

# FIRST CORINTHIANS



**BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES**

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**STUDIES IN  
FIRST CORINTHIANS**

by  
Paul T. Butler



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This volume is dedicated  
to  
Lakin Paul Lankford  
and  
Deker Kyle Lankford  
my cherished grandsons  
in the hope that they will follow in the  
steps of the great apostle to the Gentiles  
and  
preach the gospel of Christ  
wherever they go.



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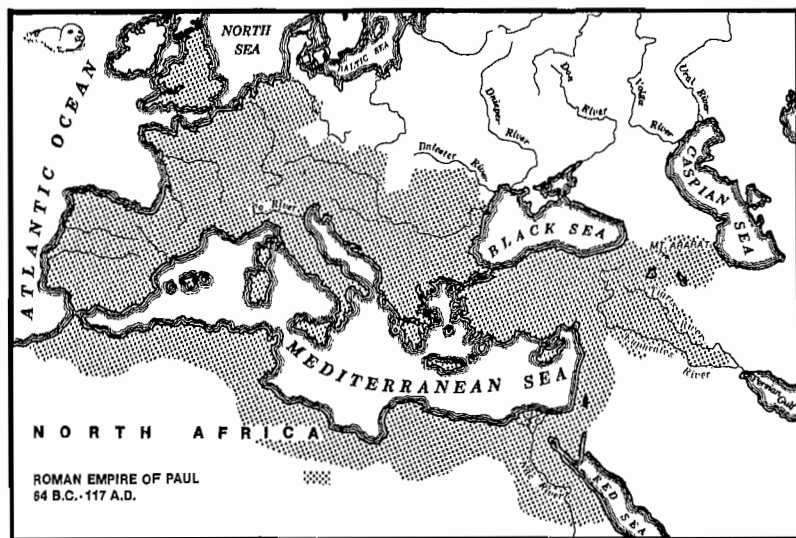
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## INTRODUCTION



### Historical Background:

*Corinth*: in Greek language, *Korinthos*, meaning, “ornament.”

In Paul’s day, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province called by them, Achaia, and the most important city in Greece (even more important from the Roman viewpoint than Athens).

Athens was the intellectual center of Greece; Corinth was the commercial center.

Corinth occupied a strategic geographical position. It was the southern gate on the isthmus into Greece.

It was built on the side or at the foot of the 2000 ft. Mount Acrocorinthus.

The acropolis of Corinth was atop this mountain. On a clear day you could see from this acropolis 40 miles northeast to the city of Athens. Corinth had three harbors.

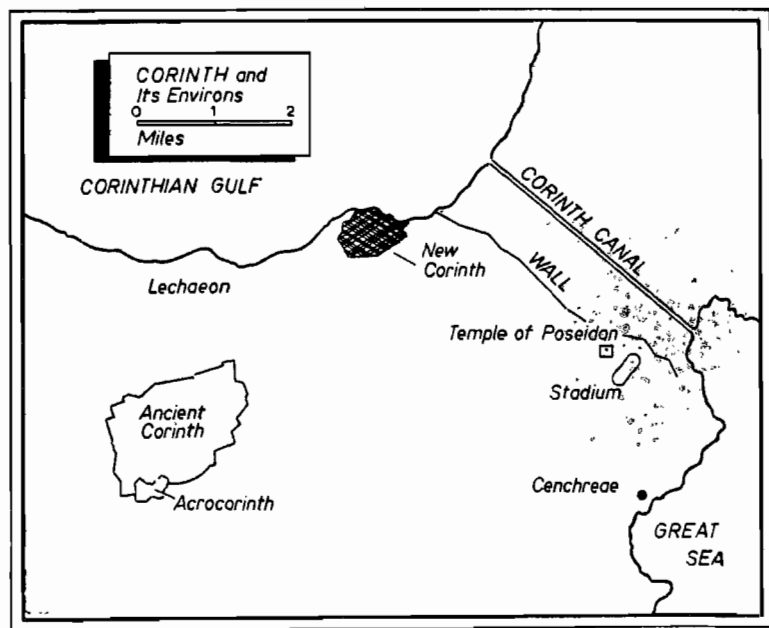
Ancient seafaring men so dreaded having to make the 200 mile voyage around the southern capes of the Peloponnesus, they would tie ropes to their ships, put logs under them and drag them across the isthmus. Large ships were unloaded, dragged across, the cargo carried across, put back on board and then they would sail on across the Mediterranean Sea.

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Many attempts were made to build a canal across the isthmus in ancient times; the most notable attempt being that of Nero (about 15 years after Paul established the Christian church there), in 66 A.D.

The Romans declared Greece and Corinth "free" in 196 B.C. But a Greek rebellion in 146 B.C. caused the Romans to destroy Corinth totally; its famous art treasures were taken to Rome as booty.

Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth as a Roman colony and made it the capital of Achaia in 46 B.C.



At the height of its power, Corinth probably had a population of 200,000 free born Greek citizens and 500,000 slaves. . . . about the population density of St. Louis, Missouri.

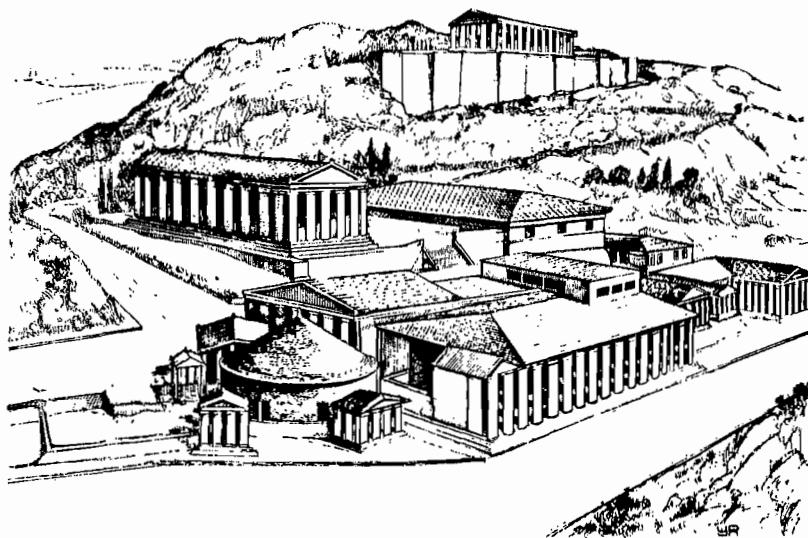
Its population consisted of descendants of the Roman colonists who came in 46 B.C. (100 years before Paul)—many Romans who came for business from Italy—a large Greek population—many strangers from different nationalities—and the inevitable Jewish community with its synagogues.

## INTRODUCTION

A broken lintel (part of a door) discovered by archaeologists bears a Greek inscription, "synagogue of Hebrews."

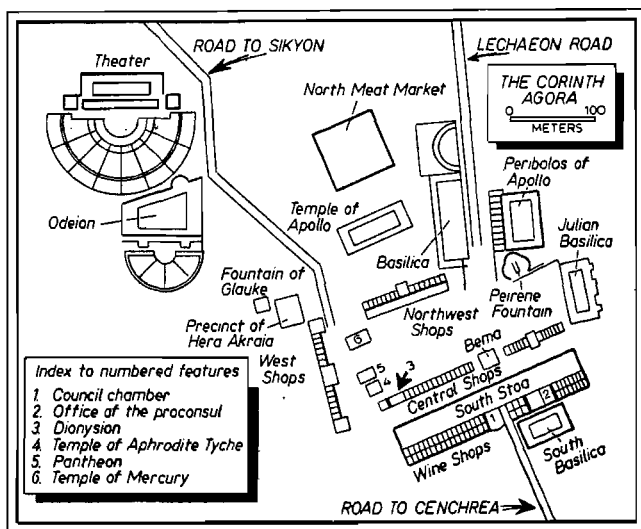
The canal at Corinth, connecting the Ionian Sea with the Aegean was begun in 66 A.D. by Nero. The present canal, begun in 1881, shortens the distance from the Aegean Sea to Athens by 202 miles for ships able to navigate its 69-foot width and 26-foot depth.

Paul undoubtedly chose Corinth for a missionary "base" because of its itinerant and cosmopolitan population. Anyone who could make his voice heard in Corinth was addressing a spectrum of people from all over the known civilized world, many of whom would be sure to go all over the world and possibly carry with them what they had heard.



This is probably what Corinth looked like in Paul's day (up-town). The acropolis had the pantheon upon it where their gods were housed. Poseidon, god of the sea, was their chief god. The Isthmian Games were held there every two years, second only to the Olympic Games in Athens. The agora (market place and public buildings) is in the foreground. What the remainder of the city looked like is not pictured.

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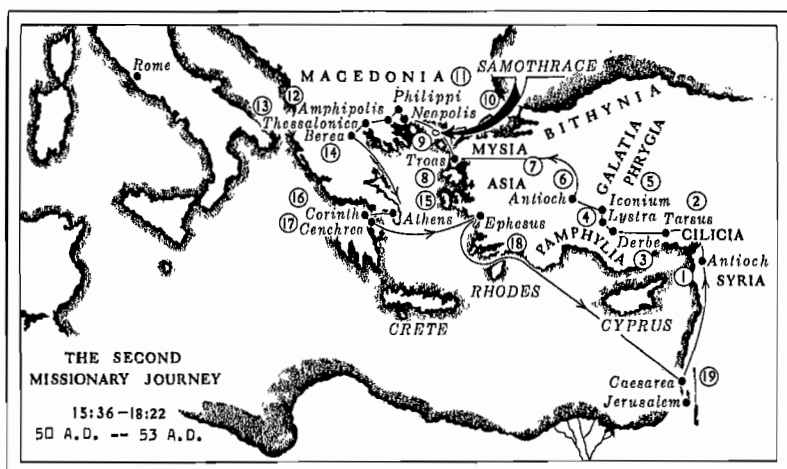
In Paul's time Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury and immorality! To "live like a Corinthian" meant to live a life of profligacy and debauchery. All over the Roman empire, women who were promiscuous or of loose morals were often called "Corinthian girls."

The reason for this is that at the temple of Aphrodite on the Acropolis there were 1000 "Corinthian girls" employed as *hierodouloi* (lit. "temple maiden servants"), actually prostitutes. Aphrodite was the goddess of love (*eros*). Worship at the temple involved sexual intercourse with one of these "priestesses." Young male homosexuals were also used by the Corinthians. This "worship" formed a great temptation, even to the new Christians at Corinth, as evidenced from Paul's exhortations against it (I Cor. 5:1ff., 6:9-19). This attracted "worshippers" from all over the Roman world. To become "corinthianized" meant a person was living the most licentious, debauched life possible. It was customary in a stage play in the theater for a Corinthian actor to come on the scene drunk. Much drunkenness, homosexuality, fornication, robbery, thievery, idolatry and immorality of all kinds went on here. Strabo quoted the proverb, "All the people of Corinth gorge themselves." Corinth had many important industries, its pottery and brass and marble for building columns were famous all over the world.

## INTRODUCTION

Sex crazy, sports crazy, affluent and cynical, citizens and visitors of Corinth liked to tell of the notorious priestesses of Aphrodite, whose studded sandals spelled out in the dust of the street, "Follow me!" Every shop in the city had a deep, spring-fed well in which to cool containers of wine.

Alciphro wrote: "I did not enter Corinth after all; for I learned in a short time the sordidness of the rich there and the misery of the poor." Aristophanes coined the word "corinthianize" to denote debauchery.



### Date of the Epistle:

Paul visited Corinth for the first time on his second missionary journey (Acts 18) about 50-51 A.D. Claudius was emperor of Rome at that time. He had just been to Athens where he was not well received

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so he came to Corinth hesitantly ("in much weakness, fear and trembling," 2:3). The Lord told Paul He had much people in the city. He became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, tent-makers like he was. During his stay of 1-1/2 years he resided in their home. Soon after his arrival, Silas and Timothy joined him with news from Thessalonica. Every sabbath Paul preached in the synagogue of the Jews; he met with strong opposition and gave the rest of his stay in Corinth to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Titus Justus, Crispus, Gaius and Stephanas were some of Paul's first converts. During Paul's stay, Gallio, the elder brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca came to his rescue when the Jews tried to have him imprisoned.

Paul seems to have visited Corinth again, during his third missionary journey when he was headquartered at Ephesus (II Cor. 12:14, 13:1). While at Ephesus, Paul wrote an earlier letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 5:9) which has been lost. Paul wrote our present First Corinthians from the city of Ephesus about 56 or 57 A.D. in answer to a letter from Corinth (probably brought to him from there by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (I Cor. 16:17) relating some of the problems in the church there. Paul had also heard of factions in the church from the servants of Chloe (1:11), probably one of the women members of the church. Paul wrote this letter to deal with these *problems*, which plagued the saints.

Of course "the church" at Corinth was probably composed of many small groups of Christians meeting in different homes. There were no church buildings as such until about 200 A.D.

### **The Purpose of This Epistle:**

Problems, problems, problems; every church has them. Even the first century churches were beset with problems. The Holy Spirit guided Paul in the composition of this letter that divine wisdom might be delineated for dealing with these enigmas and aberrations. There are nine or ten distinct problems dealt with: factionalism and schism; spiritual maturation; immorality; Christian integrity; marriage and divorce; liberties in Christ; order and decorum in worship; communion in Christ; abuse and misuse of miraculous gifts; probability of life after death (the resurrection from the dead); collections made for the saints. This book reads like a modern, twentieth century, "Report on the State of the Church of Christ."

## INTRODUCTION

The church today faces, essentially, the same problems. The problems do not change because human nature is the same in every generation. Human beings are either in the process of regeneration through the power of the word of God growing in them, or they are in the process of degeneration through the power of the word of the devil developing in them. The Holy Spirit's purpose through the pen of the apostle Paul was to produce a holy growth in the "saints" at Corinth. It will be evident as one studies this epistle that these Christians had much growing to do. But so do we all if we are to reach "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). God wished the Christians at Corinth to know that he loved them with an eternal love as they were growing into the persons for which he had created them. There could never, after the Cross, be any question about the faithfulness of God's love. The question was, then, whether the Corinthians would choose the growth he desired for them. That is still the question for the church today.

# Chapter One

## THE PROBLEM OF SCHISM (1:1-31)

### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. How could Paul address people with so many spiritual failures as “saints” and “sanctified”? (1:2)
2. Do Christians have to all agree on everything and think alike? (1:10)
3. If Christ did not send Paul to baptize, is baptism then not essential to salvation? (1:17)
4. Does Paul’s denunciation of the “wisdom of the wise” mean Christians should reject all human knowledge? (1:20-25)

### SECTION 1

#### **Unity Originates in the Character of God (1:1-17)**

1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

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

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

4 I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you—<sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>8</sup>who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

10 I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. <sup>12</sup>What



I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; <sup>15</sup>lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

**1:1-3 Consecration:** Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was born near the beginning of the first century in the busy Graeco-Roman city of Tarsus in Cilicia at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. He was born with Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28); the son of a Pharisee and a Pharisee himself (Acts 23:6), he could have boasted of the purest Hebrew background (Phil. 3:5). As a young Jewish patriot and fledgling rabbi he persecuted the Christians with zeal (Acts 7:58—8:3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11; I Tim. 1:13) until his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21). Calling himself "chief of sinners" (I Tim. 1:15), he forever after attributed the change in his life to the overflowing grace of the Lord toward him (I Tim. 1:12-17). Paul studied at the feet of the famous Hebrew rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; 26:4-5). He was well educated in the literature of the Greeks (Acts 17:28) and was a world traveler with a cosmopolitan attitude (I Cor. 9:19-23). The authenticity and historicity of this epistle is beyond question.

Paul begins by stating that he was *called* (Gr. *kletos*, means more than "invited"—it has the connotation of being *uniquely chosen*) by the *will* of God to be an apostle. Paul is declaring that he is in the service of God not by any merit of his own but by the sovereign call of God's grace. When Paul wrote to churches where his authority as an apostle was unchallenged, he did not assert his apostolic title (Phil. 1:1; I Thess. 1:1; Philemon 1); but when he corresponded with a church or churches where his apostolic authority might be questioned, he always declared his office in the salutation and sometimes presented the evidence for his apostleship (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Col. 1:1; II Cor. 1:1).

On his first missionary journey (45-48 A.D.) Paul established churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) (Acts 13:1—15:35). On his

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second missionary journey (Acts 15:36—18:22) he established churches in Macedonia and Achaia (modern Greece) (51-54 A.D.). It was during this second journey that Paul established the church in Corinth.

The third missionary journey took three years (54-58 A.D.) and, after spending three months in Achaia (Acts 20:3), he stopped in Ephesus for about two or three years. It was from this residence in Ephesus he received communication from Corinth and wrote back to them this epistle. A Christian named *Sosthenes* was with him in Ephesus. That this is Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17), is doubtful. Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, seems to have been an enemy of Paul.

Paul addressed the Christians in Corinth as "the church of God." The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* (related to the same word Paul used to describe his "call" to apostleship). *Ekklesia* means literally "the called out ones." It was used in the Greek world to denote the convening of the assembly of all the citizens of a particular city to fulfill the functions necessary for the maintenance of their social structure; a "town-meeting." Paul adapts the word to the church for the very same purpose. William Barclay says: "In essence, therefore, the Church, the *ekklesia*, is a body of people, not so much assembling because they have chosen to come together, but assembling because God has called them to Himself; not so much assembling to share their own thoughts and opinions, but assembling to listen to the voice of God." The word *ekklesia* as it is used in the New Testament certainly connotes those who have been *called out* of a life conformed to this wicked world order unto a life transformed into the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul emphasizes the fact that those addressed are a "church" of God because God had *sanctified* them. The Greek words *hegiasmenois* (sanctified) and *hagiois* (saints) mean literally "to set apart, to consecrate, to separate for a specific use." Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* declares these words do not denote some ethical attainment but rather define the state into which God, through the grace merited by Christ, has made available membership in his kingdom (the church) and all the attendant blessings of salvation. Sanctification is the separation of the believer from evil things and ways. This is God's will for the believer (I Thess. 4:3); it must be learned from God as he teaches it by his Word (I Thess. 4:4; John 17:17, 19; Ps. 17:4; 119:9) and it must be pursued by the believer, earnestly and undeviatingly (I Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14). Men must

deliberately choose the sanctification which the Lord provides and promises. They must pursue it through the directions and instrumentalities which are authorized exclusively in the revealed Word of God.

At first, reading only the salutation, the idea that a church of Christ might exist in Corinth would present no problem. That Paul addresses the members of that church as "those called to be saints," would be initially acceptable also. By the time one has read to the end of this epistle, however, he may find it difficult to believe that a church could ever have been formed in such surroundings and, once formed, that it could have survived. When Paul wrote this letter, the church was not much over six years old. It should give twentieth-century Christians pause to note that the condition of the Corinthian church is a specific example of our Lord's parables insisting that the growth of the kingdom is slow and difficult (cf. Matt. 13:1-53; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18) and the devil is always sowing tares in the same field in which God's servants are sowing good seed. Christians today should learn from this that no matter how spiritually immature a member of the Lord's church might be, he is called by God to be a saint and is a brother in Christ if he is willing to be taught the word of God and is willing to conform his mind and life to that Word. No matter how wrong some of these Corinthians were about doctrine and practices, so long as they were willing to receive his divinely-inspired instruction and grow toward it, he said they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus." We can do no less today! Of course, a brother who blatantly defies apostolic doctrine (such as the man in I Cor. 5:1ff.) and refuses to repent must be "delivered unto Satan" for the destruction of the fleshly mind. Once such a brother repents, however, the church is to forgive him (see II Cor. 2:5-17). A congregation of Christians is not sanctified in Christ because it has reached a pre-determined level of spirituality, but because every member is constantly struggling and growing into the image of God's beloved Son (cf. Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18; II Peter 1:3-21).

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that they belong to a universal brotherhood of saints—all who in every place call on the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior. This reminder is to have its impact on the whole situation at Corinth. Paul wants them to understand they are a part of a whole body of Christians. When they have divisions, immoralities, jealousies and other disorders, the whole body of Christ throughout the world will be affected, one way or another. No congregation is an island! Every saint in every congregation is

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called *together* with all those who in every place call on the name of Jesus as Lord.

So, as Paul salutes the Christians at Corinth, he begins his argument against the factionalism in the church there. He salutes them as “those sanctified . . . called to be saints” and they are thus *because* the God who called them and to whom they profess allegiance is “sanctified.” That is, God is holy! There is absolutely no falsehood or wickedness in God’s nature, nor was any manifested in God’s Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ as Lord (God) must be holy. Division and schism are unholy. God does not divide himself and fight himself. He is not jealous of his Son’s glory nor is his Son jealous of the Father’s glory. They glorify one another. Christians cannot love one another “earnestly from the heart” unless they aspire to and act in *imitation* of the holiness of God (see I Peter 1:13-25). Those who destroy God’s “holy temple” (the church) by division and partyism are trying to destroy God—and they will be destroyed (I Cor. 3:16-17). Christians are called to be members of the “sanctified” (holy) body of Christ throughout the world. Disunity, factionalism and jealousy make a mockery of the call of God for sanctification. The congregation that is constantly bickering and separating one brother from another is not holy—it is carnal and no different than the strife-filled, discriminatory, cliquey “clubs” of unregenerate men.

Unity has its origin or source in the nature and character of God. Unity cannot exist without holiness and sanctified living. Jesus’ longest recorded prayer is for the unity of his followers through sanctification (holiness) in the truth (see John 17:13-26).

Grace and peace are part of God’s holy nature. The word *grace* is from the Greek word *charis*, and means “something granted, a favor given, a gift.” We get the English word *charisma* from it. Paul is reminding the Corinthian Christians that their sanctification is only by the favor granted them by God through Jesus Christ. They did not earn the right to be sanctified—it was by the grace of God. Therefore, the love of Christ should have constrained them to dwell together in unity. If *all* Christians are sanctified by the grace of God and by no merit of their own one has no right to esteem himself above another and no cause for jealousy and division. Peace in Hebrew is *shalom* and means wholeness or well-being. The Greek word for peace, *eirene*, was often used in the same way. It means health, harmony and integrated wholeness. God, in Christ, has called men to peace (unity, harmony). The church is God’s kingdom of peace, God’s holy habitation of peace (see Eph. 2:11-22). God, by

the vicarious atonement of Christ's death, has declared himself at peace with rebellious man. Those who accept the peace Christ earned for them must practice peace with all other men (Rom. 12:14-21). In fact, the peace of Christ must be allowed to *arbitrate* (Col. 3:15, Gr. *brabeueto*, rule) in the hearts of men. All decisions a Christian makes are to be decided on the basis of the meaning and application of the peace Christ has wrought for him. When this is so, there is no schism in the kingdom of God.

**1:4-9 Constancy:** God is gracious. And God is also constant. He is faithful. What God promises, he will fulfill. Christ's body, the church, finds both *motive* and *source* of unity in God's faithfulness. Paul was always *giving thanks* (Gr. *eucharisto*, present tense verb, continuing action) for God's faithfulness and grace to the Corinthians. The Corinthian Christians had been made rich (Gr. *eploutisthete*, aorist) when they answered the call to be set apart (sanctified) unto Christ. Christ had seen fit to bless the Corinthian church with many miraculous gifts (cf. I Cor. 12:1—14:40). Paul mentions two of those miraculous gifts, "speech" and "knowledge." The Greek word for "speech" is *logos* and is usually translated "word." This probably means the miracle of declaring divine revelation. It is translated "utterance" in II Corinthians 8:7. *Knowledge* in Greek is *gnosis* (from which the English word *gnostic* comes) and refers, in this context, to a miraculous understanding of the miraculous revelation.

The testimony to Christ's faithfulness to fulfill his promises was *confirmed*. Paul uses the Greek word *ebebaiothe*, a word found frequently in Greek papyri to describe the confirmation of a business transaction. God settled the issue of his faithfulness to the Corinthians by extending a special measure of grace to them, making them *excel* (II Cor. 8:7) in miraculous gifts. The Corinthian church was second to none in experiencing Christ's faithfulness to confirm the gospel by miraculous gifts (cf. Heb. 2:4; II Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:7, etc.). They were by no means *lacking* (Gr. *hustereisthai*, last, lagging behind). Christ had kept his word. They had all they needed while they waited in daily expectation for his return. There was no lack that could justify their jealousies and factionalisms. They should not have divided up to follow other leaders as if to find in such division something *more* to sustain them against the judgment day. Christ alone gives the revelation and knowledge necessary for that. No other leader has anything to say about salvation worth hearing! If that be true, there is no reason in heaven or on earth for Christians to divide over human leaders or institutions. The unity of God's kingdom

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has its source in this characteristic of God and his Son, Jesus Christ—absolute faithfulness!

The sentence in the Greek text (v. 9) begins literally, "Faithful, the God through whom you were called . . ." It stresses God's faithfulness. *Faithful* is the very name of God. And if *he* called the Corinthians into communion (Gr. *koinonian*, fellowship, sharing) with his Son, he is certainly able by himself to sustain them. They need not divide up, compete with one another, or follow other leaders. Factionalism would make the world believe the God of the Corinthian Christians was impotent, unfaithful and less than absolute. And that is precisely what division in Christendom does in the twentieth century!

The grace of God had made it possible for these Corinthians to have the saving work of Christ imputed to them. God saw to it that they were second to none in possessing miraculous gifts. They had advantages other Christians did not have. Their disgraceful conduct (division, immorality in the church, disorderly worship, vanity, pride, and misapprehension of true doctrine) was not because God supplied them insufficiently with divine direction or that God was unfaithful toward them. It was due to their own spiritual immaturity and refusal to grow.

**1:10-17 Completeness:** "Is Christ divided?" Paul appeals for a mentality and practice of Christian unity in the Corinthian church on the basis of the oneness of God. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one!" (Deut. 6:4). God is *one* in character, in purpose and in action. There is no variation in him (James 1:17). Jesus declared that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit were one and the same person (cf. John 1:1-18; 14:1-11; 14:18-24; 8:25-30, etc.). Paul clearly taught that Jesus was God when he wrote, "For in him (Christ) the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily . . ." (Col. 2:9; see also II Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19; Gal. 3:20). Even the prophet Isaiah declared the triune oneness of God (Isa. 48:16). Jesus claimed he *always* agreed with and did perfectly the works of God because he *was* God (cf. John 5:17-46; 6:45; 8:28-30; 8:58; 10:22-39; 15:7-11; 16:15; 17:1-5, etc.). That Jesus was God in the flesh is certainly a verifiable proposition. His deity was established historically by the signs and wonders he did in the presence of men (cf. Acts 2:22; 26:26). The "Shema" (Deut. 6:4) means more than simply enumerating Jehovah as the only God there is. It means that he is one integrally—that is, he is perfectly unified, totally single in purpose, objective and goal. God may manifest himself in three persons, but his mind, his will, his heart, his actions and his purpose are absolutely undivided. God is not man

that he should change or be divided (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; Isa. 40:8; 55:11).

Paul appealed (Gr. *parakalo*, "called upon") to the Christians at Corinth on the basis of the name, or authority, of the one Lord of all Christians, Jesus Christ. His appeal was that they all *agree* (Gr. lit. *hina to auto legete pantes*, "that the one thing you may be saying, all."). The KJV translates it, "... that ye all speak the same thing . . ." In the present context, this unquestionably means Paul is directing them to all say one thing (all agree on one thing) which is: there is only one church of God—one body of Christians—over which Jesus Christ alone is the head. Paul is not here insisting that all Christians must agree on every issue of life—especially those issues not expressly commanded or clearly enjoined in the New Testament. All Christians are free, in Christ, to have opinions which may differ from other Christians in matters where the New Testament gives no specified direction. But even our opinions must be subordinated to the authoritative commands of the New Testament for brotherly love, peace, doctrinal purity, unity of the church and edification of one's brother. *Agreement*, in this context, applies primarily to the fundamental New Testament doctrine of the *oneness* of the body of Christ. There are not many *different* churches, separated according to differing teachings of human leaders, constituting *the* church of Christ. If the church of Christ is *essentially* one, as Thomas Campbell said in his Declaration and Address, then to speak of a divided church is a contradiction of terms. If it is *intentionally* one, to divide it is to disobey the intentions of Christ. If it is *constitutionally* one, it implies conformity to a plan or constitutional (Biblical) organization which must be inherent in the revealed will of its Head.

Paul considered himself free to exercise his own opinions about cultural preferences, evangelistic methods, and marital status so long as the Lord Jesus had not plainly commanded otherwise. But Paul had also committed himself so completely to the law of love he would relinquish his freedom to exercise personal opinion if opinion caused a brother to sin (see I Corinthians, chapters 8, 9, 10, and Romans, chapter 14). Paul would not divide the body of Christ over one of his own opinions. He certainly would not allow any attempt to divide it over human personalities to go unrebuked.

The Corinthian Christians are exhorted to refrain from *dissension*. The Greek word is stronger than that—it is *schizmata*, meaning, to rend, to split, to break. In non-biblical Greek the word was used to describe "cleaving the head with an axe," or "a ship breaking to pieces in the sea." Greek cultic religions punished members for

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*schizmata* (division) in the same manner they punished someone for stealing from or deceiving a member of their cult. Cancer cells within the human body are physical *schizmata*. Division within the church is destructive. The Greek word *schizo* is used as a prefix to many English words used in psychology to describe the mental disorder sometimes referred to as "split-personality." *Schizophrenia* is "a type of psychosis characterized by loss of contact with (withdrawal from) environment (reality) and by disintegration of personality." That is an apt description of a divided Christendom! Modern Christendom has a spiritual sickness (psychosis) characterized by loss of contact with (withdrawal from) its real unity in Christ and evidences a disintegrated personality to a lost world! Dividing the church of God is a *sin*. It is called a "work of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21). There the words are *dichostasiai*, from which we get the English word *dichotomy* (stand apart), and *haireseis*, from which we have the English word *heresy* (to defect, to divide). James wrote that the *contention* which causes division (Gr. *eritheian*, from *Eris*, goddess of strife and fighting) is *demonical*! Indeed, the devil is the master designer of all division in the church. The devil is an anarchist, a divider, a liar and a murderer from Eden until now. Those who deliberately practice and cherish dividing the church of Jesus Christ into opposing, unbelieving, unloving factions are children of the devil.

The apostle urges these Christians to "be *united* in the same mind and the same judgment." The Greek word *katertismenoi* translated *united* means, "be repaired" or "be restored." It is used in Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19 to describe the "folding together" of the fishermen's nets. In II Cor. 13:11 Paul tells the Corinthians to "mend" their ways. The idea is to restore or repair something that has been disordered to its proper order so that it will be fit for productive use. Christian unity is not something which originates from man—it originates from God. At the time a human being becomes a Christian God joins that new-born being to the body of Christ. We *are* joined—we do not join. Once we are joined to Christ's body (the church) we must "give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). There are times when Christians may sin and promote division, but they must repent and be diligent to "repair and restore" that unity by surrendering to the will of Christ for their lives.

Paul insisted that unity would not come until these Christians were "restored" (united) in the *same* (Gr. *auto*, one, only, same) mind and same *judgment* (Gr. *gnome*, understanding, means of knowing). Some commentators insist that the Corinthian Christians were not



dividing over central or doctrinal issues, but over diverse opinions. Consider the following issues over which there seemed to be not only differences but *divisions*:

- a. The issue as to whether *who* baptized a person was more crucial than the doctrine of the cross (I Cor. 1).
- b. The issue of divine revelation and apostolic inspiration and inerrancy (I Cor. 2).
- c. The issue of sanctification and church discipline (I Cor. 5 & 6).
- d. The issue of marriage and divorce (I Cor. 7).
- e. The issues of idolatrous associations; of Christian liberty; of apostolic rights (I Cor. 8, 9, 10).
- f. The issue of who is the Lord's body and of judging others and improper observance of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11).
- g. The issue of immaturity; of misuse of spiritual gifts; of indecency and disorder in worship (I Cor. 12, 13, 14).
- h. The issue as to whether there can be a resurrection from the dead or not—perhaps even belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ an issue! (I Cor. 15).

Most of these are more crucial than differences of opinion. They are doctrinal issues. We believe the Lord intends his church to be of the same mentality, knowing the same revelation of his will and understanding his will the same way. We believe that is the reason the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this epistle to the Corinthian Christians. The Lord intended the church at Corinth to come to the same understanding, to think the same and act the same way in all the matters to which Paul gave instruction in this epistle.

Is it possible for Christians to all understand the Bible alike? Of course it is! God wrote his book in human language. That is what Paul clearly says in chapter two of this epistle. The Bible is to be understood by using the same principles of understanding human language one would use in understanding any other book. There are some fundamental guidelines used by every one who reads in order to understand what another person has written:

- a. The correct and true interpretation of any written communication is what the *author intended* to say—not what the reader *wants* the author to say.
- b. God intended only one ultimate meaning in every word he has written in the Bible—not many conflicting meanings for each word.

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- c. God is certainly able to say what he intends to say and he knows to whom he speaks. God expects men to be *able* to understand his message to them and insists they *must* if they are to be saved.
- d. To understand a communication from another person we must investigate how he uses words. To do, that we must take into account grammatical structure, context, historical usage, historical circumstances, parallel passages, etc.

This is why Paul states emphatically in I Corinthians 2:13 that the mind of God has been imparted to mankind (through the apostles) in *words*—human language. No human being could have known the mind (will) of God had it *not* been delivered through words (human language). God wants all men to know and understand his will. And God wants all men to understand it alike! Paul repeated this appeal many times (cf. Rom. 15:5-6; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27; 2:2) and so did Peter (I Peter 3:8).

As long as Christians have different levels of scriptural *knowledge*, there will exist differences in spiritual mentality and judgment. One of the major functions for which the church was established was to bring all followers of Christ to “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to *mature* manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ . . .” (Eph. 4:13). Bringing all Christians to the same (unified) faith and knowledge in *mature* (Gr. *teleion*, perfected, attained the goal) manhood to the *stature* (Gr. *helikias*, adulthood, grown up) of Christ is the purpose of ministry. The very fact that some Christians are content to be deficient in the knowledge of God’s word gives the devil fertile ground in which to produce division! The church must not neglect the imperative ministry of edifying every member in the scriptures. A *primary goal* for the church is to bring all members to the same level of knowledge of God’s word. Until it gives priority to that goal it is *not* giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Bible study must have *top* priority in the church!

A woman member of the Corinthian church named Chloe had apparently visited Paul in Ephesus, with members of her household (people), and they had informed Paul of the divisions and quarreling (Gr. *erides*, strife) among the Christians. Practically every Christian (“each one of you”) in Corinth was involved in the strife. Christians were forming certain doctrinal and/or non-doctrinal stands opposing one another and striving against one another. Beyond that they were trying to make out that they followed divinely-appointed leaders of

Christianity who also opposed one another in these differences of doctrine and opinion. Some had even attempted to portray Paul, Peter and Apollos as opposing Christ and Christ opposing these leaders. Satan still dupes theologians and religious leaders today with the same sophistry—alleged doctrinal differences between Paul and Peter and Christ. It is absurd to think that the absolute, almighty, inerrant Holy Spirit of God would contradict himself as he spoke through these. But the biggest lie the devil perpetrates is that these men were not divinely inspired and inerrant instruments of the Holy Spirit. They were, according to many modern theologians, fallible and often mistaken in what they wrote. Before unity in the church is ever “repaired” or “restored” the issue of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible must be settled.

What the attraction was that polarized these Christians toward certain human leaders we do not know for certain. Perhaps it was “seniority” or the “successes” which the parties claimed for their superiority over one another. Peter was one of the first called to be an apostle and was recognized spokesman for the twelve a number of times. Paul, on the other hand, had demonstrated phenomenal success with evangelism and missionary endeavors to the whole Gentile world. Apollos was a man noted by many in the Roman world for his eloquence (for which neither Paul nor Peter was noted). Paul’s question, “Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” means divisions were being made according to who the baptizer might have been. There is no historical evidence whatever that Peter was ever in Corinth. There might have been some people in the Corinthian church who had been baptized by Peter in Palestine on the Day of Pentecost (or later) who then returned to Corinth. The divisions were probably more according to *alleged* differences in doctrine than anything else. There is only one name in which Christians are baptized—the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; Acts 4:12). Men are not to be baptized in the name of the church.

Paul was thankful that he had not baptized many at Corinth with his own hands lest some glory in the fact they had been immersed by the great apostle Paul. Paul would not have his name used by these factions to set themselves apart from others. Paul had immersed Crispus, ruler of a synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:8), and Gaius (identity unknown), and the household of Stephanas, first convert of Achaia (I Cor. 16:15). He could remember no others. Paul would have a difficult time understanding some preachers today who take great pains to advertise the number of baptisms

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they perform. Paul's statement that he was not sent by Christ to baptize but to preach the gospel must not be taken to mean that Paul considered baptism unessential or of little importance. Baptism was and is an essential part of the gospel message of salvation. Paul submitted to baptism himself as necessary to washing away his sins (Acts 22:16). He stated in his writings that it was the act of obedient faith which brought penitent believers *into* covenant participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11). He implies that only as many as are baptized into Christ have "put on Christ" and are sons of God, Abraham's spiritual offspring, heirs according to the messianic promise (Gal. 3:25-29). Paul taught people to be *baptized* (Gr. *baptizo*, immerse, plunge, dip) when he preached or there would never have been any question raised about some claiming to have been baptized in Paul's name! We have documented proof that people were baptized as a consequence of Paul's having preached what to *do* to be saved (Acts 16:14-15; 16:29-34; 18:8). When Paul preached, most often others did the baptizing. John writes in his Gospel about Jesus, "The Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John—Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples (did)," (John 4:1-2). The twelve apostles undoubtedly did not, with their own hands, baptize each of the three thousand believers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38ff.). There is no commandment in the New Testament that only an ordained clergyman may officiate at the immersion of a believer into Christ. For the sake of propriety, it would be preferable to have someone who was already an immersed believer in Christ to immerse new believers; but it might be an elder, a deacon, a father baptizing a son, a son baptizing a father, or, most appropriate, a Christian baptizing the person he has brought to belief. There was no problem with immersion in water in obedience to the gospel covenant of salvation in the first century church; neither in mode nor purpose. The problem Paul had to deal with here is sectarianism, not gospel immersion. It is not immersion Paul is renouncing here but the argument over who immersed whom! He is disclaiming the idea that being immersed by any particular human leader makes the immersed one a member of any religious faction or party. He *is* saying it is possible to *overemphasize* baptism. Baptism is not redemption. Redemption is what Christ did on the cross and through his resurrection. Christ's command, and that of the apostles, to be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, et. al.) is one of the initial covenant terms by which that redemption is to be granted. The New Testament is plain: to possess redemption requires covenant relationship and covenant relationship

requires, initially, faith, repentance and immersion. But to make the person or party by whom one is immersed the central issue of redemption is to empty the cross of Christ of its power. Paul says, "*He (Christ) is the source of our . . . redemption*" (I Cor. 1:30). Being immersed into Christ is not the *source* of our redemption; Christ is the source. But we cannot receive that source without accepting the Source's terms. Immersion into Christ does not tap us into different sources—it unites us in the One and Only Source! That is what Christ sent Paul to preach. And preach it he did!

Paul declares that he was not given the commission of apostle of Christ to compete in sophisticated word-games (Gr. *sophia logou*). He wanted no one to become his disciple or trust their redemption in his eloquence or other abilities. The fact of the cross of Christ cannot apply its power when human pride gathers followers through human cleverness. Such an approach inevitably produces heresy and destroys unity in Christ.

### **Unity Operates Through the Instrumentality of the Gospel (1:18-25)**

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the  
wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I  
will thwart."

20Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

**1:18-20 Because the Gospel is Revelational:** Unification of men and women from all different strata of humankind in one brotherhood of peace and love is operative only by the instrumentality of the

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gospel of Christ. That is so because only the gospel of Christ is the final, complete and perfect revelation from God. It alone is the divinely-sanctioned, perfectly-delivered, and supernaturally-functional instrument for man's redemption. Paul says the *word* (Gr. *logos*, teaching, doctrine) of the cross is *foolishness* (Gr. *moria*, moronic, stupidity) to those who are continuing to perish. However, God's declaration and demonstration that in the cross (and the resurrection) of Jesus Christ he atoned for all the sins of all the world is the *dynamic* (Gr. *dunamis*, power, dynamic) of God to those who are continuing to be saved through it. The Greek prepositions *apollumenois* (perishing) and *sozomenois* (being saved) are present tense, denoting a continuing action. Those who continue willfully to perish, reject the fact and doctrine of the cross as moronic. It does not make sense, from a strictly human perspective, that someone else should suffer (or could suffer) for my sins. It does not seem reasonable; it does not seem fair. Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, former head of the World Council of Churches, wrote the following:

We hear much of the substitutionary theory of the atonement. This theory to me is immoral. If Jesus paid it all, or if He is the substitute for me, or if He is the sacrifice for all the sin of the world, then why discuss forgiveness? The books are closed. Another has paid the debt, borne the penalty. I owe nothing. I am absolved. I cannot see forgiveness as predicated upon the act of some one else. It is my sin. I must atone. (*A Testament of the Faith*, 1958, pg. 144)

That is precisely why the doctrine of the substitutionary, vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary must be established on the basis of the historically-verified resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is a doctrine that is unacceptable to human pride. It is a doctrine that must be accepted on the basis of faith (a faith based on verification). It is a doctrine *revealed*. Jesus teaches that man's willingness to accept revelation from God is *primary* in the matter of kingdom citizenship (see comments on Matt. 11:1-30, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. II*, pp. 426-594, by Harold Fowler, College Press). So long as there are those claiming citizenship in the kingdom of God unwilling to let God give arbitrary, indisputable, seemingly-irrational revelations, there will be division. No nation can have a dependable, unified army if it has no final authority—the commander-in-chief.

Verse 19 is a quotation of Isaiah 29:14 as God's prophecy that he would, in the messianic era, deliver a divine revelation which would destroy dependence upon human pride and wisdom for salvation.

The student should study both Isaiah chapters 28 and 29 in their entirety. Isaiah is predicting the messianic kingdom to come as one in which men would humble themselves and let God teach them by revelation rather than presumptuously thinking they knew all they needed to know through their own wisdom. Isaiah has a great deal to say (and so do all the prophets) about the fact that God is aiming to build in the messianic age (the church) a kingdom filled with people willingly surrendered to total guidance, in every area of life, under the revealed word of his Messiah. That is a fundamental issue of the prophets; "they shall all be taught by God" (see Isa. 54:13; John 6:45). Through thousands of years of history God allowed one human philosophy, religion, and political system after another to come and go. They each repeated themselves, so that even in Solomon's day he could say, "There is nothing new under the sun."

God is one—he is not divided. His mind, will and purpose are all united. The unity of God's revealed will (the Bible) may be thoroughly demonstrated by simply comparing it with the pronouncements and writings of the "scribes and debaters" of the ages. Philosophers, theologians, scientists, teachers and sages have contradicted and negated one another consistently since the world began. Their inability to find unity in human tenets has been the cause of men dividing themselves from one another and from God. But the Bible, because it is a divine revelation of the One Unified Being, God, produces unity when every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God is destroyed by the gospel and every human thought is taken captive to obey Christ (cf. II Cor. 10:3-5). The power of the gospel to change wicked, idolatrous pagans into loving, believing, hoping people demonstrated the utter foolishness of the alleged "wisdom" of the ancient philosophies and philosophers. Claiming to be wise, the ancient philosophers exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and became fools (see Rom. 1:18-32). That was not simply theoretical—that was demonstrated in life! It still is today! Human unity operates through the instrumentality of the gospel, or it doesn't operate at all!

**1:21-23 Because The Gospel is Reportable:** The gospel is real. It is history. It is not theoretical or ephemeral. Human beings make theories. God does things in history and in reality. God was wise enough to give men the freedom to theorize if they choose. In this freedom God is able to demonstrate vividly the finitude of man. Since man without God is able only to theorize he should acknowledge his limitations. Man should welcome an Absolute Being with absolute wisdom—especially since such a Being has revealed Himself in history. When God decided that man's inability to redeem himself had been

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sufficiently established in the demonstration of the foolishness of human theories, the Son of God was sent to the world to establish historically and experientially the absolute wisdom of God.

The KJV translation of verse 21 is unfortunate. Paul is *not* saying that preaching is foolishness, or that the world will be saved by the foolishness of preaching. Many people preach. Politicians preach; philosophers and moralists preach; terrorists and anarchists preach, so it is not the methodology of preaching that the world calls "foolish." The RSV is much clearer when it translates, ". . . through the folly of *what* we preach to save. . . ." The world calls the Christian *message*, the gospel of the cross, foolish. But, clearly, it is the message of the gospel that saves human beings from lawlessness and wickedness. The Greek phrase, *tou kerugmatos* clearly intends the reader to understand that it is the *thing* preached (the message) which the world calls foolish. But that message is of the accomplished redemption of Christ and God has chosen to save through it. This redemption was wrought upon the cross and verified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Its proclamation and acceptance saves men unto the glorious destiny for which God created them. T. R. Applebury wrote: "While the basic facts of the gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the gospel is not limited to these facts, for it takes the whole Bible to tell the whole story of the whole counsel of God about salvation through His Son. In the Old Testament it is seen in prophecy, promise, and type. In the New Testament it is seen in the facts of the life of Christ; in the history of conversion to Christ; in the explanation of the essentials of righteousness; in the application of the gospel to daily life; and, finally, in the prophecy of the victory of Christ and of those who accept His gospel." (*Studies in First and Second Corinthians*, by T. R. Applebury, p. 23, College Press, 1963). If the Christian message (*kerugmatos*) was *only* of a crucified, dead Messiah, it would be foolishness. Any claim to atone for the sins of the whole world by someone who had no power to conquer death would be an absurd, abortive claim. But the Christian message, authenticated by eyewitnesses, friends and enemies alike, is of a Messiah who conquered death. Therefore his claims of atonement are trustworthy and will transform or regenerate those who continue to believe him. God transforms the minds and personalities of sinners through the word of his Son's redemptive program, the gospel. But man must believe that. God created man with the capability to believe and respond to God's promises and commands. So Paul says, God was pleased to save men through the agency and instrumentality of his word. Paul uses the Greek present tense when he writes the word



*believe* (Gr. *pisteuontas*) indicating that those who are being saved (see comments, v. 18) are those who are *continuing* to believe.

While those continuing to believe the facts of the gospel are being saved, those continuing to demand signs and continuing to seek wisdom from some source other than the gospel are being lost! The Jews continually demanded signs. Paul uses the present tense Greek verb here, *aitousi*, indicating that the Jews were not satisfied with the signs Jesus gave of his Messiahship, but continued demanding them. Jesus called these Jews, "an evil and adulterous generation" for continually demanding signs (Matt. 12:38ff.) when sufficient signs were already promised (Jesus' miracles and his resurrection from the dead). God is not pleased with people who continually put him to the test, asking for signs, when sufficient signs have been given (cf. Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 14:22; Deut. 18:18-19; Luke 16:30-31). Elevating spiritual (miraculous) gifts above teaching and preaching the word "line upon line and precept upon precept" is a clear indication of spiritual immaturity (cf. Isa. 28:7-13; I Cor. 14:20ff.). The Jews were even demanding a sign from Jesus when he was hanging on the cross (Matt. 27:41-44). Jesus pronounced condemnation on whole cities (cf. Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:1-20) for demanding signs and then not repenting when many signs were done. It is not one's proximity to supernatural demonstrations or even persons which saves, but faith in the deity and divine work of Jesus. Jesus said some at the judgment would claim proximity to his fleshly presence as merit for salvation (cf. Luke 13:22-30) but to no avail. It is not the possession of supernatural gifts which signified the salvation of the Christians at Corinth (for they came behind no other in such gifts). That which saves is faith in the reportable, reliable redemptive work of Christ on the cross and at the empty tomb. Without the word being preached there can be no faith (Rom. 10:17); without the "seed" (Word) being sown, there can be no fruit produced (Luke 8:11ff.).

**1:24-25 Because the Gospel is Reliable:** Unity operates through the instrumentality of the Gospel because the Gospel is the only source of power available to man to break down barriers of racial, cultural, and religious divisions. It is reliable *first*, of course, because it is authenticated by miracles and signs and fulfilled prophecies (Heb. 2:3-4). But the world should now acknowledge its reliability because it has been demonstrated through 2000 years as the only workable instrument of true spiritual unity for the human race. Producing human spiritual unity in love and peace through universal human philosophy, culture and government was tried for 700 years by four successive world empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome). That

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did not produce! In fact, it produced the opposite—slavery, hatred, war and wickedness. Only the righteousness of God in the redemptive work of Christ (which the world calls “foolishness”) is powerful enough to effect the unity of the human race under the constraints of love, peace, justice and righteousness. That is what is taking place in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ because that is where redemption is made available. The church, dwelling place of the living word of God, is the living organism in the world, kept alive by God’s Spirit, where men may be redeemed. The church is the only place where men do not lift up sword against one another and where they learn war against one another no more. In the world are the lawless. For them only a superficial form of unity and temporary restraint against wickedness is maintained by enforcement of law (cf. I Tim. 1:8-11; Rom. 13:1-7). But for the citizen of God’s kingdom, all arbitration is done peaceably and with love by the power of the Spirit of Christ in their minds and hearts (cf. Col. 3:1-24).

The Gospel is the only reliable dynamic for bringing about spiritual oneness between man and God and man and man. Christ proved it by the supernatural verification of his redemptive plan; history had proven it by experience. It is imperative that all those who profess to be followers of Christ focus all their energies to the proclamation of that message.

### **Unity Occasions Glory to God Alone (1:26-31)**

26 For consider your call, brethren, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth; 27 but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; 31 therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.”

**1:26 Their deficiency:** The very fact that there existed in Corinth a body of believers, immature and struggling, but united in the love and peace of Christ, proved that whatever unity they had achieved was to be credited to God the Father and Christ the son, for there was no other such body of human beings in Corinth like them. The

philosophers and politicians had not produced such a fellowship. These Christians certainly had not come to their fellowship through wisdom according to worldly standards. Paul reminds them to *take a look at* (Gr. *blepete*, see, look) their condition at the time they answered the call to the Gospel. Not many of them were *sophisticates* (Gr. *sophoi*, wise) as judged by *worldly* (Gr. *sarka*, fleshly, human) standards. Not many were *powerful* as the world would estimate power; nor were many of *noble birth* (Gr. *eugeneis*, well-born).

God actually chose what the sophisticates, the powerful and the nobility would call "foolishness" to form a society in Corinth of loving, caring, righteous-living people. They were called Christians. This put all the philosophies and other human attempts of man to create his own Utopia, by his own wisdom, to shame. The faith and righteousness of Christians became, as it were, a condemnation of all the humanism of their society, just as Noah's obedience to God thousands of years earlier (cf. Heb. 11:7).

The apostle's enunciation of the former lack of worldly prestige of these Corinthians is mild compared to his reminder of what a few others had been before becoming Christians (cf. I Cor. 6:9-11). The gospel not only has the power to create a kingdom of love and peace and goodness out of the unsophisticated and powerless people of the world, it also has divine power to bring into this same kingdom, by conversion, people who were formerly the dregs of humanity. Its power is operative, however, only when human beings acknowledge they have no sufficiency in anything that is human and surrender to the revelation of God's redemptive plan for their lives.

**1:27-28 Their dynamic:** When one considers the tools God chose to use in his redemptive program and the end result he produced, one must admit divine power as the source. God chose what the world, in all its accumulated expertise, calls "foolishness" (Gr. *mora*, moronic, stupid), to demonstrably put to shame the sophistication of worldly-wisdom. The world, with all its science, philosophy and psychology has never done what the gospel has done. God chose the *weak things* (Gr. *asthene*, no strength, sick, impotent) in order to expose the shame of what the world calls strong and powerful. The world calls the vicarious atonement of Christ "sick." But the change wrought in the lives of those who believe Christ proves that the world is wrong in what it depends on for power.

God chose to use what the world calls "low" and "despised" (Gr. *agene*, inconsequential, unknown; and *exouthenemena*, contemptible, rejected) to *abolish* (Gr. *katargese*, nullify, destroy) the things which the world in rebellion against God considers effective. Paul is not

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the first God uses to reveal this. The Old Testament Prophets warned their people that God was going to accomplish man's redemption by a despised and rejected Messiah, one in whom was no "comeliness" and who would not be "esteemed" (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12). Jesus warned in his parables that the kingdom would start as small and insignificantly as a "mustard seed" but would grow to be huge (Matt. 13:31-32). Righteousness, love, self-control, humility and faith are things the world calls weaknesses. Wealth, fame, self-sufficiency, political position and skepticism are things the world calls powerful. God has demonstrated his sovereign wisdom by putting everything the world calls powerful to shame through the power of the redemptive work of Christ. Only the gospel of Christ produces the society of people transformed into loving, hoping, trustworthy, faithful, peaceful servants of God. Wealth, fame and political power all combined has never done it and never shall.

God chose the betrothed of a lowly Jewish carpenter as the mother for the Savior of the world. He decided this Savior was to be born in a cattle-shed. This Savior's friends would be harlots and hated publicans. He would select as his intimate co-workers fisherman, publicans and women. But these "low born" and "rejects" would, with the divine message of God's reconciling grace through the cross of Christ, turn the world "upside down" (cf. Acts 17:6) showing that philosophies of men were totally inadequate while the word of God changed people and society for the best.

It is through this word that human beings may be born again (cf. I Peter 1:22-25). Through these promises human beings may partake of the divine nature (II Peter 1:3-4). Through this, human beings receive power to be transformed and purified (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; I John 3:1-3). And the word of God is the *only* instrument chosen by God to accomplish this in the world. The world thinks otherwise because it has believed the devil's lie told in Eden (Gen. 3:1-7) that to trust, depend upon and obey God is weakness, while independence from and resistance to God brings power.

**1:29-31 Their declaration:** God deliberately gave salvation to mankind as a gift so that no human being might boast. He chose to effect man's salvation through what the world called weaknesses so that man would not be able to glorify himself or any of his finite schemes. Salvation is absolutely by faith in the redemptive deeds done by God in Christ—not by any merit of man. Salvation is appropriated (or accepted) by man's believing obedience to the covenant terms decreed by God in his New Testament. But man, by accepting salvation, never

merits it. His sins were paid for by Christ's death—finally and completely. When finite and sinful man compares himself with other finite and sinful men, he is inclined to find someone who, in his estimation, is worse than himself. He then resolves to trust in his own self-righteousness and his own glory, (cf. II Cor. 10:12). But when man, by belief in the divine record (the Bible) honestly compares himself with the infinite and absolutely righteous God (and his Son), he finds nothing in himself to trust—not even his own feelings (Jer. 17:5-10, esp. v. 9, 10; Mark 7:21-23; Eph. 4:22; Eccl. 9:3; Isa. 6:5). Jeremiah, tempted to follow his own feelings and desires, surrendered to the word of God burning in his “bones” (cf. Jer. 20:7-12), and preached to turn man's trust in the Lord.

The KJV is nearer a literal translation of the Greek text in verse 30. The Greek phrase is: *ex autou de humeis este en Christo Iesou*. Literally that would be translated: *but out from him you are in Christ Jesus*. The RSV gives the meaning in its translation: “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus. . . .” Christ is the *source* of our salvation because he *became* (Gr. *egenethe*, 3rd aorist, sing. passive—he was both *made* and willingly *became*) our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world to himself. God decreed (made) Christ to be sin for us and righteousness for us (cf. II Cor. 5:11-21). At the same time, Christ, the Son, willingly became sin for us (Heb. 10:5-10). God decided on the substitutionary atonement by his Anointed One from the foundation of the world (cf. I Peter 1:19-20; Isa. 53:1-12, etc.). The Son of man knew he had come into the world as a vicarious *ransom* for the sins of the whole world (Matt. 20:28; 26:28). He knew that it was only by his perfect sacrifice men would be able to be set apart (sanctified) to God (cf. Heb. 10:5-10; John 17:13-26). Christ is the *source* of our sanctification. We could never be good enough on our own to be set apart unto God! If we are sanctified for God at all it is because we trust completely in the merit of Christ's perfect sacrifice. Of course, we must choose to accept his sanctification for us. And our choosing must conform to his revealed will. The same concepts apply to any claims we may have to *wisdom* or *redemption*. Christ alone is the source. We choose whether we want what he offers or not on his terms.

Verse 31 is a quotation of Jeremiah 9:24. Jeremiah faced the same problem with God's covenant people 600 years before Paul. Men basked in their own self-glory. The glory of other men was what they thought was the ultimate meaning of life (Jer. 9:23). As a result they conducted their lives on the bases of falsehood, hypocrisy, treachery, slander and deceit (Jer. 9:1ff.). But Jeremiah poured out his life in

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ministry of the Word to turn them to glorying in the Lord (Jer. 9:24) and in what the Lord determines is righteousness.

Paul wrote a great deal about “boasting” and “glorying” to the Corinthians. The Corinthians apparently assumed that anyone with the office of apostle would automatically be boastful, proud and arrogant. Paul did not behave like that (see I Cor. 3:18-23; 4:1-13; II Cor. 11:1-33; 12:1-21). Paul made it plain that Christians have nothing to boast about except the grace of God (Rom. 3:27-28; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:3-7; II Cor. 12:9). And who can boast in self when all one is or has or hopes to be is by the grace of Christ?

Since *all* Christians are thus joined and united to Christ by *grace alone*, such unity must give occasion to glorifying only Christ. Whatever results from the regenerative work going on in the church on earth, whether through spiritual leaders or those being led, it all redounds to God’s glory and not man’s. Man works, God gives the increase. Unless God gives the increase, there will be none of any value or permanence at all, no matter how hard and expertly man works.

### APPREHENSION AND APPLICATION:

1. Why do you think the apostle Paul left his home country and wandered all over the Roman empire preaching Christ? Could anyone do that?
2. Would the city of Corinth, for its time, be comparable to a large American city? Could people be sanctified to God in New York? San Francisco? How?
3. What is a saint? Which work of grace sanctifies people?
4. Why does Christian unity have as its basis the character of God?
5. May Christians be united with those who impugn the character of God?
6. How important is God’s faithfulness to you? Could not all religious people unite without all believing in the absolute faithfulness of God?
7. What does the Bible mean by saying God is “One”?
8. Is it possible for all Christians to “be of the same mind” and “united in the same judgment”? *How?*
9. Why are the principles of interpreting human language so important to Christian unity?
10. Why do people divide the church over human leaders? Do leaders sometimes contribute to division? Why didn’t Paul?
11. Did Paul infer that baptism was unessential or unimportant? Why didn’t he baptize those he converted? Who is authorized to baptize people?

12. What is the instrument with power sufficient to unite all men in God?
13. What is a revelation? Why must we accept the atonement of Christ for our sins as a revelation?
14. Why is the acceptance of revelation necessary to Christian unity?
15. What has the historicity of the gospel to do with unity? Should Christians seek unity with those who deny the historicity of the Bible? On what basis?
16. Is preaching foolishness? Why does the world consider the cross foolish?
17. Is there anything wrong in seeking signs? Is there too much of that today?
18. Can there be faith without the Word of God being preached? In what?
19. In what two ways may we prove the Word of God is reliable to produce Christian unity? Have you discussed this with other believers lately?
20. Should Christians keep reminding themselves of what they were before being saved? What has that to do with unity in Christ?
21. Do Christians have anything about which they may boast? Nothing at all? Why not?

## Chapter Two

### THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION

(2:1-16)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why is revelation a problem? Why is it a problem to Christians?
2. How is the apostolic message different from the philosophies of men?
3. What vehicle or instrumentality did God utilize in revealing the apostolic message to man?
4. Why can't man discover God's will and plan for his life?
5. How spiritual does a person have to be to understand the apostolic message?

#### SECTION 1

#### Unsophisticated but Dynamic (2:1-5)

**2** When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup>For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; <sup>4</sup>and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup>that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

**2:1-2 Plain Words:** The Greek love for sophisticated philippic and techniques of argumentation colored their concept of the worth of the apostolic gospel. The heroes of the Greek culture were the philosophers who spent all their time debating philosophies (see Acts 17:16-21) and displaying their expertise in eloquent use of language. "The speaking was the thing" with them—not the reality of what was being said. William Barclay says:

The Greek sought wisdom. Originally the Greek word *sophist* meant a *wise man* in the good sense; but it came to mean a man with a clever mind and cunning tongue, a mental acrobat, a man who with glittering and persuasive rhetoric could make the worse appear the better reason. It meant a man who would spend endless hours discussing hair-splitting trifles, a man who



had no real interest in solutions but who simply gloried in the stimulus of "the mental Hike." . . . It is impossible to exaggerate the almost fantastic mastery that the silver-tongued rhetorician held in Greece. Plutarch says, "They made their voices sweet with musical cadences and modulations of tone and echoed resonances." They thought not of what they were saying, but of how they were saying it. Their thought might be poisonous so long as it was enveloped in honeyed words. Philostratus tells us that Adrian, the sophist, had such a reputation in Rome, that when his messenger appeared with a notice that he was to lecture, the senate emptied and even the people at the games abandoned them to flock to hear him.

The Greeks were intoxicated with rhetoric and eloquence. They would look on Paul's preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in simple, direct words testifying to plain historical facts as crude and uncultured. Paul says literally, "And I coming to you brethren, came not according to over-hanging (high, superior) word or sophistry." Paul might have had the background to have attempted competition with the Greek sophists. He had studied for years from the most famous rabbis of Israel. He knew Greek poetry (cf. Acts 17:28). But he was not interested in eloquence.

Paul determined to speak nothing among the Greeks but Jesus Christ and this One having been crucified. He could do nothing else and be true to the gospel. That is what the gospel is—the redemptive work of Christ. The gospel is not what man must do—the gospel is what God, in Christ, has done. We know Paul included the resurrection of Christ in his preaching to the Greeks for we have a record of his having done so (cf. Acts 17:30-31; I Cor. 15:1-11). Paul preached that the fulfillment of the Old Testament was the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplishing atonement and reconciliation of man to God, available through faith and baptism into Christ. Paul had no time for irrelevancies; not even for the peripheral things of life. There was only one issue for him and he determined everywhere he went, to everyone who would give him attention, he would preach the facts of the good news—Christ crucified and risen again commanding all men everywhere to repent. Without this everything else in life is irrelevant (see I Cor. 15:12-19). Without this all of life is *bad* news. Without this all mankind is guilty before the Absolute God and sentenced to eternal damnation. No wonder Paul had no time to talk about innane and trivial matters. Not Christianity, but

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Christ; not a system, but the Savior; every Christian who would be faithful to God must live by the same determination (cf. Col. 1:27-29).

Unlike many modern theologians who want to present Christ as a great teacher, the founder of a great religion, or a great example of humanity at its apex of goodness, Paul preached Christ *crucified*. The Greek word Paul uses, *estauromenon*, is a perfect participle, meaning a thing completed with a continuing result. Christ's death on the cross is unlike all other deaths in this world—it continues to be efficacious for all who will make it theirs by faith.

**2:3-5 Powerful Witness:** When Paul went to Corinth, he was vividly aware of his weaknesses as a human being, (see Acts 18:9). His weaknesses would include his "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7), his poor personal appearance (II Cor. 10:10) whatever that was, and what the Corinthians thought was an inadequate speaking ability (II Cor. 10:10). The power of Paul's address before the philosophers in Athens would seem to refute the accusation of the Corinthians about his inability to speak. That sermon on Mar's Hill is irrefutable in its logic, clear in its simplicity, and persuasive in its appeal. If Paul had any inability in speaking it must have been some physical impairment in his voice.

What were the fears and tremblings Paul had? He certainly did not fear for his life. Neither did he fear that the gospel was inadequate. Paul was apparently overwhelmed, at his first glimpse of Corinth, and the enormity of the task before him, (Acts 18:9). He was afraid people, with their prejudices and superficialities, would focus on his human inadequacies and not give ear to his message in which the power resided to transform them.

Realizing this, says Paul, "my *word* (Gr. *logos*) and my *message* (Gr. *kerugma*) were not in *enticing* (Gr. *peithos*, sometimes translated *plausible* or *persuasive*) words of human *sophistry* (Gr. *sophias*)." Paul did not seek to entice, trick, seduce, or "psych" people into faith in Christ. He would not be a "peddler" of God's Word (II Cor. 2:17). He would not use disgraceful and underhanded ways, practice cunning, or tamper with God's Word (II Cor. 4:2). He openly stated the truth. And that truth was Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. There were no public relations "advance-men," paid exorbitant salaries to create an "image" for Paul. There were no huge musical ensembles, with their amplifiers, microphones, spot-lighting, and staging accompanying Paul (desensitizing men's minds so they could not *think* about what Paul was preaching).

His message was fact, not sophistry. Paul uses a number of Greek words in this text which emphasizes the legal and scientific nature of

his message. Paul's message is historical and demonstrable as opposed to the specious theories and equivocations of the philosophers and sophists. For example, the Greek word *apodeixe* (translated *demonstration* 2:4) is a word used to describe the examining of witnesses in trials testifying to eyewitnessed evidence, or to describe the testing of ore in a crucible to provide evidence of its identity. Not only was Paul's message based on eyewitnessed proofs of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see I Cor. 15:1ff.), it was also confirmed by the powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit in the miracles done by Paul himself (see II Cor. 12:12).

God never intended that man's faith should be based on speculations and feelings. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not speculation—it is history. What we believe about God and his promises, we believe on the basis of these supernatural deeds done in time and space, in this historical frame in which we exist. The Christian's faith rests on the power of God—and that is not a power about which we theorize, but a power demonstrated in history!

All God's word needs is to be preached. It will produce faith in the mind and heart of anyone who will allow it (cf. Rom. 10:1ff.). The word of God does not need the sophistries of psychology, theology, philosophy or politics to make it relevant and powerful. It has power in itself. It is a "living seed" and will produce of itself (see Mark 4:26-29; Isa. 55:10-11). It simply needs to be sown.

## SECTION 2

### Undiscoverable but Understandable (2:6-16)

6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him,"

10 God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is

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in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup> The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup> "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

**2:6-8 Perfected:** The understanding of this whole chapter hinges upon two major premises: (1) clearly, the antecedent to the repeated pronoun "we" and "us" all the way through this chapter is Paul and the other supernaturally endowed apostles, the only persons Christ ever said would be "led into all truth" (cf. Jn. 16:13); (2) contextually, the subject is divinely *revealed* truth as opposed to the limits of finite knowledge. The context is *not* dealing with different levels of understanding or even with ability to comprehend. It is dealing with the impossibility of knowing the mind of God until God decides to reveal His mind to certain individuals so they might pass it on through human language (words). Whatever Paul is saying, it must conform to these two fundamental rules of understanding what someone else has written.

Notice the clear indication that Paul is speaking of the *revelational* aspect of the apostolic message of the cross by the continuity of the antecedent:

- a. "When I came to you . . ." (2:1)
- b. "For I decided to know . . ." (2:2)
- c. "And I was with you . . ." (2:3)
- d. ". . . and my message . . ." (2:3)
- e. ". . . Yet among the mature we do impart . . ." (2:6)
- f. "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom . . ." (2:7)
- g. "God has revealed to us through the Spirit . . ." (2:10)
- h. "Now we have received. . . ." (2:12)
- i. ". . . that we might understand . . ." (2:12)
- j. "And we impart this in words. . . ." (2:13)
- k. "But we have the mind of Christ" (2:16)

Paul's shift from the first person to the third person means only that he is including the other apostles as those who have received the "mind of Christ" by revelation—it does not include all Christians.

Who are the "mature"? The Greek word used in verse 6 is *teleiots*, and is often translated, *perfect*, or, *whole*. Lenski says, "*teleios* is the one who has reached the goal. The context invariably determines the goal referred to and the sense in which the term is employed. The present context speaks of only two classes of people: such as accept the gospel in faith and such as spurn the gospel and prefer their own wisdom. No reference has been made to undeveloped Christians."

We believe the context forces us to look back to I Corinthians 1:18-25 for the definition of the "mature ones." The *mature* are those who receive the gospel message in honest, virtuous, unbiased and logical minds. They accept the message as the revelation of God on the basis of the evidence presented. The *immature* are those who are prejudiced and dishonest and who deliberately refuse to acknowledge that there is an Absolute Being existing outside the empirical knowledge of this world who may *reveal* knowledge man may not otherwise discover by his own human resources.

The *immature* are:

- a. "... like children sitting in the market places. . . ." (Matt. 11:16-19)
- b. "the wise and understanding" (Matt. 11:25-30)
- c. "... those who receive glory from one another . . ." (John 5:44)
- d. those in whom the word of Christ finds no place (John 8:37)
- e. those who cannot bear to hear Christ's word (John 8:43-47)
- f. those who say, "We see . . ." (John 9:35-41)
- g. those who love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:37-43)
- h. those who think that the Deity is like gold, or silver. . . . a representation by the art and imagination of man (Acts 17:22-23)
- i. those who claim to be wise and exchange glory of the immortal God for images. . . . who exchange the truth of God for a lie. . . . who do not see fit to acknowledge God (Rom. 1:18-32)
- j. those who refuse to love the truth . . . those who do not believe the truth but take pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:9-12)
- k. those who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at the truth (II Tim. 3:6-7)
- l. those who deliberately ignore the facts (II Peter 3:1-7)

The *mature* are:

- a. those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15)

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- b. those who do what is true and come to the light (John 3:21)
- c. those who are babes and are willing to take Christ's yoke upon them and learn of him (Matt. 11:25-30)
- d. those who acknowledge they are blind without the apostolic revelation (John 9:39-41)
- e. those willing to be guided by divine revelation (Acts 8:31)
- f. those who accept the apostolic message of the cross as the revelation of God for salvation (I Cor. 1:18-25)
- g. those who accept the word of the apostles as the word of God revealed for salvation (I Thess. 2:13)

When the gospel message of the cross and the apostolic message explaining the doctrine of the cross (and resurrection) is proclaimed, those with honest and good hearts will accept it as a revelation—something man could not know without God telling him. The revelation of God concerning eternal life is totally outside the experience of mortal man. It is not a wisdom of this age nor of any of the greatest human minds of this age. All man can know on his own is that in his present existence everything is passing away, even man himself. Man may know from the creation around him that there is an Eternal Deity (cf. Rom. 1:18-22). Man may know from his conscience that he incurs guilt and deserves judgment. But man *cannot* know from anything within him or around him that God atoned for his guilt in the death of Christ and that salvation may be his by faithful covenant relationship to Christ. That is known only by *revelation*!

The apostles *impart* (Gr. *laloumen*, speak) a secret and hidden wisdom of God. Actually the Greek word translated *secret* is *mysterio* which would be literally, *mystery*. A mystery was *not* something that could not be explained or understood, but something unrevealed and unknown. A mystery, in the New Testament usage of the word, could be known when it was revealed. Paul's use of the word *mystery* may be seen in Ephesians 1:1-23; Colossians 1:24-29; Romans 16:25-27. For man to know the *mystery* of God's will for salvation requires only that the apostles (who have the mind of Christ by supernatural gift) reveal it in human language. It does not require some additional illumination or miraculous empowering of our minds to understand it.

God speaks his eternal wisdom (his plan of redemption and salvation) through human messengers, in human language. God is certainly capable of making himself understood in human language. All that is needed for man to understand God is that God, by signs and wonders, delineate and authenticate those who are his chosen messengers, and that man listen with an honest and unbiased mind.

None of the rulers of this world understood this. Actually, the Greek word *egnoken* may be translated either *known* or *understood*. The proper translation, according to the context, would be *known*. It is something they refused to know because they refused to surrender to the fact that God *revealed* himself *incarnately* in Jesus Christ. They did *not want* to know it. They *chose* to be ignorant (cf. Luke 23:34; John 15:21; Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30; Eph. 4:18; I Tim. 1:13). Had they wanted to know this hidden wisdom of God they could have known it because God revealed it in his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Many others knew it. Had the rulers been *willing* to know it, they *would* have known it and would not have crucified the Lord of glory (cf. John 7:17). T. R. Applebury puts it succinctly: "Are we to say that the natural or uninspired man cannot understand the message revealed by the Holy Spirit? Some do take this position. But are we to say that God who created man, an intelligent being capable of communicating his thoughts through language, could not speak to His creatures in a manner so as to be understood? But, of course, man by his own experience and observation could never know God's mind. The only way he could know it was by the revelation through the apostles and prophets."

**2:9-11 Private:** God predicted his redemptive promises to the human race as far back as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15), but the exact manner in which it would be accomplished was kept *private* in his own mind until he revealed it in Christ and subsequently through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Until God decided to let it be known, no human being could know it.

Verse 9 does *not* refer to man's future state in heaven. It refers to the apostolic message of redemption through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. That divine program was not conceived by man. It never occurred to man that God would save him by grace. That is evidenced by all the religions of the world, except Christianity, attempting to attain reconciliation with God through works. Man, in his pride and arrogance, refuses to acknowledge he must be saved by grace. He could never even imagine the way God would accomplish salvation. If God had chosen to keep his redemptive plan privately hidden in his own mind forever, man would never have discovered it with his own finite and limited human knowledge.

But God chose to reveal his redemptive program to the whole world through the apostles ("us," v. 10) through his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, but he is the same person as the Father and the Son. Jesus plainly declared that he and the Holy Spirit were one and the same person (see John 14:15-23).

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The Holy Spirit of God knows everything God knows—even the deepest recesses of God's mind and heart. Everything God wanted to be revealed concerning his prepared redemption the Holy Spirit was fully capable of revealing. Therefore, Paul is saying, everything we apostles have declared to you to be God's redemptive plan is all there is. Men do not need to expect any revelation of God's redemptive program beyond what the apostles have written! There is no "latter day revelation" to be expected. Salvation is found by reading, believing and obeying the apostolic doctrine—not in some subjective, extra-Biblical, experience. What the apostles wrote is everything the Spirit searched from the Father's mind—even the *depths*.

One person can never know the mind of another person unless that person communicates his mind. Minds really never communicate until they do so by words (language). Events and deeds cannot bring about the personal encounter which the genius of language alone accomplishes. By means of the sense of hearing, as the receiver of verbal communication, one mind can make contact with the mental world of another mind and can be influenced by that inaccessible and mysterious realm of thought. But until one person decides to tell another person what is on his mind, his thoughts are inaccessible to everyone but his own spirit. This is what Paul is saying about God's mind in verse 11. Without the voluntary communication (that is, without revelation) of one person's thoughts to another by words, there is an impenetrable boundary to personal encounter. The mind of a man sitting next to you may be quite inaccessible to you, while at that very moment a friend some thousand miles away may be allowing you, by means of a letter, to learn something of what is beyond this boundary. The act of crossing this boundary (through a revelation in words) is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our experience.

No one but the Spirit of God could know what was on God's mind. God chose to cross that boundary for man so he gave his Spirit to the apostles who spoke the mind of God in human words.

**2:12-13 Published:** One of the big problems with this Corinthian church had to do with Paul's presentation of the gospel. Apparently, his presentation did not compare favorably with the eloquence of the philosophers and "preachers" of the pagan mystery cults in cosmopolitan Corinth. Some Christians in the church were probably being tempted to turn away from the gospel and classify it as not divine because it was not colored by the sophistries and verbiage of the silver-tongued orators of Greece. It just did not sound divine. It did not thrill them emotionally—it was not artistic—it was not entertaining.



The apostles received the Spirit which is from God so they might know the mind of God and Christ. Christ promised them the Holy Spirit for this purpose (see John, chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17, and 20:22). They claimed to be speaking by the direct inspiration or revelation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:14-21; I Cor. 2:12-13; II Peter 1:16-21). Their claims to divine inspiration or revelation were authenticated by the signs and wonders done by their hands (cf. II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4). No one but the apostles were promised this revelation of the mind of Christ as his *direct* agents to communicate it to the rest of mankind. The apostle John makes it clear that whoever listens to the apostles listens to God, and whoever does not listen to the apostles does not listen to God (I John 4:1-6). The only possible way to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error is to accept the teachings of the apostles as the final and completed teaching from God!

The Bible leaves us in no doubt whatever that the vehicle of revelation is language (words). The construction of the Greek sentence in verse 13 emphasizes *words* as the vehicle of imparting God's mind to the world. The sentence reads literally, "which things we speak, not in teaching of human wisdom words, but in teaching of the Holy Spirit." Paul, in putting *words* at the end of the phrase, emphasizes that the agency of apostolic revelation is not in emotions, feelings or any other subjective experience, but in human language. Language is versatile. It is unique in the reception and transmission of knowledge. It is the only means which possesses such potentiality. Mystical or subjective communication, in which the intellect is in abeyance and the object of the participant is to merge himself by a non-verbal process in the Godhead, is excluded by a word often on the lips of the writers of the Old Testament. The word is *shema*, translated "to hear," and signifies not only to hear, but "to understand" and even "to obey" what is said. There are literally thousands of references in both Old Testament and New Testament representing God as "speaking" *words* (cf. Exod. 20:1; Deut. 1:6; Ps. 33:9; Jer. 7:13; 14:14; John 6:63; Matt. 24:35; John 17:14, 17). Language is the only conceivable means of communicating non-empirical places, things or concepts. It has the ability to cross dimensional limits of time and space and communicate by verbal deputies (figures of speech, analogies, etc.) the non-experienceable.

So the apostles spoke the mind of God and Christ in human words, but not in human teachings. There is a difference in the two! The devil is able to take human words and proclaim demonic teaching (see James 3:13-18). The apostles were taught what was on God's

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mind about redemption by the Spirit of God in human language. They, in turn, teach all who will listen to them in human language also. When a man listens to the teaching of the apostles and obeys it, he is being taught by the Holy Spirit of God. If the apostles were "led into *all* truth" (see John 16:13) and if the faith is "once for all time delivered unto the saints" (see Jude 3), then there is nothing more the Holy Spirit intends to say to mankind (this side of heaven) about redemption. The apostles have said it all!

Verse 13 reads literally, ". . . with spiritual things, spiritual things comparing . . ." The RSV translation which reads, ". . . interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit," is not a good translation. Paul is not dealing with those *receiving* the apostolic message—he is dealing with those *giving* the apostolic message. This is Paul's way of saying here that the apostles spoke the revelation of the Spirit ("spiritual things") in *terms* or words ("comparables") which the Spirit directed them to use. In other words, the apostles spoke and wrote the very message, in the very terminology, the Spirit of God desired it to be written. As Peter explained it, "men spoke as they were *borne along* by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21). The Greek word *sunkrinontes* is translated *comparing* but means, more precisely, "combining, fitly joining together." It means "to adapt the language to the subject." This does *not* mean that the Holy Spirit spoke to the apostles in some "unknown tongue" or that the Bible is in some heavenly language that cannot be understood by the same rules of human language used in all other communications. It simply means that the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in selecting exactly the right words in the Greek language (for the New Testament) to communicate exactly the mind of God concerning redemption.

**2:14-16 Privileged:** Only the apostles (in the New Testament) were privileged to receive the mind of God through the Holy Spirit. And they received it as a gift from God because *no man* can know the mind of God unless God decides to give it. The natural man may know God's mind only if he is "borne along by the Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21) because "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man."

The Greek word *psychikos* is translated *unspiritual* in the RSV, but means the *physical* man, i.e., the natural man without the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. The natural man, limited to natural faculties, cannot know the will of God unless it is revealed to him by the Spirit. God's will for man's salvation must be revealed before any man can know it. This is precisely what Paul has already said: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of *what* (the revealed

message) *we* (the apostles) preach to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21). It certainly does *not* mean every human being must have his mind illuminated *separately* from the apostolic word before he can understand the Bible.

There is no need for extra-Biblical illumination or revelation for man today. As a matter of fact, the New Testament clearly teaches that a cessation of the miraculous gifts of prophecy and discerning prophecy, etc., would come soon after the first generation of Christians passed away (see our comments on I Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, 14).

The Greek words *ou dunatai gignai*, in verse 14, mean literally that the physical man *is not able to know* (unless the Spirit of God reveals) the mind of God. Until God's Spirit reveals God's mind, the physical man is like a *moron* (Gr. *moria*, foolishness)—he is unable to know. God's redemptive work in the world, without the Spirit's revelation of God's mind about redemption, is folly (or moronic) to the physical man. This may be illustrated by all the ancient (and modern) pagan attempts to explain history and nature without the propositional revelation (the Bible) of God. One poet said of history without divine revelation, ". . . it is a tale told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. . . ." Ancient philosophers grew cynical, depressed and despairing when they tried to explain life without a direct, spoken revelation from God.

But with God's Spirit searching the deep things of God's mind and revealing them as "gifts" through the apostles, everything necessary for the redemption and salvation of man becomes discernable. Nothing really makes sense in this world without the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without that, it would all be vanity (see Ecclesiastes). The physical man is not able to discover by investigation (Gr. *anakinetai*, discern, critique) the deep things of God because they are discovered (Gr. *anakinetai*, discerned) by God's spirit. Verses 14-16 and verses 11-13 mean exactly the same thing—" . . . So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we (apostles) have received not the spirit of the world (physical), but the Spirit which is from God, that we (apostles) might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." Paul, in verses 14-16, is simply restating what he said in verses 11-13.

The Spirit-filled one (Gr. *pneumatikos*), the *apostle* (remember the continuity of antecedents) discerns and discriminates *what* the mind of God is and *how* God wants it taught, and teaches all things as God's Spirit chooses to reveal them. The apostles, borne along by the Spirit of God, examined and discerned the deep things of the mind of God and then spoke them in language that could be understood by the human mind.

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The Spirit-filled apostles were, in their capacity as *revealers* of God's word, not to be judged by any one about the veracity of their message. This would not apply to the actions or life-style of the apostles. But when it came to what they preached, no one could say it was not from God. The apostolic message became the touchstone by which all other preaching was judged. The apostles proved they alone revealed the mind of the Spirit by the miracles they wrought. It was the miraculous baptism in the Holy Spirit that endowed the apostles to determine whether any teaching was from God or not (see I John 4:1-6). The man of the Spirit, the apostle (not the Christian), was not to be contradicted or disobeyed when he spoke God's revealed mind. In the first century, before the New Testament revelation reached its completion in written form, only an apostle (or someone upon whom the apostles had laid hands) could judge whether a purported "revelation" was a God-given revelation or not. Now that we have the completed revelation of God in written form, all truth purporting to be from God is to be tested as to its conformity by the written revelation of the apostles.

In verse 16 Paul summarizes this whole discussion of the problem of revelation versus the wisdom of the world. The RSV translates the first sentence, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to *instruct* him? Actually, the word *instruct* is a translation of the Greek word *sumbibase*. That is the only place in the New Testament where *sumbibase* is translated *instruct*. Everywhere else in the New Testament it is translated *knit* (see Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2; 2:19) or *proving* (see Acts 9:22; 16:10). The word *sumbibase* really means, "to understand or know or conclude so as to be *joined* together with God." Thus, Paul is saying, "We inspired apostles so have the mind of God through the revelation of the Spirit that we are united in Him teaching His will as no uninspired ("natural") man could ever do." The second sentence of this verse leaves no doubt that Paul's subject here is divine revelation, not spiritual maturity. The Greek is constructed: *hemeis de noun Christou echomen*, literally, "we indeed, the mind of Christ are having." The syntax puts strong emphasis on *we* (the apostles). That is the subject—what the *apostles* have as a supernatural gift and *not* what every Christian has by faith.

Now it should be clear to even the most cursory reader of this letter to the Corinthian church why Paul deals with this subject of apostolic revelation at the very outset of the letter. He must establish beyond contradiction the source of his authority. He is going to have to deal with very sensitive and controversial issues in both the corporate life of the church and the private lives of its members.

What he will say *must* be accepted as direct revelation from the mind of God to the church and not simply human opinion. Divine revelation is the only absolute wisdom, and the deeply spiritual problems besetting the Corinthian church will not be solved with anything less.

## APPLICATIONS:

1. The apostolic message was demonstrated to be the mind of the Holy Spirit. The written apostolic message in the books of the New Testament is as true, as authentic, as powerful now as it was then. It needs no further demonstrations any more than a fact that has been once established in court needs reestablishing (Heb. 2:3-4).

The apostolic message needs to be preached. Edward John Carnell said, "If it is true that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save sinners, have we any right to say that we love sinners if we fail to confront them with this truth? And where can we find a divinely validated account of this truth apart from Scripture? In sum, we can express no higher love to lost humanity than to preach the gospel in the precise form in which God has been pleased to reveal it.

2. If the apostolic message did not need humanly-limited wisdom to make it powerful (relevant) then, it does not need it today. The Gospel is relevant and applicable to all of man's problems today!

In fact, it is the only wisdom that is relevant.

By obeying it we can purify our souls (I Peter 1:22).

By believing and obeying it we can be born anew (I Peter 1:23-25).

By knowing and believing it we can know ourselves as God knows us (Heb. 4:11-13).

By knowing, believing and obeying we can have His Spirit living in us (John 14:23; I John 2:24; 3:24, etc.).

3. If the mind of God, His wisdom for man's salvation, could not be known by human speculation or human sciences then, it never could.

All human religions which do not depend upon the revealed word of God (specifically the apostolic message in the New Testament alone) are powerless and irrelevant.

All human religions and philosophies which contradict or oppose the revealed apostolic message are in opposition to God, because the apostolic message is *all* the mind of God which He has chosen to reveal to the world about salvation.

If ever God wanted man to know anything, God had to tell man—man could not read God's mind. That was true in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament covenant.

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4. God chose to tell man what He wanted man to know in words—human language. Language (symbols verbalized) makes the communication of minds possible. Without it, communication (at least to the human mind) is impossible. Language makes the imposition of one will upon another possible. Thus, human language makes “personal confrontation” possible. Without it personal relationships are impossible (cf. Helen Keller).

THE WAY WE HAVE A “PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP” WITH GOD IS THROUGH HIS WORD . . . JUST LIKE WE HAVE “PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS” WITH OTHER BEINGS!

Of course, God’s personality is divine, and when you let His personality come into yours through His word, you have a Person in you. Words are “instruments” by which a part of you becomes a resident in me. The Holy Word is an Holy Instrument by which the Holy Spirit becomes a resident in you.

5. God’s redemptive work in the world without the Spirit’s revelation (the apostolic message) is folly to the man limited by physical only.

The man who does not believe the Bible is God’s divine revelation has a very limited knowledge of what life is all about. Eating, drinking, relief from all the pain possible, and vainly hoping not to die is about all he sees in life.

Why was I born?

Why do I work?

Why do I get money and spend it?

Why have children?

Why think?

Why help anyone?

Why even live?

This, in fact, is where many people end it all today when they are taught and believe that there is no divinely revealed message from a Heavenly Father.

6. The apostolic message (the written word of the New Testament) is the final and complete mind of God for man’s salvation (cf. II Tim. 3:16-17). It is all that is needed to make a man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Every preacher, teacher, book, program or lifestyle must be tested by that apostolic revelation. If it does not conform in principle and precept it must not be followed.

## APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why did Paul find it necessary to defend the simplicity of his presentation of Christianity?
2. Could preachers you've heard use more simplicity?
3. Did Paul mean to say he did not want people to exercise their minds and think about Christianity? Is there nothing profound about God and Christ?
4. Did Paul limit his preaching at Corinth to only the details about the crucifixion ("Christ and him crucified")? How do you know?
5. Why can't mankind know the wisdom that comes from God on his own?
6. Is there anything man can know about God from his environment (the world in which he lives)? (See Rom. 1:18ff.) What?
7. Is creation a revelation from God? Does man need the Bible to understand creation? Why?
8. How would you illustrate that no man can know the mind of God unless God reveals it?
9. How do we know those to whom God reveals his mind?
10. Does God continue today to reveal his mind to so-called "prophets"? How do you know?
11. Why did God reveal his mind through the apostles in human words?
12. How are we to understand God's revelation in human words—what rules of interpretation should we use to understand the Bible?
13. Would it be necessary to use different rules of language to interpret a cookbook than to interpret the Bible?
14. Is it impossible to understand the Bible unless the Holy Spirit works directly (and extra-Biblically) on each individual to enlighten him?
15. Is God able to use human language so as to make himself understood by man without extra divine aid? How do you know?
16. Why would Paul deal with the problem of apostolic revelation at the very beginning of his letter to Corinth?
17. Is the problem of apostolic revelation a current problem in Christendom today?
18. Do you believe the New Testament is the final, full and perfect revelation of God to man in all things that pertain to life and godliness?

## Chapter Three

### THE PROBLEM OF MINISTRY (3:1-23)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why is ministry a problem with Christians?
2. How can Paul address these jealous and strife-minded Christians as "brethren"?
3. Why does the discussion of survival or destruction of works arise here?
4. What is God's temple?
5. How does one become wise by becoming a fool?

#### SECTION 1

#### Commence With Spiritual Feeding (3:1-4)

**3** But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? <sup>4</sup>For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely men?

**3:1-3a Babyish:** It is of first importance to note that while in chapter two the contrast is between uninspired human beings (or *psychikos*, physical, finite man) and the inspired apostles (or *pneumatikos*, spirit-guided one), the contrast in chapter three is between Christians who are carnal or fleshly-minded (Gr. *sarkikois*) and the spiritual maturity they should have attained (*pneumatikois*). Chapter two deals with divine revelation *given* by God to some and not to others. Chapter three deals with spiritual maturation which all Christians may *attain* through study and practice of the written word of God. The use of different Greek words in the two chapters makes the difference apparent.

There is, course, an essential connection between the two chapters. Paul is connecting his claim (in chapters one and two) for the divinely inspired authority of his teaching to the spiritual problem (in chapter



three) of the Christians in Corinth. Had they fed themselves on apostolic revelation more than on Greek sophistries, they would not have the problems of immature, fleshly-minded attitudes toward Christian ministry.

There was something wrong with the "feeding" the Corinthian church was getting. "We are what we eat . . ." is an adage some apply to the physical person. The same principle holds true in the spiritual person. Jesus stated this principle very clearly in his great sermon on the Bread of Life (John 6:25-71). Unless a man feeds on the Bread of Life he will have no spirituality in him, and Jesus plainly said that his words were spirit and life (John 6:63). Jesus said his own "food" was to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 4:31-34). If Jesus found it necessary to feed his mind and life on the will of God, so must we! The explicit work of the Christian ministry is the feeding of the flock of God (see Acts 20:28-32; John 21:15-19; I Peter 5:2) to bring it to spiritual maturity (see Eph. 4:1-16; Col. 1:24-29; Heb. 5:11-13).

What is spirituality? Paul clearly defines spirituality as "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit" (see Rom. 8:5-8). Spirituality is *not* emotionalism. Spirituality is *not* measured by quantity of good deeds. Spirituality is fundamentally a *mind-set*. No matter how emotional we may become or how many religious ceremonies we perform, if our motives or our reasons for doing them are carnal (worldly) and selfish, we are not spiritual. Jesus called the very religious Pharisees hypocrites because their reasons for being religious were self-serving (cf. Matt. 6:1-8; 23:1-39).

If spirituality is setting one's mind on the things of the Spirit, where do we find the things of the Spirit in order that we may *set* our minds on them? That is precisely what Paul is talking about in I Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2—the *things* of the *Spirit* are revealed in the *teachings* of the *apostles*. The apostles have the mind of Christ and of God because they are the ones to whom the Spirit of God has revealed them! The things of the Spirit are *not* found innately in man's heart. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt (see Jer. 17:9). God has not put his mind in every man in some subjective way. God has put his mind in his Word in an objective way through the revelation given to the apostles. Now any man who wants to assimilate the mind of God into his mind may do so by assimilating the objective word of God. This assimilative process involves, of course, putting the *things* of the Spirit to practice in one's life. We cannot have Christ in us unless we *do* his commandments (I John 2:24; 3:24). But we cannot know what the will of God for us is until

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we read, understand and believe the revelation of God made to us in human language by the apostles.

Paul declared to the Corinthians that he had to address them as *infants* (Gr. *nepiois*) in respect to their spiritual maturation. It was clear to him that they were not *setting* their *minds* on the things of the Spirit because they were still thinking as worldly-minded people would. Paul does *not* mean that he was talking to non-Christians for he plainly calls them "brethren." He means simply that having made their initial commitment to Christ and having been baptized into him (cf. Acts 18:8), they did not feed themselves on God's word enough to bring them to a state of spiritual growth commensurate with their opportunities and privileges. They had not trained their faculties by practice and study of the apostolic message to be able to distinguish good from evil as well as they should (see Heb. 5:11-14). They were allowing their ways of thinking and living to be dominated more by the habits of their pre-Christian life than by God's will.

Do not wonder that Paul still called them brethren. Spiritual maturation comes, like physical growth, slowly. We would not throw away a baby brother in our physical family because he did not grow into physical manhood overnight. But we do insist that a baby brother eat, learn, exercise and grow. And we make all kinds of personal sacrifices to see that he does. So must we tenderly feed and strengthen our spiritual brethren, no matter what stage of spiritual growth they may manifest. All of us are spiritually deficient when we compare ourselves to Christ, our Elder Brother. The leadership of the church cannot relax its dedication to the ministry of bringing all members to spiritual maturity in Christ. There may be many causes for Christian immaturity:

- a. Inadequate study of the Bible in the corporate worship of the church; superficial sermonizing, unhermeneutical Bible studies.
- b. Low expectations for individual growth. Teachers and preachers may not expect their Bible students to be able to think deeply. Expect the most from every brother.
- c. Failure of the church leadership to provide opportunities for all members to share in the Lord's work ("each part working properly . . ." Eph. 4:16).
- d. Failure of the church leadership to accept their call from Christ to exercise firm, but gentle and merciful, moral guidance to church members.
- e. Just plain unwillingness on the part of Christians to give up thinking and doing worldly things. If any one is willing to do Christ's will, he will mature (see John 7:17).

There was something seriously deficient in the process of Christian maturation within the Corinthian church. Whether it was the fault of those charged with the "feeding" or of those being "fed" (probably both) we are not certain. It is certain that it had to do with the teaching and believing of the most fundamental Christian doctrine of all—the resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. comments on I Cor. 15:33). They were still infantile in their thinking. They were still acting like children, apparently able to be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles . . ." (Eph. 4:14).

**3:3b-4 Biased:** The "party" spirit is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Only the carnal (worldly-minded) think of structuring the church in terms of human superiority and arrogance. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians they were behaving like "run-of-the-mill" (non-Christian) human beings who, through jealousy and strife, scheme and plot to promote their own fame and fortune.

Probably the most crucial issue Jesus had to deal with in his ministry on earth was the nature of the kingdom of God. Most people conceived of the kingdom as a place to establish worldly fame and to promote their own advancement. This involved jealousy and strife by:

- a. Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 2:3-4)
- b. Disciples of John the Baptist (John 4:25-30)
- c. Thousands of followers (John 6:15)
- d. The twelve apostles (Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50)
- e. The disciples wondering who is the greatest (Matt. 18:1)
- f. Jesus' own half-brothers (John 7:3-4)
- g. Those dining at the Pharisee's home (Luke 14:7-14)
- h. James & John (and their mother) asking Jesus for chief honors (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)
- i. Pharisees in their love for the places of honor in synagogue (Matt. 23:5-12)
- j. Twelve apostles at the Last Supper arguing about who would be greatest among them (Luke 22:24-28)
- k. Peter, refusing to let Jesus wipe his feet as a servant (John 13:5-11)

These instances do not take into account the multitude of inferences (from Acts through Revelation) that such jealousy and strife arose among the early churches. The life-style of the person whose highest hopes begin and end with this present world and a fleshly existence is one of immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party

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spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like (see Gal. 5:19-21). Those who belong to Christ have put such a life-style to death ("crucified" it). Christians, who believe there is a higher plane on which to live than bodily functions and who believe there is another world coming, live a life-style of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They trust Jesus Christ that this is true and real because he lived such life-style to perfection on earth, was slain because of it, but rose from the dead to vindicate it forever.

Jesus' statement, "He who would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all" (Matt. 20:27) is proven true by his resurrection from the dead. Those who say, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos" are not living in the light of Christ's truth.

### SECTION 2

#### **Consists In Spiritual Work For God (3:5-17)**

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup>He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup>For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—<sup>13</sup>each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup>If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

**3:5-9 Builders:** All Christians are workers in God's field—builders on God's building. What are apostles? Workers, like every other Christian. They may have gifts from God diverse from ours to equip them for the special job to which God called them, but they are still only workers. Paul calls himself and Apollos *servants* (Gr. *diakonoi*, deacons, table-waiters). The apostles were merely messenger-boys, delivering God's revelation to mankind. They were sent into the world of the first century to serve, not to be served. Paul was a *planter* (Gr. *ephuteusa*) and Apollos was a *waterer* (Gr. *epotisen*) in God's field. God is the owner of the field and the Master of the servants. Everyone else is a planter, waterer, cultivator, or a reaper. Some are sent to sow and some to reap (John 4:36-38). Neither one is more important than the other. Since not even one apostle is superior to another, partisan loyalty to one human servant of God or another which creates jealousy and strife is senseless.

The Greek tenses in verse 6 point to an interesting emphasis. The verbs used for "planted" and "watered" are aorist tense while the Greek verb for *gathering* (*euxanen*) is imperfect. Aorist means a single action completed in the past, while imperfect shows continuous past action. It could be translated thus: At one time in the past Paul planted in Corinth, and later Apollos watered there; but God was making growth occur all along during that time. It is also of importance to notice in verse 7 that the strong adversative conjunction in Greek, the word *alla*, puts emphasis on the contrast. Verse 7 might be translated "He who plants is nothing, he who waters is nothing, *but (alla)* God who *is giving growth* (Gr. *auxanon*, present participle) *is everything.*" One planted, some watered, and each was the same as the other—nothing without God for their labors produced only because God made it to be so!

Verse 8 is a reaffirmation of what Jesus taught in the gospels. All Christian servants are equal—they are all servants. Each servant will receive his wages according to *faithfulness*. Servants do not receive wages according to amount produced for producing is God's doing—God gives the increase. The servant is responsible only to faithfully use the tools over which he has been given a stewardship. The servant is not responsible for the amount of the crop.

Paul wants to discuss with Corinth the problem of pride as a factor contributing to the schismatism in the church. The attitude of servanthood is part of the answer to division in the church. Involvement, increased work-load or busyness will *not* produce Christian unity. There can only be real unity when Christians are emptied of self and willingly take the form of servants (Phil. 2:1-11).

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**3:10-11 Boss:** The apostle uses two figures of speech (verse 9) to illustrate the work of ministering the gospel. It is farming and building. Paul called the Corinthian Christians God's *field* (Gr. *georgion*, from which we get the name *George*, and the word *farmer*) and he called them God's *building* (Gr. *oikodome*, house, edifice). Paul called himself a "masterbuilder" working along with his co-laborers erecting God's building, the church. The Greek word *architekton* is the word from which our English word *architect* originates. However the use of the word by the ancient Greeks indicates the word had a wider application than our English word architect. Literally the word comes from, *arche*, master, superior—and *tekton*, artificer, skilled craftsman. In the context of this chapter Paul exhorts Christians, "Let each man *take care* how he builds. . . ." The ministry of the gospel demands the best skill in selection and use of "building materials." Paul refers to his own extreme care, as if he were a master technician, using precisely and exactly the right "material" for the foundation of the church in Corinth. Paul used Jesus Christ and him crucified as the foundation.

But the main thrust of this passage is that Paul used the "material" he was told to use by the "Boss" (God). Paul writes, "According to the grace given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation. . . ." The RSV translates, "According to the commission of God given me. . . ." but the Greek word is *charin* which is translated *grace* or *gift*. Of course, Paul often refers to his being called by God to be an apostle (a builder of God's church) using the word "grace" (see Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 15:10; I Tim. 1:12-16, etc.). What Paul is stressing here is that he exercised all the skill he had to follow the orders (or instructions) of God who was gracious enough to employ him as a builder on His building.

Immature, spiritual babies were not ready to really add to the "building" of God in Corinth which Paul had begun. Paul's foundation was the sure and solid rock of God's revelation that Jesus was the Christ. That was what God told Paul to lay as a foundation for the church. Paul did not vary from the instructions of the "Boss." Ignorant (I Cor. 10:1) and unskilled (in the revelation of God) Christians must not disregard the divinely revealed Word (blueprint) of the Owner concerning the building of the church. All Christians who wish to involve themselves in building the Lord's church must train themselves (see Heb. 5:11-14), lest they attempt to lay a foundation other than Jesus as the Christ, or lest they build upon that foundation with unenduring materials.

There is only one foundation upon which the church is built—Jesus as the only Anointed of God (and all that implies as to Jesus' deity), (see Matt. 16:13-19; Eph. 2:20; I Peter 2:4-8). To try to build on any other foundation is vain (cf. Ps. 127:1). Actually, God laid (past tense) his Son, the Messiah-Servant, as the foundation of his new covenant people (the church) long before Paul was born. God laid the promises of the Servant as the foundation in the Zion of the Old Testament (see Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42). The Jews, for the most part, rejected Jesus as the Messiah and thus rejected the foundation-stone of God. The very foundation-stone God sent became a stone of destruction falling upon those who rejected him!

**3:12-17 Building:** Paul had laid God's foundation. Apollos had continued to instruct the new converts. Now, some of the Christians of the congregation in Corinth were beginning to teach and lead in building the church. But it was evident to Paul that care was not being taken in their building. They were producing disciples who were jealous, indifferent to immorality in the church, bringing litigations against one another in pagan courts, careless about marriage, uncaring about weaker brethren, disrespectful in the corporate worship of the church and toward God ordained structures of human authority, both prideful and envious in the matter of supernatural gifts, teaching confusion about the bodily resurrection, and slack in matters of Christian stewardship. The teaching leadership of the Corinthian church was constructing God's building with weak and unendurable material. They were not building up Christian people who had strong, self-disciplined, servant-minded faith in Christ and his Word.

There are two classes of building materials (disciples, Christians); fireproof and flammable. Some Christians will be able to stand the scorching heat of persecution and testing while others will wither under it and die (cf. Matt. 13:5-6; 13:20-21). Paul's main concern in this exhortation is the ability of the Corinthian Christians to withstand the fiery trials which were coming upon the whole first-century world of Christendom (see I Cor. 7:26; I Peter 2:20-23; 4:12-13). John the apostle writes in the book of Revelation about the "great tribulation" coming upon the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries. Christians had been put to the "fires" of testing ever since the Day of Pentecost when the church was begun (see Acts of the Apostles). And physical or economic hardships are not the only forms of testing the Christian must prepare to meet. There is also the seductiveness of fleshly self-indulgence and the deceptiveness of false religious teaching.

A day of testing comes to every follower of Jesus, in every age. The word *hemera*, Greek for *day*, is *not* capitalized in the Greek text,

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although it is preceded by the definite article. That, however, does not necessarily mean *he hemera* ("the day") is pointing to the final Judgment Day of God. The Old and New Testament both have many references to specific, past, historical judgments of God upon the earth and use the term, "day of the Lord" or, "the day of the Lord." Many days of testing (in fact every day) are in the Christian's life. Paul is probably referring to a specific era of testing (perhaps the Neronian persecutions or those later under Domitian).

Paul was concerned from the reports he had received of conditions in the Corinthian church that many of the Christians there were "wood, hay and stubble" as far as their spiritual substance was concerned. Paul knew that Christians then faced "an impending distress." Their spirituality was about to be proven (Gr. *dokimasei*, tested) or disproven by some "fire" (Gr. *pyri*). Paul comes back to this subject of testing and temptation for the Corinthian Christians in chapter ten where he uses the tragic story of the Israelites in the wilderness as a case in point. Some of the Christians at Corinth will withstand the "impending distress" and others will be consumed.

The trials of the Christian life (whether persecution or temptation) will prove not only what the material (disciple) is, but it will also prove how careful the builder (teacher) has been with the material. The "day" will disclose each teacher's work! Temptations, trials and tests of faith are very revealing. Every preacher, Sunday School teacher, Christian parent, elder, deacon, and Bible college teacher who has ever sown the seed of God's word anywhere will have his work tested. Fires of persecution and temptation are so certain to come Peter chides Christians for being surprised, or acting as if these "fires" were something strange (I Peter 1:7; 4:12-13). It was predicted that the Messiah would bring the fires of testing to mankind (cf. Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:1-5). Jesus himself said he came to cast testing-fire upon the earth (Luke 12:49). God will not have any person built into his church as a living stone who has not been tested. The "wood, hay, stubble" kind of disciple is illustrated by Jesus in his parable of the soils and the "rocky ground" which has "no root in itself" so when the scorching heat of tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word "immediately he falls away"; or in the "thorny ground" which lets the word be choked out by the cares of the world and the delight in riches. The gold, silver and precious stones kind of disciple is like the "good ground" of the parable or one who hears the word and holds it fast in an honest and good heart bringing forth fruit with patience (see Matt. 13:1-23; Luke 8:4-15).

Thoughtless building, using shallow and superficial "materials" (as some teachers at Corinth appear to have been doing) will program



the structure for demolition when the inevitable fires of testing come. But there will be reward for the worker in God's farm or God's building who builds with depth and discipline. Such a worker's materials will "survive" (Gr. *menei*, remain)—they will not perish in the scorching pressures of temptation and trial. Paul's reward or "crown" was seeing his converts survive (see Phil. 4:1; I Thess. 2:19-20). The apostle John expressed the same joy that his converts were remaining true to Christ (cf. II John 4; III John 3, 4). The teacher who uses superficial materials will suffer the loss of this reward but he will be saved even if his part of the building (disciples) cannot survive the fiery trials. Even the best teachers cannot be sure those whom they teach and to whom they give their best will withstand temptation and persecution. Jesus lost Judas as well as many "thousands" of disciples who left him and followed him no more (cf. John 6:66ff.). Paul lost Demas (II Tim. 4:10). John lost Diotrophes (II John 9). The seven churches of Asia Minor lost members (Rev. ch. 2-3). However, the teacher's own salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of his disciples, but on his own faithfulness to Christ. Every teacher will face trials and hardships, discouragements and heartaches. The teacher, too, must go through the fire. He will be saved only if he is built of enduring material. The teacher, also, is a part of God's building, having been built into it by someone else. Every human being will survive God's testing-fires according to his own faith. No one will be condemned for someone else's lack of faith. Some may be saved and experience joy that others they pointed to Christ were saved also. And some may be saved and experience loss that those they pointed to Christ refused to be saved.

The honest and sincere builder (teacher) will be saved, even if some of his material (pupils) does not endure the testing. But the one who deliberately takes up the work of wrecking God's building will most certainly be destroyed. In this context, the *entire* church is being called "God's temple" (see also Eph. 2:19-22). This is *not* a reference to the individual Christian as in I Corinthians 6:19-20, and it should not be used as such. This refers to the jealous and striving brethren at Corinth who were quarreling (1:11-17) and dividing the church into separate parties following human leaders. There is no excuse for separating the local, or universal, church of Jesus Christ into factions following human leaders or using human names. Not even the name of Christ may be used to separate oneself from anyone else who is sincerely trying their best to be obedient to Christ's teachings. The only reason by which a Christian may justify separating himself from one who claims to be a follower of Jesus is deliberate, demonstrable,

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provable false teaching or licentious living. Even then such separation must have as its goal the reclamation of a brother or sister straying from Christ, (II Thess. 3:14; II Cor. 2:5-11; I Cor. 5:3-5).

God will not tolerate those who wreck his church by willful division. One must be either a builder or a wrecker. There is no middle ground. Every man or woman either gathers with Christ or scatters (Matt. 12:30). All people fall into one of two categories: either a citizen of God's kingdom making every effort to build it, or an alien enemy trying to destroy it. How terribly awesome is the sin of those who rebelliously and deliberately perpetuate divisions among believers in Christ. Division is perpetuated when unscriptural doctrine is wilfully perpetuated; when party-spirit or partiality is perpetuated; and when legalism is perpetuated. For further study of Christian unity see *Learning From Jesus*, by Seth Wilson, College Press, pgs. 412-430.

### SECTION 3

#### **Concludes With Spiritual Compensation (3:18-23)**

18 Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," <sup>20</sup>and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." <sup>21</sup>So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; <sup>23</sup>and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

**3:18-20 Nothing:** The man who thinks he is following the way of wisdom by dividing the church into factions striving against one another for superiority is self-deceived. The Greek word *exapatato* is intensive and means *thoroughly* deceived; it is related to the word *apatao*, meaning "to cheat." The man who is looking to glorify himself or some other man in the church is only cheating himself of the real reward from God. The wisdom of this doomed world is foolishness. The world that refuses to see through the perspective of God's revealed truth is a world that cannot know what is real and abiding. Christians do not see anything from a human standpoint of view (cf. II Cor. 4:16-18; 5:16-17). Christians are the ones who are wise; all who are not Christians are cheating themselves of God's divine wisdom. These are being blinded by the devil (II Cor. 4:3-6) and

deceived into thinking that following Christ is foolishness. It is true, "he who would be greatest in the kingdom must be the servant of all" (Mark 9:35; Luke 22:24-27).

If we are to follow Christ and have his reward we must be ready to be considered a "fool" by the worldly-wise. Those who give their money to see that the gospel is proclaimed and to minister to people's physical needs in the name of Jesus are "fools" according to the worldly-wise. The "smart" thing to do, according to the worldling, is to keep one's money and invest it for one's future security. The Christian who is willing to take the lowliest task or position, and let others receive the credit and applause, is a "fool" according to the world.

But the worldling is a fool! No human being can "out-fox" God. Paul says all wisdom in this world not focused on knowing God and doing his will is foolishness—but how many people believe that? God traps all the worldly-wise in their craftiness. The Greek word *panourgia* is translated *craftiness*. Literally, it means, "all working," that is, a "crafty" person is one who is versatile and clever in everything—he thinks! The word *panourgia* is applied to the subtlety of the devil in deceiving Eve (II Cor. 11:3) and to the methods of teachers who deceive immature Christians with false doctrines (Eph. 4:14). Christian teachers renounce the very idea that they need to practice such human cleverness (II Cor. 4:2). The Christian does not need the clever subtleties of falsehood and deception to feel secure in this world. He has the faithful, never changing word of God which makes him happy and secure. The one who lives by deceit and dishonesty is *caught* in the trap of guilt, shame, and destruction of selfhood. That is the way God governs his creation, (cf. Romans ch. 1 and 2).

**3:21-23 Everything:** While the non-Christian thinks the Christian is a fool and has nothing, Paul says the Christian has *everything*! Everything God has made belongs to the Christian to use to glorify God and thus be glorified by God. God has given everything to the Christian because only the child of God has surrendered his evaluation and use of everything to the revealed will of God. The Christian is the only person who knows what everything in God's creation is for! To surrender one's mind to human leaders is really a kind of self-impooverishment. Human "wisemen" who deny God understand nothing about what God has made. They will eventually use what God made for good to produce evil. But the Christian, in harmony with Christ's will, has opened up to himself the whole universe as his servant. Everything God has made is *good* (cf. Genesis, ch. 1-2; I Tim. 4:4-5). God intended his creation for man's benefit—to make

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man a spiritual partner with him and to give man enjoyment. When a man uses all that God has made to promote good, truth, purity, holiness and mercifulness, he is rewarded with glory and happiness.

All things belong to the Christian. Some in Corinth had been saying, "I belong to Paul," others, "I belong to Apollos." But the truth was that Paul and Apollos belonged to the Christians as their servants to bring them into a glorifying, enjoyable relationship with Christ. The world was theirs to use in service to God by serving men. In this they would be exalted and find satisfaction. Life was theirs to live in harmony with God's truth and holiness and in so doing find purpose and fulfillment. Even death belonged to them. Death belongs to the Christian as a release from the trials and tribulations of this world and a door opening into eternal bliss (Phil. 1:21; II Cor. 4:16—5:1). "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom. 8:32) Christians are stewards of the whole universe. It belongs to their Father. He has given it into their hands for faithful use. He did not give it to them to be enslaved. They are to control it as men made free by Christ to enjoy and praise the name of their Master. They will be asked for an accounting when the Master returns. They will be asked only if they honestly used it to the best of their abilities according to his will.

The fact that God has given the Christian everything in his creation in no way gives the Christian room to be arrogant or boastful. With great privilege comes great responsibility. It is only by virtue that the Christian is in Christ that God gives these things. Having been united in Christ by faith and obedience the Christian has victory over death, life, present, future and everything else. Man had been given dominion over God's creation in the Garden of Eden, but man lost it by believing the devil and rejecting God. The Son of man (God incarnate) won that dominion back for man by his life of perfect faith and obedience (see Heb. 2:5-18). We share in what Christ has won for man only if we hold our faith in him firm to the end (Heb. 3:14).

To minister or not minister has been a problem with God's covenant people from the time Israel left Egypt until now. In old Israel (from Moses to Malachi) the majority of priests, prophets and kings were self-centered. There were always a few saintly exceptions. Among the thousands of Israel who assumed the offices of ministry, only a few heroic individuals really ministered God's will to God's people. There was Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha; there was David, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah; there was Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah and the other faithful prophets. These ministered in times of great distress,

devastation and discouragement. But for the most part the whole nation of Israel defaulted on its call from God to minister to the nations around them—they begged, rather, to be ministered unto. So God said through the old prophets that he would form a new “nation” a “new Israel” out of every nation on earth who would be ministers unto him and the world (cf. Isa. 66:18-23, etc.). The church of Christ is that new nation of priests (I Peter 1:9-10). *Every Christian is called to be a minister.* Every Christian is a priest offering the sacrifices of praise and confession with the lips and of good deeds toward those in need (see Heb. 13:15-16). When every Christian is committed to ministry rather than being ministered to, the problem of division in the church will disappear.

### APPLICATIONS:

1. Servanthood is learned through practice, it is not innate. Jesus had a difficult time teaching his first disciples that greatness was in serving others. He taught it primarily by his own example: “The Son of man came to minister, not to be ministered to. . . .” Jesus washed the disciples feet (John 13) and said they ought have the same attitude toward one another. Paul served the Corinthian Christians—he was not served by them. In fact he refused to take any salary from them for his ministry to them so they might have it as an example (II Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13-18).
2. Dissension and the party-spirit in a church or among Christians is a sure sign of worldly-mindedness (i.e., *not* thinking as God thinks in his word). It is usually a result of refusing to see human beings as God sees them and, rather, seeing them as the world does—objects to be exploited for one’s own selfish purposes (see II Cor. 5:16-17). It is perpetuated by “comparing ourselves . . . or measuring ourselves by one another” instead of by Christ (cf. II Cor. 10:12). Christians can never make spiritual progress or come to maturity until they repent of such worldly thinking.
3. Every Christian, whether apostle, evangelist, teacher, elder, deacon, secretary, carpenter, custodian, man or woman is simply a *laborer* in God’s “field” or on God’s “building.” Only God and his Son have authority to be “boss.” Men are simply planters, waterers—God alone has the power (through his word) to produce life and growth.
4. Every laborer or worker will take care how he works on God’s building if he wants his work to survive and enjoy it:

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He will build only on the One Foundation—Christ crucified and resurrected.

He will exert every effort to produce quality materials; materials that will survive the fires of temptation and testing.

He will recognize that he too is saved by the quality of fire-survival built into his own life.

5. Christians must believe that the compensations of self-serving are for fools, while the compensations of servanthood for Christ and others are for the wise.
6. God made everything good and he made it for Christians to exercise dominion over in order to praise and serve him, to enjoy and benefit from, and to use to bring others to salvation in Christ.

### APPREHENSION:

1. How could Paul call these Corinthians “brethren” and, in the same breath, say they were not “spiritual men”?
2. What is a “babe” in Christ? Should we remain “babes” in Christ? How does this fit into Christ’s admonition that we must “turn and become like little children” to enter the kingdom?
3. Should Christians be fed in “stages” or “phases”? Are all Christians ready to receive teaching from the scriptures on the same level?
4. What is the responsibility of the leaders of the church in this?
5. What is a *clear* manifestation of spiritual immaturity?
6. Do you find this clearly manifested in the brotherhood of Christians today?
7. Is Paul saying in this chapter we should not show respect or honor to those who teach us the scriptures? What is he saying about human teachers?
8. What is the *one* and *only* essential to church growth?
9. Where does God put his power to give growth? Are churches and Christian leaders “plugging in to” God’s growing-power or relying on something else?
10. If apostles are “not anything” but planters and waterers, why did God give them powers and authority he gave to no other Christian?
11. Is God serious about Christians being careful how they build his “building”?
12. Name some practical ways we may be careful about how we build!
13. Have you seen any of your “building materials” tested in the “fire”?

14. Have any failed the test? Have any survived? What made the difference?
15. Will there be any stars in your crown when you get to heaven?
16. What will God do with those who destroy his church through division?
17. Did you realize God was that serious about Christian unity?
18. Why is it foolish for Christians to be biased in favor of some of God's servants and reject others?
19. Do you really believe that all of God's creation is yours? Are you using it?

## Chapter Four

### THE PROBLEM OF FAVORITISM AND CONCEIT (4:1-21)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why would Paul emphasize trustworthiness and then tell these Corinthians not to judge one another?
2. Does the admonition against favoring one another mean Christians should not feel closer to some brethren than to others?
3. What is Paul's purpose in demeaning the office of apostle?
4. Is it really all right to imitate Christian leaders like Paul—should we not rather imitate Christ?
5. What is the "power" in which the kingdom of God consists?

#### SECTION 1

##### Partiality (4:1-5)

**4** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup>Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup>But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup>Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

**4:1-4 Cause:** The Corinthian Christians were showing partiality toward their favorite apostles and other leaders of the church. Partiality has no place in the kingdom of God. Partiality is defined: "To show favor to a person because of his external possessions, position or privilege; or, to accept the person instead of the cause." In the Old Testament the Hebrew words *nasha panim* are translated *partiality* and mean literally, "face-taking" (i.e. to judge on the basis of appearance). The Greek words *prosopolempsia* and *prosopolempstes* (sometimes translated, "respect of person") also mean literally, "face-taking" (see Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; James 2:1, 9).



Partiality is severely condemned in the Old Testament (see Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 16:19-20; Job 13:10; Prov. 24:23; 28:21; Mal. 2:9). Jesus clearly taught that it was not to be a part of the character of the kingdom-citizen (Matt. 5:43-48). The epistles speak severely against partiality (see Col. 3:22—4:1; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; I Tim. 5:21; James 2:9).

Partiality creates discord (Matt. 20:24; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46f.; 22:24-27; Acts 6:1-6; I Cor. ch. 11-14); it causes denigration of God (Jer. 18:13ff.; Rom. 2:24; Gal. 2:11ff.); it defiles the conscience; it destroys the soul.

The cause for the display of partiality among the Corinthian brethren is evident to Paul. They were not evaluating apostles and other leaders by the *one and only* God-approved standard which is *faithfulness*. Paul uses two Greek words by which he categorizes *all* Christians whether they be leaders or followers. The word *servant* in Greek (*huperetas*) is the word from a mariner's vocabulary designating the "under-rower" in the ancient galley ships of the Mediterranean Sea. It came to mean "under-servant" or "underling" and was applied to anyone who took orders from someone higher. The second word, *steward*, in Greek is *oikonomos*, literally, "law of the house," meaning "house manager." Barclay calls the *oikonomos*, the *major domo*. The point Paul is stressing here is no matter what a Christian's place in the church, he is a servant. All Christians are underlings and take orders from Christ. All Christians are merely stewards taking care of the Master's goods. All Christians are to be evaluated only as to whether they have faithfully *accepted* this position as servant or not. We are not to compare one another's relationship to the Lord on the basis of skills, talents, accomplishments or any other quantitative measurement. When Jesus told the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) it is noteworthy that the nobleman did not condemn the man who had been given five pounds and came back with only five pounds more. If quantitative measurements are the criteria of God's judgments, the servant given five pounds should have been condemned for not returning ten more like the first servant. The only servant condemned was the third one who was unfaithful and distrusted the nobleman's faithfulness and fairness, (see comments, *The Gospel of Luke*, pages 420-425, by Butler, pub. College Press).

Christians must *always* think of apostles or other brethren in places of leadership as servants. To think otherwise produces favoritism and partiality and, ultimately, destructive division. Paul was emphatic! He insisted that the Corinthian Christians should *regard* the apostles as no more than underlings and stewards. The Greek word translated

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*regard* is *logizestho*. It is a word from the Greek world of business and finance. It means "to enter a calculation on a ledger." He wants it calculated and written down that apostles are merely servants. They are *not* Masters! The church must not enter one apostle on the "ledger" as of more account than others. The church must not show favoritism toward any church leader—they are all servants. Human judgments are always on the basis of appearances, seniority, popularity, or the like. Paul said the only thing that counted was *trustworthiness*.

The apostles were merely the first "stewards" commissioned by the Lord to dispense the "mysteries" of God. The apostles were specially gifted dispensers, to be true, but nothing more than dispensers. The Greek word *musterion*, translated "mystery" is used in the New Testament of God's redemptive program. The word *musterion* is often used by the pagan religions of the first century for doctrines and rites known by the members of their cults but kept secret from the uninitiated. The writers of the New Testament gave a new meaning to the word. God's redemptive program was symbolized and prophesied progressively but dimly in the Old Testament (Rom. 3:21; Heb. 1:1). Redemption was fully accomplished and revealed in the incarnate work of Christ and through the apostolic message which explains it and applies it.

Verse two begins with an unusual Greek phrase; *ho de loipon zeteitai en tois oikonomois*. Literally it would be translated, "As for the remaining, it is sought among stewards. . . ." What Paul means is that a certain character is sought after in *all* servants. That character is *faithfulness* (Gr. *pistos*). It is not simply sought for—it is *required*! The Greek word *zeteitai* is often translated "required, demanded" (see Luke 11:50-51; 12:48). J. B. Phillips paraphrases, "And it is a prime requisite in a trustee that he should prove worthy of his trust." Faithfulness is dependability and reliability. *All* servants of Christ (and that includes apostles) are evaluated not on the basis of giftedness but of dependability and reliability. Because some Christians may have been given miraculous powers in the first century, or even the calling as an apostle, does not mean they are to be set apart from other servants who never received miraculous gifts. Each servant is required only to be reliable and dependable with as much as Christ has given him. Jesus described the "faithful and wise steward" in Luke 12:42-43. Some classic examples of men who were faithful to earthly masters are Joseph to Potiphar, Daniel to King Darius (Dan. 6:4), and Hananiah (Neh. 7:2).

The apostles have come down to us in history as men of greatness, not because of their educational attainments or political achievements but because they were *faithful* to Christ. Being the *servants* of all, they became the *greatest* of all (see Matt. 20:20-28).

The Corinthian Christians had a problem with judging! Paul had to warn them again in his second letter that they were “comparing themselves with one another” and, in so doing, “were without understanding” (see II Cor. 10:12). Jesus evidently anticipated that all citizens of the kingdom of God would have a problem with judging. He devoted the last one-third of his Sermon on the Mount to the problems of making proper judgments (see Matt. 7:1-27). Christians are supposed to make certain judgments:

- a. Christians must judge that some are “swine” and some are “dogs” and not cast pearls before them (Matt. 7:6).
- b. Christians must judge what they would wish others to do to them so they may do the same to others (Matt. 7:12).
- c. Christians must judge which is the narrow gate and which is the broad way (Matt. 7:13).
- d. Christians must judge who are false prophets by the doctrines they teach and by the fruits they produce in their teachings (Matt. 7:15-20).
- e. Christians must judge that doing the will of God is of primary importance (Matt. 7:21-23).
- f. Christians must judge the proper place to build their lives (Matt. 7:24-27).
- g. Christians must *not* judge by appearances, but with righteousness and justice (John 7:24).
- h. Christians ought to be able to make fair and honest judgments between themselves when one has a grievance against another (I Cor. 6:1-8).
- i. Christians are to test everything for its evil-quotient and abstain from every form of evil (I Thess. 5:21), especially in the matter of religious teaching (see I Cor. 14:29; I John 4:1-6).
- j. Christians must be able to judge when a brother is “living in idleness” (II Thess. 3:6-15).
- k. Christians must be able to judge when a brother “is overtaken in any trespass” and restore him in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1ff.; James 5:19-20, etc.).

There are many judgments Christians must make about people and situations. Why then did Paul say, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court”? Literally, the Greek phrase is: *de eis elachiston estin hina huph humon*

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*anakritho e hupo anthropines hemeras*; "But unto a little it is that by you I have been judged, or by the agency of a man's day." The context makes it clear Paul is saying human beings, even Christians, should not be arrogating to themselves the prerogatives of selecting the "best" apostle to follow. Christ chose the apostles. Christ alone has authority to distinguish one above another. So Paul is telling these divisive minded people that what they are doing is of no significance whatever, except that it is ruining the Christian fellowship there. Their decisions that one apostle or leader is *better* than another is ridiculous. If they were trying to decide whether Paul were actually an apostle or a false apostle, they had every right and obligation to do so. That could be decided, and should be decided, on the basis of the *signs* of an apostle (see II Cor. 12:12). But deciding as to which apostle or leader was *better* than the other, and then using such a decision to form divisions and opposing sides within the church was utterly pointless. It was worse than that! It was assuming prerogatives which belonged only to Christ.

The phrase, "or by the agency of a man's day," is an idiomatic statement referring to the indisputable limitations of the human experience to make eternal judgments. Human life is bounded by too narrow an horizon to make such judgments. The word "day" in all languages and idioms signifies judgments. The word "diet" to designate a legislative or judicial body comes from the Latin word *dies*, the word for *day*. The word "daysman" means an arbitrator. The RSV has translated the phrase to give its idiomatic meaning. There is no human *diet* (or court) with sufficient authority or expertise to divide the church over human leaders. What Paul has said here condemns *all* division in the body of Christ, and especially that division which is perpetuated by and in favor of religious leadership. Modern denominationalism with its proclivity to perpetuate the distinguishing of one Christian from another by elevation of human religious leaders (dead or alive) stands under this apostolic censure! All a Christian needs to know about a spiritual teacher and leader is whether he is faithful to the Lord's Word and the Lord's way of life. All Christians manifesting honest effort to be dependably and reliably following Christ are to love, cherish and honor one another and unite their hearts and minds in singleness of praise and service to Christ alone.

Continuing to expose the cause of so much favoritism and division, Paul implies that part of it may be the tendency of the Corinthians to misevaluate themselves. The way Paul makes this inference is to say that he does not even critique (judge) himself. Every man is predisposed to evaluate himself too highly (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:3). No

human being can trust self-evaluation because the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt (see Jer. 17:9). Only the word of God is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the human heart correctly (cf. Heb. 4:12-13). The Greeks placed great emphasis on the adage, "Know thyself." That is good advice if a man has in his possession the revealed word of God, the Creator, and if he will saturate his mind with that word surrendering to its divine judgments and evaluations. But by himself *no* man can know himself for he did not create himself! When men reject God's word for their own opinions, they overlook their faults and are always able to find someone else more wicked than they. Consider Jesus' parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray—one a Pharisee the other a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), or consider the Jewish ruler's estimate of the common people (John 7:49).

We think J. B. Phillips has captured the essence of Paul's statement here in his paraphrase, "I don't even value my opinion of myself. For I might be quite ignorant of any fault in myself—but that doesn't justify me before God. My only true judge is the Lord." When Paul said he knew nothing against himself he was not claiming that he had never sinned. He was well aware of his failings (see Rom. 7:13-25; I Tim. 1:15, etc.). Paul is simply speaking hypothetically. He is saying, "For the sake of illustration, let us presume that I can't think of any wrong doing or wickedness against myself—that still does not prove infallibly there isn't any!" All it would prove is that Paul could not think of any. But what about the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God? Before God *all* men are sinners—even apostles! Before God *all men saved* are men saved by grace through faith.

**4:5 Cure:** In the final analysis, the judgment of God is the only infallible and absolute judgment. God alone knows all the circumstances, secret thoughts, intentions and motives behind man's actions. Much that the world thinks is goodness may have been done from very wicked and self-serving motives. So Paul advocates as the cure for the problem of favoritism and conceit an awareness that honoring one Christian servant above another must be left to the judgment of God. Paul exhorts these Corinthian Christians to cease their favoritism and partiality toward spiritual servants. When Paul says, "Therefore do not pronounce *judgment* . . ." he uses the Greek verb *krinete*, in the imperative mood, which means Paul is *commanding* them to stop making such superficial judgments. Christians must not pronounce final verdicts on any person who is evidently trying to the best of his ability (and is not causing divisions in the church) to be

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faithful to the Lord. Christians must wait upon the Lord's return for final rewards and honors to be handed out to his servants. The Lord alone has the prerogative to hand out final commendations or condemnations. Some of these Corinthian church members were usurping the Lord's prerogative and honoring one servant of the Lord over another by their fallible, schismatic standards when they said, "I am of Paul" or, "I am of Apollos." Some of them, causing division and disorder in the church by jealousy and selfish ambition (see James 3:13-16), were collaborating with the demons of hell! One would think the elders of the Corinthian church would have recognized such schismatic persons as false teachers by the fruits (division and disorder) of their teachings (see Matt. 7:16; Acts 20:29-30).

### SECTION 2

#### **Pompousness (4:6-13)**

6 I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. <sup>7</sup>For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

8 Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! <sup>9</sup>For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. <sup>10</sup>We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup>To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup>and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

**4:6-7 Egotistical:** Paul had made it clear that Peter, Apollos, and he, had all *received* their stewardship to Christ by grace, not by merit. Paul insisted that whatever any apostle or leading teacher in the church might appear to be by the world's standards, they were nothing

more than servants seeking to be found faithful to their one Lord. He made it plain that no apostle or leader should be exalted above another. And all along he has been using himself and Apollos as an illustration. The Greek word translated *applied* is *meteschematisa*. It is the word from which we get the English word *schematic*, which means a sketch or a drawing. *Meteschematisa* means "to transfer by way of a figure."

Paul made himself and Apollos an illustration *for their benefit*. The Greek phrase, *di humas*, means, "for you, or, on account of you. . . ." Notice also Paul continues to call them "brethren" even though they are thinking too highly of themselves and are "puffed up." He has not "written them off" or expelled them from his fellowship. He will exert every effort, by every proper means possible, to benefit them.

The word *live* (as in the RSV) is not in the Greek text, and neither is the word *think* (as in the KJV). The literal reading from the Greek text would be, ". . . that in us you may learn not above (or beyond) what has been written. . . ." The phrase which follows shows that Paul is talking about *both* their thinking and their living. The Corinthian Christians are exhorted to learn by the example of humility and service practiced by Paul and Apollos toward one another and toward all other Christians. Paul and Apollos do not think of themselves or live toward one another in any way contrary to the *scriptures* (Gr. *gegraptai*, what is written). They are bound by the scriptures to be humble before God as much as anyone else. Paul had already quoted six Old Testament references about boasting (Ps. 33:10; Isa. 29:14; Jer. 9:24; Isa. 64:4; 65:17; Job 5:13) and there are many more (Ps. 49:6; 94:4; 17:7; Prov. 27:1; Isa. 10:15). Jesus spoke much about humility and against arrogance and conceit, and it may be that Paul is referring to the gospel documents since there is evidence that some of them may have been in existence as early as 50 A.D. The Christian must *not* be guided in his attitude toward himself and toward others by personal feelings or by any human standard. His attitudes are under the control of the mind of Christ which is revealed in the Bible (and nowhere else).

Literally, the Greek text of verse six reads, ". . . that not one over (or, beyond one you may be puffed up against the other. . . ." The Greek word *phusiousathe* is translated *puffed up* and means, "to blow up, to inflate," and is from the word *phusa*, "bellows." It is used metaphorically in the New Testament of pride (cf. I Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; Col. 2:18). This does not mean we cannot feel closer to some co-workers than others. Paul had his Luke and his Timothy!

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The apostle now asks a series of questions, with just a trace of sarcasm to arrest their attention, to bring them back to a realistic view of themselves. He asks first, "Who sees anything different in you?" The Greek phrase is *tis gar see diakrinei* and literally translated would read, "For who makes you thoroughly separate or distinct?" J. B. Phillips has captured the idea in his paraphrase, "For who makes you different from somebody else?" The Corinthian Christians may have had many different functionaries (cf. I Cor. 12:4ff.), but they all had the same position or rank before God—that was *servant*. Paul is implying that their attitude of superiority toward one another was born of presumptuous conceit. Even the fact that they had chosen one apostle over another to follow did not make them superior, for apostles themselves are only servants! Their conceit was perpetuating division which in turn was destroying the temple (church) of God.

The second question, "What have you that you did not receive?" shows why their feeling of superiority was presumptuous. Everything they had they received from God. Life, salvation, spiritual gifts, the apostolic word, the Spirit of God—nothing was merited—everything was by grace (cf. I Cor. 1:26-31). All men everywhere need to be constantly reminded of this fact. Paul with the third question, "If then you *received* (Gr. *elābes*) it, why do you boast as not having received (Gr. *labon*) it?" There was simply *nothing* they could claim to have earned or originated themselves—therefore, they had no reason to boast. There was no need to elevate one apostle over another for they, too, had only what they *received* from God by grace.

**4:8-13 Exploitative:** These Corinthian brethren had become so egocentric, they were exploiting apostles and teachers for their own selfish purposes. They were building (they thought) their own reputations and glory at the expense of the apostles, for their divisions and partyisms hurt the apostles and brought disrepute to the name of Christ and his church. But they did not care so long as they appeared to be "wise" in their selectivity and exclusivity. Paul seeks to correct this by admonishing them through sarcasm and irony. They must be brought to see themselves as they really are—arrogant, exploitative, uncaring spiritual brats. It is a serious problem. It is destroying the church! Striking, impressive, attention-getting words must be used to solve the problem.

They considered themselves to have arrived at the goal of the Christian life—spiritual maturity—by being wiser than others. They exalted one leader or one apostle over another, thereby arrogating to themselves the stature of "spiritual giants." They thought they proved by their divisions that they alone knew which leader was the



right one for the church. Each party or group believed they alone could make superior spiritual evaluations. Each group considered the other groups immature, unqualified, and unacceptable for fellowship in the Lord. Each group considered itself the ruling group ("kings").

The apostle vividly compares their pride, egotism and superiority with the actual life and reputation of an apostle. William Barclay illustrates:

When a Roman general won a great victory he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies that he had won; the procession was called a Triumph. But at the end there came a little group of captives who were doomed to death; they were being taken to the arena to fight with the beasts and so to die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and a readiness to die for Christ.

The apostles never considered themselves kings. They knew there was only one King—Jesus. Paul is reminding them all followers of Jesus are merely his bondslaves and servants. Paul proceeds to tell these Corinthians, glorying in having chosen certain apostles to follow, just where apostles are in the scheme of things (especially as viewed by the worldly-minded). First, apostles were made to be spectacles. The Greek word translated *spectacle* is *theatron* from which we get the English word *theater*. What Paul means is the apostles were made public spectacles of humiliation through what they suffered. The same Greek word *theatron* is used in Hebrews 10:33 and translated "publicly exposed." There it is describing the public abuse and affliction Jewish Christians had to suffer from the unconverted Jews. Paul suffered that kind of humiliation from Jew and Gentile alike (see the book of Acts; also II Cor. 11:21-33). The Jews called him an apostate and blasphemer; Greek philosophers called him a babbler and trouble-maker; governors called him "mad." Paul had a reputation as a menace to society (Acts 17:6). Next, Paul says, the world looks upon the apostles as morons (Gr. *moroi*, fools). Paul accepted the world's evaluation, willing to be called a fool if it was for Christ's sake. He is saying to the Christians at Corinth that if they are expecting to gain a reputation from the world by dividing up and claiming to

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be followers of any of the apostles, their reputation will be that of fools following fools.

All through this section, Paul contrasts what the sophisticated world thought of the apostles and what the Christians at Corinth, in their naivete, thought the world should think of them. To the world the apostles (and, all of Christianity) were fools, weak, disreputable. The Corinthian Christians thought if they structured the church after worldly ways, with positions and parties of seniority and superiority by selecting the most prestigious leaders to follow, they would rule, be wise, be strong, and be honored. But the world does not see apostolic Christianity that way.

All the while the Corinthian Christians were reveling and basking in their own egotism, the apostles were suffering great privations and hardships to bring them to Christ and to strengthen them in Christ. Apostles went hungry and thirsty many times for the sake of the gospel. Paul knew how to endure hunger (Phil. 4:11-13). He knew what it meant to be beaten like a slave would be *buffeted* (Gr. *kolaphizometha*, beaten with the fist). One ancient Greek knew a man was a slave because he watched him being *kolaphizometha*—buffeted. Apostles were looked upon as itinerant wanderers (Gr. *astatoumen*, unsettled, unfixed, without a stationary place or home). They had to do *manual labor* (Gr. *kopiomen*), working for a living with their own hands (see I Cor. 9:6; Acts 18:3). Greek culture looked upon those who worked with their hands as the lowest class of society—just above slaves. Tradesmen certainly would never be classed as leaders of Greek society. Regardless of what any society or culture says, labor and work are held up throughout the Bible as character-building virtues. The sophisticates of the world, however, think otherwise. The world would see the Christians at Corinth as followers, low-class common laborers—tentmakers and fishermen.

The apostles were, by temperament, quite unlike the sophisticated Greeks. Aristotle said that the highest virtue was *megalousuchia*—*with great soul*; and, he said, the virtue of the man with the great soul was that he would not endure insults. But the apostles had the Spirit of Christ in them. By Christ's love they were constrained and controlled. The Greek text is extremely terse, for the sake of impact. Paul says, literally, "Being slandered, we bless." The Greek word *loidoroumenoi* means *to be insulted* or *reviled* (see John 9:28; Acts 23:4). Paul says, "Being persecuted, we bear it; being blasphemed, we entreat, or conciliate." The pagan Greek and Roman world of Paul's day looked upon conduct such as the apostles exhibited as

grovelling weakness, a character defect, and a sure mark of the lowliest class of society.

The apostles were, by reputation, the scum of the earth. The Greek word *perikatharmata*, translated *refuse*, refers to the garbage scoured or scraped off a kitchen vessel. The Greek word *peripsema*, translated *offscouring* means "to wipe the dirt off all around." In other words, the majority of the world, in that day, looked upon these apostles of the crucified Christ as garbage and dirt. And these Corinthian Christians thought their choosing one apostle over another would make them appear wise and worldly in the eyes of the pagan culture of the day. One is reminded by modern-day church people who create divisions in the body of Christ because of preacher-worship. And preachers are not exactly considered first-class citizens of modern culture. In fact, movies and television go to great lengths to portray preachers of the Bible as rabble-rousing, ignorant, self-serving menaces to society. Preachers, teachers and other leaders of the Lord's church should never be the object of a church's pride. They certainly are no reason over which to divide the church.

### SECTION 3

#### Exasperating (4:14-21)

14 I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. 21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

**4:14-17 Misbehaving:** Paul, having just written rather sarcastically, does not want the Corinthians to assume that he is bitter toward them or that he does not care for them. He *does* care for them—he loves them as a father loves his exasperating children. So he admonishes them. He does not write to destroy them with shame, but to correct

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them. The Greek word *noutheto*, translated *admonish*, is a compound of two Greek words, *nous*, mind, and *tithemi*, to put. Literally, it means to put into the mind as a warning some word or words. It is different from the Greek word *paideia* which stresses correction by action, although a good father uses both forms of correction (see Eph. 6:4). Paul hopes to correct their misbehavior by a word of admonition, but he will take action if necessary (see 4:18-21 below).

They are his *agapeta tekna*—beloved children—and although they may have had *thousands* (Greek, *murious*, myriads) of *teachers* (Greek, *paidagogous*, tutors, pedagogues), they have had only one spiritual father—Paul. The Greek word *paidagogous* means, literally, “a leader of the child.” The Greek *pedagogue* was usually a slave who was given charge of the children of the wealthy and influential. The *pedagogue* escorted the children to school, disciplined them when they needed it, and often tutored the children when they were not in school. The *pedagogue* might do some of the work of a father and even become very intimately attached to the children, but he could never become the father. A father begets. Only one person can be the father of a child. When Paul said, “. . . you do not have many *fathers*. . . .” he used the Greek word *pateras* (from which we get the English words, paternal, patronize). But when he said, “. . . I became your *father* in Christ Jesus. . . .” he used the Greek word *egennesa* which actually means *begat*. Paul brought about their conversion to Christ personally through his preaching (see Acts 18:8; I Cor. 3:10). He laid the “foundation” of gospel work in Corinth. Paul had begotten many spiritual children in Christ Jesus; Timothy (I Tim. 1:2) and Titus (Titus 1:4) and Onesimus (Philemon 10), and hundreds of others (see I Thess. 2:11).

It is important to notice in this text that Paul says the Corinthians were begotten by Paul in Christ *through* the gospel. Spiritual birth (new birth, being born again) is through the gospel preached by the apostles. Where does one find the gospel preached by the apostles? In the book of Acts, beginning in Acts chapter two. What is the apostolic gospel through which the Corinthians were born again or anew? It is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was manifested in the flesh, died on a cross for the atonement of the world's sin, arose from the dead on the third day to validate that atonement; it is that men must so trust that declaration of God they will repent (change their mind) and submit to the command of the apostles to be immersed in water unto the remission of sins; it is that the Holy Spirit of Christ will take residence in the penitent and obedient believer and become to him God's down-payment on eternal life. No man,

since the redemptive work of Christ at the cross and the empty tomb, can be begotten in Christ apart from believing and obeying the apostolic gospel. Christians are begotten through the word of God, the gospel (see I Thess. 2:13; II Thess. 1:8; 2:13-15; James 1:18; I Peter 1:22-25). The word of God, the gospel, is the spiritual *seed* (Greek *sperma* or *spora*, see Luke 8:11 and I Peter 1:23) or *sperm* of God which begets the Spirit of God in man's heart but only when man believes it and obeys it. Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were immersed in water (see Acts 18:8) and were thus begotten in Christ *through* the gospel!

Paul admonishes them (warns them) they are straying from the example he had given them as to how to live in Christ. He exhorts them to *mimic* his life in Christ (Greek, *mimetai*, imitate). He does not infer they should become disciples or followers of Paul or anyone else, but that they should imitate his "ways in Christ" (4:17). Paul used this exhortation frequently (see I Cor. 11:1; Acts 20:35; I Cor. 7:7; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; II Thess. 3:7; II Tim. 1:13). The Bible is full of admonitions for Christians to imitate the example of men of faith such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and countless others (see Rom. 4:1ff.; Heb. 11:1ff.). Of course, Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus is the "pathfinder" or "pioneer" of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). We *follow* Jesus, but we may also imitate Paul as he follows Jesus. Like spoiled and selfish children, these Corinthian Christians were misbehaving. They certainly were not behaving as their spiritual father did.

As Paul was writing this letter, Timothy was on his way from Ephesus to Corinth. Paul had sent him (see Acts 19:22) by way of Macedonia with Erastus as his companion. Timothy was sent to remind them of how Paul lived in Christ and what he taught in Christ. Paul was no hypocrite—he lived what he taught and he taught Christ and lived Christ everywhere, in every church (see I Thess. 2:9-12; II Cor. 11:23; 12:14-18, etc.). A journey from Ephesus to Corinth, by way of Macedonia, by ancient modes of travel, facing all the dangers of the ancient traveler, might seem unnecessary in light of what might appear to be an insignificant problem in the church. But Paul knew it was not an insignificant problem. All the sacrifice and tension necessary to correct it must be made immediately. The church at Corinth was being *destroyed* by the schismatics! Timothy and Erastus must travel some 600 miles or more, the major portion of which would probably be on foot, to attempt to produce some spiritual maturity in these bickering, arguing, misbehaving "children." This will be a work that spiritual "fathers" will have to do with their "children" so long as the church remains in this world. It does not cease!

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**4:18-21 Mocking:** Paul had heard that some of the Christians in Corinth were not only misbehaving, they were arrogant (Greek, *ephusiothesan*, puffed up) about it. Paul wrote this epistle at Ephesus in the Spring of 57 A.D. He told the Corinthians he planned to stay in Ephesus until after Pentecost (June) (I Cor. 16:8) and then come to Corinth for a visit. But he changed his plans (II Cor. 1:15, 16, 23) and apparently the Corinthians then accused him of weakness and cowardice, so he wrote what is entitled the second epistle to defend his change of plans.

There must have been some indication at the writing of the first letter that some of the brethren at Corinth were arrogantly boasting Paul would never come to Corinth and exercise any apostolic authority. They accused him of being bold when he was away from them and meek when face to face with them (II Cor. 10:1). His sending Timothy instead of going himself as first he planned seemed to them to be justifiable cause for a bold and arrogant attitude toward the apostle.

So the apostle promises, "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, . . ." and he promises to show that their mockery is all talk without any power behind it. The Greek word *gnosomai*, translated "find out," is literally, *shall know*. Paul means to settle the issue once for all with the Corinthians about the authority of his apostolic message. The Greek word *pephusiomenon* is a perfect participle meaning they had become *puffed up* in the past and were *continuing* to be puffed up. They had not repented. For some reason the teachers and leaders of the church there had not seen the error of their ways and they were getting more arrogant and bold with each passing day.

In 2:4-5 we have the antithesis of *word* and *power*. The difference there is between words of sophisticated philosophies versus the historical facts of Christ's redemptive work. The truth of God (in the gospel of Christ and his apostles) has *power* to destroy all philosophies and theories that are merely guesswork (and not even good guesses at that). The power of the Spirit of God in his word is able to cast down all *imaginings* (Gr. *logismous*, rationalizations) and bring every *thought* (Gr. *noema*, concept, purpose, device) into captivity to obedience to Christ (see II Cor. 10:3-5). Paul is talking about going to Corinth to exercise the power of truth in the apostolic message versus the boasting sophistries of the wayward and divisive Christians there. He is *not* threatening a demonstration of any physical or ecclesiastical power. None of the apostles ever assumed any papal powers.

Paul is challenging the schismatics at Corinth that when he comes to them he will put their sophisticated philosophies to the test to see if they are producing in the lives of people what his apostolic gospel is able

to produce. It will be a test of spiritual strength and power. For, he says, the kingdom of God in a man's life is not demonstrated by words, but by the power of Christian living. So far, their sophistries have shown the exact *opposite* of Christian love and unity. In the kingdom of God, every thought is brought into obedience to Christ.

The choice is theirs. He will, if the Lord wills it, arrive shortly in Corinth. The question is, will they repent and bring their thinking and acting into obedience to Christ (as preached to them and written to them by Paul), or will they continue in their egotistical divisiveness? If they repent Paul will come with a gentle love. If they do *not* repent Paul will come with a chastening love. He says he will come with a *rod* (Gr. *hrabdo*, large wooden staff), but he is using the word rod as a metaphor. He does not intend to beat them physically, but to chasten them with the truth. It is by the power of the truth men are set free from enslavement to the destructive, damning lies of the devil which alienate them from God.

### APPLICATIONS:

1. To extend favors or privileges to one person over another because of some outward attainment or circumstance is strictly anti-Biblical.
2. Christians have only *one* criterion by which they may judge the worth of a servant of Christ—*faithfulness*; not quantity, but quality, is the standard for stewardship.

Today's churches would do well to remember that in evaluating a minister's or missionary's success!

3. It is when the church begins to think of itself as a "business operation" or an "institution" and compares itself with the world that it begins to judge its servants (ministers, elders, missionaries, teachers, etc.) by worldly criteria of successfulness.

When the church does that, jealousy, arrogance, division and eventual destruction follows!

4. To really know yourself, study the Bible. No man should fall into the trap of evaluating himself apart from the Bible, for he cannot do so objectively and honestly.
5. Men and women put in places of Christian leadership must remember they are to be examples other Christians are to imitate.
6. The cure for the problem of partiality and arrogance which causes divisions in the church is to remember that *every* Christian is *only* what he is by the grace of God.
7. Schismatics in the church who exalt one leader over another are usually exploiting that leader for their own egotistical purposes.

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8. To accept insults, or to work with one's hands, for the sake of Christ, is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.
9. People are not born again through apostolic miracles, but through the apostolic gospel.
10. A faithful "spiritual father" will not shrink from chastening wayward "spiritual children" through the word of Christ, when love calls for it.

### APPREHENSIONS:

1. What is a steward? What is trustworthiness? Why is this the only standard for judging a steward?
2. Are Christians to judge anything or anyone at all? What? How?
3. What are Christians *not* to judge?
4. What should a church seek foremost in a man they call to preach? Should it be personality? Speaking ability? Age? Administrative success?
5. Does the Scripture prohibit partiality? What is partiality? Are you partial?
6. Why did Paul use sarcasm about what the Corinthians thought of themselves?
7. Is it all right for Christians to use sarcasm? When? How?
8. If the apostles were held in such low esteem in their own lifetime, why are they widely venerated by the world today? How did Jesus explain this twist of human nature? (See Matt. 23:29-31.)
9. How are people "begotten" in Christ? Should those who lead others to Christ feel like a spiritual "parent"? What would that involve?
10. Do you look upon truth as powerful? What power does truth have? (See John 8:31-32.)



## Chapter Five

### THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE (5:1-13)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What was the immorality being practiced in this instance in the Corinthian church?
2. How could Christians be arrogant about that?
3. Wasn't Paul's instruction too severe to do any good for the sinners?
4. Does all sin in the church act like leaven?
5. What should the Christian's relationship be to immoral people outside the church?

#### SECTION 1

#### Atrocious Sin (5:1-2)

**5** It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

**5:1 Aberration:** Abruptly Paul brings up the subject of the grossest immorality being practiced in the Corinthian brotherhood by one of the church members. It had *actually* (Gr. *holos*, most assuredly, incontrovertibly) been established and reported that there was *immorality* (Gr. *porneia*, sexual unchastity) among Christians in Corinth. The Greek word *porneia* does not indicate the specific form this immorality had taken because the word is used as a synonym for adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and for illicit sexual intercourse in the unmarried (I Cor. 6:9) while in classical Greek and the book of Revelation the word is used for prostitution (Rev. 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9). In fact, *porneia* often means, in the New Testament, illicit sexual intercourse in general. But Paul specifies the sexual immorality in Corinth as a form of *incest*, (*incest*, from Latin *incestus* and French *incastus*, meaning simply, "not chaste"). Paul does not use the word incest but simply describes the case as "a man living with his father's wife." Some commentators assume that the guilty man's father had died and the son was living with one of the father's wives. Most do not think it

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was the guilty man's own mother, but a second wife of his father after divorce or death. Other commentators think the father may have been still living and was the "one who suffered the wrong" mentioned in II Corinthians 7:12. Whatever the status of the guilty man's father, the crime of incestuous sexual intercourse is severe enough to warrant the death penalty in the Mosaic covenant (cf. Lev. 18:6-18; 20:10-21; Deut. 27:20). The possibility of genetic deformities in the offspring of incestuous relationships is not relevant to scriptural prohibition. God decrees against incest because it destroys the divinely decreed order of human hierarchy in marriage and thus is destructive of the social order itself.

Paul describes this sin with shock as, "such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles." Paul was speaking hyperbolically to emphasize the seriousness of the crime. Incest *was* practiced among a few of the more depraved Gentiles. Some of the ancient Egyptians (Cleopatra II, with her brother, Cleopatra VII with Ptolemy XIII, her brother) practiced incest; Herod Antipas was married to Herodias, his niece-sister-in-law; some of the Roman emperors were accused by Suetonius in his *Lives of The Twelve Caesars* of practicing incest (Nero with his mother; Caligula with his sisters); Cicero, citing the case of the woman Sassia's marriage to her son-in-law, Melinus, says, "Oh, incredible wickedness, and—except in this woman's case—unheard of in all experience." There is also the case of a man named Callias, cited by Andocides in Greece in 400 B.C., who married his wife's mother! But Andocides asks whether among the Greeks such a thing had ever been done before. Even some Jews practiced incest in the days of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 22:11). So, even though some of the more depraved practiced it, the crime of incest was generally abhorrent to the pagan. Even modern day anthropologists and sociologists find incest a crime considered immoral, aberrant and destructive in all ages and cultures:

Cross-cultural studies of morality have typically remarked on the complexity and diversity of values to be found across time and space. One commentator has been led to conclude that "There is scarcely one norm or standard of good conduct that, in another time and place, does not serve to mark bad conduct." One possible exception to this conclusion is the universality of the incest taboo. (*Moral Development and Behavior*, pg. 70, Thomas Lickona, Editor, pub. Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1976)

True, Corinth was Corinth—one of the fleshpots of the ancient world—but for all their obsessions with sin, the pagan Corinthians

themselves had certain limits! It is hard to believe that a sin which even the pagans shunned had invaded the Church! Carnality (concentration on worldliness) plays funny tricks. It often turns truth upside down, or as Isaiah the prophet put it, "calling evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20).

**5:2 Arrogance:** The Christians in Corinth divided when they were supposed to be united—and united when they were supposed to be dividing! Is there ever a time when Christians are supposed to divide? Certainly not over song books, church buildings or human leaders, or any other frivolous matter. But immorality of any kind is never a frivolous matter. Apparently, from this text and others, God expects Christians to keep themselves separated from anyone who calls himself a brother and is continuing to practice immorality. The RSV says the guilty man was "living" with his father's wife; the Greek text uses the word *echein* which is a present infinitive and means literally, "to keep on having." This immorality was flagrant and continuous. Some of these Corinthian Christians had formerly been fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and robbers as well as idolaters (I Cor. 6:10) but they had overcome these sins. Even at the time this epistle was being written they were having difficulty resolving the problems of sexuality and marriage (I Cor. ch. 7). Indeed, even those called "saints" are faced with such problems. It is not a guarantee against temptation to be a Christian. Temptations are sure to come (Matt. 18:7). But Christians must not give in to temptations. Forty years later, the Christians of Asia Minor were still having problems with immorality in their congregations (see Revelation, ch. 2-3).

They were *puffed up* (Gr. *pephusiomenoi*, perfect tense verb, meaning, having been puffed up in the past, they were continuing to be puffed up). Paul was shocked about the incestuous relationship in this Christian, but he was *more shocked* at the attitude of the congregation toward it! The congregation had puffed itself up with self-importance and worldly wisdom. It was more interested in maintaining its cliques and parties and its "image" with the worldly-wise than in righteousness. They were concentrating on patterning the church after human institutions and worldly structures of leadership. Perhaps they were so puffed up about their image they did not want to admit this problem existed among them. If they took the drastic action taught by Christ and the apostles, they might be stigmatized as "prudish" by the pagan society of Corinth and their image of sophistication would be destroyed. It does not seem they were proud of the immoral conduct on the part of this brother, but their sin lay

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in the fact that they failed to do what God required and remove the immoral person from their fellowship. Perhaps the elders of the church were afraid their fellow Christians might accuse them of being "judgmental" had they taken the action required by the gospel. These are the very reasons some Christian congregations and leaders do not exercise New Testament guidance today in disciplining church members guilty of flagrant, aberrant and continuous immorality. Another reason it has become difficult today to apply discipline that would lead to repentance is the fact that a Christian disfellowshipped from one congregation may find sympathetic indulgence and reception in another congregation, often within the same city or locality.

Paul suggests that the only proper attitude for the congregation toward this disgraceful immorality is that of *mourning*. Incidentally, Paul's suggestion furnishes a classic illustration of what Jesus meant in the second Beatitude (Matt. 5:4), "Blessed are those who *mourn* for they shall be strengthened." The Bible pronounces a blessing on those who mourn over the *cause* of sin which is rebellion and disgrace toward God. Most people selfishly mourn because they are suffering the consequences of their sin—they are not concerned that sin has brought shame and hurt to God. The Greek syntax of 5:2 is instructive! Literally it would be translated, "And you, having become puffed up continue to be, rather than having mourned about this circumstance *in order that* (Gr. *hina*) the one having done this deed might be removed from among you." In other words, true Christian mourning about sin *does* something about the sin. Mourning is not satisfied simply with regret. Paul advised, "Let him who has done this be *removed* (Gr. *arthe*, be driven out) from among you."

The Corinthian congregation was not mourning—they were *boasting* (see 5:6). What had they to boast about in this situation? Obviously, they were not bragging about how immoral the congregation was. Their pride undoubtedly centered in their concept of "sophistication" or "broadmindedness." The elders and leaders of the different factions may have rationalized, "What our brother does in his private life is entirely his affair. Our obligation is to continue to love him; we dare not be judgmental toward these people." Perhaps they justified their approach to the circumstances by saying to themselves, "When you live in Corinth, you have to adapt somewhat to the culture. Besides, morals change with the times and we should feel a certain obligation to 'loosen up' ourselves, become less bigoted and more liberal." This same carnal attitude of boasting about "broadmindedness," especially in the area of sexual promiscuity, is sweeping our nation in high and low places—and even in some churches.

Whatever the excuse for their boasting, it was improper—in fact it was sinful!

## SECTION 2

**Apostolic Summons (5:3-8)**

3 For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment <sup>4</sup>in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup>you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**5:3-5 Chastening:** This advice that the immoral man should be expelled from the church comes with full apostolic authority. It is advice from the Holy Spirit of God speaking through the instrumentality of an apostle. There is no human guesswork involved here. Christ's bride (the church) is to keep herself sanctified, cleansed, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:21-27). Immorality and all impurity must not even be *named* among the saints (Eph. 5:3). The church is to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is a shame even to  *speak* of the things that they do in secret (Eph. 5:11-12).

Although the apostle was absent from their presence, and could not be there to speak with them face to face, he had already *made judgment* from the moment he received the report (Gr. *kekrika*, perfect tense verb), and his judgment continued to be, "deliver such a one to Satan." Note the qualifying statements Paul makes about his judgment:

- a. It is in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus.
- b. It is by apostolic epistle—the apostle being absent in body.
- c. It is to be done by the assembled church.
- d. It is for the purpose of putting to death worldly-mindedness in the guilty man in order to save his spirit for God.

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Paul's bodily absence from these brethren did not mean his spirit (will) could not be present among them. His spirit would be actualized among them through his letter to them. His letter expressed his will—his spirit—his personality. As a matter of fact, it is through the written word of the Holy Spirit (the Bible) that God actualizes the Spirit of Christ in the heart and soul of every believer (see John 14:21, 23; 15:7, 10, 11; I John 2:5-6; 2:24; 3:24). And, of course, Paul's written word carried with it "the power of our Lord Jesus."

The apostolic order is to "deliver this man to Satan." The Greek word is *paradounai*, which means, "give over, abandon, deliver up." What is it to abandon someone to Satan? It is the same as, "Let him become to you as a Gentile and a publican" (Matt. 18:17); it is the same as "having nothing to do with him" (II Thess. 3:6, 14, 15). To deliver, or abandon, a church member to Satan is to declare him a non-covenant person. Those of the Old Testament dispensation who were "cut off from the congregation" were to be considered no longer members of Israel and severed from all rights and privileges of the covenant! They could not offer sacrifices at the temple, they could not associate with God's people, and they were considered unclean. They were no longer able to be reconciled to God. The same is true in the case of a Christian excommunicated from the church. Such a one is unreconciled to God, a rebel, and not a member of God's redeemed community *until* he repents and seeks forgiveness. Delivering an immoral impenitent to Satan is really only an acknowledgment by the church of that which the sinner has already done to himself! It gets the church's position straightened out on sin as much as it gets the sinner's attitude straightened out on it!

Excommunication does not mean that the church has given up on the sinner and wishes him to be lost forever. In fact, it means just the opposite. It means the church really cares that the sinner is jeopardizing his eternal salvation by continuing in his sin, and the church is jealous for his salvation and fellowship, but the church must also fear God and keep his commandments concerning "sin in the camp."

This is precisely why Paul qualified his order to deliver the man to Satan with the words, ". . . for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The church was not to destroy the man, but to reclaim the man for Christ. As he was, living in contemptuous rebellion against Christ's rule over him, he was giving allegiance to Satan. The church must understand this is where the man is, admit the man belongs to Satan and not to Christ, and take unpleasant but affirmative action that might move the man to return to Christ's lordship in his life.

Satan, of course, would not personally offer any assistance to the guilty man to destroy his carnal-mindedness. Satan would use every opportunity and circumstance to deceive the man into involving himself ever deeper into carnality. God alone, through his word and Spirit in our hearts, destroys fleshly-mindedness. Paul did not mean the physical body of the man was to be destroyed—he meant the destruction of an attitude! The apostle wanted to slay a certain mind-set, a philosophy of life, which the man had accepted and allowed to turn him away from godliness. Paul himself had to fight and conquer (by God's grace) this same mind-set (cf. Rom. 7:13-25; I Cor. 9:24-27). There is this same struggle in every Christian (see Gal. 5:17).

Apparently Paul believed this man would learn something by being excommunicated and given over to some realm where Satan is allowed by God to function which might motivate the man to draw near to Christ. Paul "delivered to Satan" two of his co-workers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, that they might learn "not to blaspheme." How did he expect them to *learn* this? How did God teach Job to depend more on God's grace than on his own self-righteousness? God "delivered" Job to Satan (see Job 2:6-7). How was Paul, the apostle, taught that he should not boast in having received revelations from God that no other human had received? How did Paul learn that God's grace was sufficient and that he should not rely on himself? God "delivered" Paul to Satan and sent Paul through the school of affliction (see II Cor. 12:1-10; II Cor. 1:3-11, respectively). Jesus "delivered" Peter to Satan "to be sifted as wheat" (Luke 22:31-32). Evidently Paul believed that when this man was cast out of the brotherhood of believers, he would suffer affliction (which the devil would gladly inflict because the devil's total ambition is to hurt both God and man) which God would allow the devil to inflict, and this might produce repentance in the man. Since Satan is the great accuser, the man's torment might be such a burden of guilt he would be moved to shame (see II Thess. 3:14-15) and turn to Christ for grace and forgiveness which would demand that he "put to death the deeds done in the body." When God "gave up" the heathen society Paul wrote about in chapter one of Romans, to whom and to what did he give them up? He gave them up to the prince of darkness! When God allowed a strong delusion to come upon those who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness, to whom did he deliver them? He delivered them to the "activity of Satan" (II Thess. 2:1-15). We must always remember, however, that Biblical religion is not a form of dualism like the religions of ancient Babylon

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and Persia. God's word never presents a picture of two kingdoms (light and darkness; good and evil) with *equal* power! In the Bible we learn that Jehovah is without beginning and end and is all powerful forever. Satan has only such power as is relegated to him and is constantly subject to the control of Almighty God (see our comments on Revelation, ch. 20, in *Twenty-Six Lessons on Revelation, Part Two*, pgs. 95-121, pub. College Press).

If this guilty man, delivered to Satan, puts to death his attitude that this world and physical things are man's ultimate purpose and goal, his spirit will be saved. Paul, of course, does not mean to infer that man is only spirit and that the physical body is evil, *per se*. That was the deception taught by the Gnostics to justify their depravities. Paul was well aware that at the resurrection man will be raised with a new body. But it will be a body different from the one he inhabits in this cosmic order. Man's new body will be celestial, immortal and incorruptible (cf. I Cor. 15:35-58). Therefore, what Paul means by the saving of man's spirit is the saving of the *whole* man. Man is not whole until he is "spiritual." It is the holy spiritual essence of man that is eternal and if controlled by the love of Christ (cf. II Cor. 4:16—5:21), will be clothed with immortality at Christ's "day" (his second coming). Scandalous and impenitent immorality in any congregation must be dealt with. There is no option except discipline. It is the Lord's command. However, in view of the awesome responsibility of having to "deliver . . . a man (or woman) to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" it must be done with compassionate love, with strict adherence to the divine guidelines of the New Testament, and with reclamation of a penitent brother as its only goal. When such a case demands attention by the congregation and its leadership, it must be done with firmness, without partiality and as quickly as love allows. "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11; see also Isa. 26:9-10). The action of delivering a member of a congregation to Satan (or excommunication) must never be done on the basis of hearsay. The evidence of immorality must be clear and actual—not merely rumored.

**5:6-8 Cleansing:** It seems incredible that the Corinthian Christians would be boasting about such an abhorrent sin in their midst. Perhaps they were boasting about their graciousness and tolerance in not having judged the man (see comments on verse 2). Whatever the case, the apostle is as appalled at their attitude as he is at the sin. By their tolerance of this perversion they are leaving the whole congregation to be infected with sin. Leaven (yeast) is commonly used



in the Bible to symbolize the penetrating power of a small matter so as to permeate and influence the greater, for either good or evil. The context always determines how the symbol is being used. It is clear that Paul is using leaven here as a figure of evil influence. Every one knows that just a little leaven will reproduce itself in a large lump of bread-dough. It is also true that one sin may infect a whole congregation, reproducing evil throughout the whole body. And how much more deadly would be the influence of such sin if the congregation was proud of its toleration of the evil.

Paul commands the church to *cleanse* itself. The Greek text has the word *ekkatharate* (aorist imperative). This is an order, not a suggestion. The Greek word is a compound word with a prepositional prefix meaning, "clean out, purge out, eliminate." It is the word from which we have the English word *catharsis* which means to purify.

Should anyone think the apostle is too severe in his demands or his language he has only to read the Old Testament law concerning punishment for sins of seemingly lesser perversion. In the law of Moses Israelites were to be put to death for rebelling against parents, for bowing down to an image, for practicing witchcraft, and many other sins. Surely Christians are never to get the idea that God is more tolerant of sin in the New dispensation (see Heb. 2:1-4; Matt. 5:27-30). Jesus cursed a fig tree and withered it simply because it gave signs of fruit but produced none. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by the Holy Spirit for lying about what they gave to the church; Elymas was struck blind by the Holy Spirit trying to turn Sergius Paulus away from faith in Jesus (Acts 13:8ff.). God is serious about sin!

All the symbolism of Jewish history and God's redemptive program for man is applied here to the Christian experience. The Christian covenant is God's ultimate feast. Jesus spoke often (parabolically) of his new kingdom (the church) as a "feast." Paul is not referring to the Lord's Supper, *per se*, in these verses. He is using the same figure of speech Jesus used in his parables. Paul is likening the *whole* Christian life to a festival or holy-day. Of course, the best symbol to illustrate that is the Jewish Passover feast. The Christian's *Pass-over* is Christ (Gr. *pascha*). Christ is the absolute passover—the perfect passover. He is the fulfillment of that which all the Jewish feasts typified and prophesied. The Old Testament passover specifically celebrated God's redemption of Israel and sanctification or separation from bondage into a people called out for God's glory and purpose. All the festivals or holy-days ordained by God in the law of Moses were celebrations of righteousness, love, truth and goodness. They

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were holy dedications acknowledging man's reconciliation to the will of God through sacrificial, vicarious atonement.

At the Jewish passover, specifically, all Jewish homes had to be searched with minute care for leaven and any that was found was to be put out of the house (see Exod. 12:14-20). If anyone disobeyed this commandment they were to be "cut off" from the congregation of Israel! Leaven, in the matter of the Jewish passover, symbolized the old life of bondage in Egypt, which, in turn, symbolizes sin. In the Jewish passover the old leaven had to be thrown out before the slaying of the sacrificial lamb and the observance of the festival. In the Corinthian antitype their lamb had already been sacrificed and they were trying to celebrate the festival (the Christian's life) with the old leaven still remaining in their "house."

The whole Christian experience is said to be a festival or a feast. The Old Testament prophets often predicted the messianic age in the figure of a feast (Isa. 25:6-9; 55:1-2; Zech. 14:16-19, etc.). Jesus used the figure of a feast to predict his messianic kingdom (Luke 14:1ff.; Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13; John 6:35-63; Luke 15:22-32). The apostles frequently spoke of the Christian life as feasting (cf. Heb. 6:1ff.; 12:22-23; I Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14; I Peter 2:2-3; Eph. 5:18; see also John 4:34; Matt. 5:6; Isa. 65:13). So, when Paul says here, "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival . . ." (Gr. *heortazomen*, feast) he is not limiting the need for cleansing to partaking of the Lord's Supper. The church must purge itself of the sin within it in order to be considered as being a participant of the whole Christian experience!

And the sin within the church is not only the man living with his father's wife! The translation of the Greek word *kakias* by the English word *malice* is not sufficiently precise to give the clear meaning of the sentence. The word *kakias* means "badness in quality." It may have the connotation of maliciousness if the context demands it, but that does not seem to be the case here. The word *kakias* refers more to disposition or attitude (bad attitude) than it does to deeds. The next word in the sentence, *evil* (Gr. *ponerias*), has to do with deeds. It would seem, therefore, that Paul was urging the Corinthian church to purge itself of its bad attitude or disposition (arrogance and worldly sophistication) as well as the incestuous relationship of the man with his father's wife.

So long as the church was of the attitude to see itself as sophisticated by allowing the sinful couple to continue in its fellowship, they could not possibly be living the Christian life ("keeping the festival with the unleavened bread") of sincerity and truth. The word *eilikrineias* is translated *sincerity* and is from two Greek words which mean *sun*

and *judge*. The idea is that a life lived in *sincerity* is a life that is not lived in darkness or shadows, but one that is lived in the undimmed, brilliance of pure truth.

### SECTION 3

#### Affiliations Sorted (5:9-13)

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup>But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

**5:9-10 Associating with Heathen:** We learn from verse 9 that Paul wrote at least three letters to the Corinthian church. It is clear from his statement, “I wrote to you in my letter . . .,” that he had written to Corinth prior to the epistle now before us, and, of course, he wrote at least one (Second Corinthians) afterward. In the non-extant letter Paul had exhorted them “not to associate with immoral men.” The Greek word *sunanamignusthai* is a compound of three words and literally means, *mix up with*, and is translated *associate with* (RSV) and *company with* (KJV). The same Greek word is used in II Thessalonians 3:14, and is translated “*have nothing to do with him*.” In his previous letter Paul intended his exhortation about dissociation from immoral people to be applied in its strictest sense to any fellow Christian who was continuing, impenitently, in an immoral sexual relationship. That would probably apply specifically, as we shall observe later, to grossly impenitent and perverted sexual sinners in the heathen society as well. It seems, however, that the Corinthians inadvertently (or perhaps deliberately) misunderstood Paul. They assumed he meant they were to withdraw *completely* from *any* associations with their heathen neighbors. The RSV translation, *not at all*, of the Greek words *ou pantas* seems to make Paul mean that Christians should have no reservations *at all* about *mixing* or *mingling* with the immoral around them. Such an idea would make the inspired apostle contradict himself since in II Corinthians 6:14—7:1 Paul

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pointedly commands Christians not to share in heathen depravity! The Greek words *ou pantas* are better translated, *not meaning altogether*. Thus Paul is saying, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not meaning that you must dissociate yourself *altogether* (or completely) from the immoral of this world. . . ." The apostle categorizes the heathen into those who sin against their bodies (immoral, Gr. *pornois*, sexual sins), those who sin against society (greedy and robbers), and those who sin against God (idolaters, Gr. *eidololatrais*, image worshipers).

Since all the citizens of Corinth, except the Christians and Jews, would be idolaters, and many of them would be guilty of sexual sins and/or greedy, it would have been nearly impossible for the Christians to reject *all* associations with the heathen. They could have made no purchases in the markets, made no appeals for civil justice, visited no neighbors and relatives, and made no evangelistic contacts with the lost. The only way they could have had no associations at all, theoretically, would be to move away from the city of Corinth into the uninhabited mountains and forests and formed monasteries or communes which were completely self-sustaining and self-governing. Total dissociation would have precluded any possibility of the Corinthian Christians carrying out the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever advocated asceticism or monasticism. New Testament Christianity is to be lived out in the midst of a sinful society so it may have a leavening (in the good sense) influence (cf. Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21). Christians are the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16). Christians are to be "in the world but not of the world" (John 17:15-19). As one writer has put it, Paul's admonition here concerning the immoral of this world did not prohibit *contact*, but it did prohibit *conformity*.

But Paul's admonition concerning an impenitent, immoral person who bears the name of brother, is, "not even to eat with such a one." This does not refer to the Lord's Supper, but to dining together socially. Being a guest for dinner in another person's home was considered in the ancient world to be a sign that the host was intimately associated with the guest and that he agreed with his philosophical stand and his life-style. The Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would eat with publicans and sinners (cf. Matt. 9:10-11; 11:19; Luke 19:7). It would be dangerous to both the faithful Christian and the impenitent brother for the faithful Christian to *socialize* with the impenitent (see II Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11; II Peter 2:1-22; II John 10-11). First, it would give the impenitent brother the impression that he would be acceptable in the Christian fellowship whether he repented

or not; second, it would expose the faithful brother to temptations in a seductive atmosphere of geniality and acceptability; third, it would make possible certain unwarranted conclusions from both the Christian community and the pagan society that the Church was not much different than the world in the matter of immorality.

The church is not charged with the responsibility of disciplining ("judging") outsiders. Paul expected the Corinthian church to know that. As far as the unchurched sinners of society was concerned, the apostle allows for such contact as was necessary for the ongoing of life in the world. But he permitted no contact (complete withdrawal) at even the social level with a sinning brother.

On the other hand, the church is most specifically charged with the responsibility for disciplining ("judging") members of the church. For the church to fail in this *duty* is to dilute the spiritual quality of the congregation, and thus destroy its purpose as a "city set on a hill"! This does not mean that all church members must be sinless. It does not mean that every church member who commits an unwitting sin or falls into a temptation, must be excommunicated. The crucial issue is flagrant, shameful, continued sin for which there is no apparent repentance (including a change of mind issuing in a change of conduct). When such impenitence is reported and has been established by due scriptural process, discipline involving *driving out* (Gr. *exareite*, expel, take out, removed from) the *evil one* (Gr. *poneron*) from the fellowship of the church is demanded. It is the word of the Lord!

## APPLICATIONS:

1. Church membership and association with Christian people does not necessarily guarantee immunity from the grossest and most perverted forms of sin.
2. There are sins so destructive of social fibre that even the heathen are appalled at them.
3. What is even more appalling is that the church may take an attitude of sophisticated arrogance or indifference toward the sins which heathens abhor!
4. The proper attitude of church members toward flagrant and perverted sin by one of its members is *not* arrogance, indifference, gossip, titillation or self-righteous apathy, but mournful discipline.
5. The spiritual authority of the apostolic revelation to guide the church in matters of discipline is as equally viable in the New Testament epistles as it would be if the apostles were present in the body.

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6. God may allow Satan to hurt those whom the church excommunicates in order to motivate them, if possible, to repent (destroy the flesh).
7. Impenitent sin is like yeast. It permeates and influences the whole community of the redeemed unless it is purged out of the church.
8. The whole Christian life is symbolized by the holy-days and feasts of the Mosaic covenant—especially by the Passover. The church could learn a great deal about its call to holiness and sanctification by studying these great Israelite festivals.
9. The Christian community cannot “celebrate” the Christian life in a manner pleasing to God if it allows flagrant, impenitent sinners to continue in its fellowship.
10. God’s demand for sanctification and holiness by church members does not mean they are to withdraw completely from the world into monasteries and convents. Christians must have *contact* with the world but not *conformity* to it.
11. But toward those who are called brothers in Christ, if they continue in immorality, Christians are not even to have contact—socially or religiously!
12. While the church is not responsible to judge and punish the immoral or criminal people outside the church, it is clearly commanded by apostolic order to judge and discipline the immoral within the church.
13. The drastic measures ordered by the apostles concerning Christian discipline are designed first for the reclamation of the sinner; second for the integrity of Christ’s holy church.
14. Paul was as harsh with the Corinthian church for its arrogance and apathy, as he was with the perverted immorality of the sinning man. For the church to do nothing about persistent immorality is as sinful as to do the immoral act!

## APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why are sexual relationships between immediate members of a family wrong?
2. Is Paul correct in saying that incest was not even found among pagans?
3. What does Paul mean by saying the Corinthian Christians were arrogant?
4. What would Paul expect the church to do if they followed his instructions and “removed” the one who had done this sin among them?

5. How could Paul be absent from Corinth in the body but present with them in spirit to the extent that he would be judging the man?
6. Why did Paul equate excommunication with delivering someone to Satan?
7. What did Paul expect to be the result of delivering this man to Satan?
8. What is "destruction of the flesh"?
9. Why does Paul liken the Christian life to the Passover feast?
10. What is sincerity?
11. Why would Paul say it was all right for Christians to associate with the immoral men of this world and not all right to associate with immoral people who bear the name of brethren?
12. Is sexual sin the only sin demanding non-association when found in one bearing the name of a brother? What others? Does the church follow this apostolic doctrine?
13. How do you reconcile Paul's command here for Christians to judge one another, and Jesus' command (Matt. 7:1ff.) not to judge one another?

## A SPECIAL BRIEF ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"For if the message declared by angels (the Old Testament law) was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Heb. 2:2-3

### A. Causes for discipline in the New Testament.

1. Refusal to repent of a wrongdoing to a brother, Matt. 18:15ff.
2. Being the instigator of dissensions and difficulties in the church, Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11
3. Laziness in personal life, II Thess. 3:6
4. Preaching false doctrine, Rom. 16:17-18; II John 9-11
5. Immorality in a member, I Cor. 5:1-7
6. Anyone who is greedy, an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or thief, I Cor. 5:11 (I Cor. 6:9-10).

### B. Purpose of discipline

1. To save the sinning member, I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 2:1-11; Gal. 6:1-10; Matt. 18:15; James 5:19-20; Jude 22
2. To maintain the honor and authority of Jesus Christ
3. To preserve the purity and reputation of the church before the world (not absolute, for that is impossible in this world). When the church is compared to the world, it must be *different*! The church must not tolerate flagrant, impenitent sinfulness in any member.

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### C. Method of discipline

1. By expression (teaching) and repression (disfellowshipping)
2. First, go to the brother in personal counsel (Gal. 6:1; Rom. 15:1; Matt. 18:15). It is divisive and schismatic to go to anyone else first.
3. This failing, take with you one or two elders so that evidence of sin and impenitence may be established by witnesses (cf. II Cor. 13:1).
4. This failing, a meeting of the church should meditate the problem and make a decision as a congregation. If the offender refuses to comply with the congregational decision, he should be disfellowshipped, excommunicated, "driven out," not even socialized with, having nothing to do with him (I Cor. 5:2, 13; II Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11; II John 10-11).

### D. Manner of discipline

1. Gentleness and humility must always characterize administration of any discipline (Gal. 6:1ff.; Col. 3:12-13; I Tim. 5:22, etc.)
2. According to the guidelines of scripture
3. Firmly, faithfully, without partiality, steadily and constantly
4. With wisdom and sound judgment; with clear thinking controlling one's emotions.



## Chapter Six

### THE PROBLEM OF BASENESS AND BROTHERHOOD (6:1-20)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What kind of "grievances" would Christian brethren have against one another? 6:1
2. Why does Paul insist that they not sue one another in civil court? 6:1ff.
3. How could Paul advise Christians to accept being defrauded? 6:7
4. What has the list of depraved sinners to do with this context? 6:9-10
5. If a man joins himself to a prostitute is he married to her? 6:16

#### SECTION 1

#### Defrauders Are Not Brothers (6:1-8)

**6** When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the the saints? <sup>2</sup>Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! <sup>4</sup>If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? <sup>5</sup>I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, <sup>6</sup>but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

<sup>7</sup>To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup>But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.

**6:1 Squabbles:** Chapter six is very evidently continuing the train of thought from chapter five. The apostle had just dealt with judging and settling disputes which must be done *within* the kingdom of God. In chapter five the problem is sexual immorality; Christians are commanded to judge and take action to solve the problem. In chapter six the problem is Christians suing one another in pagan law-courts.

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And again, Christians are commanded to judge themselves and take the action necessary to bring about a solution.

The word *grievance* (RSV), or *matter* (KJV), is *pragma* in the Greek text. *Pragma* is the word from which we get the English words *pragmatic* and *pragmatism*. Its generic meaning is, work, deed, event, or occurrence. The word *pragma* is used frequently, however, in ancient Greek writings (Xenophon, Josephus, the papyri) to denote a civil law-suit with someone. *Pragma* was the technical term for a litigation.

It is unfortunate that an arbitrary division of this context has been made by those who, centuries ago, numbered chapters and verses. Such division tends to divert attention away from the fact that Paul is still talking about the same fundamental problem. That problem is the irresponsibility of the ancient Corinthian congregation of Christians to maintain scriptural standards of righteousness, justice and mercy.

We do not know with certainty what the "grievances" were between the brethren. They were probably disputes over properties. It is doubtful that they would have taken the case of the incestuous man to the civil courts for settlement. We do know that by the middle of the first century, A.D., Rome had saturated all her subjected provinces (which included Greece) with Roman law and its procedures. Of all ancient peoples the Romans were the most prone to litigation. Any man could make himself a prosecutor in a Roman court. Each party to a litigation deposited with the magistrate a sum of money (called *sacramentum*), which was forfeited by the losing party to the state religion. The defendant also had to give bail (*vadimonium*) as security for his subsequent appearances. The magistrate then turned over the dispute to a person qualified to act as a judge. If the defendant lost, his property—sometimes his person—could be seized by the plaintiff until the judgment was satisfied. Problems of ownership, obligation, exchange, contract, and debt took up by far the largest part of Roman law. Material possession was the very life of the Roman empire, and its provinces. This would be especially true in cosmopolitan and commercial Corinth. Ownership of property came by inheritance or acquisition. The making of valid wills was complicated with hundreds of legal restrictions. No heir might take any part of an estate without assuming all the debts and other legal obligations of the deceased. Acquisition came by transfer, or by legal conveyance resulting from a suit at law. Transfer (*mancipatio*, "Taking in hand") was a formal gift or sale before witnesses and with scales struck by a copper ingot as token of a sale; without this ancient ritual no exchange had the

sanction or protection of the law. Obligation was any compulsion by law to the performance of an act. It could arise by delict or by contract. Delicts or torts—noncontractual wrongs committed against a person or his property—were in many cases punished by an obligation to pay the injured person a sum of money in compensation. Obviously, there would be *many* “grievances” which might arise between Christian brethren engaged in the multiple vocations and businesses which would be present in the huge, sophisticated metropolis called Corinth.

**6:1-6 Shamefulness:** There are a number of reasons the apostle shames the Corinthians in this matter: (a) in verse one he uses the Greek word *tolma* which means presumptuous, audacious, bold (see its use in II Peter 2:10). They have *presumed against* the power of Christ to settle these disputes and have taken them to heathen judges; (b) Christians are to judge the heathen world, not vice versa—they are showing their unworthiness to be Christians by declaring their incompetence to judge their own disputes. Just how are the saints to judge the world (v. 2)? Christians living by faith in Jesus Christ in this present world are judging this world (declaring it to be condemned) by their obedience to God’s Word (see Heb. 11:7). Every Christian who preaches or teaches the gospel pronounces judgment upon those who do not. There is no other way to deliver the gospel (see Rev. 14:6-7). But in a real sense, also, the resurrected saints will have some part in the eternal judgment of the lost world. Perhaps that judgment will be simply a vindication of Christian choices made on earth (cf. Luke 11:32), or maybe it will be some form of active participation with Christ as Christians *rule* with Him (see Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21) in eternity; perhaps both. Peter indicates that the godly behavior of the Christians, before their heathen contemporaries, will provide a vindication for the Christians should there be any charges made against them at the day of judgment (I Peter 2:11-12, 15). Now, if these Corinthian Christians are incapable of acting like Christians toward one another and producing justice, are they not declaring themselves to be incompetent to fulfill their destiny to judge the world with justice? Shame upon them! (c) Christians are to judge angels; Paul does not say how or when; we would speculate this refers to the angels who “left their first estate” (rebelled against God in heaven) and are being held temporarily in the “pits of nether gloom” (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6); Paul does say the manifold wisdom of God will be made known to the “principalities and powers in the heavenly places” through the church (Eph. 3:10); it may be, as T. R. Applebury wrote: “. . . the church is God’s means of demonstrating to the angels that rebelled . . . that some men will serve Him out of their love for Him. The church

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is made up of those who deliberately choose to do God's will and refuse to do the bidding of Satan. If men can do this, angels certainly could have done so. The character and conduct of the saints then become a means of judging angels that sinned." (*op cit* pg. 105); if Christians are to judge these cosmic, spiritual and eternal matters, how much more are they obligated to discipline themselves to make proper judgments between themselves in this life! (d) They lay their brotherhood disputes before heathen judges who have no place in the church; Paul uses the Greek participle *exouthenemenous* which is translated by the RSV as *those who are least esteemed* but would be more properly translated as *those who are rejected or condemned by the church*—in other words the Corinthian Christians are asking judges who are alienated and opposed to the church to judge matters that would require a mentality and spirituality completely foreign to them; Shame upon them! (e) In so doing these Corinthian Christians are declaring to the world that the wisdom Christians are supposed to have is not as good as that of heathen judges; they cannot seem to find one of their own brethren wise enough to settle disputes between themselves; even brothers by natural birth are often able to settle disputes between themselves without recourse to civil law courts; but in Corinth it was *Christian* brother against *Christian* brother, and that in courts where unbelieving judges sat!

Christians should obey all the laws (which do not demand direct and certain disobedience *against* God) of their governments. All transactions requiring legal sanction by a civil government should be submitted to such sanction. And Christians are not prohibited from recourse to civil court when it is necessary to defend themselves against heathen accusers. At Philippi, Paul demanded his rights as a Roman citizen against ungodly and unjust treatment (Acts 16:37); he did the same before Festus (Acts 25:10). But Christian brethren should not have to bring civil suit against one another to obtain justice when there is a grievance. Let Christian brethren first do what is fair and honest and just; let them settle any dispute between themselves, then, if civil law requires it, let it be legally sanctioned in civil court. The law is for the ungodly—not for the godly (I Tim. 1:8). Christians should never have to resort to civil law to arrive at what is fair, honest and just between themselves. Civil law should be resorted to only as a secondary sanction of the justice already accomplished between Christian brethren! And this is to apply in every area of Christian life—transfers of property, accidental harm done, services performed, etc. In every circumstance the Christian's first concern is *not* "What will it cost me?—Will I make a profit?—Shall I accept responsibility

for my error?" but, "Have I been fair, honest, and just—Have I given what my brother rightly deserves?"

**6:7-8 Solutions:** The apostle has already suggested (v. 5) that since it appears they cannot settle these disputes between themselves, they should select a "man among you wise enough" to decide between members of the brotherhood. That would be the first suggestion to bring a solution to their incompetency. But who, among them, would be wise enough? He should be well-trained in what the Word of God says in the areas of ethical absolutes and principles. He should know what the Scriptures say about brotherly relationships. He should be old enough to have had much practical experience in the circumstances of life and interpersonal relationships. Ordinarily, it would be the responsibility of elders and/or evangelists (see epistles to Timothy and Titus) to arbitrate and bring about reconciliation between disputing Christian brethren. But any wise Christian should be able to function in this capacity.

The second solution Paul offers is that a Christian would be much better off to allow himself to be defrauded by a brother than to quarrel over grievances to the point of bringing suit in a pagan civil court. When Christians take one another to a heathen judge, rather than being able to settle between themselves, it smacks of some underlying greed or spirit of retaliation. Whether that be the case or not, two Christians suing one another in civil court is taken by the world to mean that Christians are no different than greedy and spiteful heathen. Paul clearly states that for Christians to sue one another in pagan court is *defeating* (Gr. *hettema*, loss, detriment, overthrow)—it brings discredit on the church and the gospel. When Christians cannot settle a grievance between themselves, one of them should be willing to suffer personal abuse, injury or loss rather than let the church be defeated in its mission to bring men to Christ! That is not easy—but that is what Christ, Himself, did! Nowhere does the New Testament say the Christian cannot appeal to the civil courts for redress and justice when he is wrongfully sued by an unbeliever. In fact, a number of scriptures (the clearest being Rom. 12:14—13:7) tells the Christian that when he has done all he can to be at peace with all men. If an unbeliever persists in an unjust action, the Christian is to leave the wrath of God up to the civil authorities for execution.

But all members of the kingdom of God are expected to think and act as regenerated, reborn people. They should act toward *one another* as Jesus taught in the Sermon on The Mount. While force and law is for the ungodly, the Sermon on The Mount characterizes the citizens of God's kingdom. The kind of brotherly love that would rather accept

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being defrauded by a Christian brother than to sue him in civil court is taught in a number of New Testament passages (see Col. 3:12-13; Rom. 15:1-2; I Peter 2:20; 3:8-15; Phil. 2:3-4). This is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote it. The word of God abides forever!

### SECTION 2

#### **Debauched Are Not Brothers (6:9-11)**

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

**6:9-10 Reprobation:** Clearly, Paul is classifying those who are taking brotherhood grievances to civil courts as some of the “unrighteous” who shall not inherit the kingdom of God! The Greek word *adikoi* may be translated either *unrighteous* or *unjust*—the two English words mean the same. It is frightening to contemplate that those who would rather defraud a brother than be defrauded are categorized with the debauched but that is precisely what Paul is doing here.

Those who *defraud* are as abominable to God as the *immoral*, the *idolater*, the *homosexual*, the *effeminate*, the *thief*, the *greedy*, the *drunkard*, the *reviler*, and the *robber*. All these “unrighteous” ones (except the homosexual and the effeminate) are listed earlier by Paul as alien to the kingdom of God and unacceptable as citizens (5:9-13). The Greek word *arsenokoites* is a combination of *arsen*, male, and *koite* (Eng. *coitus*), sexual intercourse, and is translated *homosexual*. The Greek text here includes the word *malakoi*, literally meaning, “soft to the touch,” but used metaphorically in the New Testament to mean male effeminacy in a practicing homosexual. The word *malakoi* was used by classical Greek writers near the first century A.D. to denote *catamites* (men and boys who allowed themselves to be misused homosexually). Homosexual behavior is not sickness—it is sin! Why would the act of suing a Christian brother in a heathen court be counted such a serious crime by the apostle? Because it is a deliberate rejection of the very essence of God’s kingdom. It is a refusal of the

principle of self-denial. Anyone who refuses to put self to death, allowing Christ to live in him, is not worthy of the kingdom (see Luke 12:13-31; 14:25-33; 16:10-15; John 12:20-25; 15:12-14; Gal. 2:20; 5:13; 5:24-26, etc.). It is the love of Christ which is to control every Christian. Christians are *never* to consider one another from the world's point of view (II Cor. 5:14-21). When Christians are unwilling to settle any grievance they have with one another, even if it means being defrauded, it means they are unwilling to surrender to the sovereign will of Christ and are not fit to inherit His kingdom. Paul told these Corinthian brethren they were being *led astray* (Gr. *planasthe*, wandering stars, planets), in their unmerciful, non-Christian actions of suing one another in heathen courts.

**6:11 Regeneration:** These straying Christians, in their present shameful, defeating, unrighteous behavior unfit for the kingdom, are reminded they do not have to remain disinherited. Some of them were once before living debauched and ungodly lives. Paul is warning them not to continue in this *fallen* condition, lest they be lost. It is possible to fall from grace after having once been "washed, sanctified and justified" (see Gal. 5:1-26). Paul considers them, in their present conditions, as "unrighteous" and not heirs of the kingdom. But he exhorts them (by inference) to repent and return to the state of being sanctified and justified.

It is well to note here that the *order* of the regenerative process harmonizes with what the rest of the New Testament says about it. *First*, the Corinthians believed and were baptized ("washed"), *then* they were pronounced sanctified and justified, (see Acts 2:38; 18:8; 22:16; Rom. 6:5ff.; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12-13; I Peter 1:22-25). The Greek verb *apelousasthe* is 2nd plural aorist middle, and might be literally translated "you were washed clean." The word is a combination of two Greek words, *apo* ("from") and *louo* ("washed"). The verb *louo* and its various forms are often used metaphorically for baptism (see Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22). The believer's obedience to Christ's command to be baptized (see Matt. 28:18-20) is the initial and fundamental act of faith through which God has chosen to judicially declare a believer both sanctified and justified. It is at this point in the believer's calling upon God that he has his sins washed away (Acts 22:16), is saved (I Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5), is made a member of Christ's church (Eph. 5:26), is joined to Christ and justified (Gal. 3:23-29), is sanctified (Eph. 5:26). Without surrender to the command of Christ and the Holy Spirit (through the apostles) to baptism there is no promise of cleansing, salvation, justification or sanctification.

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While these Corinthian Christians had previously been baptized, sanctified and justified, they were not presently considered in a sanctified and justified state of the apostle. One who is aware that he is sinning, after having been once baptized, must appeal to the grace of God by repentance and prayer (Heb. 10:19-25; I John 1:8—2:6). To be an heir of the kingdom of God *after* initial admittance through belief and baptism, one must *continue* in sanctification and justification, which is done through daily repentance and prayer. *Repentance* is from the Greek word *metanoeo* which means changing the mind and actions. *Sanctification* is from the Greek word *hagiasmos* which means, set apart unto God, or dedicated to God. Justification is from the Greek word *dikaiosis* and means, to declare right, to declare innocent, to acquit of guilt. God is able to declare sinners innocent of guilt because Christ vicariously atoned for all sin upon the cross. This is established as a fact by the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But God cannot declare any sinner innocent who will not accept that declaration of grace. God has decreed that any sinner who wishes this free gift of grace (declaration of innocence from all guilt) must do so by believing Christ's death paid for his sin and by submitting to the ordinance of baptism. When the sinner accepts God's offer, on God's terms, he is set apart to God's will in his life. Of course, a washed, justified, sanctified person may renounce his inheritance and return to the former state of alienation and impenitence (II Peter 2:20-22). That, says Paul, is what these Corinthians were doing by refusing to settle their grievances with one another on Christian principles.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" simply means these Corinthians had been previously washed, justified and sanctified under the *authority* of and by the *agency* of Christ and the Holy Spirit. That authority and that agency is the *word* of Christ in the apostolic message. There is no indication in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit operates or leads in any extra-Biblical manifestation in the matter of salvation, justification and/or sanctification. The Holy Spirit's will in these matters is contained in and operates through His revealed Word. That Word is the Bible—nothing less and nothing more! The oral teachings of Christ and the apostles were the first revelations of the Holy Spirit's will for salvation, justification and sanctification. Later, their spoken doctrines were committed to writing. These apostolic documents have the same authority and power as their oral teachings did. These written words of the apostles (and the Old Testament before them) form the completed, canonized Word of God—the will of the Spirit of Truth. They are all



the world needs for salvation, justification and sanctification. Nothing must be taken away from these writings and nothing must be added to them. *All* things that pertain to life and godliness are in his precious promises (II Peter 1:3-5).

### SECTION 3

#### **Defilers Are Not Brothers (6:12-20)**

12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." 17 But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

**6:12-14 Perversion of Humanness:** Brotherly love acknowledges there is a lawful purpose for all things which God has created, but using the body for immorality (including hatred, greed and unchristian lawsuits) is perverting and downgrading that which God made to be the residence of the Holy Spirit. The last section *does* connect to the beginning admonition concerning unchristian lawsuits. It teaches that Christians who become enslaved to their emotions and feelings and drag one another bodily before heathen tribunals for their ungodly purposes of greed and retaliation are "prostituting" themselves. When God created man and gave him a human body, it was intended that God's Holy Spirit would dwell with each man in that body.

The apostolic principle, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful . . ." must be understood in its *context*. When a Christian

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brother defrauds you, it is lawful (you have the right) to sue him in a civil court—but such action is not always helpful (or, edifying). Christians are to live above the plane of law in the kingdom of grace. Christians are not to seek their own good, but the good of their neighbors (I Cor. 10:24); they are not to look only to their own interest, but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4); they are to please their neighbors for their good, to edify them (Rom. 15:2). Therefore, the Christian has the responsibility of denying any “right” he has to build people up in Christ rather than perverting these things to destroy people.

Some ancient Greek philosophers (especially the Gnostics) held that mind and thought were spiritual and holy while material things, including the human body, were impersonal and thus amoral. These philosophers taught that the natural, physical and material processes of life had *no* moral significance. Suing one another in court over physical and material things would have no moral implications according to this philosophy. Apparently some of the “wise” Christians of Corinth had decided to practice the philosophy of the Gnostics.

Paul had twice listed ways in which material things, including the human body, might be perverted (I Cor. 5:9-11; 6:7-10) and which would cause the Christian to forfeit his spiritual inheritance. That would include greed and robbery and reviling a brother in the matter of civil law suits. And it would most definitely include sexual promiscuity, which is the first subject in the context of chapters five and six.

So, as Paul wrote about Christians suing one another in heathen courts and assuming, like the Gnostics, that they might do as they pleased with material things without sinning, his thoughts were directed back to the subject of sexual promiscuity. Sexual abandon and all forms of unnatural perversion were the norm for most of first century Greco-Roman society. This is evidenced in ancient art and literature. We quote here from William Barclay:

The Greeks always looked down on the body. . . . That produced one of two attitudes. Either it issued in the most rigorous asceticism in which everything was done to subject and humiliate the desires and instincts of the body. Or—and in Corinth it was this second outlook which was prevalent—it was taken to mean that, since the body was of no importance, you could do what you liked with it; you could let it sate its appetites. What complicated this was the doctrine of Christian freedom which Paul preached. If the Christian man is the freest of all men, then is he not free to do what he likes, especially with this completely unimportant body of his?

So, the Corinthians argued, in a way that they thought very enlightened, let the body have its way. But what is the body's way? The stomach was made for food and food for the stomach, they went on. Food and the stomach naturally and inevitably go together. In precisely the same way the body is made for its instincts; it is made for the sexual act and the sexual act is made for it; therefore let the desires of the body have their way.

Another element in the heathen culture of Greco-Roman society Paul had to deal with was the matter of religion and human behavior. Heathen gods were what men made them. Naturally, when they disavowed the true God's revelation of his infinitely holy character and exchanged that truth for a lie (Rom. 1:18ff.) they supplied their own human characteristics to gods of their own making. Religion, to the heathen, was, and still is, a way to appease, cajole, and prevail against their gods until the gods are won over to the human's desire to do as he pleases. To the heathen, the human was relatively free to behave as he pleased so long as he did not anger the gods or the civil authorities. He could very easily appease the gods by making the right offerings and observing the superstitious rituals. So long as he paid his taxes, and did not participate in treason or revolution he could please the civil authorities. The Christian doctrine of freedom limited by morality and self-sacrifice was in absolute opposition to heathen selfishness.

Thus, Paul sets out to clarify the doctrine of Christian freedom as opposed to the philosophy and practice of heathen permissiveness. It is the teaching of Christ and his apostles that everything God has created is good (Gen. 1:10, 18, 25, 31; Acts 10:15; I Cor. 10:26; I Tim. 4:1-5) if used according to the precepts and principles revealed in God's word. There is a created purpose for the human longing for justice so long as it is not allowed to degenerate into a spirit of exploitation, hatred and retaliation. There is a God-ordained purpose for the physical appetite for food so long as it is controlled and not allowed to degenerate into gluttony. There is a God-ordained purpose for the desire for sexual intercourse as long as the desire is not permitted to deteriorate into adultery, fornication and homosexuality. Sexual intercourse was created by God but he never intended it to be casual, amoral and promiscuous. The longings and desires of the human being created for this earthly life have their limitations. They are for the present world order. They are created by God in order to test, discipline and prepare men during this earthly probation for existence in the next life.

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One of the principles under which these human longings are to be controlled is that while all things created by God are lawful, all things are not, in certain circumstances, helpful. Some things created by God, under some circumstances, are harmful. And, as Paul clearly says, whatever would enslave a person, under any circumstances, would be harmful. Food, drugs, sexuality, emotions, material possessions—all are lawful, good and helpful if controlled and limited by the revealed principles of God's word. But even these good and helpful things become harmful if man allows himself to be enslaved, possessed and obsessed by them, or when he abuses them beyond the limitations of God's directions. Paul uses the Greek word *exousias-thesomai* which is translated *enslaved* and means, more precisely, *ruled over by*. For the apostle it is Christ who rules over him—not his emotions, not food, not sexuality, and not material possessions. He is a slave to the will of Christ.

These Christians of Corinth, attempting to be sophisticated and follow popular Gnosticism, were apparently teaching that the appetite for sexual intercourse was merely a physical thing like the appetite for food. Paul makes it very clear that these two human functions do not belong in the same category. The statement, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" is correct, so long as man is not enslaved by food and becomes a glutton. What a man eats, so long as he is not obsessed with food, has no spiritual significance. Jesus and his apostles made that clear: (a) food has no spiritual significance even if it has been sacrificed to an idol, because an idol is not god (see I Cor. 8:1—10:33); (b) food has no power in and of itself to make a man spiritually clean or unclean—it is the attitude of the heart that makes clean or unclean (cf. Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:14-23); (c) human opinions as to which foods may be eaten and which may not is of no spiritual significance (Rom. 14:1-4; I Tim. 4:1-4; Col. 2:20-23) until someone attempts to make abstinence or indulgence a test of Christian fellowship. It is clear a man cannot be spiritually defiled by what he eats or what he does not eat, so long as it does no physical harm to the human body. There may be one exception to this in the Christian dispensation (see Acts 15:19-20; 21:25). The human function of eating and digesting food is purely a physical process and has no spiritual significance. It is for this life only. When this life is over neither food or the human stomach, as we know them now, will continue to exist. But the "body" is different!

It must be clear that Paul is using the word *body* (Gr. *soma*) in a sense intended to mean *more* than flesh and bone and blood. The Greek word in the New Testament which most often means *flesh and*

*bone is sarx. Vine's Expository Dictionary* says of the New Testament usage of the word *soma*, or *body*:

SOMA . . . is the body as a whole, the instrument of life, whether of man living, e.g., Matt. 6:22, or dead, Matt. 27:52; or in resurrection, I Cor. 15:44; or of beasts, Heb. 13:11; of grain, I Cor. 15:37, 38; of the heavenly hosts, I Cor. 15:40. In Rev. 18:13 it is translated "slaves." In its figurative uses the essential idea is preserved.

Sometimes the word stands, by *synecdoche*, for the complete man, Matt. 5:29; 6:22; Rom. 12:1; James 3:6; Rev. 18:13. Sometimes the person is identified with his or her body, Acts 9:37; 13:36, and this is so even of the Lord Jesus, John 19:40 with 42. The body is not the man, for he himself can exist apart from his body, 2 Cor. 12:2, 3. The body is an essential part of the man and therefore the redeemed are not perfected till the resurrection, Heb. 11:40; no man in his final state will be without his body, John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:13.

*Soma* as Paul used it here means man in his total existence in this world. Man is more than body, but he *is* body. It is through the body that the personality, the spiritual man, functions and operates in relationship to God and his fellow man. It is difficult for people of western culture to think of the body as the person. We tend to think of the body as a group of fleshly organs that will die and decompose in the grave. It is true, Paul spoke this way of the stomach, but to the Oriental (eastern) mind (including the Hebrew) the term *body* most often was associated with the *self*. So, in this section, we might correctly paraphrase the apostle by using either the word "self" or "man." Man is both body and soul (or spirit). In the New Testament *soul* describes man in his thinking, feeling, willing capacities; *body* describes man as an acting, functioning, personality living in this world in relationship to his Creator and other creatures. The body is the extension of and instrument through which the soul is expressed.

Man was not made for immorality. Man in his totality was made for the Lord. God made man to function and express self or soul in this existence through his body. Thus, the human body has, as it were, a spiritual purpose. In and through our bodies we are to serve and glorify Christ. Man, in his totality—body and soul—was made to serve and exhibit truth, purity, holiness, and goodness (the character of God). Man was *not* made with a body to abuse it in selfish, hurtful, degrading and false practices. The stomach was made for good, but man in his totality was made for God. Paul is

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certainly aware that some men may make their bellies their gods (Rom. 16:18; Phil. 3:19) so he is *not* saying in this text that there is no possibility of sinful abuse of the stomach and food. He *is* saying the Gnostic philosophy which says the sexual appetite is just like the appetite for food, a totally natural function, is *false*. He is saying man is *not* as free to satisfy the sexual desire as he is the desire for food.

The apostle had undoubtedly taught the Corinthians in his earlier visits that the Old Testament legislation about "sinful" foods had been fulfilled in the Gospel and they were "free" to eat anything that was not physically harmful. It is certain that he had previously taught them they were free in Christ from all opinions and superstitions of paganism. But now he sets out upon a five-chapter dissertation (ch. 6-10) concerning the limitations of Christian freedom. Clearly, the Corinthians had been twisting his earlier teaching about liberty to mean they were free to be totally abandoned to whatever fleshly appetite they might feel urged. Paul seeks to correct that by a concise and clear statement of the divine purpose for the human body.

**6:15-20 Purpose of Humanness:** The stomach was meant for food, but not for complete dietary abandon. Eating must be controlled. Gluttony is a perversion of the body and a sin. But in eating there is no intimate spiritual involvement with another person. Human sexual organs were meant for sexual intercourse. But they were not made to be given over to complete sexual abandon. Sexuality must be controlled. Sexual promiscuity is a perversion of the body and a sin. But there is more than mere physical function involved in sexual intercourse. In sexual intercourse two beings are spiritually or psychologically *joined* or united in a mutual purpose.

Paul begins his explanation of the purpose of humanness by declaring that Christians are supposed to have given their bodies (selves, persons) to be united in mutuality with Christ. Christians are to be joined, spirit, soul and body (in totality) to Jesus Christ. They are married to him (Eph. 5:21-33). For the Christian to engage in sexual intercourse with someone to whom he or she is not married is not only unfaithfulness to the human spouse but is also unfaithfulness to Christ.

The person who joins with a prostitute (male or female) in sexual intercourse does more than perform a physical function. Two people who join in sexual intimacy undeniably unite psychologically or spiritually in a mutual purpose. Those who do so as married people are fulfilling a good spiritual purpose—the will of God. Those who do so outside the marriage bonds are fulfilling a mutual, spiritual purpose

of rebellion against the will of God. If we translate (or paraphrase) Paul's use of the word *body* by using the word *person* or *self*, he would be saying, "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one *person* with her?" Sexual intercourse is the point in human relations at which two *persons* (not just fleshly bodies) are united in the *ultimate* human intimacy. There can be no other intimacy in human relations as deeply spiritual or as psychologically binding. Two thus joined become one! Legally, of course, there is more to marriage than the act of sexual intercourse. Spiritually and psychologically there is more to marriage than sexual intercourse. But both legally and spiritually, sexual intercourse is the act that *consummates* a marriage. A person who unites sexually with a prostitute (or in an act of adultery or fornication) is not legally married to the prostitute. Paul is *not* setting forth some technical law by which a person who joins in sexual intercourse to a harlot must forever after consider himself legally married to her. In fact, there are any number of persons, legally "married" having also consummated their marriage sexually, who are not "one" in other areas of marriage. Paul *is* saying here, with all the emphasis possible, that sexual intercourse is more than a physical function. Certain physical functions of the human body are instinctive and amoral. That is, when these functions operate they are neither good nor bad—man has no moral control over them one way or another. They operate whether he chooses for them to do so or not. Digestion is such an amoral physical function. With sexual intercourse that is not so. Man has been given moral choice and control over sexual intimacy. The Greek word *de* (translated "but" in verse 17) is a conjunctive particle "marking the superaddition of a clause, whether in opposition or in continuation, to what has preceded, and it may be variously rendered *but, on the other hand, and, also, now, etc.*" We think verse 17 is a clause in *continuation* of what has preceded and not in opposition. Therefore, Paul is *likening* the intimateness of the Christian's relationship to Christ to that of two persons engaged in sexual intercourse. The Christian joins himself intimately to Christ by choice. So the person who joins himself intimately (sexually) to another person does so morally—by choice. A Christian who joins intimately (sexually) with a prostitute has taken the body (person) purchased by the sinless blood of Christ, which has been intimately joined to Christ and made a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and joined it in rebellion against the will of Christ and the desecration of his glory. God created man to glorify his Son. Man was not given a human body to use as an instrument of rebellion. So Paul exhorts these Christians to make deliberate choice and take

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deliberate action to keep from sinning with their bodies. Because of modern connotations, the RSV translation "Shun" for the Greek word *pheugete* in verse 18 is not strong enough. The KJV and the ASV give it the more emphatic translation, "Flee" fornication. The Greek word *porneia*, translated "fornication," may also be used generically for all immorality. No human being can begin to fulfill God's purpose for having created him until he is willing to flee from all immorality.

The statement "Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against his own body" must be interpreted in this context. Paul is clearly teaching these Corinthians that sexual intercourse is *more* than a mere physical action. Divine revelation teaches that sexual intercourse is an intimate, spiritual and psychological union of personalities, much like the spiritual union of a Christian to Christ (it is, indeed, a *marriage*). He is *not* saying that other sins have no spiritual causes or consequences. He is simply saying that other sins do not unite one person with another in such a life-affecting way as fornication. The student should immediately read Proverbs 5:8-11; 6:24-32; 7:24-27. The spiritual intimacy of the sexual relationship, when perverted contrary to the will of God, results in the destruction of the personality; especially is the person inhibited from the spiritual goals for which God created him. This may be documented today from the experiences and files of counseling psychiatrists and clergymen.

A physical function of the body is temporary. It is of the flesh and will perish with the flesh. The *use* of some physical functions, however, is a spiritual matter. The *use* of most physical functions is a matter of moral choice. To use any physical function contrary to the revealed will of its Creator is immoral. All sins abusing the physical organs are "outside" the most intimate part of our personality *except* sexual abuse. Sexual sin is against the deepest recesses of the person *inside*! This is a solemn warning to those sophisticates of the world today who would seduce mankind with the ancient Gnostic philosophy that sexual intercourse is merely a physical function and may be practiced without obedience to the word of God.

In some way, when a human being gives his body to sexual intimacy with another being, he gives it as a *residence* to the personality of that other person. When sexual intimacy is given contrary to the will of God the body becomes a residence of the "spirit of harlotry" and prostitution. God wants man to give his or her body for the residence of the Holy Spirit. This is what a person vows to do when becoming a Christian. The *whole* man (which is what Paul means in his use of



the Greek word *soma*, or "body") is not to perish like food and the human stomach. Sexual promiscuity treats the *whole* man as if it were to perish! Sexual promiscuity destroys that which is eternal in man—love, faithfulness, honesty, orderliness, and righteousness. It is no accident that God symbolizes idolatry and unbelief as "harlotry" in the Old Testament. Sexual promiscuity and prostitution are so irresponsible, so exploitative, so degrading and dehumanizing in attitude and action. They treat the human body as a "thing." That is why Paul said every other sin which a man commits is outside the body but the sexually promiscuous person sins against his own body.

Paul's final explanation of and argument for the purpose of humanness concerns the human self or person (the whole man) as a potential residence of the Holy Spirit of God Almighty. Actually, it is presupposed by the apostle that God's Spirit had already taken residence in the bodies of these Corinthian Christians. Just what does Paul mean by the question, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" What is the phenomenon known as "the indwelling of the Holy Spirit"?

Let us first consider what, according to other New Testament passages, it *cannot* mean; (a) it cannot mean the power to perform miracles; that is specified in the New Testament as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" and was promised only to apostles—passed on by the apostles to selected Christians of the first century only by the laying on of the hands of the apostles; some (e.g. John the Baptist) who were said to be "full of the Holy Spirit" *never* worked a miracle so far as we know; (b) it cannot mean supernatural illumination that enables those who have it to understand the scriptures; all men are created with the capacity to read human language and understand without divine illumination; the apostles were given, supernaturally, a revelation of the New will of God, but they delivered it to the whole human race in human language (see our comments on I Cor. 2:1ff.) and all sinners are expected to hear and read those apostolic words and believe *before* the Holy Spirit comes to abide with them; faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17); there would be no point in preaching, no point in sinners reading the Bible, no point even in printing Bibles if every non-Christian must wait until he is sure he has the Holy Spirit in him before he can understand the revealed will of God.

The coming of the Holy Spirit of God and Christ to take residence in the human being involves *more* than understanding, acknowledging and obeying the revealed will of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures. Apparently, it is a supernatural action on the part of God but mystical

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to man (that is, a spiritual reality neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence). The difference between those who will *not* be raised to eternal life with Christ and those who *will* is the indwelling presence of Christ's Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1-11). The coming of Christ's Spirit to reside in us is not something we earn or merit by our perfect obedience, but it is initiated by God's Spirit because of his grace when we give him welcome by our love and faith.

Having said it is mystical to man, however, does not preclude the fact that we can understand, acknowledge in faith, and obey the directions revealed by the Holy Spirit providing the instrumentality through which God chooses to initiate his supernatural residence in people. God's action may be mystical, but the *directions* through which he promises to act are *not* mystical. The Bible clearly teaches that faithful and loving response to the commandments of God, in any dispensation of time, will be acceptable as an invitation for the Holy Spirit to take up residence within a human being (cf. Ps. 51:10-12; John 14:15-24; 15:1-11; Acts 2:38; 5:32; Rom. 8:5; Eph. 3:17; I John 3:24; 4:12, etc.). So then, the *way* God's Spirit dwells in a person is by a person's intelligent, willing, loving submission to what God says by the Holy Spirit in the revealed Word so that what he thinks, determines, and feels is under the direction of the Spirit through the Word. In other words, the instrument or vehicle or channel through which the Holy Spirit enters and resides in our bodies (or persons) is his revealed and written Word. Apart from that process he will not function residentially in us—not initially and not continually. Clearly, Paul has been teaching from the very first of this epistle that the apostolic gospel is the exclusive matrix within which these Corinthians must be living in order to be assured of the communion (residence) of God's Spirit. God's Spirit does not reside within a person outside the communion of his Word. Christ "stands at the door and knocks"—he will not force his way in to "sup" (reside) with any who are not believing and repenting (cf. Rev. 3:19-20).

The apostle turns metaphorically to the well known practice of slavery to show the emphatic subservience of the purchased one to his purchaser. It would be a familiar experience in the first century. The slave in the Greco-Roman world was chattel, purely and simply. Slaves were bought and sold as property, and masters held total sovereignty over them. Slaves gave total allegiance and obedience to their masters lest they be punished or slain without any appeal to civil courts or magistrates. The only purpose for a slave was to serve his master's will—totally. For slaves who were purchased by good and beneficent masters, this could mean protection, security, dignity and

even happiness (see the letter to Philemon). Paul preached and wrote a great deal about the good and beneficent Master, Jesus Christ. He always considered himself, and all other Christians, as having yielded both soul and body in slavery to Christ (cf. Rom. 6:15-23). Since Christ has purchased all men through his vicarious atonement (cf. Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:12; I Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9), they are expected to yield, by faith, and be his slaves for righteousness. If Christ has paid our ransom, he owns us. He actually owns us twice—first by right of having created us and second by right of having redeemed us.

The person who yields himself to become a slave of Christ has no "rights" of his own. He does not belong to himself but to Christ. The only "rights" a Christian has are those granted him in the revealed will of his Master, Jesus Christ (and that is in the Bible). Any attitude or action *not* found in Christ's revealed will is *not* permissible for the Christian. See "New Life Through Accepting Jesus' Death" in *Learning From Jesus*, by Seth Wilson, pgs. 495-503, College Press.

We who have yielded to the redemption he obtained for us are his "body" here on earth—the channels through which he works. We are "instruments" of his for accomplishing righteousness in the earth. Jesus, instead of being limited to one physical body as when he was here on earth, now acts through the bodies of his people in whom he lives. You will always find in the Bible that God works through a human body in this world. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-18). The Son came in a human body to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10:5-10). It was in a body that man sinned; it is in a body that we sin. It was in a body that the Son of man came to earth; it was in a body that he conquered sin which had conquered us. It was in a body that he died and rose again, and now, by his Spirit, he comes to live within the body of his people. Satan always works in this world through a body also. The only way he can thwart God's purposes is to get a body surrendered to his use, available for his diabolic power and ugly purposes. This is the question of choice in a Christian's life: shall he take that which has been purchased by Christ and made an instrument of the body of Christ, and give it to some unworthy use?—that body, the means through which God's will is to be done, and yield it to the rebellious purposes of Satan? If he does, he becomes *one* with the devil. But if he is yielded to the Lord's Spirit, he is one with the Spirit of Christ. The same Spirit which enabled Jesus Christ to live day by day in a human body and never deviate from the will of God, never yield to all the tremendous temptations of the devil, will live in us and through us as our Strengtheners, too. Joined to Christ, we are able to glorify God in the body. Joined to the devil, we glorify sin in our bodies.

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Thus, Paul closes his exhortation (temporarily) against the seductive Gnostic sophistry that since the body is merely physical and every physical hunger (including the sexual hunger) an amoral, uncontrollable animal instinct, there is no moral guilt in sexual promiscuity. The Gnostic sophistry tried to ignore the sins of fornication, adultery and homosexuality by calling them simply physical functions like eating food. Paul replies that the human body was created for the Lord's purpose, its destiny is to be resurrected for the Lord's purpose, therefore, human bodies are members of God's personhood. To prostitute a human body for physical purposes only (especially in sexual promiscuity like animals) would be to take what belongs to God and use it for the devil. The bodies of Christian people belong to Christ even more surely by their having professed to accept Christ's redemption. Christians have been sanctified, body and soul, to glorify Christ by yielding up their bodies (and souls) in service to righteousness.

It is a fundamental doctrine of the New Testament. We cannot go to heaven if we do not yield to it. The old Gnostic sophistry is flooding the earth again today and has even washed over the gunwales of the "ship of Zion"—carnality threatens to sink the church today. Christians must insist on the sacredness of the human body and its sanctification to the will of God, no matter how unpopular the doctrine may be.

### APPLICATIONS:

1. The Bible is vitally practical. It deals with the minutiae of human existence. God even expresses his will and wisdom for guidance in the matter of squabbles and grievances.
2. Christians *must* learn to settle grievances between themselves while on earth—there will be no pagan civil courts in heaven.
3. Christians are *called* to allow (suffer) wrong to be done to them rather than cause wrong to be done to another or to Christ's church.
4. One does not have to murder someone to go to hell—just be *greedy*!
5. Homosexuality is not a disease; it is not congenital; it is not mental illness—IT IS SIN!
6. The most perverse sin may be forgiven if the sinner will trust the word of Christ and be washed, sanctified and justified.
7. There is no such thing as absolute freedom—even Christian liberty is limited to God's revealed guidelines for goodness and helpfulness.
8. Any *thing*, *habit* or *idea* that would rule our conduct or dictate our way of thinking contrary to Christ's will is unlawful for Christians.

9. Sexual intercourse is *not* the same as or even like eating food. It is *not* merely a physical function. It is psychologically intimate and essentially moral. It is spiritual!
10. Human *bodies* were created by God as *instruments* through which human *beings* might express love and adoration for their Creator. Although the flesh will eventually die, while it lives it is to be employed only for loving God.
11. Human *beings*, if they are willing, may have the honor of sharing their human *bodies* with the *Spirit* of Almighty God.
12. The apostle Paul's teaching about the human body and its functions is as up-to-date as today's newspaper!

### APPREHENSIONS:

1. What is a "grievance"?
2. Why would Christians be suing one another in court?
3. How will saints be judging the world and angels?
4. Who are the "least esteemed" by the church?
5. Could Christians actually settle disputes with one another over property outside a civil court?
6. Why does having lawsuits with one another as Christians produce defeat?
7. Would you be willing to allow yourself to be defrauded by a Christian brother before taking him to civil court?
8. Sexual misbehavior excludes people from the kingdom of God—does financial misbehavior (thievery, robbery, greed)?
9. Can the sin of homosexuality be repented of and discontinued by accepting Christ?
10. What is meant by saying that some Corinthian homosexuals were "washed, sanctified, justified"?
11. What is meant by saying this was done "in the name of the Lord Jesus"?
12. How could *all* things be lawful for a Christian?
13. What condition is meant by the term, "enslaved"?
14. Why does Paul talk about food being meant for the stomach, etc.?
15. To what extent is a person "joined" to a prostitute when having sexual intercourse with one?
16. For what purpose did God make the human body?
17. How is every sin except sexual immorality *outside* the body?
18. How does the Holy Spirit dwell in the human body?
19. What is the price paid for us?
20. Does belonging to Christ mean we have no say about what we think and do? Who does have the "say-so"?

## Chapter Seven

### THE PROBLEMS OF SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE (7:1-40)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why should we accept the advice of a bachelor (Paul) on the subject of marriage?
2. Are the “unmarried” of 7:8, 25, 32, 34, those who have *never* been married?
3. What does the word “separate” mean in 7:10, 15?
4. Since Paul had no *command* from the Lord concerning the unmarried, are we still bound to obey his “opinion”? 7:25
5. Since God saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and created a woman to be his wife, why does Paul say he who refrains from marriage will “do better”? 7:38

#### SECTION 1

#### The Purity of Marriage (7:1-9)

**7** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. <sup>1</sup>It is well for a man not to touch a woman. <sup>2</sup>But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. <sup>3</sup>The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup>Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup>I say this by way of concession, not of command. <sup>7</sup>I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

<sup>8</sup>To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. <sup>9</sup>But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

**7:1a Provocation for This Discussion:** Paul was not married when he wrote this epistle to the Corinthians (see 7:7-8). Many people have

difficulty accepting advice on marriage from a bachelor. It is possible that Paul had previously been married. Some scholars think Paul implies a former marriage by his question in I Corinthians 9:5 about his right to be accompanied by a wife as other apostles did. It is doubtful that he could have been a member of the Sanhedrin (if he was) had he been unmarried. This chapter does seem to be written by someone who knew by *experience* the intimacies and problems of married life. He may have been a widower. And no one has ever glorified marriage more than the apostle Paul (cf. Eph. 5:22-23). His great tribute to Timothy's mother and grandmother shows something of the esteem with which he looked upon marriage and the home. But whether he was married or not makes no difference. He was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore what he teaches, even about marriage, is to be believed, trusted and obeyed.

The Christians of Corinth had previously written to Paul asking questions about sexuality and marriage. These questions would have been provoked by their constant exposure to three conflicting ideologies in respect to sexuality and marriage: (1) Jewish Christians in the Corinthian church would consider celibacy inimical to godliness. The idea of not marrying was so foreign to the Jewish mentality that the Old Testament does not even have a word for "bachelor." The godly life for the Jew meant not only marriage, but children; (2) Apparently there was already some kind of Christian asceticism or monasticism among some Christians at Corinth. They believed that the most "spiritual" people were those who were celibates. Some were teaching that those who abstained from physical marriage were the holiest of people, and if men and women insisted on marriage they should unite only in a "spiritual" marriage, a sort of Christian "brother-sister" platonic relationship. Such a marriage would not permit sexual intercourse. Paul warned Timothy that such a teaching was a "denial of the faith" and "demonic" in origin (I Tim. 4:1-5). The same apostle wrote, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled . . ." (Heb. 13:4), and, ". . . each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor . . ." (I Thess. 4:4). This has been an ever recurring departure from scriptural truth. One large segment of Christendom today teaches that celibacy is the holiest state of all and that those who minister must be unmarried; (3) and finally, these Christians of Corinth were trying to practice the holiness of the gospel surrounded by the loose and wicked morals of Greco-Roman culture. Rape,

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fornication, homosexuality and other perversions were glorified in the theatre and in the cultic religions of that world. From the context of this chapter, it appears these three cultural factors provoked the Christians at Corinth to "write" to the apostle for his inspired guidance.

**7:1b-2 Pressure of Desire:** Paul's statement, "It is well for a man not to touch a woman . . ." uses the Greek present middle infinitive, *haptesthai*, for the word *touch*. This word, in the middle voice, would be more accurately translated, "cling to, fasten oneself to, assimilate to oneself." In other words, Paul is not stating that men should never touch a woman at all—he was revealing (because of stressful circumstances at the time he wrote) that the wisest thing for a man to do was not "fasten" himself to a woman in marriage. Paul's command, as is clear later in the context, hinges entirely on the circumstances Christians were about to face in the Roman persecutions (7:26).

But there is an even stronger stress that might override the dreadful separation of husband and wife by martyrdom. That stress would be the drive to fulfill the human sexual urge (7:2, 5, 9, 36). God created the sexual drive in mankind, and it is good so long as it is fulfilled within biblically sanctioned marriage. So Paul writes, "But because of fornication (the word for *temptation* is not in the Greek text), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Sexual immorality (fornication) was not only practiced almost universally in first century Greco-Roman society, it was glorified in art and religion. Paul plainly states that one, (if not *the* one) primary reason for marriage is to guard against succumbing to the temptation for illicit sexual intercourse! He reemphasizes this in verses 8-9. The Greek verb *echeto*, translated "have," is in the imperative mood, and means Paul is giving a *command* here—not simply making a suggestion. Now, of course, Paul did not think relaxation from the temptation to illicit sexual intercourse was the *only* basis upon which Christian marriage is founded. He certainly emphasizes *agape* (God-like love) (see Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19) in marriage. The Bible also indicates that human marriage is to serve the even higher spiritual goal of exemplifying to the world the commitment and intimate relationship of believers to Christ (cf. Eph. 5:22-33; Isa. 54:4-8; 62:1-5; Ezek. 16:1-34; Hosea, chapters 1-3). On the other hand, it may surprise even Christians to know that the Bible says little about a man and a woman "loving" *one another* as a *prerequisite* to marriage. The Bible says a great deal about love *within* a marriage. In the Old Testament marriages were most often *arranged* by godly parents. The



young couple then married and *learned* to love one another *during* the marriage. Most of them never went through the alleged experience of “falling in love” before marriage. Love is not an accident. No one “falls” into love. True love is from the *will*—not from the emotions. True love is caring and doing good for another even when one does not *feel* like caring. A man or woman must know what love is and how to love *before* marrying or the marriage will fail. Love doesn’t happen—it is not something one waits to experience—it is something done, something practiced.

The apostle’s statement that “each” should have his “own” wife or husband incidentally *eliminates* polygamy as a Christian option. Paul did *not* mean that every man and woman *must* marry since he cites celibacy as the most viable choice in light of first century circumstances (7:26).

**7:3-7 Practical Direction:** Paul here reinforces his teaching that the pressure of sexual desire is the main reason to seek marriage. The Greek words Paul used to give directions about sexual needs in marriage are interesting. Literally, he would say, “To the wife let the husband pay the good affection due her, and likewise also the wife to the husband.” The Greek word *apodidoto* (“pay”) is an imperative verb and is therefore a command. The use of the word “pay” implies obligation. The word *eunoian* is a Greek word literally meaning, “well-minded” but is here used to connote (as v. 4 indicates) the conjugal duties involved in marriage. God instituted marriage as the state in which man and woman are *privileged* to fulfill sexual desires. But within that state there are also certain *duties*! When God created man he saw that it was not good for man to be alone so he created woman (see Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-25). It is clear from Paul’s instruction here that sexual intercourse within marriage is not sinful, and is not restricted to procreative purposes. Sexual intercourse, as befits a happy, godly and uninhibited marriage, is the God-ordained right of each partner in a marriage. Less than this (especially for a Christian) is to miss the mark of God’s will. Marriage is God’s practical way for men and women to enjoy their sexual desire in wisdom, health (both physical and psychological) and social order. Any other application of the human sexual drive results (as history verifies) in mental and physical sickness and social chaos.

In verse 4 Paul states a principle which is at variance with modern “self-assertion” hucksters. J. B. Phillips translates, “The wife has no longer full rights over her own person, but shares them with her

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husband. In the same way the husband shares his personal rights with his wife." In the Greek text the word used is *exousiazei*, and is literally, *authority*. That is stronger than the English translation, "full rights." It could be translated *rule*. In marriage *each* partner surrenders to be *ruled* by the other. Paul specifies this in regard to their *bodies* (Gr. *somatos*), but in other epistles he applies it to the whole realm of married life (cf. Eph. 5:21ff.; Col. 3:18-19). In marriage, both husband and wife give up exclusive rights to their own bodies (and lives), agreeing to share them fully and freely with their partner. The happiest marriages are those characterized by complete liberty, few inhibitions, and absence of any guilt complex about sexuality within the will of God. The cause of much marital trouble today is *selfishness*, not only, but certainly foremost, in the area of sexuality. The Greek word *exousiazei* is in the present tense indicating that this reciprocal surrendering of husband and wife to one another is a *continuing* and permanent relationship. The New Testament teaches that marriage was intended by God to be a permanent relationship between one man and one woman in which the two, by surrendering all personal rights to one another, become one.

Paul's teaching here should convince anyone that he was not a "Woman-hating" antagonist of marriage nor "victorian" in his attitude toward sexuality in marriage. He may have been a bachelor all his life; he definitely believed he was led by God to advise celibacy, because of the exigencies of the times, for those who could endure the single life. But he does not enjoin bachelorhood or celibacy as an absolute commandment of God.

In verse 5 Paul states one exception to the sexual responsibilities of Christian husbands and wives. But even in this one exception Paul is quick to limit sexual abstinence lest Satan tempt a man or a woman through *lack of self-control*! Once again, emphasis is placed on marriage as God's primary provision for the controlled practice of the human sexual drive. The apostle's one exception is in case one of the partners in a marriage wants to devote himself completely to prayer. But Paul warns against any lengthy abstinence even for prayer! The RSV translates the Greek word *apostereite*, "Do not *refuse* one another. . . ." The KJV translates it, "*Defraud* ye not one the other. . . ." Actually the Greek word is more emphatic than *refuse*—it is often translated, *rob*, *despoil*, *defraud*, *leave destitute*. The idea is that lengthy abstinence by one married partner in sexual intimacy will leave the other partner robbed, defrauded and destitute, and

clearly vulnerable to Satan's temptation to illicit sexual gratification. This, too, is an apostolic command, for the Greek verb *apostereite* is in the imperative mood. There may come times when a personal time for seeking the Lord comes before the one dearest on earth (one's spouse), *but only for a limited time*. Church work cannot be used as an excuse for neglecting one's marriage. What is accomplished for the kingdom of God if one's marriage partner is tempted and lost?

The English word *concession* (RSV) in verse 6 is not a good translation of the Greek word *sungnomen*. The Greek literally means, "to think the same as." In II Maccabees 14:31 it is translated "aware." It could be translated, "with understanding." To translate the word "concession" or "permission" (KJV) implies that the rigid apostolic standard in human sexuality was celibacy but that Paul would *concede* to the less holy relationship of marriage by bending the revelation of the Holy Spirit slightly. But that cannot be correct. To Paul marriage was God-ordained. What Paul is saying here is precisely the same thing the Lord said to the Twelve in Perea (see Matt. 19:1-12). Paul was "aware" that the majority of humanity would never have the "gift" to remain celibate without being tempted to fornication. He was writing "with understanding" of that fact and so, he declared, "I wish that all were as I myself (celibate) am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another—and I do not say that celibacy is an absolute command of God."

Jesus made plain the high ideal for human marriage (Matt. 19:3-9) and his disciples jumped to the hasty conclusion that every man should be celibate (Matt. 19:10-12). Jesus replied, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given." He said there were a few men who had to be celibate because of circumstances beyond their control; and there were a few men who were able to remain celibate by their own choice, for the sake of the kingdom of God. But Jesus recognized that most men are not able to "receive" the condition of celibacy. Jesus made it plain that celibacy is not a matter of divine commandment but a matter of capability. Here (1:6-7) Paul says celibacy is a matter of being "gifted" (Gr. *charisma*). ". . . *But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. . . .*" *Some people have charisma* to remain celibate and some people have *charisma* to marry. The word "special" as in the RSV, or the word "proper" as in KJV, is not in the Greek text. Celibacy is *not* a "special" gift like speaking in a foreign language, prophesying, interpreting, healing, etc. (see I Cor. ch. 12-14). It is apparently an innate ability. Regarding the matter of celibacy (Matt. 19:10-12) Matthew reports Jesus as saying, *ho dunamenos chorein choreito*, "the one with the

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ability to have this, let him have it!" There are some "with" the ability and some who do not have it. When God made man, he saw "that it was not good for man to dwell alone" so he made a helper "fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). Some people may be able to find completion and fulfillment without a marriage partner—but not many. Applebury states the meaning of verses 6-7 clearly: "Each one has his own gift from God; for one it may be the gift of continence; for another it may be the ability to bear patiently and lovingly the responsibilities of the home with Christian consideration for the other partner." Those who have innate ability to remain celibate in life apparently do not have the ability to deal with the responsibilities of married life. This text, incidentally, proves that the word *charisma* does not always refer to "special," miraculous gifts. There are some gifts from God (Gr. *charisma*) with which individuals are born (see Rom. 12:4-13). God gives every human being *some* charisma! In "special," miraculous gifts men exercised no decisions; these gifts came by divine intervention of the natural order; they were exercised by the operation of the Holy Spirit. But in the matter of marriage or celibacy, it is clear men are called upon to make their own choice, based upon the teachings of the apostles and their own evaluations of their innate capabilities.

**7:8-9 Passion Disciplined:** Paul addresses the remarks in these verses to the "unmarried males" (Greek, *agamois*, masculine, dative, plural, noun) and to the "widows" (Greek, *cherais*, feminine, dative plural, noun). It is addressed to "unmarried males" because in ancient times only men were allowed to take the initiative in choosing marriage partners. "Unmarried males" could mean either bachelors or widowers. Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit (see 7:40), states it would be well (Gr. *kalon*) for anyone unmarried at that time (for reasons of "the impending distress" 7:26) to remain even as he was. Paul does not say in the text that he was unmarried. The Greek text is, *kalon autois estin ean meinosin hos kago*, or "well for them it is if they remain as I also am being." We assume he was single from the context. Some think Paul had been previously married and was a widower at the writing of I Corinthians. In stating that celibacy would be *good*, Paul is not saying that marriage would be *bad*. There seem to be only two reasons Paul has for celibacy being good—because of the "impending distress" and because the celibate is able to concentrate more fully on the things of the kingdom of God than the married person is (7:25-35).

Paul is quick, however, to *qualify* his statement that celibacy is good. Celibacy is good only if a person is able to exercise sexual self-control. The Greek phrase is: *ei de ouk enkrateuontai, gamesatosan*, or, "However, if they have no self-control, let them marry." The Greek verb *enkrateuontai* means literally, "continuing power within" since it is in the present tense. There can be no doubt that the "power within" is self-control over sexual impulses. The context demands that interpretation. The apostolic wisdom in the matter is: "It is better (Gr. *kreisson*, more profitable) to marry than to be inflamed." There is no word for "passion" in the Greek text as in the RSV translation. There is only the word *purousthai* in the Greek text which literally means, "to burn." Again, the context demands we interpret Paul to mean "burn with sexual passion." For those able to live a *constant* life of sexual sublimation, the unmarried state is good. But for those who cannot, it is more profitable to marry.

Paul wrote to the young evangelist (we presume Timothy was unmarried) that the theology which forbade marriage was a theology "departing from the faith"—in other words, *apostasy* (I Tim. 4:3). In a later section of this chapter we will be asking whether Paul's statement to Timothy means no one has the right to forbid marriage to those never *previously* married, or does it mean that no one has the right to forbid marriage to any one in an unmarried state regardless of past circumstances. But one thing is certain, Paul agrees with the rest of Biblical teaching that marriage is a godly estate.

Marriage is the only human relationship in which sexual intercourse is approved by God! The person who cannot sublimate sexual urges, fulfilling them in something higher, should get married. It should be noted that Paul advises marriage when it is first apparent that a person is not able to control sexual urges—not *after* sexual experimentation has occurred. This may seem to some that Paul is taking a rather crude view of marriage. But Paul enunciates some of the highest ideals and purposes for marriage in all the Bible (cf. Eph. 5:21ff.). What Paul says in our text here shows that God is aware of the significance and power of human sexuality. The sexual urge in mankind, if not the strongest, is certainly *one* of the *most* powerful. And that is undoubtedly God's will in order to motivate man to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1, etc.). The Greek word *gamesatosan* is in the imperative mood in this text. That is more than a suggestion; "they should marry" is an apostolic command! It is crucial to later comments on remarriage that this

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*command* be remembered. Certainly, those who have once been married and later widowed or divorced would be as apt to “burn with passion” as those who have never been married. If those who once were married now burn with passion in an unmarried state, it would be better for them, too, to get married. It does not seem in keeping with God’s grace to forbid divorced persons to remarry, placing them in the position of burning with passion until they engage in illicit sexual intercourse.

### SECTION 2

#### The Permanence of Marriage (7:10-16)

10 To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband.<sup>11</sup> (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

12 To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.<sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.<sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.<sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace.<sup>16</sup> Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?

**7:10-14 Command:** God’s commandment has always been that each human marriage is to be permanent—until death separates one member of the marriage. That has been God’s will from the beginning of creation (cf. Matt. 19:8). Paul reinforces that by stating, “To the married I give *charge*, not I but the Lord. . . .” Paul uses the Greek word *parangello* which means, “a proclamation, a command or commandment . . . strictly used of commands received from a superior and transmitted to others” (see Acts 5:28; 16:24; I Thess. 4:2; I Tim. 1:5, 18; Luke 5:14; 8:56; I Tim. 6:13, 17 for usage of the word *parangello*). Paul “charges” that the wife should not divorce her husband. The RSV translates the Greek word *choristhenai* as “separate,” but it is

the same Greek word used by Matthew in reporting (Matt. 19:6) Jesus' statement about "divorce." Paul is not talking here about separation without divorce. All through this context he is talking about *divorce*, the dissolution of a marriage.

Apparently in Corinth, new converts to Christ were leaving their believing partners, or unbelieving partners were leaving their believing partners, and completely dissolving the marriages by divorce. When Christians marry non-Christians, or when one unbeliever in a marriage becomes a believer and the other partner does not, there will always be difficulties. But, according to the apostle Paul, they are not insurmountable difficulties. The difficulties of such an "unequally yoked" marriage are not necessarily such as should call for divorce. The ideal situation, of course, is that both partners in a marriage be Christians. People who are contemplating marriage *can* and should choose Christian partners before. Love is *not* blind! Infatuation and emotionalism is blind. Love is not something one "falls into" but is something one wills, decides and does, and does constantly in spite of emotions or circumstances!

Marriage as an institution predates all other institutions. It was sanctioned by God before the Law of Moses or the Christian dispensation. God's will is that marriage should be permanent, no matter who is involved. When it comes right down to it, there is no essential difference between a "Christian" marriage in a church and a pagan marriage in the living room of a justice of the peace. There is no differentiation in God's will that every marriage be permanent until death. Marriage is not "a sacrament of the church" performed exclusively by and for the church. Marriage is for the maintenance of human social structure. It is an institution established by God to be practiced by the entire human race. When a man and woman sincerely agree to become husband and wife, and obey the social and civil laws for marriage in their community, they are husband and wife regardless of their religion! Marriage can only be made permanent through unreserved faith in Jesus Christ by both partners. It can never be made permanent by civil law or force. Jesus made that plain in Matthew 19:3-12. When men have "hard hearts" they will rebel against all that God has sanctified, including the permanence of marriage. The "law" is "laid down" for the lawless and disobedient (I Tim. 1:8-9) and the civil state must legislate and enforce laws which will keep sinful and wicked people from perverting marriage until they destroy social order.

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In a world where the majority of human beings are not Christians, God's ideals for marriage are seldom considered. Sometimes a Christian will compromise principle and marry a non-Christian. Sometimes, after two non-Christians are married one becomes a Christian. What is the Lord's will in such circumstances? God's will is always for the permanence of marriage. In any circumstance that would threaten to dissolve a marriage, God's will is for *reconciliation* (reunion, coming back together). While it is possible that a marriage might have to be dissolved for continued sexual unfaithfulness (see Matt. 5:32; 19:9) or because of unsolicited desertion (I Cor. 7:15) it is certainly not what God desires. He wants repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Nor does the Lord desire that the conversion of one marriage partner precipitate the dissolution of a marriage. Paul says, "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him." The Greek verb translated "consents" is *suneudokei* and means "willingly resolves" to  *dwell* (Gr. *oikein*) with her without coercion.

There are several reasons the Lord demands permanence in marriage. We have already stated one—the need of stability in the social structure. Another reason is discussed in 7:14—the power marriage has to sanctify unbelievers. Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Christian married to an unbeliever is that the believer should "sanctify" the unbeliever through the permanence of the marriage. The unbeliever is in a "set apart" circumstance (at least that much set apart from the world) by being married to a believer. So, the marriage of an unbeliever to a believer can become a powerful tool. When a man is converted, as head of the house he should lead his family to the Lord (e.g. the Philippian jailer and Cornelius). When a wife is the Christian and the husband an unbeliever, she has to be content with a slower process. Peter says that wives should submit themselves to their husbands; the husbands will more readily be won to Christ this way than through nagging, complaining or arguing (I Peter 3:1-2). Children who have even one Christian parent are at a great advantage over children reared in non-Christian homes. So, children are "set apart" from total worldliness by just one Christian parent. God's will is that marriage with just one Christian partner be permanent wherever and whenever human beings are agreeable. Of course, Paul does not mean that any unbelieving spouse or child is "saved by association." Being married to a Christian or being born by a Christian parent does not guarantee salvation. But it does mean,



where one marriage partner is a Christian, the unbelievers in the home will undoubtedly hear the gospel or see it being lived out there more clearly and often than anywhere else!

**7:15-16 Concession:** "But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate (divorce) let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound." The Greek words *chorizetai* and *chorizestho* in verse 15 should be translated, "But if the unbelieving partner divorces, let him (or her) be *divorced*." There is no word in the Greek text for "desires"—that is supplied by the translators. And, as we have pointed out above, Matthew used the word *chorizetai* to describe the Lord's discussion of *divorce* (not separation). There may be cases where one partner, not at all seeking to do God's will, may dissolve the marriage (for any number of so-called "reasons") while the other partner may not be able to stop the dissolution. When the unbelieving partner in a marriage has a heart so hardened by sin he or she "puts asunder" (the meaning of the Greek word *chorizetai*) or divorces the believing partner, then the believing partner ("brother" or "sister") is not "bound." What does Paul mean by, "not bound"? At least he means the Christian brother or sister is not bound to the divorcing-unbeliever as a spouse. Most civil societies (some with more latitude than others) have laws permitting divorce. When an unbeliever sues in civil court for dissolution of a marriage from a believer, and it is granted, there is nothing legal a believer can do to maintain the bonds of that marriage. Therefore, the believer is not bound to that marriage. But the big question is: Since a believer is not bound to a marriage he or she was forced by civil law to dissolve (when the believer was unwilling to have it dissolved), may the divorced believer remarry?

Paul has already admitted the *reality* that there is a possibility of the dissolution of marriages even where one party does not want it to be so. The unbeliever who has caused divorce has sinned. He or she must become a believer, repent and be immersed in water in order to be forgiven. The question remains, however, does the New Testament absolutely and unequivocally forbid remarriage with a different partner after divorce? (see Matt. 5:31-32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; I Cor. 7:15, 39; Rom. 7:3-4). Actually, there are no absolute or unequivocal directions in this matter of remarriage. What each Christian believes or practices he does so by his inference or deductions from certain principles. It is the opinion of this writer that remarriage is not only possible for those who have violated the will of God and dissolved marriages by divorce, but that God desires

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remarriage in such a case for both believer and unbeliever—for both the “guilty party” and the “innocent party.” The following deductions have brought this writer to his opinion:

- a. God made marriage for the whole human race.
- b. Divorce is a sin; marriage is *not* a sin.
- c. Very few men or women have the “gift” to remain sexually celibate.
- d. Paul emphatically states, more than once, that enforced sexual continence (celibacy) when a person does not have self-control is dangerous to one’s salvation (I Cor. 7:2, 5, 9, 36; I Thess. 4:3-8; I Tim. 5:14, etc.).
- e. It is illogical to reason that a person who is divorced, when he or she is unwilling to be divorced, may be considered an adulterer or adulteress should they marry another partner. People cannot be *made* to be adulterers against their will! Society may gossip and stigmatize an innocent person in a divorce situation, but he cannot be an adulterer unless he has an *attitude* of promiscuity—a *heart* that is against permanence in marriage.
- f. When there is a divorce there is no longer a marriage, neither in God’s eyes nor in man’s eyes—**THERE IS A SIN IN GOD’S EYES FOR WHICH SOMEONE MUST REPENT** (preferably a repentance resulting in remarriage to the same partner). But unless there is a reconciliation of the divorced persons, the marriage is over. They are no longer married to one another.
- g. There are two circumstances preceding a divorce in which, I believe, God considers one party in the divorce innocent—sexual unfaithfulness and desertion. In both circumstances one party has to be unwilling to the dissolution of the marriage. It is, therefore, this writer’s opinion that the innocent party is most certainly free to remarry—guided by his knowledge of the revealed will of God about marriage and his own conscience.

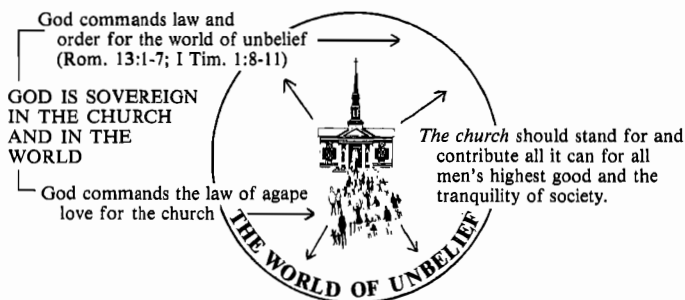
It is, further, the opinion of this writer that God desires remarriage even for the “guilty” party in divorce rather than trying to force him or her to a life of celibacy which he may not be able to endure without “burning with passion.” I believe God and Christ are interested in producing the highest good in every person’s life and in society in general. That is the spirit behind any Old Testament legislation or

New Testament principle (for example, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath").

- a. For the maintenance of social order, if an unbeliever cannot be controlled from promiscuous sexual intercourse by self-control, he or she should be married according to the laws of human responsibility and to keep society from degenerating to the level of animals.
- b. Paul points out in several places that while Christians are controlled by the highest principle, divine love, the non-Christian must be controlled by civil law, enforced by civil authorities (cf. I Tim. 1:8-11; Rom. 13:1-7).
- c. What practical or ultimate good is going to be served by forcing those once divorced to remain celibate the rest of their lives? There really is no legislation to that effect anywhere in the Bible. There is certainly no civil law to that effect. If all Christians lived by the law of divine love, Christian husbands and wives would never divorce one another. But some "Christians" do not live on that plane—they fall—they divorce one another. Are they to be banned to a life of celibacy for the rest of their natural lives? Is that seeking their highest good? What if they do not have the "gift" of sexual self-control? Should a minister of the gospel not also seek the highest good in every *fallen* person's life?
- d. Would enforced celibacy really heal the problems faced by children when divorce occurs? What if a husband is left with small children to rear? What if a wife is? Who shall support them financially? Are they better served to be reared without a father or without a mother?
- e. Would enforced celibacy heal the results of divorce? Will the church be able to support both materially and psychologically, all broken homes? Should Christians leave the healing of divorce in Christian homes to the civil state?
- f. Would enforced celibacy heal the problems of temptation and incontinence? (I Cor. 7:2, 5, 9, 36). Suppose we paraphrase Jesus thus, "Is it lawful to do good through the institution of marriage or to tempt to promiscuity through enforced celibacy? Marriage was made for man, not man for marriage!" *Enforced celibacy in prisons merely intensifies sexual crimes!* Christians who say those once delivered should never remarry need to look at what happens in prison among men and women separated from heterosexual marriage!

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- g. In no sense of the word do I condone divorce for any cause. I do not even condone loveless marriages whether the partners remain legally and outwardly married until they die. Both of these situations are certainly less than God's ideal.
- h. But, neither do I think a minister of the gospel is "partaking" of the sin of divorce by performing marriage vows (since he is authorized by the civil authorities to do so) for couples who are unbelievers; for couples where one is a believer and another an unbeliever; for couples where either one or both parties have previously been divorced. God does not approve of divorce; I do not approve of divorce. God knows that all people do not have the gift of sexual self-control without "burning"; that is revealed truth and experiential truth. God *does* approve of marriage; I approve of marriage. As a minister, I have had nothing to do with their divorce; but I can have something to do with their remarriage, and, perhaps, repentance.
- i. And, of some significance, in every marriage I perform I may, in a positive way, be able to instruct and exemplify the Christian gospel—and in a negative sense I may not give anyone an opportunity to criticize the church for lack of compassion and understanding.
- j. When I stand *for* marriage and the responsibilities that go with it, I am standing for law and order in the lives of unbelievers who will not be controlled by divine love but must be controlled by civil legislation.
- k. Is divorce a sin for which there can be no repentance (and no forgiveness) and no restoration? If a person embezzles, is imprisoned, released and states that he is of a different attitude, is he never to be allowed to handle an employer's money again? Should a divorced person never be allowed to "handle" marriage again?



## SECTION 3

**The Pressures of Marriage (7:17-40)**

17 Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 20 Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God.

25 Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it; for the form of this world is passing away.

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. 35 I