

The Corinthian Epistles

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**NOTE: The use of
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I CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

The City

The city of Corinth was widely acclaimed as a hub of Roman commerce. Located on a four-mile-wide isthmus, small ships would bypass the dangerous southern tip of Greece by tramway. It was the capital of the province of Achaia, with Gallio as proconsul (Acts 18:12).

The People

The population has been estimated to be about 500,000 of various nationalities (most of whom were slaves). The most famous religion of pagan Corinth involved the temple prostitutes dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite, the “goddess of love.” So immoral was this practice that the word Korinthiazomia (“to act like a Corinthian”) came to mean “to commit fornication.” Judaism was one of the city’s many Oriental religions where Paul began his ministry in a synagogue (Acts 18:1-4).

Corinth was also famous as a “sports town.” The Isthmian Games (similar to the Olympics), were held every two years.

Paul’s Visit

Acts 18 gives the details of Paul’s first contact with the city (A.D. 50), during his Second Missionary Trip. The first converts were mostly Gentiles of various nationalities with some Jews. Mainly poor, they proved to be slow learners and given to carnality. (Paul had experienced a great deal of discouragement starting with the opposition of fanatical Jews at Philippi; then at Thessalonica and Berea. Alone at Athens, he had little success. This may be why he states that he arrived in Corinth, “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,” 2:3).

Date and Place of Writing

Paul wrote this Epistle on his Third Missionary Journey toward the end of his extended three-year ministry at Ephesus in A.D. 55 (I Cor. 16:8).

Occasion and Purpose

Paul learned of problems through both reports (1:1) and inquires by the members themselves (i.e. 7:1; 8:1). Among many purposes in writing such a long epistle Paul:

- wished to identify the basic reasons underlying the reports
- to offer doctrinal solutions and examples
- to extend earlier doctrinal training
- to give a short defense of this apostolic authority
- to exhort the believers to maturity

NOTE: The Church of Corinth demonstrates the Lord’s patience and the responsibility of every NT local church to learn and obey!

OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-9)

The very opening words of Paul touched on the main issues of this Epistle: his calling as an Apostle, the sainthood of the Corinthian believers, and their purposed unity.

It is evident that the apostle intended that this letter should circulate beyond Corinth, as he includes in his greetings "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." This includes every reader who is a true Christian. The expression "both theirs and ours" belongs with the word Lord. In a subtle rebuke of sectarianism, we are reminded that Christ is the Lord not just of some particular group or clique, but of all who believe on Him. (G. Coleman Luck).

II. DIVISIONS (1:10-4:21)

A. The Reality (1:10-17)

NOTE: Division is the first problem addressed as Paul recognized **without unity nothing else could be accomplished (so true today).**

By v. 10 Paul had used the name Christ ten times - leaving no doubt as to the central Person deserving unity. The use of the four names of v. 12 are quite revealing. Such a condition seems to exist even in today's church circles ("camps"). Could "baptism" have been misused by them as a "badge" of honor?

Amazingly, this is a chief reason so many cults flourish across America today. They do not tolerate disunity! This "unity" becomes attractive to scores of people who are tired of ambiguity, egotism, totalitarianism, and disunity.

Quarreling is a part of life (a selfish part). From the very first days of the local church, God addressed the severe nature of such fighting (Ja. 4:1-2; Gal. 5:19-21). Paul had to address this disunity first. Without unity no church can function properly, and few even survive.

v. 10 - The "divisions" (schisma) refers to a "rent or tear" which manifested itself as groupings around different men (v.12). Paul uses the word "brethren" in this letter more than any other, appealing, not just emotionally, but doctrinally ("in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ").

v. 12 - The whole church had apparently gotten caught up in party politics ("everyone of you saith"). Paul was the church founder, Apollos a great orator.

The Cephas party (Cephas is the Aramaic form of the name “Peter”) raises difficulties of another sort. We do not know whether Peter had ever been in Corinth or not. If he had been, the basis of attachment may have been personal. But here were other considerations. Peter had been a Christian longer than Paul. He had been the leader of the Twelve. He seems to have been more ready to conform to the Jewish Law than was Paul (cf. Gal. 2:11ff). There may have been some different emphasis in his preaching from that of Paul, though if so, it must have been slight. For whatever reason, a section of the Corinthians felt that there was something about Peter that made him the man to appeal to (Leon Morris).

The fourth named group followed the right name, but not in the right spirit. These believers may have felt they had no need for human instruction or leaders even though the Lord clearly appointed such (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11ff; II Tim.1:11).

v. 13 - The answer to every one of these questions is?

vv. 14-17 – Paul’s emphasis was on preaching. He also discipled converts to do the work of the ministry. It is important to note that he was not going to be distracted from the primacy of preaching the Gospel to the lost. **THIS IS THE FIRST AND TERRIBLE SACRIFICE OF A DIVIDED CHURCH!!**

Our church is blessed with leaders who are strong-minded. In fact, in all the years we have worked together, I can’t remember a single battle over the numerous difficult issues we face. What is the means God uses to accomplish this unity? Each of us is committed to something far beyond a personal agenda. We are first of all committed to the advance of the kingdom of Christ and His church. We really listen to each other and entertain ideas that may be very different from our own. Also, and most importantly, we are committed to a biblical resolution to each problem we face in the church. This immediately reduces the number of possible solutions.

This is not the case in every church. In my wider experience with church life, and perhaps in your experience as well, some church leaders are unable to reach agreement. They compete with each other, try to promote their own agendas, and have their own group of followers. There are power struggles and lack of respect for God’s providential placement of co-workers in leadership. Some of these churches have forced pastor after pastor from his position of leadership. This is an abysmal example to the body of Christ that they are leading and does not yield the blessing of God (Richard L. Ganz).

B. The Effects (1:18-3:1)

1. Misunderstanding the Gospel Message (1:18-2:6)

Paul declares the thinking of some of the believers to be like the world. Though the world views the Gospel as “foolishness” (vs. 18; “moronic”), their thinking was in opposition to the “wisdom of God” (1:24).

v. 18 - MEMORY VERSE! To the lost, both the message and the delivery (“preaching”) have been “foolishness” (*moria* from which we get the English word “moronic” or “moron”), but to any believer it is the “power” (*dunamis* from which we get “dynamite”) that truly transforms. Amen!

v. 19-20 - By quoting Is. 29:14, Paul was demonstrating that God and the Gospel had already begun the eventual destruction of all man’s philosophies and attacks on God.

Could the apostle have written anything more appropriate for our own day? Where have our great thinkers - our philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, scientists, and statesmen - brought us? Never before has mankind been so fearful of self-destruction or been so self-consciously perplexed, confused, and corrupt. Modern human wisdom has failed just as ancient human wisdom failed, except that its failures come faster and spread farther. The outer life improves in a material way, while the inner life seems to have correspondingly less meaning. The real issues are not solved.

Human wisdom sometimes sees the immediate cause of a problem but it does not see the root, which always is sin. It may see that selfishness is a cause of injustice, but it has no way to remove selfishness. It may see that hatred causes misery and pain and destruction, but it has no cure for hatred. It can see plainly that man does not get along with man, but does not see that the real cause is that man does not get along with God. Human wisdom cannot see because it will not see. As long as it looks on God’s wisdom as foolishness, its own wisdom will be foolish. In other words, human wisdom itself is a basic part of the problem (MacArthur).

vv. 23-25 – Paul’s use of the Jews seeking “signs” and the Greeks seeking “wisdom” are representative of all men today. The only witness Paul had and we need today is the “power of God, and the wisdom of God” in the Gospel.

2. Misunderstanding the Gospel Messenger (1:26-2:5)

Paul puts these believers in their “divine place” by reminding them of their true status. Why would God ever choose them, or us? He even points out that his coming to Corinth was in total dependence upon God. Paul is very transparent in declaring his ministry style.

v. 26 - Notice Paul does not say “not any,” but rather “not many.” We may think that if famous athletes, Hollywood stars, or government officials would sound the Gospel that God’s wisdom and power would be so much more effectively demonstrated.

vv. 27-28 - These couplets (foolish vs. wise, etc.) demonstrate the wisdom and power of God! The expression “things which are nought” means the “nobodies.” God is still using the “nobodies” to “bring to nought” or “to render idle, nullify, inactivate” the things of this world.

Consider the mocking words of Celsus (A.D. 178) who wrote of Christians:

Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly (to become a Christian)... We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the most vulgar, the most uneducated persons.... They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest, frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud.

The world measures greatness by many standards. At the top are intelligence, wealth, prestige, and position - things which God has determined to put at the bottom. God reveals the greatness of His power by demonstrating that it is the world’s nobodies that are His somebodies.

vv. 29-31 - The purpose of God’s choosing believers of this caliber is clearly stated here. Believers are to glory (boast) over God and His Gospel, not over men!

NOTE: Brethren, how do we define “good preaching?” While eloquence and persuasiveness (“enticing”) are not necessarily in opposition to the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”, they are not always needed. Remember, God also does not put a premium on ignorance.

Ch. 2:1-5 - Paul underlines the effect of disunity on his own ministry. He is very transparent here. He did not come to Corinth as a philosopher but rather as a preacher.

NOTE: Church is not the place for opinions about politics, sports, or psychology. It is where one should hear the Word of God through the pastor, Sunday School teacher, etc.

Paul's self-descriptions of "weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" may refer to his physical presence, but more likely it refers to his deep concern for reaching the Corinthian people (II Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12).

His descriptions of his preaching underlines his complete dependence on God's power and his total reliance on the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16). In far too many churches, there sit the converts and disciples of men rather than of God!

3. Misunderstanding the Spirit's Role in Illuminating (2:6-16)

In quoting Isaiah 64:4 (v. 9), Paul was underlining the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination (enlightening) the believer to the truths of God's Word. Conversely, the unbelievers, like a blind critic of Rembrandt or a deaf critic of Handel, cannot really know the deep spiritual truths of God's Word.

Disunity in a church, especially with allegiances to men and their philosophies will keep believers from allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal the deep things of God to them.

v. 7 - The word "mystery" (*musterion*) does not mean "strange or puzzling," but it was originally used to mean "religious secrets, confided only to the initiated." Here Paul declares God intentionally withholds His wisdom as "hidden" or "veiled" from the world.

v. 8 - The Crucifixion of Christ is proof that the princes or rulers of this world did not (and still do not) have God's wisdom!

vv. 9-10 - This reference to Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17 is even today applied to the glories of Heaven, but Paul is referring to the glories of the wisdom of God. God's wisdom can never be observed by the eye nor the ear of man. It must be "revealed" (from *apokalupto* – "to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up").

v. 12 - The Holy Spirit has been given to the believer to help him "know" or "perceive or discern" the things of God.

vv. 14-15 - MEMORY VERSE! The "natural" (soulish from *puchikos*) refers to the lost man without the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). To them, the spiritual things of God are "foolishness" (*moria* or stupid). Only the Spirit of God can cause the believer to "discern" (*anakrino* meaning "to examine, investigate, sift, scrutinize, question"); see I Jn. 2:27.

Interestingly, Paul points out (v. 15), that the lost cannot appraise, discern, or "judge" the believer properly or spiritually. The world often believes it is their responsibility to correct Christians, but they are really contradicting God and his Word.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer is known as the doctrine of *illumination*. It does not mean that believers do not need teachers or pastors. It does not guarantee that Christians know everything God knows (Deut. 29:29). It does promise that God's Word can and should be understood by any studious and faithful believer.

C. The Consequences (3:1-4:5)

1. Spiritual Immaturity (3:1-9)

v. 1 - The word "carnal" (*sarkikos*) refers to being under the control of human nature or "animal appetites" rather than being led by the Spirit (2:14). The phrase "babes in Christ" would indicate immaturity, a willful cessation of spiritual growth.

v. 2 - Years previously, Paul had fed these believers "milk," or less difficult Christian truths, but now they were unable to eat meat. Remember, this "de-maturing" was at least in part due to their being divisive. Carnal Christians do not tolerate strong preaching.

v. 3 - Carnality manifests itself in other ways (see Gal. 5:19-21), including here:
- "envying," from *zelos* (excitement of mind, fervent of spirit, zeal, pursuing, jealousy)
- "Strife" (contention or wrangling)

These are the marks of fallen men, not of spirit-filled believers.

NOTE: In vv. 1-3 we have 6 sad characteristics of CARNAL believers:

- 1) Led by the flesh (v.1)
- 2) Behave like babies (v.1)
- 3) Refuse meat (v.2)
- 4) Surrounded by strife (v.3)
- 5) Act like the lost (v.3)
- 6) Satisfied with following men, not Christ (v.4)

vv. 4-5 - The cure for divisiveness and carnality is again to turn away from self and politics and start glorifying God. The word servant (*diakonos*) refers to "one who executes the commands of another; a servant, attendant, minister." As someone once said, "No one ever builds monuments to waiters and busboys."

vv. 6-7 - While carnal believers might have boasted in the works of men, Paul likens the ministry to agriculture. Paul (the church-planter) and Apollos (the waterer) were comparatively unimportant when God's work is viewed. Again, division among believers can obscure their ability to see who really makes things grow!

As Morris states:

This verb is imperfect, whereas those for planting and watering are aorist. The work of Paul and Apollos is viewed as completed, but God's activity in giving the increase goes on.

*Those men had their God-appointed work to do. Using agricultural metaphors, Paul acknowledged that he had **planted** and that **Apollos watered**. They had done their work well and faithfully. But the real work was the Lord's. **God was causing the growth**. No man, not even the best farmer or the best horticulturist, can give physical life or growth to a plant. How much less can anyone, even an apostle, give spiritual life or growth to a person? The most that men can do in either case is to prepare and water the soil and to plant the seeds. The rest is up to God (MacArthur).*

vv. 8-9 - Note how Paul is really emphasizing the opposite of divisions here. There is an important unity between planter and waterer. One cannot succeed without the other. Far from rivals, Paul and Apollos were “one” and “laborers together.” Both had distinct contributions to make to the ministry (as do all believers), and both would receive distinct “reward” (or wages) for one’s own distinct “labour.”

Morris states:

Only God, of course, can determine what the ‘wage’ will be; it is not for us to try to work out who is deserving of more! Notice further that the criterion is not ‘his success’, nor ‘how he compares with others,’ but his own labor.

It is God’s work, His workers, and His wage scale. While it is appropriate to appreciate God’s faithful servants, such men are never to be glorified or made the center of camps or movements.

NOTE: Remember, God will never share His glory with any man (1:29). While many men grow things (even religious things), true growth is God’s doing, never man’s. It is obvious from verses 6-9 that Paul had no jealousy problems in ministry. Why should he? His (and our) only rewards will be based on what we really did, not what we (or others) say we did.

2. Loss of Reward (3:10-4:5)

NOTE: This passage is singularly one of the greatest passages to keep our heads on straight in a world of “religious hype” and “prosperity theology.” Remember, carnal believers are not participating in the following process!

a. The Building Process (vv. 10-11)

Paul recognized that not all men are called upon to do the same tasks. He was a foundation builder (not the most exciting job). He recognized others were present to see the building process.

The word “master builder” is from *architekton*, from which we get “architect.” In ancient times, the word carried the idea of designer and general contractor. All this Paul carefully identifies as “according to the grace of God which is given to me” (Rom. 15:18; I Cor. 15:10).

The key for every believer (then and now) is to “take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon.” The word “how” means “in what way.” The word “buildeth” is a continuous action word. All believers are continually responsible during their earthly saved lives.

NOTE: v.11 Should be a warning to every generation of believers (i.e. the contemporary Christian movement). The foundation has been laid by Christ (Matt. 16:18). “Foundation” here refers to the “beginnings, first principals, or system of truth.”

b. The Materials (v.12)

The building materials have been viewed in several ways, but the emphasis is on quality over quantity (“of what sort”). God, as Judge over the materials, wants believers to use the best materials - the first three (gold, silver, and precious stones) are also the most lasting.

These materials represent the believer’s works (v. 13). They are not talents or spiritual gifts, but the believer’s use of them.

You can find, wood, hay, and stubble in your backyard, and it will not take too much effort to pick it up. But if you want gold, silver, and jewels, you have to dig for them. Lazy preachers and Sunday School teachers will have much to answer for at the Judgement Seat of Christ - and so will preachers and teachers who steal materials from others instead of studying and making it their own (Wiersbe).

c. The Test (v. 13) (MEMORY VERSE!!)

All the believer’s works shall be thoroughly examined and revealed (from *apokalupto*) or “unveiled, uncovered, or laid open.” The fire of God’s judgment will reveal the real heart motives behind not only what is done, but why it was done. Obviously, Paul is making the point that considerable works can be made with human effort, but unless, it can withstand the holy judgment of God, it will not stand.

NOTE: All these materials may exist together, even intermixed and totally undistinguishable to human eyes until Judgment Day. Imagine the shock for some of the so-called “great ones!” Could this be what Paul was personally referring to in 2 Cor. 5:10-11?

d. The Workmen and their works (vv. 14-15)

Some believers’ works will *abide* (“remain”) only if they build with the right motives and obedience. Those may include the “crowns” spoken of in Scripture (II Tim. 4:7-8; I Thess. 2:19-20; I Pet. 5:4; Jam. 1:12). Others’ works will be consumed (“burned”) as “wood, hay, and stubble.”

e. The Warning (vv. 16-17)

Underlining the building theme, the believer is reminded that the church is God’s building where His Spirit dwells. The word “temple” (*naos*) here refers to the inner sanctuary of the temple building corresponding to the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple.

The words “defile” and “destroy” (v. 17) are from the same Greek word meaning “to corrupt.” In the Old Testament, any person other than the high priest on the Day of Atonement who was caught in the Holy of Holies was put to death, not by men, but by God Himself! God has never looked mildly upon any who would desecrate His dwelling place (*cf.* Matt. 18:6-10).

When the Israelites constructed a tabernacle in the desert and in later years a temple in Jerusalem, they were the laughingstock of the nations. They were asked: “Where is your God?” They had to tell the scoffers that the structure contained no idols. In the temple dwelled the Name of God. By contrast, the temples of the Gentiles had idols that represented their gods.

When Paul taught the Corinthian believers that they were the temple of God, the unbelievers in Corinth were perplexed; they were unable to understand that a group of Christians could call themselves a temple and claim that the Spirit of God was dwelling within them. The Gentiles had difficulty perceiving a temple without a building. They were unable to comprehend how the Christian’s invisible God could inhabit a visible human body (Kistemaker).

NOTE: Divisions within a church will always lead to the defiling and corrupting of both the church and individual members (6:19-20).

D. The Cure for Disunity (3:18-23)

1. God's View of Ourselves (vv. 18-20)

The problem (as is true today), was in the Corinthians' thinking. Thinking like the world is to deceive one's self concerning the Christian life. The phrase "wise in this world" (age) indicates an independent, selfish management of life which will always affect the believer's church family and his own eternal rewards.

The only solution is the wisdom of God which is "foolishness" to the age. Consider just the plain, but politically incorrect, words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

This statement tells the Corinthian Christians that they must take a one-hundred-eighty-degree turn. They should reject worldly wisdom and become fools in the eyes of the world. The Corinthians must see the contrast between Christianity and the world and then accept the label fool (Kistemaker).

Contemporary "wisdom" has been brought into far too many churches today defiling them (v. 17). The Roman teacher Quintilian declared about his students: "They would doubtlessly have become excellent scholars if they had not been so fully persuaded of their own scholarship." An Arab proverb says, "He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool. Shun him. He who knows not and knows that he knows not is simple. Teach him."

Every believer who refuses to walk according to God's wisdom as revealed in His Word (2:14), will eventually become tripped up and entrapped in their own "craftiness" (cunning, false wisdom).

It comes as a shock to some church members that you cannot manage a local church the same way you run a business. This does not mean we should not follow good business principles, but the operation is totally different. There is a wisdom of this world that works for the world, but it will not work for the church.

The world depends on promotion, prestige, and the influence of money and important people. The church depends on prayer, the power of the Spirit, humility, sacrifice, and service. The church that imitates the world may seem to succeed in time, but it will turn to ashes in eternity (Wiersbe).

2. God's View of Others (v. 21-22a)

Paul had already spoken about the divisions that had arisen by worldly wisdom around these three church leaders (1:12-14; 3:4-9). Here he declares that they all were given by God to the Corinthians and that none of them should be gloried in. The wisdom of God they taught was to be followed, not their preaching

styles, personalities, or looks!

3. God's View of Things (v. 22b)

These five things encompass human life. Without God's wisdom they can keep the believer in bondage. The world's wisdom tells believers to "get all you can, and can all you get," making us think we possess things when those things will only possess us!

Now he gives the negative side of the same exhortation by telling the readers not to glory in the achievements of human beings. God grants His bountiful gifts to His people, and in their complete dependence on Him they are unable to boast in themselves. They must acknowledge that God, not man, rules the world and everything in it. The psalmist professed that the earth belongs to God and everything that is in it belongs to Him (Ps. 24:1). Therefore, all praise and honor are due His name (Kistemaker).

4. God's View of Himself (v. 23)

Because all believers belong to God, we are eternally bound to each other in Christ. Thus, division in local churches among members is a failure to think God's way and follows the foolishness of man's ways.

The phrase "and Christ is God's" is a very strong theological declaration. Christ has been sent by God and is subject to the Father (15:28). Jesus certainly recognized this union of oneness in His prayer to the Father in John 17: 9, 10, 21-23:

*I pray for them: I pray not for the world,
But for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine...
That they all may be one,
As thou, Father, art one in me, and I in thee,
That they also may be one in us...*

*And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them,
That they may be one, even as we are one:
And that the world may know that thou has sent me,
And has loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8).

Heav'n above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green!
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs of o'erflow,
Flow'rs with deeper beauty shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine.

-Wade Robinson

E. True Ministers and True Ministry (4:1-21)

1. The Minister (vv. 1-5)

a. Identity (v.1)

Paul identifies himself, Apollos, and Peter as “ministers” (*huperetes*, “under rower, one who serves with hands, a servant”). Paul is saying, “Which galley slave is greater than the other?”

He also identifies them as “stewards” or “a manager of a household; a slave to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs.”

To put it strikingly, Paul and his fellow-workers were underlings of Christ and overseers for God (Kistemaker).

The responsibility of the steward is to be faithful to his master. A steward may not please the members of the household; he may not even please some of the other servants; but if he pleases his own master, he is a good steward. This same idea is expressed in Romans 14:4.

So the main issue is not, “Is Paul popular?” or “Is Apollos a better preacher than Paul?” The main issue is, “Have Paul, Apollos, and Peter been faithful to do the work God assigned to them?” (Wiersbe)

True ministers are stewards of the “mysteries of God” which would include not only the Gospel, but the whole Word of God.

A popular game played by many Christians is that of evaluating pastors. All kinds of criteria are used to determine who are the most successful, the most influential, the most gifted, the most effective. Some magazines periodically make surveys and write up extensive reports, carefully ranking the pastors by church membership, attendance at worship

services, sizes of church staff and Sunday School, academic and honorary degrees, books and articles written, numbers of messages given at conferences and conventions, and so on. As popular as that practice may be, it is exceedingly offensive to God. (MacArthur).

b. Fidelity (v. 2)

The only quality that matters to God is faithfulness, dependability, reliability, and trustworthiness. God might use intelligence, creativity, or popularity (He usually doesn't. Remember 2:26-28?), but He always requires faithfulness. The very best that Paul, or any other minister, could hope to be before God is simply ***faithful***.

c. Assessability (vv. 3-5)

In a true servant's life, someone is always judging, examining, criticizing, or appraising him. Paul lists three areas of judgment in a true minister's life.

- 1) Man's Judgment (3a) - Notice Paul did not say that other men's estimation of his person and ministry meant "nothing," but very little when compared to God's appraisal. No pastor or minister can stay faithful to his ministry if he lets others decide how faithful he is, or how true his motives are to Christ. The phrase "of men's judgment" (lit. "man's day") may refer to a court appearance.
- 2) Self-judgment (3b-4a) - Paul knew that he (as are all believers) was always inclined to either build himself up or put himself down (maybe looking for recognition and consoling). Only by facing himself in front of God could he get proper evaluation (Jas. 1:22-25).

Spiritual introspection is dangerous. Known sin must be faced and confessed, and known shortcomings are to be prayed about and worked on for improvements. But no Christian, no matter how advanced in the faith, is able to properly evaluate his own spiritual life. Before we know it, we will be ranking ourselves, classifying ourselves - and discover that a great deal of time is being spent in thinking of nothing but ourselves. The bias in our own favor and the tendency of the flesh toward self-justification make this a dangerous project (MacArthur).

While Paul knew of no unconfessed sin in his own life (4a), he stated that his own evaluation made no difference. Wiersbe

comments, “There can be a fine line between a clear conscience and a self-righteous attitude, so we must be aware.”

- 3) God’s Judgment (4b-5) - Here the believer is told by Paul that under the fiery, holy gaze of the Lord “hidden things of darkness” (or beyond the comprehension of mortal men), the very purpose (“counsels of the heart”), or why he does what he does, will be made known.

Division in a church makes believers look even more for the praise of men instead of God. It also lets the believer “play God” in judging others when the standards of criticism are man’s and not God’s.

While it is gratifying for others to give sincere thanks for our ministry, we should long for that day when we might hear our Lord say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Can you wait?

d. Humility (vv. 6-13)

v. 6 - Paul notes that he had applied the principles of farming, building, and stewardship to himself and Apollos so that the Corinthian believers would not go beyond scriptural respect for ministers. These divisions had little to do with the leaders themselves and everything to do with the Corinthians’ pride and arrogance of themselves.

v. 7 - In questioning their tendency to “glory” or boast, Paul offers three penetrating inquiries:

- 1) Why or what made a separation or distinction between you?
- 2) What you are and all you have - did not you simply receive it from others?
- 3) If you actually took these things from others, why do you act as if you created them and that no one ever helped you in life?

What does anyone have that, in one way or another, was not given to him? We did not give ourselves life, the food and care and protection we have as babies, an education, talents, the country we were born in, the opportunity to earn a living, the IQ we have, or anything else. No matter how hard we may have studied in school and worked at our business or profession, we would have nothing except for what the Lord and many others, by His providential hand, has given us.

If we have a good pastor, God gave him to us. If we have good parents, God gave them to us. If we live in a good country, God gave it to

us. If we have a good mind or creative talent, God gave it to us. We have no reason to boast either in people or possessions. Not only ministers, but all Christians, are but God's stewards. Everything we have is on loan from the Lord, entrusted to us for a while to use in serving Him (MacArthur).

When a person receives a gift, he is obliged to express thanks. "What ingratitude you have shown to God!" Paul admonishes the Corinthians.

NOTE: From George Judson (son of missionary Adoniram Judson):

Suffering and success go together.

*If you are succeeding without suffering,
It is because others before you have suffered;
If you are suffering without succeeding,
It is that others after you may succeed.*

v. 8 - Paul joins in with the Corinthian believers' boasting. These proud, divided brethren had declared themselves full, rich, and royalty all without the aid of Paul, Apollos, or anyone else (God?). "The ironic comment conveys to them that they are ahead of Paul and his associates, who are still waiting for the coming of the kingdom" (Kistemaker).

vv. 9-13 - Paul forcefully contrasts the arrogance of the Corinthians to himself and others who humbly served Christ:

"us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death" - This is an allusion to the practice of Roman generals who would celebrate victories by entering a city leading his officers and troops to be followed by the conquered forces in chains for all to see.

"spectacle" (*theatron*) - the Roman arena where prisoners who were sentenced to death would fight animals or each other to the death.

"fools" (*moros*)

"weak" - infirmed, feeble

"despised" - without honor, base

"hunger, thirst, naked, buffeted"

"have no certain dwelling place" (*astateo*) - homeless, to wander about

“labourer, working with our own hands” - the idea here is of toil to the point of exhaustion. Of course, working with one’s hands was considered slave work.

“reviled” - idea of reproach, railed at, to heap abuse upon.

“persecuted” - to make to run or flee.

“defamed” - to be blasphemed, evil-spoken of.

“filth of the world” and “off-scouring” - referred literally to the scrapings, what is rubbed or wiped off; used figuratively of the lowest of criminals used as human sacrifice in pagan ceremonies.

Statistics reveal that the church increases numerically and spiritually in countries where persecutions, hardships, poverty, corruption, and distress are common. By comparison, church membership declines steadily in countries that exude affluence and ease. Whenever Christians are surrounded by material ease and comfort, they often tend to forget the claims of Christ. They become self-sufficient and, while maintaining a religious veneer, have lost their love for Christ and the message of salvation (Kistemaker).

NOTE: How could the Corinthian believers be divided over man when even the chosen Apostles and choice church leaders lived in such a fashion? Paul was saying in effect that neither in God’s eyes nor men’s eyes do we have reason to glory in men or ourselves.

2. True Ministry (4:14-21)

Paul describes himself as a spiritual father. His person and ministry to even the carnal Corinthian believers give Christians today the true marks of ministry:

- a. Admonishing (*noutheteo*) – “to warn”; note this is not “to shame.” Good parents should not seek to “tear down” when disciplining children (Heb. 12; Eph. 6:4).
- b. Loving (14b) - from *agapetos*; which in the New Testament is used of God’s love (Jn. 3:16).
- c. Begetting (v. 15)
Like a man who cannot be a father without having children, so a believer cannot be a spiritual father without being used by God to bring spiritual life to spiritual children.

d. Exemplifying (vv. 16-17a)

The Greek word “followers” is equivalent to our English “mimic.” Truly, disciplining is much more than teaching biblical principles, it is modeling them before the ones we disciple (cf. I Tim. 3:4-5; 4:12; Matt. 28:20).

e. Teaching (v. 17b)

Paul had already taught them for 18 months (Acts 18:11). He refers here to standard doctrine he had taught everywhere rather than specific advice (although he would have done this).

NOTE: Being correct in what we teach is important, but we must be understood! Our academic accolades, theological jargon, and wit, will never replace speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

f. Disciplining (vv. 18-21)

Paul was too loving a spiritual father to let these believers go undisciplined. Like arrogant sinners today who parade their freedom and philosophy some of these church members were warned of a confrontation - not for a credential, philosophy, or popularity check, but a power check by the Apostle. A person’s true spiritual character is not determined by the impressiveness of his words or deeds but by the power of his life (see Matt. 7:21-23).

NOTE: Paul demonstrates the balanced spirit-filled approach we as ministry servants must use to deal with wayward backslidden members.

III. DISORDERS (ch. 5-6)

A. Immorality (5:1-13)

Remember that the local church is to be holy (3:16,17). When a church loses that spiritual sense of the “shock” of sin, it loses its first defense against it.

1. The Call for Discipline (vv. 1-2a)

Paul had already written a noncanonical letter about the need for discipline of believers (v. 9). The problem now was known to those outside the church. How sad when the local church has such a reputation!

The word “fornication” (*porneia*), was a general term for immorality, but Paul addresses the particular sin of incest. The wording “father’s wife” indicates a stepmother (lit. “woman of your father”). In the Old Testament a sexual relationship between a man and his stepmother was an “abomination” punishable by death (Lev. 18:7-8,29; cf. Duet. 22:30). Even the Romans forbade such a relationship (and Corinth was a “sex city”). It is probable that the woman was not a believer since no discipline was called for against her behavior.

The real shock to Paul was that there was no shock to them but rather

arrogance (“puffed up”). Like so many churches today, they rationalized away the sin and disgust by focusing on their “liberty” or perhaps their division caused them to tolerate this man’s behavior. Paul demands that they mourn (“wail, bewail”) as those at a funeral.

Not long ago, the world was inundated with news of the disgraceful private life of the President of the United States. At the end of the deliberations in Congress, there was a remarkable public verdict voiced: “We don’t care what he is in private. All we care is that he is a good president!” In fact, his approval rating soared to over 60 percent, the highest it had ever been. A senator had the audacity that to suggest that these shameful practices do matter. He said that any CEO discovered behaving this way would have been asked to resign immediately by the board of directors. The United States Congress had a challenging decision to make regarding its response to this situation. The members were required to disapprove of his reprehensible behavior, discourage future such misconduct by those in leadership, and lead the country in the most stable way, simultaneously. They decided that he should continue to govern the nation until his term was completed. (See Matt. 13:24-30).

As our society has distanced itself more and more from the Word of God, it has come to approve previously unimaginable sexual practices (Ganz).

No church is perfect, but human imperfection must never be an excuse for sin. Just as parents must discipline their children in love, so local churches must exercise discipline over the members of an assembly. Church discipline is not a group of “pious policemen” out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family (Wiersbe).

2. The Action of Discipline (2b-4)

Paul had already passed judgment on this sinning member. The sinning man had to go! Notice that Paul did not use his apostolic authority to remove the man, but gave the responsibility to the assembled local church. The authority was “in the name” and “with the power” of “our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus had already spoken on church discipline and clearly gave the local church the responsibility of carrying out His will on earth (Matt. 18:15-20).

3. The Results of Discipline (v.5)

Discipline is not in opposition to love, but the very vehicle for it in times of sin (Heb. 12:6). The word “deliver” has the idea of “to give into the hands of another.” Satan would be given liberty to harm this believer and cause great suffering (see I Tim. 1:20). The word “destruction” (*olethros*) may refer to death. Morris states, “To be expelled from the church accordingly is to be delivered over into that region where Satan holds sway. It is a forcible expression for the loss of all Christian privileges.”

It is clear that this unrepentant man was a believer as Paul acknowledges that even in physical death, the man’s spirit would be saved (see I Jn. 5:16). A

disciplined believer is still a believer never to be totally abandoned (II Thess. 3:14-15). With repentance should come forgiveness and loving restoration (Gal. 6:1-2).

NOTE: Church discipline is not just the pastor's and/or deacons' responsibility. The entire church is to be involved through prayer and mourning (fasting?). The two biggest reasons it is not practiced biblically today are **ignorance** and **fear**.

4. The Reason for Discipline (vv. 6-8)

Though discipline may have to be severe, the consequences of non-discipline are so much more brutal. Sin is not static (see Jam. 1:15). Paul uses the word "leaven" to refer to influence. The entire church ("lump") is first infected, then affected! The very nature of sin is to first ferment, then spread to corrupt.

As a rule, today, the larger the church the less the average member will even see or participate in church discipline. Church discipline is bad for "public relations."

A large congregation, an impressive Sunday school, active witnessing and visitation and counseling, and every other sort of good program give no protection or justification to a church that is not faithful in cleansing itself. When sin is willingly, or even neglectfully, allowed to go unchallenged and undisciplined, a larger church will be in danger of a larger malignancy (MacArthur).

The second reason for church discipline is to keep focused on the believer's union with Christ. It is impossible to be occupied with Christ and sin at the same time. The Old Testament Passover was celebrated once annually, but the believer's union with Christ is a daily celebration - to be celebrated in honesty (sincerity) and truth.

5. The Scope of Discipline (vv.9-13)

In Paul's earlier letter, he had commanded the Corinthian believers not to "company" (lit. "to mix up together"; the idea of intimate fellowship) with immoral people. Apparently, these carnal church members had stopped having contact with those outside the church, but continued with unrepentant members. Paul clarifies by stating that the fornicators he was speaking of were named ("called") brethren and living as idolaters, etc. (patterns).

Here Paul includes not just the immoral believer, but any who are covetous ("one eager to have more"), idolater, railer (from *loidos* or "mischief"), drunkard, or an extortioner ("robber").

The idea of "not to eat" could certainly involve the Lord's Supper, but eating a regular meal was a sign of fellowship. The word "company" (*sunanamignumi*) means "to mix up together, be intimate with one." Close fellowship is forbidden. The realm of church discipline is within the local church, not those outside the

church. Can a church possibly have the above type of members? Yes, and they can, even through divisions and arrogance, allow such behavior to be “tolerated.”

B. Litigation (6:1-8)

NOTE: With the introductory phrase, “Do ye not know,” (occurs 6 times in this chapter alone) the Apostle implies they should have known the truths he was dealing with. So often it is not some “new” knowledge we need, but obedience of the “old” truth.

Certainly these believers remembered the teaching that one day the roles will be reversed when the saint not only will judge, but will also reign with Christ (II Tim. 2:12). With a tone of sarcasm Paul declares that the poorest equipped believer (“least esteemed”), with prayer and God’s Word, is more competent to settle disagreements between fellow believers than any worldly professional (who is unjust in God’s sight!).

No doubt the statement of v. 5 embarrassed the “wise” of the church. The testimony of the church (cf. 5:1) was of a litigating, instead of loving, fellowship of saints. In v. 7, Paul declares that secular lawsuits are lost already in God’s court (“fault” is used of a defeat in court). In fact, Paul demands that a true believer is far better off losing financially than to lose spiritually. If a brother wrongs us we are to forgive, not sue! We are to cast ourselves on the care of God (cf. Matt. 5:39-40; 18:21-22). A believer’s focus should be his relationship with God and his testimony before his fellow believers, not simply his rights.

NOTE: Are there times when Christians cannot help but find themselves before a secular court? What should be the principle then?

NOTE: We should be thankful that God has not commanded believers to judge the lost! That is His great and terrible responsibility (Rom. 6:23). “The church should leave the judgment of unbelievers to God and concentrate on setting its own house in order” (Ryrie).

C. Laxity (6:9-20)

The catalog of sins here (vv. 9-10), serves to characterize the lost, not the believer. The Corinthians had grown lazy in their walk with God and adopted the world’s way of thinking and behaving. What they were before they were saved was gone, but after salvation, what a believer is like is all important:

- “Washed” (*apolouo* – “to wash off or away”) - speaks of a new beginning (Tit. 3:5; II Cor. 5:17).

- “Sanctified” (*hagiazō* – “to separate from profane things and dedicate to God”) - speaks of a new lifestyle.

- “Justified” (to render righteous) - speaks of a new standing before God (Rom. 4:22-25; 3:26).

Once again, Paul reminds these believers of the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: One of the fastest growing segments of “Christendom” is the gay Christian movement. More and more “so-called” believers are expressing in various ways their liberty to practice a fornicative lifestyle and remain holy in Christ. This includes homosexuality, bi-sexuality, and trans-gender behavior (for now). The word effeminate (*malakos*; soft), speaks of a “boy kept for homosexual relations with a man.” The phrase “abusers of themselves with mankind” (*arsenokoites*), refers to “one who lies with a male as a female, sodomite, homosexual” (see Rom. 1:27).

D. Liberty (vv. 12-20)

1. Versus Power (v. 12)

The phrase “all things are lawful unto me” may have been a common saying of Corinth. Like America today, with its constant cries of freedom and tolerance for personal instant gratification, the Corinthian believers saw almost no boundaries to their behavior - especially sex. Paul states not all things are “expedient” (profitable) but nothing should ever have “power” (authority or mastery) over the believer but God.

NOTE: The control fornication has over our society is devastating. Sadly, in too many churches, members today have adopted an almost “Corinthian attitude” toward their sexuality. The biggest culprits are TV and the internet. Speaking of the incredible control sexual sin has over people MacArthur states:

The particular type of sin Paul has in mind here (vv. 13-20) is sexual sin. No sin that a person commits has more built-in pitfalls, problems, and destructiveness than sexual sin. It has broken more marriages, shattered more homes, caused more heartache and disease, and destroyed more lives than alcohol and drugs combined. It causes lying, stealing, cheating, and killing, as well as bitterness, hatred, slander, gossip, and unforgiveness.

No sin is more enslaving than sexual sin. The more it is indulged, the more it controls the indulger. Often it begins with small indiscretions, which lead to greater ones and finally to flagrant vice. The progression of sin is reflected in Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers” (v.1). When we willingly associate with sin, we will soon come to tolerate it and then to practice it. Like all other sins that are not resisted, sins of sex will grow and eventually they will corrupt and destroy not only the persons directly involved but many innocent persons besides.

The Corinthians were no strangers to sins of sex, and unfortunately many

believers there had gone back to them. In the name of Christian freedom they had become controlled by their fleshly desires.

2. Versus Perversion (vv. 13-20)

The phrase “meat for the belly, and the belly for meats” was part of Greek philosophy (man’s wisdom), that everything physical was evil and valueless. Both eating (and sex) were merely biological functions and therefore mundane. Sounds like America doesn’t it?

They treated sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not as a gift to be cherished and used carefully. Sensuality is to sex what gluttony is to eating; both are sinful and both bring disastrous consequences. Just because we have certain normal desires, given by God at Creation, does not mean that we must give in to them and always satisfy them. Sex outside of marriage is destructive, while sex in marriage can be creative and beautiful (Wiersbe).

Paul reminds these believers that their bodies and spirits belonged to God (“bought with a price”), and God has big plans for them (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 3:20-21)! In fact, God’s will for every believer is to “know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (I Thess. 4:9).

It is vitally important for believers to recognize that the sex act involves a union of more than biology, it involves the inner man or his spirit. This was stated by God from the very first union in the Garden (Gen. 2:24). When a believer engages in sexual activity outside of marriage he or she involves his Lord--an abhorrent thing to Paul (“God forbid”)!

Paul points out that sexual immorality, unlike other sin (gossip, lying, drunkenness, stealing, killing, etc.), effects the inner man in a unique and destructive way. It is by far the most destructive sin inside and outside the church today.

As you review this section, you will see that sexual sins affect the entire personality. They affect the emotions, leading to slavery (I Cor. 6:12b). It is frightening to see how sensuality can get a hold of a person and defile his entire life, enslaving him to habits that destroy. It also affects a person physically (I Cor. 6:18). The fornicator and adulterer, as well as the homosexual, may forget their sins, but their sins will not forget them.

In my pastoral counseling, I have had to help married couples whose relationship was falling apart because of the consequences of premarital sex, as well as extramarital sex. The harvest of sowing to the flesh is sometimes delayed, but it is certain (Gal. 6:7-8). How sad it is to live with the consequences of forgiven sin (Wiersbe).

In vv. 19-20 (Memory Verses!), Paul concludes the Corinthians’ confused thinking about behavior and liberty by declaring the believer as obligated to glorify

(doxazo; to magnify, extol, praise), God in everything we do with our body and spirit, even sex (Heb. 13:4).

NOTE: Our liberty in Christ gives us only one right--to obey God! It is interesting to note that the Father (v.13), the Son (v. 15), and the Holy Spirit (v. 19), are involved in this discussion.

The biblical view of sex is not prudish. Though society says that morality is a private and personal decision, the Bible is definitive. It elevates sex as something so great and special that it can be enjoyed only by a husband and his wife. Sex is not, as our culture indicates, just some biological activity that has no ramifications. This is a total lie! Just ask the women who have been used sexually and allowed themselves to be used. Ask them if it's just some physical thing to them now as they look back on it, or if it isn't, instead, something that has torn them up and broken their hearts? Just ask the men and women who have caught their spouses in adultery. See if they said, "Don't even apologize. It's just a biological act." This is nonsense. Underneath the ideology of our culture, there is a staunch adherence to standards, which, when they are broken, tear the fabric of our families and our nations apart. This idea that sex is a physical act like eating or sleeping is a lie foisted on a culture so that people could have free access to sex and have no inhibitions about it and absolutely no guilt. This was the idea of the sexual revolution, and it has destroyed the lives of a generation of people (Ganz).

IV. DIFFICULTIES (ch. 7-15)

A. Marriage (ch. 7)

Marriage and Celibacy (ch.1-9)

Paul begins answering a series of questions from the Corinthians.

- v.1 This statement seems to be directly from the Corinthians. Throughout history men and their religion have had an admiration for asceticism and celibacy. The word "touch" has the idea of sexual relations (Gen. 20:6; Ruth 2:9; Prov. 6:29). If Paul were himself making this statement it was no doubt in connection with what he had previously written (ch. 6).

Under Roman law and customs of that day, four types of marriage were practiced. If a man and woman slave wanted to be married, they might be allowed to live together in what was called a contubernium, which means "tent companionship." The arrangement lasted only as long as the owner permitted. He was perfectly free to separate them, to arrange for other partners, or to sell one or the other. Many of the early Christians were slaves, and some of them had lived-perhaps were still living-in this sort of marital relationship.

A second type of marriage was called usus, a form of common law marriage that recognized a couple to be husband and wife after they had lived together for a year. A third type was the coemptio in manum, in which a father would sell his

daughter to a prospective husband.

The fourth type of marriage was much more elevated. The Patrician class, the nobility, were married in a service called the confarreatio, on which the modern Christian marriage ceremony is based.

In the Roman empire of Paul's day divorce was common, even among those married under the confarreatio. It was not impossible for men and women to have been married 20 times or more.

The early church had members that had lived together, and were still living together, under all four marriage arrangements. It also had those who had had multiple marriages and divorces. Not only that, but some believers had gotten the notion that being single and celibate was more spiritual than being married, and they disparaged marriage entirely. Perhaps someone was teaching that sex was "unspiritual" and should be altogether forsaken (MacArthur).

v.2 - While some might accuse Paul of having a lower view of marriage here they would be incorrect (cf. Eph. 5:28ff). He is not saying sex is the only reason for marriage, but that marital relations are an answer to the temptation of celibacy (see v. 9). Morris adds, "Since fornication was so common at Corinth it was hard for the unmarried to remain chaste and hard for them to persuade others that they were, in fact, chaste."

vv. 3-5 – God's design for marriage does not include celibacy! Some may have erroneously thought sexual abstinence in marriage to be spiritually superior, but Paul clearly states "due" or "owed" benevolence (kindness, good will) in regard to sexual matters. Neither husband nor wife has "power" (exousiazō; authority, mastery).

Paul is saying that neither wives nor husbands have the right to use their bodies completely as they will. They have obligations to one another. Two things are noteworthy: the putting of the sexes on an absolute equality in this matter, and the indispensability of the sex act in marriage. Paul will have no truck with a view of marriage that leaves the sex act in the sole control of the male, nor with a view of marriage that sees sex as defiling (Morris).

The only exception would be for a "time" (a fixed and definite time), and by mutual "consent" (sumphonos from which we get the word symphony; idea of harmonious, accordant, agreeing). The idea of "fasting and prayer" indicates a strong burden about a person, ministry opportunity, grief or illness. Fasting in the Bible is always voluntary and indicates a need for undivided attention with God (cf. Ex. 19:9-15; Joel 2:12-14, 16). The word "defraud" has the idea of "to rob" (see also Thess. 4:6).

NOTE:

Here is a direct affirmation of one of Satan's ways to destroy marriage. The word "incontinency" means "want of self-control, intemperance." Lenski notes, "This may not flatter our human nature but it certainly fortifies by honestly naming the weak point...Satan is here pictured as being constantly on the watch to

bring Christ's followers to fall. It must be our purpose to thwart his nefarious attempts."

VV. 6-7 - The word "permission" (suggnome) means concession "to think the same thing, pardon, indulgence." Paul is underlining what he had just said in v.5 ("consent"). "Although he himself had received the gift of restraint, Paul does not impose abstinence on anyone who lacked this gift" (Kistemaker).

Some see Paul's desire that all men were celibate like himself as a declaration of spiritual superiority, but Paul, while acknowledging his preference for singleness, declares that one's marital status should be according to God's will.

The use of the word "gift" (charisma; as in ch. 12; "a gift of divine grace"), "of God" underlines the fact that spirituality is not determined by marital status, and that marital status is to be sovereignly directed by God, not society or man's wisdom.

NOTE:

Today's attitudes about marriage in our churches often make singleness a second-class condition. Believers need to recognize singleness in a submissive believer as a possible gift from God.

In the case of the Corinthians (as is so in our contemporary society) most of them came from promiscuous lifestyles which had been given the full approval of an all-permissive society. This made it all the more imperative that they not shoulder ascetic burdens God never intended them to bear. Repression of God-given appetites can be as harmful as unrestrained indulgence. Ascetic practices, when undertaken beyond what God demands, and without reference to one's own limitations and circumstances, do not dampen the fires of lust but feed them (Phillips).

VV. 8-9 - Paul takes the aforementioned principle and applies it to those who have no marriage (agamos) and to the widows "perhaps because of their particular vulnerability and the consequent temptation to remarry" (Morris). Paul states celibacy as "good" if they had the "gift", but if they could not "contain" ("to be self-controlled, continent, to exhibit self-government"), it was "more useful, more serviceable, more advantageous" (better) to marry.

The word "burn" (puoo; "to set on fire, to be incensed, kindle"; our English word "pyrotechnics" comes from the same root), involves sexual passion.

Paul is again succinct and to the point; there is no need to say another word. The difference in the tenses is important: "to marry" is an aorist to express a single definite act; "to burn" is a present to indicate a recurrent condition, which, deprived of marriage, may result in criminal satisfaction or may in secret devastate the inner spiritual life. But the alternatives offered are not two evils, the lesser of which should be chosen, but a good on the one hand and an evil on the other, "for marriage is honorable in all." Paul states the facts unblushingly: one either has or has not

the gift. If he has he may remain unmarried although he, too, may marry. Nor does Paul say that it would be “better” for him to remain unmarried; all he says is that, if he elects not to marry, his unmarried state, like Paul’s, is “excellent.” But if one lacks the gift, only one course is in order, he must marry, for moral danger is too deadly (Lenski).

1. Marriage and Divorce (7:10-24)

a. Believers Married to Believers (vv. 10-11)

Here Paul declares that Jesus had taught this during His earthly ministry (Matt 5:32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:9-12; Luke 16:18). The word “depart” (*chorizo*) means “to separate” while “put away” (*aphiemi*) means “to send away; divorce.” Paul affirms from Jesus’ teaching that divorce is forbidden. Note that if divorce or separation takes place there are two options:

1. Remain permanently unmarried (“remain” is present tense).
2. Be reconciled.

F.F. Bruce states, *“For a Christian husband or wife divorce is excluded by the law of Christ: here Paul has no need to express a judgment of his own, for the Lord’s ruling on this matter was explicit.”*

b. Believers Married to Unbelievers Who Want to Stay in the Marriage Relationship (vv. 12-14)

Paul’s instruction is clear - no separation and no divorce. Four times the principle of “no divorce” is mentioned in vv. 10-13! Laney adds:

A Christian, says Paul, should continue to live with the unbelieving partner as long as the unbelieving spouse consents to the arrangement. Three reasons for preserving the marriage union with the unbelieving partner are given: (1) for the sake of the family, v. 14; (2) for the sake of peace, v. 15; and (3) for the sake of personal testimony, v. 16.

Since Paul had taught that the believer’s body was the temple of the Holy Ghost (6:15-20), some of the Corinthians were possibly thinking that marriage to a pagan was defiling. Paul states just the opposite. The unbelieving spouse as well as the children, are “sanctified” or “made separate.” God has His eye on this home! One believer in the hope gives divine hope.

Paul is not saying that an unbelieving husband or wife has been made morally holy through his or her Christian spouse. No, man is unable to sanctify or to save a fellow human being. What the apostle means to say is that an unbelieving spouse who lives intimately with a Christian marriage partner experiences the influence of holiness.

To be sanctified means that a person is influenced by the claims of Christ. The converse is equally true: anyone who is not sanctified is influenced by the claims of a world that is opposed to Christ. In the Greek, the verb to be sanctified is in the perfect tense, which denotes that from the moment the spouse became a Christian his or her unbelieving partner comes in contact with holiness (Kistemaker).

With the conversion of one of the members a new dimension of holiness and sanctity is brought in the home. A new, holy, and Christlike lifestyle is exhibited by the believer. God has invaded the home. The Holy Spirit has a firm foothold in the family. The unbeliever may remain an unbeliever, but now the Holy spirit is at work on all levels of the family life. The invasion of the Lord Jesus has forever changed things in that home. The longer the unbelieving partner remains, and the more the believing partner becomes like Jesus, the more likely it becomes that the unbelieving partner will recognize the new atmosphere of goodness and godliness which has come in the home (Phillips).

c. Believers Married to Unbelievers Wanting to Divorce (vv. 15-16)

If the unbelieving spouse departs (leaves or divorces), Paul instructs the believer to let him go ahead. The comment that a Christian is not under “bondage” (enslaved) is in regard to the phrase “let him depart.” There should be no feeling of being forced by God to preserve the marriage. “Paul is saying that it is not necessary for the believer to contest the divorce action or engage in legal maneuvers to prevent it. Since God has called us to peace, the bitterness and strife of contesting a divorce or separation must be avoided” (Laney).

Many (if not most) commentators and pastors use v. 15, as a second reason for God sanctioning divorce (the first being adultery), even between believers! Notice Paul does not mention remarriage, and he does not give permission for the believer to initiate divorce. The freedom and peace of a deserted believer does not imply permission to remarry. Such would immediately contradict v. 11, and Paul’s other teachings (Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7:39), as well as Jesus’ (Mark 10-11-12; Luke 16:18).

Verse 16 has been viewed by some as a possibility, and by others as an inappropriate assumption. The idea of not being enslaved and being at peace would make the sense here that the believer should not force marriage as a missionary scheme.

In this matter of mixed marriages, the line should be followed that conduces to peace. In some cases, this will mean living with the pagan partner, in some cases it will mean accepting the pagan partner’s decision that the marriage is at an end. The underlying concern for peace is the same in both cases (Morris).

3. Marriage and Life (vv. 17-24)

Paul teaches the principle of how Christians are to respond to social and religious conditions around them. Three times (vv. 17, 20, 24), Paul states that believers should not be hasty and careless in social revolution or changing personal circumstances (the products of men's wisdom).

Whether circumcised or not, or a slave or not, believers are to remain in the condition they were when God saved them. God allows the believer to be where he is for a purpose. Salvation is not God's "call" for leaving one's social status, marriage, or singleness. We should stay put until God moves us!

This does not forbid a man to better himself. But it cautions him against seeking a change simply because he is a Christian. Conversion is not the signal to leave one's occupation (unless it is plainly incompatible with Christianity) and seek something more 'spiritual'. All of life is God's. We should serve God where we are until he calls us elsewhere. As throughout the passage, the aorist called looks back to the time of God's call. Remain is present continuous. Paul rounds it all off with 'with God'.

He is not counseling an attitude of passive resignation, an acceptance of the established order at all cost. He is reminding his friends that they are not alone as they try to live the Christian life. God is with them, whatever their circumstances. Let them, then, seek first and always to remain with him (Morris).

4. Marriage and Ministry (vv. 25-38)

1. The Problems of the Flesh (vv. 25-28)

Paul addresses another question from the Corinthian believers. This involved the marrying of virgins of which Paul states Jesus had not addressed during His earthly ministry.

Paul echoes his previous claims of vv. 17-24, that a man should remain in his calling. Here he adds the reason of "the present distress (calamity, necessity, straits)". Whatever this present problem was for the Corinthians Paul advised staying as they were. "When high seas are raging it is no time for changing ships" (Morris).

The married man, ("bound"; "to bind, fasten"), was to remain married and not to seek "to be loosed" ("setting free of a prisoner, of the bond of marriage, divorce"). The unmarried ("free from marriage"?!), were not to seek marriage, but if they married, while not sinning, there would be trouble ("a pressing, pressure"). Marriage implies responsibility, and marriage in times of distress must lead to some kind of trouble (Morris).

The marital state, in those critical days, was bound to add an extra burden. Those who elected to get married anyway, regardless of Paul's advice, would be courting trouble. It is obvious that a single person facing persecution is in a stronger position than a married person who has to weigh

the effect his stand will have on his dependents. Often one of the first moves of a terrorist is to seize the prisoner's family and hold them hostage for his cooperation with their demands. Paul knew all about this. He had been a terrorist himself once (Acts 22:4; 26:11) (Phillips).

5. The Passing of Time (vv. 29-31)

Everything (including marriage), is passing quickly (“short”).

The believer's perspective on life including: marriage (v. 29), emotions (v. 30a), possessions (v. 30b), and pleasure (v.31), must be eternal, not temporal (Matt 6:19, 20). The “not abusing” comes from a Greek word meaning “to use much; excessively.”

In all the parts of Paul's poetic composition (wedlock, sorrow, joy, wealth, goods, and service), “we ought to be living as if we might have to leave this world at any moment.” That is, we should not make earthly things our ultimate objectives. Whether we are married, cast into sorrow, given to joy, or acquire possessions, Christians should not become absorbed by them. They should see the transient nature of these things and know that after having passed through this earthly vale, believers will enter eternity. In this life, then, they ought to prepare themselves for the life after death (Kistemaker).

“Look at the clock!” says Paul. It's getting late. Time is short. We need to have eternity's values in view...Paul could clearly see that a time of dreadful tribulation was coming upon the church. By remaining single, by preparing for the worst, by touching the things of this world with as light a touch as possible, by focusing on the Lord and His coming again, the Corinthians could be shielded from much anxiety and care. It is a good recipe at all times (Phillips).

In times of affluence, ease, permissiveness, and inordinate self-acceptance it is easy to live for pleasure. Pleasures that are not immoral or extravagant may still be worldly. More leisure, more vacation time, earlier retirement, more comfortable homes, and such things can so occupy our interest and time that the things of the Spirit are neglected (MacArthur).

Paul concludes that the “fashion” (schema; “the outward form”), “passeth away” (present tense), or “is passing by or away.” Man's wisdom will try to make permanent that which is truly passing quickly, and pass over quickly that which is truly permanent! John Tillotson said, “*He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment, but a fool forever.*”

We at once see that marriage, weeping, etc., are only a part of this form and fashion of the world which is ever moving on and away, is transient, for a day, "life's little day." Why try to cling to them, to make of them more than they are, to value them above their real worth? (Lenski)

6. The Pressures of Marriage (vv. 32-35)

Paul states an obvious fact of marriage. Single believers can devote more time and energy to the Lord's work. Married "careth" ("to be anxious, to be troubled"), for worldly things (food, shelter, etc.), for the purpose of pleasing their spouse.

The "difference" has the idea of "divided, separation." Thus, the virgin (unmarried) can be fully and totally devoted and separated ("holy") to God's work. *"Marriage does not prevent great devotion to the Lord, and singleness does not guarantee it. But singleness has fewer hindrances and more advantages"* (MacArthur).

Paul adds (v. 35), that he was not trying to "cast a snare" or not trying to restrict, or throw a noose, or constrain God's will concerning marriage or singleness. He was trying to appropriately deal with what had apparently become confusing to the Corinthian church. Paul wanted both the married and the single believers to have undistracted ministries (the word "attend" has the idea of "waiting alongside, sitting constantly by, devoted"). Paul had already dealt with marriage endorsing it as a state ordained by God (6:16), but for those with the gift of celibacy Paul advocates a life of full-time service marked by discipline and devotion to God. "There need be no intermission in the service offered by the unmarried, no distraction of any sort" (Morris).

It is possible to please both the Lord and your mate, if you are yielded to Christ and obeying the Word. Many of us have discovered that a happy home and satisfying marriage are a wonderful encouragement in the difficulties of Christian service. A well-known Scottish preacher was experiencing a great deal of public criticism because of a stand he took on a certain issue, and almost every day there was a negative report in the newspapers. A friend met him one day and asked, "How are you able to carry on in the face of this opposition?" The man replied quietly, "I am happy at home."

Unmarried believers who feel a call to serve God should examine their own hearts to see if marriage will help or hinder their ministry. They must also be careful to wed mates who feel a like call to serve God. Each person has his own gift and calling from God and must be obedient to His Word (Wiersbe).

7. The Prominence of the Need (vv. 36-38)

-View One (Father/Daughter)

In light of the wickedness of Corinth, and the teaching of Paul on the

advantages of singleness, some fathers had dedicated their daughters to a life of celibacy. But some daughters did not have God's call to remain single and this would cause no small problem in the home! It is probable these fathers were confused and desperate in asking Paul for wisdom. The phrase "pass the flower of her age" (*huperakmos*), has the idea of "beyond the bloom or prime of life." The phrase "and need so require" means that she is ready for marriage and it needs to happen. While making the vow was good, things had changed, so that both the father and daughter are free to agree in marriage and not be guilty of sinning. At the same time such a vow of celibacy was right if there is no constraint by the daughter to cause her father to allow for marriage.

Notice the key is the father (v. 37). Parents are to be a major force in the marriage of their children, but they, too, must consider their own motives and what is good for their children.

Nowadays the daughter's will in the matter would certainly have to be given much more consideration than in Bible times. Doubtless a father could expect some scenes these days if he tried to force his will. He would certainly need to have his own emotions well in hand. It is surely assumed, too, that his decision is for the daughter's protection and long-term interest and not just the product of his own prejudice or dislike (Phillips).

I have noticed that often in churches marriages come in "packs." One couple gets engaged and before long four couples are engaged. If all of these engagements are in the will of God, it can be a very exciting and wonderful experience; but I fear that some couples get engaged just to keep up with the crowd. Sometimes in Christian schools, couples get what I call "senior panic" and rush out of engagement and into marriage immediately after graduation, lest they be left "waiting at the church." Sad to say, not all of these marriages are successful.

Even though our modern approach to dating and marriage was completely foreign to the Corinthians, the counsel Paul gave them still applies today. It is a wise thing for couples to counsel with their parents and with their Christian leaders in the church, lest they rush into something which afterward they regret.

Each situation is unique, and parents and children must seek the Lord's will. It takes more than two Christian people to make a happy marriage. Not every marriage that is scriptural is necessarily sensible (Wiersbe).

-View Two (Young man / girlfriend)

8. The Permanency of Marriage (vv.39-40)

The thought of a believer being "bound" ("to bind, fasten with chains"), to his or her partner for life is not a new teaching. Paul in Romans

7:2 states, “*For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth, but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.*” Commitment to marriage is not for a moment, for a trial period, or for “the seven-year itch,” but for life. Divorce is against the Lord’s command (vv10-11; Matt 19:6), so Paul moves on to discuss the remarriage of widows.

Unlike the virgin under the father, widows are free to remarry whomever they will with one stipulation...the husband-to-be must be a believer. Phillips points out, “*The clear implication in that statement is that she must marry within the bounds of the known will of God, who now plays for her role of Father. He is the One who will protect her, if she will let Him, from a hasty, foolish, or inappropriate marriage.*”

Paul concludes this section by giving his “judgment” (“view, opinion”), noting that he had the influence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As an apostle his opinion has more weight than that of a private individual. To the end, however, he refrains from making a law that celibacy is required or even more spiritual than marriage. “*Legalists will desire a different type of answer, one that is composed of laws and legal regulations. Paul’s is the gospel way: Above all things hold fast to the Lord; prefer everything that will aid you in this and discard whatever will not*” (Lenski).

Paul was still called to speak as “an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God” (1:1).

NOTE:

Wiersbe gives a thoughtful conclusion:

In summary, each person must ask himself or herself the following questions if marriage is being contemplated:

1. *What is my gift from God?*
2. *Am I marrying a believer?*
3. *Are the circumstances such that marriage is right?*
4. *How will marriage affect my service for Christ?*
5. *Am I prepared to enter into this union for life?*

B. Principles of Liberty (ch. 8)

Paul continues to answer questions from the Corinthian believers (7:1). Here there were two basic questions: Is eating idol meat wrong (v. 4)? Is it inappropriate to celebrate at Corinthian feasts (v.10)? These questions may not seem important to modern 21st century American believers, but the answer (or principles) very much affect our behavior. Modern missionaries still face direct confrontations on foreign fields when it comes to issues much like Paul addresses here. One missionary family in Nepal will not display a Christmas tree because of the native tendency to worship trees. Another missionary family in Japan had to

learn which town festivals were religious and which were civic because of continued idolatry.

Many behaviors in our society are not directly commanded, nor forbidden in Scripture. This may explain why so many Christians spend so much time arguing over them. Believers, if not Biblically careful, can tend toward either legalism or license. Legalism sees everything as black or white, rules rather than the Spirit of God. License sees really nothing as black with almost everything OK unless it is clearly forbidden in Scripture. Let your “conscience be your guide” theology may have been the Corinthians’ struggle.

The principle that Paul lays down for any doubtful behavior is in v.9.

VV. 1-3 -

“...we know that we have all knowledge” may be a quotation from the Corinthians’ letter. These believers thought they knew all about idol worship and what was inappropriate, but Paul reminds them that “knowledge” (gnosis; knowledge acquired by learning or effort), in and of itself can become arrogant (“puffeth up”). There was something extremely important they did not know - love (“charity”; agape; a willful and sacrificial love) is the key to building up (“edifieth”; oikodomeo or “house building”). “To have love but no knowledge is unfortunate; but to have knowledge and no love is equally tragic” (MacArthur). “Truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy” (Wiersbe).

Paul’s point in v. 2, is that no man knows everything! A man may know a lot, but compared to God he knows almost nothing.

The truly edified person has some idea of what he has yet to learn. Someone has defined knowledge as “the process of passing from the unconscious state of ignorance to the conscious state of ignorance.” Ignorance does not know that it does now know. True knowledge does not know and knows it (MacArthur).

The clever man’s danger lies not only in the fact that his knowledge inflates his ego. It lies in the fact that his preoccupation with his cleverness causes him to overlook love. Learning and logic will never take the place of love in God’s sight (Phillips).

Note how Paul links knowledge to love through God. Only biblical love (“charity”) can deal with both legalism and license. The greatest knowledge a man can have is to know the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that God knows him (2 Tim. 2:19).

The little child who is afraid of the dark will not be assured by arguments, especially if the adult (or older brother) adopts a superior attitude. Knowledge can be a weapon to fight with or a tool to build with, depending on how it is used. If it “puffs up” then it cannot “build up (edify).”

A know-it-all attitude is only an evidence of ignorance. The person who really knows truth is only too conscious of how much he does not know. Furthermore, it is one thing to know doctrine and quite something else to know God.

It is possible to grow in Bible knowledge and yet not grow in grace or in one's personal relationship with God. The test is love... (Wiersbe).

Hence, Paul urges the Corinthians to reexamine their perspective on knowledge and to understand what they ought to know. They must realize that all knowledge is derivative and comes from God through Christ. All the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge are stored in Christ (Col. 2:3). True knowledge therefore has a spiritual dimension that relates to God, who bases knowledge on love. Knowledge by itself is not wrong; indeed it is essential to life. But when a person fails to link knowledge to divine love, he deceives himself and fails utterly.

In recent times, however, the problem which the church faces is not a lack of love but a lack of knowledge. The problem with the members of the church is not intellectual arrogance but rather biblical ignorance. The rich heritage of the past is no longer passed on from generation to generation. Apart from the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, many church members know little of the Bible's content. Because of the scriptural illiteracy, the church's need of the hour is solid instruction in the truths of God's Word (Kistemaker).

vv. 4-7 - In their understanding that idols were “nothing” the Corinthian believers were correct, but Paul adds another truth which they did not know - that not all believers understood this yet. Some believers had not yet risen spiritually to the point where they could shake off thoughts of their past pagan lifestyle.

If a weaker brother (“feeble, infirm”), follows the lead of a strong Christian in eating what their conscience tells them not to eat, they become “defiled” (“to pollute, stain, contaminate”; Rom. 14:23). This could include guilt, sinful thoughts associated with former pagan practice, despair, and a loss of feeling forgiven.

vv. 8-12 - Paul rehearses the knowledge that some Corinthians had - eating or not eating idol meat does not make one “closer to God” (“commendeth”). But the Corinthians lack of love made them ignorant to understand that a weaker believer seeing them “sit at meat” will cause several problems:

1. Their liberty (*exousia*; “power, authority”), will become a “stumbling block” (“an obstacle”) to the weaker brother's understanding (v.9 is a MEMORY VERSE!).
2. The weaker brother will be “emboldened” (*oikodomeo*; “to build a house, erect, rebuild”), or influenced to do that which their conscience told them is wrong.
3. Such action brings destruction and ruin (“perish” from *apollumi*), to the spiritual life of the weak.

As we mature, conscience allows us to go more places and to do more things because we will have more spiritual strength and better spiritual judgment.

A small child is not allowed to play with sharp tools, to go into the street, or to go where there are dangerous machines or electrical appliances. The restrictions

are gradually removed as he grows older and learns for himself what is dangerous and what is not (MacArthur).

Again, Paul declares something else the Corinthians did not know (or were not willing to obey), that to sin against the weaker brother's conscience is to sin against Christ (Matt. 25:41-46). The word "wound" ("to strike, beat, smite"), underlines the damage done to the weak brother. "*The Lord Jesus always used His great strength to help the weak. We should do the same*" (Phillips).

- v. 13 - This is knowledge mixed (or activated) with love! Paul will set the example for the Corinthians. To "offend" (skandalizo), has the idea of "to put an implement in the way upon which another may trip and fall."

When it came to principle Paul would not yield an inch. When it came to self denial he would go to any lengths. Of course the weak brother has responsibilities, too. He is not to use his scruples and prejudices in such a way as to hold the strong believer ransom. There are some religious bigots who use their inhibitions just to get their own way. They would rob others of all their liberty. Romans 15:2 takes care of that (Phillips).

It is important to note that the stronger believer defers to the weaker believer in love only that he might help him to mature. He does not "pamper" him; he seeks to edify him, to help him grow. Otherwise, both will become weak (Wiersbe).

NOTE:

Many American believers insist on their liberty, freedom, or "rights" to behave just about any way they want, often confusing the U.S. Constitution with the Bible. But as Paul points out the only rights one has as a believer is the right to obey God (Matt. 22:37-40).

While it would not be true to say that the robust Christianity of the New Testament envisions the strong as permanently shackled by the weak, yet the strong must always act towards the weak with consideration and Christian love. In cases like the one dealt with here the strong must adapt their behaviour to the conscience of the weak. No good purpose is served by asserting their 'rights' (cf. Paul's treatment of the same general subject in Rom. 14) (Morris).

One item of caution may well be added in the cogent words of G. Campbell Morgan: "I have heard of unjustifiable and unwarranted use made of that statement. We must remember that this must be interpreted by a justifiable effect of conscience on our action, and no further. I do not think any particular word of application is necessary. It must be proved that an example of ours ever made anyone to stumble, or offend in that particular matter. That applies in a good many ways. Some people make use of it when there is no excuse for their action, when it is not based upon our action...I do not suppose anyone would dream of saying, 'clothes maketh my brother to stumble....' You finish it!" (Luck).

C. Paul's Example of Liberty (ch. 9)

Paul illustrates in his own life what he just stated (8:13). He steadfastly refused to derive material support from those to whom he ministered nor use his apostolic authority to offend in any matter (v. 18). It is obvious that the rumblings of doubt about his credentials had reached him; he would later give an extended defense (II Cor. 10-13).

In vv. 24-27, Paul underlines probably the most important principle underlining Christian liberty - self-control. Referring to the biennial Isthmian games Paul mentions "the race" of Christians who compete not against each other but against obstacles of the world, the flesh and the devil. Anything done for Christ that lasts comes through self-discipline.

What a rebuke is this athletic self-discipline (for a temporal crown) to the flabby, out-of-shape Christian today who does almost nothing to prepare for the greatest crown of all – eternity's reward.

Paul's goal is stated four times in vv. 19-22 - to win the lost. The phrase "keep under my body" translates "to beat black and blue." This Apostle would give his body a "bruising" if necessary, even make his body a slave (instead of the other way around), to win the lost.

Paul refused to be a "castaway" (disqualified) to him even good things can interfere with the best things. The word "castaway" (adokimos; a sports team) means "disqualified, not standing the test, not approved." Even one's "liberty" when not done in love ("charity" 8:1), can lead to being put on a shelf by God. "*Following our own ways can keep others from knowing the Way*" (MacArthur).

D. Overconfidence in Liberty (ch. 10)

1. The Negative Example of Israel (vv. 1-13)

Ancient Israel provided Paul with a sobering warning for the overconfident Corinthians. Israel had great assets of grace (vv. 1-4), yet they abused that grace by participating in the following:

- idolatry (v. 7)
- sexual immorality (v. 8)
- trying God (v. 9)
- complaining (v. 10)

Paul warns of all the above sins for these Corinthian believers when he states their overconfidence would be their downfall (v. 12).

NOTE: Christians who become self-confident are less and less confident in God's Word and Spirit; that leads to temptation and decreasing resistance to sin. When we think ourselves strongest, our doctrine purest, and our walk the soundest we should be the most on our guard!

To encourage them Paul reminds them that God often tests us to help us “in our place.” Such temptation is never superhuman and no one (even Satan) cannot make us sin. God is faithful to make “a way” or “the” way if we are not overcome by our overconfidence (v. 13).

2. The Participation in Idol Feasts (10:14-22)

It seems that the overconfident Corinthians were careless in either participating in pagan celebrations or being associated somehow with them. While idols are nothing of themselves Paul warns of demonic forces behind such worship and for believers to stay away (v. 20)!

3. The Principle of Glorifying God (10:23-11:1)

Again, Paul underlines the importance of not using liberty without considering others (i.e. ch. 8). Paul gives four basic principles in guiding believers to use their liberty for God’s glory:

- edification over gratification (v. 23)
- others over self (v. 24)
- liberty over legalism (vv. 25-27)
- condescension over condemnation (vv. 28-30)

NOTE:

It may be that people will be offended by the Gospel - that is their problem; but when they are needlessly offended by our way of living - that is our problem because it dishonors God.

Paul concludes this entire section concerning Christian liberty by imploring the Corinthians to be “followers” or “mimics” (from mimetes). His confidence (in contrast to the Old Testament Israelites and the Corinthian believers), was in Christ, who is the supreme example of someone who “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). Morris states concerning Paul, “*He calls on his converts to imitate him, but in the very act of saying this he points them away from himself. The reason they should imitate him is that he imitates Christ. His example points them to the Saviour.*”

V. DISCUSSION (11:1-14:40)

A. Worship (11:2-34)

1. The Veiling of Women (vv. 2-16)

The Corinthian church faced problems very much like those of today’s local churches, here regarding the submission of women of which they asked Paul (cf. 7:1). Paul begins by praising them for their thinking of him in regard to asking important questions, and that they had done well to keep what he had previously taught them.

v.3 The word “head” here is the idea of “supreme, chief, or prominent.” The

order and submission in each of those three cases is based on the principle of voluntary subordination which permeates the entire universe (Eph. 5:23). It is how God designed that everything work.

vv. 4-6 In public ministry men were not to have their heads covered (lit. “having hanging down from head”). Kistemaker states, “In their native land and in their colonies the Romans covered their heads during private and public devotions. Paul wanted the Corinthians to separate themselves from pagan customs and be distinct in their Christian practice.” It would also be confusing to the distinction of man and woman.

An unveiled woman was dishonoring her “head” or husband, and bringing shame to herself like adulterous or feminist women who had their hair “shaven” (*surao: to shave, shear*).

During the German occupation of France and other European countries during World War II, some women collaborated with the Germans and consorted with German soldiers and officials. After the war their fellow citizens showed their anger at such compromise by seizing the women and shaving off all their hair. They then became objects of public shame and disgrace. Paul uses a similar picture here to illustrate how strongly the Holy Spirit feels about the respective roles of men and women in the church (Phillips).

In Corinth, there was a rebellion demonstrated by certain women who were praying and prophesying in public with their heads uncovered. The question of Paul advocating women praying and prophesying in a local church service is answered in chapter 14 where it is clearly forbidden.

vv. 7-10. While a head covering was a cultural and customary symbol of subordination among men and women in Corinth, the uncovered head of a man in church worship is a matter of God’s design.

The image of God was placed first on the man who was given dominion over the created world thus making him the “glory of God” (Gen. 1:26-27). The woman is said to be the “glory of the man” for, indeed, she was made from his side (Gen. 2:21-23). Man is both the image and glory (*doxa: “splendour, brightness, reflection”*) of God and the woman is the glory of man but not of the image of man. “The point is that man shows how magnificent a creature God can create from Himself, while woman shows how magnificent a creature God can make from a man” (MacArthur). Morris states, “...when people worship, this high dignity must be recognized; the glory of God is not to be obscured in the presence of God (by covering the head of its bearer). The woman is not made in the image of man (it was Seth, not Eve, who was in the image of Adam, Gn. 5:3). Her relationship to man is not the same as that of man to God. She has a place of her own, but it is not the man’s place. She stands in such a relation to the man as does nothing else, and thus she is called the glory of man. And it is precisely the glory of man that should be veiled in the presence of God. In worship God alone must be glorified.”

Paul adds that the woman was not only created from man but for him. In fact, he even named her “Woe-man” (!) in the Garden “because she was taken out of man” (Gen. 2:23b). She is neither superior or inferior but unique. Only she can be “an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:20).

Verse 10 seems to be stating that, unlike other cultures where women were treated as property, Christian women now had the “authority” (power) to participate in prayer and prophesy when accompanied with the proper head covering. Even in Judaism women were not counted in the number needed to begin a synagogue (ten males). The phrase “because of the angels” indicates there is more going on than the congregation sees. It is also true that angels serve believers (Heb. 1:14), and watch the process of God saving souls (I Pet. 1:12).

vv. 11-12. The phrase “in the Lord” is key because only Christians can understand and perform their complimentary roles as husband and wife. There is a divine partnership between spouses where both are alike under God. They are to serve together and serve one another. “Even though the husband is the head of his wife, he is dependent on her in numerous ways. In turn, a wife needs her husband as much as he needs her” (Kistemaker).

“In this sense every man is ‘through’ the woman. The addition ‘everything comes from God’ is a typical Pauline reminder of the priority of the divine. From is ek denoting origin; the source, the origin of all things and all people is God. Neither man nor woman is an independent being. The implications for conduct are plain” (Morris).

vv. 13-16. The principle of distinction is easily perceived in “nature” (*phusis*: “the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature” which instructs all men that it is disgraceful and without honor (“shame”) for a man to have long hair. On the other hand, a woman’s long hair is her “glory” (*doxa*: “praise, honour splendor”), and her covering (here the word is *peribolaion* or literally “to throw around” or a mantle or covering”) as the veil is the cultural symbolic covering.

It is interesting to note that “for” (*anti*) means “instead of, or in place of.” Could Paul be stating a woman’s long hair is sufficient for worship, with no need for additional veiling? Paul is emphasizing that the distinctive difference between male and female must be addressed no matter what the cultural setting. When veils are culturally needed then they are to be utilized. The important truth here is visible submission expressed by the wife in the church to her husband.

It is interesting to note that because of this passage it is still customary in many places for women to wear hats at formal services of worship. This illustrates the fact that it is always easier to get people to follow customs than to understand principles of action. As to applying the general teaching to ourselves, it can certainly be done in this way: on things not in themselves right or wrong, it is proper to follow local custom as to modest behavior, lest in any way we cast a “stumbling

block” before another (Lenski).

Customs may also change more or less decidedly. Where these differences exist, or where these changes occur without a conscious intention to antagonize the facts of creation or of nature, no religious issue results regarding even the point of propriety. Only where changes are sought that are in contravention of the facts of creation and of nature must we proceed as Paul did when he was writing to the congregation at Corinth (Luck).

The woman’s long hair is her glory, and it is given to her ‘instead of a covering’ (literal translation). In other words, if local custom does not dictate a head-covering, her long hair can be that covering. I do not think that Paul meant for all women in every culture to wear a shawl for a head-covering; but he did expect them to use their long hair as a covering and as a symbol of their submission to God’s order. This is something that every woman can do.

In my ministry in different parts of the world, I have noticed that the basic principle of headship applies in every culture; but the means of demonstrating it differs from place to place. The important thing is the submission of the heart to the Lord and the public manifestation of obedience to God’s order (Wiersbe).

In today’s culture, the presence of a hat does not signify subordination of a wife to her spouse. And Paul is not asking a woman to wear a headpiece or to put up her hair. Rather, he wants a woman to be distinctively feminine in respect to hair and dress and thus fulfill the role that God has intended since creation. He wants her to be submissive to her husband in her femininity (Kistemaker).

NOTE: Paul is speaking of more than simply hair styles. His argument involved:

- the principle of submission based on the Godhead (vs. 3)
- God’s design of male and female (vs. 7)
- Creation’s order (v. 8)
- physiology (vv. 13-15)

v. 16. Paul closes this part of his address with a sharp warning. He had no “custom” (“a being used to; practice”), of arguing or debating this matter especially with any who were “contentious” (*philoneikos: a lover of strife*). The idea is of “one who battles over the meaning of words and prolongs an argument indefinitely” (Gromacki). Any rebellious attitude, even under cultural pressure, that would nullify the expression of subordination is not to be sanctioned in any New Testament church.

2. The Lord’s Table (vv. 17-34)

vv. 17-22 Paul would not praise them for their gathering for the Lord’s Supper. Even here there were “divisions” (*schismata*) and even “heresies (*hairesis*: “the act of taking, capture, choosin”), or “self-willed opinion which opposes truth and which leads to division and the formation of sects. The word does not denote heresies as

we commonly understand the word today, meaning radical departure from the truth” (Phillips; see also Titus 3:13, 11). This reprehensible behavior in church was necessary from Paul’s viewpoint to bring to the forefront the committed, godly, and “approved” (*dokimus*: “accepted, particularly of coins and money”) believers. The Corinthians were not gathering for the true Lord’s Supper, because their lack of love and care for each other made the ordinance of none effect. These large meals taken in connection with the ordinance were rather common in the early New Testament church (Jude 12; II Pet. 2:13b). When they should have shared in food and fellowship they were divided and mean-spirited. The wealthier believers shamed (“dishonored, disgraced”) the poorer members by “hogging” (“before” has the idea of “to take before, to anticipate”). While some had plenty, others were left to hunger. Morris aptly states, *“But what happened at Corinth was a travesty of love. The wealthier members of the congregation clearly provided most of the food, and this could have been a marvelous expression of Christian love and unity. But it was degraded into the very opposite. The poor would have to finish their work before they could come, and slaves would find it particularly difficult to be on time. But the rich did not wait. They ate and drank in their cliques (‘divisions’, v. 18), each eating ‘one’s own dinner’ (idion deipnon). The food was gone before the poor got there! ‘One remains hungry, another gets drunk.’ There was a sharp contrast between the hungry poor, lacking even necessary good, and the drunken rich. There was no real sharing, no genuinely common meal.”*

Note: It was neither a proper church gathering nor the Lord’s Supper! How does this relate to our “pot luck” dinners?

vv. 23-34. Paul now warns the Corinthian believers that they must not partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner (“unworthily”), or face the guilt of dishonoring the body and blood of Jesus.

*To come unworthily to the Lord’s table is to become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. To trample our country’s flag is not to dishonor a piece of cloth but to dishonor the country it represents. To come unworthily to Communion does not simply dishonor the ceremony; it dishonors the One in whose honor it is celebrated. We become **guilty** of dishonoring His body and blood, which represent His total gracious life and work for us, His suffering and death on our behalf. We become guilty of mocking and treating with indifference the very person of Jesus Christ (cf Acts 7:52; Heb. 6:6; 10:29) (Phillips).*

NOTE: “Flag burning” has become a “hot” topic in recent days among Americans. Would Christians feel such passion about the Lord’s table?

The believer is to “examine himself” (*dokimazo*: “to test, examine, prove, scrutinize; to recognize as genuine after examination “). An improper participation will be due to an improper evaluation. This will bring “damnation” (*krina*: “a condemnation, decree, judgment”) upon the believer in several forms for “many” (“sufficient, enough”):

- “weak” (used earlier in 8:12; “infirm, feeble”)
- “sickly” (“without strength”)
- “sleep” (“to be still, calm, quiet, to die”)

All this because believers were not “discerning” (*diakrino*: “to separate, make a distinction, discriminate”) about the ordinance. The word “body” in verse 29b, could also refer to the local church in this case.

At a Communion service in Scotland, the pastor noted that a woman in the congregation did not accept the bread and cup from the elder, but instead sat weeping. The pastor left the table and went to her side and said, “Take it, my dear, it’s for sinners!” And, indeed, it is; but sinners saved by God’s grace must not treat the Supper in a sinful manner.

The Communion is not supposed to be a time of “spiritual autopsy” and grief, even though confession of sins is important. It should be a time of thanksgiving and joyful anticipation of seeing the Lord! Jesus gave thanks, even though He was about to suffer and die. Let us give thanks also (Wiersbe).

A lack of self-judgment at the Lord’s Supper (“unworthily”), will bring certain “chastening” (from *paideus*: “child training”). This chastening is God’s loving way of dealing with his own children, not the Devil’s (Heb. 12:6), “that we should not be condemned with the world.”

In regard to this ordinance Paul tells the Corinthian believers to “tarry” (“to look for, expect, wait for”), “one for another” (“reciprocally, mutually”). “The Lord’s Supper takes the form of a meal, but its purpose is not to satisfy physical hunger” (Morris). “Here he [Paul] wants them to express genuine love for one another: the rich for the poor and the poor for the rich” (Kistemaker).

Whatever remained for Paul to instruct them in relation to this ordinance would have to wait until he would see them again.

B. Spiritual Gifts (ch.12)

1. Their purpose (vv.1-7)

“Now concerning” introduces another of the Corinthian’ questions (7:1). Paul reminds them that before salvation they were “carried away” or “to lead away as to prison” to “dumb” (*aphonos*: voiceless) idols. They had been under the influence of outside evil forces. The word for “ignorant” (*agnoeo*) is the word from which we get “agnostic”. So Paul did not want the Corinthians believers to not know or to have doubts about spiritual things.

Ignorance is the mother of all kinds of mischief. A great deal of ignorance still surrounds the subject of spiritual gifts. People make the most outrageous claims and statements. People who have never done a structural analysis of I Corinthians 12-14 and who have never carefully exegeted what the Holy Spirit has to say in these chapters set themselves up as authorities. They parrot other people’s opinions, or base their beliefs on some ecstatic experience and allow that “experience” to override sound doctrine, or take

texts from these three chapters wholly out of context and parade these “proof” texts as sufficient authentication of their views. Some of them command vast audiences on radio and television. Some of them lead large congregations. Some of them can produce strange phenomena which, supposedly, support their claims to be right. The fact remains they are wholly out of touch with the thrust, teaching, and certainties developed by Paul in these three chapters. The fact that some of these people are “nice” people, or good people, or that they have a reputation for being taught in the Word proves nothing. The test is how they handle these chapters. The question of whether we are right or wrong about the teaching of these chapters is not merely academic. It is critical. We are up against a host of hostile intelligence in the spirit world eager to exploit our ignorance in this area of the Christian life (Phillips).

Paul points out that no one speaking “by” or “in” the Spirit will curse Jesus (his nature, name, work, etc.). The word “accursed” (*anathema*) is considered the strongest condemnation in the Greek language (Gal. 1:8). The Lordship of Christ is not a manmade discovery. It is a discovery made known only through the working of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 16:17).

Paul states there are “diversities” (“divisions, distributions, allotments, apportionments”) of...

“gifts” (*charismaton*) or “graces”

“administrations” (*diakonion*) or “ministries”

“operations” (*energmaton*) or “energies”

Notice it is God Who “energizes” (*energon*: worketh) both the giving and working of the gifts, but the actual purpose is for the common good of the local church (“to profit withal,” *sumpheron*, or “to bear or bring together”). The confusion and division shown in Corinth contradicted the purpose of the gifts.

2. Their Variety (vv. 8-11)

NOTE: The other lists of the “gifts” are 12:28; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11-12; I Pet. 4:10,11. Since they are all different, one must be careful not to be too dogmatic about them. Combined they present nineteen different gifts and gifted offices. What is true of all the lists is the emphasis of God’s sovereign working of them for the good of the local church.

Paul does not explain these gifts using them only to point out the variety that God uses in His church. This is, no doubt, why he mixes the permanent gifts with the temporary or “sign” gifts (confirming the Word of God). It is not the scope of this course to thoroughly examine each one, but it is important to emphasize, as Paul did, that the gifts are given and controlled by the Holy Spirit (v. 11). The word “severally” (*idios*: pertaining to one’s self, one’s own), emphasizes the individuality of God’s program. No two believers are alike with no one receiving all the gifts and no one being without a gift.

3. Their Unity and Diversity (vv. 12-31)

The Corinthians' misuse of even their gifts reflected their worldliness and division in spite of their one source in God (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11). In vv. 12-13, Paul stresses unity, but in vv. 14-31 diversity - both are essential. These believers were carnal, envying and maybe pouting too. Refusing to participate does not remove or lessen the responsibility each believer has to his church. In an almost humorous fashion Paul uses the analogy of the human body to prove interdependence, not independence. Remember, you can lose an eye or hand and still live, but not a heart, liver, or brain (vv. 23, 24).

NOTE: It is interesting that two gifts (helps, governments), mentioned in v. 28, are not mentioned in vv. 29-30, and were probably the least prized by the Corinthian believers.

The Corinthians were to stop seeking gifts since each was gifted by God's sovereign will, but there was a way in which they were to exercise those gifts - found in ch. 13. The word "excellent" (*hyperbole*: "exceedingly beyond all measure"), and "way" ("course of conduct"), characterized the intent God had in the first place in using spiritual gifts.

C. The Excellence of Love (ch. 13)

NOTE: The simplest, yet profound, description of God is found in I John 4:16, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The simplest, yet profound, description of the believer is also love.

1. Love's Prominence (13:1-3)

It is tragic that so many churches find it difficult to love. It seems that at times it is easier to be orthodox than to be loving, to be active in church work than to be loving.

Agape ("charity") is a rare word in ancient Greek secular literature, yet it is one of the most common words of our New Testament! The problem is that few people have any idea of what true love is. Even Christians associate it with nice feelings, affection, romance, or desire. These are not what is spoken of in this chapter.

a. Without Love Eloquence is Nothing (v. 1)

Using great hyperbole Paul includes himself in imagining that if he could speak with the greatest eloquence and did not have love he would simply be making noise (*Glossais*: "tongues" means "languages or dialects").

b. Without Love, Prophecy, Knowledge, and Faith are Nothing (v. 2).

c. Without Love, Benevolence and Martyrdom are Nothing (v. 3).

Even self-sacrifice can be self-centered; and even the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom is futile without love. The loveless person produces nothing, gives nothing, and is nothing.

2. The Qualities of Love (13:4-7)

NOTE: In one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture Paul shines love through a prism showing us 15 brilliant hues and colors. Though some of these descriptions are adjectives in our English Bible, they are all active verbs in Greek. The focus is not simply on what love is, but what love does. Agape is active, not passive (i.e. it does not feel patience, it practices patience). It does not feel kind feelings, it does kind deeds, etc.

Someone has said that Paul painted a portrait of love and Jesus Christ sat for the portrait. Remember, He is love!

- a. Patience (“suffereth long”)
Lit. “Long-tempered”. To the Greek or Roman vengeance was a virtue. Hasn’t the world always made heroes of those that fight back? True love does not retaliate. Like Stephen dying under the crushing murderous blows, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” or our Savior from the Cross, “Father, forgive them” Love is never in a hurry to retaliate.

NOTE: A famous atheist would often in the middle of his lectures against God say, “I’ll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I’ve said!” He would then use the fact that his continued life was proof that God did not exist. A Christian said in response, “And did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?”

- b. Kindness (“kind; to show oneself mild”)
The counterpart of patience, Paul lists them together in Gal. 5:22 (the fruit of the Spirit). In this hardened, sin cursed world love has almost limitless opportunities to exercise this facet of love.
Again, Jesus is our supreme model. To His Disciples He said, “For my yoke is easy (the same word here translates kind), and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30; see Romans 2:4).

NOTE: Can you guess where this is first and foremost tested?

- c. Not Jealous (“envieth not” from *zeloo*; “to be heated or to boil with envy”)
This is the first of eight negative descriptions. One of the greatest battles a Christian must battle is jealousy. To the world it may seem harmless, but it was Eve’s jealousy of God to which Satan successfully appealed.
When we see someone who is popular, successful, beautiful, or talented (even in the ministry), what is our reaction?
- d. Does Not Brag (“vaunteth not itself; to boast one’s self, a self-display”)
This verb is used only here in the New Testament and means to “talk conceitedly.” Indeed, it is the flip-side of jealousy. Jealousy is wanting

what others have. Bragging is trying to make others covetous of what we have. Isn't it amazing how much we dislike bragging in others, and that we are so inclined to brag ourselves!

- e. Is Not Arrogant (“not puffed up”; “to inflate, blow up, to cause to swell up”)
This is “inflated selfishness” while love is genuine humility (they are mutually exclusive). The Corinthian believers were conceited about their knowledge of doctrine, their spiritual gifts, and even their famous teachers. They were so jaded with pride they were even arrogant about their worldliness, idolatry, and immorality (cf 5:2). “Love comes out of the shade to do its kind deed, then retires into the shade again” (Phillips).

- f. Does Not Act Unbecomingly (“doth not behave itself unseemly”)
This speaks of poor manners, acting rudely. The loveless person is usually overbearing and crude. The Corinthian believer acted improperly even at the Lord’s Supper (11:21). During services each tried to outdo the other; everyone talked at once and tried to be the most dramatic (cf. Ch. 14).
“Self-righteous” rudeness by Christians can turn people away from the Gospel before they even hear it.

- g. Does Not Seek Its Own (“seeketh not her own”)

An inscription on a tombstone in a small English village reads:
Here lies a miser who lived for himself,
And cared for nothing but gathering wealth,
Now where he is or how he fares,
Nobody knows and nobody cares.

Love is not preoccupied with its own things but with the things of others (cf. Phil. 2:4). Jesus is our loving model when He said, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). “Love is not selfish. Love does not pursue its own interests. It does not insist on having its own way” (Phillips).

- h. Is Not Easily Provoked
Love guards our hearts against being irritated, upset, or angered by others who offend us. The person who lives for his own interest is easily provoked. The word “provoked” (from *paroxuno*: “to sharpen, stimulate, irritate”), is from the same word we get our English paroxysm (“a spasm, violent outburst”).

Today, with so many of our society preoccupied with personal rights, no one can really succeed in finding happiness. Someone has said, “Love considers nothing its right and everything its obligation.”

- i. Does not Reckon a Wrong (“thinketh no evil”; from *logi zomai*: “to count, compute”)

This has the idea of taking into account. It is a bookkeeping term and refers here to someone who keeps a record of wrongs.

In business, figuring an entry permanently into a ledger is needed, but in church matters (and personal matters), it is disastrous.

In God's heavenly record the only entry after the names of His redeemed is "righteous." Christ's righteousness is placed on our account and no other record exists (II Cor. 5:21)!

Love keeps no books. Chrystostrom likened a wrong done against love like a spark falling into the sea and is quenched.

Love does not forgive and forget, but rather remembers and still forgives!

j. Does Not Rejoice in Unrighteousness ("rejoiceth not in iniquity")

The believer who truly loves will not take any satisfaction in sin, whether his own or that of others.

Among today's magazines, TV shows, and social media, is the glorification and pleasure of sin. What is "right" has become doing what you want.

Sometimes this "rejoicing" takes the form of hoping someone else will fall into sin or rejoicing when someone else does fall.

One of the most common forms of rejoicing in sin is gossip (vice enjoyed vicariously). The very essence of gossip is gloating over someone else's shortcomings. It may be a sin we treat lightly, but it is harmful because it has so many partakers!

k. Rejoices in The Truth ("rejoiceth in the truth")

Love never tolerates falsehood (i.e. gossip). While love is consistent with kindness, it is not consistent with compromise of the truth. The great ecumenical movements of today say, "It really doesn't matter that we agree on doctrine. It only matters that we love one another." Yet, the Apostle John reminds us, "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments" (2 John 6).

l. Bears All Things ("beareth all things"; *stego*: "deck, thatch, to cover")

The basic idea here is to support or protect from harm. While love never protects sin it is always supporting the sinner (it bears, it does not bare!).

Fallen human nature takes the opposite goal - taking pleasure in exposing others failures and faults, but real love helps carry the burden of the hurt. Isaiah wrote of Jesus, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (53:4).

m. Believes All Things ("believeth all things")

True love is not cynical or suspicious of others, but believes in the best for those who have sinned (innocent until proven guilty). Love trusts. "It gives the benefit of the doubt. Love prefers to be generous rather than censorious" (Phillips).

In our churches there must be an atmosphere of mutual trust, that every member is dedicated to serving our Lord. When there is sin or failure then our desire is to help that person do right. Whenever there is doubt we should err on their side because our trust is not so much in the brethren as much as in God.

- n. Hopes All Things (“hopeth all things”; from *elipizo*: “to wait, trust”)
Even when our trust in someone is shattered love still clings to hope. “Love is optimistic. Love refuses to acknowledge defeat” (Phillips). God’s grace is never final to those that love . . .
- Israel’s failure was not final to God
- Peter’s failure was not final to Jesus
- The Corinthians’ failure was not final to Paul
Someone has said, “The rope of hope has no end.” Whether the parents of backslidden children, the spouse of an unbelieving spouse, disciplined members who refuse to repent; when our hope grows weak, our love is weak.
- o. Endures All Things (“endureth all things”; from *hupomeno*: “to remain under”)
This word was a military term meaning to remain under every hardship and suffering to hold fast.
Love holds fast to those it loves. Love cannot stop loving. There is no “after” quality in this great list because endurance is a never ending process of love.

NOTE: These last four qualities of love are often seen as a crescendo - building to a magnificent climax. Thus, love . . .

- bears what is unbearable
- believes what is unbelievable
- hopes in the hopeless
- endures when everyone else has given up (and at this point there is no end!)

NOTE: To sum up this beautiful portrait of our Savior, Paul declares in v. 8a, “Love never faileth . . .” LOVE IS ETERNAL!

Gifts fail. At Corinth they were already being abused. They had been given by God to build the church, they were being used instead to tear it down. Most of the gifts Paul writes about to the Corinthians were soon to fail altogether. They were about to come to an end. Love, however, was not like that. Love was lasting. Love could not fail or fall or be rendered obsolete. Love could never cease to be active. The Corinthians had become so obsessed with the gifts they had stopped loving one another. Paul puts love back on the throne. Love is the one thing in the universe on which we can count. It is made out of the very stuff of eternity. It belongs to the ages. Time will fail. The created universe will fail. The sun and stars will fail.

Love will never fail (Phillips).

Read I Corinthians 13:4-7 carefully and compare this with the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. You will see that all of the characteristics of love show up in that fruit. This is why love edifies: it releases the power of the Spirit in our lives and churches (Wiersbe).

3. The Permanence of Love (13:8-13)

Paul uses two different verbs to describe the cessation of these “sign” gifts. Both prophecy and knowledge will “fail” and “vanish away” (from *katargeo*: “to render idle, inactivate, inoperative, to deprive of force, to put an end to”). The passive voice here means something or someone will cause them to cease (v. 10, “that which perfect”). Tongues “shall cease” or “stop, be stilled, come to an end.” The middle voice refers to a self-causing action—a built-in stopping place, the Apostolic Age. It will stop by itself.

Tongues will cease before prophecy and knowledge fail as vv. 9-10 indicate. The phrase “that which perfect” (from *teleion*: “brought to an end; finished”), conveys the idea of the divine destination or end. “When the consummation is reached, all that is partial disappears” (Morris). Several views have been espoused including the Rapture, Second Coming, and the eternal state of believers. These views do not fit within the context of revelation and the revelatory gifts (prophecy, knowledge, tongues). The completion of the last book of the canon (Revelation), by the Apostle John, around A.D. 95, would have meant tongues ended even earlier around A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 14:21-22).

The analogy of the partial gifts and infancy is to be superceded by adulthood:

“spoke as a child” (tongues: see 14:18-20)

“understood as a child” (knowledge)

“thought as a child” (wisdom and prophecy)

The phrase “put away” is from the same verb translated earlier “fail,” “vanish,” “done away.” The church was to render null and void those gifts which were needed only during the period of infancy. The church received adulthood when its spiritual nurses, the apostles, were removed (Eph. 4:1-16) (Gromacki).

This letter, written almost fifty years before the Book of Revelation would not give the complete Word of God. Until the completion of the New Testament, believers would still “see...darkly,” but with the Canon’s completion there will be clear knowledge (*epiginosko*: “thorough, accurate knowledge”).

“The Holy Spirit came. He began the process of writing the New Testament and, until such time as the process was completed, and the full record and revelation given, He gave transitional gifts of comprehension and communication. The Book is now completed. The transitional gifts have

served their purpose and have been withdrawn. The Bible is now complete and in our hands. We can now know, even as we are known. The Holy Spirit is still here to apply that truth to our minds and hearts, to our consciences and wills. God has no more to say” (Phillips).

Paul ends this chapter as he had begun-love (“charity” is the “more excellent way” and now “the greatest” (“greater, large, elder, stronger”). “In time and eternity the concept love remains foundational in divine-human relationships” (Kistemaker). The early church triad can be seen in many other passages: Rom. 5:2-5; Gal. 5:5; Col. 1:14; I Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; I Pet. 1:21-22.

D. The Place of Tongues (14:1-28)

Because of their carnality the Corinthians were especially guilty of abusing the gift of tongues. The practice of ecstatic utterances was common in Greco-Roman religion where drunkenness was believed to help bring on demonic activity (the language of the gods). It may be this was an added behavior here in Corinth.

Paul first addresses its position as secondary to prophecy (14:1-19). Verse 2 mentions the “spirit” which charismatics interpret to be the Holy Spirit, but the Greek noun refers to the person’s spirit. Tongues must edify others not be simply for devotional use (as Pentecostals have historically declared). Paul had more experience in speaking in genuine “languages” or tongues (pl.), though there is no specific record of this. Using the singular “tongue” again to refer to the paganism he had already described, he emphasized that any number of sounds in an unintelligible gibberish is useless. Five understandable words are far more desirable. Since Paul knew tongues would cease shortly he was not giving instructions for tongues today. He was warning of counterfeit tongues then (it is the warning that is appropriate for today).

Paul then deals with the purpose of tongues (vv. 20-25). It was a sign of cursing or warning (Isa. 28:9-10, 12; Deut. 28:49; Jer. 5:15). It was a sign of blessing and of authority (Acts 2:11). *“Tongues-speaking in the first century within the church was also designed as a sign to unbelievers, ‘to them that believe not.’ These unbelievers were Jews who constantly required signs (cf. 1:22; Matt. 16:1-4). On the day of Pentecost, the tongues-speaking was also used as a sign of God’s rejection of national Israel (Acts 2:22-24, 32-36). At Corinth, the meeting place of the church was situated next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7-8), thus unbelieving Jews would very likely attend the Christian services. “To them, this sign was given and doubtlessly vanished when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. There is no indication that tongue was a sign of conversion or of a post-conversion experience called ‘the baptism in the Holy Spirit.’ It was not a sign to them that believed” (Gromacki).*

Phillips points out, “It is astonishing how seldom tongues are mentioned in the New Testament. Apart from these three chapters in Corinthians, where the whole subject is doctrinally reviewed and put in its proper perspective, it is mentioned elsewhere only in the book of Acts and there only three times. Moreover, each time Jews and some form of Jewish unbelief were involved.” An unbeliever will not understand tongues but can clearly see the powerful testimony of the proclamation of God’s Word (Heb. 4:12, vv. 23-25).

Thirdly, Paul deals with the systematic procedure for tongues (vv. 26-28), all underlying edification and not self-gratification.

Fourthly, Paul gives four regulations for the use of tongues (and not gibberish, either!).

1. Only 2 or 3 members were to speak (v. 27).
2. They should take turns (v. 27).
3. There should be interpretation (v. 27).
4. If there is no interpretation, there is to be no speaking in tongues (v. 28).

E. The Procedure for Prophecy (14:29-40)

As with tongues, the Corinthian believers had carnally used the gift of prophecy so Paul lays down three regulations:

1. Only two or three were to ever speak in a service (v. 29).
2. The other prophets were to judge the declarations (v. 29).
3. The gift of direct revelation (from *apokalupto*: “to uncover”), was to take precedence over the standing speaker (v. 30).

Paul gives the reason for the regulations for tongues and prophecies, because God does not initiate “confusion” or “instability, disorder, disturbance.” Not in Corinth, or in any other church.

Most commentators see the phrase “as in all the churches of the saints” as the beginning of v.34. Here Paul gives four “commandments” (v.37) concerning women speaking during the service.

1. *Women were to be silent (sigao: “to hold one’s peace, keep silence, be concealed”), in the church service regarding what Paul had just written about. Paul told men to keep silence (sigao), with tongues if there no interpreter (14:27-28), and to “hold his peace” (sigao) if someone else is called on to prophesy (14:30). “With the women, the Holy Spirit takes the ban further than with the men. He commands women in the church never to speak in tongues and never to interrupt a preacher” (Phillips).*
2. Women were to be “under obedience” (from *hupotasso*, “to arrange under, to subject one’s self”), to their own husbands (“the law”; cf. Gen. 3:16; I Tim. 2:11-12).
3. Women were to ask husbands privately in the home about the content of the services (whether prophesy, discernment, tongues or interpretation).
4. Women who tried to speak authoritatively brought “shame” (“dishonorable, base”) upon themselves, their husbands (cf. 11:6), and the church.

It is not coincidental that, like Corinth, many of the churches today that practice speaking in tongues and claim gifts of healing also permit women to engage in speaking ministry. Many charismatic groups, in fact, were begun by women, just as many of the cults that have sprung from Christianity were founded by women. When women usurp man’s God-ordained role, they inevitably fall into other unbiblical practices and delusions.

Women may be highly gifted teachers and leaders, but those gifts are not to be exercised over men in the services of the church. God has ordained order in His creation, an order that reflects His own nature and that therefore should be reflected in His church. When any part of His order is ignored or rejected, His church is weakened and He is dishonored. Just as God's Spirit cannot be in control where there is confusion and chaos in the church, He cannot be in control where women take upon themselves roles that He has restricted to men (MacArthur).

Paul closes this section with a strong apostolic assertion that the Corinthian believers (and believers today) had no justification for being ignorant” (*agnoeo*), about spiritual gifts anymore. Everything done by believers in a church service should be done “decently” (“graceful, harmonious”) and “in order” (“arrangement; a fixed succession”). “*God's order can be seen in the universe-from tiny atoms to giant galaxies. . .it breathes through the Bible from beginning to end. It is essential in His church-order, based on divine law*” (Phillips).

NOTE: Ever seen a charismatic service?

VI. DISBELIEF (ch. 15)

A. The Necessity of Christ's Resurrection (vv. 1-34)

While the Greeks believed the souls to be immortal, they rejected the resurrection of the body. Paul was mocked and run out by the Athenians only after he preached the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:31-32). Apparently some Corinthian believers believed that Christ had risen but that they would not be resurrected (vv. 12, 35).

1. Proofs (vv. 1-11)

a. The Corinthians' testimony (vv. 1-2)

b. The Bible's testimony (vv. 3-4). Paul did not invent this truth, but “delivered” (*paradidomi*: “to give into the hands of another”) what he himself had “received” (*paralambano*: “to take or join to one's self”). Everything about Christ was in fulfillment of the Scriptures, including His death (cf. Ps. 22; Ps. 69; Isa. 53; Zech. 12; Lu. 22:37; 24:25; Acts 2:25-27; 13:24), burial, and resurrection on the third day (cf. Ps. 16:20; Isa. 53:10-12; Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:40).

The religions of the world are based upon the works and teaching of their human founders. Only Christianity rests upon the death, burial, and resurrection of its Lord.

A follower of Buddha writes of that religious leader, “When Buddha died it was with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains.” Mohammed died at Medina on June 8, 632, at the age of 61, and his tomb there is visited yearly by tens of thousands of Muslims. But they come to mourn his death, not to celebrate his

resurrection. Yet the church of Jesus Christ, not just on Easter Sunday but at every service of immersion baptism, celebrates the victory of her Lord over death and the grave” (MacArthur).

- c. The eyewitnesses’ testimony (vv. 5-7). These six confirming witnesses included (approximately 25 years later) a large group of 500 who saw Jesus at one time, most of whom remained alive for examination.
- d. Paul’s testimony (vv. 8-10). Paul refers to himself as “born out of due time” (from *ektroma*: “an abortion, untimely birth”), indicating the lowliness and hopelessness of his life without the intervening grace of God.
- e. The Gospel’s testimony (v. 11)

2. Importance (vv. 12-19)

- a. Denying a resurrection means Christ is still dead (v. 13); Christ became a man, and cannot be separated from the rest of humanity.
- b. Denying a resurrection means Paul’s ministry was worthless (vv. 14-16); his message was “vain” (*kenos*: “Empty, devoid of truth”), their faith the same, and all the apostles were “false witnesses” (*pseudomartur*: from which we get “martyr”).
- c. Denying resurrection means that the saved are really unsaved (vv. 17-19); the Corinthians’ faith was “vain” (here *mataios*: “devoid of force, success, result, of no purpose”), they are still in a state of sinful condemnation (Rom. 4:25), and believers who had died were “perished” (from *apollumi*: to destroy, to put out of the way” probably in Hades, the Greek term for the place of the dead), and finally Paul and all his associates were to be most pitied.

Charles Maurice de Tallrand-Perigord (1754-1838) knew better than that. He was a French bishop-statesman excommunicated by the pope in 1791 for his radical views. Later on he became prime minister of France. He was approached on one occasion by a M. Pepeaux who confided to Talleyrand his dilemma. He had tried to introduce a new religion which he regarded as an improvement on Christianity. He explained that, all his efforts notwithstanding, he seemed to be making no progress. What should he do? Talleyrand agreed it was not easy to start a new religion. He hardly knew what to suggest. He pondered the problem for a while. “There is one thing you might try,” he said at length. “I should suggest you get yourself crucified and then rise again on the third day” (Phillips).

3. Plan (vv. 20-28)

- a. Christ was the first-fruits (v. 20). In Old Testament Israel, Jews brought the first part of every harvest to the Tabernacle as an offering (Lev. 23:10-11), showing thankfulness and faith in the future harvest. So Christ's resurrection was God's pledge of a future harvest of bodies of the saved.
- b. God's answer to the universal death (vv. 21-22).
- c. The resurrection of men will be in stages (vv. 23-24). Every man will be raised in his personal (own) "order" (from *tagma*: "a body of soldiers, a corps, band, troop"). The first stage was Christ, the second the redeemed at Christ's coming (Rev. 20:5-6), then all the unsaved after the Millennial Age (Rev. 20:5, 11-15).
- d. The resurrection does away with death (vv. 25-26. cf. Rev. 20:11-15).
- e. The resurrection provides for universal subjection (vv. 27-28).

4. Incentives (vv. 29-34)

- a. Salvation and baptism (v. 29); Paul was asking if there was no resurrection then why were people being saved and then baptized because of the faithful testimony ("for" or "on behalf of") deceased believers?

NOTE: The cultic Mormon church teaches occultic "baptism for the dead." Some faithful Mormons testify to be baptized thousands of times for dead strangers.

- b. Service (vv. 30-32); What was the use of being subjected to martyrdom every day if there was no hope in the resurrection. The phrase "I die daily" (from *apothnesko*) has a present tense. In referring to Isa. 22:13, Paul reasoned a life of sin was preferable to daily jeopardy.

- c. Sanctification (vv. 33-34)

Their ignorance or insensitivity to the doctrine of the resurrection caused several harmful spiritual patterns:

- They were being "deceived" (from *planao*: "to go astray, wander"; from which we get our English "planet").
- "Evil communications or wrong "companionship; communion" resulted in corrupt "manners" (*ethos*: "custom, morals, character" from which we get our English "ethics").
- They were under the influence of worldliness ("awake" has the idea to "return to one's self from drunkenness").

B. The Nature of the Resurrection (vv. 35-38)

NOTE: Paul echoes questions asked by the Corinthians (v 35), who remained under the influence of their pagan Greek views. The critics of resurrection probably thought that so many difficult questions would make the doctrine of resurrection a farce.

1. The relationship of the natural body to the resurrected body (vv. 36-38).

Paul begins by calling the critic a “fool” (*aphron*: “without reason, senseless”), or simply someone who simply was not thinking. He points out that the living plant comes from a dying seed. Also, a farmer sows a seed, not a plant, so that what comes is different than what was sowed. Finally, every seed produces the same life form. The identity of the seed continues in the plant. (Corn does not become wheat, pumpkin seeds do not become alfalfa.)

“God has so designed the genetic code that men trust the relationship that exists between seed and plant....The analogies of the seed-plant relationships to the natural resurrection body should be obvious” (Gromacki).

2. The resurrected body and the principles of creation (vv. 39-41).

Just as there are vast differences in the flesh of different creatures there is a continuity of life only with the “kind” (Gen. 1:11). Seeing these differences proves God can create resurrected bodies that are different and according to man’s “kind” (v. 39).

There are also differences between that which is “celestial” (“existing in heaven”) and “terrestrial” (“existing upon the earth; earthy”), along with their “glory” or “splendor.” Obviously, God’s creativity is easily observed by men, so that His creation of resurrected bodies should not be questioned.

3. The resurrected body will be different from the natural (vv. 42-44).

Paul makes four contrasts: First, the natural is “sown in corruption” (subject to disease, decay, perishing), but “raised in incorruption” (“perpetuity, purity, nonperishable”). Second, the natural is sown in “dishonor” (“ignominy, disgrace”), but raised in “glory” (*doxa*). Third, the natural is sown in “weakness” (“infirmity, frailty”), but raised in “power” (*dunamis*: “strength, power, ability;” from which we get our “dynamite”). Fourthly, the natural is “sown a natural body” (from *psuchikos*: belonging to the earth”), but raised a “spiritual body” (*pneumatikos*; see Luke 20:34-36) “Paul identifies the renewed body as spiritual, which means that it is not immaterial but assumes a different dimension” (Kistemaker).

On the other hand, the spiritual body is not immaterial or pure spirit. Rather it is a body which is adapted to the spirit or that which corresponds to the image of God in man. Today, the spirit is hampered by a soulish body, but

in eternity, the body will be dominated by the spirit. The Greeks attempted to make a distinction between the corruptible body and the incorruptible soul, but Paul showed that the real difference was between the natural body (corruptible) and the spiritual body (incorruptible and resurrection) (Gromacki).

4. The resurrected body will be like Christ (vv. 45-49).

“Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).

5. The resurrected body is made for eternity (v. 50).

C. The Victory of the Resurrected Body (vv. 51-58)

1. The mystery (v. 51)

The word “mystery” (*musterion*: “a hidden or secret thing, religious secrets”), signaled the new truth that not all believers would die, but that some would see Christ return and immediately their bodies would be changed (I Thes. 4:13-18). The word “changed” has the idea “to exchange one thing for another.”

2. The quickness (v. 52a)

- a. “in a moment” from *atomos*; denoted “that which cannot be cut, divided, indivisible” from which we get our English “atom.”
- b. “in the twinkling of an eye” or literally the “throw, hurl, stroke, beat” of an eye.
- c. “the last trump” is not the seventh trumpet of Rev. 11:5, but in a military use of awakening or moving an army.

3. The order (v. 52b)

Paul mentions this in I Thes. 4:13-18.

4. The necessity (remember v. 50!) (v. 53)

5. The victory (vv. 5-58)

- a. It fulfills prophecy (v. 54; Isa. 25:8).
- b. It defeats sin and death (v. 55).

Paul quotes Hosea 13:14, in almost taunting death. He gives believers mourning over the death of a beloved fellow believer some of the greatest thoughts of hope in all of Scripture.

Paul pictures death as leaving a “sting” (“as of a bee, scorpion, or centipede”), which Christ took upon himself so that we might not have to! Christ also removed the “victory” (*nikos* from which we get “Nike”), from the “grave” (hades).

Paul adds that sin is the true harm and cause of death (Rom. 6:23), and that the law condemns men (Rom. 3:23), giving “strength” (*dunamis*) to death (Rom. 2:14-15; 7:7-9).

Law stirs into active life man’s inbred religion. “Sign says, ‘Keep off the grass.’” Up until we saw the sign we had not the slightest interest in the grass, but the moment we see the sign we experience an urge to plant at least one foot on it. A sign says, “do not touch,” and at once we want to touch. All the things God says we are not to do suddenly become all the things we want to do. Law activates sin. It also exposes it.

The Law activates sin. Sin, in turn, activates death, for ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Rom. 6:23). Had there been no sin there would have been no death. As it is, we are all subject to what he calls ‘the law of sin and death’ (8:2), and only in Christ can deliverance be found from the tyranny of this law. The law of sin and death is the one great law of human behavior, which explains why people do what they do” (Phillips).

c. It should cause thankfulness (v. 57)

d. It should promote faithful and fruitful living (v. 58)

Paul encourages the divided, carnal, and vacillating Corinthian believers to be “steadfast” (“seated”), “unmovable” (“firmly persistent”), always “abounding” (“to exceed, over and above”), and knowing that their Christian toil and trouble (here “labour”), would not be worthless or empty (“vain”), if they believed and served their risen Lord!

NOTE: The doctrine of the resurrection is no dry, useless orthodoxy. It gives the believer confident hope. Without it we are sure to abandon truth and see no eternal consequences of what we do in this life. Our service is not to relax; it is to be overflowing.

VII. THE LORD'S WORK (Ch. 16)

A. Giving (vv. 1-4)

1. The Purpose

Paul closes with practical considerations as he often did in his letters. He shares his desires as well as divine directions.

Paul begins by addressing the monies collected “for the saints” (probably at Jerusalem).

2. The People (vv. 1-2)

Notice it involves every believer, rich or poor. The churches of Galatia and Macedonia had already participated (II Cor. 8:1; Rom. 15:24-27).

3. The Period (v. 2)

The collection was to take place on Sunday, the resurrection day that the church looked to as its official meeting time. Both the Jewish feasts of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-11) and Pentecost (cf. Acts 2) took place on the first day of the week.

Giving each week was to keep stewardship from being sporadic or emotional, and Paul wanted the money to be ready when he arrived to keep him from having to personally collect the funds. “He is not looking for a last-minute effort with emotional pressure” (Morris).

4. The Place (v. 2)

The local church gathering was the place for every believer to “lay by him in store.” The phrase “in store” is *thesaurizo* (“to gather up, heap up, store up”), from which we get our word “thesaurus.”

5. The Proportion (v. 2)

The phrase “as God hath prospered him” is not a revocation of tithing, but an even greater responsibility. The issue here is not the tithe, but a voluntary offering for others outside the church.

6. The Protection (vv. 3-4)

Paul understood that church monies are to be protected by the church! Note how Paul had several involved in the transfer with him.

B. The Lord's Work (vv. 5-12)

1. For Paul (vv. 5-9)

- a. Ephesus to Macedonia (v. 5)
- b. Macedonia to Corinth (vv. 6-7)

Paul utilized flexibility in his life because he committed all his plans to God's will ("if the Lord permit").

c. At Ephesus (vv. 8-9)

"Paul knew that it was his responsibility to go through open doors, not to fret about closed doors." (Gromecki). The word "effectual" (*energes*: "active, powerful"), indicates Paul saw new and great opportunities God had opened to him, but at a price. There were also many "adversaries" ("to be set over against; opposite to"). If someone wants to be used of God this is where to look! "Paul's abrupt reference to them reminds us that the Christian is not usually left to pursue his work unhindered...overcoming opposition is part of the opportunity" (Morris).

2. For Timothy (vv. 10-11)

Notice the four basic instructions here:

- a. They were not to cause him any "fear" (*aphobos*); Timothy was younger and Prone to timidity (I Tim. 4:12).
- b. He was a co-worker in the ministry with Paul.
- c. They were not to "despise" him, or "to make of no account" thereby ignoring taking advantage of him.
- d. They were to send him back to Paul in Ephesus with a peaceful farewell.

3. For Apollos (v. 12)

Notice how Paul worked with others. He did not impose his will upon Apollos.

C. Final Instructions (vv. 13-18)

Paul gives commands to the Corinthians about three different groups.

1. The Church itself (vv. 13-14)

Five imperatives (commands) are given:

- a. “watch ye” or “be alert; give strict attention to”.
- b. “stand fast in the faith” or “stand firm”; the Corinthians had slipped, following at times the wisdom of God and their pagan worldliness.
- c. “quit you like men” is from a Greek word *ardrizomai*: to make a man or make brave, to show one’s self a man.”
- d. “be strong”.
- e. “let all things be done in charity” what the Corinthian needed above all else (13:1).

Love complements and balances everything else. It is the beautiful, softening principle. It keeps our firmness from becoming hardness and our strength from becoming domineering. It keeps our maturity gentle and considerate. It keeps our right doctrine from becoming obstinate dogmatism and our right living from becoming smug self-righteousness (MacArthur).

2. The Family of Stephanas (vv. 15-16)

a. Their contribution (v. 15)

They were the first family to be saved in Corinth and had “addicted” (*etaxan*: to appoint, ordain, to assign a place”), themselves to serving others.

b. Their acceptance (v. 16)

The Corinthians were to “submit yourselves” (*hupotasso*: “to arrange under, to subject oneself to”) to every fellow laborer with Paul. “Laboureth” has the idea of to “grow weary, exhausted.”

3. The messengers (vv. 17-18)

D. Closing Remarks (vv. 19-24)

At least six various groups or individuals are mentioned. Paul certainly had no ego problem or “empire-building” fetish. He was a team player and understood that all those who co-labored were important.

The “holy kiss” was the common sign of love and affection (cf. Rom 16:16; II Cor. 13:12; I Thes. 5:26; I Pet. 5:14), involving men to men and women to women. What a great weapon against division!

Paul ordinarily wrote the closing of his letters, using a secretary to write the bulk of the letter (cf. Rom. 16:22). It also helped with authenticity (Col. 4:18; II Thes. 2:2; d:17).

In challenging the love of the readers for Christ (cf. II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 1:6-9), he assigns severe judgment (*anathema*: a transliterated word meaning “a sacrifice to the gods”). *The strong expression (immediately following Paul’s taking up the pen himself) shows the depth of the apostle’s feelings on the importance of a right attitude to the Lord. If anyone’s heart is not*

aflame with love for the Lord, the root of the matter is not in him. He is a traitor to the cause of right. Paul cannot contemplate such a person calmly (Morris).

Paul's use of "*maranatha*" (a transliterated word meaning "the Lord is coming," or "come, Lord"), was his cry for Christ to judge quickly those who oppose His will.

Paul ends with what he already declared as never failing love. "I love you" was an emotion or a happy hope, but Paul's determined way of expressing the heart of ministry to these Corinthian believers. "If Paul could love them, then they should be able to love one another" (Gromacki).

II CORINTHIANS

OCCASION

The nature and purpose of Paul's visits to Corinth are not easily agreed on by scholars. The controversy involves how many times he visited (the range seems to be two to three) and how many letters he wrote (from three to five). It seems best to see that four letters were written with three visits:

1. First visit to Corinth
2. First letter to Corinth (lost)
3. Second letter (I Cor.)
4. Second visit (a painful visit; II Cor. 2:1)
5. Third letter to Corinth (now lost)
6. Fourth letter to Corinth (II Cor.)
7. Third visit to Corinth

After his first departure from Corinth, he soon wrote a non-canonical letter (I Cor. 5:9). Later while at Ephesus, he heard of more troubles in Corinth. With questions about the Christian life from the Corinthians coming to him, he addressed both the troubles and the questions in I Corinthians.

Very soon a new and more dangerous problem came to the Corinthian church—false teachers. These wicked men, claiming to be apostles, taught heresy and belittled Paul. Upon hearing of this, Paul left Ephesus for Corinth. This “painful visit” (II Cor. 2:1), did not go well prompting Paul to write a difficult letter (2:4), sending it by Titus (7:5-16).

Leaving Ephesus for Troas to meet Titus, Paul's concern forced him to go to Macedonia where he met Titus. Titus gave a good report of their love and loyalty for Paul (7:7), but Paul knew the presence of false teachers necessitated a visit. He wrote II Corinthians from Macedonia to defend his apostleship, give instructions for the collection of monies for the poor believer of Jerusalem, and to vigorously go on the offensive against the false apostles and their followers.

PURPOSE

By far the most personal of Paul's writings. This intimate letter bares the Apostle's soul and abiding love for the fickle Corinthians. One of the main themes concerned the presence of false teachers, claiming to be Apostles. There may be no greater New Testament book on the motive and philosophy of ministry.

DATE AND PLACE

From Macedonia in A.D. 55.

A COMPARISON

I Corinthians	II Corinthians
objective and practical	subjective and personal
insight into the character of an early church	insight into the character and ministry of Paul
deliberate instruction	impassioned testimony
warns against pagan influences	warns against Judaistic influences

OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-11)

One of the many paradoxes of the Christian life is that the grace of God is most keenly experienced not in the best but what seem to be the worst of times. However much a Christian longs for exaltation (cf. I Cor. 4:8), it is often in humiliation that he finds grace (cf. II Cor. 12:9). That theme pervades this letter and finds poignant expression in Paul's thanksgiving. --Bible Knowledge Commentary (NT).

The typical Pauline greeting ("grace and peace"), leads Paul in reminding the believer that God's comforting of one's personal "tribulation" ("a pressing"), provides "comfort" (from *parakaleo*: "to call to one's side"), for others which are in "trouble" (same word for "tribulation"). In fact, the greater the "sufferings," the greater "our consolation" (same word for "comfort").

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know he had been very close to death. So close that he had given up (v.8). Instead of relying on man's wisdom (i.e. drugs, psychology, etc.), Paul trusted God Who, indeed, delivered and will deliver!

Paul wanted the many persons to give thanks to God for His rescue and answers to their prayers (v. 11).

II. PAUL'S APOSTOLIC MINISTRY (1:12-7:16)

A. His Plans Defended (1:12-2:11)

While Paul does not state directly who questioned his sincerity for the Corinthians, it was probably false teachers (11:4,13). Paul's conscience assured himself that his behavior ("conversation"), was always with a transparency and sincerity (v. 12).

Paul's decision to make two visits instead of one (v. 16; cf I Cor. 16:5-7), opened the door for some to criticize his decision making skills. The two questions implied a negative response. First, that he used levity or vacillation ("lightness"); and second, that he thought

according to the flesh with a readiness to lie about promises.

Paul may have felt that the reliability of his gospel ministry may be called into question so he adds that all God's promises are true (v. 20).

NOTE: Colin Kruse makes some interesting remarks about the conscience:

The word conscience (syneidesis) is found more often in the Pauline corpus than in the rest of the books of the New Testament put together. Unlike the Stoics, Paul did not regard conscience as the voice of God within, nor did he restrict its function to a person's past acts (usually the bad ones) as was the case in the secular Greek world of his day. For Paul, the conscience was a human faculty whereby a person either approves or disapproves his or her actions (whether already performed or only intended) and those of others. The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law, rather it is a human faculty which adjudicates upon human action by the light of the highest standard a person perceives.

Seeing that all of human nature has been affected by sin, both a person's perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself (as a constituent part of human nature) are also affected by sin. For this reason, conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of one's behaviour. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows. The final judgment therefore belongs only to God (cf. I Cor. 4:2-5). Nevertheless, to reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster (cf. I Tim. 1:19). We cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, but we can modify the highest standard to which it relates by gaining for ourselves a greater understanding of the truth.

Our English word 'conscience' comes from two Latin words: com meaning 'with' and scire, meaning 'to know.' Conscience is that inner faculty that 'knows with' our spirit and approves when we do right, but accuses when we do wrong. Conscience is not the Law of God, but it bears witness to that Law. It is the window that lets in the light; and if the window gets dirty because we disobey, then the light becomes dimmer and dimmer (see Matt. 6:22-23; Rom. 2:14-16).

Paul used the word conscience twenty-three times in his letters and spoken ministry as given in Acts. 'And hereby do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men' (Acts 24:16). When a person has a good conscience, he has integrity, not duplicity; and he can be trusted (Wiersbe).

All of Paul's decisions for the Corinthians were not to allow him to have "dominion" ("to be lord of; to rule"), but rather to be co-laborers with them.

Dictatorial means can produce compliance but not the obedience that comes from faith which he sought. Authoritarian domination is often the manner of false apostles and the kingdom they serve (cf. II Cor. 11:13-15), but it was not the way of Christ (Luke 22:25-27) nor of those who stand in His stead (I Pet. 5:3) (Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT).

In an amazing display of tenderness Paul tells the Corinthians that he took no joy in causing sorrow. Instead of visiting and causing sorrow, he had written a letter with many

tears” (a non-existent letter following I Corinthians).

This letter may have further dealt with the incestuous man of I Cor. 5, who may have withstood Paul’s advice along “party lines” (I Cor. 1). Whoever the man was he had caused Paul a degree of sorrow and hurt with which Paul did not want to burden the rest of the church (“overcharge” or “to put a burden upon; to load”). This offender challenged Paul’s authority and instruction which Paul convinced the church was a severe problem to their spiritual well-being (cf. “A little leaven...”).

The church had punished this offender so Paul instructs them to now forgive him for two reasons:

- For the offender’s sake: lest he be “swallowed up” or “to drink down, to devour.” Paul did not want him to drown in his sorrow and pain so he begs them to “make public” their love toward him.
- For the church’s sake: forgiveness was needed to thwart one of Satan’s most successful “schemes” or “thinking.” Satan will get an “advantage” or “take an advantage” over the entire church if there were a spirit of unforgiveness.

Greek word pleonekteo (‘to take advantage of’) is found in four other places in the New Testament---all in Paul’s letters (II Cor. 7:2; 12:17-18; I Thes. 4:6). All of the other uses in II Corinthians (and arguably so for that in I Thessalonians) denote a taking advantage of people in the sense of defrauding them of something which belongs to them. It seems most likely, therefore, that what Paul has in mind in this verse is the possibility that Satan might take advantage of the situation and defraud the congregation of one of its members permanently. So, being ‘not ignorant of his designs,’ Paul urges the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for the offender to forestall such a possibility. Later in the Epistle (see commentary on 11:3, 14-15) we will see that Paul recognizes an active role on the part of Satan to undermine the faith, devotion and good order of the church (Kruse).

B. His Ministry Described (2:12-7:16)

1. His Discouragement (2:12-13)

Paul’s ministry at Troas was cut short because of his restlessness at not knowing about the Corinthians.

2. His Encouragement (2:14-17)

Paul declares that ultimately God is always leading believers in a triumph march (“to triumph”). Like incense offered to their pagan Gods by victorious Roman generals, Paul’s life and ministry was to be a sweet fragrance to the saved and a smell (“odor”) to the lost (vv. 14-15).

Paul humbly acknowledges that he was not in himself sufficient or “enough,” for this wonderful ministry of the Gospel to be as successful as it was. He certainly was not going to be a “peddler or a huckster” (“corrupt”) of God’s Word.

3. His Competency (3:1-18)

In this extraordinary section Paul gives four characteristics of what made him a true servant and sufficient in Christ.

a. His testimony of godliness (v.1).

The idea of “commend” is “to show, prove, exhibit, establish.” Paul was asking, in effect, “What? You don’t know me?” Nor did he need letters of recommendation.

*Because they were unregenerate, the false apostles’ lives were corrupt. Therefore, they could not remain long in one location before being unmasked. But before they moved on, they sought **letters of commendation** from those whom they had deceived. They then used those **letters** to enhance their credibility with their next victims (MacArthur).*

b. His usefulness in changing lives (vv. 2-3)

In contrast to fraudulent and unavailable letters of recommendation, Paul’s “letters” were the Corinthian believers. They were living letters dictated by Christ and “ministered” or, in essence, enscribed by Paul’s apostolic ministry Of gospel preaching. The phrases “tables of stone” and “fleshy tables” are an allusion to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekial 36:24-32.

c. His reliance on God (vv. 4-5)

Paul states that any adequacy had to come from God. He was careful not to “think” (*logizomai*: to reckon, court, compute, calculate”) anything he had as adequate to the ministry.

d. His preaching the right message (vv. 6-18)

To highlight the superiority of the new covenant with the old (which was apparently being proclaimed by the false teachers), Paul turns to Exodus 34:29-35. The old covenant ministry of Moses brought death because it was based on human initiative. Paul contrasts the fading radiance of God’s glory on Moses’ face (v. 7) with the increasing “glory” of Christians (v. 18). The word “changed” is from *metamorphoo*: “to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure.” The believer is changed into the likeness of Christ by stages of “excellence, splendour, dignity, grace” or “glory” (*doxa*), by the Holy Spirit (v. 18).

The lure of legalism is still with us. False cults prey on professed Christians and church members, as did the Judaizers in Paul’s day. We must learn to recognize false cults and reject their teachings. But there are also Gospel-preaching churches that have legalistic tendencies and keep their members immature, guilty, and afraid. They spend a great deal of time

dealing with the externals, and they neglect the cultivation of the inner life. They exalt standards and they denounce sin, but they fail to magnify the Lord Jesus Christ. Sad to say, in some New Testament churches we have an Old Testament ministry (Wiersbe).

4. The Glories of the Ministry (4:1-5:8)

a. The mercy of God (4:1-6)

“The way you look at your ministry helps to determine how you will fulfill it.” (Wiersbe). Paul was keenly aware of the great privilege he had to preach the Gospel. He never forgot the mercy of God in letting such a persecutor as he become an Apostle (I Cor. 15:9-10; I Tim. 1:12-16). This thankfulness brought about several characteristics in his ministry.

1. He would not quit (v.1). Paul refused to “faint” (“to be utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted”), because he knew that what would be accomplished for God had to be done by God.
2. He would not be a deceiver (vv 2-4). Paul had learned to speak out against (“renounce”) the “hidden things” (from *kruptos*: “concealed, secret”; our English word “cryptic” comes from this), of dishonesty (“shame, disgrace, dishonor”). This shameful treatment of the ministry (a mark of false teachers) was done primarily through two methods:
 - “walking in craftiness:” to use “cunning or craftiness, trickery, deceit; subtlety” (11:3)
 - “handling the Word of God deceitfully”; adulterating, polluting, or corrupting God’s message.

Paul’s determination to openly preach the truth was not always accepted, however. The Gospel is “hid” (“veiled”), because Satan has blinded the “minds” (“thoughts, mental perception, reasoning abilities”) of the lost.

3. He would not promote himself (vv. 5-6). Unlike far too many preachers today who love to “herald or proclaim” their importance, Paul could only present himself a “bondslave” (“servant”: *doulos*). Rather than promote himself, he preferred to preach about Jesus Christ. Kruse adds, “Here conversion is understood as illumination which reveals the true nature of Christ as the one in whose face the glory of God is seen. Paul’s own conversion may well have prompted him to think in this way (Gal. 1:13-17; cf. Acts 9:1-9)”.

NOTE: There is a strong statement with the word “but” in verse 5. The preaching of self and the Saviour are not compatible!

b. The valuable treasure (4:7-12)

The word “vessels” (v. 7) is from a word meaning “clay or earthen vessels, with the added suggestion of frailty. “God made us the way we are, so that we can do the work He wants us to do....We are vessels so that God might use us. We are earthen vessels that we might depend on God’s power and not our own” (Wiersbe).

The excellency (“superiority, pre-eminence”) is to be on God’s “power” (*dunamis*) in using plain, ordinary, fragile believers!

Paul’s quick rehearsal (vv. 8-9), of his ministry was proof that no believer could possibly withstand such onslaughts and thrive in the ministry without giving glory to God. “These reflect the vulnerability of Paul and his co-workers on the one hand and the power of God which sustains them on the other” (Kruse).

Paul in vv 10-12 explains that what one proclaims about the Lord Jesus is to be exemplified in the believer’s life (“dying” is *nckrogis* from which we transliterate our word “necrosis”; “death of a bodily tissue; gangrene”). This process brings saving faith (“life”) to the lost.

Probably no verses better illustrate the conduct of Paul’s ministry than 6:1-10. There are some external credentials that mark the true minister of God, but they are hardly ones that Paul’s opponents would like to match! The key to Paul was the defense of not himself, but the ministry (v. 3). With nine pairs of paradoxes Paul spoke of conflicts within ministry (vv. 8-10).

Paul begs the Corinthians to be open toward him. He had always been open and candid, now he expected the same (vv. 11-13). He knew what hampered them was the rival suitors that vied for their affections and allegiance. The only solution was separation (6:14-18) - doctrine long forgotten by much of the evangelical world today.

III. PRINCIPLES OF GRACIOUS GIVING (chs. 8-9)

Paul already instructed these believers about the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1-3), yet they had not followed through. While no one knows what caused such an interruption, it could have been the presence of false teachers who took such monies for themselves (cf. 2:17; 11:20). This word of encouragement, along with Paul’s visit (Acts 20:3), brought the collection to a successful conclusion (Rom. 15:26; Acts 24:17).

Paul motivates by using the examples of the Macedonians (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) and Christ. The Macedonians, entirely on their own, took the initiative to become involved in the

collection (they even begged to do so! v.4). The “secret” was probably due to their commitment to first give themselves (v.5). Maybe no verse so succinctly states the giving of Christ as v.9. The key is equality (vv. 13-15), not “robbing Peter to pay Paul!”

The promises in giving (9:6-15) involve God rewarding giving believers in three ways:

- givers are enriched (vv. 6-10)
- receiver’s needs are met (vv. 11-12)
- God, the Giver of all blessings, is glorified and praised (vv. 13-15); the “unspeakable gift” has the idea of “indescribable.”

IV. PAUL VINDICATED HIMSELF (10-12:18)

Paul, no doubt, found it difficult to make the transition to this subject he saves for last (cf. 11:1). His confrontation with false apostles simply could not be avoided.

A. He Appeals for the Corinthians’ Obedience (10:1-6)

The world’s weapons are personality cults and influence, scholarships, credentials, and impressive rhetoric; but these things were not Paul’s weapons. When the Corinthians would obey Christ, and Paul, then Paul stood ready to “revenge” (avenge)!

B. He Confronts the False Apostles (10:7-11:15)

The major factor contributing to the Corinthians’ vacillation was their constant superficiality and shallowness to look only on the surface issues of life (10:7).

NOTE: Paul knew what some said about him - that “his bark was worse than his bite” - and he did not deny that he was physically unimpressive (cf. 10:1), or that he was not a very great speaker (10:10), but he stood ready to show that he would do what he said (10:11).

Paul demanded censure of the false apostles on three counts:

- First, they used inadequate standards to measure themselves (man’s not Christ’s) (10:12).
- Second it was Paul who had produced fruit in Corinth (their salvation) (10:13-14).
- Third, the false apostles were fond of exaggeration. The work was Paul’s, not theirs (10:15-16).

NOTE: Paul succinctly states the truth in vv. 17, 18. The enamoring call for men’s loyalties is, no doubt, a considerable annoyance to our Lord today.

Paul makes the threefold appeal of the false apostles to these believers. These “super apostles” associated themselves with the original Twelve. Second, they appealed to the Corinthians’ desire for rhetorical excellence. (What Paul said was more important than how he said it). Third, their support of themselves came from the Corinthians, a practice Paul abhorred, calling it “robbery” (11:8). Paul gives a scathing denunciation of these pseudo-apostles likening them to the very work of Satan (11:13-15)!

C. He Declares His Credentials (11:16-12:10)

Like so many today, the Corinthians were ever so slow in absorbing the truth that God's standards are radically different from those of this world's. The marks of an apostle were the very marks of Christ. Candidly, Paul admits his early struggles with some unnamed physical affliction was the very backdrop of Christ's power (12:10). (Twice in 12:7 Paul declares that Christ's grace was to keep the Apostle from becoming "conceited").

D. He Appeals for a Proper Response (12:11-13:10)

Paul's desire was that upon his third visit he would find two responses - repentance for wrong against God and affirmation of their loyalty to himself and his associates as true servants of Christ. Paul warns them that trials of church discipline would be held if needed and though they might see him as weak Christ is not (13:1-3)!

In 13:5-7, Paul now hands the lens of self-scrutiny to the Corinthians. It was their standing, not his, that concerned him.

Paul was not a "fighter" by nature with those he loved; his true desire was always to edify, not punish, but his hands were obediently tied to do right (13:8-10).

V. **BENEDICTION (13:11-14)**

A. He Appeals to Them to Live Right (13:11, 12)

The expression of v. 12 would be a universal sign of their unity and peace. They were to aim at perfection, comfort, unity, and peace with the knowledge that God was always with them (even when Paul could not be).

B. Salutation (13:13,14)

NOTE: Did the Corinthian believers respond to Paul's warnings? It seems they did because Paul had put on hold any further expansion of his ministry in the region until the problems in Corinth were resolved (10:15-16). After writing the Epistle, Paul paid a three-month visit when he wrote Romans and indicated his work in the region of Corinth was done (Rom. 15:23). The Corinthians had listened and obeyed.

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