRIAGE IF POSSIBLE

Mark Taylor: In sum, in 7:12–16 Paul argues against Christians initiating divorce from unbelievers on the basis of the sanctifying character of marriage and its evangelistic potential.

A. (:12-13) Command: Do Not Initiate (Push for) Divorce

1. Additional Situation not covered By Christ's Teaching

"But to the rest I say, not the Lord"

2. Applies to Both the Believing Husband and the Believing Wife

a. Command to the Believing Husband in Mixed Marriage

"that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her."

b. Command to the Believing Wife in Mixed Marriage

"And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away."

John MacArthur: Some believers must have felt that being married to an unbeliever was somehow defiling. However, just the opposite is true.

B. (:14) Cause and Effect Principle: Appreciate the Opportunity for Godly Influence in the Home

1. Application to the Unbelieving Spouse

a. Godly Influence on the Unbelieving Husband

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife"

b. Godly Influence on the Unbelieving Wife

"and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband"

Anthony Thiselton: Whatever the finer points, Paul's main point is to allay any anxiety on the part of the Christian spouse that to remain with the non-Christian spouse might somehow imperil their status as Christians or their walk with God. Such anxiety is not at all unreasonable, for in **6:12-20** Paul has stated that sexual union with a prostitute can rip apart the limbs and organs of Christ with damaging effect.

In response to such a concern, Paul insists that the purity of Christians and their holy standing as set apart for God will not be compromised by remaining with the unbelieving spouse. Indeed, he asserts, the solidarity of the family works in the other direction: the consecration, lifestyle, values, and influence of the Christian spouse and parent has a wholesome and salutary effect on the unbeliever, and on the child also. . .

Paul does not license a Christian's deliberately marrying an unbeliever on this basis. He

simply describes a situation where the Christian is already married to a partner who has not (yet) come to faith.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul reasons that if marriage to an unbeliever in some way defiles the believing mate, it must also defile the children of that union. But since the unbeliever is blessed in the believer, so also are the children. Remaining married to an unbeliever has no negative connotations for the believing partner or the children, but there are distinct advantages for the unbeliever. There is, therefore, no good reason for the believer to seek to dissolve the marriage. All of this, however, is contingent on the desire of the unbeliever to remain married (cf. **verses 12-13**).

2. Application to the Children of the Mixed Marriage

a. Less Opportunity for Influence in Broken Home
“for otherwise your children are unclean,”

b. Greater Opportunity for Influence in United Home
“but now they are holy.”

C. (:15) Clarification: Divorce Appropriate When Initiated (Pursued) by the Unbeliever

1. Let the Unbeliever Go

“Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave;”

2. Called to Peace, not Bondage

a. Not under Bondage

“the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases,”

Mark Taylor: Many suppose the statement implies that the believer is no longer bound to the marriage commitment when abandoned by the unbeliever and is free to remarry. This reading of the text has given rise to what is known as the “**Pauline privilege.**” This may well be the case, yet **Paul does not speak directly to the issue of remarriage in 7:15.** We have to wonder if Paul might be saying something more, or perhaps even different. Paul disallows for remarriage in **7:11** in the case of the wife who leaves her husband (both believers). Paul specifies the freedom to remarry in **7:39** but only **upon the death of one’s spouse** and only if the remarriage is a Christian marriage. The verb for “**binding**” in **7:15** is not the ordinary verb Paul uses for the “binding” character of marriage (**7:27,39; Rom 7:2**). The term used in **7:15** means “*to be enslaved,*” which could be somewhat synonymous with the normal term of “binding” if Paul’s intention is to specify remarriage. In **7:17–24**, however, Paul continues with the enslavement/freedom contrast (**7:21–23**) in support of the overarching principle “*to remain as you are.*” Paul’s meaning in **7:15** may be that **the abandoned believer is not enslaved in their newfound circumstance and is free to serve the Lord without distraction (7:22, 32–35).** If the principle “*remain as you are*” holds, then Paul’s trustworthy judgment would be to remain unmarried. However, if Paul views the abandoned believer in the same light as a widow or widower whose marriage has been dissolved by death, then while advocating singleness, he would allow for remarriage.

Gordon Fee: This statement is the source of the notorious “Pauline privilege,” in which the text is understood to mean that the believer is free to remarry. But despite a long tradition that has so interpreted it, several converging data indicate that Paul is essentially repeating his first sentence: that the believer is not bound to maintain the marriage if the pagan partner opts out.

(1) Remarriage is not an issue at all; indeed, it seems to be quite the opposite. In a context in which people are arguing for the right to dissolve marriage, Paul would scarcely be addressing the issue of remarriage, and certainly not in such circuitous fashion.

(2) The verb “*to be under bondage*” is not Paul’s ordinary one for the “binding” character of marriage (cf. **7:39**; **Rom. 7:2**); that means that he does not intend to say one is not “bound to the marriage.” One is simply not under bondage to maintain the marriage, which the other person wishes to dissolve. From Paul’s point of view, one is bound to a marriage until death breaks the bond (**7:39**).

(3) At the end of the preceding issue (v. 11), even though there is a similar exception regarding divorce, he explicitly disallows remarriage.

(4) Such a concern misses the **theme of the chapter**, which has to do with not seeking a change in status. The exceptions in each case do not allow a change in partners but in status, either from single to married or vice versa, but not both!

All of this is not to say that Paul disallows remarriage in such cases; he simply does not speak to it at all. Thus this text offers little help for this very real contemporary concern, and one should therefore be especially cautious in “using” Paul at all regarding this matter.

Van Parunak: The believer may feel bound to the duties of marriage, even toward a spouse who has abandoned the union. Paul relieves the Christian's conscience. If the unbeliever leaves, the believer is no longer responsible to consider the wishes and well-being of the partner, as in a normal marriage. The believing wife does not need to submit to her husband. The believing husband is no longer responsible to support his wife. The spouse who leaves no longer has the authority over the body of the believer that Paul describes in **1 Cor. 7:4**. . .

The constant theme of **1 Cor. 7:10-16** is the **permanence of marriage**. Believers must never separate from other believers. If one spouse is unsaved, the believer should persevere in the marriage. If the unbeliever seeks a separation, the Christian should pray for the salvation of the unbeliever, and take advantage of any opportunity for a peaceful restoration of the marriage. Paul's instructions about **reconciliation** strongly suggest that **verse 15** does not authorize remarriage for the believer. If the believer marries someone else, reconciliation becomes impossible, because of the requirements of **Deuteronomy 24**, and the believer's channel of influence on the unbeliever is broken. .

When the unbeliever departs, the believer is no longer enslaved to the spouse. The human duties end. But **1 Cor. 7:15** says nothing about the bond that marriage establishes before God. **Verse 39** does discuss that bond, using a different Greek word

to describe a unity that it later says ends with death. Because Paul uses different terms in the two verses, we should not assume that they describe the same concept.

b. Called to Peace

“but God has called us to peace”

David Garland: Paul appeals to their **calling to peace** to discourage them from causing strife by stubbornly clinging to a marriage that an unbeliever wants to dissolve. *“Peace”* means **not causing conflict by disputing the decision to end the marriage**. *“Peace”* could also refer to *“peace of mind.”* They should not become excessively agitated by the divorce. A peaceful attitude can be present even in divorce.

John Piper: The last phrase of **verse 15** (*“God has called us to peace”*) supports **verse 15** best if Paul is saying that a deserted partner is not *“bound to make war”* on the deserting unbeliever to get him or her to stay. It seems to me that the peace God has called us to is the peace of marital harmony. Therefore, if the unbelieving partner insists on departing, then the believing partner is not bound to live in perpetual conflict with the unbelieving spouse, but is free and innocent in letting him or her go.

This interpretation also preserves a closer harmony to the intention of **verses 10-11**, where **an inevitable separation does not result in the right of remarriage**.

D. (:16) Caution: Don’t Presume that Your Influence Will Save Your Spouse

1. Application to the Believing Wife

“For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?”

2. Application to the Believing Husband

“Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”

Robert Grosheide: Bondage and quarreling which are certain need not be accepted in order to achieve a highly uncertain goal.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is there so much confusion and disagreement among Bible-believing Christians in this area?
- 2) What is our attitude towards divorced people in the church?
- 3) Why does Paul neglect the exception clause of **Matt 19** in his discussion here?
- 4) How does one maximize their godly influence in a mixed marriage state – trying to impact their spouse and their children?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Paul Tripp wrote a wonderful article titled “*10 Things You Should Know about Marriage*.” His main points, summarized below, provide a helpful conclusion to our study of **1 Corinthians 7:1-16**.

1) Your marriage is rooted in worship. No marriage will be unaffected when the people in marriage are seeking to get from the creation what they were only ever meant to get from the Creator. When we celebrate the Creator, we look at one another with wonder and joy. When you look at your spouse and see the Creator’s glory, then you feel blessed by the ways he or she is different.

2) Marriage will always require work. Every marriage needs divine wisdom. Every couple will need strength beyond what they have. No husband and wife can do what they were designed to do in marriage without dependency on God.

3) Marriage requires regular confession of sin. Confession is the doorway to growth and change in your relationship. It is essential.

4) A marriage cannot survive without forgiveness. Forgiveness is the only way to live in an intimate, long-term relationship with another sinner. It is the only way to deal with hurt and disappointment. It is the only way to have hope and confidence restored.

5) Selfishness is the biggest enemy for your marriage. Your biggest struggle is with the selfishness that tempts and seduces us all. We must all pull this weed again and again, along with all the weeds of destructive words and actions that attach themselves to it.

6) Your marriage needs the church. Right near you in the body of Christ are couples who have been through what you are now going through.

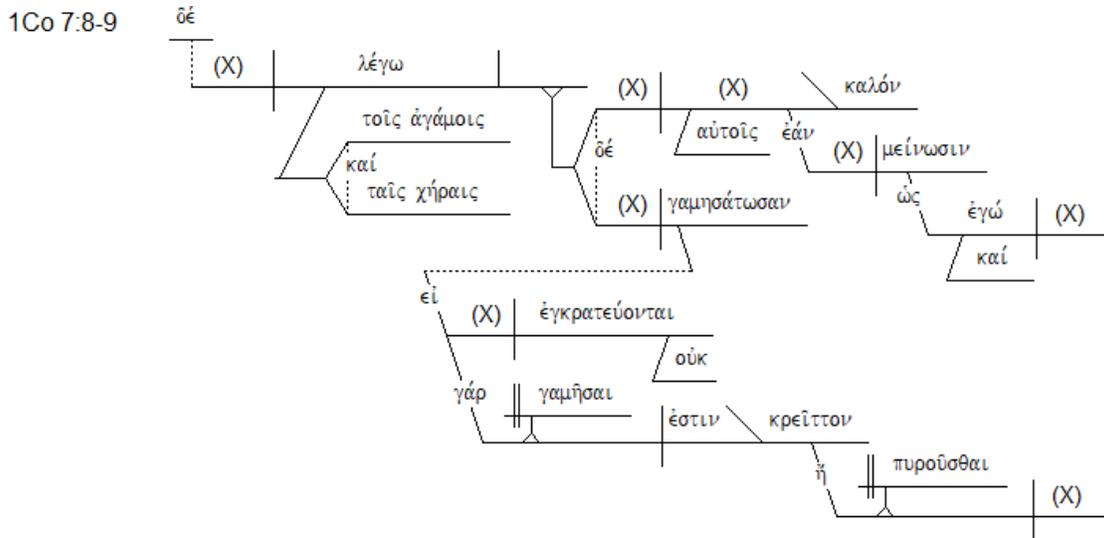
7) Marriage is the in-between. God has given us his Word as our guide. Already he has sent his Son to live, die, and rise again for our salvation. Already he has given us his Spirit to live within us. But the world has not yet been restored. Sin has not yet been completely eradicated. We have not yet been formed in the perfect likeness of Jesus.

8) Your marriage exists in a fallen world. Somehow, some way, your marriage is touched every day by the brokenness of our world. It is not an accident that you are conducting your marriage in this broken world. It is all a part of God’s redemptive plan.

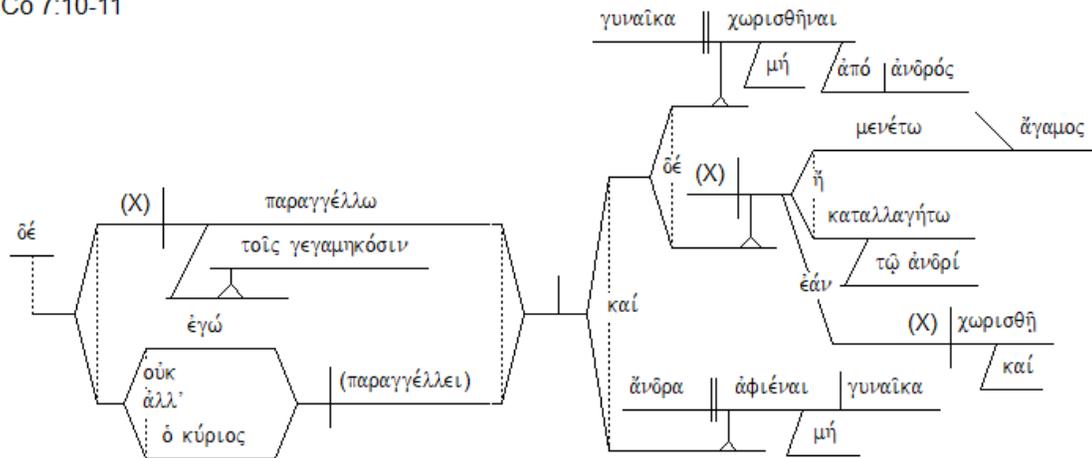
9) You are a sinner married to a sinner. Many people get married with unrealistic expectations about whom they are marrying. Here is the point: you both bring something into your marriage that is destructive to what a marriage needs and must do. That thing is called sin.

10) God is faithful, powerful, and willing to work through your marriage. You are not alone in your struggle. God is near, so near that in your moment of need you can reach out and touch him because he is not far from each one of us (**Act 17:27**). The God who determined your address lives there with you and is committed to giving you everything you need.

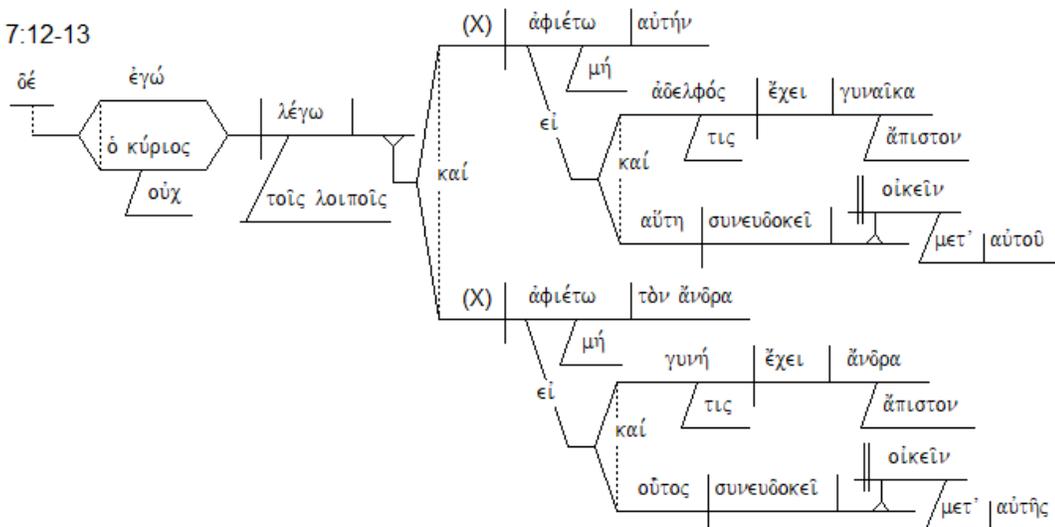
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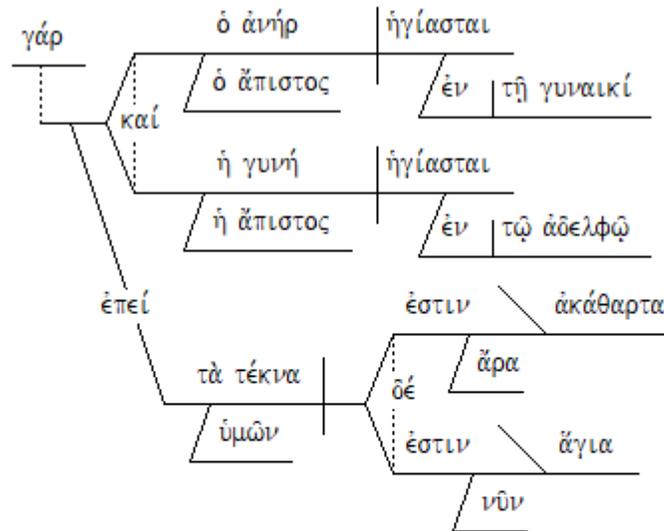
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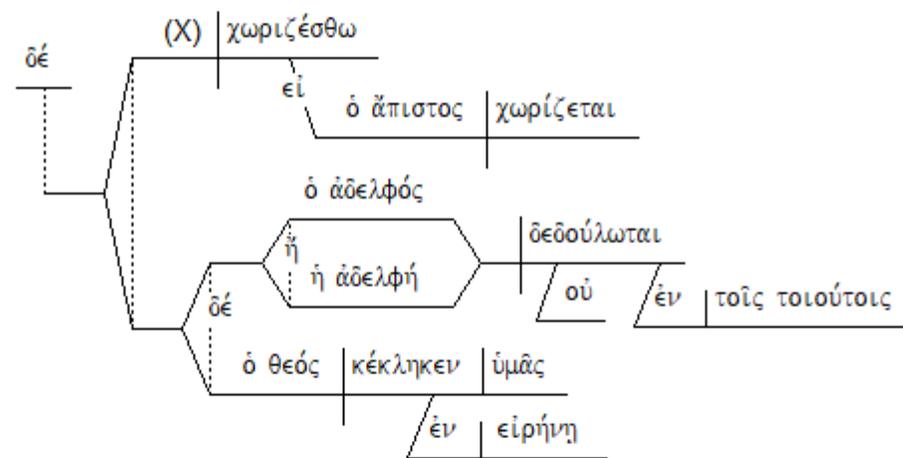
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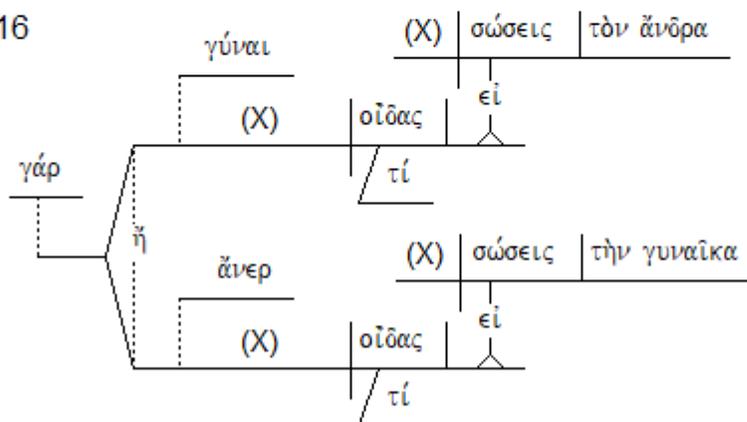
1Co 7:14



1Co 7:15



1Co 7:16



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

TITLE: BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED -- SALVATION DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD CHANGE YOUR PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

BIG IDEA:

EMBRACE WITH CONTENTMENT GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATION OF YOUR OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES AS YOU FOCUS ON SERVING CHRIST TO THE MAX

CONTEXT: MARITAL STATUS

Paul had been giving instruction in **Chapter 7** regarding marital status. Apparently there was some level of discontent among the believers where there was an inordinate desire to change their state from single to married or from married to single. Maybe those who were in mixed marriages were envious of those who were in Christian unions. Maybe those who were married wished that they were single so that they could serve the Lord more devotedly. In any case, Paul feels a need to pause and address the wider problem of contentment with your assigned role in life. Each person must understand that God is providentially working in their circumstances. The priority must be on living by faith and obeying the commandments of Christ. Every person has opportunity to live out their calling from that perspective. *“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”* For myself, I have this running joke with my family where when I start feeling sorry for myself or unhappy with my present circumstances I talk about “moving to Kansas” (= some nondescript place that is far away from my present situation). This passage addresses that struggle for contentment.

INTRODUCTION:

David Garland: No condition presents an obstacle to living the Christian life, since a Christian is now defined by God's call (**1:9**) and nothing else. As **Braxton** (2000: 50) summarizes it, “Change of social status is not a precondition of the call, nor is change a natural consequence of the call.” What matters is keeping the commandments of God (**7:19**), in particular, avoiding fornication (**7:2**). Christians can keep the commandments of God whether circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, married or celibate.

Thiselton (2000: 545) puts it well: “A Christian does not have to seek ‘the right situation’ in order to enjoy Christian freedom or to serve God's call effectively.”

Gordon Fee: Under the rubric *“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman,”* some Corinthian believers were seeking to change their present status, apparently because they saw such a change as conforming to the more “spiritual” existence that they considered themselves already to have attained. Thus they saw one's status with regard to marriage/celibacy as having religious significance and sought change because of it.

Under the theme of “**calling**” Paul seeks to put their “spirituality” into a radically different perspective. God’s call to be in Christ (cf. **1:9**) transcends all such settings, thus making them not so much unimportant per se, but basically irrelevant in terms of ultimate realities. Thus one should not seek change for its own sake, since one’s relationship with God has nothing at all to do with where a person is in terms of one’s social setting, but altogether with who one is in whatever setting one is found. That is, the call to Christ has created such a change in one’s essential relationship (with God) that one does not need to seek change in other relationships (with people). The latter are transformed and given new meaning by the former. Thus one is no better off, or worse, being in one condition or the other.

David Prior: He is, in effect, urging a basic attitude of **contentment** with whatever lot God gives to us, even if this includes circumstances which cause friction and frustration. To that extent he is urging the same approach to life’s other tensions as to marriage. There are three basic priorities in the apostle’s mind, all of which permeate his teaching in the rest of the chapter:

1. the need to be firm in our situation;
2. the need to be flexible about material things; and
3. the need to be free from any distractions from our single purpose of pleasing the Lord.

In this paragraph he applies these three priorities to each of you (**17**). He takes two particular examples, **circumcision** and **slavery**, and he argues for a radical Christian approach to both. Circumcision and slavery represented the two most divisive phenomena in the world of the New Testament. Circumcision constituted the greatest religious barrier, slavery the biggest social barrier. In each case, Paul is bold enough to assert, the salvation of God in Christ has rendered them null and void. Any man or woman in Christ has been so remade that earthly status, or lack of it, is irrelevant. It is, therefore, a distraction for Christians to become obsessed with either issue.

Paul Gardner: Paul now lays out a principle that helps explain his perspective on marriage, divorce, singleness, and widowhood. This principle should guide Christian men and women in their choices and actions in their relationships with the opposite sex. It is summarized simply in v. **17**. People should remain in the state in which they found themselves when God called them to faith, that is, either as unmarried or married. Christians must see that any decision to change that status, either from married to unmarried or unmarried to married, should not be made on the assumption that one state is less or more spiritual than another. Rather, the fact that God has called them is critical. If Christians look at their lives in terms of having graciously been called by God to live as part of his holy people and enabled by him with grace-gifts, then they will note great benefits as the Lord leads them in life. Using two illustrations, one from the ritual of circumcision (**7:18–19**) and one from the realm of slavery (**7:21–23**), Paul urges his audience three times to remain in the state in which they found themselves when they were called to faith (**7:17, 20, 24**). The two illustrations seem far removed from the question of marriage to which he returns in v. **25**. However, both demonstrate

that Christians should not change their status for so-called spiritual reasons. Just as neither circumcision nor uncircumcision provide spiritual or religious merit before God, so neither does marriage or singleness. God's gracious call comes regardless of social status. This does not mean that Christians cannot change their social status. The slave can take advantage of the offer of freedom (7:21), and the unmarried can get married, but this is always to be done in the recognition that the Lord must lead.

Richard Hays: The purpose of all this, let us remember, is to function as an analogy in support of Paul's argument that the married should not abandon their marriages and that the unmarried should not necessarily be urgently seeking partners. For many readers at the end of the twentieth century, the analogy may be more opaque and troubling than the point it is supposed to explain, but presumably Paul's original audience in Corinth would have found it relatively clear and reassuring. Regardless of our evaluation of this particular argument, we can understand Paul's basic advice: relax and "*remain with God*" (7:24) wherever you find yourself.

I. (:17) GENERAL PRINCIPLE: EMBRACE WITH CONTENTMENT GOD'S PARTICULAR CALLING FOR YOUR LIFE

A. Particular Application

(Repeated 2 other times: vv.20, 24 – Present Tense command – "*let him walk*")

*"Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one,
as God has called each,
in this manner let him walk."*

Robert Gundry: This verse forms a bridge to another topic, that of believers' assignments, or callings. Jesus is the Lord who "*has distributed* [an assignment] *to each* [believer]." God the Father is the one who "*has called each* [believer]." The call equates with the distribution, and both of them occurred at conversion. The believer "is to be walking around [that is, conducting his or her life] in this way [that is, in accordance with his or her distribution/calling]." Which means, as Paul will go on to explain, that the believer is to be **content** with his or her state in life as it was when conversion occurred. Meanwhile, a second "*in this way*" points to consistency in what Paul says here. "I'm giving orders" points to the authority with which he says it (compare 1:1; 4:17). And "*in all the churches*" points to the equal applicability to all Christians of what he says.

1. Matter of Priority

"Only"

2. Matter of Providential Calling – applies to every realm of life

"Lord has assigned"

"God has called"

Gil Rugh: Talking about the situation in which you find yourself when God saves you. That effectual call which results in our turning to God in saving faith.

3. Matter of Personal Application – no one can make this happen for you

“each one”

“called each”

“let him walk” = how we live out our Christian life; conduct ourselves

B. Universal Application

“And so I direct in all the churches.”

Still holds true for believers today – Don’t get this wrong!

David Garland: Informing them that he has ordered the same thing in all the churches (in his orbit of influence) does three things.

- First, it reminds them of his authoritative teaching as an apostle.
- Second, it makes clear that he is not giving them ad hoc counsel. This principle is the rule of thumb everywhere (Tomson 1990: 271).
- Third, by appealing to the practices of other churches, as he does throughout the letter (cf. **4:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1**), he notifies them that deviating from this principle makes them peculiar.

Gordon Fee: Thus Paul tells them that being in Christ does not negate their present situation; but neither is he arguing that it absolutizes it. Rather, the call to Christ sets them free to live out their new life within it. It is not change per se that he is against, but change as a Christian; that is, becoming a believer does not require one to seek change of status. That is to give significance to one’s social setting. Paul’s point is that God’s call, which comes to people where they are as his gracious gift, totally eliminates social setting as having any kind of religious significance. And how better can he illustrate that than by the one mark of sociological distinction that formerly did have religious significance for him but does so no more—circumcision.

II. (:18-20) CASE STUDY #1: CULTURAL, ETHNIC IDENTITY

A. (:18) Don’t Despise Your Calling

1. Called as Circumcised

“Was any man called when he was already circumcised?”

He is not to become uncircumcised.”

Robert Gundry: Circumcision embarrassed some Jewish men when their penises were exposed at public baths and at athletic events in which they participated. (Athletes competed in the nude.) Gentiles usually considered circumcision a barbaric mutilation of the human body, but Jews and Gentiles heavily influenced by Judaism considered it a sign of belonging to God’s covenant people. Paul says to let neither the usual Gentile ridicule of circumcision nor the Judaistic insistence on it make a Christian man reverse his circumcision or get circumcised.

2. Called as Uncircumcised

“Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.”

You don't have to remove your tattoos!

B. (:19) Focus on What Really Matters

1. Viewed Negatively

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,”

Gordon Fee: The various situations in which one lives either by nature or by choice ultimately belong to the category of the irrelevant, in terms of one's relationship with God. They obviously remain relevant in all kinds of other ways, all of which are irrelevant regarding Paul's ultimate concern here.

2. Viewed Positively – Serve Christ to the Max by Focused Obedience

“but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.”

Gil Rugh: Not talking here keeping the Mosaic law; Paul recognizes here that the law of Christ is now what is binding for the church. That is how he can say that circumcision is no longer important. **Gal. 5:6; 6:15**

Paul Gardner: Most commentators therefore understand this to be a more general reference to God's law, which is best expressed by Paul himself in **Galatians 5:14**: *“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”* (ESV). So, for example, **Hodge** quotes **Galatians 5:6** by saying that the only thing that counts is “faith expressing itself through love.” This, he says, is the same thing as keeping God's commands.

Richard Hays: His statement presupposes that the Law is to be read anew through a different hermeneutical lens, since Christ is the *telos* of the Law. (These ideas are more fully developed in Romans, especially **Rom. 2:25–29; 8:1–4; 10:1–13; 13:8–10**.) The Gentile Corinthians, perhaps already instructed about such matters by Paul, would have acknowledged the force of this argument. Coming to be a member of Christ's people had not required them to change their ethnic status by becoming Jewish proselytes.

C. (:20) General Principle Repeated for Emphasis

“Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.”

David Garland: To change one's condition, thinking that it might spruce up one's image before God or solidify one's footing in salvation, ascribes more significance to external circumstances than they deserve. Since human categories are not ultimate, Christians may live out God's calling in the social circumstances in which God's call first reached them. This admonition does not mean they must remain in these circumstances but that they recognize that these circumstances do not hinder their calling to live as Christians (**Fee** 1987: 309). Paul adds for emphasis the phrase *παρὰ θεῶν* (*para theō, before God*) for his final reiteration of the guiding principle in **7:24**. One can make changes in one's

estate, but nothing is to be gained “before God” from any attempt to upgrade one’s standing with God through these changes. Such a move implies that God’s call was somehow deficient and that salvation is something they need to achieve by dint of their own powers. Paul is not sanctifying the status quo but challenging the illusions of those who think it wise to desexualize their marriage relationship, to attempt to become celibate without the gift of celibacy, to divorce their spouses, and to laud such changes as a higher calling.

Gordon Fee: Two Illustrations:

A. First illustration: circumcision (18–20)

1. To the circumcised: do not change (18a)
2. To the uncircumcised: do not change (18b)
Reason: Neither counts (19)
Conclusion: Stay in your “calling” (20)

B. Second illustration: slavery (21–24)

1. To the slave: do not be concerned (21a)
Exception: If granted, make use of freedom (21b)
Reason:
 - (1) to slave: one is Christ’s freed person (22a)
 - (2) to free person: one is Christ’s slave (22b)—Additional theological reason (23)
Conclusion: Stay in your “calling” with God (24)

III. (:21-24) CASE STUDY #2: ECONOMIC, OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY

A. (:21-22) Don’t Despise Your Calling

1. Called as a Slave Man

“Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman;”

2. Called as a Free Man

“likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave.”

John Piper: He is saying that in the gospel there is an antidote for despair in menial jobs and an antidote for pride in highly esteemed jobs.

Gordon Fee: Paul now moves to a second supporting illustration, which in general is structured like the former. It begins with a word to the slave in the form of a question, followed by a command; and this is followed by a theological reason in support of the command.

B. (:23) Focus on What Really Matters

1. Viewed Positively – Serve Christ to the Max as one who has been redeemed

from bondage to sin
“*You were bought with a price;*”

2. Viewed Negatively
“*do not become slaves of men.*”

John MacArthur: Here Paul does not mean physical slavery but spiritual slavery. He is speaking of becoming slaves of the ways of men, the ways of the world, the ways of the flesh. That is the slavery into which many of the Corinthian believers had fallen, the slavery that caused their divisions and strife and their immaturity and immorality. . . . God allows us to be where we are and to stay where we are for a purpose. Conversion is not the signal for a person to leave his social condition, his marriage or his singleness, his human master, or his other circumstances. We are to leave sin and anything that encourages sin; but otherwise we are to stay where we are until God moves us.

Craig Blomberg: It is worth recalling that slavery in ancient Rome did not always resemble the institution we know from the history of the Southern United States in the 1800s. To be sure there were cruel masters, but at times some slaves lived more like the indentured servants of wealthy families in medieval Europe. Others were government officials, teachers, traders, or artists. Unlike slaves in the American South, many were able to buy their own freedom; and many who could, chose not to, preferring instead the security of their patrons to the vagaries of freedom. Still, Paul knows that owning humans as property fundamentally contradicts their status in Christ (cf. **Philem. 10–16**), and he reminds all believers not to revert to physical or spiritual slavery, from which Christ’s atonement was intended to save them (v. **23**).

C. (:24) General Principle Repeated for Emphasis
“*Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*”

Robert Gundry: “*Alongside God*” indicates that God himself stands with a believer in whatever state the believer found himself at the time God called him to salvation. Not bad company! So with the exception of slaves, it’s quite satisfactory, indeed required, to stay in that class. Though Christian slaves are to take an opportunity for freedom, they aren’t to revolt; and though within a church the barriers of class are to be broken down by common consent (see **Galatians 3:28**), in the world at large a forcible tearing down of such barriers by Christians would discredit the gospel. Stay put, then.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some temptations we face regarding contentment with our outward circumstances? How do we handle that struggle for contentment?

2) Are we always comparing how the Lord is working in our life to how the Lord

seems to be working in someone else's situation? Are we jealous for their circumstances?

3) What commandments of God require more focus from us? What distracts us from giving our full attention to obedience to God's commands?

4) What are we doing to maximize our service for the Lord Jesus who bought us for Himself with His own precious blood on the cross?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Obedience to God matters more than one's social condition.

I. Be Content in Your Assignment from the Lord (7:17).

II. Be Content in Your Conditions in the Lord (7:18-22).

III. Be Content in Your Relationship with the Lord (7:23-24).

Gordon Fee: Since the theme of "calling" is central to the argument, it may be helpful to outline it in advance:

1. The concept of call is first of all a way of describing Christian conversion. God calls people to be "*in Christ*" (1:9).

2. That call came to a person in a given social setting. This is the clear emphasis in all the verbs in this passage, especially as it is associated with various social options (vv. 18 [twice], 21, 22 [twice]).

3. These two realities are pressed theologically in various ways:

a. God's call to Christ that comes in these various settings renders the settings themselves altogether irrelevant (vv. 18-19, 22).

b. Because of this, change is not necessary; indeed, a person may live out their Christian life in whatever setting that call took place.

c. On the other hand, precisely because the settings are irrelevant, if change does take place, that too is irrelevant. What one is not to do is to seek change as though it had religious significance, which it does not.

d. Although Paul comes very close to seeing the setting in which one is called as "calling" itself, he never quite makes that jump. At most "calling" refers to the circumstances in which one's coming to Christ took place. Only in that sense does the English word "vocation" apply, which has to do not with what one does, but with one's faithfully serving Christ in whatever situation a person was at the time of their "call" to become one of Christ's disciples.

John Piper: What Paul was doing was showing that obedience to the commands of God is so much more important than any cultural distinctives, that the mere changing these distinctives should be of no importance whatever to the Christian. In other words, don't

make such a big deal out of whether you are circumcised or not, or whether you are white or black or red or Swedish. But instead make obedience a big deal; make the whole aim of your life to obey the moral law of God. Then and only then may circumcision (as Paul implies in **Rom. 2:25**) and other cultural distinctives become beautiful, in a very secondary and derivative way as expressions of the obedience of faith. In a word, the application of Paul's principle to cultural distinctives is this: Don't fret and don't boast about your present state of cultural distinctives; they are of little importance to God compared to whether you are devoting yourself, soul and mind and body, to obeying his commandments, which are all fulfilled in this: "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" (**Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14**). . .

The real contrast, it seems to me, should be expressed as: "don't let your slavery make you anxious, but instead use it." Use it to obey Christ and thus "*adorn the doctrine of our great God and Savior*" (**Titus 2:10**). . . . What matters in life and in eternal life is staying close to God and enjoying his presence. What matters is not whether our job is high or low in man's eyes. What matters is whether we are being encouraged and humbled by the presence of God.

Putting the two applications of Paul's principle together, the teaching seems to be this: Obeying the commands of God (v. 19) and enjoying his presence (v. 24) are so vastly more important than what your culture or your job is that you should feel no compulsion to change your position. You should not be driven from one by fear or despair, nor allured to the other by wealth or pride. You should be able to say to your position, "Never mind. You are not my life. My life is to obey God and enjoy his presence."

His concern is not to condemn job changes, but to teach that you can have fulfillment in Christ whatever your job is. This is a very unfashionable teaching in contemporary western society, because it cuts the nerve of worldly ambition. . . . This text implies that the job you now have, as long as you are there, is God's assignment to you. **Verse 17** says, "*Let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him.*" God is sovereign. It is no accident that you are where you are.

Charles Hodge: This of course is not intended to prohibit a man's endeavoring to better his condition. If he is a laborer when converted, he is not required to always remain a laborer. The meaning of the apostle evidently is, that no man should desire to change his status in life simply because he had become a Christian; as though he could not be a Christian and yet remain as he was. The Gospel is just as well suited to men in one vocation as in another, and its blessings can be enjoyed in all their fullness equally in any condition of life."

Steve Zeisler: The general principle which Paul is seeking to apply is this: **people do not have to change their circumstances in order to be happy**. It is not due to a mistake that you find yourself in your present circumstances. God knows your situation, and he is not calling upon you to change your circumstances in order to bless you.

Fulfillment in life, freedom in Christ, personal integration, growth and confidence do not depend on whether you are married or not. It doesn't matter whether we have the right job, whether we're making enough money, whether we have the right friends or not. . .

"*Do not become slaves of men,*" is Paul's powerful word of advice. This is what happens—you become a slave--when you give to somebody the power to make you happy or unhappy. If fulfillment for you comes only when your boss promotes you, then you have become a slave of men. If you set your sights on marriage to a particular person, and if that determines your fulfillment or lack of it, you have become a slave of men.

John MacArthur: Christians should willingly accept the situation into which God has placed them and be content to serve Him there. It is a principle against which human nature rebels, and Paul states it three times in these 8 verses, so that his readers could not miss his point. We should not be preoccupied with changing our outward circumstances. . .

The unity of the church at Corinth was seriously fractured. Not only were there numerous parties and factions, but some groups were encouraging those with the gift of celibacy to get married, while other groups were encouraging those who were married to become celibate. Slaves were chafing under their bondage and were trying to find spiritual justification for demanding freedom. Although the gospel is the antithesis of the standards and values of the world, it does not disdain or seek to destroy governments, societies, or families. Rather where the gospel is believed and obeyed, some of the most obvious by-products are better government, better societies, and better families.

But Christians can be Christians in a dictatorship, a democracy, or even under anarchy. We can be Christians whether we are man, woman, child, married, single, divorced, Jew, Gentile, slave, or free. We can be Christians in Russia or the United States, in Cuba or China, in France or Japan. Whatever we are and wherever we are, we can be Christians.

Gil Rugh: What Need Not Change as a Believer

Once someone becomes saved and has a heart to serve the Lord, all sorts of questions tend to arise:

- Should I quit my job and go into the ministry? No
- Should I abstain from sexual relations in my marriage? No
- Should I divorce my unsaved spouse? No
- Should I become circumcised like the Jews? No
- Should I change something in my physical and social circumstances?

The immediate point of the context is when you get saved that doesn't mean that there should necessarily be any change in your marriage relationship. ("If I had known the Lord before, I would never have married this person . . .")

God has been working in your life all along – even before your conversion. When God sovereignly called you, it was in the context of physical circumstances that He had orchestrated. Certain things are inconsistent with being a child of God; but most of our physical circumstances can continue on without negatively impacting our spiritual relationship.

Changing your outward circumstances won't improve your spiritual relationship with God. Submission to the will of God is what is important. These physical matters are important to the world but should not shape our thinking in terms of our relationship with our God.

Thomas Leake: Eyes on Christ = Lasting Contentment (7:17-40)

Introduction: Testimony of Paul in Philippians: “*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself*”

Refers to your marriage, your job, your social and economic status, the size of your house, the zestiness of your car, etc.

Rom. 8:28; Our goal = Become more Christlike; serve Him more fully; keep focused on Christ

2 Broad Areas of Contentment:

I. In Our Social Status (:17-24)

Don't let your focus be on improving your status in this world;

What are the sinful motives behind being so driven and ambitious in a worldly sense?

Paul said he had *learned* to be content ... and so can we.

Cf. country music song: Little Bitty by **Alan Jackson**:

Well, it's alright to be little bitty
Little hometown or a big old city
Might as well share, might as well smile
Life goes on for a little bitty while

This life will be over quickly; live passionately right now right where God has placed you;

Don't live *under* your circumstances

Ps. 42:5; 2 Cor. 12:10; Heb. 13:5-6

II. In Our Marital Status (:25-40)

Paul applying the same wisdom and the same principles to virgins and widows;

“*Good to remain as you are*”

Paul gives even more reasons in these cases

- in view of the present distress (could refer to a number of things)
- marriage brings a certain amount of its own “trouble”
 Marriage doesn't solve all your problems, just brings new problems
- the form of this world is passing away – new age rapidly approaching
 Don't get your mindset all wrapped around the things of this world

Conclusion: Are you a **discontent** person? Wishing you had different outward circumstances? Refocus on the greatness of the person of Christ; He is our lot; our

sufficiency; my portion forever.

Ps. 16:11; 84:11-12

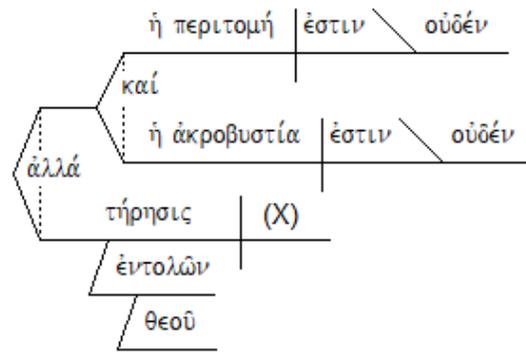
God can satisfy me; but I must trust in Him.

Halloran: *“A Prayer for Contentment”*

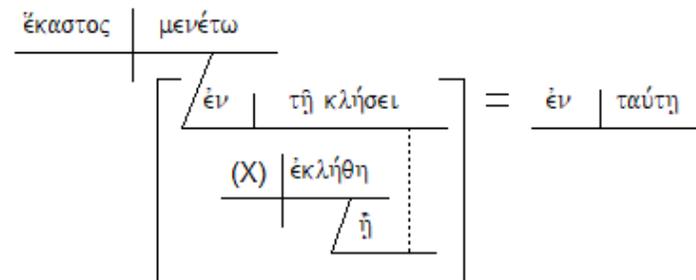
Oh Lord, You are my shepherd and I should not be in want,
but so often I struggle to be content and do want;
forgetting that you have graciously provided me
with every spiritual blessing in Christ
and everything I need for life and godliness.
Thank you for often not giving me what I want
because my desires would draw my heart from being satisfied in You.
Help me to be content in You with what You have given me
and to not be focused on what my flesh wants
or what the world tells me I should have.
Protect me from coveting possessions or people,
talent or influence, relationships or prestige.
Keep my heart from being anxious for what I don't have
and make me thankful for the numerous gifts that You have already given.

According to Your Word and steadfast love,
fill me with the joy and satisfaction of contentment in Christ.
Help me learn to be content in any situation like Paul
and to quickly reject the idolatry that dwells beneath the surface of my coveting.
I ask you to continually bring to mind your faithful provision for all my needs,
that Christ died for the sin of coveting,
that in Christ I am free to be content and live righteously,
and that godliness with contentment is greater gain than pleasing my flesh.
And may I be humbled and changed by the ultimate example of contentment;
of Christ becoming poor in order that I could become rich,
and being content to go to the cross to fulfill the Father's will
to rescue a people for Himself who can be free from discontent
and zealous for good works.

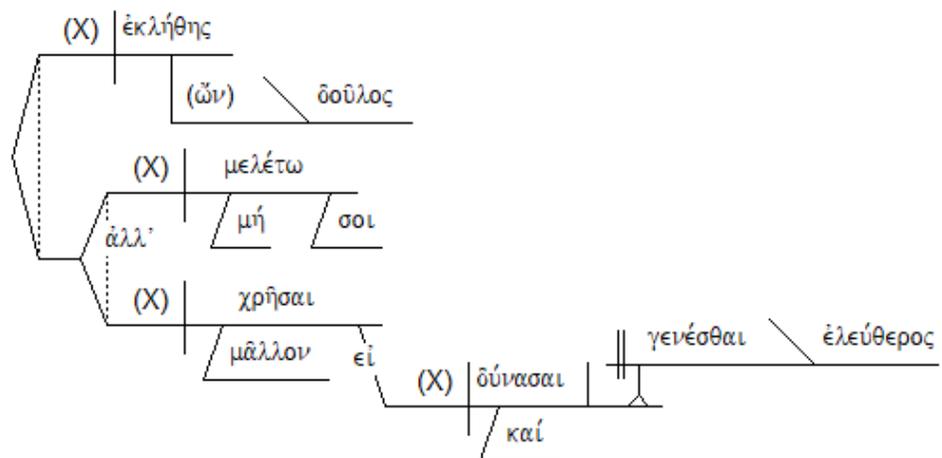
1Co 7:19



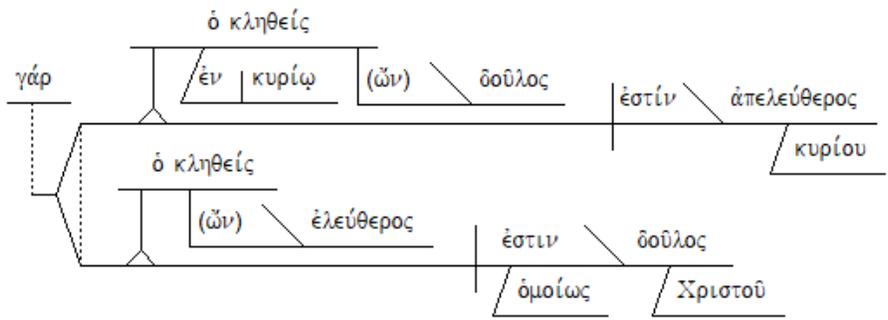
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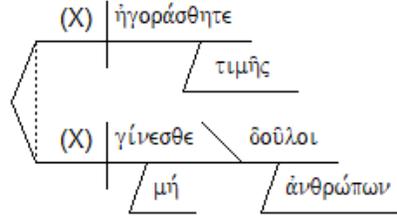
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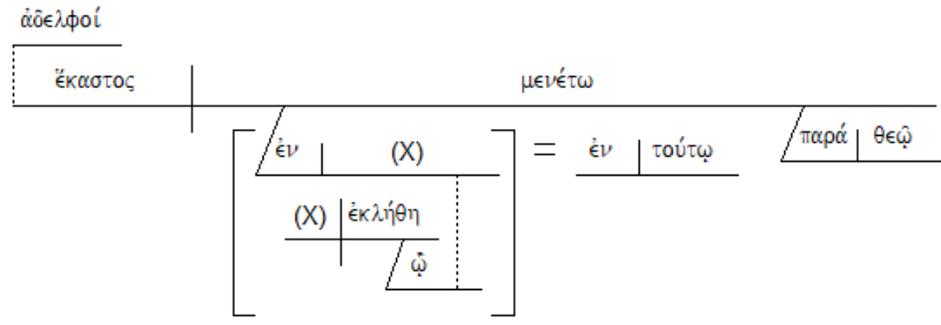
1Co 7:22



1Co 7:23



1Co 7:24



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7: 25-40

TITLE: WHO SHOULD MARRY? . . . WHO SHOULD STAY SINGLE?

BIG IDEA:

STAYING SINGLE HAS MUCH TO COMMEND ITSELF . . . BUT MARRIAGE IS STILL A GOOD OPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hays: It is notoriously difficult to determine from Paul's response exactly who the people were that the Corinthians designated as **virgins**, and what question the Corinthian letter may have posed about them. The following interpretation, which is supported by all major modern translations except JB, seems to make the best sense of the evidence: the virgins are **young women who are betrothed but not yet married** to men in the church. The question raised by the Corinthians is whether young people in this situation may go ahead and marry or whether as Christians they are now obliged to remain unmarried. Paul's answer to this question is completely consistent with the pattern we have seen in all the other cases in this chapter: it is better for them to remain as they are (in this case, unmarried), but if they choose to marry, that is no sin. The conclusion of the unit (**v. 38**) sums up Paul's position nicely: "*He who marries his fiancée [literally, "virgin"] does well; and he who refrains from marriage does better.*" The decision is left to the persons involved, with some encouragement from the apostle to stay unmarried if they are able to choose that course freely and decisively (**v. 37**). . .

Why should the unmarried remain unmarried? Paul offers two interrelated reasons: the present order of the world is going to pass away in the very near future, and marriage presents many distractions that may hinder service to the Lord.

Gordon Fee: The argument, then, is in three parts:

- (1) Paul begins with an opening statement (**vv. 25–28**), in which he picks up their slogan, agrees with it, and then qualifies it.
- (2) He follows this (**vv. 29–35**), offering two interrelated reasons for his preference for celibacy, neither of which is to be understood as an attempt—as the pneumatics are doing—to put a noose around their necks (**v. 35**).
- (3) Rather (**vv. 36–38**), the two options, to marry or to refrain, are both open to them. If one feels a compulsion to be married, so be it (**v. 36**); but if one is under no such compulsion, so much the better (**v. 37**). So then (**v. 38**), the one does well, and the other, especially in the light of present conditions (**v. 26**), does even better.

He concludes the whole discussion with a final word to the women (**vv. 39–40**), reminding them that they are bound to their one husband as long as he lives, but that on his decease they too have the same two options: to remarry (within the context of the

faith) or to stay as widows, of which the latter is preferable. But again, this is his opinion, wherein he also thinks he has the mind of the Lord

Paul Gardner: Paul addresses advantages of remaining unmarried, writing mainly with specific reference to those who have never been married (“*virgins*”). Though the advantages to being single are considerable, including the ability to be more committed to the affairs of the Lord, this does not mean that marriage is wrong. In the last two verses, Paul returns to talk of a widow (cf. 7:8), who, though free to marry, may be more blessed if she remains as she is (vv. 39–40). Paul’s goal is that each person should understand that “*undivided devotion to the Lord*” (v. 35) should guide these decisions and that such a stance benefits the whole church. . .

The Benefits of Remaining Unmarried (7:25–40)

1. Matters for the Unmarried (7:25–38)

- a. Living in the End Times Relativizes Marriage (7:25–31)
- b. The Unmarried Can Offer Undivided Devotion to the Lord (7:32–35)
- c. Consider Sexual Passions When Deciding Whether to Marry (7:36–38)

2. Matters for Widows (7:39–40)

(:25) PROLOGUE – LISTEN TO ME ON THIS SUBJECT

A. Topic: Responding to a Particular Question Regarding Virgins

“Now concerning virgins”

We must understand that Paul was asked a specific question or was addressing particular circumstances that faced the believers of his day in Corinth.

He starts out with his focus on the virgins . . . but then expands his answer since most of the same principles would apply to any unmarried parties – those who had been divorced, widows, etc.

Paul had been answering questions regarding sexual relations in marriage, regarding whether singleness or marriage was appropriate for different groups, and whether conversion requires a change in one’s outward physical circumstances. He now leaves the more general discussion of overall contentment to finish with his discussion of the single state vs. marriage.

Mark Taylor: The view taken here is that “*virgins*” refers to **betrothed young women of marriageable age** and that Paul directs his instructions primarily toward the men who took the lead in such matters. The question before Paul is what those currently engaged should do about marriage in light of the “*present crisis*” (7:26).

Gordon Fee: The view adopted here is that it was a term that the Corinthians used in referring to some young betrothed women who, along with their fiancés, were being pressured by the pneumatics and were now themselves wondering whether to go through with the marriage. Paul’s response is basically from the man’s point of view

because it was the cultural norm for men to take the initiative in all such matters. This assumes the influence of Roman culture, since by the time of the early Empire it was common for men to act on their own behalf, without the father acting as *patria potestas* as in earlier days. This view has the distinct advantage of seeing both crucial passages, one at the beginning and the other at the end (vv. 27–28 and 36–38), as being addressed to the same man, without the need of changing either topics or persons addressed.

B. Tone: Sanctified Guidance vs Authoritative Command

“I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.”

The Lord did not provide teaching in this area and Paul is not trying to command any particular practice. He is led by the Spirit to provide principles that require application depending on the situation.

SIX CLARIFICATIONS ABOUT GETTING MARRIED VS REMAINING SINGLE (OR SIX REASONS FAVORING REMAINING SINGLE)

(Largely following outline of [Dr. John MacArthur](#) in this section)

I. (:26-28A) CLARIFICATION #1: PERILOUS TIMES WOULD FAVOR REMAINING SINGLE

A. Basis for Paul’s Argument: Pressure of Immediate Circumstances

“I think then that this is good in view of the present distress,”

Ray Stedman: My own view is that because the apostle is aware of the fact that he is writing Scripture -- that it is for all Christians in all times, as he infers in some of his letters -- that he is not talking about any particular, immediate crisis then, but he is referring to the returning crisis that every generation of Christians have to face. Remember in **Second Timothy** the apostle says to his son in the faith, *“that in the last days perilous times shall come,”* (2 Tim 3:1 KJV). I think it is a mistake to read that as though he meant *“in these last days,”* or *“in the last days”* as a reference only to the time preceding the return of Christ. Actually the church is always living in *“these last days.”* They stretch from the first coming of Christ to his second return, as **Hebrews 1** makes clear where it says, *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,”* (**Heb 1:1-2a** KJV). Therefore, this is a reference to what Paul thinks of as continuing, returning cycles of trouble.

Richard Hays: In light of this point, we may reconsider the meaning of v. 26: *“I think that, in view of the present necessity, it is well for you to remain as you are”* (author’s translation). The italicized phrase is usually understood to refer to the **eschatological sufferings** that Paul expects to come upon the church. Another meaning, however, fits the context better. The translation *“impending crisis”* (NRSV) is simply wrong: the participle *enest san* refers to present, not future, events (cf. **3:22**, where the same word

refers to “*things present*” in contrast to “*things to come*”). The more difficult question concerns the meaning of the noun *anagk*. This is usually interpreted to refer to some sort of suffering or (as in NRSV) “*crisis*.” The ordinary meaning of the word, however, is “*necessity*” or “*urgency*.” An illuminating illustration is given by Paul’s use of the same word just a few paragraphs later: “[*N*]ecessity [*anagk*] is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I do not preach the gospel!” (9:16, KJV). In light of this usage, it seems probable that the “*present necessity*” to which he refers in 7:26 is the **urgent imperative of proclaiming the gospel and doing the work of the Lord in the short time that remains**. This interpretation links verse 26 with verses 32–35 and explains more clearly why Paul regards celibacy as preferable to marriage: It frees the time and attention and energy of believers for the **crucial work that is to be done in the precious short time before the parousia**.

Craig Blomberg: Paul knows that after Christ’s first coming, his second coming could take place very soon (“*the time is short*” -- v. 29a). This does not mean that Paul had set any dates or necessarily expected the Lord to return within his lifetime. Rather he, like the rest of the New Testament writers, recognized what **C. E. B. Cranfield** has phrased so aptly, that

the **Parousia** is near ... not in the sense that it must necessarily occur within a few months or years, but in the sense that it may occur at any moment and in the sense that, since the decisive event of history has already taken place in the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, all subsequent history is a kind of epilogue, necessarily in a real sense short, even though it may last a very long time.

All Christians should therefore sense an **urgency** to serving the Lord, caused by the uncertainty of the time of the end, after which point it will no longer be possible to win any more people to Christ or to disciple them to maturity. Paul is well aware that distractions of marriage may temper this urgency. So those who choose to wed must not become so preoccupied with their families that they can no longer effectively serve Christ (v. 29b). The same is true with other normal human activities—celebrations and wakes, commerce and shopping (vv. 30–31). All are legitimate endeavors, but all remain fleeting. The Christian should therefore be less involved in the affairs of this world than the non-Christian.

B. Basic Conviction -- Maintain the Status Quo (Applies to everyone)

1. Categorical Judgment

“that it is good for a man to remain as he is.”

Immediate group in view was the single man – this is the emphasis

2. Application to both Married and Unmarried –

but Paul gives a word to both

a. Application to Married – Stay Married

“Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released.”

- b. Application to Unmarried – Don't Pursue Marriage
"Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife?"

C. Balancing Perspective: Getting Married is a Valid Option

*"But if you marry, you have not sinned;
and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned."*

II. (:28B) CLARIFICATION #2: PRESSURES OF MARRIAGE WOULD FAVOR REMAINING SINGLE

A. Caution of Inevitable Pressures

"Yet such will have trouble in this life,"

B. Compassion of Pastoral Heart

"and I am trying to spare you."

III. (:29-31) CLARIFICATION #3: PASSING OF THE WORLD WOULD FAVOR REMAINING SINGLE

Anthony Thiselton: The seven verses that follow (vv. 29-35) focus on the single theme of the need **to avoid whatever distracts the Christian from single-minded service of the Lord**. This may take the form of preoccupations about possessions, property, business, and all that married responsibilities entail for maintaining the household in decent living conditions (vv. 30-31); or general anxieties about relationships, including anxiety about ... how to please his wife (vv. 32-33); and anything that causes the Christian to be pulled in two directions (v. 34). Paul applies this mutually: the woman who has become married is anxious about the affairs of the world, how she is to please her husband (v. 34b).

A. Priority of Serving the Lord – Given the Short Window of Opportunity

"But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened,"

Charles Hodge: It is the design of God in allowing us but a brief period in this world, or in this state, that we should set lightly by all earthly things;

B. 5 Applications – Don't be Distracted from Serving the Lord by:

1. Marriage

"so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;"

2. Misery

"and those who weep, as though they did not weep;"

3. Merriment

“and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice;”

4. Material Possessions

“and those who buy, as though they did not possess;”

5. Mundane Pursuits

“and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it;”

C. Reason for Such Urgency

“for the form of this world is passing away.”

Daniel Akin: Cultivate the Proper Perspective –

Proper priorities will grow out of the proper perspective, seeing all of life with kingdom eyes. Paul writes, “[*T*]his world in its current form is passing away.” The Message reads, “[*T*]his world as you see it is fading away.” This world is not our home. This world is not our home because we will die. This world is not our home because it will die, too. It will pass away. We should long for an eternal home, a new heaven and new earth, which will arrive in God’s timing (**Rev 21–22**). We are to pine for that “*kingdom that cannot be shaken*” (**Heb 12:28**). In **Colossians 3:1–2** Paul says, “*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.*” Having been transformed by the gospel, we should have **new affections, desires, and passions**. This world thus loses its attraction. It no longer controls us. Christ does. It no longer sets our agendas. Christ does. The Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom will last forever. This world and its stuff will not. Each of us should seek to become heavenly minded, for that will lead to us accomplishing the most earthly good.

IV. (:32-35) CLARIFICATION #4: PREOCCUPATIONS OF MARRIAGE WOULD FAVOR REMAINING SINGLE

A. The Goal = Undistracted Devotion to the Lord

“But I want you to be free from concern.”

B. The Reality = Marriage Complicates the Situation

1. Case of the Single Person

“One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;”

2. Case of the Married Person

“but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided.”

Anthony Thiselton: The only “mixed” marriages that Paul contemplates are existing marriages in which one partner, but not the other, comes to Christian faith. Deliberately to marry someone who did not endorse or understand a Christian’s relationship with

Christ would indeed be to exacerbate being pulled in two directions (v. 34).

3. Case of the Single Person

“The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit;”

4. Case of the Married Person

“but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.”

C. The Motivation Behind This Instruction = to Promote the Goal

“This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.”

V. (:36-38) CLARIFICATION #5: PERSONAL CONVICTION MAY FAVOR EITHER SINGLENES OR MARRIAGE

A. The Father May Choose to Marry Off His Virgin Daughter

“But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.”

B. The Father Does Well to Keep His Virgin Daughter

“But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.”

C. Both Options are Good . . . But Singleness Still has More to Commend It

“So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.”

VI. (:39-40) CLARIFICATION #6: PERSEVERANCE IN THE STATUS QUO IS WHAT PAUL RECOMMENDS FOR OLDER WIDOWS

Craig Blomberg: Verses 39–40 round out the chapter by reaffirming **monogamy as a lifelong commitment**. These verses also contain the only explicit reference to remarriage in this chapter. Christian widows and, by implication, widowers are free to remarry, so long as they marry fellow believers. As in **verse 8**, Paul reiterates his preference for the single life but will not absolutize it. *“I think that I too have the Spirit of God”* (v. 40b) does not reflect any doubt on Paul’s part but represents a slightly sarcastic aside to the Corinthians, who felt that only they had attained true spiritual insight.

Mark Taylor: Since Paul has already addressed “widows” in 7:8, he does not seem to be addressing them once again as a distinct group. Even though his instruction takes into

account the widow and her freedom to remarry, it appears that Paul is still on the topic of the “ *betrothed virgins,*” reminding them that once married a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. In other words, Paul speaks to the issue of the **permanence of marriage**, both at the beginning and end of the unit (7:25–40; cf. 7:10–11), which is another strong consideration for decision-making for those contemplating marriage. If the husband dies, then the woman is free to marry whomever she wishes, but “*he must belong to the Lord.*” Paul’s judgment, however, is that she will be happier if she remains single. Thus, this concluding paragraph draws the discussion of **chap. 7** to a close by reiterating the permanence of the marriage bond and by stating the guiding principle of the chapter one final time, “*to remain as you are.*”

A. Permanence of Marriage Must be Honored

“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives”

B. Freedom to Remarry in Certain Situations

“but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes,”

C. Caveat Regarding Marriage for Any Believer – Must be to another Believer

“only in the Lord”

D. Status Quo Has Much to Commend Itself

*“But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is;
and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.”*

Ray Stedman: He is obviously thinking of an older woman, a widow whose husband has died, who is left alone, and facing the declining years of her life. She misses the companionship, she misses the fellowship of her mate, and, in the emptiness of her life, she is tempted to plunge back into marriage just for companionship alone. "Now," Paul says, "be careful there." That is an emotional pressure and many succumb to it without any thought about what the alternatives might be. But, he says, if she does succumb it is all right; it is not a sin to remarry as long as it is to a Christian, someone "*in the Lord*" -- whom she can share her faith and life with -- "*But in my judgment she is happier if she remains unmarried.*"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the force of inspiration in this passage since Paul is not speaking a *command of the Lord* but his “*opinion*”?
- 2) How does our cultural situation today and its differences from Paul’s situation impact the application of this section to us today?
- 3) Are we truly living in light of the fact that *the form of this world is passing away*?

4) Should fathers today be taking more initiative and responsibility for the marriage decisions of their daughters?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Married couples and singles should aim to live in ways pleasing to God and work for his kingdom, yet singles have a special opportunity to serve God and avoid many earthly difficulties.

I. The Spiritual Single Can Expect Less Distress (7:25-28).

- A. Singleness can be a good life (7:26).
- B. Singleness can avoid troubles in this life (7:27-28).

II. The Spiritual Single Can Encounter Fewer Distractions (7:29-31).

- A. Cultivate the proper priorities (7:29-31).
- B. Cultivate the proper perspective (7:31).

III. The Spiritual Single Can Enjoy Greater Devotion (7:32-35).

- A. He or she is freed from many worldly anxieties (7:32).
- B. His or her interest can remain undivided (7:33-35).

IV. The Spiritual Single Can Exercise a Better Decision (7:36-40).

- A. Getting married is not sinful (7:36).
- B. Remaining single can be even better (7:37-38).
- C. Getting remarried must be in the Lord (7:39).
- D. Remaining single can result in being happier (7:40).

David Garland: Paul offers his maxim that **it is best to remain as you are**. Therefore, do not break a betrothal; do not seek a wife. He insists, however, that choosing marriage is no sin (7:28, 36), although he thinks it inadvisable for four reasons:

1. The death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit mean that the new age has invaded the present. Christians can evaluate their choices in life from the perspective of the end that has come so near (7:29-31). An end-time awareness should sharpen the focus of their decisions in the mundane matters of this world.
2. Marriage brings trouble in the flesh (7:28).
3. Marriage brings responsibilities that divide a person's heart at a time when singleness of purpose is most needed (7:32-35). Preoccupation with the things of this world will result in a lack of preparedness for the world to come. The unmarried who devote themselves fully to the Lord have a practical advantage.
4. The form of this world, with its systems, values, and statuses, is passing off the stage. Everything belonging to this world is lame-duck, marriage included. Those who marry must realize that earthly relationships will be transformed in the coming kingdom (7:29, 31).

Ray Stedman: In this section of First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul has already discussed the place of sex in marriage and the right and wrong of divorce. Now, beginning with **Verse 25** of **Chapter 7**, we come to a section addressed to the unmarried that sets forth both the advantages and the pressures of the single life:

Verses 26-35 set forth three advantages of singleness; and then **Verses 36-40** give us the pressures of single life.

Robert Deffinbaugh: Undistracted Devotion

In our text, Paul seeks to help his readers minimize the distractions which so easily focus our hearts and minds on earthly things, rather than on things eternal. Specifically, Paul wants each of his readers to view their marital status and ambitions in the light of eternity. . .

Christians can be assured of facing trouble in this life. Marriage and a family only multiplies the troubles one may expect; thus those who are single should consider the option of remaining just as they are. If they choose to marry, they have not sinned, but they have increased their troubles in this life. **Mark Twain** once said something like this: “It’s easier to stay out than to get out.” Paul does not even give us a way out of marriage, but he does say that while “getting out” is not an option, “staying out” is. Paul’s opponents, the ascetics, forbid marriage (**1 Timothy 4:3**); Paul simply encourages the saints to seriously consider the single life as a lifestyle, for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel. . .

We know that God “*richly supplies us with all things to enjoy*” (**1 Timothy 6:17**). We also know that while some things the world offers to us are lawful, all of these are not profitable (**1 Corinthians 6:12**). Some may hinder the gospel or the spiritual walk of a fellow-believer. Some may be detrimental to our walk. This means that we should not make use of everything which the world offers to let us use. We should use this world thoughtfully and selectively.

The unbeliever’s outlook is vastly different. It is summed up by the beer commercial: “You only go around once, so grab all the gusto you can get.” Christians know they “go around” in this life only for a short time, and that we “go around” the next life for all eternity. Because everything this world offers to us does not contribute to the kingdom of God, we choose not to grab all the gusto we can get. We choose not to fully use all the world offers. This is the reason Paul later informs the Corinthians of those rights and liberties he has chosen not to use. . .

You will note from these two translations that biblical scholars interpret Paul’s words in **verses 36-38** in two distinct ways. The problem we face is how to understand Paul’s words “*his virgin*.” The NASB translators understand Paul to be referring to a father’s virgin daughter, while the translators of the NIV believe Paul is speaking to a young man who is engaged to be married to a virgin. In the East, often the parents choose the marriage partner for their child, and so one can mentally picture a father reading what

Paul has written and responding, “Paul, what should I as a father of a young woman do? Should I heed your words by refusing to let my daughter marry? What if she is already engaged?” The young Christian Corinthian man who has already become engaged before Paul’s letter arrives might ask, “Should I go ahead and get married, or should I break my commitment to marry?”

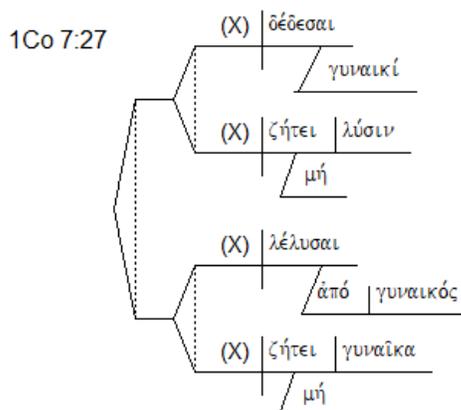
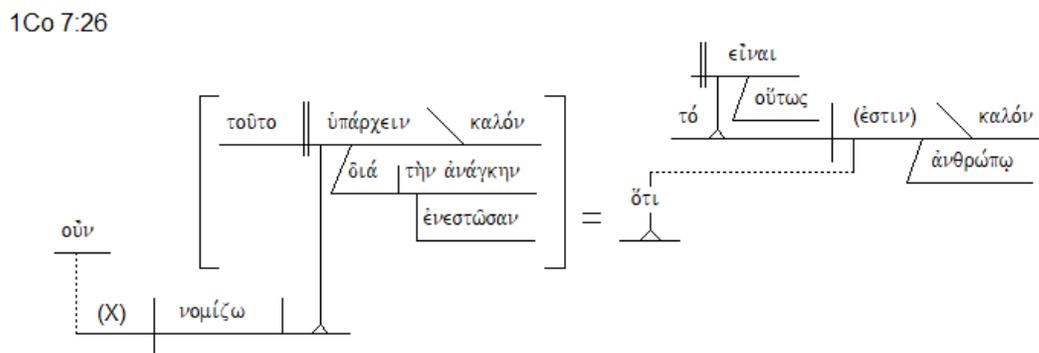
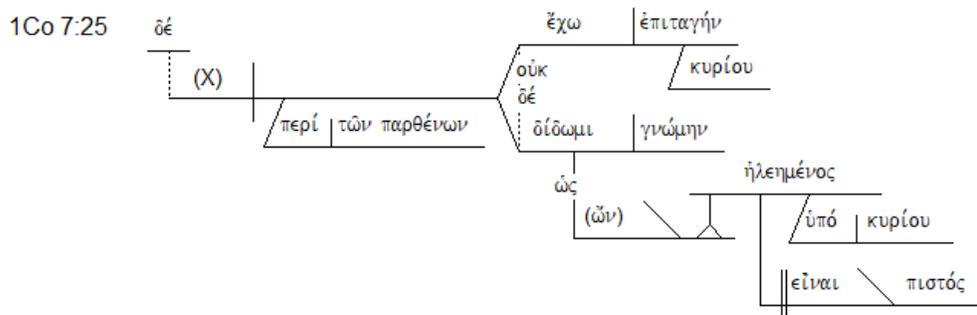
In either case, Paul’s response is essentially the same as his teaching to those who have not committed themselves to another for marriage: “If you are able to take the heat for standing firm in your convictions not to marry your daughter to another, then do so; if not, do not agonize about it. It is not a matter of sin, but simply a matter of “good” and “better.” The same answer is applied to the young man who is engaged to marry a young woman: “If you conclude that marriage is the proper course for your life, then don’t agonize over this, do it; you have not sinned in so doing. If, on the other hand, you are able to gracefully reverse your decision, and you have the will power to do so, then release yourself from this commitment and remain single. The one who marries does well; the one who does not marry does even better.” . . .

At the beginning of **chapter 7**, Paul seems to agree with the ascetics. In a sense, he does agree, for he goes on to extol the virtues of remaining single. But his reasons for doing so are so very different from those of the ascetics. The ascetics judge one’s spirituality by outward, external appearances. Paul calls for Christians to consider remaining single, so that we might serve God more devotedly and without distraction. Our decision about whether we should marry should not be made solely on the basis of what we are free to do, but on the basis of what course of action best enables us to serve God. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the time is short, and the days are evil. Let us make those choices which best advance the gospel and which enable us to serve God wholeheartedly.

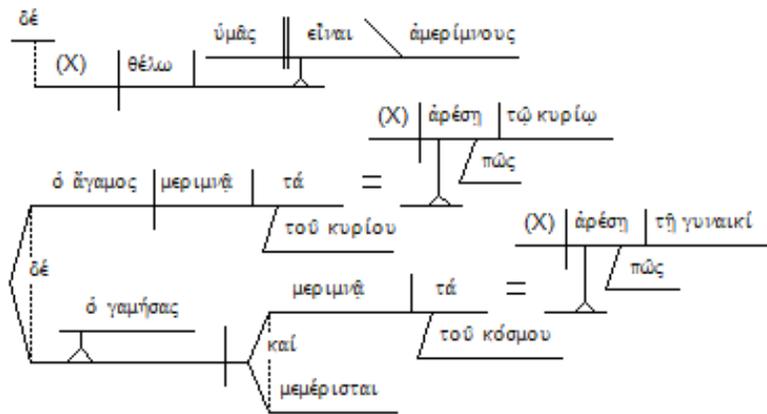
Paul Gardner: What Paul writes about the “*time*” is indeed driven by an **eschatological frame of reference** in which the Christ has come and will come. Paul works with a view of history that sees these two points in history as enclosing an “*age*.” He refers to this in 10:11 where he speaks of “*us, upon whom the end of the ages has come.*” For Paul, this age is the last period of history for this world as it now exists, and its present form is passing away (v. 31). The age that began with Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation will come to an end at his “*coming*” (cf. 15:24). It is this “*time*” that has been “*shortened*” (συστέλλω), which may simply mean that it is short. However, the word can also mean “*shortened*” in the sense of “*limited.*” Thus Paul may have in mind that God has deliberately restricted the time “*for the sake of the elect*” to spare them the worst of a period of extreme sufferings (**Mark 13:20**; though note the different word for “*shorten*”—κολοβόω). Or it may mean that it is “*shortened*” in the sense that because of Christ it is now known that the end will come and so Christians must live in the light of this fact. **Thiselton**, building on Cullmann, suggests that “*the time*” (καιρός) is a “*critical time,*” not necessarily to be limited only to some particular distress or affliction, such as a famine, but is a general “**time of opportunity**” that Christians must take advantage of. In the light of the emphasis on a person following his or her “*calling,*” this makes good sense of the chapter.

Here we take the view that Paul believes God has deliberately limited or shortened this time, in line with the Lord’s teaching, and that therefore **the time is one of special opportunity and challenge**. What Paul builds from this, though, in no way reflects what we might today call “short-termism.” Paul is not suggesting the suspension of normal human activity because the end may come tomorrow. Even though all Christians live in anticipation of that coming day (the letter ends in **16:22** with the Aramaic prayer *marana tha* [“come, Lord!”]), Paul asks that such life activity now be framed in an appropriate manner and lived with **priorities appropriate to gospel people** who have been called by God. As Christians come to understand that this age will pass away (**7:31**), so they are to gain a certain urgent perspective on life’s priorities in this age. Christ is Lord. He is to be followed as a matter of priority over everything else in life.

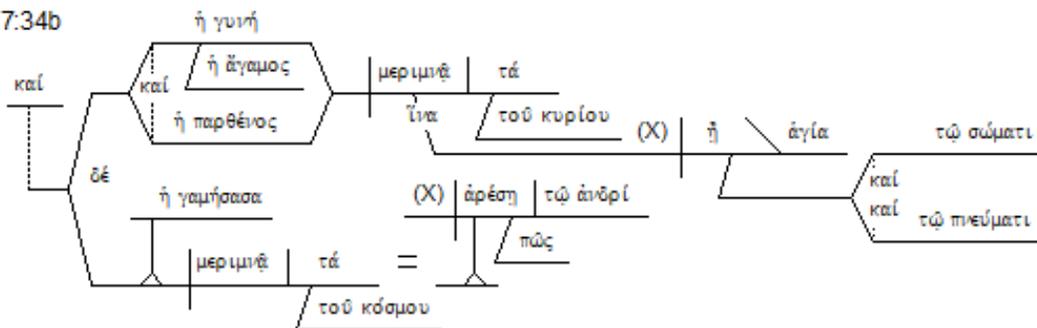
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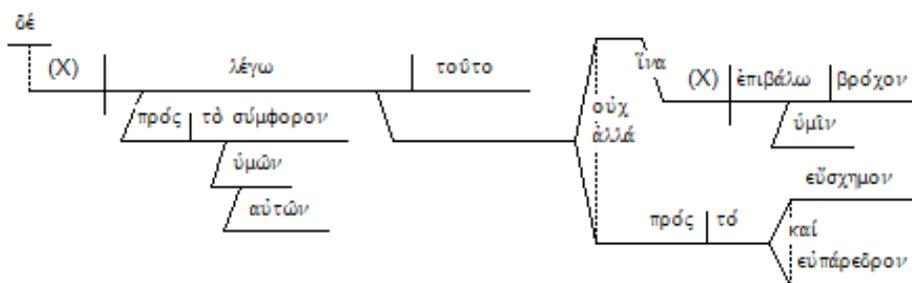
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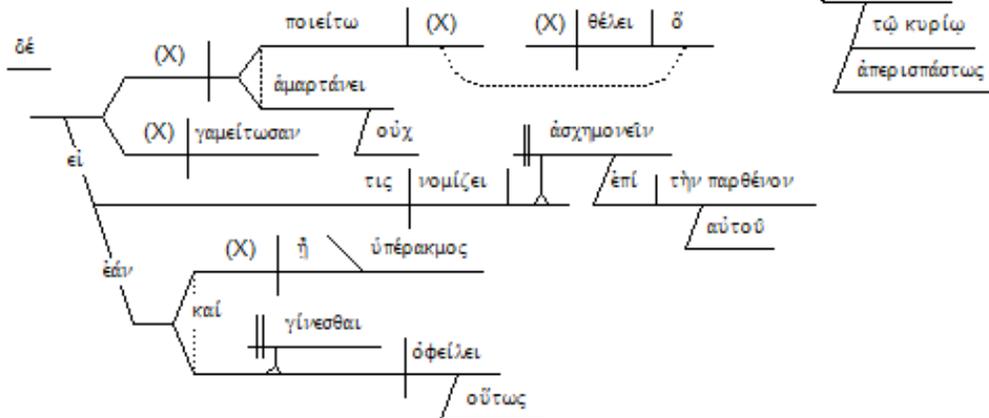
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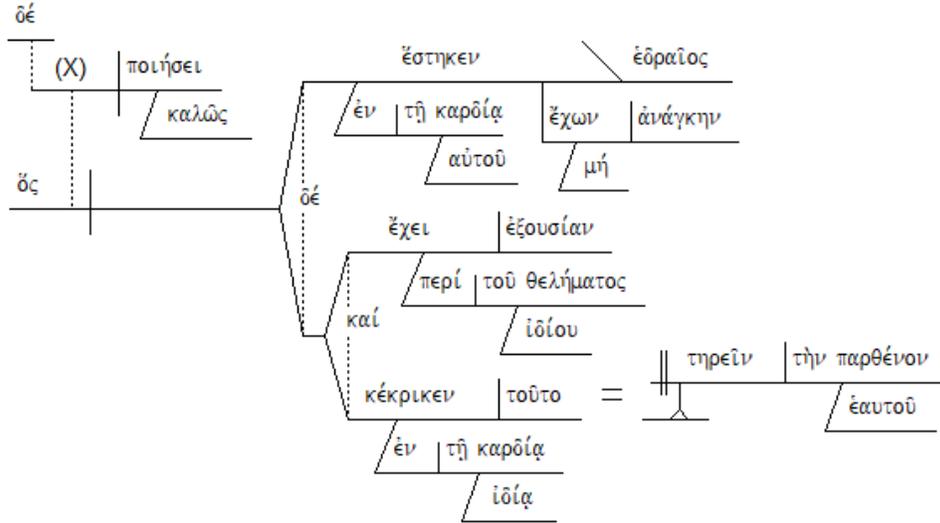
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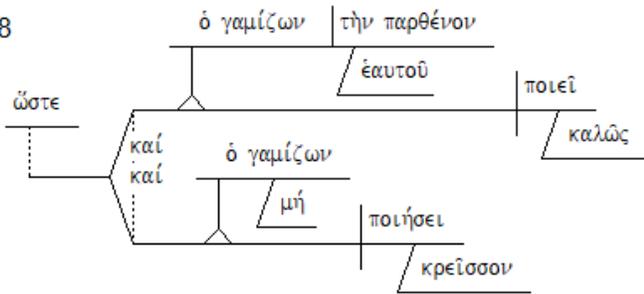
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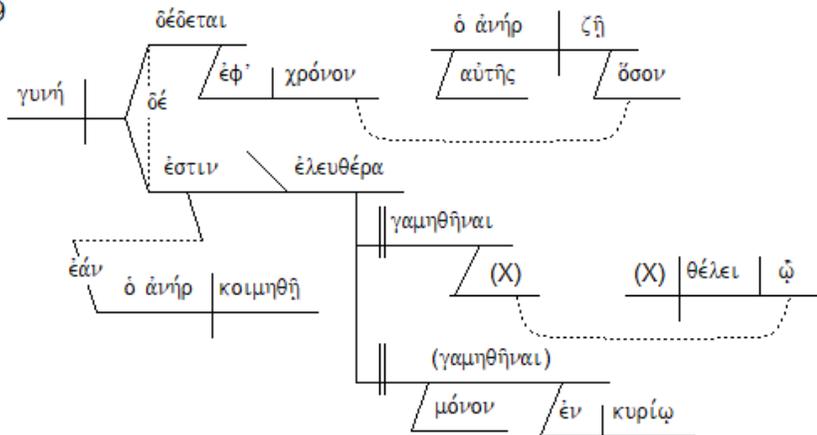
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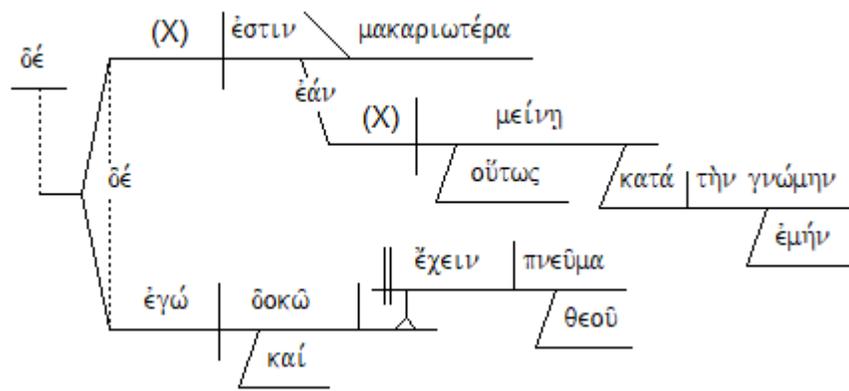
1Co 7:38



1Co 7:39



1Co 7:40



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

TITLE: CHRISTIAN LIBERTY MUST NOT VIOLATE CHRISTIAN LOVE

BIG IDEA:

THE CONTROLLING FACTOR IN OUR DECISION MAKING REGARDING DEBATABLE AREAS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT MUST BE LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

These matters are sometimes called doubtful areas. They are specific issues of Christian conduct where believers debate whether it is appropriate or not to participate. The issues will vary by culture and by generation; but the principles regarding how to address them remain the same. In this chapter we must look beyond the particular area of controversy (“*Is it OK for Christians to eat meat offered to idols?*”) to glean the controlling principles that we must apply to our issues today. Paul is not talking about areas of doctrinal or theological controversy here – issues over which denominations have taken various stands. These are **practical areas of Christian living**. In our context of liberty-dominated thinking there don’t seem to be as many of these questionable issues as in past generations.

- Can Christians go trick-or-treating on Halloween?
- Is it OK for Christian teenagers to go to a school dance function?
- Can believers drink alcohol? What types? In what contexts?

But these issues, instead of staying small, can rise up to be very divisive in a church.

Robert Gundry: Now Paul proceeds to another topic that came up in the Corinthians’ letter to him (7:1). The topic has to do with the question whether Christians can eat foods that they know came from sacrifices to idols. Take meat especially. Parts of an animal sacrificed at a temple housing the idol of a god were burned in honor of the god. The priests of the temple got some of the meat for their own consumption. The offerer got some for himself, his family, and guests to eat in the temple (more exactly, in a dining room adjacent to the temple) or at home. Any remaining meat was put up for sale to the general public. You could be sure that meat eaten in the temple had come from an animal sacrificed to the god of that temple. But elsewhere, in private homes and public markets, you wouldn’t know unless you were told, because not all meat came from sacrificed animals. It turns out that Paul prohibits Christians from eating any food they know to have been sacrificed to an idol, but they don’t have to enquire whether food had such an origin.

Paul Gardner: Two groups of people emerge in this chapter even more clearly than in earlier chapters. Paul refers to the “*weak*” (8:7). These weak, as we shall see later, are those who are weak in their self-awareness (συνείδησις). They are insecure in their standing before God and lack confidence in community membership. How can they be sure they are part of God’s rescued covenant community? This means that they are open to being misled by others who would claim to be secure in their status. The second group of people is normally referred to as “*the strong*,” though Paul does not use that

term here. Various in this commentary this group is referred to as “**the elitists,**” “**the arrogant,**” “**the knowers.**” Mostly we have avoided the term “the strong” because of the very real concern that this group should not be identified with the “strong” of **Romans 14–15**. In **Romans 15:1** Paul refers to himself as “strong.” In this passage, he distances himself almost entirely from the group. In using various terms, we are also seeking to reflect our belief that these people do not have a settled theological position to defend but rather have a deficient understanding of how their standing before God and membership in his community are to be demonstrated and authenticated.

Anthony Thiselton: A significant group in the church were relatively unconcerned about the problem that Paul addresses, except insofar as the “insecure” group criticized them for their lack of sensitivity or even Christian loyalty. Their logic, it seemed, was faultless. Their Christian creed affirmed, “*There is no God but One*” (**8:5**), and the immediate deduction is that “*An idol has no real existence*” (v. **5**). They applied this axiom to the question of eating meat that had originated from a pagan temple as the main supplier of the meat market. What did it matter if meat had on some earlier occasion been offered or dedicated to some pagan deity, such as Zeus or Aphrodite? These “deities” are “nothings,” and a “nothing” cannot affect meat! Those who criticize this practice are “weak.” They failed to work out the implications of the falsity of idols robustly and confidently. . .

Why is “being right” not always the be-all of everything? Paul does not deny that the logic of “the strong” is faultless as far as it goes, but is this enough? Would it go too far to suggest that without a caring, loving concern for others who may see things differently, “being right” can bring confusion, minister to moralism and judgmentalism, and even perhaps destroy fellow believers?

Gordon Fee: The most plausible solution to all these data is to view what is said explicitly near the beginning (**8:10**) and is elaborated in full toward the end (**10:1–22**) as the basic problem to which Paul is responding throughout. This means that *eidōlothyta* does not refer primarily to marketplace food, but to their (some of them at least) **participating in the cultic meals in the precincts of the pagan temples**, and thereby eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. In this view most of the present passage (**8:1 – 10:22**) takes up this issue against the Corinthian position that they have the “right” to continue this practice. As with going to the prostitutes (**6:12–20**), Paul forbids such behavior on both ethical (**8:1–13**) and theological (**10:14–22**) grounds. Then at the end (**10:23 – 11:1**) he picks up the matter of food sold in the market and eaten in private homes, much of which had been previously presented in sacrifice to a false god. On this issue the answer is considerably different; they may do as they wish unless someone else present at the meal calls attention to its (probably) idolatrous origins; and for the sake of that person in that setting Paul would have them forbear.

That going to the temples is the real issue is supported by the fact that the eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul’s time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrations of

various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the “table of the god,” which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present, since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, the meals were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part, the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives; indeed such meals served as the basic “restaurants” in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.

The problem Paul is addressing may thus best be reconstructed along the following lines. After their conversion—and most likely after the departure of Paul—some of them returned to the practice of attending the cultic meals. In his earlier letter Paul had forbidden such “idolatry,” but they apparently have taken exception to that prohibition and in their letter have made four points:

(1) They argue that “*all have knowledge*” about idols. Monotheism by its very nature rules out any genuine reality to idols (**8:1, 4**) -- a point, of course, on which Paul will agree. Apparently this meant for them that attendance at the temples had no significance one way or the other, since they saw such participation in the meals as merely a matter of their eating with friends, not of worshipping what did not exist. Indeed, it is especially difficult to understand the vigor of Paul’s response if this were not the case.

(2) They also have knowledge about food, that it is a matter of indifference to God (**8:8**) -- another point on which Paul will agree. But their take on this matter seems to be: “Since idols are nonentities, and since food is a matter of indifference to God, it matters not neither what we eat nor where we eat it.” So how can Paul forbid their going to the temples, especially since the “gods” involved had no reality?

(3) Although one has less certainty here, they perhaps also had a somewhat “magical” view of the sacraments; those who have had Christian baptism and who partake of the Lord’s Table are not in any danger of “*falling*” (**10:1–4**), especially when the other “gods” do not exist at all.

(4) Besides, there is considerable question in the minds of many whether Paul has the proper apostolic authority to forbid them on this matter. In their minds this has been substantiated by two factors: first, his failure to accept support while with them; and second, his own apparently compromising stance regarding idol food sold in the marketplace (he abstained when eating with Jews, but ate when eating with Gentiles; cf. **9:19–23**).

David Garland: The issue is not just about meat bought in the market (contra **Bruce** 1971: 78) or dining in a temple (contra **Fee** 1980a; **Witherington** 1995; **R. Horsley** 1998: 141). It has to do with eating food conspicuously sacrificed to an idol, whether at

a public feast, in a temple dining room, as a participant in an actual sacrifice, or in a private home (Cheung 1999; R. Collins 1999: 304). The Corinthians might excuse it as accommodation; Paul condemns it as **religious syncretism**. . .

The basic issue has to do with what Paul considers to be forbidden idolatrous behavior by those who perceive themselves as endowed with liberating knowledge.

Mark Taylor: The exegetical challenges of 8:1 – 11:1 are numerous. Since Paul links the expression “*now about*” in 7:1 to a previous correspondence, it is probable that the Corinthians also raised the issue of food sacrificed to idols in their letter to Paul. The phrase itself, “*food sacrificed to idols*” (NIV), translates one Greek word, which occurs five times in 1 Corinthians (8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19), but elsewhere in the New Testament only in Acts (15:29; 21:25) and Revelation (2:14, 20). In Acts 15 and 21, Luke writes of the decision of the Apostolic Council forbidding Gentile believers from eating food associated with idols, and in Rev 2 Jesus warns the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira of those who would lead believers to do the same. Paul’s discussion of the issue is not as clear cut, involves a circuitous argument with what appears to be a long digression from 9:1 – 10:13, and raises a host of questions.

- Why did Paul respond at such length to the question?
- Did he implement the Apostolic Decree in Corinth, or was the situation in Corinth different from the concerns of Acts 15?
- Were the Corinthians in agreement on the matter of idol food over against Paul, or were they themselves divided over the issue, and did they appeal to their apostle to render a verdict between competing factions in the community?
- Why would those with “*knowledge*” (8:1) argue for the right to eat idol food?
- Was the motivation primarily theological (freedom to eat, “*all things are lawful*”), or did they want to eat idol food for social reasons and sought to justify their behavior theologically?
- What is the relation of this passage to Rom 14 and 15 where Paul addresses the strong and the weak in the context of eating certain foods?

I. (:1-3) LOVE MUST BE THE GOAL OF OUR KNOWLEDGE

David Garland: (:1-6) -- Paul introduces the dispute over idol food by establishing common ground with the Corinthians: We Christians know that God is one and that idols have no existence despite their many adherents. This consensus allows him to introduce two key principles that will inform his argument.

- First, Christian love is to override knowledge that feeds arrogance. Christian love is not blind (in contrast to the popular saying about love); it is to be informed by knowledge (cf. **Phil. 1:9**). But knowledge without love is barren (**13:2**).
- Second, Christian monotheism defines who the people of God are as distinct from those who worship many gods and lords in their sundry guises. The

confession of one God and one Lord, however, requires exclusive loyalty to God as Father and to Christ as Lord. Even a perfunctory or make-believe show of fealty to an idol compromises the loyalty owed only to God and Christ.

A. (:1A) Specific Doubtful Issue Introduced – Eating meat possibly offered to idols
“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols”

For us today it would be range of different issues; same principles will apply

Cf. **Acts 15:28-29** This was a major issue in the early church.

1 Timothy 1:5 *“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”*

James Boyer: Some considered such food defiled. They not only refused to eat themselves, but were offended by those who did eat. Others considered meat in the category of “morally indifferent things” and claimed Christian liberty. They considered it right to do so and went ahead.

B. (:1B-2) Knowledge Alone Just Promotes Pride

1. Sarcastic Retort – Everybody is a Know-it-all in their Natural Pride

“we know that we all have knowledge”

James Boyer: Paul is making reference to some of their own claims, even quoting their very words, when he says, *“We know that we all have knowledge.”* He does so a bit sarcastically, for in **verse 7** he says that they did not all have this knowledge.

Robert Gundry: Here in **8:1**, then, *“We all have knowledge”* appears to be a slogan of those Corinthian Christians who, unlike the others, recognized the falsity of polytheism (the belief in many deities). Since Paul immediately follows with the observation that *“knowledge puffs up,”* *“we know that”* represents Paul’s sardonic prefix to the Corinthians’ slogan. Furthermore, his quoting the slogan in connection with “[foods] sacrificed to idols” implies that the slogan rationalized unlimited freedom to eat foods sacrificed to idols, this on the ground that nonexistent gods and lords such as are represented by idols can’t taint sacrifices offered to them. For nothing comes of nothing.

Gordon Fee: In their minds being “spiritual” apparently meant to have received *gnōsis*, meaning probably that the Spirit had endued them with special knowledge, which all believers should have as they do, and which should serve as the basis of Christian behavior.

David Garland: Paul opens his discussion of idol food by asserting that knowledge is not their special domain. He gently reminds them that their prized knowledge of God is something that God has bestowed on them through revelation and is something all Christians share. He also reminds them that knowledge can be unhealthy when misused. All Christians possess knowledge, but not all Christians know as they are meant to

know. Knowledge can be incomplete and/or misapplied. Knowledge misapplied can lead to the wrong kind of edifying (8:10) and can destroy others (8:11). Knowledge that permits one to steamroll over the scruples of others or to harm them or the church in any way is not Christian knowledge.

2. Ultimate Goal is Love, Not Knowledge for Its Own Sake

a. “*Knowledge makes arrogant*” -- puffs up

Gordon Fee: Paul’s response goes right to the heart of things. Their emphasis is totally wrong; the aim of our faith is not knowledge but love. Knowledge and love are thus contrasted in two ways.

- First, the net effect of each (knowledge puffs up; love builds up);
- second, the difference it makes for the one doing the knowing or loving.

b. “*but love edifies*” -- builds up

Ray Stedman: Knowledge creates pride; it makes you feel superior. You only have to listen to some of the arguments waged in this regard today to see how true that is. It does not make any difference which side you are on, on the liberty side or the restricted side, knowledge tends to create a sense of pride.

3. Self-Deception in This Area is Prevalent –

True Knowledge vs False Knowledge

*“If anyone supposes that he knows anything,
he has not yet known as he ought to know.”*

At best, our knowledge is incomplete and limited to our finite view.

Robert Gundry: “If someone supposes he has come to know something” refers to thinking mistakenly that information is all that’s needed for the governance of Christian conduct. Paul counters that loving God has to accompany the learning of information if knowledge is to govern such conduct correctly.

Thomas Schreiner: True knowledge is adorned with humility and accompanied by love, and if these qualities are lacking, one’s knowledge has not been applied correctly. Love is the signature and mark of being a Christian (cf. **13:1-13; John 13:34-35**), and such love has God supremely as its object, though such love for God is also expressed in love for brothers and sisters. The knowers may have boasted in their knowledge, but what is decisive is whether one is known by God.

Paul Gardner: Since “*knowledge*” is incomplete and partial, it can hardly function as a marker of status before God, so flaunting it brings no benefit at all. However, those who love God reveal in themselves that they are indeed authentically the Lord’s, for they reveal that they “*are known*” (v. 3).

C. (:3) Test of Whether Love has been the Goal of Your Knowledge ---

Do you love God? (with accompanying Word of Assurance)

“but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him”

Ray Stedman: If you love God you are responding to the love of God for you. That is the appeal of the apostle everywhere. Do not try to force yourself to think of somebody else. Give yourself to reviewing what God has already done for you. Think of the thousand times a day he has manifested love and concern and faithfulness for you. It will begin to make you feel humbly grateful. When you do this you will then be able to recognize that other people need to be treated with patience as God treats you. You will begin to be more understanding of their point of view. Therefore, the key to the carrying out of this kind of exhortation is that you learn to love God because he has loved you.

David Garland: He is reminding them that loving God means that they are known by God, and that draws sharp boundaries that set them apart from worshipers of false gods and delimits what they may and may not do. Those who love God and are known by God may not dally in the shrines of other gods.

Paul Gardner: Ironically, the elitists at Corinth had failed to “*know*” that love is the only clear marker of authentic Christianity and maturity of faith. It is love, practiced in their love for God and for each other, that they should be pursuing (14:1; cf. 16:22). This contrasts starkly with “*knowledge*,” which is being practiced in a way that divides people and even leads some back to other gods.

II. (:4-6) KNOWLEDGE LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN LOVE

A. (:4A) Specific Issue Repeated

“Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols,”

Paul gets back to the issue he had raised in **8:1**

B. (:4b) Two Things Believers Know with Certainty

1. Idols Don't Exist

“we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world”

No reality behind the physical image that man has created

2. Other Gods Don't Exist

“and that there is no God but one.”

Epistemology: How do believers know what they know?
Why doesn't everyone have this knowledge?

Paul Gardner: Monotheism is true, but to deny the spiritual realities involved with idolatry and the eating of food offered to idols is wrong. This is what Paul now argues in the next two verses, which, we believe, reflect the apostle’s position as distinct from the Corinthian position.

C. (:5-6) Uniqueness of the One True God

1. (:5) Not Negated by the Existence of Lesser Demonic Powers

“For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords”

David Garland: The γάρ (*gar, for*) beginning this clause is explanatory (Fee 1987: 371 n. 10) and introduces either a corroboration or clarification of the two statements in 8:4. It is not a continuation of the Corinthian argument (contra Findlay 1910: 841; Willis 1985b: 83–88) but Paul’s explanation of what he means when he says that “*idols do not exist*” (8:5) and that “*there is no God but one*” (8:6).

2. (:6) Known Personally by All Believers

a. One God the Father

“yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him;”

b. One Lord Jesus Christ

“and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

David Garland: This confession marks out believers as having special obligations. He begins his argument by defining the nature of the people of God, who believe in one God and one Lord and who live in the midst of a pagan society where there are many gods and lords. Consorting with the many other gods and lords ruptures the relationship with the one God and one Lord. He develops this idea in 10:1–22, along with the blazing jealousy of the one God, who must be feared. This confession bars any participation in idolatry, even if it appears on the surface to be only a perfunctory and innocuous idolatry—friends gathering for convivial fellowship in an idol’s temple where even the devotees do not take seriously their consecration of the food to the god or goddess.

III. (:7-13) SENSITIVITY TO OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS MUST GUIDE THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN LOVE

David Garland: Paul’s strict monotheism makes him rigidly opposed to any encroachment by **religious syncretism**, but his argument does not take the form of a raging renunciation of the actions of those who feel free to eat as they please. He chooses a more indirect route to try to convince those who have not yet been persuaded. He began his discussion by reasserting the Christian’s basic confession that binds them to one God and one Lord with its distinctive obligations. Mentioning Christ recalls

God's supreme act of love that made Christians a unique people. Christ died for them (8:11). This act of love that brought them into God's family requires that they respond to others in the family with love, to put others' needs and interests ahead of their own (N. Wright 1992: 133–36). It may require giving up things that one regards as a right for the sake of winning others or preventing them from falling. Hays (1997: 142) comments on 8:11, "Christ died for this person, and you can't even change your diet?" But it is more than a matter of changing their diet. Withdrawing from pagan celebrations calls for a real sacrifice that will bring inevitable ostracism and potential material loss.

Paul leaves aside, for the moment, the theological aspect of the argument and turns to the potential effect of their current behavior on a fellow believer who may not have the same level of theological sophistication to rationalize such behavior or to apprehend its theological consequences. Paul presents the hypothetical example of a fellow Christian observing another Christian, esteemed as a person of knowledge, eating food in an idol setting. The Christian who does not have the knowledge to make correct moral judgments may then be persuaded that such syncretistic practice is permissible for Christians. Paul fears that this Christian will be sucked back into the vortex of idolatry and face spiritual ruination. He concludes with a hyperbolic example of what he would do to avert such a catastrophe: he would abstain from eating meat altogether.

A. (:7) Believers Vary in Their Level of Knowledge and Background –

Making some more vulnerable in the area under consideration

*“However not all men have this knowledge;
but some, being accustomed to the idol until now,
eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol;
and their conscience being weak is defiled.”*

David Garland: I have noted that Paul shows no concern to try to strengthen the person with a weak conscience. It is not that the weak one is insufficiently astute intellectually to understand all the theological intricacies of the question and so must be treated with kid gloves. The issue does not revolve around the one with a weak conscience; **Paul's goal is to change the activity of the knowers**, who, despite their imagined theological sophistication, are in danger of being partners with demons. His rhetorical strategy is to show those who presume to have knowledge that they also have a responsibility for the weak individual. This approach assumes that they would care about the plight of one with a weak conscience. If there were an intense debate raging between the strong and the weak over this issue, the knowers would have already shown a lack of regard for the weak. They would be likely to reject such an argument and respond that the “weak conscience” was precisely the problem. The case of the weak conscience is therefore a new wrinkle in Paul's approach to the problem. He trusts that it will carry weight because the knowers would not be callously indifferent toward the weak's situation, and they would be impressed by the grievous nature of sin against Christ (8:12) and the expected punishment for such sin. In this segment of his argument, Paul seeks to help the knowers examine their actions from a new angle and see ramifications of their actions that they had not foreseen.

B. (:8) Spirituality is Not the Issue

*“But food will not commend us to God;
we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.”*

David Garland: Paul’s illustrations from the OT in **10:1–13** reveal that idol food is not as harmless as they assumed. It can kill—most significantly, it kills a person’s relationship to God. Kosher laws may be a matter of indifference, but idol food is not. Nothing is unclean in itself, unless it is known to be idol food. Just as sexual relations are not unclean in themselves but can be perverted by human sin into *porneia*, food is not unclean in itself but can become tainted by its associations with demons and thus become something forbidden. Consuming food in an idolatrous context or food plainly associated with idolatry is not a matter of indifference but one that has deadly consequences.

C. (:9-13) Sensitivity to Our Fellow Believers is the Issue

1. (:9) Liberty Requires Caution – Understand the Impact on Fellow Believers

*“But take care that this liberty of yours
does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”*

David Garland: Paul is not afraid that they might offend the weak in some way but that they might cause them to fall away from their Christian faith.

2. (:10-12) The Non-Moral Issue for You Can Become a Sin Issue for Your Fellow Believer – and Therefore a Sin Issue for You

“For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”

3. (:13) Liberty Must be Restrained to Protect Fellow Believers

“Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”

Chestnut: We create Christian community when we restrict our freedom for the sake of others.

David Prior: The whole of Paul’s argument in this chapter is a practical example of following the law of love: **love will restrict itself for the sake of others**. To cause any brother or sister, just one brother or sister, to stumble even once is such an appalling danger for Paul that he will not once touch meat to avoid such a disaster. That is true Christian love, and that, Paul would affirm with equal fervour, is true Christian freedom.

Mark Taylor: Paul has enumerated a string of negative consequences that result from the actions of those with knowledge:

- (1) Their actions defile and strike the conscience of the weak (**8:7, 12**),
- (2) are a stumbling block to the weak (**8:9**), and
- (3) destroy those for whom Christ died and therefore constitute a sin against a brother and a sin against Christ.

David Garland: Commentators frequently have missed the **radicality** of Paul’s argument. **He wants to show what love ultimately requires from believers and how it transcends knowledge.** The argument moves from the lesser to the greater. If he would do this in the case of ordinary food, how much more so in the case of something so spiritually toxic as idol food? We should not infer from this principle, however, that Paul thinks it is permissible to eat idol food as long as those with weak consciences do not observe it or if it will not cause them to stumble. Ruling out eating idol food on the basis of the “weaker brethren” principle does not affirm its appropriateness in other circumstances (**Cheung** 1999: 90). It is not an invitation to the “strong” to “come over and join Paul at table with the weak” (contra **Hays** 1997: 142). It is instead **an indirect demand to withdraw from idolatry.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the practical areas of life that you would classify as debatable or questionable – where Christians would have different convictions on what is permissible?
- 2) How can you tell whether your pursuit of Christian knowledge and doctrine really has love as its goal and outcome? How can you tell whether you are truly loving God?
- 3) Is there some area where you might have a weak conscience?? Or some area where you might look with contempt upon a believer who engages in that practice?
- 4) When have you willingly chosen to restrain your Christian liberty out of consideration for your brother or sister in the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: Sacrifice to the gods was an integral part of ancient life. It might be of two kinds, private or public. In private sacrifice the animal was divided into three parts. A token part was burned on the altar . . . ; the priests received their rightful portion . . . ; the worshipper himself received the rest of the meat. With the meat he gave a banquet. Sometimes these feasts were in the house of the hosts; sometimes they were even in the temple of the god to whom the sacrifice had been made . . . The problem which

confronted the Christian was, ‘Could he take part in such a feast at all? Could he possibly take upon his lips meat that had been offered to an idol, to a heathen god?’ If he could not, then he was going to cut himself off almost entirely from all social occasions . . . In public sacrifice . . . after the requisite symbolic amount had been burned and after the priests had received their share, the rest of the meat fell to the magistrates and others. What they did not use they sold to the shops and to the markets; and therefore, even when the meat was bought in the shops, it might well have already been offered to some idol and to some heathen god . . .

What complicated matters still further was this – that age believed strongly and fearfully in demons and evils . . . They were always lurking to gain an entry into a man’s body and, if they did get in, they would injure his body and unhinge his mind . . . These spirits settled on the food as a man ate and so got inside him. One of the ways to avoid that was to dedicate the meat to some good god . . . It therefore followed that a man could hardly eat meat at all which was not in some way connected with a heathen god. Could the Christian eat it? . . . To the Christian in Corinth, or any other great city, it was a problem which pervaded all life, and which has to be settled one way or the other.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: The spiritual good of others should always govern what we Christians do.

I. All My Actions Are Regulated by the Principle of Christian Love (8:1-3).

- A. Knowledge alone can make us prideful (8:1-2).
- B. Love for God is evidence God knows us (8:3).

II. All My Actions Are Regulated by the Truth of Christian Worship (8:4-6).

- A. Unbelievers worship false gods and false lords (8:4-5).
- B. Christians worship one God and one Lord (8:6).

III. All My Actions Are Regulated by the Guideline of Christian Deference (8:7-13).

- A. I will not defile my brother’s conscience (8:7-10).
- B. I will not sin against my Christ (8:11-13).

Paul Gardner:

A. Knowledge and Love Contrasted (8:1–3)

- 1. Knowledge Is Temporary and Puffs Up (8:1a–c)
- 2. Love Builds Up (8:1d)
- 3. Loving God Is to Be Known by God (8:2–3)

B. Knowledge concerning the Existence of “gods” and “lords” (8:4–6)

- 1. The Elitist Position: Idols Do Not Exist (8:4)
- 2. Paul’s Position: For Us One God, but Demons Exist (8:5–6)

C. Knowledge regarding the Eating of Idol Food in an Idol Temple (8:7–13)

- 1. Recent Converts May Be Drawn into Sin (8:7)

2. Such Eating Gains No Advantageous Status before God (8:8)
3. Such Eating May Lead to a Person's Destruction (8:9–13)

Many Christians wonder whether their faith is secure, and perhaps inevitably this means they look around for visible or practical evidences to which they can appeal to provide them assurance of their standing before God. A poor understanding or “weak self-awareness” regarding our position among God’s people can easily be exploited by those who have become puffed up and boastful of their own supposed community standing. Paul does not suggest that the position of the “weak” is wrong. Rather, he uses this passage to teach of the danger of them being led by other Christians back into their old, sinful way of life. That such “weak” people should be “built up” in the faith and in their assurance of their standing before God goes without saying. In **chapter 12** Paul will demonstrate that this is precisely why grace-gifts have been given: to build up people in their faith in Christ and so they can better see themselves as part of the body of Christ. All Christians need this edification, but it must be built on the foundation of Christ rather than on seeking to copy some other Christian who seems to have the outward signs of status. Those who think they are “something” need to realize they can end up leading others into sin. When they no longer see love for God and love for neighbor as the true markers of community standing, then they will behave arrogantly toward others and will replace what is good and of the Lord with what is at best inadequate. This arises from people’s desire to place themselves and their actions at the center of their spiritual lives. The ability of Christians to give up what they see as their community rights and privileges -- even things they enjoy -- for the sake of a Christian brother or sister is ultimately the test of the presence of love. Assurance for those who lack it is found first in looking again to the love of Christ who was crucified for them, but it is then reinforced by a people who build each other up in the faith through their love for one another.

Gordon Fee: The tyranny of “knowledge” as the basis of Christian ethics has a long and unfortunate history in the church, from which most likely few who read—as well as the one who writes—this commentary are exempt. Once one’s theology is properly in hand, it is especially tempting to use it as a kind of insiders’ club on others. And in this case, such behavior occurs from the theological right as well as from the left. This does not mean that knowledge is either irrelevant or unimportant, but it does mean that it cannot serve as the primary basis of Christian behavior. In Christian ethics “knowledge” must always lead to love. One should always beware of those teachers or systems that entice one by special “revelation” or “deeper insights.” Such appeals are invariably to one’s pride, not to one’s becoming a more truly loving follower of Jesus. While it is true that “insight” often leads to “freedom,” it is also true that it often results finally in the demand for “freedom” in the form of “rights.” This is what had happened at Corinth. In the Christian faith “knowledge” or “insight” is never an end in itself; it is only a means to a greater end, the building up of others.

Mark Taylor: There are three scenarios related to eating food sacrificed to idols in **8:1 – 11:1**:

- (1) eating food sacrificed to an idol in the temple precincts (**8:7–13; 10:1–22**);

- (2) eating food purchased in the marketplace, which may or may not have been sacrificed to idols (10:23–27); and
- (3) eating food at the invitation of an unbeliever where some of the food served may have been previously sacrificed to an idol (10:28–31).

The primary critical issue presented by these scenarios is consistency in Paul's thought. In 8:1–13, for example, Paul prohibits eating meat offered to idols on the basis of love for a brother who might stumble because of a weak conscience. Paul's language seems to suggest, in principle, that he agrees with those who have a certain knowledge about idols, God, and food. Idols are nothing in the world (8:4) since there is only one God (8:6), and food has nothing to do with one's relationship with God (8:8). Likewise, in 10:23–31, Paul appears to have no problem with food purchased in the marketplace of unknown history, but that may have been offered to idols, and he justifies this perspective from Ps 24:1, "*The earth is the Lord's and everything in it*" (10:26). Likewise, in the case of dining with an unbeliever Paul forbids eating only if someone discloses the history of the food (10:27–28). In these passages the guiding principle for Paul, it seems, is **the effect eating has on another**.

Ray Stedman: What's Behind Your Influence?

"How much should I let other people's views control my actions?" That is, "Must I limit my liberty by the narrower, more restricted views of other Christians?" . . . The question arose among the Christians: "If a Christian eats meat offered to an idol is he not participating in some way in the worship of that idol?" . . .

Therefore, we are to consider our influence upon others, and weigh the fact that what we want to do may not be very important at all, compared with the possible danger to another's spiritual life. This certainly has a bearing on how we act in public, on whether we are willing to flaunt our freedom in somebody else's face.

Doug Goins: The Loving Limitation of Liberty

In Corinth most of the meat that was sold in the public meat markets came from sacrificial animals that had been slaughtered in ceremonies at pagan temples. So the questions these Corinthians had were as follows: Did these rituals somehow automatically taint the meat? Could Christians buy it from those markets for their use at home? Could they eat it if it was offered to them at non-Christian friends' homes? And what about the various social events that were regularly scheduled in the banquet halls of the temples? These were the best banqueting places. So if you were invited to a party or a club meeting or a wedding, were you free to participate and eat the food that was served there? What if you were invited by your non-Christian friends to some sort of a ritual in the temple that was overtly pagan? Were you free to participate in something like that? And the immediate concern of these Christians in Corinth was this: If a Christian ate meat offered to an idol, wasn't he participating in some way in the sinful worship of that idol? Some of the Corinthian believers said that the meat was tainted by its idolatrous identification, and it was a sin to eat it. Some of the believers said it wasn't. . .

Think about our love relationship with the Lord. He doesn't ignore us, look down on us, or criticize our immaturity or ignorance. No, he patiently and lovingly brings us along through the process of growing in maturity. So my gratitude to him for first loving me is what frees me to love the other person who may be struggling because they're not where I am in my understanding of certain truth. What Paul wants us to see clearly is that agape love is far more important in the big picture than knowledge or theological sophistication. . .

These new Christians struggled with issues stemming from two things: their past and their conscience. Because of association with idols in the past, every new contact triggered the memory of the former connection. The phrase "*being accustomed to*" refers to habitual ways of thinking and believing. Old habits are hard to break. Paul calls it weakness, and he's going to make the point that the weakness of a brother or sister must be lovingly considered in all of our relationships. . .

Paul is asking the more mature, knowledgeable Christian, the one who is secure in his freedom in Christ, to substitute for his own knowledge of what is right and wrong, love for the less mature Christian who is insecure about his standing in Christ. More than any other writer in the New Testament, Paul taught Christians to celebrate the freedom that they found in Christ. But in these verses, he is saying that no Christian has a right to exercise his or her freedom in a way that undermines the faith of a weaker brother or sister, somebody who is less mature in their walk with the Lord. Love understands the sinful consequences of deliberately ignoring a weaker Christian's sensitivities. Forcing my freedom onto a believer whose conscience is not yet as strong as mine not only undermines his Christian growth, but violates the body of Christ, of which we are both a part. And Paul goes on to say that such an offense against a weaker Christian is a sin against the Lord Jesus who lives inside that brother. So instead of proving myself to be strong spiritually, I've transgressed the law of love. My Christian freedom must never be used at the expense of a brother or sister who has been redeemed at the great price of the death of the Savior. . .

Paul's whole point in **chapter 8** is that as Christians we're meant to act on the basis of love and not stand on our supposed superior knowledge. It's true that idols are not gods, that food is a matter of indifference to the Lord, and by implication we are free to eat and drink what we like. But the universal spiritual principle is that knowledge has to be tempered by love for the weaker brother or sister who will be harmed if we act on this knowledge with indifference or insensitivity. To put it another way, we don't have to have our rights. We also have the right not to exercise them for the sake of love. What a tremendous freedom and wonderful privilege we have to choose to lovingly limit our liberty.

Steve Zeisler: Liberty, Limits and Love

Be free!, and Be careful! Be free, because there is only one God; be careful, because the wicked one is the force behind idolatry. . .

In our freedom we must be willing to forfeit our rights for the sake of others. We must not exercise our freedom at the expense of others who do not know better yet, those who still fear idols. If our freedom to indulge in what they consider forbidden inclines them to fall under the influence of idols once more, then we of course should deny ourselves. Now you do not have to agree with them. In fact you had better not agree with them. What you are doing rather is giving up your rights for their sake. Choose to act in love, not in arrogance.

Bob Deffinbaugh: The Great Divorce – Separating Truth from Love

While Paul initially appears to grant the premise that eating meat offered to idols is a matter of liberty in chapter 8, this same permissiveness is not found at the end of Paul's argument on the subject.

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? 19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 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. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we? (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). . .

What Paul allows to stand initially in his argument, he may eventually prove to be wrong. This is the case in **1 Corinthians 8-10**. In **chapter 8**, he allows those Corinthians who view themselves as being more spiritual than others to retain this false notion momentarily. But by the end of **chapter 10**, those who think they have the liberty to eat meat offered to idols are shown up for what they are. The “weaker brethren” of **chapter 8** seem to be the “stronger brethren” in **chapter 10**. Those supposedly “weaker brethren” who refrained from eating meat offered to idols were not only in compliance with the decree of the Jerusalem Council, but with the teaching of Paul. . .

Christians are not to boast in knowing, but to rejoice in being known by God, and this is the result of loving God (**verse 3**). When Jesus sent His disciples out to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, they returned, rejoicing over the mighty works God had accomplished through them. Jesus gently corrected them saying, “... *do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven*” (**Luke 10:20**). Here, Paul tells Christians that they should not rejoice in knowing, but in being known by God. Salvation surpasses any sheepskin (diploma) we will ever obtain. Moreover, the way that we are known by God is not because of our knowledge, but because of the love which God has produced within us for Himself. Once again, love takes priority over knowledge. What a humbling truth Paul has put

before these all-knowing, stronger saints. If knowledge was the most important thing of all, and if they knew more than others, than they were the spiritual elite. But they have sought to excel in a category which is subordinate to love . . .

While neither eating meat nor abstaining from it changes my spiritual status, what I do with this meat can have a great impact on my brother. If something is a true liberty, I can partake of it in good conscience, just as I can abstain from it in good conscience, for I am not doing what I believe to be wrong. But a truly weaker brother does not have the same liberty. He does not see eating this meat as a liberty, but as a sin. If he views me as the stronger brother, then what I do is an example for him to follow. If I am more spiritual by eating idol-meat, then my weaker brother assumes he will be more spiritual for following my example. But since his conscience is not clear with respect to idol-meat, eating of it will be a sin for him.

Thomas Leake: Not Legalism, Not Liberty, But Love

Introduction:

New section introduced by *peri de*. Disagreements and squabbles should have been minor issues. Believers need to focus on the major doctrines of the faith. Little things should remain little things:

- Can we use drums in the worship service?
- Can the wife of the pastor wear pants?
- What movies are acceptable for the believers to watch?
- How to celebrate or not celebrate different holidays

Such matters don't matter all that much. God gives us a lot of latitude and freedom.

(Definition of legalism and Definition of liberty.)

Caution to libertines: Don't love your freedom more than you love Christ and the brethren.

Caution to legalists: Don't orient your relationship to Christ and your fellow believers around structure, rules, regulations where everything has to be spelled out in black and white. Otherwise you can't help judging one another, despising one another ... etc. These issues, while small, have the potential to divide churches.

Understand the Historical Situation:

There were many pagan gods, idols, etc. Food that was brought to the temple to be offered up in worship to these pagan gods was divided into 3 parts:

- one part given back to the worshipper
- one part burned in the temple
- one part given to the temple priest for their use – they had so much they ended up selling some of that back in the marketplace

You also had the problem of being invited over to a dinner or feast where the origin of the meat served might be in question. Or you might be attending some larger function held in a pagan temple hall. Christians responded strongly with different reactions.

3 Steps to Paul's Wise Counsel about how to deal with these debatable issues

I. (:1-3) Learn the Value of Love Above Knowledge

Every Christian has doctrinal knowledge about God. But by itself knowledge just puffs

up – makes you look important and big – if you don't have love.

Look at the arrogant, highly educated people in our society. They have too high a view of themselves. They don't understand their own spiritual blindness.

1 Cor. 13 – study what *agape* love really is all about

Knowledge which puffs up is not true knowledge. It is really ignorance.

Humility involves understanding your place before God.

The true test of knowing is *loving God*. (Pres. Tense) God has that special type of knowing relationship with such believers.

1 John 5:2 – Love God and observe His commands

John 15:10, 21

Rest of 1 John passages about loving the brethren

Love is greater than mere knowledge

II. (:4-8) Apply Your Doctrinal Knowledge to the Issue

Learn what is really true about the issue in question. What is the reality. Paul is not saying that knowledge is bad – he spent his life communicating knowledge to others and to us through the Scriptures. Knowledge is necessary. Paul is not throwing knowledge out.

Certainty of Christian knowledge – we know certain things for sure – not we guess or we hope .. but we know

Knowledge is beneficial when it is rightly expressed.

Love (so-called) without doctrinal understanding is useless.

What do we know?

1) There is no such thing as an idol in the world in reality

That is pretty good information to have! The world does not know this. How do we know? Because there is someone who knows and has told us! Revelation from God is the key. Not because we are so smart and have figured anything out. God has spoken! Go to the one who knows.

The emphasis here is on the nothingness of the idol; there is no god behind those lifeless statues and fancy temples.

Cf. Elijah making fun of the idols of Baal –

Is. 44:8-9; Psalm 115; Is. 41:23-24

There's nobody listening to your prayers!

2) There is no God but one in the real universe

How do we know this? Same way as above. Not through empirical research; not through strictly rational contemplation; but by means of revelations from an ultimate being who knows everything

Deut. 6:4 – people are too proud to receive the testimony of God; don't let them call you proud for listening to your Creator

1 John 5:9-10 – making God a liar; we can know with certainty

Is. 45:5 – name of God is *YHWH*, not Allah; He is the only one;

Idols don't really exist; however you can have a fallen demon spiritual being operating behind the façade of an idol and inspiring false worship

Deut. 10:17 – God is over all the spiritual beings in the universe;

Revelation is superior to science.

Is. 40:18 – you cannot create anything physical that can compare to God; physical matter can't cause itself; if you don't exist you can't start anything or be the source of something; **John 5:26; Rom. 11:36**

Did God then create evil ... if He created everything that exists ... Evil is not a thing; but a perversion of a thing; of a twisting of something; evil comes from the moral being that decides to twist a good thing

Look at the switch in prepositions:

- *ex* = out of
- *dia* = through or by means of

The Son is not a second source but the means by which all came into being

John 1:1-3; Complicated to try to understand the eternal relationship of the godhead;

Col. 1:16; Heb 1:10-12; “**Lord**” = OT name for the Lord God (*kurios*)

Christ cannot be created; He eternally proceeds from the Father; **Heb. 1:6; John 5:21; Rev. 22:13**; no beginning or end

Not all believers understand these difficult truths in the area of Christology

- they think there are still lesser gods existing out there
- they don't understand certain things about food – create man-made dietary
 - Laws; **Mark 7:18-19; 1 Cor. 6:13; Rom. 14:17**

All of this knowledge should help us

III. (:9-13) Put your Knowledge with Love Into Action

(:9) Overall Concern – restrict your liberty because of love

(:10-12) 3 Reasons you need to restrict your liberty in certain circumstances:

1. (:10) you don't want to mess up your brother
2. (:11) He is the brother for whom Christ died; **Rom. 14:23**
3. (:12) You would ultimately be sinning against Christ Himself

You must give up your freedoms out of loving consideration for your brother.

(:13) **Conclusion** to the matter:

You don't want to be a stumbling block to your brother;

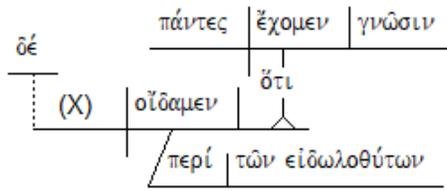
Apply these same principles to other issues; you also don't want to be paralyzed so that your fear of offending everyone prohibits you from doing anything ...

Ask 3 Questions:

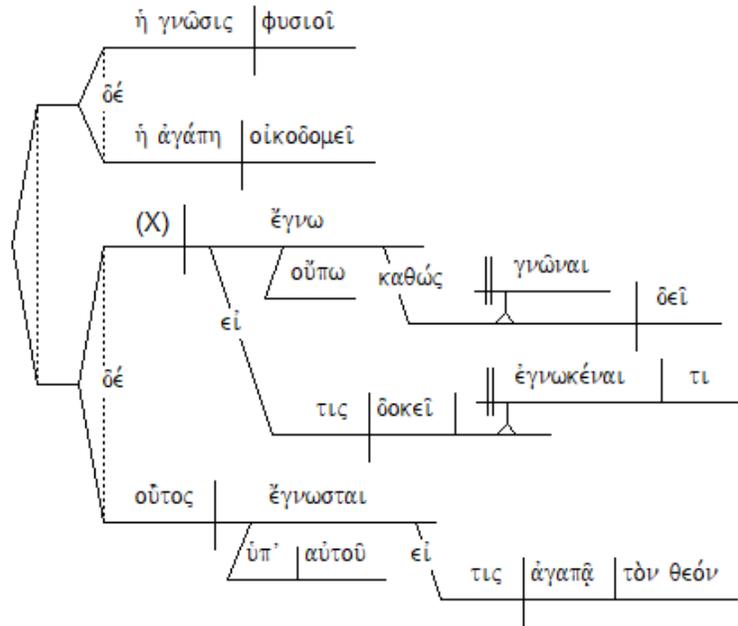
1. How important is this issue to my weaker brother – Will it really mess up his faith?
2. How important is my example to that person – this criteria becomes more important as you become a public leader
3. Is there a way to help them along with doctrinal knowledge?

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

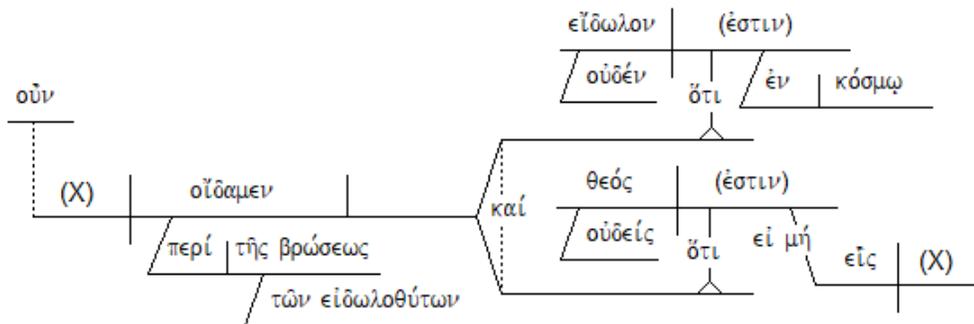
1Co 8:1a



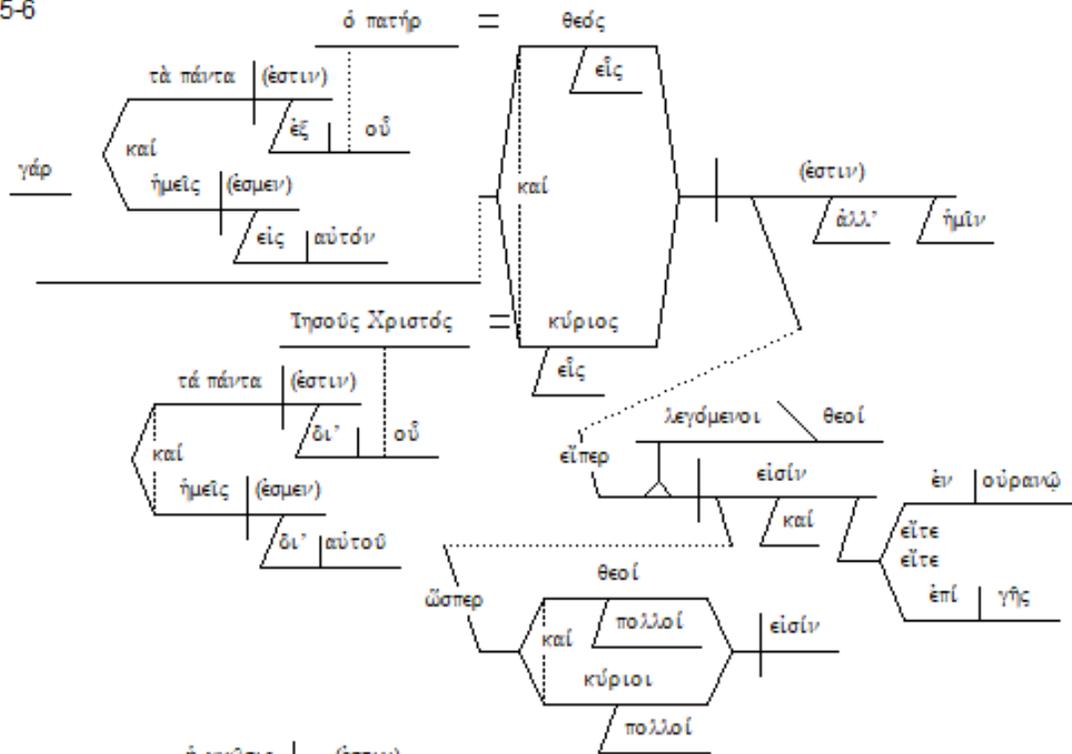
1Co 8:1b-3



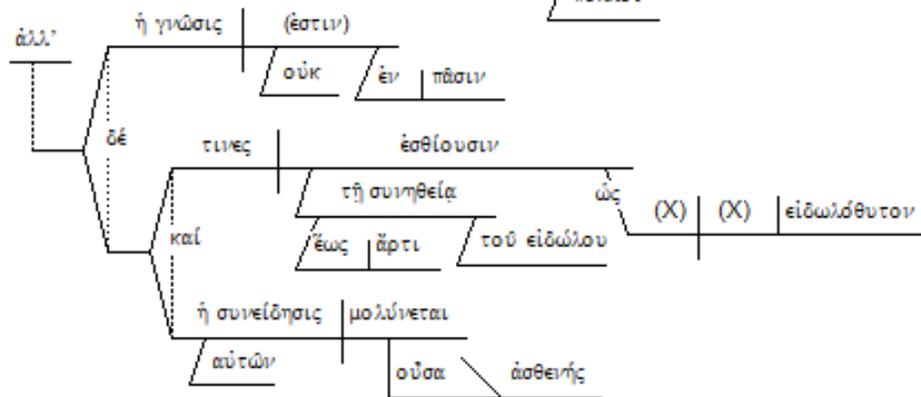
1Co 8:4



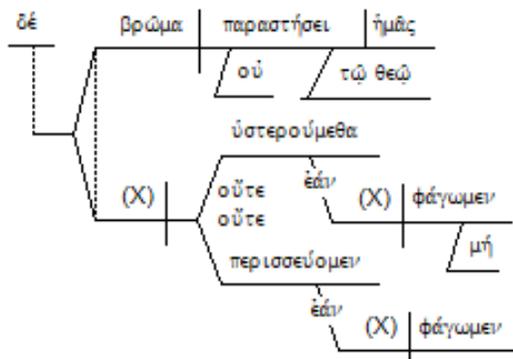
1Co 8:5-6



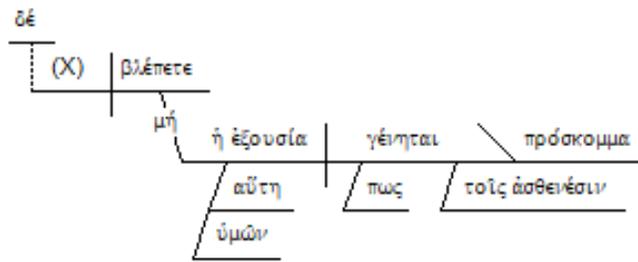
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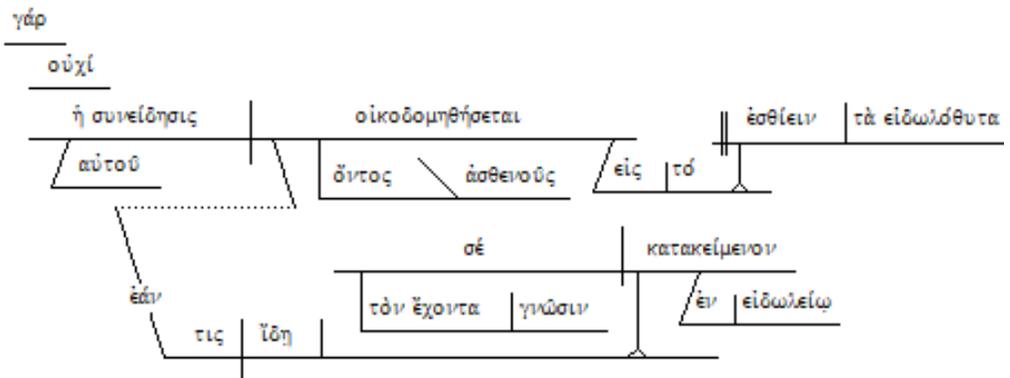
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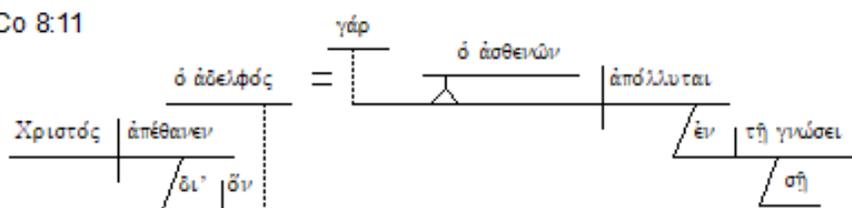
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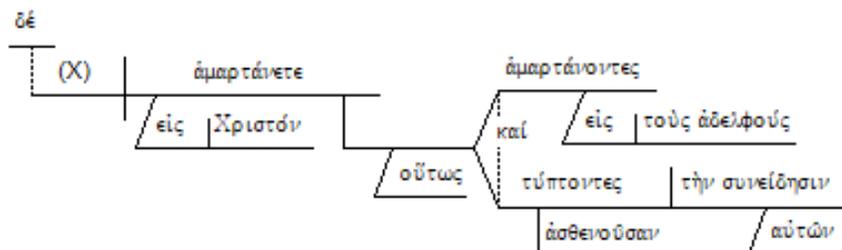
1Co 8:10



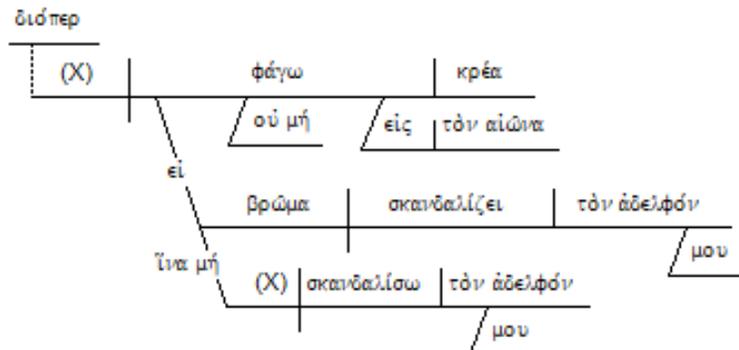
1Co 8:11



1Co 8:12



1Co 8:13



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

TITLE: FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:

SPIRITUAL MINISTERS (ESPECIALLY APOSTLES) DESERVE TO BE ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED BUT ALSO HAVE THE FREEDOM TO REFRAIN FROM DEMANDING SUCH RIGHTS

INTRODUCTION:

Some people imagine that Christian ministers should serve at their own expense. This passage clearly gives a number of reasons why the flock needs to take very seriously its responsibility to financially support its ministers in proportion to their labor and effectiveness. The general rule is simple: “*the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.*” But how can we explain the Apostle Paul’s tent-making practice in this light? Some people always want to demand that their rights be respected and fulfilled. This passage gives some principles regarding higher objectives which might guide someone to refrain from insisting upon exercising all of their rights. In this pastoral example, Paul demonstrates how believers can refrain from the exercise of their Christian liberties in cases such as the context of the previous chapter = meat offered to idols. Sometimes the exercise of a right can actually be a wrong.

Richard Hays: Paul was simply a **freelance missionary**. The Corinthians would most naturally have compared him to the rhetoricians and philosophers familiar within their world. **Ronald F. Hock** (50–65) has explained that within this cultural setting there was an ongoing debate about the appropriate means of economic support for a philosopher. Four basic models were advocated, each with its distinctive drawbacks.

1. The philosopher could charge fees for his teaching, as the Sophists did; they were often accused of greed and manipulating their pupils.
2. Alternatively, the philosopher could be supported by a wealthy patron, as the “resident intellectual” in the patron’s household, often with the task of educating the family’s children; such a role entailed an obvious loss of independence, for the philosopher would be tied to the purse strings of the patron.
3. A third option, notoriously practiced by the Cynics, was to beg on the streets; for obvious reasons this was widely perceived as eccentric and demeaning.
4. The final option was for the philosopher to work at a trade in order to support himself; this had the disadvantages of low social status and of consuming time and energy for mundane matters. At least, however, working for a living preserved the philosopher’s independence from control by other people.

Paul decided early in his apostolic career to follow the fourth of these models, working with his own hands to earn his living (cf. **1 Thess. 2:5–10; 2 Thess. 3:7–9**) -- supplemented by occasional unsought gifts from some of his churches, particularly the church in Philippi (cf. **Phil. 4:10–20; 2 Cor. 11:9b**). This was a relatively unusual

choice (the first two options were by far the most common), and the Corinthian correspondence shows that it proved controversial. . .

The argument has two phases. In **verses 1–14** he argues that he is a real apostle and therefore has every right to receive financial support from the Corinthians. Then in **verses 15–23** he explains that he has renounced these legitimate rights “*for the sake of the gospel*” by offering the gospel free of charge and identifying with lower-status members of the community. Thus, by choosing “*not to make full use of my rights [exousia] in the gospel*” (v. 18), Paul confirms rather than denies his apostolic mission.

Craig Blomberg: Paul turns now to a second illustration of the principle that Christian freedom should be tempered by voluntary relinquishing one’s rights. But the illustration is scarcely arbitrary; it reflects one of the primary ways the Corinthians are challenging Paul. They have come to doubt his apostolic authority (vv. 2–3), precisely because he is not charging them for his ministry (cf. **2 Cor. 11:7**). . .

The powerful patrons in the Corinthian church doubtless would have preferred to have Paul accept their money but give them deference and political support in return. When he refused and continued to rely on tentmaking instead (cf. **Acts 18:1–4**), they charged that his unwillingness to go along with their patronage demonstrated that he did not have the same authority as other itinerant apostles or preachers.

Paul Gardner: Paul has argued that the elitists are so flaunting their “*knowledge*,” especially regarding their right to eat meat sacrificed to idols, that the “weak” who once worshipped idols were being led back into idolatry. **Chapter 8** ended with Paul insisting that he willingly would give up eating meat altogether to avoid leading anyone to destruction. For Paul, the Lord and the gospel will always take priority in life. It is this that provides the link into **chapter 9**, in which Paul exemplifies from his own life how he **prioritizes the gospel**. As an apostle he has certain rights that he can exercise, but he has been prepared to give these up “*for the sake of the gospel*” (**9:23**). Structurally the link between this chapter and the previous is therefore to be found in **8:13**. Here Paul moves from the rights of the elitists and the danger that their behavior may lead the weak person to destruction to talking about himself and his actions, which are designed to avoid leading brothers and sisters into such stumbling. The Corinthians were likely leading the weak astray through the exercise of what they saw as a “right” to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols in an idol temple.

Daniel Akin: **There Is a Right to Compensation for the Minister of the Gospel (9:1-14).**

1. It is the right of God’s apostles (**9:1-6**).
2. It is the right of a soldier (**9:7**).
3. It is the right of a vinedresser (**9:7**).
4. It is the right of a shepherd (**9:7**).
5. It is the right of an ox (**9:8-9**).
6. It is the right of a plowman (**9:10**).
7. It is the right of a thresher (**9:10**).

8. It is the right of God's servants (9:11-12).
9. It is the right of priests (9:13).
10. It is the right of those who minister the Word (9:14).

Gordon Fee: One may properly experience a strange **ambivalence** toward this text. On the one hand, it serves as one of the key passages that make it clear that those who give themselves to the “*work of the ministry*” are deserving of material support. The whole reason for the argument is to assert that his giving up of these rights does not mean that he is not entitled to them. In a day like ours such rights usually mean a salary and “benefits.” On the other hand, the reason Paul feels compelled to make this kind of defense is that he has given up these rights. Contemporary Protestant ministers seldom feel compelled so to argue! The key to everything must be for us what it was for Paul -- “*no hindrance to the gospel.*” For every valid ministry in the church of Jesus Christ this must be the bottom line. All too often, one fears, the objective of this text is lost in concerns over “rights” that reflect **bald professionalism** rather than a concern for the gospel itself.

I. (:1-6) THE FRUIT OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY IMPLIES THE RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

A. (:1-2) The Credentials of Authentic Christian Ministry (Especially of Apostles)

1. Voluntary Service

“Am I not free?”

John MacArthur: In their letter to Paul (see 7:1) the Corinthians must have made much of their liberty in Christ – a liberty they had been taught largely by Paul himself. Now he states his own freedom and his own rights. “I have no less freedom than you do,” he implies. “And I cherish my freedom no less than you do. But I cherish some other things even more.”

Paul Gardner: Given the number of **rhetorical questions** in this chapter, it is important to understand how these function in Paul's discussion. Some commentators, while acknowledging that these four questions are indeed a rhetorical device, proceed to treat the questions as real questions and so suggest that Paul is here having to defend the fact that he is an apostle. On this view, “*Am I not an apostle?*” is therefore a real question, as are all four. The Corinthian reader, it is suggested, was expected to answer “yes.” However, the functional difference between real and rhetorical questions is that real questions are used to elicit information or specific response while rhetorical questions are used “to convey or call attention to information.” The questions in themselves, then, provide no evidence that Paul was seeking to defend his apostleship against some who were either criticizing or denying it. Rather, they are a useful device to make a strong assertion of the premise for the following argument. Paul is an apostle, and apostles have certain rights that in his case and for the sake of the gospel he has chosen to forgo.

David Garland: Several arguments weigh in against the view that in this section Paul is circling the wagons around his apostolic authority.

First, the notion of his apostleship appears only in **9:1–2**, in which he establishes his right to earn material support. These remarks are too brief for a substantive defense. The rest of his argument appeals to the everyday examples of the soldier, farmer, and shepherd (**9:7**), the plowman and thresher (**9:10**), and the priest (**9:13**). These illustrations simply point to “the universal norm that every person ought to profit from his labour” (Savage 1996: 94). The authority of the law (**9:8–10a; Deut. 25:4**), the precedent of others who already have received benefactions from the Corinthians (**9:12a**), and the command of Jesus (**9:14**) further buttress the right of an apostle who labors in the gospel to earn his living from the gospel. These arguments do not furnish any support for Paul’s apostolic standing. He simply reminds them of what everybody already knows. He is not establishing (again) for the supposedly dubious Corinthians that he is a legitimate apostle but **instead makes the point that apostles have the right to be supported. . .**

That Paul intends in this section to offer himself as a model of one who voluntarily relinquishes his rights is confirmed by the athletic metaphor that spotlights his own conduct (**9:24–27**) and the concluding admonition to imitate him as he imitates Christ (**11:1**). His personal example as an apostle who unselfishly sacrifices for others in his missionary service is particularly appropriate for those Corinthians who have demonstrated a tendency to seek personal gain. The implication is that those with knowledge should follow his example by abdicating their so-called right to eat idol food (**8:9**) in order to avoid any possibility of causing others without their endowment of knowledge from falling back into idolatry.

2. Gifted Calling

“Am I not an apostle?”

“Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”

Qualification for apostleship = **Acts 1:21-22**

3. Spiritual Fruit

“Are you not my work in the Lord?”

“If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

John MacArthur: In ancient times seals were used on containers of merchandise, on letters, and on other things to indicate the authenticity of what was inside and to prevent the contents from being substituted or altered. The seal was the official representation of the authority of the one who sent the merchandise or letter. What was under the seal was guaranteed to be genuine. The Corinthian church was a living **seal** of Paul’s apostleship, the proof of his genuineness.

Paul Gardner: The final question in this series refers to the fact that he was the **founder of the church in Corinth**. This is reinforced by the assertion of v. 2 in which Paul makes it clear that he does not expect the Corinthians to take issue with his apostleship. Even if others might not see him as an apostle, the Corinthians surely will since their existence sets the seal on it. After all, they are the result of Paul's work of gospel proclamation. The word "seal" (σφραγίς) attests to something that is legally valid. It is a word that is used metaphorically of circumcision and Abraham's "righteousness by faith" in **Romans 4:11** and there legally attests to his membership in the covenant people. In **2 Timothy 2:19** it is used as an attestation of membership in God's people. Here Paul indicates that the existence of the Corinthian church attests to his apostleship. However, the seal is provided by the fact that all his work has been "in the Lord" (ἐν κυρίῳ). In fact, the conversion of the Corinthians has been the work of the Lord and has been brought about according to his will (**1 Cor 1:4–8**).

B. (:3-6) Delineation of Rights of All Christian Workers (Especially Apostles)

"My defense to those who examine me is this:"

Some people might look at a gospel minister who is supporting himself via secular work and argue that his ministry is not approved by God since he is not supported full-time in the ministry. Paul's apostleship was under attack in Corinth. Others were exalting themselves as somehow more worthy of recognition and of a following than the Apostle Paul.

Paul Gardner: Paul's main concern is that they should see that just as the exercise of an apostle's "rights" do not authenticate apostleship (he is an apostle whether he exercises his "rights" or not), so the exercise of certain other rights that the elitists claim to have do not authenticate those who are God's.

1. (:4) The Right to Basic Material Support

"Do we not have a right to eat and drink?"

2. (:5) The Right to Christian Marriage

"Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"

3. (:6) The Right to be Freed Up from Secular Labor to Devote Time to Ministry

"Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?"

David Garland: The reference to Barnabas reveals three things:

(1) that he was known to the Corinthians, perhaps only by reputation (cf. **Col. 4:10**);

(2) that he adopted the same modus operandi as Paul in refusing to accept financial support from the persons with whom he was ministering; and

(3) that Paul and Barnabas presumably have patched up the strained relationship implied in **Gal. 2:13** and **Acts 15:36–41**.

II. (:7) THE COMMON PATTERN OF WAGES APPROPRIATE FOR LABOR IMPLIES THE RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN SPIRITUAL MINISTRY – 3 FAMILIAR ANALOGIES FROM COMMON OCCUPATIONS:

Craig Blomberg: In **verses 7–12a**, Paul begins accumulating a series of reasons why in fact he does have the right to request payment for his services. These continue into **verses 13–14** as well. All told, there are five lines of argument: “common practice, scriptural precept, intrinsic justice, Jewish custom and Christ’s command.” **Verse 7** presents three analogies from the common practice of human experience in the areas of warfare, farming, and shepherding. Few in Paul’s day would have disputed the logic of these examples.

A. Soldiers who Risk Their Lives Deserve Support

“Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?”

B. Farmers Who Produce Crops Deserve Support

“Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?”

C. Shepherds Who Tend Herds Deserve Support

“Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?”

III. (:8-10) THE OLD TESTAMENT FARMING ANALOGY IMPLIES THE RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

A. (:8A) Not a Matter of Subjective, Personal Opinion

“I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I?”

B. (:8B-9A) Supported by God’s Law = Authoritative OT Quotation

“Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.’”

David Guzik: In **Deuteronomy 25:4**, God commanded You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. This law simply commanded the humane treatment of a working animal. In those days, grain would be broken away from his husk by having an ox walk on it repeatedly (usually around a circle). It would be cruel for force the ox to walk on all the grain, yet to muzzle him so he couldn't eat of it.

C. (:9B-10A) Application to all Spiritual Ministers of the Gospel

*“God is not concerned about oxen, is He?
Or is He speaking altogether for our sake?
Yes, for our sake it was written,”*

D. (:10B) Fundamental Principle: The Laborer Should Share the Fruits

*“because the plowman ought to plow in hope,
and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.”*

Paul Gardner: The place of vv. 9–10 is now clear in Paul’s discussion of his “right” as an apostle to material support. The law supports Paul and all that he has argued with the rhetorical questions of v. 7. He is entitled to such support. The law speaks to Paul’s generation and to gospel preachers. Moving on from the ox to the people who produce the crop that eventually must be threshed, Paul adds that these also clearly wait for a share of the threshed grain. He has now most carefully set up the next part of his argument, namely, that he has sown and so he too can rightly expect to share in what is reaped.

IV. (:11-14) VOLUNTARILY FOREGOING THE RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT DOES NOT UNDERMINE THE VALIDITY OF THAT RIGHT

David Prior: Argument from Intrinsic Justice –

Paul’s next argument in effect asks the Corinthians how much store they place by the gospel: what does it mean to you to have been brought from darkness to light? What do all these ‘spiritual blessings’ mean to you? Is there any gratitude in your heart for ‘*the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus*’ (1:4)? One of the most instinctive habits in believers is the gift of hospitality and generosity: if we have been on the receiving end of spiritual blessing, we want to demonstrate our thankfulness to God in tangible ways.

A. (:11-12A) Rationale for Reaping Financial Support

1. Material Support is a Small Compensation for Spiritual Ministry

*“If we sowed spiritual things in you,
is it too much if we reap material things from you?”*

2. Argument from the Lesser to the Greater

“If others share the right over you, do we not more?”

B. (:12B) Reason for Refraining from Demanding Such Support

“Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”

There are special circumstances where the wiser course of action is to refrain.

Adam Clarke: Though we had this right, we have not availed ourselves of it, but have worked with our hands to bear our own charges, lest any of you should think that we preached the Gospel merely to procure a temporal support, and so be prejudiced against us, and thus prevent our success in the salvation of your souls.

Richard Hays: In the latter part of **verse 12**, Paul at last tips his hand about the point to which he has been building up throughout the chapter: despite all the above arguments establishing his right to receive support, he has made no use of this *exousia*. Why? Because he does not want to “*put an obstacle in the way of the gospel.*” The echo here of the “*stumbling block*” image of **8:9, 13** is unmistakable. For reasons not yet explained, Paul believes that accepting financial support from the Corinthians would create barriers for his work of proclamation; since that is his preeminent concern, he takes no money.

David Garland: How would receiving money have hampered the gospel? To whom would it have been a stumbling block? Potential converts may have shied away from converting to the gospel if they suspected that it came with strings attached: acceptance would cause them to incur financial obligations to support the one who brought them the gospel. Paul sought to avoid any impression that he was preaching only to acquire support. This policy of refusing assistance from converts caused him to endure privations. In **4:12**, he lists growing weary from working with his hands as part of his hardships, and in **2 Cor. 11:9**, he will remind the Corinthians that when he was with them and in need, he did not turn to them for help. This statement indicates that he was in need. His poverty caused the Corinthians some consternation. They did not interpret his voluntary privation as conforming to the pattern of Christ’s sacrifice -- “*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*” (**2 Cor. 8:9**). Instead, they interpreted his penury as demeaning to himself and an embarrassment to them. Paul apparently considers the Corinthians’ disapproval of his choice of low social status as only a minor impediment in their relationship compared to the possible negative repercussions that accepting support would have on potential converts. His strategy of supporting himself freed him to serve all, not just his patrons. He voluntarily lowered himself from a higher status position as one supported by others to work with his hands. As a laborer, Paul could make his appeal also to the lower classes (**D. Martin** 1990: 124).

C. (:13-14) Reinforcement of the Right to Support and its Validity

1. (:13) Reinforced by Appeal to Common Sense and Jewish Custom

“Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?”

2. (:14) Reinforced by Direct Command from the Head of the Church

“So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

“The laborer is worthy of his hire” – Luke 10:7; Matt. 10:10

This should be the normal expectation and the normal practice.

Daniel Akin: Paul’s climactic argument appears here. He cites as his support Jesus himself. “*In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel*” (v. **14**). Paul probably has in mind the words of

our Lord recorded in **Luke 10:7**: “*For the worker is worthy of his wages.*” Jesus commanded that God’s people take good care of God’s servants. However, he did not command his servants always to take what was offered. Ultimately God’s servants serve him above all. They serve the gospel above all. Whatever best furthers the gospel must guide the minister of the gospel above all other considerations.

Adewuya: In **verse 14**, he says that God has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should be paid for it. He will insist on it for others, but not for himself. He’d rather support himself with his business as a tentmaker than ask the Corinthians for money and muddy the waters about his motivation. Paul’s life was utterly consumed and motivated by proclaiming the good news from God about Jesus. He could not but do it. An obligation to proclaim it has been put on him. He is required to do it. If he proclaims it out of his own free desire, then his reward for doing so is that he makes it free of charge (**v. 17–18**). On the one hand, Paul is like every other Christian; he will say in **11:1** to imitate him as he imitates Christ. If we cannot be like him, then what’s the point of imitating him? But on the other hand, Paul is utterly unique. For him, his conversion to Christianity and his commissioning to apostleship were one and the same event. But even in his unique role, and despite being an apostle, he will not make use of his rights, wanting to make it easier for people to believe, not harder.

David Gardner: Preachers of the gospel no longer can live to themselves, but must live for Christ (**2 Cor. 5:15**; cf. **Phil. 1:21**), which also entails doing all things for the sake of the gospel (**9:23**) and living for others (**10:33**). Paul is not simply offering himself as a model to illustrate his argument but presents himself as an apostolic standard for his churches (**Hafemann 1986: 128**). The one who enjoins a policy regarding idol food that would cost the Corinthians in both honor and material benefits has himself sacrificed significantly to advance the gospel. He is not blowing smoke when he says that he would not eat meat if it caused a fellow Christian to founder (**8:13**). He already has waived his right to eat anything supplied by the community. The lesson should be clear to the Corinthians. At great cost to himself, he renounces his legitimate and irrefutable right to eat and drink at the expense of the community, and he does so to avoid anything that may deter others from accepting the gospel. The Corinthians should follow their apostle’s example and renounce their presumed right to consume idol food, which Paul regards as illegitimate and injurious, in order to avoid causing a weak brother to stumble back into idolatry. Paul’s not “eating” (partaking) what the community could and should supply him as its apostle is going above and beyond the call of duty. The Corinthians’ not eating idol food is simply obeying their duty as Christians.

Mark Taylor: The implication of Jesus’ teaching for his disciples is **complete dependence on God for provision**. The whole tenor of Paul’s argument in **1 Cor 9** clarifies that he viewed financial provision as a right to forego for the sake of the gospel rather than an obligation of obedience to God. Paul’s obligation was to preach the gospel. On this matter he had no choice (**9:16–17**). He did have a choice, however, regarding whether or not to receive pay, and for the sake of the gospel he offered it free of charge.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is the responsibility for Christian ministers with regards to their financial support more upon their own shoulders to demand the right to such support or upon the shoulders of those to whom they are ministering to take the initiative to provide it?
- 2) What type of hope or expectation should Christian ministers have?
- 3) In what ways do Christian ministers today give up some of their rights for the advancement of the gospel and the healthy growth of their flock?
- 4) Which should come first, the performance of ministry or the seeking of material support?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: This [*context of Chap. 8*] raises the whole issue of, "How far must I insist on my rights?" We all wrestle with this very pertinent question. In fact, this is much before us today. You cannot turn on the television without seeing scenes almost every day of some crowd of people demanding their rights. This is the spirit of the age. Somehow or another, if you have a right you have to demand it.

I am getting so tired of hearing the word "demand," as though the existence of a right makes it necessary that someone demand that he be given that right. The question every Christian has to face is, "How far should this affect me? Do I have the right to demand my rights, especially with regard to the limitations on my personal liberty, because of the scruples of someone else?" . . .

He says, "If I am an apostle, and I have this knowledge that is greater than yours" (as he will now go on to say in the next twenty verses), "nevertheless I do not exercise all my rights. You object to giving up some rights for the sake of others. Well, I want you to know that is what I have been doing for you for a long time." . . .

I want to point out something here, and it is very necessary to add this. In Paul's case, as it should be in every case of someone wanting support, **the ministry comes first and then the support** – not the other way around. In the New Testament you never read of anybody going out to raise support in order to go out to take on a ministry that he has not done anything in yet. It is the demonstration of a ministry that is the basis for the raising of support, and we need to apply this today. Many young people have come to us asking to be supported to go out into a foreign field. They have been rightly challenged in their lives; they see the opportunity and they want to respond. It is sincere and earnest on their part, and God bless them for it. They are willing to give up certain

advantages of living here in the United States and deprive themselves and their families to go out to difficult places. That is a marvelous thing, but what they ought also to understand is that there is a need to demonstrate before they go that they can do something in a ministry. It does not have to be teaching always. Sometimes just to show a helpful spirit, a willingness to help clean up some older person's backyard or help them with some difficulty they are having indicates that here is someone who is willing to minister and not to be ministered unto. That is the basis, then, for asking for support.

Zeisler: Paul's questions in **verses 1, 2 of chapter 9** raise the query which those who work in the ministry should first ask: Is this position one which the Lord has called into being? As far as he is concerned, Paul is certain of his calling. Why, the Corinthians themselves above all others were incontrovertible evidence of his apostleship. Through ignorance of the facts, others may well have had questions concerning his calling, but not the Corinthians. Paul himself had led most of them to Christ. He had founded their church. There were legitimate criteria by which he could be measured, and upon which they could conclude that he had indeed been called to the proclamation of the gospel. . .

Hard work and productivity, in other words, should be rewarded by allowing the worker to partake of the harvest accruing to such work.

But implicit in Paul's illustrations is the question, "Is anything being accomplished? Is anything growing." The results do not have to be high profile and striking. We are speaking of a heart condition. Real prayer, real encouragement, teaching, counseling, evangelism, etc., are in question here. There are some who have God-given gifts and opportunities who are unwilling to work hard. Just because one has graduated from seminary does not mean that a Christian bureaucracy must now find a position in the ministry for that person so that his needs are fully met. A mere degree, title, dream or whatever does not qualify one for support by the Body of Christ.

Having raised these questions then, Paul's response as he views his own ministry is, "I qualify." Jesus said so. Reason, history, the Scriptures, all agree that it is right and proper that Paul and others like him be supported in the ministry to which God had called him. . .

What an extraordinary and compelling illustration of giving up one's rights! The rights he so clearly enunciates in **verses 1 through 14** he denies himself, so overcome is he by something else-his compulsion to preach the gospel-which supersedes his rights and his freedom. He did not find laboring for the cause of Christ so heavy a burden to bear that he needed to be reimbursed by having his needs met. On the contrary, it was his joy and his compelling reason for living.

Johon MacArthur: Paul gives six reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches to whom he ministered:

- (1) he was an apostle
- (2) it is customary to pay workers
- (3) it is according to God's law

- (4) other leaders exercise the right
- (5) it is the universal pattern
- (6) and Jesus ordained it

Bob Deffinbaugh: Some of the Corinthians have several problems with Paul's apostleship. The first is Paul's message. Paul's message is simplistic (Christ crucified), and it is one that does not find general acceptance. Second, Paul's methods are unappealing. He does not (indeed, he will not) use the persuasive techniques of some, which many find appealing. His speech is far from eloquent, and this is by choice. Finally, Paul does not charge for his services. They think that no one worth their salt would teach and preach for nothing, because after all, you get what you pay for! . . .

Now, in **chapter 9**, Paul presses further this option of refraining from one's rights by illustrating it from his own life and ministry. He first sets out to prove, without a doubt, that he is an apostle and that as such, he has the right to eat and drink at the expense of those to whom he ministers. Having done so, he then explains why he has chosen to refuse this right, at great personal cost. Not being supported at the expense of those to whom Paul ministers is

- (1) the basis for anticipated rewards related to his ministry and,
- (2) a means by which the gospel can be proclaimed more effectively. . .

Being an apostle then is having the right to be supported by those to whom he ministers. His right to "refrain from working" (at a secular job) enables him to devote himself to those to whom he ministers, his "*work in the Lord*" (**verse 1**). All of the other apostles except Barnabas have chosen to exercise the right to be supported and to lead about a wife. Paul and Barnabas have gone above and beyond the call of duty. They have chosen not to exercise their rights in these matters. . .

How does declining financial support remove a hindrance to the advance of the gospel of Christ? For one thing, Paul's work as a tent-maker puts him in touch with the lost. Preachers often live in a kind of seclusion, finding it difficult to get close enough to the lost to be a testimony. Working in the secular work place puts one in contact with people, heathen people who need to hear the gospel. Working in the secular work place gives one the opportunity to be a witness by the quality of our work and of our relationships. Not seeking or taking funds from people is something which takes the world by surprise. We all know that many unbelievers, not to mention many Christians (including most of us), roll our eyes when we hear the televangelists on television asking over and over for money. Paul is a man who not only refuses to exercise his right to be supported by the Corinthians, but often labors so that he can support the needy. In doing this, Paul sets himself apart from many of the religious charlatans of his day and causes people to look upon him and his message with a measure of respect.

Matthew Henry: And, if the Jewish priesthood was maintained out of the holy things that were then offered, shall not Christ's ministers have a maintenance out of their ministry? Is there not as much reason that we should be maintained as they?" He asserts it to be the institution of Christ: "*Even so hath the Lord ordained that those who preach*

the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14), should have a right to a maintenance, though not bound to demand it, and insist upon it." It is the people's duty to maintain their minister, by Christ's appointment, though it be not a duty bound on every minister to call for or accept it. He may waive his right, as Paul did, without being a sinner; but those transgress an appointment of Christ who deny or withhold it. Those who preach the gospel have a right to live by it; and those who attend on their ministry, and yet take no thought about their subsistence, fail very much in their duty to Christ, and respect owing to them.

Craig Blomberg: Paul's model of accepting help from other churches but not from the congregation to which he is currently ministering finds a partial parallel in the common practice of itinerant Christians ministering freely in their home congregations but receiving gifts or love offerings elsewhere. A closer parallel emerges with the practice of missionaries receiving support from one or more congregations in one location to enable them to minister full time somewhere else. But none of these models can be absolutized, since the first Christians themselves employed different methods in different places. No one model, therefore, should be mandated as the only legitimate practice for a certain organization or group of believers.

Paul Decker: This is not the easiest job in the world. And there seems to be a lot of expectations for a person that gets accused of only working one day a week.

So when I am asked, "What do you do Monday through Saturday anyway?"... I can say I play the role of...

- ...teacher
- ...healer
- ...lawyer
- ...judge
- ...social worker
- ...writer
- ...editor
- ...philosopher
- ...ethicist
- ...entertainer
- ...salesman
- ...manager
- ...planner
- ...visionary
- ...leader
- ...peacemaker
- ...servant
- ...counselor
- ...scholar.

And in the midst of all these roles, the pastor must stay sweet to those that chide him for not doing it correctly.

Thomas Leake: (:1-6) A Spiritual Leader Must Be a Genuine Example

Introduction:

Problem of Hypocrisy in the church; outward show driven by pride; Leaders cannot make excuses for their own sins or try to cover them. In some cases, leaders need to step down. Only a genuine example on the part of spiritual leaders validates the Word of God.

Context of Chap. 8 = need to place love for brethren above the exercise of our liberty in Christ; Did Paul practice what he preached? **Chap. 9** shows that he did. Paul is not a perfect example, but he is a worthy example by God's grace.

Main Principle: 1 Cor. 8:9 – Liberty is not the freedom to do whatever we please; but the freedom to do the will of God. The Corinthians had misinterpreted Paul's actions in not demanding his right to financial support. They looked down at his apostleship – partly because he was not being paid full-time but was supporting himself in a tent-making capacity. Paul maintains that he (of all people) certainly has a right to financial support from the Corinthian church which he founded.

Paul was not one of the original 12 Apostles; he had to defend his apostleship on numerous occasions; not out of pride, but in order to defend the truth.

3 Reasons Why the Apostle Paul is Worthy of Financial Support

I. Free in Christ

Followed by 4 rhetorical questions

Paul had freedoms like any other believer; includes freedom from sin; freedom from the Law of Moses; he understood his freedoms better than any believer; knew that he was not under the dietary laws involved with Chap. 8 discussion; but primarily he was a man of love.

II. Apostle of Christ

What is an Apostle? More than a Disciple

Some people today think that their church has apostles. But nobody today can meet the NT criteria and description of an apostle.

Definition: "Sent one" by another to represent them; like an ambassador or an envoy.

Paul had been personally sent out by Jesus Christ with His authority to proclaim His words. Paul spoke with the authority of his Lord and Master.

Review of NT teaching regarding the apostles:

Mark 3:13-14 – the choosing and appointing of the 12; hand-picked by Christ;

Luke 6:12-13 – Christ probably praying about whom to select; very important; very special;

Acts 9:15 – Paul = "*chosen instrument of mine*" = Apostle to the Gentiles – not one of the 12 (Matthias was the legitimate replacement for Judas);

2 Tim. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:7; Rom.. 11:13; Gal. 1:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Cor. 14:37 – Paul

spoke and wrote with the authority of Christ

1 Thess. 2:5-6 – Paul refrained from always exerting his authority;

1 Cor. 15:7; Rev. 21:14; Acts 5:12-13 – How did the church treat the apostles?

Special regard; they performed “*signs and miracles*” – not performed by all believers;

people listened to their teaching in a special sense – **Acts 2:42; 2 Pet. 3:2;**

Peter and Paul finished their epistles with exhortation: “*You had better listen to the words we wrote*”

2 Cor. 12:12 – Paul defending his apostleship – authenticating signs were important;

Eph. 2:20 – apostles were **foundational** to the churches (so we would not expect to see them now during the finishing of the structure)

We certainly have false apostles present today; very strong words – **Rev. 2:2; 2 Cor.**

11:13 – Paul should have been revered in church at Corinth; **Acts 4:33** – must be a witness of the resurrection of Christ; **Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:8-10** – “*last of all*” = there will not be any more apostles coming after Paul – pretty clear statement; had to have seen Jesus in the flesh – **2 Cor. 11:5**

If anyone in the world should understand this, it should be the Corinthian church; tone of sadness on the part of Paul; notes of sarcasm in his questions; the very existence of the Corinthian church authenticated his apostleship

III. Worker of Christ

Corinthians must have argued that Paul could not be very important since he was not being paid; Paul points to his humbling of himself out of love for them; I sacrificed for you; Follow my example.

The issue was not whether the apostles like Paul could be married; that was understood; but whether their right to financial support extended to provision to take along their wife on the missionary travels. She was an important supporter of the ministry in many ways.

[Some interesting points in this short passage that contradict traditional Roman Catholic teaching]

Peter was married (**Matt. 8:15**)

Jesus had earthly brethren from Mary; Mary did not remain a virgin; did not remain sinless;

Conclusion / Applications:

- Good to have a genuine example of Christian leadership – go out and find one
- Practice what you preach; importance of involvement in small groups
- Don't cover up your sins
- Other people are watching how you live; our example matters
- Jesus gave up His rights and humbled Himself to take on human flesh

Thomas Leake: (:7-15) -- 7 Reasons Why Spiritual Leaders Should Be Supported Financially

Introduction:

Problem of shameless appeals for money by those religious hucksters who enjoy such a

high standard of living; **2 Pet 2:3** – using religion for financial gain; Your use of money reveals your spiritual priorities and level of thankfulness; Contentment of our elder wives; should give to those who have impacted your life spiritually.

1) (:7) Normal Human Employment Pays Their Workers

No one questions its appropriateness; what kind of army would expect its soldiers to maintain their secular job and be self-supporting?

2 Tim. 2:6 – not only are you entitled to support, but to the first fruits;

This is basic care ... not exceptional

2) (:8-10) Scripture Teaches This is God's Law

Deut. 25:4; look at the justice embedded in this verse; God does care about animals and makes sure that they are fed; we are far more important; we need to be wise in our giving; not all causes pleading for money are worthy of the money.

1 Tim. 5:17-18 – same OT quote coupled with quote from Luke – both are treated as equal Scripture;

Implication: Christian workers expected to work hard; don't be a lazy pastor

3) (:11) Material Support is the Least a Church Can Do

Paul gets very specific in applying the principles to his relationship to the Corinthian church. Spiritual things are of greater priority than material things; cf. being saved by firemen and policemen and considering them worthy of support; how much more those that save us from spiritual ruin;

Must understand the importance of spiritual life – **1 Thess 5:12-13**; world looks down on pastors and missionaries and makes fun of them; we need to exalt them.

4) (:12) Our Example was Exemplary

Paul's practice was not to ask for financial support for his apostolic ministry; His key motive = No hindrance to the gospel; no road blocks to the smooth advancement of the gospel; He was willing to sacrifice and not use his rights; so often we fight for our rights.

5) (:13) It is Right in Sacred Duties to be Paid From the Offerings

Some people might have objected to money being offered up to the Lord being used for the physical sustenance of God's workers; **Lev. 7:5-6** – good example: offering to the Lord, but the priests benefited from it for food; v. **8-9** – also received shelter and clothing; cf. Abraham tithing to Melchizedek – 10% is not a legalistic amount required in the church age . . . but it is a worthy amount and an excellent guideline – Why would people react against this guideline?

Giving must be consistent and reliable

6) (:14) Jesus Himself Commanded Support of Full-Time Christian Workers

To neglect the messenger was to neglect the message and the one sending the messenger (the source of the message); very important for us as a church to support missionaries.

7) (:15) My Motive is Right in Teaching You This Now

“*But I*” = emphatic – as for me, let me remind you what I have done . . .

My Boast = to offer the gospel without charge.

Did not mean Paul never received an offering; Jesus was supported in His itinerant missionary work; But Paul sacrificed in an exceptional way in this area; so much emotion in these statements;

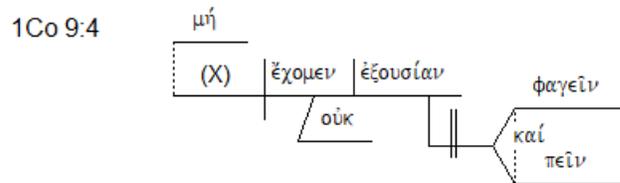
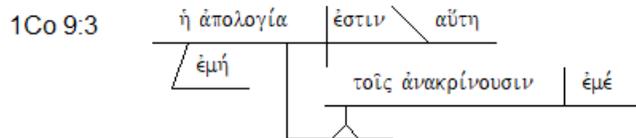
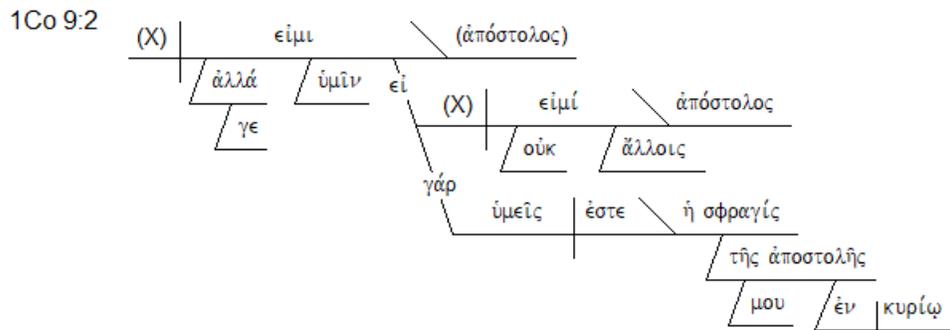
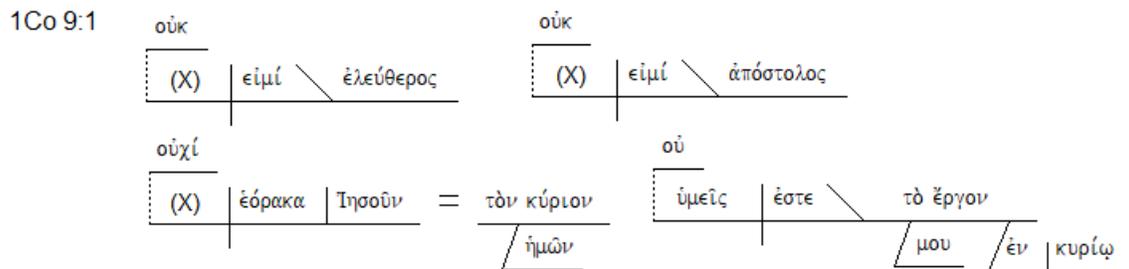
No one could ever accuse him of preaching for financial gain.

Why are so many people so naïve regarding their giving – give lots of money to very poor causes and very suspect preachers.

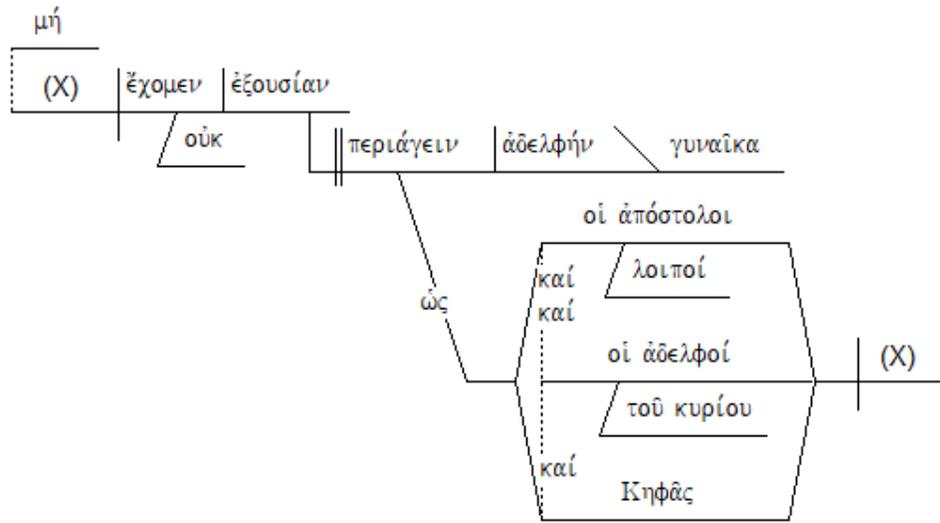
The Corinthians should have been forcing their money on Paul – if he had too much, certainly no one would know better than him who needed support.

Conclusion: 2 Cor. 11:18ff. – Nobody sacrificed for the ministry like the Apostle Paul.

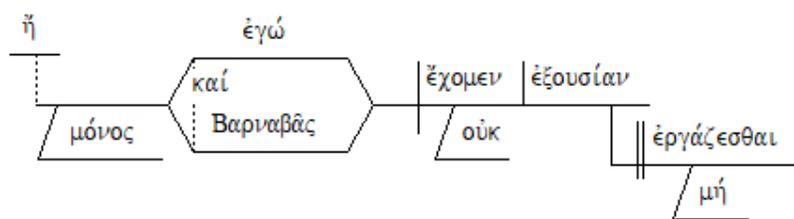
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



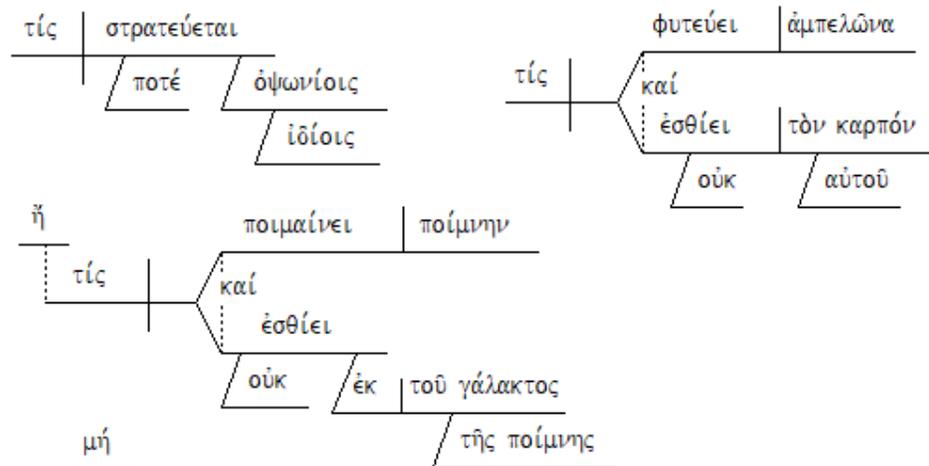
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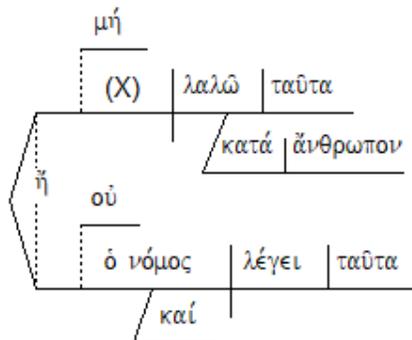
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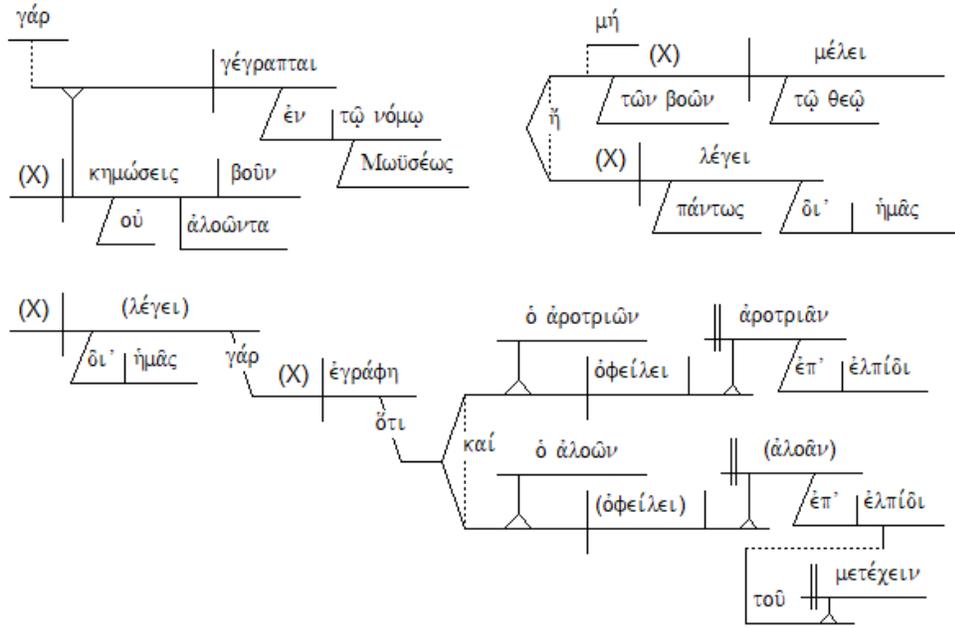
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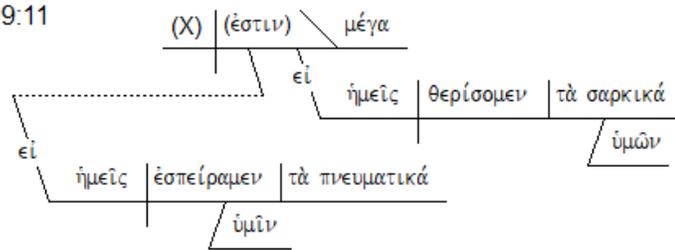
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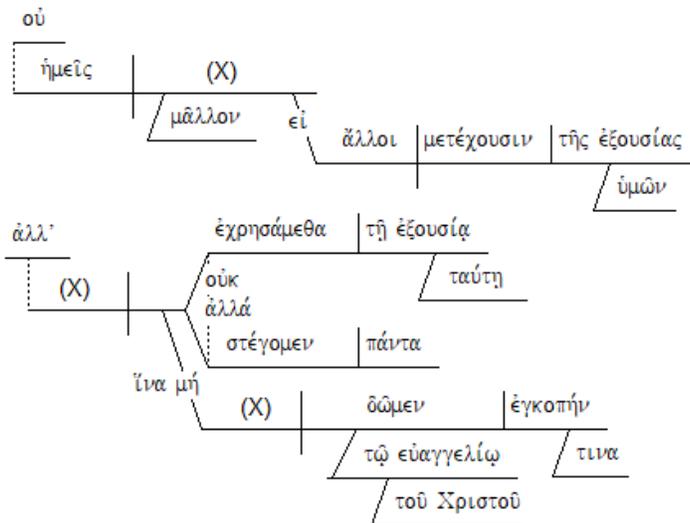
1Co 9:9-10



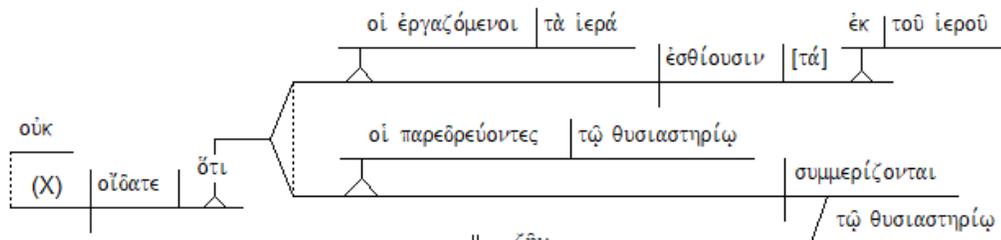
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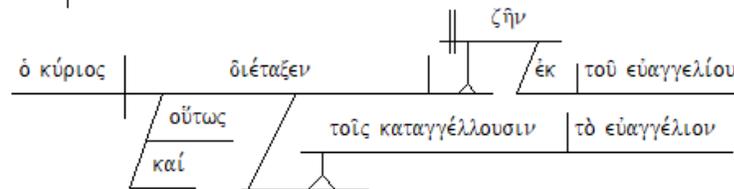
1Co 9:12



1Co 9:13



1Co 9:14



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:15-18

TITLE: *PREACHING WITHOUT PAY*

BIG IDEA:

SOMETIMES GOSPEL MINISTRY INVOLVES YIELDING ONE'S RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

FOUR CONSIDERATIONS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL REGARDING PREACHING THE GOSPEL WITHOUT DEMANDING HIS RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION:

The immediate context has already established the right of those who preach the gospel (including the Apostle Paul) to receive appropriate material support for their labors. This point is no longer open for debate. Paul moves beyond that foundational truth to speak to his own personal strategy of offering the gospel without charge to those to whom he ministered. You do not find Paul making pleas for financial support. You do not see him making the deputation rounds to line up sufficient guaranteed support before stepping out into the ministry. You do not find Paul spending enormous amounts of money on fund-raising efforts – knowing that if he just turns the crank, a substantial amount of money will flow to his ministry. (This does not mean that he refused all gifts that were offered. Although often those funds went to the needs of others as well.) Instead, you see the ultimate type of self-sacrifice as Paul labors with his own hands in his tent making occupation to support himself and even others in the gospel ministry. Was it because Paul had some type of inner drive to fulfill his calling to be an excellent tent maker? Was it because he took some great satisfaction in spending tireless hours at that craft? Not at all – it was because Paul deemed self-support essential to his personal strategy of both earning him a better reward and establishing the integrity of his ministry and ensuring that the gospel would go forth without any unnecessary criticism. Paul knew that there was special reward for going the extra mile. (Illustration: at work we have a program that rewards employees for “Going the extra mile.”) What a remarkable example! Yet where do you hear this message preached? Where do you see this example emulated? You will search long and far to find anything comparable. This section which seems so foreign to our Christian ministry model deserves our extra study and meditation. Paul gives two reasons for preaching without pay: the first is covered in this paragraph. The second will be covered in **vv. 19-23** – he wanted nothing to hinder the progress of the gospel through his ministry.

Robert Gundry: The boast gets spelled out in five explanatory sentences, each one beginning with “*For*” and supporting what immediately precedes.

1. Why hasn't Paul written to get material support? Because he's determined that no one void his boast by persuading him to accept such support.
2. Why that determination? Because by itself, proclaiming the gospel is nothing to

boast about, whereas proclaiming it without taking remuneration is something to boast about.

3. Why is only proclaiming the gospel nothing to boast about? Because Paul has to proclaim it. The “necessity” of proclaiming it has been “imposed” on him, so that he can take no credit for doing his job (see **Galatians 1:15–16; Acts 9:15–16; 22:15, 21; 26:16–20**).
4. Why this necessity? Because failure to proclaim the gospel would bring him “woe.”
5. And why woe? Because he’d lose the reward he’ll get if he proclaims the gospel willingly. “*But if [I’m doing this] unwillingly, I’ve been entrusted with a managership*” means that an unwilling proclamation of the gospel would reduce him to a slave who has been put in charge of household affairs but doesn’t get rewarded for doing his duty (compare **Luke 17:7–10**).

We expect Paul to answer his question, “What then is my reward?” in terms of something to be received at the Last Judgment. But no, he answers in terms of what he can boast about right now, that is, “proclaiming the gospel . . . free of charge,” with the result that he hasn’t “at all used” his “authority” to charge people for proclaiming “the gospel” to them. The ability to make this boast is reward enough, thank you.

Charles Hodge: That Paul preached the gospel willingly, that he esteemed it his highest joy and glory, is abundantly evident from his history and his writings [**Rom. 1:5; 11:13; 15:15-16; 1 Cor. 15:9-10; Gal. 1:15-16; Eph. 3:8**]. The difference, therefore here expressed between (ἐκὼν and ἄκων), willing and unwilling, is not the difference between cheerfully and reluctantly, but between optional and obligatory. He says he had a dispensation or stewardship (οἰκονομία) committed to him. These stewards (οἰκονόμοι) were commonly slaves. There is a great difference between what a slave does in obedience to a command, and what a man volunteers to do of his own accord. And this is the precise difference to which the apostle here refers. (*An Exposition*, 161–62)

Anthony Thiselton: Behind these verses stand two distinct issues. First, Paul is aware that if he accepts financial provision from Christians in Corinth, this will come mainly, if not entirely, from the wealthier members of the church, who constitute, or are linked with, “the strong.” They will become, in effect, his patrons, and he, their client. In the Greco-Roman culture of the day, “favors” are regarded as implying some reciprocal obligation. Hence, if Paul accepts their financial provision, they will expect “favored terms” from Paul in their claims about their position in the church, their relation with the weak, and their role in the “ordering” of the church, perhaps in terms of a hierarchy of status within the church. Such hostages to pastoral pressures would be unthinkable. Paul insists on being evenhanded or, when necessary, on giving particular attention and respect to the most vulnerable and fragile (cf. **12:22-24**).

Second, Paul has his own special reason for wanting to pay his way. Overwhelmed by the generosity of God’s grace personally to him for his salvation and apostolic call (**15:8-10**), he longs to give to God some **voluntary thank offering**. But this cannot be his apostolic labor. For, in Paul’s personal perspective, this has been pressed upon him

as a commission and obligation. God in Christ set Paul apart or “*marked him out*” (Greek *aphorizō*) from before birth, and “*called*” him to preach the gospel among the Gentiles (**Gal. 1:15-16**). Paul could no longer “*kick against the goads*” (**Acts 9:5**). Like one of the prophets constrained by “*the burden of the Lord*” and “*appointed*” to fulfill a commission (cf. **Jer. 1:5, 10**), he declares, Compulsion [Greek *anankē*] presses upon me; it is agony for me [Greek *ouai gar moi estin*, “*woe to me*”) if I do not proclaim the gospel (v. 16b).

How, then, could Paul choose to offer this service of proclamation as a freely given thank offering? In his own heart Paul cannot glory in his commission unless there is some way in which he can live out the “*giving freely.*” Hence to live by the labor of his own hands allows him that one point of Christ-like giving, in which he can glory. His own labor permits him to proclaim the gospel gratis, which is akin to going “*the second mile.*”

Paul’s “*reward*” (**vv. 17-18**) is not some external return that he receives in consequence of a personal sacrifice; it is the joy that this renunciation of rights gives him in and for its own sake. The act and its “*reward*” are linked by “*internal grammar*” like the delight of giving a gift to a loved one, not by external cause and effect. This “*internal*” grammar has a parallel in Isaiah, where “*His reward is with him*” means not that God brings an external reward, but that his very coming is itself “*reward*” (**Isa. 40:10**).

Richard Hays: After all this buildup, one would suppose that the logical conclusion would be for Paul to demand that the Corinthians ante up the money they rightfully ought to give him, but in fact, as he has already indicated, this is the exact opposite of his intention. **Verse 15** is the dramatic climax and pivot-point of the chapter. Not only has Paul not made any use of these impressively attested rights, he would rather die than ... than what? The sentence in the Greek sputters to a halt. Then Paul blurts that no one will deprive him of his “*boast.*” The meaning of this somewhat opaque statement is explained in the following highly compressed sentences (**vv. 16–18**). Despite all the impressive reasons for receiving support, including the command of the Lord, Paul will take no money because he cannot claim to be working voluntarily as an apostle. Therefore, unlike the sophists, he can receive no fees in payment for services rendered. His service is rendered to God, not willingly (!) but because he has been “*entrusted with a commission.*” The language here suggests once again the image of the slave as steward (cf. **4:1–4**). Paul preaches because “*necessity*” (*anagk* ; NRSV “*obligation*”; cf. **7:26**) has been laid upon him by God. (We might recall the image of Jeremiah, for whom the prophetic word is “*something like a burning fire shut up in my bones,*” **Jer. 20:9**.) He has no choice but to proclaim the gospel. Therefore, his “*reward*” is, paradoxically, to make the gospel available to others “*free of charge*” (**v. 18**; cf. his caustic description of other preachers as “*peddlers of God’s Word,*” **2 Cor. 2:17**), thereby not making use of his rights.

I. (:15) PAUL’S COMMITMENT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL WITHOUT DEMANDING HIS RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A. Testimony Regarding Paul's Historical Practice

"But I have used none of these things."

Note use of pronoun "I" in this section – Paul speaking of his own personal practice – not speaking for all of the apostles here.

Perfect Tense – Continues to be true for the Apostle Paul

Charles Hodge: the right of a recompense for labour, v.7; the right to an equivalent for benefits conferred, v.11; the right to be treated as other ministers were, v.12; the right to be dealt with according to the law of God in the Old Testament, and of Christ in the New.

B. Resolve to Maintain that Same Example of Self Support

1. Not Lobbying for Financial Support

"And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case"

How very different from most of the ministry letters we receive.

2. Extreme Importance Placed on Maintaining the Current Practice

"for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one."

Paul is going to explain exactly what that boast of his was. Apparently this approach to finances in his ministry is not some minor issue, but a matter of highest priority.

David Garland: The sentence may be completed thus: "It is better for me rather to die than to live off the gospel." Living off the gospel would mean death to his whole understanding of his prophetic calling and his reason for being. It would also entail slavery. **Patterson** (1982: 19) reminds us that the slave could have retained freedom by dying. By choosing to continue with physical life, the slave gives up freedom. Paul is free only as a slave of Christ (**Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1**), which necessitates that he be a slave of all.

Paul Gardner: When Paul speaks of his **boast**, therefore, he is making two points both here and in **chapter 1**.

- Firstly, Paul deliberately contrasts what he wants to boast in with what the elitists have been boasting in with their arrogant words and behavior. They have been boasting in outward wisdom and spiritual gifts. This sort of boasting is condemned in **Jeremiah 9** and by Paul.
- Secondly, in expounding upon his own "*boast*," which is in the Lord and in a God-centered grace revealed in Christ crucified, he points to his total dependence on Christ. Paul's boast arises not from his brilliant gospel preaching or his wisdom but simply from his love for the one who had died for them.

II. (:16) PAUL'S OBLIGATION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL – IRREGARDLESS OF ANY FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

A. Preaching By Itself (Fulfilling one's calling) Carries No Special Reward

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of”

Mark Taylor: Paul explains and elaborates on the concept of “boasting” raised in **9:15**. Whether or not he preaches the gospel has nothing to do with financial support but rather is wrapped up entirely in his apostolic calling. The gospel itself is grounds for boasting in the Lord (**1:30–31**), but in terms of preaching the gospel, like the prophets of old, Paul was under divine compulsion. He had no choice in the matter, expressed in Greek by two parallel conditional sentences: “*If I preach, I have no reason to boast*” and “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*” In other words, there is no reason for boasting if Paul preaches because he is compelled to do so. If he does not preach the gospel then he faces “the ultimate calamity.” Paul did not preach the gospel willingly for a reward. If he had a choice in the matter and chose to do it willingly, then he might merit a reward. Rather, Paul understood his calling as a stewardship that required faithfulness (**9:17**; cf. **4:1–5**). This does not mean that Paul preached unwillingly, only that he wants to express in the clearest way possible the divine mandate that compelled him in ministry. His reward in preaching was to give up his rights inherent in the gospel and to preach without charge.

B. Preaching (for one so gifted and called) Constitutes an Obligation

“for I am under compulsion”

Gordon Fee: God had ordained such a destiny for him from birth and had revealed it to him in the event of the Damascus road (**Gal. 1:15–16**). From that time on, proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles was both his calling and his compulsion. He “had to” do it because God had so taken hold of him (cf. **Phil. 3:12**). Indeed the compulsion is so great that “*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*” Again, “woe is me” is not to be understood in terms of common parlance, as if he would experience some kind of inner distress if he were to fail to preach. Since this is his divinely appointed destiny, he thereby would stand under divine judgment if he were to fail to fulfill that destiny. His point is a simple one, which has nothing to do with “inner compulsion.” As in an earlier moment (**4:1**), Paul is reflecting once more on his “servanthood,” which for him meant “calling” and “joy,” not drudgery and head-hanging obedience. He cannot boast in the task of proclaiming the good news of Christ to the Gentiles because that is what he must do by divine design, an “obligation” he has gladly taken on as divine calling. Thus in Paul’s own self-understanding he is simultaneously Christ’s “slave” and Christ’s “freedman.”

C. Failure to Fulfill One's Calling Brings Judgment

“for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”

R.C.H. Lenski: Calamity, dire punishment from God would overtake Paul if he ceased to preach. This is surely astounding, and Paul intends that it shall be so.

III. (:17) PAUL'S STEWARDSHIP TO PREACH THE GOSPEL -- IRREGARDLESS OF ANY FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

A. Paul's Preaching Ministry Was Not Initiated by His Choice

"For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward"

B. Paul's Preaching Ministry Was Divinely Entrusted to Him as a Stewardship

"but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me."

John MacArthur: This does not indicate that Paul was unwilling to obey but that his will had no part in the call itself. Since it was God's sovereign choice and call, he received not a "reward," but a "stewardship" (a valuable responsibility or duty to be carefully managed).

R.C.H. Lenski: In order to understand Paul's statement we should remember that the *oikonomoi* (4:1, 2) were slaves, whose masters simply gave certain goods or property into their hands to be administered in trust. The entire matter rested on the decision of the master to whom the slave in question belonged. The master did not ask: "Will you take this stewardship?" He only gave the order: "Take it!" The slave took it – woe to him if he was obstinate and refused! But when a slave, who had nothing to say in the matter, was put in charge of such a trust he had no claim to wages for administering this trust.

IV. (:18) PAUL'S STRATEGY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL WITHOUT DEMANDING HIS RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Why then did Paul choose to minister in this mode of self-support? What was his motive? How did he feel that this approach would benefit his ministry?

A. The Motivation is for Special Reward, Special Boasting

"What then is my reward?"

Paul Gardner: Paul's understanding of rewards is similar to what is taught in **Matthew 6:1–6, 16**. There Jesus distinguished between the intentionally self-flaunting acts of the hypocrites and the quiet works of the righteous. The former "receive" (ἀπέχουσιν, present tense) their "reward" (μισθός), while the Father "will reward" (ἀποδώσει, future tense) the righteous. Just as the "woe" of **v. 16** looked forward to the future, so Paul now shows that he anticipates "reward" rather than judgment (see again **vv. 24–27**).

B. The Method Involves Not Demanding Financial Support

"That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge"

R.C.H. Lenski: free of expense to the congregations concerned

Gordon Fee: Although Paul himself does not press the point here, his presenting the

gospel “free of charge” also serves as a lived-out paradigm of the gospel itself—the “free” gospel that leads to their freedom from Satan’s oppression is thus freely given.

David Garland: The Corinthians may know that Paul receives support from churches elsewhere to help him expand his mission field into new territory (**2 Cor. 11:8–9; Phil. 4:15**). He may be making a fine distinction that he never receives help from the people where he is preaching the gospel but does accept help from those who wish to support him when he leaves their district (see **Garland** 1999: 98, 475–76).

C. The Mindset Involves Voluntarily Giving Up Certain Rights

“so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.”

R.C.H. Lenski: not to use at all – the negation of “not to use fully or completely” ??

Nothing said in this passage denies the legitimacy of these rights to financial support.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Can we even imagine such a situation where the most respected Apostle to the Gentiles, charged with such a tremendous burden of ministry, church planting duties, leadership training responsibilities, itinerant preaching schedule, etc. does not seek compensation from those to whom he is ministering? This is one of the most shocking examples of self-sacrifice and humble love in all of Scripture.

2) Would we treat unpaid, but gifted and diligent preachers of the Word with the same respect as those who are pulling down big salaries? Would we tend to devalue the ministry of those who are not supported full time in the church?

3) Should anyone today even consider following Paul’s example in this regard, or was his situation unique for his calling and his circumstances?

4) How faithful are we in carrying out the stewardship of the ministry entrusted to us, based on our giftedness and opportunities?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gordon Fee: The argument has thus come full circle. They have viewed his restraint in making use of his apostolic *exousia* to patronage as not having apostolic *exousia* at all. He does indeed have such *exousia*, he has argued, but for him use might be viewed as misuse. Thus he has refrained for the sake of the gospel. But this policy has also set him free from merely human restraints. He will now return to the theme of freedom (from

v. 1) and explain how his nonuse of his rights enhances his freedom to be a servant of the gospel all the more.

James Boyer: Paul has in mind a higher reward than the benefit of material support. Indeed, his sense of responsibility toward the gospel was too strong to allow thinking of it as a way of making a living. Pay for preaching the gospel? Never! That was a stewardship laid on him. To do it earned no credit, deserved no pay. He was but a slave doing his duty (cf. **Luke 17:7-10**). But there was one thing Paul could do to please his Master and gain a basis for pride in his work. He could voluntarily renounce his right to support, support himself, and make the gospel without cost to those he served! “If I were volunteering my services of my own free will, then the Lord would give me a special reward; but that is not the situation, for God has picked me out and given me this sacred trust and I have no choice. Under this circumstance, what is my pay? It is the special joy I get from preaching the Good News without expense to anyone, never demanding my rights.”

Leon Morris: Re **vs 17** – There is more than one way of understanding this difficult verse. Paul may mean that the man who preaches with a willing spirit merits a reward, whereas if he is unwilling he is not excused. He must still discharge his stewardship. Or he may be starting from the premise of **verse 16** that “*necessity presses upon me*”. If he preached of his own free choice he would merit a reward. As it is, it is not his own choice. He must preach. The next verse would then be understood as, “What reward is possible under these circumstances?” There is nothing of grace in *misthos*, *reward*, which rather signifies “*wages*”, “the payment of what is due.”

Charles Hodge: Re **vs. 16** – The reason why it was so important to him to refuse all remuneration as a minister was, that although he preached the gospel that was no (*kauxema*), ground of boasting to him. That he was bound to do, yea, woe was denounced against him unless he did preach it. Nothing could be a ground of boasting, but something which he was free to do, or not to do. He was free to receive or to refuse a remuneration for preaching; and therefore his refusing to do so was a ground of glorying, that is, a proof of integrity to which he could with confidence appeal. . .

A physician may attend the sick from the highest motives, though he receives a remuneration for his services. But when he attends the poor gratuitously, though the motives may be no higher, the evidence of their purity is placed beyond question. Paul’s ground of glorying, therefore, was not preaching, for that was a matter of obligation; but his preaching gratuitously, which was altogether optional. . . The principle on which the apostle’s argument is founded is recognized by our Lord, when he said, “*When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,*” **Luke 17, 10.** . Paul’s reward was to sacrifice himself for others.

Ray Stedman: But now Paul comes to his point. All this has just been building up to what he has been wanting to say. He proves that he had the right to be supported, but he did not always exercise that. When he came to Corinth he had deliberately chosen not

to, although he did receive support at times from other churches, as he tells us in his letter to the Philippians and so on. But at Corinth he did not.

Look at **verse 15**. He feels very strongly about this. He says to these people, "Look, I would rather die than have you take away my right to give up my rights. That is a right I insist on having." The right to give up his rights, that is the greatest right a Christian has. Paul says, "This means everything to me." "Well," you say, "why did he feel so strongly about it?" . . .

He did make use of his right sometimes, but not in Corinth. There he made the gospel free of charge. What he is saying is simply that the thing that motivated him, the thing that drove him to work late hours at night making tents so he would earn a living and would not have to be supported by anybody in the church in Corinth, was the sheer delight it gave him to bless and enrich someone else without taking a penny in return. It was the joy of giving that Paul was experiencing.

Steve Zeisler: We have in this passage a remarkable insight into the heart of this great servant of God, this man who later will say, "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*" Paul shares with us this picture of himself so that we may grow to be like the One whom he himself imitated. He is saying that if he were indeed to exercise his rights as a Christian minister in this area, a certain boast which he held would no longer be his.

Certainly, the apostle is not talking about boasting as we commonly understand that word. He is not saying what a great man he is, but rather is using this word about himself in the sense that it is a badge of distinction; this is how he thinks of himself, in other words. . .

Having described his compulsion -- "*woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*" -- Paul now goes on to say what is his reward, what is there about him that he can approve of as he carries out his ministry. The one thing he can do, he says, is adorn the glorious message of the gospel by making it available free of charge. Having preached all day he could make tents at night, sacrificing something of himself in order to make an offering to the Lord by adorning the ministry he had been given. Supporting him for his work among them would rob him of the one choice which he had in life, which was to beautify the gospel by the free offer of it. He did not have the option of not preaching. That choice was no longer available to him. What he could choose to do, however, was to give something of himself for the sake of the gospel. He did not want to lose that privilege.

At times, of course, he was supported. Different circumstances-his health, his surroundings, the needs of fellow-believers, etc.-indicated that he be supported, and he was. But his heart was inclined to make free of charge the offer of the gospel. That was his contribution toward what he was doing, and he did not want to lose it, especially as far as the Corinthians were concerned.

What an extraordinary and compelling illustration of giving up one's rights! The rights he so clearly enunciates in verses 1 through 14 he denies himself, so overcome is he by something else-his compulsion to preach the gospel-which supersedes his rights and his freedom. He did not find laboring for the cause of Christ so heavy a burden to bear that he needed to be reimbursed by having his needs met. On the contrary, it was his joy and his compelling reason for living.

Bob Deffinbaugh: It may be needless to say, but I will nonetheless say it again as I conclude this message: This passage proves that Paul has the right to be supported in his ministry, and that he also has the privilege of not exercising it, for his own benefit (his reward) and for the advance of the gospel. This text does not teach that individuals or churches have the right not to support those who preach.

In our text, Paul has spent a great deal of time defending his right as an apostle to be supported (to eat and drink) by those to whom he ministers. He has spent no time attempting to defend his status as a free man (not a slave). Why is there this emphasis on his rights as an apostle? First, because his apostleship is being challenged by some in Corinth, especially by those who are false apostles (see **2 Corinthians 11**). Paul will not give ground on the matter of his apostleship, because he will not surrender the truth of the gospel to those who would change it. Second, Paul emphasizes his rights as an apostle because these rights are the most evident and least disputed. Aside from Paul and Barnabas, all of the other apostles not only support these rights, they exercise them in their ministries. If anyone wishes to challenge Paul on the matter of being supported, they will also have to take on Peter and all the rest of the 11. The “liberty” to eat idol-meats, claimed by some Corinthians and exposed by Paul in **chapter 8**, is based on very thin reasoning, which is directly opposed to the decree of the Jerusalem Council (which includes the apostles). Paul wants his “right” to be understood as indisputable, before he goes on to decline it for the sake of the gospel. . .

Paul’s words also challenge the current mindset that those who are spiritual are those who have a “full-time ministry.” I cannot tell you how many times I have seen and heard words and actions which betray the presence of a two-story spirituality. Those who are really spiritual go to seminary or devote themselves to full-time ministry. If this is so, then Paul must not be all that spiritual. No wonder some Corinthians challenge his spirituality (**2 Corinthians 10:1-2**). Paul’s spirituality is evidenced by his willingness to sacrifice his rights for the sake of the gospel. One such right is that of having a full-time ministry. Let us beware of false standards of spirituality. Let those who think they will be more effective by ministering “full-time” pause to reflect on Paul’s “part-time” ministry, for the sake of the gospel.

Doug Goins: The Reward of Doing Something for Nothing

Paul's reward turns out to be, in part, his total freedom from all merely human pressure or constraint on his ministry, which accepting support from the Corinthians, with their mixed motives, would have invariably brought. Now, it's true that at times Paul did accept financial support from some churches, but he never asked for it and never expected it. He was committed to offering the gospel free of charge.

Another reward that drove him to work late hours into the night making tents so he could minister for free was the sheer delight it gave him to bless and enrich someone else without taking a penny in return. Through my years in para-church and church ministry, I've known people who followed Paul's example, who laid aside the financial privileges to which they were entitled for the sake of the gospel. They were volunteers in the body of Christ and underpaid Christian workers who rejoiced in the inherent spiritual reward for spiritual service.

John MacArthur: Paul's refusal to accept wages from those he was serving was the result of a deep conviction. ***It would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.*** He would rather have been dead than have anyone think he preached and taught for money. He was not a prophet for hire, as was Balaam (**Num. 22**), or in the ministry "for sordid gain" (**1 Pet. 5:2**). It is this commitment that he declares to the Ephesian elders: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (**Acts 18:33-35**). . .

The gospel was thrust on Paul; he was under compulsion to preach it, and would have been in serious trouble with the Lord if he had not. But he was not under compulsion in regard to payment for it. In that he was entirely free to expect support from those he served. He chose not to be paid because he wanted it that way, not because it was necessary. In that choice he found great satisfaction and joy, and for that choice he knew he would receive a reward.

Thomas Leake: Woe is Me if I Preach Not the Gospel (:16-18)

Introduction: Paul's passion and obligation to devote himself to Evangelism;

2 Ways Paul approached his Evangelism Ministry:

I. (:16-17) Paul Viewed His Evangelism Ministry as an Obligation

Paul went on 4 missionary journeys; very involved with preaching the gospel = "to announce the good news" – Pres Tense – continuous, ongoing calling

Evangelism was his job; not all things are identical with Evangelism; e.g. Apologetics by itself technically is not Evangelism; you have to actually tell someone the good news about Jesus Christ

Definition of the Gospel Message – **1 Cor. 15:1-4** – Paul defines it for us; are we competent in our understanding of the message and in our ability to communicate it to others? Must include: death, burial, resurrection of Christ – **Rom. 1:16; Luke 17:7-10**;

Nothing to boast of when slaves are obedient to their masters; Paul was under compulsion; had a direct commission from Jesus; This is what you are going to do with your life; Paul had no choice; **Acts 26:19** – he accepted that calling willingly; He viewed himself as under threat of punishment and pain and displeasure if he did not fulfill that calling; God reserves His severest judgments for unfaithful ministers;

2 Cor. 5:11 – not according to his own will; talking about his calling, not his feelings; he loved to preach;

Eph. 3:8 – his human will had nothing to do with his calling; God imposed His own will on Paul – who was exercising his will and persecuting the church at that time; need to understand how the human will is prevailed upon by the divine will

Stewardship entrusted to him; gospel = valuable commodity to God; Paul felt a great privilege in being chosen – **Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; Rom. 1:14-15** – eager to preach; **1 Tim. 1:12-13**

Application to us today:

We are not charged to do exactly the same thing as Paul – don't have his commission to be the apostle to the Gentiles; but we are all charged to be followers of Christ and that involves being fishers of men and preaching the gospel; as well we are charged with ministering in the context of a local church; we must do our part in the Great Commission; we have been entrusted with the same gospel message

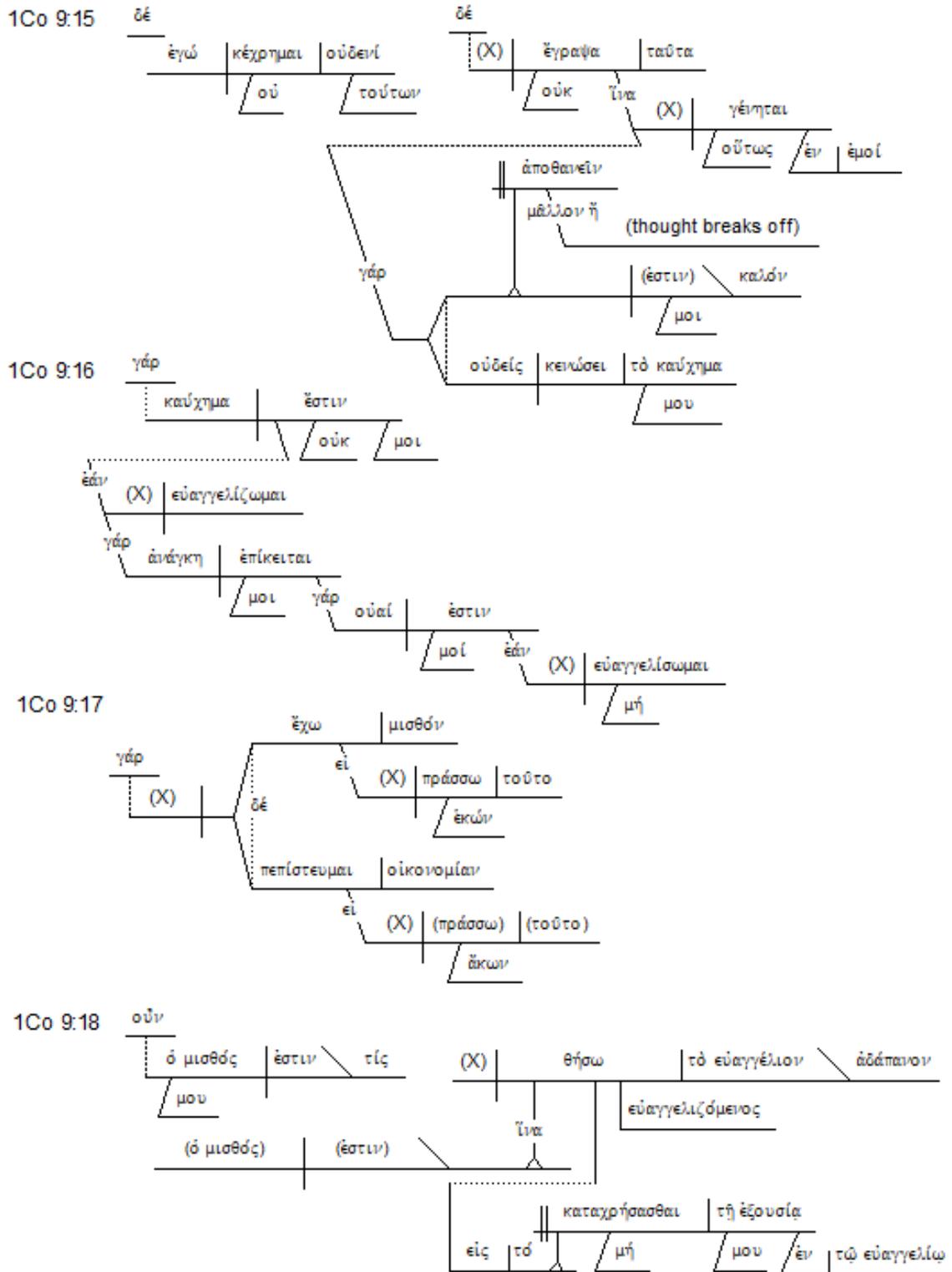
We can become better evangelists by:

- 1) striving to live a godly and Spirit-filled life
- 2) Know the gospel well; master the message; be able to explain it well
- 3) Don't be fearful in witnessing – there is a tremendous open door in the U.S.; take a step of faith and just go do it; be Nike Christians
- 4) Start where God has placed you – neighbors; co-workers; God has providentially put you there
- 5) Pray for opportunities
- 6) Don't feel that you have to give out the entire message every time – are they willing to hear? Don't be obnoxious; be sensitive to your audience
- 7) Use helpful resources = tracts, etc.; invite them to church, etc.

II. (:18) Paul Viewed His Evangelism Ministry as a Way to Excel in Ministry and Seek Special Reward from God

Andrew Noselli: Paul chooses not to exercise his right to get paid, because he does not want to lose his ground for a good kind of boasting. Merely preaching the gospel does not give Paul such a ground, because preaching the gospel is precisely what God commissioned him to do on the road to Damascus (**Ac 9:22; 26; Gal 1:11-17**). It is Paul's duty. He did not volunteer to do it; God appointed him to do it. If he had a choice, then he could have a ground for boasting or a reward for preaching the gospel. But since he does not have a choice, his ground for boasting or reward is that he preaches the gospel free of charge. That is a way to demonstrate that he is "all in" as he heralds the gospel.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

TITLE: *IDENTIFYING WITH THE LOST FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL*

BIG IDEA:

THE GOAL OF WINNING SOULS DRIVES US TO RESTRICT OUR FREEDOM IN WAYS THAT WOULD SERVE OTHERS IN LOVE RATHER THAN OFFEND THEM

INTRODUCTION:

Voluntarily restricting our rights and freedoms is no small matter. But a person who has been genuinely converted and filled with the love of Christ will have a heart of compassion for reaching the lost. The main method of evangelism is not some specific program or crusade, but a servant heart that ministers to others in love. We never compromise the message, the commands of Christ or the priority of preaching the gospel (even in confrontational ways). But we make every effort not to unnecessarily offend others as we understand the behavioral and cultural issues that are important in whatever context we are ministering and adapt our behavior accordingly.

Anthony Thiselton: Each of the groups cited in **vv. 19-23** is an “outsider” from the point of view of the opposite group. The free (**v. 19**) may not view those in slavery as “one of us.” Gentiles regard the Jews as “other” (**v. 20**). Jesus regarded those outside the law as “other” (**v. 21**). The strong regard “the weak” as “other” (**v. 22**). Hence, to stand in solidarity with all these outsiders and to show them practical love, care, and respect, Paul declares: To them all I have become everything in turn, in order to bring some to salvation (**v. 22**). This, he concludes, is the nature of the gospel, as he seeks to live it out (**v. 23**). But this is not easy and demands costly effort and sacrifice. Hence Paul concludes in **vv. 24-27** with the analogy of the disciplined, trained runner, who makes sacrifices and shares hardship for the sake of the goal (**v. 26**).

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: All preferences and rights are worth giving up to bring others to Jesus.

I Deny Myself to Win Souls for Christ (9:19-23).

- A. I willingly deny myself personally (**9:19**).
- B. I willingly deny myself religiously (**9:20**).
- C. I willingly deny myself socially (**9:21**).
- D. I willingly deny myself completely (**9:22-23**).

Craig Blomberg: Paul understands that with the death of Christ the age of the Law has come to an end (**Gal. 3:19 – 4:7**). Scripture itself is still relevant for followers of Jesus (**2 Tim. 3:16**) but only as it is interpreted in light of what Christ has done (**Rom. 10:4**). Nevertheless, to Jews and others under the Law, Paul at times acts as if he is still subject to all of the laws of Moses (cf. **Acts 16:1–3; 21:20–26**), so long as it is clear that his actions are not a proof of salvation or spiritual maturity in any way. Hence he is

not really “under the law” as non-Christian Jews believe they are. With the Gentiles he does not impose his Jewish scruples or follow Jewish ritual, but he avoids becoming antinomian and is careful not to transgress God’s timeless moral principles.

For Christians, God’s will is now summed up as Christ’s law (v. 21; cf. Gal. 6:2), which probably includes both Jesus’ explicit teachings as well as the laws of the Old Testament as they now apply in light of the work of Christ. Verses 22b–23 summarize the paragraph, repeating Paul’s **principle of flexibility** one last time and noting an additional rationale for his behavior. As in verses 15–18, there is inherent blessing in fulfilling his commission and seeing the results—people saved from their sins.

Andrew Noselli: Paul chooses to make himself a servant to all people to win more of them. For example, he is flexible for Jews (e.g., by following aspects of the Mosaic Law such as kosher rules, Sabbath laws, and circumcision to gain a hearing to evangelize Jews), Gentiles (e.g., by living among Gentiles in ways that could be culturally uncomfortable for an ethnic Jew), and the weak (e.g., by accommodating unbelievers with a weak conscience in a particular area [10:28-29a])

David Prior: Paul clearly exercised the most imaginative and sensitive adaptability in his relationships with unbelievers. He did it all for the sake of the gospel, so that he might share its power and reality as far and wide as possible. Paul was the most versatile of men, never locked into any single way of operating and always listening to God’s ideas in each new situation: I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some (22) – a veritable spiritual chameleon. Paul’s versatility in seeking to win men and women of all backgrounds to Christ challenges us to cross the culture gap between the Christian subculture of cozy meetings and holy talk and the pagan culture of our local community. The task of identification with and incarnation into our contemporary paganism, of all kinds, is one of the biggest tasks confronting the church.

I. (:19) THESIS STATED -- THE GOAL OF WINNING SOULS DRIVES US TO RESTRICT OUR FREEDOM IN WAYS THAT WOULD SERVE OTHERS IN LOVE RATHER THAN OFFEND THEM

A. Freedom in Christ Understood

“For though I am free from all men,”

No man or no cultural group has Paul as a puppet on a string where they can dictate his behavior. He is free to personally respond to Christ and live in a way that is pleasing to His master.

Mark Taylor: Whereas 9:17 employs the metaphor of the household manager entrusted with the care of an estate, the image in 9:19 shifts to the slave who accommodates to his surroundings. In 9:17 Paul is the faithful steward compelled to preach. In 9:19–23 Paul enslaves himself to all so that he might make the greatest possible gains for the gospel.

Paul's assertion of freedom in **9:19** not only plays off the idea of freely offering the gospel in **9:18** but also recalls the opening question of the chapter, "*Am I not free?*" In this instance Paul specifies freedom from all men, which in context may refer to his financial independence that released him from any obligation to wealthy patrons. Yet, for Paul, the very nature of the gospel obliged him to all men in other ways in order to gain as many as possible for the gospel. To this end Paul enslaved himself to all, and in this way he imitated Christ, who came to serve and to give his life for others (**Mark 10:45; Phil 2:5–8**). Paul's stewardship of the gospel (**9:17**) embodied the essence of the gospel by entailing a complete inversion of the world's values whereby the slave occupies a position of considerable influence. Just as God's folly, the cross, is the power of God unto salvation (**1:18**) so also is Paul's enslavement to different classes of men the best possible means for gaining others for Christ.

B. Voluntary Personal Restrictions Regulating Ministry Approach

"I have made myself a slave to all,"

Quite an extraordinary condescension and limitation

C. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

"so that I may win more."

Paul's heart and priority for soul winning is the key to the passage. Not just people have to adjust to who I am with all of my personal preferences. Instead, Paul was willing to be the one to make every necessary adjustment. He was flexible where possible to win others to Christ. He didn't want anything to unnecessarily hinder the gospel.

David Garland: The verb κερδαίνειν (*kerdainein, to win, to gain*) appears five times in **verses 19–21**. It is related to conversion (**1 Pet. 3:1**) but can apply to winning a faltering believer (**Matt. 18:15**). The word is also a business term related to profit (**Matt. 25:16, 17, 20, 22; James 4:13**), and Paul may be playing on this idea in light of his previous comment about his reward in **1 Cor. 9:17–18**. The profit that he gains, his μισθός (*misthos*), comes from spreading the gospel among Jews and Gentiles. **Daube** (1956: 349) observes that from contexts where κερδαίνειν is used in the NT for conversion, "they all represent humility as an instrument of conversion." Courtesy toward those one hopes to win is crucial for success.

II. (:20-22) THESIS ILLUSTRATED – PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF IDENTIFYING WITH THE TARGET GROUP HE IS TRYING TO EVANGELIZE

A. Identifying with Cultural Jews (no matter how serious they were religiously)

1. Target Group

"To the Jews"

2. Strategy of Identification

"I became as a Jew"

3. No Clarification Necessary – Paul still was a cultural Jew

4. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“so that I might win Jews”

B. Identifying with Religious Jews (scrupulous about obeying the Law)

1. Target Group

“to those who are under the Law”

Most commentators take this as just further explanation of the same Jewish category above. I have broken it out because of the parallelism as a somewhat separate emphasis. Some take this to be Gentile converts to Judaism. I would apply it to all Jews who were very scrupulous about the requirements of the Law.

Maclaren: The category which he names next is not composed of different persons from the first, but of the same persons regarded from a somewhat different point of view. ‘*Them that are under the law*’ describes Jews, not by their race, but by their religion; and Paul was willing to take his place among them, as we have just observed.

2. Strategy of Identification

“as under the Law”

3. Clarification

“though not being myself under the Law”

4. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“so that I might win those who are under the Law”

C. Identifying with Gentiles

1. Target Group

“to those who are without law”

Gordon Fee: Among Gentiles he behaves as one who is *anomos* (not under Jewish law), but he is not thereby to be considered *anomos* (“*lawless*” = “*godless, wicked*”; cf. **1 Tim. 1:9**), which point is made by adding the qualifier “*toward God*.” Indeed, he goes on, I am *ennomos* (lit. “*in law*” = subject to law) toward Christ. His point is plain: He wishes no misunderstanding of the word *anomos*, which would ordinarily mean to behave in a godless way. To be “*as one without the law*” does not mean to be “*lawless*.” As earlier (**7:19**) this is a clear instance in which Paul can distinguish between keeping “*the law*” and obeying the ethical imperatives of the Christian faith. For Paul the language “*being under* (or ‘*keeping*’) *the law*” has to do with being Jewish in a national-cultural-religious sense; but as a new man in Christ he also expects the Spirit to empower him (as well as all of God’s new people) to live out the ethics of the new age, which are the “*commands of God*” (**7:19**) now written on hearts of flesh (cf. **Ezek. 36:26–27**).

2. Strategy of Identification

“as without law”

3. Clarification

“though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ”

Andrew Noselli: What Paul says about the law in **1 Corinthians 9:20b-21** is important for understanding how the old and new covenants relate (cf. **7:18-19**). Paul is not under the Mosaic Law, but that does not mean he is free from all moral laws. To become all things to all people does not mean that to the sexually immoral Paul becomes sexually immoral! Paul is under Christ’s law – **the law of love**. Paul knows when he can adapt for the sake of the gospel and when he must not bend for the sake of the gospel.

4. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“so that I might win those who are without law.”

John MacArthur: In other than moral matters, however, Paul identified as closely as possible with Gentile customs. He ate what they ate, went where they went, and dressed as they dressed.

Paul Gardner: As a servant to all, Paul is first and foremost a **servant of Christ**. This means, of course, that there are things he will not do even for the sake of “winning” people for Christ. He will not do what Christ would not do! In this context, among other things, he would not take part in idolatrous rites or meals.

D.. Identifying with the Weak

1. Target Group

“To the weak”

This illustration seems somewhat ambiguous. The immediate context has been talking of trying to win different cultural groups to Christ . . . so from that perspective this does not sound here like the contrast between the weaker and stronger brother (such as in the example in **Chap. 8** of eating meat). This group is weak in the eyes of the world: whether in terms of social status, economic position, educational background, intellectual ability, etc. However, the larger context of the weaker brother from **Chap. 8** certainly fits the general thrust of what Paul is trying to communicate about regulating his liberty and modifying his conduct. In that case one would have to modify the meaning of “*win*” the weak to have the broader connotation of impact them positively for Christ, improving their spiritual position, or gaining a hearing for the teaching Paul is providing.

Richard Hays: Sometimes it is suggested that “*the weak*” in **9:22** cannot refer to the weak Christians at Corinth, because Paul speaks here of “winning” or “saving” them. Therefore, it is alleged, he must be referring to non-believers. This is, however, to make too sharp a distinction, as though Paul thought his converts were already “saved” as

soon as they professed faith. We should remember that in **1:18** Paul referred to himself and other members of the believing community as those “*who are being saved.*” For Paul, conversion is a process of having one’s life reshaped in the likeness of Christ, and salvation is the eschatological end for which we hope. The weak Christians, as we have already seen in **chapter 8**, are in danger -- in Paul’s view -- of falling away from Christ and therefore not being saved (see also the illustration in **10:1–13**). Thus, his continuing identification with the weak aims not only to gain converts but also to strengthen their adherence to the community and to help them along the path to salvation.

Paul Gardner: Paul has used the word “*weak*” to describe a people who have been made to feel inferior because they are not exercising certain rights related to gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom or knowledge. These people are looked down upon by the elitists or “knowers” and so have been made to feel weak. Yet, in God’s eyes the so-called “weak” belong to him even without these (merely) human markers, and Paul can happily identify with that! It is to read too much into the text to insist that these people must be poorer people not in receipt of patronage, even though some might be so. Defining them as they are defined in **chapter 8** works well in this context and explains why Paul omits the word “*like*” (ὡς). It would be exceedingly strange if Paul introduced at this point a different set of people known as “the weak.”

Therefore, the word “*weak*” should not be seen as a derogatory term or even a description of a people who are basically inadequate in one way or another. In chapter 8 Paul sided with the weak, and ever since **1:27** “*weak*” has been a term that has been used to contrast one group of people against the arrogant. From the start, Paul has ensured that this has been a contrast that favors the weak. Sadly, though, their self-awareness as members of the body of Christ is depleted and poor. If they also have no status in the world’s eyes, no power, no patronage, no great wealth, then this may make them feel even more “*weak*” in the church. Yet, for Paul they reflect the very evidence that “*God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*” (**1:27** ESV). Indeed, Paul has even called himself “*weak*” in comparison with the strong in **4:10**.

2. Strategy of Identification

“I became weak”

3. No Clarification Given = Paul’s Humility

4. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“that I might win the weak”

E. Lesson From These Illustrations = Thesis Repeated

1. Target Group

“to all men”

2. Strategy of Identification

“I have become all things”

David Garland: The principle that Paul outlines in **9:19–23** is that he “shares the condition of those to whom he ministers, and so is conformed to the pattern of his Lord” (**Hooker** 1996: 97; cf. **Garland** 1999: 231–34). He imitates Christ’s self-emptying humiliation and suffering for others.

3. No Clarification Necessary

4. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“so that I may by all means save some.”

III. (:23) THESIS EXTENDED – LIVING A GOSPEL-FOCUSED LIFE ENSURES MY OWN PARTICIPATION IN GOSPEL BENEFITS

A. Freedom in Christ Implied

B. Voluntary Personal Restrictions Regulating Ministry Approach

“I do all things for the sake of the gospel”

C. Goal in Ministry of Maximum Evangelism

“so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

The gospel is all about denying self, taking up our cross and following after our Lord Jesus Christ who promised to make us “fishers of men.” If we live selfishly and do not have any gospel focus we give evidence that our lives have never been transformed. An authentic Christian will serve others in love for the sake of the gospel and thus demonstrate the fruit of genuine conversion. Only those who live for the gospel actually participate in the benefits of the gospel.

Anthony Thiselton: In our view (with **Collins**) the issue is neither that of bringing benefits to others (NJB), nor that of sharing in these benefits as a missionary-pastor (NRSV, NIV, REB, **Fee**). To stand alongside the Jew, the Gentile, the socially dependent and vulnerable, or to live and act in solidarity with every kind of person in every kind of situation is **to have a share in the nature of the gospel**, i.e., to instantiate what the gospel is and how it operates.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What groups have we targeted for evangelism and how are we regulating our ministry approach to identify with them for the sake of the gospel?
- 2) What can we do to cultivate Paul’s heart for evangelism?

3) Where do we draw the line in our attempts at identification so that we do not compromise our standing in Christ? The seeker church model would use this passage as justification for their methodology. What should we learn from their approach? What should give us caution?

4) What is the benefit of our freedom in Christ if we need to restrict the exercise of those freedoms in certain contexts?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: It seems that here in **1 Corinthians 9:19–22**, the idea of “**winning**” or “**gaining back**” has been too quickly dismissed. It is an understanding of someone being “won back to the Lord” that makes most sense of what Paul says here. Indeed, context provides a solid second reason for viewing the word in this way. Paul has not been speaking about converts. He has, however, been exhibiting deep concern for the brother or sister who might be “*disqualified*” (**8:11**) and for the elitists who are “*puffed up*” and “*sinning against [their] brothers [and sisters]*” (**8:12**). Thirdly, the modern emphasis on individual conversion has often overstressed a sole meaning of the English verb “to save” and “to win.” For Paul, the proclamation of the gospel, which is his “compulsion” and divine call, does not cease at the point of conversion! The very fact that we have his epistles is a clear indication that Paul saw the proclamation of the gospel in much broader terms. He knew that being won for Christ was just the start of a process of being “won,” as the former ways give way to Christ’s ways and as people mature in their faith. For Paul “salvation” concerned the **eschatological destiny** of the people of God, as well as initial conversion. Paul has already used the verb “to save” in just this way of Christian teachers in **1 Cor 3:15**: “*If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved but only as through fire.*”

John Piper: The first question to ask is whether this remarkable testimony of Paul is something we should imitate, or is this just something that apostles did -- or that missionaries do who must adapt to other cultures?

The answer comes from one of the clearest commentaries on these words that Paul himself wrote in the next chapter. Look at **1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1**. Here the issue is exactly the same as in **9:19ff.**, namely, how to relate to Jews and Greeks so as to win them for Christ. He says,

*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32) Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; [in other words, adapt as much as you can in non-sinful ways] 33) just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. [That's the same as **9:22**, "I have become all things to all men, that I may by*

all means save some." Then comes the answer to our question, in **11:1**] *Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*

So that answer is: No, this is not a specifically apostolic or missionary way of life. It is something that he meant for all the Corinthian believers to imitate. He was imitating Christ, and he wants us to imitate him. So hear this message this morning a Word from God for you particularly and not just for someone else. Ask how you, in your sphere of life can use your freedom the way Paul and Jesus did, if by any means you might save some.

Now the second question to ask in this text is what Paul's aim is. Why has he made himself a slave to all? Why is he becoming "as a Jew" to the Jews? Why did he make himself as a "lawless one" to the lawless, and weak to the weak? Which is the same now as asking, Why should we?

It's a tremendously important question. Paul is telling us to live and act in ways that are different from the way we would act if we didn't share his aim in life. So it makes a big difference if we have the same aim Paul does here. What was his aim?

Five times he says that **his aim is to win people.**

- **Verse 19:** "*that I might win the more.*"
- **Verse 20:** "*that I might win the Jews . . . that I might win those under the law.*"
- **Verse 21:** "*That might win those who are without law.*"
- **Verse 22:** "*That I might win the weak.*"

So five times he says that his aim in adapting to the way people live is to win them. Then at the end of **verse 22** in his summary statement he says, "*I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.*" So he says his aim differently here. Five times it was "*to win*" people; and now it is "*to save*" people.

Then in **verse 23** he gives one last aim: "*And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*" I believe this means exactly what **R. H. Lenski** says it means. Paul is saying, "If I omit this concern of love for others, although through my work, devoid of such love, many others may be saved, yet I myself would not be saved." In other words, Paul knew that his faith in Christ would be utterly inauthentic and false, if he abandoned the pattern of life set by Jesus and no longer cared for other people.

So Paul tells us his aim in three ways:

- 1) to win others;
- 2) to save others;
- 3) to be partaker in the benefits of the gospel himself.

Now what does this mean? Win others for what? Save others from what? Partake in what benefits of the gospel?

The most straightforward answer is given in **Romans 5:9**: "*Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath [of God] through Him.*" Of all Paul's uses of the word "save" in his letters this is the one place where he tells us explicitly what we are saved from. When we put our trust in Christ, we are saved from "*the wrath of God.*"

So that is the aim of Paul in becoming all things to all people. **Verse 22**: "*I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some*" -- from the wrath of God. The gospel is the good news that God has made a way to save us from his own wrath. In **1 Thessalonians 1:10** Paul says that "*Jesus delivers us (=saves us) from the wrath to come.*" . . .

In 1520 **Martin Luther**, the great Reformer in Germany wrote a treatise called "The Freedom of the Christian." He began it with this paradox:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

Then he explained:

These two theses seem to contradict each other . . . [But] both are Paul's own statements, who says in **1 Corinthians 9:19**, "*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all,*" and in **Romans 13:8**, "*Owe no one anything, except to love one another.*" Love, by its very nature, is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved.

So **Paul's strategy is love**. It's exactly what he said in **Galatians 5:13**, "*You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*" Use your liberty to love by serving. That's what Paul says he is doing here in **verse 19**: "*Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave (or servant) to all.*" That's what Paul -- and Jesus -- mean by love.

You can see this even more clearly in the three things Paul says about his relation to the law in these verses. Notice: First, **verse 20b**: "*To those who are under the Law, [I became] as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law.*" So he says he is NOT under law. Second, **verse 21**: "*To those who are without law, [I became] as without law, though not being without the law of God.*" So he says, in the second place, that he is not without the law of God. First, he is not under the law, but, secondly, he is not without the law of God. Third, **Verse 21b**: "*But [I am] under the law of Christ.*"

So there are three statements about his relation to the law:

- 1) I am not under law;
- 2) I am not without the law of God;
- 3) I am under the law of Christ.

You might say, "That sure sounds involved." But life is involved. This is the sort of careful thinking you must do if you are going to take the risks involved in adapting to all kinds of people so that you might save some. As soon as you say, "*I have made myself slave to all*" (v. 19), and "*I have become all things to all men*" (v. 23), you are on the brink of idolatry and compromise and worldliness and sin. You are walking the razor's edge between fruitless separatism and unprincipled expediency. If you fall one way you are of no use because you have no connection with the world; if you fall the other way you are of no use because you are just like the world.

How do you keep your faith and your freedom and your radical zeal to win people and not just copy people? The answer is that you think hard about your relation to the law of God -- the way Paul did. And what you come to is this:

1) As a Christian, I am not "*under law*" (v. 20) -- that is, I am not bound to earn my salvation by the law, nor am I bound to live by the ceremonial, dietary, separation laws of the Old Testament (for example, circumcision, holy days, no ham and cat fish, no mixed fibers, no meat offered to idols, and so on). I am free to go to the home of an animist and humanist and eat whatever they put before me in order to win them for Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:27**).

2) As a Christian I am nevertheless not without God's law (v. 21). In **1 Corinthians 7:19** Paul says, "*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.*" This is a remarkable verse! It says that circumcision, which was a commandment of God in the Old Testament is negligible for Christians, but the commandments of God are not negligible. This is why we distinguish between the ceremonial law and the moral law. As Christians **we submit to the moral law of God**. We are not without the law of God, as Paul says.

3) Which is defined for us in **verse 21** as "*the law of Christ.*" We are under the law of Christ. This is the **law of love**. In **Galatians 6:2** Paul says, "*Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*" The law of Christ is the law that fulfills all laws: **Galatians 5:14**, "*The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" This is called in **James 2:8** the "*royal law*" and "*the law of liberty*" (**1:25; 2:12**). It's the law that free people submit to gladly because they are led by the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul means when he says in **Galatians 5:18**, "*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*" Instead, you bear the fruit of love, and so submit gladly to the law of Christ, the law of love.

And what does it look like.

In freedom, for love's sake, you try to overcome unnecessary, alienating differences that cut you off from unbelievers.. In freedom, for love's sake, you learn the Manike language and translate the Bible. In freedom, for love's sake, you eat dinner together the way they eat dinner. In freedom, for love's sake, you dress pretty much like the middle class American natives. In freedom, for love's sake, you get into their politics and their sports and their businesses.

And all the while you keep a vigilant watch over your heart to see if you are in the law of Christ. Here are two tests of how you are doing in this delicate balancing act. I close with these:

1. Are you becoming more worldly minded than they are becoming spiritually minded? If so, you have probably crossed the line of the law of Christ. Christ does not call you to lose your holiness, but to gain theirs.
2. Is your passion for winning your friends and family growing, or is it shrinking as you become all things to them? If it is shrinking, then you are not in the law of Christ at that point.

Here is the sum of the matter: Christ died to set us free. Free from the wrath of God, and free from the loveless limits of the law. Free for love and eternal life. Are we using our freedom to make this good news plain? Or are we so separatistic that we have no connection with unbelievers; or are we so worldly they don't know we have anything radically different to offer?

O may the Lord grant us to use our freedom to become the servants of all, that we might by all means save some!

Ray Stedman: He was willing to go back under the old restrictions that he had been brought up in, all the old limitations of ritual and ceremony and outlook, in order to move back in alongside his Jewish brethren and be understood by them. He was willing to live again as a Jew when he was with them. . .

To those who were still under dietary restrictions and various limitations on their activity, Paul says he was willing to do the same, though, he says, he was not himself under the law. . .

“I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”
(1 Cor 9:22b RSV)

That is the great verse in which the apostle declares this spirit of selfless accommodation to where people are. That is what ought to characterize the Christian approach. We should be willing to set aside our own personal desires in order that we might win a hearing and open a door for a witness about the Lord. He never denied principle, never compromised in the realm of immorality, but nevertheless adjusted to the outlook of those with whom he was. . .

I want to close with these words of **C. S. Lewis**. I think they are significant, and pertinent to this issue:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be rung, and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you

must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.

John MacArthur: He would modify his habits, his preferences, his entire life-style if any of those things caused someone to stumble, to be offended, or to be hindered from faith in the Lord. Again we are reminded that in the gray areas of living, those that involve practices about which the Bible does not speak, Paul, as all believers, was free to do as his conscience allowed. But love would not let him do anything that the consciences of weaker believers would not allow. Love would not even allow him to do things that would be offensive to unbelievers to whom he witnessed. He would put every questionable thing in his life under the control of love.

Charles Hodge: By the weak many understand the Jews and Gentiles considered under another aspect, i.e. as destitute of the power to comprehend and appreciate the gospel. The only reason for this interpretation is the assumption that *to gain* in this connection must mean to convert, or make Christians of and therefore, those to be gained must be those who were not Christians. But the word means merely *to win over*, to bring to proper views, and therefore may be used in reference to weak and superstitious believers as well as of unconverted Jews and Gentiles. As in the preceding chapter the weak mean weak Christians, men who were not clear and decided in their views, and as the very design of the whole discussion was to induce the more enlightened Corinthian Christians to accommodate themselves to those weaker brethren, it is altogether more natural to understand it in the same way here. Paul holds himself up as an example. To the weak he became as weak; he accommodated himself to their prejudices that he might win them over to better views. And he wished the Corinthians to do the same.

Bob Deffinbaugh: It is vitally important for you to understand that in **verses 19-23** Paul is not teaching: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Paul is not speaking about the sins of others with which he is willing to participate. Paul is talking about accommodating himself to the weaknesses of the lost, by surrendering any liberties which might prove offensive to them and thus hinder his preaching of the gospel. One might be invited to make a gospel presentation in a retirement home. One could go with drums, guitars, and an electronic keyboard. But it is possible that an organ or piano accompaniment would be received more readily. Why insist on your rights, when practicing them might needlessly alienate someone who is lost, keeping them from hearing the gospel? Paul is willing to sacrifice the free exercise of any liberty if doing so will further the gospel. Never will Paul think of committing a sin in order to identify with the lost. One does not need to win an alcoholic to Christ by getting drunk with him, or to convert a drug addict by getting high with him. It is one thing to commit a sin in the name of furthering the gospel; it is quite another to sacrifice a liberty for the sake of the gospel.

Gordon Fee: This passage has often been looked to for the idea of '**accommodation**' in evangelism, that is, of adapting the message to the language and perspective of the recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one lives or behaves among those whom wishes to evangelize.

Alexander Maclaren: We can do no good by standing aloof on a height and flinging down the Gospel to the people below. They must feel that we enter into their circumstances, prejudices, ways of thinking, and the like, if our words are to have power. That is true about all Christian teachers, whether of old or young. You must be a boy among boys, and try to show that you enter into the boy's nature, or you may lecture till doomsday and do no good.

Dr. David Silversides: Selfless Evangelism

Context: Chap. 8 – weaker Christians who had scruples against eating meat possibly offered to idols; the more enlightened should bear with and adjust their behavior to help rather than hinder other Christians in their walk with God. The Apostle Paul had sought to follow this principle of loving flexibility in matters that were not required. The command of loving one's neighbor should take priority. Paul had set aside in Corinth that normal entitlement to receive pay for his preaching ministry.

He was the servant of Christ in terms of the content of his message and fixed moral requirements. But in non-regulated areas he made himself the servant of all men to be flexible in his conduct so as not to offend.

I. The Flexibility that is Not Intended

This text has been frequently used to justify a wrong course of action ... so I will explain how it has been widely misused – especially **vs. 22**. This text has been used to justify a wide range of evangelistic methods that the Scriptures do not endorse. This text has nothing to do with methods of evangelism. The Apostle did not use any and every method. He employed a remarkable uniformity of method – not evangelistic music, drama, etc. The apostles preached. The believers bore testimony in the course of their godly lives. **2 Cor. 4:1-2** summarizes their approach. No tricks, no entertainment focus; but the open manifestation of the church. Simple, straightforward approach. The church must be the pillar and ground of the truth.

II. The Flexibility that Honors God – Apostle gives 3 examples

- A. The Jews and the Ceremonial Law
- B. The Gentiles
- C. The Weak

Paul's behavior governed by desire to seek their spiritual welfare. The same approach to non-believers and to weak believers.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=31705124456>

Thomas F. Leake: Adapting to Advance the Gospel

Introduction: Review of the simple Gospel message itself; The tough part is getting

unbelievers to recognize they really need salvation and Jesus Christ as their Savior. Men would rather chart their own course or follow man-made religions because of their hard hearts, proud minds and stubborn wills.

Present Cultural Obstacles to the Gospel Message:

- 1) No sense of sinfulness before a Holy God; they don't sense impending judgment of a God of Wrath. Self esteem and Feel-Good theology insulate people from the gospel. That type of message never confronts man with their failures.
- 2) Prevalence of Hedonism and materialistic pursuits – people's thinking dominated by what they will earn; how they will play; etc.
- 3) Pluralism – people feel they are free to choose whatever path they want
- 4) Wrong understanding of Christianity – View it as just vague moralism that has confused people; Can the Bible even be read and understood

Various Wrong Responses of Today's Church = Their Strategy and Approach to the Mission of Evangelism:

- 1) Some have given up on any type of aggressive evangelism strategy; maybe God has written off this American culture because of its moral decay
- 2) Some have lost sight of the ancient gospel. They have switched their focus to practical areas of the social gospel agenda where they think they can have some impact. They are mum on Jesus.
- 3) Some are quite zealous and put a lot of emphasis on making a decision for Christ. They espouse an easy believism message. They have fantastic success stories; but produce many false converts who have a false sense of security.
- 4) Friendship Evangelism – this is a long and slow process where you earn the right to present a few close individuals with the gospel message. Often such love is needed; but there is also a sense of urgency that cannot just rely on this method alone. Look at how aggressive John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles were.
- 5) Confrontational Tough Evangelism – such as open air preaching, etc. This can be bold and commendable; but it can also unnecessarily turn people off. Contrast this with the patient teaching of Christ.
- 6) One dominant approach today = Market Driven Seeker Approach – The premise is that you need to use surveys and polls to figure out what the sincere mass of unchurched seekers are looking for in their spiritual journey and then just deliver that in as pleasant an environment as possible. The result is molding the Sunday morning service and even the entire church experience to market Christianity as relevant to what this group claims to want. But there are 2 negative effects:
 - Produces a weaker, less mature church
 - the doctrinal message and sound teaching are compromisedSeekers are still lost sinners who don't know what church should be.

What is Hope Bible Church's Outreach Strategy? We need to be following an effective and biblical approach.

Are you personally committed to the work of evangelism?

This paragraph in **1 Cor.** is still about the ministry of the Apostle Paul and his strategy for advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about the need to adapt the way we behave to fit in with different groups to advance the gospel. This text has been misunderstood to become a favorite for seeker churches; a favorite for missionaries who talk in terms of contextualization; a favorite for the justification of Messianic oriented assemblies; some see here a reliance on human methodology rather than divine sovereignty and election. We must understand it correctly and extract the timeless principles that we can apply. Church people by nature are uncomfortable with change. What type of change is talked about here?

LOOKING AT PAUL'S OUTREACH STRATEGY FROM THREE ANGLES:

I. PAUL'S ACCOMMODATION

What did Paul do? "*I made myself a slave to everyone.*" This was an act of Paul's will; no one forced him to do this; he did it himself. Remember that Paul was free; he did not have to do this.

What was Paul's motivation? For the sake of ministry. Love is a greater priority than liberty; not doing it out of legalism.

Writes about 3 different groups of people as an example of adapting for the sake of ministry:

A. To the Jews – but Paul was already a Jew; what did he have to change to accommodate them? He was no longer under the Mosaic Law. That law must be viewed in its entirety; you cannot break it up into various components (ceremonial, moral and civil). Moses was the mediator of the covenant. **2 Cor. 3:5-6; Heb. 8:6-8; Gal. 3:23-26; Rom. 10:4; Rom. 6:14**

Paul did not get any righteousness from his keeping of the law.

Paul acted out of a principle of love to guide him (the law of love). **Col. 2:16-17; Mark 7:19;** When with the Jews Paul practiced some OT behavior – his motivation is the key. Was that deceptive? Paul was trying to gain a hearing. **Acts 16:3** – Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to be a stumbling block; but Paul never acted in this fashion if compromising the gospel of grace was the issue. **Acts 18:8; 21:20-26** – when the situation changed in Gal. 2 Paul would not accommodate the Judaizers. Accommodation had to be for the right reason.

Paul still committed to obeying God morally. The Law of Christ = the Law of Love was his guide. That is an overwhelming and all-encompassing law. **Gal. 6:2; James 2:8** – a new commandment from Christ

B. To the Gentiles

C. To the Weak – 2 possibilities

- saved believers who did not fully understand their freedoms in Christ – sense of the word "won" would then be more influenced towards growth and

maturity

- still speaking to the unsaved

In either case, Paul's motive is clear = he became more like them in certain behavior respects to help reach them and improve them. Love will do anything God allows to win that person to Christ

II. PAUL'S AIM / PURPOSE – 3 words with same idea

A. “Win” more – Paul had already won some; (more than any of us); “to gain” – word is used 5 times in these 4 verses here; they are lost and need to be won to Christ. Concept of “I’m OK, you’re OK” is a killer to evangelism. Whether they understood they were lost or not, Paul was seeking their salvation.

B. “Save” – here in the sense of spiritual deliverance (not just physical). **1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15**; Paul knew from personal experience what it meant to be saved. Ultimately God does the saving; but Paul was in the saving business. Assumes there must be some type of grave danger out there = eternal destruction, divine wrath, second death, lake of fire that burns forever

C. “Partaker” of the gospel = share with; work alongside of; This is Paul's passion; not just witnessing once in awhile; this drove his engine; this is why he disrupted his life to move around and preach in different cities. He who is wise wins souls. Paul loved people. Do you have a commitment to get out the gospel? Why aren't more people responding and believing?

III. PRESENT APPLICATION

A. Negatively: What Paul was NOT saying to do:

1) Paul never changed the gospel message; never compromised; never reduced the message or left out unpopular parts; **Gal. 1:9**; did not accommodate the Judaizers or legalists; made no apologies for the gospel; was not ashamed of the gospel; Did not adopt the stance of some: “I believe it all but just preach certain parts”; he preached the whole counsel of God; exclusivity = there is only one way to God – did not back down from this message which is hard for people to stomach

2) Paul never joined anyone in sinful practices – Rom. 14:14-17

Talking about gray areas of behavior; not areas of compromise with sin.

Paul never said “become like a thief to win thieves”

You can't win the world by imitating it.

Not the end justifies the means. Not a people pleaser. **Gal. 5:11**; not relying on marketing savvy

B. Positively: What Paul WAS saying to do:

1) Don't put a stumbling block before others (except for the gospel message itself)

Don't be Seeker insensitive

2) Know your culture – remain engaged

Don't become an isolationist like the Amish; how people dress; type of music; etc. we make too big of a deal about certain things

3) Don't be fearful to make changes; Act in Faith

Ask for counsel about whether a particular approach would be wise

Conclusion: Success of our evangelism is not due to our methodology; God is sovereign

Love wedded to truth will rescue the perishing.

Tom Ascol: He describes his actions in relation to 3 groups of people: to the Jews who were under the law; to the Gentiles who were without the law; and to the weak or overly scrupulous Christians (cf. **8:9-12**).

With regard to the Jews, Paul did not hesitate to participate in certain Jewish customs (treating them as nonobligatory indifferent things) for the sake of gaining a hearing with the Jews. At least three times in the book of Acts we see him doing exactly what he says he is willing to do here. In **Acts 21**, Paul goes to Jerusalem, and after conferring with the leaders there in that church, discovered there were some who were accusing him of preaching against the law of Moses. Some of the brethren were about to undergo a purification rite. Paul agrees to undergo that Jewish rite with them and even to pay the tax that was due for it. This is an act of accommodation. We see it also in **Acts 18** when a vow being taken at Cenchræa to shave his head was fulfilled. He was willing to accommodate this Jewish ceremony. Then in the opening verses of **Acts 16**, when he was ready to embark on his second missionary journey, he wants to take a young man with him. Yet, this young man had not been circumcised. So Paul circumcised Timothy and took him along. To the Jews, he says, "*I became as a Jew, as one under the law.*"

To the Gentiles, in **verse 21**, those without the law, he identified with them by showing himself to be truly free from the civil and ceremonial requirements of Judaism. He did not take any advantage at all of his Jewish heritage at their expense. He never lorded his spiritual advantages over them.

Then in **verse 22**, with regard to those who are weak in conscience, knowledge, or faith, he was willing to act and live as if he himself were weak for their sake. He was willing to eat no meat to gain them for Christ. He was willing to forego his liberties in this area. He was willing to be a vegetarian, if need be, for the sake of preaching the gospel to them.

Paul was willing to go to great lengths to accommodate. But we should not conclude from this that there were no boundaries to his accommodation. In **verse 21**, in the parenthetical comment, the apostle tells us that indeed there are limitations—important limitations. There is a fence around Paul's field of accommodation. He says that he is not "*anonomous theou, alla ennomous Christou*" (genitive case, as opposed to the TR which has it in dative case).

Paul would go as far as his freedom would permit, but he would not transgress the standards of God ("God" and "Christ" should not be pitted against one another as if Paul is referring to two different standards). Though he would readily accommodate

himself to all men, where he might do so lawfully, for the purpose of gaining some, he would violate no laws of Christ to please or humor any man.

His accommodating conduct was limited by the precepts of God's Word. He often denied himself and resigned his own rights for the good of others, but he would not sin against his God nor give up the rights of his King to save the soul of another. Here is where Anselm gets his thesis that the slightest sin can never be justified even if by committing it the whole world would be saved. This is why Paul could not circumcise Titus -- it would have meant denying the gospel by giving in to the legalistic demands of the Judaizers.

Accommodation is not possible when the truth of God's Word is at stake. When the battle lines are drawn (either by you or by someone else) over the revealed precepts or principles of God's Word, the Christian only has 2 options, and accommodation is not one of them. He may contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, or he may compromise. In such matters you are not free. For you, like Paul, are subject to the law of Christ. To compromise is to break that law. Accommodation must end where biblical precept and principle begin.

<https://founders.org/articles/1-corinthians-919-23-paul-on-accommodation/>

Greg Allen: I wonder if you have heard of the great missionary **Hudson Taylor**. He founded *China Inland Mission* (now known as *Overseas Missionary Fellowship*) about 160 years ago. He was a pioneering missionary in a very difficult field. And a crisis moment came upon his life that not only changed his work dramatically, but also transformed modern missionary methodology from then on.

Hudson had been living in Shanghai, in a humble shanty, while working with other missionaries and providing medical care for the Chinese people. The people in that port city were rather accustomed to seeing European missionaries; and so, they didn't think much about seeing an Englishman like Hudson. But the people of the inland regions were different. Few of them had ever seen a missionary; and the English dress and English manner of the missionaries were very strange to them. The missionaries found it difficult to reach them with the gospel. The inlanders were so taken aback by their strange European ways that they were unable to pay attention to the message of the gospel. Many of the Chinese people thought that the missionaries looked funny and undignified. And it wasn't a very pleasant experience for the missionaries either. The hot Chinese sun in the summer made their conventional English garb very uncomfortable and exhausting to travel around and work in.

Reaching the unreached people of China was a hard task. And then, as if to make matters even harder, Hudson received word that he had to move from his humble Shanghai residence; and that it would be some time before the mission organization that he served under would be able to afford to build some replacement housing for the missionaries in the port city. He had to find a new place to live; and so, it occurred to him: 'Why not live in a boat, like many of the Chinese people did?' This, he decided, fit in very well with another idea that had been growing in his mind: 'If the way that the

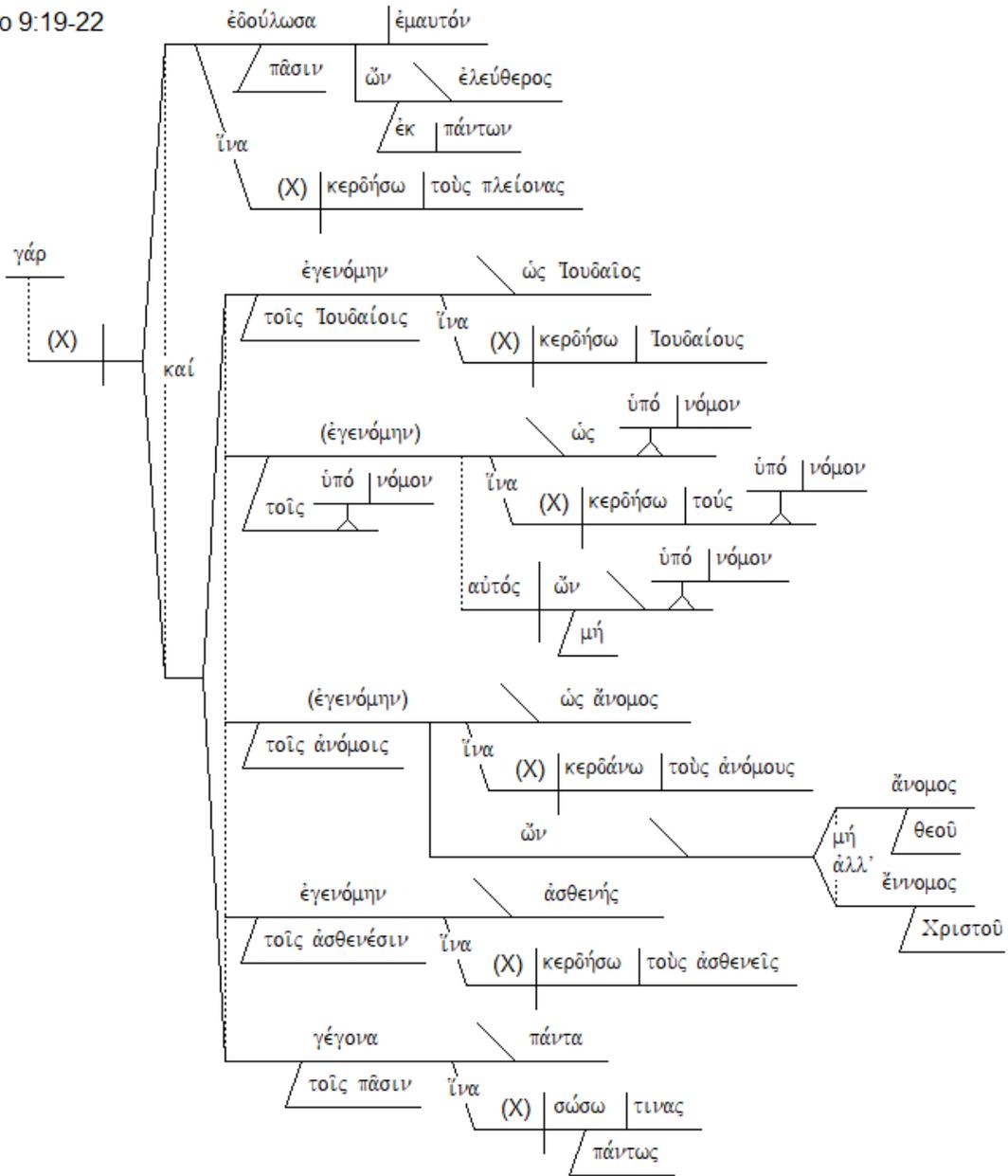
missionaries are dressing was a distraction from the message, then why not dress like the people they were trying to reach—as well as live where they lived?’ After much thought and prayer, Hudson made the radical choice to break from his European ways and intentionally live and look like the people he was trying to reach for Christ.

It was no easy thing for a 19th century Yorkshire Englishman to do. To wear Chinese dress would also have to involve shaving off the front and sides of his head and letting the hair on the top of his head grow long for a braided queue—just as all the Chinese men did. He knew that it might even backfire. This radical new measure might result in his becoming ostracized—not only by the Chinese people, but also from his fellow missionaries. He struggled with the idea for a time; but he finally took the risk, went to the barber to have his hair cut, and put on the silk garments of a Chinese man. In a biography of his life that was written by his son and daughter-in-law, we’re told:

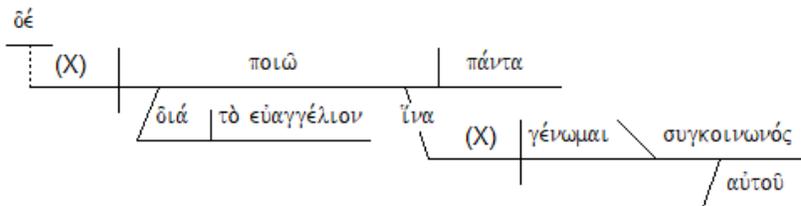
“Everything opened up after that in a new way. On the return journey to Shanghai he was not even recognized as a foreigner, until he began to preach or distribute books and see patients. Then women and children came around much more freely, and the crowds were less noisy and excited. While missing some of the prestige attached to Europeans, he found it more than made up for by the freedom his changed appearance gave him in moving among the people. Their homes were open to him as never before, and it was possible to get opportunities for quiet intercourse with those who seemed interested. Filled with thankfulness for these and other advantages, he wrote home about the dress he had adopted, “It is evidently to be one’s chief help for the interior.”

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

1Co 9:19-22



1Co 9:23



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

TITLE: TWO MOTIVATIONS FOR DISCIPLINED CHRISTIAN LIVING

BIG IDEA:

THE VALUE OF THE ETERNAL PRIZE AND THE DANGER OF DISQUALIFICATION MOTIVATE DISCIPLINED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE WARFARE AGAINST SIN

APPROACH:

- Are we talking in this passage about rewards that will differentiate between believers based on the quality of their Christian service . . . OR
- Are we talking about gaining or being disqualified from the same prize that awaits each believer = eternal life and fellowship with God

Issues to deal with:

- says that **only one** receives the **prize** – how can this be a reference to salvation?
- Apostle Paul views himself as in danger of **disqualification** – What to make of this?

John MacArthur takes the view that it may refer to disqualification “from preaching and leading the church, particularly being blameless and above reproach in the sexual area, since such sin is a disqualification.”

But what does the text say?

CONTEXT:

A. Preceding context – 9:23 “*that I may be a fellow partaker of it*” [the gospel]
Seems to be talking about fellowship in the eternal life that is in the Son in the same sense that fellowship is spoken of in **1 John 1:1-4**

B. Following context – 10:5 “*Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.*”
Paul uses this historical example to exhort the Corinthians not to crave evil things; not to be idolaters; not to act immorally; not to try the Lord; not to grumble; etc.; This usage does not seem to lend a lot of weight in either direction.

Start at the end – word study of “*disqualified*” in **v. 27** – NT usage is decisive:

2 Cor. 13:5-7 -- used of *reprobates*

Heb. 6:8 – “*worthless and in danger of being cursed*”

Rom. 1:28 – “*disapproved mind*”

2 Tim. 3:8 – “*Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.*”

Titus 1:16 – “*They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him,*

being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

Mark Taylor: It seems best to regard this unit as **transitional**, functioning both as the conclusion of Paul’s self-exemplary argument, which began in **9:1**, and also as an introduction to **chap. 10**, which brings the discussion back to the main topic of food sacrificed to idols by way of the negative example of Israel in the wilderness following their exodus from Egypt.

INTRODUCTION:

The Corinthian believers exhibited a carelessness in their Christian living and a casualness that did not recognize the reality of their ongoing warfare with sin. The Apostle Paul shakes them out of their lethargy with this motivational plea for disciplined Christian living.

Nicoll: Paul pursues this line of warning, addressed to men who were imperiling their own souls by self-indulgence and worldly conformity. Of the danger of missing the prize of life through lack of discipline Paul is keenly sensible in his own case; he conveys his apprehension under the picture, so familiar to the Corinthians, of the Isthmian Games.

Paul uses both the carrot and the stick and dresses up his appeal in the familiar athletic pictures of two different types of contests:

- an Olympic style marathon race and
- an intense boxing match.

These two analogies from the realm of sports should be self-evident:

“Do you not know that”

Robert Gundry: Athletes who competed in contests such as the ancient Olympics and the Isthmian games near Corinth had to undergo a months-long discipline of rigorous exercise, a strict diet, and abstinence in matters of sex and alcohol or, as Paul puts it, “*in all respects.*” For him, such discipline is analogous to Christians’ needing to avoid food known to have been sacrificed to an idol. The victorious athletes’ “*perishable wreath*” consisted of laurel, pine, or celery, all of which withered quickly. Christians victorious because of their analogous self-control will receive “*an imperishable [wreath]*” consisting in **eternal life** (compare **Philippians 3:7–14**). For professing Christians defeated because of their lack of self-control are no Christians at all and therefore won’t receive that imperishable wreath.

Anthony Thiselton: The Christians in Corinth would know full well all about competitive races and the stadium, and such other competitions as boxing, wrestling, weaponry, and even music and poetry. The **Isthmian Games** were held every two years on the very doorstep of Corinth, within a short walking distance, and they provided a major tourist attraction and a huge source of external revenue and employment for all

types of trade and business for the city. The Games were held in A.D. 49, shortly before Paul's arrival in Corinth, again in A.D. 51 while he was ministering there, and again in A.D. 53 and 55, around the period of the arrival of this letter.

David Garland: This sports analogy does multitudes in clarifying three issues.

1. First, it plays on the Corinthians' craving for honor and allows Paul to contrast the ephemeral honor bestowed on the winner of an athletic contest with the eternal prize that God will award the Christian victor in the contest against sin.
2. Second, the prolonged, rigorous training required for success in athletic competition was a well-known image in the ancient world, and it sheds light on Paul's own voluntary restraint in his refusing to exercise his apostolic rights so that he might successfully attain his goal of saving others.
3. Third, it warns that any who fail to exercise self-restraint when it comes to the delights of this world may be disqualified from the ultimate race directed by God. It is more than a general warning against complacency, however. It reminds Corinthians of the difficulties of living out their Christian commitment. Entry into the contest does not guarantee a prize (Yinger 1999: 252), and they cannot repose in the illusion that they are safe from failure. The athletic simile serves as a transition to the warning example of Israel in the next section (10:1–13).

I. (:24-25) THE CARROT – RUNNING ANALOGY THE VALUE OF THE ETERNAL PRIZE MOTIVATES DISCIPLINED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE WARFARE AGAINST SIN

A. Participation Does Not Equate to Victory

1. The Christian Life is a Marathon ... not a Sprint
"in a race"

(Although the figure used here for a stadion was only a furlong long, a little more than 200 yards)

2. Participation is Not the Same as Perseverance and Victory
"the runners all compete"

3. Receiving the Prize is What Matters
"but only one receives the prize?"

B. Pursue the Prize Diligently and Zealously

"Run in such a way that you may win it."

Why else would you train and participate? The possibility of running and not obtaining is very real to the Apostle Paul.

The Goal of the Christian life is Victory -- How is victory defined here?

John Piper: The point here is not that only one Christian wins the prize of the upward call of God. As a matter of fact in the Christian race one of the rules is that you must help others finish (**Hebrews 3:13**). Finishing the race is a community project. The point is not that there is only one winner. The point is: run the way the winner runs. How does the winner run? He runs hard. He gives the race everything he has. In another place Paul says, "*Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord*" (**Romans 12:10**). This is the way we are to run in our service for Christ: with zeal and fervent in the Spirit. Not lazy or idle or sluggish or unconcerned.

Gordon Fee: Paul is urging the Corinthians to “run” the Christian life in such a way, in this case by exercising proper self-control (the emphasis in **vv. 25–27**), as to obtain the eschatological reward. In context, the area where they lack “self-control” is that of insisting on the right to continue eating in the environs of the pagan temples. Exhortation, therefore, is Paul’s primary purpose; but the passage also serves as a clear warning if they fail to “run” properly. As warning it anticipates what comes next (**10:1–22**). Inherent in the metaphor is the greater reality that entry into the contest itself does not guarantee the prize; Christian life requires **perseverance** as well.

David Garland: The crux of the argument is that simply entering a race and running does not automatically qualify one as a winner (**Findlay** 1910: 855; **Barrett** 1968: 217; **Oster** 1995: 224). Christians not only must join the race, but also must put forth every effort to finish it well, because the laurels go only to the victor, in this case, a multitude of victors. The οὕτως (*houtōs, thus, in such a way*) means that they are to run as if winning were not guaranteed with prizes granted to every entrant. They cannot amble nonchalantly around the track and expect some kind of trophy simply for participation. **They are to run as if their life depended on it.** It does.

C. Disciplined Living (Exercising Self Control by the Spirit) is the Key to Victory *“Athletes exercise self-control in all things”*

What type of discipline and training do we see from athletes?

How would you describe disciplined Christian living?

Why must the scope of this discipline be “*in all things*”?:

Morris: Notice that the athlete denies himself many lawful pleasures. The Christian must avoid not only definite sin, but anything that hinders his complete effectiveness.

Richard Hays: We should take care here not to lose the thread of Paul’s argument and slip into thinking of spiritual discipline in an individualistic way. The self-control to which Paul is calling the “strong” is precisely the discipline of **giving up their privileges for the sake of others in the community**. They are to exercise self-discipline by giving up their rights to certain foods -- and perhaps some of their privileged social status as well. This is a minor consideration, Paul suggests, in contrast to the prize set before us.

D. Earthly Prizes Cannot Compare to the Eternal Prize

1. Earthly Prizes are Perishable

“they do it to receive a perishable wreath”

2. The Eternal Prize is Imperishable

“but we an imperishable one.”

R.C.H. Lenski: The argument from the less to the greater is overwhelming: if those athletes practice such self-control merely to obtain a slight and fading earthly crown, shall we do less for a heavenly crown of glory that lasts forever?

II. (:26-27) THE STICK – BOXING ANALOGY THE DANGER OF DISQUALIFICATION MOTIVATES DISCIPLINED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE WARFARE AGAINST SIN

A. (:26) Key Elements of Disciplined Christian Living

1. Discipline Involves Purposeful Dedication

a. Transition: Race Analogy – Purposeful Running

“So I do not run aimlessly”

Gordon Fee: This can only mean “as one who has no fixed goal.” People who enter races, of course, do not do such things. Hence the absurdity of the metaphor makes its own point. Paul’s actions, which are defended in the preceding paragraphs, are not those of an aimless runner. **Everything is focused** -- it is for the sake of the gospel, that he too might share in its blessings

b. Boxing Analogy – Purposeful Boxing

“nor do I box as though beating the air”

2. Discipline Involves Hardship and Mastery

a. Hardship / Suffering

“but I punish my body”

b. Mastery / Dominion

“and enslave it”

John MacArthur: Most people, including many Christians, are instead slaves to their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. Their bodies decide when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat, when to sleep and get up, and so on. An athlete cannot allow that. He follows the training rules, not his body. He runs when he would rather be resting, he eats a balanced meal when he would rather have a chocolate sundae, he goes to bed when he would rather stay up, and he gets up early to train when he would rather stay in bed. An athlete leads his body; he does not follow it. It is his slave, not the other way around.

B. (:27) Ever Present Danger of Ultimate Disqualification

1. Christian Service No Guarantee of Ultimate Victory

“so that after proclaiming to others”

Gordon Fee: With this language Paul is bringing the concerns of the foregoing defense back into focus. He exercises self-control in all things, he is telling them with the preceding metaphor, so that after he has fulfilled his task, laid on him by divine necessity (v. 16), he himself will not come short of the prize. To make that point he picks up the athletic metaphor one final time, *“lest I be disqualified,”* to which the NIV has (correctly) added *“for the prize.”* This has been the point of the metaphors from the beginning, that the Corinthians exercise self-control lest they fail to obtain the eschatological prize. As he often does, and especially so in the present context, he uses himself as the example of his concern. That he intends it as a word for them is made clear by the argument that follows.

2. Disqualification Would be a Terrible Tragedy

“I myself should not be disqualified.”

Robert Gundry: And *“to become disqualified”* confirms that failure to win the prize would mean losing out on eternal life, for in **2 Corinthians 13:5** disqualification runs counter to being *“in the faith”* and having *“Jesus Christ in you,”* which are matters of salvation itself (see also **Romans 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:16**). So the underlying issue of eating food known to have been sacrificed to an idol is of no small import.

Gordon Fee: It would be sheer folly to suggest thereby that the warnings are not real. **Paul keeps warning and assurance in tension.** Simultaneously he exhorts and, by this and the following examples, warns the Corinthians of their imminent danger if they do not exercise “self-control” in the matter of idolatry; yet, as always (cf. on **5:8** and **6:11**), he reminds them of their security in the prior activity of God, who has committed himself to them in Christ Jesus. In so doing—and again as always—he puts his final emphasis on God’s activity in our behalf.

Andrew Noselli: Winning motivates an athlete to be self-controlled. The prize for winning an Olympic-type race in Paul’s day was a wreath made of plant leaves, celery, or pine. The prize for winning the gospel race is eternal life with God himself (cf. **Php 3:14**). The wreath is perishable; the eternal reward is imperishable. Therefore, Paul runs the spiritual race with a fixed goal. Paul changes the metaphor to boxing; he fights with skill. He is not competing against fellow Christians. His opponent is his own body and its immoral desires, which must not control him. He trains strictly so that he does not get kicked out of the race or boxing match in the end. He exercises self-control so that he does not abandon his faith. For example, if he did not keep his body under control, he might have immoral sex, and the sexually immoral – that is, people for whom unrepentant immoral sex characterizes their life – do not inherit the kingdom of God (**1Co 5-6**). Being disqualified from this race means being disqualified from inheriting the kingdom of God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would I characterize the level of my effort and zeal in living for Christ?
- 2) What specific examples of self-control and the exercise of spiritual discipline mark my Christian life?
- 3) Do I view myself as exempt from the exhortation of the Apostle Paul to take care in how I live the Christian life lest I end up outside the camp of heaven?
- 4) How does this paragraph support the doctrine of the Perseverance of the saints?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R.C.H. Lenski: Now there follows the final negative purpose clause, which explains the purpose clause used in **v. 23**, in which Paul states that he himself may be a joint partaker in the gospel. At the same time this purpose clause, which is found at the very end of the chapter, illumines the entire chapter, it reaches back to the desire to eat idol meats, continues on through the self-denials which Paul practiced, and culminates in Paul's determination to preserve his own share in the gospel: "*lest in any way, after having preached to others, I myself should be rejected,*" the aorist denotes a final, decisive act: "*should be a castaway,*" A.V. . .

What a calamity when a professing Christian finds himself "rejected" in the end! How much worse when one of the lord's own heralds has this experience! Paul regards his work and even the way in which he does his work with extreme seriousness. The fact that he is an apostle is not yet proof to him that he will be saved. He knows the test that he must face. He applies that test to himself in this chapter and so attains both the subjective and the objective certainty that he will indeed not be a castaway.

Robert Grosheide: His great antagonist is sin, which always drives him in the wrong direction (cf. **Rom. 7**). Paul does not refer to fasting and bodily chastisement but to his struggle against sin. And the apostle summons the Corinthians to do the same. In his final words Paul also refers to his apostleship. It is that apostleship which compels him to preach the gospel and to train himself as a Christian. Knowing the way of salvation so eminently himself, he makes a special effort to go that way that he *should not be rejected*, i.e., to be one of those who did not stand the test of God (**3:13f.; 4:4f.**). As previously (**vs. 23**) Paul brings in the matter of his own salvation. Paul's life is a unity: his apostolic work as well as his Christian life concern his whole personality.

Charles Hodge: The reckless and listless Corinthians thought they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted apostle considered himself as

engaged in a life-struggle for his salvation. This same apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved, and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyful assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in heaven, earth or hell could ever separate him from the love of God. **Rom. 8, 38. 39.** The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other. It is only those who are conscious of this constant and deadly struggle with sin, to whom this assurance is given. In the very same breath Paul says, "*O wretched man that I am;*" and "*Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory,*" **Rom. 7, 24. 25.** It is the indolent and self-indulgent Christian who is always in doubt.

John Piper: What's at Stake in This Race?

Paul gives the answer to this question in four different ways in four different verses. In two of them he talks about what is at stake in the way he runs his own race. And in two of them he talks about what's at stake in the way the Corinthians run the race. It's the same thing for both. He wants them to see what's at stake is the prize. And he uses himself as an example. He is in the race with them.

1. Becoming a Fellow-Partaker of the Gospel

First, in **verse 23** he comes to the end of his description (in **verses 19–22**) of how he is willing to become all things to all men in order to save some (**v. 22**), and he sums up this passion for people and for the gospel like this: (**v. 23**) "*And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it.*"

There's the first description of what is at stake in the way Paul runs the race of his life. "*. . . that I may become a fellow-partaker of the gospel.*" "*. . . that I might have a share in the gospel.*" "*. . . that I might obtain what the gospel promises.*"

Now what the gospel promises is salvation—salvation from sin and death and hell. "*The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe*" (**Romans 1:16**; cf. **1 Corinthians 15:1–2**). So what Paul is saying is this: "*I live for the sake of the gospel—I preach it and become all things to all people, not only that they might be saved, but that I might inherit the same salvation with them.*" He said the same thing to Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:16**, "*Take heed to yourself and to your teaching, hold fast to that; for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*"

God has called Paul to preach the gospel. Whether he does or not is evidence of his living relationship to Christ. It is evidence of whether he has been born of God and given a new heart of love to Christ. And therefore what hangs on Paul's running in the path of obedience and his fighting the fight of faith is the reality of his own standing in grace, his own participation in the gospel.

If he quit running, if he said, "I've had enough of this life of service; I'm through with following the path of obedience to my heavenly call; I'll try to hang on to Christ for the forgiveness of my sins, but I'm done with doing what he says," -- if Paul quit like that, and never came back, he would be lost. He would not get the prize of salvation. He

would be disqualified from the race and sent away in shame -- like a sprinter guilty of unlawful steroids.

2. Disqualification

That's what Paul says in **verse 27**, which is the second way he describes what is at stake in the race of life. He says, "*I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.*"

"Disqualified!"

Paul will warn the Corinthians in the next chapter (**10:12**), "*Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*" Now Paul applies it to himself. "If I do not take heed, if I give way to some of the impulses of my body, I could find myself on the slippery slope of disobedience away from Christ, and get to the end of my life and hear the judge of the race say, 'Disqualified! Yes, you prophesied in my name. Yes, you cast out demons in my name. Yes, you did many mighty works in my name. But you left the racetrack of faith and love and righteousness. You are disqualified. Depart from me. I never knew you (**Matthew 7:22–23**).'"

The best evidence perhaps that this is what Paul means is the use of the word "*disqualified*" (*adokimos*) in **2 Corinthians 13:5**. Paul says, "*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you are disqualified.*" The word is exactly the same one from **1 Corinthians 9:27**.

To be disqualified means that Christ is not in you. The race has been run in vain. It was a sham.

How Paul Viewed His Own Life

Now Paul does not believe that is true about his own heart. And he means to make his whole life a living demonstration that Christ is in him and Christ is mighty to save. The way he runs and the way he fights is not because he doesn't have Christ and hopes to have him, but because he does have Christ and means to show it to the world.

The beautiful way he puts it in **Philippians 3:12** is, "*Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*"

The running and the fighting of the Christian life is a running and fighting for **eternal life** (**1 Timothy 6:12**—"Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of eternal life"). But it is a race and a fight in the confidence that we have been taken hold of by Christ for that very life. Our running and our fighting, with all its pain, is proof that the Christ who ran his race and fought his fight and endured his cross for the joy (the prize) set before him is alive and real in our hearts.

So Paul uses himself and his own race twice to show what is at stake in the way we run and fight. Now he says the same thing when he mentions twice what is at stake in the way the Corinthians run their race.

3. The Prize of Heaven

Verse 24: *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may seize it."* Run to win the prize.

The word for "prize" is used one other time in the New Testament, namely, in

Philippians 3:14. *"I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* **Not to get the prize is not to go to heaven.**

So when Paul says, *"Run in such a way as to win the prize,"* heaven hangs on this running. That's why next week's message is so crucial. What is it? How do we do it?

4. The Imperishable Crown of Righteousness

The fourth description of what is at stake in our running is mentioned in verse 25.

"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." The prize is an *"imperishable wreath."*

The word is *stephanos*, crown, and the closest parallel to this use of crown is **2 Timothy 4:7–8** where Paul mentions the race and the fight just like he does here in **verse 26.** *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course [race], I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing."*

The *"imperishable crown"* is the righteousness that finally fits us for heaven. We don't have it yet. We still sin. We repent. God forgives. But we fight and we run in the pursuit of righteousness (**Hebrews 12:14**). We hunger and thirst for righteousness with the confidence, Jesus says, that *"we shall be satisfied"* (**Matthew 5:6**). We do not run in vain!

Conclusion

And so the conclusion this morning is this: the Christian life is an awesomely serious affair and the stakes are infinitely high. What you do with your life—the way you run your race and fight your fight—will make the difference between sharing in the promises of the gospel or being disqualified. It will make the difference between attaining the prize of the upward call of God in Christ, or not. It will make the difference between receiving the unfading crown of righteousness or not. Life is serious business.

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/19/802_Olympic_Spirituality_Part_1/

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

TITLE: TAKE HEED LEST YOU FALL – PERSEVERE TO THE END

BIG IDEA:

INCLUSION IN SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGE NO GUARANTEE OF PARTICIPATION IN SPIRITUAL SALVATION

INTRODUCTION:

We must remember everything said earlier about Paul's desire to persevere in his Christian life and ministry so as to be a "*fellow partaker*" of the gospel benefits (9:23) and not to be "*disqualified*" (9:27). [*adokimos* is the key determining word in this whole section = "*rejected, worthless*"] He has **salvation** in mind in both of those references – consistent with the Calvinistic doctrine of the **perseverance of the saints**. Some might argue that salvation cannot be in view because that would call into question the doctrine of assurance of salvation. How can you have any confidence of your salvation if you need to wait to see if you persevere to the end? Isn't that adding an element of works to assurance? But the Book of 1 John teaches that there are multiple tracks of assurance. Someone can have assurance on the **basis of their faith** as soon as they are saved. But there is also another growing track of assurance that is based on your living out a **changed life** by the grace of God. Assurance on that track can fluctuate some and we are exhorted to make our calling and election secure. So any objections on those grounds would constitute objections against the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as well.

The difficulty is that there are multiple tracks of application that grow out of the one thread of interpretation. In 9:24-27 as well as 10:1-13, there are different groups of people listening to this message and needing to make different applications. There are certainly the self-deceived and false professors of Christianity who need to be challenged to move on to genuine repentance and faith so as to not miss out on the blessing of God's rest (**Hebrews 3-4**). We know that no one whose life is characterized by idolatry or immorality or unbelief or rebellion can enter into the kingdom of heaven. Yet are we going to argue that all of those who died in the wilderness missed out on salvation? Certainly not! Moses was one of those who died in the wilderness. So there are also the large numbers in the audience Paul is addressing who are genuinely saved and need to be challenged to live a disciplined Christian life to the end, not to abuse their Christian freedoms and liberty in Christ, and to beware lest they fall as well. My point is that we do not want to strip away one of the main threats of the passage which is that it is possible for someone to have all types of intimate contact with spiritual privilege and the best Bible teaching and Christian fellowship and yet still miss out on salvation. We need to drive home that warning while still making the application to Christians of the need for careful and diligent pursuit of holiness.

We need more teaching on the important doctrine of the **perseverance of the saints** so that we don't shy away from this truth where it is referenced in the passage. (See

doctrinal statement below.) Certainly in our day with the prevalence of “easy believism” and many people who have a false sense of security in their salvation, they need to be shaken from their spiritual lethargy with these challenging words and OT examples.

Richard Hays: As we begin reading **1 Corinthians 10**, it is important to recall the situation that Paul is addressing. The letter from the Corinthians has appealed for Paul’s support of an enlightened understanding that idols are meaningless. Some of the Corinthians are attending meals and festivities in the temples of pagan gods, just as they had done before becoming Christians. In their view, this is merely a normal aspect of social life in their culture. Such activities entail no spiritual danger, they argue, because they have knowledge: knowledge that there is only one God, knowledge that sets them free from the petty rules and restrictions of ordinary religious life. Perhaps they are also arguing that, having participated in the mysteries of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, they have passed into a zone of spiritual blessedness that makes them immune to any harm from associating with pagan worship. If they are sharers in the table of the Lord, receiving there the elements that Ignatius of Antioch later called “the medicine of immortality,” what possible difference can it make if they accept friendly invitations to other meals that just happen to be located in the shrine of some imaginary god? . . .

Paul’s use of Israel’s story is crucial to his case: the God with whom we have to do, he insists, is not merely some abstract divine principle that sets us free from polytheistic superstition. The God with whom we have to do is the God of Israel, a jealous God who sternly condemns idol-worship and punishes all who dare to dabble in it. The Corinthians who lightly flit about to temples, supposing themselves impervious to harm, are courting destruction.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Avoid sin by remembering God’s work in the past among the Hebrews and by depending on God’s faithfulness.

I. Spiritual Blessings Do Not Guarantee Us God’s Pleasure (10:1-5).

- A. We see God’s guidance (10:1).
- B. We see God’s deliverance (10:2).
- C. We see God’s provisions (10:3-4).
- D. We see God’s wrath (10:5).

II. Spiritual Blessings Do Not Insulate Us from Divine Judgment (10:6-10).

- A. God punishes the sin of lust (10:6; cf. Num. 11:18-34).
- B. God punishes the sin of idolatry (10:7; cf. Exod 32).
- C. God punishes the sin of sexual immorality (10:8; cf. Num 25:1-9).
- D. God punishes the sin of testing him (10:9; cf. Num 21:4-9).
- E. God punishes the sin of grumbling (10:10; cf. Num 16:41-50).

III. Spiritual Blessings Do Not Protect Us from Personal Temptations (10:11-13).

- A. Remember our susceptibility to evil (10:11-12).
- B. Remember God’s way of escape (10:13).

In 1948, in a speech to the House of Commons, British Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** famously said, “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” The apostle Paul, no doubt, is in full agreement with Churchill’s warning, as **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** makes clear. Twice he tells us that events in Israel’s past serve as “*examples*” (**10:6,11**) warning us not to repeat their sinful behavior, which had devastating consequences for the Hebrew people. Paul has challenged us to discipline ourselves so that we may win imperishable crowns and not suffer disqualification (**9:24-27**). Unfortunately, such determination and discipline “found no place in the lives of many of the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt” (**Vaughn and Lea, 1 Corinthians**, 99). Though they made a good start, they failed to finish well. Paul wants us to learn from their tragic example so that we do not repeat their history.

Craig Blomberg: The danger of failing to exercise strict self-control in the Christian life (**9:24–27**) is now illustrated. **First Corinthians 10:1–13** uses numerous examples of the sins of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings to warn against Corinthian participation in idolatrous idol feasts (**10:14–22**). The parallels prove particularly intriguing, not least because the Israelites demanded meat from Moses (**Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:4**). **Verses 1–5** describe four privileges the Israelites received which did not guarantee subsequent blessings: (a) guidance by God in the cloud, (b) crossing the Red Sea, (c) eating manna and quail in the desert, and (d) supernaturally provided water. **Verses 7–10** recall four ways in which many of those same Israelites proved faithless and suffered for their sins: idolatry, immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. **Verses 6 and 11** punctuate these two sections with parallel reminders that the Israelites’ experience should caution the Corinthians against behaving similarly. **Verses 12–13** close off this section by balancing a summary warning (v. 12) with a promise that history need not repeat itself (v. 13).

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: The community of Israel, established by God and given gifts by God, still sinned and was judged. It thus offers a salutary example for the community of Christians at Corinth. They must watch out lest they too, thinking they stand, sin and fall. Ultimately, only dependence upon God’s faithfulness will enable them to bear up under temptation.

I. (:1-5) THESIS PROVED: GOD’S REJECTION OF THE UNBELIEVING GENERATION OF EXODUS WILDERNESS WANDERERS

Transition

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren”

(Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13)

Robert Grosheide: a litotes, which always introduces an important matter.

Robert Hays: The important point in **verses 1–4** is that Israel -- whose legacy the Corinthians have inherited -- experienced powerful spiritual signs of God’s favor and

sustaining power. Paul’s summary narration highlights the fact that these signs were given to all the Israelites: the word “*all*” appears five times in these verses (a single sentence in the Greek). All were “baptized,” and all enjoyed the blessings of spiritual food and drink. And yet, despite these signs of grace, “*God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness*” (v. 5). The verb “*struck down*” conveys the vivid and appalling image of the bodies of the Israelites strewn across the desert sand (see NEB). With that sobering note, Paul begins to develop the hortatory application of Israel’s story to the situation of his Corinthian readers: Just because you have received spiritual blessings, he says, do not suppose that you are exempt from God’s judgment.

Paul Gardner: In these opening verses . . . Paul emphasizes the same points that the accounts of the wilderness traditions in Jewish history have emphasized. Notably, the Israelites were identified as God’s covenant people by the separation from Egypt in crossing the sea (a “baptism”). No Israelite was exempted as they “*believed in God and in Moses.*” As a people, all benefitted from his “spiritual” gifts of manna and water. Even so, as a people, many were judged for their sin because they desired evil. Significantly, this is the classic way these stories were used by Jewish traditions, a point missed by most commentators. Paul’s comparison then builds on these points, as will be seen in the next few verses. All Christians are identified as covenant people in baptism as they believe in God and in Christ. As his people, all benefit from his spiritual gifts. None is exempt. In the same way, Christians who desire evil will face judgment (v. 6). It is the parallel with “*desiring evil*” that Paul will first take time to elaborate upon in vv. 6–12.

A. Tremendous Inclusion in Spiritual Privileges

1. (:1) Privilege of Divine Guidance and Deliverance

a. Divine Guidance

“that our fathers were all under the cloud”

David Guzik: The cloud of Shekinah glory overshadowed Israel throughout their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. During the day, the cloud sheltered them from the brutal desert sun, and during the night, it burned as a pillar of fire. It was a constant, ready reminder of God’s glory and presence (**Exodus 13:21-22**).

b. Divine Deliverance – Tremendous miracles experienced

“and all passed through the sea”

Robert Grosheide: All Israelites enjoyed that favor of God [being led by the pillar]. Even so when they passed through the Red Sea there was no distinction between believers and unbelievers: the entire nation safely reached the other shore.

Mark Taylor: The cloud and the sea were both powerful reminders of Israel’s deliverance through Moses, Yahweh’s appointed deliverer. In the exodus narrative the cloud was more than a mere symbol of Yahweh’s continual presence and leadership; Yahweh himself went before his people “*in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their*

way” (Exod 13:21–22). At the Red Sea the cloud moved around behind Israel in order to separate them from the Egyptians (Exod 14:19–20). Other passages parallel Paul’s description of Israel as “*under the cloud*” (see Exod 14:24; Num 14:14; Ps 105:39).

2. (:2) Privilege of Union with Moses

“and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”

Significance of “baptism” – immersed, identification, union – symbolic
To bring in close relationship with Moses; his ministry and leadership

Anthony Thiselton: All shared in the corporate solidarity of the redeemed community led by Moses. *Baptized into Moses* indicates their being initiated into a new status of loyalty to his leadership as those who share in the blessings and also the renunciations of the group as a whole.

David Prior: To be *baptized into Moses* meant that they were voluntarily and unconditionally placing themselves **under the leadership of Moses**. Paul’s very striking, but unusual, language in this passage emphasizes the parallels between the privileges of God’s people under Moses and the privileges of God’s people under Jesus. In both historical epochs there were two events which were pregnant with meaning:

1. being baptized to denote loyalty to God’s appointed leader; and
2. being provided with ‘supernatural’ food and drink on a regular basis.

Paul is clearly comparing the presumptuous attitude of God’s people under Moses to the arrogance of certain Corinthian Christians in his own day. They too had been through the waters of baptism, with all the deep significance this carried for allegiance to Jesus as Lord (6:11). They too were involved regularly in common meals, during which they were both physically and spiritually nourished. These Christians, like God’s people under Moses, were on the receiving end of great blessings; but to receive blessing is by no means the same as to enter into the privilege and responsibilities of blessing. They had become so absorbed with rights that they were now presuming on the efficacy of their relationship with the Lord.

3. (:3-4a) Privilege of Spiritual Nourishment – spiritual source – Supernatural Provision

a. (:3) Spiritual Food

“and all ate the same spiritual food”

b. (:4a) Spiritual Drink

“and all drank the same spiritual drink”

4. (:4b) Spiritual Types Fulfilled in Christ

“for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”

Here Paul makes the connection between the OT experiences and the spiritual reality involved and the NT experience of the Corinthian believers as the OT types are fulfilled in Christ.

Gil Rugh: Ex. 17 and Num 20 – two instances – at the beginning of their journey in the wilderness and at the end; perhaps the rock was an ongoing source of water.

David Guzik: Paul is building on a Rabbinical tradition which said Israel was supplied with water by the same rock all through the wilderness, a rock which followed them.

Charles Hodge: This view of the passage makes the apostle responsible for a Jewish fable, and is inconsistent with his divine authority. . . It is not necessary, however, to assume that either the rock or the water out of the rock followed them. The rock that followed them was Christ. The Logos, the manifested Jehovah, who attended the Israelites in their journey, was the Son of God who assumed our nature, and was the Christ.

Paul Gardner: Paul saw Christ as the fulfillment of God’s faithfulness and the embodiment of his grace (1:4). “In Christ Jesus” the Corinthians received every spiritual gift (1:4–7). In line with Old Testament teaching, Paul regarded the manna and water as gifts from the faithful God who was called “Rock.” But Paul had a new “spiritual” understanding of this. Christ was the source of the water, water that was “spiritual” in that it pointed back to Christ. To ask questions about the manner in which this was true misses Paul’s point and is a question perhaps more prompted by anachronistic sacramental discussions than by v. 4. Paul was direct. The rock was Christ. Detailed analysis of how Christ was there is not addressed. For Paul, the fact is that he was, and that is God’s revelation to Paul. It is thus meaningless to ask whether the Israelites should have seen Christ in the wilderness, for that understanding is precisely what is new to Paul. It is not that “Paul’s readers should see the rock then as an equivalent to Christ now” but rather that they should look at Scripture and see a directly parallel example to their own situation, **for the covenant Lord is with his people now as he was with Israel. . .**

This is Paul’s concern for the Corinthians. He sees parallels and patterns at multiple levels between the covenant community of the wilderness generation and that in his day in Corinth. Both communities have been mightily blessed by God, who has poured out his gifts on both. The Corinthians lacked no grace-gift and had been enriched “*in all speech and all knowledge*” (1 Cor 1:5). But God killed many of the Israelites in judgment. Now Paul will write of the reasons why they were judged and show the parallels yet again, for the Corinthians face the very same dangers. Ellis rightly says that Paul, having presented God’s grace in 10:1–4, moves in the verses that follow to “**judgment typology.**”

David Garland: The idea of the rock evokes a number of OT images.

- First, “Rock” is a title used for God in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31), a passage that forms the foundation for Paul’s arguments against the

Corinthians' participation in idolatry. The figures of "the Rock of salvation," "the Rock that begot you," "our Rock," and "my rock and my redeemer" (**Ps. 19:14**) all easily transfer to Christ. Israel's idolatry also spurned the Rock that had delivered and sustained them throughout their wilderness trek (**Deut. 32:15**). These "rock" texts may nudge the reader to remember Israel's deplorable idolatry and rejection of God, who emancipated and cared for them, and Paul would have regarded them as particularly applicable to the Corinthian situation, where they have been dallying with idols.

- Second, the metaphor of the Rock emphasizes God's stability and permanence (**Craigie** 1976: 378) and underscores God's covenant faithfulness in choosing a covenant people (**P. Gardner** 1994: 125, 147). The image accentuates God's unchanging nature in contrast to the erratic, impulsive, and unreliable nature of God's covenantal people (**Oropeza** 1998: 62).
- Third, the image of rock in the Scriptures, recalling the miraculous provision of water (**Deut. 8:15; Neh. 9:15; Job 29:6; Ps. 81:16; 105:41; Isa. 48:21**) or as an epithet for God (**Ps. 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; Isa. 30:29; 44:8; Hab. 1:12**), was associated with God's saving work. It harks back to God's redemptive achievement for the people of the covenant.

B. Shocking Rejection of Participation in Spiritual Blessing

1. Extent of the Failure

"Nevertheless, with most of them"

Classic understatement – all but 2 men! Vs. millions

2. Evaluation of Their Spiritual Condition

"God was not well-pleased"

Gil Rugh: God's sovereign pleasure; context of God's sovereign work of divine election; Look at word usage in NT:

Ephes. 1:5,9 *"kind intention"* – according to what pleased His will

Phil. 2:12b *"for His good pleasure"* – according to what pleases Him

Heb. 10:36-39 *"you have need of endurance"* – If you don't do the will of God you won't receive what is promised; *"and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him"*

Robert Gundry: Christians who do misbehave in such ways won't enter the Promised Land of eternal life, but "will pay a penalty, [namely,] eternal destruction away from the Lord's face" (**2 Thessalonians 1:9**).

3. Execution of Severe Judgment

"for they were laid low in the wilderness"

"Spread out; scattered"

Charles Hodge: Would God permit those to perish for whom he had wrought so signal a deliverance, and for whose sake he sacrificed the hosts of Egypt? Yet their carcasses were strewed in the wilderness. It is not enough, therefore, to be recipients of extraordinary favours; it is not enough to begin well. It is only by constant self-denial and vigilance, that the promised reward can be obtained. This is the lesson the apostle intends to inculcate.

David Prior: Their Punishment (10:5-10)

This can be summarized in three dramatic and tragic phrases: *they were struck down (5)*; *they fell (8)*; *they were destroyed by the destroyer (9–10)*. The last example is a similar situation to that described in 5:5 (cf. Num. 16:41–49). Destruction of the flesh, in this case of thousands, did not necessarily involve eternal destruction as well. These people did not see the Promised Land, but nothing is said of their eternal destiny. Paul wants these beloved, but boastful, brethren to be the very best that they can be for the Lord.

II. (:6) THESIS APPLIED BY WAY OF WARNING: GUARD AGAINST THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH = MAJOR PITFALL

A. Value of OT Warning Examples

“Now these things happened as examples for us”

David Garland: In ethical discussion, “a *typos* is a model, hardly different from an example” (Spicq, TLNT 3:387). It reveals a pattern or correspondence, observed after the fact, that contains a teaching (cf. Rom. 6:17). The word clearly means “example” in Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7. The phrase “so that we might not be” confirms that they were not types but “examples for guidance” (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 202–3; R. Collins 1999: 370; contra Goppelt 1982: 146; TDNT 8:251–52). Paul’s high view of the church living under the new covenant in the last days emerges here. These things occurred so that they might be **warning examples** for his readers.

B. Purpose of OT Warning Examples – Guard Against the Lusts of the Flesh

“so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.”

David Garland: Paul connects the selfish craving of the wilderness rabble to the Corinthian desire to eat (meat?) in idol temples.

III. (:7-10) THESIS ILLUSTRATED FURTHER: FOUR OT EXAMPLES OF MORAL FAILURE AND DEVASTATING JUDGMENT (UNGODLY BEHAVIOR ON THE PART OF THE SPIRITUALLY PRIVILEGED . . . FOLLOWED BY DIVINE JUDGMENT)

(Examine how **Unbelief** lies at the core of each of these manifestations of Rebellion)

Anthony Thiselton: Four Instances of Destructive “Craving” (10:7-13)

A. (:7) Guard Against Idolatry (Ex. 32:1-6)

*“Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written,
‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’”*

Steven Cole: The verb translated *play* suggests sex-play in Hebrew . . . and therefore we are probably to understand drunken orgies.” (commentary on Exodus)

J. Scott Lindsay: **Exodus 32** talks about this incident. And it is interesting that of all the things that Paul *might* have quoted from **Ex 32**, the one thing he chooses to quote is **verse 6**, “*And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play*”. Now why quote this? Because of the parallels with the Corinthian situation. The people of Israel were engaging in blatant idolatry, *eating and drinking in the presence of a golden calf* - an idol - and doing other things as well. God’s anger and judgment against them on that occasion were great. And what were the Corinthians doing? They were *insisting* on their “right” and freedom to eat and drink food, in an idol temple.

Richard Hays: There are two ways of understanding the function of the first part of the quotation (“*the people sat down to eat and drink*”) within Paul’s argument. The eating and drinking could refer to the Israelites’ eating and drinking the spiritual food and drink provided by God (**vv. 1–4**). In that case, the point of **verse 7** would be to emphasize their appalling ingratitude: “Even though they ate and drank the spiritual nourishment that God provided, nonetheless they rose up to commit idolatry.” The advantage of this interpretation is that it permits us to see the whole of **verses 1–12** as structured upon this single quotation. Alternatively, the eating and drinking of **verse 7** could refer not to their consumption of God-given food and drink but to their feasting in the presence of the idol. In that case, the point of **verse 7** would be to emphasize that participation in the idol feast leads on to other immoral behavior. “They ate and drank before the golden calf and rose up to commit other offenses against God.” There are two major advantages of this second interpretation: it is in keeping with the contextual meaning of the sentence in **Exodus 32** (unlike the first interpretation), and it relates directly to the problem that Paul is addressing in **1 Corinthians 10:1–22** -- eating sacrificed meat in a pagan temple. All things considered, the second reading is to be preferred. By quoting **Exodus 32:6**, Paul deftly identifies the “*eating*” of the temple food with the act of idolatry that brought God’s wrath upon Israel.

B. (:8) Guard Against Immorality (Num. 25 or Ex. 32?)

*“Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did,
and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.”*

Possible answers to apparent discrepancy in numbers here with 24,000 of **Numbers 25:9**: (“*those who died by the plague were 24,000*”)

Charles Hodge: Moses and Paul were accustomed, like most other men, to use round numbers; and they used them when under the influence of inspiration just as they used

other familiar forms of statement. Neither intended to speak with numerical exactness, which the occasion did not require. What a wonderful book is the Bible, written at intervals during a period of fifteen hundred years, when such apparitions of inaccuracy as this must be seized upon to impeach its infallibility!

John MacArthur: Having just quoted from **Ex 32** in **vs. 7**, this very likely also refers to the incident in **Ex 32**, not to the incident at Shittim in **Nu 25**. Apparently 3,000 were killed by the Levites (**Ex 32:28**) and 20,000 died in the plague (**Ex 32:35**).

C. (:9) Guard Against Insurrection (Presumption – Testing God -- Num. 21:5-6)

*“Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did,
and were destroyed by the serpents.”*

Anthony Thiselton: The common factor between Israel in Exodus and in Numbers and “*the strong*” in Corinth appears to be the presumptuous attitude of provoking God to the very limit in the confident, complacent assumption that God will protect his people and not let them go. Their overconfident attempt to play off God’s protective love against their willful craving failed to work. They found destruction by the snakes (**v. 9b**).

Richard Hays: The third exhortation (**v. 9**) alludes to the story of **Num. 21:4–9**. Once again, food is the issue, though here there is no direct reference to idolatry. The sin seems to be primarily the **sin of complaining against God**: “*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 detest this miserable food’*” (**Num. 21:5**). This time the punishment takes the form of poisonous serpents. **Psalm 78:18** may provide a link to Paul’s interpretation of the story, because it speaks of the people putting God to the test by their desire for food: “*They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.*” But why does Paul say, “*We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did*” (**1 Cor. 10:9**, NRSV)? (The NIV, following a different Greek text, reads “*test the Lord*”; however, the reading adopted by the NRSV is clearly the more difficult and therefore more likely to be original.) The likeliest explanation for this odd turn of expression is that Paul is thinking primarily of the action of the Corinthians in the present time: they are putting Christ to the test by attending pagan temples and participating in the idol meals. That is what Paul insists must not be done. The formula, “*as some of them did*,” already established in **verses 7** and **8**, is repeated for the sake of rhetorical parallelism, even though the Israelites in the wilderness were not, strictly speaking, putting Christ to the test (but cf. **10:4**).

Paul Gardner: “*Testing*” God describes the sin of not trusting him for his provision or not trusting in his promises. Yet it is more than this. The Israelites did not trust the Lord to provide, but even then, when he did provide, they held his provision in **contempt**: “*We detest this miserable food*” (**Num 21:5**). It is this contempt for the Lord and his gifts and provision for the community that draws down immediate judgment in the form of the snakes (**v. 6**). Once again, the result is that many died.

David Garland: With the dreaded image of vipers striking unsuspecting victims and causing painful deaths, Paul deliberately heightens the horror of the punishment that will smite those who affront God.

D. (:10) Guard Against Ingratitude (Discontent -- Num. 16:3-41)

“Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”

Look at how this common sin is thrown in here at the same level of importance with the others. Grumbling, murmuring, discontent are huge problems. Don't minimize these. It is an attack of unbelief against the Goodness and Wisdom of God.

Charles Hodge: To murmur is to complain in a rebellious spirit.

Anthony Thiselton: The Greek word and the context in Exodus and Numbers suggest a constant grumbling, griping, groaning, murmuring, whispering, and complaining that expresses **discontent with what God had provided**. Thus this was in part a sin of ingratitude, in part a disloyal sowing of seeds of discontentment among others. In **1 Corinthians 8–10** it pinpoints, first, an ungrateful discontent with the generosity of God's grace; and, second, a behind-the-back unsettling of those who would otherwise have accepted what God's grace has assigned. In all probability the insecure in the church in Corinth felt, with good reason, that some of the “strong” whispered about their confusions and doubts behind their hands.

Richard Hays: Paul's heaping up of examples from the Pentateuchal narratives has demonstrated emphatically that God is not to be trifled with. Those who defy God's authority by flirting with idolatry and “craving” idol-tinged food will suffer catastrophic consequences.

David Garland: Paul perhaps singles out “grumbling” because the Corinthians have been guilty of murmuring against him (so **Robertson and Plummer** 1914: 206; **Moffatt** 1938: 132; **Oster** 1995: 235), particularly because of his hard-line stance against their participation in idol feasts (**Fee** 1987: 457). As Moses protested the peoples' idolatry, so Paul has protested the Corinthians' participation in sacrificial meals. As the people of Israel grumbled against the leader appointed by God, so also Paul insinuates that the Corinthians are no less guilty of rebelliously grumbling against him and refusing to listen to his counsel.

IV. (:11-13) THESIS APPLIED BY WAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT: WATCH OUT! BUT WITH AN ATTITUDE OF HOPE NOT DISCOURAGEMENT . . . NO EXCEPTIONS . . . NO EXCUSES

A. (:11) Relevance of These OT Examples

1. History Has a Purpose for Us

“Now these things happened to them as an example”

2. Scripture Provides Authoritative Instruction for Us
“and they were written for our instruction”

3. Time Is Running Out for Us
“upon whom the ends of the ages have come”

Anthony Thiselton: Paul’s appeal to the “eschatological” situation of Christians clinches this. Christians are those *upon whom the ends of the ages have come*. The traditional understanding of this is that Christians live “in the last days.” But Paul is more precise than this. He refers to “the two ages” of both Jewish apocalyptic and Pauline thought. Christians stand on the borderline between the continuing “age” of the present world order and the new age of the last days and new creation. These “intersect” where “the close of the old coincides with the beginning of the new” (Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, p. 254).

The practical point, therefore, is twofold:

- (1) because Christians still live within the continuing world order, they must guard against presumption and heed moral exhortation; but
- (2) because they belong to the new age, they have access to a definitive disclosure of God’s will and access to divine grace in Christ.

Their relation to the old underlines the need to take warnings seriously (**v. 11b**); their relation to the new addresses doubt and anxiety on the journey of pilgrimage, self-discipline, and growth.

This double perspective paves the way for the two complementary halves of **vv. 12-13**.

- (1) To the complacent, overconfident, and cocksure, Paul gives the warning, *Whoever thinks that he or she is standing fast, watch out lest you fall* (**v. 12a**). Christians are still on the journey of the pilgrim where temptation and danger still lurk.
- (2) On the other hand, whatever temptations come, these are no more than what arise as part and parcel of being human, and God, who is faithful, will not allow you to be tempted beyond your powers (**vv. 12b-13a**). Furthermore, since God’s purpose in such experience is for Christians to attain maturity by bearing up under temptation rather than suffering destruction, God will make an exit path alongside the temptation (**v. 13**).

Again, as **Moltmann** urges in *Theology of Hope* (p. 21), the two “sins” to resist are those of presumption and despair. Each respectively relates to the problems of the “strong” and the “weak” in Corinth.

- (1) No doubt some appealed to claims that they suffered “special” temptations. Paul replies that their experience is simply part of being human, alongside all misplaced desires, misdirected passions, self-deceptions, and illusions.
- (2) Paul also insists that we can never say, “There is no way out.” God would not allow a temptation that is in principle irresistible, without their being some way of skirting around it or escaping it.

Craig Blomberg: Verse 11 repeats the warning of verse 6, all the more crucial since Christians live in the climactic era of human history for which all previous ages were preparing.

Verse 12 summarizes the significance of these warnings for the Corinthians—even those who think they stand securely should take care, like Paul in **9:27**, lest they fall and be disqualified. After all, the pagan temple feasts in Corinth involved similar idolatry, sexual sin, and trying God’s patience. And the Corinthian quarrels could certainly qualify as grumbling against one another. Nevertheless, **verses 1–12** are all balanced by the marvelous promise of **verse 13**. The circumstances that tempt us to sin are never qualitatively different from those which God’s people of every era have experienced, and we never have to give in to them. There is always an escape-hatch, which is defined as a way to persevere without sinning in whatever difficult situation we find ourselves.

David Garland: The earlier generations lived at the beginning, when God’s promises were being announced. Christians stand at a point when God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ and the veil has been lifted (**2 Cor. 3:14–18**). Hidden realities have been revealed (**1 Cor. 2:9–12, 16**) -- for example, that Christ was the prime mover in these events (**10:4**). Christians need to recognize how these realities apply to the present.

B. (:12) Central Application – Warning Against Spiritual Overconfidence – Need for Careful, Diligent Pursuit of Holiness

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”

1. Primary Application to the Unsaved

2. Secondary Application to the Saved

Paul Gardner: This is the Corinthian problem. Some feel secure and think they “stand” safely in the covenant community without fear of judgment. They are arrogant in that they do indeed “*think they stand.*” Paul insists with an imperative (βλεπέτω) that they must “watch out!” or “take heed” lest they fall. The danger is real and deeply disturbing for Paul, as he has made clear. . .

There is surely considerable irony here in that the elitists, who thought they stood but were causing people to “*stumble*” (**8:8, 11**), were in fact themselves in danger of “*falling.*” Paul’s comment, “*anyone who thinks he stands*” (ὁ δοκῶν ἐστάναι) provides another link back to **8:2**, “*if anyone thinks he knows*” (εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνοῦκέναι). This person in **8:2** is the **arrogant “knower”** who is reminded by Paul that he does not yet know as he ought. The person in **10:12** is surely the same: those who think they stand must be reminded that they are in danger of falling.

C. (:13) Faithfulness of God Provides for the Perseverance of the Saints

1. No Unique Temptation that God Cannot Defeat = Provides Hope

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man”

2. Character of God Provides Hope

“God is Faithful”

3. Limitation of Man No Excuse

“who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able”

4. Endurance is Possible and Sovereignly Enabled

“but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

James Boyer: If Christians once learn the meaning of **I Corinthians 10:13** they never again will say, “I couldn’t help it.”

David Prior: *The way out (ekbasis)* is almost exactly the same word as ‘exodus’, and Luke (**Luke 9:31**) describes the redemptive death of Jesus as the ‘exodus’ he will achieve at Jerusalem. God himself provides the oppressed and sorely tried with his exodus. He is not vindictive. He is not waiting to hit the presumptuous with punishment. Nor are we on our own; we are in this situation along with countless others, for whom the time of testing is equally, if not more, nerve-racking. It is the certain consummation of an exodus already achieved that enables us to endure: we see the light at the end of the tunnel and we press on.

David Garland: This verse serves as both warning and encouragement (**P. Gardner** 1994: 155), but the emphasis lies on comfort (**Robertson and Plummer** 1914: 208–9; **Willis** 1985b: 157). After the gloomy, threatening example of Israel, **Paul urges perseverance with a note of assurance**. When one puts God to the test, it will inevitably result in catastrophic judgment, as it did for Israel. But when one is tested and places one’s trust in God, God provides a way through the testing. **Calvin** (1960: 214) writes, “Therefore, once He has taken you under his own faithfulness . . . , you have no need to be afraid, so long as you depend wholly on Him.” This assurance strengthens the Christian to endure unto the end (cf. **Mark 13:13**).

Paul Gardner: The **function of v. 13** is the same as the function of the stress on **God’s covenant faithfulness** in those traditions. The logic goes like this: God “*tested*” (πειράζω) his people so that they would learn to rely on him (cf. **Deut 8:2**). When they failed this test, they were guilty of “*tempting*” (ἐκπειράζω) or “*proving*” God (**Ps 78:18** [77:18 LXX]; cf. **1 Cor 10:9**). Thus, **the whole situation was hopeless if God himself, who had originally chosen them, did not remain faithful to them**. This was what Paul had acknowledged in **1:8–9**, but it needed repeating if the warnings against arrogance and false security from the past were to be understood.

At first glance this verse seems out of place. **Verse 14** could follow reasonably easily from **v. 12**. **Godet** commented, “This verse is undoubtedly one of the most difficult of the whole Epistle, at least as to the logical connection joining it to what precedes and to what follows.” However, the problem is greatly diminished when it is remembered that

the **faithfulness of God**, despite the people's rebellion, is common to almost all the accounts of the wilderness events. Earlier it was suggested that the idea of Christ as the "rock" (10:4) was drawn from the epithet "Rock" that was applied to God, especially in **Deuteronomy 32**. It served clearly as a reference to the covenant Lord's faithfulness in providing for his people in the wilderness. In fact, the description of God as "*the faithful God*" appears only twice in the LXX. In **Deuteronomy 7:9** God is called "*a faithful God*" (θεὸς πιστός), "*who keeps covenant and steadfast love.*" Then in **Deuteronomy 32:4** we read, "*God [“the Rock” in Hebrew], his work is true, and all his ways are justice, a faithful God [θεὸς πιστός], and without unrighteousness, just and right is the Lord.*" The covenant ideas abound here. Even as the Israelites are warned of God's judgment, God's nature to be faithful to and protective of his people is emphasized. Thus, the exodus, when God brought them out of Egypt and brought his people through "testing," all the while remaining faithful to them, is stressed.

The temptation Paul has in mind may be the general sin of "*desiring evil*" (v. 6) or the more specific sin of idolatry (v. 7). This would then lead easily into v. 14: "*Flee from idolatry.*" However, though the sin of idolatry is indeed addressed next, it seems more likely that in this sweeping text Paul is thinking generally of the **sin of self-pride** seen in those who believed they "*stood*" when they did not. For his covenant people, however, God faithfully provides the "*way out*" (ἐκβασίς) of this sin. God's kind faithfulness to his people will enable them "*to bear up under*" (ὑπενεγκεῖν) the temptation; that is, it will prevent them from "*falling*." The special faithfulness of God is seen in the way God providentially oversees the life of his people so that they will not be tempted "*above what they are able*" (ὑπὲρ ὃ δύνασθε). In other words, the sin of which Paul speaks is not inevitable. Paul is not describing a counsel of despair and hopelessness. Rather, as they return to the Lord, he not only forgives but also enables by his Spirit the life of holiness to which he calls them (cf. **Rom 8:4, 13; 1 Cor 6:19; Gal 5:16, 25; cf. 2 Pet 1:3**).

Gordon Fee: The concluding affirmation of this paragraph helps to put things into perspective. The warning, based on the tragic examples of Israel, is straightforward and powerful. Some sins are so incompatible with life in Christ that sure judgment, meaning loss of salvation, is the inevitable result of persistence in them. These are not matters of being "taken in," as it were, by temptation, thus falling into sin. These are deliberate acts, predicated on a false security, that put God to the test, as though daring God to judge one who has been "baptized" into Christ. Such heady disobedience, Paul assures us, is headed for destruction. But on the other side is the faithful God, ready to aid those enduring trial, assuring them that there is a way out, an end to it. And in the meantime God is there to apportion the necessary ability to endure, appropriate to the trial, to which our appropriate response is, "thanks be to God!"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What spiritual privileges have our children been exposed to? Do we understand that

this is not a guarantee of salvation?

2) Are we surprised to find that the source of all spiritual blessings for OT saints was Jesus Christ – just as it is for us in NT times?

3) Did the Apostle Paul consider himself to be under the same admonition of needing to “*take heed lest he fall*”? What does this say about those who are overconfident and complacent in their Christian experience?

4) Are we encouraged or discouraged by this need to persevere and finish the race?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: Two principles of interpretation must not be neglected in this discussion. The first is that the original events, such as the exodus, were important in themselves as evidence of God’s redemptive purposes among his people. The “old” should not be regarded as of secondary importance. The second is that later revelation from God was not always to be seen as a straightforward application of the events to a later generation in some “spiritual” manner. Rather, God revealed more about how things actually were. This new understanding of what happened then could now be shown, providentially, to parallel events of the day in which the reader lived. **Woolcombe** suggests that this is particularly evident in the Pauline corpus: “Paul proceeded to show that the events . . . directly corresponded to the events which he and his contemporaries were experiencing because Christ was the prime mover in both . . . the historical pattern of the Old Covenant exactly corresponds to the historical pattern of the New Covenant, because both are the work of the Word and Wisdom of God.”

As Paul writes he wants his readers to understand that the coming of Christ means that they may expect a greater understanding of how events actually were and so see more clearly their own place in this story. Thus, as Paul looks at the wilderness story and events, he does not just see analogies or symbols but comes to see that Christ was present in the wilderness and that he gave gifts to the people. This is the new wisdom of the new covenant where all that is “spiritual” is seen to focus on Jesus. However, in the light of some common teachings in the church today, it is important to understand that Paul’s teaching gives no warrant to suggest that the Israelites themselves knew Jesus! That Jesus was present is precisely the heart of what is new about what Paul is doing in expounding this Old Testament text.

Hope Bible Church: Doctrinal Statement: Security, Perseverance, and Assurance

1. All the redeemed once saved are kept by God’s power and are thus secure in Christ forever. No truly saved person can or will lose his salvation. [John 10:28-29; 17:12; Romans 8:30, 35-39; 11:29; Ephesians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 2:1; 5:13, 18]

2. All real believers endure in their faith to the end. Their continuance in the Christian walk and Christian doctrine is the mark that distinguishes them from those who merely profess Christianity. [Matthew 24:13; Luke 22:31-32; John 15:1-6; Romans 8:17; Galatians 5:4; Colossians 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 10:38; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 John 2:18-19, 28]

3. A special providence of God cares for the saved and keeps them from falling away permanently. Therefore, perseverance is guaranteed by God's provision of new life in Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the intercessory work of Christ at the right hand of the Father. [Luke 22:31- 32; John 17:9-12; Hebrews 1:3; 4:14; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 2:1; 5:13]

4. It is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's word and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, which however, clearly forbids the use of Christian security and liberty as an occasion for sinful living. [John 3:16-17; Romans 8:16; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 2:3-4; 3:1; 4:1-4; 5:13, 19]

http://hopebiblechurch.org/files/documents/HBC_WhatWeTeach.pdf

John MacArthur: It is interesting that Dr. MacArthur takes the position that the 1 Corinthians passage deals with the danger not "*of falling from salvation but of falling from holiness and from usefulness in service.*" But then look at what he says about the Hebrews (**chap 3-4**) passage (admittedly a different context) where the same OT illustrations are used:

"It describes Israel's disobedience and rejection of God in the Exodus wanderings." . . . Addressed to "the Hebrews who are on the edge of decision but have never made a commitment." . . .

"After they arrived for the trial in the wilderness, God continued to bless them with miracles – travel direction by pillars of cloud and of fire (for night travel) and provision of food and good water. After each blessing they were satisfied only for a brief time. They soon started again to complain and to doubt God. **They became the classic illustration of unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence.** God had clearly and miraculously revealed Himself; they knew He had revealed Himself; they knew what He expected them to do; and they saw evidence after evidence of His power and His blessing. **But they never really believed.** Just as the Egyptians quickly got over their fear of God, the Israelites quickly got over their trust of Him. They would not commit themselves to Him in faith. As a result, they had to wander and wander and wander – until all of the ungrateful, untrusting, unbelieving generation had died. For some forty years they wandered around in circles in a barren, desolate, and oppressive land – **because of their unbelief.** . . . The rest was Canaan, where the toil of wandering would end. As we shall see in the next chapter [4], it is a symbol of salvation. . . **The greatest proof of salvation is continuance in the Christian life.**"

John Calvin: What he had previously taught by two similitudes, he now confirms by examples. The Corinthians grew wanton, and gloried, as if they had served out their time or at least had finished their course, when they had scarcely left the starting-point. This vain exultation and confidence he represses in this manner — “As I see that you are quietly taking your ease at the very outset of your course, I would not have you ignorant of what befell the people of Israel in consequence of this, that their example may arouse you.” As, however, on examples being adduced, any point of difference destroys the force of the comparison, Paul premises, that there is no such dissimilarity between us and the Israelites, as to make our condition different from theirs. Having it, therefore, in view to threaten the Corinthians with the same vengeance as had overtaken them, he begins in this manner — “Beware of glorying in any peculiar privilege, as if you were in higher esteem than they were in the sight of God.” For they were favored with the same benefits as we at this day enjoy; there was a Church of God among them, as there is at this day among us; they had the same sacraments, to be tokens to them of the grace of God; but, on their abusing their privileges, they did not escape the judgment of God. Be afraid, therefore; for the same thing is impending over you. Jude makes use of the same argument in his Epistle. (**Jude 1:5.**)

Mark Copeland: EXAMPLES OF ISRAEL'S APOSTASY (1-14)

A. APOSTASY IN SPITE OF BLESSINGS (1-5)

1. Blessings received in the crossing of the Red Sea (**1-2**)
2. Blessings received as they sojourned in the wilderness (**3-4**)
3. Still, with most of them God was not pleased, and they died in the wilderness (**5**)

B. THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL SHOULD SERVE TO WARN CHRISTIANS (6-14)

1. Their example of apostasy to warn us (**6**)
 - a. Not to become idolaters (**7**)
 - b. Not to commit sexual immorality (**8**)
 - c. Not to tempt Christ (**9**)
 - d. Not to murmur (**10**)
2. Their history recorded to admonish us (**11**)
 - a. For we can just as easily fall (**12**)
 - b. Though God is faithful to provide help in dealing with temptation (**13**)
3. Therefore, flee from idolatry! (**14**)

Robert Grosheide: Three things thus stand out:

- the entire nation received the benefits of God;
- those benefits had a spiritual character;
- those benefits came from Christ.

The apostle has now established two things:

- first, that we must distinguish between an enjoyment of the genuine benefits of God and a continuance in God's favor till the end (cf. vs. 5).
- Second, Paul has made it impossible for the Corinthians to say that all those

things only applied to old Israel but that they no longer applied to them in the new dispensation. By recording past history the apostle is able to show that God punishes sinners more clearly than by direct admonition.

Gil Rugh: True Believers Stay the Course (:1-5)

True salvation changes a life radically. The Bible compares the change to death. You are raised as a new creation in Christ. That change and transformation controls your life until your life comes to an end. The Bible knows nothing of a salvation that works just part way (not a cure for just a short time). Importance of finishing the race. Cf. **Hebrews 6:7-8** same word *adokimos* from **1 Cor. 9:27** used here; **Rom. 15:4-5**; Note the word “*all*” – refers 5 times in first 4 verses. There are spiritual blessings that every Jew coming out of Egypt experienced. Those with whom God is not “*well-pleased*” will end up experiencing destruction. Both the Church in the NT and Israel in the OT get all of their spiritual blessings from Christ. Forty years wilderness wandering was a Death March; only an 11 day journey. Only Joshua and Caleb went into the land. That doesn’t mean they were the only believers. Those who are truly saved will stay the course.

Heb. 3 – Superiority of Christ to Moses – uses the same type of OT examples; they passed through the Red Sea and ate the manna – so what! Not about impressive testimonies but a changed life. “*We have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*” You must finish the race or you prove yourself worthless. **Being disobedient is a manifestation of unbelief. That is the root problem.**

Heb. 5 – You’re not saved by persevering; but if you are saved you will persevere. “*You have become dull of hearing*” – *nothroi* – **6:12** – “*sluggish*” – same word; context is the need to *show diligence until the end*; those *do not inherit the promises*; even though they all have experienced great spiritual blessings; the Word preached to them did not profit them

I’m glad that my salvation is complete until the end. The passion of my life is to obey and serve Jesus Christ. The goal is to finish well.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=83106155944>

J. Scott Lindsay: And so, it is in *that* vein that Paul continues with his words of warning to the Corinthians. Whereas in **9:24-27** he used himself as an example of someone who - just like them - needed to take care that he did not disqualify himself in the “Christian race”; he now turns to another source to drive home his point - the example of God’s people in Israel in the days of Moses. To be sure, while the majority of Paul’s Greek audience were not *ethnic* descendants of the Hebrew people, they were nevertheless, the *spiritual* descendants of them. As a result, the Israelites were very much “their people” and so what happened to them was perfectly relevant to the Corinthians, many years later.

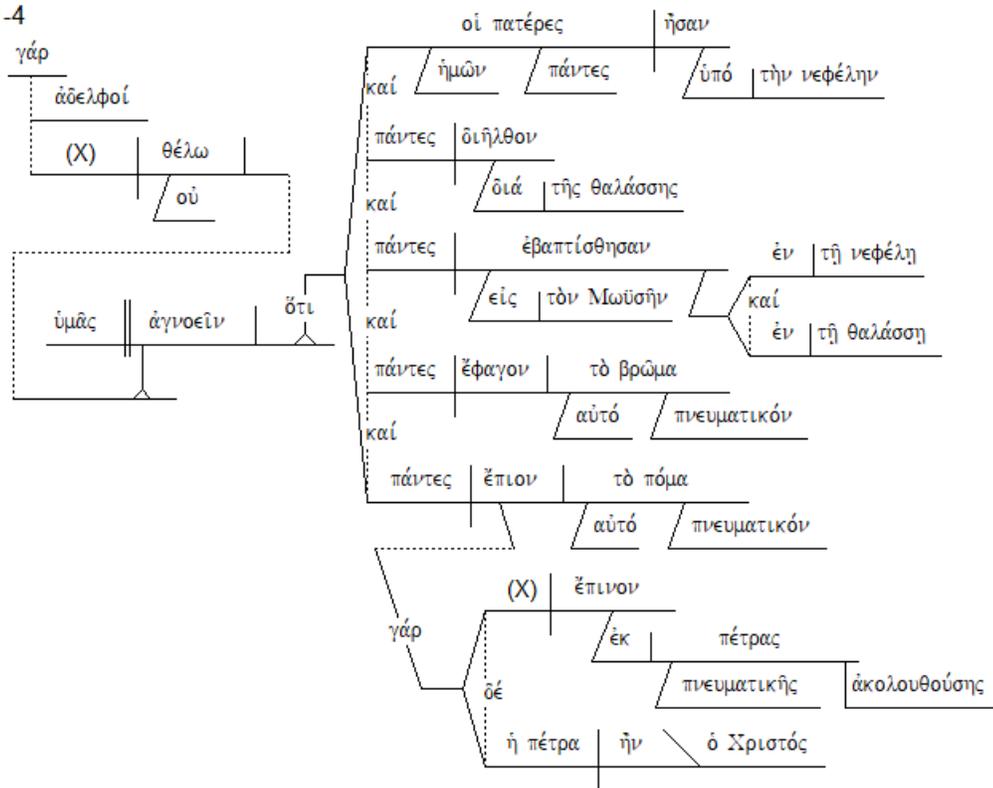
Now, in order to get any mileage out of what happened to God’s people in Moses’ day, Paul has to make some connections. He has to draw some parallels between their

situation and that of the Corinthians. The more parallels he can draw, the more similarities he can point out - the stronger his point will be. And the reason *why* Paul even bothers to take this sort of approach in the first place is grounded in his understanding of the person and character of God. In short, Paul understood that because God never changes then we can expect some consistency in how He responds to certain things - even if the circumstances are separated by a great deal of time. God is always holy, He is always just, He is always good - and because of that there will be some recognizable pattern in His responses to situations of similar natures. Even more to the point, Paul not only believed that God responded to things in these ways because of His *consistent character* but also because of his *sovereign purposes*.

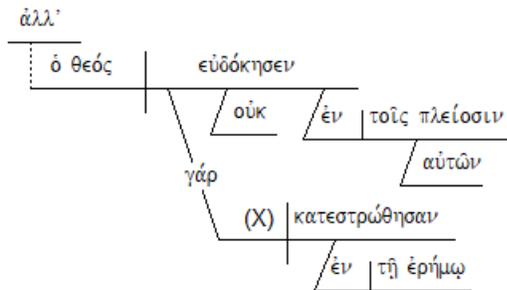
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Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

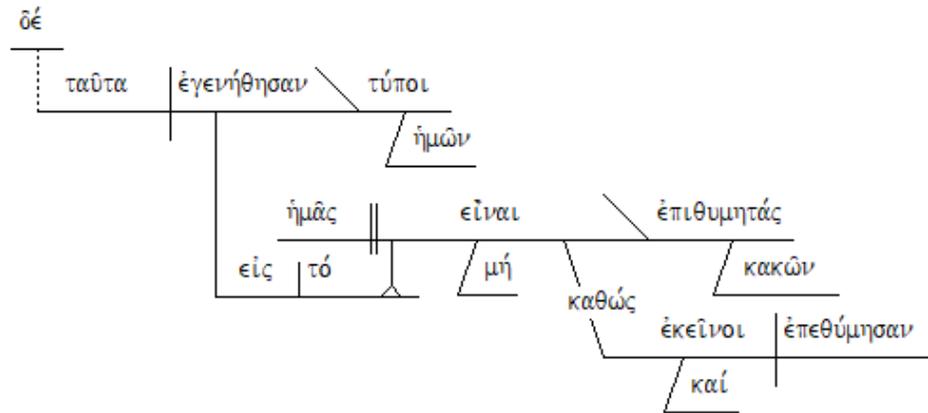
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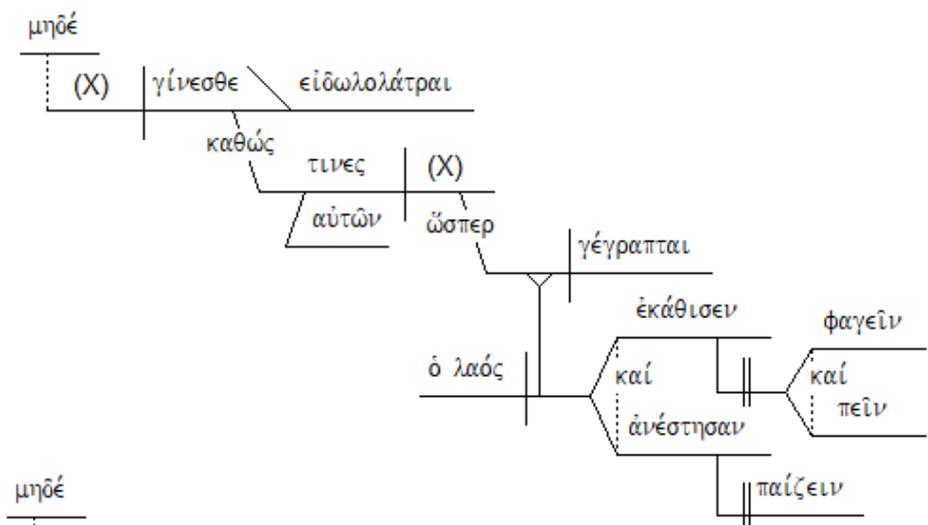
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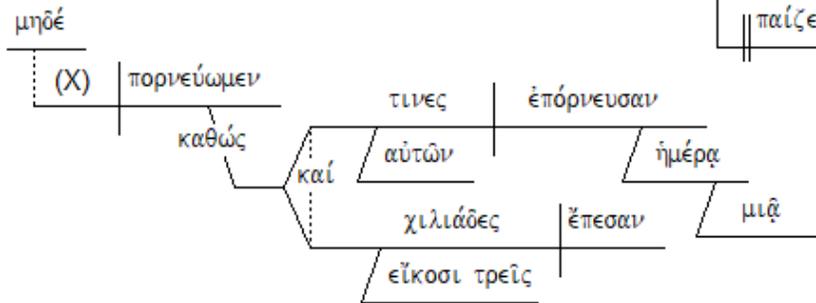
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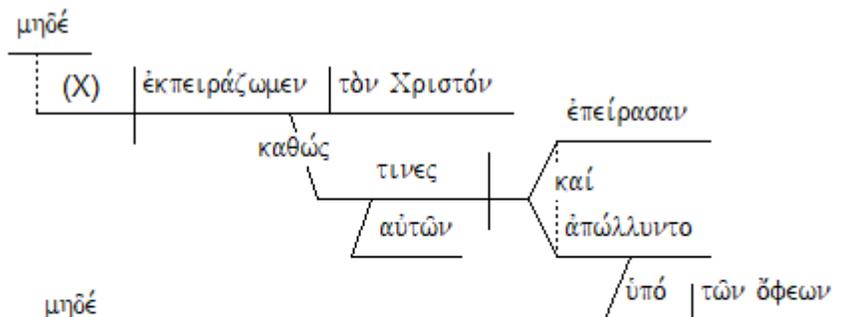
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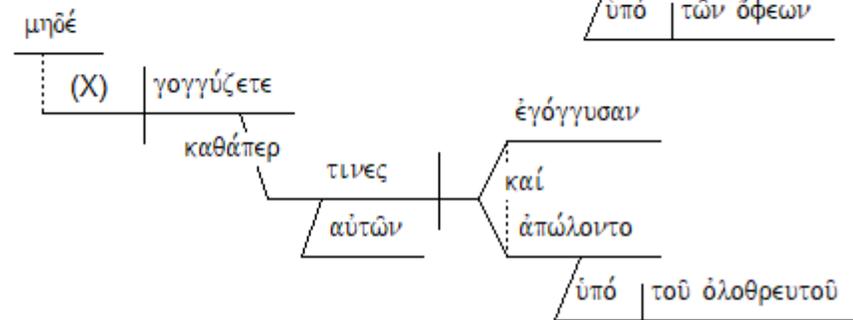
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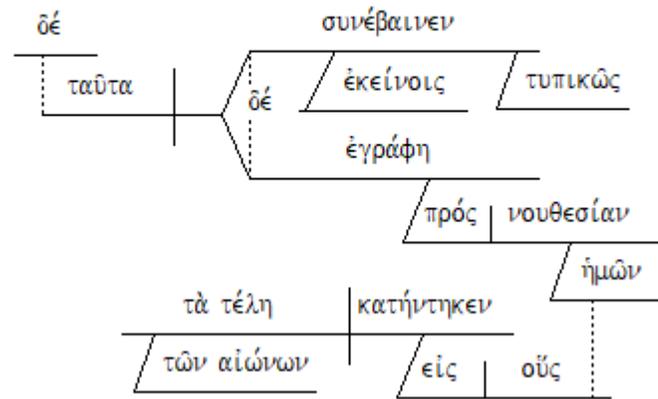
1Co 10:9



1Co 10:10



1Co 10:11



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

TITLE: *DON'T MESS WITH FALSE RELIGIONS*

BIG IDEA:

MEMBERS OF THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST CAN HAVE NO ASSOCIATION WITH IDOLATRY (FALSE RELIGION)

INTRODUCTION:

Paul continues his general discussion about the propriety of believers eating meats offered to idols. This was the subject introduced back in **8:1** “*Now concerning things sacrificed to idols.*” The context in this paragraph (**10:14-21**) relates to participation or at the least association with the culture of false, man-made worship. Instead of actively confronting the evil and the contradictions to biblical truth and practice, the individual adopts a very careless and ecumenical spirit of indifference towards the upholding of truth regarding the One True God. Christianity is a narrow, exclusivist approach to the worship of God. We need Paul’s strong admonition here to “*Flee from idolatry.*” Once we understand the danger of the demonic activity behind false religions and the jealousy we will provoke from a holy and powerful God we should act sensibly in this area.

Gordon Fee: In a way similar to a preceding argument (**6:12–20**, esp. v. **18**), Paul finally asserts an absolute prohibition against idolatry (v. **14**). Then in an appeal to their good sense (v. **15**) he explains from their own experience of the Lord’s Table (vv. **16–17**) and from the OT sacred meals (v. **18**) that the same realities carry over to the pagan meals (vv. **19–20**), which therefore makes participation in one meal absolutely incompatible with participation in the other (v. **21**). All of which ends on the rhetorical note that, just as with Israel’s idolatry (v. **9**), by their current behavior they are “testing” Christ, provoking him to jealousy (v. **22**).

The basis of Paul’s prohibition is twofold:

- (1) His understanding of the sacred meal as “fellowship,” as the unique sharing of believers in the worship of the deity, who was also considered to be present;
- (2) His understanding, based on the OT, of idolatry as a locus of the demonic.

It should be noted that these two bases for the prohibition bring closure to the two basic arguments from their letter:

- (1) that, since an idol is not real, not only is it of little consequence what we eat, but where should be of no concern as well, and
- (2) that as long as we participate in our own sacred meal, we remain secure in Christ.

In the preliminary qualification of the content of their knowledge (**8:4–6**), Paul had allowed that for the pagans there are “*many gods and many lords,*” and that for some, these “*gods*” still had some measure of subjective reality. Now he asserts that they do have reality indeed, but not as “*gods*”; rather, these “*deities*” are in fact the **habitation**

of demons. In the immediately preceding argument (vv. 1–13), Paul had pointed out on the basis of the divinely established example of Israel that **there is no inherent safety in the sacraments.** Now he moves beyond that to demonstrate the absolute **incompatibility** of eating both sacred meals. The kind of “fellowship” involved eliminates any such possibility.

David Garland: Paul’s insistence on **exclusive loyalty** to a religion was something uncommon in paganism. People were accustomed to joining in the sacrificial meals of various deities, none of which required an exclusive relationship (see **Walter** 1978–79: 429–30; **Willis** 1985b: 213; **Smit** 1997a: 48). The Hellenistic world was a great religious melting pot, and tolerance and syncretism reflected the spirit of the times. The Greeks and, later, the Romans were very tolerant in their attitude toward the kaleidoscope of other religions and cultures. They understood that every nation had its own ancestral traditions, its own temples and gods, and that worship of these gods was a part of everyday life. For practical reasons, the Romans did not want to alienate the regional deities within the empire and did not insist that everyone worship Roman gods alone. For theoretical reasons, traditional local deities were left alone because the intellectual elite assumed that the gods of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Asia, Judea, and Persia were symbolic representatives of an ultimate ground of being. They basically said, “You may continue to worship your gods and goddesses; we will worship them as well and you can worship ours. That way, no one’s gods will be slighted.” This openness to other gods is reflected in the altar to an unknown god in Athens (**Acts 17:23**), which offered homage to whatever god the people may have neglected to honor. The relative disinterest in doctrine and the utilitarian interest in the power of individual gods to deliver a desired outcome also mitigated the potential for any theological friction.

Most people honored gods whom they thought were useful. Some believed that there was “safety in numbers” and worshiped a smorgasbord of deities. The more gods that were honored, the better their chance of success in life. **Paul radically rejects all such syncretism** and anything that might even hint of it. His attempt to convince the Corinthians that the Christian’s fellowship with Christ restricted them from any association with other gods was not an easy task. Christian parents who have had to forbid their teenage children from attending something that the parents recognize as fundamentally opposed to Christian values may best understand the difficulty. How do they explain to the children why they may not participate when all their friends are going and they will be left out and perhaps ostracized?

Paul attempts to make his case by **arguing from the Lord’s Supper.** Because mention of the Lord’s Supper is rare in Paul’s letters, this passage has been milked for every ounce of information that it might offer about his theology and practice. It should not be forgotten that Paul brought it up only as part of his argument against idol food. He worries about the danger of “serial fellowships.” The Supper of the one Lord, which unites participants to him, excludes eating idol offerings, which unites participants to idols and their demons (**Smit** 1997a: 48). As the Lord’s Supper is a sacred meal that represents and creates a fellowship of believers in the worship of Christ, who is considered to be present, so pagan meals represent and create a fellowship of

worshippers of pagan deities who also are considered to be present. Idols, however, represent the realm of the demonic. Participating in the one meal precludes participating in the other. In **10:14–17**, Paul develops the theological significance of participating in the Lord’s Supper (cf. **10:1–5**). In **10:18–20**, he develops the theological significance of participation in pagan sacrificial meals (cf. **10:6–10**). He draws the conclusion in **10:21–22** that participation in the Lord’s Supper bars participation in pagan sacrificial meals in any form. Believers should not fool themselves into thinking that they are strong enough to try to merge the two meals, to affiliate with Christ and demons. To attempt to do so only **kindles the jealousy and judgment of God**.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Avoid idolatry and practices that bring you near idols, knowing that demonic activity promotes them.

I. Communion with the Lord Is Essential (10:14-17).

- A. We are to flee idolatry (**10:14-15**).
- B. We are to fellowship with our Savior (**10:16-17**).
- C. The cup emphasizes our communion (**10:16**).
- D. The bread emphasizes our union (**10:17**).

II. Association with Demons Is Evil (10:18-22).

- A. It distorts our worship (**10:18-20**).
- B. It compromises our loyalty (**10:21**).
- C. It provokes our God (**10:22**).

I. (:14-15) THE COMMAND – FLEE IDOLATRY --KEEP YOUR DISTANCE FROM FALSE RELIGIONS

Picture getting sucked into the fast-flowing current and tumbling over a waterfall

A. (:14) Separation from Idolatry Must be a Top Priority

1. Separation from Idolatry is Essential to our Faith and our Testimony

“*Therefore*” -- connective to previous sections in chaps. 9-10

Robert Gundry: “*Therefore*” harks back to God’s providing an escape route from temptation as a basis for the following command. “*Indeed*” stresses the availability of the escape route.

Richard Hays: Sometimes **10:14–22** is treated as a separate pericope, but it really should not be so considered, for it continues to draw out the immediate practical implications of the wilderness story.

- a. Connection to our own endurance in the faith
- b. Connection to our testimony to win many to Christ

2. Separation from Idolatry Presupposes a Loving Family Connection within the Body of Christ

“my beloved”

Charles Hodge: Paul addresses them in terms of affection, although his epistle is so full of serious admonition and warning.

3. Separation from Idolatry Involves Immediate and Drastic Action
“flee from idolatry”

Robert Gundry: His command to “flee away from idolatry” recalls the command in **6:18** to “flee fornication,” which often accompanied idolatry, and like that earlier command uses the hyperbolic verb “flee,” as though because of the strong pull of temptation and the likely consequence of yielding to it you should run away from occasions and places of idolatry and fornication, not just avoid them.

- a. Must be able to Identify False Religions
- b. Must Respond Aggressively and Urgently

B. (:15) Separation from Idolatry Should Make Sense to Believers

1. Separation from Idolatry is the Path of Wisdom
“I speak as to wise men”

This issue is not an easy one; not for the immature; requires great wisdom to sort out how to conduct oneself

2. Separation from Idolatry is the Path of Discernment
“you judge what I say.”

Where are the people of discernment today? Believers are so easily duped. Have we developed our critical thinking skills under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

R.C.H. Lenski: The questions which Paul now asks bring out the vital facts. All of them are plain, and all of them are undisputed. On the basis of these Paul wants the Corinthians to make a definite decision on their own account. Sensible Christian people will not only at once give the self-evident answers to these questions but will also perceive the force of these answers as far as conduct is concerned.

Gordon Fee: The preceding prohibition (v. 14) is both **abrupt** and **absolute**. Now Paul seeks to show them how **sensible** it is, based on their own experience of the Lord’s Table. Since the Corinthians had prided themselves in their understanding of things, and surely had intimated as much in their letter to him, Paul allows: “I speak as to sensible people.” Although he had earlier used this same language in biting irony (**4:10**), it seems less likely that he intends it so here. Similar to an earlier instance (**5:3**) the “as” refers to an actual reality, not a merely hypothetical one. Since they are sensible people by their own admission, he chooses here, as he will again later (in **11:13** and **14:20**), to appeal to them as such: “judge for yourselves what I say,” meaning in this case, “what I

am about to say.” But he does not mean “judge for yourselves” as to its rightness or wrongness. They are to judge for themselves that their apostle is right!

David Garland: Paul truly believes that they are perceptive enough to see the illogic of their behavior and to discern the truth, so he presents a reasoned argument (**Edwards** 1885: 252; **Findlay** 1910: 863; **Parry** 1926: 150; **Conzelmann** 1975: 171 n. 12; **Willis** 1985b: 183; **Fee** 1987: 464–65; **Smit** 1997a: 49). In **10:16–22**, he asks seven rhetorical questions inviting their thoughtful response. He tries to persuade because it would do no good to coerce the “knowers” to stop fraternizing with idolaters in idolatrous settings -- except that it might avert the weak from falling into ruin -- if they do not recognize and accept in their hearts and minds how and why it is wrong. In the end, however, what counts is not just what they can understand but also their willingness to be faithful to Christ no matter the cost.

II. (:16-21) THE CONTRAST -- UNDERSTAND THAT PARTICIPATION INVOLVES IDENTIFICATION

A. (:16-18) Positive Example of Identification with the True God

1. (:16-17) NT Example – Centering around the Lord’s Supper

a. Sharing in the Blood of Christ

*“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless
a sharing in the blood of Christ?”*

David Garland: The emphasis on the **blood of Christ** sharpens the seriousness of the **covenantal relationship** to Christ. Blood seals a covenant (see **Gen. 15:9–18; Exod. 24:3–8; Zech. 9:11; Heb. 9:18**). The “*fellowship of his blood*” (**1 Cor. 10:16**) parallels the explanation of the cup in **11:25** as the new covenant in his blood. **Willis** (1985b: 218) claims, “What is decisive about the sacrifice of Jesus is that it created a new covenant between God and man (**1 Cor. 11:21**) and a resulting community of faith.” Breaching this covenant can have only calamitous consequences.

b. Sharing in the Body of Christ

*“Is not the bread which we break
a sharing in the body of Christ?”*

Gordon Fee: The “*fellowship*,” therefore, was most likely a celebration of their common life in Christ, based on the new covenant in his blood that had previously bound them together in union with Christ by his Spirit. But while their “fellowship” was with one another, its basis and focus were in Christ, his death and resurrection; they were thus together in his presence, where as host at his table Christ shared anew with them the benefits of the atonement. It is this unique relationship between believers and with their Lord, celebrated at this meal, that makes impossible similar associations with other “believers” at the tables of demons. In this passage the cup seems to focus on the vertical dimension, the bread on the horizontal (cf. v. **21**).

c. Unity in One Body

*“Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body;
for we all partake of the one bread.”*

2. (:18) OT Example – Centering around the Sacrifices

*“Look at the nation Israel;
are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?”*

B. (:19-21) Negative Example of Identification with the Demons Behind False Religions

1. (:19) Don’t Miss the Point of the Contrast – Not talking about Inanimate Objects

*“What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything,
or that an idol is anything?”*

2. (:20) Participation in False Religion Involves Identification with the Demons Behind the Idols – Talking about very real and very powerful evil spirits

*“No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice,
they sacrifice to demons and not to God;
and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.”*

Gil Rugh: “Gentiles” not in the earlier texts

John Piper: So here is the key word again: *sharers*. What does it mean? Again it does not mean that we eat demons when we eat meat offered to idols. It means that we get entangled in their power. **We submit to them.** We become vulnerable to them. We enter into some kind of fellowship. We affirm them in some way and give them leeway in our lives.

Robert Gundry: The sharing of demons means that the eating of food known to have been sacrificed to idols represents an acceptance of the demons’ life-destroying activity in the world just as the drinking and eating of the Christ’s blood and body represent an acceptance of the life-saving benefits of his sacrificial death.

Gordon Fee: Paul’s point is simple: These pagan meals are in fact sacrifices to demons; the worship of demons is involved. One who is already bound to one’s Lord and to one’s fellow believers through participation at the Lord’s Table cannot under any circumstances also participate in the worship of demons. That point will be made explicit in the parallel sentences that follow.

David Garland: The problem for Paul is not that Corinthian Christians join in camaraderie with idolaters but that they become actual partners with demons. However innocent the Christians’ intentions might be, the result is that they give their assent to, collaborate with, and swell the ranks of demonic defiance of the sovereign God. They may think that they are simply joining a festive party, but in reality they are joining a party infested by Satan and forming an alliance with those who crucified the Son of

God (2:8). They cannot dismiss these meals as simply a casual, meaningless social repast any more than they can dismiss a sexual relationship with a prostitute as a casual, meaningless tryst (cf. 6:15–20). If God’s pattern revealed in Scripture holds true, they will **provoke God to jealousy**, who will turn away from them, and they will be destroyed as a perverse generation.

3. (:21) Identification with the Lord is Mutually Exclusive from Idolatry

a. The Cup of the Lord vs. the Cup of Demons

*“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord
and the cup of demons”*

b. The Table of the Lord vs the Table of Demons

*“You cannot partake of the table of the Lord
and the table of demons.”*

Robert Gundry: “*The Christ*” of 10:16 changes to “*the Lord*” for emphasis on his **authority**, which makes provoking him to jealousy dangerous and his judging us irresistible. But jealousy implies love in addition to lordship. “*You can’t*” connotes **incompatibility**. This incompatibility is so sharp as to provoke jealousy because the Christ as Lord bought us at a price (6:20; 7:23), therefore owns us as his slaves, and demands our turning from demonic idols to serve him alone (compare 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10). “*Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy?*” puts forward an alternative to the two instances of “*You can’t . . .*” That is to say, though you can’t compatibly participate in the Lord’s Supper and a supper of demons, you can actually participate in both—but only at the expense of provoking the Lord to jealousy (compare Hebrews 3:7–11; Psalm 95:7–11; Deuteronomy 32:21a–b).

David Prior: Paul still affirms the nonentity, the unreality, of idols as such; but he equally affirms that behind all idolatry is demonic activity: what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God (20). There is only one true God, anyway, and idolaters have no time, desire or ability to worship him. But they are creatures with the capacity and the inner drive to worship when they focus this worship on ‘*beings that by nature are not gods*’ (Gal. 4:8). Paul’s own conviction is that the spiritual truth of such a situation is that such people offer their sacrifices to demons (20), are partners with demons (20), drink the cup of demons (21) and partake of the table of demons (21) – and as a result share in the ‘benefits’ of such fellowship. Christians, therefore, who become involved in idolatrous feasts are exposing themselves and the Christian community to demons.

III. (:22) THE CAVEAT – PROVOKING GOD WOULD BE A SERIOUS MISTAKE -- FEAR THE JEALOUS, OMNIPOTENT GOD

Very solemn warning – Don’t mess with God – He is extremely jealous and powerful

A. Don’t Mess with a God Who is Extremely Jealous

“Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?”

B. Don't Mess with a God Who is Extremely Powerful

"We are not stronger than He, are we?"

David Garland: The question again recalls an OT motif contrasting the mighty God with frail humans (cf. **Job 9:32; 37:23; Eccles. 6:10; Isa. 10:15; Ezek. 22:14**), but the background that specifically connects the motif of God's strength and jealousy to idolatry is primary (**Num. 14:13–35; Deut. 32**). **Rosner** (1994: 201) notes, "All Pentateuchal references to God's jealousy have to do with idol-worship." Paul concludes his application of the OT texts to the Corinthian situation by reminding them that idols provoke God's jealousy (**Deut. 6:14–15; Josh. 24:19–20; Ps. 78:58–64; Zeph. 1:18**). He takes for granted that God's attitude toward idolatry has not changed with the coming of Christ. The OT paradigm reveals that association with anything idolatrous will meet with God's swift and irrevocable retribution. **Rosner** (1994: 202) correctly reads this climax to Paul's argument in **1 Cor. 10:1–22** as a "frightening threat of judgment upon those Corinthian Christians who provoke God to jealousy." The command to flee idolatry in **10:14** is capped off balefully with an implicit threat in **10:22**: Flee idolatry—or else.

Gordon Fee: Most likely this is the **final warning** that God's "*jealousy*" cannot be challenged with impunity. Those who would put God to the test by insisting on their right to what Paul insists is idolatry are in effect taking God on, challenging him by their actions, daring God to act. Secure in their own foolhardiness, they think of themselves as so "*strong*" that they can challenge Christ himself (cf. **Isa. 45:9–10**). But their folly, implied in an earlier exhortation (**9:25**) and given in the preceding warning (**10:12**), is that they will thereby fail to gain the final eschatological prize. In any event, the question calls for "an emphatic negative response."

Warren Wiersbe: "*Are we stronger than he?*" (**1 Cor. 10:22**) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. "You may be stronger than your weaker brother," Paul intimated, "but you are not stronger than God!" It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God. (*Be Wise*, 94)

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the relationship between **verse 13** and this paragraph?
- 2) Where is an ecumenical spirit creeping into our thinking and compromising our loyalty to God's narrow truth?
- 3) In what ways do we act as if we think that we are stronger than the Lord?
- 4) Do believers today take the threat of demonic activity seriously?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: Covenant Allegiance Matters (10:14–22)

Main Idea: Some of the Corinthians have been drawn into idolatry by eating sacrificial food at tables where offerings are being made to idols. As the Lord's Supper demonstrates, covenant meals involve real participation in the God or gods in whose honor they are held. This will provoke the Lord's jealousy just as the Israelites' idolatry in the wilderness provoked him to covenantal jealousy and judgment.

1. Covenantal Allegiance Is Indicated in Pagan Sacrificial Meals (10:14–20a)

- a. Flee Idolatry (10:14)
- b. Consider Covenant Allegiance in the Lord's Supper (10:15–17)
- c. Consider the Israelite Breach of Covenant in Pagan Meals (10:18)
- d. Pagans Are Participants with Demons (10:19–20a)

2. Allegiance to the Lord Cannot Be Compromised (10:20b–22)

- a. Do Not Participate in Demons (10:20b)
- b. Do Not Participate at Both the Table of Demons and of the Lord (10:21)
- c. Do Not Provoke the Lord to Jealousy (10:22)

Ray Stedman: What he has in mind is not bowing and scraping before an image, but succumbing to the temptation to enjoy again the atmosphere found at the idol temple. There were a lot of fun things going on with regard to idolatry that some of the Corinthians, at least, were hoping to be able to hang on to. If you had lived in Corinth in that 1st century you would have recognized that the whole Roman and Greek citizenry of the city regarded the temple as the most exciting place in town. There you could get the best food, served up in the open-air restaurant. There they had the wildest music and all the seductive pleasures of wine, women and song. If you wanted to enjoy yourself in Corinth, therefore, you went out to the temple.

I believe the apostle is concerned lest these Corinthians, in seeking to enjoy what would be normal pleasures of life, would be tempted to go back into it to such a degree that, ultimately, they would find themselves lured back into belief in these idols and their power. Idolatry is not something you do outwardly with your body. Idolatry basically occurs whenever anyone or anything becomes more important to you than the living God. . .

Any form of idolatry awakens the jealousy of God. All through the Old Testament we are told that God is "*a jealous God*," (Exod 20:5, 34:14, Deut 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, Josh 24:19). What does Paul mean by that? Is God subject to capricious whims in which he gets angry if anybody looks at anything else? No, God's jealousy is a proper jealousy; it is a love so intense for the object of his love that he is angry when something threatens it, and he will act. He will not stand idly by and let you drift away into some idolatrous preoccupation with something of the world. He will strike at it; he will destroy it. And if

your affections are so entwined with it, you are going to get hurt in the process; you will find yourself crushed and hurt and crying out to God, "Why do you do this to me?" But it is an act of love from a jealous God who will not allow you to drift into that kind of preoccupation.

<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/4867/3592.html>

James Boyer: Paul appeals to them as sensible, reasonable men to draw their own conclusions (v. 15). The communion of the bread and the cup, instituted by our Lord on the eve of His sacrificial death, was a familiar practice to them. They understood well that the partaking of the communion elements was a communing with, a partaking of, Christ. So also it was in Israel. Those who ate of the sacrifices were partakers of the altar. So also, Paul reasons, is it in paganism. Those who partook of the idol sacrifices were communing with the idols. Not that the stone or wood image was anything, but it represented a false religious system which was in actuality the worship of demons (vv. 19, 20). Such a mixing of the table of the Lord with the table of demons was a monstrous thought and a moral impossibility. God is a jealous God, and to provoke His jealousy by playing around with idolatry is the utmost in foolishness; unless, of course, you are greater than He is! (v. 22).

John Piper: Idolatry, The Lord's Supper and the Body of Christ

What **1 Corinthians 10** is about is the way the Corinthians had overestimated the power of the Lord's Supper as sacramental food, and had underestimated the purpose of the Lord's Supper as spiritual fellowship with Christ.

In other words, they saw eating the bread and drinking the cup as a kind of sacramental antidote to any ill effects that might come from tasting the poison of idolatry. And so they overestimated the power of the Lord's Supper.

And they failed to see that the purpose of eating the bread and drinking the cup was to share in the life of Christ and to fellowship with him as one body. And so they underestimated the purpose of the Lord's Supper, and thus its true power in the fight against idolatry and sin.

And both their overestimation of its power to immunize, and their underestimation of its purpose to nourish fellowship with Christ, made them vulnerable to sin. And not only to sin, but to entanglement with demons . . .

In **verse 18** Paul says, "*Look at the nation of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?*" Now this does not mean that they eat the altar. It means that they share in the benefits of what happens on the altar. On the altar God removes guilt and forgives sin and makes peace and establishes a fellowship of thanksgiving and love. So to be a sharer in the altar is to share in all those things that God is doing at the altar. This is probably what Paul means in **verse 16** when he says that the bread is a sharing in the body of Christ and the cup is a sharing in the blood of Christ. When Christ was sacrificed on the cross and shed his blood and gave his body for us, God was removing guilt and forgiving sin and making peace and establishing fellowship with all who

believe. And the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to receive from Christ the nourishment and strength and hope and joy that come from feasting our souls on all that he purchased for us on the cross, especially his own fellowship. We share in the body and the blood by sharing in the benefits that they bought -- including, as **verse 17** says, our unity in the body of Christ.

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/19/811_Idolatry_the_Lords_Supper_and_the_Body_of_Christ/

Gil Rugh: Flee From Idolatry

Introduction: We live in a **pluralistic society**. Christianity claims to be an **exclusive religion**; the only way to heaven; the only way to know God. This passage still has great relevance. The Hellenistic world was a great religious melting pot; tolerant of other beliefs as long as they didn't claim to be the only way. We are charged with being narrow, self-righteous, arrogant. Don't soften our message of narrowness. Paul is concerned that the Corinthians may be indulging in things that would exclude them from saving faith and ultimate salvation. You can have a false sense of security and be lost. Your faith must be in Christ. That will manifest itself in a life that evidences you have become partaker of the divine nature.

Corinthians were thinking they could dabble in parts of false worship – eating meat offered to false idols, etc. **1 John 5:21** “*Guard yourselves from idols*” – all kind of false worship of every kind must be avoided. Don't tolerate things that are unbiblical and untrue. Paul believes they have the wisdom to sort through what he says and respond to his corrections. Paul not being sarcastic in **vs. 15**.

We become sharers in Christ; partakers of Christ in the communion service. **1 John 1:1-4** – the fellowship goes both ways – with Christ and with fellow believers. In OT a portion of what was sacrificed was given back to the people bringing the offering and they would make a meal together out of that. What's the point? Cf. **8:4** An idol is just a block of wood or a piece of stone; there is only one God. Then food offered to nothing is still just plain food. But there is more to the picture than that.

There are evil spirit beings operating in the world that stand in opposition to God. They attempt to lure the people of world to worship them in contrast to the living God. I don't want you to become sharers in demons. What would you think of someone who was baptized one day in the name of Christ and then a week later in the name of Mohammed or another god? There can be no mixing. **Deut. 32:15ff** Israel became prosperous and would then forsake their God; *sacrificed to demons* ... Johnny-come-lately gods; **Matt. 4:9** -- What did the devil offer Christ when he tempted Him? All about falling down and worshipping Satan instead of the true God. **1 Tim. 3:15; 4:1ff** “*some will fall away from the faith*” ... “*doctrines of demons*” – some people who had professed faith in Christ will now follow demons; We don't take this seriously today. **Is. 8** – if they don't speak in accordance with this book, they have no truth in them. We want to be as narrow-minded as God is. **James 3:14** “*demonic wisdom*” **Rev. 2:14, 20** – 2 churches condemned for tolerating idolatrous teachings in the church; What do we tolerate? You can't be broad and open to everything. Same types of issues in view

here. **Rev. 9:20** -- worshipping demons in the tribulation period; refused to repent; “If I get saved, do I have to leave the Roman Catholic Church? Yes!” You cannot be a Roman Catholic and be joined in demonic worship and be a child of God. We cannot tolerate teaching that we know to be false. **Is. 45:9**

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=9150613622>

Bob Deffinbaugh: Verses 14-33 spell out Paul’s bottom line in the matter of idol-meats. In these closing words of instruction and counsel, Paul practically applies what he has been teaching in principle by addressing three situations which the Corinthians would face:

- (1) The question of whether a Corinthian Christian should eat idol-meat at a meal that is a part of a heathen worship ritual (**verses 14-22**).
- (2) The question of whether a Corinthian should eat meat purchased at the meat market, the origins of which are not known (**verses 25-26**).
- (3) The question of whether a Corinthian Christian should accept a dinner invitation from an unbeliever (**verses 27-28**). . .

(1) *To partake of the cup at the Lord’s table is to symbolically partake of what the cup represents.* To partake of the cup is to symbolically commemorate the fact that we have become partakers in the shed blood of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins which it accomplished, through faith in His atoning death on the cross of Calvary. This is what Jesus taught before His death.

(2) *To partake of the bread at communion is to symbolically proclaim that we have identified with our Lord’s body.* We have identified with Christ, not only in His incarnation, and in His bodily death, burial, and resurrection, but we have identified ourselves with His “body,” the church. The one loaf symbolizes one body, of which all Christians have partaken and are thus a part. When we partake of the bread, we remind ourselves of our union with His body, but also in His incarnation, and in His spiritual presence now, through the church.

(3) *Communion commemorates our union with the person and work of Jesus Christ.* It commemorates our union with Christ by faith at the time of our salvation and for all eternity. It commemorates our union with Him in His bodily death, burial, and resurrection. It signifies our union with the church, His body. Communion symbolizes our union with Christ, then (at the cross of Calvary) and now (in His body, the church).

(4) *There is more than one “communion.”* The Old Testament saints had communion, too. Eating of what has been sacrificed on the altar not only unites the one eating with the sacrifice, it unites him with those who share in the meal with him. The Old Testament saints had their own form of communion at which they ate a portion of what had been sacrificed. The sacrificial meal joined the participant to the sacrifice and to those who shared with him in eating of it.

(5) *The pagan ritual of eating a meal, of which a portion is that which was sacrificed in heathen worship, was a “communion service” as well.* The heathen worshipper is

celebrating a communion service when he eats of what was sacrificed to an idol. In eating the things sacrificed to the idol, he is identifying himself with the pagan sacrifice and all that it means. Those who eat the meal together identify not only with the pagan sacrifice, but also identify themselves with all those sitting at the table with them.

(6) *When the pagans worship idols by sacrificing to them, they are worshipping demons. Here is an amazing fact, which the Corinthians had overlooked.* There are no other gods. Idols are nothing, because they represent gods which don't exist. But false worship is not thereby rendered harmless and insignificant. This is where the Corinthians went wrong. Paul says that the worship of idols is the worship of demons. Is this some new truth, a mystery not revealed until Paul's writing? Far from it!

“And they shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations” (Leviticus 17:7).

7) *When Christians participate in the pagan sacrificial meal by eating the idol-meats, they unite themselves with the pagan sacrifice and with the heathen with whom they are eating.* Just as biblical communion unites the meal-sharer with the sacrifice, and with those sharing in the meal, so the one who participates in a pagan festive meal becomes a sharer in the heathen sacrificial altar, and a co-participant with those eating the meal. One does far more than have dinner when one attends a pagan sacrificial meal.

(8) *Christians cannot become partakers of two tables, for one is the table of the Lord and the other is the table of demons.* Just as no man can serve two masters (**Matthew 6:24**), neither can a Christian participate at two religious tables or partake of two sacrificial meals. The Lord's Supper, and all that it symbolizes, is diametrically opposed to the “*table of demons.*” It is amazing that some Corinthians could so casually explain away their presence at the table of demons, while at the same time regularly observing the Lord's table. The inconsistency is intolerable.

(9) *When the Corinthians eat idol-meats while participating in pagan idol worship, they provoke the Lord to jealousy.* Paul has instructed the Corinthians to “*flee idolatry*” in **verse 14**. Now we know exactly what he means. To sit at the table of demons and to participate in this pagan worship by eating idol-meats is to practice idolatry. This is exactly the way the ancient Israelites fell into idolatry, by joining themselves with the pagans at their “*table.*” No wonder God gave the Israelites such strict food laws; this kept the Jews from eating with the Gentiles, and thus from participating in their idolatry.

J. C. Ryle: Idolatry

I say then, that Idolatry is a worship, in which the honor due to the Triune God, and to God only, is given to some of His creatures, or to some invention of His creatures.

It may vary. It may assume different forms, according to the ignorance or the knowledge -- the civilization or the barbarism, of those who offer it. It may be grossly

absurd and ludicrous, or it may closely border on truth, and being most superficially defended. But whether in the adoration of the idol of Juggernaut, or in the adoration of the Pope in St. Peter's at Rome, the principle of idolatry is in reality the same. In either case the honor due to God is turned aside from Him, and bestowed on that which is not God. And whenever this is done, whether in heathen temples or in professedly Christian Churches, there is an act of idolatry. . .

No man, I think, need wonder at the rise of idolatry in the Early Church who considers calmly the excessive reverence which it paid, from the very first, to the visible parts of religion. I believe that no impartial man can read the language used by nearly all the Fathers about the Church, the bishops, the ministry, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the martyrs, and the dead saints, generally -- no man can read it without being struck with the wide difference between their language and the language of Scripture on such subjects. You seem at once to be in a new atmosphere. You feel that you are no longer treading on holy ground. You find that things, which in the Bible are evidently of second-rate importance, are here made of first-rate importance.

I feel no hesitation in affirming that idolatry never yet assumed a more glaring form than it does in the Roman Catholic Church in this present day.

And here I come to a subject on which it is hard to speak, because of the times we live in. But the whole truth ought to be spoken by ministers of Christ, without respect of times and prejudices. And I could not lie down in peace, after preaching on idolatry, if I did not declare my solemn conviction that idolatry is one of the crying sins of which the Roman Catholic Church is guilty. I say this in all sadness. I say it, acknowledging fully that we have our faults in the Protestant Church; and practically, perhaps, in some quarters, a little idolatry. But from formal, recognized, systematic idolatry, I believe we are almost entirely free. While, as for the Roman Catholic Church, if there is not in her worship, an enormous quantity of systematic, organized idolatry, I frankly confess then I do not know what idolatry is.

(a) To my mind, it is idolatry to have images and pictures of saints in churches, and to give them a reverence for which there is no warrant or precedent in Scripture. And if this is so, I say there is idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church.

(b) To my mind, it is idolatry to invoke the Virgin Mary and the saints in glory, and to address them in language never addressed in Scripture except to the Holy Trinity. And if this be so, I say there is idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church.

(c) To my mind, it is idolatry to bow down to mere material things, and attribute to them a power and sanctity far exceeding that attached to the ark or altar of the Old Testament dispensation; and a power and sanctity, too, for which there is not a speck of foundation in the Word of God. And if this be so, with the holy coat of Treves, and the wonderfully-multiplied wood of the true cross, and a thousand other so-called relics in my mind's eye, I say there is idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church.

(d) To my mind, it is idolatry to worship that which man's hands have made—to call it God, and adore it when lifted up before our eyes. And if this be so, with the notorious doctrine of transubstantiation, and the elevation of the host in my recollection, I say there is idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church.

(e) To my mind, it is idolatry to make ordained men mediators between ourselves and God, robbing, as it were, our Lord Jesus Christ of His office, and giving them an honor which even Apostles and angels in Scripture flatly repudiate. And if this is so, with the honor paid to Popes and Priests before my eyes, I say there is idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church.

I know well that language like this jars the minds of many. Men love to shut their eyes against evils which is disagreeable. They will not see things which involve unpleasant consequences. That the Roman Catholic Church is an erring church, they will acknowledge. That she is idolatrous, they will deny.

They tell us that the reverence which the Roman Catholic Church gives to saints and images does not amount to idolatry. They inform us that there are distinctions between the kinds of worship -- that God deserves the "strong worship" and the saints and images get a lesser worship. That there is a distinction between a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of intercession, which clear the church of the charge of idolatry. My answer is, that the Bible knows nothing of such distinctions; and that, in the actual practice of the great bulk of Roman Catholics, there is no distinction at all.

They tell us, that it is a mistake to suppose that Roman Catholics really worship the images and pictures before which they perform acts of adoration; that they only use them as helps to devotion, and in reality look far beyond them. My answer is, that many a heathen could say just as much for his idolatry -- that it is well-known, in former days, they did say so -- and that in Hindu religion many idol-worshippers do say the same even in the present day. But the apology does not help. The terms of the second commandment are too stringent. It prohibits "bowing down," as well as worshipping. And the very anxiety which the Roman Catholic Church has often displayed to exclude that second commandment from her catechisms, is of itself a great fact which speaks volumes to a candid observer.

They tell us that we have no evidence for the assertions we make on this subject; that we found our charges on the abuses which prevail among the ignorant members of the Roman Catholic Church; and that it is absurd to say that a Church containing so many wise and learned men, is guilty of idolatry. My answer is, that the devotional books in common use among Roman Catholics supply us with unmistakable evidence. Let any one examine that well known Catholic book, "*The Garden of the Soul*," if he doubts my assertion, and read the language there addressed to the Virgin Mary. Let him remember that this language is addressed to a woman, who, though highly favored, and the mother of our Lord, was yet one of our fellow-sinners -- to a woman, who actually confesses her need of a Savior for herself. She says, "*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior*" (**Luke 1:47**).

Let him examine this language in the light of the New Testament, and then let him tell us fairly, whether the charge of idolatry is not correctly made. But I answer, beside this, that we need no better evidence than that which is supplied in the city of Rome itself. What do men and women do under the light of the Pope's own countenance? What is the religion that prevails around St. Peter's and under the walls of the Vatican? What is Romanism at Rome, unfettered, unshackled, and free to develop itself in full perfection? Let a man honestly answer these questions, and I ask no more. Let him read such a book as Seymour's "*Pilgrimage to Rome*," or "*Alford's Letters*," and ask any visitor to Rome if the picture is too highly colored. Let him do this, I say, and I believe he cannot avoid the conclusion, that Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of Church-worship, Sacrament-worship, Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, and priest-worship -- that it is, in one word, a huge organized idolatry.

I know how painful these things sound to many ears. To me it is no pleasure to dwell on the shortcomings of any who profess and call themselves Christians. I can truly say, that I have said what I have said with pain and sorrow.

I draw a wide distinction between the accredited dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church and the private opinions of many of her members. I believe and hope that many a Roman Catholic is in his heart inconsistent with his profession, and is better than the Church to which he belongs. I believe that many a poor Italian at this day is worshipping with an idolatrous worship, simply because he knows no better. He has no Bible to instruct him. He has no faithful minister to teach him. He has the fear of the priest before his eyes, if he dares to think for himself. He has no money to enable him to get away from the bondage he lives under, even if he feels a desire. I remember all this, and I say that the Italian eminently deserves our sympathy and compassion. But all this must not prevent my saying that **the Roman Catholic Church is an idolatrous Church.**

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/WARN8.HTM>

John MacArthur: Idolatry includes much more than bowing down or burning incense to a physical image. Idolatry is having any false god – any object, idea, philosophy, habit, occupation, sport, or whatever that has one's primary concern and loyalty or that to any degree decreases one's trust in and loyalty to the Lord. . .

False gods may be either material objects or mythical, supernatural beings. Material gods may be worshiped even without the conscious thought that they are deities. Job wrote:

*If I have put my confidence in gold,
And called fine gold my trust,
If I have gloated because my wealth was great,
And because my hand had secured so much;
If I have looked at the sun when it shone,
Or the moon going in splendor,*

*And my heart become secretly enticed,
And my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,
That too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment,
For I would have denied God above. (Job 31:24-28)*

Idolatry has many forms . . .

- Libeling the character of God is idolatry
- Worshiping the true God in the wrong way is idolatry (**Ex. 32:7-9**)
- Worshiping any image is idolatry (**Is. 44:17; John 4:24**)
- Worshiping angels is idolatry (**Col. 2:18**)
- Worshiping demons is idolatry (**Rev. 9:20**)
- Worshiping dead men is idolatry (**Ps. 106:28-29**)
- Supreme loyalty in our heart to anything other than God is idolatry (**Matt. 6:21**)
- Covetousness is idolatry (**Eph. 5:5**)
- Inordinate desire or lust is idolatry (**Phil. 3:18-19**)

In **verses 16-22** Paul gives three reasons for fleeing from idolatry: it is inconsistent; it is demonic; and it is offensive to God.

Charles Hodge: The heathen certainly did not intend to worship evil spirits. Nevertheless they did it. Men of the world do not intend to serve Satan, when they break the laws of God in the pursuit of their objects of desire. Still in so doing they are really obeying the will of the great adversary, yielding to his impulses, and fulfilling his designs. He is therefore said to be the god of this world. To him all sin is an offering and an homage. We are shut up to the necessity of worshipping God or Satan; for all refusing or neglecting to worship the true God, or giving to any other the worship which is due to him alone, is the worshipping of Satan and his angels. It is true therefore, in the highest sense, that what the heathen offer they offer to devils. Although their gods have not existence, yet there are real beings, the rulers of the darkness of this world, wicked spirits in heavenly places (**Eph. 6:12**), on whom their worship terminates.

Doug Goins: A Balanced Life

Any form of idolatrous involvement provokes the jealousy of God. All through the Old Testament he identifies himself as a "*jealous God*." But his jealousy is not like ours. His is pure. It's totally committed to what's best for us. It's the jealousy that comes from his loving ownership of us. He loves us too much for us to get away with whatever rebellion or idolatry we're pursuing. He will intervene; he will crash into our life and it will be painful. He will do whatever it takes to get our attention, because the answer to the question is, we are not stronger than he is. No matter what the rebellion is or how entrenched it is, he is more powerful.

Now these three warnings are very clear: Idolatry contradicts our identity in Christ. It is driven by demonic evil. And it provokes the holy wrath of God. We need to hear this today, because we live in a religious climate that is increasingly pluralistic or syncretistic. There are world religions that have been created to combine the table of the Lord and the table of demons. The best example is the Bahai religion, which tries to

combine the best of all the world's ideologies. The apostle thunders, "You cannot!" In our own country, more and more people are creating their own patchwork quilt of religious beliefs, trusting that by combining the essential doctrines of different faiths, they will come to know the true God of the universe and live with him eternally.

<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/6446/4527.html>

Thomas Leake: (10:14 – 11:1) What God Thinks of Man's Religion

Introduction: There are 2 main approaches to how people view the other religions of the world:

- 1) Historical approach for evangelical Christianity: View Christianity as exclusive truth; one must hear the gospel about Christ and personally put their faith in Christ; no other way to approach God; other religions have nothing to offer
- 2) Newer and growing view – even among some evangelicals: Other religions can be viewed as lesser lights with Christianity being the brightest light; thus you can gain some insight and value from other religions; this is the path of pluralism and religious syncretism; you can somehow learn something of Christ from religions that don't even talk about Christ

Context: Paul still talking about overall subject of a Christian's boundaries for liberties and freedoms in Christ

5 Instructions About a Christian's Relationship to Other Religions

I. (:14-15) Flee Idolatry

Strong connective used to point back to the overall context; strong warning that Paul gave earlier in **chap. 10**;

The faster and farther you flee from idolatry, the better; cf. similar command to *Flee Immorality*;

Don't wrestle with either Idolatry or Immorality or spend any time contemplating the; *Guard yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21)*;

Situation = being invited to pagan idol feasts; a believer might reason: "Idols don't exist; I am free in Christ; I don't want to offend my friends; I want to win others to Christ; so I should just participate with them"

Participation crossed the line; believers need to use their Spirit-guided mind

II. (:16-21) Christ Can't Be Mixed with Other Gods

A. 2 Illustrations of Religious Communion

1. Communion / Lord's Supper – understand the different views:

- a. Roman Catholic = transubstantiation
- b. Lutheran = consubstantiation
- c. Reformed = spiritual participation with Christ present
- d. Symbolic = the elements are only symbols

This text does not argue for or against any of these views; you must go to other passages to decide.

Point: in partaking we share with Christ; the kind or type of communion is not taught here; we are sharing with Christ; But a few points to argue for the Symbolic view:

- at the institution of the Lord's Supper, His blood had not even been shed yet
- Christ still refers to the cup as wine
- Christ's presence is mediated via the indwelling Holy Spirit
- Nothing special about the elements

But: don't take communion lightly either

2. 2nd Illustration = OT Levitical System

Priest and those who brought the offering might share in a meal from the meat of that offering;

B. Idols vs. Demons

cf. **8:4** – No such thing as an idol really exists in the world; e.g. gods like Zeus do not actually exist; so it is impossible to fellowship with a non-existent deity; But Demons (fallen angels) are real; the strictly materialistic view of the universe is wrong; Demons are behind all of the worship of false idols and false gods; **Deut. 32:16-17; Ps. 106:36-37**

Application: Don't synchronize our beliefs with any false views of gods or false religious systems; **2 Cor. 6:14-17**; No room for compromise here

We should have no visual conception of God; idolatry starts in the mind with a wrong concept of God; **Rev. 9:20-21** – not just incomplete ways of worshipping the true Christ; God hates idolatry; **Rom. 1: 20-23**; idolatry can never be a pathway to God; **2 Cor. 4:4**;

1 Cor. 10:21 is key verse – You are not able to partake from both tables; God will not commune with anyone who communes with idols

III. (:22) Idolatry Provokes God's Jealousy

You have to choose sides; no middle ground

Ex. 34:12 ff.; Is. 48:11; Don't incite God to Jealousy (zealous for the relationship) unless you are stronger than God

IV. (:23-30) 2 Principles About How to Use Our Christian Liberties

A. Principle of Expediency (:23)

Only make the better decisions; those that are helpful and profitable

B. Principle of Edification

Love should control all of your decisions; Will this decision help my brother in Christ? You restrict yourself by your love for others

Paul looks at 2 very specific situations and how these principles apply:

1. You can eat any meat that is sold in the meat market – just don't ask questions; the Jews had been very scrupulous in investigating the source of the meat; Paul takes the

opposite approach – just don't ask; all meat ultimately comes from God and can be received with thanksgiving; source of the meat is an irrelevant question

2. When invited into someone's house for dinner – 2 possibilities
 - a. If the issue is not raised, go ahead and eat
 - b. If someone makes a point that the meat comes from idol worship, then refrain – don't cause your weaker brother to stumble or give occasion for the unsaved to have accusations against you; Be careful and sensitive of the conscience of others

V. (10:31 – 11:1) 3 Commands for Believers Living in This Pluralistic Culture

A. Live for the Glory of God

You have one life; make it count by making it always your one ambition to live in such a way as to glorify God

1st Commandment = Love God supremely

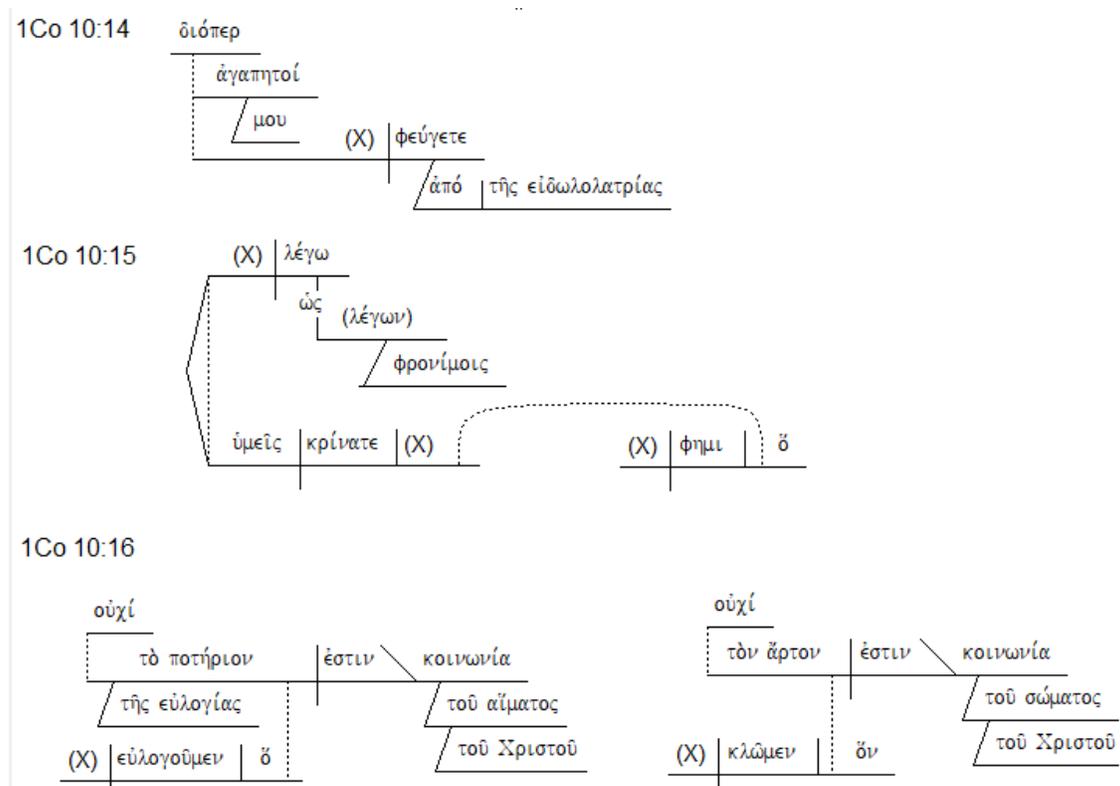
B. Give No Offense

Paul was not a man-pleaser in the wrong sense; but he was flexible in the non-essentials so as to accommodate others and win as many as possible to Christ;

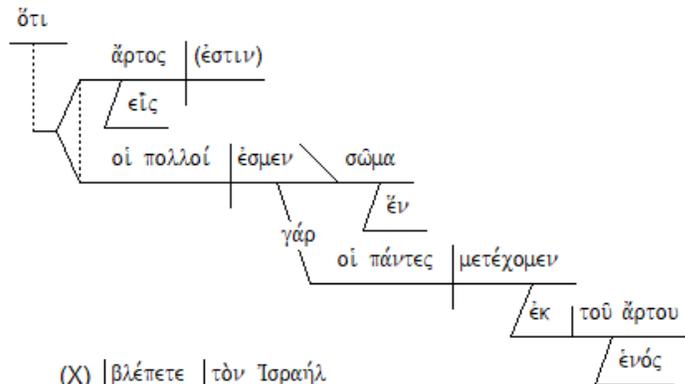
2nd Commandment = Love your neighbor as yourself

C. Imitate Godly Examples – like that of the Apostle Paul who was imitating Christ

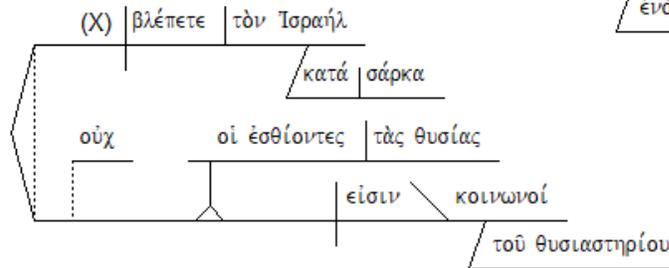
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



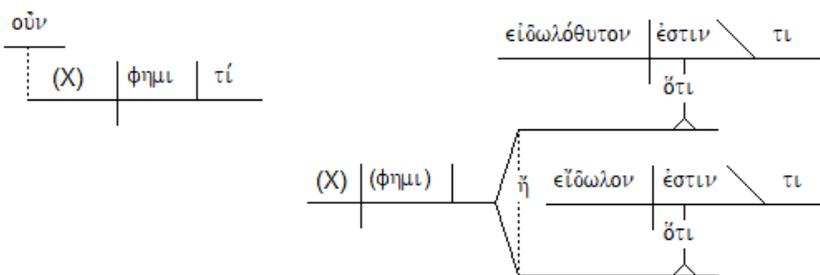
1Co 10:17



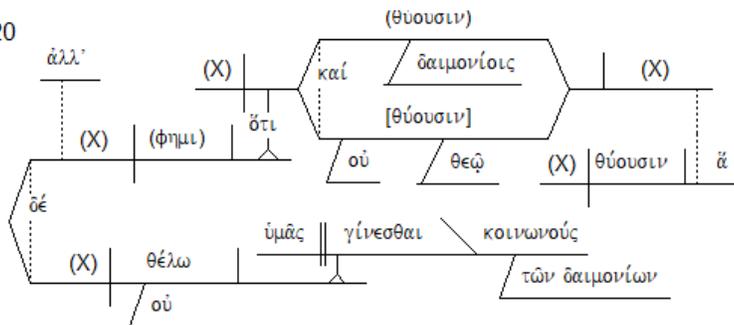
1Co 10:18



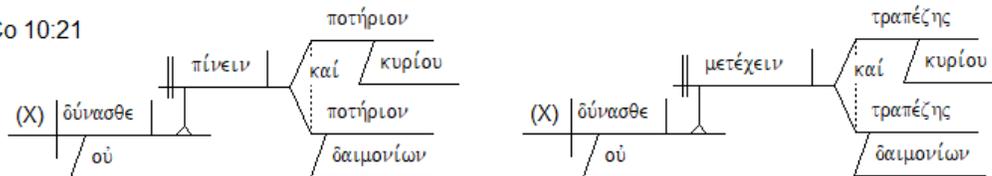
1Co 10:19



1Co 10:20



1Co 10:21



1Co 10:22



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:23 – 11:1

TITLE: *SITUATIONAL ETHICS – WHEN CAN I EAT MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS?*

BIG IDEA:

THE EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY MUST BE GOVERNED BY LOVING SENSITIVITY AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO THE SPECIFIC SITUATION

INTRODUCTION:

According to *Wikipedia*:

Situational ethics, or situation ethics, is a Christian ethical theory that was principally developed in the 1960s by the Episcopal priest **Joseph Fletcher**. It basically states that sometimes other moral principles can be cast aside in certain situations if love is best served; as **Paul Tillich** once put it: 'Love is the ultimate law'. The moral principles Fletcher is specifically referring to are the moral codes of Christianity and the type of love he is specifically referring to is 'Agape' love. Agapē is a term which comes from Greek which means absolute, universal, unchanging and unconditional love for all people. Fletcher believed that in forming an ethical system based on love, he was best expressing the notion of '*love thy neighbour*', which Jesus Christ taught in the Gospels of the New Testament of the Bible. Through situational ethics, Fletcher attempted to find a 'middle road' between legalistic and antinomian ethics. Fletcher developed situational ethics in his books: *The Classic Treatment* and *Situation Ethics*.

Fletcher believed that there are no absolute laws other than the law of Agapē love and all the other laws were laid down in order to achieve the greatest amount of this love. This means that all the other laws are only guidelines to how to achieve this love, and thus they may be broken if the other course of action would result in more love.

Christians have reacted against the tenets of Fletcher's proposed ethical system because the law of Christ and the moral principles laid out in the Scriptures should not be set aside for subjective interpretation of what is the most loving and expedient thing to do. That is true for situations where there is a clear moral right and wrong position. But as the Apostle Paul explains in this passage which concludes his teaching on the issue of eating meat offered to idols, there are occasions where situational ethics must be employed in light of the reality of the Christian's liberties.

Richard Hays: It remains for Paul to draw general conclusions and wrap up some loose ends left in his lengthy treatment of "food sacrificed to idols." Unfortunately, this concluding section is a bit muddled, because he is making two different points, and he swings back and forth between them in a potentially confusing way. Still, the two basic emphases are clear enough:

Point A: All our actions should glorify God by seeking the benefit of others rather than ourselves.

Point B: Within the framework of that principle, we are free to eat whatever we like with thankfulness.

The first point is the fundamental one, the guiding principle that has governed Paul's whole discussion of idol food. By pressing this principle he hopes to change the terms of the discourse at Corinth, to provide a new framework for moral judgment. This principle poses a fundamental challenge to those Corinthians who style themselves strong and wise: they should stop asserting their rights and start thinking of the interests of others in the community. On the second point, however, Paul agrees fundamentally with their judgment about the moral neutrality of food per se, and he affirms -- contrary to the scruples of the weak—that outside the temple setting Christians can eat meat without worrying about its source.

This is a delicate balancing act, because Paul's position does not fit precisely into either of the opposing positions in the Corinthian debate. It is easy to see how each side might accuse him of inconsistency or lack of moral courage. Nonetheless, his position is a coherent one, however difficult it might be to put into practice in a community.

Structure (see also **Fee**, 478):

- A. Seek the benefit of others (23–24)
 - B. Eat whatever you want (25–27)
 - A1. Exception: abstain for sake of the other's conscience (28–29a)
 - B1. Defense of freedom to eat (29b–30)
 - A2. Do everything for the glory of God by seeking the benefit of others (10:31 – 11:1).

Paul Gardner: Paul now speaks more generally. Bringing glory to God and building up one's neighbor provide general categories by which to approach the question of what (sacrificed) meat to eat. The theme of stumbling reappears in v. 32. Should the good of the other not be furthered, then it is better not to eat. In a link back to **chapter 9**, Paul concludes with a return to the first-person singular and urges that people imitate him as he imitates Christ. He especially recalls from that chapter how he seeks not his own advantage but that many may be saved.

Seek Only the Neighbor's Good and Bring Glory to God (10:23–11:1)

1. When to Eat and When Not to Eat (10:23–30)

- a. Seek the Benefit of the Other Person (10:23–24)
- b. Eat Food Sold in the Market (10:25–26)
- c. Eat Food Offered at Dinner with an Unbeliever (10:27)

- d. Do Not Eat to Prove a Point! (10:28–29a)
- e. Understand the Nature of Your Liberty (10:29b–30)

2. Do All to the Glory of God (10:31 – 11:1)

David Garland: In this section, Paul tries to ensure that the Corinthians do not misconstrue what he says, as they had previously (5:9–10), and think that he is insisting that they withdraw completely from society and have nothing whatsoever to do with unbelievers. He clarifies that food is food, and it is permissible to eat unless it is specifically identified as idol food, which puts it in a special category that is always forbidden to Christians. As **Dunn** (1998: 705) observes, he does not ask them “to avoid idol food at all costs or to parade their consciences in the matter by making scrupulous enquiry beforehand.” They need not abstain from all food on the chance that it may have been sacrificed to idols. He basically says, “Of course, you can buy food in the provision market” (10:25); “Of course, you can dine with friends” (10:27). His prohibition of idol food does not mean that they must retreat to the seclusion of a gloomy ghetto. Nevertheless, he **anticipates potential problems** presented by food that a Christian might purchase from the market or food that a Christian might eat in the home of an unbeliever who might have offered it to idols.

I. (:23-24) THREE GOVERNING PRINCIPLES IN DETERMINING APPROPRIATE CONDUCT IN AREAS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

A. (:23a) The Principle of Expediency

“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.”

Gordon Fee: For the Corinthians *exousia* meant the “right” to act in freedom when and wherever they saw fit. For Paul, as with his own *exousia* already argued for (9:12 and 18), where it meant the “right” to become slave of all, here the “right” is to “benefit” and “build up” others in the body. For him nothing else is genuine *exousia*.

B. (:23b) The Principle of Edification

“All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

David Garland: The two statements [“*Not all things are beneficial*” and “*Not all things edify*”] recall the corporate dimension of Christian life (**Willis** 1985b: 226–27) and Paul’s opening thought in 8:1 that **love builds up**. From his radical perspective, the only thing profitable is that which builds up the church as a whole (**R. Collins** 1999: 386). He leaves it to the readers to infer the corollary to this principle: Anything that might destroy another becomes unlawful (cf. 8:7–13). **Robertson and Plummer** (1914: 219) correctly observe, “There are some things which do not build up either the character of the individual or the faith which he professes, or the society to which he belongs.” But Paul also believes that there are limits beyond which Christians may not go (cf. 10:1–22). Here, however, the limits are defined by the benefit an action brings to another or the church.

C. (:24) The Principle of Unselfish Love

“Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.”

II. (:25-30) TWO CASE STUDIES APPLYING SITUATIONAL ETHICS TO THE ISSUE OF EATING MEAT POTENTIALLY OFFERED TO IDOLS

Anthony Thiselton: Paul includes two further distinctions raised by case studies. One case study concerns buying meat from the shops; the other arises when a Christian is invited to a Gentile household for a meal, and is offered meat that has probably been resold in the market after it had first passed through a pagan temple. Some argue that almost all the meat sold in the meat market would have followed this route. Often the best quality meats and best cuts would become available this way. In effect, much would have been involved in the liturgical processes of sacrifice, but it would also be of a quality suitable for hospitality to guests.

A. (:25-26) Case Study #1 – Buying Meat in the Open Market – Avoid the Issue and Exercise Your Freedom

1. (:25) Simple Guideline – If the question is not raised it is a moot point
“Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience’ sake.”

Gordon Fee: In light of the emphasis in the preceding criterion, the reader is not quite prepared for the “applications” that now follow. One might expect illustrations of forbearance for the sake of others; what we get instead are two concrete examples of **personal freedom** with regard to the meat market, which are finally defended rhetorically in a very personal way at the end (vv. 29b–30). Only in the preceding example of forbearance (vv. 28–29a) is there an expression of concern for others.

2. (:26) Universal Principle – Source of the meat ultimately is a Gift from God
“For the earth is the Lord’s, and everything that is in it.”

Paul Garland: This is a further indication that Paul’s real concern about eating such food is not the fact that it may, at some stage, have been sacrificed to an idol but the context in which it is eaten. Eaten in the temple itself (8:10), it is being eaten as part of the worship of that idol, and so the eater is caught up in the worship, and the results of that are what Paul has spoken about earlier in this chapter. Eaten in a nonreligious context simply as food rather than as the content of a sacrifice, there is nothing to worry about. Christians may eat this food. Paul gives a theological reason why, in principle, he is prepared to eat this meat, drawing on **Psalm 24:1**: *“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness of it.”* In other words, eating food when not as part of temple worship is simply to enjoy God’s creation. It should be done with genuine thanksgiving to God, who supplies all food (v. 30).

Mark Taylor: What is clear in the first example is that believers should not inquire about the food’s history in the buying process. The principle that emerges from both

examples is that freedom is restricted in any situation that hints of the participation in or condoning of idolatry. The principle of seeking “*the good of others*” (10:24) requires a decision-making process guided by the perceptions of others in relation to their spiritual well-being.

B. (:27-30) Case Study #2 – Eating Meat Served by an Unbeliever at a Private Dinner Party

1. (:27) If the Issue is not Raised, Go ahead and Eat – Still a Moot Point

“If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience’ sake.”

Craig Blomberg: More central to this section is Paul’s preference for freedom over restraint when commending the gospel to unbelievers. Non-Christian stereotypes of conservative Christianity consistently characterize us as dour, legalistic joy-killers. And at least part of this caricature is deserved. Evangelicals often do argue over where to draw the boundaries in morally gray areas. Fee correctly observes that “conservatives on these issues simply fail to reckon with how ‘liberal’ Paul’s own view really is. Hence Paul is seldom heard for the sake of traditional regulations.”

Paul Gardner: With these matters of “evaluation” and “self-awareness” in mind, Paul argues that it is fine to eat this meat at dinner or when bought in a market, provided it is not seen as a way of evaluating or judging anyone’s self-awareness vis-à-vis the community. As long as eating this food is in no way done to make some point about being spiritually mature or having “knowledge,” then it is fine. Thus Paul insists twice that eating can take place as long as it is “without evaluation for the sake of self-awareness.”

For the sake of clarity we may **paraphrase vv. 28–29** thus:

If, at a meal with an unbeliever, one of the so-called “knowledgeable” Christians draws attention to the fact that idol meat is being eaten and that, therefore, this is a good occasion to make a point of your “freedom,” then you should decline to eat. You do not want further to encourage this person in his or her false understanding of self-awareness. Anyway, why should another (and false) type of self-awareness be allowed to decide whether or not I am “free”?

2. (:28-30) If the Issue is Raised, Refrain from Eating

“But if anyone should say to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?”

Mark Taylor: There is not enough information given to know why the informant makes known the food’s history, whether it is a courtesy to the known believer present at the meal or a subtle test of the Christian’s convictions regarding things associated with

idols. Paul simply does not say since the motives of the informant are irrelevant.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul now asks two questions in the second half of **verse 29** and in **verse 30**. First, Paul asks why his freedom should be scrutinized and restricted by the conscience of another. Second, he seems to ask why, even though he can partake of the meal with thankfulness, he should be spoken against as though he were doing wrong. I am inclined to understand these as the questions which prompt Paul not to partake of idol-meats, after their presence at the table has been pointed out. He does not wish to offend the conscience of another, and so any indication that another guest would have his conscience wounded by his eating is sufficient reason not to eat the idol-meat. Even though he could eat that meat with thanksgiving, he will not do so because he would be evil spoken of for having done so by another. In either case, Paul stands to lose much more by eating than he could possibly gain by eating.

David Garland: The advice that follows shows that Paul does not expect the Corinthians to give up their interests or rights entirely -- only when the situation calls for it. They do not need to give up eating meat, for example (**8:13**), but love for others is to be the controlling factor in their choices. Food that may have an idolatrous history may be eaten unless it is specifically identified as idol food. When it is identified as idol food, however, the principle of love must overrule assumed knowledge or presumed rights. They must abstain out of concern for another's conscience as well as to avoid rousing the wrath of God for violating their covenantal obligations. . .

Paul formulates another key hermeneutical principle underlying his advice. The food's history matters only when it matters to someone else who considers it sacred. Christians know that idols do not exist, that there is no God but one, and that all food belongs ultimately to God; in this sticky situation, however, it is not what the Christian knows that counts, but what others believe. . .

Paul is not concerned here that Christians might endanger a fellow believer who has a weak conscience. Rather, their willing consumption of what has been announced as food sacrificed to idols would do three things:

1. It would compromise their confession of the one true God with a tacit recognition of the sanctity of pagan gods.
2. It would confirm rather than challenge the unbeliever's idolatrous convictions and would not lead the unbeliever away from the worship of false gods (**Conzelmann** 1975: 178; **Ruef** 1977: 102). If a Christian eats what a pagan acquaintance regards as an offering to a deity, it would signal the Christian's endorsement of idolatry.
3. It would disable the basic Christian censure of pagan gods as false gods that embody something demonic (**Cheung** 1999: 159) and make that censure seem hypocritical.

Paul expresses concern about the Christian's witness to the unbeliever. The announcement presents an opportunity to expound one's faith in the one God and one Lord (see **Godet** 1887: 97).

III. (10:31 – 11:1) THREE GOVERNING PRINCIPLES IN DETERMINING APPROPRIATE CONDUCT IN AREAS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Anthony Thiselton: The final verses of this section (vv. 31-33; 11:1) set out the **criteria for decision** and action in an aphoristic, succinct, summarizing form.

- (1) The highest positive criterion is to do it all for the glory of God (v. 31b).
- (2) The highest negative criterion is to avoid doing damage (NIV, “do not cause anyone to stumble”), whether those under consideration include non-Christians (both Jews and Gentiles, v. 32a), or fellow Christians (God’s church, v. 32b).
- (3) The second positive criterion is to take account of all the interests of everyone (v. 33a), having universal respect for the concerns and well-being of “others.”
- (4) The second negative corollary is not seeking any advantage of my own (v. 33b).
- (5) The specific goal, or final cause, is the good of the many, with a view to their salvation (10:33c).
- (6) The formal cause arises from following the example of Paul, which he, in turn, derives from the way of Christ (11:1).

Craig Blomberg: **First Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1** restates the twin principles of freedom and restraint one last time, now in the **context of God’s glory** -- that which conforms to his standards and priorities (v. 31). Paul tries to lead as few into sin as possible, both outside and inside the church, but his most basic underlying motive is the salvation of as many as possible (vv. 32–33; recall 9:19–23). And he has included this somewhat lengthy discussion of his actions and motives precisely so that the Corinthians might imitate him carefully, at least to the extent that he successfully models Christ-like behavior (11:1).

A. (10:31) Glorify God in All You Do

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

B. (10:32-33) Give No Unnecessary Offense that Would Hinder the Gospel

1. Principle Stated

“Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God”

2. Reason – Seeking the Benefit of Others – Especially Their Salvation

“just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”

Not talking about being a “man-pleaser” in a selfish, ambitious sense

C. (:11:1) Imitate Godly Examples

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Doug Goins: Paul is asking every one of us through this entire passage, "Do you want to know what it means to live a consistent Christian life? Do you want to properly balance freedom and restraint? Do you want to be in the world and not of the world? Do you want to have a positive spiritual influence in your community, but not allow that community to mold you so you compromise what's true and what's right? Do you want to live a balanced life, not being driven by the extremes of legalism or its opposite, selfish license? If you do, then watch me, follow me, live with me. I may not be perfect, but I try to imitate the selfless life that Christ lived. I want to glorify God in what I say and what I do and in the attitudes of my heart. To the extent that I succeed, then the good news is that you can, too."

Richard Hays: It is regrettable that the chapter division (introduced centuries later) has caused many readers to miss the connection of **11:1** to the foregoing argument. In fact, the entire treatment of idol food (**8:1 – 11:1**) should be read in the light of this **closing call for imitation**. Paul has presented himself as exhibit A of giving up prerogatives in order to reach out to others (**8:13, chapter 9** in its entirety, **10:33**); furthermore, what has been implicit throughout is now at last made explicit: the fundamental pattern of self-emptying, on which Paul's own actions are based, is Christ. Paul concludes the section, leaving the word "*Christ*" hanging in the air, without explanation or elaboration. Perhaps he trusted that the Corinthians, having already heard what he had to say in **1:18 – 2:5** about Jesus Christ crucified, could work out the implication of this for their own lives. If we are less confident of the ability of our congregations to make the connections, we might refer to **Phil. 2:1–3** for further elucidation.

Paul's summons to the church to imitate him (cf. **Phil. 3:17; 4:9; Gal. 4:12; 2 Thess. 3:7–9**) sounds like breathtaking immodesty, but in fact it reflects simple wisdom: we learn who we are and how to act only by the example of others. Believing that his own life was in fact conformed to the self-sacrificial example of Christ, Paul was willing to **offer himself as a role model**. Here is a sobering challenge for all who preach the gospel: how many of us would be willing to present our own lives for inspection as models of Christ's self-giving love?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) If you have access to Fletcher's book on Situational Ethics or if you have time to read J. I. Packer's analysis below, how does the guidance here of the Apostle Paul differ from the basic premise of Fletcher's approach?
- 2) What types of behavior might fall into the category of that which is lawful but not expedient or not edifying?
- 3) Where have you chosen to restrain your Christian liberties? Why and How did it work out in that situation?

4) What godly examples have had the most impact in your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Glorify God by doing whatever you can to serve others and bring them to salvation.

- I. I Will Always Pursue What Is Helpful and Builds Up (10:23).
- II. I Will Always Pursue What Is Good for Others (10:24).
- III. I Will Always Pursue What Is in the Best Interest of Another's Conscience (10:25-29).
- IV. I Will Always Pursue a Thankful Heart (10:29-30).
- V. I Will Always Pursue the Glory of God in All Things (10:31).
- VI. I Will Always Pursue What Is Best for the Salvation of Others (10:32-33).
- VII. I Will Always Pursue the Principles of WWPB and WWJD (11:1).

J.I. Packer: Situations and Principles

First, let us note that though 'situationism' is usually thought of as a term referring specifically to one view of Christian morality, it is actually an umbrella-word for all views which reject the idea that the way to decide what to do is always to apply rules, positive and negative, concerning types of actions (*e.g.* keep your promises, do not steal, do not rape, do not torture). The situationist does not regard such rules as *prescriptive, i.e.*, as having absolute and universal authority, but as at best *illuminative*, in the sense of being relative, provisional and violable indicators of what behaviour may (though it may not) be right here and now. Thus, 'situationism' is a term of negative classification, dear only in what it excludes and covering many positive conceptions that are intrinsically different.

The word 'existentialism' is similar; it, too, is an umbrella-word for all views, Christian and non-Christian, which reject the idea that one can achieve authentic personal existence without total commitment, and it, too, in practice covers a wide range of outlooks. Now as a view about the way to determine what one should do, situationism can be part of an atheistic existentialist or humanist position no less than of a Christian one. The mark of existentialist situationism is its requirement that one should always act whole-heartedly, in conscious personal freedom (meaning by this, openness to variation from all one's actions hitherto). The mark of humanist situationism is its quest in all circumstances for the realization of personal values as it sees them. The mark of Christian situationism is its conviction that general moral rules applied to the matter in hand will not always lead you to what the command of God and the calculations of neighbourly love (which two things some identify and others distinguish) actually require.

The claim traditionally made for Christian morality is that love can be, and indeed has been, embodied in rules, so that in using the moral principles of Scripture prescriptively a Christian will always be expressing love, never frustrating it, and so will always be

doing the will of God. Situationism diagnoses this claim as legalistic and declines to accept it, insisting that love itself requires one to go further and do more: namely, to pay fullest attention to the situation itself, which may be an exceptional set of circumstances requiring, for the fullest expression of love, an exceptional way of acting. Action which the rules would call wrong will yet be right if analysis shows it to be the most loving thing to do. For no types of action, as such, can be said to be immoral; only failures of love in particular situations can be called immoral or thought of as forbidden, inasmuch as the fullness of loving action is the whole of what God commands.

How, then, should we decide what to do in a given situation? Here the ways part. The *rational* situationism of the Anglo-Saxon Anglicans Fletcher and Robinson offers us a method of calculation; the *existentialist* situationism of the big Bs of continental neo-orthodoxy—Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Bultmann—takes the line of attuning us for particular self-authenticating commands from God which will reach us via Scripture, though they will not be identical with, nor will they be simply applications of, moral principles stated in Scripture. Neither position (be it said) is intentionally lax or antinomian (that is, opposed to law); both think they achieve what the law in Scripture is really after; the differences between them, and between them both and Christian ethical stances which would not call themselves situationist, are theological. This chapter is most concerned with the former type of situationism, but we shall grasp it better by comparing it with the latter, and this will be our next step.

Pure situationism

Neo-orthodox situationism may be called ‘pure’ as distinct from ‘principled’. Its main thesis is that as I face each situation, taking its measure and noting its complexities, God will speak, in some sense of that word, directly. The determining factor here is the dynamism or ‘actualism’ of the neo-orthodox conception of God: that is, the insistence that the Creator-God, who is transcendent, sovereign and free, is known to us and reveals his command to us only in the particularity of the present moment. So the generalized ethical injunctions of Scripture are understood not as formulae embodying the fullness of God’s will for all time, but as so many indications of the lines along which, or within which, particular commands of God may be expected to come. God’s revealed will never takes the form of a universally valid rule for us to apply to all relevant cases, but only of particular summonses. ‘God’s commanding can only be this individual, concrete and specific commanding,’ says Karl Barth. Formally, then, the Christian ethic is obeying God in a most direct way; and materially it is neighbour-love, in whatever mode God’s self-authenticating command specifies here and now. Thus Brunner writes: ‘Nothing is good save obedience to the command of God, just because it is obedience. No reasons of determination from content here come under consideration, The “form” of the will, obedience, is all. But to be obedient means: “love your neighbour!”’

Bonhoeffer says this most starkly, forbidding us to ask ‘What is the will of God for this particular case?’ because the question embodies ‘the casuistic misinterpretation of the concrete. The concrete is not achieved in this way. . . The will of God is always concrete, or else it is not the will of *God*. . . the will of God is not a principle. . . which

has to be applied to “reality”.’ These negations sound startling; but the guidance that Bonhoeffer takes away with the one hand, by denying that God reveals principles, he effectively restores with the other, by his teaching on the ‘mandates’—church, government, labour and culture, and marriage and the family, spheres of delegated divine authority which the Reformers also recognized. ‘Mandate’ (which term Bonhoeffer preferred to the more usual ‘orders’, because it denoted a God-given task) meant for him ‘the conferment of divine authority (*i.e.* the right to command obedience as God’s representative) on an earthly agent’, and ‘the formation of a definite earthly domain by the divine commandment’; and the mandates themselves, conservatively conceived, define closely the limits within which God’s concrete will is expressed and encountered. Barth and Brunner speak similarly. Barth also affirms that, while God’s demand cannot be anticipated in abstraction, his constancy of character revealed in Christ means that like demands will be made in like situations: for Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever, is ‘the ground, content and form of God’s command’.

In all this neo-orthodoxy is polemicizing against what Barth calls a ‘theoretical casuistry’ which assumes that the whole of God’s command consists of a legacy of general principles left us in the Bible, to be applied by our own best wisdom. Their motive—a proper one—is a desire to display Christian obedience as direct response to God’s present, personal address. But as anyone with a ripe doctrine of the Holy Spirit can and will make that point without denying that in what God says today he applies what he has said in Scripture once for all, so the ‘pure’ situationism to which these men resort seems to turn God’s command, at least in its details, into an uncheckable private revelation every time. Nor (to their credit!) do they sustain in practice the daunting notion which they profess. Thus, Bonhoeffer’s concept of the command of God, which if it is not ‘dear, definite and concrete to the last detail . . . is not God’s command’, receives a crippling qualification when he admits that God’s will ‘may lie deeply concealed beneath a great number of available possibilities’, so that ‘the whole apparatus of human powers must be set in motion when it is a matter of proving (*i.e.* discerning, as in Romans 12:2) the will of God’. These admissions, and the whole excellent section on ‘proving’ from which they come, recognize realistically the perplexities which ethical choices involve, but hardly square with ‘clear, definite and concrete to the last detail’. And Barth’s treatment of areas of ethical decision in terms of God’s work in Christ (which, he holds, is the basic subject-matter of ethics) differs little from the kind of casuistical reasoning which he professes to abhor.

The most problematical version of neo-orthodox situationism is Rudolf Bultmann’s. Here the existentialist motif is strongest (for man’s existence consists wholly in his possibility of existence, and he is always seeking authentic selfhood by choosing who he is); here, too, God and his will are most elusive, for God is silent, and ‘Jesus teaches no ethics at all in the sense of an intelligible theory valid for all men concerning what should be done and left undone’, and obedience itself must be understood in a ‘non-objectifying’ way, not literally, that is, as response to God’s command, but in a Pickwickian, that is, private and unnatural sense as decision in the situation, whereby authentic existence is achieved. The whole ethical process in man is reduced to successive crises of new decision each present moment. ‘A man’, Bultmann insists,

‘cannot in the moment of decision fall back upon principles, upon a general ethical theory which can relieve him of the responsibility for the decision. . . man does not meet the crisis of decision armed with a definite standard; he stands on no firm base, but rather alone in empty space.’ Newness of decision is called for each new moment, for each new moment the situation itself is new.

So how should we act? First, we must realize the necessity of meeting the demands of the moment, for it always carries eschatological, that is, ultimate, significance for our existence; second, we must realize that each moment calls on us not just to do something but to be something—namely, persons who love their neighbours as themselves. We know how we love ourselves and how we want others to love us, so we already know how to love others. Jesus and Scripture do not therefore tell us what things love should make us do (that, if attempted, would be legalism); all we are told is that we should love, and that is all we need to be told, for ‘if a man really loves, he knows already what he has to do’; and he knows it, ‘not on the basis of any past experience or rational deductions, but directly from the immediate situation.’

General strictures on situationism will come later, and general criticisms of Bultmann on God, Christ and Scripture would not be in place here, but some particular shortcomings of his ethic may be noted at once. First, he takes an over-optimistic view of *man*. Does one who ‘really loves’ thereby always know what to do? Does real love keep us who are naturally daft from speaking and acting in character? Second, Bultmann takes an over-simplified view of *situations*. Do not most perplexities in moral decision stem, not from lack of loving intention or will to obey God, but from ignorance of past and future facts, so that one cannot with confidence calculate consequences? Is it not daunting to note, with Thomas Oden, that Bultmann lacks ‘realistic understanding of the intense and endless *conflicts of values* and interests and obligations that characterize human existence’? Is it not disastrous that Bultmann neither will nor can develop a social ethic? Third, Bultmann gives an over-simplified account of the moral life, reducing it to a series of isolated decisions and allowing no significance to factors like character, habit, aspiration and growth (all of which find a place in the New Testament!). Fourth, Bultmann gives an unrealistic account of moral decision itself, speaking as if there never need be—indeed, never should be—any doubt in a Christian’s mind as to what he should do this moment, for if his heart is right God will have made the right course clear to him. I do not always find that, nor do you; who does?

Principled situationism

Set beside this, now, the ‘principled’ situationism of Fletcher and Robinson—‘principled’ because it offers a constant method of deciding in each case what love demands. We may state it thus:

- a. Neighbour-love is God’s absolute and only demand in each situation. God does not require invariable performance of particular types of action, as such, whatever the simple reader of the Decalogue and the ethical parts of the New Testament might think; he calls simply for love, first as a motive (good will) and then as beneficent behaviour, of whatever form the situation requires. ‘Love is

both absolute and relative by its very nature. An unchanging principle, it nevertheless always changes in its concrete application.”

- b. ‘Old’ Christian morality lapses into Pharisaic legalism and so sins against love, because in determining how to act it ‘begins from the deductive, the transcendent and the authoritative. It stresses the revealed character of the Christian moral standard, . . . (and) starts from Christian principles which are valid “without respect of persons”.’ The ‘new’ morality, by contrast, starts from persons rather than principles and from experienced relationships rather than revealed commandments, and in and from the situation itself works out, by reference to personal claims and probable consequences, what is the most loving thing to do. Fletcher, stressing that love maximizes good for all, assimilates love and justice and affirms a Christianized utilitarianism²¹ so calculating that one reviewer called his book ‘blood-chilling’ and asked: ‘Does this “calculus” of love not, in effect, dehumanize love?’ Robinson, by contrast, seems to think that the discerning of love’s demands will occur spontaneously, through intuition rather than calculation. ‘Love alone,’ he writes, ‘because, as it were, it has a built in moral compass, enabling it to “home” intuitively upon the deepest need of the other, can allow itself to be directed completely by the situation. . . . It is able to embrace an ethic of radical responsiveness, meeting every situation on its own merits, with no prescriptive laws.’ At all events, it is part of the optimism of situationist faith that, by one means or another, love will be able to see what the personal claims in each situation require, without needing to run to God’s law for guidance.
- c. Love may dictate the breaking of accepted moral rules of the ‘do this’, ‘don’t do that’ type. These rules, both in Scripture and in life, are no more than rules of thumb (‘maxims’, Fletcher calls them; ‘working rules’ is Robinson’s phrase); they give preliminary guidance as to how love will normally be expressed, but sometimes for the sake of persons different action will be called for. This, however, presents no problem theoretically, for what the rules forbid is forbidden only because it is ordinarily unloving, and nothing that actually expresses love in a particular situation is actually wrong. ‘Apart from (love) there are no unbreakable rules.’ Love as the end justifies its means; nothing is intrinsically evil, since what makes for good in a situation thereby becomes good in that situation. Fletcher notes that Paul rejects all thought of doing evil that good may come (Rom. 3:8), but sees Paul as here ‘victimized’ by ‘the intrinsic theory’, that is, the false notion that things are good or evil in themselves.
- d. No situation ever faces us with a choice of evils; the traditional view to the contrary is one more product of the mistaken ‘intrinsic theory’. ‘*The situationalist holds that whatever is the most loving thing in the situation is the right and good thing.* It is not excusably evil, it is positively good.’ To illustrate, Fletcher is ready with blandest aplomb to justify— not as lesser evils, but as positively good—such acts as killing one’s baby (p. 125), abortion (pp. 37ff.), therapeutic fornication (pp. 126f.), patriotic prostitution (pp. 163f.), adultery to

induce pregnancy (pp. 164f.), premarital sexual intercourse (p. 104), sacrificing lives on your own side in time of war (p. 98), suicide and euthanasia (pp. 66, 74, 165f.), and distribution of contraceptives to unmarried women (p. 127; *Moral Responsibility*, pp. 139f.). He also insists on saying that ‘in principle, even killing “innocent” people might be right’, and ‘in some situations lying and bribery and force and violence, even taking life itself, is the only righteous and good thing to do in the situation’. It is Fletcher’s use of ‘good’, ‘right’ and ‘righteous’ that secures to situationism its well-known reputation of being desperately lax; here the ‘new morality’ and the old immorality do seem to speak in identical terms.

Situationism evaluated

Christian situationism claims to distil essential biblical teaching about decision-making. This claim must now be tested.

Let it first be said that fair dealing with situationism is not easy, for it is a very mixed bag. Viewed as a reaction of protest against the all-too-common legalism which puts general principles before individual persons and whose zeal for God ousts neighbour-love from the heart, it commends itself as making a healthy biblical point, namely that only by love and care for others can we acceptably serve God (*cf.* Rom. 13:8-10; I Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:14). But viewed as a method to guide us in choosing our behaviour, it appalls, particularly when Fletcher cracks it up as the panacea for all moral perplexity, delivering us from centuries of Christian ethical error. When situationists detect provincialism, shallowness, negativism, thoughtlessness and lovelessness in our ethical thought and practice, we must humbly take the criticism, and be grateful for it. But when they treat God’s revealed directives as working rules only, and invite us to hail as good what God calls evil, a different response is called for.

Situationists are right to stress that each situation is in some respects unique, and that only by concentrating intensely on it shall we ever see what is the best we can make of it. Rightly too do they stress that love always seeks the best for all parties, and is betrayed if we settle for mere formal correctness, or avoidance of wrongdoing, without asking whether we could not do something better. Insistence that real love is creative, enterprising and unwilling to settle for the second-best in relationships is a substantial grain of truth in situationism, as is its further insistence that the lovingness of loving action should be thought out and spelt out in terms of the relationship itself. Robinson’s casuistry of premarital sex, for instance, runs thus: ‘To the young man asking in his relations with a girl, “Why shouldn’t I?”, it is relatively easy to say “Because it’s wrong” or “Because it’s a sin”—and then to condemn him when he, or his whole generation, takes no notice. It makes much greater demands to ask, and to answer, the question “Do you love her?” or “*How much* do you love her?”, and then to help him to accept for *himself* the decision that, if he doesn’t, or doesn’t very deeply, then his action is immoral, or, if he does, then he will respect her far too much to use her or take liberties with her. Chastity is the expression of charity—of caring, enough.’ Though weakened by Robinson’s unwillingness to declare sex relations apart from the full bed-and-board commitment of marriage wrong as such, this is surely right-minded. **No; it is**

only in its denial that any particular action is intrinsically immoral, evil and forbidden that situationism goes astray. Unfortunately, this one mistake is ruinous.

Whence does it spring? Partly, from an unbiblical habit of defining actions externally, in merely physical terms, abstracted from their motive and purpose; partly, from misconceptions about the place of the law of God as such. The New Testament says that while our relationship to God is no longer determined by law (Rom. 6:14), Christ having freed us from law as a system of salvation (Rom. 7:1-6; 10:4; Gal. 3:23-26), we are ‘under the law of Christ’ (I Cor. 9:21; *cf.* Gal. 6:2) as a standard of sanctification; Robinson, however, seems to infer from the end of the law for salvation that it has no place in sanctification. The continentals, conceiving God’s command as essentially specific and concrete, deny that the Bible’s moral teaching, which was specific and concrete for its own situation, can be directly applied to ours.

The effect of denying that there are universal God-taught prohibitions is to enmesh love (good will, the commanded motive) in perplexities. How am I to love my neighbour now? By attending to the situation, I am told. But how should I define ‘the situation’? Any circumscription of it will be arbitrary and open to challenge; I could always have included more, or less. And however I define it, how can I be sure what is really the most loving thing to do in it? By trusting my ‘built-in moral compass’? I do not know whether Robinson risks trusting his, but I dare not rely on mine. My love is often blind, or at least goofy, partly through sin, partly through natural stupidity (two factors with which situationism fails to reckon). Also, I know by experience that in moments when I have to make decisions the factors that ought to count most, and the long-term implications of this or that way of handling the situation, are often far from clear to me. So am I to calculate my way through all possible alternatives, both those which stick to the rules and those which break them? But time, brains and factual knowledge fail me; and in any case it is plain that, whatever I do, whether I keep the rules or break them, uncertainty about the consequences I calculated will leave me still unsure whether I did the most loving thing. James Gustafson observes that “love”, like “situation”, is a word that runs through Fletcher’s book like a greased pig’—how does one catch and tie down such slippery items? Fletcher’s method, which in intention makes things easy and, as Gustafson notes, ‘omits any possibility of a bad conscience’, actually makes it impossible for me to know whether I have ever done what I should, and so leaves me with an anxious conscience every day. The way of relating love to law which requires the former to do duty for the latter does not make the life of Christian obedience easier for anyone.

But how are love and law related in the Bible itself? As follows:

First, no doubt ever appears about the universal applicability and authority of laws commanding and forbidding particular things—promise-keeping, payment of debts and care of one’s children, for instance, in the one case; murder, adultery and theft, for instance, in the other—and John tells us ‘this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments’ (I Jn. 5:3; *cf.* 2:3-5; 3:21-24, and Jesus’ words, Jn. 14-15, 21; 15:10). In 1957, before the situationist storm broke, John Murray wrote: ‘It is symptomatic of a pattern of thought current in many evangelical circles that the idea of keeping the commandments of God is not consonant with the liberty and spontaneity of the

Christian man, that *keeping* the law has affinities with legalism. . . .’ He then quotes the passages referred to above, beginning with John 14:15, ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’, and ending with 14:21, ‘He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me’, and concludes: ‘When there is a persistent animosity to the notion of keeping commandments the only conclusion is that there is either gross ignorance or malignant opposition to the testimony of Jesus.’ It is hard to see how this can be gainsaid.

Second, love of God has priority over neighbour-love. Jesus categorizes love of God as the great commandment, which comes first (Mt. 22:37f.). Scripture is full of instruction on how to trust, fear, praise and serve the Lord, and for this we may be grateful—no utilitarian calculus could possibly take its place! It is odd that situationists regularly ‘write as if love of God is wholly a matter of loving one’s neighbour, but in Scripture it is certainly not so.

Third, neighbour-love is to be directed by law. So far from seeing an antithesis and possible clash between the claims of persons and of principles, Scripture assumes that we can only meet the claims of persons as we hold to the God-taught principles in dealing with them, and the principles take the form of directives as to what should and should not be done to them. The theology, in a nutshell, is that God our Maker and Redeemer has revealed the unchanging pattern of response that he requires, and that man needs if he is to be truly himself. The pattern is both an expression of God’s own moral character, an indication of what he approves and disapproves, and also a due to man about his own nature and that of his *neighbour*. By adhering to the pattern we express and further our own true humanness on the one hand, and true love for our neighbour on the other. Our fellow man is always something of an enigma to us, just as we are something of an enigma to ourselves, but our Maker who knows our true nature and needs has told us how we are to do ourselves and each other real good. So love and law-keeping are mutually entailed, as Paul shows in Romans 13:8-10. The sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth commandments prohibit particular actions and attitudes (murder, adultery, theft, covetous jealousy) and Paul quotes them to make the double point that when we keep these commandments we love our neighbour as ourselves, and when we love our neighbour as ourselves we keep these commandments. The point is confirmed by John’s striking reasoning in I John 5:2: ‘By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God *and obey his commandments*.’ Neighbour-love fulfils the law.

Biblically, then, there is no antithesis between the motive of love and the divine directives which tell us what kinds of action on man’s part God approves and disapproves. Situationism is, after all, gratuitous.

The lesser evil

But if God’s laws, and the actions which they prescribe and prohibit, have fixed intrinsic values, as expressing God’s unchanging will for mankind, what are we to think and do when we find ourselves in situations where we cannot move at all without transgressing a divine prohibition, so that the best we can do is evil from one standpoint? Briefly, love’s task then is to find how to do the most good, and the least

evil; doing nothing is rarely the answer! Rightly, different principles come out on top in different situations: two Christians armed with ‘honour your parents’ and ‘do not steal’ might well act differently if one could only prevent his parents dying of hunger by stealing, while the other was being told to steal by his heavily gambling father. We may agree with the situationist that love for persons must arbitrate between the conflicting claims of moral principles, that doctrinaire decisions in such cases will not make the best of the bad job, and that unwillingness to face the situation’s full complexities, and insensitivity to the variety of rules and claims that apply, will lead straight into ironclad Pharisaic legalism. But we shall reject Fletcher’s grotesque idea that in such situations adultery, fornication, abortion, suicide and the rest, if thought the *best* course (which arguably in Fletcher’s cases they might be—we will not dispute that here), thereby become *good*: which valuation, as Fletcher himself emphasizes, leaves no room for regret at having had to do them. Instead, we shall insist that evil remains evil, even when, being the lesser evil, it appears the right thing to do; we shall do it with heavy heart, and seek God’s cleansing of our conscience for having done it.

In the film of Nicholas Monsarrat’s novel *The Cruel Sea*, a destroyer commander had to decide whether to drop a depth-charge that would kill dozens of desperate seamen struggling in the icy North Atlantic, but might also (*might*—there was no certainty) destroy the U-boat waiting on the sea floor to ravage the rest of the convoy. The alternative was to stop and pick up the swimmers. He headed through the men in the water and dropped the depth-charge. One of his men yelled, ‘Bloody murderer!’ He did not know if he hit the U-boat. The experience temporarily shattered him. He said: there are times when all we can do is guess our best, and then get down on our knees and ask God’s mercy. This is the most painful form of the lesser evil situation, that in which knowledge is limited and one does the evil that seems best knowing that it may not turn out best at all. The poignancy and justice of the commander’s words need no underlining. The most distressing feature of Fletcher’s often distressing book (in which, incidentally, there is a reference to this episode) is that, if he knows what Christian men feel at such times, he keeps quiet about it, and writes as if a dose of situationist casuistry will make them proof against it. One can only say: God help them if it does. Yet this is where situationism logically leads; Fletcher is only being clear-headed in pointing it out.

[check out the website for all of the references to the quotes used in the above analysis]

<http://www.the-highway.com/articleJan02.html>

Doug Goins: A Guide for Using our Freedom in Christ

Now we come to the good news in **10:23 - 11:1**. Paul talks about the opportunity to use our freedom for God's glory and for the good of other people. No matter what we're doing, we're to do it all to the glory of God. It's interesting to me that Paul refuses to lay down rules for practice that will apply to every Christian in every cultural setting, under all circumstances. Instead he summarizes spiritual principles that we must work out in our own setting where God has placed us. He gives us wonderful insights into making decisions about the gray areas of life and spirituality—some of the issues that our brothers in Romania struggle with in the life of their churches and in being salt and light in their culture. In **verses 23-30** Paul summarizes four principles in a kind of guide for

using our freedom in Christ for God's glory.

1. The first point is in **verse 23**: Edification is more important than our personal gratification.
2. The second principle in **verse 24**. Our freedom is going to express itself in serving other people.
3. Look at the third principle in **verses 25-27**. The good news is that liberty in Christ will always triumph over legalism.
4. Let's read the fourth principle in **verses 28-30**. Self-sacrifice on our part will triumph over any kind of condemnation, either self-condemnation or judgment by others.

<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/6446/4527.html>

Bob Deffinbaugh: In the specific context of our text, let us be very certain that those things we consider Christian liberties are really matters of liberty. And if indeed we do have the liberty to enjoy certain things, let us be willing to set aside the momentary pleasure we might gain from the exercise of our liberty for the good of our brother, the sake of the gospel, and the glory of our Lord.

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=799

James Boyer: In what situations should we be expected to forego our rights in deference to the uninstructed consciences of the weak brother? The scriptural context specifically applies it to:

- (1) eating meat offered to idols (**1 Cor. 8-10** and **Rom. 14**)
- (2) eating unclean foods (**Rom. 14**)
- (3) the observance of special days (**Rom. 14**)
- (4) the right to be married (**1 Cor. 9**)
- (5) the right of a minister to financial support (**1 Cor. 9**)
- (6) the Jew-Gentile distinction (**1 Cor. 9:20-22**)

It is to be noted that all of these are “morally indifferent” according to scriptural standards. None of them are matters which are right or wrong of themselves. Therefore, Scripture uses this principle of considerateness for the weaker brother as a secondary principle. It is to be used only if the issue of right or wrong is not involved. If the Bible says a thing is wrong, then this principle has no application whatever. The way it is frequently used by Christians to answer the questions of “worldly amusements” can hardly be justified unless it has first been determined that the particular worldly amusement under consideration is by scriptural standards not wrong in itself.

John MacArthur: **Using Freedom for God's Glory**

I. The Principles for Using Christian Freedom

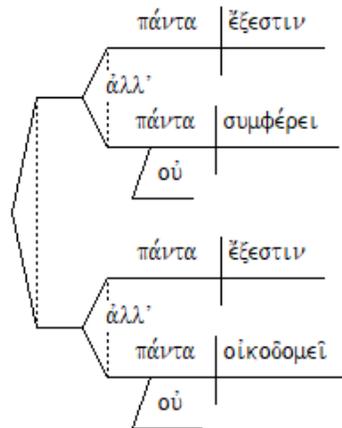
- edification over gratification
- others over self
- liberty over legalism
- condescension over condemnation

II. The Purpose for Using Christian Freedom = to glorify God

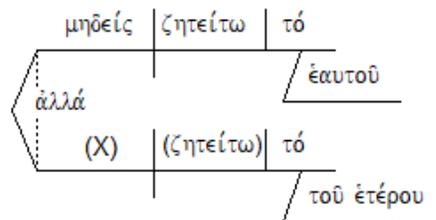
III. The Pattern for Using Christian Freedom Imitate Paul in imitating Christ

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

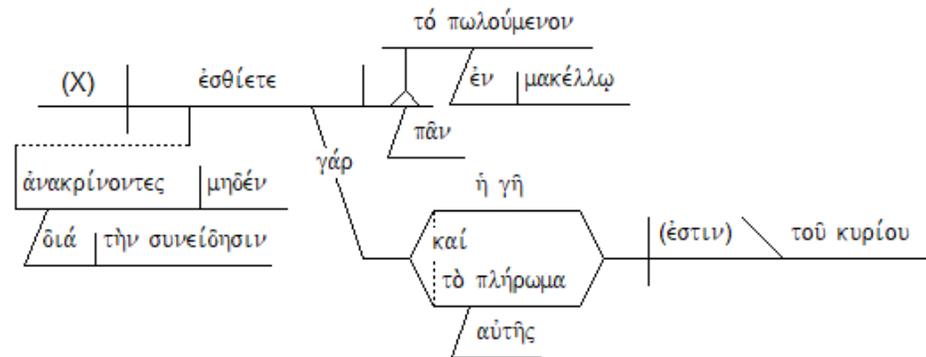
1Co 10:23



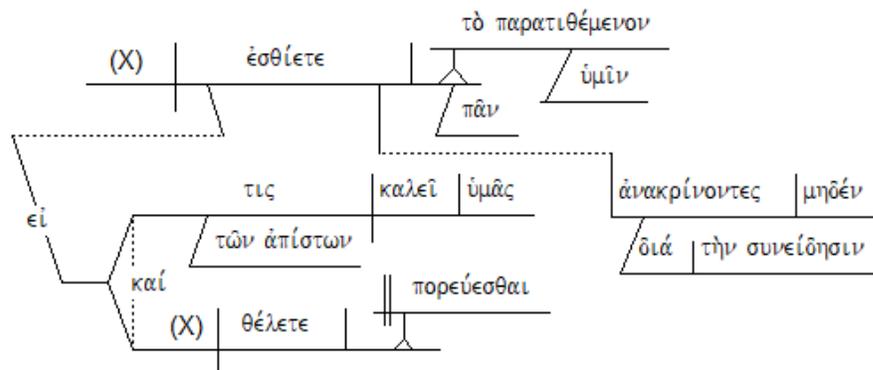
1Co 10:24



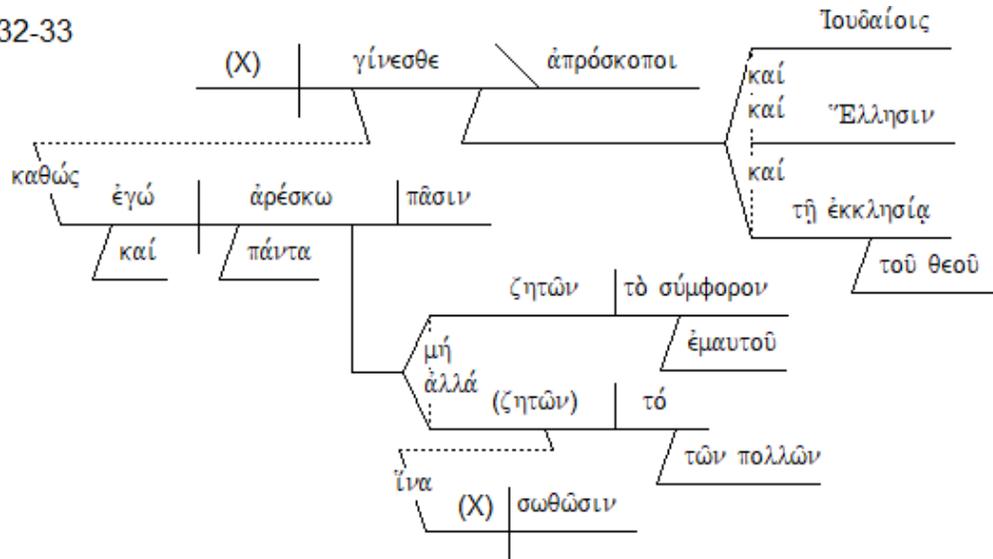
1Co 10:25-26



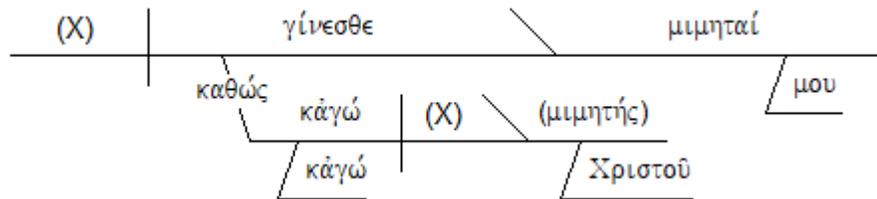
1Co 10:27



1Co 10:32-33



1Co 11:1



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

TITLE: *THE WOMAN IS THE GLORY OF MAN*

BIG IDEA:

WOMEN MUST APPROPRIATELY ACKNOWLEDGE THE AUTHORITY (HEADSHIP) OF MEN (BY WEARING THE SYMBOLIC CLOTH HEAD COVERING) AND AVOID DENIALS OF THEIR GOD-APPOINTED FEMININE ROLE

INTRODUCTION:

This is certainly a very controversial topic in light of the feminist movement in our culture. We see a woman running for President of the most powerful country in the world. We see churches attacked as outdated and chauvinistic if they limit the church office of elder and the role of preaching to men. We see much gender confusion with women pushing for a type of “Equality of the Sexes” that amounts to denying any role differentiations between men and women. So you have women serving in the military and holding the most powerful leadership positions in the business world.

The Apostle Paul had been dealing with issues related to a Christian’s liberties. Apparently some women in the church had taken the concept of liberality too far and were removing their cloth head-coverings that symbolized their submission to the headship (authority) of men. Paul felt this was an important error to address since the God-ordained creation order and differing roles of man and woman were a fundamental fabric both of society itself and of godly behavior in the church.

Mark Taylor: Commentators routinely recognize **11:2–16** as one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. At the outset it is helpful to emphasize what is clear in the passage, namely, that each believer should behave in worship in a manner that brings glory and honor to their respective head (**11:4–10**). This fundamental concern relates directly to the main emphasis of the previous section regarding food sacrificed to idols summed up in **10:23 – 11:1** as seeking the good of others in the ultimate pursuit of the glory of God. In **11:2–16** Paul submits that a man (husband) ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God (**11:7a**), and conversely, a woman (wife) should cover her head when praying and prophesying because she reflects the glory of man (**11:7b**). Thus, in keeping with the emphasis of the preceding section (**8:1 – 11:1**), Paul’s main concern in **11:2–16** is the edification of others to the glory of God.

David Garland: Paul addresses sexual propriety. When a wife converts to Christianity and learns that she is set free in Christ so that she can pray and prophesy in public, it does not mean that she can disregard social conventions. The emphasis on **shame and glory** reveals that to understand this text, one needs to appreciate the social clues associated with shame and honor. In this gender-divided shame/honor culture, the head of the family publicly symbolized the family’s honor, and members of the family were to behave in public so as not to bring disgrace or dishonor to that person and the family’s good name. A woman cannot acquire honor for the family but can only lose it (see **Sir. 42:9–14**). **R. Williams** (1997: 57) notes that “it is through the strict maintenance of her sexual purity and personal integrity that a woman contributes to her family’s honour.” The head covering “is a symbol of a woman’s shame, worn in public to mark her off as a private person intent on guarding her purity, and so maintaining the honour of her

husband and her father” (R. Williams 1997: 57–58). It communicates to others in public that the woman is demure, chaste, and modest, and that she intends to stay that way. The head covering in Paul’s setting was an important piece of apparel because no male wanted his wife or a female in his charge to appear in public in a way that hints, intentionally or unintentionally, that the opposite might be true. Derrett (1977: 172) comments, “The husband is entitled to his wife’s modesty in public even if their thoughts are directed towards God. For the husband’s rights are not forfeited simply because their spiritual status is changed by their conversion.”

The passage fits a chiastic pattern:

- A Commendation for maintaining the traditions handed on by Paul and the assertion of the basic principle that everyone has a head (11:2–3)
 - B Shame about coverings for men and women (11:4–5)
 - C Social impropriety for a woman to be uncovered; theological impropriety for a man to be covered (11:6–7)
 - D Theological explanation from the creation account (11:8–9)
 - E **Central assertion: for this reason a woman ought to have authority over her head (11:10)**
 - D’ Theological caveat from procreation (11:11–12)
 - C’ Social impropriety for a woman to be uncovered (11:13)
 - B’ Shame (and glory): lessons from nature about coverings for men and women (11:14–15)
 - A’ Admonition to conform to Paul’s customs and those of the churches of God (11:16)

Paul Gardner: Most commentators see the women’s action [in removing the traditional head covering] as reflecting the belief that “*in Christ*” all, including women, are free people and that sexual relationships in worship before the Lord simply do not matter at all. Hurley’s summary is useful: “It would seem quite likely that the Corinthian women had concluded that, having been raised with Christ (1 Cor 4:8–10), their new position in Christ and their resultant freedom to participate in the worship by prayer and prophecy was incompatible with wearing a sign of submission to their husbands! Paul defends their right to pray and prophesy, but does not see it as doing away with the marital relation. . . . Only at the resurrection will marital patterns be done away with completely (Matt 22:30). The Corinthians had not grasped the both/and of the present stage of the kingdom.”

David Prior: Paul’s four themes in this paragraph are submission, glory, interdependence and nature.

I. (:2-7) FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING OF THE HEADSHIP OF MEN OVER WOMEN AND HOW THAT RELATES TO THE NECESSITY OF WEARING THE SYMBOLIC CLOTH HEAD COVERING

A. (:2) Introductory Word of Commendation

1. Positive Approach of Prefacing Correction with Praise

“Now I praise you”

Surprising, because Paul did not have a lot of areas in which he was praising the church at Corinth; very gracious, diplomatic approach to dealing with a delicate topic

2. Two Reasons for the Commendation

- a. Loyal to the Personal Example of the Apostle Paul – Personal Connection
“because you remember me in everything”

Whom are we imitating in our church practices?

- b. Loyal to the Doctrinal Teachings of the Apostle Paul – Doctrinal Connection
“and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”

“traditions” can be either positive or negative – here viewed as the positive apostolic instruction in doctrine and practice that was essential in these transitional times before the full development of the Canon of Scripture

Mark Taylor: What Paul says in **11:2–16** is not merely his opinion but represents traditional teaching practiced by all the churches (**11:16**).

B. (:3) Reinforcement of the Fundamental Role Differentiations Involving Headship

1. Headship of Christ Over Man

“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man”

Concept of Headship had to involve primarily **Authority** ... some people today want to limit it to some reference to **“Source”** alone.

What does this picture of headship communicate?

Thomas Leake: head of every man, not just the church; **Heb. 2:8**

Mark Taylor: Scholars debate at length the precise nuance of the metaphorical sense, whether the term denotes “authority over,” “source,” or “that which is the foremost/at the top.”

The traditional, most widely held view until recent times maintains that the term in this context indicates a hierarchy that entails **authoritative leadership**, that is, the man (husband) as the head of the woman (wife) occupies a position of superior relational authority that corresponds to the principle of subordination within the Godhead. The woman (wife) is equal in essence but subordinate to the man (husband) in function and role. In the contemporary debate **Grudem** and **Fitzmyer** rigorously defend this position against others as the correct understanding of Paul’s usage of the term here.

Alternate View:

David Garland: The best option understands κεφαλή to mean “that which is most prominent, foremost, uppermost, pre-eminent” (**Perriman** 1994: 618; cf. LXX **Deut. 28:44; Lam. 1:5; Isa. 7:8–9; 9:13; Jer. 38:7**; Philo, Mos. 2.5 §30; Rewards 20 §125). According to Perriman (1994: 618), the noun applies to

- (1) “the physical top or extremity of an object, such as a mountain or river”;
- (2) “more abstractly, that which is first, extreme (temporarily or spatially)”;
- (3) “that which is prominent or outstanding”;
- (4) “that which is determinative or representative by virtue of its prominence.”

2. Headship of Man Over Woman

“and the man is the head of a woman”

Not restricting the context to the marital relationship of husband and wife

Richard Hays: In Greek there are no words equivalent to the English “husband” and “wife”: the generic words for “man” (an r) and “woman” (gyn) do double duty, and the context determines whether reference to a married couple is intended. In the present passage, however, the context does not give us much help. (The NRSV translates the words as “husband” and “wife” in v. 3, but as “man” and “woman” elsewhere the passage; this seems arbitrary. Most other translations employ the generic terms “man” and “woman” consistently throughout.) In the absence of any indicators to the contrary, it is preferable to understand Paul’s directives here as applying to everyone in the community, married or unmarried: women should have covered heads in worship; men should not.

3. Headship of God the Father Over Christ

“and God is the head of Christ.”

Certainly no concept of inferiority involved

Thomas Leake: Christ submitted to the will of the Father; **John 6:38**; Jesus did not send the Father but the other way around (**1 Cor. 15:28**).

C. (:4-7) Explanation of the Need for a Head Covering for the Woman

1. (:4-5a) The Issue Involves Respecting vs Disgracing Your Head

a. How does a Man Disgrace His Head?

“Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head.”

Thomas Leake: Problem of the **context** mentioned here for “*praying and prophesying*” -- The context of “*praying and prophesying*” does not refer here to the entire church gathered together for public worship because it is clear from **1 Cor. 14** that women were not allowed even to speak in such a context. Also it would seem that **vs. 17** talks about when they come together in the worship assembly in contrast to preceding verses [But others argue from the parallel expressions “*I praise*” vs 1 ... “*I do not praise*” **vs. 17** that these must be the same contexts in view]; How do you harmonize the two passages that seem to allow for women prophecying and then seem to restrict that in the assembly?? Take **chap 11:4-5** as a **less formal setting than the full worship service**.

Alternate View:

Mark Taylor: Both the Old and New Testament recognize women prophets. In **Acts 2:14–21** Peter announces at Pentecost the fulfillment of **Joel 2:28**, which includes the prediction that “*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.*” Paul’s concern in **11:2–16** is not the fact that women are prophesying in Corinth but rather the manner of their praying and prophesying. In the parallel passage, **14:33b–36**, which occurs in the context of doing all things unto edification and in an orderly manner (**14:26, 40**), Paul instructs the wives to remain silent in certain situations and to learn from their husbands at home.

b. (:5a) How does a Woman Disgrace Her Head?

“But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head;”

Gordon Fee: But what specifically does it mean for the woman to pray and prophesy “with her head uncovered”? There are three basic options:

(1) The long-held view from an earlier time considered her to be discarding some kind of external covering. This was understood as implied by both the verb “to cover” and the words about the man (v. 7), which seem to suggest an external covering (he “ought not to cover his head”). The difficulty with this view comes mostly from understanding the final word regarding the women (v. 15), which says that a woman’s long hair is given to her instead of a peribolaion (lit. “a wraparound,” hence something like a shawl).

(2) Because of this final word regarding the women (v. 15), some have argued that the “covering” contended for earlier (vv. 4–7 and 13) is actually the long hair picked up in the final word regarding the women (vv. 14–15), thus suggesting that some of the women were having their hair cut short. But this has against it the explicit language and grammar of the first things said regarding the women (vv. 5–6), where Paul argues by analogy that they should be shaved or shorn if they will not be “covered.”

(3) Other, more recent, scholars suggested on the basis of a usage in the LXX that the adjective “uncovered” refers to “loosed hair,” that is, to letting her long hair down in public and thus experiencing shame. While this is attractive in many ways, it has its own set of difficulties: how the man’s not covering his head (v. 7) is the opposite of this; what to do again with the final word about the women (v. 15), which implies that long hair, not piled-up hair, serves in the place of a shawl; and the fact that there is no sure first-century evidence that a woman’s long hair in public would have been a disgrace of some kind.

Although none of this is without some measure of difficulty, the **traditional view** still seems to be the best by a considerable margin -- in the sense of having fewer difficulties(!) -- since in every case the greater problem lies with the final word about the women (v. 15).

2. (:5b-6) Argument from the Lesser to the Greater --

Same Category as Shaving a Woman’s Head – just more extreme

“for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.

For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off;

but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.”

David Prior: If a Christian woman became so uninhibited in public worship that she dispensed with the outward symbol of her submissiveness, then she ought (following the logic of her lack of submission) to have cut off her hair and thus removed at a stroke the distracting impact of her ‘crowning glory’. But that was obviously not the Christian way to behave (and certainly would have flouted the norms of Corinthian society); therefore she ought to accept the discipline of

keeping a veil on her head, especially when so moved by the Spirit in prayer or in prophecy that she was tempted to fling all her inhibitions to the wind.

3. (:7) Distinction of God-Appointed Roles Must be Maintained

a. Man is the Image and Glory of God

*“For a man ought not to have his head covered,
since he is the image and glory of God”*

b. Woman is the Glory of Man

“but the woman is the glory of man.”

II. (:8-12) PRIMARY ARGUMENT BASED ON ORIGINATION WHICH CREATES A NECESSARY ROLE DIFFERENTIATION

A. (:8-10) Three Reasons Why it Makes Sense for Women to Wear the Cloth Head Covering

1. (:8) Woman Originates from Man

“For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man”

2. (:9) Woman Was Created For Man

*“for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake,
but woman for the man’s sake.”*

3. (:10) Submission of Woman to Man Matters to Angels

*“Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head,
because of the angels.”*

This is a powerful argument in favor of the symbol still being valid today and essential. Angels cannot see into the heart of a woman to determine if she has the proper attitude of submission. They must see the visible symbol. Yes, there can still be hypocrisy, but that is a separate issue.

B. (:11-12) Balancing Perspective (to mitigate against abuse)

1. Mutual Dependence

*“However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man,
nor is man independent of woman.*

*For as the woman originates from the man,
so also the man has his birth through the woman”*

David Prior: This parenthesis [:11-12] is a necessary corrective to Paul’s strong teaching on the distinctiveness of the man and the woman as created in God’s image. In the Lord, that is, in Christ, the man and the woman (husband and wife) are completely interdependent. He has been arguing strongly for the wife to be submissive to her husband, and for that attitude to be publicly spelt out whenever God’s people gather for worship. Here he argues with equal strength that the two are one in Christ, totally bound up with each other, inseparable and interdependent. It is true physically (12), but it is even more true in the Lord. Both the man and the woman owe their existence to God: all things come from God. Christian worship is expressed best when together such married couples visibly give the Lord the glory of their interdependent lives.

2. Primacy of God

“and all things originate from God”

III. (:13-16) THREE SECONDARY SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS WHICH LEAD TO THE SAME CONCLUSION – THE WOMEN MUST CONTINUE THE SYMBOLIC PRACTICE OF WEARING THE CLOTH HEAD COVERING

A. (:13) Argument From Propriety

“Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?”

B. (:14-15) Argument From Nature

“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.”

David Prior: Each human being is to give glory to God by being what God intends him or her to be. **The man is to be truly masculine and the woman truly feminine**, without allowing stereotypes of either to dictate our perceptions, but rather basing our understanding of what it is to be fully human on the perfect model of Jesus. This principle will make us chary of going overboard on the modern theme of ‘unisex’. The fullness of Christian worship can be experienced only as each man and each woman, created for God and redeemed by God, allows his or her humanness to be expressed according to God’s pattern.

C. (:16) Argument From Universal Church Practice

“But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.”

Robert Gundry: That “*the churches of God*” follow this custom strengthens the appeal further. The prior grounding of Paul’s instruction in the theology of headship and creation and in nature itself undermines any attempt to treat the custom as culturally relative rather than culturally absolute.

APPLICATION:

The difficulty in this passage is all about application. Apart from the easy-to-answer objections of the feminists to the clearly defined role differentiations, we are left to wrestle with the thorny issue of whether God really expects women today in our culture to still wear head coverings in some context of Christian gatherings. This is an issue which the modern church does not have much appetite to investigate. Where is the perceived benefit to try to re-introduce a practice that most people would find to be bizarre at best? On the other hand, the issue is always about what is pleasing to the Lord and consistent with His revealed will.

There are two main approaches for the biblical scholar who cares about practicing what he believes to be the truth:

1) The majority will argue that the **principle of submission** is the focal point of the passage and the area of obedience of concern to God. The practice of wearing the head covering was cultural

and not obligatory for today. The fact that the head covering has lost its symbolism in today's culture would make it unnecessary and even overly restrictive to try to re-introduce the symbol and re-educate people as to its significance. A strong argument from silence would be to note that the OT never claims that Eve was commanded to wear any type of head covering from the beginning. It would seem that she was naked in the garden originally; and after the Fall the garments which the Lord made for them did not include a head covering for Eve (**Gen. 3:21**).

However, the difficulty is that the arguments used in the passage seem to extend beyond cultural lines of reasoning and have a more universal application. Perhaps Paul is more concerned with the statement made by women removing the head covering rather than by the necessity of wearing the head covering itself. But again, the nature of the arguments do not point in that direction.

2) Some will dare to argue and practice that we need to take the Scriptures at face value in this text as everywhere else. And as strange as it seems to us, we need to make an issue of women needing to wear the required head covering. (The point would not be to coerce women against their conscience to adopt such behavior; that would be legalistic. Rather there would be teaching to re-establish the symbolism intended by God and women taking up this practice as a matter of personal conviction.) However, that puts us in very strange company in today's world. One would not want to create unnecessary obstacles to people embracing a church community. But the determining factor still must be: How clear is the Lord's revelation on this subject and what application does He desire for us?

If the practice needs to be re-instituted, one must address a wide range of questions that are problematic:

- **Who** is required to wear the head covering? The instruction goes beyond application just to married women. At what age would it become appropriate?
- What is the **context** in today's spiritual experience where "*praying and prophesying*" take place? Many people who have adopted the practice have limited its expression to the main public worship service. But the passage seems to go beyond that since women were not allowed to take a vocal leadership role in that context. Is the head covering something that you would put on and take off repeatedly? Should it have application in private prayer (probably not)? How about prayer within the context of the home, but not public prayer?
- **What type of covering** should be worn? Must it be opaque and truly cover the head as opposed to just a symbolic little cap?

The temptation is to admit to the complexity and allow others to wrestle with the details! You certainly have to have a very strong level of conviction to move forward in this direction.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How many generations ago did women in America typically wear head coverings in church? Why do you think our cultural practice changed?

- 2) Why do we still see men typically remove their hats before any public prayer?
- 3) What types of things most capture the interest of angels and why do you think this is the case?
- 4) What type of a distinction should we see in our culture in terms of hair length and hair styles for men and women? How can we encourage this without being legalistic?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God’s instructions, not past experiences, must govern Christian worship if it is to be pleasing to him.

- I. We Must Honor the Principle of Divinely Ordained Authority (**11:2-3**).
- II. We Must Honor the Principle of Proper Social Expectations (**11:4-6**).
- III. We Must Honor the Principles of Glory, Creation, and Purpose (**11:7-9**).
- IV. We Must Honor the Principles of Angelic Observation and Submission (**11:10**).
- V. We Must Honor the Principle of Interdependency (**11:11-12**).
- VI. We Must Honor the Principle of Nature (**11:13-15**).
- VII. We Must Honor the Principle of Common Practice (**11:16**).

I am an unapologetic complementarian when it comes to gender and gender roles in the church and the home. I believe “*The Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*” (1987) and “*The Nashville Statement on Human Sexuality and Gender Roles*” (2017) faithfully reflect biblical and theological truth. Among their affirmations and denials, we find the following statements, which are relevant to **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**.

- Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (“Danvers”).
- Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order (“Danvers”).
- WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God’s original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing. WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome (“Nashville,” article 4).
- The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (**Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18; Gal. 3:28**). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (**Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15**) (“Danvers”).
- Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
- In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands’ authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands’ leadership (**Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7**) (“Danvers”).

- In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (**Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15**). (“Danvers”).
- WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times [**Eph. 4:15**], including when we speak to or about one another as male or female. WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God’s design of his image-bearers as male and female (“Nashville,” article 11).

Such statements sound countercultural (and they are!) in a society awash in so much confusion about gender and sexuality.

Thomas Leake: Can Women Be Both Submissive & Liberated?

6 Truths About the Principle of Submission

Introduction: Very tough passage; There is a proper way for both men and women to behave in worship and in their distinctive roles. Much misleading teaching has grown up around **Gal. 3:28**. This text deals with salvation privileges in general – especially the future inheritance; everybody (man and woman, slave and master) gets the same glorious inheritance. However, that does not mean that these distinctions in society have been wiped out and no longer apply.

What today is sexism and what is not? Is it wrong for a woman to want a man to act like a man and vice versa? Should there be no distinctions in roles??

- man: lead, provide for, and protect
- woman: affirm, receive, and nurture

1) (:2-3) The Principle of Submission Declared

Concept of Headship involves Authority; Paul uses the word in contrast to the body (**Eph. 5:22-30**); Submission is involved = being obedient to authority over you; **Titus 2:3-8**; What kind of body doesn’t obey its head? Head does not need another head but a body to uphold it and support it; The image is simple and clear
God did not design woman to lead man

2) (:4-6) The Cultural Practice of Submission

Takes the position that the wearing of the actual head covering cloth had a cultural symbolic meaning that no longer exists today; so it would not be appropriate to wear the head covering today. (quote from **Wayne Grudem**)

What exactly was the head covering? Lit., *something hung down from the head*

- Right view: some type of lengthy veil or shawl hanging down -- **Esther 6:12; Gen. 24:65; 38:14**
- referring to a woman’s long hair itself – but that leads to absurdities when you talk about covering and uncovering
- a woman’s hair pinned up into a bun at the top rather than flowing down; **Num. 5:18**; but this does not work in terms of the contrast with man
- Style of the head covering was not Paul’s main concern ... but it was **some type of cloth covering separate from her hair**

How can women today show their submission? (if the symbol no longer has validity)

- by their behavior
- by their propriety and modesty in how they dress
- by how they speak when around men
- by affirming male leadership

3) (:7-10) The Defense of the Principle of Submission

“glory” = that which flows out from a declared greatness of the original

“liberation” is an affront to God; a shame to woman; and robs man of his due

4) (:11-12) The Principle of Submission Balanced by Interdependence

Wrong for man to use headship in selfish ways;

Christianity elevated the role of women in society

5) (:13-15) The Appeal to Common Sense About Submission

What is long hair today? “dropping to shoulders” -- There must be a distinction in length and style between man and woman

6) (:16) The Universal Practice of Submission

Sermons can be listened to at www.hopebiblechurch.org

“*Let Her Be Veiled*” -- Edited by **Tom Shank**:

Survey a host of Bible commentaries on **1 Corinthians 11** and you will find that generally only since the beginning of this century has the practice of wearing the veiling been interpreted away by liberal scholars, and the church has followed their lead. . .

It is Important to keep in mind that in writing this epistle to the Corinthian Christians, Paul was speaking not only to them, but also to "*all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...*" (**ch. 1:2**). With prophetic foresight, Paul was perhaps seeing that his letters, as statements of apostolic doctrine, were going to be widely circulated. All of his epistles had universally applicable messages even though he was also speaking to local needs and problems. With this in mind, we realize that his teaching concerning the veiling of women was not to a specific socio-cultural situation, but to all the churches everywhere, as **1 Cor. 11: 16** also clearly points out. . .

Man's headship over woman is a relationship for this age, and has Its origin in the creation account itself. Man's headship is not just a result of the fall, but was established in the Garden of Eden in that she was created out of man and was a "helper comparable to him" (**Gen.2: 18**). Eve's sin in the Garden was in one sense her breaking this headship principle by disobeying God and enticing Adam, She thereby overstepped her place as helpmeet, and thus nullified her authority and influence Man's headship over woman is not abolished in the church, because it is an aspect of God's government in this world for the effectual achieving of His purposes. . .

We serve a God who for various reasons has put great emphasis upon symbols and their meaning. The O.T. Is full of types and symbols which point to and prepare for the fuller revelation and reality of the new covenant. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with

Abraham; baptism corresponds to It. The head veiling serves to remind us that even though we are in a new covenant and have entered into the boundless freedom of Christ, yet God's governmental distinctions which were established in the Garden are yet in force while this creation lasts. . .

* * * * *

Quoting from **Watchman Nee**:

The meaning of head covering is: I submit myself to God's government; I accept God's appointed position; I dare not nullify His government by the grace I have received; I do not even dare to think about it; on the contrary, I accept God's government. As Christ accepts God as His head, so should every man accept Christ as his head. Likewise, woman should representatively accept man as her head. In covering the head, the woman signifies that she is not head, that she is as if she has no head - for it is covered....

God calls upon the sisters to show this arrangement. It is through the sisters that God's governmental system is to be displayed. It is the sisters who are responsible to have the sign of obedience on their heads. God specifically requires women to have their head covered when praying or prophesying. Why? Because they ought to know God's government when they come before Him. In going before God to pray for people or in going before people to prophesy for God, whether in praying or in prophesying, whether in that which goes to God or in that which comes from God, in whatever is related to God, head covering is demanded. The purpose is to manifest the government of God....

* * * * *

If one thinks that her hair is the only covering implied in this chapter, they need only replace the word '*covering*' in **verses 4, 5, 6, 7, and 13** with the word 'hair', and they will quickly see how absurd such a notion is.

The final blow to this argument is found in **verse 6**, where Paul says "*If a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn*". The word '*also*' (kai) can't but be implying an artificial covering besides the hair. To paraphrase this verse with this assumption in mind, it would read, "If her head is not covered with hair, then let her hair be cut." How can you cut something that isn't there?!

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Cyprus/7560/LetHerBeVeiled.html>

Thomas Schreiner: Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity

The Son has a different function or role from the Father, not an inferior being or essence. This point is often missed by evangelical feminists. They conclude that a difference in function necessarily involves a difference in essence; i.e., if men are in authority over women, then women must be inferior. The relationship between Christ and the Father shows us that this reasoning is flawed. One can possess a different function and still be equal in essence and worth. Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home. Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply His inferiority.

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2820

David Silversides: Is Headcovering Biblical? – in Puritanism Today

Our feminist culture certainly does expose the church to the temptation to abandon the Scriptural sign of acceptance of male and female distinctiveness. . .

The idea that we must find ‘culturally relevant’ ways of expressing male headship becomes obviously absurd in a culture like ours where every trace of male leadership is being eradicated. .

The Danger of the Cultural Argument.

The random imposition on a passage of Scripture of cultural considerations has serious repercussions for Biblical interpretation generally. As an example of this approach applied to other passages relating to gender issues, let us see how it works with **1 Tim 2:11-14**.

- a) The concession - the principle of male leadership is based on the creation order and is permanent.
- b) The assumption - in the culture of the 1st century AD, the woman’s acceptance of male leadership was expressed by her being silent in public assemblies (probably more easily provable than the use of headcovering).
- c) The conclusion - female silence wasn’t the real issue, but the principle of male headship which may find different expression according to time and place. Therefore, women may now, in our culture, preach and teach in the church.

Again, the repercussions of the random appeal to culture approach on other aspects of worship should be kept in mind. Immediately after the headcovering passage, we have the section relating to the Lord’s Supper. Let us see how the random cultural approach applies in **1 Corinthians 11 v23-27**.

- a) The concession - the principle that an ordinance commemorating the death of Christ in a meal is to be observed is permanent.
- b) The assumption - bread and wine were the normal elements of food and drink in the 1st Century AD (undoubtedly true) and can be assumed were only used in the Lord’s supper for cultural reasons.
- c) The conclusion - We are to remember Christ’s death by communal partaking of food and drink, but the precise elements will depend on the culture of time and place (tea and biscuits or coke and crisps etc.). . .

John Bunyan 1628-1688

“For this cause ought the woman to have power”, that is a covering, “on her head, because of the angels” **1 Cor.11:10**...Methinks, holy and beloved sisters, you should be content to wear this power or badge...”

Ligonier Ministries (1996)

“Our actions must conform to the principles that God has established...Do you disregard the exterior aspects of religion, saying the heart is all that matters? If so, confess your pride before God today.

Whenever we have a lesson from both the Scriptures and from nature, we are doubly bound to obey. We also must recognize that it is a rule rooted in nature, not custom.

If it is shameful for a woman to have her head shaved, then she must realize that it is just as shameful for her to enter public worship with her head uncovered. We must not confuse Paul's use of hair as 'nature's covering' and the covering he is exhorting women to wear in public worship.

Nowhere does (Paul) give cultural reasons for his teaching, i.e. abusive practices of a pagan society that placed prostitutes with shorn heads in the temple. Paul points back to God's established order in nature. Whenever a teaching in Scripture refers to 'creation ordinances', that teaching is binding for all cultures in all ages...

The 'rules of decorum'...regarding the worship of God are established by God Himself not by the whims of culture. It is proper for a woman to have a symbol of authority on her head...The necessity of the symbol remains fixed even as the authority of the man remains fixed."

(From 'Table Talk' Devotional Guide for June 17-24, 1996, pp.36-43 – quoted by Sanseri op. cit. pp.278f.) . . .

Female head-covering was the norm in the majority of churches for centuries. The comparatively recent change of this state of affairs is, we suspect, not due to greater exegetical insight or true scholarly advance, but concession to the spirit of the age in which we live.

<http://puritanismtoday.wordpress.com/2006/05/31/is-headcovering-biblical-1/>

Matthew Henry: Note, The sexes should not affect to change places. The order in which divine wisdom has placed persons and things is best and fittest: to endeavour to amend it is to destroy all order, and introduce confusion. The woman should keep to the rank God has chosen for her, and not dishonour her head; for this, in the result, is to dishonour God. If she was made out of the man, and for the man, and made to be the glory of the man, she should do nothing, especially in public, that looks like a wish of having this order inverted.

Miles Stanford: History of the Plymouth Brethren Assemblies

Experience of Dr. Ironsides: Dr. Ironside certainly knew whereof he spoke. During his illustrious and fruitful lifetime, he moved from the Salvation Army to the open Brethren to the closed Brethren (Grantites), to an extended ministry as pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, and thence into Glory. He authored a book, titled A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement -- An Account of Its Inception, Progress, Principles and Failures, and Its Lessons for Present-Day Believers [5]. Sometimes one can judge a book by its cover!

The assemblies have always insisted upon female silence in the meetings, and submission in the home. The possible over-emphasis and overbearing attitude of the men along these lines have in many instances produced a traumatic effect upon the female constituency. Some have claimed that this has brought about a situation whereby the women actually control many present-day assemblies--through their husbands!

Over-emphasis in any realm always has its penalties, no matter how well-intentioned or how biblical. The Brethren still insist that their women wear head coverings as a sign of submission; but a bit of net or cloth doily--or even a full-fledged and flowered bonnet--do not always prove the presence of a submissive spirit, do they?

<http://www.withchrist.org/MJS/pbs.htm>

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

However, to speak of head covering as an "apostolic custom" is to say more than Scripture says. There is no place in Scripture that establishes that God has mandated the custom of woman's head covering for his believers in all times and in all places.

Then why does Paul argue so strongly for it in **1 Corinthians 11**? Even the pagan culture of that day recognized to some degree from the law written on the heart the concept of head and helper which God established at creation. It was not an apostolic mandated custom, but the general culture of Paul's day that had the expectation that women would wear a head covering. Paul urges the women of Corinth to abide by that custom of the day because it was a reflection of a God-given principle. Paul's whole point is based on the fact that for the women of the Corinthian congregation to flaunt that custom would be to speak against God's principle of head and helper that Paul clearly restates in verse 3.

You are correct that our own culture also once had a similar custom. And, as you mentioned, you can find remnants of that in some places. And were that custom still in general practice in our day, Christian women would be in danger of giving the same impression of ignoring God's principle if they ignored that cultural custom that reflected it. However, whether for good or bad reasons, that custom has ceased to be common in our culture. To insist upon reinstating it would be to elevate a custom of men to the level of a principle of God.

http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?1518&cuTopic_topicID=30&culitem_itemID=15544

Warren Henderson: Glories Seen & Unseen – A Study of the Head Covering. Scroll Publishing, 2007.

Why did God take such care to create the Seraphim with six wings and the Cherubim with four wings? To ensure that all “competing glories” would be hidden and to provide a visible representation of divine order throughout the dominion of Almighty God. . .

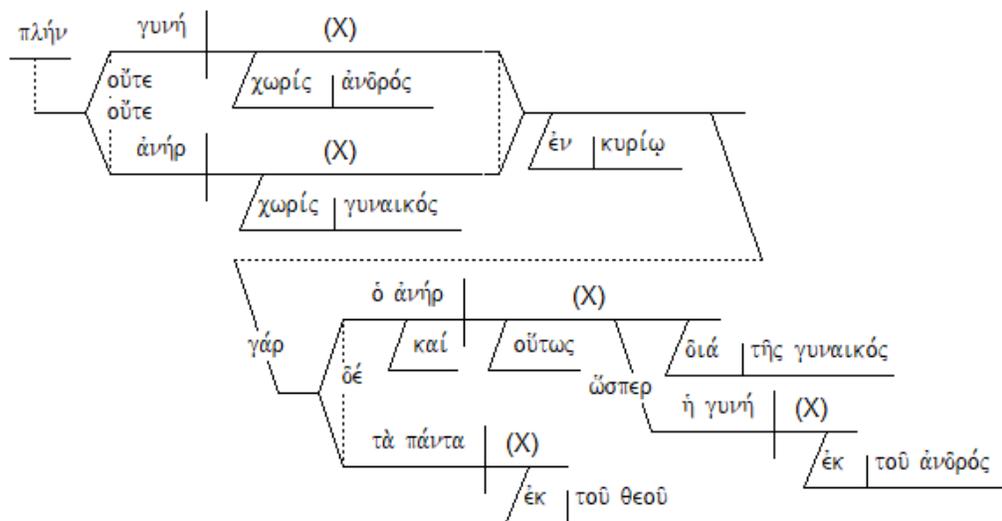
What is symbolic truth? Simply stated, it is an act or object that epitomizes a spiritual fact. God knows that we are forgetful creatures, so He surrounds us with constant reminders of Himself, lest we forget his accomplishments. . .

This symbolic practice of covering ensures that only the glory of Almighty God is seen and all other competing glories remain unseen. Proper covering gives the visible evidence of order in the heavenly realms as well as in the assemblies of God's people on earth. Divine order is fundamental and central to the proper functioning of any local church, and it should thus be expressed symbolically in the church's public gatherings through the head covering. . .

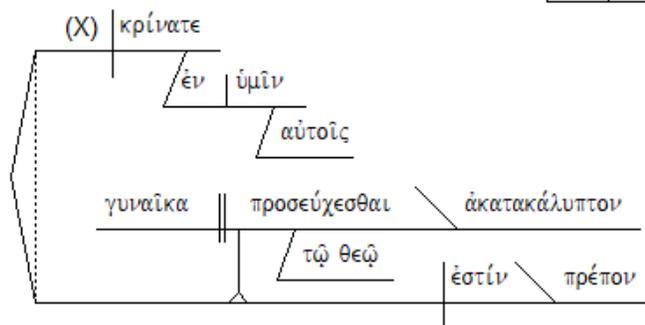
To summarize [the data from church history], in two generations a Christian practice spanning two millennia was generally lost. Apparently, the head covering practice became unfashionable and lost its spiritual significance. In short, Christianity in the early 20th century still maintained the “what” – the head covering, but had generally lost the “why” – the scriptural principle. It is an important lesson for us to pass down to our children. Whenever we don't understand “why” we are practicing something, we ultimately lose the practice. “The why” must be declared to keep “the what”!

<http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/more-Glories.html>

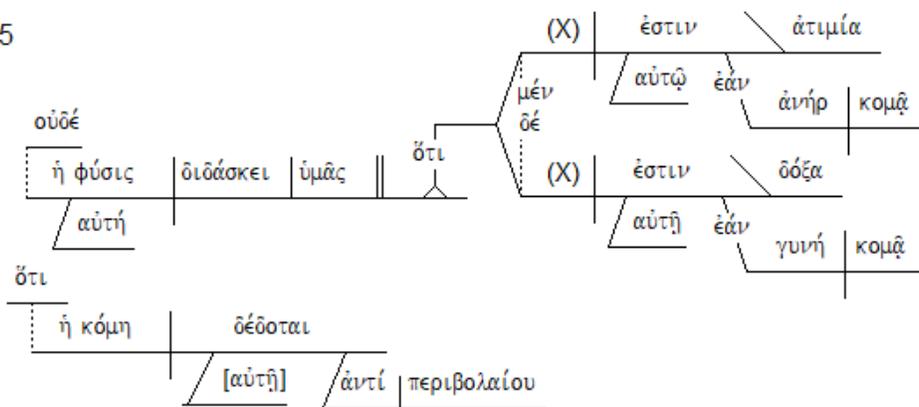
1Co 11:11-12



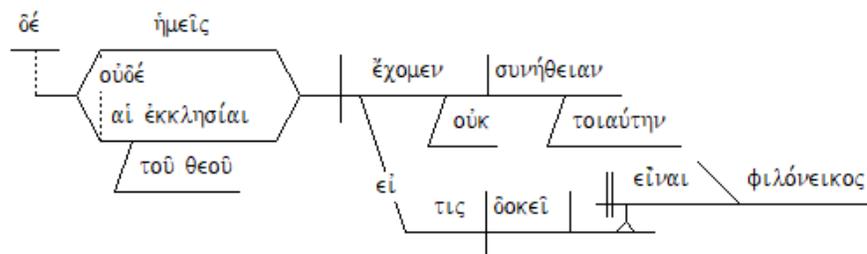
1Co 11:13



1Co 11:14-15



1Co 11:16



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

TITLE: CORRECTING ABUSES REGARDING THE LORD'S SUPPER

BIG IDEA:

THE PROPER PRACTICE OF THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:

- PROMOTES THE UNITY OF THE BODY
- PROCLAIMS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRUCIFIXION
- PROTECTS AGAINST DIVINE DISCIPLINE

INTRODUCTION:

The Lord's Supper was instituted as the central act of Christian worship. Its simplicity and symbolism point to the depth and richness of the significance of the Lord's crucifixion for our salvation. Abuses in the practice of the Lord's Supper at the church of Corinth led to these important words of correction from the pen of the Apostle Paul. The context was the love feast or potluck fellowship meal that led up to the observance of the divine ordinance. The abuses surrounded the selfish indulgence of the believers at Corinth on such occasions. The divisions in Paul's day seemed to revolve around social and economic status as the believers failed to share their food and drink in a way that would unite their fellowship. Today the divisions are even more dramatic revolving around the significance of the ordinance itself. The Roman Catholic mass takes the extreme position that the bread and the wine actually become the body and blood of Christ and communicate grace to the participants. But even within Protestantism there have been differing views regarding the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper.

Richard Hays: The source of the report is unnamed, but probably the news of the Corinthians' **disunity** at table had been brought to Paul either by Chloe's people (**1:11**) or by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**16:17**). Division in the community has been a consistent concern of the letter; therefore, we should not be surprised that their differences find expression in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, although the divisions here may not be precisely the same as the factions that Paul deplored in **1:10–17** and **3:1–4**. In any case, the meal that should be the symbol and seal of their oneness has in fact become an occasion for some of them to shame others (**11:21–22**). Thus, their assembly for the common meal has actually become an occasion for them to "*eat and drink judgment against themselves*" (v. **29**). That is why Paul says that "*when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse*" (v. **17**). . .

Two preliminary observations about the original **historical setting** will help to keep our reading of the passage in focus.

First, when Paul refers to the Lord's Supper at Corinth, he is not talking about a liturgical ritual celebrated in a church building. At this early date, there were no separate buildings for Christian worship. The Lord's Supper was an **actual meal eaten**

by the community in a private home. Commentators sometimes refer to a distinction - - documentable only later in church history -- between “the agape” (love-feast) and “the eucharist,” but Paul makes no such distinction. Evidently, the sharing of the symbolic bread and cup of the Lord’s Supper occurred as a part of a common meal; otherwise, the passage makes no sense. Christians accustomed to experiencing the Lord’s Supper only as a ritual “in church,” removed from a meal setting, will need to discipline their imaginations to keep this original setting in mind.

Second, the problem that Paul is addressing at Corinth is not (overtly) a problem of sacramental theology; rather, it is a problem of social relations within the community. Paul’s vision of community comes into conflict with the Corinthians’ conventional social mores, which require distinctions of rank and status to be recognized at table: the more privileged members expect to receive more and better food than others. Paul regards this as a humiliation for the community and as an abuse of the Supper of the Lord, whose own example contradicts such status divisions. Paul appeals to the tradition of Jesus’ institution of the meal in order to highlight Jesus’ death and to remind the Corinthians that they are to remember him as they eat together; this memory should bring a halt to their selfish behavior.

With these points in mind, we can turn to a reading of the passage, which has three main parts.

1. In the first part (vv. 17–22) Paul describes and deplores the behavior of the Corinthians.
2. In the second part (vv. 23–26) he reminds them of the tradition of the institution of the Supper.
3. Finally, in the third part (vv. 27–34) he draws inferences about the meaning of the tradition for reshaping their practices of sharing the meal.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Examine yourself when taking the Lord’s Supper, repenting of all sin and selfishness and uniting with believers around the work of Christ.

I. We Must Deal with Problems When We Come (11:17-22).

- A. We must deal with divisiveness (11:17-19).
- B. We must deal with selfishness (11:20-22).

II. We Must Honor the Meal’s Purposes When We Come (11:23-26).

- A. It is a commemoration of the Lord’s death (11:23-25).
- B. It is a proclamation that anticipates the Lord’s return (11:26).

III. We Must Make Preparation When We Come (11:27-34).

- A. There must be personal examination of ourselves (11:27-32).
- B. There must be humble consideration of others (11:33-34).

Evangelicals and Baptists limit the number of ordinances to two because only baptism and the Lord’s Supper meet five important criteria:

1. They were prescribed by the Lord.

2. They were proclaimed among the saints.
3. They were practiced by the churches.
4. They were participated in only by the saved.
5. They picture the atoning sacrifice and bodily resurrection of Jesus.

I. (:17-22) SHAMEFUL SCHISMS – THE PROPER PRACTICE OF THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER PROMOTES THE UNITY OF THE BODY

A. (:17) Constructive Criticism

1. Correction Necessary

“But in giving this instruction,”

When people are involved in practices that are hurting the church instead of edifying the body, the Word of God must be applied first to provide instruction, and then followed up in a way to administer reproof, correction and then training in righteousness (**2 Tim. 3:16**).

2. Commendation Not Possible

“I do not praise you,”

3. Coming Together Not Productive

“because you come together not for the better but for the worse.”

John MacArthur: It would have been much better for those Corinthians never to have had a love feast, and even never to have observed the Lord’s Communion, than to have so abused them. They came together *not for the better but for the worse*. The term for *worse* is a comparative of *kakos*, which represents moral evil. Instead of the celebrations being times of loving fellowship and spiritual enrichment they involved selfish indulgence, shaming the poorer brethren, mocking the Lord’s sacrificial death, and scandalizing the church before the unbelieving world around them.

Paul Gardner: Throughout this letter it has become clear that Paul wants the Corinthians to “*build up*” others and work for the benefit of others. It is this that Paul has in mind as he speaks of “*not for the better but for the worse*.” The “worse” means that people are being led away from the covenant relationship that the meal signifies rather than being built up in it. The “better,” had it happened as it should have, would have meant that the meal was serving to confirm their covenant commitment to each other as well as to the Lord.

David Garland: Paul’s accusation is that the meal that was supposed to be a sign of their integration and unity has become a flash point highlighting their inequality and alienation. This calamitous state of affairs, which could only feed arrogance and nourish bitterness, makes him wish that they had no group meal at all. Their assembly is not simply a waste of time; it is downright harmful. Paul specifies the harmful effects in the

third part of this section: they become liable for the body and blood of the Lord (11:27); they incur condemnation (11:29, 32); and they are beset by sickness and death (11:30).

B. (:18-19) Demonstrative Divisions

1. (:18) Divisions Disrupt Body Unity

a. Importance of the Issue

“For, in the first place”

Paul doesn't always follow out his enumerations.

b. Identity as One Body

“when you come together as a church”

c. Report of Divisions

“I hear that divisions exist among you”

d. Credibility of the Problem

“and in part I believe it.”

2. (:19) Divisions Separate True Believers From Pretenders

a. Inevitability of Divisions

“For there must also be factions among you,”

Paul Gardner: Paul sees this sort of horrendous division as being part of God's way of revealing those who are truly his and those who are not. *“It is necessary”* (δεῖ) means that the divisions are part of **God's sifting process**. It is argued that this leads well into vv. 27–31 in which people will be judged by God on the basis of their behavior at the Lord's Supper. The *“genuine”* (δόκιμοι) are thus those who are righteous in this matter and not causing divisions at the Supper.

b. Separation of Wheat from Chaff

*“so that those who are approved
may become evident among you.”*

Usage of *dokimos* consistent in Paul's writings for contrast between legitimate believers and mere professors of faith in Christ; the opposite would be the reprobate.

C. (:20-22) Self-Centered Selfishness

1. (:20-21) Selfish Approach Documented

a. (:20) Missing the Point of Worship

*“Therefore when you meet together,
it is not to eat the Lord's Supper”*

Anthony Thiselton: The word translated *supper* (Greek *deipnon*) primarily denotes the **main meal** of the day, without any necessary reference to timing. In this respect, like the English dinner it usually refers to evening dinner where the term is used in its

traditional sense, but it can denote a different timing in such contexts as “Christmas dinner,” “Sunday dinner,” or “school dinner.” In other words, it denotes the **importance of the occasion** rather than a time. Paul insists that when it is the *Lord’s Supper*, the dynamics of this meal are determined not by the household, the host, or favored guests, but by apostolic tradition and by scriptural and ecclesial arrangements (v. 22b).

b. (:21) Putting the Priority on Self Satisfaction

1) Piggish Behavior

“for in your eating each one takes his own supper first;”

Craig Blomberg: The minority of well-to-do believers (1:26), including the major financial supporters and owners of the homes in which the believers met, would have had the leisure-time and resources to arrive earlier and bring larger quantities and finer food than the rest of the congregation. Following the practice of hosting festive gatherings in ancient Corinth, they would have quickly filled the small private dining room. Latecomers (the majority, who probably had to finish work before coming on Saturday or Sunday evening—there was as of yet no legalized day off in the Roman empire) would be seated separately in the adjacent atrium or courtyard. Those that could not afford to bring a full meal, or a very good one, did not have the opportunity to share with the rest in the way that Christian unity demanded.

2) No Consideration for Others

“and one is hungry and another is drunk.”

Richard Hays: We must bear in mind that the Christian gatherings were held in private homes, not in large public spaces. Archaeological study of Roman houses from this period has shown that the dining room (triclinium) of a typical villa could accommodate only nine persons, who would recline at table for the meal. Other guests would have to sit or stand in the atrium, which might have provided space for another thirty to forty people (see **Murphy-O’Connor**, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 153–61). The host of such a gathering would, of course, be one of the wealthier members of the community. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the host’s higher-status friends would be invited to dine in the triclinium, while lower-status members of the church (such as freedmen and slaves) would be placed in the larger space outside.

Furthermore, under such conditions it was not at all unusual for the higher-status guests in the dining room to be served better food and wine than the other guests—just as first-class passengers on an airliner receive much better food and service than others on the same plane.

Daniel Akin: Selfish and narcissistic behavior insults God and embarrasses brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no place for it in the faith family.

2. (:22a) Shameful Conduct Exposed (for what it is)

a. Shocking Exclamation

“What!”

b. Searching Question

“Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?”

c. Sarcastic Accusation

“Or do you despise the church of God
and shame those who have nothing?”

David Garland: Why were some Christians oblivious to the needs of their fellow Christians? The answer is that they were too much at home in a culture in which contempt for the poor was typical of the wealthier class. The well-to-do were used to having servants stand around as they ate and also would have no misgivings about feasting in the presence of others who had nothing or had only inferior fare. Given the dinner conventions of the ancient world, they would have thought nothing of this inequity.

3. (:22b) Scathing Rebuke Administered (in place of praise)

“What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you?
In this I will not praise you.”

John MacArthur: A Christian’s attitudes and motives should be pure at all times. But when believers come to the table of the Lord, sharing the bread of His body and the cup of His blood, it is absolutely necessary that they leave behind all sin, all bitterness, all racial and sexual prejudice, all class pride, and all feelings of superiority. Of all places and occasions, those attitudes are most out of place at the Lord’s Supper. They grievously profane that holy, beautiful, and unifying ordinance of God.

Mark Taylor: When the church gathered together, what occurred could not in any way be called the “*Lord’s Supper*” with integrity. Instead, their behavior was a travesty of love and the epitome of self-indulgence. Paul paints a stark contrast between the hungry poor and the drunken rich. The actions of the “haves” showcased contempt for the church of God and brought shame on the “have nots.” They were in clear violation of the principle of doing all things for the good of others and the glory of God (recall **10:23–33**). **This was no occasion for praise.**

II. (:23-26) SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE – THE PROPER PRACTICE OF THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER PROCLAIMS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

A. (:23a) The Significance of the Setting for the Establishment of the Ordinance

1. Divine Institution

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,”

Paul Gardner: The purposes for recounting the Supper tradition in this way are important. There are three.

- First, the Lord's focus in giving this "Supper" was quite different from the focus of the Corinthian meals. There was a simplicity to the eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper that should have overcome all social divisions.
- Secondly, the eschatological context of the meal relativizes any possibility of elitism.
- Thirdly, because of its status as a covenant meal, Paul emphasized that blessings and curses are attached to taking part in the meal.

2. Traitorous Backdrop

"that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed"

Leon Morris: Paul brings out the poignancy of the institution of that feast of love which was to bring such strength and consolation to Christians, at the very time when human malignancy was engaged in betraying the Saviour to His enemies.

David Garland: The tradition is cited only by way of illustration, and excessive attention to tracing its historical particulars and theological vectors serves to eclipse the rhetorical point that Paul makes. He does not intend to teach the Corinthians something new about the Lord's Supper or to correct their theology of the Lord's Supper. He cites it only to contrast what Jesus did at the Last Supper with what they are doing at their supper.

B. (:23b-24) The Significance of the Bread

1. Consecration of the Elements

"took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it"

2. Connection to His Physical Body via Symbolism

"and said, 'This is My body, which is for you;'"

3. Command to Practice the Ordinance

"do this in remembrance of Me."

C. (:25) The Significance of the Cup

1. Consecration of the Elements

"In the same way He took the cup also after supper,"

2. Connection to His Atoning Blood via Symbolism Surrounding the New Covenant

"saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood;'"

Richard Hays: In Paul's rendering of the tradition, two closely linked themes stand out: the sharing of the Supper calls the community to think of Jesus' death for others, and that death is understood to initiate a new covenant (v. 25; cf. **Jer. 31:31-34**). To be in covenant relation with God is to belong to a covenant people bound together by responsibilities to God and to one another; the character of this new covenant should be shown forth in the sharing of the meal. The trouble with the Corinthians is that they are

celebrating the Supper in a way that disregards this structure of covenant obligations and demonstrates an odd amnesia about Jesus' death. By showing contempt for those who have nothing, they are acting as though his death had not decisively changed the conditions of their relationship to one another. Paul therefore retells the story so as to spotlight the death of Jesus as the central meaning of the Supper.

Craig Blomberg: The cup that was drunk after supper would probably have been the third of four cups of wine consumed during the Passover meal, again with redemptive implications. This was the point in the ceremony at which the words “*I redeem you*” from **Exodus 6:6** were read. There is no chance that unfermented beverage was poured into the cup, since some who drank excessively were getting drunk (v. 21). The reason Paul, like the gospel writers, calls it the “*cup*” rather than using the word wine is because the expression would evoke Old Testament associations of suffering the “*cup*” of God’s wrath (e.g., **Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17**). Christ’s shed blood demonstrated that he accepted the wrath we deserved to experience and so made possible for us peace with God. In so doing he inaugurated the new covenant that had been prophesied (see esp. **Jer. 31:31–34**). “*Whenever you drink it,*” in **verse 25**, may hint at the fact that wine was not present with every meal. Or it may mean that **bread and wine should form the center of the Lord’s Supper whenever it is celebrated**. The message about the significance of Christ’s death which this ceremony re-enacts should be proclaimed throughout church history. Only when the Lord returns (v. 26) will cross-centered Christianity become redundant, a fact that the Corinthians clearly had yet to learn (recall under **1:18 – 2:5**).

David Prior: The main word Paul uses to describe what has happened is **covenant**. Through the shedding of the blood of Jesus, the paschal lamb (**5:7**), it is now possible for Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, libertine and rigorist, men and women, to know the glorious freedom of forgiveness and to have personal knowledge of God. Those who enter into this personal relationship, this covenant relationship, with the Lord naturally enter at the same time into a covenant relationship with one another. Thus, the covenant community is established – and that is precisely what the Corinthians were undermining by their behaviour. For them the death of Christ was not central; the return of Christ was not dominant; the love of Christ was not in control. It was, in a word, not ‘*the Lord’s Supper*’.

3. Command to Practice the Ordinance

“*do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.*”

D. (:26) The Significance of the Regular Practice of the Ordinance

1. Frequency

“*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,*”

2. Focus

“*you proclaim the Lord’s death*”

3. Finish Line

“until He comes.”

John Piper: If the Lord's Supper is worship, how does it express our inner treasuring of Christ's beauty and worth? Let me mention three things from the text. We express the value of Christ by "**remembering**," by "**proclaiming**," and by "**nourishing**." . . . This supper is not about physical nourishment. It is about spiritual nourishment.

III. (:27-32) SOBER SELF-EXAMINATION (= PREREQUISITE TO PARTICIPATION) – THE PROPER PRACTICE OF THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER PROTECTS AGAINST DIVINE DISCIPLINE

A. (:27) Unworthy Participation Condemned

“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.”

Chestnut:

1. What does it mean to "*eat in an unworthy manner*?" (**27**).
 - a. Not individual worthiness--nobody is worthy!
 - b. "*Unworthy manner*" is when you eat and hate your brother!
2. What should we be examining about ourselves before we eat? (**28**).
 - a. Whether or not we are worthy to partake?
 - b. "Do I love my brothers?" or "Am I united with the brothers?"
3. What does it mean to "*not discern the Lord's Body*?" (**29**).
 - a. Same thing as to "*despise the church of God*" (**22**).
 - b. Church IS the body of Christ! (**Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:27**).

Charles Hodge: To eat or drink unworthily is in general to come to the Lord's table in a careless, irreverent spirit, without the intention or desire to commemorate the death of Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, and without the purpose of complying with the engagements which we thereby assume. The way in which the Corinthians ate unworthily was, that they treated the Lord's table as though it were their own; making no distinction between the Lord's supper and an ordinary meal; coming together to satisfy their hunger, and not to feed on the body and blood of Christ; and refusing to commune with their poorer brethren. This, though one, is not the only way in which men may eat and drink unworthily. All that is necessary to observe is, that the warning is directly against the careless and profane, and not against the timid and the doubting.

Richard Hays: Paul's words must be understood in the context of the specific situation that he is addressing: The more affluent Corinthians are consuming their own food and shaming the poorer members (vv. **20–22**). In this context, to eat the meal unworthily means to eat it in a way that provokes divisions (v. **18**), with contemptuous disregard for the needs of others in the community. Paul's call to self-scrutiny (v. **28**) must therefore be understood not as an invitation for the Corinthians to probe the inner recesses of their consciences but as a straightforward call to consider how their actions at the supper are affecting brothers and sisters in the church, the body of Christ.

B. (:28-32) Self-Examination Essential

1. (:28) Avoidance of Judgment –

Self-Examination with a Goal of Qualification and Participation
(not Disqualification and Avoidance)

*“But a man must examine himself,
and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

2. (:29-30) Reality of Judgment

a. (:29) Possibility of Judgment

*“For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself
if he does not judge the body rightly.”*

Paul Gardner: Paul is urging **discernment** and **right judgment** upon the Corinthian elitists. The immediate problem here is summed up by Paul’s insistence that they should “discern” properly the “body.” The verb “discern” (διακρίνω), which may also be translated “judge,” has been used previously in **4:7** and **6:5** and appears again in **11:31** and **14:29**. The noun (διάκρισις) is found in **12:10**. In its broader connotation the verb implies judging between two positions or differentiating matters, as can be seen in most of these examples. The elite and wealthy, who are so keen to show off their status as they recline at a meal while others go hungry, have not discerned the nature of the “body.” Paul urges them to make a judgment about what the body is and what it is not and to understand its central place in the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

To what does “the body” (τὸ σῶμα) refer? . . . A third view suggests that the body is the Lord’s body and blood (“my body . . . my blood”; **vv. 24–25**), but not in some sacramental sense. Rather, in the bread and the wine the one who died “for you” is signified together with all that his death meant. To “discern” this means therefore to distinguish this meal as different from a normal meal. Again, it is not that the bread is no longer bread (in some sacramental sense), but that in this meal, instituted by the Lord himself, something different is going on from what might happen in a normal meal. The “remembrance” must happen! Christ died to bring forgiveness of sin and form a people who participate together in the covenant he guaranteed through his blood. If they “discerned” in this way, they would not mix up two different meals nor would they conduct the meal in a way that divides covenant members one from another. This latter view seems to make most sense of the immediate context. **The Lord’s Supper is not just any meal!** Even if the Lord’s Supper is celebrated around a bigger meal, it will govern the nature of the bigger meal to ensure that the whole is “communal.”

David Garland: A proper understanding of **what these elements represent** should change the Corinthians’ attitude and behavior toward others. It reminds them of their dependence on Christ and their own interdependence and should cause them to share their own provisions with others at the meal who have little or nothing. Paul is arguing that when they recognize fully the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, remembered in reenacting the Last Supper, they will act compassionately toward their brothers and sisters in Christ. **Passakos** (1997: 210) claims that the Lord’s Supper becomes “the

starting line for the transformation of the relationships and structures in the community.”

b. (:30) Examples of Judgment

“For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”

3. (:31-32) Purpose of Judgment

a. Self Judgment Avoids Divine Judgment

“But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.”

b. Divine Discipline Provides Necessary Protection

“But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.”

(:33-34) SUMMARY – ABUSIVE PRACTICES MUST BE CORRECTED

A. (:33) Assemble to Promote Church Unity by Practicing Loving Self Control

“So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”

Must be unselfish and loving towards the other members of the body

B. (:34a) Avoid Divine Discipline by Maintaining the Symbolic Focus of the Ordinance

“If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment.”

It’s not about eating to satisfy your hunger

Paul Gardner: Coming together and eating in a way that understands the nature of the Supper and recognizes that all believers are equal at the Supper will mean they avoid coming together “*for judgment*” (εἰς κρίμα). God may overrule for good through the judgment of discipline for his people, but it is not something to be desired. Since the covenant Lord brings blessings and curses, they should clearly seek in every way that they can to live out the Lord’s will and receive his blessings.

C. (:34b) Anticipate Additional Authoritative Clarification and Correction

“The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.”

Mark Taylor: Since Paul does not elaborate on his concluding words, “*And when I come I will give further directions,*” we cannot be sure of his reference. Perhaps there are further issues concerning the Lord’s Supper that he feels can only be addressed in person. Or perhaps the reference is to other issues. We simply do not know.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Should some type of love feast or fellowship meal accompany the practice of the Lord's Supper?
- 2) Should the Lord's Supper be a central focus of the main meeting of the assembly?
- 3) Do you know anyone whom the Lord has disciplined with sickness or death in harmony with this context here?
- 4) What are some helpful guidelines for the preparatory process of self-examination?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gordon Fee: The abuse seems to have moved in two directions, horizontal and vertical. The primary problem was an abuse of the church itself. This is specifically stated in the rhetorical questions at the end of the first round (v. 22): Some are despising the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing. Both the structure of the argument and its details confirm this. The argument is in four parts, which together form a **chiasm**:

A 17–22—The statement of the problem: the rich are abusing the poor (“*going ahead with their own [private] meal*”) *at the Lord's Table*.

B 23–26—The repetition of the “*tradition*,” the words of institution, with their emphasis on “*remembrance of me [Christ]*” and “*proclaiming Christ's death until he comes*.”

B1 27–32 -- “*So then*” -- in response to the words of institution (vv. 23–26), one must “*discern the body*” as one eats; otherwise one is in grave danger of judgment.

A1 33–34 -- “*So then*” -- in response to the abuse of the poor (vv. 17–22), they are to “*welcome/receive one another*” at the meal, so as not to incur the threatened judgment (vv. 30–32).

Ray Stedman: Some were bringing a lot of food and gathering in their own little family group to eat it, while others who had hardly anything, or nothing at all, were left hungry. One would have a crust of bread, perhaps, to chew on, and over here would be a family group eating Kentucky Fried Chicken, or steak and lobster, perhaps, while others were completely left out. Paul says, "That an absolute parody of what the church ought to be. Instead of caring for one another, you are excluding one another, and even worse, some of you are eating and drinking so much that, unfortunately, you are actually coming to the Lord's Table intoxicated."

That is hard for us to conceive of, but that is what was happening. (Incidentally, that answers the question that many have asked as to whether the wine that the early Christians drank was alcoholic. I remember Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse being asked on one occasion, "Don't you believe that the wine the early Christians drank was really grape juice?" In his brusque way he said, "Well, they got drunk on it at Corinth." This certainly is the answer to that question.) But even worse, in the eyes of the apostle, some of them seemed to shrug off any rebuke along this line. They were indifferent; they exhibited a careless defiance of the need to minister to one another. . .

This is what the bread symbolizes -- that he is to be our power by which we obey the demands of God, the Word of God, to love one another, to forgive one another, to be tender and merciful, kind and courteous to one another, to not return evil for evil but to pray for those who persecute us and mistrust us and misuse us. His life in us enables us to be what God asks us to be. We live by means of Christ. Jesus said it himself in John 6, "so he that eats me, even he shall live by means of me," (cf, **John 6:57**). . .

The wine of the cup symbolizes his blood which he said is the blood of the New Covenant, the new arrangement for living that God has made, by which the old life is ended. That is what blood always means: Blood is the end of a life, and the old life in which we were dependent upon ourselves, and lived for ourselves, and wanted only to be the center of attention is over. That is what the cup means. We agree to that; we are no longer to live for ourselves. That is why, written across the front of this auditorium, it says, "*You are not your own. You are bought with a price.*" You do not have final rights to your life, and the price is the blood of Jesus. Therefore, when we take that cup and drink it, we are publicly proclaiming that we agree with that sentence of death upon our old life, and believe that the Christian life is a continual experience of life coming out of death. That is what it says. . .

God guards the Table from unworthy partaking. Now, what that means, of course, is what Paul has just been rebuking these Christians at Corinth about. They were partaking in an unworthy manner because they were careless, selfish, and indifferent to the needs of others. They were coming to the Lord's Table in a kind of an empty ritual, just going through it in a mechanical, ceremonial way. That, Paul says, is a dangerous practice, because it is acting as though the death and the life of Jesus mean nothing to us, and he warns against that. We become sharers of the guilt of those who put the Lord to death when we participate without our heart-interest and our heart-concern involved in the Lord's Table. Therefore, according to the apostle, a proper participation involves a careful self-examination. That is why he says let someone examine himself or herself earnestly and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Craig Blomberg: Debates still rage as to whether the Lord's Supper should be called an ordinance or a sacrament. The latter historically has suggested the unbiblical notion of a quasi-mechanical "means of grace." The former seems to limit the ritual to an act of obedience to Christ. Our culture is one of the few in the history of the world that has lost respect for the immense value of tradition, ritual, symbolism, and religious drama. Not surprisingly, evangelical liturgical churches thus prove very appealing to many who

are more and more frustrated with this loss. Some evangelicals, unable to find such churches within their own traditions have increasingly turned to Anglicanism, Catholicism, and even Greek Orthodoxy to recover those emphases. What we need are balances between liturgy and spontaneity in the Eucharist and in worship more generally. We also need balances between planned sameness to stress our link with the past and opportunities for creativity to keep services fresh and meaningful for different subcultures within our society. We must simultaneously avoid the error of very formal churches that restrict God's grace to ceremonies performed in duly authorized fashion and the error of very informal fellowships that measure God's grace by "exotic experience." The former seems most pronounced today in very conservative or traditional Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran contexts; the latter is most notable in charismatic circles. But to one degree or another, both problems usually appear sooner or later in all traditions.

John Piper: Instead of a detailed exposition of this passage I want us to see only two main things.

1. One is that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of how Jesus established the new covenant.
2. And the other is that this new covenant creates and controls the existence of local churches. . .

The Lord's Supper is a celebration of how Jesus established the new covenant--by shedding his blood for his people and thus securing for them the forgiveness of their sins and the sanctification of their souls. . .

God wills for the new covenant to create local churches. The covenant promise, "*You will be my people and I will be your God,*" does not just create a universal body, but local expressions of that body in specific local gatherings called churches. . .

In other words when a local number of believers comes together to form a church they are to think something like this; we are bound to God by the new covenant; and not only that, since we are bound to God by that covenant, we are bound to each other by that covenant too. The covenant that makes us belong to God, makes us belong to each other. Therefore our commitment to each other in a local church is a **covenant commitment**. Our covenant relationship to God implies a covenant relationship to each other. God's covenant with us creates and shapes our covenant with each other. . .

Different Views Regarding the Lord's Supper:

Roman Catholic View

How does this work? Roman Catholics speak of **transubstantiation** and teach that, at the consecration by the priest, the bread and wine are actually and miraculously transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus. Eating this transubstantiated bread and drinking this transubstantiated wine brings saving grace to the soul.

Lutheran View

Lutherans speak of **consubstantiation** and teach that the bread and wine don't cease to be bread and wine, but that the real, literal presence of the physical body and blood of Christ is present along with the natural elements when they are consecrated in worship.

Reformed View

Our view (call it the Reformed view) is that the bread and wine are emblems or **symbols** of the real, literal body of Christ that was crucified in history and today is in heaven at the Father's right hand. But we believe that there is a real feeding on Christ spiritually by faith - not on his physical body, but on his real, spiritual presence. And even though a believer can nourish himself any time and anywhere on the presence of Christ in his word, there is a special nourishing offered in eating the Lord's Supper and hearing the preaching of God's word.

Luther Versus Zwingli - John 6

The place to see this most clearly perhaps is in **John 6**. Here is where Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli locked horns at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. Luther quoted **verse 53**, "So Jesus said to them, *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.*" And then he would quote **1 Corinthians 11:24**, "*This is my body,*" and he even wrote it with chalk on the big conference table during the debate.

His claim was that we are tampering with the Word of God to say that "*This is my body*" means "This symbolizes my body." He would go back to **John 6:53** - we must "*eat the flesh of the Son of Man!*"

But Zwingli, on the other hand, who took the view that we embrace, pointed to **John 6:63** as an explanation of Jesus' words. There Jesus said, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*" He became exasperated at Luther's repetition of "*This is my body,*" and said, "I remain firm at this text, 'The flesh profits nothing.' I shall oblige you to return to it. You will have to sing a different tune with me" (*Reformers in Profile*, ed. B.A. Gerrish, p. 139).

We believe that Zwingli was closer to the truth here. "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*" In other words, when Jesus said in **John 6:53** that we must "*eat the flesh of the Son of Man,*" he did not mean to say that literal flesh profits anything, even if it were possible. He meant to say that his

words were spirit and life. We feed on the flesh and blood of Jesus spiritually, not physically.

One last pointer to this way of seeing the Lord's Supper. In **1 Corinthians 11:25** Paul said, "*He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood.'*" I am not aware of anyone who says that the cup is literally the covenant. Nor is the wine in the cup the covenant. The new covenant is God's commitment to save to the uttermost those who trust in Jesus. The cup of wine (or juice) represents this covenant because the blood of Christ bought the covenant for us. It doesn't become this covenant.

So I conclude that, in a few minutes, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we may nourish our souls by faith on the spiritual presence of Christ. When we remember and proclaim his death, he manifests himself to us as infinitely precious. He shows us all that God promises to be for us in Christ. This is the food of our souls. With this we are nourished and find strength to live as Christians.

The Lord's Supper is worship because it expresses the infinite worth of Christ. No one is more worthy to be remembered. No one is more worthy to be proclaimed. And no one can nourish our souls with eternal life but Christ. So let us come and remember, and proclaim and eat.

Alan Carr: Gilead Baptist Church -- **OUR TIME AT THE LORD'S TABLE**

I. v. 24-26 IT IS A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE

A. v. **24-25** Remember an Agonizing Lord

B. v. **26** Remember an Achieving Lord

C. v. **26** Remember an Appearing Lord

II. v. 27-30 IT IS A TIME OF REPENTANCE

A. v. **27-30** From Our Sins

B. v. **17-22** From Our Selfishness

III. v. 31 IT IS A TIME OF RENEWAL

A. Our Vows -- What have you promised the Lord that you haven't carried out?

B. Our Vision -- This time at the Lord's table is a great time for us to remember why we are here anyway. We should all take this time to ask the Lord to renew our vision of:

1. A World Lost Without Jesus. (Ill. The horrors of the lost man -- **Eph. 2:12**)
 2. A Lord Worthy of Our Best Service, Faithfulness and Worship.
 3. A Church With a Future Only as Large as Our Commitment.
- C. Our Victory - This is a great time to bring your defeats, your trials, your valleys, your hurts and struggles to the Lord and let Him remind you that He hasn't forgotten you. That He is working everything out for your good -- **Rom. 8:28**. That in Him you always walk in victory -- **1 Cor. 15:57**. That in Him, you are more than a conqueror -- **Rom. 8:37**.

Chestnut: Rituals have become devalued in our culture. Everybody wants a ceremony that is short and sweet. We have lost sight of the value of ritual.

Rituals and ceremonies have great value.

1. Actions that proclaim important truths without words.
2. Illust. Think about a wedding ceremony. Important truths are communicated non-verbally:
 - 1) Giving away the bride. (Comes down aisle, hand placed in his, gets out of the way.);
 - 2) Unity candle. (Two lives become a shared life.)
 - 3) Throwing rice/birdseed. (The community wishes prosperity on new couple.)

In a ceremony actions speak louder than words!
3. Illust. Think about a baptism. Re-enactment of the death, burial, Resurrection of Jesus. Individual is passive, accepting salvation.

How can we keep the Lord's Supper from becoming an empty ritual?

1. Take the Lord's Supper each and every week.
 - a. This was the practice of the early Christians.
 - b. Illust. But someone says: "If we do it every week it will become too common and lose its significance."

Alexander Campbell answers: "Well, then, the seldomer the better. If we observe it only once in twenty years, it will be the more uncommon and solemn. And, on the same principle, the seldomer we pray the better. We shall pray with more solemnity if we pray once in twenty years." ("On the Breaking of Bread" [No. III], The Christian Baptist 3, No.3 [Oct. 3, 1825])
2. Take enough time for the Lord's Supper. (Meal: don't "eat & run")
3. Stress the meaning of the Lord's Supper. (Sacrificial death)
4. Give thought to the prayers at the Lord's Supper.
5. Sing appropriate songs for the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper at Corinth (**1 Cor. 11:17-34**).

1. A look BACKWARD (v. 25)
2. A look FORWARD (v. 26)
3. A look INWARD (vv. 27-29)
4. A look OUTWARD (v. 26)
5. A look UPWARD (giving thanks)

Charles Hodge: In order to show how inconsistent their conduct was with the nature of the service in which they professed to engage, the apostle recounts the original institution of the Lord's supper, **vs. 23-25**. From this account it follows, first, that the Lord's supper was designed not as an ordinary meal, but as a commemoration of the death of Christ; secondly, that to participate in this ordinance in an unworthy manner, was an offence against his body and blood, the symbols of which were so irreverently treated; thirdly, that no one ought to approach the Lord's table without self-examination, in order that with due preparation and with a proper understanding of the ordinance, he may receive the bread and wine as the symbols of Christ's body and blood, **vs. 26-29**. In this way they would escape the judgments which the Lord had brought upon them on account of their profanation of his table, **vs. 30-32**. In conclusion, he exhorts them to use their houses for their ordinary meals, and to make the Lord's supper a real communion, **vs. 33, 34**.

Thomas Leake: (:17-22) Abuses of the Lord's Supper

Introduction: A Christian is defined as one who follows Christ (**Mat. 10:25; John 12:26**); we must learn to obey Christ; **Luke 6:46; Mat. 7:21**; Obedience must be learned by all disciples; shown in different ways; Major way = Love one another = sacrifice in our love for fellow members of the body; **Eph. 5:2** – as He loved us, setting the example; **1 John 4:19-21; 1 Cor. 11:1**; Be imitators of Paul as he was imitating Christ; That's the way it is supposed to be in the church; but not the way it always is; Note Paul's tone of indignation and even disgust at their behavior; church was indulging itself at the very time it should be celebrating sacrificial love

3 Manifestations of a Selfish Spirit

I. (:17) No Benefit When They Assembled

When churches assemble a lot of good things are supposed to happen; but they were hurting themselves;

We need to think: How can I be a benefit to others? Be faithful in your area of service; make a contribution; don't be selfish and disconnected from the life of the church

II. (:18-19) Divisions in the Church

Church is the people, not the building;

Economic standing was one thing that had led to divisions; thought they were a cut above others.

Two ways of looking at concept of "approved"

- genuinely approved by God
- sarcastically – approved wrongfully in their own eyes

In either case, two things are true:

- Paul is not happy with the divisions
- The divisions stemmed from selfishness

At HBC we strive to be of one mind, same doctrine, same philosophy of ministry; need to be on guard against someone with a secret agenda coming into the church and trying to gather a following and take the church in a different direction; a little corner of dissent.

III. (:20-22) Pleasing Themselves Rather Than Others

Thomas Leake: (:23-32) Abuses of the Lord's Supper (Part 2 and 3)

Introduction:

The Lord's Supper is not to be abused like what was happening in the church at Corinth; So we need instruction to celebrate it correctly;

Ordinance has been dressed up and distorted over time. We need to understand it correctly.

Correct the various wrong understandings that have crept into the church over time.

Myths are best dispelled by going back to history.

12 facts about the Lord's Supper

1) The Lord's Supper is an Ordinance given by Christ

"Do this" and keep doing this; pres tense; something we are commanded to do; not optional for Christians; both must be consumed – the bread and the cup

2) Jesus Prescribed How to celebrate the Lord's Supper – not just the necessity of celebrating it;

Rebuke because the Corinthians are not doing it correctly; Jesus told Paul how to do it – not just take it or leave it instruction.

3) The Lord's Supper Reflects True History

"*in the night in which He was betrayed*" – fixes this at a particular time in history when it was instituted;

"*betrayed*" = handed over; Imperf tense = ongoing nature; what was going on that night ... looking at Judas' betrayal of Christ here

4) It is a time of Communion for the church assembled

A communing with Christ and each other -- **Luke 22:15** – "*share among yourselves*"

Matt. 26:27-28 – "*all of you drink*" – not some of you

Something we are to do together; not something we should go off and do by ourselves as a family; a symbol for the local church; don't put the symbols outside of the context God had prescribed; must be for the entire church or it is not the Lord's Supper; **1 Cor. 10:16** "*a sharing in the blood of Christ*" ... not just communing with one another but with Christ; no life innate in me a dead guilty sinner; it comes from without from Christ

from His righteousness; not just for one particular church; we practice Open Communion – whoever the Lord has accepted should participate

5) It is a time to Give Thanks

Celebrating the eucharist = Gk verb to give thanks; believers delivered from wrath of God just as Jews had been delivered at time of Passover; look at all that we celebrate: secure inheritance; forgiveness of sins; etc.; to be a joyous time; not stoic; as things get embellished everyone gets a little more formal and stiff; **1 Thess. 5:18; Heb. 13:15; Is. 25:1; I Pet. 1; Eph. 1**

Contemplate our own forgiveness and our unworthiness

6) The Lord's Supper is celebrated with Symbolic Elements

this is the controversial part; All agree that the bread and the wine are the two elements used;

Acts 2:42: “*breaking of bread*”; **John 19** – not one of Jesus’ bones was ever broken – so this does not refer to His physical body but is symbolic; no blood in the cup; called the fruit of the vine; **Rev. 1:5** = the blood of the cross;

Widespread disagreement about what the elements actually mean;

4 views:

a) transubstantiation – elements changed thru an actual miracle – the various substance actually changes into body and blood of Christ; Roman Catholic; but you can’t tell it has been changed; makes God deceptive

b) consubstantiation -- the real physical body and blood are around the elements – Lutheran view; assumes Christ’s human body is omnipresent

c) Spiritual presence view -- Presbyterian and Reformed view – means of grace apart from other means of grace -- elements have no physical presence but convey to us a special spiritual presence of Christ that is not available to us any other way; sacrament is a medium of communion and appropriation of blessings of Christ’s death

d) the elements are only symbolic of Christ and His death; the communion is real; but no special presence of Christ spiritually or physically in association with the elements (**Zwingli**)

10 quick reasons in support of symbolic position:

- Christ was speaking with symbolism and non-literally because His body was right there intact
- Jesus often spoke non-literally in His teaching (“*I am the door...*”)
- Symbolism already built into the very Passover meal that Jesus was using; giving it a greater sense
- Jesus said: “*this cup is the New Covenant*” – but a Covenant is a promise, not a cup; the cup is a symbol
- Jesus still called the contents of the cup “*the fruit of the vine*” after He had instituted it
- there was no spiritual presence of Christ in the elements; Jesus was there physically; today He is with His church spiritually all the time and with the church when it is assembled
- the other ordinance is also symbolic = mere water – not holy or special

- it was very common to use the word “*is*” = represents
- Jesus did not explicitly teach anywhere that He is spiritually present in the elements
- **Eph 1:3** – we already have all blessings in Christ

Objections:

- What about people who ate unworthily and died? They mocked the symbol and God killed them;
- What about the communing with Christ at His table? Yes, we are communing with Christ at the table; but no special spiritual presence of Christ there; don’t need it; have the Holy Spirit all the time;

Don’t look for any saving or sanctifying power in the ordinance itself

7) It is a Remembrance of Christ’s Death

“Remember” is a rich word – treasure His sufferings on our behalf; never doubt God’s love for you personally; time of rich and full meditation

8) It is the Sign of the New Covenant

Vs. 25 – another word for testament; celebrating the new covenant; so many believers still confused about what to do with the Old Covenant; Moses was the mediator; Ten Commandments at the center with other associated commands and regulations; we are not under the Old Covenant; it is gone; people feel compelled to do some of the things that the Old Covenant stipulates; but it has been made obsolete (book of Hebrews); **Jer. 31:31; Luke 22:20** – church participates in that new covenant promised to Israel; live by the law of love; Christ has fulfilled the righteousness of the law for us completely; Sabbath, etc. no longer applies; it is a better covenant that we have; celebrating a new age that Christ instituted by His blood; a better covenant; law of God written on our hearts; Holy Spirit administering; we are NT believers; we must act that way; Permanently indwelt by Holy Spirit

9) The Lord’s Supper is a Perpetual Ordinance

“*as often as you*” – shows the continuity; unlike the one time ordinance of baptism; one true baptism is all you have; continuation of observance commanded; the frequency is not commanded; some did it daily, weekly, etc. Jesus has not come back yet so we continue to celebrate

10) The celebration Proclaims the Lord’s Death

a silent preaching that takes place; Why should we proclaim the death of Jesus? This is what Christianity is all about; people want to approach God on their own terms; this is the only way to come to God and gain access; a bold and clear message – presents Christ’s death as the only gateway to God; **1 Cor. 15:3-4**; No death of Jesus – no bringing us to God; so many churches decentralize the death of Christ

11) The Lord’s Supper Anticipates the Lord’s Second Coming

He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven and sat down at Father’s right

hand in heaven and is coming again; it's just a matter of time; **1 Thess 4:16** – Jesus could come back at any time mentality

12) The Lord's Supper is a time for Self Evaluation (:27-32)

Very sobering verses; designed for a church that was abusing the Lord's Supper; we should be evaluating our walk with Jesus Christ;

This text answers 4 basic questions about self evaluation:

a) Why should we evaluate ourselves ...

Why do it? You might be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; cannot treat this time lightly; why is Paul being so severe? No magic in the elements – that would be superstition; Paul still calls it bread; importance of our attitudes and actions in God's sight as we worship Him; must worship in accordance with the truth of God and in sincerity; not talking about us being worthy in our own person; talking about your attitude – what motivates you on the inside

What are some unworthy attitudes:

- treat it as a ritual
- treat it lightly
- don't think of the import
- anger and bitter feelings against a brother or sister in Christ

b) How are we to go about examining ourselves?

To test something so as to attempt to approve it; Pres Imperative – repeated along with the celebration each time we come to the table; reflexive pronoun – do the test to yourselves, not to others; asking God to probe your conscience; often we can deceive ourselves;

- What sins have I committed this past week?
- What motivated me to do that?
- Have I served the body of Christ?
- Have I been loving the things of the world more than Christ?
- Is there some reoccurring sin that I keep making excuses for?
- What have my parents or spouse been telling me?

c) What if I choose not to examine myself and still participate?

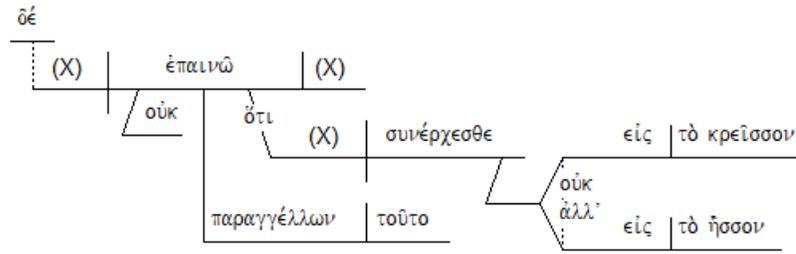
Spiritual sins can lead to physical ailments; doesn't mean that every illness we have is a result of God's chastisement; based on willful and persistent sin – God took the physical life of some believers; the judgment is severe for believers (but not eternal condemnation)

d) What is the benefit of self-examination (:31)

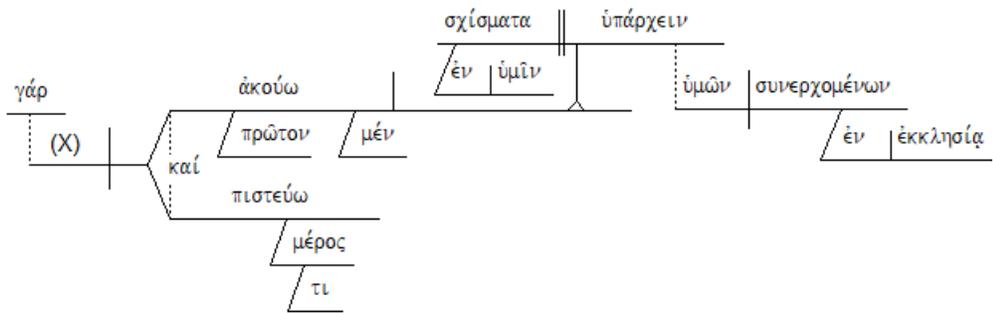
You avoid sickness and death and God's chastisement

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

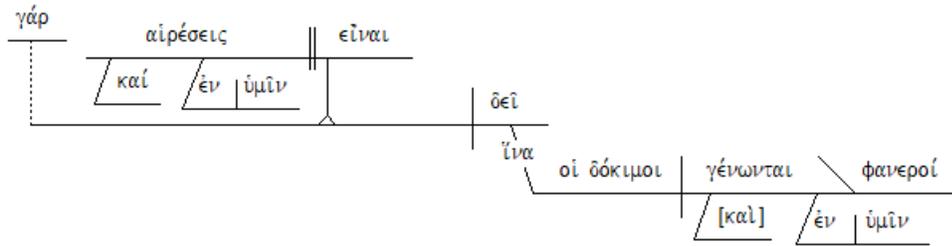
1Co 11:17



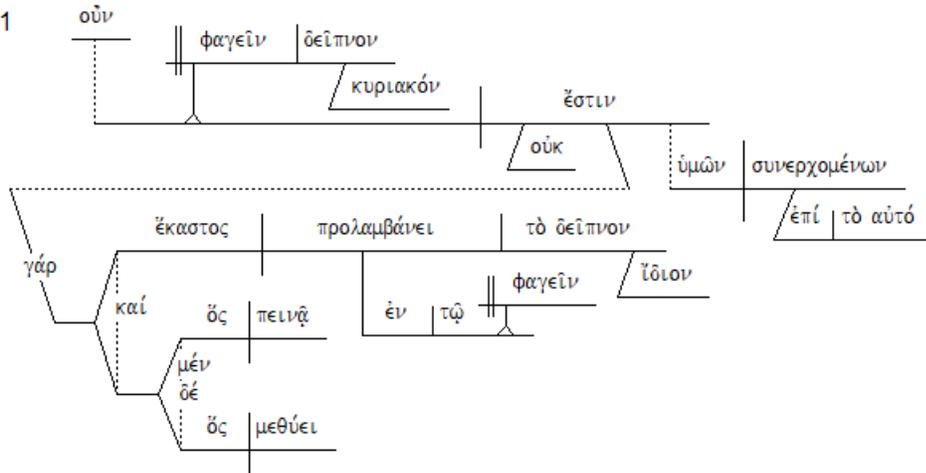
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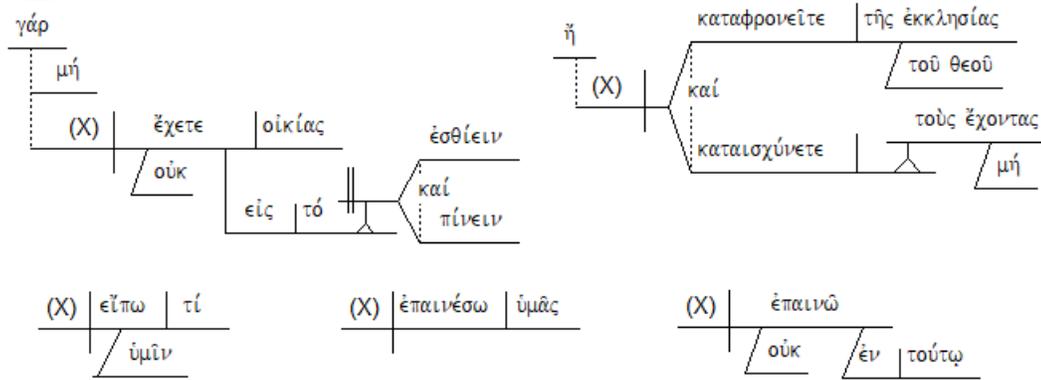
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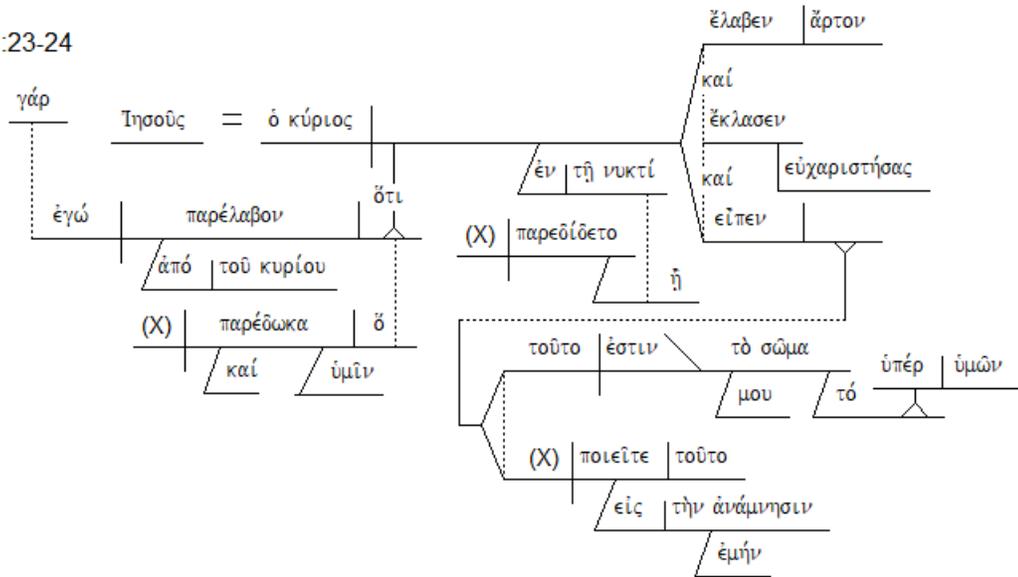
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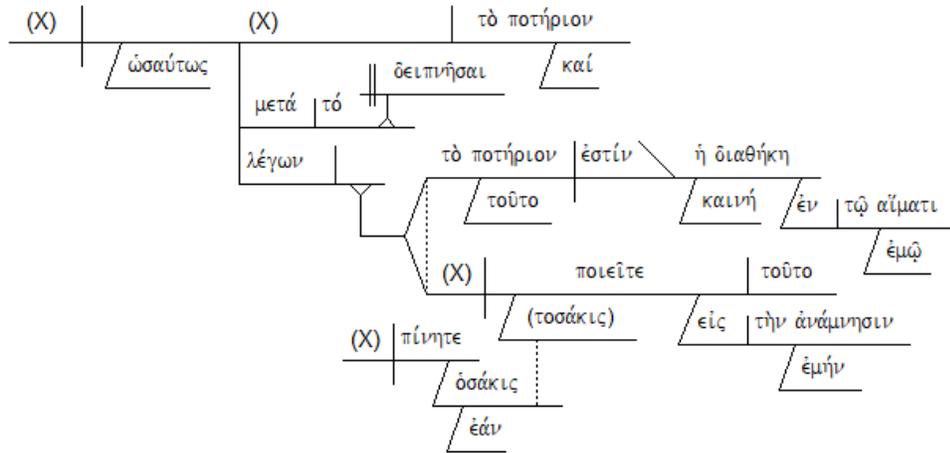
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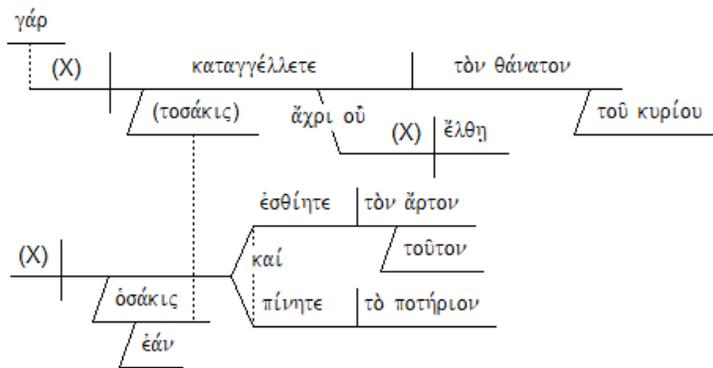
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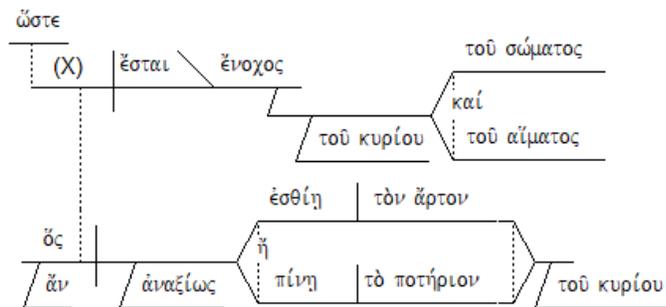
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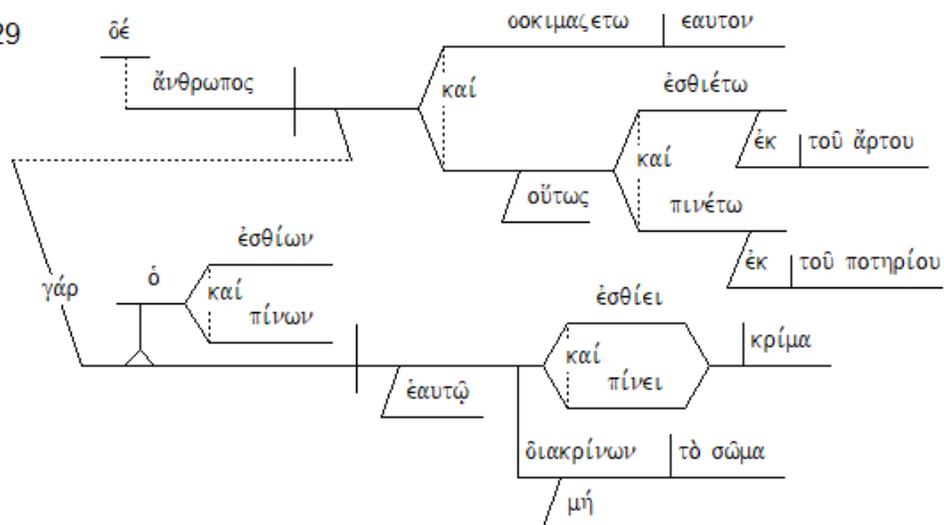
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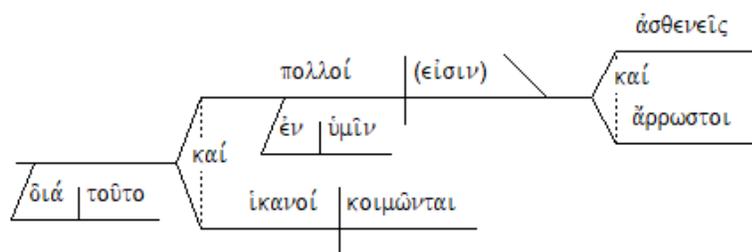
1Co 11:27



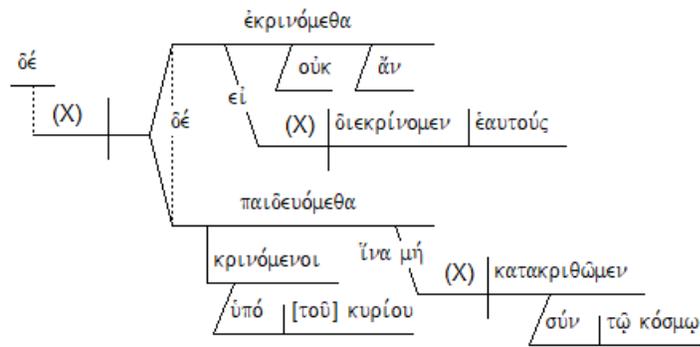
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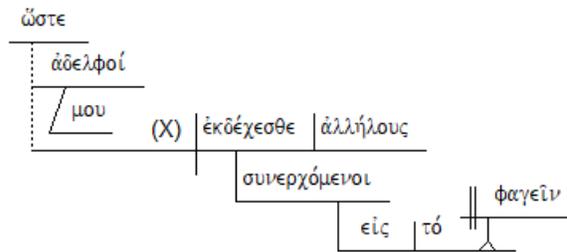
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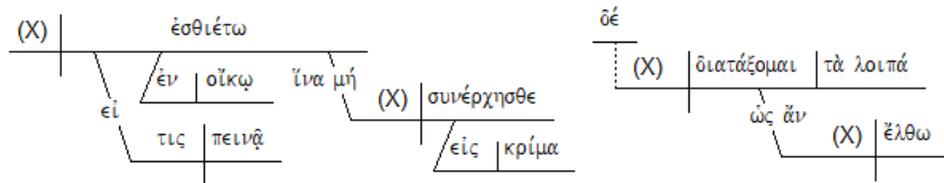
1Co 11:31-32



1Co 11:33



1Co 11:34



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

TITLE: UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

BIG IDEA:

THE VARIETY OF EXPRESSION OF GENUINE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WILL CONSISTENTLY EXALT JESUS CHRIST AND BUILD UP HIS BODY

INTRODUCTION:

David Prior: We need to remind ourselves of the pagan background from which most of the Christians in Corinth had been delivered. This was essentially based in the Greek mystery-religions, in which spiritual experiences were the norm. They had grown accustomed to being enticed by some kind of supernatural or demonic force, either into a state of trance, or into ecstasy, or into some strange course of action. Such ‘inspiration’ was regarded not merely as normal and to be expected, but as a clear authentication of the reality of the divine force involved. If there was no such clear manifestation of inspiration, the power of the relevant divinity was suspect.

Robert Gundry: The problem is almost certainly an abuse of the charisma of tongues. This is made clear first of all by the structure of the argument itself, which is basically in three parts, following the A-B-A pattern noted in previous sections (and basically corresponding to our current chapter divisions). Thus the argument begins with a more general, descriptive presentation (**chap. 12**), which is followed by a theological interlude (**chap. 13**) and concludes with a very specific response to the matter in hand (**chap. 14**).

David Garland: In **chapter 12**, Paul puts in proper perspective the nature of spiritual gifts and the role of the bearers of spiritual gifts. He makes clear that there are diversities of gifts, diversities of services, and diversities of activities, but only one Spirit, who distributes them as he wills. Each gift is given to different persons for the common good. Consequently, each person is needed in the community. Inspired speech is only one among many ways the Spirit works in the body of Christ. The body cannot be all eye with no sense of smell. It cannot be all nose with no vision. No individual member should be valued as superior to another, though Paul will argue that prophecy is superior to tongues because it contributes more to building up the community. No one should feel left out in the community because he or she lacks a particular spiritual endowment. No one should feel superior because he or she possesses a particular spiritual endowment. All are gifted by God in some way, and all are encouraged to contribute their gifts in ways that will build up the community. The Spirit decides who gets what gift and apportions them according to the need in the community, not according to the value of the recipient. There is to be no spiritual elite in the church. Spiritual gifts are not indicators of one’s spiritual status.

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: Spiritual people are those who possess the Holy Spirit and are thus enabled to affirm the total lordship of Christ. They must recognize their

dependence on one another as the body of Christ, and each must build up the body of Christ as they employ the grace-gifts given them by the Spirit.

Daniel Akin: YOU ARE A GIFTED CHILD

(:1-6) Main Idea: Every believer has spiritual gifts that are to be exercised, not for personal gratification, but for corporate edification in the church.

I. How the Gifts Are Described (12:1,4,7)

- A. They are spiritual gifts (12:1).
- B. They are supernatural gifts (12:4).
- C. They are service gifts (12:7).

II. How the Gifts Are Distributed (12:5-7,11)

- A. They are distributed individually (12:5-6, 11).
- B. They are distributed intentionally (12:7).

III. How the Gifts Are Distinguished (12:4-6)

- A. There is a motivation for the gifts (12:4).
- B. There is a ministry with the gifts (12:5).
- C. There is a might behind the gifts (12:6).

UNWRAPPING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

(:8-31) Main Idea: Different gifts are given to different believers, and all gifts are for the glory of God and the good of the church.

I. The Gifts of Wisdom (12:8,10)

- A. The message of wisdom (12:8)
- B. The message of knowledge (12:8)
- C. The work of distinguishing between spirits (12:10)

II. The Gifts of Worship (12:9-10)

- A. The work of faith (12:9)
- B. The word of prophecy (12:10)

III. The Gifts of Wonders (12:9-10)

- A. The work of healings (12:9)
- B. The performing of miracles (12:10)
- C. The word of tongues (12:10)
- D. The work of interpretation of tongues (12:10)

IV. Unity in Diversity (12:11-31)

- A. The unity that binds the body (12:11-13)
- B. The diversity that blesses the body (12:14-31)

(:1) IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

A. Transition to a New Topic = Spiritual Gifts

“Now concerning spiritual gifts”

Important to the community of believers

David Garland: Paul takes up a new topic -- “*now concerning*” (περὶ δέ, *peri de*)—that he will address in **chapters 12–14**. . .

Either the Corinthians want to know, “Which spiritual gift is the highest and best?” or some are touting their own spiritual gift as “the highest and best.”

Mark Taylor: Thus, Paul begins and concludes the discussion with reference to “*spiritual persons*.” In other words, in these chapters the primary concern is what it means to be “*spiritual*” in the context of public worship. Paul is not necessarily sorting out Corinthian confusion over spiritual gifts in general, but in order to address the issue of what true spirituality entails, he broadens the discussion considerably in order to clarify the role of the Spirit among all believers. Therefore, before making the case for intelligible prophecy over against unintelligible tongues so that the church might be edified (**14:1–40**), Paul reminds the Corinthians that it is only by the Holy Spirit that believers confess Jesus as Lord in the first place (**12:1–3**), that all believers are gifted individually by the Spirit for the common good (**12:4–31**), and that love, the more excellent way, is the only proper context for the exercise of the gifts (**13:1–13**).

B. Target Audience – Fellow Believers in the family of God

“brethren”

C. Teaching Opportunity Critical in light of the Danger of Ignorance regarding this important topic

“I do not want you to be unaware.”

Believers can be taken by surprise; some things look much better than they are; need to get behind the effects to the motivating spiritual forces at work

John MacArthur: It was an idiomatic phrase often used to introduce an exceptionally important subject. Paul used it to encourage his readers to pay close attention to a critical truth.

I. (:2-3) RIGHTLY DISCERN THE GENUINE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

A. (:2) Reality of the Deceptive Power of Satanic Spirits

“You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols; however you were led.”

Gordon Fee: His initial concern is to set their former experience as idolaters in contrast with their present experience as Christians, who speak “*by the Spirit of God.*” . . .

He is reminding them of what they well know, that in some of the cults “inspired utterances” were part of the worship, despite the “mute idols.” If so, then his concern is to establish early on, as the next sentence seems to corroborate, that it is not “inspired speech” as such that is evidence of the Spirit. Many of them had already known a similar phenomenon as pagans. Rather, what counts is the **intelligible and Christian content** of such utterances.

Robert Gundry: “*Voiceless*” describes the idols not so much in contrast with the living God as in contrast with the Holy Spirit’s giving believers a voice to say, “*Jesus [is] Lord.*” As a leadup to that Spirit-inspired confession, Paul denies that anyone speaking by God’s Spirit says, “*Jesus [is] anathema.*” “*Anathema*” means “*accursed,*” and the statement as a whole represents what an unconverted Jew would say about Jesus because the Mosaic law pronounced a curse on anyone hanged on a tree, as Jesus was in crucifixion (see **Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13**). So as idolatry characterized the pre-conversion past of Gentile Christians, an estimation of Jesus as accursed characterized the pre-conversion past of Jewish Christians. “*Therefore*” makes idols’ voicelessness, which renders them unable to speak, the basis for Paul’s mentioning both the speaking of a curse and the speaking of a confession. . . The main point: since “*no one can say, ‘Jesus [is] Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit,*” everyone who makes this confession has the Holy Spirit, so that no Christian (by definition a confessor of Jesus as Lord) can rightly look down on another Christian as not having the Holy Spirit (compare **12:13**). **Chapter 14** will make it look as though some Christians in Corinth thought that if you don’t speak in tongues you don’t have the Holy Spirit.

David Garland: His point is to establish from the outset that **all Christians are spiritual**. The contrast is between then, when they were pagans and led to dumb idols, and now, when they confess that Jesus is Lord. **Paige** (1991: 62) concludes that “the *pompē* becomes a symbol for all the attractions of pagan life: the attractions of political power, religious cult, social ties and the need to belong, not to mention the enticing feast. At the same time, Paul uses the *pompē* as a symbol of the delusion involved in all of this.” The “*dumb idols*” symbolize only their former ignorance.

B. (:3) Reliability of Indicators that Distinguish Between Counterfeit and Genuine Spiritual Powers

1. Apostolic Revelation Can be Trusted

“*Therefore I made known to you*”

2. Test for Rightly Discerning the Operation of the Spirit of God = the Exaltation of Jesus Christ

- a. The Holy Spirit Cannot Blaspheme the Person of Christ
“*that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’*”

Paul Gardner: In our view, the clause “*Jesus is accursed*” (ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς) must be understood in the light of the Christian confession “*Jesus is Lord*” that, in various forms, is so frequently seen in the New Testament and was clearly part and parcel of the identification of true Christians (cf. **8:6; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:9–11**). It is **submission** to the lordship of Jesus that is key. Paul has made this clear in many ways through the epistle, but especially as he has contrasted this lordship with the activity and worship of demons in **chapters 8 and 10**. Any explanations of **v. 2** that avoid the compulsion to follow idols implicit in the passive voice of “*being led away*” easily miss the contrast between **v. 2** and **v. 3** and fail to do justice to Paul’s insistence that those who eat with idols “covenantally participate” with them (**10:20**). **To follow another lord is to curse Jesus.**

b. Only the Holy Spirit Can Truly Confess the Lordship of Christ
“*and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.*”

David Prior: The burning desire of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus is Paul’s overall criterion of genuineness in this matter of spirituality. Indirectly but cardinally, it pervades all these three chapters.

1. Thus **chapter 12** concentrates on the church as the body of Jesus Christ;
2. **chapter 13** unfolds the essential character of Jesus Christ;
3. **chapter 14** takes two particular gifts (speaking in tongues and prophecy) and shows how any spiritual gift exercised with true Christlikeness serves to build up his body, the church -- at Corinth or anywhere.

As the church is thus consolidated and begins to function effectively, so Jesus of Nazareth is seen to be Lord of the universe.

Gordon Fee: The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God’s people to think of the power and gifts as the real evidence of the Spirit’s presence. Not so for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit’s activity is the **exaltation of Jesus as Lord**, which in turn **expresses itself in loving concern for others**. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself.

David Garland: This confession is not some spontaneous, ecstatic utterance that anyone could blurt out. It affirms the **majesty of Jesus** as the one raised from the dead to become the one universal Lord above all other so-called lords (**8:6**). It declares absolute allegiance to him and accepts his absolute authority over every aspect of life. Paul’s purpose is to identify who qualifies as **spiritual** (cf. **14:37**). He is not dealing with the question of how to judge inspired speech (contra **Barrett** 1968: 281). He counters those who think that the true mark of the spiritual person is that one engage in inspired speech. He wants to affirm from the start that **all the members of the body of Christ are spiritual**. He argues in **Gal. 4:6** that because they cry “*Abba, Father,*” it is proof that God sent the Spirit into their hearts and that they are “*sons.*” In the same way, he argues here that all who confess Jesus as Lord are spiritual. **Bassler** (1982: 416; see also **Schrage** 1999: 125) gets at the truth:

Since Paul is concerned to refute those Corinthians who claim their gift of glossolalia is a special, perhaps unique, demonstration of spirit possession, he opens his response in vv 1–3 by presenting a radically different perspective. Noting the simple baptismal confession, *Jesus is Lord*, can only be uttered under the influence of the Holy Spirit (v 3b), Paul **undermines any pneumatic elitism**. All Christians make this confession, thus all Christians, not a tongue-speaking few, are πνευματικοί.

The term “*spiritual*” does not apply exclusively to those who, according to the Corinthians’ yardstick, had this or that conspicuous speech gift, but to **all Christians**. This point serves to relativize “all claims to greater or lesser spiritual attainment” because a person demonstrates or lacks certain gifts (M. Mitchell 1993: 267–68). In this introduction, Paul sets the stage for his argument that “each person has his or her own individual gifts and roles to play, each of which in its own way benefits the community” (M. Mitchell 1993: 268). **He seeks to correct those in the church who see themselves as a Spirit-bearing elite to be set apart from the rest of the congregation.**

Mark Taylor: The confession “*Jesus is Lord*” is made with full meaning and understanding only at the prompting of the Spirit. Anyone can “say” the words “*Jesus is Lord*,” but what Paul has in mind here is speaking with full conviction and complete personal allegiance.

David Prior: To be truly ‘spiritual’ drives a person neither to ecstasy nor to individualism nor to other-worldliness, but into the life of the local church as an expression of his or her personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and to his body here on earth. It is there that the implications of what it is to be ‘spiritual’, men and women of the Spirit, will be worked out. In times of persecution and martyrdom, such as many of Paul’s contemporaries were to face in the days of Nero and Domitian, the meaning and the inspiration of being members of the body of Christ begin to make themselves felt. To distance ourselves from other Christians is to waver in our allegiance to Jesus as Lord: this is the unmistakable thrust of what Paul now proceeds to unfold in the ensuing three chapters.

II. (:4-6) APPRECIATE THE VARIETY OF EXPRESSIONS OF THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – ALL CONSISTENT WITH THE UNITY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

Robert Gundry: “*Gracious*” describes the gifts as ill-deserved but given anyway, and these gifts refer to authorized abilities. “*Services*” connotes the uses to which the abilities are put and implies an obligation to use the gifts in service to others. “*Activities*” connotes the effort required to use the abilities in such service and implies an assurance of God’s working in and through the use of gifts in serving others.

A. (:4) Variety of Gifts – bestowed by the One Spirit of God
“*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*”

Gordon Fee: It seems likely, therefore, that even though at points the two words are nearly interchangeable (as **12:31a** and **14:1** would imply), the emphasis in each case reflects the root word (*pneuma*, Spirit; *charis*, grace). When the emphasis is on the manifestation, the “*gift*” as such, Paul speaks of *charismata*; when the emphasis is on the Spirit, he speaks of *pneumatika*.

B. (:5) Variety of Expression of the Gifts in Ministries – Directed by the One Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ

“And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.”

C. (:6) Variety of Effects of the Ministries – Accomplished by the Power and Will of the One Sovereign God the Father

*“And there are varieties of effects,
but the same God who works all things in all persons.”*

Gordon Fee: Paul’s point seems clear: Not uniformity (their model) but diversity in the context of unity (God’s model) is essential for a healthy church. At the same time he urges that all of this is God’s doing and part of the divine purposes, a point he repeats throughout (vv. **6, 7, 11, 18, 24, 28**). The eternal God who is characterized by diversity within unity has decreed the same for the people who are to bear God’s likeness, the church. Very likely this emphatic theological framework is part of the corrective. Had their emphasis on a misguided “spirituality,” manifested by tongues-speaking, become an end in itself, so that they were focusing more on these things than on the one God who alone is to be worshiped? In any case, the opening paragraph (vv. **1–3**) put the work of the Spirit into a proper christological perspective; this section puts it into a proper theological one. Everything, absolutely everything—gifts, persons, church—owes its origin to the one God who works all things in all of God’s people (v. **6**).

III. (:7-11) UNDERSTAND THE SOURCE, PURPOSE AND EXERCISE OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A. (:7) Simple Statement of Fact -- The Source, Purpose and Exercise of the Spiritual Gifts

1. Every Believer has a Spiritual Gift
“But to each one”

One or Multiple??

2. Every Gift is Bestowed by and Controlled by the Spirit of God
“is given the manifestation of the Spirit”

3. The Exercise of Every Spiritual Gift is for the Good of the Body
“for the common good.”

Steve Zeisler: The apostle gives some tests that will help them know if their gifts were from the Spirit or not. The first test is that any such manifestation be "for the common good." It should benefit everybody, in other words. If you have a special ability that is from God, it is not given to make you richer, more prominent, or anything like that. It is not merely for your own good, in other words. If it is in fact from the Spirit of God, it will benefit all. Your using your gift will spread joy, truth and knowledge of Christ everywhere.

Gordon Fee: Paul concludes with the reason for this great diversity: "*for the common good.*" By so doing, he anticipates the concern to follow (chaps. 13 and 14), namely that "*the different kinds of gifts*" are for the building up of the community as a whole (= the outflow of love), not primarily for the benefit of the individual believer through whom the charisma is given expression, which unfortunately all too often becomes the emphasis or interest of a later time.

Daniel Akin: Spiritual gifts are given to every believer to bless the church, build up the body of Christ, and edify believers. But if a spiritual gift does not in some way edify the church, it is no longer a used gift; it is an abused gift. My mentor, **Dr. Adrian Rogers**, used to say, "Spiritual gifts are not given for your enjoyment, but for his employment." They are not toys for playing; they are tools for building.

To be sure, this does not mean there would not be any private benefit to the one exercising the gift. But this verse would certainly rule out using any gift strictly or merely for personal gain or self--satisfaction. It certainly does not rule out any and all benefits for an individual (**Carson**, *Showing*, 35).

B. (:8-10) List of Spiritual Gifts that are Especially Prone to Counterfeiting, Abuse, Misunderstanding and Misapplication – Emphasis is on the Variety

God has uniquely gifted each of His children; He does not intend for us to function as carbon copies; the body is healthy as we all make our unique and significant contribution

Jeffries: A complete list of around 20 specific spiritual gifts can be compiled by adding to the two **1 Corinthians 12** lists specific gifts listed in **Ephesians 4:11** and **Romans 12:6-8**. It has been suggested that since none of the lists is identical they were not intended to be comprehensive.

Gordon Fee: Attempts to **classify** the several items are numerous and varied. Some have suggested that they reflect a descending order of value, while others have rearranged the items conceptually. A popular grouping is

- (1) gifts of instruction (wisdom and knowledge);
- (2) gifts of supernatural power (faith, healings, miracles); and
- (3) gifts of inspired utterance (prophecy, discerning prophecies, tongues, interpretation of tongues).

The seventh item (distinguishing between spirits) is the one that tends to give trouble to most of these arrangements. If grouping is legitimate at all, it is most likely to be found in some clues Paul himself has given, by starting the third and eighth items (faith and tongues) with a different word for “another.” If so, then the first two are chosen for very specific ad hoc purposes; “wisdom” and “knowledge” held high court in Corinth. He then adds a random list of five items that have as their common denominator a supernatural endowment of some kind, and concludes with the “problem child” and its companion, tongues and interpretation.

What distinguishes this listing is their **concretely visible nature**, especially of the last seven. These, after all, are not only “gifts”; they are above all **manifestations of the Spirit’s presence in their midst**, most likely chosen because they are, like tongues itself, **extraordinary phenomena**. It would scarcely do for Paul at this point to attempt to broaden their perspective by listing less visible workings of the Spirit. That will come in time (esp. through the analogy of the body and in the lists in vv. 28–30); but for now the **emphasis is on the supernatural**.

1. Word of Wisdom

“For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit”

Robert Gundry: “A word of wisdom” consists in counseling others what they should do and comes first because the topic of wisdom came up prominently in the first main section of 1 Corinthians (**1:10 – 2:16**).

Gordon Fee: This language clearly harks back to the problem addressed at the beginning of the letter (**1:17 – 2:16**), where on the basis of “wisdom” the Corinthians were rejecting both Paul and his gospel. Indeed, in contrast to their own criterion for “spiritual” excellence, Paul says he deliberately rejected coming to them either in “wisdom characterized by word (rhetoric)” (**1:17**) or “with excellence of word or wisdom” (**2:1, 5**). With a considerable stroke of inspiration Paul now does *two things*:

- (a) He uses one of their own terms to begin his list of “manifestations” in the assembly that demonstrate the great diversity inherent in the one Spirit’s activities; and
- (b) he reshapes that term in light of the work of the Spirit so as to give it a significantly different content from their own.

2. Word of Knowledge

“and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit.”

Robert Gundry: “A word of knowledge” consists in informing others what they should understand and comes next because knowledge relates to wisdom and came up prominently within the second main section of 1 Corinthians (**chapter 8**).

3. Faith

“to another faith by the same Spirit”

Mark Taylor: The gift of faith is to be distinguished from faith as a possession of all believers that brings one into relationship with God (**12:3**). Paul must have in mind a particular kind of faith that believes God for extraordinary things, or a faith that guides the church through exceptional circumstances (**1 Cor 13:1–3**). If Paul has intentionally categorized the gifts, then there may be some relationship between the gift of faith and gifts of healings and miraculous powers that immediately follow.

4. Healing

“and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit”

5. Miracles

“and to another the effecting of miracles”

6. Prophecy

“and to another prophecy”

Gordon Fee: The prophet was a person who spoke to God’s people under the inspiration of the Spirit. The “inspired utterance” came by revelation and announced judgment (usually) or salvation. Although the prophets often performed symbolic acts, which they then interpreted, the mainstream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with “ecstasy,” especially “frenzy” or “mania.” For the most part, the prophets were understood only too well! Often the word spoken had a futuristic element, so in that sense they also came to be seen as “predicters”; but that was only one element, and not necessarily the crucial one.

7. Discernment

“and to another the distinguishing of spirits”

8. Speaking in Tongues

“to another various kinds of tongues”

Anthony Thiselton: At least five distinct views about speaking in tongues find a place in scholarly literature. These include tongues as:

- (1) angelic speech,
- (2) miraculous power to speak foreign languages,
- (3) liturgical or archaic utterances,
- (4) ecstatic speech,
- (5) mechanisms of release, especially in releasing longings or praise.

9. Interpretation of Tongues

“and to another the interpretation of tongues”

C. (:11) Fuller Explanation -- Understand the Sovereign Distribution and Operation of the Variety of Spiritual Gifts -- to Each Believer by the One and Only Holy Spirit

*“But one and the same Spirit works all these things,
distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”*

Gordon Fee: The gifts, even though they are “*given*” to “each person,” are ultimately expressions of the Spirit’s own sovereign action in the life of the believer and the community as a whole.

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 11** provides a crucial caution against the natural human tendency to want or expect everyone else to be gifted in the ways we are. It completely refutes all claims that any one gift is necessary for someone to be a Christian, or to be a mature Christian, or to be in the center of God’s activity in some part of the world. Just as there are no ‘one-member churches,’ neither are there any ‘every-member gifts.’

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can believers have only one spiritual gift or multiple?
- 2) Why does this list of spiritual gifts differ from the lists recorded in other NT passages? Can we put together one exhaustive list?
- 3) If someone practices some form of “spiritual gift” that only applies to their own personal edification, how would you respond?
- 4) Are you actively applying this test of whether the operation of the Spirit actually exalts Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: It is the universal testimony of the Scriptures that man is subject to the influence of other spirits besides the Spirit of God, and Paul is giving us a way to tell who they are. They can use religious jargon, they can use Biblical terminology and practices, but they will lead eventually to some form of idolatry. And here are the marks of idolatry:

1. First, it is always a personality cult. Some leader lifts himself up as the focus of all interest and attention, and people following him find themselves having to give a form of adulation and worship to a man or a woman like that.
2. Second, it always involves some degree of regimentation and control. In order to enforce the personality cult there have to be certain demands made, certain limitations imposed, certain rights must be given up, certain liberties have to be set aside, and the power of the personality in charge is such that he or she enables people to voluntarily consent to giving up their rightful liberties. That is always true in religious error.

3. Then along with that comes certain claims of special and unique powers. Every group must feel that they have a unique mission, they have a special authority, a special power has been committed to them that marks them out as different from others, and that claim becomes the mark of idolatrous solicitation.

4. Then together with that invariably comes a stress on money and finances as the central power and need of a group. Money is seen in terms of power as providing opportunities to fulfill desires and goals, and nothing can be done without it. . .

5. Then, of course, the final mark of religious idolatry is that it always creates unending jealousy and strife. You have groups like this constantly afflicted with internal dissensions, infighting, arguing, struggling for control, cutting down one another -- a total absence of all we seek to uphold in a Christian assembly: The love and affection of one for another.

Now in contrast to that, the apostle helps us to recognize the true mark of the Spirit of God at work. People are asking this everywhere today: "How do you know that the Spirit of God is really behind some of the manifestations that we're running into? Is the true Spirit of God behind the great healing meetings of today, or the demonstrations of tongues, or some of the other claims of religious leaders today?" Well, the apostle gives us the mark. He says,

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 12:3 RSV)

There is how you recognize the Spirit of God at work. He came into this world to do one thing: To exalt Jesus Christ. That is all he does. Everything the Spirit does aims at that goal and that point. And he will never do anything else.

Paul puts it negatively and positively here:

First, negatively: No one who speaks by the Spirit of God ever demeans or in any way diminishes the centrality of Christ in the Christian life or in the Christian faith. The Person and the work of Jesus are always the central thing. I am sure that very few people today would ever say these words, "Jesus is cursed." Perhaps there are groups that would say that; some of the Satanist groups might. I am equally sure that in the 1st century this was common, especially in the synagogues and in Jewish organizations where Christ was seen as a threat to Judaism. It may be that Paul is referring to the fact that when he was a young, zealous rabbi -- Saul of Tarsus, breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the Christians -- he may have forced them to say these words. In his defense before Agrippa, in the book of Acts, he says he forced many among them to blaspheme, and it may be that this is the sentence that he tried to get Christians to say: "Jesus is accursed."

But you do not have to say those words to fulfill what Paul is saying here. Anyone, for instance, who says that Jesus Christ nothing but a mere man is virtually saying, "Jesus is accursed," because according to the teaching of the Bible the whole race is cursed; the curse of Adam's evil has come upon us all and twisted our inner life to make us self-centered and living for self-that is the curse. And it is universal, everybody is born with that inner drive to be the center of attention and to have the universe revolve around him. That is the curse. Now when you say that Jesus was nothing but a man, a great teacher, perhaps, a moral leader, whatever, you are saying that he too is part of that cursed race, that he was not free from it, although in the Biblical record it is the virgin birth that preserved him from that taint of sin. He was not under the curse of Adam; that is why he could be our Deliverer from it. Therefore, all teaching that puts down Jesus, that denies his deity, that says he is not the redeemer, that he too is nothing but a great teacher, is, in effect, saying "Jesus is accursed."

Now positively: When the Spirit is at work he always seeks to exalt and magnify Christ as Lord. "Jesus is Lord" was the creed of the early Church. The Romans attacked that. They tried to hold up Caesar as Lord, and in the early persecutions they made the Christians choose between saying, "Caesar is Lord," and they could be delivered and set free, or, "Jesus is Lord," and they would meet the lions, or be burned at the stake. And to the glory of most of the early Christians, they held fast and gave up their lives rather than deny that Jesus is Lord.

Lord means "in charge of all human events." I think we Christians oftentimes subconsciously live less than Christian lives in this regard. We think Jesus is only going to be Lord when he comes back again and rules and reigns in triumph over the earth, when every knee shall bow and every tongue acclaim that he is Lord. But the truth that the Scripture sets forth, and the truth that the Holy Spirit always undergirds, is that Jesus is Lord; he is in charge now of all human events; he is the One who holds the controls of history, and everything that is reported in our papers today is moving at his will to a single point in history that he controls.

This is what Peter declared to the assembled multitudes on the Day of Pentecost: "Him whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ," {cf, Acts 2:36}. This was what made the early Christians so fearless: "Jesus is Lord; he is already in charge of these people who are giving us trouble, and he will see how far they go and determine what they do with us, therefore we don't need to be afraid. Jesus is Lord." This is what the Holy Spirit everywhere manifests.

Steve Zeisler: God gives his children spiritual gifts, such as prophesy, teaching, discerning of spirits, etc., which he utilizes to spread his truth. But there are other voices claiming spiritual power who are actually liars and deceivers. That is why the apostle does not want the Corinthians to be ignorant of spiritual things, and why he wants them to be able to identify the course of spiritual things. . .

Although there are differences in callings, experiences and assignments, there is yet a central witness which all must make, and that is that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man. There is only one way to relate to Christ if we are Christian, and that is to relate to him as Lord. Having made that clear, then we will find the beautiful diversity of Christian experience which we need to understand from that chapter. . .

The tests which Paul suggests we apply are: gifts are for the common good; they are given by the Holy Spirit; and, it is the Lord himself who is ultimately at work.

John Piper: [*Takes the position that the gifts of miracles and healing are still appropriate for believers today.*]

Let me begin by summarizing some of the reasons why I think the "*gifts of healings*" and "*workings of miracles*" referred to in **1 Cor. 12:9-10** are gifts still available to the church today. It may seem obvious to a simple reading. But there are many who say they are not. So basically what I have to do is respond to their arguments.

Let me quote directly from a very popular teacher: "The four temporary sign gifts [his designation, not the Bible's] were miracles, healings, tongues, and interpretations of tongues. These four sign gifts had a unique purpose -- to give the apostles credentials, to let the people know that these men all spoke the truth of God. But once the Word of God was inscripturated, the sign gifts were no longer needed and they ceased." The assumption in this argument is that the "*gifts of healings*" and "*workings of miracles*" mentioned in **1 Cor. 12:9-10** refer only to what Jesus and the apostles could do (including Stephen, Barnabas and Philip). These were not gifts given to ordinary Christians, but only to the authoritative leaders of the first generation. Then they disappeared.

The same teacher says, "We never see the gift [of healing] being used at random in the churches. It is a gift always associated with Christ, the Twelve (plus Paul), the seventy, and the close associates of the Twelve. The gift of healing was a limited one in terms of the people who possessed it, as was the gift of miracles. And like miracles, the gift of healing was used to authenticate and confirm the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom." So you see how the argument works: first, you equate the "*gifts of healings*" in **1 Cor. 12** with the unique authority of Jesus and the apostles (that's the linchpin of the argument!); second, you show that the role of miracles for the apostles was to authenticate their teaching; and, third, it follows automatically that these gifts cease with the disappearance of the founding apostles who wrote our New Testament.

The problem with this view is that the basic assumption won't stand up under scrutiny. The "*gifts of healings*" and "*workings of miracles*" in **1 Cor. 12:9-10** are not limited to Jesus and the apostles. In fact the New Testament never describes the ability of Jesus and the apostles to work miracles as "the gift of healing" or "the gift of miracles." When you read **1 Cor 12:7-10** you get the simple impression that these gifts are given according to God's will to various people in the church: "*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the*

utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the one Spirit, to another the workings of miracles . . ." It does not seem to be a natural reading of these verses to say that what they mean is that NO ONE at Corinth gets the "gifts of healings" or the "workings of miracles" but only Jesus and the apostles.

This looks even more unlikely when you read **verse 28** where the gift of apostle seems clearly distinct from the "gifts of healings" and "miracles": "*God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings.*" This looks like gifts of healings and miracles are different from and additional to the gift of apostle and prophet and teacher.

This is what we saw in **Galatians 3:5** last week also. Paul writes to the Galatians and says, "*Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?*" The most natural meaning of that verse is that God is working miracles in their midst by the Holy Spirit. He is doing this through the ordinary believers not through the apostles. This is just what we would expect in view of **1 Cor. 12** -- The Spirit gives to some in the churches "gifts of healings" and "workings of miracles."

I still stand by what I said last week, namely, that I want to honor the uniqueness of the apostles -- that they are once for all eyewitnesses and authoritative revelatory spokesmen of the living Christ. We have their final revelation in the New Testament and that remains now and always will remain our measuring rod for all doctrine and experience. But now the question is: Do we need to keep the gifts of healings and miracles away from ordinary church members because that was the only way the apostles could authenticate themselves? No. The miracle working power of the apostles was only PART of what authenticated their authority. If the only thing that set the apostles apart as authoritative and true was their signs and wonders, then false prophets could claim the same authority and truth, because Jesus and Paul both tell us that false prophets will do signs and wonders to lead people astray (**Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; cf. Rev. 13:14; 16:14; 19:20**).

Alongside miracles Paul said that his apostleship was confirmed by at least a dozen other things. For example, in **1 Cor. 9:1-2** he says, "*Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*" Here there is no mention of miracles as Paul defends his apostleship. He had seen Jesus in person and God had blessed his ministry with life changing power in bringing the Corinthian church into being. That was his argument. In other words, miracle working was only part of his credentials.

What that means is that the apostles' uniqueness is not at all jeopardized when we say that gifts of healing and miracles were given to other Christians in the church at Corinth and in the churches of Galatia. And if that was true then, it is also true today. Gifts of healings today do not compromise or call into question the unique place of

Jesus and the apostles or the unparalleled role that miracles had in their ministries. So as far as I can see the argument against the gifts of healings today is not compelling.

Wayne Wever: Definition of a Spiritual Gift:

A God-given ability for service (whether natural -- such as hospitality; or supernatural - - such as miracles); relates exclusively to the body of Christ (mostly for the purpose of building up the body of believers -- **Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 12:7**; some gifts deal with evangelism); None have self-edification as their goal -- this can only be a by-product.

John MacArthur: True spiritual gifts are given by God to strengthen and manifest oneness, harmony, and power. Satan's counterfeit gifts are meant to divide, disrupt, and weaken. God's gifts build up; Satan's counterfeits tear down. . .

Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for ministry, characteristics of Jesus Christ that are to be manifested through the body corporate just as they were manifested through the body incarnate. Each gift the Holy Spirit now gives to believers had its perfect expression in Jesus' own life and ministry, His church continues to live out His life on earth through the power of His Spirit working through His gifted people.

James Boyer: That the exercise of these grace-gifts had been a problem in the Corinthian church has been hinted at before in various places (e.g., **1:5, 7a**). Their pride in knowledge and wisdom apparently reflected a fascination with the showier, more spectacular gifts. Their particular problem appears to have centered in the undue exaltation of tongues, as is shown repeatedly in this section. In Paul's listing of these gifts, he puts speaking in tongues at the end of the list (**12:10**). In his second listing he does the same (**12:29, 30**). He begins his chapter on love by relating it to the gift of tongues (**13:1**). Later in that chapter he makes a clear distinction between tongues and the other gifts in the way they will cease. And the whole of **Chapter 14** is a discussion of this gift. Evidently the Corinthians had some problems with this particular gift. And it is not inappropriate to remark that this is the most problematic gift of all.

Paul treats this problem after the following outline:

- (1) A general presentation of the matter, the diversity of gifts and their function in the one body (**chap. 12**)
- (2) The one quality necessary to the exercise of any gift, i.e. love (**chap. 13**)
- (3) The specific problem at Corinth, the relative value of tongues and rules regarding their practice (**chap. 14**)

Thomas Leake: Answering Basic Questions About Spiritual Gifts

Introduction: What is your spiritual gift? Are you using it? Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Why is the gift of tongues so controversial? Are there still prophets in the church today?

List of many possible questions about spiritual gifts . . .

Spirit of God speaks the Word of God – so you can count on consistency there;

We will be studying a number of **questions** in the section from **chap 12-14**

I. (:1) Why is it important to learn about spiritual gifts?

(10:1) – similar formula – there is a need to teach and fill in knowledge that is lacking; Why would people be ignorant?

- maybe their church never talks about spiritual gifts
- maybe their church has a lot of activity in this area but very little instruction

Why should we even bring up such a controversial subject that has proven to be divisive? Our unity must be based on a right understanding of God and His purposes as we learn from His Word

We need to be able to distinguish between the true and the counterfeit

Context tells us that Paul is speaking about spiritual gifts (even though the word “gifts” is omitted)

Emphasis: on the source and enablement of the gift

1 Pet. 4:10 – we must employ the gift in serving one another; contrast the effort people put into what career to pursue

We are post-pentacostal believers – important distinction

- know who you are and what your gift is
- use your gift as a good steward

II. (:2-3) How can we discern the true from the counterfeit?

2 Ways to Distinguish the True from the Counterfeit:

A. Beware of Non-Christian Influences

Paul starts by reminding them of their dismal past in pagan days; but why did Paul include vs 2 in his flow of thought right here? Corinthians had come from a background of pagan idol worship – what did they used to find as spiritual, powerful, and impressive?

How could dumb idols hold such influence over intelligent people?

Ps. 115:3-8 –

“*led astray*” -- Passive; someone else was at work here; a false spiritual power; unclean, intelligent spirits; activity of demons; manipulative

Eph. 2:2; 1 Cor. 10:20 – an idol is nothing but they were sacrificing to demons

Spiritual warfare going on in unseen realm;

Need discernment about what comes from God and what does not

How Powerful were these influences? Examples from their pagan past:

1) The Mystery Religions – popular among the Greeks; ecstatic state; thought that they could become one with the gods; very enthusiastic and outwardly impressive; cf. description by Dr. House

2) Religion of Apollo – spirit of Python – demon possessed girl who was able to make pronouncements about the future

Acts 16:16 – ecstatic utterances – same manifestation; oracles spoken by prophets and prophetesses

Never let your pagan past guide you!

Impressiveness does not mean that it is from God; Corinthians were saved, but still easily fooled

B. Be Guided by the Scriptures – not Personal Experience

Not the only rule, but an important one provided here;

Obviously not just uttering the words, but meaning them;

1) Negative side – **John 16:14**; Spirit always glorifies Jesus Christ

What was happening here?? Can only speculate

- Jews – maybe were saying that Jesus was accursed because He had been hung on a tree – **Gal. 3:13**
- Greeks – dualistic theories; Gnostic theories – Jesus is separate from the divine Son of God – **1 Thess. 5:20**

We must examine everything carefully; don't just look at the external phenomena;

Self control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit

Pentacostal groups can have elitist mentality – “I had the experience and you did not so you cannot say anything against it” = self-authenticating; “So I am the authority on the subject”

Cf. Toronto Blessing – some good things came out of this; but what about “barking in the Spirit” (their terminology)

Need to always subject your experience to the Word of God

Cf. “being slain in the Spirit” – exciting, impressive – but Bible says nothing about looking for this – God rules in climate of peace and order in the church

1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2 – Test the spirits

2) Positive side – confessing “Jesus is Lord” = foundational confession of the Christian faith – **Rom. 10:9**

- to the Jews, Christ viewed as an imposter
- to the Muslims, as just a prophet
- to liberal Protestants, as just a good moral teacher; Etc.

2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Tim. 6:15; Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46

Deut. 13 – even if the prophet performs signs or wonders that come true – examine the message for consistency with the Word of God

III. (:4-7) What are Spiritual Gifts?

A. “Spiritual” – remember this from back in **vs. 1**; given by the Spirit; energized by the Spirit

B. “gifts” (:4) – God bestows, generously; these are grace gifts, not earned by works; undeserved; so we must use them in humility

C. “ministries” (:5) – word for deacon; servant; work done on behalf of other people; serving and waiting on tables; like slaves serving a master; some only want to serve when it is convenient

D. “effects” (:6) – energy – actual working out of the gift; what gets done by the gift in use; you accomplish something; not based on human talents or abilities; results are God's work and not our own

E. “manifestations” (:7) – that which is revealed, made plain, displayed; meant to be on display = how we see the working of the Holy Spirit; **1 Tim. 4:14**; reflect the person

Def: A spiritual gift is an undeserved divine enablement freely distributed by the Holy Spirit to believers and manifested through empowered service to the body of Christ

IV. What is the Source of Spiritual Gifts?

The Divine Trinity

- Holy Spirit gives the spiritual gift
- Christ assigns the associated ministries
- God the Father produces the effects

Unity of the Trinity is a powerful argument for the unity of the church; this would be a remedy for the problems at Corinth; believers there are rebuked for elevating the gift of tongues; Paul puts it last on purpose; Love is most important

Something is seriously wrong when the effects of the gifts breaking out all over is one of division

V. What are the Kinds or Types of Spiritual Gifts? Varieties

Distributions; apportionments; as the Spirit wills

Diversity is crucial to the Body of Christ; there is beauty and fullness to the variety;

How many gifts are there? The lists in NT are not exhaustive (**1 Cor. 12:8-10; 28;**

Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)

How are they labeled? Expressed by either the ability, the name of the church office, or through the effect produced (e.g. miracles)

Look at the overlap in the lists – e.g. prophecy mentioned repeatedly

Lists might only be representative ... but we have a hard time coming up with other possibilities

Problem: many view the church through the lens of their own giftedness; cf. people with discernment who tend to be overly critical

VI. (:6-7) Who Gets Spiritual Gifts?

“in all persons” / “to each one”

Any and every member of the body of Christ; all true believers -- **Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:11**; we are the temple of the Holy Spirit; indwelt; gifted – no exceptions

Vital equipment to operate in the body of Christ; not based on level of maturity; no second blessing needed; **Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12**

VII. When does a Christian get his or her Gift?

At moment of salvation; when they enter into the body of Christ; the body would have no use for someone without a gift; every member of the body is needed; we are never exhorted to try to get some gift you don't already have; Spirit of God has already decided; what about **vs. 31**?? Some people misunderstand this – *“be zealous for the greater gifts”* – not “desire” – not talking individually here, but as a congregation; covet

the ministry of the apostles, prophets and teachers in their midst (**vs. 13**) – “*in (with) one Spirit we were all baptized into one body;*” answers the When question; you got into the body of Christ by Spirit baptism; a doctrine often overlooked

Erroneous teachings about Spirit baptism:

- Seek it as a second work of God’s grace after salvation; you must understand the historical, transitional nature of the Book of Acts where the church is born
- Staging some service where you seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit; or the Holy Spirit to fall upon you in some special way
- Teaching that OT saints were also baptized into the Holy Spirit in the same sense
- Claiming you have to speak in tongues as a sign you have been baptized in the Spirit
- Confusing this with other works of the Holy Spirit (regeneration, filling, etc.)
- Seeking multiple experiences of being baptized in the Spirit (only happens one time)
- Confusing water baptism with Holy Spirit baptism

Bapto = to dip; Baptidzo = intensive form = to totally immerse

Immersed into the Holy Spirit (just as immersion into water)

Acts 1:5; that sound of the wind was never repeated (shows it is transitional in nature rather than normative for church age)

Jesus is doing the baptizing; not only all around us, but within us; **Gal. 3:27**

VIII. How many gifts did we get?

Harder to answer this question; emphasis = we don’t have all the gifts; but each one is gifted

Apostle Paul = example of someone who had multiple gifts (Apostle, prophet, gift of healing, spoke in tongues, etc) – indicates that multiples are possible

You have the perfect blend of gifts that the Holy Spirit wants you to have for how God wants you to function in the body; one might be dominant

IX. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

For the common good of the body of Christ

Eph. 4:16 – have to operate in love; building up others; not given for personal edification; people are too wrapped up in themselves; tools for helping others not toys for playing by ourselves

1 Cor. 14:4 rebuking self edification; not promoting it;

1 Pet. 4:10

We have to fight the individualism and selfishness of our culture

Cannot be like the Olympics where 90,000 watch 8 people race

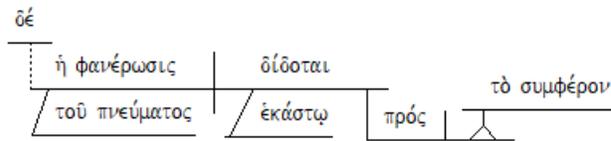
Word for body (soma) used 18 times

Vs. 12 summarizes **vv.14-27**

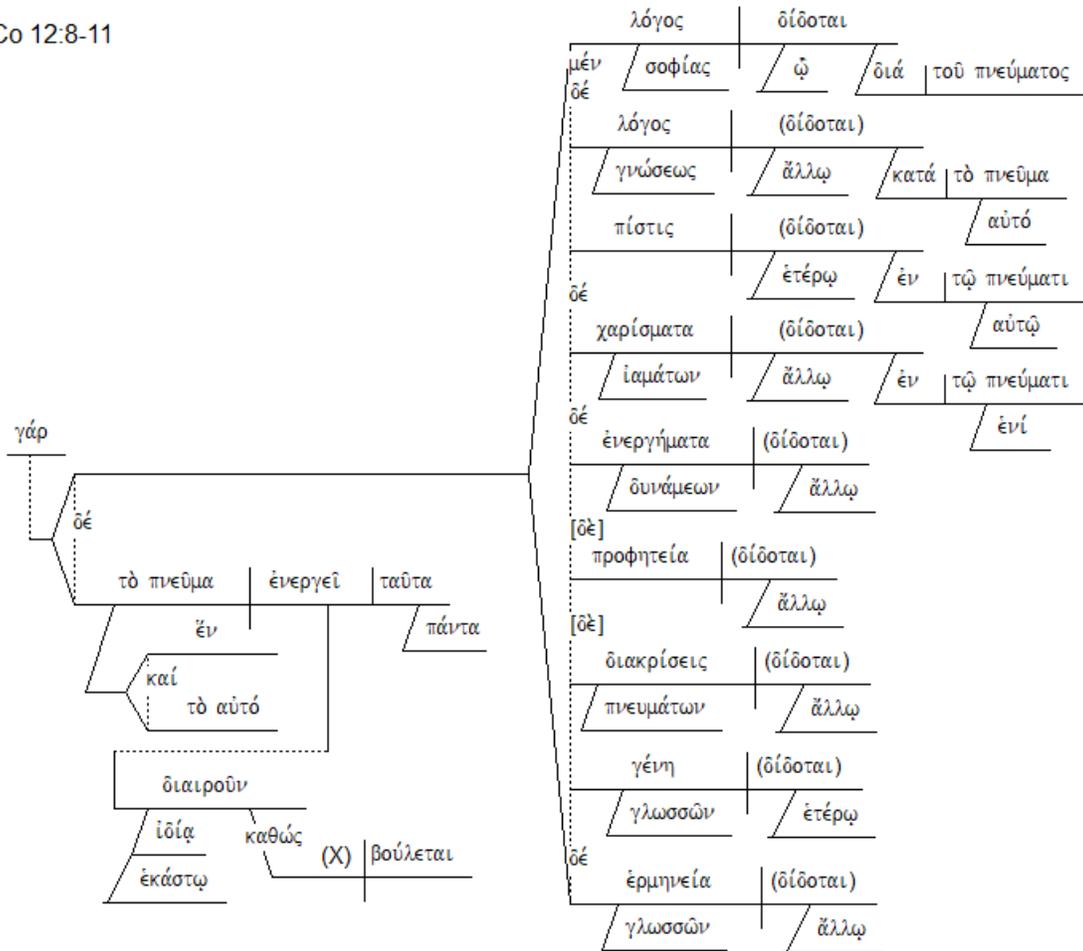
- 1) the body is one body
- 2) all the many members make up the one body
- 3) it is the body of Christ and that is you

Vs. 27 is the climax – get busy serving together

1Co 12:7



1Co 12:8-11



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

TITLE: ONE BODY OF CHRIST . . . MANY DIVERSE BUT INTERDEPENDENT MEMBERS . . . ALL SIGNIFICANT AND ESSENTIAL

BIG IDEA:

THE HEALTHY FUNCTIONING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH (THE EXPRESSION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST) DEPENDS ON EVERY MEMBER FULFILLING THEIR GOD-GIFTED ROLE

INTRODUCTION:

We have been studying the subject of spiritual gifts. Do you know how God has uniquely gifted you for the goal of building up the body of Christ? Are you fulfilling your role so that the local body of believers is benefiting from your ministry? Do you have an appreciation for the contribution that others are making in your life and in your church? Are you envious of the gifts that others have? Are you content with your God-appointed role? Too many people approach church from the standpoint of what they can receive rather than what they can give. Too many people sit on the sidelines and squander the opportunity to invest their spiritual gift to impact the lives of others.

Paul Gardner: Paul now advances an extended metaphor (vv. 12–26) for the church that he describes as a human body. The intention of the metaphor is to demonstrate that every member of the church is vital and that the church will not function properly when one or more members are ignored or regarded as less useful or less valuable. The unity of the physical body, in which each part serves a different but important function, becomes a picture of how the body of the church ought to function and view its members. Once again, it provides Paul with another way of tackling the whole question of the elitism among some that has been based upon certain grace-gifts. The emphasis of v. 11 that the Spirit allocates these gifts “*as he wills*” (καθὼς βούλεται) is taken up again in v. 18 where it is “*God*” who has arranged the members of the body “*as he chose*” (καθὼς ἠθέλησεν). “*For*” (γάρ) indicates that he is offering a further explanation of the last section (vv. 4–11). God determines what the body looks like, how it functions, and the place of each person within it. Because of this, no one can view another as greater or lesser.

David Garland: His main concern is how their distorted view of spiritual gifts contributes to their lack of social cohesion. The elitist regard for some of the manifestations of the Spirit has exacerbated their disunity. To rebut this notion, he insists that all have been immersed in the one Spirit into the body of Christ, which he likens to a complex, living organism. The first three verses (12:12–14) give the theological basis for the body imagery that is developed in the rest of the section. This body is not an agglomeration of autonomous body parts but a symbiotic whole. **Snyder** (1992: 169–70) summarizes the point: “Each part of the body takes its meaning from being a functional body member. A collection of arms, legs, and torsos does not create a

body.” In **12:15–19**, Paul develops the analogy that the body is made up of many different parts, not one. In **12:20–26**, he emphasizes that although the body has many parts, it is nonetheless one body. Diversity is necessary for a body to function, but the body is unified as each member is interrelated and interdependent. In **12:27–30**, he concludes with a list of functions in the church and a series of rhetorical questions expecting the answer no: “*Not all are apostles, are they?*” and so on. He confirms the need for diversity (as opposed to hierarchy) for the body to function properly. . .

The body metaphor was readily understandable as a common motif in political oratory and useful to underscore the folly of the Corinthians’ fragmentation as a community. The argument emphasizes the interrelationships of bodily members to ridicule these rifts. Paul seeks to impress upon them the need for solidarity and to persuade them to show loving concern for the less honored members. He also emphasizes that diversity in the body is something divinely implanted and therefore necessary. If any think that they are so gifted that they can do without others, he calls them back to a renewed sense of community. One person alone, no matter how gifted, cannot play a Beethoven symphony, act a Shakespearian tragedy, or compete against another team. The same is true in the church. It can never be a solo performance.

I. (:12-26) THE BODY OF CHRIST IS PATTERNED AFTER OUR PHYSICAL BODY WITH DIVERSITY OF FUNCTIONALITY SUPPORTING UNITY OF PURPOSE AND EXPRESSION

A. (:12) Presentation of the Thesis: The Parallel Between the Human Body and the Body of Christ – Unity Despite Diversity

1. Human Body

*“For even as the body is one and yet has many members,
and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body”*

2. Body of Christ

“so also is Christ.”

B. (:13-18) Argument Based on God’s Formation of the Body of Christ

1. (:13) Role of the Spirit in Formation of the Body of Christ

*“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,
whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free,
and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”*

Richard Hays: The result of that immersion in the Spirit is that all have been made one. They have come from very different ethnic and social backgrounds—Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—but they have been bonded together by the Spirit into one body. Consequently, the old markers of identity should no longer divide the community.

Gordon Fee: In Paul’s view what makes the Corinthians one is not just their common article of faith, but especially their **common experience of the Spirit**, the very Spirit responsible for and manifested in the great diversity just set before them (vv. 4–11). For

Paul the reception of the Spirit is the *sine qua non* of Christian life. The Spirit is what essentially distinguishes the believer from the nonbeliever (2:10–14); the Spirit is what especially marks the beginning of Christian life (Gal. 3:2–3); the Spirit above all is what makes a person a child of God (Rom. 8:14–17). Thus it is natural for Paul to refer to their unity in the body in terms of the Spirit. Indeed, despite the considerable literature on this text suggesting otherwise, Paul’s present concern is not to delineate how an individual becomes a believer, but to explain how the Corinthian believers, though many, are one body. The answer: The Spirit, whom all alike have received, and in whom all alike have been baptized.

2. (:14-17) Diversity of the Body with Unique Roles

“For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?”

Mark Taylor: In 12:15–20 Paul makes three self-evident observations about the individual members of the body. First, each member of the body is equally a part of the body. The rhetorical device of personification (“*If the foot should say ...*,” “*If the ear should say ...*”) allows Paul to portray more vividly the envy that one Corinthian believer might have for another or the sense of being an “outsider” instead of an integral part of the church. Just because the foot is not a hand or an ear is not an eye does not mean that either is any less a member of the body (12:15–16). There is no insignificant, unimportant, or inconsequential member of the body. **Garland** explains, “The failure of one little valve can shut down the whole bodily system. The implication is that there is no unimportant gift or person in the body of Christ.”

Second, each part of the body has its own unique function. The logic of 12:17 is intuitive and simple. “*If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?*” The corollary point is that there is no such thing as a body that is only one part, expressed in the question of 12:19, “*If they were all one part, where would the body be?*” In other words, if the whole body were only one part, then not only are other vital functions missing, there is no body at all, only a body part. **Garland** suggests that the “application may or not have been obvious to the Corinthians. A church full of only glossolalists would be no less freakish.”

Third, the one body of many parts is by God’s sovereign design (12:18). “The hypothesis and the analogy is over and done with: now for realities as God has arranged them.” Paul is careful to stress that God placed “*each one*” of the members in the body “*just as he wanted them to be.*” Each member of the body has its own function according to God’s design. The emphasis on “*each one*” and the placement of the members in the body according to God’s pleasure builds up the main point of 12:4–11

that describes the manifestation of the Spirit “*to each one*” (12:7), the distribution of gifts “*to one*” and “*to another*” (12:8–10), and the allotment of gifts of the Spirit “*just as he determines*” (12:11). This third point is perhaps Paul’s chief point, since he not only restates the essence of 12:4–11 but will do so again in 12:24 and 12:28. Paul concludes the first part of his elaboration on the body with a reprise of the essential point of 12:12–14, “*If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body*” (12:19–20).

3. (:18) Divinely Ordained Individual Roles of Each Member

“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”

Richard Hays: The body is internally differentiated in accordance with the design of God (v. 18); without such differentiation, the body would be grotesque and helpless (v. 17), all eye or all ear. For that reason, no member of the body (church) should ever think that he or she is worthless or unimportant (vv. 15–16); each constituent part has its own distinctive purpose in the functioning of the whole. This also suggests—though Paul does not develop this point—that members should neither envy nor mimic one another, “desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope” (T. S. Eliot, “Ash-Wednesday,” Complete Poems and Plays, p. 60). Rather, each person should accept gracefully and gratefully whatever gifts God has given and use them for the benefit of the community.

C. (:19-26) **Argument Based on Each Role Being Significant and Essential**

1. (:19-20) Many Members in One Body

*“And if they were all one member, where would the body be?
20 But now there are many members, but one body.”*

2. (:21-25) Diversity of the Body with Mutual Care for Each Member

“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, 24 whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”

Richard Hays: In the body metaphor, however, Paul goes farther than before to validate the legitimacy and importance of these weaker and less honorable members within the community: not only are they indispensable to the healthy functioning of the whole body, but God has arranged the body in such a way that greater honor is to be given to those who in the natural order of things might be despised (v. 24).

Anthony Thiselton: The application to Corinth and to church life today is clear. Those who may appear to flaunt supposedly more spectacular gifts (or perhaps those whose social status appears to confer prestige on the church) may turn out to be less indispensable than the faithful, humble, hard-praying, or hard-working “members” whose value may be overlooked by the power seekers. **Jürgen Moltmann** argues that Christian believers who bring with them disabilities, privations, or experiences of suffering may be the most precious and “charismatic” part of the body, because every church stands in genuine need of such to live out and to teach the character of the gospel (*The Spirit of Life*, pp. 192-93).

Paul Gardner: Two purpose clauses round out Paul’s definitive point that this is the way God designed things to be. The first expresses the negative, and the second a positive comparison. God did it this way “*so that there may be no division*” (ἵνα μὴ ᾖ σχίσμα) and that the members “*may have the same care for one another*” (τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν).

Mark Taylor: In **12:21–27** the personification of body parts continues in order to make a different point. Here the main consideration is the need that members of the body have for one another with an emphasis on the weaker, less honorable, and unpresentable members of the body. The shameful treatment of the poor at the Lord’s Supper by the more distinguished and honorable members of the church (**11:17–34**; esp. **11:22**) is undoubtedly in the background and aptly illustrates the necessity of this particular application of the body image.

In **12:21–27** Paul makes four key assertions. First, the members of the body need one another (**12:21**), “*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’*” Paul changes the image from the previous paragraph a bit by having one of the sensory organs (eye) speak to one of the external limbs (hand) and replaces the ear with the head that speaks to the feet. Most commentators suggest that the new pairings reflect the hierarchical attitudes of some Corinthians. The head and the eye are obvious metaphors for the supposed higher status members of the church who viewed themselves to be of greater value than others.

Second, the weaker members are indispensable (**12:22**). The verse opens with a strong adversative statement, “*On the contrary.*” In other words, in stark contrast to the attitude that one body part has no need of the other, what only appears to be weaker is actually all the more essential. Furthermore, the body parts we deem less honorable we treat with greater honor and the unpresentable parts we treat with modesty (**12:23**). The language of weakness, honor, and shame brings to mind some of the major emphases of the letter. In explaining Christ crucified as God’s wisdom, Paul reminded the Corinthians that God’s weakness is stronger than men (**1:25**) and God’s choice of the weak things of the world shames the strong (**1:27**). Paul’s ironic rebuke of the Corinthians’ arrogance by comparing their self-exaltation to the suffering of the apostles in **4:10** employs the weak/strong and honor/dishonor motif, “*We are weak, but you are strong!*” Paul warned those with knowledge to watch their so-called freedom lest their liberty causes their weaker brother to stumble (**8:9–10**). Paul explicitly

identified with the weak: *“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak”* (9:22). In **chap. 11** the notion of shame and honor is a major motif in Paul’s discussion of the head covering (11:2–16) and the Lord’s Supper (11:17–22). All of this suggests that in 12:22–23 Paul’s analogies and word-choices concerning the body parts are carefully chosen.

Third, and relatedly, God gives greater honor to the members that lack it according to his design (12:24b). God has combined, or *“mixed together,”* the members of the body for this very purpose. This is essentially a restatement of 12:18, that God put the members in the body as he pleased. Here, however, Paul adds a clarifying purpose statement concerning the divine blending of the body: *“so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other”* (12:25). Collins notes that the compound purpose clause emphasizes what it means for there to be no division in the body. “In place of division there should exist mutual concern of the members for one another.” The unity of the church is one of the primary themes of the letter.

Fourth, what affects one member of the body affects all members of the body. Thus, not only is the one body many members, one member of the body affects the whole: *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it”* (12:26). Everyone can relate to the pain that reverberates throughout the body when one small member is compromised. On the positive side, *“If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”* The implication is that a profound solidarity exists between the members of the body. Like the previous paragraph (12:15–20) Paul concludes 12:21–27 with a summarizing statement, which states in no uncertain terms that they are the body he is talking about, *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

3. (:26) Unity of the Body in Experiencing Suffering or Joy

*“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;
if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”*

(:27) CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION TO FINAL SUMMARY – MANY MEMBERS BUT ONE BODY OF CHRIST

“Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

Anthony Thiselton: The last five verses of the chapter press home the argument by way of summary. If these “gifts” are “different apportionings” in accordance with the will and the generosity of God (vv. 4-6), and if they are given “for common advantage” on the part of the whole church (v. 4) to “one ... [or] to another ...,” at least two consequences follow. First, they cannot be a source of competitive comparisons in the stakes for status. Second, the full range of gifts (even granted that no “list” of gifts is comprehensive) transcends the capacity of any individual Christian alone to possess them. Only in the church as a community of diverse individuals who bring diverse gifts

for the mutual building up of all can anyone witness and experience the rich fullness of the many gifts of the Holy Spirit.

II. (:28-31) EACH CHURCH MEMBER MUST FUNCTION WITHIN THEIR GOD-APPOINTED ROLE WHILE DESIRING THE OVERALL EDIFICATION OF THE BODY AND PURSUING LOVE ABOVE ALL

A. (:28) Sovereign Disposition of Spiritual Gifts – All Are Not Equal in Order or Importance

“And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.”

Andrew Noselli: Paul numbers the first three gifts. To rank the gifts in order of importance would contradict what he has been arguing, so the numbering is probably **chronological**: God first appointed apostles (i.e., the Twelve), the prophets at Pentecost, then teachers (i.e., people who clearly explain and apply Scripture).

B. (:29-30) Sensible Diversity of Spiritual Gifts -- One Size Does Not Fit All

“All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?”

Ray Stedman: These gifts, when they are being exercised, grow into offices. Notice how that which is listed as a gift in the beginning of the chapter has now become an office in the church at the end of it. Instead of having "gifts of healing," we speak of "healers," and instead of "gifts of administrations," we speak of "administrators." One grows into the other.

Robert Gundry: Prophets are conveyers of divine revelations, and teachers are explainers of those revelations. . . “Administrations” refers to people gifted for guiding a church in its policies and programs. The term was used for the helmsman of a ship and therefore suited especially well the church in Corinth, a maritime community through which sea traffic passed.

C. (:31) Strategic Design of Spiritual Gifts

1. Edification of the Church Must Be the Differentiator in Promoting Spiritual Gifts

“But earnestly desire the greater gifts.”

Anthony Thiselton: Verse 31 is a **transitional** verse that belongs equally to **12:1-30** and to **13:1-13**. Continue to be zealously concerned reflects a continuous imperative with the force of go on doing it. But what the readers are to go on doing can be understood in either of two ways. Paul might be rebuking their competitive envy of other people’s gifts (Greek *zēloute* can mean envy). He would then be redirecting this to

the one gift that everyone can possess, namely, the gift of love, which is noncompetitive by its very nature. Alternatively, and more probably, Paul urges with irony, tongue-in-cheek, that their zealous concern (verging on obsessive concern) to receive “spiritual gifts” needs actually to be extended to the “*greatest*” of these, namely, **love**.

2. Love Must Be the Common Thread in Exercising Spiritual Gifts
“*And I show you a still more excellent way.*”

Ray Stedman: Now, there is a big difference between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit is what God is after. That is the character of Christ coming through. The gifts are given to enable us to achieve in increasing degree, by mutual exercise, the fruit of the Spirit. But the fruit is what God is after, and every congregation should be infinitely more concerned with the fruit of the Spirit than they are with the gifts of the Spirit.

Gordon Fee: The preceding argument has concluded with the preceding rhetorical questions (vv. 29–30). With these words Paul is about to launch on his next argument (14:1–25), with its passion regarding the need for intelligibility in the community; and in the community all the intelligible gifts are “*greater*” than tongues because they can **edify**, while tongues without interpretation cannot. But before he gets to that point, Paul interrupts himself to give the **proper framework** in which the “*greater gifts*” are to function -- **love**. In this view the imperative to come (14:1) is resumptive. “*Pursue love,*” he commands, “*and in that context eagerly desire the things of the Spirit, especially those gifts that are intelligible and will thus edify the community.*”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How content are you with the way that God has gifted you . . . or do you tend to be jealous of the gifts of others?
- 2) Do you see your role in the local church as significant and essential? How can you encourage others to view their role in this way?
- 3) How would you argue from this passage against those who would encourage all believers to speak in tongues?
- 4) How can Paul say that the church should “*desire the greater gifts*” if all members should be content with the gift they have been given?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: We noted that being “*baptized into Moses*” described Israel’s entrance

into the covenant and its allegiance to the Lord (by analogy with baptized into Christ). “*In the cloud*” spoke of the active presence of God in the nation-forming event and his continuing protection of them. Drinking the same “*spiritual drink*” referred to all Israelites drinking of water in the wilderness that was given as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Now in **12:13** we would suggest something quite similar is being said. The earlier example of the wilderness generation was used negatively. Its teaching purpose was that though all were part of the covenant community and the presence of God in the cloud brought them into being as a separate people and all received the Spirit’s gifts for their good, yet many rebelled and were judged. In **12:13**, however, it is no longer an illustration and is now used positively. The Corinthian believers were baptized “*into one body*,” that is, they all became part of the single covenant community of Christ. “*In one Spirit*” speaks of the active presence of the Spirit in the community-forming event but especially of his continuing protection of them, for they remain in his sphere. They are all caused to drink of one Spirit, that is, they enjoy the gifts that God gives them for their spiritual sustenance. Thus, the drinking of the Spirit, we believe, ties back well to how Paul viewed the water gift in the wilderness where the people “*drank from the rock . . . and the rock was Christ*” and to the Spirit’s work in that provision for the Israelites. One further point may be made. The passive (ἐποιήθημεν) is rightly translated “*made to drink*.” In its most common use in the LXX it refers to flocks and land that are “*watered*” in the sense of being given to drink. (The passive voice of the verb only appears in **Gen 13:10** and **Ezek 32:6**.)

In summary, Paul thinks again of the community-forming nature of the Spirit’s work into which all were brought at their conversion, since this happened through the Spirit’s active presence. All also were given to drink of the blessings of the Spirit, namely, the grace-gifts that are the matter Paul addresses here. The passive voices remind us again it is all of the Spirit and not because of the work of “spiritual” individuals. Mention of “*Jews or Greeks or slaves or free*” once more stresses that all are in this together and that no one has been left out if they are “*in the one Spirit*.” No one is better than another, nor is there any hierarchy of people or gifts.

Thomas Leake: (:14-26) You Are the Body of Christ

3 Vital Truths About the Church that should Inspire Greater Involvement and Dedication

Introduction: Christ is the Head of the Church; importance of corporate commitment; cf. Mark Dever book: *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*

Eph. 3:10, 21; 1 Tim. 3:15; Acts 20:28 – “*purchased with Christ’s own blood*”

I. One Body Yet Many Members

Message written to a selfish, divisive group that needed greater commitment to one another; series of couplets; cf. **Eph. 4:15-16**

The parts of the body are all different, but are all needed; should be no inferiority complex in the body of Christ; there would be no wisdom in gifting everybody identically

(**12:14-19** illustrate this truth)

3 Keys to Unity amidst Diversity:

- 1) (:15-19) Recognize the value of our own position and gift
- 2) (:25-26) Have the same care for one another
Rom. 12; James 5:16; Gal. 6:1 – the “one another” passages
- 3) (:29-30) Don’t try to do everything yourself
 But do we act like we are one body? We have less involvement than we ought to have.

II. (:20) All of the Members Make Up the One Body

The flip side of v. 14 – Members have need of one another; the body must not have uniformity; diversity helps us get a wide array of functions accomplished; Exercising our gift with pride leads to problems and division; don’t claim superiority; the gifts may at times come in conflict with one another (e.g. doing battle over which ministry should get more of the church’s budget)
 Need love and humble teamwork

III. (:27) The Body is the Body of Jesus Christ

V. 27 is the climax of this passage; You should base your decisions on your identity in the body of Christ; you should be committed to serving; the body needs to hold the Head up; need to use gifts with fervor

1 Tim. 4:14 – real possibility of neglecting your gift; God will never take your gift away; There are great pressures and demands in serving the church; you feel like giving up at times; need greater love; patience with people; gratitude

2 Tim. 1:6 – “*stir up the gift that is in you*”

How important is Christ to you? Serve Him with the best you have; Be alert to the needs of others; organize your ministry better; Christian life is designed to be lived in the context of the local church – Giving / Serving / Sacrifice

When it starts to get hard you are just starting to learn what ministry is all about;
 “*For me to live is Christ; to die is gain*”

Temptation to pursue an easier life; don’t be an under-achiever in the body of Christ; show me your commitment by your service; in a church you make ministry, not excuses; you can bring your children alongside of you in ministry rather than use family obligations as an excuse not to minister

John Piper: This is what the church is for in the world. This is our calling. We are to pursue the manifesting of God. And when we do, what happens is the common good. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." We stressed that these two goals are not at odds: the common good of the body through the manifesting of God; and the manifesting of God for the common good. The good of people and the glory of God happen together through faith in Christ.

Now there are some ailments in the body that keep this from happening the way it should. Paul deals with one of these in **verses 14-20** and another in **verses 21-27**. The one is feelings of uselessness (today) and the other is feelings of self-sufficiency (next Sunday). When members of the body feel useless or when they feel self-sufficient--when they say "You don't need me," or, "I don't need you,"--then the body will not manifest the Spirit and produce the common good the way it should. . .

So the point of **verses 14** and **19-20** is that the very existence of the body depends on having diversity of members--"member" means "a constituent part having a function of its own" (C. Hodge, *First Corinthians*, p. 256). So a person who says, "I'm useless because my function is not like the function of another," is saying, "The church should not be a body with "many" diverse members. It should only have a few members and I should be like a lot of others. But the truth is (v. 20): "*There are many members, but one body.*" That's what it means to be a body. . .

So Paul's remedy for feelings of uselessness in the body is first to say that they are feelings or opinions that do not accord with truth. They are out of sync with reality (vv. 15-16). Second, to think that you should be like others in the body rather than having a unique function of your own is to go against the very idea of a body made up of many diverse members (vv. 14, 19-20). Third, and most important, resenting your gifts and your unique manifestation of the Spirit is a way of not trusting God. Since **verse 18** says he put all the parts where they are with their unique functions, to say that you are useless is to say that God is weak or mistaken or evil: He is not sovereign, not wise or not good. Like all issues it comes down to a radically God-focused issue—do you trust God?

Summary:

Let us not say, "I have no need of you."
Let us have the same care for one another.
Let us seek our worship unity around these primary truths.
And let us put our trust in God who composes the body as he wills.

Ray Stedman: The work of the church is to heal the broken-hearted out in the world, to give deliverance to the captives, to open the eyes of the blind, and to preach the good news to the poor and despairing of heart. That is what the Body of Christ has come into the world to do -- to encourage, strengthen and help people, and especially to deliver them from the guilt, the loneliness and the misery of sin and to set them free from the bondage of foul tempers and evil habits and all the rack and ruin of life. That is what the work of the church is. And it does not go on here, it goes on out there. This is merely part of the training program. We do not come to church to fulfill the work of the church. We come here to get ready to fulfill it out there. If you have that in mind, then there is definitely a part for every member, without exception.

That is what Paul is arguing here. You are only kidding yourself if you say that because you cannot lead, or teach, or preach, you are not a part of the body and do not have a function within it. . .

I am sure Paul is referring to what we used to call our "private" parts when he says "our unrepresentable parts." (They are not so private anymore.) But we treat these with great modesty. Paul simply draws the analogy with the Body of Christ. He says there are hidden, secret functions within the body, never mentioned in public, that are

nevertheless exceedingly important. Take the ministry of prayer, for instance, and those people who consistently pray for others. Nobody knows about them. There is a lady in this congregation who spends hours each day praying for the staff and members of this church. She counts it her ministry. You seldom see her at meetings, she has difficulty getting out, but how she upholds us in prayer. What a mighty, valuable ministry that is. That is what the apostle is referring to. . .

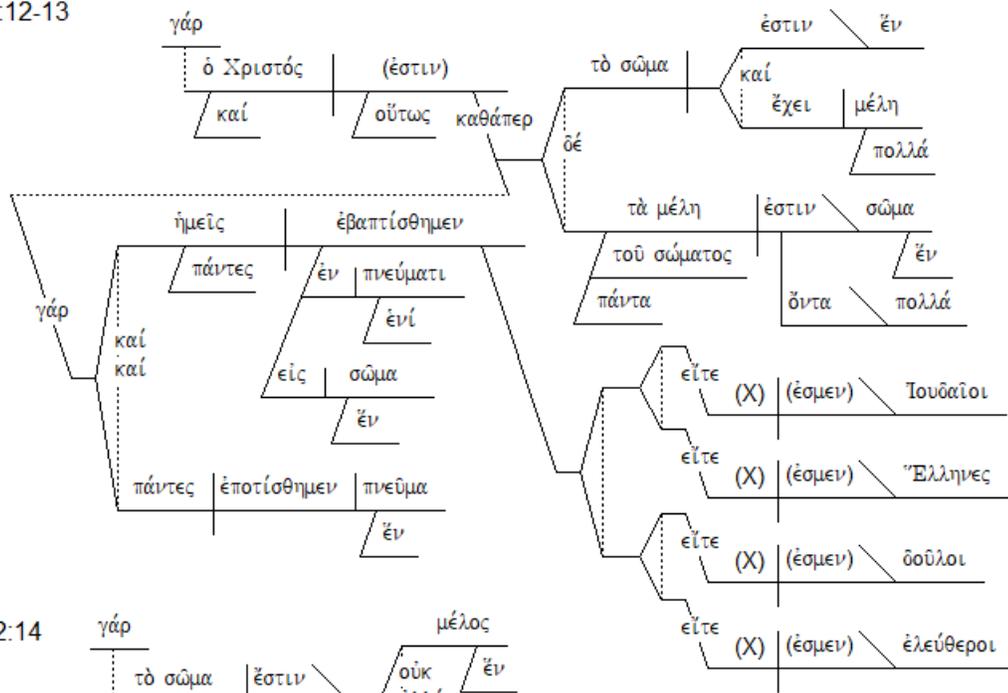
There is nothing in the world more beautiful, more exquisite than the human body. It is the most beautifully balanced and delicately articulated instrument the world has ever seen. All the computers in the world put together cannot do what a single human body can do, and it does it with such exquisite grace when it is functioning right.

Steve Zeisler: It's very important for everyone to know that they have gifts, to discover what they are, and to come to understand what our gifts fit us for. Where can we serve? Where can we make our best contribution? Having found that out we should engage in making that contribution with a whole heart. We are not to isolate ourselves in our supposed inadequacy, nor are we to isolate ourselves in our imagined superiority. We are all in this together. If one of us suffers, everybody suffers. This is true of your physical body. If you have a stomach ache, the rest of you feels crummy. If one member rejoices, we all rejoice together. . .

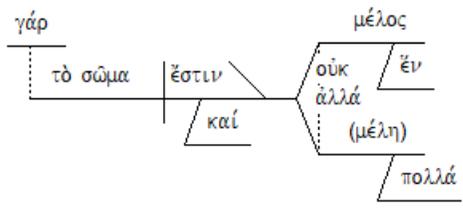
I hope you recognize that the Spirit of God is present in his people; that he is committed to glorifying Jesus Christ; that he has given us work to do and capacity to do it. Christians are to be united in their one Lord, despite their diversity. The Christian life is a call to adventure. The people sitting next to you are remarkable because the Spirit of God dwells in them. There is a vibrancy about the Spirit's call which we must not lose sight of. We need each other. We are members of each other. Each of us can contribute as the work of the Spirit is made manifest in us.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

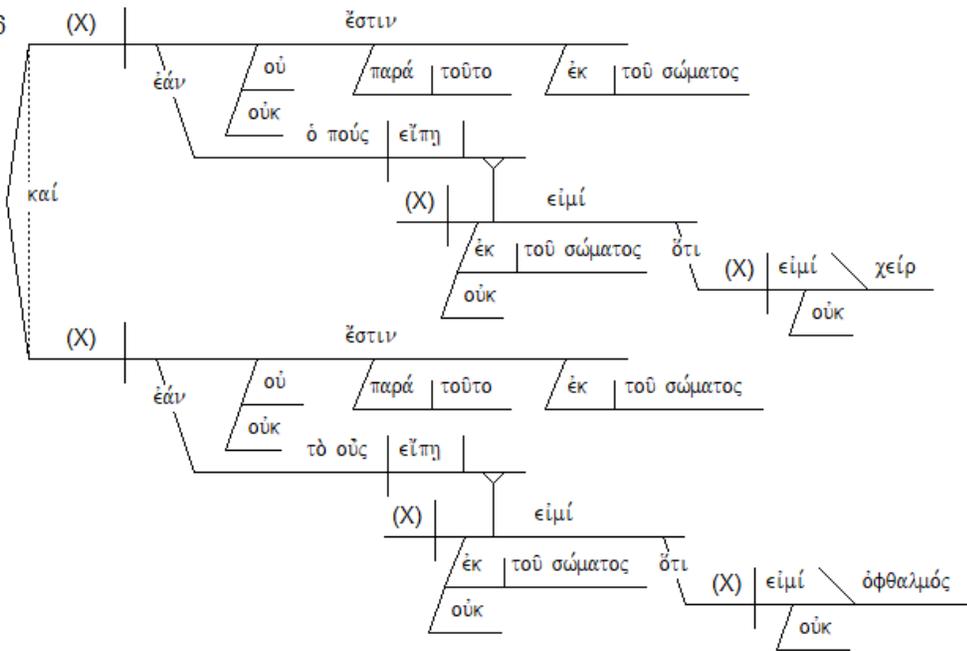
1Co 12:12-13

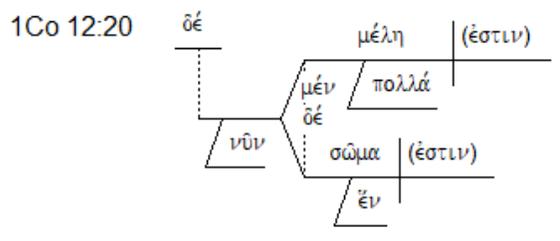
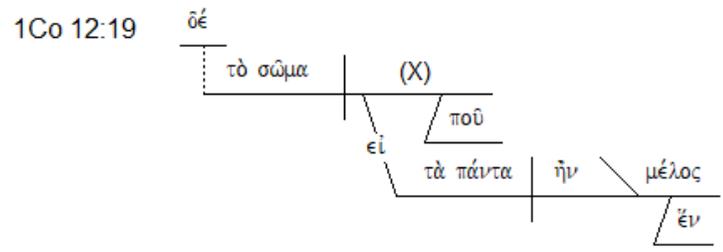
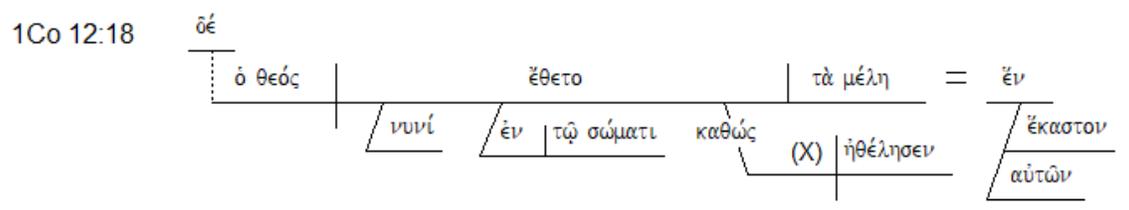
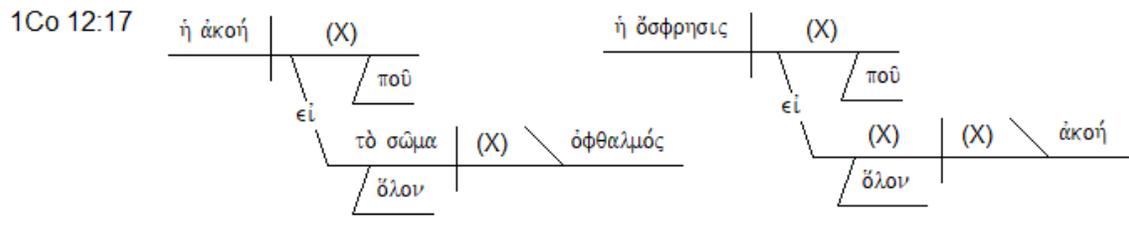


1Co 12:14



1Co 12:15-16





1Co 12:29

μή
πάντες | (είσιν) | απόστολοι

μή
πάντες | (είσιν) | προφήται

μή
πάντες | (είσιν) | διδάσκαλοι

μή
πάντες | (X) | δυνάμεις

1Co 12:30

μή
πάντες | ἔχουσιν | χαρίσματα
/ ιαμάτων

μή
πάντες | λαλοῦσιν
/ γλώσσαις

μή
πάντες | διερμηνεύουσιν

1Co 12:31

δέ
(X) | ζηλοῦτε | τὰ χαρίσματα
/ τὰ μείζονα

καί
(X) | δείκνυμι | ὁδόν
/ ὑμῖν | καθ' ὑπερβολήν
/ ἔτι

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

TITLE: THE NECESSITY, NATURE AND SUPREMACY OF LOVE IN EXERCISING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

BIG IDEA:

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY MUST FLOW THROUGH THE CHANNEL OF LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

Gordon Fee: This is one of the greatly loved passages in the NT, and for good reason. It is indeed one of the apostle's finest moments; so let the interpreter beware lest too much analysis detract from its sheer beauty and power. Unfortunately, however, the love affair with this love chapter has also allowed it to be read regularly apart from its context, which does not make it less true but causes one to miss too much regarding Paul's own concerns about the situation in Corinth. . .

In the opening rhetoric (vv. 1–3), and using himself as a hypothetical negative example, the apostle urges the absolute necessity of love; the second paragraph (vv. 4–7) describes the character of love; and in the last, now alternating between first person singular and plural pronouns (vv. 8–13), he illustrates the permanence of love -- all to the one end that they eagerly desire “*gifts of the Spirit*” (14:1) for the sake of the common good (12:7).

John MacArthur: It is easier to be orthodox than to be loving, and easier to be active in church work than to be loving. . . **Chapter 13** is the central chapter in Paul's lengthy discussion of spiritual gifts (**chaps. 12-14**). **Chapter 12** discusses the endowment, receipt, and interrelatedness of the gifts. **Chapter 14** presents the proper exercise of the gifts, especially that of languages. In this middle chapter we see the proper attitude and atmosphere, the proper motive and power, the “*more excellent way*” (12:31), in which God has planned for all of the gifts to operate. **Love** is certainly more excellent than feeling resentful and inferior because you do not have the showier and seemingly more important gifts. It is also more excellent than feeling superior and independent because you do not have those gifts. And it is more excellent than trying to operate spiritual gifts in your own power, in the flesh rather than in the Spirit, and for selfish purposes rather than for God's.

David Garland: To be sure, Paul considers love to be the panacea for their factionalism, but he does not appeal to it simply because of its utilitarian benefit to bring about concord. **Bornkamm** (1969: 188) connects it to the grace-gifts:

“Love” is related to the multiplicity of the “gifts of grace”; as Christ is to the many members of his body . . . ; indeed, we may not speak of an analogy at all, but must understand the relationship between Christ and love as being still closer: love is the new aeon already present now; that is, the presence of Christ himself in the congregation.

In this context, “love means concern for the community and is the check on the exercise of the gifts for personal gratification or the gratification of some rather than all” (Stendahl 1977: 124). Though God and Christ are not mentioned, the cross of Christ as the manifestation of God’s love for the world (cf. **Rom. 5:8; 8:37; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2**) is the central defining reality for Paul’s understanding of *ἀγάπη* (*agapē*). He is speaking not about some human virtue but about love that is rooted in God’s love in Christ.

Paul Gardner: **Chapter 13** forms a climax to Paul’s discussion of the role of both grace-gifts and the marker of “love” in the community. As in **8:1–3**, love is contrasted with the grace-gifts. For Paul “love” and “grace-gifts” must not be presented as an “either-or.” He has argued, especially in **chapter 12**, that the grace-gifts are needed, and he has thanked God that this church is well blessed with them by God’s Spirit (**1:4–9**). He will continue to discuss them in **chapter 14**. However, they only make sense when used in a context where people are marked out as the Lord’s by “love.” The gifts themselves, therefore, are not to be seen as community markers.

The Status of Spiritual People Is Authenticated by Love (13:1–13)

1. Love Alone Authenticates Spiritual People (**13:1–3**)
2. Love Controls the Thoughts and Actions of Spiritual People (**13:4–7**)
3. Love Is Eternal and Complete, While Grace-Gifts Are Temporal (**13:8–13**)

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: No spiritual gift, no natural ability, no human achievement is greater or more important than love.

I. The Matchless Value of Love (13:1-3)

- A. Love is greater than beautiful speech (**13:1**).
- B. Love is greater than brilliant scholarship (**13:2a**).
- C. Love is greater than bold spirituality (**13:2b**).
- D. Love is greater than benevolent sacrifice (**13:3**).

II. The Marvelous Virtues of Love (13:4-7)

- A. Love is patient (**13:4a**).
- B. Love is kind (**13:4b**).
- C. Love does not envy (**13:4c**).
- D. Love is not boastful or arrogant (**13:4d**).
- E. Love is not rude (**13:5a**).
- F. Love is not self-seeking (**13:5b**).
- G. Love is not irritable (**13:5c**).
- H. Love does not keep a record of wrongs (**13:5d**).
- I. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth (**13:6**).
- J. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (**13:7**).

III. The Majestic Victory of Love (13:8-13)

- A. Love is permanent (**13:8-12**).
- B. Love is preeminent (**13:13**).

Richard Hays: Two common misunderstandings of the chapter must be set aside in the beginning.

- First, Paul does not write about love in order to debunk tongues and other spiritual gifts. His point is not that love should supersede spiritual gifts but that it should govern their use in the church—as **chapter 14** will clearly demonstrate. Love is not a higher and better gift; rather, it is a “way” (**12:31b**), a manner of life within which all the gifts are to find their proper place.
- Second, love is not merely a feeling or an attitude; rather, “love” is the generic name for specific actions of patient and costly service to others. If we attend closely to what Paul actually says in this chapter, all sweetly sentimental notions of love will be dispelled and replaced by a rigorous vision of love that rejoices in the truth and bears all suffering in the name of Jesus Christ.

I. (:1-3) NECESSITY OF LOVE -- IN THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, NOTHING CAN COMPENSATE FOR A LACK OF LOVE – MINISTRY WITHOUT LOVE FAILS IN 3 AREAS:

Robert Gundry: But without love, even speaking in angelic as well as unlearned human languages would grate on the ears. Without love, even omniscience and mountain-moving faith would count for nothing. And without love, even investing in other people not only all one’s possessions but also one’s very own body would give grounds for boasting but not bring any profit at the final judgment bar. Love must imbue all these activities, and those associated with the remaining Spiritual gifts; for only love makes speaking in tongues musical, prophecy and understanding helpful, and self-sacrifice profitable.

David Garland: Persons with the attributes listed in these verses may seem on the surface to be invaluable to the church, but God, who inspects beneath the surface, sees the lovelessness, which makes all these glorious endowments worthless.

A. (:1) No Reception of Revelation . . . Just Annoying Noise of Proclamation

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Gordon Fee: In saying “*but do have not love,*” Paul does not mean to suggest that love is a possession of some kind. The language has been formed by the elevated style of the prose. To “*have love*” means to “act in a way that is loving,” just as to “*have prophecy*” (v. 2) means “to speak with the prophetic gift”; and to act in a loving way means, as in the case of Christ, actively to seek the benefit of someone else. For Paul it is a word whose primary definition is found in God’s activity in behalf of God’s enemies (**Rom. 5:6–8**), which was visibly manifested in the life and death of Christ himself. To “*have love,*” therefore, means to be toward others the way God in Christ has been toward us. Thus, in the Pauline parenthesis, for those who “*walk in the Spirit*” the primary ethical

imperative is “*love one another.*” This is found at the heart of every section of ethical instruction, and all other exhortations are but the explication of it.

David Prior: No doubt the streets of Corinth resounded with the noisy gongs and clashing cymbals which were a feature of such worshippers. A *chalkos* (gong) was a piece of copper; a *kymbalon* (cymbal) was a single-toned instrument incapable of producing a melody. Both were used in the mystery-religions, either to invoke the god, to drive away demons or to rouse the worshippers. They were neither melodious nor capable of producing harmony. Both beat out a heavy monotone and caused as much offence as constantly barking dogs.

Equally **offensive**, maintains Paul, are those who use the gift of speaking in tongues without the controlling motive of love. It does not matter whether the tongues are human languages (as they sometimes seem to be) or even ‘the language of heaven’ (which some people rather tendentiously assume): if there is no love they come across as unattractive and boorish. Some Christians with this particular gift insensitively impose it on others in the congregation; with considerable self-indulgence rather than a deep desire to build up the church, such people override the feelings of those who are either unaccustomed or unsympathetic to this gift.

B. (:2) No Spiritual Impact . . . Just Empty Knowledge and Faith

“And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

Gordon Fee: In this second sentence Paul widens the perspective to include three of the **charismata** from before (**12:8–10**), a list which in that argument came from Paul himself as his way of expanding their own horizons as to the work of the Spirit. Thus he includes prophecy, the gift he regularly considers to be of primary significance for the community (cf. **1 Thess. 5:19–20; 1 Cor. 14:1–25**); knowledge, which was another of the Corinthian favorites (cf. **1:5; 8:1**); and faith, which, together with its qualifier, “*that can move mountains*,” means the gift of special faith for mighty works (see on **12:9**). In order to make this point as emphatic as possible, Paul thrice emphasizes the totally inclusive “*all*”: all mysteries, all knowledge, all faith. If one person could embrace the whole range of charismata and the full measure of any one of them but at the same time would fail to act in love toward someone else, such a person would amount to nothing in the sight of God.

C. (:3) No Eternal Reward . . . Just Meaningless Sacrifice

“And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

Ray Stedman: In the next section the apostle goes on to show us that love must be practical. Love is not an ethereal thing; it is not just an ideal you talk about. It is something that takes on shoe leather and moves right down into the normal, ordinary

pursuits and aspects of life. That is where love is to be manifest. Nothing is more helpful, in reading a chapter like this, than to ask yourself the question. "Am I growing in love? Looking back over a year, am I easier to live with now? Am I able to handle people more graciously, more courteously? Am I more compassionate, more patient?" These are the measurements of life. This is why we were given life, that we might learn how to act in love. Nothing else can be substituted for it. There is no use holding up any other quality we possess if we lack this one. It is the paramount goal of every human life, and it is well to measure yourself from time to time along that line.

II. (:4-7) NATURE OF LOVE -- IN THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, LOVE CAN COMPENSATE FOR A MYRIAD OF DEFICIENCIES – 15 WAYS LOVE PROMOTES EFFECTIVE MINISTRY:

A. 2 Fundamental Expressions of Love

Mark Taylor: The first two qualities of love, to exercise patience and to show kindness, form a complementary pair. The cognate nouns often occur together in Paul's writings (**Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 6:6; Gal 5:22; Col 3:12**). Patience is the more passive idea and, coupled with kindness, indicates a relational quality. In other words, the patience and kindness Paul has in mind is lived out in community in relation to others.

1. Love is Patient

Ἡ ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ

Thomas Leake: Be inconvenienced; allow yourself to be taken advantage of by others without getting angry; be slow to anger; be aware of the faults of others but still show love and care; help to preserve the unity in the church; **Eph 4:2; 2 Pet 3** – look at how God views time; **Rom. 2:4; Eph. 5:3-5**; Listen well **Prov. 18:13**; show patience with newer believers and with unsaved friends and in discipling others; spiritual learning is a slow process; spiritual leaders must be persistent; patience with correcting our children; patience with traffic; sometimes action is needed or we would be called neglectful; the trouble is when I am in a hurry and God is not; **Col. 3:12**

Gordon Fee: These first two clauses, "*Love is patient* [= forbearing], *love is kind*," represent respectively love's necessary passive and active responses toward others or difficulties in general. The first verb pictures long forbearance toward them -- indeed, it is difficult to improve on the KJV's "*suffereth long*" (without the archaic verb); the second verb pictures active goodness in their behalf. In Pauline theology they represent the two sides of the divine attitude toward humankind (cf. **Rom. 2:4**). On the one hand, God's loving forbearance is demonstrated by his holding back divine wrath toward human rebellion; on the other hand, God's kindness is found in the thousandfold expressions of divine mercy. Thus Paul's description of love begins with this **twofold description of God**, who through Christ has been shown to be forbearing and kind toward those who deserve divine judgment. The obvious implication, of course, is that this is how God's people (i.e., the Corinthians themselves, not to mention all others who would claim to belong to Christ) through Christ and the Spirit are to be toward others.

2. Love is Kind
χρηστεύεται ἡ ἀγάπη

Thomas Leake: Be gracious in serving and helpfulness; connotes action of some kind; deeds of kindness; must be shown first in the home; opposite = bickering and sarcasm; recognize that everybody carries a heavy load; unlocks hearing for the gospel; Ruth showed kindness to Naomi; David to Mephibosheth; kindness is the oil that takes out the friction in the machinery of the church; **Prov. 3:3**; think of others first; show hospitality; pray for others

Ray Stedman: Notice in that paragraph there are only three positives; all the rest are negatives. So love is really only three simple things, basically. It is patient, it is kind, and it is honest. It rejoices in the right. (The word really is "*truth*." It rejoices in the truth.) The quality of love we are talking about is that which produces patience, kindness and honesty. The negatives that are given here are associated with love in the apostles though -- because these are the things we must set aside in order to let the love of God, which is patient and kind and honest, manifest itself. We do not have to produce this love in the Christian life. We only have to get the things that are hindering it out of the way. Those are the negatives that are suggested here.

B. 7 Contrasts Showing What Love Is Not

1. Love is not Jealous
οὐ ζηλοῖ

Thomas Leake: Wants what others have – their toys, their popularity; joined with spite and envy; there is a godly form of jealousy – **2 Cor. 11:2**; **Ex. 34:14**; **Deut. 4:24** = zealous for the name of God and for the purity of His people
Jealousy is the inability to rejoice when others have success and you do not; robs you of happiness and fruitfulness; cf. Rachel vs Leah over Jacob; **Prov. 27:4**; first sin in heaven and first murder on earth sparked by jealousy; selfishly possessive; sometimes lazy people are jealous; they feel that others owe them; you can see it in their countenance; they turn into backstabbers in the church; their success should be your success – **Phil. 2**; **James 3:16**; **Rom. 13:13** – coupled with arguments and strife.

Gordon Fee: Love does not allow fellow believers to be in rivalry or competition, either for “vaunted positions” or to curry people’s favor in order to gain adherents. Indeed, love seeks quite the opposite: How best do I serve these for whom Christ died, whatever my own desires?

2. Love does not Brag
[ἡ ἀγάπη] οὐ περπερεύεται

Thomas Leake: Don’t talk conceitedly; gloat; show off; trash talk; if it is all of God’s grace there is no room for bragging; empty yourself; Paul viewed himself as a servant; **1 Cor. 4:1**; **1 Pet. 5:6**; **Mark 9:35**; **Phil. 2:17**

Gordon Fee: It is simply not possible to “boast” and love at the same time. The one action wants others to think highly of oneself, whether deserving or not; the other cares for none of that, but only for the good of the community as a whole.

3. Love is not Arrogant
οὐ φυσιοῦται

Thomas Leake: Humility involves lowliness of mind; **1 Pet. 5**; lower your view of yourself; Romans and Greeks saw no use for humility – they valued power, control, intellectualism; **1 Cor. 1:26-30**; **2 Cor. 10:17-18**; **11:30**; we like to commend ourselves; but should boast only in our weakness = the things that I can’t do; **12:9** – we need the power of Christ; don’t take pride in our knowledge of Scripture and the conclusions we come to; church leaders need to watch out for pride in themselves; how do you receive correction? Do you need to be at the center of attention? Are you always bragging about your children? Do you need to be seen as one of the cool ones? Do you associate with the lowly?

David Garland: *Love is not puffed up* (φυσιοῦται, *physioutai*). **Arrogance** is one of the particular faults in Corinth. Six of the seven occurrences of this verb in the NT appear in this letter (**4:6, 18, 19**; **5:2**; **8:1**). **Judge** (1984: 23) claims that Paul’s clashes with the Corinthians stimulate “his reflection on constructive as opposed to destructive relations.” Love is constructive. It builds up the building (**8:1**). The puffed-up spirit blows up the building.

4. Love does not act Unbecomingly
οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ

Gordon Fee: The verb means to “behave shamefully or disgracefully.” In this letter it recalls

- (i) the activities of the women who are bringing shame on their “heads” by attiring themselves so as to disregard the distinctions between the sexes (**11:2–16**), or
- (ii) the actions of the “haves” at the Lord’s Table, who are humiliating (shaming) “those who have nothing” (**11:22**). Christian love cares too much for the rest of the community to behave in such “unseemly” ways.

5. Love does not Seek Its Own
οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς

Gordon Fee: It does not seek its own; it does not believe that “finding oneself” is the highest good; it is not enamored with self-gain, self-justification, self-worth. To the contrary, it seeks the good of one’s neighbor -- or enemy (cf. **Phil. 2:4**).

6. Love is not Provoked
οὐ παροξύνεται

David Garland: *Love is not cantankerous* (παροξύνεται, *paroxynetai*). The verb refers to an inward state of arousal and can have a positive sense, “to stimulate,” or a negative sense, “to irritate.” As a passive verb, it means to be irritated. Love does not go into paroxysms (fits) of anger, nor does it provoke anger in others with its irritability (LSJ 1342–43). Where tensions arise in a community, one may assume that the disputants engaged in irascible responses (see **Seesemann**, TDNT 5:857).

7. Love does not Take into Account a wrong suffered
οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν

Doug Goins: Love doesn't take into account a wrong suffered; it isn't resentful. "Take into account" is a bookkeeping term. It means to calculate something, as when entering numbers into a journal or a ledger. It's to keep a permanent financial record. That's good practice in business, but in human relationships that's a bad thing. It's very destructive to keep records of imagined or real slights against us, because it means we end up living with indignation toward other people, holding a grudge, feeling victimized by an affront or personal injury. We must remember that God does not view us this way. God is not a record-keeping God. And love won't keep records against other people. It never evaluates people that way.

David Garland: Love absorbs evil without calculating how to retaliate. On the other hand, keeping count of wrongs allows us to take advantage of another's guilt (**Bornkamm** 1969: 183). **Spicq** (1965: 157) describes it as “absolute forgetfulness, as if the marks of the stylus vanished from the wax tablet.”

C. Basic Orientation of Love

1. Love does not Rejoice in Unrighteousness
οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ

2. Love Rejoices With the Truth
συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ

D. 4 Enduring Expressions of Love

Gordon Fee: Love has a tenacity in the present, buoyed by its absolute confidence in the future, that enables one to live in every kind of circumstance and continually to pour oneself out in behalf of others. Paul's own ministry was a perfect example of such love.

Daniel Akin: There is a staying power to true love, like a flame that cannot be quenched. Love takes the long view not the short view. It keeps the big picture in mind. It hangs in there with other people even under their worst circumstances and refuses to quit. For married couples, it takes seriously those words “until death do us part.” You simply cannot kill a love that bears, keeps believing and hoping through, and endures all things. That is a love that will last through all adversity and stand the test of time.

1. Love Bears All Things
πάντα στέγει

2. Love Believes All Things

πάντα πιστεύει

3. Love Hopes All Things

πάντα ἐλπίζει

4. Love Endures All Things

πάντα ὑπομένει

Doug Goins: Finally, love endures all things. Literally that means to stay under pressure. It's a military term that means to hold a position at all costs, even unto death, whatever it takes. So love holds fast to people it loves. It perseveres. It never gives up on anyone. Love won't stop loving, even in the face of rejection.

III. (:8-13) THE CAPSTONE OF THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE = ITS PERMANENCE AND VALUE

Andrew Noselli: The present age contrasts with the age to come. Love is superior to spiritual gifts because love never ends. Love is not a spiritual gift, but it is essential for using them. Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will end because they will no longer be necessary in the age to come. At this point in the history of salvation, what we know is only partial and what we prophesy is only partial. But that partial understanding will pass away when the completeness comes – that is, after Jesus' return. Our knowledge now is like a child's, and our knowledge later will be like an adult's. Now we indirectly see a reflection, but later we will see Jesus face to face. Sin hinders us from knowing more fully now, but later sin will no longer hinder us. Our knowledge now compared to our knowledge then will be like being outside in pitch darkness with a flashlight compared to being outside when the sun is brightly shining: just as we would no longer need the flashlight, so we will no longer need spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy.

A. (:8A) Promise of Permanence for Love

“Love never fails”

John MacArthur: Love cannot fail because it shares God's nature and God's eternity.

Gordon Fee: With the next paragraph he brings this description of love into focus in terms of its **permanence**, over against the gifts of the Spirit that belong only to the **present age**. And in so doing he leads the Corinthians back to the concern at hand, that they should above all *“make love their aim”* and at the same time in that context *“eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit”* -- but always with a view toward their **benefiting others**.

B. (:8B) Contrast with the Transitory Nature of Spiritual Gifts

1. Example of Gift of Prophecy

“but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away”

2. Example of Gift of Tongues

“if there are tongues, they will cease”

3. Example of Gift of Knowledge

“if there is knowledge, it will be done away”

John MacArthur: Prophecy and knowledge will be stopped by something outside themselves (the coming of *the perfect*), but the gift of tongues will stop by itself. . . Tongues will have ceased at an earlier time (when the New Testament was completed).

C. (:9-12) Supremacy of Full Revelation Over Partial Revelation

1. (:9-10) Full Knowledge Will Replace Partial Knowledge

*“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;
but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”*

Gordon Fee: At the coming of Christ the final purpose of God’s saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because “completeness” will have come. To cite **Barth**’s marvelous imagery: “Because the sun rises all lights are extinguished.”

David Garland: “*The perfect*” refers to the state of affairs brought about by the *parousia* (**Robertson and Plummer** 1914: 287, 299–300; **Lietzmann** 1949: 66, 189; **Fee** 1987: 646; **Schrage** 1999: 307–8). Paul uses the (*elthein*) in **Gal. 4:4** to refer to the coming of the **fullness of time**. Here, the battery of future tenses, the disappearance of the partial replaced by the complete, and the reference to knowing as God knows us, all point to the end time. He contrasts the present age with the age to come. The “*perfect*” is shorthand for the consummation of all things, the intended goal of creation; and its arrival will naturally displace the partial that we experience in the present age. Human gifts shine gloriously in this world but will fade to nothing in the presence of what is perfect. But they also will have served their purpose of helping to build up the church during the wait and to take it to the threshold of the end. When the anticipated end arrives, they will no longer be necessary.

2. (:11) Maturity Preferred Over Immaturity

*“When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child,
reason as a child; when I became a man,
I did away with childish things”*

3. (:12) Full Knowledge Will Replace Partial Knowledge

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;
now I know in part, but then I shall know fully
just as I also have been fully known.”*

John Piper: My conclusion is that the contrast between seeing fuzzily in an old mirror made out of metal and seeing face to face is not a contrast between first century spiritual knowledge and the knowledge we have from the New Testament today, but rather it's a contrast between the imperfect knowledge we have today in this age and the awesome personal knowledge of God we will have when the Lord returns.

Mark Taylor: The metaphor of the mirror enjoyed widespread use in the ancient world and was particularly relevant to Corinth where bronze mirrors were manufactured. Although looking into a mirror could carry different connotations, the use of the metaphor in context points to the **indirectness of one's vision**, to partial and incomplete knowledge. Seeing in a mirror is contrasted with seeing "face to face" and having full knowledge. The phrase "*poor reflection*" renders a phrase occurring only here in the New Testament, but scholars concur that the reference is to **Num 12:6–8**, which contrasts Moses' prophetic experience with other prophets. Other prophets received revelation through visions and dreams (**Num 12:6**), but the Lord spoke to Moses face to face (**Num 12:8**). **Ciampa** and **Rosner** submit that Paul's allusion to **Num 12:8** "is consistent with other early Jewish interpretations in understanding that in the age to come all God's people would have an experience similar to that which distinguished Moses from the other prophets. We already see the Lord as through a mirror (imperfectly) and know him as well as that experience allows (cf. **2 Cor 3:18**), but the day is coming when we will see him as Moses did, face to face, an experience of knowing him fully as we are already fully known by him."

Gordon Fee: Thus Paul's point with all of this is now made. He began (v. 8) by arguing that love, in contrast to the charismata, never comes to an end. Precisely because the gifts have an end point, which love does not, they are of a different order altogether. This does not make them imperfect, although in a sense that too is true; it makes them relative. Paul's concern throughout this paragraph has been to demonstrate the strictly "present age" nature of these gifts. They will pass away (v. 8); they are "*in part*" (v. 9); they belong to this present existence only (vv. 10–12). Most likely the purpose of all this is simply to reinforce what was said at the beginning (vv. 1–3), that the Corinthians' emphasis on tongues as evidence for being people of the Spirit is wrong because it is wrongheaded, especially from people who do not otherwise exhibit the one truly essential expression of the Spirit's presence, self-giving love. As good as the Spirit's giftings are, they are nonetheless only for the present; sacrificial love, which the Corinthians currently lack, is the "*more excellent way*" in part because it belongs to eternity as well as to the present.

D. (:13) Supremacy of the Value of Love Over Even Faith and Hope

1. The Top Three Christian Virtues

"But now abide faith, hope, love, these three;"

Gordon Fee: But why this triad in the present context where the contrast has been between Spirit gifting and love? The answer probably lies with Paul's concern to emphasize that love is not like present manifestations of the Spirit, in that it is both for now and forever. The preceding argument might leave the impression that, since the

“gifts” are only for the present, love is basically for the future. But not so. Love never comes to an end; it always remains. So now he concludes the argument by emphasizing the presentness of love as well. In so doing, since he is trying to emphasize the nature of their present life in Christ, he adds faith and hope to love somewhat automatically, since for him these are what accompany love, not Spirit gifting. They simply belong to different categories.

That also, then, explains why he adds at the end, “*But the greatest of these is love.*” Even though love “*continues*” in the present, along with its companions faith and hope, love is the greatest of these three because it “*continues*” on into the final glory, which the other two by their very nature do not.

David Garland: The triad of faith, hope, and love appears elsewhere in Paul’s letters (see **Rom. 5:1–5; Gal. 5:5–6; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Eph. 4:2–5; Titus 2:2**) and in **Heb. 6:10–12; 10:22–24;** and **1 Pet. 1:3–9** (see also Barn. 1:4; 11:8; Pol. Phil. 3:2–3). They are well known as **essential Christian virtues**. Paul probably added faith and hope to love here to allow the familiar combination to balance the triad of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues. The inclusion of faith and hope also allows Paul to magnify love even more. Not only is love superior to spiritual gifts that are partial and will come to an end, but also it is superior to virtues that are absolutely essential to being a Christian.

2. The Winner is. . .
“*but the greatest of these is love.*”

John MacArthur: Love is the greatest of these not only because it is eternal, but because, even in this temporal life, where we now live, love is supreme. Love already is the greatest, not only because it will outlast the other virtues, beautiful and necessary as they are, but because it is inherently greater by being the most God-like. God does not have faith or hope, but “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:8**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What evidence is there in your life that you are growing in the exercise of *love* as you use your spiritual gifts in the church?
- 2) What are some of the signs that someone values spiritual knowledge more than love?
- 3) Do we interact with others as those who only “*know in part*” or as a “*know it all*”?
- 4) Try reading this passage substituting the name of *Jesus* for *love* and see what insights grow out of that exercise.

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Leake:

INTRODUCTION:

In church ministry we need to push for excellence in all areas; **1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:31** – showing us a still more excellent way; Pride in self limits the effectiveness of your ministry vs. Love for the Brethren which allows for the effectiveness exercise of your gifts; love is the right atmosphere in which the gifts operate; in the list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love is primary; **1 John 4:7** -- Love has its source in God

I. (:1-3) THE PREEMINENCE OF LOVE

A. The Gift of Tongues apart from Love

The most abused and misunderstood spiritual gift; simply means languages; who knows what kind of language the angels use – just pointing to that as an exaggeration; What does the church need? Not the richest person but someone who loves others; people want to be ministered to by someone who cares about them; Consider how what you say will affect others; parents can give correction without love; **Col. 4:6**; Bible teacher must connect with people with a heart of compassion; develop rapport with people (**Prov. 12:18; 16:23**); you are not wise because you know the right answer; you must deliver the message with love; Love for the Brethren is the jersey we all wear that identifies us as being on the Team

B. Exaltation of Prophecy / Knowledge / Faith apart from Love

Impressive gifts – receiving and understanding and communicating all of God's revelation; but still in God's estimation worth zero apart from love; training and background don't matter; Love matters; the world doesn't value humble, selfless love that much; Jesus will give the ultimate evaluation on Judgment Day; exalt those who have served humbly; there is no way to love a body of believers without being committed to serving one another

C. Sacrifice apart from Love

Some charity can operate from selfish motivations rather than from love –

- produces nothing
- is nothing of value
- gains nothing of value

What if I don't feel like loving others? Do it anyway

What if people are unkind to me? Love them anyway

Sacrificial love is the pathway to the richest kind of joy; we are too interested in self Don't wait to love; there can be no excess in love; **1 John 2:9-11; James 2; Rom. 13; Eph. 5:1-2, 25; Phil. 1:9; Col. 3** – love = perfect bond of unity

II. (:4-7) THE PICTURE OF LOVE

Describing what love is; what it looks like in its operation; many wrong views of love in today's culture; **1 John 4:8** – essential to the character of God; **John 3:16**; many-sided perfections of love

- Look at what Love Is ...
- Look at what Love Is Not . . .

III. (:8-13) THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE – LOVE NEVER FAILS

A. (:8) Superiority of Love

What does this not mean?

- it does not mean that love is always successful in winning others to Christ
- it does not mean that if only man was loved more he would do what is right – This is very shallow thinking; **Mk. 7:21**

“*fails*” = never falls into decay or uselessness

Gifts of the Holy Spirit will run out of usefulness – 3 are mentioned here; they were prominent in the church at Corinth

- 1) “*prophecies*” – does not refer to the gift but to the effect = what is produced by the gift
“*done away*” = made inoperative, not abolished; God's Word endures forever; the fulfillment of the prophecies will have arrived; only God can put these out of operation
- 2) “*tongues*” – emphasis is on the effects as well, the languages
“*cease*” – middle voice instead of active; will cease all on their own; fizzle out; doesn't say when or how; but the gift serves a limited time and purpose
- 3) “*Gift of knowledge*” – the result or the effect – revelational knowledge; in the context of progressive revelation

B. (:9-10) Reason for Love being so Valuable = it is Permanent –

The Partial is Replaced by the Perfect

That which is perfect – brought to completeness

C. (:11-12) 2 Helpful Illustrations / Images

1. Illustration from Childhood to Manhood
Remember how a child thinks and reasons
2. Illustration of seeing in a mirror vs face to face
Polished metal not like our clear mirrors of today – details not all that clear; partially distorted

What is the perfect and when is it to come? Possibilities:

- Canon of NT Scripture (would be attractive to cessation view)

- But not in view in this passage
- this view too hidden from original audience
- doesn't explain vs. 12 adequately
- Maturity of the Church – gifts no longer needed
- Presence of Jesus Christ – some options here or combination of options –
 - Believer enters into His presence at death; Rapture; Second Coming; Eternal state; this is preferred option

Jude – once for all delivered; not continually

Eph. 2:2 – foundational aspect of certain gifts

Heb. 1

Rev. 22

But charismatics use this passage to say tongues continue to the end of the age; the effects of prophecies and knowledge do continue until the end of the age; but new prophecies are not being issued today.

We should be excited about being in the presence of Christ

D. (:13) Climax

Paul has both this age and the next in mind;

Why is love the greatest? Because love never fails; it will always be permanent;

How do you learn to love? Look at how Jesus loved others

Ray Stedman: I call this [the way of love] the "*fruit of the Spirit*" because in the letter to the Galatians, in the famous passage in **Chapter 5**, the apostle details for us what the fruit of the Spirit is. It is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, (cf, **Gal 5:22-23**). It has been pointed out that all of those qualities really are manifestations of the first one, love -- that, after all,

Joy is love enjoying itself;

Peace is love resting;

Patience is love waiting;

Kindness is love reacting;

Goodness is love choosing;

Faithfulness is love keeping its word;

Gentleness is love empathizing; and

Self-control is love resisting temptation.

Love is the key; love is the main thing. This chapter, therefore, is setting forth that quality of love which is the work of the Spirit of God within us reproducing the character of Christ. Now once you have love all these other qualities that are part of the fruit of the Spirit are possible to you. If we have the love of God in our hearts, then we can be patient; we can be peaceful; we can be good, loving, faithful, gentle, kind, and all these other qualities. But without love all we can do is imitate these qualities, and that is what produces a phony love. One of the most deadly enemies of the Christian cause is phony love. That is why, in Romans, Paul says, "*Let love be genuine,*" (**Rom**

12:9a RSV). When you come into the church, especially among the people of God, love must be genuine. If it is not, it is hypocrisy. If it is put on just for the moment, if it is an attempt to put on a facade, to act like you are kind, thoughtful, gracious, faithful, and so on, but it all disappears as soon as the situation changes, that spreads death within the whole community. Genuine love, however, will produce all these qualities.

Bob Deffinbaugh: But, while all Christians now share in the “*unity of the Spirit*” (**Ephesians 4:3**; compare **4:5**; **2:14-22**; **1 Corinthians 12:13**), we do not all share in the “*unity of the faith*” (**Ephesians 4:13**). This is because we only “*know in part*” (**1 Corinthians 13:9-12**). We Christians disagree, in part at least, because our knowledge is partial and incomplete. We tend to disagree over those things we do not fully know, even though we may believe we do know. Love is the means God provided for us to live in harmony and unity, even though there is a diversity of doctrine in matters which are not fundamental. Paul’s instruction on love then becomes absolutely vital to our Christian walk and to our Christian unity.

[With regard to the **cessationist** position, **Deffinbaugh** argues that we should make allowance for the possibility of God continuing to use those gifts of prophecy and knowledge and tongues today.]

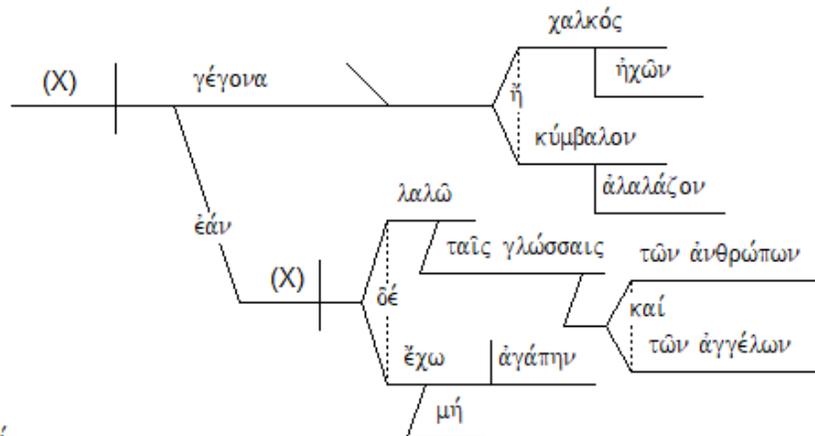
Having indicated I do not embrace the cessationist position, I should further say I also believe God is not obliged to give the gift of tongues today either. It should be pointed out that there are certain vital and necessary functions in the church, for which there are accompanying general commands. All are commanded to give, to help, and to encourage. All may not be gifted in these areas, but it seems necessary that there be some who are thus gifted. All are not commanded to prophesy or to speak in tongues, and I believe there may be reasons for **inferring** that some gifts may have ceased. I must further state in clear terms that while I must grant the possibility of tongues, I do not grant the necessity of tongues, as is the practice of some Christians. Not all that is called tongues is biblical tongues, and much of what is practiced as tongues (whether genuine tongues or false) is not practiced as the Scriptures require. In spite of this, a blanket rejection of the possibility of tongues cannot be biblically sustained in my opinion.

John MacArthur: By process of elimination, the only possibility for *the perfect* is the eternal, heavenly state of believers. Paul is saying that spiritual gifts are only for time, but that love will last for all eternity. The point is simple, not obscure.

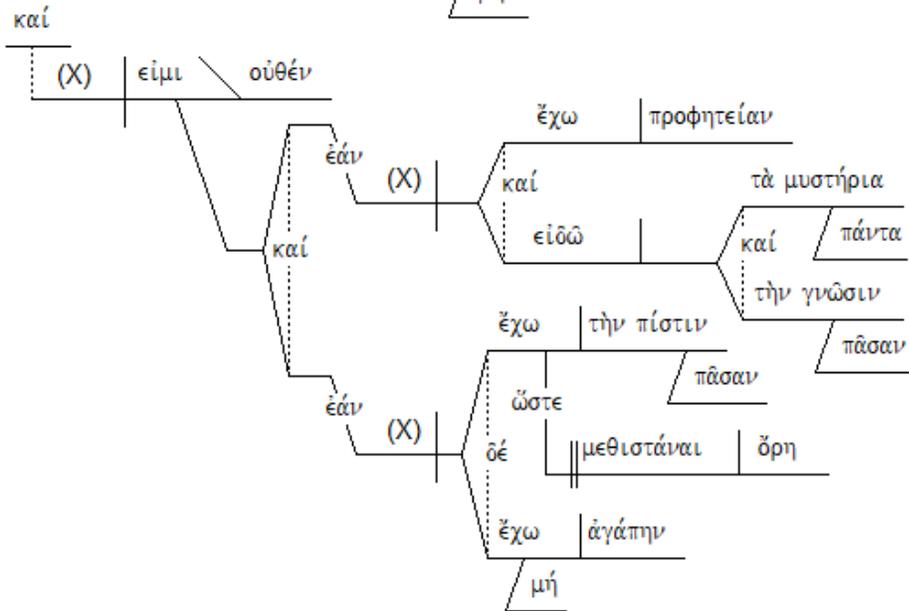
The eternal state allows for the neuter form of *the perfect* and allows for the continuation of knowledge and prophecy during the church age, the Tribulation, and the Kingdom. It fits the context of Paul’s emphasis on the permanence of love. It also fits his mention of our then seeing “*face to face*,” which will come about only with our glorification, when we will be illumined by the very glory of God Himself (**Rev. 21:23**). Finally, only in heaven will we “*know fully just as [we] also have been fully known*” (**1 Cor. 13:12**).

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

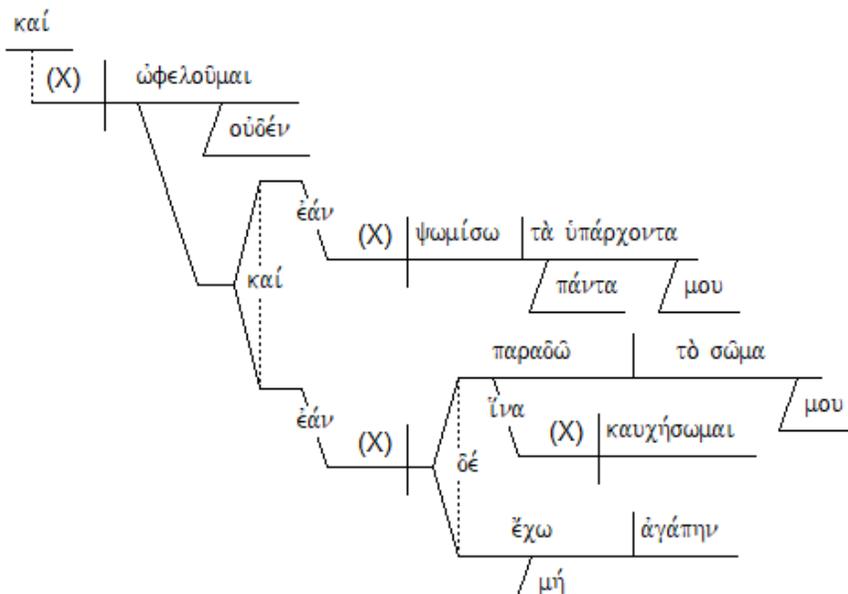
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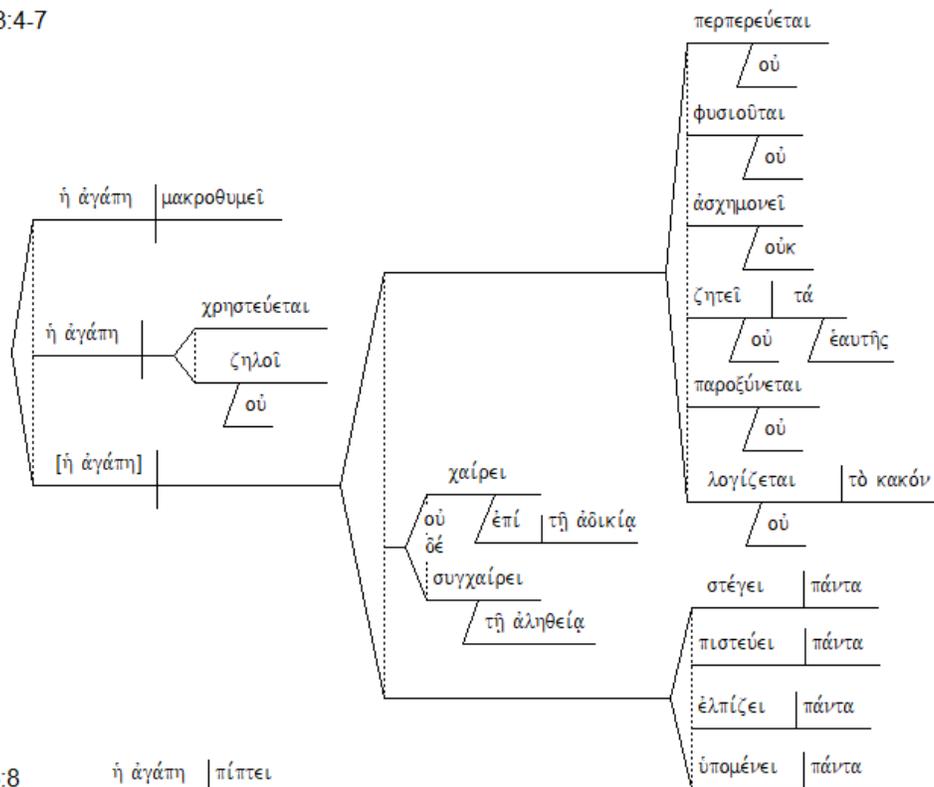
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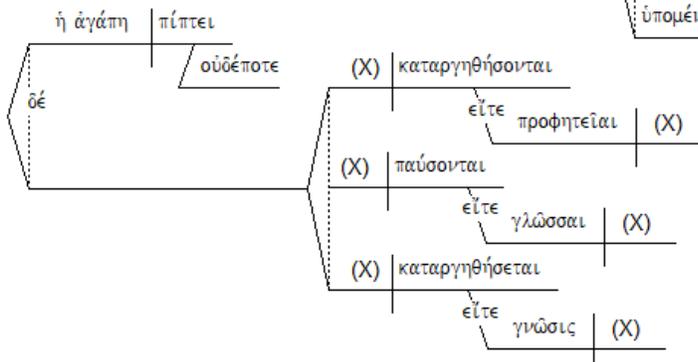
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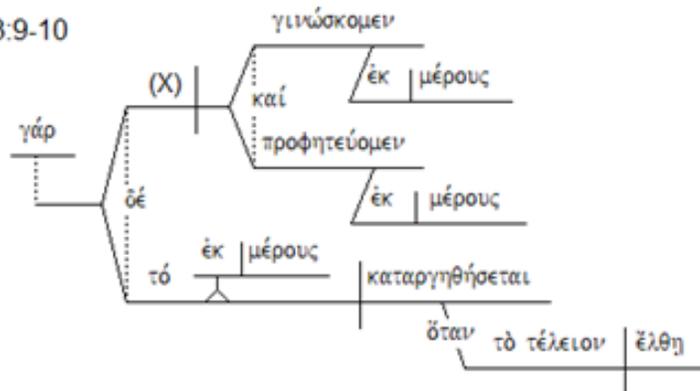
1Co 13:4-7



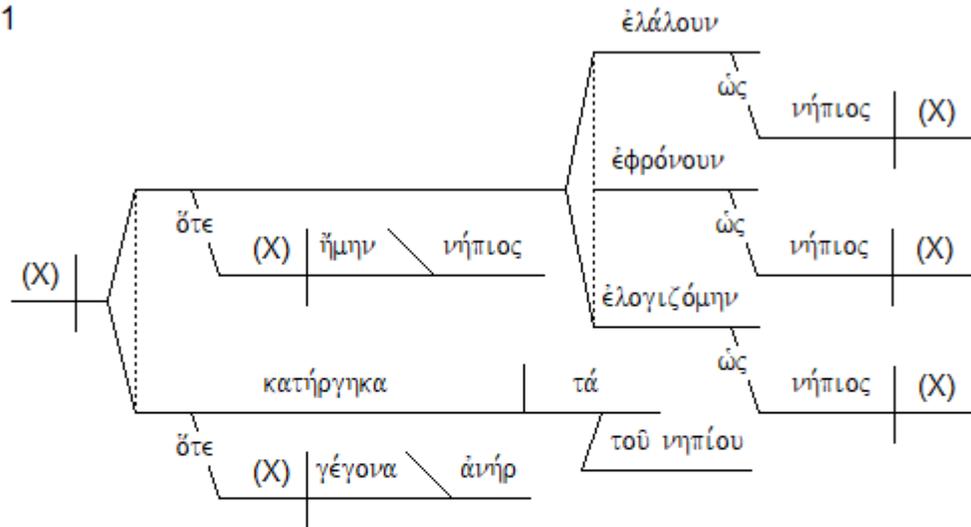
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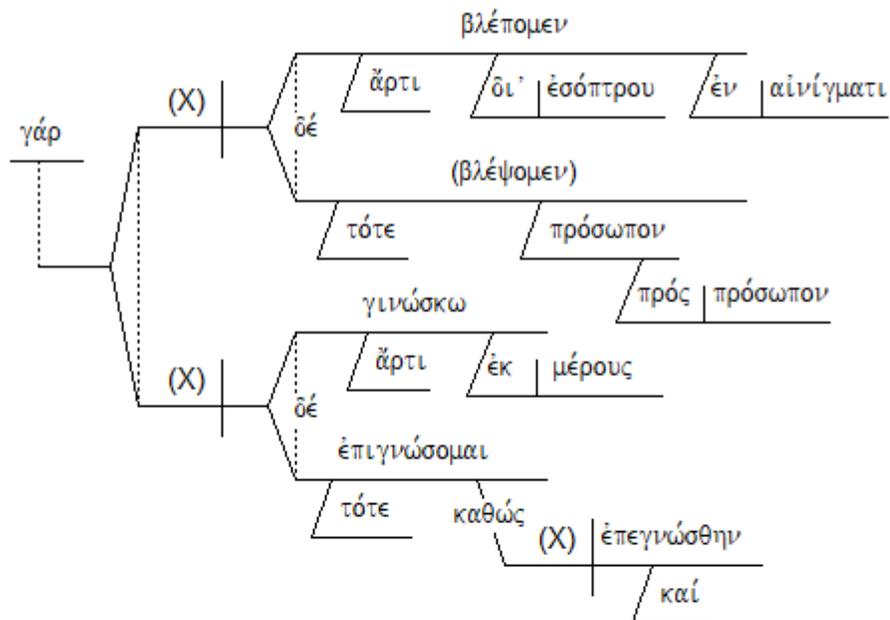
1Co 13:9-10



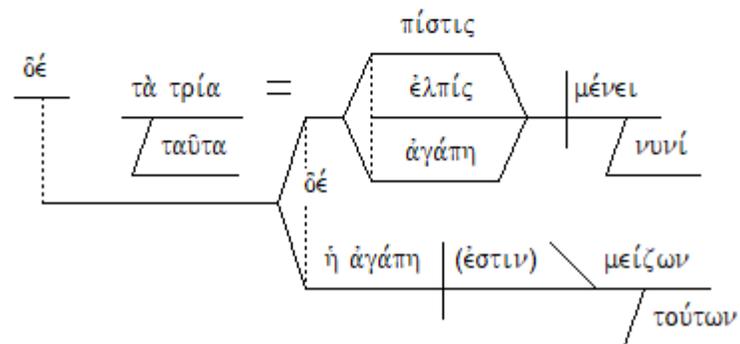
1Co 13:11



1Co 13:12



1Co 13:13



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 14:1-26

TITLE: CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING PROPHESYING AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN THE CHURCH

BIG IDEA:

GIFTS THAT EDIFY THE CHURCH (SUCH AS PROPHECY) MUST TAKE PRIORITY OVER THE GIFT OF TONGUES

INTRODUCTION:

We must first understand that in today's context the spiritual gifts most related to edification would be teaching and preaching the Word of God and exhorting believers to obey. New prophecies are not being delivered today. We have the completed canon of Scripture. We need gifted men to study and explain the text and its application to our culture today. That is not the gift of prophesying. But that is how edification takes place today in the church. That is why churches must give the highest priority to the exposition of Scripture. It is not enough to just treat things in a topical manner. You must have a systematic diet of going through the Scriptures book by book, paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse.

Mark Taylor: Paul's intent is not to eliminate the gift of tongues from use among the Corinthians. He does not call into question the legitimacy of the gift, nor does he say that they cannot or should not exercise the gift. . . Tongues and the interpretation of tongues are listed as one of the manifestations of the Spirit for the common good (12:7–10). Paul does establish clear guidelines for the use of tongues in the church, which must include interpretation (14:13, 26–28). Paul writes that he has no problem if all speak in tongues (14:5), claims that he himself speaks in tongues (14:18), and expressly commands, “*Do not forbid speaking in tongues*” (14:39). However, Paul qualifies each positive statement regarding the gift of tongues with a corresponding assessment of prophecy, demonstrating that prophecy is the preferred gift. Paul preferred prophecy over uninterpreted tongues (14:5), had rather speak five intelligible words in church in order to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (14:18), and while not forbidding them to speak in tongues, exhorts that they “*be eager to prophesy*” (14:39).

Paul Gardner: Having spoken of the serious problems of practical theology that have developed in the church because of their abuse of the grace-gifts, Paul began in **chapter 12** to look at the right use and right purposes for which God gave these gifts. They are for the building up of the body of Christ. **Chapter 13** fits well in Paul's argument. There he specifically contrasts grace-gifts with the true authenticator of mature Christian faith: **love**. Paul had already indicated that the key to love is that it functions to build up the community (8:1). Then in **chapter 13** he drew on some of the more exceptional or unusual gifts to make his point. It has been suggested that these gifts were among those that the elitists were probably promoting. Having shown that “*love*” is the **only true authenticator** of God's people and one that, unlike the grace-gifts, survives death itself, Paul now returns to the right and proper function of the gifts.

Chapter 14 thus follows clearly and easily from **chapter 13**. The first verse of chapter 14 makes the transition with a summary of the thought of chapter 13 and a return to the matter of the gifts, specifically two of the gifts mentioned in **13:1–2**.

Paul thus applies his teaching specifically by comparing the gifts of speaking in tongues and of prophecy. He demonstrates how one can function to build up the community and even outsiders, thus becoming an example of the love spoken of in **chapter 13**, while the other cannot normally serve this purpose. While there is good reason to assume that these gifts were highly esteemed among the elitist Corinthians, they serve for Paul to make the general point about the need for discernment and judgment about the things of the Spirit and how they should be allowed to function in the community.

The Proper Function of Grace-Gifts in Public Worship (14:1–25)

1. Pursue Love and Strive for Gifts That Build Up the Worshippers (**14:1–5**)
2. Tongues Can Be Problematic in Worship (**14:6–12**)
 - a. Illustration from Musical Instruments and Application (**14:6–9**)
 - b. Illustration from Different Languages and Application (**14:10–12**)
3. Public Worship Should Be Characterized by Intelligibility (**14:13–19**)
4. Prophecy Is More Beneficial Than Tongues in Public Worship (**14:20–25**)

I. (:1-5) EDIFICATION MUST BE THE PRIMARY GOAL IN CHURCH SERVICES

Andrew Noselli: Paul’s command to pursue love connects to **1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13**. Instead of following the way of love, the Corinthians have been childish in how they think about spiritual gifts (**14:20**) by earnestly desiring the flashy gift of tongues (cf. **v. 12**). So Paul exhorts them to use spiritual gifts in a way that builds up the church when they meet together. Specifically, they must pursue love by earnestly desiring to prophesy, which is more edifying than tongues because it is intelligible (**vv. 1-25**). Paul repeatedly compares what is unintelligible (uninterpreted tongues) with what is intelligible (prophecy and interpreted tongues). When a Christian speaks in tongues (in contrast to prophesying), that person speaks to only God (not fellow humans) in a way that is intelligible only to God (not fellow humans) and that builds up only the speaker (not the church).

A. (:1) Edification Is Consistent with Pursuing Love

“Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

Many people today would downplay the goal of edification; their concept of love is not a biblical one; they are much more interested in the emotional experience associated with worship. Paul is not setting spiritual gifts in opposition to love. We have already

seen that any spiritual ministry must be conducted in the environment and within the boundaries of love. The error of the Corinthian church was that they had placed too much priority on the gift of tongues rather than on those gifts that had more functionality related to edification. Paul is not deprecating the importance of all of the spiritual gifts – including the proper use of the genuine gift of tongues. His point in this passage is that edification must be the primary goal in church services.

Doug Goins: This first verse says that spiritual gifts are given as a **channel for love**. The basic reason that we're to express our spiritual gifts, to minister and serve, is for the benefit of other people. In this discussion of gifts, especially tongues and prophesying, love ought to be the controlling factor in our consideration.

1. Pursuing Love Remains the Highest Priority

2. Exercising Spiritual Gifts Must Harmonize with Pursuing Love

3. The Emphasis Must be on Those Gifts that Contribute the Most to Edification

B. (:2-5) Since the Measurement is Edification, Prophesying Excels Tongues

1. (:2-4) Two Contrasts Between Speaking in Tongues and Prophesying

a. First Contrast = Whom are You Addressing

1) Tongues – speaking not to men but to God

a) Men do not understand the content

“in his spirit he speaks mysteries”

b) Only God understands the content

2) Prophesying – speaking to men – they understand the content

b. Second Contrast = What are You Accomplishing

1) Tongues – Edifies Self – not the purpose of spiritual gifts

John MacArthur: I believe Paul's point here is **sarcastic**. . . Because even true tongues must be interpreted in order to be understood, they cannot possibly edify anyone, including the person speaking, without such interpretation. They cannot, therefore, be intended by God for private devotional use, as many Pentecostals and charismatics claim. Paul here is referring to the supposed value the Corinthians placed on their self-styled tongues-speaking. The satisfaction many of the believers experienced in their abuse of tongues was self-satisfaction, which came from pride-induced emotion, not from spiritual edification. It is an illegitimate self-building, often building up nothing more than spiritual pride.

2. Prophesying – Edifies the Church – Has Value for:

- Exhortation

- Consolation

Doug Goins: Paul says in **14:3** that there will be three obvious effects or results when prophecy is exercised in the church. The first is **edification**. That's a great word from the building trade. It means building or construction. A prophet is a home-builder. The word can be used either for laying a foundation, which speaks of stability, or retrofitting or repairing a building that already exists, strengthening it and shoring it up. So applying this word to our lives, it means that when prophecy is exercised, we will be spiritually strengthened and stabilized in our emotions and our understanding.

The second effect of prophesying is **exhortation**. That means to motivate, to come to a person's side and put an arm around their shoulder, to encourage that person, to give direction. This word exhortation doesn't mean that you shake your finger in somebody's face and holler at them. We sometimes have the idea that a prophet is someone who thunders from on high at people. But exhortation means you're on the same level; with your arm around their shoulder, you're saying, "Would you consider this truth?"

The third effect of prophecy is **consolation**, or literally, "near speech, talking very closely." It means to comfort somebody with tenderness and hope, to empathize with that person, to give sensitive counsel.

Daniel Akin: I define the gift of speaking in tongues as a gift of speaking in a foreign language that is totally unknown to the one who is speaking and to some who may be hearing. This is what we find in the very first occurrence of the gift in the book of Acts.

2. (:5) Prophesying Excels Tongues with Respect to Edification

a. Not Putting Down Tongues

"Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues"

b. But Elevating Prophesying

"but even more that you would prophesy"

c. Prophecy More Valuable for Edifying the Church

"and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues . . . so that the church may receive edifying."

d. Exception: Tongues Accompanied by Interpretation

"unless he interprets"

II. (:6-12) SPEECH MUST BE UNDERSTANDABLE FOR EDIFICATION TO OCCUR

Richard Hays: Paul restates his argument in **verses 6–12** by using analogies, the first two musical in character. He compares inspired speech in the church to the sounds produced by harp and flute (v. 7), to the call of a military horn (v. 8), and to the varieties of natural human language (vv. 10–11).

In the first analogy, he observes that the flutist or harpist cannot merely play random notes; in order for the melody to make sense to the hearer, there must be an order or pattern to the notes sounded. (Furthermore—a point that Paul does not make—different musicians trying to play together cannot simply play whatever occurs to them; their parts must be orchestrated in a complementary fashion.)

The second analogy—the trumpet sounding a call to battle—is even more telling. Paul sometimes uses military metaphors to describe the calling of Christians (e.g., **Rom. 6:12–14; Cor. 10:3–6; Phil. 1:27–30; 1 Thess. 5:8; cf. Eph. 6:10–20; 2 Tim. 4:7**); his metaphor in **1 Corinthians 14:8** suggests that public speech in the Christian assembly should awaken members of the church to action in the cosmic conflict in which the church is engaged. The “indistinct” sound of incoherent speech in tongues will do nothing to marshal the troops for battle. The speaker in tongues will merely be talking “*into the air*” (v. 9).

In the third analogy, Paul shifts the metaphorical field and points to the great variety of languages in the world (rightly NIV, JB, not just “sounds” as in NRSV). Estrangement occurs when we encounter someone who does not share a common language with us, because meaningful communication is impossible. Similar estrangement will divide us from one another in the church, he suggests, if incomprehensible tongue-speaking dominates the church’s discourse.

A. (:6) Contrast Between Speech that is Unintelligible vs. Intelligible

1. No Profit in Unintelligible Tongues

“But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you?”

David Prior: Paul spells out three major limitations in speaking in tongues: in intelligibility, personal wholeness and impact on outsiders.

2. Much Profit in Intelligible Spiritual Communication

“unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?”

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 6** presents the thesis of the next paragraph (vv. 6–12), repeating the need for intelligibility. The four elements of **verse 6b** (“revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction”) all share this attribute, as over against uninterpreted tongues. “*Word of instruction*” is literally “*teaching*,” so it seems that Paul is lumping more and less miraculous gifts together here to stress the importance of clear communication.

B. (:7-9) Illustration from Realm of Music – Only Clear Speech Can Elicit an Appropriate Response

“Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? 8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who

will prepare himself for battle? 9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.”

1. Generally, Musical Instruments must make distinct intentional sounds

Daniel Akin: Musical instruments don't exist to make random sounds; they are intended to actually play music that has melody and meaning. Music that is unintelligible to the mind will never move the heart.

2. Specifically, the Battle Call of the Trumpet must be understandable

Daniel Akin: An even more pertinent illustration involves the military bugler (v. 8). A soldier must always know whether the bugler is sounding retreat or attack. Getting that wrong can lead to a disastrous defeat instead of thrilling victory. The fact that Paul has to emphasize this point with examples from music and the military shows just how deeply committed at least some of the Corinthians were to trying to argue for the superiority of tongues (Carson, Showing, 103).

3. Language and speech must be clear

Mark Taylor: Paul observes broadly that all sounds (languages) in the world have meaning and exist to be distinguished and understood. . .

Paul's third analogy, all sorts of languages (“*sounds*”) in the world, was especially relevant to Corinth with its two harbors positioning the city as a major crossroads to the world. The citizens of Corinth would have been all too familiar with the alienation and frustration caused by the blend of different languages and different cultures in a major urban setting. Such alienation and frustration, however, should never characterize the assembly of believers. By means of a wordplay Paul asserts that of all the different kinds of sounds in the world none are “without sound,” that is, without meaning. If someone speaks and the hearers cannot understand what is being said, then meaningful communication cannot occur.

John MacArthur: The Corinthians were so carnally self-centered that they could not have cared less about communication. They were interested in impressing others, not communicating with them, much less edifying them.

C. (:10-11) Language Only Has Value if it is Understood

“There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. 11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.”

Tremendous argument against any type of language that would not have meaning for man; the essence of language is the communication of thoughts and ideas that can be understood by those who know the language.

John MacArthur: The Corinthians were so carnally self-centered that they could not have cared less about communication. They were interested in impressing others, not communicating with them, much less edifying them. . . A language without meaning is pointless. A language without meaning is not really a language. It is meaning that makes language language.

D. (:12) Zeal for Spiritual Gifts Must be Channeled Towards Edification

“So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.”

III. (:13-19) PRACTICE IN THE CHURCH (RELATED TO THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS) MUST BE ADJUSTED TO PROMOTE EDIFICATION

A. (:13) Tongues Require Interpretation

“Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.”

B. (:14-17) The Mind Must be Engaged in Worship

1. The Mind Must be Engaged in Prayer

“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also”

John Calvin: Let us take notice, that Paul reckons it a great fault if the mind is not occupied in prayer. And no wonder; for what else do we in prayer, but pour out our thoughts and desires before God? Farther, as prayer is the spiritual worship of God, what is more at variance with the nature of it, than that it should proceed merely from the lips, and not from the inmost soul?

2. The Mind Must be Engaged in Singing and Praise

“I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.”

John MacArthur: Spirituality involved more than the mind, but it never excludes the mind.

3. The Mind Must be Engaged in Giving Assent and Blessing and Thanks

“Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.”

“*ungifted*” is not speaking of an unbeliever, but of one who does not have the gift of interpretation to allow him to understand the message from the speaking in tongues

David Prior: The most likely explanation of *idiōtēs* is the one given by Morris. Paul uses a rather cumbersome phrase in **verse 16**, ‘one who fills the place of the *idiōtēs*’,

which indicates that [these people] had their place in the Christian assembly. They would be ‘inquirers’, people who had not committed themselves to Christianity, but who were interested. They had ceased to be simply outsiders, but were not yet Christians. Any church with an evangelistic cutting-edge into the local community has people of this kind in its gatherings for worship. They are not yet believers; indeed, they are still ‘unbelievers’. But they are on the verge of commitment. Nothing should be done, especially in a spirit of self-indulgence by a few enthusiastic Christians, to drive them back into an unbelief from which it will then be far more difficult to extricate them.

John MacArthur: *Amen* is a Hebrew word of agreement and encouragement, meaning “*So let it be*”

C. (:18-19) The Practice of the Apostle Paul Supports This Emphasis on Edification

1. (:18) Paul Excels in Speaking in Tongues

“I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all”

Paul can’t be accused of not knowing what he is talking about here.

Ray Stedman: Well, then, when did Paul speak in tongues? I think the only situation that fulfills all the biblical requirements for the gift of tongues, one that would have allowed the apostle to exercise his ability in this area, would be when he went into the Jewish synagogues, because there was a provision made for public praise of God by visiting people. To praise God in a language never learned would be a very impressive thing to the Jewish people present, especially if it was a Gentile tongue. That is when Paul spoke in tongues “*more than them all,*” and that would fulfill every requirement of the biblical gift of tongues.

Richard Hays: Paul has held back one important bit of information. Now he drops it in for rhetorical impact: He claims to speak in tongues more than any of the Corinthians, including those who pride themselves on this gift! He explains, however, that he has not employed this gift “*in church*” (*en ekkl sia*: NEB’s “*in the congregation*” is a better translation) because he would rather speak “*five words with my mind*” to instruct the congregation than to pour forth a torrent of incomprehensible words (**vv. 18–19**). Paul has now played his ace, seeking to trump the Corinthians’ claims. He could beat them at their own game of superspirituality, he says, but he has chosen not to play that game because he has another goal in mind. Here again Paul holds himself up as an example to be imitated—an example of renouncing spiritual glory and status for the sake of others. Thus, his ethical example concerning the use of spiritual gifts matches the pattern already outlined in **chapters 8–10**: Paul renounces rights and privileges for the benefit of others in the church. The instruction of the community is a higher value than any amount of exalted religious experience.

2. (:19) Paul Addresses His Communication in the Church to the Mind

“however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

IV. (:20-25) CONTRAST IN PURPOSE AND EFFECT BETWEEN SPEAKING IN TONGUES AND PROPHECYING

A. (:20-21) Appeal to Maturity of Thinking

1. (:20) The Appeal

“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.”

Doug Goins: A preoccupation with tongues without concern for their place and purpose, or their effect on oneself or others is childish. Paul says we're to be innocent or childlike when it comes to evil or sin, but not in our use of spiritual gifts. Some of the Corinthian believers had come to believe that speaking in tongues was evidence of spiritual maturity. But Paul is making it clear in this chapter that this gift can be exercised in an unspiritual, immature way. Twice he uses the word "*thinking*" in **verse 20**. That word means the faculty of wise, thoughtful, rational investigation. Mature faith will never stress the noncognitive or nonrational over the cognitive or rational. I'm not saying the noncognitive and nonrational have no place, but the cognitive and the rational must be central to the life of the church.

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 20** forms the transition to the last paragraph of this first section of **chapter 14**. A preoccupation with tongues without concern for their effect on oneself and others is childish. There are ways Christians should be childlike (e.g., being innocent of evil—cf. **Matt. 10:16**) but not in their use of spiritual gifts. Mature faith never stresses the noncognitive at the expense of the cognitive. "*Thinking*" translates a word (*phren*) which means "the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, often with the implication of being wise and provident."

2. (:21) The Supporting Argument from Isaiah

“In the Law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me,” says the Lord.”

Context here is clearly talking about known languages, not ecstatic utterances.

B. (:22) Contrast in Purpose

1. Purpose of Tongues – Directed towards unbelievers

“So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers;

Daniel Akin: What did Paul mean when he said that tongues were a sign for unbelievers (**v. 22**)? We have already stated it could refer, as it did in the reference to Isaiah, to the judgment of God, but I would go further. Tongues when interpreted can also show unbelievers the power of God when they hear the gospel in their own languages,

knowing full well there would be no way the speaker could have possibly known the language beforehand. Certainly in the book of Acts tongues was a sign of confirmation. It made unbelievers sit up and take notice. Jews from all over the world asked, *“How is it that each of us can hear them in our own language? . . . [We all] hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues”* (Acts 2:8,11).

2. Purpose of Prophesying – Directed towards believers

“but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.”

Doug Goins: He tells us that tongues is a sign gift to be exercised for the benefit of non-Christians. That was its purpose at Pentecost, as we see in **Acts 2**. It arrested attention as the disciples declared the magnificence of God to the thousands of Jewish pilgrims from all over the world in their native languages. Their praises were immediately followed by Peter's preaching of the gospel as he interpreted the events to the crowd. So the expression of tongues, like any good sign, directed the attention to the saving message of Jesus Christ, which is the more important issue. A billboard arrests attention, but surely you don't get hung up with the sign itself. Its advertisers want you to think about the message it's pointing to. That's the purpose of any sign in our culture today. Tongues awakened people to the presence and the power of God at Pentecost, but it was Peter's prophetic preaching that explained who this God was and called the people to believe what God had said in his word.

C. (:23-25) Contrast in Effect

1. Effect of Speaking in Tongues

“If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?”

2. Effect of Prophesying

“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.”

(:26) CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION: EDIFICATION MUST BE THE PRIMARY GOAL IN CHURCH SERVICES

“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

This forms the **transition** to the next section in **chapter 14** which speaks of orderliness in the church services.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is our church doing to promote the function of edification within our church services? What parts of the service don't seem to engage the mind?
- 2) Will the gift of prophecy be functioning again during the Great Tribulation period even though we don't need it at present?
- 3) If the Apostle Paul was such a prolific speaker in tongues, why don't we hear more about how he used that gift in his missionary journeys?
- 4) When unbelievers visit our church services do they come under the conviction of the Spirit as described in v.24-25? Why don't we see more of this type of behavior?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Leake: (:1-12) THE CHURCH IS TO VALUE PROPHECY FOR EDIFICATION SAKE – 2 COMPARISONS

INTRODUCTION:

Very controversial and yet practical section; the importance of edification; the mind and the understanding are key.

I. (:1-5) PROPHECY IS GREATER THAN TONGUES

A. (:1) Bridge: 2 Commands

- Follow after love hard
- Earnestly desire spiritual gifts

You should want your congregation to be blessed by prophecy since prophecy has a greater ability to edify the church

B. (:2) The Inadequacy of the Gift of Tongues

Communicates nothing of value to the congregation; *no one* in the congregation can understand that foreign language (does not mean that *no one* in the world can understand it)

Nature of Tongues – known foreign language; not ecstatic utterance with repetitive syllables that make not sense; charismatic tongues movement of recent origin – maybe only the last 100 years in America

Origin of Tongues = at Pentecost – look at historical record in Acts 2 – interpret the unclear in light of the clear (not vice versa) – meant to be a miracle; not gibberish that others could produce apart from the Spirit of God;

Acts 2:9-11 lists the various foreign languages involved that day
2:18 – uses the word *dialect* – like a reversal of the Tower of Babel; the sign was effective; not a gift of hearing.

How does the charismatic movement arrive at definition of ecstatic utterances or some type of unknown angel language?? They start with their experience and then go back into the Scriptures looking for justification for some type of private prayer language – Can there be two different types of tongues?? Not likely since the same words are used; **Acts 10** and **19** assume the same phenomena as **Acts 2**; Luke = traveling companion of Paul and wrote Acts after 1 Corinthians – must be talking about the same thing

Purpose of the gift of tongues = a sign to unbelievers (**14:22**) – same terminology, same purpose, same gift of languages
Improper not to use the gift for edification

“*mystery*” = previously unrevealed truth; not a reference to the groaning of the Spirit from **Rom. 8:26**; when we pray, God hears our language just fine; the Holy Spirit then talks to God on our behalf using groanings that are too deep for words (unutterable); not talking about ecstatic speech on our part

C. (:3) Reasons for Superiority of Prophecy

- communicates effectively
- edifies
- builds up the church properly
 - Via Exhortation – move the human will towards godly goal
 - Via Consolation – comforting the troubled heart
 - Also need systematic teaching for doctrinal instruction

Rom. 12:7-8 – now teaching and exhortation needed for growth

D. (:4) Who Should be Edified

The Church; not Self

The church must receive the benefit; the reference here to building self up is not a compliment; not encouraging us to sit at home and speak in tongues

E. (:5) using hyperbole – **7:7** is not saying that all men should really remain single; it is not the divine will that all men should speak in tongues; not deprecating tongues; but elevating prophecy and edification – We need God’s Word

Having an interpreter is the key = why it can’t refer to ecstatic utterances that could never be interpreted

II. (:6-12) UNDERSTANDING IS GREATER THAN CONFUSION

In order for edification to take place, content must be delivered in understandable language; otherwise all you have is Confusion

“*barbarian*” = anyone who does not understand the Greek language

(:12) Application -- use the gift in love to build up and edify the body of Christ; value the teaching; listen; it can change our lives; value the pulpit ministry

Thomas Leake: (:13-25) PREACHING TO THE MIND IS ESSENTIAL FOR EDIFICATION – 4 REASONS

INTRODUCTION:

God's method to build up the local church continues to be the expositional preaching of the Word of God; not based on the greatness of the human instrument behind the pulpit but on the greatness of the Word of God as the Spirit applies it to the hearts of the people;

Look at the differences and similarities between prophesying and preaching so that we get the right application from this text;

Our worship service is important to the Lord

I. (:13-15) PREACHING TO THE MIND EDIFIES THE SPEAKER HIMSELF
“*therefore*” – links back to vs. 12 and the principle of edification; this principle of the importance of speaking to the mind is not limited to prophecy; aim everything at the mind = singing, etc.

They were using the genuine gift of tongues inappropriately; apart from gift of interpretation this would not edify the church; Paul's aim was always to edify

Prayer Request

Reason for the Prayer Request

Paul was not advocating praying only in the spirit; the mind must be engaged; vs. 15 looks at the correct practice; this is how it should be happening

Worship Principle: singing must be truth oriented, not rote or mindless; not just repetition to gear us up to some type of emotional excitement;
Look at the reduction in truth that has taken place in contemporary Christian songs and prayers; you don't see people praying Scripture back to God;
We are not advocating that emotion should not be expressed in our worship

II. (:16-19) PREACHING TO THE MIND EDIFIES THE WHOLE CHURCH

- Paul had the gift of languages
- Paul was thankful for the gift
- Paul exercised the gift more than the Corinthians

So Paul knows what he's talking about

Look at the Pride of the Corinthians and of some charismatics today: “If you don't have the gift of tongues you are not qualified to teach me on this subject”

Same experience of ecstatic utterance has been evidenced around the world; not supernatural; not a sign; not impressive; not from the Spirit of God

Paul used tongues in his missionary travels; not talking about speaking privately or without an interpreter

Note **Matt. 6:7** cautions against meaningless repetition in our prayers; pray intelligently

III. (:20) PREACHING TO THE MIND MATURES THE THINKING

2 sides of the same exhortation expressed as a rebuke; the Corinthians prided themselves in their thinking; Truth matures the mind

Qualification given about being infants with respect to evil; does not mean:

- not to study the bible
- not to be on guard against Satan's schemes
- not to be able to recognize evil for what it truly is

But it means don't have experiential knowledge of sinning; cf. tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden

Stay away from imagination and creativity in the realm of evil

You don't learn loving by lusting;

You don't learn contentment by coveting

IV. (:21-25) PREACHING TO THE MIND CONVINCES EVERYONE

Everyone = believers and unbelievers alike

Talking about the abuse of the principle.

Sometimes the entire OT referred to as "the Law" – here the quote is from Isaiah – foreign language brought by Syrian conquerors – pointing to the special work of God in correction and discipline of His people

Purpose of tongues = miraculous sign for unbelievers; God doing something special; had an evangelistic and apologetic purpose; unnecessary to authenticate apostles and prophets today

(:24-25) Positive effect of Prophecy – benefits spill over to unbelievers

John Stott: Between Two Worlds

Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God because it is the adoration of His name.

Therefore, acceptable worship is impossible without preaching, for preaching is making known the name of the Lord, and worship is praising the name of the Lord made known. Far from being an alien intrusion into worship, the reading and preaching of the word are actually indispensable to it. The two cannot be divorced. Indeed, it is their unnatural divorce which accounts for the low level of so much contemporary worship.

Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the word of God is expounded in its fullness, and the congregation begin to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before his throne. It's preaching which accomplishes this, the proclamation of the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. That's why preaching is so unique and irreplaceable.

Ray Stedman: The gift of tongues is a sign. A sign to whom? Well, the quotation from **Isaiah 28** makes it clear (cf, **Isa 28:11**): Isaiah was speaking to the whole nation of Israel at a time when the Assyrians were knocking at the doors of Jerusalem, threatening to capture it. Through the prophet, God is warning the nation that, if they do not repent and turn from their evil and idolatrous ways, they are going to hear foreigners talking in the Holy City; they are going to hear Gentile tongues filling the streets of that city. It is a warning to Israel to face up to their relationship with God lest he turn from them to the Gentile world.

Now that was the scene and the setting of Isaiah's words. One hundred years later they were completely fulfilled when the Babylonians came in and did take over the city and the streets of Jerusalem were filled with foreigners speaking strange tongues. If you read the Day of Pentecost in that light you will see how fully that accords with this prediction, for, on that day, when the streets of Jerusalem were filled with thousands and thousands of people, largely Jews, who had come from all the nations around, they heard the disciples speaking these strange, Gentile languages they had never learned. It was a sign to unbelieving Jews that God was about to turn from Israel's favored position and go to the Gentile world. On that day, remember, Peter stood up and warned them that they were facing the judgment of God, being convicted in their hearts, that was why they said, "*Men and brethren, what must we do?*" (cf, **Acts 2:37**), and three thousand of them turned to God because of that, while the rest of the city, the mass of the population, remained in unbelief.

That is what Isaiah said would happen, "*By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.*" (cf, **Isa 28:11**). So Paul says that is the purpose for the gift, that is why he used it in synagogues wherever he went, because it would be a sign of warning to unbelieving Jews that God was turning to the Gentiles.

Ray Stedman: That raises, then, the final question, which I want to briefly answer this morning. That is, "Is what we are hearing around us today the biblical gift of tongues?" My judgment is, "No, it is not." I have heard hundreds of manifestations of what is called "tongues" today, and I am alarmed by the fact that hardly anybody ever raises the question, "Is this the same thing?" They never ask, "Is this a language, or is it not?" I have a quotation here from **William Samarin**, professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, who says,

“Over a period of five years I have taken part in meetings in Italy, Holland, Jamaica, Canada and the United States. I have observed old-fashioned Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals. I have been in small meetings in private

homes as well as in mammoth public meetings. I have seen such different cultural settings as are found among Puerto Ricans of the Bronx, the snake handlers of the Appalachians and the Russian Molakans of Los Angeles... I have interviewed tongue speakers, and tape recorded and analyzed countless samples of tongues. In every case, glossolalia turns out to be **linguistic nonsense**. In spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia is fundamentally **not language**. It is not a language, and it is not often addressed to God. It is usually addressed to a crowd of people present, so it does not fit that qualification. And it is primarily exercised privately today, whereas there is no manifestation of the private use of tongues in the New Testament. Finally, it is not a sign to unbelievers, therefore, we have to judge that the phenomenon that we see and hear today is not the biblical gift of tongues.

What is it then? Well, once again people are being misled, oftentimes quite earnestly and sincerely, into identifying a **purely psychological phenomenon**, of which many temperaments are capable, a kind of self-induced hypnosis which results in a repetition of sounds and syllables that have no meaning in themselves, as the gift of tongues. In itself it is relatively harmless. If people want to do it at home I have no objection as long as they do not call it the biblical gift of tongues because it is not that. It is this common phenomenon which was present all through the ancient world, and which Plato discusses in several of his discourses, and which was practiced commonly in the mystery religions of that day. It is very often, all through the history of the church, associated with religious excitement. That is what is being identified today as the gift of tongues.”

John MacArthur: In the church at Corinth much of the tongues-speaking had taken on the form and flavor of those pagan ecstasies. Emotionalism all but neutralized their rational senses, and selfish exhibitionism was common, with everyone wanting to do and say his own thing at the same time (**v 26**). Services were bedlam and chaos, with little worship and little edification taking place. Because of the extreme carnality in the church at Corinth, we can be sure that much of the tongues-speaking there was counterfeit. . .

The apostle gives three reasons why the position of tongues is secondary to that of prophecy: prophecy edifies the whole congregation; tongues are unintelligible; and the effects of tongues are emotional rather than rational. . .

The mysteries Paul has in mind here are of the type associated with the pagan mystery religions, out of which many of the Corinthian Christians had come. Unlike the mysteries of the gospel, which are revelations of things previously hidden (**Matt. 13:1; Eph. 3:9**; etc.) the pagan mysteries intentionally remained mysterious, as unknown truths and principles that supposedly only the initiated elite were privileged to know. . .

The sign was threefold: a sign of cursing, a sign of blessing, and a sign of authority.

A SIGN OF CURSING

Some 15 years or so before Isaiah prophesied about the strange tongues from the lips of strangers, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered and taken captive by the Assyrians (in 722 B.C.) because of unbelief and apostasy. The prophet then warned the southern kingdom, Judah, that the same judgment awaited her at the hands of the Babylonians. The proud religious leaders of Judah would not listen to Isaiah. His teaching was too simple. He talked to them, they claimed, as if they were babies. . .

About 800 years before Isaiah, God had warned Israel that “*The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand*” (**Deut. 28:49**). The strange language of their conquerors would be a sign of God’s judgment. About 100 years after Isaiah, the Lord warned through Jeremiah, “*Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel, . . . a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say*” (**Jer. 5:15**). The sign of judgment would be a language they could not understand.

When the apostles spoke at Pentecost and were heard in their own language by Jews from many countries (**Acts 2:7-11**), those Jews should have known that God’s judgment was imminent. His judgment had fallen on rebellious Israel and then on rebellious Judah. How much more would it fall on those of His people who now had crucified the Son of God? . . .

After the destruction of Jerusalem, and especially of the Temple, the reason for tongues ceased to exist. The judgment of which it was a sign had come. After the Pentecost manifestation of tongues, Peter, by implication, reminded his hearers of that judgment: “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified*” (**Acts 2:36**; cf. **vv. 22-23**).

A SIGN OF BLESSING

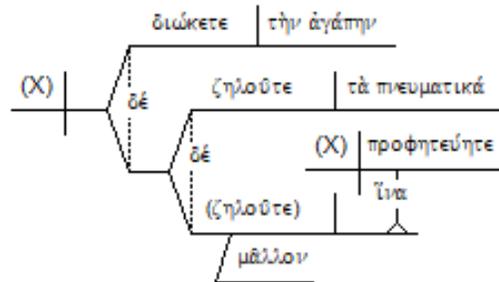
The gift of tongues was a sign that God would no longer work through one nation, and favor one people. . .

A SIGN OF AUTHORITY

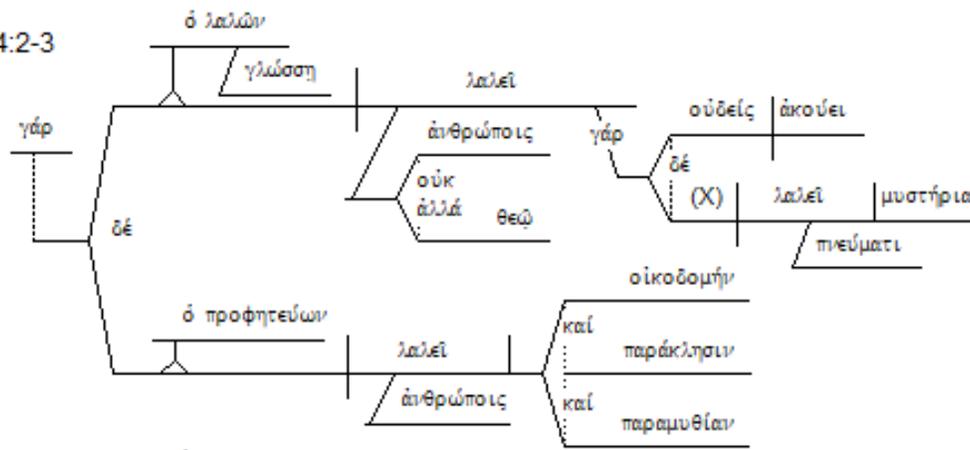
Those who preached the judgment and promised the blessing were the apostles and prophets, whose authority was validated by “*signs and wonders and miracles*” (**2 Cor. 12:12**; cf. Rom. 15:19). Among the authenticating signs was the gift of tongues, in which Paul spoke “*more than you all*” (**1 Cor. 14:18**).

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

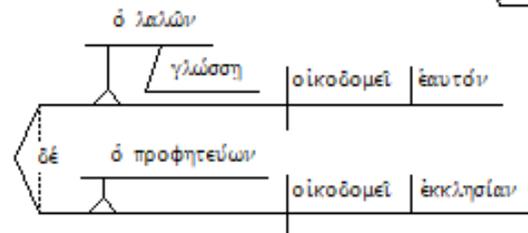
1Co 14:1



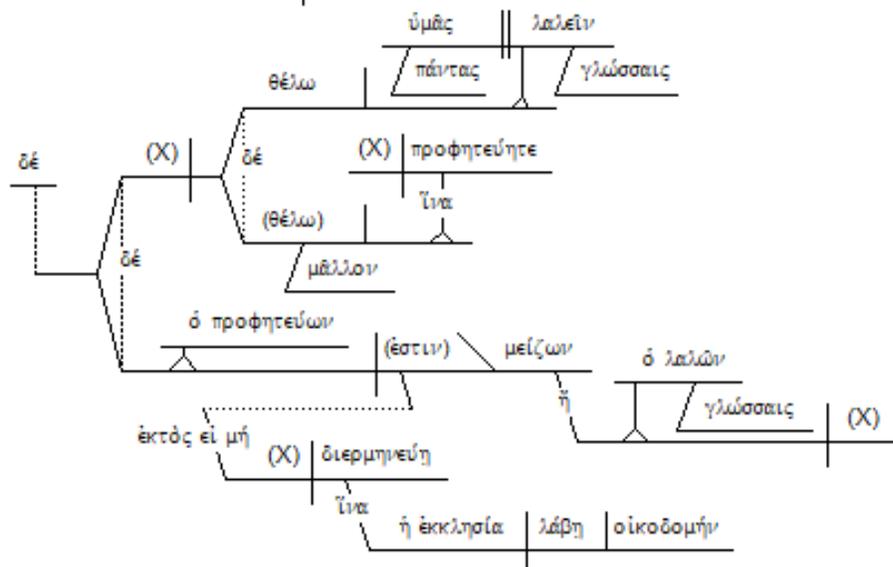
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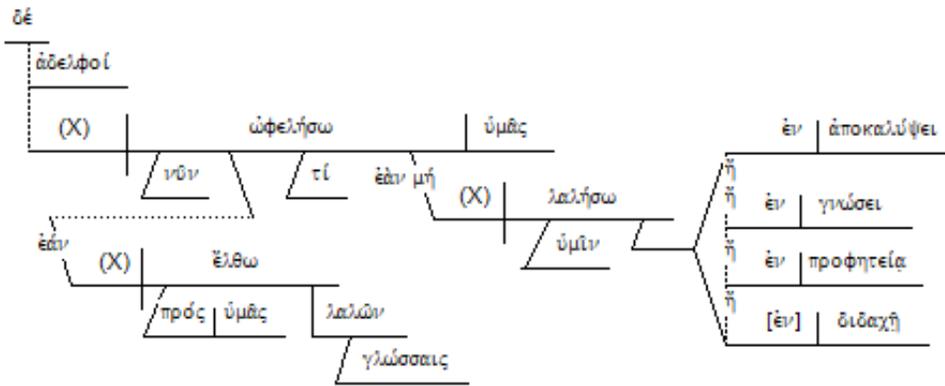
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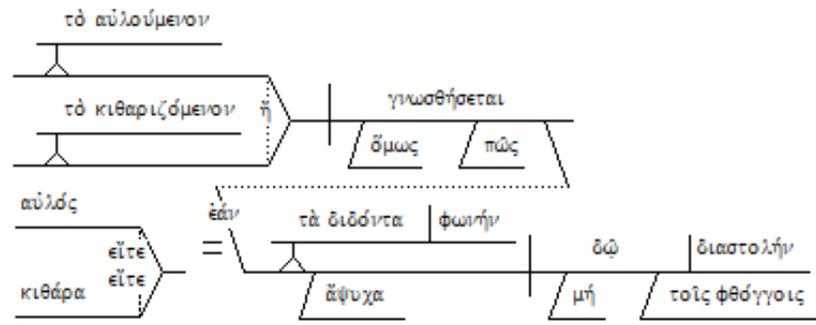
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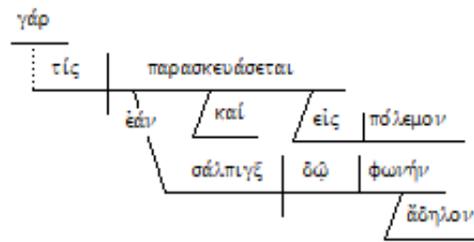
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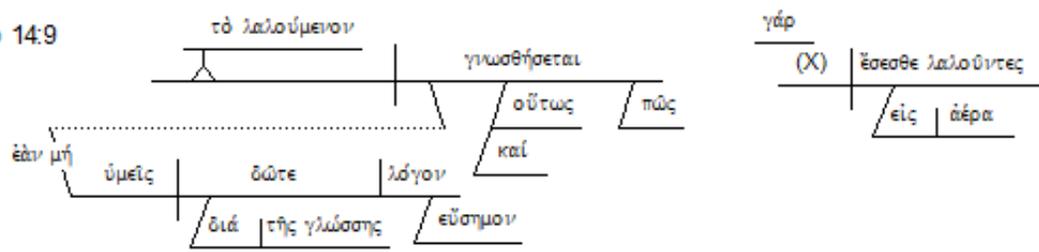
1Co 14:7



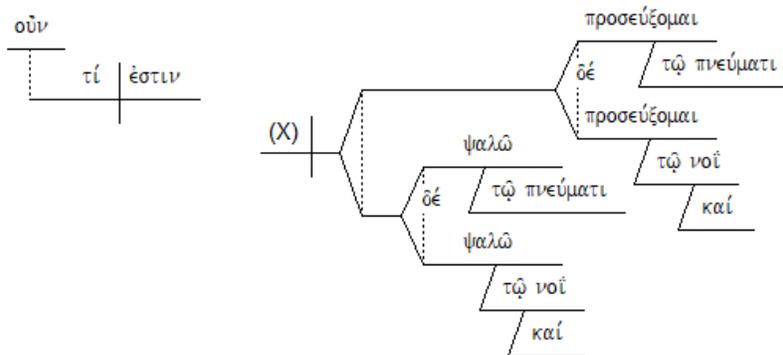
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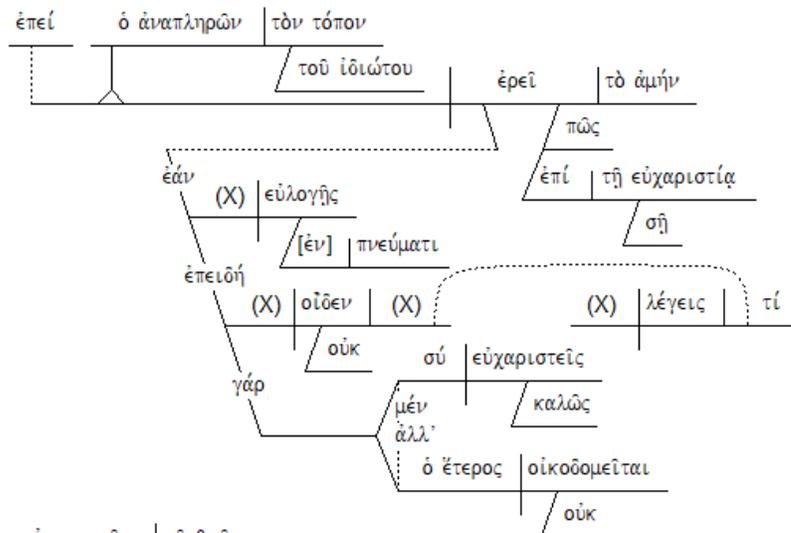
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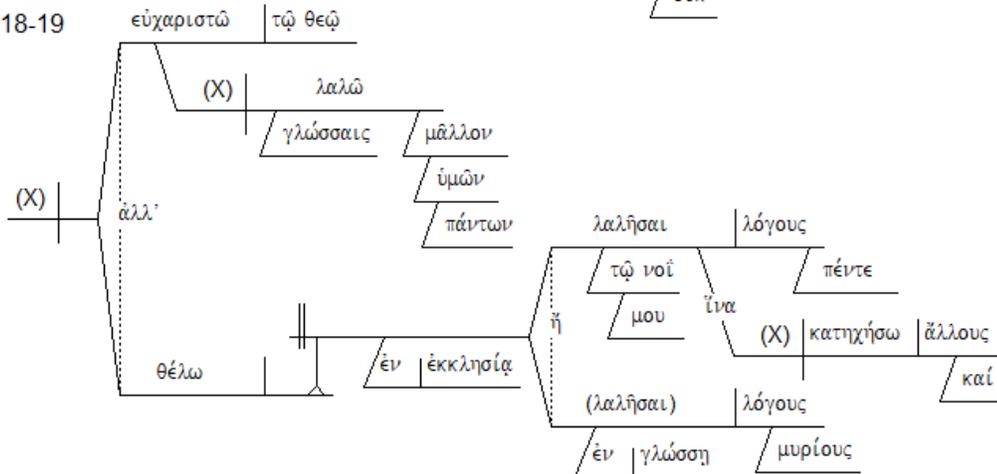
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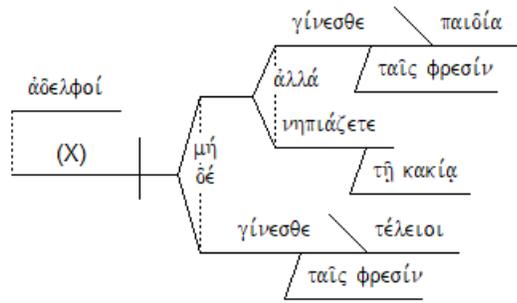
1Co 14:16-17



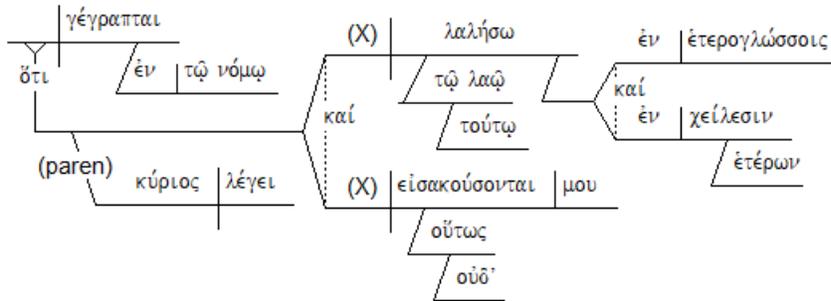
1Co 14:18-19



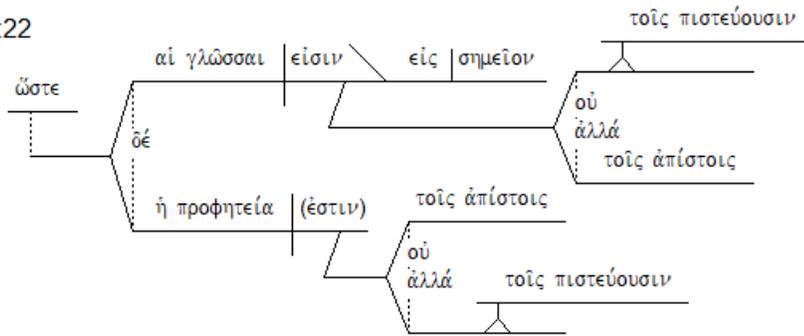
1Co 14:20



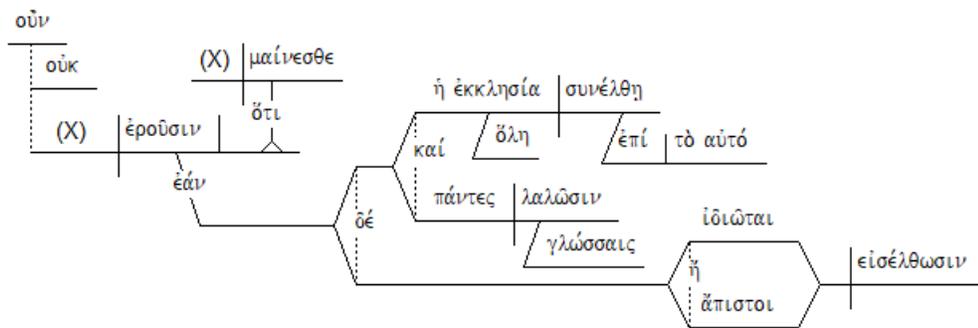
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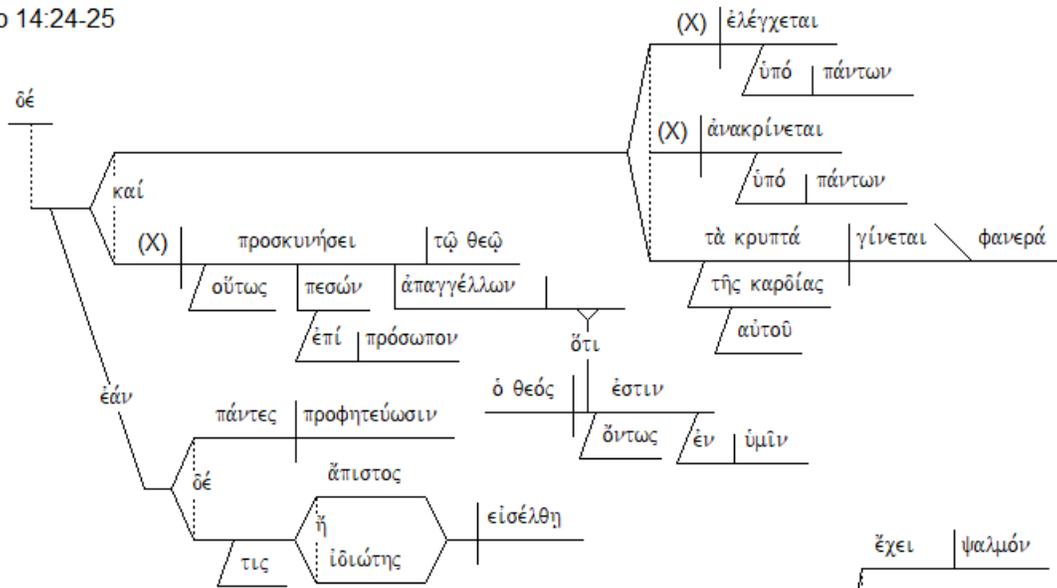
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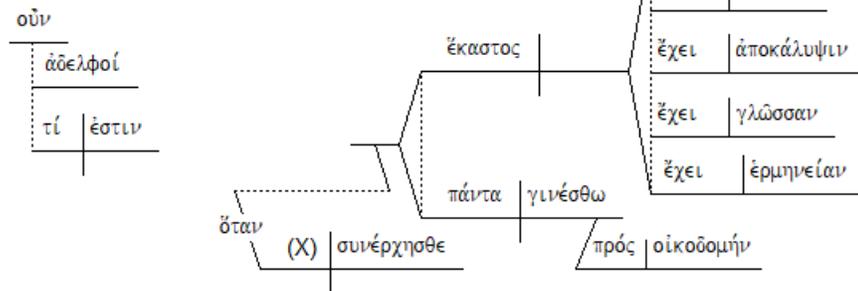
1Co 14:23



1Co 14:24-25



1Co 14:26



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

TITLE: ORDERLY CHURCH SERVICES

BIG IDEA:

THE ORDERLY PATTERN FOR WORSHIP LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH INVOLVES MULTIPLE GIFTED MEN PROMOTING THE GOAL OF EDIFICATION

INTRODUCTION:

There is a pattern for worship leadership in the church. There are appropriate ways to achieve the goal of edification; there are inappropriate ways. The role of gifted men is different from that of gifted women. Need to determine if this passage addresses the church as it comes together in its entirety or just as it meets in smaller house church or flock group meetings. It would seem that the corporate meeting of the entire church is in view. However, in either case, these principles would seem to apply.

David Garland: In the final unit of **chapters 12–14**, Paul issues **regulations for worship**. Gatherings in which each person could make a contribution under the guidance of the Holy Spirit need some ground rules. Openness to the Spirit and to individual expression of spiritual gifts is not to become a pretext for chaos. Paul does not see tongues or prophecy as a solo performance. The glossolalist requires an interpreter; the prophet requires reviewers who assess what is said (**Friedrich**, TDNT 6:852). He offers three criteria to control what is done.

1. First, edifying others becomes the touchstone to determine the fitness of everything that is done in the Corinthians' worship. Contributions to the church's worship are not to become an ego trip or an exercise in "unbridled individualism" (**Talbert** 1987: 93).
2. Second, they are to speak one at a time (**14:27, 30, 31**) and may be limited to no more than three speaking at any given gathering (**14:27, 29**).
3. Third, they are to do nothing that is shameful (**14:35**); wives are to refrain from speaking in any way that brings shame or shows insubordination.

His discussion can be outlined as follows:

1. Restraints concerning speaking in tongues (**14:27–28**)
2. Restraints concerning prophecy and discernment (**14:29–36**)
 - a. Restraints on the number of prophets speaking and others discerning (**14:29**)
 - b. Restraints on a prophet speaking (**14:30–33a**)
 - c. Restraints on wives in discerning (**14:33b–36**)
3. Injunction (**14:37–38**)
4. Encouragement of prophecy and tongues (**14:39**)
5. Concluding statement of general principles for worship gatherings: all things must be done in decency and order (**14:40**)

This unit is similar to the conclusion of Paul's long discussion of the issues related to idol food in **10:23 – 11:1** in that it gives specific instructions about what should be done in concrete situations. The **pattern** for his instructions in both passages is comparable:

Statement of general principles

- All things are to be done for the edification of others (**10:23–24 / 14:26**)

Specific instructions for one situation

- Eating whatever is sold in the public market (**10:25**)
- Speaking in tongues (**14:27–28**)

Theological rationale

- The earth is the Lord's (**10:26**)

Specific instructions for a second, correlative situation

- Eating in an unbeliever's home (**10:27**)
- Prophecy (**14:29–32**)

Theological rationale

- God is not a God of disorder but of peace (**14:33a**)

Exception applicable to the second situation

- If someone points out that it is idol food (**10:28–29a**)
- Wives joining in the evaluation of prophecy (**14:33b–35**)

General principle stated as a question

- Partaking thankfully (**10:29b–30**)
- The word of God not reaching the Corinthians alone (**14:36**)

Concluding statement of general principles

- Do all to the glory of God (**10:31 – 11:1**)
- Do all things properly and in good order (**14:37–40**)

I. (:26-33) CONNECTION BETWEEN ORDERLINESS AND EDIFICATION

Richard Hays: In **verses 26–33**, Paul sketches a picture of a free-flowing community gathering under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in which “*each one*” contributes something to the mix. Clearly there was no fixed order of service, no printed bulletin for the worshipers! Nor -- more remarkably -- is anything said of a leader to preside over the meeting. Apparently Paul expects all the members to follow the promptings of the Spirit, taking turns in offering their gifts for the benefit of the assembly, deferring to one another (**vv. 29–30**) and learning from one another. The meeting will include singing, teaching (probably exposition of Scripture), revelatory utterances (prophecy and its cognates, cf. **v. 6**), and praise to God in tongues with interpretation. . .

The overall picture that emerges from these instructions is of a church in which the Spirit is palpably present, flowing freely in the communal worship through the complementary gifts of different members. In Paul's vision for Christian worship there is neither stiff formality nor undisciplined frenzy: the community's worship is more like a complex but graceful dance, or a beautiful anthem sung in counterpoint. . . . If the Corinthian worship meetings are chaotic and conflictual, the question must be raised: What God are they really worshipping? The term *akatastasis* has connotations of civil strife and rebellion (M. Mitchell, 173). This is one more hint that the problems in Corinthian worship are not merely the result of overheated spirituality; they are also linked to the factionalism and defiance of Paul's authority that have been the consistent concern of this letter. If, however, God is a God of peace, the Corinthians should learn to be at peace with one another and to express that peace in a style of worship that emphasizes concord and complementarity.

A. (:26) Orderliness Essential for Edification

1. (:26A) Exercise of Spiritual Gifts Must Achieve Desired Outcome

"What is the outcome then, brethren?"

We have spent a lot of time studying spiritual gifts and the pursuit of love. This has not been just an academic exercise. There is a practical objective of accomplishing the goal of edification within the context of orderly church services.

Robert Gundry: The brotherly relationship is supposed to make the instructions palatable as well as mandatory.

2. (:26B) Eclectic, Haphazard Contribution by All Does Not Work

"When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation."

Paul is challenging the appropriateness of their unorganized practice.

Paul Garland: It has been our contention throughout this commentary that the Corinthians have probably taken the more spectacular gifts—those which do indeed perhaps seem more "spontaneous"—and have made them into indicators or markers of spiritual maturity. Throughout Paul has denied them this function. The issue is whether they build up or not. There is no clear reason to limit these gifts to complete spontaneity, even if some may have been given by God in this way. The text does not preclude some people standing up at will in the congregation with a prepared piece of "teaching."

Anthony Thiselton: *Hymn* (Greek *psalmon*) may denote a biblical psalm, a pre-composed hymn, or an innovative utterance sung rather than spoken. Other terms are more akin to their normal modern usage, for example, *teaching*. *Something disclosed* (Greek *apokalypsis*) may denote a stretch of prophetic speech "given" to a speaker from God, but it may equally include a sermon or even a "given" portion of Scripture as God's revelation.

3. (:26C) Edification Must be the Goal

“Let all things be done for edification.”

They have gotten so caught up in themselves and their giftedness that they have lost sight of God’s goal for the church.

David Garland: The thrust of this chapter makes clear that he wishes to thwart those expressions of spiritual gifts that build up only the individual (14:4) and to encourage those gifts that edify the entire community. The controlling factors are to be order, self-control, and concern for others (Fee 1987: 688).

Mark Taylor: The concluding unit of this chapter, 14:26–40, is marked off by an inclusio regarding how “*all things must be done*” (14:26, 40). All things must be done “*for the strengthening of the church*” (14:26) and all things must be done “*in a fitting and orderly way*” (14:40). The two commands complement one another. The church is strengthened (edified) only when everything is done in the right way and in an orderly fashion. Order in worship imitates Christ by taking others into account and brings glory to God, who is the God of peace rather than disorder (14:33; cf. 10:31 – 11:1). Paul’s instructions are theologically grounded.

B. (:27-32) Orderliness Ensured by Following Simple Guidelines / Restrictions

Ray Stedman: Well, I do not like rules either. I basically resist rules, but I learned many years ago that you cannot function as a corporate body without some rules. You cannot play a game of football without rules; the rules make the game possible. You cannot play a game of chess without rules; you cannot drive through traffic without rules.

1. (:27-28) Guidelines Involving Speaking in Tongues in Church Meetings

a. Not Too Many – But More Than One

*“If anyone speaks in a tongue,
it should be by two or at the most three, “*

Why this emphasis on multiple ministry?

b. Not All At Once

“and each in turn,”

c. Not Without an Interpreter

“and let one interpret but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.”

Implied goal is edification of the church – not just speaking to oneself or to God

2. (:29-32) Guidelines Involving Prophesying in Church Meetings

a. (:29A) Not Too Many – But More Than One

“And let two or three prophets speak”

b. (:29B) Not Without Checks and Balances
“and let the others pass judgment.”

How do we accomplish this goal of checks and balances in our assembly. Do the elders actively monitor the content of the teaching and preaching and raise appropriate questions or refute error? Do other gifted men have a forum to pass judgment on what has been spoken as well? Importance of discernment

David Garland: Paul does not list any criteria for gauging what a prophet says, but we can infer some norms from his discussions in this letter.

- (1) Does what is said accord with the tradition of Jesus (7:10; 9:14; 11:23; 12:3; 15:3; cf. 2 Thess. 2:15 – 3:6) and with the preaching of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:18–25)?
- (2) Does it accord with the Scripture as it is properly interpreted through Christ (1:19, 31; 4:6)?
- (3) Does it accord with what their apostle has handed on to them and taught them (2:1–5; 7:25; 11:2; 15:3)?
- (4) Does it accord with sacrificial love for others (13:1–13; 8:1)?
- (5) Does it promote the community’s good (14:3–5, 12, 17, 26; cf. 12:7)?
- (6) Does it not cause another Christian to stumble in the faith (8:7–13)?
- (7) Does it lead outsiders to come to faith by reproofing, convicting, and convincing them that God is present in their midst (14:20–25)?

c. (:30-32) Not Without Self Control and Restraint and Consideration
for the Contribution of Others

“But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;

Implied goal is edification of the entire church – not just speaking to oneself or to God.

Why would God give multiple men in a single church the gift of teaching and preaching? What should be the context for the expression of those gifts? Does it show a lack of self control and a lack of restraint and a lack of consideration for the contribution of others for the public teaching ministry to be dominated by one man – no matter how singularly gifted?

Robert Gundry: Not only are prophets to speak “*one by one*.” They’re also to stop prophesying if another prophet receives a revelation. Reception of the revelation while the first prophet is speaking indicates that the Lord wants the first prophecy concluded. Presumably the second prophet signals the first one in the event of a revelation. “*For you can all prophesy one by one*” gives the reason behind the command that a prophet stop talking if another prophet receives a revelation. This restriction parallels the restriction to one translator for each tongue.

Ray Stedman: nobody was to take over the meeting, Paul says, for **two reasons:**

1. First, because the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. Someone might have said, "I can't help what I say. The Spirit of God is in me and he is speaking through me. Therefore, everything I say is of God." Paul says, "Rubbish! The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. You can help yourself; you need not claim that you just have to say these things." As someone has said, there are always two kinds of speakers -- those who have something to say, and those who have to say something. The apostle is concerned that he limit the latter.

2. The second reason he gives is, the Spirit of God never creates confusion or disorder. Therefore, no one is to dominate a meeting, to run away with it, or consider himself an inspired spokesman because God does not work that way. Let it be orderly and decently done and give room to others to speak and to share in the ministry. Remember, if there is strife, jealousy, confusion, argument, and that kind of thing, it is not a meeting led by the Spirit of God. God does not work that way. When that kind of a meeting is going on, it is some other spirit at work.

John MacArthur: A new revelation took precedence over the reiteration of something that had already been taught. It was not that the truths in the new revelation were necessarily more important than those then being proclaimed, but that, at the moment, the new should be heard while it was fresh from the Lord. That is not an issue in the church today, because the revelation aspect of the prophetic ministry ceased with the completion of the New Testament. But apparently in the early church such conflicts sometimes occurred. When they did, the prophet with the new revelation was to be given the floor. In other words, when God spoke directly, everyone was to listen.

C. (:33) Orderliness Consistent with the Character of the God we Worship

*“for God is not a God of confusion but of peace,
as in all the churches of the saints.”*

David Garland: Paul clearly believes that persons inspired by the Spirit **remain in control of themselves** (Conzelmann 1975: 244).[5] They are not “*carried away*” so that they are not fully responsible for what they say or do, but rather can hold their tongues. By contrast, the Greek world had many religious groups that claimed to have experiences of divine inbreathing, which were likened to playing a flute: the flute plays what is breathed into it, no more, no less. The enthusiast is compelled to speak and has no control over it. Philo (Plant. 9 §39) shares such a view in describing the psalmist, who cries, “*Delight in the Lord*” (Ps. 36:4 LXX), as moved to an ecstasy of heavenly

and divine love, and whose “whole mind” was snatched up “in holy frenzy [οἴστρω, *oistrō*] by a divine possession.” The noun οἴστρος is a term for a tormenting insect and is used metaphorically to describe “insane passion” or “madness,” such as the Maenads caught up in a Dionysian frenzy (**Euripides**, *Bacchae* [Bacchanals] 665). By contrast, **Paul does not view tongues as an uncontrollable emotional experience that overpowers an individual.** The promptings of the Spirit do not contribute to confusion or unbridled outbursts. In fact, Paul lists “self-control” as one of the fruits of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:23**). If tongues are of the Holy Spirit, then one should be able to hold one’s peace to maintain order in the worship so that things do not get out of hand. **Fee** (1987: 692) comments, “It is indeed the Spirit who speaks, but he speaks through the controlled instrumentality of the believer’s own mind and tongue. In this regard it is no different from the inspired utterances of the OT prophets, which were spoken at the appropriate times and settings.”

Paul Gardner: Paul has been clear that “love” is the marker that authenticates true Christian existence. The spiritually mature person exhibits love because he or she will reflect the image of God. So Paul returns to the character of God himself. God is a God of “peace” and hence not of “disorder.” Nowhere should this “imaging” of God be more clearly seen than in the worship of the gathered congregation. As Paul ends this section, therefore, his concern remains for the building up of the body of Christ even when he is talking about an especially useful gift like prophecy. All the good learning and encouragement (v. 31) that should come from a prophecy comes to nothing if the presentation of the prophetic messages is not ordered in a humble and peaceable way. Paul will say more about the prophets in **14:37–38**, but his comments on order in worship now turn to the matter of “*the women*.”

II. (:34-35) CORRECTION REGARDING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC CHURCH SERVICES – NOT A VOCAL, TEACHING, AUTHORITATIVE ROLE

A. (:34) Role of Women Defined – Two Broad Injunctions

1. With Regards to Their Role in Public Teaching – Keep Silent

*“Let the women keep silent in the churches;
for they are not permitted to speak”*

Robert Gundry: The command that corresponds to all the churches’ custom is that “*the women are to keep quiet in the churches; for it’s not permitted for them to speak.*” But in **11:2–16** Paul laid down a condition under which women could indeed speak in church meetings—by way of praying and prophesying.[9] So **what kind of speaking is prohibited here?** The contrast with being in subjection indicates **speaking by way of contradicting the message of a prophet.** There may have been, incidentally, something of a women’s liberation movement in the first-century Roman Empire, a movement that would have encouraged the speaking prohibited here by Paul. He’s still concerned to avoid “disorder” and maintain “peace” (**14:33a**). On the other hand, he respects the desire of women to learn, but says they should direct enquiring questions to their husbands at home. For asking such questions in church would not only interrupt

the prophesying but also hinder the purpose of prophecy “*that all may learn*” (14:31). Church meetings have the purpose of corporate learning, which is a form of corporate edification such as Paul has been advocating all the way through **chapters 12–14**. Individual learning can take place “*at home*.” Paul says that the Law commands women to be in subjection but doesn’t cite any passage in particular. Apparently, then, his arguing in 11:7–12 from **Genesis 1–2** (“*the Law*”) for the subjection of women carries over to the present passage. He’s also concerned that they not shame their husbands with contrarian comments and interruptive questions directed to men not their husbands. In a culture that traditionally frowned on public discourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband, such shaming would disrecommend the gospel -- hence Paul’s command that women ask “*their own husbands*” (compare 11:5).

David Garland: The situation that best fits the adjective “*shameful*” is one in which wives defy convention by publicly embarrassing their husbands through their speaking. In the context, it is likely that Paul imagines a wife joining in the process of weighing what is being said during the congregational scrutiny of prophecy (14:29). They either raise questions or contradict their husbands or other senior male relatives. By doing so, they compromise their husband’s authority over them and appear to undermine the good order of the household (Dunn 1998: 592). The problem, then, concerns how wives are to comport themselves in the public sphere in the context of examining prophecies and has nothing to do with the public ministry of women, as many suppose (Ellis 1981: 217). Paul does not contradict what he says in 11:5 but imposes silence on wives in matters other than praying and prophesying.

Paul Gardner: There is no contradiction with Paul allowing women to prophesy and to pray in 11:5. They have not been asked here to refrain from speaking prophecies. In fact “*all*” have been encouraged to do so. Rather, they have been asked to refrain from speaking during the “*judging*” of those prophecies and, perhaps specifically, during the judging of the prophecies of their own husbands.

Alternate View:

Mark Taylor: Paul’s concern is not with the wives’ speech per se or with their participation in the evaluation of prophecy but with **behavior that would be offensive to their husbands**. The reference to submission would be understood in Paul’s world as a reference to the wife’s submission to her husband. While asking one’s husband questions or calling into question their prophecies would bring shame, Ciampa and Rosner think it is more likely that women were asking questions of other men during the church meeting that would have brought shame on her husband. Thus, the improper questions were not necessarily related to the weighing of prophecies but other kinds of disruptive questions that would have been considered shameful. The clearest hint of what was occurring is found in 14:35, that is, the desire for the wives to learn and asking their husbands at home.

2. With Regards to Their Submission to Male Authority – Submit Themselves *“but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says.”*

Doug Jeffries: Prophesying and speaking in tongues involve teaching, transmitting truth and revelation. A woman, who is to be in submission to male authority, should never seek to overshadow that authority. This does not mean that she is not endowed with these gifts, which she can use privately. Neither does it mean that she cannot pray or sing, because neither of these actions involve exercising authority.

B. (:35) Proper Context for Doctrinal Interaction

“And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home;”

Seems to imply a much greater role of participation on the part of a larger number of men than what we see in our church services.

C. (:35B) Appropriateness of This Role Reiterated

“for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”

III. (:36-38) CAUTION AGAINST PRIDEFULLY ASSERTING SOME INDEPENDENT STANDARDS FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP SERVICES

Craig Blomberg: Verses 36–38 thus challenge the Corinthians not to reject Paul’s counsel lightly. If every other Christian church practiced what Paul preached on this matter, who are they to be the sole exceptions (v. 36)? Those who contested Paul’s teaching undoubtedly justified their rebellion by claiming the Spirit’s direction (v. 37a). So Paul adds that if they are truly Spirit-led they will come to acknowledge his views as from the Lord (v. 37b). If they continue to go their own way, they demonstrate that they are out of touch with the Spirit, and the Lord will continue to ignore them and to accomplish his work without them (v. 38).

A. (:36) Caution Based on the Source and Scope of the Word of God

1. Source -- Did Not Originate From You

“Was it from you that the word of God first went forth?”

2. Scope -- Was Not Limited to You

“Or has it come to you only?”

B. (:37-38) Caution Based on Respect for Apostolic Authority –

Communicating Divine Commands must be in the context of recognizing and submitting to the Authority of the Word of God

1. (:37A) Warning Against Pride

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual”

2. (:37B) Assertion of Apostolic Authority

“let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.”

David Prior: Paul ends the general discussion on spirituality (**chapters 12–14**) and the specific teaching on prophecy (**chapter 14**) with a strongly worded statement about his authority as an apostle: *what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord*. Obviously there were many Christians at Corinth laying claim to being really spiritual: Paul’s response to such claims points out that true spirituality is not arrogant and self-assertive, but accepts the authority of those set over them in the Lord. To those Corinthians who prided themselves on being prophets – an attitude which often seems to characterize those used in the prophetic ministry – Paul also emphasizes the call to recognize the authority behind his remarks. Any tendency to think that we are right, while the rest of the church universal is wrong, is both arrogant and dangerous.

John MacArthur: In **verses 37-38** Paul gives perhaps his strongest claim to authority as God’s apostle. Paul had personal limitations and blind spots, which he freely recognized (see, e.g., **Phil. 3:12-14**). But when he spoke for God, his views were not tainted by cultural or personal bias. He did not, for instance, teach the submission of women in the church because of his Jewish background or in order to conform to any personal male chauvinism. He taught that truth because he himself had been so taught by the Lord. Paul did not claim omniscience, but he claimed unequivocally that everything he taught about God, about His gospel, and about His church was God’s own teaching, **the Lord’s commandment**.

3. (:38) Litmus Test for Legitimacy

“But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

Beware of anyone who is not willing to submit to the authority of the Word of God; or who appeals to some type of subjective experience for legitimacy rather than putting the priority on the Word of God

Anthony Thiselton: The force of **v. 38a**, *If anyone does not recognize it, he or she is not recognized*, performs the speech act of withdrawing recognition of claims. More important still, it reflects the “internal grammar” of **1 Cor. 3:18**, *“If anyone thinks himself wise, let that person become a fool in order to become wise.”* This axiom follows **3:17**: *“If anyone destroys God’s temple, that person will God destroy.”* Each respective action brings a self-defeating axiomatic penalty of self-loss. To step beyond the bounds is thereby to show the emptiness or lack of validity of the claim. This becomes all the clearer when the cross is perceived as both “ground and criterion” of the gospel and the church, especially in **1:18 – 2:5**.

IV. (:39-40) CONCLUSION: THE ORDERLY PATTERN FOR WORSHIP LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH INVOLVES MULTIPLE GIFTED MEN PROMOTING THE GOAL OF EDIFICATION

A. (:39) Pursue the Goal of Edification

1. Priority on Prophesying

“Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy”

Robert Gundry: “*And so*” introduces a wrap-up of **chapters 12–14**.

2. Prudence Regarding Speaking in Tongues
“*and do not forbid to speak in tongues.*”

B. (:40) Practice Orderliness in the Church Services

“*But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.*”

Paul Gardner: There is a right and proper way for Christians to live before outsiders that reflects who they are and who they worship. The word is used here not in a moral context of life lived before outsiders but in a church context of worship before God. There is a right way to behave and a wrong way. Paul has described the right way for people to conduct themselves in corporate worship, and so all things must be done “*properly*” (or “*decently*”). To this Paul adds, “*and in an orderly manner.*” This has been the key point. Since God is a God of peace and not confusion and since he brings order to everything, all must be done in a way that reflects him “*in an orderly manner*” (κατὰ τάξιν).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How must the principle of orderliness of the worship service be balanced with the command to not quench the Spirit of God?
- 2) Do we place too much emphasis on the edification gift of one man in our services rather than allowing edification from multiple gifted men? How should the change in emphasis from a ministry of prophecy (involving direct divine revelation) to a ministry of teaching and Bible exposition (involving a lot of study and preparation) affect our approach to edification in the worship service?
- 3) If the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying are no longer applicable for the church today, why didn’t Paul indicate here that his instructions to the Corinthians were not normative for the entire church age?
- 4) What are some ways that people claim to have a message directly from God that others should submit to when in reality they are not submitting to the authority of the Word of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: The spiritual edification of God’s people in public worship requires their orderly conduct in worship, the orderly use of the grace-gifts, and an eagerness especially for prophecy.

In Public Worship All Activity Must Build Up the Church (14:26–40)

1. The Orderly Use of Grace-Gifts in Worship Enables Edification (14:26–33a)
 - a. Many Gifts Are Used to Build Up the Church (14:26)
 - b. How Tongues-Speaking May Be Used (14:27–28)
 - c. How Prophecy May Be Used (14:29–33b)
2. The Conduct of Wives in Judging Prophecies (14:33c–36)
3. Prophets Must Heed the Lord’s Command (14:37–38)
4. All Should Desire Prophecy and Maintain Order in Public Worship (14:39–40)

Ray Stedman: PRESCRIBED PRACTICE OF TONGUES AND PROPHESYING IN CHURCH, 26-38

- A. The basic rule for all gifts, **26**
 1. Intended for when you come together
 2. Must result in edification
- B. The specific rules for tongues, **27-28**
 1. Only two, or at most, three should speak
 2. Each must wait his turn
 3. At least one must interpret
 - a. If no interpreter, keep silent in church
 - b. Speak to himself and to God (Way to edify himself and yet keep silent)
- C. The specific rules for prophesying, **29-33**
 1. Let two or three prophesy, **29**
 2. Let the others (other prophets) evaluate what has been said
 3. If a revelation be given to a second prophet, let the first keep silent (no domination of meeting by one), **30**
 4. Take turns, one by one, **31**
 - a. So all may learn and be encouraged
 - b. Possible, because each prophet can control his own spirit
 5. Confusion or tumult is not from God, for he produces peace
- D. Rules concerning women, **34-35**
 1. Women should neither prophesy or speak in tongues in church, **34-35**
 - a. It violates their submissiveness
 - b. The law agrees with this also, **34**
 2. Provision for learning is made for them at home, **35**
 3. It is shameful to disregard this, **35**
- E. Admonitions to those who resist this, **36-40**
 1. Do you think you are supersaints? **36**
 - a. Did you originate the Word?

- b. Are you the only saints around?
2. A genuine prophet or spiritual man acknowledges apostolic authority
3. To resist this teaching is ignorance, so leave such to his ignorance

Doug Jeffries: Some scholars believe that the apostle Paul has in mind two very different worship settings in this chapter.

a. In **14:23** ("*Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place...*") he is referring to the infrequent occasions when the various home-churches in Corinth would join together for a large-scale corporate worship service. In Paul's mind, "outsiders" and other interested inquirers might well be expected to visit such a service.

b. In **14:26** ("*Whenever you come together...*") Paul might be directing his comments toward those home-churches, which met more frequently and, in all probability, in less formal settings.

Steve Zeisler: How different is our problem than the one which the Corinthians had to struggle with! They were too active in their expression, we are too passive. I liken the Corinthian church to a large, voluble family living in a house that is too small for them. They are forever bumping into one another. There are always lines for the bathroom. They talk too much and get on each other's nerves. Although they love one another, they are at times resentful of each other and impatient with one another. Today, the Christian body seems to gravitate towards what I would call condominium-type Christianity. We each want to have our own small space, at a safe distance from other Christians. We are polite towards one another and we are good, quiet neighbors, but we take good care to maintain our privacy. We need to be reinfused with life. If the Corinthians were crowded and competitive, we tend to be isolated and private. Because they wrestled with a problem that was the opposite of ours, perhaps the very difference between us can be a source of help to us.

Thomas Leake: Spirit Led Worship is Orderly

Introduction: cf. orderly plan the Lord laid out for the tabernacle in the OT; cf. orderly arrangement of the Israelite camp; cf. duties of the priest and their clothing – all prescribed in Ex. And Lev.; God was to be approached in a certain way – with thought and care; they were to be systematic; cf 2 sons of Aaron who learned that lesson the hard way (**Lev. 10**). Churches should have the same attitude of reverence; although differences in dispensation; but the God whom we worship has not changed from age to age. His holy person has not been altered; He desires beauty and order; despises a flippant approach to worship.

Regulating gift of tongues and prophecy in the gathered assembly; could be used for edification if used in a certain way; get some insight into early NT worship services;

Cautions:

1) Paul's purpose is not to explain how the worship service is to be set up and run; not trying to give us a complete and sequential order of how it should flow;

2) Since there were revelatory gifts in operation in First Century, by necessity the early church had to have supernatural revelation; so their services will look different

3) NT purposefully gave no set rules as to how to structure our worship services; focus on the timeless principles that can be adapted to different times and cultures; use godly wisdom to think through our present circumstances and make applications; meeting in any church building would have cost Christians their lives; cf. meeting outside under trees; would not work for us

Still much to learn from this passage about worship

Our worship should reflect who God is and must be orderly and peaceful and holy and careful; we must be committed worshippers

7 Timeless Principles of God Honoring Worship

1. (:26A) Worship Should be Corporate

“*when you assemble*” – not just individual and family worship; we are the body of Christ; we are meant to relate to one another and build one another up; to use the gifts to edify; some people miss this = a sin; your small group meetings are not the same as the whole corporate church assembling; you must understand this time and value it

2. (:26B) Worship is to be Complementary

Diversity of spiritual gifts in operation; all the varying gifts are needed; they are to be inclusive; prophecy resulted in a revelation; various speakers were not to be in competition with each other

3. (:26C) Worship is to be Constructive – designed for edification

1 Thess. 5:11; Rom 14:19; worship is primarily for God’s pleasure, yet has an edifying effect on us; **Ephes. 5:18-19**; not gathering together for show

4. (:27-30, 40) Worship is to be Coordinated (Orderly)

Importance of having some structure; the structure itself is not completely dictated; not all met in houses (some in synagogues; some in storefronts); needs to be a time limit; tongues was not to dominate the other gifts; not a result of an irresistible urge of the Spirit – he could keep quiet; they had control over the gift; not speaking at the same time; Charismatic Chaos = book by **Dr. MacArthur**; gift of prophecy also regulated; must be used in love; remember, these were not expository sermons – might have been quite short and followed by exhortation; these revelations must be judged as to whether they really came from God; practice discernment in the worship service (cf. Bereans); How do we know something is from God:

- predicts the future accurately
- would be consistent with rest of God’s revelation

Not told how the revelation came to the prophets; Holy Spirit does not overrule common courtesy and common sense; God has given gift of governments to His church

5. (:31) Worship is to be Charismatic

Not that the speaker is to be a charismatic speaker or imitating the false gifts going around today; but led by the gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of worship;

not “all” in the church for the first “all” – but all those who are gifted to minister the Word should be allowed to speak over time; not necessarily in that one meeting; Paul was not attempting to suppress the contribution of any gifted speakers; No single person was to dominate and suppress others from speaking; no pontification; Some want to use their gifts without training; others are shy and need to be encouraged to step out in faith

6. (:32) Worship is to be Controlled

You must keep self control as a prophet; all that we teach must be subject to the text of Scripture; does not mean that every teacher will agree on everything; endorsement of preparation in a subtle way

7. (:33) Worship is to be Cooperative (Peaceful)

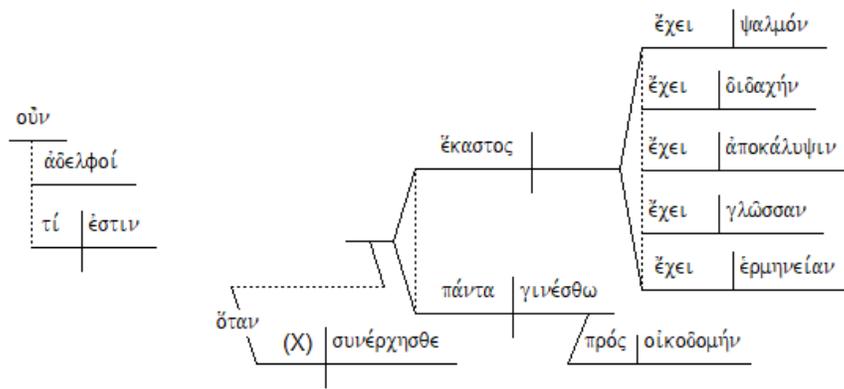
The theological reason underlying all of the teaching in this section. **Heb. 13:20; Rom. 15:30; 2 Thess. 3:16**; do not let disruptive people win out in our service; important role of our ushers to provide order and peace

Conclusion: **Phil Johnson** article: The Vineyard Movement – “*Laughing our Brains Out*”? My visit to the Anaheim Vineyard (related to Toronto Blessing)

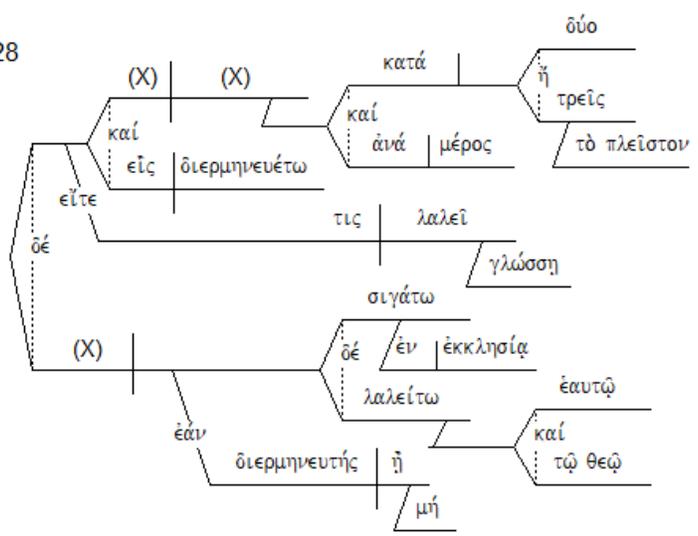
- Regarding dancing girls; “In a moment I will call down the Holy Spirit ... you will see things you have never seen ...no matter what you see happen, don’t be alarmed; don’t try to analyze things; God trying to reach your heart, not your mind; let the Spirit flow through your emotion”; cf. chaotic ministry that followed – shocking and appalling; decidedly anti-intellectual tone; park your doctrine at the door and get into the feeling of this; holiness is a feeling; drunkenness in the Spirit is the opposite of the path to sanctification; how can anyone who loves the Bible think that this pictures true revival or the true work of the Spirit of God -- www.spurgeon.org

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

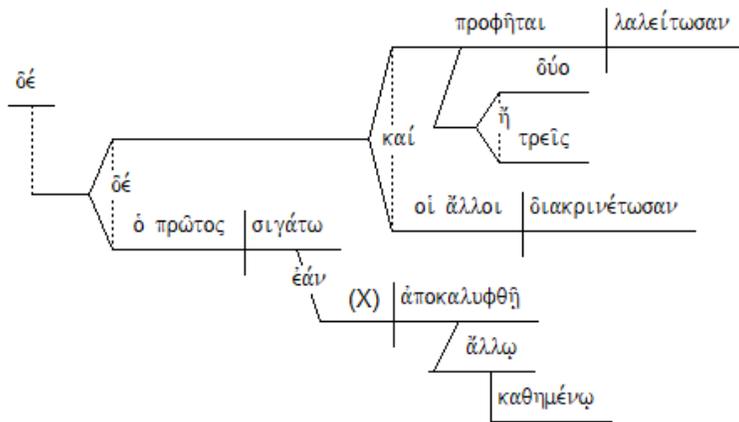
Co 14:26



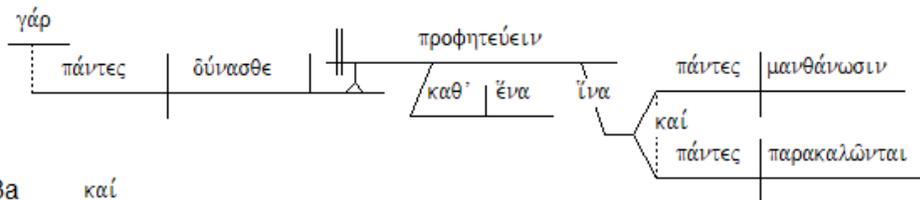
Co 14:27-28



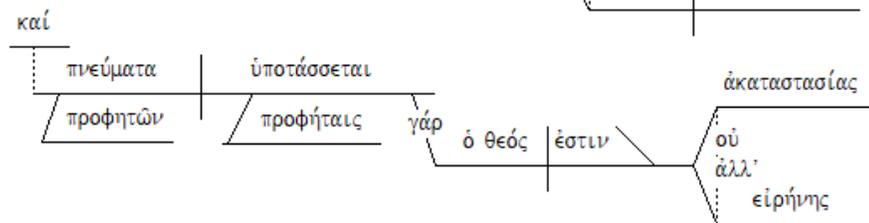
1Co 14:29-30



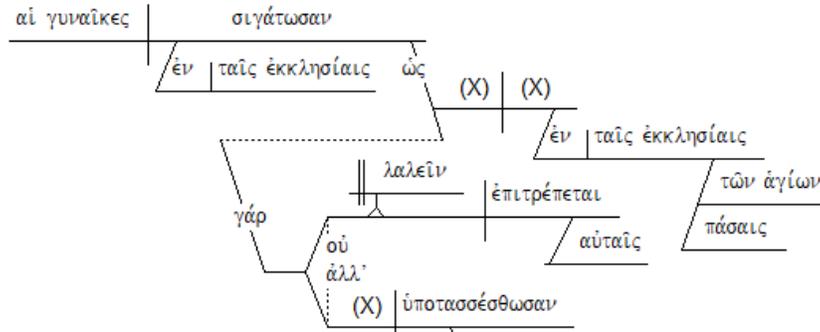
1Co 14:31



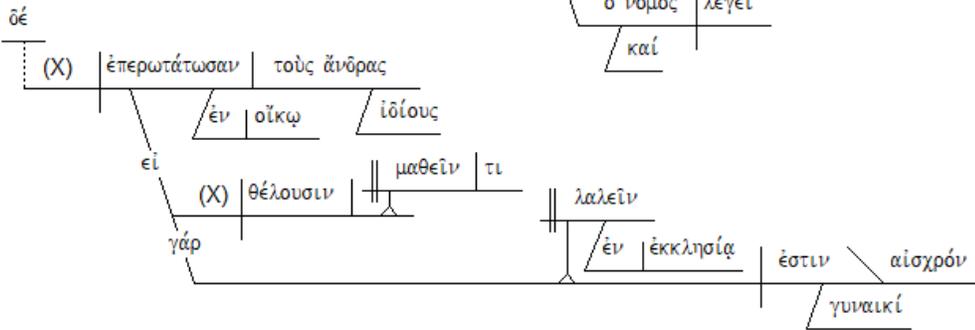
1Co 14:32-33a



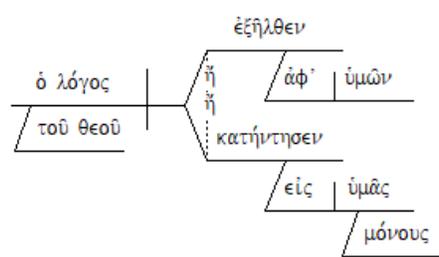
1Co 14:33b-34



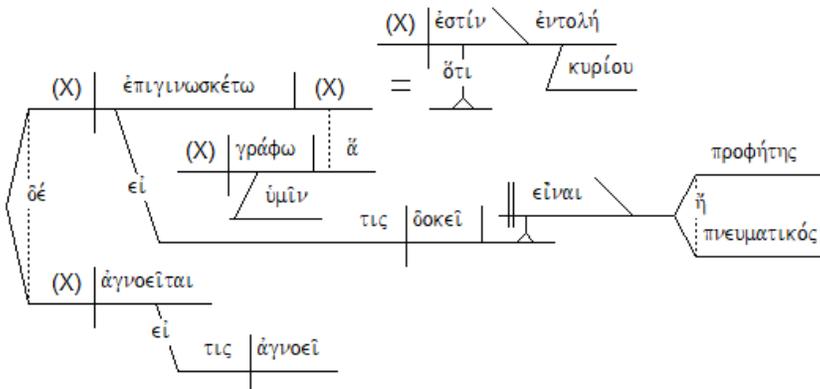
1Co 14:35



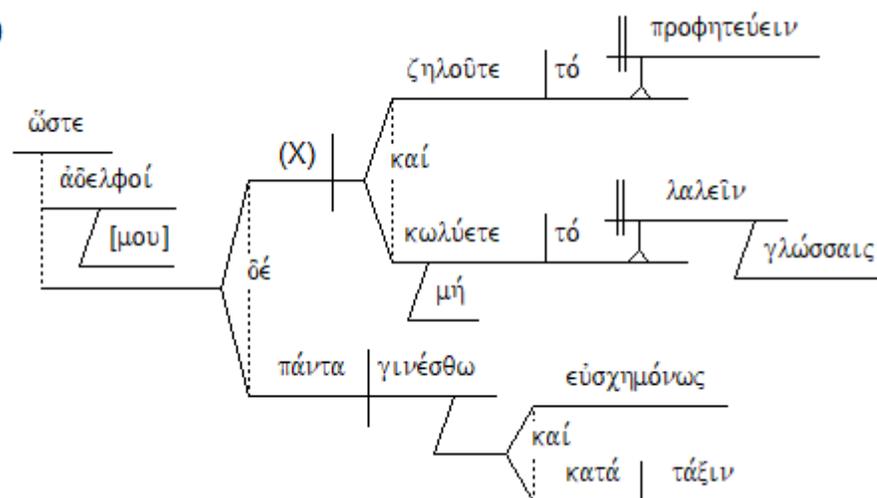
1Co 14:36



1Co 14:37-38



1Co 14:39-40



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

TITLE: THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE --
THE HISTORICAL FACT OF THE RESURRECTION ESTABLISHED

BIG IDEA:

THE FAITHFUL PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL – FOCUSED IN THE DEATH AND ESPECIALLY THE HISTORICALLY ATTESTED RESURRECTION OF THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST – ACCOMPLISHES SALVATION BY THE GRACE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Paul Gardner: **First Corinthians 15** can appear at first sight to sit at a distance from the rest of this epistle. It is one of Paul's longest expositions on one particular subject in all his writings and deals with the resurrection of Jesus and the consequent resurrection of those who belong to him. Without doubt this chapter has always been regarded as of crucial importance for the whole of the Christian faith in the way it spells out the facts of the faith and develops the subject of the resurrection with all its implications for Christians. However, its links to the rest of the book are clear and must not be overlooked. Paul began the epistle with an emphasis on God's grace given to the Corinthian church in Christ. They had received grace-gifts from God, but only as part of God's gracious calling of them to be his people. Paul repeatedly drew his readers back to their commitment to Christ as Lord (e.g., **1:2, 10, 31; 2:8; 5:4; 8:6; 10:21–22**), to an understanding of the implications of their belief in Christ crucified (**1:17–25; 5:7; 6:20; 11:17–32**), and to the recognition that until "*the end*," the "*day of the Lord*" (e.g., **1:7–8; 3:13; 4:5**), they are sustained by God's grace (**1:4; 3:10**) because God is faithful (**1:9; 10:13**). He has repeatedly demonstrated that they must live, knowing that the present age will come to an end in judgment and resurrection (**1:2, 7–8; 2:9; 6:2–3, 13; 7:29; 9:24; 10:11**). Therefore, it is always to the "faith," the "gospel" of Jesus Christ, that Christians must constantly return.

The Facts of the Gospel Secured by the Resurrection of Christ (15:1–11)

1. A Reminder of the Gospel and Its Results (**15:1–2**)
2. The Content of the Gospel That Was Preached and Received (**15:3–5**)
3. Witnesses to the Resurrected Christ (**15:6–8**)
4. Paul Preached the Same Gospel as Other Apostles with the Same Result (**15:9–11**)

John MacArthur: Just as the heart pumps life-giving blood to every part of the body, so the truth of the resurrection gives life to every other area of gospel truth. The resurrection is the pivot on which all of Christianity turns and without which none of the other truths would much matter. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be so much wishful thinking, taking its place alongside all other human philosophy and religious speculation.

Richard Hays: Paul is quoting an early confessional formula (**vv. 3b-5**). The fact that he "*received*" this tradition from others (presumably from the witnesses mentioned in **vv. 5-7**) shows that this confession is very ancient indeed, probably datable to the time surrounding Paul's own call to apostleship – in other words, back to within about three years after Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem. Thus, the opening paragraph of **1 Corinthians 15** is a testimony

of inestimable value concerning the form in which the gospel was preached in the very first generation of Christianity.

Paul goes back to this bedrock confession in order to make the point that “*the resurrection of the dead*” is not merely some idiosyncratic speculation that can be set aside by those who claim more sophisticated knowledge; rather, it is a matter “*of first importance*” (v. 3). It is an integral part of the *euaggelion* (“*good news*”) on which those who believe take their stand (v. 1; cf. Gal. 1:11). The resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent appearance to a long list of witnesses is at the heart of the gospel proclaimed in the church; without this foundational truth, there would be no church because there would be no gospel. Those who hold fast to this truth are saved by it – unless, Paul remarks in a deft foreshadowing of verses 12-19, the whole thing is a sham and their faith is “*in vain*” (v. 2; cf. vv. 10, 14, 17, 58).

Karl Barth: The **Resurrection of the Dead** is the point from which Paul is speaking and to which he points. The resurrection ... forms not only the close and crown of the whole epistle, but also provides the clue to its meaning, from which place light is shed on the whole ... as a unity.

Mark Taylor: In light of what follows in 15:12–19, Paul’s major premise is that the resurrection of Christ, which is **central** to the gospel, proves that the resurrection of the dead is possible. The concise, formulaic presentation of the components of the gospel in 15:1–5 suggests traditional, creedal material uniformly proclaimed by apostolic witnesses. It is possible that the formulation is Paul’s own, or that he expanded on an existing creed to include a larger circle of witnesses beyond Peter and the Twelve (15:6–8). Either way, there are four components of the gospel listed, each introduced by the same conjunction in Greek.

1. Paul delivered to the Corinthians what he received, namely, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
2. that he was buried,
3. that he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures,
4. and that he appeared to others.

Paul expands considerably on the fourth component of the gospel in order to demonstrate a constant chain of witnesses to the resurrection of Christ beginning with Peter and the Twelve and culminating with his own personal encounter with the risen Lord. Paul mentions some resurrection appearances that are not recorded elsewhere in the New Testament, such as Jesus’ appearance to five hundred people on one occasion and his appearance to James (15:6–7).

Craig Blomberg: Chapter 15 falls into two main sections. Verses 1–34 present Paul’s arguments for the certainty of the bodily resurrection, while verses 35–58 discuss the nature of resurrection bodies. The first section also divides into two parts. Verses 1–11 reiterate the fact of Christ’s bodily resurrection. Verses 12–34 outline the consequences of disbelief and belief in this fact. The first of these parts in turn has three components. Verses 1–2 provide an introduction to Paul’s treatment of resurrection. Verses 3–8 rehearse the early Christian creed or confession about Christ’s death and resurrection. And verses 9–11 highlight Paul’s unique role as an “untimely” witness to the risen Lord.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: The gospel is the most important message in the history of the world, for it alone is an eternally saving message and is therefore to be a universally shared message.

- I. We Must Prioritize the Message of the Gospel (15:1-3).
- II. We Must Recognize the Meaning of the Gospel (15:3-8).
- III. We Must Emphasize the Might of the Gospel (15:2, 9-11).

Gordon Fee: Although the enumeration of appearances might suggest otherwise, Paul is not here setting out to prove the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, he is reasserting the commonly held ground from which he will argue against their assertion that there is no resurrection of the dead.

I. (:1-2) THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE – THE GOSPEL SAVES ALL WHO PERSEVERE IN FAITH – WHAT THE GOSPEL DOES

A. The Faithful Communication of the True Gospel

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you”

R.C.H. Lenski: force = “I remind you of” truths you already know very well

Paul Gardner: Paul begins a remarkable chapter that will discuss in detail the nature of the resurrection by reminding the Corinthians of the content of the gospel that he first preached to them. He intends them to understand that they received the gospel through his preaching and owe their present status as saved people to their reception of the message. Unless they have failed properly to believe the gospel, then they should accept that they hold in common with Paul the gospel facts laid out in vv. 3–7. . .

For Paul the content aspect of the good news can never be separated from the power inherent in the gospel as the word of God that brings salvation. This is God’s message that is in itself a performative action. The gospel is a speech act with perlocutionary force. Thus, it is that God’s gracious act in Jesus Christ is both the content of the gospel and the power of the gospel in producing salvation (**Rom 1:16**).

Daniel Akin: Obviously, these Corinthians knew and understood the gospel enough to be saved by it. But for reasons to be seen, Paul obviously felt the need to make crystal clear the true essence of the gospel again. In the early church there was a need to continuously clarify the heart of the gospel.

B. The Power of the Gospel to Create and Sustain Spiritual Life and Stability

“in which also you stand”

C. The Need for Perseverance in Believing the Gospel for Genuine, Lasting Salvation

“by which also you are saved”

1. Positive Condition

“if you hold fast the word which I preached to you”

Charles Hodge: not retaining in the memory, but persevering in the faith

Thomas Schreiner: Warnings and admonitions are a constituent part of the Pauline gospel. . . . Eschatological salvation is conditioned on **perseverance in the gospel**. Paul never views faith

as a static reality that cancels out the need for present and future faith.

2. Negative Possibility

“Unless you believed in vain.”

Empty, worthless faith; without effect; to no purpose (**Gal. 3:4; 4:11**)

Charles Hodge: Their salvation, however, is conditioned on their perseverance. If they do not persevere, they will not only fail of the consummation of the work of salvation, but it becomes manifest that they never were justified or renewed.

John MacArthur: Our Lord repeatedly spoke of sham believers who had useless, non-saving faith. The parable of the sower (**Matt. 13:1-23**) tells us that some of the seeds of the gospel fall on shallow or weedy soil, and that tares often look like wheat, but are not (**13:24-30, 34-43**). Jesus spoke of many kinds of fish being caught in the same net, with the good being kept and the bad being thrown away (**13:47-50**). He spoke of houses without foundations (**7:24-27**), virgins without oil for their lamps, and servants who wasted their talents and so were “cast out” (**25:1-30**). He warned of gates and paths that seem right, but that lead to destruction (**7:13-14**).

II. (:3-8) THE ESSENTIALS OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE – THE GOSPEL CENTERS ON THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST AS PROPHECIED IN THE OT – WHAT THE GOSPEL IS

A. Paul’s Faithful Stewardship of the Gospel Message

1. The Delivery

“For I delivered to you”

2. The Priority

“as of first importance”

3. The Reception

“what I also received”

Paul received this gospel by direct revelation

B. The Death of Jesus Christ

1. The Historical Event

“that Christ died”

David Garland: Christ’s death is **unique** because of

- the manner of his death, which is so foolish and scandalous to the world;
- the purpose of his death as an atonement that expiates human sins and extricates them from the tentacles of sin and death;
- the universal consequences of his death for all who will trust, not just for a particular city, nation, or group;
- the conformity of his death to God’s purposes revealed in the Scriptures;

- and his being raised by God to life after death.

2. The Significance “for our sins”

As a sacrifice or propitiation for our sins

James Boyer: these historic facts alone . . . are not in themselves the good news . . . It is the scripturally interpreted significance of those historic events which constitute the good news.

Gordon Fee: This is the **language of atonement**. In saying “*Christ died for our sins*,” the creed presupposes alienation between God and human beings because of human rebellion and sinfulness, for which the just penalty is death. Death “*for our sins*” means that one died on behalf of others to satisfy the penalty and to overcome the alienation. Thus, even though there is no “theory” of atonement here, simply the affirmation, the concept of substitution is woven into the very earliest of the Christian creeds. In Pauline theology this includes not only forgiveness of past sins, but in a very real sense deliverance from the bondage of one’s sinfulness as well.

3. The Scriptural Prophecy “according to the Scriptures”

Anthony Thiselton: This very early confession of Christian and apostolic faith declares that the Scriptures of the Old Testament provide the frame of reference or the interpretive key for understanding how or in what sense the events of Christ’s death and resurrection were saving events “for us” or for our sins. The phrase does not imply that Christ’s death and resurrection relate to one specific scriptural reference. The pre-Pauline creed or confession of faith thus reflects the tradition behind **Luke 24:27**.

Paul Gardner: The twice-repeated phrase (“*according to the Scriptures*”; **1 Cor 15:3–4**) therefore serves in both instances to affirm that all this happened according to God’s plan and according to his promises (cf. **Acts 2:23**) and helps explain Christ’s death and resurrection. On the first occasion it is used to corroborate the teaching of Christ’s death for sin. We have seen how Scripture may help explain this enigmatic idea of death for sin. While **Isaiah 53** may provide substantial background, the reference is no doubt broader than simply one text and refers to the broad flow of Scripture regarding punishment for sin and related sacrifices resulting in God’s mercy being shown and forgiveness received.

4. The Undeniable Proof “and that He was buried”

Ray Stedman: Did you ever realize how hard it was for them to accept the fact that he died? They did not want to believe it when he himself told them that was what he was going to do. They refused; they shut their minds to it. When it actually happened they went away stunned and unbelieving, agonizing and unwilling to believe that all their hopes and dreams, all they had built up in those marvelous years with him, should come crashing down and become nothing but empty hopes, empty dreams, all in ashes at their feet. But somewhere along the line some realist among them faced up to it and said, “We have got to go get his body, and

bury him." Joseph of Arimathea came forward and offered a tomb, and with loving hands they took his body down from the tree. They wrapped it in grave clothes, bound it tightly, took his head and wrapped it with a separate cloth. (By the way, that answers the claims of the so-called "Shroud of Turin" as to whether it was the legitimate garment that was about Jesus. According to the Scriptures, his grave clothes came in two pieces; one was wrapped around the head and the other around the body.) They embalmed him with spices, and then they placed him in a tomb where he lay for three days and three nights. There is no question that the disciples believed that he was dead. In their minds there was no doubt about it. They could never have entertained any idea that he had merely fainted on the cross, or entered into a coma, for they themselves had performed the burial service. That is why Paul adds that here. It marked the acceptance of the disciples that Jesus was truly dead.

R.C.H. Lenski: This addition is necessary; first, because it attests the reality of Christ's death, and secondly, because it shows that his death was like ours, for we, too, are buried after death. The latter is important because, like Christ we who die shall have our bodies raised again. Paul intends to write at length regarding this resurrection of our bodies.

Anthony Thiselton: The purpose of this clause is twofold. It demonstrates the undeniable reality of the death of Jesus; and it excludes any notion of a "docetic" Christ, namely, one whose flesh and blood were merely "what appeared to be the case" but were illusory "clothing" for a being of pure spirit. Such a view rested upon the Greek notion that a flesh-and-blood body would have been an unworthy vehicle for a heavenly Christ figure. But apart from its false assumption about the body, such a view would deny the reality of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Hence "*He was buried*" became an important early article of Christian belief.

C. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

1. The Historical Event

"and that He was raised on the third day"

Craig Blomberg: "*On the third day*" uses inclusive reckoning: Good Friday is day one, Saturday is day two, and Easter morning is day three. It is less clear which Scriptures point to the resurrection on the third day. Perhaps Paul meant only that the Scriptures testified to Christ's resurrection, with passages like **Psalms 16:8–11** and **110:1–4** in view (cf. **Acts 2:24–36**). In that case, "*according to the Scriptures*" would modify only the verb "*raised*" and not the phrase "*on the third day*." But he may also have found some **typological significance** in the third-day references to God's vindication of his people in such texts as **Genesis 42:18**, **Exodus 19:16**, **Joshua 2:22**, **Ezra 8:32**, **Esther 5:1**, **Jonah 1:17** (cf. **Matt. 12:40**), and especially **Hosea 6:2**.

Paul Gardner: The use of the perfect here no doubt reflects the tense's regular "stative" function. That is, the tense points not simply to the point of Christ's resurrection but to the state of having been raised. Christ remains raised.

David Garland: If they do not hold firmly to what has been preached about the resurrection, they jeopardize their future with God. If they do not have faith that holds out, they believed in vain (cf. **15:58**; **16:13**). If they have faith in something that is untrue, they believed in vain (**15:14**). The resurrection is the keystone that integrates the incarnation and Christ's atoning death. If it is removed, the whole gospel will collapse. If there is no resurrection of the dead

(15:12), humans remain under the tyranny of sin and death, and their bouts of doubt and despair are fully justified.

2. The Significance

[will be the subject of much of the remainder of **Chapter 15**]

3. The Scriptural Prophecy (Ps. 16:10)

“according to the Scriptures”

4. The Undeniable Proof = Numerous Post Resurrection Appearances – 6 Listed Here

a. Peter

“and that He appeared to Cephas”

Gordon Fee: In the gospel narratives, the first appearances are to women; in the tradition Paul is citing these appearances are skipped over in favor of those to Peter and the Twelve, which are also recorded in the Gospels.

Paul Gardner: The addition of the reference to the appearance to Cephas (the Aramaic name for Peter, also at **1:12, 3:22, and 9:5**) is unsurprising. The Gospels record Jesus’s appearance to this apostle as one of the first appearances (**Mark 16:7; Luke 24:34**), but he was already prominent as a witness in the early church, having been the one who identified Jesus as the Messiah (**Matt 16:15–20**). It is likely that this was part of the original formula and reflects the **significant role** that Peter played in the early church in proclaiming the gospel and Christ’s resurrection on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:14–36**). He was also prominent in the work among the Samaritans (**Acts 8:14–17**), and among Gentiles (**Acts 10:40**).

b. Apostles

“then to the twelve”

Paul Gardner: At the end of Jesus’s life, Matthew writes about the “*eleven*” disciples (**Matt 28:16**), so the use of “*Twelve*” suggests that the replacement described at the start of Acts was well known even though we hear nothing further about this particular “*Twelve*” in the New Testament. Since the original “*Twelve*” did not all witness the resurrection, and here Paul is clearly not including himself, this number most likely **includes Matthias**. The main criterion for the replacement apostle was that he had to come from among the small group of men who had witnessed the resurrection (**Acts 1:22**).

c. Multitude of Brethren – more than 500 – most still alive

“After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep”

Paul Gardner: Mention of five hundred “*at once*” (ἐφ’άπαξ), together with the other people mentioned, adds weight to the truth of the witness. Too many had seen the risen Christ for the story to have been fabricated, and, as Paul makes clear, “*many remain alive*” (οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν) and so can be checked for the accuracy of their witness.

d. James (half brother of Jesus)

“then He appeared to James,”

Paul Gardner: This James is almost certainly the Lord's brother on whom Jesus's resurrection clearly had a profound impact. Paul regarded this James as an apostle (**Gal 1:18–21**) and he was a leader (a “*pillar*,” **Gal 2:9**) of the church in Jerusalem and so would have been widely known throughout the early church.

e. Apostles Again
“*then to all the apostles*”

Paul Gardner: Paul's mention of the apostles, as distinct from the “*Twelve*,” reveals Paul's wider use of the term to describe those leaders regarded as witnesses to Christ's resurrection in the early church, who took the gospel message out to the world.

Mark Taylor: It is not clear who would have been included in the third group designated “all the apostles,” but it presumably extends beyond the Twelve mentioned in **15:5**.

Gordon Fee: Most likely this designation, as elsewhere in Paul, is a functional term rather than an official one. Or to put that in another way, “*the Twelve*” were a definite group who had a special relationship to Jesus and in the early church probably served in some kind of authoritative capacity. But the “*apostles*,” a term that included the Twelve, were a **larger group** who in Paul's understanding had seen the risen Lord and were commissioned by him to proclaim the gospel and found churches (cf. **9:1–2**). They, too, had authority in the churches, especially those they founded, but they scarcely formed a “body” or served as a “council.” **Their authority was that of ministry rather than jurisdiction.**

f. Paul Himself
“*and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also*”

David Garland: Paul is not trying to legitimize his apostolic authority in this section (contra **Wilckens** 1963: 62–69; 1968: 73) or to make the case that he stands on the same level with Peter and the Twelve as an apostle. Instead, he seeks to **authenticate the gospel** he preached (**Plevnik** 1988), which assumes the facticity of the resurrection (**Sider** 1977: 131; **Lambrecht** 1991: 669–70). He is responding to those Corinthians who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, not to those who say that Paul is no apostle. He argues more for “the equivalence of the appearances” than for the equality of the witnesses (**Schrage** 2001: 66). **Schütz** (1975: 99) points out that Paul does not ground his sufficiency as an apostle in the resurrection appearance given him, “*but in the surpassing ‘grace’ of God manifested in his missionary labors*” (cf. **2 Cor. 3:1–6**). Paul is not on the defense here (contra **Schmithals** 1969: 73–80) and is not taking their criticism of him a step further (contra **Fee** 1987: 734). We must not take everything he says about his apostleship as a defensive remark. **Schütz** (1975: 101) is correct that Paul identifies himself “with a wider apostolic circle,” but he is interested not in “the size of the circle” but in the “nature and function of the apostle.”

Paul Gardner: The word for “*stillborn child*” (ἔκτρομα) is a New Testament hapax legomenon, but Paul's intention in using the word here is not obvious. The word appears in **LXX Numbers 12:12**, **Job 3:16**, and **Ecclesiastes 6:3** where it refers to a stillborn child, but it can also designate an aborted fetus. In each of the passages cited, a stillborn birth is used to describe a dreadful and wretched situation in which people find themselves. It is possible that

this was some horrible term of abuse that Paul’s opponents hurled at him as an insult, and that he now picks up and acknowledges to emphasize the glory of the grace that he had received from the Lord. Yet Paul does not seem to be concerned here with opponents. Another possibility is that it is the suddenness and unexpected nature of a stillborn birth that causes Paul to use this term of his own calling. A third alternative is that Paul uses the word as a vivid picture of his wretched state much as it is used in the LXX. Given v. 10 and Paul’s insistence that as an apostle he is what he is by God’s grace, it may be best to understand him as drawing attention to his state as all but “dead” save for the sovereign redeeming work of Christ that gave him a new and purposeful life (2 Cor 5:16–18).

David Prior: Perhaps the most significant phrase in this account of the gospel facts is in **verse 8**: *Last of all . . . he appeared also to me*. By this terminology Paul is saying at least two things:

- first, his own encounter with the risen Jesus (after the ascension) is of equal validity and identical in nature to the others he has just recorded;
- second, once the risen Jesus had appeared to Paul, there were no further appearances of that nature (*Last of all*).

Mark Taylor: The simplest contextual explanation is that Paul employs the metaphor of the stillborn child in order to highlight the grace and the power of God. As an unbeliever and persecutor of the church, Paul was in a deplorable condition of spiritual death. The image of a stillborn child is an especially powerful image in an argument for resurrection. The next two verses highlight the undeserved grace of God, “who chooses to give life and new creation to those reckoned as dead.”

III. (:9-11) THE ENIGMA OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE – THE GOSPEL SHOWCASES THE GRACE OF GOD POURED OUT UPON UNDESERVING ENEMIES – WHAT THE GOSPEL SHOWCASES

Craig Blomberg: In **verses 9–11**, Paul acknowledges his inferiority as an apostle because he had persecuted the first Christians (v. 9; cf. **Acts 8:1; 9:1–2**). But he turns this admission of weakness into an opportunity to magnify God’s grace. And that grace did not lead to sloth but to greater effort and substantial accomplishment (v. 10). Yet lest his remarks be seen as prideful or competitive, he closes this paragraph by stressing that all the apostles agree on the message of the resurrection and that this belief is what initially led to the Corinthians’ salvation as well (v. 11). **Verse 11b** repeats the thoughts of **verse 1** to bring this first section of **chapter 15** to a close.

A. (:9) Supreme Example of the Grace of God = Personal Testimony of the Apostle Paul Himself

1. His Undeserving Character

- a. “*For I am the least of the apostles*”
- b. “*and not fit to be called an apostle*”

2. His Unrelenting Persecution of the Church
“because I persecuted the church of God”

B. (:10A) Transformed Identity – by the Grace of God

“But by the grace of God I am what I am”

C. (:10B) Supreme Effort Directed Towards Sanctification and Service – Energized by the Grace of God

*“And His grace toward me did not prove vain,
but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”*

Anthony Thiselton: Paul labored to an even greater degree (v. 10b) to express and to convey his gratitude for such exceptional grace; but it was not a fruitless attempt to “pay God back” for it. Grace in this way worked with [him]. This reflects closely the maxim of Jesus, “*Freely you received, freely give*” (Matt. 10:8). But whether, anyway, it is I or they (v. 11a), all of the witnesses stand under grace, and all share together in the privilege of the apostolic proclamation that you came to believe (v. 11b).

Paul Gardner: This section lays the groundwork for part of Paul’s argument yet to come in v. 14, where he talks about the possibility of preaching “*in vain*” and so also of the possibility of the Corinthians’ having believed “*in vain*.” At the end of this section, in v. 58, Paul will urge the Corinthians to “*abound in the work of the Lord*” and so ensure that their own “*labor is not in vain*.”

Gordon Fee: Even my intense labors in the gospel are ultimately not the result of a personal need to compensate God for his grace, but are themselves the reflection of that very grace at work in my life. Thus, in Pauline theology, even though his labor is a response to grace, it is more properly seen as the **effect of grace**. All is of grace; nothing is deserved. Neither therefore can he lay claim to his own ministry nor can they reject it; it is God’s activity in him in their behalf.

(:11) CONCLUSION: THE CORINTHIANS HAVE RESPONDED TO THE FAITHFUL PREACHING BY THE APOSTLES OF THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL OF GOD’S GRACE IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

“Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed”

Paul Gardner: The same gospel tradition has been handed down to him and preached by him as has been preached by all the apostles. Whether they wish to acknowledge him is unimportant. They are where they are because they received and believed the gospel that he and the apostles and the Corinthians hold in common. At the heart of that gospel is God’s sovereign grace, something Paul has experienced as deeply as anyone to whom he writes. That grace is seen in the preaching of the gospel and especially in the death of Christ for his people, followed by his resurrection. Paul will now expound upon **the nature of the resurrection and its implications for Christians**.

Gordon Fee: On the basis of this common faith, Paul will next turn to a direct confrontation with the Corinthians over their denial of the resurrection of the dead. The nature of that argument makes it plain that the purpose of this opening paragraph is not to prove Christ’s

resurrection but to reestablish this fundamental premise as the common denominator between him and them, and from this to argue with them as he will in the next step of the present argument (vv. 12–34). The reason for the catalogue of witnesses is therefore not to prove that Jesus rose but to emphasize that the resurrection of Christ, which they believed, had objective reality and was held universally by all true believers and thus to emphasize that it is they who were desperately out of line.

Mark Taylor: The summary statement of 15:11 closes out the prologue to chap. 15 and paves the way for Paul’s confrontation of some who were saying, “*There is no resurrection of the dead.*”

Applications:

- The message is more important than the messenger
- Preaching the gospel remains God’s method of saving sinners
- Repentance and Faith are essential for salvation
- God’s Grace Accomplishes it all

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does our presentation of the gospel to unbelievers faithfully capture the essentials of the message and showcase the grace of God?
- 2) Do we orient our cooperation and partnership in ministry around those groups and spiritual leaders that are faithful to this exclusive gospel message?
- 3) Do we give God all of the glory for the wonderful working of His undeserved grace in our Christian growth and ministry?
- 4) Are we laboring our hardest for the sake of the gospel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steve Zeisler: It appears that two kinds of evidence are on display here. In a court of law, juries find two things that are persuasive. The first is that the evidence for the case being tried be attested to not just by one, but by several witnesses. Paul demonstrates that not just several but five hundred people, most of whom were still alive when he wrote this letter, and so were available to confirm his words, saw the resurrected Jesus. And they would testify that it was in fact Jesus, not an apparition or a ghost, who appeared to them. In a resurrection body, fit for eternity, the Lord had eaten with them and fellowshiped with them. There was an abundance of evidence testifying to his resurrection.

And then Paul names three people to whom Jesus appeared, Cephas, James, and Paul himself, men for whom the evidence was deep as well as wide. Cephas, otherwise known as Peter, the self-promoter who was given to much talk, the man who had protested that he would never

deny his Lord but who would later do so three times when confronted by a teenage girl, had become a changed man. Why? It was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his

appearance to Peter which set the apostle on his feet again. Peter was one who would attest to the fact of the resurrection and also the efficacy of that event.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, is the second eyewitness whom Paul mentions. We remember that at one time in his ministry the family of Jesus thought he was a disturbed man and sought to put him away for his own good. To them, Jesus was eccentric and incomprehensible. Even his own brothers failed to recognize his Messiahship. But to James, the little brother of Jesus who had rejected him during his earthly ministry, the Lord appeared after his resurrection. And this had the effect of making him also stand on his feet, and confirming him, with Peter, as a leader of the church.

Then we have this extraordinary description by the apostle of himself: "...and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am..." The words "untimely born," mean a miscarriage or an abortion. Paul regards himself as an ill-conceived, rejected person. On occasion, a pregnancy will terminate spontaneously because the fetus is diseased or malformed. The apostle is describing himself in these terms. He was a persecutor, an enemy of the church, an outsider who deserved nothing. Yet the Lord appeared to him. He refers humbly to the energy given him which enabled him to serve in the ministry to which he had been called.

Thus we have the testimony of a preponderance of evidence, and the depth of character of the three individuals called, to testify to the change that occurred in them because of the resurrection. The apostle is at pains to point out that these are reliable facts. (We will look at their implications later.) Be assured, however, says Paul, that we know what is true. Our hope for the forgiveness of our sins rests on a reality that cannot be taken away.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Verse 12 discloses the problem which prompts Paul to write this chapter: some of the Corinthian saints are saying there is no "*resurrection of the dead.*" Denying the resurrection of the dead is seen in several different forms in the New Testament. The Greek pagans denied the resurrection of the dead, as we can see from the Book of Acts. In his sermon to those in the market place of Athens, Paul preached these words:

30 *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."* 32 *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this"* (Acts 17:30-32).

The Greeks may have believed in the immortality of men, as spirits, but they did not seem responsive to the teaching that God raises the dead so that they may stand in judgment before God.

The Jewish Sadducees did not embrace the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead either: 6 *But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope*

and resurrection of the dead!” 7 And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” (Acts 23:6-9)

The Pharisees did believe in the resurrection of the dead, and in spirits and angels, but the Sadducees did not. Basically, the Sadducees were anti-supernaturalists—they did not believe in miracles. It would almost seem the Sadducees were farther from the truth (at least about the resurrection of the dead) than the Gentile pagans.

There were those in the church who professed to believe in the resurrection of the dead but who insisted that this “resurrection” had already taken place:

16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

This “resurrection” was a present possession rather than a future hope. It must therefore have been some kind of mystical or spiritual “resurrection” rather than a literal, bodily resurrection. In saying that there has already been a spiritual resurrection, these heretics were denying that there was a future bodily resurrection. And for this they receive Paul’s indictment that they have “gone astray from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18). The error is so serious that it “upsets the faith” (verse 18) of those who embrace this error.

We are not told exactly what form the denial of the resurrection of the dead took at Corinth. I am inclined to think it was the same kind of error Paul exposed in Ephesus (2 Timothy 2:16-18), where Paul told Timothy that such error would “lead to further ungodliness” (verse 16). We can see some forms of ungodliness this doctrinal deviation took in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians. While the theological error regarding the resurrection of the dead is not exposed until **chapter 15**, the fruits of this error are everywhere apparent in **chapters 1-14**.

In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with the divisions and factions which had disrupted the unity of the church at Corinth. These divisions were based upon the pride which some took in certain leaders and their teachings. The Corinthians were puffed up because their leaders “were the greatest” and their teachings were so “wise.”

Their esteem for these leaders resulted in a corresponding disdain for Paul and the other apostles: **1 Corinthians 4:6-13**

Paul’s gospel (which was one and the same with the gospel proclaimed by the other apostles) was disdained because it was too simplistic, too naive, too foolish. The “new gospel,” proclaimed by the Corinthians’ new leaders, was much more sophisticated, much more acceptable and appealing to the pagan culture of that day.

Just what was the problem the Corinthians had with Paul, his theology, and his practice? The key is found in the word “already” in verse 8. The Corinthians seem to be claiming that they have already arrived, spiritually speaking. Christianity has three dimensions or tenses: past,

present, and future. We were chosen in Christ in eternity past, and 2,000 years ago, Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins and our eternal salvation. We are now being saved; we are currently being sanctified, daily being transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. Our final salvation comes when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth, and when we, with glorified and transformed bodies, live eternally in His presence.

Difficulties arise whenever we confuse these three tenses. Some Christians live as though Christ's atoning work at Calvary (in the past) has no great impact on our day-to-day living in the present. Such people live out their lives naturalistically, as though the supernatural power of God has no practical relevance to daily living. They go about their daily living little different from atheists. They employ merely human methods and mechanisms. They raise funds, for example, using the same methods as the Red Cross or the United Fund. They seek to sanctify and utilize secular marketing techniques to evangelize and to produce church growth. They use human management techniques to run the church and Christian organizations.

Other Christians go to the opposite extreme. They confuse the future blessings, which Christ has promised and purchased, with His present blessings. In short, they think the Christian can and should experience heaven on earth. They believe no one needs to be sick (or perhaps even to die), because of the atoning work of Christ at Calvary (see **Isaiah 53:5**). According to this version of "spirituality," we should expect to be happy, healthy, and wealthy now. They claim the future blessings of **Revelation 21** and **22** as their present rights, and they tell us that if we do not experience these blessings now it is due to our lack of faith.

This health and wealth doctrine does not find its origin in the Scriptures, but in the wishful thinking of those who do not want to face up to a life of suffering, a life that is lived out in a fallen world. The context of **2 Timothy 2** and **3**, the teaching of the Book of Hebrews and 1 Peter, and the example set forth by Paul and the apostles points to a different view of spirituality in the present age (see also **Romans 8**). The Scriptures speak of our identification with Christ in this age through our participation in His sufferings (see **Philippians 1:12-26; 3:10; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Peter 4:12-19**), rather than in our escape from them.

No wonder the "spiritual" Corinthians looked down upon Paul. They had already arrived; Paul had not. They were kings; Paul was homeless. Paul and the apostles were a disgrace, and the proud Corinthians were ashamed of them. The apostles did not look nor act like royalty, but like the "*scum of the world*" (**1 Corinthians 4:8-13**). To speak of the resurrection of the dead as a future certainty meant they had not already arrived, that the kingdom of God had not yet come. It meant that they must identify with Christ in His earthly humiliation and rejection and not in His triumphant reign. And so they set aside the literal bodily resurrection of the dead, embracing in its place some kind of spiritual resurrection which already brought them into their kingdom, a kingdom of this age and not the next, a kingdom which the apostles and their gospel would not embrace or sanction. . .

Several characteristics of the gospel are emphasized in **verses 1-11**, which we can summarize.

*(1) The gospel is not a message devised by the minds of men, but a revelation from God, received by the apostles and delivered to men by them (see **15:1, 3, 11**).*

*(2) The gospel is the only message by which men are saved and by which they stand (**15:1-2**).*

(3) *The gospel is “good news” concerning the grace of God, which informs men concerning the only way they, as undeserving sinners, may experience the forgiveness of their sins (15:3, 9-10).*

(4) *The gospel is the message which is based solely upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sins on the cross of Calvary, who was buried, and who was literally and bodily raised from the dead on the third day (15:3-4).*

(5) *The sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are events which were prophesied in the Old Testament, foretold in the Gospels by our Lord, and then fulfilled by Him as God’s promised Messiah.*

(6) *The gospel is the message which is of the highest magnitude of importance (15:3).*

(7) *The gospel saves and keeps only those who receive it and hold fast to it by faith (15:1-2).*

(8) *The gospel is false and our faith is vain if any element of it is proven to be false (15:2; 12ff.).*

(9) *The gospel is established on the literal, bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as witnessed by more than 500 people.*

James Boyer: It must be made clear here at the start, because there has been much foolish and unscriptural teaching on this point, that the resurrection is a term which has to do with the *body*. It has nothing to do with the “*immortality of the soul*,” or the persistence of existence beyond the grave. It is the doctrine that a man “stands up” (Greek, *anastasis*) again after he dies, he comes back to life in the body. While the term is used in the Scriptures in a metaphorical sense of a spiritual resurrection, this too is not persistence of the soul. It is coming back to life again (spiritually) in regeneration.

Charles Hodge: In treating this subject the apostle first proves the fact of Christ’s resurrection, **vs. 1-11**. He thence deduces, first, the possibility, and then the certainty of the resurrection of his people, **vs. 12-34**. He afterwards teaches the nature of the resurrection, so far as to show that the doctrine is not liable to the objections which had been brought against it, **vs. 35-58**.

John MacArthur: The doctrinal problem on which this chapter focuses was not the Corinthians’ disbelief in Christ’s resurrection but confusion about their own. Paul was not trying to convince them that Christ rose from the dead but that one day they, too, would be raised with Him to eternal life. Nevertheless, to lay the foundation, in the first eleven verses he reviews the evidences for Jesus’ resurrection, a truth he acknowledges they already believed (**vv 1, 11**). The five evidences, or testimonies, he presents are: the church; the Scriptures; the eyewitnesses; a special witness, the apostle himself; and the common message.

R.C.H. Lenski: [anticipating **vs. 12**] Now, with their faith in Christ’s resurrection again rising full and strong in their hearts, he flashes on the screen with one vivid sentence the startling, utterly unfounded denials at which this entire introduction has aimed from the very beginning. The effect produced must have been very strong when Paul’s words were first read in Corinth.

Thomas Leake: What is the Correct Christian Gospel (:1-4)

Gal. 1:6-9; Paul here strengthens their understanding of the Resurrection as a prominent part of the genuine gospel (he had already stressed the importance and significance of the cross

earlier). Doctrinal issue that had arisen = denial of the resurrection of our human bodies (not a denial of the resurrection of Christ) – **v. 12**; Why did some not believe? **Acts 17:32** – belief that anything physical or material was innately evil; Greek thinking and philosophy; honest confusion; so out of the problems of the Corinthians we get the blessing of this great teaching on the Resurrection

I. (:1-2) Characteristics of the Gospel

“which . . .”

A. Preached

“to evangelize” = preach the good news God has for the world; Aorist = simple past tense; pressure in our culture to quit evangelizing others; we are not called to “share” the gospel as if it is one attractive option among others; this is an authoritative message from God to be proclaimed to the whole world

B. Received

Not just heard; Corinthians were to be praised for having received it in repentance and faith; not designed for entertainment; contains its own persuasive power; cf. the emotional responses elicited by large Crusades – where are the changed lives??

Cf. if there were a pill discovered that would cure cancer; you must take the pill; Gospel gives mankind Hope; **John 1:10-12**

C. Upholds Every Christian in Every Church

The image of Standing as an image of a transformed life; Opposite = Falling; we gather because of the gospel; **Rom. 5:2; 11:20; 14:4; Eph. 6:11**

D. Saves

Pres. Tense here; **Rom. 10:9**; we must respond before it is too late

E. Gospel Must be Held on to for Entire Life

Conditional clause; people can let go of the gospel by turning their back on Christ or changing the gospel; not talking about a one-time only belief; not just praying the sinner’s prayer or going forward in altar call; only those who persevere in faith have genuine saving faith; You can’t lose your salvation; If you turn your back on Christ you have no one who can save you

F. Cannot be Renounced

Very similar thought; gospel presentation must include the Resurrection; look at preaching in the Book of Acts

II. (:3) Contents of the Gospel – 4 Components

Paul was a faithful delivery boy; carried out his role; **Gal. 1:11**; did not get the gospel from men

A. Christ Died

1. Normal word for physical death – historical act; past tense
2. Sacrifice for Sins – on behalf of something; paid the penalty for sins
For whose sins?? Specific and particular in His aim; definite atonement;
For the elect; Yes there is a real choice for all to make; but the death of Christ will only benefit the church
3. According to the Scriptures (plural – all of God’s Word)

B. Christ Was Buried

Simple, direct; we tend to leave out this important detail but it is stressed in all 4 gospel accounts; confirmed the reality of His death; showed Jesus was fully human; nobody stole the body; grave was secured; gives support to the bodily resurrection

C. Christ Was Raised – Ps. 16:8

Perf tense – present reality due to accomplished fact
Not raised in a different body; He was recognizable; predicted that it would be on the third day; God sovereign over all of the details and events; Jesus = only true Prophet who rose again (not Mohammed)

D. Christ Appeared to His disciples following His resurrection

5 Applications:

- need to receive the gospel; Jesus accomplished all of the work
- need to proclaim the gospel
- need to guard the gospel – Satan is always attacking it
- need to define your arena for acceptable Christian fellowship and joint ministry by the gospel; Satan likes to lump everyone together and pretend like there is no difference
- need to live the gospel

Thomas Leake: (:5-8) Resurrection Appearances

Introduction: Christianity confirmed by historical fact

I. The Historical Order of the Resurrection Appearances

Luke 24:38-39 shows the nature of these appearances = “*flesh and bones*” = resurrected body; this list of appearances is only representative, not exhaustive

Acts 1:3 – *many convincing proofs* over 40 day period

This list is presented in chronological order: “*then . . . after that . . . last of all*”

A. Cephas – Aramaic name for Peter

Mark 16:7; Luke 24:34

B. The Twelve – but Judas has gone out and died already; also Thomas was not there; so this was a term used to refer to that chosen group; **Matt. 19:28; Acts 1** – Judas replaced by Matthias

C. More than 500 Brethren – at one time, somewhere outside; these could not have been hallucinations; Corinthian letter written only 25 years after the resurrection; you could go and check out the story with people who were still alive

D. James – Half brother of Christ – **Gal. 1:19; Acts 15:13**; an *apostle* in the wider sense; a leader in the church at Jerusalem; wrote the Epistle of James; Jesus was showing some special mercy to His earthly family; he was the eldest of the brothers – none of them believed initially; but by **Acts 1:14** they were all on board

E. All the Apostles – maybe included some beyond the 12
Acts 1 – time of the Ascension

F. Paul – “*Last of all*” in chronology; came after the Ascension; **1 Cor. 9**; **Acts 1** – having seen the resurrected Christ was necessary for an apostle
Damascus Road experience; *untimely born* = a fetus born before full term = incapable of sustaining life on its own apart from supernatural intervention; Paul was the last new person ever to see the Resurrected Christ; **1 Peter 18**

There were other appearances not mentioned in this representative list:

- Mary Magdalene – **John 20**; **Mark 16** = one who had been forgiven much and then loved much; very loyal to Christ; honored by seeing Christ first
- Bunch of other women – not impressive – but faithful and loyal; **Matt 28:9-10**
- Two on the Road to Emmaus – **Luke 24**; **Mark 16**
- the Seven by the sea shore – **John 21**
- **Matt. 28:16-20**
- Mt of Olives – Christ giving final instructions

II. The Historic Importance of These Resurrection Appearances

A. Confirms that Jesus was Raised from the Dead

- better proof than just leaving us with the mystery of the empty tomb

B. Predicted in detail and then it happened in corresponding detail

C. Showed us what kind of Body we will have

First fruits of those who believed – permanent existence

D. Basis for our Witness

What gives us the right to pass along the gospel message? We can testify that Jesus is alive and has changed our lives; don't let anyone intimidate you or shut you up

Christianity is Unique – the Passion and the Empty Tomb

Thomas Leake: (:9-11) 2 Simple Guides for A Healthy Christian Self Image

Introduction: Self Esteem movement has been accepted by most of the evangelical church; liking self, being happy with self, being infatuated with self; Is it really healthy to have a positive self image? To question that today is almost heresy; people do not want to hear a message that has anything negative; Build us up in our view of ourselves; we don't want to think that there is anything wrong with us;

But how do these sayings of Christ and Paul fit in:

John 12:25; **Luke 14:26**; **2 Tim. 3:1** “*lovers of self*”; **Matt. 7:23** – eternal rejection – that doesn't build up self esteem; How did the Apostle Paul view himself?

The great American Idol isn't someone who sings . . . it is Self Esteem!

The impact of the resurrected Christ in changing his own life; grace should transform our lives; How could He be changing lives if He were dead?

This is how Paul views himself. **Phil. 2:3** We must see ourselves the way God sees us.

I. Devalue Self (:9)

A. The Least of the Apostles

Lowers his status as compares to others in his category; doesn't take any time to accentuate the negatives of the other apostles; Don't you remember how . . .

Not even towards the bottom half – but the least; significant since many were speaking out against Paul; forming factions against him; but he had loved them so much; he had started the church; poured out his life for them

B. Not even fit to be called an Apostle

Looking at the office he held with its privileges and status; the most prominent of the gifts; vs. I earned this; I worked for this; I deserve this; I belong here; But he was called an apostle;

1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; Rom. 11:13

Why did he not deserve it?

C. Reason: He had persecuted the church of God – Acts 8

Persistence and degree of Saul's opposition before his conversion was shocking; what would we think of such a man? Destroying people's lives; Paul knew very well the depth of his depravity and personal transgression; not weighed down with guilt but could not forget that for which he had been forgiven; Do you think highly of yourself? Are you better than the average person? **Is. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-12** – You can't become a better You The You is too corrupted; **Luke 9:23**

Do any of you have a horrific background that you are ashamed of? We are not fit to be a member of the church of God – we don't deserve anything – that is the first step to a healthy self image

II. SuperValue God's Grace (:10-11) – 3 Reasons

Our lives are not worth much, but God's grace is worth much

A. Value Grace because it made a new and better you (:10A)

Whatever is attractive about me, I want to give full and unreserved credit to the grace of God; Undeserved; God is the source of the grace; **2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 1:3**; God is completely unimpressed with our goodness; sinners by nature, by practice, by divine declaration; yet now we possess untold riches and status

B. Because it is presently working in your life right now (:10B)

You need it to sustain you; the grace did not just come, make a flashy splash and then fizzle out; it is still accomplishing something; Grace is sovereign; it accomplishes what God wants it to; not empty; the same grace that was responsible for his calling was responsible for his faithfulness; so Paul worked hard to the point of exhaustion; **Gal. 1:23**; Paul is boasting here in the greatness of God's grace – labored more than all of the other apostles; True humility can recognize that you are doing more and doing better than others as long as you give all the credit and glory to God's grace; *“to the praise of the glory of God's grace”* (**Eph 1**)

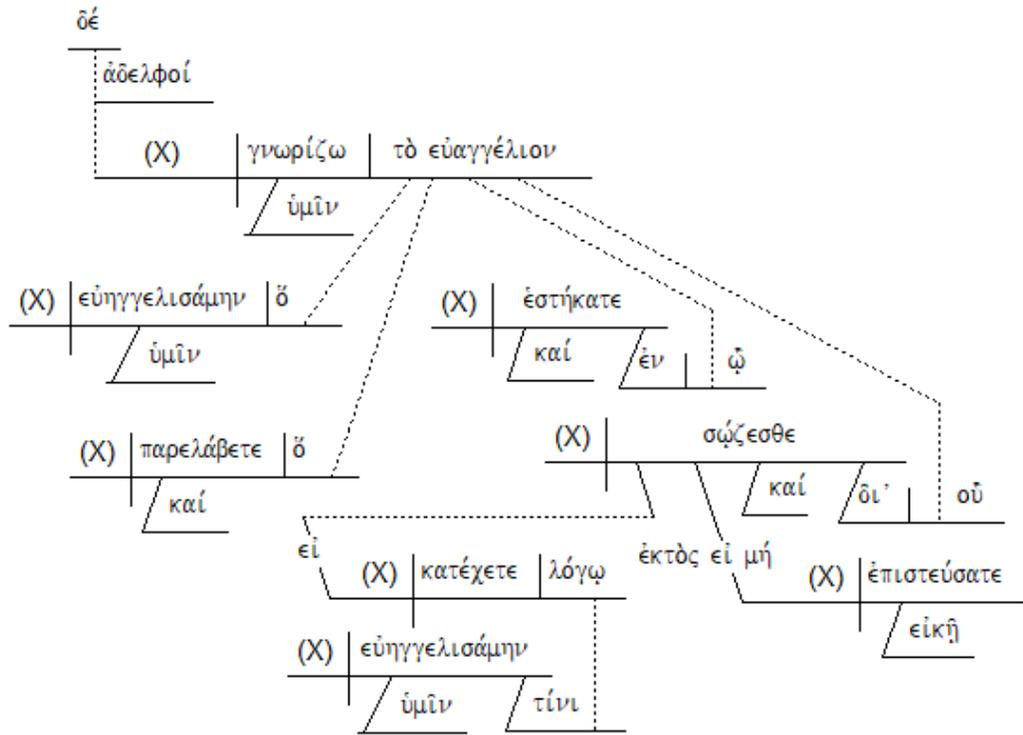
Accentuate the undeserved work of God in your life; what would you be like today apart from the grace of God

C. Because it advances the Gospel (:11)

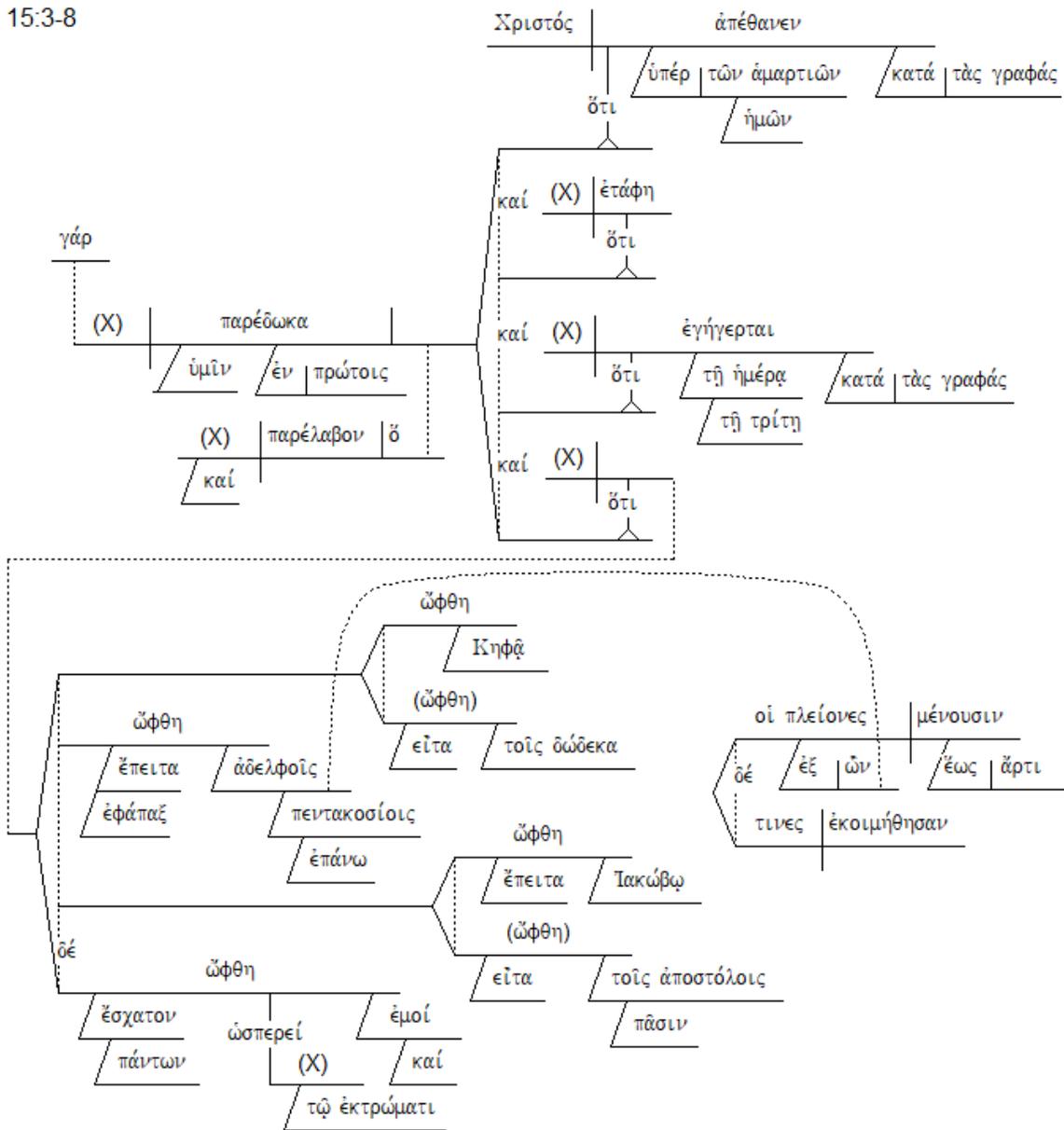
Can you imagine someone boasting about how many souls they have won to Christ, or baptisms they have produced; **1 Cor. 3:3**; we have no resources in ourselves to bring to the table – not even to worship

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

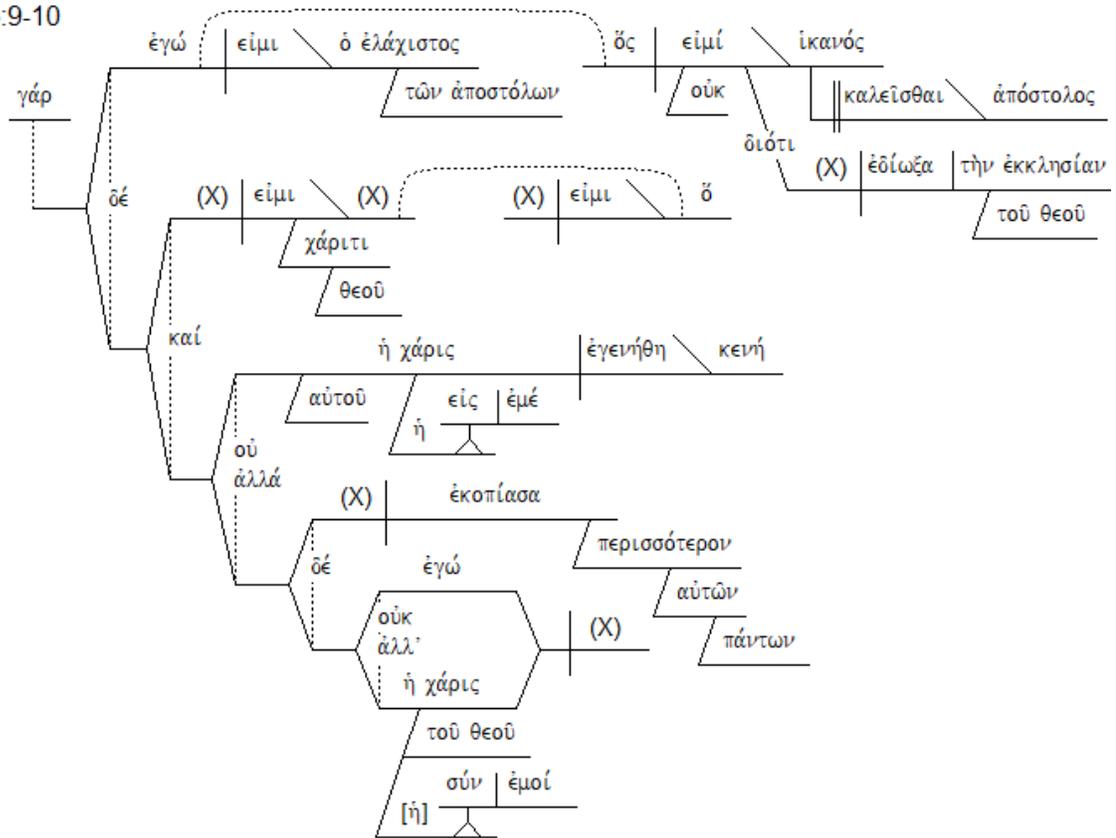
1Co 15:1-2



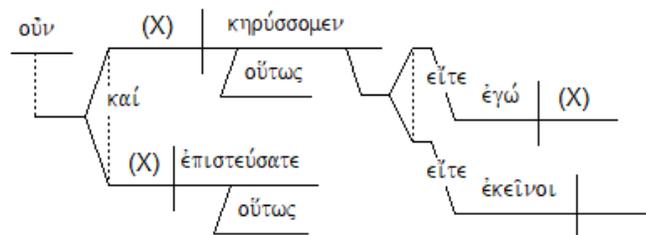
1Co 15:3-8



1Co 15:9-10



1Co 15:11



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

TITLE: ABSURDITY OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SAINTS --
EASTER ERASES ALL THE “WHAT IF’S” SURROUNDING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

BIG IDEA:

7 FUTILE RAMIFICATIONS OF NO BODILY RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD → **7 NOTES OF EXULTATION**

INTRODUCTION:

Robert Gundry: Having reasserted the resurrection of Christ as the common ground of all Christian preaching and faith, Paul now moves from that base to refute those who deny the resurrection of believers who have died. The argument proceeds along two lines,

1. an appeal to logic (vv. 12–28)
2. and an appeal ad hominem (vv. 29–34).

In each case Paul indicates the logical consequences, and therefore illogical nature, of their position. On the one hand, he argues at the beginning (vv. 12–19), if they are right that there is no resurrection of the dead, that can only mean that Christ was not raised, which not only contradicts the common faith just appealed to (vv. 1–11) but logically means that he and they cease to exist as believers altogether. On the other hand, as he continues in the next step in the argument (vv. 20–28), since Christ was raised from the dead, that means that God has set in motion two irreversibles: the resurrection of all who are “*in Christ*” (vv. 20–22), and thus the final destruction of death itself (vv. 23–28). Likewise, Paul goes on at the end (vv. 29–34), if there is no resurrection of the dead, then both they and he are playing the role of fools. Significantly, and somewhat characteristically of this letter, he concludes the present argument with a strong appeal to them to stop their sinning as well (vv. 33–34).

Thus Paul’s concern is to demonstrate from the commonly held position of both himself and them—the resurrection of Christ—first the absurdity of their present position (vv. 12–19) and then the splendor of his (vv. 20–28). And in case that is not fully heard, there are always the practical absurdities of both his and their daily lives if there is no resurrection of the dead (vv. 29–34). . .

By this form of logic, called *modus tollens*, the Corinthians are being forced to agree that there is a future resurrection of believers on the basis of their common faith in the resurrection of Christ. The argument is irrefutable, given their acceptance of Christ’s resurrection and its effects in their lives. Hence the significance of how all this began (vv. 1–11).

Mark Taylor: Verses 12–19 consist of an introductory statement (15:12), followed by two parallel units (15:13–15, 16–18) and a conclusion (15:19). The two parallel units both begin with the claim, “*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even has Christ been raised*” (15:13, 16). Three consequences follow from each parallel statement. Each consequence has to do with preaching or faith, the two focal points of

the opening section (cf. **15:1–2, 11**). The consequences in **15:15** and **15:17–18** follow from the two overarching consequences stated in **15:14**, “*our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*” The conclusion is also stated as a condition, “*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men*” (15:19; cf. **4:6–13**). The theological implications of Paul’s argument regarding the person of Christ and the destiny of the dead are substantial. Simply stated, the resurrection of the dead is linked inextricably to Christ’s resurrection and his full humanity (**15:13**; cf. also **15:21**), and, apart from Christ’s resurrection, there is no hope of eternal life (**15:18**).

David Prior: If resurrection does not exist in any shape or form, then the consequences to Christian faith and discipleship are devastating. It is important, with Paul, to push people to see the logic of their beliefs, whether those beliefs are orthodox or heretical. Many Christians have never applied their faith either to their ordinary thinking or to their daily behaviour. Likewise, those who deviate from biblical truth must face up to the implications of what they assert and deny. This is what Paul does in **verses 13–19**. To deny resurrection is to strip the Christian message of seven essentials.

(:12) PIVOTAL QUESTION UNDER EXAMINATION

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

This is the issue that Paul is addressing in **chapter 15**. He waits until this point to introduce the pivotal question. People in the church at Corinth did not really have a problem with the fact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ – the abundant proofs for that historical phenomena had just been set forth. But creeping in was potential uncertainty about the bodily resurrection of believers. Especially given the dualistic philosophical world view of that day concerning the distinction between the spirit which was good and the body which was deemed evil.

John MacArthur: But in spite of the clear word of the Old Testament and in spite of the clear word of Jesus, in spite of the clear of apostolic preaching, in spite of the clear word of the apostle Paul, the Corinthians had come to the place where they were denying bodily resurrection. They had bought the bag of Greek philosophers and you remember the Greek philosophers taught that the soul was immortal, but the body was not.

That the soul would go on forever, but the body rotted in the grave and it was good-bye forever. So that immortality had only to bear on the spiritual. We would live spiritually forever not in any kind of corporeal sense. In fact, verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 15 has basically the statement these critics were making. “Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Quite typical to emphasize positive points by contradicting the associated negative points. So Paul takes us through a string of “What Ifs” surrounding the Christian faith.

He does this not to raise the level of our doubts and uncertainty, but to confirm us in the victorious truths that are central and foundational to our Christian faith.

Richard Hays: As we have noted, the people in Paul's church at Corinth most likely to be skeptical about *anastasis nekron* ("the rising of corpses") would have been those members of the community with greater cultural pretensions, those who knew enough philosophy to distance themselves from the apocalyptic worldview of Paul, whom they may have viewed as an unsophisticated, literalist Jewish preacher. Like many thinkers in the ancient Mediterranean world, they may have desired the escape of the rational soul from the body, viewing the body as a dark and corrupt tomb from which the enlightened person ought to seek release. **Plutarch**, for example, insisted that only the soul could attain to the realm of the gods, through freeing itself of attachment to the senses and becoming "pure, fleshless, and undefiled" (*Romulus* 28.6). Having been schooled in such refined philosophical thought, perhaps the "wise" Corinthians said something like this:

"The resurrection of Jesus is a wonderful metaphor for the spiritual change that God works in the lives of those who possess knowledge of the truth. 'Resurrection' symbolizes the power of the Spirit that we experience in our wisdom and our spiritual gifts. But the image of resuscitated corpses (*anastasis nekron*) is only for childish fundamentalists. Those of us who are spiritual find it repugnant."

Paul reacts to their refined skepticism with astonishment and outrage, because he sees it as denying in principle the claim made at the heart of the gospel story: "*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised*" (v. 13).

Robert Gundry: Instead of exploring the reason for some Corinthians' denial of a resurrection of dead people, Paul pounces on the **inconsistency** of denying it yet believing in Christ's resurrection. The blatancy of this inconsistency leads Paul to introduce it in the form of an astonished question: "*how is it that some among you are saying . . . ?*" So confident is he of the evidence for Christ's resurrection and of the Corinthians' belief in it that in effect he challenges them to deny Christ's resurrection if they persist in denying others' coming resurrection. Then he tightens the argumentative screw by saying that if Christ wasn't raised, as consistency with their denial demands, they've worthlessly believed a worthless proclamation peddled by false witnesses, who did not see the raised Christ as they claimed to have seen him. Gone is Christ's resurrection. Gone is the truth of the gospel. Gone is the validity of the Corinthians' faith in Christ. Gone is the truthfulness of Cephas, of the Twelve, of the more than five hundred, of James, of all the apostles, and of Paul himself. Furthermore, the witnesses would not only have been testifying falsely "about God." They would also have been testifying falsely "*against God*," as though he were in the dock being falsely accused of wrongdoing. Paul designs the otherwise otiose phrase, "*against God*," to highlight the **absurdity** of concluding for the sake of consistency that the witnesses to appearances of Christ as raised are false. "*Even false witnesses*" adds to the absurdity, and "*being found*" false portrays the deniers of a future resurrection as judges who are ignorantly

throwing out of court the testimonies by all those from Cephas through Paul concerning Christ's past resurrection. "*Whom he [‘God’] didn’t raise if in fact, then, dead people aren’t raised*" brings into the open God as the doer of the action in "*he [Christ] was raised.*"

David Garland: That some in Corinth questioned how a terrestrial body could be raised up to live in a celestial realm makes the best sense of Paul's explanation of the nature of the resurrection body. He rejects any idea of the existence of the soul/spirit without a body. It is possible that the Corinthians may have thought of the resurrection of the dead in literal terms of a reanimation of decayed corpses. They may have been mystified as to how a body that perishes and rots could be resurrected, or they may have found the whole idea repulsive. Paul's argument in **15:35–41** that God can give a different body to each creature as it suits its environment may correct this mistaken impression. This view also makes sense of his argument that spiritual immortality is not received upon death and that death is not destroyed until the end. It clarifies why he argues that a radical discontinuity exists between mortal existence and life after death, a discontinuity that can be bridged only by the resurrection. **Holleman** (1996: 38) comments, "Resurrection will therefore be another act of creation, this time resulting in a spiritualized body."

7 FUTILE RAMIFICATIONS OF NO BODILY RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD —→ 7 NOTES OF EXULTATION

I. (:13) THE FUTILITY OF CHRIST NOT HAVING BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD = JESUS IS NOT ALIVE

"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised."

Think about the implications of that possibility.

These two concepts are mutually exclusive; you cannot have it both ways.

- Assertion: No resurrection of the dead for people
- Deduction: Jesus Christ has not been raised
- Conclusion: Forget the whole affair

If Christ has not been raised from the dead – 16 negations --

- We have no **Vine** for the branches to derive their life from
- We have no **Good Shepherd** to guide and nurture the sheep
- We have no **Advocate** to plead our case before the Father
- We have no great **High Priest** at the right hand of God
- We have no **Head** of the church to direct us
- We have no **Mediator** between God and man
- We have no **Door** by which we can enter into the kingdom of God
- We have no **Giver** of the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower us
- We have no **Living Water** to invigorate us
- We have no **Judge** of all the earth to return and set matters straight

- We have no **King** and thus no future millennial kingdom on earth with all of its blessings
- We have no **Divine Friend** to confide in and to enjoy companionship with –
“*What a Friend we Have in Jesus*”
- We have no **Living Word** to continue to communicate to us the essence of the Father
- We have no **Solid Foundation** for our faith and Christian life; no **Anchor**
- We have no **Trinity** with its blessed union of three in one
- We have no **Way**, no **Truth** and no **Life**

Charles Spurgeon: When you know what rests on the resurrection, you know why if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

- i. The divinity of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 1:4**).
- ii. The sovereignty of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 14:9**).
- iii. Our justification rests on the resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 4:25**).
- iv. Our regeneration rests on the resurrection of Jesus (**1 Peter 1:3**).
- v. Our ultimate resurrection rests on the resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 8:11**).
- vi. "The fact is, that the silver thread of resurrection runs through all the blessings, from regeneration onward to our eternal glory, and binds them together."

PTL: CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

Paul could have stopped at this point -- He has already won the logical argument – look at the credible witnesses to the resurrection that he had set forth – the evidence was irrefutable and consistent with OT prophecy –

But Paul goes on to logically build one argument upon another so that there would be no doubt about the victorious, exulting state of Christians because of the reality of Easter.

II. (:14A) THE FUTILITY OF PREACHING THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION = OUR PREACHING IS VAIN

“and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain”

- What type of sacrifices had Paul made to invest his life in preaching the gospel of Christ?
- What degree of suffering had he endured to embrace the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ?
- What pleasures and comfort had Paul renounced?
- How much effort and hard work and exhausting labor had Paul poured into this ministry?

Anthony Thiselton: *The proclamation of the gospel [would be] hollow, and your faith [would be] empty (v. 14b). Hollow and empty translate the same Greek word (kenos,*

“without substance, in vain, empty”). Neither the gospel nor the faith of Christians would retain any substance, authenticity, or effectiveness. They would be a sham and a delusion. Christianity would be no more than a human social construct.

Alistair Begg: Not referring to whether it was a good sermon or bad sermon ... just that the content is meaningless; we have nothing to say; “*through the foolishness of the content of the proclamation God has chosen to save people*” – facts about Jesus summarized in first 4 verses – modern man characterizes this as foolishness; compelling logic here; apostate preachers: you don’t really have to believe in any of the miracles – Illustration: like soccer – forget the ball, let’s just start the game; Example of apostate preaching: “I suggest that we confess openly that the resurrection is a myth; this is not to say that it is not true; to say that the resurrection is a myth is to say that it represents the deepest kind of truth . . .” You can’t take away the resurrection and think that you still have anything worth talking about; Why would sensible men and women listen to something like this?? Your preaching is useless!

This concept of futility reminds us of the familiar themes from the pen of that ultimate OT preacher – **King Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes:**

What’s the point to life under the sun – if you strip away the eternal perspective?

PTL: OUR PREACHING MINISTRY IS NOT IN VAIN!

Even though others would look at our efforts and say we are just wasting our time. Nobody cares about truth; nobody wants to investigate the OT book of Isaiah – get a life!

What is the goal of our preaching?? Not just to hear ourselves talk; not just to accumulate pdf files and Sermonaudio.com messages ...

III. (:14B) THE FUTILITY OF FAITH IN THE GOSPEL MESSAGE = OUR FAITH IS VAIN

“your faith also is vain”

This implication really hits home. This is the same charge we lay at the feet of all the false religions. What if our Christian faith is no different than any false religion.

Zeal without knowledge gets you zip.

Sincerity without truth is like taking the wrong antidote to a fatal disease.

What a blowhard if you are walking about proclaiming a message that is no better than vaporware – a cloud without any substance ...

How would you like to be part of a church movement that endured painful persecution for an empty and futile cause?

Alistair Begg: Your faith rested on the preaching of the truth; if that is a sham, so is your faith; biblical faith is not some vague hopefulness; just important that we have faith – in what? Biblical faith rests on objective reality and propositional truth;

PTL: OUR FAITH IS NOT IN VAIN!

Paul even goes beyond to state that our condition would not just be neutral ... as if we had wasted our life in a meaningless cause ... but actually we have heaped blame and condemnation on ourselves by committing the horrible sin of blasphemy against God.

IV. (:15-17A) THE FUTILITY OF WASTING YOUR LIFE IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AS PROCLAIMERS OF A FALSE HOPE (BEARING FALSE WITNESS AGAINST GOD)

“Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless”

Robert Grosheide: *False witnesses of God:* people who give their false witness in God’s name not only speak an untruth but they hold God in derision by covering their false witness with His name. Thus the apostles would then appear to have presented themselves as witnesses of God, while God actually did not send them. The object of the testimony is the resurrection of Christ. That was the message Paul and his co-laborers brought.

Alistair Begg: **Acts 2:24;** apostles were not advice givers; they were preachers of the truth; had great integrity; they died for their proclamation – not likely to have made this up; why get yourselves killed over known fabrication? They weren’t making money; they weren’t becoming popular ... Man may die for a conviction, but man will not die for a concoction; they started from the conviction that Jesus had died; it’s pride that keeps people from believing in the face of such facts

REPETITION: BASED ON THEIR BEING NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD:

- I. Futility of Christ not having been raised
- II. Futility of Preaching and Testifying regarding the Gospel
- III. Futility of Faith

PTL: WE ARE NOT FALSE WITNESSES!

We proclaim the truth

V. (:17B) THE FUTILITY OF STILL BEING HELD IN BONDAGE TO SIN

“you are still in your sins”

This may be the cruelest “What If” of all of them. What if we have deceived ourselves into thinking that our lives have been freed from the bondage of sin?

Alistair Begg: dreadful predicament with no way to get clean; hands are stained with our sinfulness; remember what you were; they knew they were changed; we know we are not in our sins!

Robert Gundry: The denial of their future, that they are destined for resurrection on the basis of Christ's resurrection, has the net effect of a denial of their past, that they have received forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ's death. As in his later letter to the church in Rome (4:25 and 5:10), the death of Jesus as "for us," including both justification and sanctification, is inextricably bound together with his resurrection. To deny the one is to deny the other. Thus, as hinted at, at the beginning (v. 2), Paul is urging that their present position with regard to the resurrection means that they cease to be believers altogether. This, of course, is a *reductio ad absurdum*; since their experience is otherwise, he expects them to read the logic in reverse and admit therefore that there must be a resurrection of the dead. . .

Paul's point is that to deny the resurrection of the dead is not only to deny one's past but finally to deny any real future as well. Thus the whole of the Corinthians' existence, past, present, and future, has come to nothing, if they are correct.

PTL: WE HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM OUR SINS!

We can testify to the reality of this blessed state – we can compare our former condition to our current converted and transformed state and rejoice that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Nobody can argue us out of this truth. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are in the family of God. We are no longer the children of Satan. We have been delivered out of darkness into the blessed light of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

VI. (:18) THE FUTILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN DEAD HAVING PERISHED WITHOUT HOPE

"Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."

Have you forgotten about your loved ones who have already died and gone ahead to the other side?

Don't you have a longing to be reunited with them for all of eternity?

What cruel comfort is dispensed at most funerals – to a crowd of unbelievers who have concern for their relationship to a holy God until the moment comes when they long to play a Get Out of Hell Free card.

Oh, your loved one is better off ... Is he or she?

Remember the way is broad that leads to destruction -- many are rolling down that path; the gate is narrow that leads to eternal life – few there be that find it.

We have been called to rescue the perishing.

Alistair Begg: Those who have fallen asleep are lost; funeral messages would thus be lies; death is not falling asleep in Jesus and waking up to see His face; we all live without hope and without God; Christians in same predicament as pagans

PTL: THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN CHRIST HAVE NOT PERISHED!

They also have not been consigned to some type of incomplete existence where they will remain separated from their body – instead their body will be raised incorruptible; they will be clothed again with a resurrection body like that of the Lord Jesus.

VII. (:19) THE MISERABLE CONCLUSION – SUMMING UP THE FUTILITY OF CHRISTIANS – THEY ARE A PATHETIC LOT

“If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

Charles Hodge: “If all our hopes in Christ are confined to this life . . .”

Leon Morris: If there is no resurrection they are pitifully deluded men. They have set their hopes on a Lord who is to bring them a richer, fuller life, and all that distinguishes them from others is a special form of hardship (cf. **2 Cor. vi. 4ff., xi. 23ff.**). While Paul never minimizes the compensations the Christian has in this life in the way of peace within and the like, yet it is only common sense to see that, if this world is all there is, anybody is better off than the Christian.

Alistair Begg: We have to put up with a lot of difficulty and suffering ... but there is an ice cream at the end; if we believed in the future when there was no future then we are of all men most pitied; yesterday is dead and gone; tomorrow is never coming ... let's live existential life of hedonism . . .

This whole paragraph should be deeply disturbing to those who have tried to make Christianity more palatable by removing the difficult things of the faith, the miraculous truths; end up giving nothing to people

PTL: BELIEVERS ARE DESTINED FOR GLORY AND REWARD!

Lowery: (:15-19) If there were no Resurrection, the pagans would be right. The “*foolishness of the Cross*” (**1:18**) would be just that, and men such as Paul and the apostles who had suffered for the gospel (**4:9-13**) could only be **pitied**. Those who lived for the pleasure of the moment would be right and the sacrifices of Christians would only be cruel, self-inflicted jokes (cf. **15:32**).

Paul Gardner: For Paul the consequences of denying the resurrection are severe and many. These are as much found in the present as they are in the future. People's faith right now is in vain. The present preaching of the gospel is vacuous without the resurrection. Christ is not alive now if he has not been raised, and this means that right now people are still in their sins with no atoning sacrifice having availed anything on their behalf. Even those who are now dead have not gained anything but have perished.

Thus, v. 19 functions as a powerful summary. It is utterly pitiable to think of believing in Christ only for this life since all believers then have is a dead Christ.

(:20) GLANCE FORWARD: STATEMENT OF CERTAINTY AND CONVICTION

*“But now Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who are asleep.”*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is truth and the bodily resurrection of all true believers is equally true.

Once we assert the resurrection all of the above points of futility are removed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could they both affirm the resurrection of Christ on one hand and deny the bodily resurrection of believers on the other hand?
- 2) What are you expecting your resurrection body to be like?
- 3) How do we know whether or not we are *still in our sins*?
- 4) Does the world pity those who are believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Garland: In **15:13–19**, Paul argues *ad absurdum* to show how **futile** the Christian faith would be if there were no resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then how can Christ be raised from the dead? If Christ is not raised from the dead, then everything based on that belief collapses in a heap of broken dreams.

- 1) The first thing to fall is the **content of the gospel**, which he summarized in **15:3–5**.
- 2) The second thing to fall is their **faith**. If this core belief proves to be a delusion, then everything else they believed from this preaching of the gospel is discredited. The gospel is not good news but a hoax that has no real power to change lives or to do anything else except to deceive.
- 3) Third, the **trustworthiness of all the apostles who proclaimed that Christ is risen (15:15)** is thrown into question. They are perjurers conspiring to make false statements

by announcing that God raised Christ, when in fact, God does not raise the dead. They speak in God's name what they know to be untrue. God is not, as they claim, the one who raises the dead.

4) Fourth, the **Christian assertion that Christ died on behalf of humankind's sins is to be discounted**. If Christ was not raised, then they are still damned in their sins and will not inherit the kingdom of God (**6:9–11**). Death's stinger (**15:56**) still spears its victims; its shroud will forever bind them. Sin's wages must be paid (**Rom. 6:23**), and redemption has been foiled by the last enemy. Paul asserts in Romans that Jesus was raised "*for our justification*" (*Rom. 4:25*), which enables us "*to walk in newness of life*" (**Rom. 6:4–5**). He visualizes the resurrected Christ at the right hand of God, interceding for us against all who would condemn us (**Rom. 8:34**). But if Christ has not been raised, none of this is true.

5) Fifth, those believers who have died (cf. **1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6**) **remain in the clutches of death**. They have perished (**15:18**). The ἄρα (*ara, then*) goes back to the εἰ (*ei, if*) in **15:17a**. If Christ has not been raised, then there will be no resurrection of Christians either. "*In Christ*" governs those who have fallen asleep (cf. **1 Thess. 4:16**). If Christ has not been raised, then those who "*fall asleep in Christ*" are no different from unbelievers, who are consigned to doom and ruin (**1 Cor. 1:18**). The human terror of death as a gloomy portal leading to oblivion and divine condemnation would be justified, for God abandons to perdition even those who have been faithful. This statement packs a punch because, as **Goulder** (2001: 181) trenchantly states it, "No one wants to think that their relatives have kidded themselves in this life and are now rotting or, worse, frying."

6) Sixth, **all hope is dashed (15:19)**

Ray Stedman: Have you ever had the "What if's" about your Christian faith? What do you do when doubt attacks, and you feel that perhaps it is Christianity that is wrong, that maybe this is all a delusion, a psychological trick you have been playing on yourself? What do you do when you feel that the record of Scripture is merely a collection of myths and legends, as we are frequently told, and that there is no life after death, there is no God, no judgment, etc.?

We all feel that way at times because those are attacks upon our faith, and we live in a day when faith is being attacked. I have just returned from Poland, and in that Communist world Christians have to learn to live under the unrelenting pressure of assaults upon their faith. They are constantly asked to believe, to accept, the secular, world view. They are ridiculed when they say they believe in life after death. Karl Marx, of course, is well known for his statement that "religion is the opiate of the masses," that it holds them in a kind of a "pipe dream," removing them from the realities of existence and making them willing to endure great indignities and injustices now, with the transient hope that some day they will find a compensation.

Even here, in the West, this is very common also; we are under attack as well. I am sure there are days when you feel, as I sometimes do, that Christianity might just be a delusion; we feel that we are just kidding ourselves, perhaps, that this Christian faith is nothing but a dream, or at best a kind of unfounded hope based on wishful thinking.

Now, when we feel that way, the temptation is always to think, "Well then, I'd better get what I can now." The fundamental assumption of almost all advertising today is, "You only have one life, so live it now. You are only going to get one opportunity to enjoy yourself, so go to it." Somebody once said in my presence that we are living in a day which is like unto the day of the sinking of the Titanic. Even secular observers can see that we are headed for destruction, but the philosophy seems to be, "Well, if you are going to be a passenger aboard the Titanic you might as well go first class."

Some of these feelings were widespread in Corinth when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter. The Corinthians were concerned about getting the most out of life now. They were not denying the resurrection of Jesus; there was too much evidence for that. As we saw in our last study, there were over 500 eyewitnesses, "most of whom are still alive," as Paul had said, whom they could ask if they wanted evidence about the resurrection. But what they were denying was that that meant that we, the body of Christians, were going to be resurrected too. This represented a surrender to the thinking of the Greek philosophers, who held that the spirit is saved but the body is buried, gone and forgotten. These philosophers taught that the body is essentially evil, that it is a kind of prison we have to live in now, and when the day comes that we can get out of it we will be free; the body will have served its purpose, and that will be the end of it. . .

Let me share with you a quotation from a man who had no faith in the resurrection. His name is **Bertrand Russell**, one of the eloquent spokesmen for unbelief in our day. This is what he says has to be the natural outcome of a life from which faith in the resurrection of Christ is removed. He says:

The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none can tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death.

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls, pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.

What pessimism! What despair! What darkness! That is what we have left when the resurrection of Jesus is taken away.

John Piper: I see Paul proclaiming the good news that the resurrection of Jesus satisfies six of our deepest needs and longings. But in doing this he is not putting us at the center. He is putting Jesus as the center, and God who raised him from the dead. . .

The greatest news in all the world is that God and his Son are most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in them. And to make that true God raised his Son Jesus from the dead to reign for evermore. In raising him from the dead:

1. (:17) he gave us **forgiveness** and glorified Jesus as the all-sufficient forgiver;
Rom. 4:25
2. (:14) he gave us a **friend** to count on and glorified Jesus as utterly reliable;
[Our faith is not in vain]
3. (:15) he gave us guidance and unchanging **truth** and glorified Jesus as the absolute foundation for truth and righteousness; (**John 14:6**) [importance of absolute truth]
- 4/5. (:19) he gave us a life that is not pitiable but **enviable**, a ministry that is not in vain but **fruitful**, and glorified Jesus as the source and goal of all life and all ministry;
6. (:18) and he gave us everlasting **joy** that will not be ended by death, and glorified Jesus as the author of life, the victor over death and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Alan Carr: WHAT IF THERE HAD BEEN NO RESURRECTION?

Introduction: In the opening verses of this chapter, the Apostle Paul reminds us that the doctrine of Christ's resurrection from the dead is a vital and foundational doctrine. In fact, he tells us that it is an essential component of the Gospel of grace, v. 3-4. With that in mind, he proceeds to offer proof that Jesus did indeed raise from the dead, v. 5-8. Apparently, there were some members of the church in Corinth who doubted the truth of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. In this chapter, Paul is writing to remind them that the resurrection is essential to salvation and to any hope of Heaven. In an effort to awaken the Corinthian believers to the importance of the resurrection, he paints a dismal picture of what life would be like if there had been no resurrection. You see, if there had been no resurrection from the dead, then we would be in sad shape this morning! As the Lord leads, let's take the time to consider what would be true if there had been no resurrection.

I. (:12-19) A BITTER ASSUMPTION

A. (:12-13) No Foundation - Paul reminds us that if there is no resurrection from the dead then Jesus did not rise again, If He is dead, then everything we believe in comes crashing down around us. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Jesus Himself is no better than the tens of thousands of others who have claimed to be sent from God. If He did not rise, then His death was the unfortunate end to a misspent life and His teachings are nothing more than the raving of some maniacal madman! If it is true, and there is no resurrection from the dead, then the very system of belief that we cherish so deeply is nothing more than just another religion that offers life and hope to no one. If Jesus is still in that tomb today, then our way of life is a farce and we are among the greatest of fools to have ever walked upon this planet. For, if Jesus is dead, then our

system of belief is dead, our foundations have crumbled beneath us and we might as well go home right now!

B. (:14-16) No Faith - In these three verses, the great Apostle moves to paint an even more sobering portrait of how things would be if Jesus were indeed dead today. He tells us three areas that are truly of base if Jesus is dead.

1. (:14) Our Preaching Is Vain - Paul tells us that if Jesus is dead, then all the preachers have wasted their words and time proclaiming the message of the resurrection. From the first witness, Mary Magdalene - **John 20:2**, to the several hundred mentioned in verses 5-8 of our text, to great men like Spurgeon, Wesley, Sunday, Jones, Graham, Edwards, Talmadge, Moody, Truit, Criswell, Evans, Carroll, and millions of others have been fools, if Jesus did not raise from the dead!

2. (:14) Our Faith Is Vain - Paul tells us that if Jesus is still dead, then we are wasting our time serving Him and worshiping Him. If Jesus is really still dead, then you would be just as well off worshiping a rock, a tree or an image of some type. If Jesus is still in the grave, then everything we do is false, phony and foolish! If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then all the preaching you have listened to over the years is a lie, all your praying, serving, witnessing, and church attendance have all been a waste of your time. If Jesus did not rise from the dead then you are the victim of the most cruel hoax ever played on humanity and the Christian faith is the greatest joke of all time.

3. (:15) We Are False Witnesses - Paul tells us that all those who spread the Christian message of salvation through the crucified and resurrected Jesus are liars if Jesus did not in fact rise from the dead. Every time we open our mouths to sing, to witness, to testify, to preach, or whatever we do in His name, then we are liars if He did not rise from the dead.

C. (:17) No Forgiveness - As if things couldn't get any worse, Paul now tells us that if Jesus isn't alive, then we are still lost, hell bound and still in our sins this morning. The heart of the Gospel message is the great truth that Jesus Christ left Heaven above, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. It doesn't stop there! The Bible goes on to say that He rose again the third day for our justification, Rom. 4:25. If Jesus is still dead, then we cannot be justified and we are still lost in sin this morning! If He is dead today, then we are still looking for a redeemer and we are all headed to Hell!

D. (:8-19) No Future - Paul now moves beyond this life to consider things of an eternal nature. He tells us that if Jesus is still dead, then we have no hope for the future at all. Notice 2 terrible things that are true if Jesus did not rise from the dead.

1. (:18) Our Loved Ones Who Have Gone Before Are Gone Forever – One of the blessings of the Christian life is the knowledge that one day, we will participate in a reunion in Heaven which will include all those we have known and loved who knew the Lord Jesus Christ. However, Paul tells us that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then every one who dies is forever lost. Either we are like a dog and go to the grave, or we go to Hell to be forever separated from the Lord. If this is true, then there will be no

Heaven, there will be no gatherings on the other side. There will be no hope and there is no future to anticipate. If Jesus is still dead, then we might as well live it up down here and enjoy the time we have left. If Jesus is dead, then we are all but dust and when we die, we are gone forever!

Heaven is a cruel joke, mom and dad are gone forever, sons and daughters are gone, brothers and sisters are gone, grandparents are gone, if there is no resurrection from the dead.

2. (:19) We Have Lived Our Lives In Vain - Paul is saying that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then every child of God has wasted his/her life in living for Jesus. We have believed a lie and are headed to Hell! If the Bible lied about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, then you and I can believe nothing this Book tells us! (**Matt. 11:28; John 6:37; John 3:16; Heb. 13:5; Psa. 103:12; 1 John 1:9** - All bitter, cruel lies if Jesus did not rise from the dead!)

(All of this paints a pretty bleak picture for us. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then we are all in real trouble and need to seek psychiatric help to be delivered from the delusions that have gripped and enslaved our minds. But, thank God, aren't you glad that Paul did not stop writing with **verse 19**? **Verse 20** stands like a majestic lighthouse pointing the way to hope, safety and salvation.)

II. (:20) A BLESSED ASSURANCE

A. Our Foundation Is Firm - The bedrock doctrine of our faith is true. Jesus lives and Christianity stands as the only valid means whereby a lost sinner can reach the God of Heaven.

B. Our Faith Is Genuine - Our preaching has power, our faith is real and our witness is true! Jesus lives and we stand vindicated in our faith and in our claims concerning Him. It is not a waste of time to trust Jesus. It is not an exercise in vanity to believe in the One called Jesus. He lives and because He lives our faith lives also!

C. Our Forgiveness Is Accomplished - Because He lives, we are no longer lost in sin, but we have been delivered by His blood and have been justified by His life. Now, all our sins have been washed away as far as the east is from the west. We have been forgiven and we have been redeemed!

D. Our Future Is Secure - Our loved one, who died in faith, live on and await our arrival in glory. There is a heavenly home waiting all of God's children on the other side. In this life, we can enjoy the victory, but in the life to come we can enjoy the presence of the One who died in our place on the cross. Yes, negatives have become positives, but despair has also been changed into hope for all men who receive Jesus and trust Him by faith.

Robert Grosheide: We notice that Paul in his entire argument assumes that the main points of the Christian doctrine were accepted at Corinth; the error had not assumed serious proportions. Not only had the consequences not yet been drawn, but those

consequences had been realized so little that Paul, by pointing them out, is able to combat the error itself.

Voddie Baucham: A Biblical Defense of the Resurrection

1. Argument from Authority (:1-4)
2. Argument from Eyewitness Evidence as well as fulfilled OT prophecy (:5-11)
3. Argument from Logic (:12-19) -- 7 things that have to be true if no such thing as resurrection – must follow as inexorably as night follows day –
 - a. Won the argument on point #1 – He had already proved that Christ had risen from the dead! Not finished yet – just warming up
 - b. Preaching is empty, powerless
But preaching is powerful
 - c. Your faith is vain – just wishful thinking
 - d. We are misrepresenting God; we are a liar and blasphemer; interesting that objectors to the faith try to be politically correct and just tell us it is not true for them; you must call those who preach the resurrection bald-faced liars
But we are truth tellers
 - e. No penal, substitutionary atoning death of Christ – we are still in our sins; I still owe a price I can never pay
But we are not in our sins; my price has been paid; I am made right with God
 - f. No hope for anyone who has gone before us
But our dead believers are present with the Lord
 - g. We are most to be pitied – pathetic lot; living a hopeless existence
But don't pity us – we live for eternity

We can turn those 7 things upside down because the resurrection of Christ is true
The essence of Christianity – not just a philosophy to live out or rules for living but a hope for eternity.

Alistair Begg: If Christ Has Not Been Raised

Bring us from confusion to faith; from doubt to certainty, from rebellion to obedience.

Resurrection is vital area of Christian doctrine; the way we think is related to the way we live; learning how to think correctly is the key to learning how to live properly;
Theology is everybody's business; not just for a few egghead professionals.

The only Jesus in whom we can trust biblically is a resurrected Jesus; impossible to be a Christian without embracing this truth; can't set this aside and just try to live out the Sermon on the Mount; Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection; the very heart of our message; Illustration: you can live without your appendix – put it in a jar and carry it around – not so with resurrection.

The logical consequences of such a perspective; for the sake of argument let's allow that your position is factual; 7 implications. . .

David Thompson:

Importance of the doctrine of the resurrection; **15:36** – Paul calls those who deny the resurrection, fools; he plays along and shows them the consequences of their thinking; they got caught up in human philosophy; Christianity is an empty belief system and its followers should be pitied; 6 if clauses; first class conditional clauses – assuming the reality of his argument; shows them the factual consequences

1) Christ is not risen – he is still dead; profound theological implications

- we have no evidence he was God; **Rom. 1:4**
- no evidence we have been justified
- no evidence of our own life after death
- no positional or practical power over sin – Rom. 6 says we were buried and raised with Christ

Must explain empty tomb; testimony of eyewitnesses; how sorrow turned into joy; willingness to endure persecution and martyrdom

2) Preaching is vain – heralding and proclaiming God’s message; shepherd must feed the flock; once sheep get done grazing in one area they don’t know where to go

3) Faith is vain – what a person places their confidence in for salvation; empty, vain, purposeless;

4) Witnesses are liars – God’s commissioned us to witness falsely; but impossible for God to lie;

5) Faith is worthless – 2 negative realities would then be true:

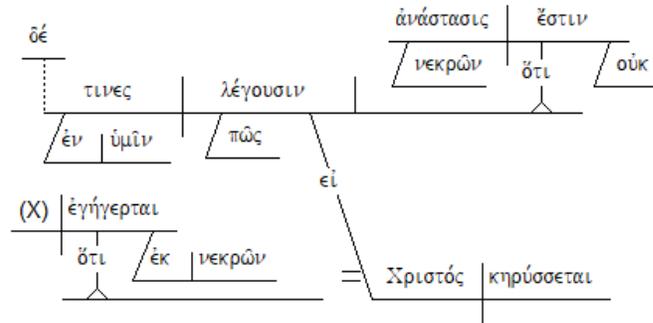
- we are still in our sins; Jesus did not make successful payment; he was a failure
- we will die and go to hell – assumption that nobody can make their own payment for their sins

6) Christians should be pitied – everything then about Christianity is a miserable joke; the people who don’t come to prayer meetings are the smart ones;

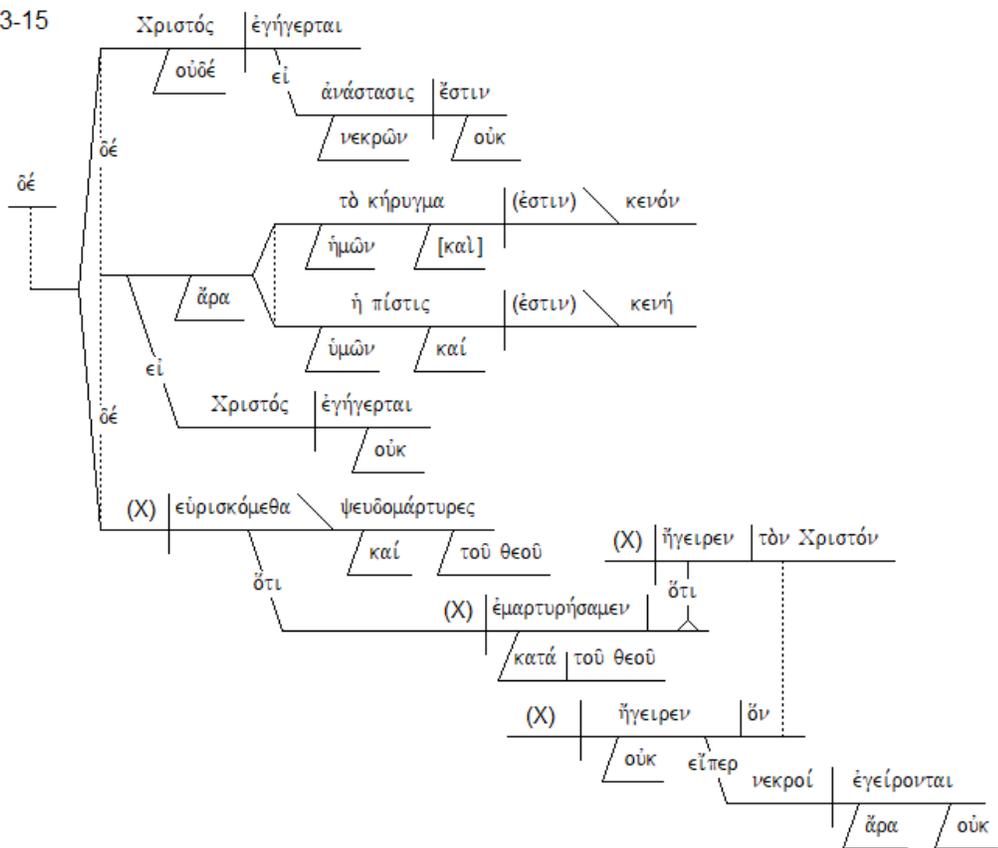
Vs. 20 – *But now ...* I have played along with your thinking and it is a miserable form of thinking; but now it is time for the truth ...

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

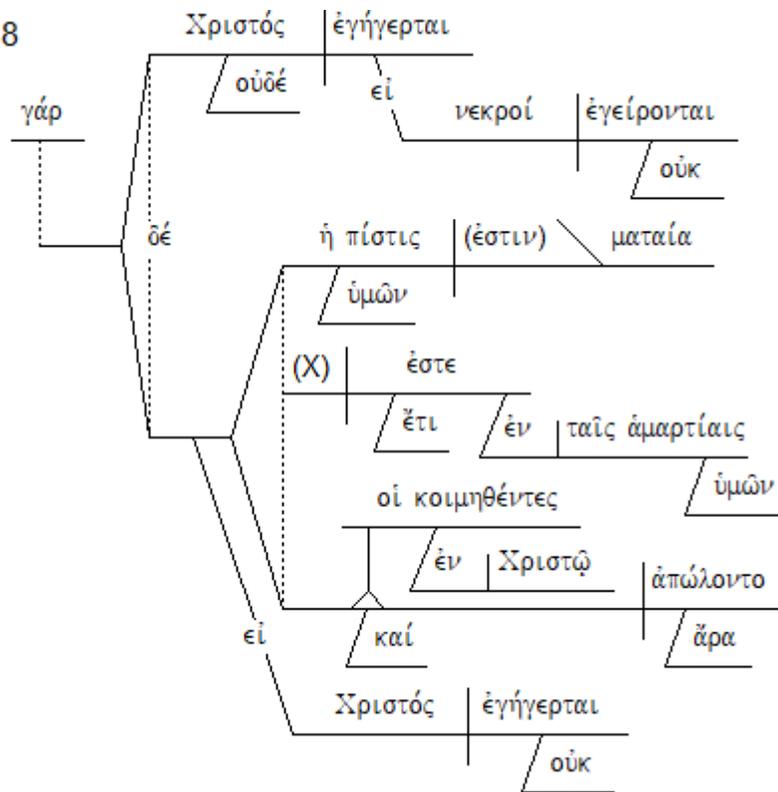
1Co 15:12



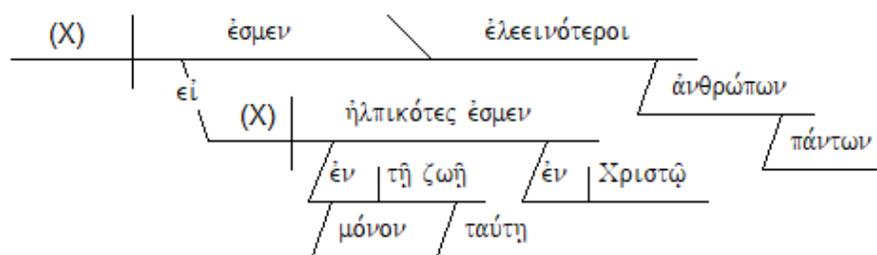
1Co 15:13-15



1Co 15:16-18



1Co 15:19



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

TITLE: VICTORY IN JESUS

BIG IDEA:

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

INTRODUCTION:

It is always satisfying to be on the winning team. But life is much more than a game. Our eternal destiny hinges on the validity of the resurrection of Christ. And more than that, the ultimate triumph of God's entire kingdom program derives from the reality of the resurrection of the God-Man.

In contrast to the hypothetical dreaded consequences of no resurrection of Christ as contemplated in the previous paragraph (v.12-19), Paul now moves forward with decisive certainty and assurance to the blessed consequences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Review: Since Christ has been raised from the dead:

- OUR PREACHING MINISTRY IS NOT IN VAIN!
- OUR FAITH IS NOT IN VAIN!
- WE ARE NOT FALSE WITNESSES
- WE HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM OUR SINS
- THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN CHRIST HAVE NOT PERISHED!
- BELIEVERS ARE DESTINED FOR GLORY AND REWARD!

I. (:20-23) VICTORY FOR BELIEVERS -- THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS OVER SIN AND DEATH AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST IN RESURRECTION

A. (:20A) The Resurrection of Christ is a Certain Historical Reality

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead,"

1. Strong Contrast –
2. Providential timing – in the fullness of time –
3. Bodily Resurrection – Perf. Tense -- past action with abiding results
4. Separation from one state to another that is completely different

B. (:20B) The Resurrection of Christ is the Pledged Pattern for all Believers who have Died

"the first fruits of those who are asleep."

1. OT background of feast of first fruits

Stedman: Paul is referring here to the ritual that was given to Israel in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus, where on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed the Passover, on the morrow after the Sabbath, there would be the offering of the first fruits of the barley harvest. The Jews were commanded to bring a sheaf of grain, the first of the harvest, to the priest, who would wave it before the Lord.

Now if you have been carefully following the chronology of Scripture, you know that was the

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Anthony Thiselton: The **firstfruits** is an agricultural term for the first installment of the harvest that pledges more of the same kind to come. Paul regularly stresses the "sameness," solidarity, or paradigmatic equivalence of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians who are "*in*" Christ, but with the one crucial difference of timing. In this sense, Christ is the "*firstborn*" (Greek *prōtotokon*) among many brothers and sisters (**Rom. 8:29**; cf. **Col. 1:18**). Christ's resurrection, therefore, is a pledge and assurance of the future resurrection of the dead in Christ. The term also denotes a representative example of the rest of the crop.

Daniel Akin: Thankfully, here Paul quickly pivots from the gloom and doom of a purely hypothetical situation to the joyful actuality that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. His resurrection is actually a guarantee of our resurrection. As we will see, the past resurrection of Jesus also guarantees several facets of the future resurrection to come.

Mark Taylor: The passage opens with a reaffirmation of Christ's resurrection and the claim that he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (**15:20**), followed by an explanation of death and resurrection by way of a typological contrast between Adam and Christ (**15:21–22**). Paul then repeats that Christ is the firstfruits in order to clarify the order of resurrection. Christ and those who belong to him are each raised "*in his own turn*" (**15:23**). Christ has already been raised from the dead, and the resurrection of believers will occur at the Lord's coming. The second unit takes its cue from the word "*the end*." Paul describes the end as the time when Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father and abolishes all rule, authority, and power, including death (**15:24b–26**). The destruction of all enemies is necessary "*so that God may be all in all*"

(15:27–28). Paul finds scriptural warrant for God’s sovereignty over his creation in **Pss 8 and 110:1**.

Gordon Fee: Thus, in a passage of “epic grandeur,” Paul responds to the Corinthians’ denial of the resurrection of the dead. Their form of “spirituality,” which allows such a denial, stems not only from a false view of the nature of humanity but also from a less than adequate view of God as the **sovereign Lord of history**.

Paul Gardner: Paul now affirms the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus and leads from that into affirming the resurrection for all believers. In these verses, he assesses the results and merits of the Lord’s resurrection for those who believe in him. Where the previous section had demonstrated the absurdity of the denial of a bodily resurrection for Christian faith, this section explains the theological and practical benefits for believers who trust in Christ’s resurrection. Building on ideas of the respective representative headships of Adam and Christ, Paul shows how death gives way, in Christ, to life. This life is seen in its fullness now in “*Christ the firstfruits*” and will be seen at his coming among all “*who belong to Christ*” (v. 23). The resurrection guarantees the destruction of “*the last enemy . . . death*” (v. 26) and culminates in all things being in subjection under God (vv. 27–28). In terms of the rhetoric of the argument, this should probably be seen as the *confirmatio*, that is, the main body of Paul’s argument in which logical proofs for the wisdom of his position are offered.

Main Idea: Christ has indeed been raised and, by God’s clear design, leads the way through death to resurrection for all who are in him. Christ destroys death and rules his kingdom until he finally delivers all to the Father.

Christ Has Been Raised, So in Him Shall All Be Made Alive (15:20–28)

- a. As in Adam All Die, in Christ All Are Made Alive (15:20–22)
- b. The Risen Christ Comes for Those Who Belong to Him (15:23–24a)
- c. Christ Delivers the Kingdom to the Father (vv. 24b–25)
- d. Sin Is Destroyed (v. 26)
- e. Christ Subjects Himself to the Father (vv. 27–28)

I. (:20-23) VICTORY FOR BELIEVERS -- THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS OVER SIN AND DEATH AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST IN RESURRECTION

Anthony Thiselton: Three theological themes converge in vv. 21-22.

(1) First, the resurrection of Christ is an event of **cosmic significance**, not simply an event in the history and life of Israel and the church. Since resurrection was expected only as an event of the “last days,” the resurrection of Christ brings forward the end time to the present as the firstfruits of the new creation. In vv. 38-44 Paul will expound resurrection as an act of the sovereign Creator God, comparable in formative power and purpose with the act of creation itself, but the active creation of a new, transformed “world.” In technical terms it is an “apocalyptic” event.

Beker perceives this aspect in 15:20-28 as the very heart of this chapter (*Paul the Apostle*, pp. 168-70).

(2) Second, since the resurrection of Christ is not an isolated event but carries with it the pledge of the future resurrection of believers, the terms in Adam and in Christ (v. 22) reflect the theological reality of **corporate solidarity**. “Solidarity” was more difficult to explain to a culture of modern Western individualism before the media made sports such an all-pervasive phenomenon in life, and before trade unions took over the term to denote “one for all” and “all for one.” If a team member scores a goal, or contrariwise incurs a penalty, the whole team is credited with the gain or made liable for the loss incurred by an individual on the team. In **Rom. 5:12-21** Paul explains that we cannot have one (the advantage) without the other (the liability). Yet “*the result of one trespass*” differs in effect and scope from “*the result of one act of righteousness*” (5:17) in that “*how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many*” (5:14, NIV).

(3) The third theological theme is the **Lordship of Christ**, or Christology. The resurrection of the dead comes about through a human being... All will be brought to life in Christ (vv. 21-22) in a cosmic and corporate event that rests on “the enthronement of Christ as ‘Lord’” (Beker, as cited above; cf. **Rom. 1:3-4**). Through this cosmic event, Paul goes on to explain, Christ shall have annihilated every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet (vv. 24b and 25).

A. (:20A) The Bodily Resurrection of Christ is a Certain Historical Reality

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead,”

Richard Hays: With the ringing affirmation of **verse 20**, Paul moves from illusion to reality:

1. Strong Contrast – “*But*”

Small conjunction but One of the most beautiful and powerful words in the Greek NT Paul does not leave us hanging with regards to his argument – he dismisses the negative consequences associated with the premise of no resurrection.

2. Providential timing – “*now*” -- in the fullness of time –

Paul ministered at a very special time in human history – in the immediate afterglow of the blazing glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ
No longer straining to look forward to see the fulfillment of the types and shadows and prophecies of the OT regarding the death and resurrection of the coming Messiah; looking back in blessed fulfillment.

3. Bodily Resurrection – “*has been raised*” –

Perf. Tense -- past action with abiding results

4. Separation from one state to another that is completely different *“from the dead”*

B. (:20B) The Bodily Resurrection of Christ is the Pledged Pattern for all Believers who have Died and the Guarantee of Their Participation

“the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Richard Hays: There is also a **new element** in the story here, an aspect of Christ’s resurrection not made explicit in the traditional kerygmatic formula of **verses 3b-5**: the risen Christ is “*the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” His resurrection is not merely a wondrous event that

confirms his special status before God; rather, it is the beginning of a much greater harvest. This is the crucial point that some of the Corinthians had failed to understand: they did not see that there was a direct connection between Christ's resurrection and their own future fate. . .

The early Christians, Paul among them, took the resurrection of Jesus as a sign that the end of the age was breaking in. If Christ had been raised, then the resurrection of others must follow in due course. The metaphor of "*first fruits*" serves to express the idea that the great harvest of the general resurrection is at hand.

Paul Gardner: The first sheaf of the harvest, probably a sheaf of barley, was to be brought to the priest as an offering. This was a community offering rather than one brought by an individual. As the sheaves are "waved" or elevated before the Lord by the priest, so the offering becomes one of praise to Yahweh, who has supplied food for his people. In this sense the image does justice to Paul's constant emphasis through this chapter that God is the one who raised Jesus and that as "*firstfruit*" Jesus brings glory to God. Of note from Leviticus is the fact that the people may not eat of the harvest themselves until the firstfruit has been offered to God, but once the offering has been made, the people may participate in the enjoyment of the harvest as well. Paul may have this strict order in mind as he develops his argument here that Christ must rise first and then those who are "*in Christ*" (v. 23). The offering also looks forward with expectation to the Lord supplying a full harvest. Indeed, the dedicated firstfruit comes to be regarded as the guarantee of the full harvest. In this sense, it takes on the same idea as the "*deposit*" or "*guarantee*" (ἀρραβών) that is reflected in Paul's discussion of the work of the Spirit, who secures "*what is to come*" (2 Cor 5:5).

1. OT background of feast of first fruits

Ray Stedman: Paul is referring here to the ritual that was given to Israel in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus, where on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed the Passover, on the morrow after the Sabbath, there would be the offering of the first fruits of the barley harvest. The Jews were commanded to bring a sheaf of grain, the first of the harvest, to the priest, who would wave it before the Lord.

Now if you have been carefully following the chronology of Scripture, you know that was the exact morning of our Lord's resurrection. There, in the feasts of Israel, you have a prediction that the resurrection of Jesus would be the first fruits of the harvest. Paul's argument is that not only did Jesus rise from the dead on the exact day predicted by the ritual, but, furthermore, his resurrection is a sample and a guarantee of the entire "harvest" of resurrection, which would include ours as well.

David Guzik: The offering at the Feast of First fruits was a bloodless grain offering (Leviticus 2). No atoning sacrifice was necessary, because the Passover lamb had just been sacrificed. This corresponds perfectly with the resurrection of Jesus, because His death ended the need for sacrifice, having provided a perfect and complete atonement.

2. Significance of first fruits

3. Concern of believers regarding their fellow Christians who have fallen asleep

Only believers are in view in this context; not speaking of the resurrection of all men to judgment.

C. (:21-22) The Resurrection of Christ Mirrors the Causal Relationship Established Back at the Fall of Man (Rom. 5:12ff)

Principle: The Action of One Man Determines the Fate of All Men He Represents
Where did sin and death come from?

1. Remember the Effects of Our Union with the First Adam in Universal Sin and Death

“For since by a man came death”

“For as in Adam all die”

2. Rejoice in Our Union with the Second Adam in Certain Resurrection to Eternal Life

“by a man also came the resurrection of the dead”

“so also in Christ all will be made alive”

John MacArthur: Now watch, it depends upon the link with the man. That's the point. Who died? All who are in Adam. Who live? All who are in Christ. You see the all has to be connected to the individual and his work. Listen by natural descent from Adam, we all die and all who are naturally descendent from Adam will die. And all who are supernaturally descendent from Christ will live. That's the point. It is the all of who...who you're in. All in Adam die. All in Christ live. If you're not in Christ, you're still in Adam, you die. You see?

The first all includes all who are in Adam by the common factor of sin. The second all includes all who are in Christ by the common factor of faith. All who are in Adam die. All who are in Christ live. So Paul's first point is the impact of the resurrection. It deals with the resurrection of the redeemer and it is the first fruits, the guaranty, the source, as Adam was the first fruits and source of death, so Christ is the source of life.

If you don't believe in the literal events recorded in **Gen. 1-3** you have major problems in your theology.

Paul Gardner: What is so staggering in Paul's argument here is that he emphasizes that Christ is truly “*a man*” (like Adam) and yet “*in Christ*” something so remarkable happens that the representative headship of Adam is broken. This is climactically seen in the resurrection. Even Christ was to be identified with Adam as a human being, for certainly these verses will not allow anyone to argue that Jesus was not a human being (δι' ἀνθρώπου). However, that Adamic humanity should have led to death. It did, but it didn't end there. By the action of God in Christ, at last, **linkage to Adam's representational headship has been broken**. How it is that God was able, in Christ, to break this linkage is well summed up in **2 Corinthians 5:21**: “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Thus, as head of his covenant people, the linkage to Adam is broken for his people as well. To ensure their resurrection, Christ identifies with their humanity and even their death, not just the physical death of age but the death of judgment by God. A few verses earlier, in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, Paul uses a dynamic metaphor to describe the astonishing fact of this radical transformation of identity. He writes: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (ESV).

D. (:23) The Resurrection of Christ Provides Confident Anticipation of the Future Resurrection of Believers – there is a prescribed order of future events

*“But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits,
after that those who are Christ's at His coming”*

1. The Order of Future Events – not exhaustive; many gaps

Much could be said here – there are a number of different resurrections – even what is called “the first resurrection” has different stages:

- resurrection of NT church saints at the time of the Rapture
- resurrection of Tribulation saints and OT saints – just preceding the Millennial Kingdom
- resurrection of the unbelievers right before the Great White Throne judgment not really in view here

2. Reference is to the destiny of believers, not unbelievers

The Good Shepherd never loses any of His sheep or forgets about them – words of great assurance; we belong to Jesus Christ – that union will be fully manifested when He returns; He knows His sheep and calls them by name.

Richard Hays: Paul believes firmly in election – another characteristic doctrine of Jewish apocalyptic – and he is concerned in the present passage only about the way in which Christ’s resurrection prefigures the fate of *hoi tou Christou*, “those who are Christ’s people.” He says nothing one way or the other in this passage about the resurrection and judgment of unbelievers.

3. Anticipation of the Return of Christ

This is the event we look forward to now with great anticipation – just as He ascended up into heaven as He commissioned His disciples to be about the fulfillment of the Great Commission in His absence ... so He will come again .. we live in the last days.

Mark Taylor: The time of the resurrection of believers is the “*coming*” of Christ, a word that means **presence** and that was used in some contexts in the ancient world in a technical sense to denote the coming of a political figure of high office, such as the visit of an emperor to a province. In the New Testament the term takes on the technical meaning of the **second coming of Christ** in certain contexts (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1).

II. (:24-28) VICTORY FOR THE TRIUNE GOD -- THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF GOD’S KINGDOM PROGRAM AS THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM PUTS DOWN ALL ENEMIES AND PASSES RULERSHIP BACK TO GOD THE FATHER

A. (:24) The Resurrection of Christ Sets the Stage for the End Game Kingdom Transfer

1. What is this “end” that is in view?

“then comes the end,”

Mark Taylor: Paul’s language is compact and precise and does not specify the **time interval** between the resurrection of those who belong to Christ and the end. Since a rather long interval exists between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of his followers, it is possible that another lengthy interval exists between the resurrection of believers and the final consummation, including the millennial reign of Christ mentioned in **Rev 20:5–6**. Paul does not reveal his full understanding of end-time events in the span of only two verses! As noted in the comments on **15:20–23**, Paul does not mention the resurrection of unbelievers. Neither does he mention the resurrection of some believers immediately following the resurrection of Jesus (**Matt 28:52**).

Paul is fully aware of other events attendant to the last days (see esp. **2 Thess 2:1–11**). While some argue for an “interval” (millennium), others think Paul speaks of a more immediate consummation. **First Corinthians 15:20–28** is not decisive on this matter. Paul’s immediate concern in this passage is not to establish precise time intervals but to show how Christ’s resurrection set in motion a sequence of events that will culminate with the complete overthrow of all hostile powers opposed to God, including death, which entails the subjection of all things to God the Father.

2. What is the Difference between the Mediatorial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom?
“when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father,”

3. What is involved in this ultimate triumph?
“when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power”

B. (:25-27) The Resurrection of Christ Sets the Stage for His Subjection Over All

1. (:25) Victory Over All Enemies --

The Necessity, Duration and Objective of the Mediatorial Reign of Christ

“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.”

John Piper: First, it means that Christ is reigning NOW! He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (**Col. 3:1**). His kingdom does not begin at the second coming. When Christ comes again there will be a thunder clap of great victory in his reign over evil. You can see it in **verse 23** -- at his coming those who belong to Christ will be raised from the dead. But that thunder clap of victory will not be the beginning of his reign. His reign is underway now.

The other thing that the word *“until”* means is that Christ's kingly warfare against his enemies is going on right now. In other words his reign is not passive. If a football player gets injured and the coach wants to take him out of the game, but he says, “No, I am playing until we win,” you know two things: you know that he is playing now and that he is playing to win.

So when Paul says Jesus must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, you know two things: he is reigning now and he is reigning to win. . .

There is no disease, no addiction, no demon, no bad habit, no fault, no vice, no weakness, no temper, no moodiness, no pride, no self-pity, no strife, no jealousy, no perversion, no greed, no laziness that Christ does not aim to overcome as the enemy of his honor. And the encouragement in that is that when you set yourself to do battle with the enemies of your faith and your holiness, you will not fight alone.

2. (:26) Victory Over the Last Enemy = Death
“The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

David Guzik: Death will be present during the millennial reign of Jesus (**Revelation 20:9; Isaiah 65:20**). But afterward, death will be abolished. It is truly the last enemy that will be destroyed.

Richard Hays: This interpretation of Death as one of the defeated eschatological enemies is in turn justified by appeal to **Psalm 8:7**, which shows that God has put *all* things (including death)

under Christ's feet. Thus, according to Paul's reading, these Psalm texts prove that Christ will finally overcome death.

3. (:27) Total Subjection to Christ – With One Exception

a. Total Subjection to Christ

“For He has put all things in subjection under His feet.”

b. One Exception

“But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.”

C. (:28) The Resurrection of Christ Sets the Stage for the Ultimate Glorification of God the Father

“When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.”

We will finally have the perspective of God = it is all about God – not all about us

Ray Stedman: But there is coming a day when we will thoroughly understand, emotionally, the makeup of God, and we will understand the great truth God has been seeking to teach us all through this earthly experience that he is all we need, that God is everything to everyone.

David Guzik: In **Ephesians 1:10**, Paul reveals God's eternal purpose in history: *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.* Paul wrote of the "gathering together" of all things in Jesus, or of the "summing up" of all things in Him. Here, in 1 Corinthians, he looks forward to the time when all things are resolved in Jesus Christ and He presents it all to God the Father, giving glory to the God who authored this eternal plan of the ages.

Craig Blomberg: Although God the Son is essentially equal to the Father, he remains functionally subordinate, just as his glorified humanity keeps him distinct from what he was prior to the incarnation.

Gordon Fee: Paul's point is that in raising Christ from the dead God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus in God's being once again, as in eternity past, *“all in all.”*

Paul Gardner: The goal of all Christ's work, the conquest of all God's enemies and the resurrection of the dead, is that all may truly be subordinated to God for God's great glory. At the end of this age all things, that is, *“everything”* (neuter, τὰ πάντα) in the universe including all God's people, like the Son himself, will be subordinated to the Father. All evil will be defeated, and God's people will live in the presence of and for the God who has so loved them. Nothing ever again will challenge the rule of God. This section started by saying, *“In fact Jesus Christ has been raised.”* The end result of God's overcoming death in Christ, and of Christ's vanquishing all God's enemies, is that God reigns supreme. If there is no resurrection of the dead, it is the very reign of God himself that has been denied.

David Garland: The affirmation *“God will be all things in all”* refers to *“the unchallenged reign of God alone,”* not some metaphysical absorption (**Barrett** 1968: 361; so also **Fee** 1987: 759–60).

It applies to the pacification and redemption of the created order and is similar to saying that God is over all (**Rom. 9:5**; see also **Rom. 11:36**; **1 Cor. 8:6**; Sir. 43:27–28). It affirms God’s undivided and total power over the enemies (**S. Lewis** 1998: 68). According to **Boer** (1988: 126), all things “constitute the totality of the world experienced by human beings.” It means that humans will no longer be subject to the destructive forces of the powers. Therefore, whoever denies the resurrection of the dead basically denies God’s power over death and that God will reign over all things unchallenged (**Lindemann** 2000: 349).

CONCLUSION: LIVE TRIUMPHANTLY AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

1 Cor. 15:50-58

Apostle Paul makes the application for us – **vs. 58**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How should our lives be impacted in the present by the assurance of our future resurrection?
- 2) Why are we born with a sin nature?
- 3) Why doesn’t this text reference the victory of Christ over Satan?
- 4) How does the subjection of the Son to the Father mesh with the doctrine of the deity and divinity of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: The resurrection of Jesus was not a one-off event; it guarantees our resurrection as well, and much more!

- I. Jesus’s Resurrection Guarantees the Certainty of Future Resurrection (**15:20-22**).
- II. Jesus’s Resurrection Guarantees the Priority of Future Resurrection (**15:23**).
- III. Jesus’s Resurrection Guarantees the Finality of Future Resurrection (**15:24-26**).
- IV. Jesus’s Resurrection Guarantees the Totality of Future Resurrection (**15:27-28**).
- V. Jesus’s Resurrection Guarantees the Reality of Future Resurrection (**15:29-34**).

John Piper: Now it makes no sense to say that a person created the universe and upholds it by the word of his power, but that this person has no kingly right or might over it. And so we must say that Christ has always reigned over the world in one sense. So was the opening of his reign at the beginning of creation or at his resurrection from the dead?

There are at least three things new about the reign of Christ since the resurrection and exaltation of Christ:

1) Since the resurrection Christ is now the God-man. He has taken humanity onto himself which he never had before, and now he rules not merely as Son of God, but also Son of Man.

2) As the God-man he has now been openly declared to be the Messiah, the Christ, who will fulfill all the promises of God and will sit on the throne of his father David as a legal heir. Before the incarnation Christ was King over the world incognito as it were. And during his 33 earthly years he was still incognito, except for a few who had eyes to see. But now he is openly declared to all the world as Christ and Lord, which means Messiah and King. It is no secret now. Jesus is Lord!

3) And the third thing that is different about his reign now is that it is based on his finished work of redemption for the forgiveness of sins on the cross. Which means that in this age the word of the King is the word of the cross. His reign is primarily a saving reign. Judgment is delayed. The King reigns in a day of grace.

Bob Deffinbaugh: The argument Paul plays out in **verses 12-19** is a purely theoretical one. His “If ... then ...” argument was simply to show the folly of rejecting the resurrection of the dead, a claim which directly contradicts the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Now in **verses 20-28**, Paul takes up the truth of Christ’s resurrection, a truth he has already set down in **verses 1-11**. **Verses 1-11** point out the historical authentication of the resurrection of Christ. Now, Paul sets down the logical implications of His resurrection. The resurrection of the dead is not only consistent with Christ’s resurrection, it is a certainty which flows out of His resurrection. There are no “ifs” here, but only the much stronger term “*since*” (**verse 21**). . .

Paul speaks here of two “reigns”, **the “reign” of Christ**, during which time all of His enemies are defeated, and **the “reign of the Father,”** when Christ hands the kingdom over to the Father, in submission to Him. The reign of Christ is, I believe, the millennium, described in **Revelation 20**. The reign of the Father is the eternal kingdom of God, forever and ever, described in **Revelation 21 and 22**.

Are there those who deny the resurrection of the dead and thus also (by implication) the resurrection of our Lord? They cannot be those who look for the coming kingdom of God, for the last and final victory of Christ is His victory over death, a victory achieved by the resurrection of the unbelieving dead and the banishing of death to the lake of fire. The kingdom cannot come until all of our Lord’s enemies are defeated, and His last and final enemy is death itself. The final stage of resurrection, the last fruit of our Lord’s resurrection, is the resurrection of the unbelieving dead. When this final enemy is defeated, the kingdom of our Lord is secured, and it is at this time that our Lord subjects the final “thing” to God – Himself -- by handing the kingdom over to the Father. The resurrection of the dead is not only a vital part of the gospel, it plays a crucial role in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Who would dare to deny it?

Lowery: (Re vv. **27-28**) The reprise of these verses is found in **verse 57**. It is by the power of God that the incarnate Christ victoriously mediates His authority (cf. **Phil. 3:21**). This work of the Son will find ultimate completion in the glory of the Father (cf. **John 17:4-5**). That too is the ultimate goal of the church (cf. **1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14**). When God is all in all (cf. **Rom. 11:36**), the new creation will be consummated and the resurrected Christ and His church will share in that experience (cf. **Rev. 22:1**).

Mare: The future aspect of Christ's subjection to the Father must rather be viewed in the light of the administrative process in which the world is brought from its sin and disorder into order by the power of the Son, who died and was raised and who then, in the economy of the Godhead, turns it all over to God the Father, the supreme administrative head. All this is to be done so that God will be recognized by all as sovereign, and he – the triune God – will be supreme (cf. **Rev 22:3-5**).

Alistair Begg: A Matter of Death and Life

Previous section: let's imagine that there is no resurrection; let's show the logical implications; the resurrection is not some type of theological appendage that we could do without; lies at the heart of Christian faith; foundational truth;

I. (:20) Affirmation --

now moves to statement of great affirmation; he uses **2 pictures** to drive home his point:

- 1) first fruits – **Lev. 23** – within context of Passover; harvest time; appearance of first fruits indicative of another whole harvest to follow; previous raisings – raised to die again; Jesus raised to life which would never again die
- 2) sleep – we should fear death no more than we fear falling asleep at night; we disappear into the night and appear again each day; dead body looks like person has just fallen asleep; **2 Cor. 5:8** – at death believer goes immediately into the presence of Christ; wonderful picture of falling asleep in Jesus;

Moody Illustration: Some day you will hear that Dwight Moody has died; don't believe it; at that moment I will be more alive than ever.

We are too earthbound in our thinking and perspective;

The one taboo subject today is death; we have no problem talking about anything else; this is the one eventuality everyone will face;

II. (:21-22) Explanation – these verses address the origin of sin and death --

What does it mean that I died in Adam; that I sinned in Adam; that when Adam sinned, I sinned; that I am responsible along with Adam for his sin? Is it just that we should get the benefits of Christ? Important for theology; **Rom. 5:12ff** – key accompanying passage; how did sin reign from time of Adam until Moses? They did not break direct statements of prohibition like Adam did? Children are still infected by sin; traces back to sin of Adam; the universality of sin pervades all of mankind; universality of death; everyone is messed up and everyone is going to die; Why is everyone messed up? World view of evolutionists – born without reason; have sustained themselves by chance and will die without meaning; want to eventually conquer over death; wake me up from my frozen state then; give no place to the idea of sin = a Christian neurosis – man is not bad; just not as good as he could be; idea of reincarnation introduced to explain how people can be judged and how they can improve;

Embrace the simple explanation of the Bible vs the silliness and foolishness of man's wisdom:

- Sin exists
- God created world perfect
- Sin must have had a starting point in time
- Fall of man in Genesis in Adam – you must hold to a literal Adam; literal view of creation

Modern man cannot explain the predicament of why things are in such a mess and people are so bad; look at newspaper and you will see that sin is alive and well on planet earth; churches today don't want to talk about sin; they talk about guilt as a sickness to be cured; widely held view that humans are basically good and occasionally do bad things; understand theology of Original Sin;

Dr. Joel Beeke: Now is Christ Risen – What Difference Does It Make After Easter?

Is religion just the opium of the people ... just a crutch to help people walk? Is Christianity just one more option in the grocery store of religion to select from? How do we know that Christianity is exclusively true? Is there a factual basis for Christianity?

“But now is Christ risen from the dead”

I. The Defense of Christ's Resurrection

Christianity is true and every other religion is false; foundation is critical; remove the resurrection of Christ and the entire building of our faith collapses in shambles; a cry of validation; an apologetic for Christianity; not a religion based on an idea or a feeling or a teaching or an experience; but based on the fact of the resurrection; Mohammed and Buddha never claimed to rise from the dead; abundant proof – more than 500 saw him – more than half of these still alive to testify;

Frank Morrison illustration – tried to write a book against the resurrection – ended up writing Who Moved the Stone affirming the resurrection

5 denials of the resurrection:

- Disciples came and overcame the soldiers and stole away his body; they weren't even thinking about the resurrection
- Jesus didn't really die; He fell into a swoon; He awoke in the cool of the tomb unwound his own clothes and walked
- Pharisees came and took the body – they hated the disciples for preaching the resurrection; they would have produced the body and refuted them
- Hallucination theory – Mary and others just imagined that they saw him
- Myth theory – **Rudolph Bultmann** – take the miracles out of the Bible; de-mythologize the NT

II. The Comfort of Christ's Resurrection

“But” – instead of being discouraged, we are comforted by the resurrection;

5 wonderful comforts from the fact of Christ's resurrection – theme of Assurance –

1) Assurance of our justification in Christ – **Rom. 4:24-25**

2) Assurance that our trials in this life are nearly over – Christ is on his way to empty the graves; hang on; persevere

3) Assurance of His power to achieve our blessed resurrection; He is the pledge, the earnest, the power that guarantees our resurrection

4) Assurance that all things will be set right on the day of resurrection – our Judge is also our Advocate; all our discouraging fears and self condemnations will be put behind us; we will leave our sin clothes behind in the grave; Why do the ungodly prosper?? It seems that sin goes on

unpunished and good goes unrewarded; it seems that the godly suffer more in this life than the ungodly; no more in that day; world's philosophy = might is right

5) Assurance that we will enter the land of perfection to be with our Saviour and Lord forever.

III. The Warning of Christ's Resurrection

Jesus is alive and in control and coming again; how will we stand before Him?

Door of mercy is still ajar, but soon it will be closed.

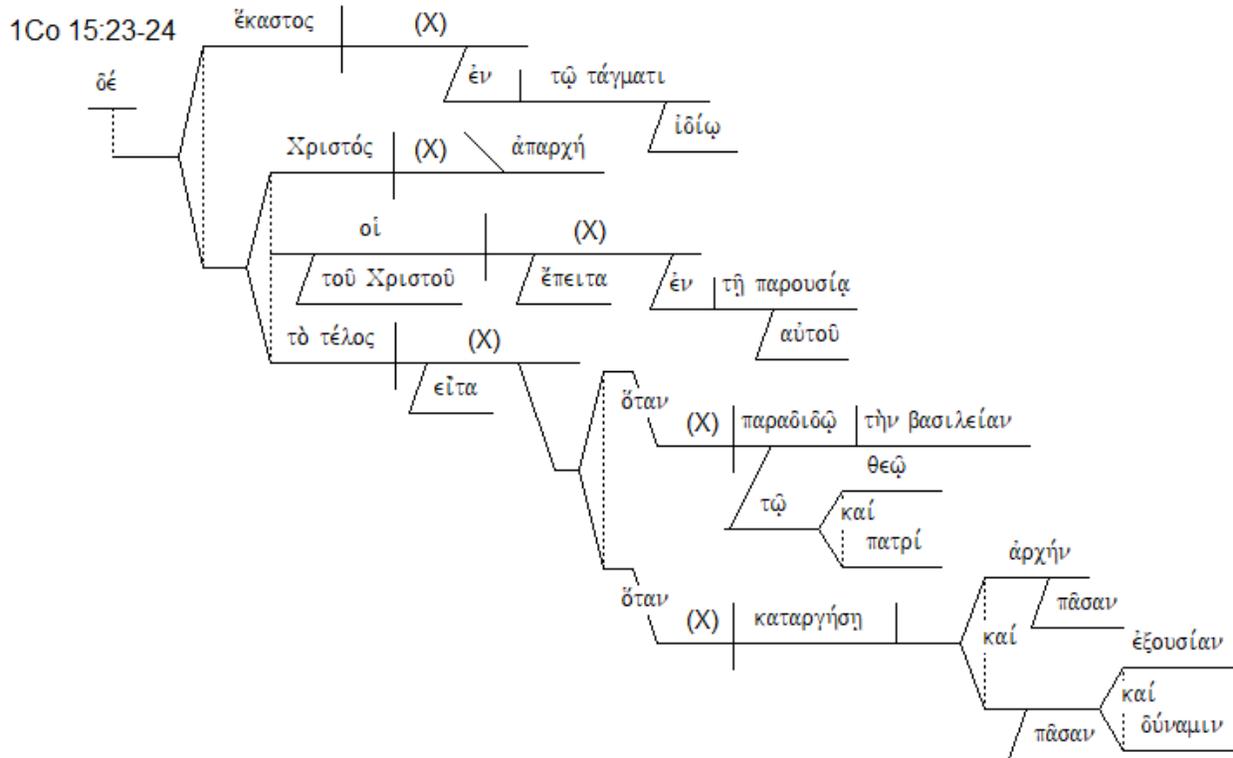
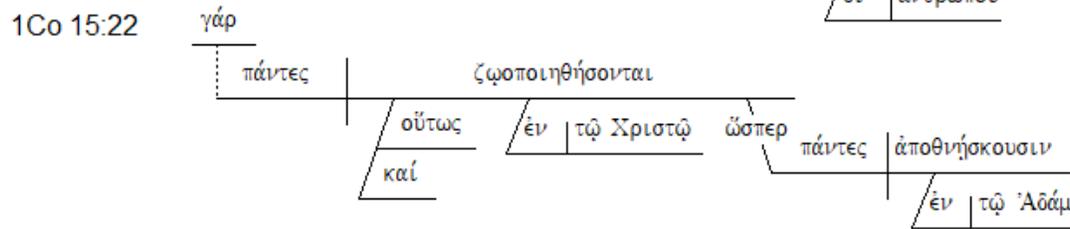
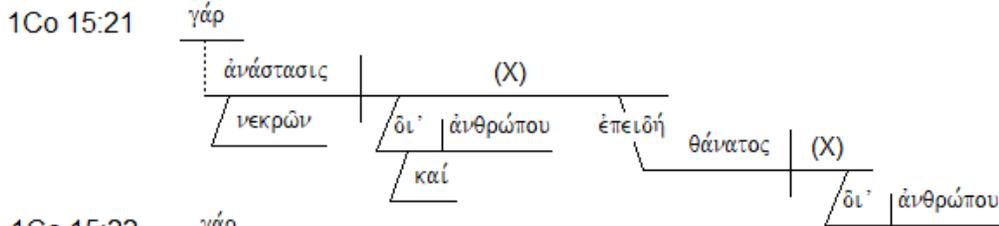
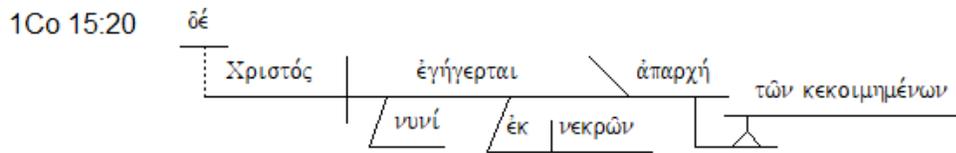
Name of Jesus Christ is the only refuge for sinners.

Gil Rugh: The Millennial Kingdom – Rev. 20:7-9; 1 Cor. 15

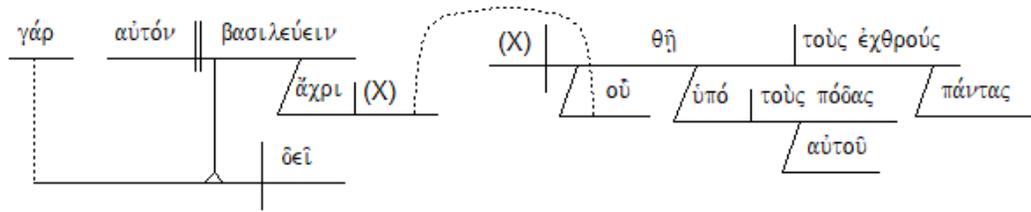
Luke 1:32-33; 1:67-79 – at his first coming Jesus did not destroy all of the enemies of Israel and save the nation and enthrone Him on the throne of David; but the plan has not changed; **Matt. 24:29-31** coming with power and great glory; **Acts 1:3-7** still anticipating the coming kingdom; nothing has changed in their understanding of a physical kingdom; they just want clarification as to the timeframe; additional revelation clarifies and expands but does not change or alter earlier revelation; You don't need to know the timeframe; you need to be about my work in the power of the Spirit; **Rev. 19** – we have come through the church age and still no kingdom; **Daniel 9** says we still have 7 years left in God's prophetic program with Israel; Christ returns to earth; armies of earth destroyed; judging of living Jews and Gentiles; Satan bound in **Chap. 20** and placed in abyss for period of 1000 years; six references to literal 1000 year period; part of the eternal kingdom; no satanic or demonic influence in world and Christ reigning from Israel; church will be enthroned having authority with Christ over angels and men in the kingdom; first resurrection includes all believers;

Overall view from **1 Cor. 15** – His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection; He is the first fruits; **order** is given here; those who are Christ's at His coming – 2 stages of His coming: first stage he comes in the air for the church – the catching away of the church; Christ does not come to earth on that occasion; calls us to meet Him; OT saints have to be resurrected as well as tribulation saints; **Dan.12:1** – resurrected to life at the beginning of the millennial kingdom; to death at the end of the 1000 year period; **Jude 14** prophesied future events in the past tense; all of these resurrections of believers comprise together the first resurrection; its foundation is in the resurrection of Christ; first resurrection speaks to the quality of this resurrection; the only other resurrection is to condemnation; then comes "*the end*" – Christ comes and reigns on the earth for 1000 years until He puts all of His enemies down and abolishes death; moves into the eternal phase of the kingdom; if you are not part of the first resurrection you come under condemnation of the second death.

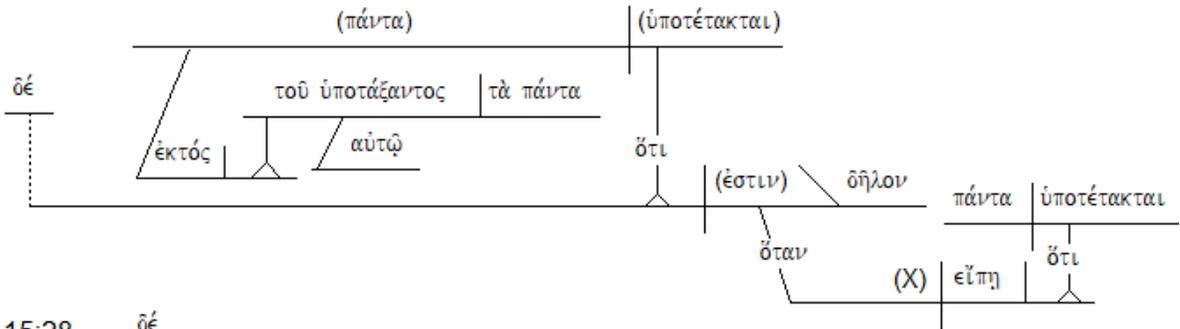
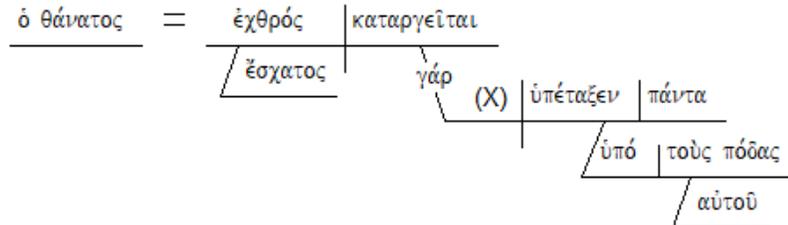
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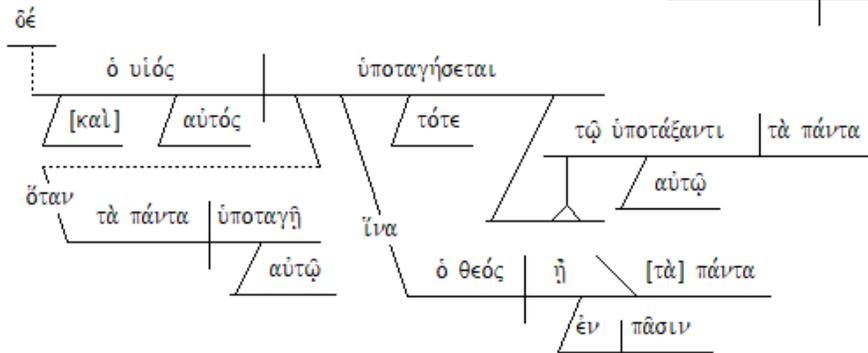
1Co 15:25



1Co 15:26-27



1Co 15:28



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

TITLE: *DOCTRINE MATTERS -- NO RESURRECTION . . . NO CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION*

BIG IDEA:

DENIAL OF THE RESURRECTION WOULD KILL ALL MOTIVATION FOR CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, SPIRITUAL SERVICE AND HOLY LIVING

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Before we look specifically at the text, let me remind you that it is axiomatic...that is, it is a given, it is an obvious truth, that unbelievers and hypocrites do not become martyrs. People do not die for something they hold lightly. They do not die for something about which they have doubt. They do not die for things they do not believe are worthy of life and death. People give their lives only for causes that they are wholeheartedly committed to. And one of those great realities is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who said, "*Because I live, ye, too, shall live also.*" And millions of Christians have given their lives in living and given their lives in dying with the hope of that resurrection truth.

Gordon Fee: Probably because most people have had such a difficult time knowing what to do with the question with which this paragraph began (v. 29), there has been a strange silence in the church with regard to this paragraph. Yet it stands as one of the more significant texts pointing to a **genuine relationship between what one believes about the future and how one behaves in the present** (cf. 2 Pet. 2–3). This is not to say that the future is the only motivation for correct behavior, but it is to plead that it is a proper one because it ultimately has to do with the nature and character of God. Those who have put their trust in Christ should be living in this world as people whose confidence in the final vindication of Christ through our own resurrection determines the present. On this matter see also on an earlier passage (7:29–31). It is a matter of sober historical record that slippage at this key point of Christian theology is very often accompanied by a relaxed attitude toward the Christian ethic. It is no wonder that the world fails so often to “hear” our gospel, which must look at times like anything but the good news it really is—that **Christ delivers people from the bondage of sin** and guarantees their future with him in a life where neither sin nor death will have a foothold.

David Garland: Paul’s argument moves from the third person: what those do who are baptized on behalf of the dead (15:29); to the first person: his own experiences of suffering as an apostle (15:30–32); and culminates in second person plural imperatives for the Corinthians to come to their senses and stop sinning (15:33–34). For Paul, Christian belief in the resurrection clearly impinges on ethical living (cf. 6:12–14), and he draws a close connection between moral decadence -- one of the dangers facing the church -- and the failure to believe in the resurrection. If there were no resurrection of the dead, then hedonistic self-indulgence and overindulgence (cf. 11:21) would be

legitimate options because the ethical prohibitions no longer would have their foundation in a legitimate faith. The resurrection of the dead is true, which imposes on believers the need for moral rectitude in this life.

Daniel Akin: Paul now brings the Corinthians back to the matter of daily life and shows how the reality of their coming resurrection should impact how they live. Paul leaves the realm of the theological and enters the realm of the experiential.

Richard Hays: In **verses 29-34**, however, Paul gives some specific examples of practices that would make no sense in a resurrectionless world (**vv. 29-32a**) and concludes with a word of warning suggesting that the Corinthians' abandonment of belief in the resurrection has led the community into sin (**vv. 32b-34**).

The specific examples are given in the form of rhetorical questions that allude briefly to matters well known to his original readers but almost completely opaque to us. Rather than getting bogged down in speculative attempts to explain the details of these obscure references, the preacher working with this text should supply some analogous contemporary examples of activities in the life of our congregations that make no sense if the dead are not to be raised.

Mark Taylor: **Verses 29-34** divide into three units.

1. First, Paul calls into question the practice of those being baptized for the dead by posing two rhetorical questions (**15:29**): "*What will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?*"
2. Second, using himself as a representative example of all apostles, Paul challenges the wisdom of the life of the apostles if there is no resurrection (**15:30-32**): "*If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'*" (**15:32b**).
3. Third, Paul's probing questions lead to three exhortations: do not be deceived, become sober-minded, and do not sin (**15:33-34**). Paul underscores the urgency of the situation and scolds the Corinthians because "*there are some who are ignorant of God.*"

Paul Gardner: Practical Consequences of Denying the Resurrection (15:29-34)

- a. There Is No Point in the Practice of Baptism for the Dead (**15:29**)
- b. There is No Point in Suffering for the Gospel (**15:30-32b**)
- c. The Conduct of Christian Life Matters (**15:32c-33**)
- d. Application: Do Not Go on Sinning (**15:34**)

I. (:29) FUTILITY OF SALVATION -- DENIAL OF THE RESURRECTION WOULD KILL ALL MOTIVATION FOR CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Why take the risk of identifying with Jesus Christ in Christian Baptism?

"Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?

If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"

On the surface the language seems to speak of some type of mysterious proxy baptism – perhaps for believers who had died before they had an opportunity to be baptized?? Very difficult to make sense of this verse. MacArthur thinks it means baptized with a view to being reunited with those believers who had already died and gone home to be with the Lord.

Gordon Fee: The normal reading of what Paul wrote is that some Corinthians were being baptized, apparently **vicariously**, in behalf of some people who have already died. It would be fair to add that this reading is such a plain understanding of the Greek text that no one would ever have imagined the various alternatives were it not for the difficulties involved, both historical and theological. The problem is twofold:

(1) There is no historical or biblical precedent for such baptism. The NT is otherwise completely silent about it; there is no known practice in any of the other churches nor in any orthodox Christian community in the centuries that immediately follow; nor are there parallels or precedents in pagan religion. This is a genuinely idiosyncratic historical phenomenon. For that reason, if in fact some were actually practicing such a baptism, we are left quite in the dark on all the essential questions:

- (a) Who was being baptized?
- (b) For whom?
- (c) Why were they doing it? And
- (d) What effects did they think it had for those for whom it was being done? It is quite impossible to give a definitive answer to any of these.

(2) The second problem is theological and has to do with how Paul can appeal, without apparent disapproval, to a practice that stands in such contradiction to his own understanding both of justification by grace through faith, which always implies response on the part of the believer, and of baptism as personal response to grace received. This smacks of a “magical” view of sacramentalism of the worst kind, where a religious rite, performed for someone else, can have saving efficacy. That lies quite outside the entire NT view of things.

John MacArthur: A reasonable view seems to be that those who are baptized refers to living believers who give outward testimony to their faith in baptism by water because they were first drawn to Christ by the exemplary lives, faithful influence, and witness of believers who had subsequently died. Paul’s point is that if there is no resurrection and no life after death, then why are people coming to Christ to follow the hope of those who have died?

Charles Spurgeon: “For as soon as anyone was baptized, the Romans would be looking after him. To drag him away to death. Thus they were baptized as if they were being washed for their burial & dedicating themselves to the grave”

Robert Grosheide: The apostle could hardly derive an argument for the resurrection of the body from a practice of which he did not approve. The rendering “*for the benefit of the dead*” does not appear tenable.

Robert Gundry: What reason for baptism there can possibly be if the baptizees, already in death’s grip as they are, won’t be raised.

David Garland: Another view explains the term “*dead*” (οἱ νεκροί, *hoi nekroi*) as a metaphor for **the condition of believers who receive baptism**. The recipients are, in effect, dead bodies when they are baptized (Oliver 1937; K. Thompson 1964; R. Martin 1984: 120–21; Talbert 1987: 99). O’Neill (1979–80) understands “*on behalf of the dead*” to refer not to some third party but to the subject, “*those who are being baptized,*” and paraphrases it “**Otherwise what do those hope to achieve who are baptized for their dying bodies? If the completely dead are not raised, why then are they baptized for themselves as corpses?**” This view has several advantages.

First, it was the unanimous view of the Greek fathers, who argue that the dead are the bodies “because of which we are baptized” (Staab 1963). Chrysostom (Hom. 1 Cor. 40.2) contends that the wording recalls a baptismal confession.

Second, it explains the use of the third person. Paul uses the third person because he is referring grammatically to those who are being baptized.

Third, it is compatible with Pauline theology. Paul interprets baptism as a symbol of death and resurrection, and “the dead” either characterizes the individual’s prebaptismal state or refers to the individual’s soon-to-be dead body (cf. **Rom. 6:3–14; Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13**). Paul’s specific statement in **Rom. 8:10** that “*the body is dead because of sin*” gives further credibility to this interpretation. If this view is correct, then he uses a theological shorthand, familiar to his readers, to refer to Christian baptism.

Fourth, it fits the context. If, as I argue, the problem is that the Corinthians assumed the inherent immortality of the soul or some kind of assumption into glory at death (**1 Cor. 15:12, 36**), then the issue addressed here is “death as a presupposition of resurrection” (R. Martin 1984: 121). Baptism connotes sharing Christ’s death to share his resurrection (cf. **Rom. 6:3–14**, which uses the image of dying and rising in baptism differently to convey **the necessity of ethical living**).

Mark Taylor: Some propose the following translation: “*Now, if there is no resurrection, what will be accomplished by those who get baptized because of what they have heard about how our dead will be raised? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people undergoing baptism on account of them?*”

Anthony Thiselton: Common to all explanations remains the foundational axiom that the act of baptism is above all identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (**Rom. 6:3–11**). Baptism as such without the dimension of the resurrection would mean nothing.

II. (:30-32A) FUTILITY OF SERVICE -- DENIAL OF THE RESURRECTION WOULD KILL ALL MOTIVATION FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE

Why put yourself in danger by zealously serving Jesus Christ?

A. Serving the Lord Can be Dangerous

“Why are we also in danger every hour?”

B. Serving the Lord Involves Taking Up One’s Cross Daily

“I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”

Paul Gardner: The dying to which Paul appeals is not to be taken metaphorically, though undoubtedly Paul sees his suffering as following in the footsteps of Jesus (**2 Cor 4:9–11**). The word “die” (ἀποθνῆσκω) has been used already in this epistle and refers to **real death**, whether Christ’s death on the cross (**8:11**) or his own death (**9:15**). Paul’s concern is that they must know he faces physical death at any time and that without hope of the resurrection his life and ministry would be meaningless. Lest any should doubt that he is prepared to give his life for the gospel of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, he takes an example from his own life.

Anthony Thiselton: He accepts a ministry and lifestyle that brings him regularly to the brink of death in the knowledge that God’s resurrection power is also at work, promising in due time the climactic event of resurrection at the last day. In pastoral terms this includes (1) facing death with robust courage; (2) living life in identification with Christ and Christ’s work; and (3) accepting vulnerability and fragility in expectation of God’s power of resurrection.

C. Serving the Lord Requires Spiritual Motivation

“If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?”

There is no historical record of this – could be some type of actual physical ordeal (maybe being thrown into some type of coliseum contest) or could be speaking of the spiritual forces at work behind the opposition that Paul faced.

John MacArthur: I mean if there's no resurrection, why in the world am I doing this? Why am I putting my life on the line? Jeopardy means danger. Why am I living in constant danger? Why am I living on the edge of death all the time? Why am I being beaten with rods? Why am I being beaten with whips? Why am I going through shipwrecks? Why am I being thrown in prison? Why am I being put in stocks? Why am I putting my life on the line, as it were, my neck on the chopping block? Why am I putting my life in jeopardy every hour if this is all there is? If it ends right here? If there's nothing else, what am I serving for? Why am I trying to win you to a king that is dead? Why am I trying to populate a kingdom that doesn't exist? If there's no resurrection. It makes a sham out of all Christian service.

Paul Gardner: The **benefit** or **profit** Paul is looking for is not about personal gain. His concern is to see the purposes of God fulfilled in bringing the gospel to all nations. The resurrection is the pinnacle of this as people from the whole world are raised from the dead to receive their inheritance in Christ and to experience the full gracious rule of the sovereign God and Father. Such “*gain*” (ὄφελος) or “profit” entirely disappears if there is no resurrection, providing yet more proof of the truth of what Paul has been arguing throughout this passage.

III. (32B-34) FUTILITY OF SANCTIFICATION -- DENIAL OF THE RESURRECTION WOULD KILL ALL MOTIVATION FOR HOLY LIVING

Why forego the pleasures of this world by refraining from worldly lasciviousness?

A. Apart from the Resurrection, Hedonistic World View Makes Sense

“If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Ray Stedman: That was the philosophy of **Epicureanism** in that day, and it is widespread today. “Live it up. Get it all now. Don't bother with giving yourself and wasting your time on doing things for God. Enjoy yourself. Spend all your free time having fun and pleasure.”

David Garland: Resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means a hopeless end—and **hopelessness breeds dissipation**. **Barrett** (1968: 362) comments, “Take away the resurrection and moral standards collapse.” A cynical fatalism toward life encourages people to try “to go for the gusto,” to have it all now, to amuse themselves endlessly. If life ends at death, why not live it up? Paul quotes **Isa. 22:13** (cf. **56:12; Wis. 2:6–9**), “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,*” but the sentiment was widespread (**Luke 12:19–20**). **Herodotus** (Historiae [Histories] 2.78.1) reports, “After rich men’s repasts, a man carries around an image in a coffin, painted and carved in exact imitation of a corpse two or four feet long. This he shows to each of the company, saying ‘While you drink and enjoy, look on this; for to this state you must come when you die.’” If the Christian hope is taken away, not only will any motive for a person to endure suffering for Christ be crushed, but also any moral standards will be crumpled (**Barrett** 1968: 366–67).

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 32b** points out how self-indulgence is the consistent outgrowth of a material philosophy that denies the resurrection life. The Epicureans of old did not usually interpret their slogan as a call to sheer gluttony and drunkenness. Rather they sought the “good life,” cultivating the arts of fine dining, music and theater, and treasured friendships. Yet ultimately all of this was self-centered, since they did not look to continuing any pleasures beyond the grave. Self-interest may even lead to humanitarian and altruistic concerns, but ultimately it produces nothing permanently satisfying if this life is all that exists.

B. Theology Does Affect Morality

“Do not be deceived: Bad company [or teaching] corrupts good morals.”

John MacArthur: Thirdly, sanctification, and this is closely related. Verse 33, "Don't be deceived...he says...don't make a mistake. Don't miss this one. 'Evil'...and the word is *homalea*, from which we get homiletics, and the word homiletic or *homalea* basically means association. Homiletics is...is a word used to describe how to teach or preach or to organize something into a meaningful, logical flow. And what he is saying here is, "Evil systems or evil association." I think it could mean company, as it's often translated, talking about people. But I don't think that's the intent here. I think the word that we use to speak of sermons and lessons being homiletic has to do with a body of teaching. And what he's saying here is, "Bad teaching corrupts good morals." And what he means by that is, if you don't have a right theology about the resurrection, it's gonna impact your morality. You understand that? If you don't believe right, you won't behave right. If you have a doctrine or a teaching that denies resurrection, that it's gonna affect your living, because if there's no eternal accountability, you're liable to sink to the lowest level...

Mark Taylor: Paul concludes this unit with three imperatives followed by an explanation. The commands are (1) do not be misled, (2) come back to your senses as you ought, and (3) stop sinning. The reason given is, "For there are some who are ignorant of God." This, according to Paul, is a shameful matter.

Paul Gardner: Paul is concerned with the way certain people are living, and there is a real danger that mixing with the wrong crowd leads to the ruin of good (godly) habits. We have seen how the apostle has been disturbed throughout the epistle by the behavior of some of the Corinthians who, we have suggested, claim to have gifts of the Spirit, especially gifts of wisdom and knowledge. They claim to be "spiritual," yet their behavior is far from godly. If such people also fraternize with or even support those who deny the resurrection (because they have already "arrived" spiritually), then it is easily understandable that they would find themselves morally corrupted.

C. Sanctification is Worth Pursuing – Purge Out Bad Doctrine

*"Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning;
for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."*

David Prior: In Paul's assertion that *some* [of you] *have no knowledge of God* (34) we can detect another veiled attack on the so-called **knowledge** of the Corinthians (cf. 8:1). Certain Christians, who were claiming a special knowledge of God, were losing control of themselves and sliding back into paganism. They needed Paul's blunt command: 'Stop sinning!' Paul saw this sinfulness as the result of failing to think soberly (Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more). Wrong thinking, about the resurrection or any other fundamental articles of faith, inevitably leads to wrong behaviour. Paul was not beyond shocking Christians into a sense of shame about the way they were behaving (34): they had allowed themselves to be led astray and to absorb error.

Paul Gardner: Life today is to be lived in obedience to Christ, all the while anticipating the day when full obedience is realized and the Christian's own perfection is

established. The race is worth running, but only if the end is Christ and sharing in his resurrection and his glory. Otherwise, Christians are left to the world that “*is passing away*” (7:29–31). Sadly, some at Corinth, as so often in the church today, seem to be sleepwalking into ruin as they evidence “*no knowledge of God*” (15:34). With no anticipation of the resurrection, they mix too readily with those who, likewise, have no great hope for the future. Most seriously they have dramatically underestimated the power of God to raise the dead.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you answer those who claim that water baptism is essential for salvation? How would you counsel those who place too little emphasis on the importance of baptism?
- 2) If we emphasize the teaching of sound doctrine, are we in danger of not being well-balanced in terms of promoting practical Christian living?
- 3) How are churches today being *deceived* about thinking that it is better to tolerate false doctrine in the hopes of promoting Christian love and unity?
- 4) What was Paul pointing out as so “*shameful*” about the church of Corinth here?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: [Note: I came to my outline before reading this commentary note from Dr. MacArthur – that is how expository preaching should work! It should be no surprise that we arrive at the same destination when we are examining the same text!] And because He is risen, we now come to verse 29 to 34, our text. Because He is risen, there is motive for three things. Because He is risen, there is motive for **salvation**. There is motive for **service**, and there is motive for **sanctification**. And here are the practical implications of the resurrection. They come right down to practical aspects. The motive for salvation, the motive for service, the motive for sanctification in our lives is built on the resurrection.

Ray Stedman: The Mormon church bases a major part of their religious activity on this one verse. Unless you are a "good" Mormon you are not permitted to enter one of their temples. People ask, what goes on in them? Well, one of the things is that they are being baptized on behalf of the dead. The Mormons believe that you can go back through history and be baptized for all your ancestors. That is why they put great reliance upon genealogical tables and spend a lot of time tracing their ancestry, because they believe they can be baptized on their behalf and thus save them. I met a woman once who said that she had saved more people than Jesus Christ because she had been

baptized for so many thousands of people! Some Mormons pick out the well-known figures of history and are baptized for Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, etc., all based on this one verse; there is no other reference in the Bible to being baptized on behalf of the dead.

Gil Rugh: Doctrinal Error Corrupts Morality

Some confusion in the church at Corinth about the bodily resurrection of believers; some have infiltrated the church and promoting a teaching that there will be no bodily resurrection for the believer. **Vv. 20-28** the eschatological plan of God for future events that will culminate in the kingdom to be established on this earth; **vv.29ff** -- the consequences of denying the resurrection – has dramatic ramifications for the way we live our lives, for our moral conduct; you can't have too much doctrine because it impacts how you live.

Vs. 29 – **What it cannot mean** (based on comparison to other scriptures)

Not you accomplishing by proxy the salvation of someone who has died

Rom. 4 -- salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone;

You did not have to be circumcised to receive this blessing of righteousness;

There is only one God and one way of salvation

What could it mean – over time, some believers have died and some new believers have come up and been baptized and taken the place of those who have died; if there is no resurrection, what is the point in this process of making new disciples?

vv. 30-32 -- Paul talks about his own personal experience of danger in the ministry – not just every day, but every hour; beaten times without number; paid a great price for his testimony; surrendered his body to tremendous suffering; take up your cross = life of scorn, suffering, rejection; I face the possibility of death every day; open door does not mean no adversaries; **2 Cor. 1:8** – the worse they can do is kill me; hope of the resurrection fortifies him

vv. 33-34 -- the bad company in the church at Corinth = those teaching bad doctrine about the resurrection; the church is in sin because it is not dealing with the false doctrine in their midst; sober up; don't be deceived; don't tolerate bad doctrine; the church is the pillar and support of the truth; our doctrine shapes our conduct

David Silversides: Doctrine, Hope and Godliness

There is an inevitable connection between right doctrine, Christian hope and the practice of godliness. There can be no godliness if the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the believers is denied.

3 Aspects:

1) Baptism is not a Blunder because there is a bodily resurrection of the dead (:29) The practice of vicarious baptism was practiced later on by a minority that followed heretics; no record of it until the second century; probably derived from a misunderstanding of this verse; Unlikely that the apostle would refer to such a practice and not condemn it in this letter.

Correct view: those who are baptized take the place on earth of those who have left the earth and passed on into glory; cycle of replacement over time; stock of church members constantly being replenished on earth; **Ps. 110:3** – out of the womb of every morning there is the birth of new recruits; **Ps. 44:22** – suffering for the sake of truth – “*we are killed all the day long*” – speaking of church as one body; martyr application; Why join the ranks of those who have identified with Christ and gone on to death (some as martyrs) if there is nothing beyond the grave? Resurrection of soul only is not an option for the Apostle Paul.

2) Suffering as a Christian is not Futile (:30-32)

Why jeopardize his body in the pursuit of serving Christ if there is no glorious future for the people of God? I would be wasting my time. All their joy is misplaced if no resurrection. Your joy and my joy would be nonsense. I suffer the danger of death daily. He prepared for death daily. The hostility was so great – “fought with wild beasts” = probably a figurative expression for these hostile forces. **2 Cor 1: 8**; Why bear the reproach of Christian baptism and the sufferings of serving Christ; **Is. 22:13**;

3) Practical Godliness is not Irrelevant (:33-34)

Quotation from Greek poet; applied to the people of God; bad company corrupts good habits; **2 Tim. 2:17** – listening too much to heathen philosophers; body is not just a prison for the soul; Wake up out of a drunken stupor of doctrinal indifference; Have you not caught on? See where this false doctrine leads = to despair and ungodliness; Some people in the church have no knowledge of God; Doctrine matters; truth rightly used will do us good; this is an anti-doctrinal age; Sanctify them in Thy truth – **John 17**

Thomas Leake: How Our Future Resurrection Motivates Believers Now

Introduction: What motivates you in your Christian life?

You must look to something that is permanent and off in the future; we have precious and magnificent promises that should motivate us;

Today look at the promise: “*though you will die, yet you will live*”

This future resurrection body will never fail you or disappoint you; not a flashy kind of motivation; but a more compelling kind of motivation than the world pursues; **1 John 2:15-17** – the world is passing away

3 Motivations that the Resurrection of the Body Provides:

I. Motivation to Christian Baptism

(:29) difficult verse; over 30 different interpretations with multiple variations; most of the Bible is easy to understand;

Sample of some views:

- 1) most common interpretation: some type of vicarious water baptism to try to bring some blessing or benefit to those who have already died; unlikely because it goes against Paul’s theology; unlikely he would suggest this without condemning this wrong view
- 2) young converts filling in the church as the old ones died and passed along; strange idea
- 3) baptized in the name of a deceased saint – that came along later in church history

- 4) immersed in such severe persecution in a non-water sense with reference to the dead
- 5) metaphorical – means the resurrection??
- 6) people are saved and baptized because of those who have gone ahead and preached and evangelized them – Dr. MacArthur’s view
- 7) the dead refers only to the bodies of those who have been baptized – they come up out of the water to symbolize the new resurrection life they possess; they symbol of baptism reenacts what has happened spiritually – Leake prefers this view; commonly held in early church; **Rom. 6:3-7; 8:10**

Point: Practice of baptism indicates belief in bodily resurrection; the water itself does nothing; just a symbol

Baptism is commanded by Christ; be motivated to Christian baptism

II. Motivation to Facing Danger

Why suffer if there is no reward; you have to believe in the reward in order to suffer
Heb. 12:1-3 Christ endured dying; you have to look through this life unto the next life in order to live this Christian life; look through the pain to the glory;
“I die daily” – I put my life on the line constantly; today could be the very last day I have in the world and that is OK; the sacrifices are worth it for Paul; my life cannot be precious to me; **2 Cor. 4:7**

“Paul fought with wild beasts” – literal or figurative?? *“many adversaries”* – **Acts 19:23ff**; we have been called to greater and greater sacrifice as we get older in Christ; not talking about convenient service that fits our schedule

III. Motivation to Living Holy

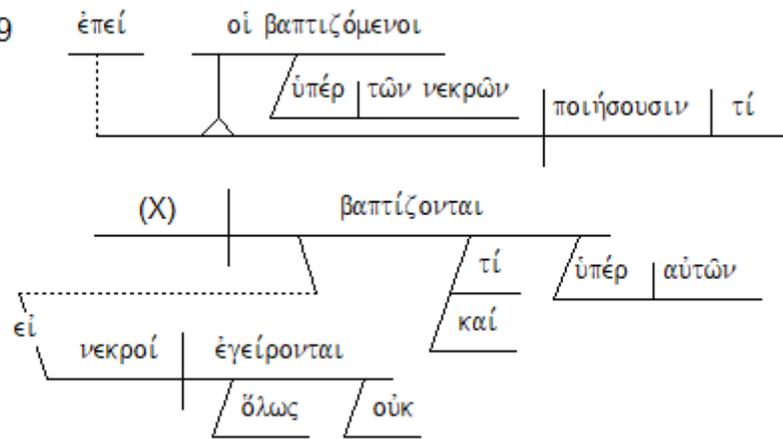
If it all ends tomorrow, then life is just a party to be enjoyed now; that type of thinking is utter foolishness because there is going to be a resurrection; God gave you your life as a stewardship; don’t waste your life

1 Cor. 10:31 = a better philosophy of life

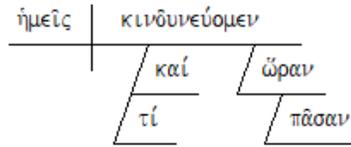
Avoid those who deny the bodily resurrection – wrong thinking will lead to immorality
 Need to be a companion of all those who fear the Lord

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

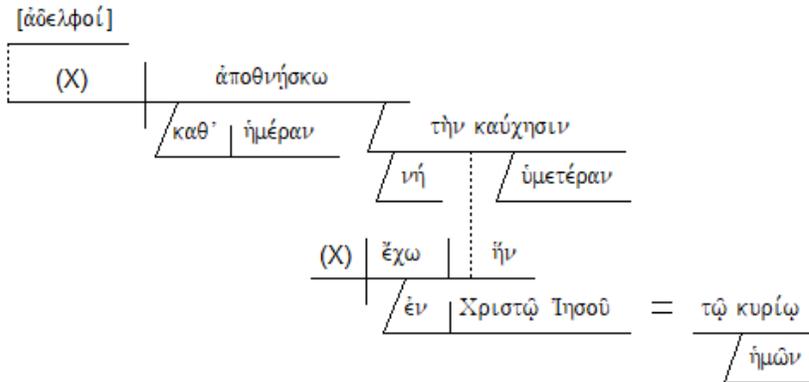
1Co 15:29



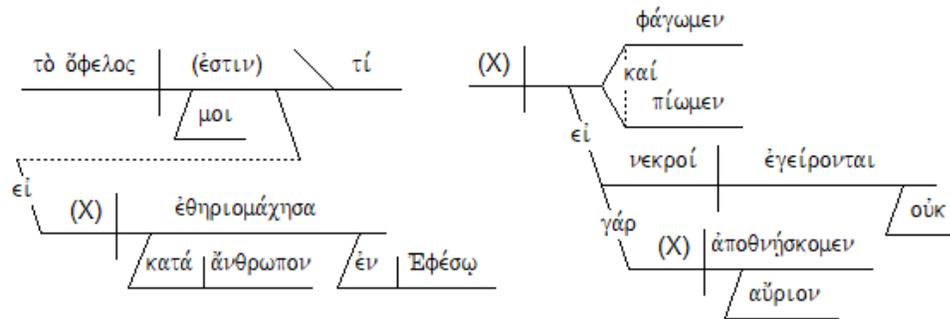
1Co 15:30



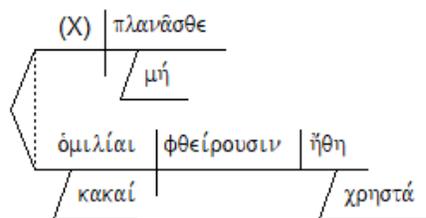
1Co 15:31



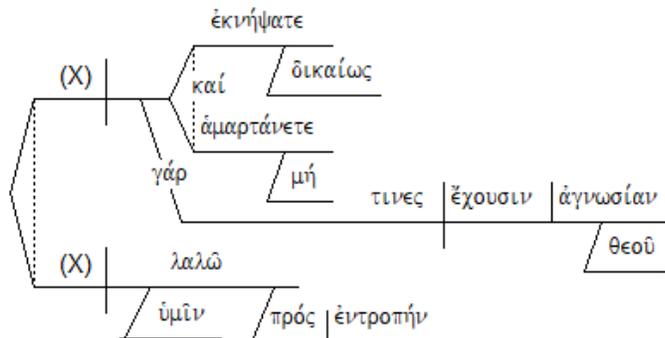
1Co 15:32



1Co 15:33



1Co 15:34



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

TITLE: LINK BETWEEN OUR MORTAL BODY AND OUR TRANSFORMED RESURRECTION BODY

BIG IDEA:
UNDERSTANDING OUR FUTURE RESURRECTION BODY --
TWO AREAS OF ANALOGY AND TWO AREAS OF CONTRAST

INTRODUCTION:

Anthony Thiselton: This section resumes a second *refutatio*, which supplements the *refutatio* of vv. 12-19. In the first *refutatio* Paul showed the unacceptable consequences of denying the very notion of resurrection and thereby also denying the resurrection of Christ. Here he exposes claims that the future resurrection of the “body” is unintelligible and unbelievable as indefensible and untenable.

Mark Taylor: In 15:35 the argument shifts from the fact of the resurrection to the nature of the resurrection body. Although bodily resurrection has been the issue all along, the term “*body*” appears for the first time in this chapter and becomes the dominant focus of 15:35–49. The unit opens with two questions in the style of the Greek diatribe, a method of argumentation that employs a hypothetical opponent in order to address a real scenario: But someone may ask, “*How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?*” Paul answers the questions by way of the Genesis creation narrative on the analogy of the seed (15:36–38) and the different kinds of earthly and heavenly bodies (15:39–44a), which prepares the way for another use of the Adam/Christ typology (cf. 15:22) that sets up the contrast between the natural body and the spiritual body (15:44b–49). The future resurrection body of believers is likened to the resurrection body of Jesus, the second man from heaven (15:49). The analogies draw from ordinary experience and do not attempt to prove bodily resurrection but rather offer a way to understand how bodily resurrection is possible. Regarding the allusion to the Genesis account in this unit, Ciampa and Rosner observe that in the study of the beginning of creation we find keys to eschatology. “It is understood that in many ways the last things will be like the first things, only better.”

Gordon Fee: This section, therefore, is absolutely crucial to the argument of this entire passage (from 15:1), since it responds to the real issue that led to their denial of the resurrection. At the same time, it is crucial to the entire letter. The key issue has to do with being *pneumatikos* (“*people of the Spirit*”). The Corinthians were apparently convinced that, by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they had already entered into the spiritual, “heavenly” existence that is to be. Only the body, to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality. Thus they have tended to deny the body in the present, and have no use for it in the future. Not so, says Paul. As with Christ, so with us. **This corruptible must put on incorruption**; only then does the End come. At stake is the biblical doctrine of creation. According to Scripture, God created the material order and pronounced it good. But in the fall it also came under the curse. In Paul’s view, therefore, **the material order must also experience the effects of redemption in Christ**, and that involves the physical body as well. Since in its present expression it is under the curse, it must be transformed; and that happens at the Eschaton, so that beginning and end meet in Christ Jesus. . .

In our present earthly existence the body simply is, neither to be admired (or lavishly adorned) nor denigrated (as less than truly “spiritual”). Since it serves as the present vehicle of our life on this planet, one should properly care for it as the gift that it is; but “care” should not also lead to adoration, just as it should not lead to contempt.

Paul Gardner: Main Idea: At the resurrection, the natural body in the image of Adam will give way to a spiritual body in the image of Christ. That body is appropriate for the eternal realm of existence.

The Resurrection Body: Continuity and Discontinuity (15:35–49)

1. Two Questions about the Resurrection Body (15:35)
2. The Sowing of a Seed Illustrates the Answer to the Questions (15:36–44)
 - a. The Seed Dies in Becoming a Plant (15:36–37)
 - b. God Determines the Body Each Seed Will Become (15:38)
 - c. Different Bodies Exist for Different Settings (15:39–41)
 - d. Application: A Natural Body That Dies Is Raised a Spiritual Body (15:42–44)
3. Adam and Christ Compared (15:45–49)
 - a. Adam Was from This Earth, Christ Is from Heaven (15:45–47)
 - b. Christians, Presently in Adam’s Image, Will Bear Christ’s Image When Raised (15:48–49)

Daniel Akin: No Body Like This Body

Main Idea: Like the Savior, every saint will be physically raised in a supernatural body impervious to sin and death forever.

- I. Paul Receives a Puzzled Interrogation concerning the Resurrection (15:35).
- II. Paul Gives Practical Illustrations of the Resurrection (15:36-41).
 - A. The agricultural world (15:36-38)
 - B. The animal world (15:39)
 - C. The astronomical world (15:40-41)
- III. Paul Provides Pertinent Information about the Resurrection (15:42-49).
 - A. The promise of the transformation (15:42-46)
 - B. The perfection of the transformation (15:47-49)

David Garland: The argument begins with the question of an objector. Paul delineates various principles before presenting the solution that explains how the resurrection of the dead is possible:

1. A skeptical question setting up the issue of how bodily resurrection is possible (15:35)
2. The principle of change from the example of botanical processes (15:36–38)
3. The principle of different types of bodies and glories from the example of terrestrial bodies and celestial glories (15:39–41)
4. The radical difference between the risen body and its earthly counterpart (15:42–44a)
5. The explanation of how the polarity between the earthly and heavenly will be bridged through Christ (15:44b–49)

(:35-36A) TWO MOCKING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RESURRECTION BODY

A. #1 – How is the Resurrection of the Body Even Possible?

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised?’”

Daniel Akin: Paul shifts from dealing with the necessity of the resurrection body (that is, since Jesus was raised from the dead one should not doubt that we will be raised from the dead) to the nature of the resurrection body. He is dealing with two specific questions: “How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have?” Some people in the church were questioning not just the **possibility** but the **pattern of the resurrection**.

B. #2 – What will the Resurrection Body Look Like?

“And with what kind of body do they come?”

C. Mockers Labeled as Fools

“You fools!”

Richard Hays: This word of stern rebuke introduces a section in which Paul turns the tables on the Corinthians, suggesting that they, not he, are the ones guilty of crude literalism. Paul insists that the concept of “*resurrection of the dead*” should not be naively understood to refer to the resuscitation of corpses; rather, the concept of resurrection necessarily entails transformation into a new and glorious state.

Ray Stedman: For twenty centuries now the skeptics of all ages have asked these same questions. Of course, they amplify them by imposing various obstacles they see. They say, for instance, “We can understand, perhaps, that a body that has been carefully embalmed and placed in a grave might possibly be brought back to life, but what about those that have been destroyed? What about all the people that have been cremated?” . . .

These questions always arise when unbelief faces this question of the resurrection of the dead. “How can it be?” That is what some of these Corinthians were asking. The clear implication was, “It cannot be; it is impossible.” The Greeks, of course, were teaching that it was a good thing, an advantage, to lose the body. The body was a prison-house, they taught, where we are limited and restricted. The Oriental religions, on the other hand, were teaching that many bodies were needed in a process of salvation, that you return to earth many times. Their question would be, “Which body is raised from the dead? Is it the ‘cow’ body you once had, or the ‘gorilla’ body you may have had, or the one you are walking around in now?” Reincarnation would, for them, pose an entirely different question concerning the resurrection of the body.

I. (:36B-37) ANALOGY OF PLANTING – TWO MAJOR CORRECTIONS REGARDING THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE PRESENT BODY AND THE FUTURE RESURRECTION BODY BASED ON THE ANALOGY OF SOWING

A. The Seed Planted Must First Die

“That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies”

David Garland: Paul’s first example argues by analogy from the known world of seeds to the unknown world of the resurrection (**Bonneau** 1993: 79). The illustration contains three points (**Asher** 2000: 79):

1. The seed is not made alive unless it dies.

2. The seed planted is not the body that will come up from the ground.
3. God effects the transition between the seed and the plant.

The resurrection remains a mystery, but its mystery does not tell against its reality (Findlay 1910: 934). The same mystery shrouds the germination of seeds.

B. The Seed Planted is Only a Microcosm of the Different Product that will Result

“and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”

Ray Pritchard: Paul uses the analogy of the seed to correct two common errors:

- 1) That the resurrection body will be identical to the one that was buried.
- 2) That the resurrection body will be completely unrelated to the original.

Ray Stedman: Nature teaches us two obvious lessons.

First: Death is a necessary part of the process. Far from being an obstacle to resurrection, death is essential to it. You can put that in the form of an axiom: Nothing that has never died shall ever be raised from the dead. Obviously if it is going to be raised from the dead it has to die. Therefore, death is not an obstacle to resurrection. It is an ingredient of it and necessary to it. To balk at the fact that people die and the body loses its ability to function and its form and consistency as a body, ought never to be any hindrance to believing that life will emerge from it. The body must die just as the seed must die.

The second lesson that nature teaches us is this: The body that emerges from the seed that dies is different from the one that was planted. Put a grain of wheat or a kernel of corn into the ground and what comes up? Another grain of wheat or another kernel? No! What comes up is a green stem which does not look at all like what you put into the ground. Nevertheless it is tied to it; it is continuous from it; it has an identity with it. There is an undeniable tie with that which you put into the ground, and yet it is not the same; it is the "same" without being similar. Now, if you had never seen that process before, would you have believed it if somebody had said that that is what would happen? You would have looked at him as though he were mad and said, "How can that be?" because you can put almost anything else into the ground and that will not happen. It is one of those miracles that is so familiar to us that we miss the miraculous part of it. But Paul says it happens so frequently there should therefore be no struggle with believing in the resurrection of the dead.

Steve Zeisler: Here Paul is testifying to the fact that although humans are planted in the ground when they die, they will be raised very different beings indeed. Bodies may be burned or suffer decay, but what was planted will not be the same as what will be raised. Yet there is continuity, however. The one who was buried will be the one who will be raised. Wheat seed will produce wheat. What you are right now, everything you are becoming inside, all of the changes which God is making in your character, will be there upon your resurrection. You will be raised, but not with the same body. In the resurrection, you will be gloriously different.

Doug Goins: But there is a continuity, and that's the point of **verse 38**: "...To each of the seeds a body of its own." The seed changes radically, but it does continue the same life form. A wheat seed doesn't turn into a barley plant, and a kernel of corn doesn't turn into flax. The identity of the seed continues into the full-grown plant. In Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in his resurrection body, none of his disciples and followers recognized him until he chose to reveal himself to them. But once he told them who he was, they did recognize him. They saw the

wound in his side and the nail prints in his hands. They knew his face. The promise for us is that we will have some kind of continuity of our personhood, our personality, our unique individuality, after death.

II. (:38-41) ANALOGY OF CREATION – GOD GRANTS EACH TYPE OF CREATION ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE QUALITY AND ITS OWN UNIQUE GLORY

A. (:38-39) God Grants Each Type of Flesh its Own Distinctive Quality

1. The Creator Makes Everything Unique

- a. Nature of each body determined by God – a Sovereign Gift
“But God gives it a body just as He wished”

Mark Taylor: No one unfamiliar with agriculture could ever imagine the utter difference between the seed planted in the ground and the glorious plant that emerges, each distinct to its own seed. For the believer, the fullness of life lies not on this side of the grave but in the glorious age to come. Resurrection entails new creation. The key point is that God gives to each seed its own body **as he has determined (15:38)**. The implication is that God will also give to each believer a resurrection body as he has determined. The language of God’s determination echoes Paul’s explanation of God’s sovereign placement of the members of the body in **12:18**. **Thiselton** rightly calls attention to the themes of God’s **sovereignty** and **grace** conveyed by **15:38**. It is God who determines the kind of body we will have, and it is God who gives.

- b. Independence of each individual body
“and to each of the seeds a body of its own”
- c. Uniqueness of each type of flesh
“All flesh is not the same flesh”

Look at the implications for the erroneous theory of evolution

2. Four Examples of Different Types of Flesh

- a. Men – *“but there is one flesh of men”*
- b. Animals – *“and another flesh of beasts”*
- c. Birds – *“and another flesh of birds”*
- d. Fish – *“and another of fish”*

Steve Zeisler: Think for a moment about the animal world, says Paul. Take earthworms, for instance. They are uniquely adapted to their environment. Humans could not survive in the same circumstances. We cannot ingest what worms eat; such a diet would not be suitable for us. In the same way, polar bears are uniquely adapted to their environment. They can swim and hunt in the frigid waters of the Antarctic. Humans, of course, would die if they tried that. Fish also are uniquely adapted to the water. They have gills, not lungs like humans have. From this, Paul concludes that when we are raised, we are going to be given bodies quite unlike the bodies which we now have which enable us to survive on earth, but rather we will have bodies uniquely fitted for heaven very different environment. Christians should expect this. God creates bodies to fit their environment.

Ray Stedman: . . . this difference is a result of the inner difference of nature, or personality, that these beings have. It says, "to each kind of seed its own body." In other words there is a correspondence between what the body looks like and what the being inside is like. That is why animals have various natures. For this reason, animals are used in Scripture as symbols of corresponding qualities about human beings -- wolves are always ferocious and dangerous, sheep are always helpless and needing protection, and pigs are always dirty. All these qualities are there because God wants to demonstrate to us truth about ourselves that we see reflected in the natural world.

Doug Goins: I remember a Broadway musical in which there is a love song. The lady sings, "Fish gotta swim, and birds gotta fly, and I gotta love one man till I die." Each one uniquely fulfills the purpose for which it was created. Fish are created to swim in the seas, birds to fly, and human beings to know love relationships with other human beings. Fish don't fall in love. Fish swim in the ocean. And we are created to love another human being, but we are not created to flap our arms and fly around like a bird. The sun generates tremendous light and energy in our solar system. The moon is just a rock that reflects the light of the sun toward the earth. And all this variety and diversity in the worlds of biology and astronomy is a marvelous hint of the same diversity of resurrection glory in our heavenly bodies.

Anthony Thiselton: The whole issue hinges upon **God's infinite resourcefulness**, demonstrated already in God's resourcefulness as Creator. God has already shown that he created organisms, entities, and modes of being appropriate for every kind of condition or environment: animals for earth, fish for rivers and the sea, birds for the sky, planets or flaming gases for space, stars of different magnitudes for different places within the galaxy and the universe (**vv. 39-41**). Using "flesh" to denote here substances-used-in creation, Paul declares, *All flesh is not the same flesh* (**v. 39a**). Human flesh differs from that of animals; and we can extrapolate through to the sun, moon, and stars, each of which has a different splendor, each a glory of its own: star differs from star in splendor (**v. 41b**). So God will not be caught by some design problem relating to the resurrection.

Paul Gardner: Paul grounds his example solidly in the **creation story of Genesis 1:11-12** where God created vegetation and trees and plants, and the passage speaks of each plant bringing forth seed "*which is their seed, each according to its kind*" (ESV). Even the differentiation where a seed will only produce its particular kind of plant is part of God's creative purposes. The future lies with God, and he will see to it that the seed of the human who has died will be brought to life in the form and physical body appropriate to the realm or environment in which it will then be living. (There is nothing wrong with using the word "physical" at this point, for Paul is dealing with a real resurrection of substance that is in continuity with the physical body that has died, but which has a different "flesh" or outward form. There is nothing in anything that Paul says that would lead us to believe physicality as such has gone; in fact, this very use of the word "flesh" militates against this.)

B. (:40-41) God Grants Each Type of Creation its Own Unique Glory

1. Distinction in Type and Glory Between Heavenly and Earthly Bodies = Two Major Divisions

*"There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,
but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another."*

Paul Gardner: The word “*glory*,” however, means more than simply splendor and light. The comments on this word in **1 Corinthians 11:7** are useful here as well. There it was noted that any “glory” attached to a person was derived first from the “glory” attached to God. With God the word points to all that is uniquely true about him. It no doubt involves his brightness and existence as “light.” God is revealed in a “pillar of fire” in the exodus, the “cloud” that surrounds him seems to be there to protect humankind from death, and it is understood even from the blinding that happened to Paul as he saw Christ in his “glory” on the Damascus road. When it is applied to men and women, as in **11:7**, we suggested that “glory” was to be understood in close relationship with being in God’s image and so reflecting glory back to him as the worship of their lives (cf. **2 Cor 4:6**). “Glory” therefore becomes that which sums up the person as God created them. Glory is that which belongs to the person and, in this case by extension, the created entity that reflects his, her, or its creator.

2. Distinction in Glory Among the Unique Heavenly Bodies

- a. Sun – “*There is one glory of the sun*”
- b. Moon – “*and another glory of the moon*”
- c. Unique Stars – “*and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*”

Robert Grosheide: Among the celestial bodies themselves also there is a difference of glory. Not only between the sun, the moon and the stars, but also between the various stars. This goes to prove that though there may be equality between the one body and the other, yet there is a great variety because of a difference in quality and in glory.

Robert Gundry: The fact that many ancient people thought of the sun, moon, and stars as personal beings with shining bodies helped Paul’s analogy at this point. And just as in **15:35–38** Paul supplemented a stress on variety with a stress on individuality for a forthcoming distinction between those who are still living on the day of resurrection and those who’ve died, so too here—and for the same purpose—he notes differences in glory from star to star, though all the stars fall into the same category over against the sun and the moon.

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION: Resurrection Body is Unique in Type and Glory

“So also is the resurrection of the dead.”

III. (:42-44A) CONTRAST OF INNATE QUALITIES – FOUR DISTINCTIONS HIGHLIGHTING THE SUPERIORITY OF THE RESURRECTION BODY

David Garland: Corinthians have trouble conceiving of the resurrection of the dead because they know the terrestrial body to be

- Susceptible to corruption—the condition of fallen creation (**Rom. 8:21; Gal. 6:8; Col. 2:22**; see also 2 Bar. 44:9)
- Dishonored—the condition of being subject to shame and shameful treatment (**1 Cor. 4:11–13; 2 Cor. 6:8**)

- Weak—the condition of being embodied in something that is subject to physical infirmities and deformities (2 Cor. 12:9–10) and that wastes away (2 Cor. 4:16)

A. #1 Indestructible -- Perishable vs Imperishable – Permanent, not Transitory

“It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body.”

B. #2 Triumphant -- Dishonor vs Glory

“it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory”

Doug Goins: This contrast addresses value or potential. We know that as sinful men and women we are dishonorable. At the fall our potential for pleasing, serving, and glorifying God was drastically reduced. Genesis tells us we were created in the image of God, designed to reflect his glory and perfection, created to honor him. But we know that sin is at work in us now. Even though we've been redeemed from the penalty of sin by Jesus Christ, we still struggle with fleshly patterns of sinful rebellion. Even the most faithful follower of Jesus Christ knows that his body, his intellect, his emotions, and his will are in a sense dishonorable or imperfect or incomplete. We live in a fallen, flawed world, and we reflect that fallenness. But we will one day be raised in glory, to use Paul's phrase. When we get to heaven we won't be sinful anymore.

David Prior: Paul does not mean that there is no honour or power in our physical bodies, but that the very greatest honour and power inherent in these bodies could not begin to cope with life in the kingdom of God in all its fullness. The fundamental reason for this is their bondage to decay (42). There is no way in which this corruption can be halted; it can only be buried.

C. #3 Transformed -- Weakness vs Power

“it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power”

Daniel Akin: The idea of “sown in weakness, raised in power” (v. 43) means our current bodies are limited by time, space, sickness, and breakdown, but our new bodies will be freed from the shackles of fallen humanity. They will no longer be limited by time, space, or material substance. Such bodies will be filled with the power that can only come from the God who raised them.

D. #4 Transcendent -- Natural vs Spiritual (transcending material existence)

“it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body”

John MacArthur: Focusing directly on the resurrection body, Paul gives 4 sets of contrasts to show how the new body will differ from the present ones (cf. v. 54; **Php 3:20, 21**):

- 1) no more sickness and death (“perishable”)
- 2) no more shame because of sin (“dishonor”)
- 3) no more frailty in temptation (“weakness”)
- 4) no more limits to the time/space sphere (“natural”)

Doug Goins:

- 1) Durability
- 2) Value or Potential
- 3) Abilities
- 4) Sphere of existence

Bruce Goettsche:

Paul tells us about some of the differences between the physical and spiritual bodies.

- the earthly body wears out (decay, corruption, ruin). . . the heavenly body will not
- the earthly body knows embarrassment and all kinds of sinful desires . . .the heavenly body will know glory
- the earthly body is limited and weak held captive by the forces of the world such as disease and aging . . . the heavenly power will know power and strength.
- the earthly body is natural (or anchored to nature)....the heavenly body is spiritual

Richard Hays: Our mortal bodies embody the psyche (“*soul*”), the animating force of our present existence, but the resurrection body will embody the divinely given *pneuma* (“*spirit*”). It is to be a “*spiritual body*” not in the sense that it is somehow made out of spirit and vapors, but in the sense that it is determined by the spirit and gives the spirit form and local habitation

IV. (:44B-49) CONTRAST OF PROTOTYPES – JUST AS OUR PHYSICAL BODY IS PATTERNED AFTER ADAM SO OUR RESURRECTION BODY WILL BE PATTERNED AFTER CHRIST

Andrew Noselli: The analogy of Adam and Christ proves that resurrecting the corpses of believers is certain. The natural body connects to Adam, the covenantal head of all humans, and the supernatural spiritual body connects to Christ, the covenantal head of the new creation. Adam was merely living, but Christ is life-giving because he will raise all those who belong to him.

A. (:44B) Certainty of the Resurrection Body – Reality of the Existence of both the Natural and Spiritual Body

“If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

B. (:45-47) Case for the Superiority of Christ as the Prototype of the Resurrection Body -- Three Distinctions Between Adam and Christ

1. Supreme Distinction – Self Sufficient, Self Existent Life-Giving Spirit

*“So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’
The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”*

Psalm 36:9 *“For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.”*

Mark Taylor: The phrase “*life-giving spirit*,” on the other hand, describes the risen Christ, the last Adam, in his transformed state and corresponds to the description of the resurrection body as “*spiritual*.” As with the term “spiritual,” “spirit” does not mean “immaterial” but rather designates that which is the opposite of and belongs to a different order than the “natural.” The modifier “*life-giving*” is a participle form of the verb meaning “to bring to life” that appears in **15:22** and 36. In other words, just as the natural body came to all humans through Adam so also Christ became in resurrection a life-giving spirit (*pneuma*), that is, the source of life to all who are “*in him*.” The first Adam received life. The last Adam imparts life. Just as humans have a natural body after the pattern of Adam so also Christ is representative of all who will be raised and given a spiritual body. The framework of Paul’s argument is representative, soteriological, and eschatological.

Gordon Fee: Although some subtleties are at work here, from these observations one may draw the following conclusions about Paul’s intent.

First, the reason for the citation lies with his desire to demonstrate the reality of the resurrection body on the basis of the prior Adam-Christ analogy. The use of *psychē* to describe Adam gives Paul a biblical base for the distinctions he wants to make between the two kinds of *sōma* and at the same time allows him to connect that with what he had said previously (vv. 21–22).

Second, as the further explanation (vv. 47–48) makes clear, the overriding urgency in this passage is to show in an analogical way that the two kinds of bodies “sown” and “raised” (v. 44) are already represented in the two archetypal “Adams.” The first Adam, who became a “living *psychē*,” was thereby given a *psychikos* body at creation, a body subject to decay and death. This Adam, who brought death into the world (vv. 21–22), thus became the representative man for all who bear his *psychikos* likeness. The last Adam, on the other hand, whose “*spiritual* (glorified) *body*” was given at his resurrection, not only became the representative Man for all who will bear his *pneumatikos* likeness, but he is himself the source of the *pneumatikos* life as well as the *pneumatikos* body.

Therefore, third, the shift from “living” with regard to Adam (he is merely life-receiving) to “life-giving” seems to have a double entendre with regard to Christ. In his resurrection whereby he assumed his “supernatural body,” Christ also became the giver of life to all who will ever follow after. Paul’s point seems to be that one can assume full *pneumatikos* existence only as Christ did, by resurrection, which includes a *pneumatikos* body. The concern of line 2, therefore, is not christological, as though Christ and the Spirit were somehow now interchangeable terms for Paul. The concern is soteriological-eschatological; the language has been dictated both by the Genesis text and the concern to demonstrate that Christ is the foundation of believers’ receiving a “*spiritual body*.” To make any further theological deductions from such analogies is to do the apostle a grave injustice.

Part of Paul’s point in all of this seems to be **to deny, on the basis of Christ’s resurrection, that they are completed people of the Spirit now.** They, too, must await the resurrection (or transformation, v. 52) before their “spirituality” is complete, since, as with Christ, it must include a somatic expression. This is the point he will pick up with the second use of this text and the Adam-Christ analogy to follow (vv. 47–49); but before that he takes a final swipe at their misguided, overspiritualized eschatology.

2. Sequence -- Order of Appearance on Earth

“However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.”

Bob Deffinbaugh: True spirituality in the present is our identification with our Lord’s earthly body. We must identify with Him in His weakness, in His dishonor, in His death, and (partly) in His resurrection. This is why Paul speaks of his ministry in terms of dishonor and weakness. This is the calling of the Christian: to identify in body, soul, and spirit with the Lord in His earthly coming, in His rejection, weakness, shame and death. Spirituality cannot be separated from what we do in and with our bodies:

Ray Stedman: The Mormon church teaches that we were once spirit beings who then came to earth and became men, but this verse flatly contradicts that. It is not the spiritual which is first, it is the physical.

We came into existence on a physical level, but designed by God, beyond that, is the spiritual. That is next, and death is but a stop in that process, and necessary to it. So now we are in a state of transition, as Paul goes on to describe,

3. Source

“The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.”

C. (:48-49) Consistency in Matching the Prototype – Two Very Different Prototypes – But in each case they establish the Pattern

1. Adam is the Prototype for all Earthly Bodies

“As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy”

“Just as we have borne the image of the earthy”

2. Christ is the Prototype for all Resurrection Bodies

“and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly”

“we will also bear the image of the heavenly”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What kind of resurrection body do you anticipate receiving?
- 2) What is the importance of the principle that death must precede resurrection? How does this impact our understanding of our resurrection body?
- 3) What are the implications for the theory of evolution from the teaching that there are fundamentally different types of flesh created by God?
- 4) What is involved in the *“image of the heavenly”* that we will bear in our resurrection body?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: On the occasion reported in the book of Acts where Paul is defending himself before King Agrippa, he says to the king, *“Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?”* (cf, **Acts 26:8**). And why should it, when we have the testimony of nature all around that this kind of thing can and does happen? If it was not incredible in the 1st century how much more should it be believable today, when, by the efforts of science, we know a great deal more about the processes of transferring energy and of retaining life. We are now familiar with a process called “cloning.” Scientists say that it is possible to take a single cell of the human body, any cell, it does not have to be a sex cell, and by a process now known in theory, though not yet in practice, to restore that body completely as a human being. Why then should it be thought incredible that God can do it, that all he needs is a single cell from a body to restore the body exactly as it was? Man can do it; surely God will catch up with man one of these days. . .

Paul now faces the skeptics' second question, *“With what kind of body do they come?”* All right, supposing there is a resurrection, they said, “What is the resurrection body like? How will it differ from the one we have now?”

Paul's answer is found in the next ten verses, **Verses 39 through 49**. He takes it in three movements:

1. First, he goes back again to the lessons which are visible in nature itself;
2. Then he draws the parallel with the reality of resurrection;
3. Finally, in a great theological argument, he establishes the absolute certainty that this is going to happen.

Ray Pritchard: I love the epitaph that **Benjamin Franklin** wrote for himself while still a young man. It wonderfully catches the spirit of Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 15**.

The body of
B. Franklin, printer,
(like the cover of an old book,
its contents torn out and
stripped of its lettering and gilding)
lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be lost;
for it will (as he believed)
appear once more,
in a new and more elegant edition,
revised and corrected
by the Author. . .

He's right. God will not let death win. **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** expressed the same truth in his poem "**God's Acre**." Here are the first and last stanzas:

I like that ancient Saxon phrase, which calls
The burial-ground God's-Acre! It is just;
It consecrates each grave within its walls,
And breathes a benison o'er the sleeping dust.

With thy rude ploughshare, Death, turn up the sod,
And spread the furrow for the seed we sow;
This is the field and Acre of our God,
This is the place where human harvests grow.

What an image that is: "the place where human harvests grow." Go to any graveyard where Christians are buried and there you will find "God's acre." Take off your shoes. It is holy ground. Human harvests are growing there. I close with the words of **Thomas Watson**: "We are more sure to arise out of our graves than out of our beds. Oh! how precious is the dust of a believer!" Amen.

Bob Deffinbaugh:

Paul responds to the questions which have been raised, turning first to nature, to God's creation, to make several very powerful points.

(1) Death and physical decay are not an insurmountable barrier to resurrection life, but rather the means to it. Would we suppose that death and decay are some kind of insurmountable problem for God, rendering Him incapable of resurrecting our bodies from the natural processes of corruption and decay? We need only to look at the realm of nature to see the folly of such logic. If we reason that death and decay renders resurrection impossible, all we need do is trace

the steps of the farmer, who every year sows seeds in the soil to undergo the process of “dying” so that a new plant can be produced through its “death.”

(2) *There is a transformation process which occurs in nature so that the seed which dies comes to life in a different and vastly better form. This is a most important point.* There is a direct connection between the seed that is “buried” and the plant which results from the “resurrection” of that seed. Wheat seeds produce wheat plants; rye seed produces rye plants, and so on. But in the process of dying and being “resurrected” as a plant, the once “naked” or “bare” (verse 37) seed becomes something much more beautiful. There is nothing particularly beautiful about a grain bin filled with wheat seed, but there is great beauty in a wheat field!

(3) *God is the giver of bodies.* The grain of wheat which “dies” in the ground and comes to life in a new resurrected “body” comes to life in a body which God Himself has given (verse 38). It is important to notice that in the question raised in verse 38, God is not mentioned: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” I do not think the Corinthians dared to ask the question the way they should have: “How can God raise the dead? And what kind of body does God give those He raises?”

It is better for the skeptic to reject the resurrection of the dead as a natural phenomenon. And yet Paul uses “nature” as an example of just such resurrection. But when he does so, he specifies that the body which is given is the body God has given. Paul goes even further, indicating that the body God gives is just exactly the body He wishes to give. Would anyone dare to deny the resurrection? Then let them dare to deny that God raises the dead. Would anyone dare to question the quality of the body God gives those whose corpses He raises? Then let them hear that God gives them just the body He wants!

(4) *God is the Creator, the giver of all life.* God created not only the plant world, but the animal kingdom as well, and beyond this, the heavens above. Does the mention of plants, each containing their own seed, of mankind, of beasts, of birds, of fish, and of heavenly bodies not take us back to the first two chapters of Genesis? Surely Paul has the first creation in mind. The God who called creation into existence is surely the God who can cause a decaying corpse to come to life. To put it a little differently, God created man from the dust of the earth. Death turns man back to dust. And out of this “dust,” God can create anything He purposes and promises to fashion.

(5) *God, the Creator, is the One who gives each form of life its own distinct and unique body, and each body is perfectly suited for its function and environment.* Think back on the creation account in Genesis. God created the heavens and the earth. He created man. He created birds and fish and beasts. Each of God’s creatures has its own beauty and its own glory. Birds fly, and so a part of their “glory” is that they have a lightweight structure with hollow bones. Whales live deep beneath the sea. Their glory does not come from their light weight, but from their design which allows them to endure the pressures of the depths. Each member of the animal kingdom has a body whose glory is found in relationship to its domain and function. Seeing this glorious design in the bodies God made in the first creation, do we dare to doubt the glory of the bodies God will create in the new creation? We can be assured that our resurrection body will be the perfect body, the glorious body which ideally suits us for heaven.

James Boyer: Here, as in **Romans 5:12-21**, Paul makes a typological connection between Adam and Christ. In the Romans passage this connection is seen in their respective relationships to sin. Here he draws a comparison in their relationships to our bodies. From Adam we received our present, natural bodies. From Christ, by way of resurrection, we shall receive our spiritual,

heavenly bodies. Christ, the last Adam, was made a quickening Spirit when He was raised from the dead (cf. **Rom. 1:4; 64**, and especially the whole context here. Before resurrection He too had a natural body). Thus Paul leads us to the most instructive illustration of all to teach us what the resurrection body will be like. “*We shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” (v. 49). He will “*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*” (**Phil. 3:21**). What was His resurrection body like? “*We shall be like Him*” (**1 John 3:2**). Meditate on that, and rejoice!

Thomas Leake: Our Future Resurrection Body

Introduction: Human pride has a way of blocking out truth; **Prov. 18:2; 12:15** “*wise man listens to counsel*”; Often what man asserts to be true is later found out to be not true; Understand some of the reasons for our belief in the resurrection of the body; many people deny this; this is a cardinal Christian doctrine

2 Objections to the Resurrection and Paul’s Defense

I. (:35) 2 Objections to the Resurrection by Raising 2 Questions

A. The How Objection – *How are the dead raised?* Resurrection is Impossible – scientific and naturalist would offer this objection;

Not a genuine question due to the tone; it is a mocking objection; intimates that the resurrection is a scientific impossibility; Science is a great subject, but a limited subject – cannot investigate certain areas; has its boundaries; science can only take you so far; an open mind should take into account all the evidence – including evidence from history; just because we can’t give a scientific formula for the How, does not mean it is impossible with God

B. The Nature of the Resurrection Body – *with what kind of body?*

Resurrection is Inconceivable – philosopher or false theologian would offer this objection; **Matt. 22:23ff**; Do you ever struggle with the supernatural elements in the Scriptures? Nothing in the Bible is unreasonable when you understand the infinite power of God and His purposes. **John 17:17**

II. (:36-49) Paul’s Defense of the Resurrection—4 Answers

Paul gives these objections no hearing – strong language – “*you fool*”)

A. (:36-38) There is evidence from nature that helps to explain the change that takes place in resurrection – Analogy from nature

Think of how God operates in the world

You just plant the little seed; change happens; you don’t plant the whole oak tree

B. (:39-41) Evidence from nature for diversity of bodies – Does it all look the same to you? It’s all different

Glory = aura, radiance, shining ability

C. (:42-44) The human resurrection body will be gloriously different

The stuff of the resurrection body will be different; cemeteries are seed beds for resurrected saints;

Look at 4 descriptive adjectives:

1. *Imperishable* – **2 Tim. 1:10**;
2. *Glorious* – beautiful, shining, impressive;
3. *Powerful* – old folks can’t even lift themselves up – won’t need food or sleep – *dunamis* = refers to a greater set of capabilities;
4. *Spiritual* – opposite = natural (not physical) = same as Adam’s body, formed from

elements of the earth – originates from spiritual realm = heaven

D. (:45-49) The Resurrection Body will be like Christ's resurrection body

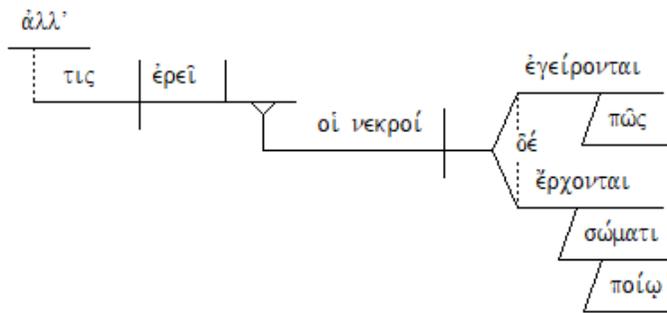
First Adam vs Last Adam – 2 Different Races – we all originate from the same man Adam; this NT passage is strong support against evolution; Creation accounts in Genesis are both historically and biologically accurate; 4 comparisons

- a. (:45) Their capabilities – **John 5:26; 1 John 5:11**
- b. (:46) the order in which they came; the second is the improvement on the first
- c. (:47) the origins are different
- d. (:48-49) comparison made with our identification with these two men – **Gen. 5:3; 1 John 3:2**

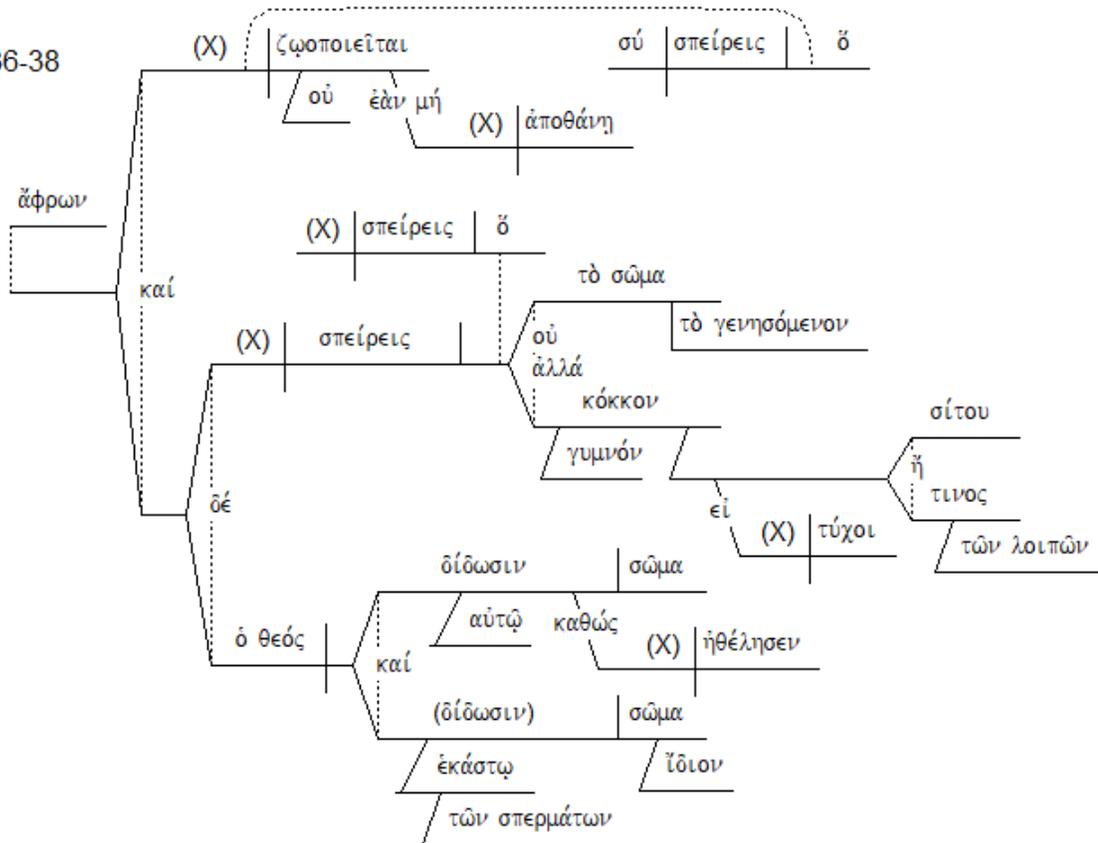
Conclusion: Death is not the end of the story; never doubt the truth of the resurrection body; we serve a glorious God; *“I am the resurrection and the life ...”*
Believe this; Rejoice in this; Anticipate this; Desire this

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

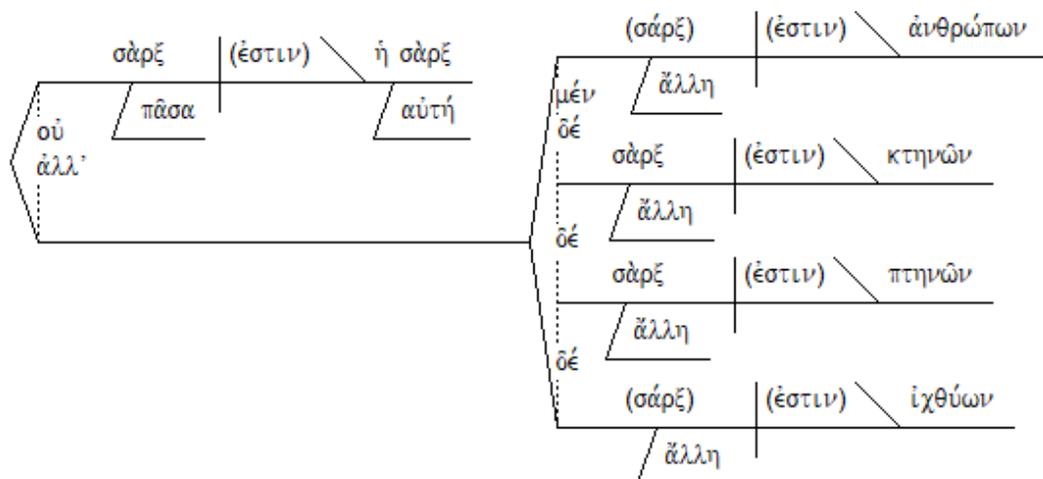
1Co 15:35



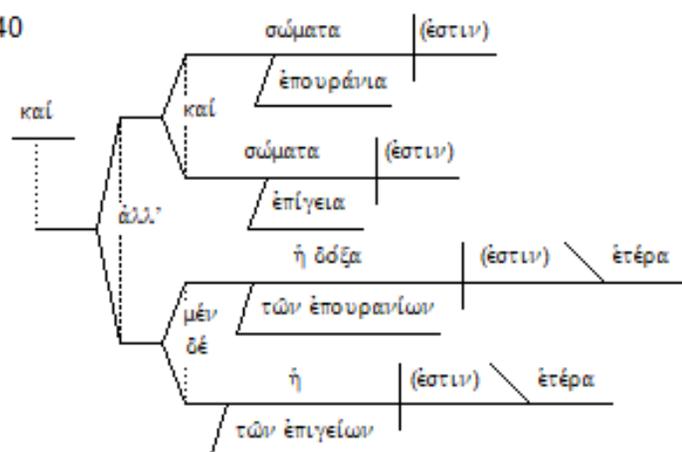
1Co 15:36-38



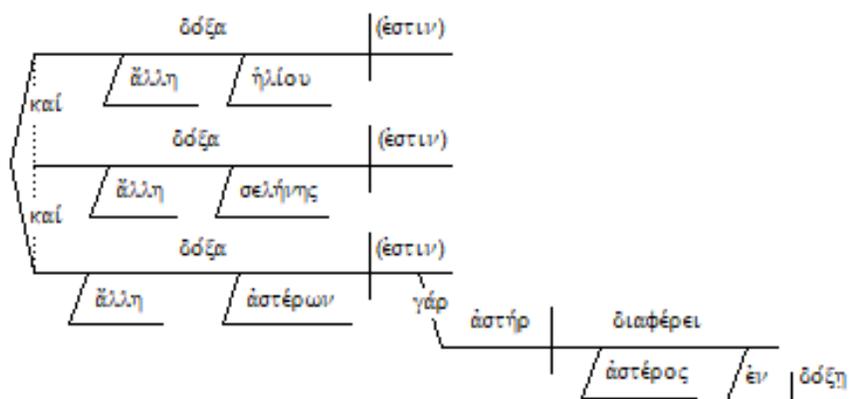
1Co 15:39



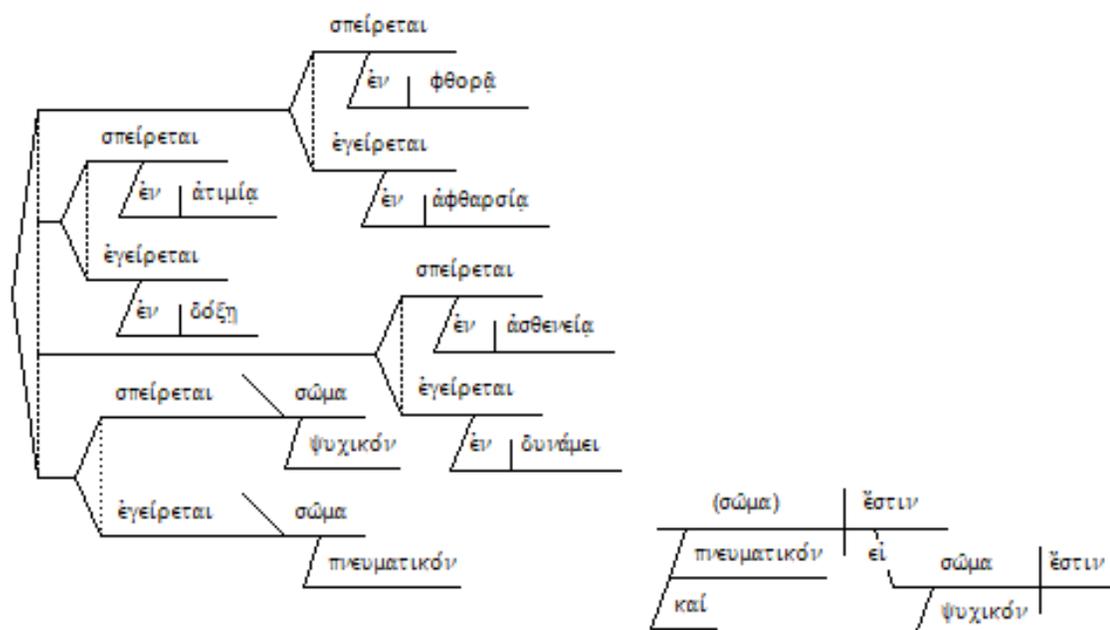
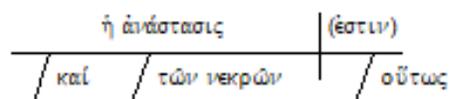
1Co 15:40



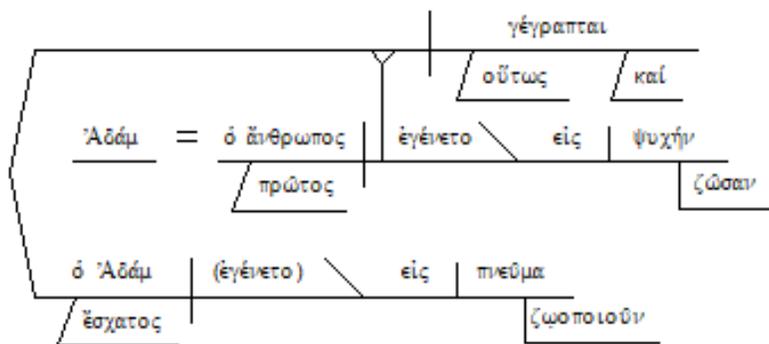
1Co 15:41



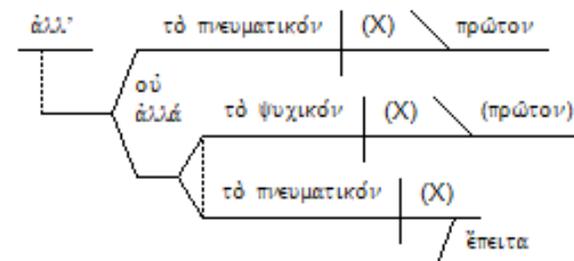
1Co 15:42-44



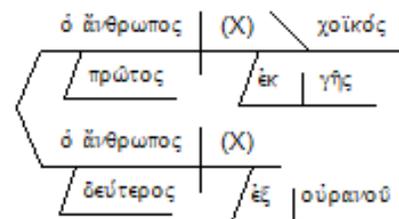
1Co 15:45



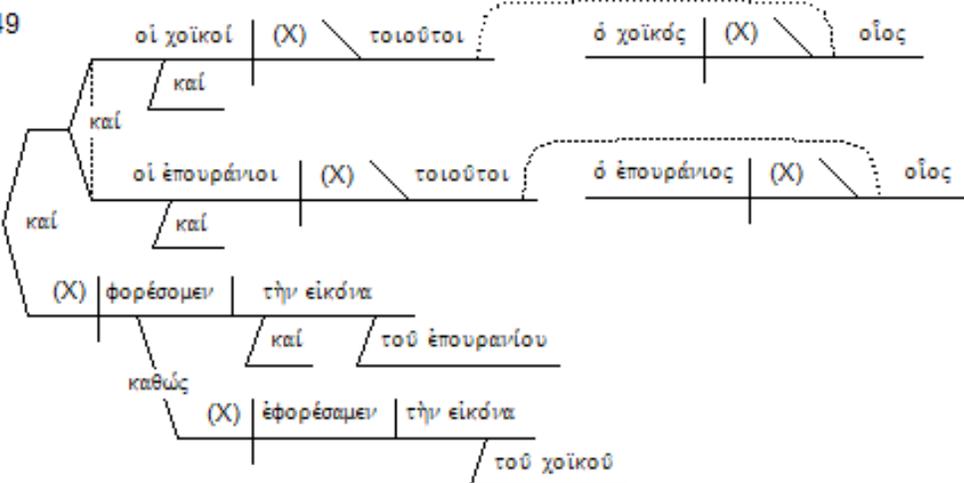
1Co 15:46



1Co 15:47



1Co 15:48-49



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

TITLE: FINAL VICTORY OVER MORTALITY

BIG IDEA:

TRANSFORMATION OF THE BODY EQUIPS ALL BELIEVERS FOR GLORY

INTRODUCTION:

Steve Zeisler: All of our efforts to halt or even retard the aging process-the sagging flesh, the balding pate, the wrinkled face-are doomed to failure. The sure word of Scripture is that we are destined either to be raised imperishable in the resurrection, or that we will suffer eternal death.

Gordon Fee: With this magnificent crescendo Paul brings to a conclusion part III of the argument for the future bodily resurrection of believers (that began in v. 35). Having argued both for the reasonableness of a resurrection body (through the analogies of vv. 36–44) and for its certainty (on the basis of Christ’s heavenly body, vv. 45–49), he now emphasizes:

- (1) the absolute necessity of transformation in order to enter the heavenly mode of existence (vv. 50, 53);
- (2) the fact that both the living and the dead must be so transformed (vv. 51–52); and
- (3) that the resurrection/transformation, which will take place at the Parousia (v. 52), will signal the final defeat of death (vv. 54–55).

Never one to let a theological moment pass without an exhortation, Paul concludes on the high note of Christ’s present victory over sin and the law as well (vv. 56–57), which leads to a concluding exhortation to “*labor*” for Christ in the context of hope (v. 58).

David Garland: In 1 Cor. 15:50–57, Paul continues to address the same problem that has driven the entire discussion: the metaphysical incompatibility between the heavenly order, which is spiritual and imperishable, and the earthly, organic order, which is fleshly and perishable. The polarity between the terrestrial and the celestial prohibits the ascent “of a terrestrial human form or substance to the celestial region” (Asher 2000: 153). Older commentators get it right: “Our present bodies, whether living or dead, are absolutely unfitted for the Kingdom” (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 376; cf. Godet 1887: 434; Edwards 1885: 449; contra Thiselton 2000: 1291). What is raised is not flesh and blood. The earthly frame will be utterly changed into a heavenly body of glory. Barrett (1968: 379) missteps in saying that Paul does not intend “to teach a direct incompatibility between flesh and the kingdom of God.” He does not need to teach it, because the Corinthian dissenters already take it for granted. Paul only concedes it. What he wishes to teach, however, is that this inherent incompatibility is overcome by change. His view differs significantly from 2 Bar. 50:2, which has God telling Baruch that the earth gives back the dead as it received them, “not changing anything in their form.” For Paul, change is absolutely necessary to make what was flesh and blood and perishable fit for what is imperishable and immortal.

Anthony Nosselli: God must transform the perishable, mortal bodies of dead and living believers into imperishable, immortal bodies to triumphantly defeat death. Similar to how the unrighteous are not fit to inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10), our earthly bodies are not fit to inherit the kingdom of God. So God will transform the earthly bodies of believers into heavenly ones. Paul announces a mystery – something God had hidden but now has revealed. The mystery is that God will suddenly transform the earthly body of every believer – dead and alive – into a

heavenly body when Christ returns. He will do that in a snap, in the twinkling of an eye. The trumpet will signal that the end has come (**Mt 24:31; 1Th 4:16**). Then God will resurrect dead believers and transform their earthly bodies into heavenly bodies, as well as transform the earthly bodies of believers who have not died. Our perishable, mortal bodies must take on the characteristics of Christ's resurrected body.

Christ decisively defeated death at the cross (**Heb 2:14**), and after God transforms the bodies of believers, Christ will finally, completely, and permanently defeat death. That will climactically fulfill **Isaiah 25:8** and **Hosea 13:14**. Death will die because Christ died and rose again. By permanently defeating death, Christ also permanently defeats sin. The law energized sin by giving it death-dealing power (**Ge 3:1-6**). By permanently defeating sin, Christ permanently ensures that God's law is only life-giving for his people and not sin-empowering (cf. **Ro 3:20; 4:15; 5:13, 20**).

Christians should stand firm, or persevere, because they know that in the Lord their work is valuable (**1Co 15:2, 10, 14, 17**). What we believe about the future affects what we do now. Christ's resurrection and the transformed heavenly body he will give us encourage us that what we do in our earthly body has meaning (cf. **Gal 6:9**). It is wonderful news for believers that God will transform our natural, earthly bodies into supernatural, heavenly ones. It is also wonderful news for family and friends of a dead believer. It helps believers not to grieve as others do who have no hope (**1Th 4:13**), and it enables believers to be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (**2Co 6:10**). Christ's resurrection guarantees that death will die.

Paul Gardner: At the heart of what the Corinthians must understand about the resurrection is the matter of continuity and discontinuity. It is this, which Paul has partially described in the preceding verses, that he now argues for in more detail. Continuity there certainly is: Christians are themselves raised from the dead. Yet, there is also great discontinuity. Thus, Paul continues his answer to the question of **v. 35**, "*How are the dead raised?*" and, "*With what kind of body do they come?*" while also moving the reader on to examining the resurrection itself. **Verse 50** acts as a **transitional verse** as Paul's argument progresses. There is an extraordinary and miraculous, God-ordained change that must take place at the resurrection if victory over death is finally to be established. Paul looks back to Isaiah and Hosea as he develops the idea of victory over death. Whether dead or alive at the coming of Christ, all believers will be "*changed*" (**v. 51**). This change, as the dead are raised and all are given incorruptible bodies, is the final evidence that death has been defeated, that the power of sin has been broken, and that God's victory has been won "*through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**vv. 54-57**). The final appeal in **v. 58** reminds the Corinthians once again that Paul is not discussing the theology of the resurrection for its own sake but because true belief and trust in the resurrection has immediate and powerful implications for the present. It means that faithful and steadfast commitment to the Lord and his calling is not in vain.

The Necessity of the Transformation of the Body (15:50-58)

1. The Mortal Must Take on Immortality(**15:50-53**)
2. All Will See Christ's Victory over Sin and Death (**15:54-57**)
3. Be Steadfast in the Lord's Work: It Is Not in Vain (**15:58**)

I. (:50) MAIN PRINCIPLE: THE NECESSITY OF A RESURRECTION BODY -- PHYSICAL BODY MUST BE TRANSFORMED INTO A BODY SUITABLE FOR THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

A. Transition – Closing out this section on the Resurrection of the Body
“*Now I say this, brethren*”

B. Main Principle Stated Twice

1. Mortality must be Transformed to Immortality – Fit for the Kingdom of God
“*that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,*”

Mark Taylor: Some argue that Paul has in mind two different groups; “*flesh and blood*” refers to those who are living at the time of Christ’s coming and “*the perishable*” refers to those who have already died. More likely, the parallelism is synonymous, meaning that “*flesh and blood*” refers to the perishable body. Paul simply repeats the analogy of the seed in **15:42**: “*The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.*”

John Piper: “*Flesh and blood*” simply means “human nature as we know it”--mortal, perishable, sin-stained, decaying. Something so fragile and temporary as the body we now have will not be the stuff of the eternal, durable, unshakable, indestructible kingdom of God. But that doesn't mean there won't be bodies.

Gordon Fee: Most likely the term refers simply to the body in its present form, composed of flesh and blood, to be sure, but subject to weakness, decay, and death, and as such ill-suited for the life of the future.

Robert Gundry: This denial is often misunderstood as a denial of the physicality of resurrection. But in addition to recognizing the natural meaning of “body” in connection with resurrection and the very meaning of “resurrection” as “a standing up” of bodies out of their graves, it’s important to note that the phrase “*flesh and blood*” doesn’t have to do with physicality as such—rather, with perishable physicality.

2. Perishable must be Transformed to Imperishable
“*nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*”

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 50** reminds us that our current sinful and mortal bodies are incapable and unworthy of coexisting with an infinite, holy God.

II. (:51-52) THIS TRANSFORMATION APPLIES TO ALL BELIEVERS – BOTH THE DEAD AND THOSE STILL ALIVE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST’S RETURN

A. Mystery Truth

“*Behold, I tell you a mystery*”

A truth that was not unfolded in the Old Testament, but now God is making it known; we would never come to know this truth apart from God’s gracious revelation.

(**Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5**)

Ray Stedman: We have already come to understand that the word “*mystery*,” when it is used like this in Scripture, does not refer to something murky or mysterious or hard to understand. What it means, of course, is a truth that our human sense can never discover, that no scientific

investigation will ever reveal, that no amount of intense research on the part of human beings will ever unravel.

Richard Hays: The mystery is that even the living will undergo transformation into a new form, receiving their resurrection bodies without having to pass through death.

B. Same Transformation – Despite Two Very Different Conditions

1. Condition of Death for Most – but not All

“we will not all sleep,”

There will be one unique group of believers that is alive at the Return of Christ

David Garland: Paul does not intend to hint that he and the Corinthians belong to the last generation with the assertion *“we will not all sleep”* (cf. **11:30; 15:6**). Those who interpret this verse to mean that he assumed that he would survive until the *parousia* must reckon with what he says in **1 Cor. 6:14**, *“God both raised the Lord and will raise us through his power.”* This statement could be interpreted to mean that he expected death for himself and the Corinthians, but the identity of the *“us”* in **6:14** is as indeterminate as the *“we”* in **15:51**. *“We will not all sleep”* anticipates only that the *parousia* will break into human history and directly affect those who are alive at that time (cf. **1 Thess. 4:15**). When that event will occur is unknown and not at issue. The *“all”* refers generically to Christians who happen to be alive at the *parousia*. Since it can happen at any time, and since he is still among the living, Paul can include himself and the Corinthians in the first group: *“We will not all sleep.”*

2. Reality of Transformation for All

“but we will all be changed”

Robert Gundry: In **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18** Paul is concerned to show that deceased believers will be at no disadvantage. Here he’s concerned that living believers will be at no disadvantage.

C. Suddenness of the Transformation

1. Time Reference

“in a moment”

John MacArthur: Moment is from *atomos*, from which we get the word *atom*, and denotes that which cannot be cut, or divided, the smallest conceivable quantity. In the smallest possible amount of time our perishable bodies will be made imperishable.

2. Physical Analogy Reference

“in the twinkling of an eye”

Ray Stedman: There is a generation of Christians that is never going to die. Scripture constantly anticipates this. There are some who will not even have to pass through the portals of death, such as we know it, but will instantly, while they are walking around, suddenly, without warning, be changed -- *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”* That phrase refers to the little change of light that occurs when you blink. It is one of the fastest speeds known to our human experience, and that is how fast the change will take place to some.

D. Certainty of the Transformation for All Believers

1. The End of the Church Age and the Return of Christ Will Come

“for the trumpet will sound”

Lowery: The **trumpet** in the Old Testament, signaled the appearance of God (cf. **Ex. 19:16**). It is the last blast for the church because this appearance shall never end (cf. **1 Cor. 13:12**). (There is no basis for posttribulationists equating this trumpet with the seventh trumpet in **Rev. 11:15-19**. The trumpets in Rev. pertain to judgments during the Tribulation, whereas the trumpet in **1 Cor. 15:52** is related to the church.)

Gordon Fee: What will mark the Parousia is the blowing of “*the last trumpet*,” imagery that had been taken up into Jewish prophetic-apocalyptic in a variety of senses to herald the Eschaton: to sound the last battle cry (e.g., **Jer. 51:27**), to warn of the approaching day of judgment (**Joel 2:1**), to announce the coming of the Lord (**Zech. 9:14**), to summon the people of God from the four corners (**Isa. 27:13**). Since it is such common imagery for the heralding of the End, it may carry no metaphorical freight whatever in this instance. On the basis of the next clause, however, it is arguable that the imagery is that of summoning the dead from their graves. It is the “last” trumpet not because it is the final in a series, but because it signals the End.

2. The Dead will be Transformed – Implies a Measure of Continuity
“and the dead will be raised imperishable”

John Piper: When he says “*the dead will be raised*” he means we—the dead--will be raised. If God meant to start all over with no continuity between the body I have now and the one I will have why would Paul say, “*the dead will be raised*”? Why would he not say, “The dead will not be raised” (since they are decomposed and their molecules are scattered into plants and animals for a thousand miles) and so God will start from scratch since there are no bodies to raise, and he will make totally new bodies that have no connection with the old ones? He did not say that, because it is not true.

3. The Raised Dead and Those Still Living Will All be Transformed
“and we will be changed”

III. (:53) MAIN PRINCIPLE REPEATED – THE NECESSITY OF A RESURRECTION BODY -- COMPLETION OF CHIASMUS

A. Perishable must be Transformed to Imperishable

“For this perishable must put on the imperishable”

Anthony Thiselton: Verse 53 expounds the resultant condition further: in place of decay we shall receive a mode of being which cannot wear out and is incapable of dying.

B. Mortality must be Transformed to Immortality – Fit for the Kingdom of God

“and this mortal must put on immortality”

Steve Zeisler: Because we are destined to die, as human beings we face two dilemmas:

- 1) our lives will end (we are mortal), and
- 2) our bodies deteriorate (we are perishable).

Solomon looks at life under the sun; but the Apostle Paul takes us to the next level – that of what awaits after death.

The fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other. Indeed they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast. For all is vanity. All go to the same place. All come from the dust, and all return to the dust. Eccl.3:19-21

IV. (:54-57) THIS TRANSFORMATION DEFEATS SIN AND DEATH FOREVER

A. (:54) Victory Culminates at the Time of this Transformation

1. The Time of Transformation

a. Perishable Transformed to Imperishable

“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable,”

b. Mortality Transformed to Immortality

“and this mortal will have put on immortality,”

2. The Triumph of Transformation

“then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

B. (:55-56) Victory Crushes All Enemies – Death, Sin, the Law = things we cannot defeat on our own

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin,

And the power of sin is the law”

David Garland: The rhetorical questions now sneer defiantly at death’s impotence before the power and mercy of God, who wills to forgive sins (**1 Cor. 15:3, 17**) and to raise the dead.

Steve Zeisler: But the law offers no praise for good or even improving effort. It always demands absolute obedience and always condemns anything that falls short of that. This is why sin is so powerful, and why we fear death so much.

Gordon Fee: Paul’s point in this theological aside is that death is not simply the result of decay through normal human processes. Rather, it is the result of the deadly poison, sin itself, which became all the more energized in our lives through acquaintance with the law. Hence, in exulting in Christ’s victory over death, Paul is reminded that that victory is the final triumph over the sin that brought death into the world, and over the law that has so frequently emboldened sin. But since both sin and the law have already been overcome in the cross, this compendium prefaces a final doxology that thanks God for present “victory” as well.

Craig Blomberg: Increasing transgressions is not the sole purpose of the Law. Indeed Reformation theology has traditionally recognized three uses of the Law, the other two of which are far more positive—as a deterrent to sin and as a moral instruction for Christians. But the first one is an important use and supports in some measure the classic Lutheran dichotomy between law and gospel.

Anthony Thiselton: Through his atoning work Christ has removed death’s sting. The word denotes the bite of a venomous animal or the sting of a scorpion’s tail. Death has poison fangs if

we encounter it in the context of sin and the law (v. 56). But because Christ has dealt with sin and the law, it now faces Christians as a stingless death: as a cup of poison from which an antidote has neutralized and removed the poison. For Christ himself has absorbed in his own person the sting and the poison of death.

John MacArthur: It is not, of course, that Christians no longer sin, but that the sins we commit are already covered by Christ's atoning death, so that sin's effect is not permanently fatal. "*The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). But for those who do not believe, death's sting tragically remains forever.

C. (:57) Victory Comes as a Gift from God through Christ

"but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Mare: If it were not for sin, death would have no sting. It is the law of God with its stringent moral demands that strengthens the power of sin by showing us how sinful we are, and thus condemns us. But death does not have the final victory!

R.C.H. Lenski: "Victory" connotes enemies and battle, but it is not for us, for we should never win. This stupendous victory is being given to us. The last phrase therefore names the Victor, names him as the medium through whom the victory gift becomes ours.

Mark Taylor: Even though Paul's derision of death and his assertion of victory is in the present tense, the final victory awaits the return of Christ when those who belong to him will be raised (15:23). In other words, Paul contemplates death's defeat in the light of resurrection day. It is quite presumptuous to downplay the present reality of death and its power over humanity. We need not fear death (cf. Heb 2:14–15), but neither should we deny it (15:21–22; Rom 6:23). Paul faced death daily but with confidence in God who raises the dead (cf. 2 Cor 1:8–9; Rom 8:31–39). **Thiselton** explains, "Even if the last resurrection is still future, the basis of the victory is a present gift, providing grounds for present exultation and thanksgiving."

(:58) APPLICATION: PERSEVERE IN SERVING THE LORD

A. Transition to the Application

"Therefore, my beloved brethren"

B. 2 Exhortations to Perseverance in Serving the Lord (first two are very similar)

1. Stand Firm -- "*be steadfast*" / "*immoveable*"

Don't give up; Don't be distracted

Mark Taylor: To "*stand firm*" in this context is to hold fast to the gospel and to the belief in the resurrection that the gospel proclaims. Otherwise they have believed in vain. Having established the fact of resurrection as central to God's redemptive plan, Paul concludes by urging them to rid themselves of the belief that there is "*no resurrection of the dead*" and to prosper in the work of the gospel knowing that all such work is not in vain (cf. 15:10,14).

2. Serve to the End -- "*always abounding in the work of the Lord*"

Stay Focused and Engaged

Assurance that Spiritual Ministry Matters

"knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

Robert Gundry: The certainty of believers’ resurrection, should they die before the second coming, and of transformation, should they live till then, ought to breed a resolve that prevents being moved away from faith and that prompts activity in the work of evangelism.

Richard Hays: The resurrection of the dead serves as a warrant validating not only Christian preaching but also “the work of the Lord” more generally; everything that we do stands under the sign of Christ’s resurrection, and all our actions are thereby given worth and meaning. The resurrection is the necessary foundation for faithful action in the world. . .

Paul saw that underneath all the dismaying problems of the Corinthians lay one massive theological fallacy: they denied the resurrection of the dead. And by doing that, they denied the importance of the world that God created. They denied – whether they meant to or not – that these flawed bodies of ours are loved by God and will be redeemed. And therefore – whether they meant to or not – they denied that what we do with these bodies is of ultimate significance in God’s eyes. So they lapsed into confusion, both moral and theological.

Craig Blomberg: Given the Corinthians’ tendency to divorce theology from ethics, Paul’s conclusion (v. 58) remains telling. It is just like him to conclude his discussion with very practical applications. Here he reminds us that it is the resurrection hope, and only this hope, that keeps believers in every place and time from despair and helps them stay faithful in Christian service. In fact, the resurrection demonstrates four sweeping principles that affect all of life: truth is stronger than falsehood, good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hatred, and life is stronger than death.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is so different and unique about the *kingdom of God* that *flesh and blood* are not suitable or fitting for such an existence?
- 2) How is our life today different because of the confidence we have in this future transformation?
- 3) How has the *power of sin* already been broken in our life?
- 4) How was Paul able to persevere in his Christian service despite all of the physical suffering and persecution he experienced?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Greg Allen: Let’s walk through four key affirmations that Paul makes in this passage. The first one is probably an obvious one. But it’s one that explains why we sometimes feel that sense of defeat and frustration. It’s that . . .

1. RIGHT NOW, WE LIVE UNDER THE LIMITATIONS OF A FRAIL, PERISHABLE BODY (v. 50).

I think that one of the ways that the devil seeks to bring discouragement to God's redeemed people—people who love the resurrected Lord Jesus and trust in Him for their salvation—is to get them to forget that they live in perishable bodies that are limited, and that get sick, and that have periods of temptation, and that eventually grow old and die. If the enemy of our souls can keep us from focusing on the fact that Jesus not only rose gloriously from the dead, but has promised that we will one day be raised in glory with Him, then he can easily make us discouraged, and defeated, and focused only on the 'here-and-now', and lose our zeal for the future glory that we will enjoy with the Lord.

2. BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, WE CAN KNOW THAT THESE FRAIL BODIES OF OURS WILL ONE DAY BE TRANSFORMED (vv. 51-53).

So; the first affirmation that Paul makes is that we live—right now—under the frustrating limitations of a perishable body. But the second affirmation he makes is that, because the Son of God took full humanity upon Himself—including a flesh-and-blood human body like our own—died in that body, and rose again in the same body in a state of glory, we who are united to Him by faith can rest assured that these frail bodies of ours will one day be transformed to be like His own!

And now; notice the third affirmation that Paul makes. It's that . . .

3. THAT COMING TRANSFORMATION WILL RESULT IN DEATH BEING COMPLETELY SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY (vv. 54-57).

And that leads us to that final affirmation; that . . .

4. THEREFORE, WE WHO FOLLOW JESUS SHOULD REJOICE RIGHT NOW IN THAT COMING VICTORY, AND NEVER GIVE UP (v. 58).

<https://bethanybible.org/new/sermon/sermons-2012/2012-04-08/the-day-death-died-%E2%80%931-corinthians-1550-58>

Ray Stedman: The Victory of the Mystery

When is this going to be? Paul's answer is, "*at the last trump*." The next question, of course, is "When is the last trump?" That is what everybody wants to know. The answer of Scripture is, "at the return of Jesus." Paul says it in First Thessalonians, Chapter 4:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. (1 Th 4:16 KJV)

That is the last trump you will ever hear, the trump of God, when the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain so shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Th 4:17a KJV)

That is the great event, the great change that is coming. I believe, as I have already stated, that this occurs for every one of us when we step out of time into eternity, but it will also occur when

Jesus steps back out of eternity into time. This is the event that the apostle refers to. . .

We are afraid of death because it is an unknown, over which we have no control. We cannot evade it -- it is beyond us. We are in the grip of other forces, and, what bothers us is, we have a sense that we are being plunged into accountability. Beyond death lies a settling, and an answering, for where we have been, and how we have lived, and what we have done. That is why death is such a fearsome thing. It is made all the more so by the law that says you cannot escape the evil of your past. God cannot set it aside nor can any man. It must be faced. There can be no deliverance from it. That is what makes us afraid of death.

But the good news coming to us from the resurrection of Jesus, following his crucifixion, is that this power of sin is broken. We are no longer helpless; we are no longer unable to change. Many people today are troubled by an unending struggle they feel within to try to be different, but they cannot find the way.

John Piper: Why does God go to all the trouble to dirty his hands to reestablish your body and clothe it with immortality? Because his Son paid the price of his life so that God could be glorified in your body for ever and ever. "You were bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies." God will not dishonor the work of his Son. That's why he will raise your body.

The sting of death is sin (**15:56**), but Christ bore the curse of sin. The power of sin is the law (**15:56**), but Christ satisfied the demands of the law. Therefore Paul cries out, "*Thanks be to God who gives the victory through Jesus Christ.*" When Christ died he forgave sin and fulfilled the law and defeated death and obtained not just our souls but also our bodies.

Therefore God will honor the work of his Son by raising your body from the dead, and you will use your body to glorify him for ever and ever. That is why you have a body now. And that is why it will be raised imperishable.

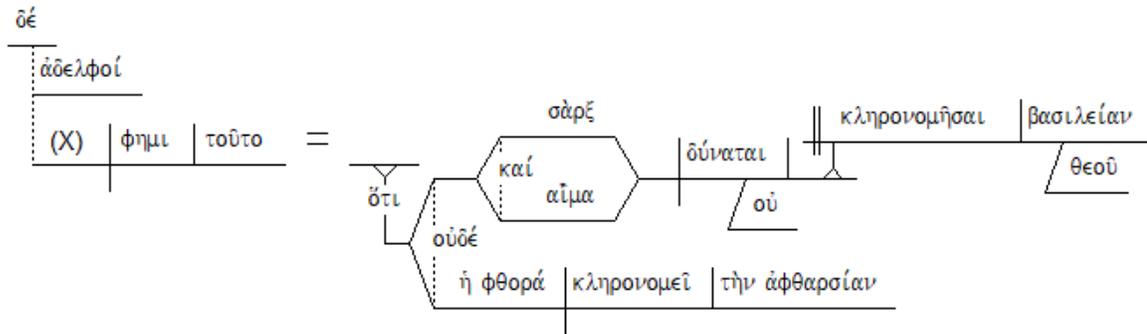
Steve Zeisler: The English writer **Malcolm Muggeridge** was standing by his father's grave once, beside which was his own future grave. As he mused about death, here are the words he wrote on this occasion; may they serve to encourage us:

Death is a beginning, not an end. The darkness falls, and the sky is a distant glow, the lights of St. Augustine's City of God. Looking towards them, I say over to myself John Donne's splendid words, 'Death, thou shalt die.' In the graveyard the dust settles. In the City of God, eternity begins.

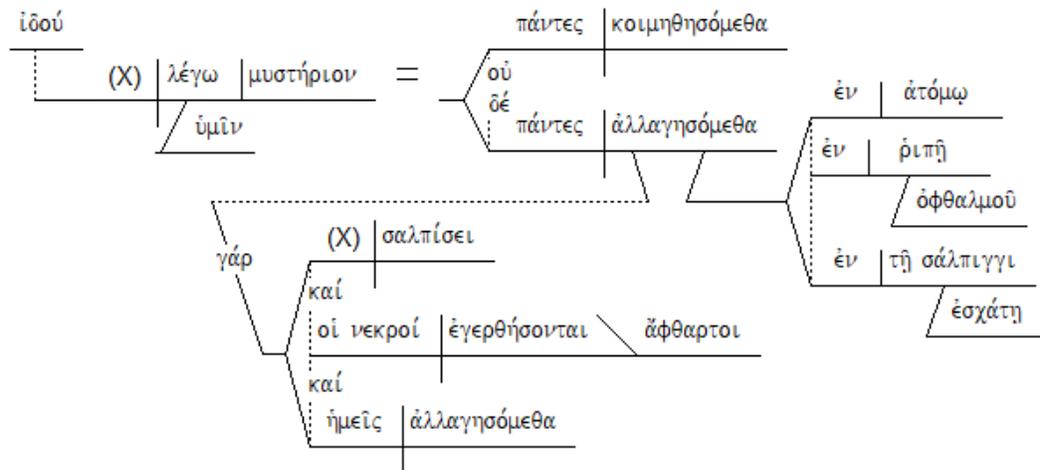
R.C.H. Lenski: "*Incorruption*" is the new heavenly condition and form which ever remain perfect. Every trace of sin and of its effects is gone, and in their place there are the glory, beauty, and power of an imperishable life, "*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,*" **1 Pet. 1:4**. Its other name is "*immortality,*" a condition and a corresponding form that are free from the power of death and from any deterioration or change which death works, they are fadeless because of the unchanging powers of eternal life.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

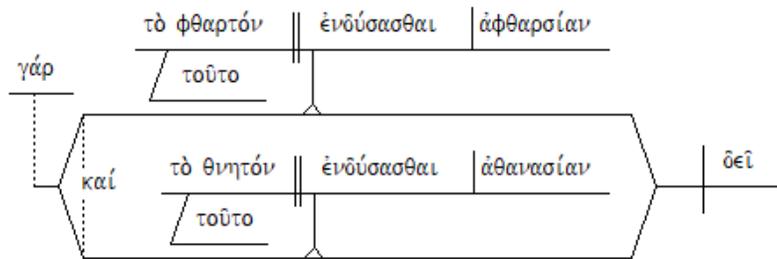
1Co 15:50



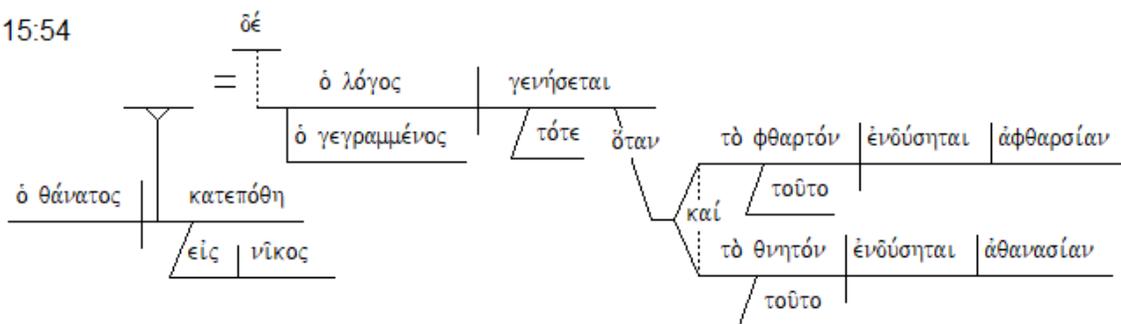
1Co 15:51-52



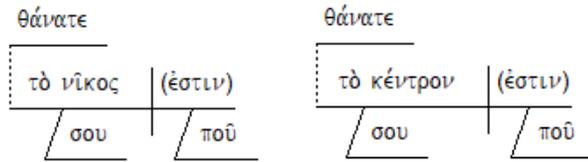
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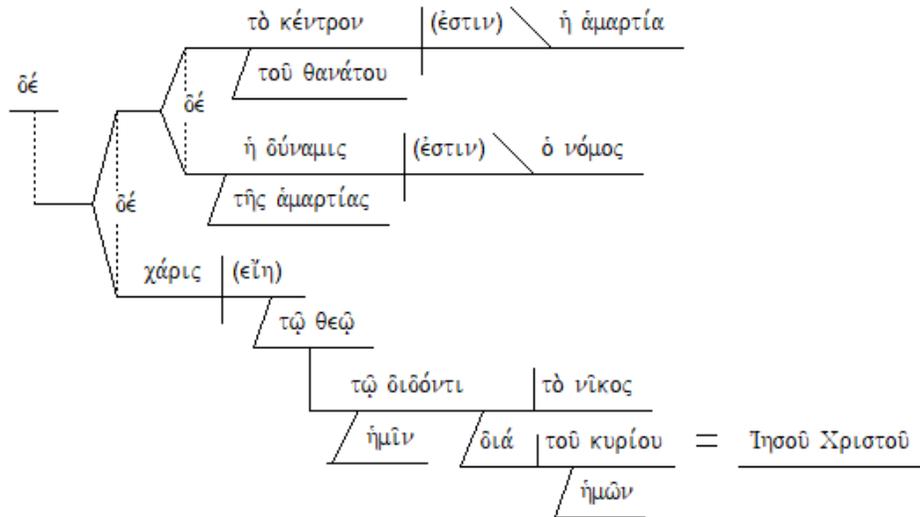
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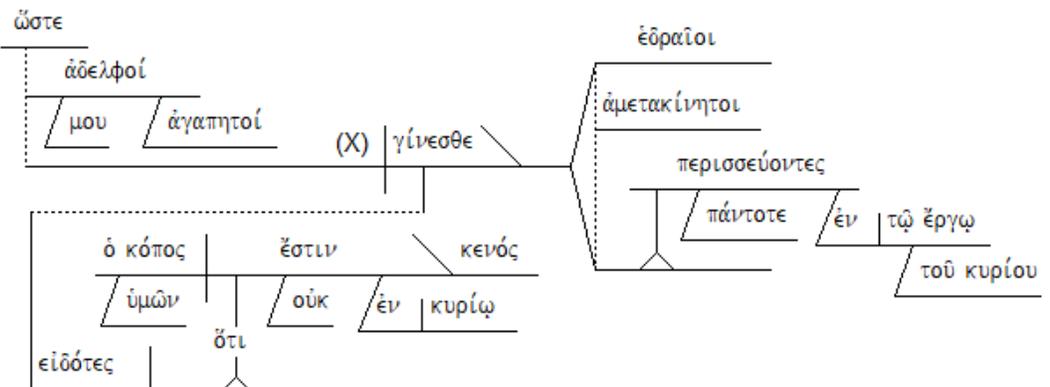
1Co 15:55



1Co 15:56-57



1Co 15:58



TEXT: 1 Corinthians 16:1-24

TITLE: *LOOSE ENDS AND FINAL THOUGHTS*

BIG IDEA:

APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS CLOSE OUT PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hays: With the grand conclusion of **chapter 15**, Paul has finished responding to the various contested issues at Corinth. The final chapter deals with some practical loose ends, gives the Corinthians information about Paul's travel plans, and closes, like all Paul's letters, with a few admonitions and greetings. That is not to say that the content of this final chapter is unimportant; Paul is a savvy pastor who makes every sentence serve a purpose in shaping the life of the church. These brief comments and directives seek to cement Paul's relationship with the Corinthian community and to shape the members' attitudes about Paul's associates Timothy and Apollos. Furthermore, Paul's directions about the collection (**16:1-4**) and about the role of Stephanas in the community (**18:15-17**) touch upon matters that would have been of vital concern to the original readers of the letter. It is not surprising that these specific issues are not of direct concern to us; this concluding chapter reminds us once again that **1 Corinthians** really is a **letter**, not a theological treatise, and that we are after all reading someone else's mail. Still, here as elsewhere in the letter, we stand to learn something by observing closely how Paul brings the gospel to bear upon practical issues.

Mark Taylor: Paul brings the letter to conclusion by addressing several matters of practical concern and giving final exhortations. At first glance the shift from the exultant tone of **15:50-58** regarding resurrection, transformation, and the defeat of death to the matter of the collection for God's people seems quite abrupt. **Chapter 15** ended, however, with an exhortation to *abound in the work of the Lord*, and the collection is one way among others to do this very thing. There is still much to attend to in this life, and Paul "must return to business." In this final chapter

- Paul gives instructions for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (**16:1-4**),
- announces his travel plans and the plans of Timothy and Apollos (**16:5-12**),
- and offers final exhortations, commendations, and greetings (**16:13-24**).

Gordon Fee: the triumphant words that brought the preceding argument to its conclusion (**15:50-58**), Paul has also brought to their conclusion the essential matters between him and the Corinthians that have come to him by way of both report and letter. But two items from their letter (presumably) still require a brief word. Apparently they have written for further instructions as to their part in the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, especially how they are to go about it and how it is to get to Jerusalem. So he gives instructions similar to those given to other churches. Since these instructions included a word about his coming to pick up the collection, he digresses to speak about his own travel plans in coming to them (**vv. 5-9**). This in turn reminds him that Timothy may very well be arriving in the meantime, so he includes a word about how they are to receive him (**vv. 10-11**). While on the matter of travel plans, he concludes (**v. 12**) by returning to the final item from their letter: their request that Apollos return soon.

Unlike most of the letter, these final words have little that is openly confrontational; nonetheless, in light of what has preceded, one may see hints of tension here as well, especially since some of these items are the very ones that explode on him between this letter and his writing of our 2 Corinthians. Thus the way the apostle defuses potential trouble in some workaday, personal matters becomes both a lesson in Christian tact and instructive about how Paul managed his everyday relationships with his churches.

David Prior: fascinating insights into the life of the New Testament church:

1. A church which is international but also interdependent.
2. A church which faces opportunities but also opposition.
3. A church which has resources but also responsibilities.

Paul Gardner: Closing Instructions and Comments (16:1–24)

- A. Instructions for the Collection (16:1–4)
 1. Put Aside Gifts Each Week (16:1–2)
 2. Paul Will Collect and Deliver the Gifts (16:3–4)
- B. Paul’s Travel Plans (16:5–9)
 1. Plans to Visit Corinth (16:5–7)
 2. His Immediate Plans (16:8–9)
- C. Note about Timothy and Apollos (16:10–12)
- D. Various Exhortations (16:13–18)
- E. Greetings in the Lord from Others (16:19–20)
- F. Paul’s Own Closure to the Letter (16:21–24)

I. (:1-4) FINAL INSTRUCTIONS: COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM – CONSISTENT GIVING

Paul Gardner: This approach of Paul to giving, centered in the need of others and the mutual fellowship across churches and focused in the Christ who gave himself for his people, is undoubtedly different from how giving and receiving gifts were regarded in Greco-Roman society. The apostle’s observations on giving may touch upon the recurring issue of elitism in 1 Corinthians. It seems that giving almost universally involved obligation in the Greco-Roman world. Giving and receiving was part of “**social reciprocity**,” much as is still seen in many cultures today. If a gift is received, there was often an obligation to give back.⁶ The one who gives is regarded as the “socially superior” unless reciprocity can be maintained. Honor will be gained by the one who can gain the upper hand in these exchanges of gifts. To speculate, not unreasonably perhaps, it may be that some of the Corinthians were quite concerned about who delivered the gift and who was seen to be involved in the transaction of gift giving since this helped indicate their social status. This would fit with their general concern throughout every area of the church’s life to evidence “**status**” of one sort or another. Paul’s theological understanding of giving, therefore, though not laid out here in this brief paragraph, provides a radically different perspective on giving from that which perhaps was driving the elite, wealthy Corinthian Christians. For him there is no expectation at all of reciprocity. Rather, Paul exhorts them strongly with an aorist imperative to “*do*” the same as he had “*directed*” the Galatian churches (cf. **Acts 13–14**).

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Giving will always be a part of the church’s worship, and it should follow some specific guidelines.

- I. We Should Give with Sincere Dedication (16:1).
- II. We Should Give to a Specific Destination (16:2a).
- III. We Should Give with Steadfast Determination (16:2a).
- IV. We Should Give with Studied Deliberation (16:2b).
- V. We Should Give with Sober Discrimination (16:3-4).

This chapter is a refreshing reminder that even the early church understood the importance of giving and its role in worship. It gives us some wonderful insights into how money should be given, distributed, and managed in such a way that the needy are ministered to, the gospel is spread, and the church is blessed.

A. (:1) Consistent Directions for Support Spread Across All Churches – One Pattern

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints,
as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.”*

Albert Barnes: The use of the article here shows that he had mentioned it to them before, and that it was a subject which they would readily understand. It was not new to them, but it was needful only to give some instructions in regard to the manner in which it should be done, and not in regard to the occasion for the collection, or the duty of making it. Accordingly, all his instructions relate simply to the manner in which the collection should be made.

Richard Hays: Paul is seeking to avoid the unpleasant necessity of launching a fund drive when he arrives in Corinth; he would prefer that all the money be stored up before he appears on the scene. Further, he wants it to be clear to everyone that the money is not for *him*, but for the poor. Thus, rather than taking the money himself, he plans to send emissaries of the Corinthians’ own choice to deliver it to Jerusalem; this procedure will eliminate any possible suspicion that Paul might be planning to misappropriate the money. Not incidentally, it will also enhance the symbolic value of the gift: the offering of the Gentiles to Jerusalem is to be brought **by the Gentiles themselves**.

B. (:2) Consistent Discipline of Orderly Collection – One Practice

1. Priority of Giving – Repeated Each Week

“On the first day of every week”

Christians by this time had begun to meet on Sunday every week.

Gordon Fee: why then does Paul mention “*on the first day of every week*”? Traditionally this has been one of three NT texts that have been used to support these early Gentile believers’ use of Sunday, rather than the Jewish Sabbath, as their day of worship. Although one should not assert more than such a passing reference allows, several observations are in order:

(1) The fact that Paul makes such a reference at all implies that there is some significance to their setting money aside on this day rather than, for example, “once a week.”

(2) Although that significance may have been only a matter of when people were paid, it seems far more likely that it is a weekly reckoning with religious significance, especially since it reflects the Jewish tradition of counting days with reference to the Sabbath.

(3) This language is well remembered in the gospel traditions in relationship to the resurrection

of Jesus from the dead. The fixed place of this terminology in those narratives implies that it had more than simply historical interest for the early church. This is verified further by the note in Luke's account (**Acts 20:7**), which implies most strongly that Paul and the others waited in Troas until the "first day of the week" precisely because that is when the Christians gathered for the breaking of bread, that is, their meal in honor of the Lord.

Therefore, and despite sabbatarians to the contrary, all of this together implies that this is the day when believers from a very early time gathered for their specifically Christian celebration of worship, which included the Lord's Table. Thus, even though they were not necessarily to bring their gift to the assembly on this day, it was the fact that this day marked for them the specifically Christian day in their week that probably made it convenient for Paul to note it as the time for them to remember the poor among the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

2. Participation by Everyone – No Exceptions

"each one of you"

3. Purposeful Savings – Protected Gift

"is to put aside and save"

Ray Stedman: He is referring to the fact that, in that culture, people got paid every day. They were to go home and put aside, in the sugar bowl, each day a certain amount of money so that on Sunday they would have a larger amount to bring to the services, and contribute to the needs of others. Now the principle, of course, is that they had an objective they had determined upon. They were not merely giving to nothing or everything, but they had determined that they would have a part in a specific need and they were giving regularly to meet that need.

4. Proportional Giving – Expectation of God's Favor

"as he may prosper"

Ray Stedman: Nowhere in the New Testament do you find tithing taught or laid upon Christians. But proportionate giving is, for God does not give us wealth in order to lavish it in abundant measure upon ourselves but that we might share it more abundantly with those who have pressing needs. If this simple principle were thoroughly grasped, all the needs of Christendom would be abundantly met by those who give as God has prospered them.

Steve Zeisler: If we recognize that it is God who has been responsible for the degree of prosperity which we have, and if we are grateful for that, then our response ought to be proportional to what he has bestowed upon us. Jesus declared that the widow who gave two copper coins had contributed much more in proportion to the rich and prosperous who stood about congratulating themselves for their generosity. This passage does not give any absolute percentages or amounts here. Christians should give, says the apostle, as God has prospered them. My recommendation is that not only should the absolute amount of giving go up as we grow more prosperous over the years but the percentage ought to go up, too. The government operates that way. The more you make, the higher tax bracket you find yourself in. But the apostle's directions are simple: every week, having thoughtfully determined the amount, each one should give, as he may prosper.

Craig Blomberg: Paul's phrase "*in keeping with his income*" (v. 2) reminds us that neither here nor in any other New Testament text is the **tithe** taught as incumbent on Christians. Indeed, the

only New Testament reference to giving ten percent comes in a passage in which Jesus is instructing Jewish scribes and Pharisees on how they should live under the old covenant, and in which he is drastically subordinating the tithe to “*the more important matters of the law -- justice, mercy and faithfulness*” (**Matt. 23:23**). Paul’s ideal appears instead in **2 Corinthians 8:13–15**: no one is ever permitted to get too rich or too poor, as more well-to-do Christians share from their surplus with needier ones. The problem with a tithe is that it is too burdensome for many of the poor, while letting most middle-and upper-class Christians off the hook too quickly! So Paul refuses to legislate any percent; indeed, verse 2 here can be taken as support for the concept of a “graduated tithe”—the more one makes, the higher percentage one should normally give. But he does stress that “*each*” must give; the task may not be restricted to the wealthy patrons, lest they think they are again buying power with their gifts.

5. Unpressured Giving – not based on trying to impress the Apostle Paul
“*so that no collections be made when I come*”

Steve Zeisler: There should be no tear-jerking appeals, no threats, power plays or stern lecturing or thundering from the pulpit.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Think about it for a moment. What is the most difficult sales pitch to reject? It is the face-to-face presentation of someone we know and love. We find it a little easier to say no on the phone, and it is quite easy to throw a sales-oriented letter into the trash. Paul wrote a letter so they would not have to give when he arrived and saw them face-to-face. Paul really wanted their decision to give to be divinely prompted, rather than prompted by human persuasion. Paul set aside the means and methods which the world knows to work well in fund-raising.

C. (:3-4) Careful Delivery of the Funds to Jerusalem – One Presentation – Responsible Stewardship and Fiscal Accountability

1. (:3) Approved Delegates Dispatched with the Relief Funds

“*When I arrive, whomever you may approve,
I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem*”

No administrative fees subtracted from these gifts; 100% given to the need

Craig Blomberg: Most likely, the Jerusalem church’s need was the product of a series of factors that included the famine of the late 40s, the relative poverty level in Jerusalem to begin with, the number of poor people (e.g., the widows of **Acts 6:1**) who flocked into the early church there, and the fact that these Jews, now turned Christians, would most likely have been cut off from the distribution of food and provisions for the needy that other Jews assiduously practiced. . .

Indeed, Paul’s two major rationales for this collection have influenced the church’s history to such an extent that they provide the two major foci of Christian giving in almost every age—

- supporting those who are our spiritual parents or authorities over us in full-time ministry and
- helping to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the world’s most dispossessed, particularly within the body of Christ.

2. (:4) Accompanying Paul if Appropriate

“*and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.*”

II. (:5-12) FINAL ITINERARY ISSUES: POTENTIAL PERSONAL VISITS TO CORINTH – MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

A. (:5-9) Paul’s Personal Intentions – Wants to Spend Time with Them

1. (:5) Plans to Visit Believers at Corinth after going through Macedonia

“But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.”

Paul made very definite plans; purposeful, strategic

Anthony Thiselton: Here he shares his strategies, plans, and hopes for revisiting and reviewing churches to whom he has already brought the gospel, with the possibility of extending further outreach. Paul combines the work of apostle, pastor, theologian, and evangelist or missionary. Corinth remains the most strategic cosmopolitan center of Greece, spanning north and south and east and west. Ephesus represents his strategic center for Asia Minor. Philippi and Thessalonica are key centers for Macedonia. Rome and further west find a place in his thoughts of outreach.

2. (:6-7) Wants to Stay for Extended Time

“and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.”

Paul submitted to the Lord’s providential will; was not presumptuous; Grateful for the support and encouragement of the brethren

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul did not claim to have received any direct divine guidance which communicated God’s travel plans for his next visit to Corinth. The supernatural guidance Paul occasionally received was not normative. Paul’s words here do not indicate any sense of need for such guidance on his part or any distress that such guidance was not given. Paul speaks as though he is confident that he will know when and how to reach Corinth when it is necessary.

Richard Hays: After his stay among them, he hopes that the Corinthians will “*send him on*” to his next, as yet undetermined, destination with financial and logistical support (v. 7; the verb *propempein* seems to be a technical term for the **support of missionaries**). If he does accept their financial assistance for his mission, that will represent a change of his previous policy toward them (cf. **9:12; 15-18**), but he does not elaborate on his reasons for this shift.

Craig Blomberg: “*If the Lord permits*” (v. 7) is a key proviso that should qualify every Christian’s plans and prayers (cf. **Matt. 6:10; James 4:13-15**), though this does not necessarily mean that we should speak it formally in every situation in which it is applied. People who overly punctuate their conversation with “*God willing*” often dissolve the meaning of those words into a mere cliché.

3. (:8-9) Ministering Effectively in Ephesus until Pentecost

“But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Open doors for ministry do not mean easy sailing.
We need to be opportunistic to take advantage of potential for effective service.

Craig Blomberg: Paul's twofold rationale for staying in Corinth in verse 9 provides a powerful model for Christians in many times and places trying to decide where to perform ministry or exercise their spiritual gifts. An open door and much opposition often go hand in hand, and they may jointly signify that God's Spirit is mightily at work. To be sure, at times God brings blessing and prosperity for short intervals without significant antagonism. On other occasions, he allows seemingly unmitigated hostility, perhaps even for somewhat longer periods of time. But a prolonged lack of results in ministry more often than not suggests that it is time to move on, while prolonged prosperity without any difficulty should make one question if the full-orbed gospel with all its demands is clearly being preached.

Ray Stedman: [Acts 19:9-10] -- Paul himself was teaching in a rented hall, the hall of Tyrannus, where he taught, some manuscripts say, five hours a day, six days a week. Can you imagine the church that must have crowded and jammed into that hall to hear this mighty apostle? It was an urban church in the heart of Ephesus, and it sent greetings together with all the spin-off churches that had come out of that remarkable ministry throughout the province. . .

We do not know how far in advance that would be, but there is a reason why he chose Pentecost. As you read some of the literature of that day, you discover that Pentecost, which comes 50 days after the Passover time, is the time when shipping resumed in the Aegean Sea. During the winter months it was impossible for these frail little boats to survive in the great storms that would sweep through the Mediterranean, but by Pentecost the weather had calmed and shipping would resume. Paul is simply taking that into account, and he is basing his plans on that fact. This in line with the normal circumstances of life. . .

Principles about Ministry Planning

- (:5) Make immediate short range goals
- (:6) Make flexible commitments
- (:6) Trust God to provide the necessary funds as you pursue the ministry; not all up front
 - If we are really convinced that there is a need for something, God has promised to supply our needs, therefore we do not have to have everything in hand before we start. We venture on the power and the provision of God.
- (:8) Take into account the normal circumstances of life
- (:9) Look for a combination of a wide door and many adversaries = effective ministry

B. (:10-11) Timothy's Travels – Needs Encouragement in the Ministry

1. (:10) Timothy Deserves Good Treatment at Corinth

a. Expectation of Visiting Corinth

“Now if Timothy comes”

b. Tendency to be Fearful

“see that he is with you without cause to be afraid”

Ray Stedman: But I do not think it was timidity so much as it was really a temperament that was quiet and unassuming and did not force its way to the front.

- c. Fully Engaged in Christian Ministry
“for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am”

Paul Gardner: These verses give a fascinating, brief insight into the way Paul made his plans and thought about his work and his travel. In the end the reader encounters an apostle who was prepared to give himself emotionally, physically, and spiritually to the task of preaching to which he had been called. In all this he was aware that if doors were opened for the gospel, it was the Lord’s work. His task of itinerant apostle, though, also involved him in clear pastoral roles as he travelled, and so he could remain flexible about the amount of time he was needed in the various places he visited. Thus he knew he would need more time with the Corinthians at his next visit than he might have expected. Meanwhile, he is constantly aware of the spiritual battle he faces in the form of adversaries as he does *“the work of the Lord”* (v. 10).

2. (:11) Paul Wants Timothy Returned to Him

- a. Respect and Support Him in His Ministry

1) Negatively

“So let no one despise him”

2) Positively

“but send him on his way in peace”

- b. Return Him to Paul in a Timely Fashion

“so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.”

C. (:12) Encouragement to Apollos to Visit

*“But concerning Apollos our brother,
I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren;
and it was not at all his desire to come now,
but he will come when he has opportunity.”*

Mark Taylor: There is no indication from Paul’s brief comments of why the Corinthians desired a visit from Apollos and no indication of why Apollos refused to come at the present time. Some surmise that Apollos did not return due to his disgust with the perpetuation of factions in his name.⁶⁴ Paul’s strong encouragement to Apollos to visit Corinth shows the strength of Paul’s character and his absolute commitment to partnership in ministry. No jealousy existed between the two.

Ray Stedman: That is a most remarkable verse, especially in view of the attitude many today have that the apostles were, in a sense, "generals" in the army of the Lord, sending out people, ordering them here or there, and commanding these younger Christians to go at their beck and call, and so forth. But you do not find that here. This verse indicates that Paul does not command Apollos at all; he has no authority over him. He urges him, rather. In several places in the New Testament we are reminded by the apostle that he was not "lord" over anybody else.

Lording it over the brethren is, in my judgment, one of the great curses of the church today. Some men assume, for instance, that the office of pastor gives them an authority over other people. I believe that a redefining from the Bible of the issue of authority is going to be one of the hottest issues the church will face in the next decade. Having just come from Southern

Baptist country, I was very much confronted with this last week, and was challenged on it. Yet it was interesting to see how the word of the Scripture, in turn, shook men who had long assumed that they had an authority that the Word really did not give them. This is a good verse in support of that. . .

I find Christians everywhere under the authority of men who seem to be dictators -- much like Diotrefes, whom John mentions in one of his letters, who loved to have the pre-eminence among them (cf, **3 Jn 1:9**). I am becoming much more bold in my speaking along this line, because of the widespread nature of this problem. I have to tell congregations at times that:

No pastor has the right to tell them what they can do with their spiritual gifts.

No pastor has the right to tell you that you cannot have a meeting in your home and teach the Word of God to whoever will come and listen.

Now you should listen to him as a wise brother who understands the nature of truth, perhaps, and can give you great suggestions. But no pastor ever, anywhere, has the right to tell you that you yourself cannot follow the leading of the Lord as to the ministry that you have. Paul makes that clear in this passage.

III. (:13-18) FINAL EXHORTATIONS – TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS – COMBINATION OF STRENGTH AND LOVE

A. (:13-14) 5 Closing Commands:

1. Be Vigilant -- “*Be on the alert*” **1 Pt. 5:8**

Albert Barnes: The term is frequently used in the New Testament, and the duty frequently enjoined, **Matthew 24:41, 42; 25:13; Mark 13:35; Luke 21:36; Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:5**. The sense here is, that they were to watch, or be vigilant, against all the evils of which he had admonished them--the evils of dissension, of erroneous doctrines, of disorder, of false teachers, etc. They were to watch lest their souls should be ruined, and their salvation endangered; lest the enemies of the truth and of holiness should steal silently upon them, and surprise them. They were to watch with the same vigilance that is required of a sentinel who guards a camp, lest an enemy should come suddenly upon them, and surprise the camp when the army was locked in sleep.

Richard Hays: The first imperative, “*Keep alert*” (*gregoreite*) is a verb with strong **eschatological** overtones. Paul uses it elsewhere to admonish his readers to watch intently so that they will not be caught by surprise by the coming of the day of the Lord: (**1 Thess. 5:6**; for a similar call to eschatological watchfulness, see **Rom. 13:11-14**; cf. also **Mark 13:33, 35, 37**). In view of his many reminders throughout the letter for the Corinthians to see their lives in light of the coming eschatological judgment, Paul’s call to watchfulness here in **16:13** should certainly be understood as a call for them to look intently for the coming of the Lord and to conduct themselves in a way appropriate to that hope.

2. Be Steadfast -- “*stand firm in the faith*” **2 Thess. 2:15**

Albert Barnes: Be firm in maintaining what you believe to be true, and in holding on to your personal confidence in God, notwithstanding all the arts, insinuations, and teachings of seducers

and the friends of false doctrine.

3. Be Manly -- “*act like men*” **1 Cor. 14:20**

Albert Barnes: It means, to render one manly or brave; to show one's self a man; that is, not to be a coward, or timid, or alarmed at enemies, but to be bold and brave. We have a similar phrase in common use: "Be a man," or "Show yourself a man;" that is, be not mean, or be not cowardly.

Paul Gardner: Whatever the temptations, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to “*act like men*” (ἀνδρίζεσθε), that is to say, “*be brave*” and “*be strong*.” Paul has amply laid out the pressures of a pagan society to which this church is being subjected: from the proud elitists with their vaunted “*wisdom*” and “*knowledge*” through to problems with sexual immorality and idolatry. These require true courage and a reliance upon the Lord to overcome.

4. Be Strong -- “*be strong*” **Eph. 6:10**

Adam Clarke: Put forth all the vigour and energy which God has given you in maintaining and propagating the truth, and your spiritual strength will increase by usage. The terms in this verse are all military: *Watch ye*, γρηγορείτε, watch, and be continually on your guard, lest you be surprised by your enemies; keep your scouts out, and all your sentinels at their posts, lest your enemies steal a march upon you. See that the place you are in be properly defended; and that each be alert to perform his duty.

Stand fast in the faith-στηκετεεντηπιστει. Keep in your ranks; do not be disorderly; be determined to keep your ranks unbroken; keep close together. On your unity your preservation depends; if the enemy succeed in breaking your ranks, and dividing one part of this sacred army from another, your rout will be inevitable.

Quit yourselves like men-ανδρίζεσθε. When you are attacked, do not flinch; maintain your ground; resist; press forward; strike home; keep compact; conquer.

Be strong-κραταιουαθε. If one company or division be opposed by too great a force of the enemy, strengthen that division, and maintain your position; if an attack is to be made on any part or intrenchment of the foe, summon up all your courage, sustain each other; fear not, for fear will enervate you. Your cause is good; it is the faith, the religion of Jesus; he is your Captain in the field; and, should you even die in the contest, the victory is yours.

5. Capstone: Be Loving -- “*Let all that you do be done in love*” **1 Pet. 4:8**

Richard Hays: Finally, the last of this string of pithy exhortations powerfully reinforces one of the central themes of **1 Corinthians**: “*Let all that you do be done in love*” (**16:14**). This distills the message of the letter into a single sentence. Hearing these words, the Corinthians should certainly remember **8:1-3** and the entirety of **chapter 13**. Paul hopes they will be moved to action.

Paul Gardner: The Corinthians are thus reminded in this final exhortation that there can be no place for pride or elitism, no place for some setting themselves up as more “*spiritual*” than others, and no place for the divisions that seem to pervade the church. It reminds them of the call

to act as “one body” and of their covenant commitment to love one another even as the Lord loves them.

B. (:15-16) Respect and Submission Due to Ministry Care Providers

“Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.”

Addicted to ministry of the saints; showing hospitality; supporting itinerant missionaries

Steve Zeisler: It is an unvarying principle in the Christian life that service to others is what gives a man or woman the right to speak and to be an example to others. Paul makes no mention of wealth, social standing, personality, degrees, or to any natural ability or attribute. The only qualification is servant-heartedness; a heart given over to God in service to others. Those who have had a lifestyle of such service, who year in and year out seek ways to build up others and meet their needs, should be respected and followed.

Adam Clarke: That ye have due regard to them, and consider them as especial instruments in the hand of God for countenancing and carrying on his great work. The submission here recommended does not imply obedience, but kind and courteous demeanour. *Kypke* vindicates this sense of the word from **Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5**.

Daniel Akin: (:15-18) -- I want to commend some who had come to visit him from Corinth. Paul had baptized the entire household of Stephanas (**1:16**). As so-called firstfruits (**16:15**), these most likely were the very first believers of Corinth (**Schreiner, 1 Corinthians, 333**). Because of their devotion to serving the saints (particularly within their own local church), they deserved both respect and submission because they had certainly proven their servant leadership.

Fortunatus and Achaicus evidently filled a void in Paul’s life, rescuing him at times from loneliness, discouragement, and perhaps even depression, which is something all Christ-followers should do for one another. We can refresh one another’s spirits. Even though people like this serve mostly behind the scenes, Paul reminds the Corinthians, **we should always give honor to whom honor is due.**

C. (:17-18) Appreciation and Recognition Due to Sacrificial Encouragers

“I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.”

Bob Deffinbaugh: Appreciation and respect are certainly due such men, but Paul seems to have more in mind. I believe that he is indicating to the church that these men should be formally recognized as leaders. It is the Holy Spirit who makes men elders (**Acts 20:28**), but it is the church which formally recognizes this divine appointment (compare **Acts 13:1-3**). Here is the kind of leadership the Corinthian church needs. Here is the kind of leadership every church needs, and it is our task to identify and recognize such men.

Paul Gardner: Unlike what is happening in some sections of the Corinthian church where recognition is given on the grounds of status, wisdom, wealth, etc., Paul seeks recognition for people on the grounds of their humble and generous service offered to himself and to the Corinthian church for the Lord's sake.

IV. (:19-24) FINAL GREETINGS AND FAREWELL

Mark Taylor: The letter concludes with standard greetings (16:19–22), a grace benediction (16:23), and a postscript (16:24). The final greetings in Paul's letters reveal his considerable support network in ministry

A. (:19-21) Final Greetings

Paul Gardner: When seen as a whole, these three verses do more than simply conclude a letter with greetings. They draw attention to the close unity and love between these early churches of the Roman provinces of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia and the close fellowship shared by individual Christians with one another and with the apostle Paul.

1. From Churches of Asia

“The churches of Asia greet you.”

2. From Aquila and Prisca and their House Church

“Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house”

Steve Zeisler: But the point I want to focus on is the fact that their home was always open. Paul lived and worked with them in Corinth. In Ephesus, they had a house church in their home. In Rome, they had another home church. They consistently invited others to come among them and see them interact in their own home. God works in unique ways in godly homes, among godly families. This is how change is wrought in society. It is not accomplished by massive, staged meetings addressed by captivating and eloquent speakers, but is brought about as mature Christian men and women invite non-Christians into their homes and give them opportunity to see a believing home go about the business of Christianity.

3. All the Brethren

“All the brethren greet you”

4. Mutual Greeting

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

Anthony Thiselton: The kiss was a sign of both respect and honor. It is possible but less certain that it conveys personal affection. The parting kiss of the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:37) is a sign of their respect and gratitude to Paul. Research on the significance of the formal kiss in the Greco-Roman world shows that it might be used to signify a variety of acts and attitudes. Hence Paul couples with it the adjective holy to denote a kind of greeting appropriate to an expression of solidarity, mutuality, and respect among the people of God. Negatively it excludes its use for erotic expression or overfamiliarity; positively it includes reciprocal respect and (where needed) reconciliation. As time passes, it becomes the kiss of peace in public liturgy.

5. Personal Greeting from Paul

“The greeting is in my own hand – Paul”

Ray Stedman: This greeting is Paul's way of authenticating his letters. From the letter to the Galatians, we know that he had the habit of taking the pen from the secretary and adding in his own handwriting a greeting to the people to whom he wrote. And since, as many feel, Paul was almost blind, he wrote with large letters, scrawled across the bottom of the manuscript, words like this: *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.”*

B. (:22-24) Farewell and Benediction

1. Directed to False Professors of Faith or Apostates – A Curse – Gal. 1:9; Rom. 9:3

“If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.”

[**Adam Clarke** applies this to the Jews based on **1 Cor. 12:3**]

David Guzik: In fact, *anathema* was the third of three levels of discipline among the ancient Jews. The first level was a simple separation of a man from the synagogue for thirty days. If one did not repent in the thirty days, he was under the second degree of discipline, giving him still an undefined time to repent, but warning him of the dire consequences to come. The third level was the *anathema*, and with that all hope of reconciliation and repentance was cut off. The man could never be reconciled to the synagogue, and was no longer accounted as a Jew at all.

2. Directed to the Lord

“Maranatha” – Our Lord is coming; Our Lord is at hand; Come, Lord Jesus

Word play here – similarity between *accursed* and *Maranatha*;

We serve in light of our expectation and longing for the imminent return of Christ

Andrew Maclaren: his first clause is not an imprecation, nor any wish on the part of the Apostle, but is a solemn prophetic warning (acquiesced in by every righteous heart) of that which will certainly come. The significance of the whole may be gathered into one simple sentence—The coming of the Lord of Love is the destruction of the unloving.

3. Directed to Genuine Believers – Final Benediction

a. Divine Grace

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.”

b. Brotherly Love

“My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”

Paul Gardner: His final words indicate his own commitment to the principles of which he has spoken. For all his concern for them, this is a people he deeply loves in Christ. They are his *“dearly loved children,”* and he is the one who became their *“father”* in Christ Jesus through the gospel (**4:14–15**). This love is *“in Christ Jesus.”* Once again Paul reminds them that they are in covenant fellowship with the Lord himself. This is the one who has loved them even to his death. This is the one they imitate as they seek to love God and to love neighbor, and so identify with their covenant Lord.

“Amen.”

Craig Blomberg: The “Amen” is missing from some of the oldest manuscripts and may well reflect a pious addition by an early scribe.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the giving in the NT seem to be more oriented towards relief funds for saints in financial difficulty than support for the leaders of the local church and the maintenance of the local ministry?
- 2) Why does Paul judge it to be unseemly for collections to be made while he is present?
- 3) Why such an emphasis on strength in the closing exhortations?
- 4) Why does Paul close with pronouncing a curse?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Deffinbaugh: Verses 1-4 of **chapter 16** flow very logically out of Paul’s teaching on the resurrection in **chapter 15**. Paul concluded by assuring the Corinthian saints that due to the resurrection of our Lord, and thus the resurrection of the dead, our labor and toil is not in vain in the Lord. No wonder Paul can now speak to his readers about making a contribution to the poor. This is one of the ways the Christian can “*lay up treasure in heaven*” (see **Matthew 6:19-21**). Furthermore, the contribution to the saints, which Paul has instructed the Corinthians to prepare for, is that which will be delivered after he arrives at Corinth, so Paul’s discussion of his travel plans logically follow in **verses 5-9**. Giving to the poor is an eternal investment, which will be delivered to the saints after Paul has returned to Corinth.

Ray Stedman: He is talking, of course, about the collection that was being made in many churches to send to the troubled, discouraged, and afflicted church in Jerusalem. This is a theme very close to Paul's heart, and he mentions it in several of his letters. He is very anxious that these Gentile churches, scattered in the Roman world, should have a part in meeting the needs of the afflicted saints in Jerusalem. As you read the book of Acts, you can see there are two reasons why this church in Jerusalem was having trouble -- one of them was circumstantial, and the other is consequential, that is, one they are to blame for, and the other they are not.

The one they were not to blame for was a series of famines that had occurred. These are also mentioned in the book of Acts -- times of drought such as we went through recently here in California. Crops did not grow adequately, and with a limited system of distribution, they were without food.

But then there was another reason why the church was suffering, and that was their own failure to obey what the Lord had said. Just before his ascension, Jesus said to this church, “*begin in Jerusalem and then go to all Judea and Samaria and then reach out to the uttermost part of the earth,*” (cf, **Acts 1:8**). Reading the record of Acts, you can see that they totally ignored those

words. They were having a great time in Jerusalem. They had all the apostles teaching them; they had all the gifts of the Spirit manifest in their midst; they were experiencing miracles and wonders and signs, and they had tremendous numbers of people, thousands, converted at a time. Nobody wanted to leave. They were enjoying their privileges and clinging to them, so the Lord, in his wisdom, sent a time of persecution. Acts tells us that at the time of the death of Stephen there broke out a great persecution against the church which forced them out. In the process they lost their resources. All the wealthy people were driven away or they lost their wealth. So this church was reduced to poverty, to penury, and they were unable to pay their bills. It became at last the privilege of the Gentile churches who had profited from them spiritually to minister to their material needs.

Steve Zeisler: Giving, Greetings and Good-byes

Chapter 16 flows naturally from this closing word in **verse 15**. Here in this section the apostle is specific in his directions, following the more general counsel of **15:58**. Two principles surface in this chapter. As we go through this life as Christians, says Paul, some things will always be constant and unchanging; but other things will be uncertain and changeable. Some things remain the same. Patterns do not change in our approach to ministry, no matter what the circumstances. But in God's calling there are many things that are uncertain and are forever changing. God sends us off in directions which we could never have anticipated. We make plans and God changes them. Their will be both the predictable and the unpredictable in our Christian walk.

Recognizing these twin truths, however, we are still to be "*abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our toil is not in vain.*" . . .

Giving is to be a regular, habitual responsibility for all Christians at all times, according to the apostle.

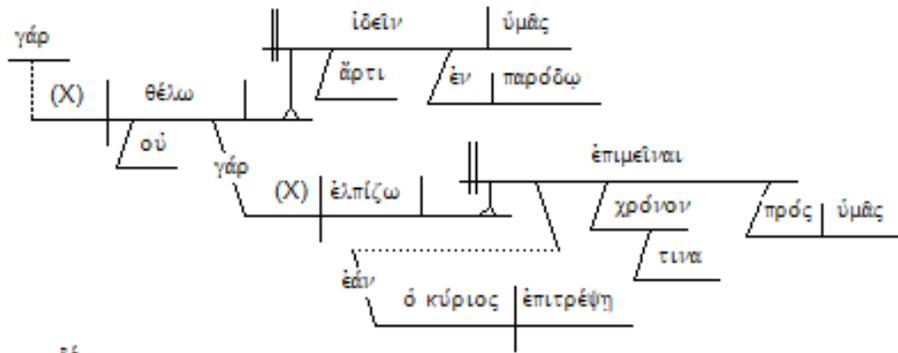
Andrew Maclaren:

Terror and tenderness are strangely mingled in this parting salutation, which was added in the great characters shaped by Paul's own hand, to the letter written by an amanuensis. He has been obliged, throughout the whole epistle, to assume a tone of remonstrance abundantly mingled with irony and sarcasm and indignation. He has had to rebuke the Corinthians for many faults, party spirit, lax morality, toleration of foul sins, grave abuses in their worship even at the Lord's Supper, gross errors in opinion in the denial of the Resurrection. And in this last solemn warning he traces all these vices to their fountainhead—the defect of love to Jesus Christ—and warns of their fatal issue. ‘*Let him be Anathema.*’

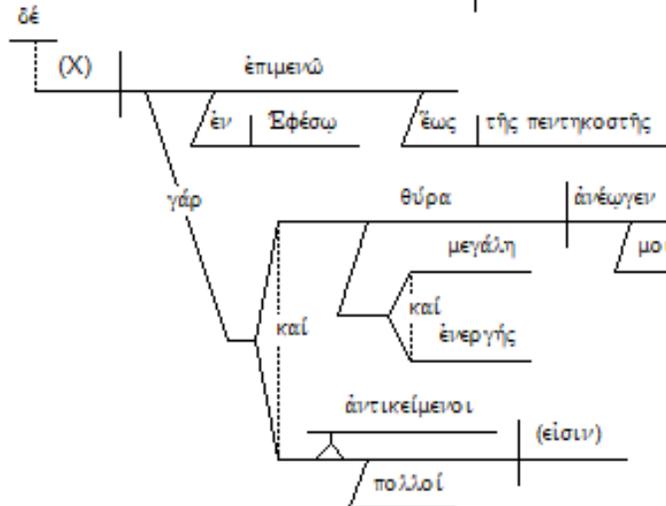
But he will not leave these terrible words for his last. The thunder is followed by gentle rain, and the sun glistens on the drops; ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.’ Nor for himself will he let the last impression be one of rebuke or even of warning. He desires to show that his heart yearns over them all; so he gathers them all—the partisans; the poor brother that has fallen into sin; the lax ones who, in their misplaced tenderness, had left him in his sin; the misguided reasoners who had struck the Resurrection out of the articles of the Christian creed—he gathers them all into his final salutation, and he says, ‘Take and share my love—though I have had to rebuke—amongst the whole of you.’

Is not that beautiful? And does not the juxtaposition of such messages in this farewell go deeper than the revelation of Paul's character? May we not see, in these terrible and tender thoughts thus inextricably intertwined and braided together, a revelation of the true nature both of the terror

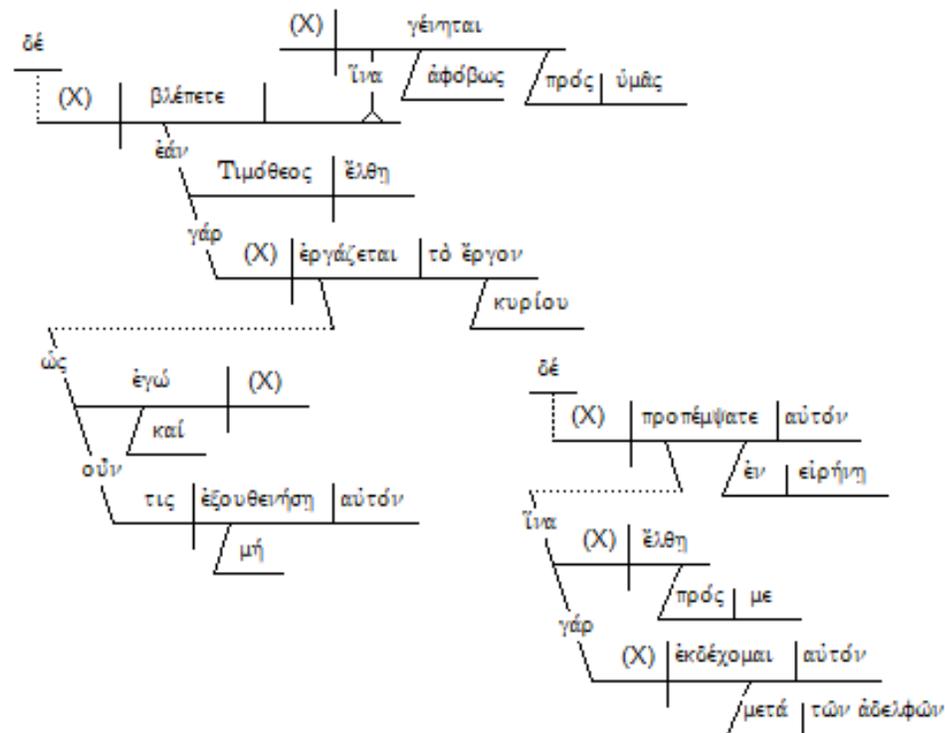
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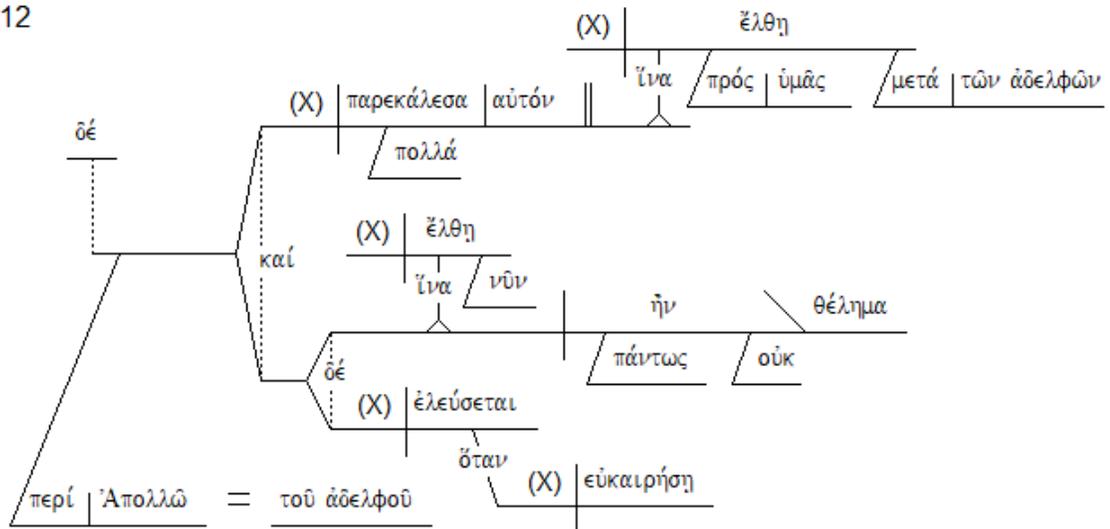
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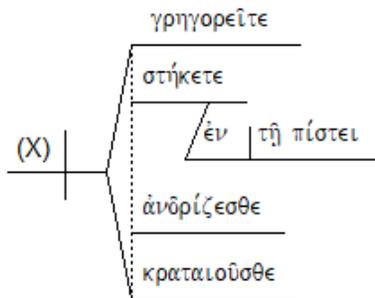
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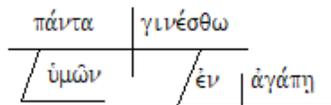
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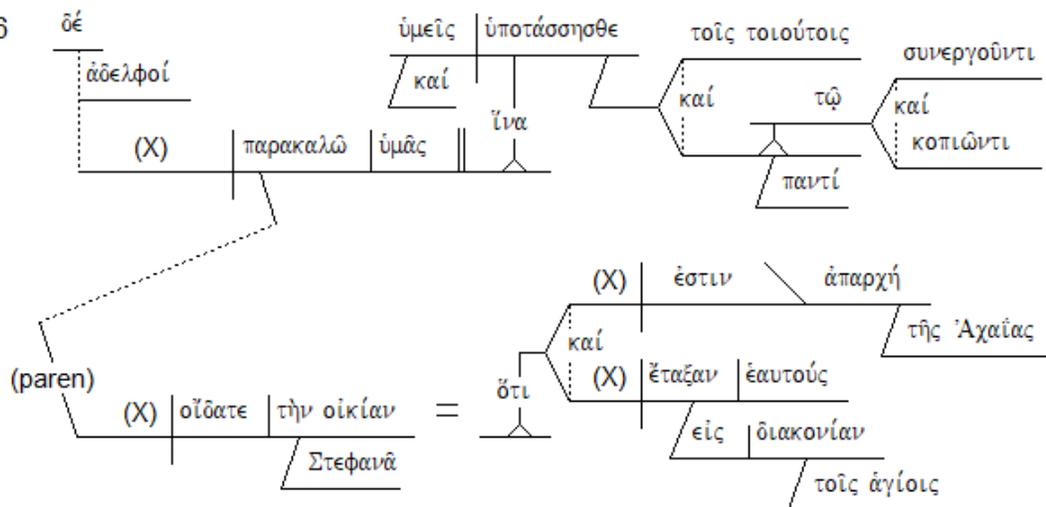
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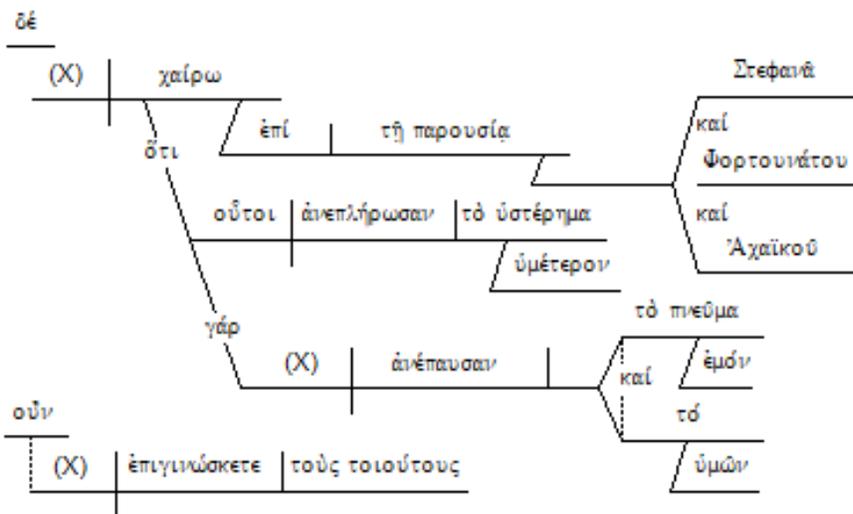
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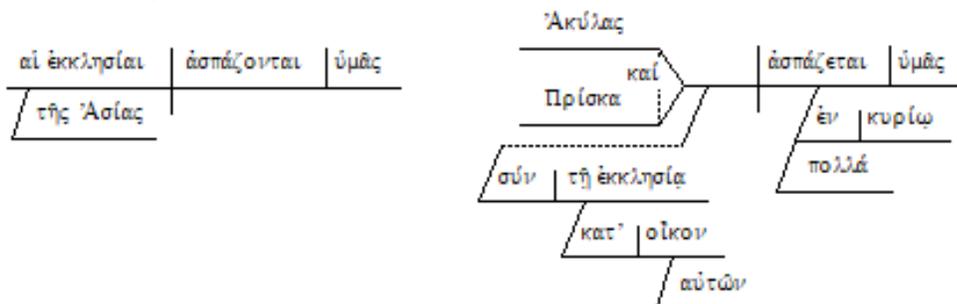
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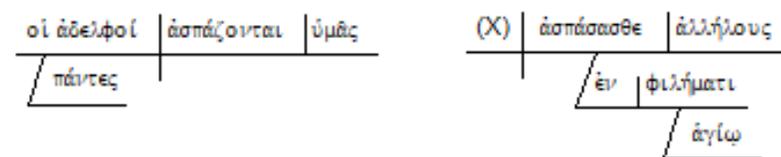
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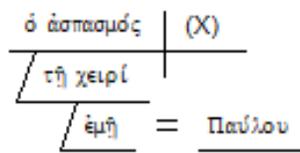
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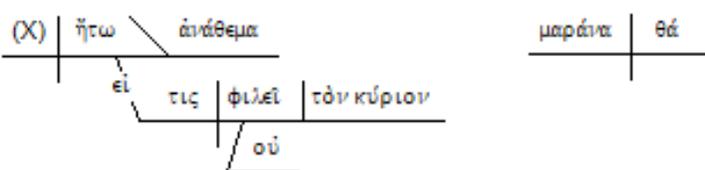
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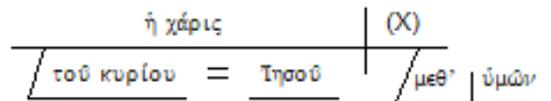
1Co 16:21



1Co 16:22



1Co 16:23



1Co 16:24



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