

**Core Values  
From I Corinthians**

## Core values from I Corinthians

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## Chapter 1:1-2 - To the Church of God

In my carrying out Jesus' command of making disciples, one of the objections I often encounter is the poor behavior of those who are regarded as being members of the local body of Christ. "If that is Christianity," it is said, "then I don't want any part of it." While it is true that there is objectionable behavior on the part of brethren, that poor performance is not a legitimate excuse for someone's refusal to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. What if the apostle Paul was engaged in a Bible study with the above-mentioned objector in the city of Corinth, Greece, and was charged similarly with the behavior of the brethren in the Corinthian congregation? Would he regard that as a sufficient reason for that prospect's not following Christ? He would tell the individual that his personal responsibility is to repent and be immersed, and work with the local congregation; and that he, Paul, would worry about the congregation itself. If congregations did not have problems, most of the New Testament scriptures would never have been written. And the church at Corinth had plenty!

- **Paul and Sosthenes** - The apostle Paul arrived at Corinth in Achaia soon after being hurriedly escorted out of Berea in Macedonia during what is called his second missionary journey, after having stopped at Athens on the way. Opposition to his preaching in Corinth arose quickly, and Paul was soon in court. But the judge refused to listen to the charges brought against Paul by the Jews, and the Jews started beating up the leader of their synagogue, a man named Sosthenes, in front of the bench. And the judge let the beating continue before the courtroom eventually cleared out. Possibly, then, this man became a Christian after being so treated by the members of his own synagogue. Whether this is the same Sosthenes that is co-authoring this letter with Paul or not is not known, but it will be interesting to find out in the courts of glory. "Paul," the epistle begins, "called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth" (I Corinthians 1:1,2). Paul's own credentials are clearly laid out in the beginning words: he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. There were only thirteen of those, and each had the ability to perform miracles and pass on gifts of the Spirit in order to establish the authority of his apostleship. Paul needs to present his authority "by the will of God" to this congregation because his authority and his doctrine were being attacked by elements within the church in Achaia.
- **The church of God** - In a discussion recorded in the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus stated, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus has *His church*, and it is being built on the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of God. This church, world-wide in scope and continuing for all eternity, does not have one specific name. Here the apostle addresses the congregation as "the church of God." Sometimes the congregations are called "the churches of Christ," sometimes "the churches of God in Christ Jesus," and the church at one point is even called by the name of the brethren, "the general assembly and church of the first born ones who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). The church in general is the spiritual collection of those who have been "called out" of this world into fellowship with Christ.

An ethereal congregation, or "mystical body of Christ," will not be able to accomplish the will of God. Hence the Lord's church in general is parceled out as specific congregations, as in "the church of God which is at Corinth." In these local assemblies, actual work can be done, and individual Christians can grow as they by God's design must learn to interact with each other positively!

## Chapter 1:1-2 - Saints by Calling

Every Christian is a saint! This comes as a shock to those steeped in a denominational background that gives the impression that to be a saint, one must be “canonized” after careful “documentation” that at least two miracles can be attributed to use of the name of the departed individual. This is so bogus that it is absolutely astounding that anyone could possibly believe it. The term translated into English as “saint” is a term given by God, and it must be understood as God defines it. It means “holy one,” someone set apart from common mankind for God’s purposes. When a person is immersed into Christ, and thus cleansed from his sins, he is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is what makes the individual a “holy one,” or “saint.”

- **The church of God** - The Lord designed the church as a whole to accomplish His purposes of distributing the word of God, saving the lost, and conserving the saved. To accomplish these purposes with any sort of effectiveness, the body of Christ has to be distributed as individual congregations, as Paul in this case writes “to the church of God which is at Corinth.” Here the Christians would be joined together as a team, and through their interactions with one another in a setting which the Lord orchestrated, they would be able to achieve the goals of Jesus and to grow into the character of Christ. Without the actual, tangible members of the body, everything Christ-like would remain ethereal and imaginary. But with real, up-close-and-personal brethren working in the same congregation, individual character development is accomplished as saints meet the challenges that come — individually and collectively.
- **Sanctified in Christ** - Paul, with Sosthenes, addresses the congregation in his opening, stating, “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (I Corinthians 1:2). The gospel of God is clear and specific: in order for any person to come to God, he must come through Jesus Christ. God sent His Son into the world, put Him through suffering and death, and then exerted the power necessary to raise Him from the dead; having done all this, He is not going to allow some spiritual anarchist to “make and end run around” Jesus and cut his own deal with the Father. The sanctification, the setting-apart without which no one will see the Lord, is only accomplished “in Christ.” And the only way to be “in Christ” is to be “immersed into Christ” (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27).
- **The call of God** - Through the body of Christ, God is still walking through the garden and calling man out from his hiding place. The gospel is His call. Hence, the *ekklesia* — those “called out”, the church — consists of those who have heard the call of God and willingly answered. “Saints by calling,” is how Paul addressed the assembly at Corinth, “with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.” God calls; those destined to become saints answer, calling upon the name of the Lord. This call is a non-verbal call, accomplished in immersion, as Ananias directed one Saul of Tarsus, later this same apostle Paul: “Arise, and be immersed, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

The brethren at Corinth, then, were being called to holiness out of the muck and mire of this sea-going city. “Therefore, come out from their midst, and be separate,” Paul would quote the Lord from the Old Testament writings, “and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you” (II Corinthians 6:17). In his present, positive, affirmative opening description of the brethren in this beleaguered congregation, the apostle sets the stage for their future success in following the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

## Chapter 1:3-5 - The Grace of God

This first epistle to the Corinthian brethren begins with the standard greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 1:3). Even though the greeting is standard, it is not perfunctory. The saints in Corinth, as well as any other brethren addressed in any epistle, need the great grace of God. The struggle of coming out of the world is intense, and the struggle of those who earnestly desire to be transformed by the renewing of their minds is intense indeed, and there are generally many slips and falls before the next step of transformation can be accomplished. Hence it is that the grace of God is lavished upon the brethren so that their mistakes are covered by His munificence. The peace prayed for is no minor matter either. The world offers no peace, no respite for the soul mired in its guilty conscience and in slavery to Satan. Only God can give His peace to the faithful followers of Christ as they learn from Jesus how to carry His yoke. That peace which passes all comprehension is worth searching for! But as the Roman epistle focused on faith, this second in the line up of letters from Paul is focused on grace.

- **Grace in Christ** - It is worth repeating again and again: all the spiritual blessings of God are found *in* Christ Jesus. Outside of Christ there is condemnation. Those who have not been immersed *into* Christ are strangers and aliens to the Father, without hope and without God in this world. But *in Christ* are found all the great spiritual treasures, the great riches which God has stored up for those who know and believe the truth. “I thank my God always,” says Paul, “for the grace that was given you in Christ Jesus” (I Corinthians 1:4). Paul — preacher, teacher, and apostle of Christ — was supremely conscious of the necessity of each of the brethren to be covered by God’s grace. Knowing the congregation of the Corinthian brethren intimately, he was aware of the moral and internal challenges the church faced, and knew of their need for the surpassing wonders of God’s overshadowing grace and His willingness patiently to withhold His judgment.
- **Enriched in Him** - The old covenant was a physical covenant for a physical people. God, then, to show His power and presence on behalf of Israel, blessed them physically. He gave them rain in the land of milk and honey when they walked in His ways, giving them fruitful harvests and blessing their herds and flocks. Collecting the material riches of Egypt and surrounding nations into the hands of David and Solomon, God showed the world in a way they could understand that He was the God of Israel and the only true God. But under the terms of the new covenant, God blesses a spiritual people with spiritual blessings — blessings that cannot really be detected except by those spiritually attuned. “In everything,” affirmed the apostle, “you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge” (I Corinthians 1:5). Speech is riches? And “all knowledge?” All the collected blathering of the great orators will not save one soul. All man’s scientific knowledge and his accumulated history will not rescue a single individual from the clutches of the prince of darkness. The church at Corinth and Cenchrea, planted by the apostle Paul, from the beginning was the recipient of the great spiritual treasures, and was blessed beyond measure.

The challenge often is to help the brethren to put the proper value on the spiritual blessings such as God’s grace. The saints at Corinth were no exception; they tended to be physically oriented and therefore were not properly appraising the value of their being “enriched in all speech and all knowledge.” May we learn from their mistakes, and turn our attentions to a proper assessment of God’s blessings in Christ Jesus!

## Chapter 1:6-7 - Confirming the Testimony

It is interesting to consider the difference between the spread of early Christianity and the spread of early Islam. Once Mohammed, founder of Islam, gained acceptance in Medina, Arabia, and was able to unite the Arabic tribes by sword and by persuasion under the banner of an Arabic religion, the “band-wagon effect” was very pronounced. Islam spread rapidly in a veritable spiritual and political vacuum; within ten years after Mohammed’s death, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Persia were all under Moslem domination, conquered not by reason but with the sword. Christianity, however, never had such a “band-wagon” appeal. Jesus Himself was crucified by entrenched opposition, put to death by a dark combination of Roman and Jewish leadership. His followers were persecuted from the beginning; when a person made his public confession that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God,” he essentially signed his death warrant. So why would people believe the testimony that Jesus was really risen from the dead if there were no earthly benefit to be gained by professing such a belief? The answer is that they examined the claims of Jesus’ exponents, and found them to be verified.

- **The testimony concerning Christ** - The central claim of disciples of Christ is that Jesus was indeed resurrected from the dead. Islam, for example, discounts this claim, having the tradition that the empty tomb next to Mohammed’s grave will be filled when Jesus comes back, dies, and is to be buried there; a central belief of Moslems is that Jesus was taken alive like Elijah, and never went to the cross and was therefore never resurrected. But God uses three things to confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (the most difficult of all miracles to believe): 1) eyewitness testimony of the apostles and others; 2) the ability of the apostles and others to perform attesting miracles; and 3) Old Testament prophecies. These three are conclusive to anyone who will objectively examine the record, and compel him to believe that Jesus is Lord.
- **The testimony confirmed in Corinth** - The apostle Paul personally came to Corinth, having been ushered out of Macedonia and having spent only a short time in Athens. He himself, by revelation, was an eyewitness of Jesus’ resurrection and was able to confirm his testimony by the miracles he performed in Jesus’ name. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you,” he would later write to these brethren, “with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (II Corinthians 12:12). “My message,” he would say shortly in this first epistle, was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (I Corinthians 2:4). They therefore believed the gospel and were immersed into Christ (Acts 18:8).
- **Confirmed in you** - The apostles, and only the apostles of Christ, could pass on what the scripture calls gifts or manifestations of the Spirit. Paul came into Corinth, and as is evident, passed on these gifts of the Spirit to many of the brethren, so that the congregation had all the gifts and the confirmation of the testimony concerning Jesus of Nazareth. “The testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,” asseverated Paul, “so that you are not lacking any gift” (I Corinthians 1:6,7).

The apostle arrived in Corinth, preaching first in the synagogue to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles present on the Sabbath. Later, when Silas and Timothy arrived with financing from Macedonia, Paul could teach every day in the synagogue. But when the Jews resisted his message, he then took it next door and into the streets of the city, bringing all manner of Gentiles into the church, joining them with the Jewish core of first converts. That Jew and Gentile were both welcome to God was evident in that God backed Paul’s work in Achaia with the attesting miracles, giving those of both Jewish and Gentile background gifts of the Spirit. “You were enriched in Him,” is the apostle’s reminder, “in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift.” God covers all the bases!

## Chapter 1:7-9 - The Day of Our Lord

Jesus will come again! He will come to execute His judgment on the ungodly, and to reward His saints for their patience and perseverance. When this apostle Paul preached on Mars Hill in Athens to the philosophers of the day, he closed his message with this appeal: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance," he noted, in reference to the fact that God let the Gentiles drift until He could bring the message of Christ to the world, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30,31). The confirmation that Jesus is risen from the dead also establishes the coming of the Day of Judgment.

- **Eagerly awaiting** - The heart Jesus is exposed to the world in the record of the days of His earthly sojourn. "I have come to cast fire upon the earth," He commented, "and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). But He has to wait until the last soul who will repent is gathered in, and then He will come. Children of the King are therefore encouraged to be in anticipation of this great advent, and the exhortation to the Corinthian brethren was no exception. The saints were positively described by the apostle as "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1:7). *Eagerly* is the word which keeps showing up. The picture is that each disciple of Christ is constantly scanning the sky, expecting that this is the hour in which our Lord makes His return, the sky splits open, and He is revealed to a surprised group of unbelievers. But the brethren are prepared, having constantly lived in expectation of this moment!
- **God's assistance** - God did not send His only begotten Son into the world to see how many people He could condemn; He sent Him to save every possible person who would believe in the Christ. The great spiritual Dad, then, is willing to work with each of His children in the Spirit, helping them to succeed as long as they continue in faith and sanctity with self-restraint. Jesus, Paul informs us, "shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1;8,9). Peter joins in this same chorus, noting that God "will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (I Peter 5:10). The Father, if He can get a little cooperation with His saints, can take them from being spiritual weaklings and transform them into mighty warriors in His spiritual army. What a blessing, and what a hope for each brother or sister in Christ!
- **Blameless in Christ** - The work of God on behalf of each Christian might be summarized as, "If we'll do a little, He'll do a lot." The saint's primary responsibility is to keep his faith intact and growing, and God promises that He will provide the strength and backing to give the saint victories in his personal life, and victories for the gospel as it impacts others through him. And at the end, when Jesus is revealed, the resurrection of the saints has taken place, and each gives his account before the Judgment Throne, then he has the great promise that he is presented blameless. As Jude also noted, God "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24). How huge is that!

God has indeed set before each of His children of faith precious and magnificent promises. These promises, though in the realm of faith and not in the realm of sight, are real, and properly understood, powerfully motivate the saint to be ready for the return of his Lord. "Maranatha," indeed!

## Chapter 1:10 - The Faithfulness of God

One of the purposes of the written record called the word of God is to demonstrate His faithfulness through the ages. For example, God made a covenant with Abraham, saying, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you" (Genesis 17:7). This covenant was reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob during the years of their sojourn in the land of promise. Over the centuries Abraham's physical descendants became enslaved in Egypt, and "God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). His faithfulness was demonstrated, and with a mighty outstretched arm, He brought them out of the land of Egypt and established them in the land of Israel. When Israel turned away from God, and would not walk with Him under the terms of the covenant, still God was faithful. "But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them out of His presence until now" (II Kings 13:23). As first Israel and then Judah turned from God to worship idols, God had to turn His back on most of them. But for the sake of His covenant, He preserved a remnant of the physical nation until such time as the "seed of Abraham" [Christ] should come. To those Jews of New Testament times, the offer was made for them to continue in the covenant with God, now made manifest through the gospel of Christ. "It is you," said Peter to a crowd of Jews assembled on the temple grounds in connection with the crippled man's healing, "who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Acts 3:25). To this small remnant of first century Jews who became true disciples of Christ, God added the stream of Gentiles to form the church of the living God. "And if you belong to Christ," the apostle Paul affirmed to the Galatian brethren, "then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29). God is clearly faithful, executing His promises and accomplishing His will over thousands of years.

- **Assurance** - The congregation in Corinth was struggling, and many of the brethren were fighting their own personal battles with sin. How quickly would God give up on this congregation, and when would His patience run out with the brethren? The answer, built upon the thousand years of God's patience demonstrated in Israel according to the flesh, is: "God is faithful ..." (I Corinthians 1:9). His earnest desire for their spiritual success was greatly manifested in His bringing them into the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for His name's sake.
- **Called into fellowship** - What is important is fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. On the negative side, for example, Jesus noted what He would say to those who pretended to be His disciples on Judgment Day, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23). "God is faithful," Paul thus reassured the brethren in Corinth, "through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

How magnificent is this faithful God, and how wonderful is His plan. "For you first," the apostle Peter explained to those initial Jews, "God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:26). First the Jew, then the Gentile! God indeed is faithful, calling all men from darkness into His marvelous light, offering them mercy, grace, strength, and eternal life. Who could possibly turn away from that call?

## Chapter 1:11-13 - What a Fellowship!

God has called men and women from every tribe and tongue into fellowship with His Son. This is no minor call. This is an invitation to be a part of the most august group ever assembled, to be a part of the eternal elite, to participate in the council of the holy. For those who have no spiritual eyes, it is a worthless invitation — nonsense and non-existent. “But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24). The saints, then, would do well to pay close heed to the exclusivity and value of their call, and place the proper assessment on the church of the living God.

- **By the name of Jesus** - In God’s graphic way, He speaks through the prophet Isaiah, beginning His point with a question. “Who is this who comes from Edom, with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah?” is the picture of the angel of the Lord making His way from Edom up to Jerusalem. Who is “this One who is majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength?” The answer comes, “It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save” (Isaiah 63:1). “I looked,” He said, “and there was no one to help, and I was astonished and there was no one to uphold; so My own arm brought salvation to Me” (Isaiah 63:5). Jesus, then, in the words of the apostle Paul, “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.” But the death would have been worthless without the subsequent resurrection to the power position of glory. “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:8,9). To this name apostle appeals to the brethren in Corinth: “Now I exhort you, brethren,” is the exhibition of his earnestness, “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree ...” (I Corinthians 1:10). If Christ is properly exalted in the minds of the brethren, everything else takes its appropriate place.
- **Moving past petty division** - When the focus falls away from Christ, then all sorts of issues come to the forefront. People become petty, pressing for the prominence of their pet projects. Invoking the name of the Lord Jesus, the apostle calls for the brethren to move past pettiness, exhorting them “that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Corinthians 1:10). Jesus earnestly prayed on the west side of the Kidron, during the night in which He was betrayed, for all His future disciples, “that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that they world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). Would those first century disciples of Christ in Corinth let those words of Jesus fall unheeded to the ground, or would they work assiduously to eliminate division among them, and walk in the steps of the Savior.
- **In the same mind and same judgment** - It is a major challenge for the saints to be “made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” But this is the goal of God. To accomplish this, the brethren must, on an individual basis, lay aside the carnal nature and put on the new spiritual man in the image of Christ. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is do-able!

As God joins brethren to one another in the local body of Christ, He has His opportunity to perfect the saints through their interaction with one another. Those who avoid the process of becoming of “the same mind” and of “the same judgment” are actually avoiding part of the God-designed process of putting on love, compassion, patience, and understanding. One of the themes of this epistle is that God has carefully placed the members of each local fellowship; the brethren need to work through their difficulties to be one with the Father and with His Son!

## Chapter 1:11-13 - Inside Information

The world has powerful appeal. The saints are repeatedly warned about its pulls and pressures, and are exhorted to walk in the light rather than crawl in the slime of the world. "For all that is in the world," explained the apostle John, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (I John 2:15). Any one of the three listed can get inside the individual, and thus get inside the local congregation. And when that happens, division and destruction are part of the path left by its tornado-like movement through the fellowship of the saints. "I exhort you," says Paul thus to the brethren in Corinth, "that you all agree." To do that, "all that is in the world" would first have to be exposed and then eliminated in the lives of the brethren.

- **Information on problems** - The apostle Paul started the congregation in Corinth. He had poured out his heart, his labor, and his tears on their behalf. Because he loved the brethren and their eternity, he had an information network that kept him abreast of the spiritual progress of the church in Achaia. And in this case, the news passed on to the apostle was not all good. "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren," was his intonation, "by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you" (I Corinthians 1:11). Uh oh! Some brethren's lust of the flesh got in the way of the gospel. Some brethren's lust of the eye blinded them to the purpose of the church. And some brethren's boastful pride of life positioned them as political climbers and visible reputation builders instead of workers for the Lord. The result was that quarrels severe enough to be reported to Paul were developing within the congregation.
- **Playing politics** - Pride is sometimes hard to detect or to define, but it is tremendously destructive to the prideful individual and to all around him. The possessor of pride, unless he can humble himself under the mighty hand of the Lord, will end up in the lake of fire for all eternity. "God is opposed to the proud," says the scripture, "but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). One of the characteristics of the proud can be to be "the biggest fish" no matter how small the pond. Hence they work to develop parties and influence groups they can use to position themselves for the power play at the strategic moment. It was happening in Corinth. "Now I mean this," explained the apostle, "that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Apollos,' and 'I am of Cephas,' and 'I am of Christ.'" (I Corinthians 1:12). The deadwood leaders that were rising to the top in the congregation were splitting the local church and positioning themselves for some sort of "market share" when the fighting was over. How destructive, and how counter to the purpose of the Christ who died on their behalf!
- **Appeal to perspective** - The apostle has to stop this splintering, and the only real legitimate and also ultimate way to put a halt to the schisms was to refocus the brethren on Christ. "Has Christ been divided?" is the poignant question (I Corinthians 1:13). If Christ has not been divided, it is obvious that his body cannot be caused to be divided either. Halt! then, to the divisiveness in the congregation. And since some were claimants to being followers of Paul and throwing his name around for their own political gain, the apostle uses himself as an example in order to beat back the developing party spirit. "Paul was not crucified for you, was he?" he queried. "Or were you immersed in the name of Paul?"

Christ is all, and in all! The deeds of the flesh need to be put to death, and Christ and Christ alone needs to be exalted by all. Then there will be peace among the brethren, and the purpose of His body will be fulfilled as they work together for the spread of the gospel.

## Chapter 1:13 - Immersion in Jesus' Name

In his discussion on unity in the body of Christ in Corinth, the apostle Paul asked an interesting question, "Were you immersed in the name of Paul?" (I Corinthians 1:13). The asking of this question, in the midst of other questions and related comments is highly significant and instructive concerning the topic of immersion. Most religious bodies claiming in some way to be connected with the New Testament have some form of "baptism," as they would call it. Some sprinkle, some pour, some immerse, and some think it is only "Spirit baptism." Some think it is for infants, some for kids, some for adults, and some think it happens spontaneously from heaven upon anyone. Some think it is for forgiveness of Adam's sin, some think it is an "outward sign of an inward grace," some think it makes you a member of that "church," and some think it doesn't matter. Obviously there is a lot of confusion concerning the Greek term *baptizo* and its derivatives, and confusion concerning its origin and object.

- **Immersion - *Baptizo*** is immersion, and the word and its use in context clearly bear that out. Immersion was not something that was practiced as part of the Law of Moses, but was initiated by John the son of Zacharias in preparation for the new covenant. John indicated that his immersion was given to him from heaven, and this divine origin was verified by Jesus (John 1:33; Matthew 21:25). His immersion clearly occurred in water, as people were coming to the Jordan to be immersed by him. And his immersion followed repentance, and was for the forgiveness of sins.
- **Immersion in Jesus' name** - Immersion upon the authority of Jesus Christ is first mentioned in Acts 2:38. This immersion was introduced to the Jewish public after the foundation of understanding had been laid by John's immersion. This one in Jesus' name would also follow repentance, would be in water, would be for the forgiveness of sins, but would add the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Here the old self would be buried with Christ in the likeness of His death, and the new self would come forth in the likeness of His resurrection, arising from the watery grave to walk in newness of life, a newly born-again individual. By thus being immersed into Christ, the saint now participates in all the blessings found *in* Christ.
- **Teaching moment in Corinth** - Paul then uses the understanding the brethren in Corinth had concerning the teaching of immersion in Jesus' name. In his series of questions: 1) "Has Christ been divided?"; 2) "Paul was not crucified for you, was he?"; and 3) "Or were you immersed in the name of Paul?"; the reasoning process used makes it clear that the Corinthian brethren were immersed in the name of Jesus. Christ is clearly the exalted One, and not Paul, Peter, or Apollos. The thought process used also establishes that to be one of the brethren in Corinth, the individual had to be immersed in the name of Jesus. And the immersion also took place in water in a manner consistent with other scriptures, inasmuch as Paul did immerse at least Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas (if it were the so-called "Spirit immersion," Paul would have not been the one to perform the immersion — the Spirit would have done it without any man serving as a go-between). The fact that these brethren had participated in what Paul would call elsewhere the "one immersion," would be a major factor in bringing them together in unity.

Even though some use Paul's phrase, "For Christ did not send me to immerse, but to preach the gospel," in an attempt to deny the necessity of immersion in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, their arguments are disingenuous and sophistry. The brethren in Corinth were all immersed in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of their sins, and that they might receive the gift of the indwelling Spirit. This immersion is not a work of the Law, nor is it a denial of the blood of Christ shed on the cross. It is given from heaven by the authority of King Jesus!

## Chapter 1:14-17 - Paul's Humility and Purpose

All through Paul's epistles to the Corinthians brethren, his humility stands out. Not to say that Paul was not a commanding person; he was! But as Moses was humble before the Lord, and yet leading hundreds of thousands, even more so was the great apostle of Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself was the most humble, yet the greatest leader of men ever seen. Humility, then, is oft misunderstood by the brethren; it really is a willingness to do what God needs done. "Christ," noted Paul, "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death" (Philippians 2:8). And in Paul's own case, when the brethren were informed by the prophet Agabus that Paul would be bound and imprisoned if he were to go to Jerusalem, and they begged him not to go, he stated, "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). That's humility! Paul could lead with power, but was humble and only achieved that leadership in the Lord because he did not exalt himself.

- **Destroying developing schisms** - Some in Corinth were using Paul's name to their advantage; others were using Peter's; others Apollos'; and others, apparently "holier than thou" types, were using Christ's name. Paul attacks this positioning by putting himself in the proper perspective. "Paul was not crucified for you, was he?" he asked. "Or were you immersed in the name of Paul?" The answer to these rhetorical questions is a resounding, "NO!" So those who were trying to use Paul's, Peter's, Apollos', or even Christ's name as a basis for their maneuvering had nothing solid for such action.
- **A little history** - The apostle is going to remind them of the congregation's beginnings, showing his anticipation for the current clique-building operations now functioning within the church. "I thank God," he states, "that I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were immersed in my name" (I Corinthians 1:14,15). He only immersed a few at the beginning, to get the first few Christians in motion; all the immersing that would be done from that point on would be done by others in the congregation, so that no one would try to claim that their immersion was superior to others simply because Paul had performed it. And, just to clear the record, he also recalls, "Now I did immerse also the household of Stephanus; beyond that, I do not know whether I immersed any other" (I Corinthians 1:16).
- **Paul's purpose** - It was not important to Paul who did the immersing. "For Christ did not send me to immerse," he states, "but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void" (I Corinthians 1:17). Paul came to Corinth to preach the gospel. Apollos came to Corinth to preach the gospel. Peter [Cephas], if he ever arrived in Corinth, would be there to preach the gospel. Christ Himself, averred Paul before the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa, "was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). The preaching — the proclamation — of the gospel was the purpose of Paul, and who did the immersing was secondary.

Paul submitted himself in humility to suffering, shame, and imprisonment on behalf of the gospel. Those who wanted to use Paul's name as leverage in their political climb inside the church at Corinth would thus be exposed for what they were in a comparison between their and Paul's purpose. Paul's goal was to have every man hear the word of Christ, and this pervaded his every effort. Those who had no real interest in preaching the word to the lost would be manifest, and their credibility in the church at Corinth would be eliminated.

## Chapter 1:17-18 - The Importance of the Cross

The Jews had little or no conception that their *Messiah* was to suffer. When Jesus indicated His visible on the cross with the words, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself," the multitude was confused. "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever," they commented, followed with the question indicating their consternation: "How can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12:32-34). They had an idea that the Messiah would live forever; they didn't know He would have to die first!

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, the multitudes were excited and the entire city was astir. But the shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David" died out when the Romans arrested Jesus. "If You are the Son of God," was the challenge issued to Christ as He hung there bearing the sins of all mankind, "come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). Because He did not fit their preconceived ideas of what type of person the Messiah would be and what He would do, the vast majority of the Jews rejected Him and His message.

To the Jew first went the gospel, then to the Greek (or Gentile). And the Jew turned against the message first, and then the Gentile world also. Neither, for different reasons, would accept the concept of the Savior's death on a cross.

- **Straight-forward preaching** - The apostle Paul makes it clear that his purpose was to preach the gospel. "Christ did not send me to immerse," he states, by way of emphasis and not in any way denigrating the importance of immersion in the name of Jesus, "but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ might not be made void" (I Corinthians 1:17). He is introducing the idea that the message from heaven is not to be presented with the orations characteristic of the Greeks or with the complicated meanderings of their philosophers.
- **No voiding out the cross of Christ** - The philosophies of men and their vain imaginings of how to contact God or reach to heaven are indeed empty. Whether it is posited that a sufficient amount of good deeds might accomplish enough reparation for the not-so-good deeds, or whether some outlandish forms of chants or fastings are presented as the means to holiness, they are all worthless attempts on the part of man to come to God on the basis of their own terms. The apostle notes the world's response in general to the only means by which a man might approach God: "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness," he observes, "but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18). To the Greek mind, the idea that some Jew's death on a Roman cross on the outskirts of Jerusalem would somehow be necessary for their salvation was foolishness. They are *perishing!* But to those who would examine the claims of God, set in motion from Genesis chapter one and successively brought forward, the death of Jesus on the cross is understood as necessary for the salvation of the world. *The word of the cross, then, is the power of God* for those who are willing to step into the realm described by the words "being saved."

The saints of Corinth were being warned of the subtle deadliness of Greek philosophy and pressure from Jewish elements closely connected with each Christian community. Each person's salvation was going to be fraught with challenge, and each would have to be aware of those challenges and maintain his faith through the waves of confusion that would splash on his shore. Understanding *the word of the cross* would be critical in the eternity of those who would go through the process of "being saved," and there could be no compromise in presenting it to the world.

## Chapter 1:18-21 - The World's Wisdom is Foolishness

Those who claim to be the wise of this world are also clever salesmen. They position themselves visibly before the population, and make swelling claims as if those claims were absolute truths incontrovertibly accepted by all those who can think. Hence it is that although the so-called great philosophers have struggled with whether or not they exist, and have come inexorably to the conclusion that all is futility, they still have the adulation of the propagandists working in the human race. In their attempts to find God in the recesses of their minds or to find "the God within," they have failed. Whatever man can do with observation coupled with reason, he cannot find God; he can find evidence of "intelligent design," but he cannot find the Designer. That is why, in the midst of the cauldron of Greek philosophy, the apostle Paul brings the wooden cross of Christ into the foreground of the discussion. "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness," is his initial sally, "but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18).

- **Collapsing human wisdom** - God is not able to be understood through mere human wisdom; He who more than fills the heavens is not going to be comprehended by grey matter impounded in a *homo sapiens* skull. Hence it is that He has to reveal Himself, in His own time, and in His own way. Using a quotation from Isaiah, the apostle to the Gentiles notes, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.'" (I Corinthians 1:19). By sweeping aside human wisdom as the mechanism for knowing God and by eliminating the "cleverness of the clever," the Almighty has made it possible for the slave girl who sleeps behind the millstone to have equal access to God as might have the mightiest Pharaoh. She doesn't have to pay for it, and she is not denied the privilege simply because she does not have the proper social standing.
- **Clearing the stage** - By eliminating the possibility of man's finding God through his own reasoning, the All Wise cleared all the pretenders off the stage where they were clamoring for the human race's attention. "Where is the wise man?" the apostle rightly asks of the Greeks. "Where is the scribe?" he asks of the Jews. "Where is the debater of this age?" (I Corinthians 1:20). Properly understood, they dare not show their faces; they are shown to be utterly empty by the simple truths of the gospel of Christ.
- **Elevating the wisdom of God** - 50,000 pages of Vedantic writings cannot elucidate anything about the love of God for a lost and wandering people. The minarets of a million mosques cannot call their hearers to any knowledge of the redemption of a fallen race. But a simple Roman cross, pictured as raised on the Jerusalem skyline with the Savior of the world nailed to its wood, communicates how much the great God cares for the least among men. "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" Paul asks. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (I Corinthians 1:20,21). If anyone wants to know God, he will have to listen to the message preached!

What seems to man, on the surface at least, to be foolishness is what God uses to communicate the truthfulness of who He is. Through the word of the cross, man comes to understand his own sinfulness and his own inability to approach God. He then learns of the great sacrifice God made in sending His own Son to die on behalf of the alienated sinner, and to begin to apprehend God's love for his soul. God's "foolishness" is really not foolishness at all!

## Chapter 1:22-23 - The Importance of Preaching

“God was well-pleased,” affirmed the apostle Paul, “through the foolishness of the message *preached* to save those who believe.” God’s ways seem foolish to prideful man. The message that, to some extent, begins with Jesus’ death on the cross is foolish; how could there be any victory in that? And then the method of distribution! By the foolishness of preaching! How ineffective does God want to be? Couldn’t the message be better communicated by group discussion? How about drama presentations? Or weaving the message into musicals or theatrical presentations? Not boring *preaching*? Yep! Foolish though that may be, that is how God has chosen to communicate His eternal truths and His love for man lost in the wilderness of his own confusion.

- **Preaching pleases God** - God sent forth His word into the world to accomplish His purpose. The word of God sifts the hearts of men, separates the wheat from the chaff, and presents to God as holy those who will believe and obey it. The rest go into the garbage dump of all eternity, into the hellish vacuole. The heavenly Father thus designed preaching as the best means of accomplishing that separation. Preaching has never been particularly popular with mankind as a whole. In Israel, for instance, God is pictured as “daily rising early” and sending His prophets to preach His message. But they rejected the preaching. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” lamented Jesus Himself, “who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her” (Matthew 23:37). But it doesn’t matter if mankind doesn’t like preaching; God does! The message of the cross, carried on the words, conviction, and care of God’s preachers, will accomplish God’s purpose. And nothing else will.
- **Looking in the wrong place** - If someone is looking for something in a place where that something is not, he is never going to find it. The Jews, then, of New Testament times, as well as the Gentiles, looked for God in places where they could not find Him. “For indeed Jews ask for signs,” averred the apostle, “and Greeks search for wisdom” (I Corinthians 1:22). God had to use all kinds of preparatory signs in the development of Israel. To prepare Israel so that they would sprinkle the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and thus deliver their firstborn, God had Moses bring nine plagues upon the land of Ham. The result of the plagues and the deliverance from Egypt was that “the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses” (Exodus 14:31). He continued to use signs in Israel eventually to prepare them for the greatest sign of all — Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. But the Jews overall behaved like spoiled children, and they wanted signs for entertainment or signs that would allow them to continue in their misguided beliefs. When Jesus gave sight to a man who was born blind, the Pharisees absolutely refused to draw the conclusion as to whom Jesus might be. “Give glory to God,” said they to the formerly blind man, “we know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner” (John 9:24). “The Jews seek for signs,” but not the right ones.
- **Preaching Christ crucified** - Paul then adds, “but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness” (I Corinthians 1:23). The crucifixion was a stumbling block to the Jew because their concept of the Messiah did not include His suffering and death. And the Greeks sought for wisdom, but it had to fit inside their own preset boundaries. Since the message of the cross was outside those boundaries, it was obviously foolishness.

That Jew and Gentile alike in general rejected the message of the Christ and of His crucifixion, did not stop Paul and the others from proclaiming the gospel. They knew that the gospel of Christ was the only means by which men could be saved and they were going to “preach the gospel to all creation!”

## Chapter 1:24 - Power and Wisdom

One of the purposes of the word of God is to give a true depiction of the spiritual realm. Man, for example, is a spiritual being who will be in existence in either heaven or hell for all eternity. The most important part of man, then, is what the scripture calls “the inner man.” In another place, the apostle Paul pointed out that “though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:16). While God has made extensive provision for man’s outer man, He has made much more for the inner man. “The word of the cross,” then, “is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Those who reject the only message that will rejuvenate the inner man are perishing, and unless they turn to the Lord on His terms, they will burn forever in the lake of fire. But those who are sufficiently spiritually interested to realize the importance of the inner man will fix their attention on the message brought to them through the word of the cross, and they will be saved for all eternity.

- **To the called** - The Jews asked for signs; was that what Paul was really going to give them? The Greeks were searching for wisdom; was that how Paul was going to argue and philosophize? No! He preached to them! Most rejected the message; to the Jew, the cross was a stumbling block, and to the Greek it was foolishness. But there was a percentage who would believe, whom Paul termed “the called.” “To those who are the called,” he noted of those who received the word of the cross, “both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24). It was always God’s plan to reach the entire world with the message of redemption and establishment of true spiritual fellowship with Him. He had to work thousands of years and even prepare the Jewish people as the means by which the Christ could come, and with Him, the message of salvation. The gospel thus is preached — it is announced and broadcast — and any who heed it, regardless of background, are “the called.”
- **Christ the power of God** - Those Jews who could get past “the stumbling block” of the cross would find that on the other side of that was the resurrection and glorious ascension of Christ. Here they would find an intercessory High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, whose might and power greatly exceeded any of those of the weak priesthood of Aaron. The Gentiles who could get past “the foolishness” of the crucifixion would find great power in Him who ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high, who with strength could redeem them and cause them to be born again to a living hope. But the power is spiritual, and it really only strengthens the inner man!
- **Christ the wisdom of God** - Those of Jewish and Gentile background who would bury the old man in immersion and arise to walk in newness of life would begin to comprehend and appreciate the wisdom of God expressed through Christ. Through the cross, Christ was able to be exalted as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to all and forgiveness of sins. In this exalted Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Those whose eyes of the heart would thus be progressively enlightened would increasingly understand that wisdom and knowledge, and marvel at Him who was able to make it known to them.

The power and wisdom of God expressed and comprehended through Christ are awesome and magnificent, but that power and wisdom is primarily vested in the spiritual realm. Those who are interested in the flesh will not put the proper value on this spiritual power and wisdom, and consequently will move on to hear other voices. But “the called” will hear, and appreciate and glorify the Lamb that was slain who is worthy “to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

## Chapter 1:25-29 - Foolishness and Weakness of God

God, in order to reach down to man and help him, has to initiate the dialogue through what appears to be foolish and weak. Because God has to veil Himself in thick darkness to protect the material creation, the only way man can approach God is through faith — through believing what is revealed about the unseen realm in the Bible. In order for any commitment to God truly to be faith, the “playing field” has to be leveled; the message is going to be communicated from person to person, and many of those communicators are going to be “the common man.” If the message were communicated through angels, the presence and power of the messenger would overpower the information delivered. As foolish, weak, and inefficient as preaching seems to be, it is wisely chosen by God because it accomplishes His purpose. “Because,” says Paul, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Corinthians 1:25).

- **“The called”** - The appeal of the gospel goes forth into all the world, calling men to repentance and obedience to God. Those who respond are thus designated “the called,” and they are very much a cross-section of humanity as a whole. “For consider your calling, brethren,” exhorted the apostle Paul, “that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble ...” (I Corinthians 1:26). There were a few that the world (“according to the flesh,” is the way Paul put it) would count as wise, mighty, or noble, but for the most part the brethren would be taken from the ranks of the common man. This is God’s design also, for if only the wealthy, wise, or noble could come in, then faith would be made void.
- **What God chooses** - All the sales pitches and sneaky techniques that the world uses to influence people are discarded. The rich are not paraded before potential prospects in hopes that the presentation of these will somehow increase the viability of the message of the cross. The erudite are not trotted out before the intelligencia in the expectation that the presence of these somehow makes the gospel more palatable. Men of influence are not prominently displayed before the community in an effort to create a “band wagon” effect from the top down. No, it is the simple preaching of Christ and His cross which are initially tendered toward the hearers. “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise,” noted Paul, “and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, that He might nullify the things that are” (I Corinthians 1:27,28).
- **The great leveling** - Man in the midst of his contrived pomp is actually petty. Hence it is that the All Wise and the Almighty has used the “base” instrument of the cross to bring all mankind down to the same level. Hence it is that He has used blood poured out on the ground as the vehicle of redemption, and there is no offer of money that can be used as a substitute. Hence it is that the lifeless body of God’s Son would be the tool for the expiation of guilt, and not one person of “influence” can alter the means by which a man might secure his eternal salvation. What God has chosen, through the death of Christ on the cross, nullifies any plan or scam of man, and reduces all to the same level of need, “that no man should boast before God” (I Corinthians 1:29).

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to *shame* the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to *shame* the things which are strong! Let’s get on with the preaching of Christ crucified, then, and let the shame spread!

## Chapter 1:30-31 - Christ Became

“The Greeks search for wisdom,” was one of Paul’s inspired observations. The Greeks had elevated their concept of wisdom and its presentation to an art form, and had even deified it as the goddess *Sofia*. In their stylized presentations, high sounding phrases and all the techniques of oratory were used to impress the audiences, and both the audience and the “wise man” were carried away into the lofty reaches of imagination, where vain ideas were folded into the blankets of impressive rhetoric. By contrast, the word of the cross was simple, but in full bloom with the most important message which could ever be communicated, and ready to scatter its seeds in the hearts of honest men. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” was one of Paul’s statements (Romans 3:23), and as such are in need what God provided through the cross of Christ. “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us *wisdom from God* — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:30).

- **Wisdom from God** - There is no need for fancy rhetoric here; the information from God on this point is linear and cuts right to the heart. Each person has sinned; each person’s sin separated him from God, and that sin consigns that person to an eternity in hell; Jesus came into the world to die on behalf of that individual and pay the price for his sins by His death on the cross; and the Lord was resurrected to the power position in glory where His sacrifices can be implemented. “For God has shut up all in disobedience,” Paul explained to his readership in Rome, “that He might show mercy to all.” As he contemplated the sweeping impact of that statement, the apostle could only exclaim, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:32,33).
- **Righteousness** - Christ also became our righteousness! In a marvelous exchange which began on the cross, the apostle noted, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21). Christ took our sins, and gave us His righteousness! When the gap between hell and heaven is contemplated, then the value of the exchange of our sins for his righteousness can be better appreciated.
- **Sanctification** - Prior to our immersions into Christ, we were unholy and unclean. Our sins had separated us from fellowship with God, and we had plunged into darkness. But through the blood of the cross and the indwelling Holy Spirit, we have been made holy, or sanctified. We have been set apart for God’s purposes, and our holiness and purity is on display for any of the world to see if they are interested.
- **Redemption** - Mankind was lost, strangers to God and without hope in this world. Having been carried into the captivity of Satan by falling prey to the deceptiveness of sin, each has to be “bought back” in a very high-priced exchange. This “redemption” was accomplished as God sent His Son as the substitute, and every person on the planet who is willing to submit to His governance will be able to sing the song which can never grace the tongues of angels, “I have been redeemed!”

“By His doing,” is Paul’s affirmation, “you are *in* Christ Jesus.” The objective viewer of the scriptures understands that a person enters *into* Christ by virtue of his immersion *into* Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). While the individual must cooperate with God, the Almighty is the One who has made it all possible. Christ by the will of God came in the first place, the gospel was set in motion by God, God distributed the message, and God gets the information to the individual. It is clearly “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus.” Hence the exordium, “Just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in God.’” (I Corinthians 1:31).

## Chapter 2:1-5 - Paul's Entrance into Corinth

Paul's *modus operandi*, upon entering a new town, was to go into the Jewish synagogue first. Here he would find a people who were literate in the Old Testament scriptures, with whom he could reason about the passages prophesying of Christ. After the initial hearing of the gospel, the synagogues usually divided; a few followed the Paul and his fellow preachers into the teaching about Jesus, but most refused to listen to God's message of redemption and many became violently hostile to the Word. Hence Paul was hastened out of Macedonia before he finally found some permanence in Corinth. "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath," is Luke's recounting, "and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:5). The Greeks mentioned were those who actually entered into the synagogue to hear the word of the Lord, but the audience was primarily Jewish. Paul intensified his efforts when Silas and Timothy arrived with a fresh influx of cash, because he could now totally focus on preaching, "solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said, 'Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles' " (Acts 18:5,6). And once he went to the Gentiles, then he directly encountered Greek *wisdom* and the Greek ways of impressing the audiences.

- **Simplicity** - Many in the church are only one step away from the world, and many of the world's influences thus deeply impact the church. In his early portions of this epistle to the Corinthian brethren, the apostle really has to challenge Greek philosophy head on and its danger to the message of redemption in Christ. He thus reminds his hearers, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God" (I Corinthians 2:1). No fancy stuff here; just the straight-forward proclamation of the gospel!
- **Paul's determination** - The world's appeal is powerful, and its ways of selling its goods and ideas to the sons of men are often slick and impressive. Paul, in going to the Gentiles of Corinth, had to preset his mind so that he wouldn't fall into the trap of promoting the gospel of God in worldly ways. "For I determined to know nothing among you," he notes, "except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). (Side note here: Paul did not say that all he knew was Christ crucified; he stated that he determined to know nothing but *Christ and Him crucified*. "Knowing Christ" includes all the events connected with His resurrection and ascension, as well as His crucifixion.) The apostle was not going to bring Jesus in as a tag-along in his philosophical presentation; he was going to use the frontal approach and preach Christ — not avoiding the cross, the stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.
- **The power of God** - Paul himself had been persecuted severely on this second missionary journey prior to his arrival in Corinth. "And I was with you in meekness and in fear and in much trembling," he states for the record. "And my message," he adds, "and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:3-5). The truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection cannot be established by human wisdom; it requires the testimony of God. Hence God backed the eyewitness account of the apostles concerning Jesus' resurrection with the miracles coming from the Holy Spirit.

The apostle wants their faith to be real, since salvation is through faith in Christ. Hence he does not want them to confuse the wisdom of men with the power of God. And he desires that the brethren evaluate all future preaching on the same basis!

## Chapter 2:6 - The Wisdom of God

Only truth-seekers are going to make it to heaven. God allows all kinds of false doctrines and worldly wisdom to exist, knowing that truth-seekers will be able to sift through the errant claims to get to the truth, and that people whose motives weren't pure will be shunted aside. The apostle Paul bluntly explained this to the Thessalonian brethren: "And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (II Thessalonians 2:11,12). In the wisdom of God, the gospel and its simple presentation are designed to accomplish God's purpose in weeding out those who are not truth-seekers and letting the sons of the kingdom shine.

- **Demonstration of the Spirit** - If a person accepts the resurrection of Christ today too easily without having thought through its significance, he will accept something contrary to that tomorrow just as easily. Hence the Spirit builds the case for Christ through the history of Abraham and Israel, laying down foreshadows and prophecies pointing to Christ and His kingdom. Regarding Christ's resurrection from the dead and His subsequent accession to the throne of glory, these events were witnessed by the apostles, either physically in the case of seeing Christ still in His body for a period of forty days, or by the revelation of the Spirit in connection with the events that occurred in heaven. Not only that, the Holy Spirit verified the eyewitness accounts of the apostles by giving them the ability to perform all manner of attesting miracles. Paul notes, in this connection, that his message and preaching were not at all like the Greeks' presentations of their wisdom, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." In his letter to the congregation assembling in Rome, Paul also attributed the rapid spread of the gospel to the miracles and signs accomplished by the Holy Spirit: "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through," was his annotation, "resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, *in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit*, so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:18,19). The resident of the twenty-first century doesn't see the miracles himself, but he easily recognizes that without the testimony of the apostles being backed by the miraculous power of the Spirit, the gospel would have died. "Your faith," asseverates the apostle, "should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
- **Speaking God's wisdom** - There is human wisdom, and there is divine wisdom. Human wisdom is by comparison extremely tiny, focused in the wrong direction, and unable to penetrate the spiritual realm. So while Paul makes it clear that he in no way wanted to engage in any sort of sophistry in preaching the gospel, he also wants the brethren to know that God's wisdom is good and great. "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature," he expounds, "a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away" (I Corinthians 2:6). This wisdom, he said, is for the mature. Interesting! So the brethren have to be "brought up to speed" spiritually in order to be able to process and assimilate this divine wisdom.

Christ "became to us wisdom from God." The saint needs to be educated in what this wisdom is, and what its value is. The wisdom of this age, used by the rulers of this age to establish and maintain their rule, is passing away. But the wisdom of God is eternal. And this is the wisdom the mature saints really desire to possess and use for the glory of God.

## Chapter 2:7 - The Hidden Wisdom

Sometimes, as the saying goes, things are hidden in plain sight. Thus it is with the wisdom of God. The parables of Jesus, for example, are open and published for anyone to read, in nearly every language in the world. But their meaning is hidden from those who do not really desire to decode a couple of key words, and who do not really make an effort to see what the Lord of the universe is communicating to His disciples. Their meaning is in plain sight, but hidden from those who are spiritually blind. So while God used the signs and wonders to establish that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is risen indeed from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of power, He wants to move those who now believe these truths toward maturity and an understanding of God's wisdom.

- **Worldly wisdom is transitory** - It cannot be overstressed how short man's time on earth is. Men and women throw away their eternal souls for the sake of some mad scramble to the top, for a fleeting moment on TV, for their brief moment in the sun. Now a certain type of wisdom is required to get to the top of the heap or to exploit those moments of fame. "This wisdom," said James, "is earthly, natural, demonic" (James 3:15). Paul called it "a wisdom of this age," and a "wisdom of the rulers of this age." To which he immediately added, "who are passing away." Worldly wisdom is transitory. So why would a person pursue such quick emptiness? "Why do you spend money for what is not bread," the prophet Isaiah asked, "and your wages for what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2).
- **God's wisdom in a mystery** - One of the underlying themes of the apostle Paul's writings is that God's wisdom is hidden, and that it is hidden in Christ. In his epistle to the Colossian brethren, the apostle emphasized what He called "the mystery," Christ in the Spirit, adding "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). In his first letter to the Corinthian brethren, he emphasizes, "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (I Corinthians 2:7). This hidden wisdom, as Paul puts it, is spoken in a mystery, spoken in somewhat of a code, so that the one who wants to understand those secrets has to do the work of ferreting out the meanings. Some of the wisdom is paradoxical, and thus hidden because it is not obvious. For example, Jesus noted, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). From a "worldly wisdom" perspective, this is stupidity; but when God's wisdom is understood, it makes perfect sense. Some of the wisdom is hidden because it is spiritual, and cannot be comprehended or valued from the worldly or physical point of view. That the inner man, as another example, beholds the glory of the risen Lord, and is being transformed into that same image, is hidden wisdom, and many people reading that plain sentence still wouldn't have a clue of the value or power of what they just read. And some of the wisdom is from the depths (or heights) of God's communication, and takes much spiritual education before such topics can even begin to be explored.

"We do speak God's wisdom among those who are mature," was Paul's annotation. Those of us who want to know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent will press on toward this maturity. Those of us who want to know the power of Christ's resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings will diligently peruse the scriptures and pursue the sanctification without which no one will see God. For the rest, God's wisdom will be hidden in plain sight.

## Chapter 2:8-9 - Wisdom to our Glory

God has had His plan in motion “before the foundation of the world.” The depths of that concept are incomprehensible to the mind of man, which is “time-dependent” in its operation. But the All Knowing affirms it is true, and based on our belief that Jesus is risen from the dead, we can accept it. In a similar fashion, “God’s wisdom, the hidden wisdom,” was “predestined before the ages to our glory!” The author of the epistle to the Hebrew brethren brings forth an interesting point: “For it was fitting for Him,” he says of the Christ, “for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10). Jesus’ purpose, for which He had to suffer greatly to accomplish, was to *bring many sons to glory*. The hidden wisdom of God has the same purpose; it was predestined before the ages to bring the saints to glory!

- **None understood** - This wisdom which has been predestined for the glory of God’s people requires that a person pause and reflect a moment on its awesomeness. This wisdom set up a system of justice which necessitated payment or penalty for sin. This wisdom set in motion a system of sacrifices, which would culminate in the death of Christ on the cross and the sprinkling of His blood in heaven as a means of propitiation for mankind’s sin. That wisdom included raising Jesus from the dead and seating Him at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Furthermore, that wisdom enveloped the mercy of God, who would through the saints’ obedience to the gospel, forgive their transgressions, raise them up with Christ, and seat them with Him in the heavenly realms — in the Christian era, so that in the eons to come He might show us the full riches of His grace. This wisdom, then, “none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Corinthians 2:8). If they could have had a glimpse of the greatness of God’s strategies, they would have honored Jesus. But, being earthly-focused and self-centered, Roman and Jew combined to put the Lord of glory to death.
- **Hidden wisdom prophesied** - God, having predestined His wisdom before the ages for our glory, also prophesied that man would not find this hidden wisdom on his own, but that it would have to come through Christ. “Just as it is written,” Paul quotes Isaiah, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him” (I Corinthians 2:9). No one could have contemplated the magnificent things which God has accomplished through Christ, and which are available for those who come under the terms of the New Covenant. The signs that God performed in releasing Israel from Egypt’s captivity and “His marvels in the field of Zoan” are small, small compared to what the Almighty executed through Christ. All the Old Testament wonders and all the miracles that Christ performed while sojourning on earth were preparatory for the greatest of all that God accomplished when He raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand. None of this had “entered the heart of man.”

“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,” are not references to the second coming of Christ and His taking His saints to heaven. These are references to the great blessings found in Christ, as Paul put it in his letter to the Ephesian brethren: God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). The hidden wisdom is now revealed, and God is executing all these things which He prepared “for those who love Him.” It is worth our time to make certain we love God, and are called according to His purpose!

## Chapter 2:10-12 - Revealed to the Apostles

God has communicated His hidden wisdom to man in a very specific way. It came from Jesus through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. "I have many more things to say to you," said Jesus to the eleven as they made their way to Gethsemane, "but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12,13). And when Jesus prayed on the west side of the Kidron as He approached Gethsemane, He invoked the Father, "I do not ask on behalf of these [apostles] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). Everyone who would ever become a Christian would believe through the words of the apostles. No New Testament prophet, even, would have any new information doctrinally to add to what the apostles taught; they would only be given what had already been loosed on the world through the apostles, and they functioned only because there was no written word and because the apostles were already moving on to other locations. Another name for the new covenant teaching, then, is "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

- **God's revelation** - When Paul spoke of his first preachings of the gospel in Corinth, he used the first person singular. "I did not come," he said, "with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." But when he broadened the discussion to talk about the wisdom of God in general, he moved to the first person plural. "Yet we do speak wisdom," he notes, "among those who are mature." The "we" is the other apostles and he. So when he speaks of the hidden wisdom which had not entered the heart of man, he uses the plural pronoun again. "For to us," he averred, "God revealed them [things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard] through the Spirit" (I Corinthians 2:10). What any of the rest of us know about "all that God has prepared for those who love Him," we know through what is written. This is how God ensured that the true doctrines continue to move forward, and how He minimizes the amount of confusion resulting from false claimants with their false doctrines.
- **The Spirit's role** - God revealed these things to the apostles, affirmed Paul, "through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of the man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (I Corinthians 2:10,11). This is a very interesting point. The Holy Spirit is the only One who knows the thoughts of God, and has to search for them! On a much simpler scale, as the spirit of man knows the thoughts of man, in a parallel fashion the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God, and can find them, no matter "how deep" they are! And these thoughts are what are revealed to the apostles through this same Holy Spirit.

"Now we have received," averred the apostle, referring to other apostles as well as himself, "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given by God" (I Corinthians 2:12). The spirit of the world would result in earthly, natural, and demonic wisdom, or the excesses of Greek sophistry. The grand claim here is that Paul and the others received their revelation directly from the Holy Spirit, and God gave them this information regarding His hidden wisdom and the new covenant so that they could teach it to others. No one today can make this kind of claim; the "we" is limited to the apostles. Hence what we are to know concerning the wonderful wisdom connected with the new covenant is all contained in what is written!

## Chapter 2:12-13 - Bible Names for Bible Things

The amount of confusion in this world is staggering, and the obfuscation accelerates every day. And the stakes are high. There are only two possibilities: either there is an “afterlife,” or there isn’t. If there isn’t, nothing matters; if there is, a person better know as much about that as possible. Hence it is that God instituted His plan, His “wisdom predestined before the ages,” in order to, among other things, establish that Jesus Christ is indeed God, that He has been raised from the dead, and that He has the information and the authority to clear away all the confusion. “If I told you earthly things,” said the Lord during the days of His earthly sojourn to Nicodemus, “and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? And no one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man” (John 3:12,13). There is an “afterlife.” “An hour is coming,” said the Lord in another place, “in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His [the Son of Man’s] voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28,29). The stakes are high indeed! So God sent forth His Spirit with the information from Jesus to clear away the confusion, and that the sons of men may make an informed decision about their eternities.

- **The apostles’ claim** - “Now we have received,” asseverated Paul, “the Spirit who is from God.” That is quite a claim, but a claim that others might make as well. Hence the apostles were able to perform attesting miracles and signs to establish the truthfulness of their claim. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you,” Paul would later say to these same Corinthian Christians, “with all perseverance, by wonders and signs and miracles” (II Corinthians 12:12). And the writer of the Hebrews epistle chimes in, speaking of the apostles in these terms: “After it [the great salvation] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us *by those who heard*, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3,4).
- **Communicating God’s things** - Paul noted that he and the other apostles had received the Spirit of God, “that we might know the things freely given by God, which,” he added, “things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (I Corinthians 2:12,13). The world has its vocabulary for communicating human wisdom, and the Holy Spirit has His vocabulary for communicating spiritual wisdom. The world’s goal is to confuse the vocabulary. The world wants to attribute to people and denominational groups terminology that technically cannot be applied to them: to call people saved when they are not saved; to denote denominations as Christian; to call the savior of their imagination Jesus, and to call their twisted version the gospel. And the world wants to denigrate true Christians and the true church by calling them members of a cult, etc.

What is really important is that we call Bible things by Bible names; false terminology leads to confusion and ultimately false doctrine. The Holy Spirit wrote the terminology of the Bible, and certainly can communicate His spiritual thoughts through spiritual words. Translations faithful to the original languages will still be able to bring the flow of logic from one language to another, and those definitions for key spiritual terms can be determined. “Whoever speaks,” encouraged Peter, “let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God” (I Peter 4:11). Let us be faithful in our use of terminology, using words and wisdom from the Holy Spirit rather than making accommodations with the spirit of this world.

## Chapter 2:14-16 - The Natural and the Spiritual Man

Adam was not a spiritual man. He was, as Paul described him later in this epistle to the brethren in Achaia, "from the earth, earthy" (I Corinthians 15:47). So God has to begin with what He calls the natural man, and through that produce a spiritual man, as the apostle Paul put it, "the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual" (I Corinthians 15:46). While natural man and the necessities for sustaining him were created in six days, it took God thousands of years of preparation to produce spiritual man. "When the fullness of the time came," the apostle commented to the Galatian brethren, "God sent forth His Son." The groundwork had been laid through the Jews, and the educational, economic, and political conditions were set for the spread of the gospel. Through the redemption accomplished through Jesus Christ, the Father was thus able to send "forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts" (Galatians 4:4,6). Those obedient to that gospel come forth from the waters of immersion as "born of the Spirit," and now have the potential to develop into the spiritual people that God has always wanted for His fellowship.

- **The apostles** - The first "spiritual men" apart from the Lord Jesus Himself were the apostles. Having withstood the tests connected with Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, these men were ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts chapter two. Indwelt by the Spirit, strengthened with power from on high, and given the revelation of the essentials of the glorified Christ, these men constituted the first foundation stones of the church of the living God. Overall, they refused to participate in any of the pettiness plaguing mankind as a whole, they laid aside the old self, and they put on the new self and the new nature of "spiritual men." They spoke, then, as they delivered what is styled "the apostles' doctrine," "in words taught by the Holy Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."
- **Problem of the natural man** - The major problem the natural man faces is that he does not put the proper value on the truly spiritual concerns. This is why the Almighty worked for thousands of years to prepare mankind as a whole for the responsibilities of sonship in Christ. "But a natural man," says Paul, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (I Corinthians 2:14). It isn't that the natural man cannot understand the reasoned appeal of the scriptures; it is just that the natural man hasn't put the proper value (appraisal) on the material presented to him to govern himself in a spiritual fashion. It is "foolish," for example, to spend time memorizing the word of God when that same time could be used "productively."
- **The spiritual man** - What the apostle calls "the spiritual man" has moved over the boundaries separating the man of flesh from the man of the spirit. "But he who is spiritual appraises all things," is Paul's statement, "yet he himself is appraised by no man" (I Corinthians 2:15). Hence he has the ability to put the proper appraisal on what is in front of him. And because he has this ability, wisdom, and focus, no "mere" man is able to put the proper appraisal on him and his actions.
- **Seeing as Jesus sees** - Mankind as a whole rages against God and against what they perceive as unreasonable strictures on their activities. The fair question is then posed: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?" By contrast, the truly spiritual men such as the apostle Paul can say, "But we have the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16). They see as Jesus sees, because they put the proper spiritual appraisal on things.

Not all saints are yet spiritual men. The goal is to get them to where they really will be walking as Jesus walked.

## Chapter 3:1-3 - Babes in Christ

When a person commits his first sin, corruption enters into his heart. Moving from the state and innocence of childhood, the individual has now become what the scripture calls “a natural man,” one who is “in the flesh” and whose interests are earthy. During this period of time — and to some degree “prepped” by earlier childhood experiences or poor training — weaknesses of the flesh become entrenched in this “slave of sin.” And when he hears the gospel and, as a repentant believer, willing to obey it, he becomes a new creature in Christ. The problem is that these same weaknesses remain entrenched in the habits of the newly immersed saint, and it is going to take some “renewing of the mind” to root those out and replace them with new habits. Thus when Paul writes to the church at Corinth, trying to defend his apostleship and help the brethren straighten out some internal situations, he has to help them understand that they still have a ways to go to be able to put the proper appraisal on spiritual matters, and to be able to recognize fleshly behavior when they see it.

- **Not to spiritual men** - The philosophies and “wisdom” of the world are dangerous. Paul, for example, warned the church at Colossae, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Colossians 2:9). “Captive” is a strong word, and illustrates the spiritual subterfuge of these appeals to the minds of men. The church at Corinth was also being victimized by these holdovers from Greek philosophy, and as a result much schismatic activity was taking place in the church. “And I, brethren,” notes Paul, “could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ” (I Corinthians 3:1). Having earlier made the point that the natural man, the man of flesh, does not put the proper appraisal on spiritual concerns, the apostle now charges that these brethren in Corinth are men of flesh and not able to apprehend the things he would really like to say. In the process he brings forth a metaphor, calling the saints “babes in Christ.”
- **Milk rather than meat** - Having properly described the members of the congregation, Paul can now begin to talk in language they can understand. “I gave you milk to drink,” he affirms, “rather than solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it” (I Corinthians 3:2). Some in the congregation had already begun pushing themselves forward as leaders of factions, and of course would have to represent themselves as being wise and mature and able to guide the other sheep along the way. The apostle and the Holy Spirit undercut these would be church leaders by pointing out that they had only gotten the basics — the milk — of Christianity rather than the stuff of substance that truly mature saints can digest. “Indeed,” he says, “even now you are not yet able [to receive the meat], for you are still fleshly.” Men of flesh are not fitted to lead members of the flock in a spiritual direction.
- **Walking like mere men** - The proof of their fleshliness and babyhood in Christ was evident in their conduct, to one who like the apostle Paul could appraise actions from a spiritual perspective. “For since there is jealousy and strife among you,” he queries, “are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?” (I Corinthians 3:3). Jealousy and strife are just as much deeds of the flesh as adultery and drunkenness, and will send a person to hell just as rapidly. These people in Corinth needed to pay careful attention to the apostle’s analysis, and repent where necessary.

The scripture encourages all brethren to move past the “babes in Christ” stage, and to grow up in aspects into Christ. Deeds of the flesh are to be laid aside, and the new nature of Christ is to be put on, so that the saints really are a new race that walks according to Christ rather than according to man!

## Chapter 3:4-5 - What Are Apollos and Paul?

The natural man is schismatic or factious because of the corruption in his heart. For this polarization to occur on a congregational scale, someone has to be regarded as the leader of each faction or group. The propagandists for polarization will often use the name of someone not directly associated with their splinter in order to give their factiousness the color of legitimacy. This it was in Corinth; Paul had earlier noted that “each one is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’” None of the above — Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ — were trying to cause divisions within the body of Christ in the province of Achaia. But their names were being used by those driven by strife and jealousy as a vehicle to cover their real agenda.

- **Jealousy and strife** - Men and women often have selfish motives if they have not subjugated themselves wholly to Christ. While some are brash, bold, and bullying in their attempts to get their own way, others are subtle and are willing to work patiently behind the scenes to push their agendas through. The more open individuals have to be dealt with openly; for those who work subtly, the congregation has to be educated so that it can see what is going on. “You are still fleshly,” was Paul’s inspired analysis of the church at Corinth. “For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?” Jealousy, while being one of those “unseen” sins, is one of the most destructive forces on this planet. It blinds those saints caught in its vise to the priorities and perspective of Christ, and turns every situation into one that the jealous individual tries to use for his own gain. The result, of course, is every type of strife imaginable!
- **Mere men** - “The natural man,” Paul had stated, “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.” The apostle is trying to help solve some problems inside the congregation at Corinth, but he knows that, unless the saints there can be moved over to being spiritual rather than fleshly, he is wasting his efforts. Those “men of flesh” had thus used the names of particularly of Paul and Apollos to put the stamp of legitimacy on their schismatic efforts. “For,” reasoned the apostle, “when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” (I Corinthians 3:4). True saints, by contrast, do their part to put to death the old man of sin, and to walk as truly spiritual people in “newness of life” as members of a new and chosen race.
- **Servants** - This brings up the question: “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?” (I Corinthians 3:5). Paul’s credentials as an apostle of Jesus Christ were well established. Apollos, as recorded in the book of Acts, had been a powerful exponent of the Old Testament scriptures from Alexandria, Egypt, and had the difference between John’s immersion and immersion in Jesus’ name clarified for him by Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. Because that worthy couple’s connection to Corinth, Apollos came into Achaia and worked effectively for a period of time before moving on. His name would thus be one that some of the schismatics would use for their gain. But what were Paul and Apollos, really? “Servants,” states the apostle, “through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.” Servants! Just servants! So why would their names be thrown about? Thinking individuals know that the names of servants can’t give the stamp of legitimacy to anything.

The battles for the souls of men sooner or later become wars of words. Those who have covert agendas use carefully chosen words to sell their ideas, cloak their plans with acceptability, and persuade others to join their factions. It takes “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” to expose this darkness, and turn the disciples back to following Christ.

## Chapter 3:6-8 - God Causes the Growth

God is worthy, and will receive the glory and honor due Him through Jesus Christ. And while man must work, for example, to provide sustenance for himself and his family, he must realize that God has established the huge foundation on which man can do his small part in raising and harvesting crops. “The kingdom of God,” said Jesus, “is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows — how, he himself does not know” (Mark 4:26,27). While man may increasingly understand the chemistry of such growth, he will never have the capacity to know how life itself was injected onto the chemistry. Only God knows, and only God can do that. “The soil,” Jesus added, “produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:28,29). The farmer can plant, water, protect, and harvest, but he cannot cause the growth. No matter how you slice it, man must still thank God for his daily bread. God is worthy, and will receive the glory and honor due Him through Jesus Christ!

- **Paul and Apollos** - The apostle Paul is working with the church at Corinth in an effort to get them to see that their splitting into factions and playing their particular celebrity name game was nonsensical and destructive. The value of Paul and Apollos was that they were servants of the Lord, and through them the Corinthians were able to become Christians, “even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.” If the Lord hadn’t given these people the opportunity, they wouldn’t have been able to hear the word of the gospel, and therefore wouldn’t have been able to be saved. God gets the honor and glory.
- **Planting and watering** - While the Father grants the overall moisture for plant growth, man still generally carries out the details of planting and irrigation. Wheat grass can grow wild on the plain, but yields are much higher if it is planted in carefully prepared soil, nurtured along the way, weeded and ready for harvest. The same is true for the harvest of souls. “I planted,” says Paul in his metaphor, “Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (I Corinthians 3:6). Those two men obviously did their part, and worked hard in so doing. “So then,” is Paul’s reality comment, “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (I Corinthians 3:7). If neither Paul, who planted the congregation, nor Apollos, who “watered” it and took it to the next stage of growth, were anything, how much less are any of these unnamed fleshy promoters of strife and factions?
- **Same goal** - The planters and waterers of material crops have the same goal: to reap a harvest. The same was true of Paul and Apollos as each accomplished his work in Corinth and Cenchrea; they wanted a bountiful harvest of souls whose names would truly be written in the Lamb’s book of life. “Now he who plants and he who waters are one,” Paul comments, “but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (I Corinthians 3:8). The Owner of the field and the crop will reward each planter and each waterer accordingly; but He is the One who rightly receives credit for the harvest.

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he also gave them a good perspective, pointing out that “grace was given me from God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles ... that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:15,16). The great God is the One who gave someone like Paul his ability to do what he did, who sanctified his work, and who granted the increase. “We are,” he says, referring to himself and Apollos, “God’s fellow workers.”

## Chapter 3:9-11 - Laying the Foundation

The apostle Paul was trying to maintain a difficult balance in his working with the congregation at Corinth. He has to defend his apostleship and thus his doctrine, he has to defend his authority but make certain that God is honored, and he has to accomplish his purpose but be sure that Jesus Christ glorified remains the focus. "I determined to know nothing among you," he had stated earlier, "except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." What is Apollos in comparison to Christ? What is Paul, when likened to the Lord Jesus? If the members of the Corinthians congregation could focus on Christ, then the other issues would basically disappear. "We are *God's* fellow workers," is the apostle's affirmation. "You," says he to the church, "are *God's* field," referring to the planting and watering. But now, he is ready to change the metaphor. You are, he adds, "*God's* building" (I Corinthians 3:9).

- **A wise master builder** - Having moved from "babes in Christ" to "planting and watering" in God's field, the apostle is now using the metaphor of a building to paint his next picture. "According to the grace of God which was given me," he notes as he carefully ensures God's being credited on the large scale, "as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it" (I Corinthians 3:10). The apostle is also making sure that the brethren know that he himself is a skilled workman, using the guilds' terminology of apprentice to journeyman to master. He is a master builder, and the lesser brethren need to acknowledge that experience and give him the proper deference. Any of the Johnny-come-lately's would have less experience and would be building upon a foundation painstakingly and properly laid. "But let each man be careful," exhorts the apostle, "how he builds upon it."
- **The only true foundation** - Referring to the confessional truth that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord Himself said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). If that is how Jesus would build, then that is how his trusted servant Paul would build. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). There are all kinds of denominations built on something other than the true Jesus, while claiming to be established on Christ. As the apostle Paul pointed out in his later epistle to the Corinthians, "For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully" (II Corinthians 11:4). The apostle, of course, is excoriating them for putting up with twisted teaching and preaching — which uses the terms "Jesus," "Holy Spirit," and "gospel," but which in fact is false doctrine — and he is pointing out that their acceptance of such perversion would send their souls to the darkest hell. The true foundation for the church can only be laid on the Jesus revealed in the scriptures: the Jesus who is to be believed, and the Jesus whose gospel is to be obeyed.

Paul was a wise master builder, and painstakingly laid the foundation for the church in Corinth. "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ," was part of his foundational perspective. "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," he further stated, "that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." He knew what kind of foundation he needed to set in place so that the future congregation would be able to withstand the storms of false teachers, highly visible immorality, betrayal from within, and people with a power-position agenda. He wanted that foundation, as one capable of laying it by the grace of the Almighty God, to be one which would serve as a base for reaching the many people in Corinth and the surrounding area who would turn to the Lord. And he put it down, solid and square! Now, what will those who follow do ...?

## Chapter 3:12-13 - Builder - Take Care!

The work of the master craftsman is often slow and challenging. The master has, like an architect, to see the whole building in his mind before he lays the first block. He has to construct his foundation with extreme care, so that it will carry the weight of the whole building, so that the base be “true” or “square” in order that all the future angles will be also be exactly right, and so that the building will not shift or come apart. Such a craftsman was the apostle Paul, when it came to laying the foundation of local congregations. “As a wise master builder I laid a foundation,” he calmly noted, stating the fact without arrogance or bragging. The honest concern of Paul, then, is for the future building of the congregation based on the foundation which he laid.

- **Next builders** - Paul spent about a year and half in Corinth before he moved on. After laboring so intensely on the foundation, he did not want those who followed to mess up or destroy the work which he began. “I laid the foundation,” he remarked, “and another is building upon it.” Then comes the warning: “But let each man be careful how he builds upon it” (I Corinthians 3:10). Satan, the dark lord disguised as an angel of light is at work to confuse and destroy, and the eternity of hundreds and thousands of souls is at stake!
- **Cheaply, or with care** - Builders have a choice; they can build cheaply and quickly, or they can construct with care something that will last. “Now if any man builds upon the foundation,” intones the apostle, “with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident” (I Corinthians 3:12,13). Like two of the three little pigs, some of the builders in Corinth would build of wood, hay or straw; their work would go up quickly, but would come down just as fast in the face of spiritual wolves. Those who would build of “gold, silver, precious stones” would be engaging in much more labor intensive work, educating the brethren and building conviction in them.
- **Fiery trials** - The warfare in the spiritual realm is intense and violent. Because this warfare is in the realm of the unseen, God uses the physical warfare of Israel’s taking the promised land to communicate the nature of what is happening where demonic and angelic forces collide, and how intense is the battle for the souls of men. The builders, then, who would follow Paul and Apollos in the continuing work on the church at Corinth, were informed that their work would be tested. “Each man’s work will become evident,” stated the experienced builder, “for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.” Waves of spiritual warfare would sweep through the congregation, and that which was built of “wood, hay, straw” would be gone in the fire, while that work which was of “gold, silver, precious stones” would stand the test of that fire.

If a man wants to build his house cheaply, and it burns in the first blaze that gets slightly out of control, there is no eternal loss. But in the case of these laborers in Corinth, the building blocks are the precious, eternal souls of the sons of men. If the teaching was shallow, and full conviction about the apostles’ doctrine was not established in the brethren, these people spiritually would not survive the fiery trials that would test their faith. They would end up burning in hell forever, and Paul was conscious of the horribleness of that loss. But if the teaching were solid and intensive, the disciples would be able to stand the tests to their faith, would be saved for all eternity, and thus the work of the builder who followed Paul and Apollos would stand. “Let each man be careful” how he builds upon the foundation of Jesus Christ!

## Chapter 3:14-17 - Rewards for the Builders

The joy of Jesus Christ is centered around those with whom He will spend eternity. He had glory before He came to earth, but He did not have a bride. It was the thought of the prospective bride that powered Him through the agony of His humiliation, beatings, and crucifixion, as the writer of Hebrews noted, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). “You,” stated the apostle Paul concerning the church in Thessalonica, “are our glory and joy” (I Thessalonians 2:20). The true laborers in the gospel, who follow in the footsteps of Jesus and Paul, have as their reward and joy the eternal fellowship of those whom they have taught and influenced regarding the word of God.

- **After the fire** - The fires of persecution, false teaching, and temptation periodically sweep through each congregation. In the aftermath of each conflagration, a check on the spiritual building of the local congregation will reveal that some of that which was wood, hay, or straw is permanently gone; the fire of the “day” has taken it out. That which was more carefully trained as gold, silver, or precious stones is still standing. “If any man’s work which he has built [upon Paul’s foundation] remains,” encourages the apostle, “he shall receive a reward” (I Corinthians 3:14). The great reward is seeing those for whom he labored faithful to the Lord, and extending the gospel of salvation to others. “I have no greater joy than this,” is the reaffirmation of the apostle John, “to hear of my children walking in the truth” (III John 4). By contrast, the apostle Paul noted, “If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (I Corinthians 3:16). What loss! The disciple-maker who takes his work seriously, who knows the eternal value of each person, and who sees the “fire” destroy one of those precious souls, feels the loss intently. Maybe he was inexperienced, and built too cheaply. Perhaps he wanted more numbers more quickly, and learned too late that it’s the number that survive the “fire” that counts. At least this individual himself will be saved, even though suffering the loss of those for whom he labored.
- **Destructive elements** - There are those who build carefully, there are those who build cheaply, and there are those who destroy! “Do you not know that you are a temple of God,” charges the apostle to the destroyers, calling the congregation in Corinth that temple, “and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” This is the collective “you”; “you” plural is the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells in the description here. “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him,” animadverts the apostle, “for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (I Corinthians 3:16,17). There were those inside the congregation who were incorporating Greek philosophy and pagan pride into the doctrines they were teaching and the influence they were peddling. In the midst of the tremendous spiritual warfare, these errors would destroy the church at Corinth. And the apostle is emphatic — if anyone destroys the local congregation, God will destroy him!

Those who carefully taught their disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded would be rewarded by God for those disciples who stood the test of the probing and exposing “fire.” Those who watched their disciples crumple under the flames would suffer loss, but they themselves would be saved. But those who destroyed would themselves be destroyed. All who preach and teach must remember that ultimately they are answerable to God, and they will answer! “We are God’s workers,” was Paul’s earlier comment, in regard directly to Apollos and himself. “Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” God is the One who judges, and God is the One who rewards. “Let each man be careful how he builds!”

## Chapter 3:17 - The Temple of the Holy Spirit

God is Spirit, and as such He does not inhabit temples made with human hands. “Heaven is My throne,” was the martyr Stephen’s quote from Isaiah, “and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will *you* build for Me?” is the challenge. Man cannot build a temple for the Lord that is adequate, so He is building one for Himself, using the most precious materials He ever created as His building blocks. The sound of the hammer or of the axe will not be heard during the construction of His temple; much finer means are used for the shaping and tooling of His stones.

- **The temple as a whole** - What the scripture calls the *church* or the *kingdom* also constitutes the *temple* of God. The apostle Paul explained it thusly to the congregation at Ephesus, noting that the church was being built “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22). All Christians everywhere make up this habitation of the Spirit of God, and therefore it is defined as the temple of the Holy Spirit. “We are the temple of the living God,” Paul stated later to the Corinthian brethren, “just as God has said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’” (II Corinthians 6:16).
- **The local congregation** - The spirit realm is not so limited as the physical realm. The physical realm has distinct boundaries, and no two objects can occupy the same space at the same time. But in the spirit realm, for example, Jesus can be both on the throne in heaven and at the same time dwelling in the hearts of all the faithful. In the spirit realm, then, the temple of the living God can be both the church as a whole, but also can be the local congregation. To all the brethren in Corinth, Paul writes, “Do you [plural] not know that you [plural] are a *temple* of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you [plural]?” The congregation together constituted one temple, and together they constituted one dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. This concept would help the congregation see how important it would be for them to be of the same mind and the same judgment, and how God would destroy anyone who attempted to destroy this holy temple called the local congregation!
- **The individual Christian** - The saint himself is a temple of the Holy Spirit. When a person is immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. This indwelling Spirit is the determining factor as to whether or not the individual *belongs to Christ*, which is the meaning of the word *Christian*. The apostle Paul would later ask the congregation in Corinth if they knew that each Christian was also a temple of the Lord. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,” he writes, using the singular form for *you*, “who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (I Corinthians 6:19).

A major point is that the temple of God — be it the church as a whole, or the local congregation, or the individual saint — is holy!!! How could the Holy Spirit live in an unholy temple? The words from the Old Testament law, and quoted by Peter, still have the ringing power of the ages: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16). “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are!”

## Chapter 3:18-21 - Let no Man Deceive Himself

All things are carried out in the sight of God. "Night," said the sweet Psalmist of Israel, "is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You" (Psalm 139:12). "And there is no creature hidden from His sight," comments Hebrews' author, "but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). Every conversation has His listening ears, and every plan has His full attention. Within the auspices of the church of the living God, then, each saint must be continually cognizant of the presence of the All Knowing, and conduct himself accordingly.

- **Watch the back door** - The apostle cut the legs off of the Greek philosophers who might try to try a frontal approach to combining Greek philosophy with some semblance of the gospel of Christ. "When I came to you, brethren," he recalls, "I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." Their faith would not be based on the reasoning processes of the Greeks; rather it would be based on the testimony of eyewitnesses such as Paul, upon the ability of these eyewitnesses to back their testimony with signs and miracles from the Holy Spirit, and with Old Testament prophecies. So the prideful and the powerful would try to come through the back door in sprinkling the poison of Greek thought into the pure sustenance of the gospel of Christ. "Let no man deceive himself," is Paul's injunction. "If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise" (I Corinthians 3:18). The warning here is severe; Paul had just stated that anyone who would destroy the temple of God would be destroyed, and it is clear that anyone trying to bring the wisdom of the age into the church of the living God was trying to do just that. Nothing would escape the eye of Him who never sleeps.
- **Foolishness before God** - Christ and the teachings connected with Him are the solution to all of mankind's spiritual problems. The wisdom of the world proposes other solutions, with the long-term destruction which attends such wisdom. The apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit signify that any individual "wise in this age" needs to start at zero in Christ, and learn everything new again. "For," he says, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God." If it is foolishness, why would anyone put value on it? "For it is written," adds the apostle, " 'He is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.' " (I Corinthians 3:19,20). Why would the wisdom of this world say that people are born homosexuals, rather than its being their choice of a perverted lifestyle? Why would the wisdom of the world say that drunkenness ("alcoholism") is a sickness rather than a conscious series of decisions? Why would the wisdom of the world say that it is better to live together rather than be married? Why would the wisdom of the world be clueless about how to raise children? The world has a hidden agenda of destruction of the human race, and the Lord knows about it. "He catches the wise in their craftiness." The Lord knows that advice of the world's experts is not going to have the proper spiritual perspective. "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless."

In the church of the living God, earthly wisdom has to be laid aside. Those who refuse to do so are still trying to please men, and starting to destroy the temple of God. "So then let no one boast in men" (I Corinthians 3:21). "Learn Christ," is the exhortation!

## Chapter 3:22-23 - The Exalted Saint

There is no need for the saint to be overly impressed by the credentials offered by the world. "The whole world," is the scripture's analysis, "lies in the power of the evil one" (I John 5:19). And one of the evil one's most powerful tools is deception, pretending to be something other than what he is. "Even Satan," intones the apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthian brethren, "disguises himself as an angel of light" (II Corinthians 11:14). The world, then, presents itself as enlightened, when in fact it is in darkness. The philosophers and professors of the world post their credentials on their walls, and position themselves in places of prominence in order to pretend that their "knowledge" is of value. "They are from the world," is the perspective of the apostle John. "Therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them" (I John 4:5). The disciple of Christ must therefore recognize that much of the spiritual warfare around him is a war over ideas and ideals. The devil and the forces of darkness have the worldly resources necessary to paint themselves as liberators when they are in fact oppressors; they picture themselves as having the solutions when they have fomented the problems. "Woe," says Lord, "to those who call evil 'good,' and good 'evil'; who substitute darkness for light, and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20). There is absolutely no need for the saint to be overly impressed by the credentials offered by the world! "So then let no one boast in man."

- **The saints' status** - The bankers of the world are the world's biggest thieves, and they are in the process of placing all the property and people on this planet in their possession. But Jesus queried, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). The financiers have set up the world's educational institutions, have exalted their academic spokesmen, and enshrined their worldviews of evolution and secular humanism. But "the wisdom of the world is foolishness before God," was Paul's earlier statement in this letter. The faithful follower of Christ needs to recognize who he is, even though he may appear poor and out-of-date by the world's standards. "For all things belong to you," is the Holy Spirit's assurance (I Corinthians 3:21). Now who can really match that????
- **The saints' possessions** - "Everyone," said Jesus, "who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). The child of God may not possess deed and title, but if he needs the use those for the Lord's work, those will be his to use. But it is not just earthly-type "stuff" that is owned by the saint; it includes great teachers of the word, and all the spiritual blessings. "All things belong to you," was the statement, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you" (I Corinthians 3:22). *That* is an impressive list!
- **Who's who?** - The saint, then, is placed in an awesome position, and there is no one of the world who should impress or intimidate him. But the Christian must remember what his new name means; "and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (I Corinthians 3:23). The believer must remember that he is still subservient to Christ and the Father.

If the saints in Corinth could be strengthened and made more confident in who they were, and see the superiority of the teaching they had received, they would be able to stand united against the forces of deception working inside the congregation. Paul's purpose, then, in writing this letter, would be accomplished!

## Chapter 4:1-4 - Evaluating from a False Perspective

It is well said that a little knowledge is dangerous. Some of the saints in Corinth had become arrogant as fairly new Christians, and assayed to evaluate the respective strengths and weaknesses of Paul and Apollos. This type of thinking led to comparison mentioned earlier in the epistle, dragging the names of Peter and even Jesus Himself into the discussion. The final result of all this counterproductive talk led to schisms in the body of Christ at Corinth, and the apostle Paul is working hard to put things back on track. "If any man destroys the temple of God," is his statement, in reference to the local congregation, "God will destroy him." And no one in Corinth is going to be smart enough to out-manuever God, as it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness."

- **Proper evaluation** - How could an amateur really judge the work of a seasoned professional? How could a mere apprentice or novice in the church honestly evaluate the expertise of the "wise master builder" Paul? Or how could he properly assess the follow-up efforts of Apollos, who came to Corinth from Ephesus upon the recommendation of Priscilla and Aquila? "Let a man regard us in this manner," Paul instructs, backed by the Holy Spirit, "as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Corinthians 4:1). These two men were directly to be regarded as servants of Christ, and through that trust indirectly as servants of the church; thus their accountability was not to the church but to Christ. Similarly in their stewardship "of the mysteries of God," they were to answer to God in their manner of step-by-step revealing the All Wise's secrets to the body of Christ.
- **Import of stewardship** - *Stewardship* is not a word to be thrown around to simply accomplish a visual effect. The entire responsibility for finances, projects, or people is delegated to the steward. Stewardship of, for example, 200 ounces of gold and associated investments would be a weighty responsibility. The oversight of the construction of a several million dollar building would not be taken lightly. How about the guardianship of someone else's minor children as a significant trust? How much more then, the "planting and watering" the crop of eternal souls in the congregation in Corinth. "In this case, moreover," is the intonation of the apostle, "it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (I Corinthians 4:2). Almost an understatement!
- **Who will judge?** - Will the church in Corinth really be able to evaluate properly the foundation that Paul laid, and the long-term effects of his work? Will the brethren truly be able to assess the positive impact of the teaching and preaching of Apollos? Regarding himself, the apostle remarked, "But to me it is a very small thing to be examined by you, or by any human court" (I Corinthians 4:3). Whatever talk there might be about Paul in the congregation, it was of no consequence to the apostle. "In fact," he noted, "I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the One who examines me is the Lord" (I Corinthians 4:4). When it is clearly understood that Paul was selected by Jesus to be an apostle to the Gentiles, that he was guided by the Holy Spirit into the locations where he preached and taught, and that he would be tried in the court of Christ regarding the quality of his work, then it is easy to understand why it would be "a small thing" to be questioned about his efforts by any sniveling brethren in the Corinthian congregation.

Paul, the wise master builder, laid the proper foundation of Christ for the church in Corinth. He was the one who was concerned about the quality of the work of those who followed him, and who was exhibiting concern over the Greek philosophy being subtly introduced into the teaching of the congregation. He could evaluate properly; apparently others were not yet capable.

## Chapter 4:5 - No Premature Judgment

When Samuel the prophet interviewed the oldest son of Jesse for the position of king in Israel, he thought to himself, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But the prophet was mistaken. "God sees not as man sees," came the word of the All Knowing, "for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (I Samuel 16:6,7). "The word of God," says another scripture, "is living and active and sharper than a two edged sword ... and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Saints, however, need to be cautious and conservative in their evaluations of mankind, especially of fellow saints, because the picture they have of their brethren may not be totally complete.

- **Not so fast** - The novice builder is not going to be able to properly evaluate the work and effectiveness of a master. The typical saint in Corinth is not going to be able to truly assess the work of either Apollos or Paul, or fully to comprehend their respective values to the general body of Christ. "Therefore," avers the apostle, "do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts" (I Corinthians 4:5). Withhold final judgment until Jesus pronounces His reward or sentencing at the great white throne in connection with His second coming!
- **The Lord knows** - The Lord knew the motives of Paul and Apollos. He knew what conversations they had behind closed doors; he knew what their plans were for the congregation in Corinth. But the blade of His sword cuts two ways: He also knows the motives of the membership and the leaders of the factions which have arisen in the congregation. He knows what conversations they have had behind closed doors, and He knows what their plans are for the congregation. And at His coming He will "bring to light" those things which the plotters thought were hidden in the darkness, and He will "disclose the motives" of their hearts. The brethren, then, and especially the leaders of the schisms, would be very wise indeed not to pass judgment upon Paul or Apollos, or to plant the seeds of such judgment in the minds of their fellow brethren.
- **Reward from the Lord** - "The Lord," adverted the apostle Paul, is "the righteous judge" (II Timothy 4:8). He will honor the faithful, and He will cast the unworthy into the lake of fire. The faithful brethren in Corinth's congregation were therefore to let the Lord be the final judge, to wait for His coming, "and then each man's praise will come to Him from God." That honor and that praise from the Lord Jesus Himself will be worth everything a faithful saint has to suffer during the years of his earthly sojourn. The accolades of the host of heaven will be poured out for the successful Christian when the Lord Jesus utters His words, "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Matthew 25:21).

What the apostle is working on here in this issue of "not passing judgment before the time" is to break down the walls of division that had arisen in the various segments of the congregation. The leading schismatics had effectively used the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas [Peter], and Christ for their own purposes, and had used differences in the personalities and styles of these high profile individuals to split the congregation into different factions. By helping the brethren see that they were not capable of making a proper evaluation on Paul and Apollos, then the tools the schismatics were using to cause division would be effectively rendered useless.

The scripture teaches about God and His good angels, about Satan and his bad angels, and about good and evil men. And God wants His saints to learn the lessons about all three of these major categories very well!

## Chapter 4:6 - Elimination of Arrogance

Greed, envy, pride, and arrogance are hard to prove. Because they are more in the realm of character issues than just the execution of a single act or series of acts, it can be difficult to lay the specifics before the miscreant and say, "See, this clearly establishes envy [for example] on your part." But these character issues are real, nonetheless, and they are extremely destructive to the wellbeing of God's people as well as eternally destructive to the individual who still possesses these darkened character qualities. There seem to be "body language" indicators, however, which are tell-tale signs of these character deficiencies. "Grasping greediness" is an expression that is in our spoken terminology, and paints a clear picture of the body language of one so possessed. "Green with envy" is another expression, as well as "swell with pride." We can almost see the "green" in the corners of those slitted eyes of envy, and we can see the chest swell with false pride over aggrandized accomplishments or position. When it comes to arrogance, the scripture uses an interesting expression that the New American Standard Bible translators render *arrogance* and that expression is "puffed up." There is a clear visual image of the character issue, of the individual's inflating his self-importance so that it is far larger in his mind and in his projection than it is in fact. The apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit will deal with this issue several times in this letter to the Corinthian brethren.

- **Paul's using himself and Apollos** - People can be defensive about their character flaws, and when that character flaw is being exposed, their ability to listen often shuts down. So the apostle, here, having to deal with the issue of their being puffed up, approaches the subject indirectly. "Now these things, brethren," he notes, "I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes..." (I Corinthians 4:6). "What then is Apollos?" he had asked earlier. "And what is Paul?" The answer to those questions is what he wants to get at for the sake of the Corinthian brethren: "Servants through whom you believed." If the apostle Paul and the mighty-in-the-scriptures Apollos were merely servants, what puffed up, arrogant claim could any of these other brethren make?
- **Lesson to learn** - Paul remarks that his previous paragraphs were initially directed at Apollos and himself, so that the application of the points could be more easily absorbed by the brethren, "that in us," he asseverated, "you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against another." The apostle wants their assessment of themselves to be based on the information which came from the Holy Spirit, and written down by him, rather than on Greek philosophy or some other man-made source. Much like a dominant child who, in the game he and others are playing, makes up the rules as he goes and these rules naturally benefit him, those who would use man-made ways of assessment would naturally choose the standards which would benefit them. By using an artificial set of standards to elevate Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or even Christ, they could position themselves as dominant, and position the participants in their schism as superior.

The goal of God was to help the brethren understand that each saint was first of all to be a servant. Out of their gratitude to Christ for saving them, they were to serve God and serve each other. The apostle had reiterated, in his and Apollos' case as examples, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ." If the individual Christian in Corinth were to approach his work in the church from the perspective of being a willing servant, there would be none of these schisms. The splintering the body resulted from people wanting visible positions rather than simply doing the work that needed to be done.

## Chapter 4:7-9 – “Kings Without Us?”

The American performer Frank Sinatra crooned a famous song, “I Did It my Way.” Designed to be sung in upscale lounges where the “successful” loitered over their martinis, the tune gloried in the businessman or politician who climbed to the top, and — in his mind — did it all on his own. This is a tendency of mankind as a whole, to neglect their perception of the Father’s input. The man can clear the land and plant the crop, but unless God makes the seed sprout, there will be no harvest. In all of the activities of the human race, and especially within the church of the living God, each individual must do his part but also recognize that God’s part is far greater.

- **Forgetting God** - Factions had developed inside the congregation at Corinth, and, in order for that to have happened, the brethren had to forget the existence of God and the knowledge that He had been a participant in each conversation. So while strategy sessions occurred behind closed doors, and secret meetings took place in downtown businesses owned by the brethren, the schismatic saints in Corinth seemed unaware that the All Knowing isn’t barred by locked doors, or can’t find the location of the secret meeting. The men, then, who had orchestrated all this strife rode the waves of the resulting confusion to positions of high visibility and major influence. For those who were thusly singing, “I Did It my Way,” the apostle Paul has some questions. “For who regards you as superior?” was his first query. “And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (I Corinthians 4:7). They had forgotten God (other than giving lip-service to His name), and were conducting themselves as if they were climbing the corporate ladder.
- **Some sarcasm** - All the literary devices used by the human race in communicating are also used in the Bible. There are similes and metaphors; personification is used, as well as parables and hyperbole. Irony shows up occasionally, and, yes — sarcasm. “You are already filled,” is the apostle’s sarcastic comment to these novices. These saints were still on milk rather than on meat, and they were claiming to be filled? “You have already become rich,” he adds. They were too blinded by position-jockeying to recognize how spiritually poor they were. “You have become kings without us.” They forged ahead, and jumped over the apostles to become no less than kings! Their arrogance was showing. “I would indeed that you had become kings,” comments Paul, “so that we [the apostles] also might reign with you. For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death” (I Corinthians 4:8,9). If these arrogant leaders of factions, receiving that adulation of the lesser members of the congregation, had become kings, then of course the apostles could reign with them. As it was, the specially chosen apostles of Jesus Christ were, from the world’s standards, last of all, and even were condemned to die. So what standards were being used in the church at Corinth to evaluate their rising leadership — the world’s, or God’s?

The spiritual condition of the church at Corinth was in jeopardy. Because of their fleshly-mindedness, they were being split into factions, and the leaders of those factions were taking the congregation in the wrong direction. The apostle Paul, in thus resorting to sarcasm, is doing everything he can to right the listing congregation. In his cutting remarks, he shreds the claims of those wanting to lead “according to the wisdom of this age.”

Men like the apostles were the true leaders. In following in the footsteps of Christ, they put themselves last, and were willing to die for the sake of the gospel. What a contrast between them and these pretenders who moved up the ladder of influence by their ability to play politics!

## Chapter 4:9-10 – “Fools” for Christ’s Sake

The apostles of Jesus Christ were truly unique men. Whether they were chosen directly by the Lord during His sojourn on earth, or later in the case of Paul, they were representative of a cross section of the Jewish people as whole, and ultimately of the human race in general. Commoners they were, rather than earthly kings, and therefore fitted for the rigors that were to be theirs in living, traveling, teaching, and dying for Jesus. Tested they were, as well; in remarks directed to the eleven apostles who would remain faithful after Judas’ defection, the Lord stated: “You are those who have stood by Me in My trials” (Luke 22:28). They would need to stand by the Lord again and again.

- **Apostles last of all** - Man-made religions are set up so that the leaders of that religion benefit in some sort of earthly way. And why wouldn’t they? Since they are not really trusting in the only true God and in Jesus Christ whom He sent, they have no eternal hope. Therefore, those religious leaders have to receive wealth, special privileges, extra wives, adulation or magnification, or some other perk that appeals to them. So when God set up Christianity, the leaders — the apostles — were basically stripped of all earthly reward so that it might be clear that the reason they were committed to their belief system was because it was true. “For, I think,” affirms Paul, “God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (I Corinthians 4:9). Instead of being exalted, they were “last of all”; when they became respected in the local congregations in the area they were working, it was time for them to move on. They were to be persecuted and hated in the world; James had already been put to death with the sword at the time Paul writes, and most of the others would be brutally executed, as “men condemned to death.” While records of the apostles other than Paul are a little sketchy, it is easy to draw the conclusion that they were beaten, scourged, jailed, tortured, and in other ways made “a spectacle to the world.” The reactions of mankind ranged from joy over the persecution and deaths of the apostles, to anguish and horror at the way they were treated. And the angels watched the spectacle, longing to look into the mysteries connected with God’s redemption of man, and seeing the manifold wisdom of God being made known through the church that was being put in motion by these men.
- **The “fools”** - The apostles were exhibited as last of all; the would-be leaders of the congregation in Corinth were chasing after comfortable positions of visibility and adulation. “We are fools for Christ’s sake,” was the apostle’s exposè, “but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor” (I Corinthians 4:10). The apostles were absolute fools; with just a little bit of compromise on their doctrine, they wouldn’t have had to suffer and die. These “prudent” leaders of schisms in Corinth knew just how much Greek philosophy to incorporate into their teaching in order to be acceptable to the world around them. The apostles were “weak” in that they depended on the teachings of Jesus to transform the brethren; the schismatics formed power coalitions in the back rooms in order to “strongly” take control of the congregation. The apostles were looked down on as “fringe fanatics” and therefore “without honor” in the first century world; the leaders of Corinth’s factions had positioned themselves as “distinguished” members of the community, and therefore to be looked up to inside the congregation.

Those with spiritual eyes could see that the apostles were anything but “fools.” They were willing to give all of themselves in order to, along with the New Testament prophets, lay the foundation of the church of the living God. Today’s Christians are beneficiaries of the “foolish” legacy of the apostles, and we give thanks to the Lord for these men of sacrifice.

## Chapter 4:11-13 - Treatment of the Apostles

In Old Testament times, God generally blessed His people with earthly blessings. Abraham was blessed by God with riches, and refused to take any spoils of Sodom and Gomorrah lest, as the patriarch put it, the king of Sodom should say, "I have made you rich" (Genesis 14:23). Abraham wanted to be sure that God received the credit, so that the message was clear: God blessed His physical people with physical blessings. To Israel, the Lord promised — if they would keep all His commandments — "that He shall set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, for fame, and honor, and that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:19). Visible, physical blessings for a visible, physical people!

But it is different for the people of the new covenant, the children of faith. They are promised only to be minimally provided for, as Paul reminded Timothy, "And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content" (I Timothy 6:8). To the Jewish Christians at Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). These spiritual blessings are extended also the Gentile Christians; note then that the saints are promised *spiritual blessings* under the terms of the new covenant rather than physical blessings. The real blessings for the saints are such things as forgiveness of sins, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the great peace that surpasses comprehension. These are invisible. Invisible, spiritual blessings for an invisible (in a sense), spiritual people!

- **A look at the apostles** - The apostles were to be blessed the maximum in the spiritual realm. "Truly I say to you," Jesus commented to those apostles, "that — you who have followed Me — in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). But in the material realm, the blessed state of the apostles would not be seen. "God has exhibited us apostles last of all," Paul noted. "To this present hour," he affirmed, "we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our hands" (I Corinthians 4:11,12). These men, commended by none other than Jesus Christ, were certainly not examples of the "health, wealth, and happiness" fake gospel.
- **The apostles' response** - How then did the apostles respond to their privations? How did they exhibit the character of Christ in a hostile and foreign world? "When we are reviled," adverted the apostle Paul, "we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate ..." (I Corinthians 4:12,13). These are powerful spiritual responses to the vicissitudes the world has to offer (just try it!). To bless when being "cussed out"; to endure and endure and endure persecution with a great attitude; to try to conciliate when someone is spreading slander all over — these responses require great restraint, great love, and great fortitude and forward focus of character.

When James and John, during the years of Jesus' earthly sojourn, asked to sit at His right and left hands in the kingdom, the Lord commented, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" (Matthew 20:22). Their blithe rejoinder was that they were able. Jesus then let them know, "My cup you shall drink" (Matthew 20:23). As Jesus drank the cup of suffering in sacrificing Himself for the rescue of mankind, so the apostles would drink of that same cup in doing their part likewise to rescue mankind through the gospel. "We have become as the scum of the world," observed Paul, "the dregs of all things, even until now." But they were the most blessed of men, spiritually!

## Chapter 4:14-16 - Fatherly Appeal

The battle for the souls and the future of the congregation at Corinth was intense. Certain people were splitting the congregation up into competing factions to benefit their own egos; Greek philosophy or wisdom was being subtly introduced into the teaching of the congregation; there was blatant immorality that was tolerated; and they were drifting from the practices established by Paul in starting the church. To correct these problems, the apostle has to lay the groundwork re-establishing his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He has pointed out that the congregation was to regard him and Apollos as “stewards of the mysteries of God,” and therefore accountable to God for their teaching. He even goes to the lengths of pointing out the privations that he and the other apostles have suffered for the sake of the gospel, contrasting that to the comparative well-being of the safely ensconced comfort of the leaders of the factions in Corinth. “We have become as the scum of the world,” states Paul of himself and the other apostles, “the dregs of all things, even until now.” Would the congregation then listen to his appeal?

- **Admonishment** - In listing the sacrifices he made for the gospel, the apostle is not trying to exalt himself and put down the brethren in Corinth. “I do not write these things to shame you,” he averred, “but to admonish you as my beloved children” (I Corinthians 4:14). The privations he had checked off were his credentials in establishing that his advice and wisdom were not motivated by any personal gain. When “jealousy and selfish ambition” are present, the advice and direction given are perverted. The apostles were hungry, thirsty, reviled, and persecuted; this is how God established to the satisfaction of any serious questioner that their only motives in preaching the gospel had to do with the truthfulness of the testimony concerning Jesus Christ and the salvation of the hearers’ souls. Thus Paul could point out that his desire was to admonish the brethren rather than shame them.
- **Reminder of foundation** - If any Christian seriously contemplates what his eternity would be like without the redemption of Christ, he is truly grateful for those who brought the gospel to him. He recognizes that the gap between heaven and hell is almost incomprehensible. Therefore he appreciates the individual who sacrificed his time, energy, and money to bring the gospel to him. On this basis Paul makes his appeal to the congregation: “For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ,” he posits, “yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (I Corinthians 4:15). Properly understood, the relationship between a father and his children is a tender one, but one which includes measures of instruction coming from the dad to his offspring; no tutor could match that. He appeals to the fact that he founded the congregation in order to get them to listen to what he has to say because he knows their eternity is at stake.
- **Exhortation** - Having set the stage, the apostle makes his appeal: “I exhort you therefore,” he says in elevated tones, “be imitators of me” (I Corinthians 4:16). His motives were pure, his doctrine was sound, his love for them was sincere, and his conduct exemplary. His desire was for them to come up to his level in all these areas. But they need more than just this letter. “For this reason,” the apostle informs them, “I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” (I Timothy 4:17). Timothy will accomplish the all important follow up!

The forces of darkness were working on many fronts to subvert the work of Paul and Apollos in Corinth. Paul, aware that the eternities of the brethren was at stake, was — under inspiration of the Holy Spirit — making his appeal in written form, and sending Timothy to follow up the exhortations in this epistle. Modern saints must keep in mind the severity of the conflict and the intensity of the battle for their own souls.

## Chapter 4:16-17 - Everywhere in Every Church

In the free religious atmosphere which resulted from the 1787 *Constitution* of these United States, truth and confusion both abounded. Without the sword of the state hanging over the heads of those who would pursue truth, it was possible to peel back the veneer of tradition that had covered the sound doctrines and practices of the New Testament church. At the same time, the opportunity for charlatans abounded, and the number of denominations exploded into the thousands. This, of course, was in contravention of the prayer of Jesus lifted to heaven on the west bank of the Kidron, that His disciples might all be “one.” The Lord had stated that He would build what He called “My church” upon the bedrock truth that He was the Christ, the son of the living God. He did build it from Acts chapter two onward, and it is our responsibility to cut through the confusion and get back to that one church that Jesus started.

- **The principle of Paul** - The church in Corinth started down the same route of splintering and confusion that in modern times has resulted in the plethora of denominations. Since Paul could not readily be on the scene in Corinth, he explained that he was sending Timothy to correct the problems and practices in the congregation. Timothy, the apostle explained, “is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.” The point of Timothy’s commendation before the church was that Timothy would have exactly the same teachings and ways of doing things that Paul would have; his presence would just the same as if Paul himself were to come. “And he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ,” asseverated the apostle, “just as I teach everywhere in every church.” This is hugely significant for the modern student of the scriptures because he can peruse any of Paul’s epistles and the record of the book of Acts to see what examples of doctrine and procedure the apostle inculcated. What was taught and practiced in Corinth was what was taught and practiced in Troas, for example, and these can be put together to give a picture of the congregations begun by Paul.
- **The principle of the apostles** - In the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus informed the eleven apostles that stood with Him at the moment, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). This Spirit of truth came upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and what was revealed through them was known as “the apostles’ doctrine” or “the apostles’ teaching.” Hence it was one body of doctrine, and the practices and teachings of the eleven plus Matthias were universally the same. Paul, having come upon the scene later, explained, “For I would have you know, brethren,” stated he to the churches in Galatia, “that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11,12). The test of his teaching came sometime later. In Acts chapter fifteen a meeting in Jerusalem is recorded wherein Paul and Barnabas came from Antioch of Syria to Jerusalem to discuss whether the circumcision of the Gentile Christians was necessary. Paul discusses some of that meeting in his epistle to the Galatians. He knew that his teaching was correct because he had received it by revelation; he was not certain whether the others — such as Peter and John — was going to be correct. But the result was that “James [elder in the church in Jerusalem] and Cephas and John ... gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (Galatians 2:9). The point was that all the apostles — Paul and the twelve — all preached the same doctrine and encouraged the same practices.

The early church, under the tutelage of the apostles, universally had the same doctrine and the same basic practices. It is possible for us today to become like that first century church if we sincerely and honestly reason correctly from the scriptures and implement those teachings in our congregations.

## Chapter 4:18-20 - The Power of Paul

“When the cat’s away, the mice will play,” is the old proverb. When Paul left Corinth, and Apollos came and went, then the “mice” of the membership in the congregation began to show what they wanted to do when they “played.” And what they wanted to do was neither nice nor moral. Hence they were covering their tracks, setting their defenses, and positioning unspiritual leadership. As part of their strategy, they spread the rumor that Paul was not coming back. This would leave them room to continue to carry out their lawless activities, and to continue their moral and doctrinal degradation of the congregation at Corinth.

- **Paul will return** - The apostle Paul had opened this epistle with the thought that the grace of God had supplied the congregation with everything it needed to function in Paul’s absence. “In everything,” he had stated, “you were enriched in all speech and all knowledge ... so that you are not lacking in any gift” (I Corinthians 1:5,7). The moral excellence and love necessary to use the gifts properly was apparently lacking, so it was going to be incumbent upon Paul to return. “Now some have become arrogant,” he noted, “as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills ...” (I Corinthians 4:18,19). The apostle was always conscious that, while men may plan their ways, it is the Lord who directs their steps. His plan was definitely to come to Corinth soon, but experience and the Spirit had taught him that he needed to give God room in his plans.
- **Finding out the power** - The “big talkers” are always around. They bluster about past accomplishments, and blow about what they are going to do in the future. These were called “arrogant” by the Holy Spirit, and in Paul’s absence they were making their brags. Paul was ready to call their bluff, stating, “I will come to you soon ... and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power.” The face-to-face confrontation between Paul and his antagonists would tell the story quickly as to who was on target with God’s teaching and those who were twisting the teaching for personal benefit.
- **The kingdom of God** - Another name for the kingdom of God is the church. The church, Biblically speaking, is not a physical building at all, but is spiritual in nature, consisting of all those who have obeyed the gospel. Because the kingdom is spiritual, none of its characteristics are particularly noticeable in the physical realm. But their lack of notice does not render them nonexistent; Jesus, the spiritual King, was clearly the One in control in the presence of the physical power of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The apostle thus emphasizes this point to the Corinthian brethren: “For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power” (I Corinthians 4:20).
- **Their choice** - Paul, when he comes, is coming with the backing of God; his opposition would be facing him with guilty consciences and lame excuses. “What do you desire?” the apostle then asked. “Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and spirit of gentleness?” (I Corinthians 1:21). They could face the spiritual rod of Paul’s discipline, or they could repent before he arrived and be accepted with the warmth and gentleness of God’s love.

The wording of this epistle — though carefully and positively addressed to the saints at Corinth — indicates how dire their spiritual situation was. There was a spiritual and doctrinal crisis with major implications, so serious that the apostle Paul was willing to meet them on a “power against power” basis if necessary. He was confident in Christ, because he knew that he was backed by the Holy Spirit, that he would win in such a confrontation. But he would rather that they would repent so that he could come to share with them on positive footing. Either way, he would come, as soon as the Lord wills!

## Chapter 5:1-2 - Flagrant Immorality

If saints are not in the process of putting to death the deeds of the body, all kinds of destruction is on its way. Wherever Satan has opportunity to work through the saint's fleshly desires, he will do so. And because the prince of darkness hates mankind, and saints in particular, he always works to destroy anything good in their lives. Hence, wherever sin goes, there follows a swath of ruination and all kinds of collateral damage. The apostle Paul, then, is compelled to address the sin situation in the congregation in Corinth. "You are still fleshly," he had earlier stated. "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly?" Along with that fleshliness comes the sin and destruction which was at work in Corinth.

- **Flagrant disregard** - Because the congregation was basically still fleshly (although there undoubtedly some in Corinth that were more spiritually oriented), flagrant immorality was allowed to develop. "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you," asseverated the apostle, "and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (I Corinthians 5:1). We are not privy to the details of what this is necessarily all about, but it is a pretty clear case of "I want, so I am going to take" behavior, regardless of God's teaching on sexual purity.
- **Tacit congregational assent** - The leadership of any congregation must deal with the sin issues that develop. They can deal with those things privately and patiently; they can deal with other situations more publicly. They must pray for wisdom to help saints work through their sin habits in accordance with the principles of the system of the faith of Christ. But if the leadership themselves are enmeshed in fleshly behavior, they are basically blocked by their own guilty consciences from acting in the cases of other sinful brethren. Often the sin-ridden leadership will cover their spiritual weakness with arrogance. "And you have become arrogant," commented Paul, "and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst" (I Corinthians 5:2). The implication is that, instead of having the right type of spiritual concern, the congregation prided themselves on their tolerance of such behavior. Such "tolerance" was practiced because it also allowed the rest of the brethren to engage in their own sin.

The very existence of the church in Corinth, in regard to their remaining in Christ, was threatened by this working of the devil and complicity among the saints. They were in danger of falling into the same condition as would later describe the church in Sardis, "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). The apostle Paul had started this congregation. He gave up a year and a half of his life in laying the foundation for this local church, and he loved those people. It pained him to see the direction the congregation was taking, and hurt him to see so many souls torn apart by their continuing in sin. It concerned him to see the factions developing within the congregation, and the type of men who were catapulting themselves into leadership positions within those factions. He therefore is serious when he says, "Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?"

He, as an apostle and one experienced with the development and growth of congregations, could see where this was headed. "Your boasting is not good," said he. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (I Corinthians 5:6). A spot of mold will begin to spread through the whole cloth, and requires immediate action to staunch the spread. Paul therefore was poised for action, and was going to give the congregation some specific instructions for the removal of this "leaven." Congregations today would do well to pay attention to the action in Corinth.

## Chapter 5:3-6 - Power of our Lord Jesus

When everything is running smoothly, there are no big crisis decisions to be made, and authority is generally not questioned. But when situations become a bit more “dicey,” then the proper authority clearly has to be in place and recognized. And one of the more challenging situations for a congregation is when disciplinary action has to be taken over someone’s breakdown in moral issues. The congregation in Corinth, as noted in Paul’s letter, had arrived to the point where such action needed to be taken. What leadership there was in Corinth (and there is no indication that this local church was yet governed by elders), was either unable or unwilling to act in dealing with a man who was apparently living in sin with his father’s wife. The apostle decided, with the backing of King Jesus, to issue some strongly worded instructions.

- **Already judged** - The apostle Paul had a good information network that funneled information to him on the continuing progress of the congregations he had started. In the case of Corinth, “Chloe’s people” were the ones who had given him a report, and he and the Holy Spirit regarded that report as reliable. The apostle, then, cognizant of the seriousness of the moral lapse in the congregation, and its subsequent impact on the future of the brethren, decided to take immediate action. “For I, on my part,” he intoned, “though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present” (I Corinthians 5:3). Paul knows the man is guilty, and therefore is about to issue his judgment.
- **Paul’s authority** - The congregation in Corinth was in danger of being fragmented, Greek philosophy was being intermixed in the teaching, and unqualified leadership was surfacing. If the apostle were merely to act on his own authority, his actions would be questioned or criticized. Therefore he prefaces the statement of his judgment upon the aforementioned individual by referencing the basis of his authority: “In the name of our Lord Jesus,” the apostle announces, “when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus ...” (I Corinthians 5:4). He first notes that the pronouncement is coming “in the name of” Jesus, meaning with His authority. But this has the appendage “with the power of the Lord Jesus,” indicating that the words of authority were backed by the spiritual power necessary to execute this judgment.
- **Decision rendered** - Paul is pretty adamant about what needs to be done. “I have decided,” he said, with the full support of the Lord Jesus, “to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (I Corinthians 5:5). This is a powerful punishment — for the guilty man to be turned over to Satan, and have his flesh destroyed (perhaps something similar to AIDS, or some debilitating disease) in order for his thinking and commitment be straightened out. The goal, however, was plain, that the man’s spirit be on the right side of the resurrection at Jesus’ second coming. (And the second epistle shows that this man did in fact repent!)

The arrogant among the congregation in Corinth refused to do anything about this flagrantly immoral situation. The internal politics of the factions of the congregation may have been such that to act would have cost some of the schismatics their leadership position, or whether they themselves were covering “lesser” but similar sins is not exactly known. “Your boasting is not good,” was Paul’s way of exposing these pseudo-leaders. Their failure to act was dangerous. “Do you not know,” was his reminder, “that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” (I Corinthians 5:6). Hence his instructions were to act “when you are assembled.” The action: “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (I Corinthians 5:13).

## Chapter 5:7-8 - Celebrate with New Leaven

“Out with the old, and in with the new!” Whether it is a new year or a new creation, the old saw applies. When Jesus spoke of the onrushing new covenant, He used the illustration of wineskins. “Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins,” He stated, “otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:17). The covenants cannot co-mingle; out with the old, and in with the new!

- **Leaven and lumps** - Consider a lump of dough — basically moistened flour clumped together. But if a bit of yeast is added to the lump, regardless of how large the lump is, after a period of time yeast will have worked all through the lump and raised or leavened it. The apostle Paul compares this working of yeast in dough to the working and spread of iniquity inside a congregation. “Do you not know,” he asks, “that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” In this case of in-your-face immorality, the congregation needed to act, “and I with you in spirit” — the symbolic presence of Paul — to remove the insolent man from their midst. “Clean out the old leaven,” the apostle ordered, “that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened” (I Corinthians 5:7). What could be done for the congregation in the spiritual realm could never be done in the physical realm of yeast and lumps. Once the dough is leavened, it is leavened; there is no possibility of going back. But in the case of the congregation, by clearing out the “old leaven,” they could be a “new lump.” This marvelous application of the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ made it possible, not only for the individual Christians, but for the whole congregation to start over. That is why the apostle could address them as saints, “just as you are in fact unleavened.”
- **Passover application** - The use of the leaven and lumps carries Paul back to using the Passover — the feast of Unleavened Bread — as the basis for another point. “For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed,” he asseverated. Christ was the pure, unblemished Lamb of God; He knew no sin, but became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him! “Let us therefore celebrate the feast ...” (I Corinthians 5:8). The Old Covenant Passover was celebrated once per year; it is clear that the New Covenant Passover celebration is ongoing, illustrated in the remembrance of the Lord’s Supper, observed weekly by the saints. This regular memorial assists the brethren of Christ in living righteous, holy, and godly lives, not leavened by the pernicious effects of sin.
- **Covenants and contrast** - Since Christ was both the Passover Lamb and the High Priest to offer the Lamb’s blood in the true Holy of Holies, a new covenant has been instituted and a new way of life for His disciples has been inaugurated. “Let us celebrate the feast,” exhorts the apostle, “not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” The “old leaven” — the old covenant and the system of law — is gone, and is not to be mixed with the feast of the new covenant system of thought. Likewise, the “leaven of malice and wickedness” — the participation in lawlessness — is to be put behind. What now is in practice is the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

“But the goal of our instruction,” Paul reminded Timothy, “is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (I Timothy 1:5). This is where the principles and power of the new covenant intersect with the pure and holy lifestyle of the new creature in Christ. “Out with the old; in with the new!”

## Chapter 5:9-13 - Intelligent Associations

“Do not be deceived,” the apostle Paul would later say in this epistle to the Corinthian brethren, “bad company corrupts good morals.” Bad company is not limited to drunkards and philanderers; bad company can be intelligent thieves, scheming schismatics, slandering slanderers, or people with bad attitudes and bad outlooks. There comes a point when the person who is serious about moving forward has to distance himself from those who insist on going down to the dark side. Not only is that true on an individual basis, it is also true for congregations; at some point the congregation has to distance itself from those who will not follow the upward call of God. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

- **Working in the world** - Christianity is stronger than Judaism. And, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the individual Christian is capable of going into a corrupt world, and doing his part to call people out of the world into the kingdom of God, whereas the Jew had to be essentially isolated in order to retain his level of faith. The apostle Paul is conscious of this point, but wants the issue clarified for the saints in Corinth. “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people,” he stated, in reference to earlier correspondence with the brethren. But he wants to emphasize that evangelism goes on, rather than that the Christians should cloister like monks. “I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world,” says he, in connection with their associations, “or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world” (I Corinthians 5:9,10). As the excerpts from Jesus’ prayer indicate, the children of God are to be “in the world, but not of the world.” They need to be able to mix in with the rest of Adam’s descendants, but keep the appropriate spiritual barriers in place so that the corruption of the world does not leak over and mess up their purity and holiness.
- **Association in the church** - The picture, then, for the saints, is that they have come out of the world. There is an understanding, implicit in such terms as “babes in Christ,” that there is room and time for spiritual growth — to be able to have time to lay aside some bad habits and replace them with good ones. But it is also clear that if an individual is claiming to be a Christian but simply using his religion as a cover for his illicit activities, that individual cannot be tolerated within the body of Christ. “But actually,” states Paul in regard to his comment about not associating with immoral people, “I wrote you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one” (I Corinthians 5:11). The implication of this statement by the apostle is that a person who doggedly engages in these activities is not really a brother in Christ; and because of the potential nearness of these corruptions, the saint is not to fellowship with such as these.
- **Necessity of judgment** - The decision whether “to eat or not to eat” with such a corrupt individual is a weighty and spiritual matter. Therefore it is not to be enforced somewhat arbitrarily by saints acting on their own accord, but rather to be a church decision, coming in connection with “when you are assembled together.” “For what do I have to do with judging outsiders?” Paul asks (I Corinthians 5:12). That’s God’s purview. “Do you not judge those who are within the church?” he again queries. That’s the church’s purview.

“But those who are on the outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (I Corinthians 5:13). The congregation is to set the covetous, the swindlers, the idolaters, and the immoral outside of the church; that is their responsibility in judgment. Once they are outside the church, they fall under the judgment of God. If they have any spiritual sensibilities left, they will repent, for it would not be good to fall into the hands of Him who is a consuming fire!

## Chapter 6:1-8 - Handling Issues

Husbands and wives, even as Christians, often have issues to deal with, and situations to work through. When Jesus was teaching on the seriousness of the marriage relationship, and the importance of not getting a divorce, the apostles' comment was, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry" (Matthew 19:10). As complex as the relationship between man and wife is, it is simple compared to the intricacies of the inter-relationships that occur with the local church. So at some point within the interactions of the body of Christ, frictions will occur, saints will be offended, issues will develop, and sometimes general church action must take place. Hence the apostle Paul offers some Spirit-inspired directives for dealing with these situations that have escalated.

- **Mourning** - Earlier, when the apostle was directly discussing the illicit relationship between a man and his father's wife, he stated, "You have become arrogant, and not mourned instead." There is to be sadness when sin is overtaking a saint's life. This "mourning" sets the tone as to how these issues are going to be dealt with, and underscores the intensity of the spiritual battle for the soul of each individual.
- **Where to plead** - So ... when serious issues (or what seem to be serious issues) arise between brethren, and they cannot reach a conclusion themselves, to what court do they appeal? "Does any one of you," probes the apostle, "when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (I Corinthians 6:1). There might have been a point in American history where some modicum of justice could have been expected from the courts; but in these days of "judicial activism," where judges make totally arbitrary decisions, any semblance of justice in this country has degenerated to the same level as it has been in the rest of the world throughout most of history. So why would saints take issues among themselves to worldly, unrighteous courts?
- **Competency of the church** - The saints of God sometimes have their view of their position in Christ obscured. Paul points out some items of significance: "Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?" (I Corinthians 6:2). Satan is very good at getting the brethren to think too lowly of the church and its leadership. "Do you not know we shall judge angels?" he adds. If the same individuals in the assembly will be judging the world and also judging the fallen angelic beings, "How much more matters of this life?" (I Corinthians 6:3).
- **Wise men** - Inside the congregation there are those of tested and trusted leadership. Their "wise counsel" is extremely valuable, and their words should be heeded by the brethren. "If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life," is Paul's next reasoned point, "do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?" (I Corinthians 6:4). (Not all brethren are equally competent!) "I say this to your shame," the apostle adds, noting again that the wrong people were rising to positions of influence in Corinth. "Is it so," he further probes, "that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?" (I Corinthians 6:5,6). There was at least one such individual in the congregation, but the wise were being shunted aside by those rushing to be the big fish in that pond.

Modern congregations need to learn from the breakdown in Corinth. "Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you," animadverted the concerned apostle, "that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren" (I Corinthians 6:7,8). Better for a saint to be defrauded, if it comes to that, rather than having the name of Christ dragged through the courts.

## Chapter 6:8-10 - Moral Issues

The congregation at Corinth was beset by all kinds of problems. There were those who were “politicking” to maneuver themselves into positions of leadership that they did not deserve. There were those who were incorporating Greek “wisdom” and philosophy into the doctrines being taught by the church. There were rampant immorality, fleshliness, division and fighting. There were brethren who were filing lawsuits against one another in the courts of this world. Satan was having his heyday, and the apostle Paul was once again having to take his stand to “right the ship,” and prevent more collateral damage from taking place.

- **Fate of the unrighteous** - The saint of God is to come out of this world, and live a lifestyle that is in conformity with the doctrines of Christ. While there is sufficient grace to cover any transgression against the Almighty God, there is also a warning that certain behaviors have to come to a stop. The warning here from the inspired apostle is not to be taken lightly: “Or do you not know,” he again queries, “that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Corinthians 6:9). This is addressed to the Christians in Corinth; it is not addressed to those who have never been immersed into Christ. It is possible for the saint to lose his healthy fear and respect for God and His holiness. “Do not be deceived,” is the cautionary cry. Those once justified by the mercy and grace of God — if they engage in self-deception, and drift back into worldliness — will not maintain their standing with Him who died for their sins, who desires that they might live righteous, godly, and holy lives for Him.
- **The inherited kingdom** - Those who live in their flesh by faith in the Son of God still have to face the challenges of being “in the world, but not of the world.” Persecution, torture, and humiliation often face those who have chosen to take up their crosses and follow the Great Leader. While walking the surface of the earth, they are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, having been transferred out of Satan’s realm into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. But there still awaits the “eternal kingdom,” wherein those of the times before Christ who were faithful and those who were in the kingdom which came as recorded in Acts chapter two will enter what moderns often call “heaven.” Only the righteous will enter; and the warning for the brethren in Corinth is that they must lay aside the deeds of darkness in order to enter or inherit that eternal kingdom.
- **Listing the sinners** - When people commit their first sin and enter the trap of Satan, the devil becomes their father. They, instead of having the image of the heavenly Father, are part of the fallen race, and act in accordance with the image of the prince of darkness. Hence they are sinners. These who were to be saints — holy ones — in Corinth, had possibly lost their new image in Christ, and had gone back to being what they were in the world. “Do not be deceived,” is the emphasis, “neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). The types of characters are what Paul is using to illustrate what he means by “unrighteous.” No type of sexual deviant will be allowed in the heavenly kingdom; only those who, if they are married, have the proper relationship with their spouses. Fornicators, adulterers, “femmy” men, and homosexuals are excluded. That not only includes the outright action, but also those “who indulge the desires of the mind” (Ephesians 2:3). The grasping, greedy, and envious will not enter in — the thieves, the covetous, the swindlers. Those whose evil thoughts cause them to issue vile comments and destructive names of others will not enter — the revilers. And the drunks won’t enter in either.

Christians are “new creatures in Christ.” The old self is to be laid aside, and the new self is to be put on. Those who refuse to participate with all diligence in this transformation will remain what they were in their former life, and their continuing behavior will send them straight to hell.

## Chapter 6:11 – “You Were Washed”

The word of God continually paints the picture of what the new creature in Christ is. Time after time, and in illustration after illustration, teaching after teaching, the Holy Spirit points the sincere believer to the image of Christ in glory, and repeatedly shows him how that image in the saint's faith center translates into high spiritual performance and exemplary behavior. The scripture describes those in Satan's realm as “sinners”; that is who they are, and therefore they act accordingly. The word of God describes those in Christ's kingdom as “saints”; and if that is truly what they are, they will act accordingly. Performance is always based on the inner picture; hence God works to transform the inner picture, both by painting the picture and by the transforming power of the Spirit in the inner man.

- **“Such were some of you”** - The members of the congregation in Corinth came out of all kinds of backgrounds. “Such were some you,” is Paul's comment about how they used to be sexually immoral, thieves and covetous, revilers and drunkards. That was their picture: that is how they *were*.
- **“You were washed”** - God was wonderfully intelligent in designing immersion in Jesus' name, and all the pictures that feed into it. Water is normally, by His overall design, associated with washing; hence, it is fitting that the washing away of sins should take place in water. And no one knew this better than Paul, who was told by Ananias (sent by the Lord Jesus Himself!), “Arise, and be immersed, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Herein also, is the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus' sacrifice, cleansing the conscience (Hebrews 10:22), as Peter said, “that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (I Peter 1:2). Thus Paul reminded the Corinthian brethren that, regardless of what they were in the past, “you were washed” (I Corinthians 6:11).
- **“You were sanctified”** - These who were once unrighteous and unholy, God transformed. He can do more than raise up from the stones children to Abraham; stones are neutral. He can take the most abject sinner, and set him apart — sanctify, or make holy — for God's purposes! Once again, the apostle Paul is conscious of this working in his life, telling the churches of Galatia, “He who had set me apart from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:15,16). As Paul's setting apart was operative at his immersion, just so it was for the Corinthians: “you were sanctified.”
- **“You were justified”** - Regardless of how far the fallen state of the individual is, God can rescue him. Essentially the charges against him in the courts of heaven are transferred over to Jesus, so that the individual now stands free and clear before his God; he is justified. Paul himself, “foremost” among sinners —persecutor of the church, blasphemer, and violent aggressor — was able to be justified by the intercession of Christ, the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek. And so it was for the brethren in Corinth: “you were justified.”

This washing, sanctification, and justification were “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” This parallels, as expected, Acts 2:38. Immersion in water is “in the name of Jesus Christ,” and the “gift of the Holy Spirit” is then granted. Thus it was with the Corinthian brethren, and they are reminded of this. This is where their new image began; this is where the old man of sin was done away with, and the new self was resurrected to walk in newness of life! They needed to be reminded of this picture, so that they might have the performance befitting those sanctified and bearing the name of Jesus the Christ!

## Chapter 6:12 - The System of Faith Works

Being an adulterer or other sexual pervert was wrong under the Law of Moses. Idolatry was wrong, and likewise punishable by physical death. Stealing, coveting, reviling, drunkenness, and the like had similar condemnation. But did the Law really prevent those things from happening? The record of Israel according to the flesh is that while they may have, to outward appearances, observed the Law, inwardly and under cover they participated in all these sinful and destructive practices. Hence, if the apostle Paul were to try to help the saints at Corinth past these habits and practices by bringing the Law down on them, he would have had the same results as were accomplished under old covenant. Therefore, he will — after pointing out the consequences of those who engaged in such practices, that they would not enter the kingdom of heaven — broach the subject their changing by “a new and living way.”

- **Not all things are profitable** - The Christian is set free from the law of sin and of death. Because he is free from the law of condemnation, he is able to move forward without being motivated by guilt; he is free to make progress in his walk with Christ, overcoming sins one at a time. Under the system, styled “the faith of Christ,” the way the saint looks at things is different than the way they would have been perceived under “the law of Moses.” Under the system of law, the perspective was: “Is this going to condemn me?” or “How close can I get to sinning without its *actually* being sin?” Under the system of faith, the question is: “Is this going to be beneficial to my forward progress in the gospel, or is this going to be a step backward?” The way the apostle Paul put to the church in Corinth was in this fashion: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable” (I Corinthians 6:12). In this way thinking is freed up, and the follower of Christ can start looking at things from a perspective of “positive or negative” rather than being in a constant state of mental paralysis out of fear of doing something wrong.
- **Cautionary note** - For the Christian, everything needs to be seen the way it is. Where there is sin, it needs to be confessed, and repentance is in order. Part of the purpose of the combination of grace and mercy is to enable the disciple of Christ to face himself objectively. Whereas the ultimate goal of the law was to be a schoolmaster to bring the sinner to Christ, the goal of the gospel is to enable the believer to walk as Christ walked. Hence a system of law is not used on the Christian; the appeal for living a holy life is on a totally different basis. “All things are lawful for me,” stated the apostle, “but I will not be mastered by anything.” The boundary on participation is not going to be a law-type of limitation; it is going to be an individualized boundary based on whether the saint is the master, or the habit is the master. There is no room for justification or excuses; the saint needs objectively to look and see whether he is in control, or whether he is a slave to a bad habit.

The saints in Corinth were beset by varied and multitudinous sins. The apostle Paul could not help them accomplish real change by coming in and hammering them with the law of Moses; that system did not work in Israel, and would not work in the church. Hence he continues to work with those who are yet “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, or swindlers” on a different basis, appealing to them on the basis of their conduct’s being “profitable.” Real change in performance only springs from a real change in thought processes. Thus Paul was going to the root of the problem — the way they thought — rather than simply excoriating their performance. This is how the system of faith works, and why the system of law fails!

## Chapter 6:13 - Temporal Vs. Eternal

The intelligent individual is going to invest in that which has positive long term return, and he is going to avoid significant investment in that which has no return at all. The grass may need to be mowed and the snow may need to be shoveled, but there is, for the most part, no return on the investment of time for those necessary but not particularly long-term productive tasks. And thus it is for most of earthly living; the work connected with planting, harvesting, buying, selling, building, marrying, and being given in marriage has no long term benefit other than to sustain the individual while he is in the process of deciding where he is going to spend eternity. The “outer man is decaying,” affirmed the apostle Paul, “yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:16). It is obvious, then, to the clearly reasoning mind, that the area to invest in is in things eternal rather than things temporal.

- **Priority problem** - Under the terms of the new covenant, the goals of the saint are primarily spiritual. The old covenant was a maintenance system, designed to preserve a remnant of faith in the Jewish people until such time as the Christ could come to earth and implement the new covenant. The new covenant is an evangelistic covenant, containing in its teachings and practices the ingredients necessary to prepare God’s people for going into a pagan world and rescuing its woe-begone inhabitants. It makes sense, then, that the new covenant saint — going everywhere into an often stark world instead of being located in land of milk and honey — would need to be able to say with Paul, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.” Who knows under what conditions the follower of Christ might be living off the flesh of the pig, dog, or rat? Who knows when he might have to be wearing leather breeches, linen shirt, and woolen coat I one ensemble? The issue here is not whether such food and clothing is lawful, but whether it is profitable. “All things are lawful,” was the apostle’s added statement, “but I will not be mastered by anything.” The mission of the apostle, and by extension, of all Christians, is not to be subverted by pulls of the flesh. “Food is for the stomach,” is one aspect Paul uses to illustrate his point, “and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them” (I Corinthians 6:13). Like mowing the lawn or shoveling the snow, the preparation of meals is a necessary but not particularly profitable activity — gastronomy must never get in the way of the gospel! Food and stomach will both perish in destruction of all things material.
- **Destructive priority** - Planting, harvesting, milling, and other processing are all necessary in providing the fuel necessary for this piece of machinery called “the body” to function. While any of these aspects can be overemphasized and wrong priorities can be set, they are not wrong in and of themselves. But the individual can place his body into situations that are wrong and unnecessary. “Yet the body is not for immorality,” animadverts the apostle, “but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.” The body is not bad or evil; the body is for the Lord! Furthermore, the Lord is *for* the body; He wants it to be used as a tool for His glorification. Definitely, then, the body is not for immorality!!!!

The problem is perspective. As long as temporal things are the fixations of the mind, then the world and Satan have their opportunity to pull the saint into immorality. The goal of God, therefore, is to help the saint keep his eyes fixed on Jesus who sits on His glorious throne. If the Christian can continue to focus on the things eternal, the things temporal will have no pull power. Then the body will truly be for the Lord!

## Chapter 6:13-17 - Flee Immorality

The leaven of immorality was working its way through the congregation in Corinth. Sexual proclivities have a perniciousness and infectiousness about them; those involved by nature are in the process of recruiting others into the same depravities. Furthermore, the visual and open attractions, as well as the more clandestine subtleties, appeal to the sensual side of the human race, and can serve to pull a Christian off his path. Hence the word of God is strident in its warnings in this area. "Do you not know," Paul had stated a bit earlier in this epistle, "that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" Not only can the individual saint accept the misdirection immorality offers, but the whole congregation can be desensitized into accepting such flagrant violations of the sacred marriage relationship.

- **The body is housing** - The body is temporary housing for the soul. It is a *tent*, designed as a temporary location in which the individual's soul and spirit operate and are tested until such time as they exit the carcass. In order for God's overall plan to continue on earth, the male body is made for war, for work, and for reproduction, while the female body is made for nurturing, for work, and for reproduction. Because there has to be a normal attraction between male and female for all this to transpire, then the forces of darkness have their opportunity to intervene and begin to twist that which is honorable into the one of the most destructive forces in the idea sphere in which human beings live, move, love, and die. But it is important to remember that the body is not the focus; it is just the housing for the inner man. To function, it needs food. "Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food," are Paul's reminders, "but God will do away with both of them." He then moves on to the moral areas connected with sex and reproduction. "Yet the body is not for immorality," is his emphasis, "but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body" (I Corinthians 6:13). The body is for the Lord! That concept, held and firmly focused on by the mind, will keep a person from immorality.
- **Members of Christ** - Time on earth is so transitory; a few blinks of the eye, and earthly existence has passed. Why, then, would a supposed disciple of Christ throw away his eternity for some sensual pleasure that itself is fleeting compared to fleeting life on earth? "Now God has not only raised up the Lord," is the apostle's way of bringing eternity in focus, "but will also raise us up through His power" (I Corinthians 6:14). Why jeopardize that proper and wonderful resurrection! "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Paul further queries. "Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be!" (I Corinthians 6:15). This is slapping the face of Him who loved us and released from our sins by His blood — taking away the actual members of His body and selling them into prostitution!
- **Choose your union** - God's design from the beginning was for the sexual union of man and wife to make them "one flesh"; Satan is the one who has gotten into the mix and tempted man into sinning against God and against his spouse. What was intended to be very good ends up being very twisted. "Or do you not know," is the lead in to another of Paul's rhetorical questions, "that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, 'The two will become one flesh.' " (I Corinthians 6:16). Is that your union? Or is it this one, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (I Corinthians 6:17).

The injunction: "Flee immorality."

## Chapter 6:18-20 - The Holy Spirit's Temple

The great event in the future is styled "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb." God thus designed the consummation of marriage as the specific means of communicating the ultimate spiritual intimacy between Jesus and the church. Satan, then, in strategizing his assault on Christ and His bride, works to pervert the bond that makes man and wife one flesh, and promotes every sort of sexuality outside the marriage covenant. It is somewhat understandable for those who are slaves of sin, who lie in the power of the evil one, to be pulled into adultery, fornication, and perversion. But for those who have been delivered from the domain of darkness, and have been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son... No wonder Paul exclaimed, "Shall I take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot!"

- **Flee immorality** - The Holy Spirit inspired injunction is to "flee immorality." The saint is deceiving himself if he [or she] thinks that he can place himself in "steamy" situations and somehow not get pulled into that vortex. The advice from heaven is, "Run!" "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body," states the apostle, "but the immoral man sins against his body" (I Corinthians 6:18). A husband is "one flesh" with his wife; a single man is to hold himself in purity to be, if God so wills, joined to his wife in the future. Husband and wife are, in effect, one body. Every other sin that a man commits is thus outside the body, but violation of God's sexual code is sin against his own body. These habits become ingrained in the body, and defile the relationship of the individual and Christ.
- **Body a temple for the Holy Spirit** - The saint's union with Christ occurred in his immersion into Christ. "The one who joins himself to the Lord," says Paul, paralleling the spiritual union to Christ with the physical union of a man and his bride, "is one spirit (as contrasted to *one flesh*) with Him." A Christian who would get sidetracked from that union needs this reminder: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own" (I Corinthians 6:19). The magnificence of the house that Solomon built was not sufficient for the great God of all and over all to dwell in; but He is delighted to make the body of the saint His temple! Forgiveness of sins, accomplished initially at a person's immersion into Christ, is the means by which the vessel is cleaned, so that it is now a fit dwelling place for God in the Spirit. Hence it is that "the Holy Spirit is in you." This indwelling Spirit "you have from God"; He is the gift received at immersion.
- **Not your own** - The disciple of Christ needs to contemplate that he indeed is a holy one, a saint. He is holy initially because he has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and he is to be holy also in all his behavior (I Peter 1:15). "You are not your own," said Paul. "For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (I Corinthians 6:20). The price that was paid to purchase the saint was the precious, precious blood of Jesus — shed on earth, sprinkled in glory. Why would the saint, valued at such a high price, allow himself to be sold at such a loss for the price of a harlot? The child of God needs to remember the statement: you are not your own, you do not get to do with your life what you (in a fleshly sense) want with it.

The body of the Christian is the temple of the Lord. That body then must be brought under subjection to the will of God so that it shines spiritually for anyone who has eyes to see. *Therefore glorify God in your body!*

## Chapter 7:1-3 - Gods Plan One Man, One Woman

At the beginning of creation, according to Jesus Christ, God made mankind male and female. Part of the command from the beginning was to multiply, God said, and replenish the earth. Hence there is a built in attraction between the male and the female of the “species” or kind that is natural, and within God’s boundaries, a good thing. And this attraction does not die just because people become Christians. It is there; it is still good for a man to be attracted to his wife and for the wife to be attracted to her husband; but it must be managed. Therefore the word of God has all sorts of lessons in various ways scattered throughout its set of instruction. The followers of Christ would do well to hearken to those teachings, both in terms of ‘do’s” and in terms of “don’ts.”

- **Do not touch** - The brethren in Corinth had written Paul with some questions regarding husband-wife relationships. Those questions arise naturally as a person is moving either out of paganism or out of Judaism into a new way of life. “Now that I’m a new creation in Christ,” the saint might ponder, “in what ways am I to conduct myself differently than I did in the past? What does the picture of this new life look like?” The apostle Paul responds in this epistle. “Now concerning the things about which you wrote,” is his opening in this section of the letter, “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (I Corinthians 7:1). While men tend to be visually stimulated, women tend to tactilely stimulated. The thrust of the use of the word “touch” here has to do with a touching or brushing that has sexual overtones, and women know the difference between that which does and that which does not. The instruction is: don’t!
- **A world of immoralities** - Our modern world is awash in sexual immorality, coming at the brain of the saint from every imaginable source. The ancient world was also, but without the technology to bring it digitally. But that lack did not lessen its pull power over the individual who might have allowed himself to be weakened by circumstance. “But because of immoralities,” answers the apostle, “let each man have his own wife, let each woman have her own husband” (I Corinthians 7:2). Desires for companionship and intimacy are real and normal among saints. The driving point in the discussion here is that if Christian men and women are married, they are less likely to be tempted by the sundry siren songs wafting the airways of the world. It is also clear that the basic teaching of the new covenant is not polygamous; each man is to have his *wife*, and each woman is to have her *husband*. As part of that general instruction, the husbands and wives are to be cooperative in their intimate relationships, so that the married partner doesn’t feel driven to look elsewhere. “Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife,” Paul affirms, “and likewise also the wife to her husband” (I Corinthians 7:3).

The battle between light and darkness as it is waged in the human soul is intense. Those who are of the world are on record as having lost the battle, and their only hope is the redemption found in Christ Jesus. For those who are redeemed, the warnings are consistently strong and pointed. Most saints will need to be married in order to maintain their holiness in Christ. “I wish all men were even as I myself am,” Paul comments concerning his own ability to be single and remain focused on Christ. “However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that” (I Corinthians 7:7). Each saint has to be honest in his own assessment of himself and govern himself accordingly. “Because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”

## Chapter 7:4-9 - A Matter of Self-Control

Satan is indeed the roaring lion, prowling through the churches, seeking someone to destroy. And one of the key tools in his destruction chest has to do with sexual improprieties. It is pretty obvious from the figurines and carvings from the ancient world, as well as the continual barrage of images and celebrity news of the modern world, that the human race as a whole does not handle the intended intimacy of the husband/wife relationship very well. Fornication and adultery are prevalent, and the attendant destruction of relationships and accompanying heartache abound in modern society. People coming into the church from the world, as new Christians, often bring many of these issues with them. This, coupled with the temptation that just normally is hanging around, results in the church's continually having to deal with immorality. Thus it is, and so it was!

- **Whose body?** - Most Christians, most of the time, should be married in order to handle companionship needs and sexual drives. A lonely lady or a single, driven man is usually easy prey for the roaring lion; hence marriage partners in Christ have certain obligations to their mates to help keep the lion at bay. "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife," Paul states, "and likewise also the wife to her husband." Many scriptures and lots of instruction feed into that simple statement. Husbands need to live with their wives in an understanding manner in order to make this really work, and wives need to respect their husbands. "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does," asseverates Paul, "and likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Corinthians 7:4). Selfishness and sin are thrown out the door in this instruction, and this is a practical way to implement the dictum: "Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).
- **Holiness in all things** - Conflict can arise in Christian marriages; the key is to work out the conflict in a manner that is open and honorable. If couples are going to fight, they need to fight "fair." No manipulation techniques, such as temper tantrums or playing the "I'm just a bad person" card to get the discussion off topic. And no using the granting or withholding of sexual favors to get your own way! "Stop depriving one another," is Paul's straight-forward comment, "except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (I Corinthians 7:5). Clearly it is good to set aside a block of time for special prayer, maybe including fasting; and for this time the couple could put their intimate relationship on hold. But it has to be by *mutual consent*. The lonely lady or the deprived male is open to the temptations the wily Satan can send their way.
- **Better to marry than to burn** - Paul is not commanding that all disciples of Christ should be married. "But this I say by way of concession, not of command" he comments, noting that not all individuals in Christ are driven by companionship needs or sexual desires (I Corinthians 7:6). "Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am," he superadds, in regard to his being able to be single and totally devoted to the Lord. "However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7:7-9).

Most saints will need to be married in order to stay sexually pure, especially at younger ages. If a follower of Jesus can remain single and devoted to the cause of Christ, he should do so. But, if a person is burning with desire, it is better to marry, rather than ending up burning in the hellfire!

## Chapter 7:10-16 - Separation Issues

This side of glory, none of us lives in an ideal world. Ideally, every person becomes a Christian, husbands and wives are brothers and sisters in Christ, and the Christian family is one of harmony and peace. Until the Lord calls us to be absent from the body and at home with Him, we live in a place fraught with pain and sorrow, sickness and death. Part of that pain and sorrow often has to do with marriage relationships. Sometimes one of the marriage partners needs what the other is unable or unwilling to give at that time. Sometimes there is selfishness or obtuseness, which really get in the way of healthy communication and teamwork. Sometimes there are conflicting goals, or different priorities, or different ways of seeing things. This is partly why Paul said it would be better if everyone could stay single like he.

- **Believers' marriage** - It can be very frustrating for the husband if his wife just refuses to cooperate, or to give him the respect for the male role model as set forth in the scripture. And it can be very difficult for the wife if her husband is behaving like an unreasonable master and not really demonstrating the love of Christ toward her. "But to the married I give instructions," adverts the apostle, "not I, but the Lord [meaning he did not have a series of direct quotes from Jesus, but not indicating that this section is uninspired by the Holy Spirit], that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away" (I Corinthians 7:10,11). God hates divorce, and He really wants Christian marriages to work. So He is making the point that if saint is really serious about breaking up the Christian marriage, then he or she needs to be committed to never marry again. This would be a decision that would need to be thought through carefully in the sight of the Lord!
- **If one is not a believer** - In an ideal world, everyone is a Christian, and husbands and wives live in peace and harmony. But sometimes a person will become a Christian, and the marriage partner does not. Then what? "But to the rest I say, not the Lord [no direct quote again], that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away" (I Corinthians 7:12). If she is willing to stay, make it work! What if the wife is a Christian? "And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away" (I Corinthians 7:13). If he is willing to stay, make it work! It is understood that the unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife in these cases is not hindering the pursuit of Christianity by the believing spouse. "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace" (I Corinthians 7:15).

From a human perspective, things on earth seem to go very slow. Sometimes the saint grows impatient with the time it is taking for his spouse to "come around" to understanding and following the gospel. But God is the one who joined the particular husband to his particular wife, and it is important to give God's plan time to work. "For how do you know, O wife," is the direct query of the apostle, "whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" (I Corinthians 7:16). Ultimately, one of saint's major purposes while on earth is to save others. So, if his marriage is the vehicle God is using to save his marriage partner, is he not willing to make that marriage a high priority, and to do his best to make it a wonderful marriage? And if the saint really loves his spouse, wouldn't he want that spouse to be in eternity with him?

## Chapter 7:14 - Holiness Questions

Old Testament holiness had a lot to do with certain items' being clean or unclean. But under the terms of the new covenant, holiness has much more to do with the heart of the child of God rather than whether the object itself could be regarded as holy or unholy. Old Testament foods for the Jew were clean or unclean depending on animal of origin; new covenant food is sanctified or made holy by the word of God and prayer. And just as the Jew had to be super conscious of whether or not his food was clean, so the Christian is to be super conscious that his food is made holy, so that nothing unholy or unclean enters his mouth. But more than that, the saint recognizes the teaching of Jesus that it is out of the heart that come the evil thoughts, fornications, murders, adulteries, etc. Hence it is that the true disciple of Christ wants to do his part in making sure that the circumcised heart he received in his immersion into Christ remains pure, and that he desires to be holy as his heavenly Father is holy.

- **Holy intimacy?** - So what happens to the intimate relationship between husband and wife if one is a Christian, and one is not? The saint recognizes the teachings of the scripture, as the apostle Paul would detail later in his second epistle to the Corinthian brethren: "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ... or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" (II Corinthians 6:14,15). So is the believer's unbelieving spouse untouchable? "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife," is Paul's inspired answer, "and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband" (I Corinthians 7:14). This does not mean that the unbeliever is somehow saved from his sins just because he is married to a Christian; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the unrighteousness of the unrighteous will be upon himself. What the apostle is gently bringing forward is that the sexual relationship between the believing spouse and the unbeliever is a sanctified relationship because of the one who is a saint. This allows the wife to fulfill her duty to her husband, and the husband to his wife, and to free the one who is godly in Christ Jesus from the temptations which might otherwise arise.
- **Holy children** - There is a sense in which all children in the world belong to the Lord. But children of Christians are special; they have the opportunity to grow up in an environment where they can know the living oracles in their total completeness, and where the answers to the great questions of life can be found. They have examples of righteousness and godliness around them, and have fellowship with those who truly walk with the Lord. So what about the children of those whose parents are mixed (that is, one is a saint and one is not)? Just as the companionship between husband and wife is sanctified by the believer, so also is the parental relationship with the children: "Otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." Thus the whole family is a special, sanctified unit in the sight of the Lord, and the Christian can govern himself accordingly!

God used the physical clean/unclean aspects of the old covenant to set the stage for what He really wanted to accomplish under the terms of the new. The purpose of clean/unclean foods was to prepare for the new covenant people of God to be concerned about whether actions and/or attitudes are holy or unacceptable to God. The brethren in Corinth, with as many problems as they obviously had as a congregation, obviously still had a concern about holiness and sanctified relationships. May the brethren of modern times also have a concern about their personal holiness, and the sanctification of their relationships!

## Chapter 7:17-20 - The Lord's Assignment

The great God over all is able to determine the boundaries and the times of the habitation of each nation on this planet. He is able to execute His will, while preserving the free will of each individual who will ever exist on earth. He who "stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth," also "forms the spirit of a man within him" (Zechariah 12:10). The point is that many of the circumstances surrounding a Christian's life have been pre-ordained, and the saint in all humility is to accept the will of the Lord. Why did Esther attain to royalty at exactly the right moment to preserve the remnant of the Jews as a basis for the coming Christ and His church? How is it that both Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth, or that Augustus Caesar issued the taxation decree at exactly the right time? How is it that the apostle Paul was born with Roman citizenship? God is working in our lives, even if we do not know the outcome. "For how do you know, O wife," is the apostle Paul's comment, "whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

- **The directive** - One of the huge challenges is for saints to maintain great attitudes when earthly circumstances do not turn out "favorably." The record concerning the men and women of faith is not good from an earthly perspective: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ... wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground" (Hebrews 11:37,38). Those were all circumstances which the Lord orchestrated in each of their cases, and the inspired record is there for the perusal of modern saints, that they might learn and respond in a godly fashion to their challenges. Thus Paul makes the application to the saints in Corinth: "Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches" (I Corinthians 7:17). The issues of husband/wife relationships, freedom/slavery, circumcision/uncircumcision, and general discontent were such that Paul stated that he had to write his directive for all the churches. The directive: "As God has called each, in this manner let him walk!"
- **Circumcision as an example** - Paul is laying the groundwork for the brethren to be content in their current marriage status. Therefore he brings to the foreground circumcision [born Jewish] as base point. "Was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised" (I Corinthians 7:18). There would be no reason for a person of Israelite ancestry to repudiate that in becoming a Christian; rather it could be used to convert other Jews. Similarly, a person of Gentile background need not adopt the law and customs of the Jews at his coming out of darkness into God's marvelous light. "Circumcision is nothing," says the apostle, "and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God" (I Corinthians 7:19). The message: "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called" (I Corinthians 7:20).

Ultimately, this discussion has to do with the ability to trust God and to be content with what He has provided. The Lord has assigned each one, said Paul, a certain place and a certain set of circumstances at time of his immersion into Christ. The happy desire of the saint is to function in a manner worthy of the great name by which he was called. "What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God."

## Chapter 7:21-27 - Contented Slaves and Singles

The word of God does not indicate that the Christian life is pain free or without work. Rather, Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you, and *learn from Me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). The key for saints is to be able to learn from Jesus how to accept with humility the circumstances in which they find themselves, and do the right thing — to keep the commandments of God. Even though our Lord prayed with great intensity amidst the olives of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering might be removed from Him, He humbly acceded to the will of the Father, and carried out His part of the plan set in motion before the foundation of the world. He was "tempted in all points as we," according to the inspired commentary; could He set aside normal desires for an earthly spouse and family, and focus on His mission? And can we, the saints of the Most High, likewise set aside our earthly desires, and focus on our purpose in the body of Christ, following in His footsteps?

- **Slaves** - The prospect of being a slave, frankly, bothers me. I like being free to go where I think I need to go when I think I need to go. But not all have been "born free"; in fact it is estimated that perhaps two-thirds of first century Christians were slaves. Slavery is an entrenched economic system, and it is not abrogated without major upheaval. So the slave of the first century was to understand that a Spartacus-style uprising was not where he was to set his mind. "Were you called while a slave?" queries Paul. "Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that" (I Corinthians 7:21). The Christian slave was to trust God in his circumstances; if the Lord set him free in the physical realm, he would have more options in his service to God. But to be contented as a slave requires some mental and spiritual adjustments. The apostle and the Holy Spirit have some helpful thoughts. "For he who was called while a slave is the Lord's freedman," is the encouraging perspective, "likewise he who was called while free is Christ's slave" (I Corinthians 7:22). As usual, there is the great leveling process inside the body of Christ. "You were bought with a price," is the common currency of Christ's blood, with the conclusion, "do not become slaves of men" (I Corinthians 7:23). Life on earth is a vapor, was the concept of Paul's contemporary, James, elder of the church in Jerusalem. Because earthly existence is so short and eternity is so long, saints can be content rather than agitated anarchists. "Brethren," says Paul in this regard, "let each man remain in that condition in which he was called" (I Corinthians 7:24).
- **Singles** - The contentment suggested toward slaves is used as a basis for encouraging the singles. "Now concerning virgins," is the track of the apostle, as he works on the general issue of Christian singles, "I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy" (I Corinthians 7:25). Again, he does not have a direct quote from Jesus, but his statements are still Spirit-inspired. And his point is that virgins are better off if they remain single in the Lord. Regarding men: "I think then in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife" (I Corinthians 7:26,27).

Spiritually, every Christian is the Lord's freedman; indwelt by the Spirit, he is in liberty. The goal is for every saint to be, as Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren, content in whatever set of circumstances he finds himself. It may take some education in the word and in experience, but each is to learn from Jesus, and in Him find rest for his soul.

## Chapter 7:28-31 - Spouses and Spiritual Issues

“I wish that all men were even as I myself am,” stated Paul in regard to his being single in the Lord. “However,” he notes, “each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (I Corinthians 7:7). The thrust of his comments in this whole section of this letter to the church of God in Corinth is that if a saint can remain single and focused on the Lord, he is better off to do that. “But,” he says, “if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.” As the apostle discusses this in some depth, he brings four issues to the forefront: circumcision, slaves, singles, and spouses. The issue of circumcision or uncircumcision was decided by someone else at birth; the individual did not have a choice in that, so “let him remain in that condition in which he was called.” Similarly with a slave — generally speaking, it was out of the control of the individual whether he was born free or enslaved, and once again, the exhortation is, “Let each man remain in the condition in which he was called.” But marriage is a different issue, because someone’s choice is involved. Hence the apostle is giving some inspired advice to singles and spouses in the local congregation, noting, “And thus I direct in all the churches.”

- **Trouble in this life** - “In view of the present distress,” comments the apostle, he thought it would be “good for a man to remain as he is,” just as he recommended with regard to circumcision and slavery. If the saint is married, he should stay married. If he is single, he should remain single. “But,” he and the Holy Spirit add, “if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you” (I Corinthians 7:28). It is important to know that it is permissible for male and female saints to marry. The apostle’s concern is that the challenge of establishing a true marriage relationship is such that it can occupy a lot of time that could be spent in promoting the gospel and working with the local congregation.
- **Shortened time for spouses** - The apostle Paul is conscious of some pressing situations confronting or about to confront the congregations. “In view of the present distress ...” was an expression he had just used. “But this I say, brethren,” is his next comment, “the time has been shortened ...” When Christians are thinking of marriage, they generally (and should) think of long-term goals. They are thinking of a family, a dwelling place, how to spend time together, and some plan for some sort of financial security. But when the time, as the apostle put it, “has been shortened,” things change. “From now on those who have wives should be as though they had none,” is his first exhortation, “and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of the world is passing away” (I Corinthians 7:29-31). It takes a marriage that is already stable for the men to be able to step into the action of “those who have wives should be as though they had none.”

The church needs many people working together to continue to carry out the commission of the Lord to evangelize the neighborhood, as well as to continue to edify the saints. When the brethren are fully conscious that there is “present distress,” that “the time has been shortened,” and that “the form of this world is passing away,” then they can realistically set their sights on what is important, and set the prospect of the felicities of domestic life on the back burner.

## Chapter 7:32-35 - Undistracted Devotion

Brethren will make, by deliberation or by default, decisions about what is truly important to them. Basically, they will choose heaven as their priority, or they will choose earth. But choosing heaven is no easy matter; it may be a “no brainer,” but it is not easy. Most people want to go to heaven, but they do not want to develop the belief system in their own lives that is necessary to enter the courts of glory, nor to undergo the sacrifices necessary in taking up their respective crosses and following Jesus. Hence, choosing heaven requires a continual persistent, daily mental effort to set aside things of this world and focus on the realm of the unseen as revealed in the scriptures. The requirements of survival — feeding, clothing, sheltering the carcass — can occupy enough space in the saint’s thought processes so as to be somewhat of a distraction. But when the issue of marriage is added to the mix, then the challenge of fixing the spiritual gaze on the Lord in His glory can be greatly intensified.

- **Divided interests** - There are twenty-four hours per day, and the clock is an unbending marker of the passage of time. Thus what is done today is what is done, and what is left undone is left undone. Hence lesser priorities can prevent the highest priority items from getting done. “The form of this world is passing away,” observes the apostle Paul. Earthly concerns should not then override heavenly priorities. “But I want you to be free from concern,” is his added comment in regard to things of earth. “One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of this world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided” (I Corinthians 7:32-34). A truly caring Christian husband will do the work necessary to understand his wife, and take the time to meet her needs and satisfy her interests. “And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit,” is the apostle’s high affirmation of single female saints, “but the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” A Christian woman does want to please her husband, and the time occupied in helping him, raising a family, keeping house, etc., can be really overpower the ability to focus on spiritual things. The apostle is trying to help brothers and sisters in the Lord be realistic about what a marriage relationship requires.
- **Not a matter of restriction** - The apostle is making it clear that he is not opposing marriage, nor is he saying that marriage is forbidden. In fact, in another epistle, he comments generally on younger widows, noting that they begin to feel sensual desires, and slip into a lifestyle of going about from house to house being idle, gossips, and busybodies. “Therefore,” he says, “I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach” (I Timothy 5:11-15). The concern, then, of the apostle, is that nothing come between the saint and his Lord, including marriage. “And this I say for your own benefit,” he superadds, in reference to his comments on setting aside the option of marriage for better direct service to the Lord, “not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord” (I Corinthians 7:35).

Earthly life is so short and eternity is so long that earthly goals and desires can be shoved into the background. It is no secret that Satan’s goal is to get the saint to focus away from heaven and drop the gaze of his affections to earth. The intense desire of the apostle Paul, in regard to the church in Corinth, is understandable. He wants to promote the appropriate regard for marriage and sexuality, and “secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.”

## Chapter 7:36-40 - Wrap Up on Virgins and Widows

Historically, women have not had many rights. Christianity has done much to elevate the status of women, in that women hold the status of “equal heir” in the spiritual realm, and that men are given some very specific instructions in terms of laying their lives down for their wives as Christ lay down His life for the church. The picture, then, is that the Christian husband, and thus the Christian dad, is not a tyrant, but one who carefully and prayerfully puts the interests of his wife and family ahead of his own. The saintly elder or bishop is one who “manages” his own household; he is thus involved in the thoughtful development and spiritual growth of each of his children, helping them to be all they can be within the scope of the scriptures. Dad is going to consider thoughtfully the desires of his virgin daughter.

- **Virgins** - Historically, women have had to be granted permission from their fathers or guardians to marry. While this could lead to bad situations in which daughters were used as bargaining tools as their fathers tried to accomplish certain objectives, it could have also been a means of protecting daughters against unwelcome suitors. A truly Christian father will have a good communication relationship with his daughter, and desire her happiness. That the virgin has a choice in these matters of the heart is implicit in one of the apostle’s statements in this section on marriage, where he comments that “if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned.” If it were not her choice, then it would not be a matter of her committing a sin. “But if any man thinks he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter,” Paul begins to answer another marriage question, “if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin, let her marry” (I Corinthians 7:36). [There are some complexities in the thrust of this passage; the New American Standard version chooses to translate these verses in this way because of what is in verse 38.] If a man’s Christian daughter really wants to get married, the father does not sin if he lets them marry. “But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well” (I Corinthians 7:37). If the father has a really good reason that he is firm on, then he will do well to keep his daughter under his care. “So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well,” Paul notes, and then in consideration of the points he has made earlier, he adds, “and he who does not give her in marriage will do better” (I Corinthians 7:38). Christian dads are not tyrants, and these decisions are carefully and prayerfully made.
- **Widows** - Women generally live longer than men, tend to be younger than their husbands, and their occupations are generally along the lines of less hazardous duty. Thus there are more widows than widowers, and the women are in a more dependent position. The word of God, therefore, across the board takes special note of widows, and gives specific instructions concerning their cares. “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives,” reaffirms the apostle, “but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (I Corinthians 7:39). The restriction that widow marry a Christian man is really a sensible one, considering the difficulties that can arise if the spouse is not committed to the Lord. “But in my opinion,” he adds, “she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 7:40).

The overriding goal is to help the saints get to heaven. Many things, including marriage issues, can really cloud saints’ thinking, but the apostle is not going to be deterred in his purpose of getting as many as possible through the gates of glory. These instructions are given with that goal clearly in mind!

## Chapter 8:1-3 - Saints Conduct in a Pagan World

Throughout the Roman world, idol temples were a major feature of the landscape. The Greeks had developed a complex panoply of gods and goddesses which the Romans renamed, and so pervasive was Greek mythology that it has carried down into the education of today. Luke in the book of Acts gives us a picture of the pervasiveness of Greek idolatry as he describes the apostle Paul's entrance into Athens: "Now while Paul was in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols" (Acts 18:1). The Christians who lived in Greece were thus confronted on a daily basis with decisions as to how they were to handle situations involving idols, and what to do with leftover meat from the idol sacrifices sold the next day on the meat market. The apostle, as he continues to answer questions sent to him from the congregation at Corinth, tackles these issues.

- **Handling knowledge** - Christians, by definition, are not idol worshipers. In the process of becoming a disciple of Christ, the individual must make a public confession that he believes that Jesus is Lord prior to his immersion in Jesus' name. That confession will not allow a belief that Zeus is a god, or that Caesar is a god; to make any admission that either of these two, for example, is a god is to deny the Lordship of Jesus. Hence those of Gentile background, as well as those of Jewish heritage, would clearly understand that idols were figments of men's imaginations stirred up by demonic forces. "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols," thus asseverated the apostle Paul, "we know that we all have knowledge" (I Corinthians 8:1). The specific "knowledge" to which he refers is the knowledge that idols are not real. Because people were continually being converted out of idol worship to believe in the only and true God through Jesus Christ, there were varying degrees of understanding and conviction concerning idols. The saint who regarded himself as more mature is therefore cautioned by the apostle. "Knowledge makes arrogant," he warns, "but love edifies." In other words, the brother who focused on his "knowledge" of the paucity of idols and the fullness of Christ was pointed in the wrong direction; the one who loved would be thinking in terms of the lost and his weaker brethren.
- **Proper perspective** - The proverb rooted in English culture is: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." The thrust of that general observation is that those who have learned new truths often parade their new-found knowledge in the face of their more ignorant associates; they are arrogant show-offs, and often later find out that they opened their mouths way too soon! "If anyone supposes that he knows anything," is the apostle Paul's comment on this point, "he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (I Corinthians 8:2,3). The proper perspective is grateful humility in knowing that God has opened up the door for the saint's salvation, and loving God because He first loved each of the brethren. What a tremendous blessing it is to apprehend that the great God who more than fills the universe knows and acknowledges each Christian!

One of the apostle Paul's major underlying themes throughout this epistle to the Corinthian brethren is *love*. The saint is to love God, to love the lost, to love the brethren, and to love himself. If he really loves God, he is conscious of his own eternity and the eternity of others. If he really conscious of the eternity of others, he is going to consider carefully how to conduct himself in a pagan world so that he would not cause his weaker brother to stumble, nor will he compromise his position on idol worship for the sake of the lost. In wisdom, humility, and love, he will do and say the right thing at the right time, that the testimony of Jesus Christ might go forward!

## Chapter 8:4-7 - For Us There Is One God

People's perception of reality depends initially upon their culture. A child, for example, who grows up in a home where there is a lot of screaming and yelling going on thinks that is normal. It is not until they have a little larger perspective when they get older that they begin to see that screaming and yelling is not necessarily the way it has to be. Similarly, if children grow up in a culture — Hinduism would be one of these — where idol worship is a way of life, they think that is normal. But as they get older, if they will be curious and begin to examine the foundations of belief systems, they can see that such idol worship is not the way it is to be. Not many will follow this path to find true understanding, but truth-seekers all over the world will! These truth-seekers will become Christians.

- **Meat sacrificed to idols** - Satan has always tried to counterfeit what God does. From the time of Cain and Abel onward, God required sacrifice from man in order to bring about consciousness of sins and the need of an offering to pay the price. Hence the prince of darkness instituted sacrifices to idols as a counterfeit, throwing confusion into the understanding of the plan of God. As the apostle Paul would later note in this epistle to the Corinthians: Is a “thing sacrificed to idols anything, or [is] an idol anything? No, but I say that they the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (I Corinthians 10:19,20). To these truth-seekers in Corinth, the apostle then writes, “Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one” (I Corinthians 8:4). These brethren had the *knowledge* that idols were nonsense, and that meat offered as a sacrifice to these idols was nonsense.
- **One God** - Through the preaching and teaching of the gospel, an individual can come to understand that the Bible is the word of God, and that through Jesus Christ is the revelation of the one true God. These brethren in Corinth had gone through that process, and believed the testimony that the apostle Paul had borne concerning the invisible, immortal, and glorious God. “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth,” he then writes, “as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (I Corinthians 8:5,6). How awesome it is to know that the Creator God is clearly revealed and identified through an understanding of who Jesus is! How awesome it is actually to know that we exist for Him, that we have a clearly identified purpose for being, and that we can know where we will spend eternity!

“However,” notes the apostle, “not all men have this knowledge” (I Corinthians 8:7). Ancient or modern, man is trapped in the confusion of his culture and idolatry. Whether it is a belief in the system of Hinduism, or a belief in the system of Islam, or a belief in the system of *evolution and humanism*, mankind tends to adopt these tenets without thinking them through. But the gospel of Jesus Christ, preached like a stabbing searchlight into the darkness of these satanic systems, has the power to rescue and transform the one who formerly worshiped at these altars of misunderstanding. In humility and gratitude, the new creation in Christ walks through the world of confusion, and in love and truth reaches out to find other truth-seekers in the rubble of idolatry and confusion.

## Chapter 8:7-9 - Managing Our Liberty

The Christian truly is free! He is free from confusion and darkness; he is free from idolatry and philosophy; he is free from sin and the pressure to conform to this world. He is free, free, free! But most of mankind's thought processes are in slavery to the prince of darkness. Hence they pay attention to their superstitions, listen to their priests and shamans, and follow the directives of the diviners. God, in going over the Law the second time through Moses, warned the children of Israel not to participate in the pagan practices and beliefs of the Canaanites. "For those nations," He says of the seven that Israel was to overpower, "which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so" (Deuteronomy 18:14). God is prosecuting His long war against idolatry and the attendant practices of darkness. Initially He established Israel as the beginning point of the base of operations, and was able to extend the reach of His influence through the gospel and the formation of congregations of Christ. Thus people were turning from idols to Christ and being educated in the ways of the Lord and light.

- **Watching out for the weak** - Through the gospel, brethren in Christ come to understand that idols are figments of men's imaginations, collective ideas implanted and spread by Satan and his demons. "Yet for us," says Paul, "there is but one God." Having proved that Jesus is resurrected from the dead and therefore Lord of all, any idol's pretense to power and existence is destroyed. "However," the apostle continues in his instruction, "not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (I Corinthians 8:7). It takes awhile for the education connected with discipleship in Christ really to soak into the skull of new brethren. Hence some of them still viewed the meat offered to idols and sold in the marketplace as having some power and significance. So if they, as new Christians, bought and ate that meat, their conscience would "be defiled" because in their mind they would still be participating in the sacrifice to that idol. The more mature brother, then, was carefully to consider the thought processes of the weaker brother, and govern himself accordingly.
- **Limiting liberty** - The mature brother or sister in Christ knows that idols are nothing, and the meat offered to those idols has zero significance. But the saint is not to be arrogant about his knowledge; instead of thinking of himself and maximizing what he can get away with, he has to think of his weaker brother. Paul argues, for the benefit of the stronger brother, "But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor better if we do eat" (I Corinthians 8:8). The thrust of the passage is that it is not a huge issue for the Christian if for some reason he does not get to eat his meat because of other people around; the eating of food when considered simply by itself does not impact the inner man and does not commend or condemn the individual in the sight of God. "Take care," exhorts the apostle, "lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (I Corinthians 8:9).

The arrogant Christian in Corinth would go into the meat market and buy whatever meat he wanted just because he could; he would not take into consideration the other brethren who might be nearby or affected negatively by his choice. But the faithful follower of Christ would be aware of the nature of God's warfare against paganism, conscious of the time and effort necessary for the newer brothers to reprogram their minds, and would make his choices based on their impact on the brethren. "Knowledge makes arrogant," says Paul, "but love edifies."

## Chapter 8:9-13 - No Cause for Stumbling

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor,” stated Paul. “Love is therefore the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13:10). “Walk in love,” states the apostle in another place, “just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2). Thus when the apostle introduces the topic of handling meats offered to idols and then sold in the market place, he stresses the importance of love as the foundation for conduct. The brother who has “knowledge” is aware that idols are nothing, and meat offered to an idol is still just meat. “But,” says Paul, “take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (I Corinthians 8:9). If a brother who has “got it” in reference to knowledge of idolatry and sacrifices to said idols decides to “flaunt it,” he is likely to cause a weaker brother to stumble, and the resulting collateral damage could be massive.

- **Conscience issue** - The pull of pagan idols is powerful. It should not be so, yet it is. Perhaps it is not so much the idol itself, but that the worship of those idols permits the fleshly side of man to do whatever it wishes is where the appeal is. For those, then, who have grown up in a system where, for example, spells can be cast by the shaman and voodoo hexes can be placed upon people by the demon priestess who lives in the swamp, it is not necessarily easy to convince their minds that those things are not true. Therefore those in Christ who are not affected by these pagan superstitions must be careful how they conduct themselves in the presence of newer brethren who still are. “For if someone sees you, who have knowledge,” posits Paul, “dining in an idol temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?” (I Corinthians 8:10). The conscience is somewhat programmable; the brother in Christ who was in the process of moving out of idol worship now has his conscience deprogrammed (“strengthened” is the way the apostle put it) so that it does not bother him to go back and participate in the rituals and sacrifices of paganism.
- **Ruination of a brother** - The saint with the correct “knowledge” about idols arrogantly went down to the pagan temple and sat through the proceedings, eating what was offered as a sacrifice, heedless of the impact that would have on a weaker disciple. “For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined,” adverts the apostle, “the brother for whose sake Christ died” (I Corinthians 8:11). The struggle inside the mind is so intense that Christians need to be conscious of their positive or negative impact on a brother or sister who is looking up to them. “And thus,” adds the apostle, “by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (I Corinthians 8:12). The saint who chooses to be arrogant, and in his “knowledge” plays around the edges of idol temples, is guilty of sinning against the brethren and sinning against Christ. Strong words ...

“All things are lawful,” the apostle is going to state a little later in this epistle, “but not all things edify” (I Corinthians 10:23). It is one thing for a Christian to be in a local tavern for a Bible study with a prospective Christian because that is the only or best place to study; it is another thing for a Christian to be in a local tavern “just because he can.” Paul is going to limit his personal liberty willingly because of the value of the souls that would be impacted by arrogance on his part. “Therefore,” he says, “if food [offered to idols] causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat [offered to idols] again that I might not cause my brother to stumble” (I Corinthians 8:13). Not a problem!

## Chapter 9:1-6 - Paul's Voluntary Limited Liberty

Motivating Christians is a big challenge. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," were Paul's words to Timothy, encouraging the younger preacher to do his part in motivating the brethren in Ephesus. The dark prince of the power of the air is constantly doing everything he can to get inside the brains of brethren, and begin to twist their perception and their thinking so as to get them off course. The mental mountains which must be moved as the saint ceases to be conformed to this world and becomes transformed into the image of Christ cannot be thrown into the sea by mere human effort. So the saints fight their intense battles. And in the midst of these battles, they could use motivation. Thus preachers and teachers of the word of God are exhorted to lead by example, backing their exhortations with lives that exhibit the teachings of Jesus the Christ.

- **Paul's credentials** - Paul stated that he was willing, if necessary, not to eat meat offered on the idol's altar if that would be an occasion for his brother's stumbling. He expresses his point strongly, stating, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble." To show the Corinthians that this statement was backed by action he had already taken in other areas, the apostle launches into a fairly long dissertation on what he and his companion Barnabas had voluntarily given up for the sake of the gospel, as well as further exhortations for the followers of Christ in the Corinthians congregation. "Am I not free?" he asks. "Am I not an apostle?" he further queries. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" he superadds. Paul's credentials establish his freedom to do anything his knowledge of God's covenant would allow him to do. His point is going to be that while he has all this freedom, he is not going to use that freedom in the arrogance of his knowledge; he is going to limit his liberty in order to do what is best to encourage the brethren through their mental barriers and adjustments to new ways of thinking in Christ. "Are you not my work in the Lord?" is the apostle's final rhetorical question here (I Corinthians 9:1). "If to others I am not an apostle," is his reference to some others' denigration, "at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (I Corinthians 9:2).
- **Illustrations of limitation** - Paul was willing to face his questioners, and here uses a graphic picture of how he would parry those queries. "My defense to those who examine me is this," is his open challenge (I Corinthians 9:3). "Do we not have a right to eat and drink?" (I Corinthians 9:4). The apostle is laying the groundwork, since he and others such as Barnabas have to eat and drink in order to function, for the fact that he could be financially supported in order to eat and drink. "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife," is an additional fair question, "even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (I Corinthians 9:5). Certainly he did have a right to be married and to take his wife along on his travels. But as he had previously made clear, he thought he was more effective and more efficient being unmarried so that he could serve the brethren better. "Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?" (I Corinthians 9:6) is another inquiry he has for provoking thought. He could take money from the congregation at Corinth, but he is not going to because he knows it is better for the brethren and the furtherance of the gospel if he does not.

Brethren do need to be motivated. In hopes that the more arrogant brethren would get off their high horses and abstain from meats offered to idols for the sake of weaker brethren, the apostle is offering illustrations of how he limits his liberty. His good example would motivate the honest ones!

## Chapter 9:7-10 - Plowing in Hope, Threshing in Hope

The test of many a character occurs when the exchange of money is involved. Abraham, for example, would not take any of the spoils of Sodom and Gomorrah after he rescued them from the kings of the east, saying to the king of Sodom, "I will not take a thread or sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abraham rich.'" (Genesis 14:23). Abraham had a right to the spoils, but he would not bend his principles for the sake of the money. He would willingly refrain in order that he might further the purpose of God; the result of Abraham's successfully passing this character test is that in the next chapter God implements the beginning of the eternal covenant with him. Similarly, men such as Barnabas and Paul had passed God's character test and were entitled to support from congregations such as Corinth, and the apostle is going to take some time to drive this point home. Then he is going to show that he was willing to forego money that was rightfully his in order to demonstrate to the Corinthian brethren that they could forego the eating of meat offered to idols.

- **Practical argument** - The body of man is a physical machine, and it needs fuel and oxygen to function. The oxygen can come from breathing the air, but the fuel has to come from food hunted or harvested. And that hunting and harvesting is labor intensive; it requires much work for comparatively little. Hence as Paul makes his case about how the apostles could receive remuneration for their spiritual labor in order to fuel their bodies, he asks the question, "Do only Barnabas and I have a right to refrain from working?" The point is that Paul and others had the right to remuneration, and also — Paul especially, here — could refrain from that for other purposes. "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?" he asks. Soldiers don't, and neither are the apostles and others required to do so. "Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?" he further probes. "Or who tends a flock and does not use of the milk of the flock?" (I Corinthians 9:7). Those who labor on the battlefields or the agricultural fields have the right to their produce; in fact, that prospect of remuneration or usage is the only incentive to labor. The application to spiritual fields is clear.
- **Argument from the Law** - Paul has used an argument from human experience to make his point. But he is willing to carry his logic further. "I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I?" he challenges. "Or does not the Law also say these things?" (I Corinthians 9:8). Now he can bring in an even more substantive point from the Old Testament scriptures. "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.'" (I Corinthians 9:9). The ox was permitted to dip his nose into the grain while he turned the millwheel. But apostle is not willing to leave the point here. "God is not concerned about oxen, is He?" he reasons. "Or is He speaking altogether for our sake?" So God was writing things in physical terms in the Old Testament writings for a basis of how things are to function under the terms of the New! "Yes," he says, "for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops" (I Corinthians 9:10).

Paul, with his usual insight, clear reasoning, and inspiration, is making his case that he has the right to share in the material side of the Corinthians commitment to God. But his ultimate point is that he is not going to use this right in the case of these brethren, according to the wisdom granted him by the All Wise God.

## Chapter 9:11-12 - No Hindrance to the Gospel

There were those who were working inside the church at Corinth in order to achieve position and a market share of the church finances. The apostle Paul, by contrast, had made the point that “I preached the gospel to you without charge” (II Corinthians 11:7). “But what I am doing,” he stated, “I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting” (II Corinthians 11:12). Strong words!!! Because of these opportunists’ desire to get their mitts into the treasury, Paul was willing to demonstrate in a clear way that, although he had the right to compensation, he was willing to forego that right. And he is bringing it to their attention here in order that the brethren might forego some of the things they could do for the sake of weaker brethren. In making his presentation, he argued first from the perspective of what he called “human judgment,” pointing out that it naturally makes sense that a soldier would have to serve for pay, or that a farmer would have to expect a return on his harvest. He further argued that even the Law of Moses had that the statement that the ox was not to be muzzled while it threshed out the grain, and that those who preach the gospel have to “plow” in hope of being able to use some of the produce of their labor.

- **Spiritual pre-eminence** - The material things — food, clothing, the labor for their production, and the money used to make the transactions possible — are all of this world, and destined to perish. The things which bring salvation to the soul — the word of the gospel, forgiveness of sins, and the indwelling Holy Spirit — are eternal. Hence it is impossible to value that which will last forever on the basis of anything temporal. Paul thus makes this point to the brethren: “If we sowed spiritual things in you,” he emphasizes in question form, “is it too much if we should reap material things from you?” (I Corinthians 9:11). Again, he is buttressing his point that he and his fellow bond-servants of the gospel had a right to some financial assistance in appreciation for their efforts in the spiritual realm.
- **Non-use of his right** - The brethren apparently understood that those who labor in the word can have some compensation for their efforts, since living on earth requires financing. “If others share the right over you,” he appeals on this basis, “do we not more?” As the one “who plowed in hope” in starting the congregation, he had more right than anyone to material return. Now, however, he is ready to make his application. “Nevertheless, we did not use this right ...” (I Corinthians 9:12). Paul had not wanted to take anything monetarily from the congregation at Corinth, knowing, apparently, something of their character and anticipating future problems. “I robbed other churches,” said he, engaging in a little hyperbole, “taking wages from them to serve you” (II Corinthians 11:8).

The apostle’s earnest desire was the salvation of souls. He did not want there to be any confusion as to what his purpose was in preaching the gospel to those who might possibly become Christians; he did not want any intimation that his motive was money rather than their eternity. It was at Corinth he worked as a tent-maker, waiting until Silas and Timothy could come from Philippi in Macedonia, bringing assistance from that congregation and enabling him to begin preaching and teaching full time. “We endure all things,” he states, “that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:12). Paul’s track record in Corinth and elsewhere demonstrated to any objective observer his willingness to endure whatever persecution and privation that might come his way in order that the gospel go forward. And he is making this point that the brethren might have a similar attitude in demonstrating their willingness to forego the eating of meats offered at idol altars. In this way, the weaker brethren would not have cause for stumbling, and the gospel could go forth unfettered.

## Chapter 9:13-14 - The Lord's Directive

The warfare for the soul of one single individual is intense. Multiply that thought by billions, and the nature of struggle of the gospel against the forces of darkness somewhat comes into view. Saints must be reminded that the lock-down Satan had on each member of the fallen race was so great that deliverance could only be accomplished through the death of God's only begotten Son! Hence it is that serious brethren and sincere proclaimers of the gospel must want to conduct themselves in such a way as to generate no true impediment to the word of God. "We endure all things," the apostle Paul had stated, "that may no hindrance to the gospel of Christ." "If food causes my brother to stumble," he had also noted, "I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble." Money is a major issue among the Gentile peoples of the world, who always seem to be in a mad scramble for the stuff, and Paul doesn't even want that to become an issue. Hence he spends a sector of his letter explaining in detail his and others' right as preachers to receive material compensation for spiritual work done. By somewhat belaboring his point on this matter, then his willingness to forgo such return from the congregation at Corinth will stand as an even higher point.

- **Argument from the priesthood** - Paul has argued that soldiers do not serve at their own expense, that farmers and shepherds operate in expectation of gain, that according to the Law even oxen have a right to eat from the grain they grind. Now he argues his point based on the Old Testament priesthood. "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple," he asks, "and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar?" (I Corinthians 9:13). What he is referring to is that a portion of many of the Old Testament offerings — either meat offerings or grain offerings — was burnt, but another part was for the sustenance of the priest and his family. In fact, those offerings had to be offered with salt, and thus the priest and his dependents would obtain that necessity of life also. All that he needed while he was performing the Lord's service was in this way provided.
- **Living from the gospel** - Paul parallels the ministrations of the Old Testament priesthood to those who preach the gospel. In writing to the brethren in Rome, he had pictured himself in his preaching, "ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16). Drawing from the idea that the priests got their living from the altar where they served, he asseverates, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:14). There three major "directives" from the Lord: one, that those who desire to be saved must obey the gospel; two, that saints must participate in the Lord's Supper in order to have eternal life; and three, that those who proclaim the gospel are to get their living from the gospel. When the follower of Christ considers the weight put on this proposition, he better understands the importance of preaching in saving the lost and conserving the saved!

The apostle, however, demonstrated his willingness to set that directive aside as it applied directly between him and the church at Corinth. For him to make that sacrifice and "endure," as he put it, there must have been some greater issue at stake. "But I have used none of these things," he animadverted. He wanted to "offer the gospel without charge," and for the brethren likewise to put aside personal rights so as not to hinder the forward progress of the gospel, or put a stumbling block before weaker brethren. This is Christianity in action!

## Chapter 9:14-16 - Preaching the Gospel

“The world through its wisdom,” stated Paul, “did not come to know God.” The peoples of the world can and must draw the conclusion that the universe was created by God, and through that conclusion be able to know that God is a God of order. But to know of His love and mercy and grace requires the gospel, information given by revelation. And that is where preaching comes in! “God was well-pleased through the foolishness of preaching,” was the apostle’s foundational statement, “to save those who believe.” A person may argue with God, but not successfully. If God is pleased to have the message delivered through preaching rather than through song or dance, then that is how God is “well-pleased”! “How shall they hear without a preacher?” Paul had queried, concerning the masses huddled in the darkneses of this world. “And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” was his follow up question (Romans 10:14,15). It takes money to send them, and thus the record of the Lord’s instruction: “So also the Lord directed those who preach the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:14). Preaching is the critical part of the spread of the gospel.

- **Focus** - Preaching is hard work, when it is done the way it is supposed to be done. There are drones who “milk the system,” preaching in long-established congregations, with set office hours like working in a bank, with hours to prepare messages, and with the ability to live the soft life. But it is hard work, as Paul mentioned in reference to his preaching in relationship to that of the other apostles, noting, “I labored more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (I Corinthians 15:10). The point is that true preaching is hard work, and it requires focus to be effective. In the modern world it involves setting appointments, working through contact lists, communication, care, Bible studies, and many other demands that drain mental energy. If an individual tries to preach part time, and focus on something else part time, his effectiveness is really limited. So as men develop into evangelists, having proven their worth and desire to reach the lost, then they need to be financially able to focus on that work. That is one of the reasons for the Lord’s directive.
- **Paul’s restraint** - Having clearly established that those who preach the gospel are to get their living from the gospel, the apostle then again emphasizes his point. “But I have used none of these things,” he affirms (I Corinthians 9:15). “And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case,” he clarifies, “for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.” The apostle is not trying to get an offering from Corinth, like so many then and now would; he is not preaching for the money, as he somewhat sarcastically call his “boast.” “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:16). Paul is internally driven to preach; it wells up from within him, flowing from his concern for souls. Whether he is in the king’s palace or in the chains of a prison, he will preach. He will call King Agrippa to repentance, immerse run-away slaves, and convert the Praetorian guard. He is going to preach, and monetary concerns have nothing to do with it!

The desire of Paul — his compulsion to preach — stands as a great example to moderns. The same concern for lost souls must still be there. The same desire to get people to understand the word of God and the gospel of glory must be there. The same desire to endure for the proper motive must still be there. From the pen of this man flowed this continuing challenge: PREACH THE WORD!

## Chapter 9:17-19 - Stewardship of the Gospel

“Regard us in this manner,” the apostle had exhorted, “as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” The apostle thus often refers to himself and his fellow workers as these “bond-servants of Christ” – slaves of Christ by choice. He also uses words like *compulsion* to describe his condition subsequent to his decision to follow Christ. “For the love of Christ controls us,” he noted in another place, “having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died” (II Corinthians 5:14). The apostle, then, is indicating how driven he is to preach the gospel, and that he will respond in any circumstance by teaching and preaching about Jesus the Christ. Others are not so driven; therefore he has to describe the condition of his mind and the habitual action that he will always take.

- **His stewardship** - *Stewardship* has to do with assets or responsibilities of one entity which are entrusted to someone else. The apostle, then, as he describes himself as a steward, views this stewardship of the mysteries of God as something which he cannot relinquish. “I am under compulsion,” he emphasized, “for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” *Woe* is a strong word! But it thus serves to set the stage for Paul’s next comment. “For if I do this voluntarily,” he explains, “I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (I Corinthians 9:17). Recalling his meeting the Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road, in his testimony before the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa, the apostle quoted Jesus as saying, “For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you ...” (Acts 26:16). He was sent; he, in one manner of speaking, was compelled!
- **His reward** - Since he has this stewardship from God, what sort of payment should he get from people? If he charged people for his services in teaching the truths of eternal life, he then in effect would be “double dipping.” Furthermore, what price could be set for an hour of his time? Would \$100, \$1000, or even \$10,000 be adequate compensation for the information shared? “What then is my reward?” he asks. “That, when I preach the gospel,” he answers, “I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:18). He wants to know that he is contributing to the cause of Christ voluntarily in some way, and the way in which he accomplishes that is to set aside his “right” to compensation.

The context of the apostle’s remarks must not be forgotten. He is still writing under the general heading of encouraging the brethren to set aside their “right” to meat which had been left over from pagan sacrifices and which had been offered for sale in the meat market. The brethren “in the know,” of course, had the knowledge that pagan gods were not gods at all, but that the whole package of these sacrifices had been implanted in the minds of Gentiles by Satan. The concern of the apostle was that weaker and newer brethren would have their consciences weakened by these stronger brethren who would purchase and eat such meat. He therefore encourages the more knowledgeable brethren to forsake their “right” to so eat, and offers himself as an example of someone who also would forego — and had forgone! — his “right” to compensation. The goal of all such setting aside of “rights” is either the conservation of the saved or the salvation of the lost. “For though I am free from all men,” he asseverates, “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (I Corinthians 9:19). May we all follow in his footsteps!

## Chapter 9:19-22 - By All Means, Save Some

It takes tremendous desire to seek and to save the lost. The beginning of this desire, and its ultimate expression, are exhibited in the great golden verse of the Bible: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). In a few simple words, the awesomeness of the gulf between sinful man and the righteous God, the incomprehensible gap between heaven and hell, and the yawning chasm between eternal life and eternal condemnation are pictured by Jesus Himself. In this way, the driving desire of God to save mankind is graphically illustrated. This earnestness of the loving Father is therefore to be passed along to His children. "We love," said the apostle John, "because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). Hence it is that the entire body of Christ is infused with a love for the lost; it exerts itself mightily, it sacrifices greatly, and inconveniences itself tremendously for the sake of getting the gospel to a dying world. And one of the greatest examples of such love is the apostle Paul.

- **Slave to all** - The difference between a slave and a free man is huge! The apostle Paul uses that distinction to make his point about his desire to seek and save the lost. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more" (I Corinthians 9:19). The apostle endured every privation in order to serve mankind in getting to them the words of eternal life. While many would not recognize this as service or slavery, those who appreciated the gospel and began to participate in its promulgation would increasingly understand that Paul had indeed set aside his desires and wants. Although he could set his own schedule, he made himself a slave to others' hours, with the earnest desire that he might win just one more soul.
- **Reaching the Jews** - To reach the lost, the teacher of the word has to get down to where people really live; he has to eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners, but without compromising God's principles and morality. The great example, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whom the apostle John describes in these terms: "And the Word became flesh, and *dwelt among us* ... (John 1:14). "And to the Jews," then says Paul, "I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews" (I Corinthians 9:20). People have to be "won." They need to be educated, then persuaded. They need to be cajoled, then motivated. They need to feel the wrath of God, then understand the greatness of His love. To bridge the gap, Paul became — as he legitimately could — a Jew, with full understanding of their idioms and customs. "To those who are under the Law," he added, "as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law." The apostle could share with the Sadducee and the chief priest; he could also meet the Pharisee at his level. His goal was to "connect" so that he could communicate.
- **Reaching the Gentiles** - The apostle could join the Jew in his customs. But he could also interact with the Gentile, as he noted: "to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law" (I Corinthians 9:21). He kept God's standards, but with concern and compassion interacted with all people.

"To the weak," he said, "I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). *By all means save some ... By all means save some ... By all means save some ... By all means save some ... !!!!!*

## Chapter 9:24-27 - Fellow Partaker of the Gospel

“While we are in this tent,” averred the apostle Paul, in reference to dragging the physical body through life, “we groan, being burdened” (II Corinthians 5:4). Feeding the body, sweeping the domicile, keeping the stall for the donkey transport system ... these all require time, energy, and some focus. Hence it is that the necessities and distractions of earth can blur the saint’s vision, and cause him not to focus enough the value of the eternal things. Not so with the apostle Paul! He clearly grasped the eternal value of each soul, and reordered his life’s priorities accordingly. “I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some,” was his commentary. Through persecutions, threats, slanders, dangers, and physical challenges, he did whatever it took to rescue the next soul held in captivity by Satan. “I do all things for the sake of the gospel,” he added, “that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” Having, in his own words, “been caught up into Paradise,” he had a perspective on the unspeakable value of being a partaker of the gospel; therefore, he threw himself into the work of seeking and saving the lost for their sakes, for his own sake, and for the sake of the name of the Lord.

- **Total intensity** - Athletics can serve as good illustrations. Because they take place in the physical arena, have specific boundaries and definite goals, many of the extraneous factors that complicate the rest of life have been cleared away. Thus the point to be illustrated can be easily brought to the fore, and good communication will ensue. The apostle, then, wants to demonstrate the intensity it takes in seeking and saving the lost, and uses some athletic illustrations to make his points. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run,” he asks, “but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win” (I Corinthians 9:24). While the losers of the race may have lollygagged a bit, the winner has to run with maximum intensity for the entire duration of the race. The apostle is encouraging the saints to have this same intensity in doing everything in their lives also “for the sake of the gospel,” that they might become partakers of its victory.
- **Total control** - Those who reach the Olympics are the best performers of their sports specialty in the world. To be the best, they have to exercise discipline for years to increase or maintain their top-level performance. “And everyone who competes in the games,” illustrates the apostle, in reference to the Olympiads of his day, “exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (I Corinthians 9:25). The laurel leaf which crowned the victor in those days dried and crumpled within a few days; but the saint who exercises self-control in all things will receive the “unfading crown of glory”!! This will be enough incentive for those who are spiritually attuned.
- **Total focus** - Misdirected energy is worse than wasted; it is often destructive. The apostle demonstrates his focus in using his personal energy in ways that are directed and cumulative. “Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim,” he avers, “I box in such a way, as not beating the air” (I Corinthians 9:26). He runs toward his goal; he makes his punches count. There is no wasted effort with the apostle as he rescues the lost and ensures his own salvation. This total focus is thus also enjoined upon the followers of Christ.

“I buffet my body,” is the apostle’s salient point, “and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (I Corinthians 9:27). Words are the primary tools used in the salvation of others; for the salvation of self, actions are the requisites. Advice is easy to give, but not so easy to implement. Hence it is, that the saints have to buffet their bodies and make them their slaves in order to be qualified for “so great a salvation.” It is worth the effort!

## Chapter 10:1-4 - Immersed into Moses

Jesus not only said to seek first the kingdom of God, but He also added, “and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews also added this exhortation, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). The intent of God’s scriptures is pretty clear, that each saint is to exercise self-control in all things. “I buffet my body,” was Paul’s way of making this point, “and make it my slave.” If he did not control himself, then — regardless of how many thousands of others his messages had saved — he himself would be disqualified at the gates of eternal life. This is a sobering thought for any modern Christian making the claim to godliness. With the help of the Holy Spirit, and the renewing of his mind by the scriptures, the disciple of Christ can win this battle with self, and exhibit the righteousness and holiness that the Father desires and requires from His children.

- **Israel’s foreshadow** - It is truly astounding to look into the word of God and see the types and foreshadows the All Wise and All Knowing orchestrated in Old Testament times to prove the truthfulness of what is written in the New Testament. Whether it is Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a foreshadow of God’s offering of His only begotten Son, or whether it is the tremendous typology of the Old Testament tabernacle foreshadowing the church of the living God, it is always interesting, amazing, and instructive. So it is with Israel’s crossing the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,” are the words of Paul’s introduction of this point, “that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were immersed into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (I Corinthians 10:1,2). Here is a truly amazing and orchestrated picture indeed! With the walls of water on each side and with the cloud covering them over the top, the body of Israel was effectively immersed into Moses, prefiguring the saint’s immersion into Christ. Just as the children of Israel left a life of slavery in Egypt behind and came up out of the water to enter a new life of freedom and responsibility, so the penitent individual leaves a life of slavery to sin behind and comes up out of the water to enter a new abundant life of freedom and responsibility in Christ.
- **Spiritual food and drink** - The cloud which covered them in crossing through the sea was the same cloud which guided them by day and the pillar of fire which guided them by night through the wilderness. The apostle described this in these terms: “And all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ” (I Corinthians 10:3,4). The manna on the ground in the wilderness and the water which flowed from the split rock of Horeb were prefigures of the Christ who dwells within Christians. Jesus, conscious of this foreshadowing, noted, “He who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). The Spirit who brought them out of Egypt with the mighty uplifted arm and preserved them in the wilderness is the same Spirit of Christ — the Rock of our salvation — who indwells those who walk in the footsteps of Christ in modern times!

Paul’s reason in bringing this example forward is to warn the brethren. “Nevertheless,” he points out, “with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness” (I Corinthians 10:5). It is not enough for an individual to simply be immersed into Christ; he must follow through and live successfully under the terms of this wonderful and final new covenant. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” is Paul’s exhortation (Philippians 2:12). Modern saints must buffet their bodies and make them their slaves, lest they also be disqualified.

## Chapter 10:5-6 - Do Not Crave Evil Things

It is possible to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is possible to walk as Jesus walked! But sinning is a possibility also; the scripture talks about it, and warns against it. The writer of Hebrews has a similar thought to that which Paul expressed to the Corinthian brethren when he wrote, "Let us lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). The god of this age is hard at work, appealing to every lust of the flesh, every lust of the eye, and every bit of the pride of life to turn saints aside from the path of righteousness. Hence it is that the apostle Paul seriously warns the brethren in Corinth not to follow in the steps of the children of Israel after the crossing of the Red Sea, but rather to go forward and take hold of the abundant life in Christ.

- **God was not happy** - The twelve tribes had seen the mighty things which God had accomplished in Egypt, His wonders in the land of Zoan. They had participated in the crossing of the Red Sea, and had been guided and fed by the Spirit of God. They had assembled at the base of Sinai, had witnessed the lightning and thunder on the mountain, and had heard the voice of God utter the Ten Commandments. But, in spite of all this, they — according to the writer of the Hebrew epistle — lacked the faith to go and take the promised land. "Nevertheless," was Paul's word of astonishment, "with most of them God was not well-pleased, for they were laid low in the wilderness" (I Corinthians 10:5). Of the men twenty and above, 603,548 out of 603,550 did not cross the Jordan to go into the promised land. Those statistics should sober any Christian.
- **Example for us** - God was able to orchestrate the history of the Old Testament to serve as foreshadows of the New. The individuals involved exercised their free will, but the Mighty Hand was able to work through those choices to execute a plan to accomplish His eternal purpose. The Father, therefore, was willing to use the perishing of more than 600,000 men and their women to paint and record a picture to assist His new covenant saints in their battles for spiritual victory. "Now these things happened to them as examples for us," notes Paul and the Holy Spirit, "that we should not crave evil things as they also craved" (I Corinthians 10:6). It is interesting that the expression "crave evil things" is used here. There were not a lot of luxuries in the wilderness as Israel wound its way for forty years. But the fact that most of the apparent temptations were not available in the austerities of desert life did not stop their minds from imagining and craving for the things they had seen in the fleshpots of Egypt. Hence, because the craving for the evil things was there, their minds were not truly interested in the true wonders of the spiritual life and the unique place in history which God had prepared for them.

It is clearly important, then, that the saint recognize the importance of having the driving desire to please God. If He is not happy with an individual, that individual is going to be really unhappy for all eternity. "Walk as children of light," Paul exhorted in another place, "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8,10). The saint will take spiritual inventory of his progress and position at this point, and make the adjustments necessary. He is to put a stop to any craving of evil things, and focus his entire attention on pleasing the Lord. In so doing, he will cross his own Jordan, and conquer the "lands" that the Lord has set out for him!

## Chapter 10:7-11 - Warnings from Israel's Wanderings

An estimated 1.5 million Israelites perished in the wilderness of Sin and related locations over a period of forty years. That averages out to a little more than 100 people per day, every day, for those years! That's 100 families per day in the camp affected personally by death; that's 100 funerals per day in the congregation in the wilderness. These are sobering statistics to contemplate, and that contemplation is exactly what God wants His new covenant saints to do. "They were laid low in the wilderness," Paul had stated, and that "these things happened as examples for us." Christians, if they do not maintain their proper spiritual focus, can be sucked into Satan's schemes just as Israel was pulled into idolatry and moral destruction.

- **Idolatry and immorality** - God had given the second commandment that they were not to make any carved image to worship. But in short order, they had made a golden calf and held an orgy at its base. Despite strong action by Moses, and the death of 3000 unrepentant Israelites, the people continued to worship idols and engage in secret pagan sacrifices. The saint is warned against falling into an sort of idolatry, whether it involves visible images or whether it is more subtle idolatry such as humanism or covetousness. "And do not be idolaters," enjoined the apostle, "as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.'" (I Corinthians 10:7). The games they played were not children's games! Idolatry and immorality were problems from the beginning to the end, from the golden calf to the last plague forty years later in connection with the introduction of Moab's idols into the camp. "Nor let us act immorally," was the apostle's continued warning, "as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day" (I Corinthians 10:8). The Moabites deliberately sent their young ladies into Israel's camp for seduction and destruction, the young men of Israel yielded to the temptation, and God responded with the obliteration of thousands of Israelites in this last plague.
- **Incorrigible and horrible** - As the children of Israel approached the last year of their sojourning in the wilderness, they became impatient at the inconvenience of having to go around the land of Edom. One more time they went back to the well of discontent, saying to God and to Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and water, and we loathe this miserable food" (Numbers 21:5). By this point, they had pushed God's patience beyond the limit. Paul's comment: "Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents" (I Corinthians 10:9). The plague of fiery serpents was only checked by the raising of a bronze serpent on a pole, and God's willingness to heal any who would gaze at that pole. God also does not like His special children whining or complaining. "Nor let us grumble," Paul charges, "as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (I Corinthians 10:10). The same One who passed through Egypt in the night of the Passover to destroy the first-born of Egypt also passed periodically through the camp of Israel in the wilderness, bringing to death those who complained before the Lord. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," is Paul's instruction to the Philippian brethren, and for us as well, "that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14,15).

God, then, expects His children to step up and perform worthy of the family Name. One of the points in these exhortations is that there are consequences for running counter to the direction the Lord would have us to go. "Now these things happened to them as an example," notes Paul, in reference to those millions who perished in the wilderness, "and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (I Corinthians 10:11). The instruction is given; will we heed the instruction?

## Chapter 10:11-12 - Heed What Is Written

One of the common, but mega-important, statements of the Bible is: "It is written ...". From the time that Moses inked the first scroll, God has pointed truth-seekers to what is written for instruction and direction. When Israel was pictured as hesitating between what was muttered by the mediums and spiritists, the prophet cried out, "To the Law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah 8:20). Hence it is that New Testament apostles, preachers, and teachers would continually appeal to what was recorded in the sacred scrolls. Even our Lord Jesus, during the days of His sojourning in the flesh, again and again pointed people to those written documents of authority with words such as, "have you not read?", "it is written," and "the scripture cannot be broken." Thus the apostle Paul, in this epistle to the Corinthian brethren, adverts that the Old Testament scrolls were really written and preserved for the sake of the followers of Christ. Referencing the Old Testament quotation, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," the apostle had posited, "God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written ..."

- **The special people** - God created the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them in six days. A truly thoughtful consideration of the awesomeness of space and the hugeness of the galaxies and some of the stars in them give an idea of the grandeur of the Omnipotent. An honest examination of the complexity of life at a cellular and sub-cellular level reveals a picture of the wondrous intelligence and engineering capability of the Omniscient. But the magnitude of the difficulties of creation is small in comparison to what it took for God to work with the free will of man. He accomplished the physical creation in six days; it took Him four to five thousand *years* to work with man to produce the first *new creation* in Christ Jesus! The Father had patiently worked with mankind through Israel to produce the first of those who were "born from above," those indwelt by the Spirit with whom the great God could have full fellowship. "This will be written for the generation to come," the Lord had stated through one of His prophetic psalmists, "that a *people yet to be created* may praise the Lord" (Psalm 102:18). The apostle Paul, familiar with this concept, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, then commented to the church about the Israelites in the wilderness: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written," he says, "for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (I Corinthians 10:11). Modern saints need to savor these words, that disciples of Christ are those "upon whom the ends of the ages of have come!" These "sons of God" are the awesome ones who are joint-heirs with Christ as they humbly stride over this planet, and those for whose revealing the whole creation eagerly awaits!
- **A word of caution** - "Pride goeth before destruction," is the wording of the King James Version, "and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). These awesome people — this special generation — need to recognize the truthfulness of the proverb, and to remain humble, as their Lord and example was humble. The apostle adds his cautionary note, saying, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

"I buffet my body and make it my slave," Paul had commented concerning himself, to enjoin upon the brethren the seriousness of their commitment to Christ, "let possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." Most of the Israelites who had crossed the Red Sea failed to cross the Jordan; the modern saint needs to somberly consider that truth, and be certain to heed the things that are written!

## Chapter 10:13 - What God Can Do

The spiritual warfare is intense. The temptations are great. The forces of evil are at work, clawing and tearing at the defenses of the Christian, to wear him down. The devil is prowling about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to destroy. The saints, then, are warned by Paul and the Holy Spirit that “we should not crave evil things,” that we should “not be idolaters,” “nor act immorally,” nor “try the Lord,” nor “grumble.” The saint is cautioned that he should, when he “thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” When these are the considerations, the picture painted is pretty bleak. And if the saint were on his own, then the outcome would most likely be one of failure. But these are not the only considerations by far. The focus is really on what God can do! “What God has promised,” the scripture affirms, “God is able to perform” (see Romans 4:21).

- **God wants victory** - The Father wants His children to be victorious over the forces of darkness, for He triumphs through the saints. He has therefore set in motion the works and words which produce Biblically defined faith in those who are interested in truth. “Faith comes from hearing,” said the apostle Paul, “and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). These faithful brethren, then, believe what is written concerning what God is able to do. As the apostle John noted, “This is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith” (I John 5:4). “God is able,” said John the Immerser, as he prophetically spoke to the Sadducees and Pharisees, “from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). Who would believe that this could be accomplished? But He has done so; those who are immersed into Christ — specifically from the Gentiles — are these children to Abraham, according to Paul in Galatians 3:26-29. He raised Jesus from the dead, and is able to raise those who have fallen asleep in Jesus also. If He can do these things, what else can He do?
- **Dealing with temptation** - Temptation exerts a powerful pull or push. When Jesus, following His immersion, went into the wilderness for forty days to fast and pray, “the tempter came” to Him (Matthew 4:3). Jesus was able, through quoting the book of Deuteronomy, to send Satan packing. But the devil was not finished, and continued to try to turn the Lord aside from His purpose until His very last breath. But, praise be to God, the tempter was not successful! To this, then, is added a powerful application. “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered,” the word of God has noted, “He *is able* to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). The saint is not alone in his struggle! He “*is able* to keep you from stumbling,” as another exhibition of God’s power, “and to make to you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy” (Jude 24). “No temptation has overtaken you but such is common to man,” Paul contributes to the discussion, “and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (I Corinthians 10:13). The faithful, dependable, you-can-count-on-Him God absolutely will not allow the Christian to be tempted beyond his capacity! He *is able* to provide a way of escape.

He has given the saints His word, “which *is able* to save your souls” (James 1:21). He “*is able* to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). He “*is able* to save forever those who draw near to God” through Jesus (Hebrews 7:25). If He is able to do these things, why — to parallel one of the apostle Paul’s points before Porcius Festus — would it be considered incredible if God *is able* to deliver the saints from temptation?

## Chapter 10:13 - Faith That Overcomes

Are Christians fighting the battle against temptation, but guaranteed to lose? This, of course, is the position of Catholics and Calvinists, of denominationalists and deniers of the faith once and for all delivered. Catholics are encouraged to petition for Mary to pray for them as sinners even in the hour of their deaths. Protestants, with their Calvinistic foundation, believe that they are simply sinners, and always sinners, saved by God's grace. But this is not the picture the inspired scriptures paint. Rather, Christians are represented as those who are overcomers — those who overcome sin, self, and circumstance in order to propagate the faith of Christ throughout the world. They are to "lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily besets" them (Hebrews 12:1). They are to "stop sinning" (I Corinthians 15:34). "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked," walking in purity and sinlessness and compassion, "because as He is, so also are we in this world" (I John 2:6; 4:17).

- **Mental preparation** - He who is defeated mentally before he begins to play is guaranteed to lose the game. The army which knows it is going to lose the war is defeated before it ever takes the field. Would, then, the one who is known as *the tempter*, attempt to have everyone believe that there is no possible way to overcome temptation and therefore continue to fall under the spell of sin? Would he, who holds sinners in captivity to do his will, endeavor to establish that no one can ever escape that captivity? The obvious answer to anyone who understands even a modicum of strategy is, "Yes!" But what saith the Lord? "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man," is one of the foundation points the apostle Paul lays. One of the mental positions the mind is tricked into believing is that "no one has ever had the obstacles in their lives that I have; if they had, they would be doing the same things I am doing." No one has ever had it as bad as I have; no one has ever had the bad childhood I have had ... But that type of thinking is brought on by the prince of the power of the air, the spirit working in the sons of disobedience. The word of God is firm on this point: any temptation an individual is facing is *common* to man. So all those excuses for mental and spiritual bail-out are taken away. The mind of the saint needs to be preset that anything he is facing is common, and therefore there is a common solution found for that in the sacred pages of the word of God.
- **The situation can be handled** - One of the common statements made is, "This situation is too much for me; I just can't handle it." Again, what saith the Lord? "God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." If a saint is in the middle of a set of difficult — tempting — state of affairs, then God knows he can handle it, with God's help. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," is the proper spiritual mindset (Philippians 4:13). Knowing this enables the saint to buckle down and power and pray his way through the temptation.

If the temptation is too strong, there is a way out. "God," says Paul, "with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." Sometimes the way out is simply to shut off the TV, walk out of the movie, stay out of the bar ... whatever! But there is always a way out, so there are no excuses! Christians, then walk by faith and live by faith. They trust in the truthfulness of God's word; they don't find excuses — they find a way forward!

## Chapter 10:14-17 - Flee From Idolatry

Idolatry and paganism are powerfully deceptive. Most of Abraham's descendants descended into paganism; most of Israel was swept away by idol worship; and it was a tremendous battle in the early church. Will not the weaker brother, asked Paul, if he sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, "will not his conscience be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?" (I Corinthians 8:10). The pull of paganism is obviously powerful, so powerful that the apostle exhorts, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (I Corinthians 10:14). Some idolatry is subtle. "Greed," says Paul, "amounts to idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). "A covetous man," says he in another place, "is an idolater" (Ephesians 5:5). Jesus thus talked about "unrighteous mammon [taken from a pagan god of wealth]" (Matthew 6:24). But some of the idolatry the early church faced was open worship of the pagan gods, and due to family and peer pressures, the pull exerted was so strong that the saints were simply exhorted to flee.

- **A word to the wise** - The apostle really believes in the Corinthian brethren; he believes that they will get past their difficulties and be able to enter the gates of glory. Therefore, in a congregation riddled with factions, idolatry, and immorality, he calls them "saints." As Paul approaches a key point in his argumentation with these disciples, he attributes to them "wisdom" of the spiritual type. "I speak as to wise men," is his affirmation, "you judge what I say" (I Corinthians 10:15).
- **Communion with Christ** - To the wise in Corinth, the apostle Paul makes his ultimate appeal. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless," he reasons, "a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?" (I Corinthians 10:16). This sharing — this *koinonia* (from the Greek language) — is a broad word referencing those things which are held in common, and is the word from which is translated the English word *communion*. The idea is that when the saints share in the "cup," meaning the fruit of the vine, they are actually sharing in the precious blood of Christ, blood spilled on Calvary but sprinkled in glory. Likewise, when they participated or shared in the "loaf," they were sharing in the body of Christ, the one who bore our sins in His *body* on the tree (I Peter 2:24). The Lord Jesus Himself is the One who instituted the terminology, affirming as He broke the bread with the apostles at the inauguration of the Lord's Supper, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matthew 26:26). Of the cup, He noted, "This is My blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:27). The apostle, then, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gives us the language by which communion was styled by those entrusted with the apostles' doctrine.
- **One "bread"** - There is only one avenue of participation with Christ, not two or many. "Since there is one bread," he again emphasizes, "we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (I Corinthians 10:17). The "many" are funneled into one body through their participation in the one "bread," which, while having physical aspects, is primarily a spiritual loaf in which all the brethren throughout the world participate when they share in the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day!

Paul's desire is to emphasize the importance of fellowship with Christ. The thoughtful individual — and certainly every Christian should be one of these — recognizes that continued participation in the body and blood of the Lord is the only means by which the proper eternity is secured for him. Hence the beginning point in the apostle's carefully reasoned presentation against any semblance of participation in idolatry is his emphasis on the importance of sharing in the body and blood of Christ. "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry!"

## Chapter 10:18-21 - Nature of Our Participation

God's goal has been to move man from focusing on the physical to a sharing in the spiritual. "The things which are seen are temporal," noted the apostle Paul in another place, "but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:18). The elements of the Old Covenant were of necessity physical in nature, whereas the elements of the New Covenant are spiritual, although occasionally with physical touchstones to make the bridge to the spiritual. The thrust of immersion into Christ, for example, is primarily spiritual, involving unseen forgiveness of sins and a new spiritual birth, but it has the physical component of having a physical body plunged into physical water. Similarly with the Lord's Supper; it has the physical elements of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, but the significance of the Supper is spiritual. The "cup," then, is "a sharing in the blood of Christ," and the loaf is "a sharing in the body of Christ."

- **One distinct body** - One of the apostle's purposes is to call the brethren in Corinth out of the world, to have them separate from the participation in idols that so plagued their ancestors. "Since there is one bread," he reasons, "we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread." Saints, then, are a part of a fellowship that is contradistinguished from every other fellowship. They are participating in a spiritual altar — they are participating in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God! — and therefore are segregated from all other religious fellowships.
- **Israel's priesthood** - The apostle uses a couple of real life illustrations to make his point. "Look at the nation Israel," says he. "Are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?" (I Corinthians 10:18). In the case of the sin offering, for instance, "the priest who offers it for sin shall eat it" (Leviticus 6:26). "No layman," wrote Moses, "however, is to eat that which is holy; a sojourner with the priest or a hired man shall not eat of that which is holy" (Leviticus 22:10). Only those who ate of the sacrifice were sharers in that altar, and only those who shared in that altar could eat of the sacrifice. Thus it is written of Christians, each of whom is a new covenant priest, "We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" (Hebrews 13:10). The participation in the Lord's Supper is therefore highly significant, and is clearly a participation in a spiritual altar wherein there is a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ.
- **Pagan altars** - The pagans had their altars as well, and their priests offered their sacrifices in accordance to their customs. "What do I mean then?" the apostle queries. "That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?" (I Corinthians 10:19). Of course not! "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons" (I Corinthians 10:20). Now that is a strong statement!! Those who participate in pagan sacrifices are actually fellowshiping with demons.

There is one God, and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, and those who participate in the Lord's Supper have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. But if there is a distinction between the altar at which the Old Covenant priest served (which was ordained by God) and the spiritual altar of the New Covenant, how much more distance is there between the pagan altars and the participation the body and blood of Christ! "You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (I Corinthians 10:21). The saint, then, must choose which side he will fellowship with; either he participates with his pagan relatives and demons, or he participates with the Lord and His brethren. No one can choose "the middle ground" because there is no middle ground.

## Chapter 10:23-28 - Common Sense Edification

God has always indicated that He will brook no competition. At the beginning of Israel as a nation, God spoke through Moses, saying to Israel, "You shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14). And reaching to the other end, as the prophet Ezekiel looks to the church, he quotes the Almighty as saying, "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name" (Ezekiel 39:25). The revelation of that love and jealousy is expressed through the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Thus Jesus would say, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32,33). A situation, then, where a Christian would participate in the sacrifices at an idol's temple, or would light a candle, saying, "Caesar is Lord," would be tantamount to denying Christ before men!

- **Deceptive demonic influence** - Satan is the ultimate deceiver, and his fallen angels are participating in that deception. The devil does not want people worshiping God. He perpetrates idol worship to turn people aside from God's path, and garners worship for himself and his demons indirectly through those idols. Thus those who partake at the idol's table are actually "sharers in demons." Unknowingly, perhaps, but sharers nonetheless.
- **The Lord's table** - It is a tremendous privilege to be able to eat at the King's table. God began to set the stage for the Lord's Supper when He called Moses, Aaron, and seventy elders of Israel up at the base of Sinai, and "they beheld God, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11). Later, the priests were commanded to eat of the unleavened "bread of the presence" every Sabbath from the table of the Lord that first stood in the tabernacle as a foreshadow of the Lord's Supper. To eat at the table in the presence of King David and his sons was also a great honor, and likewise a foreshadow of eating at the Table in the presence of King Jesus and His sons. Thus the apostle is so emphatic: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."
- **God's jealousy** - God will not allow split loyalty. "He who is not with Me is against Me," said our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, "and he who does not gather with Me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). The saint, then, who would try to please his earthly relatives by participating when the family went down to the pagan temple, and turn around and show up on Lord's Day for participation the Lord's table would be playing with fire. "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" is Paul's question here. He follows with a straightforward reminder: "We are not stronger than the Lord, are we?" (I Corinthians 10:22).

God is a jealous God! He sent His only begotten Son into the world to rescue the lost, demonstrating His love for His brethren. How then could they participate in "other communions?" How could they drift over and eat at the temple of Zeus, or participate in the sacrifice to Poseidon? How could they participate in the ashrams of Hinduism, or the mosques of Islam? How could they share in the so-called eucharists of the Greek Orthodox religion, or participate in that offered by the Roman Catholics? How could they share with the Methodists or Baptists? Assemblies of God? Presbyterians? Episcopalians? So-called Disciples of Christ? Lutherans? Fake churches of Christ, or compromised Christian churches? How could they share "communion" with any of the thousands of denominations out there who "have a form of godliness" but deny its power? Would they provoke THE LORD to jealousy?

## Chapter 10:29-33 – “That They May Be Saved”

Free in Christ! Free at last! Free at last! But what does that mean? Over the centuries God has used political freedom and political tyranny, slave holders and slaves, to communicate the difference between slavery to sin and freedom in Christ. One of the great lessons exhibited in the inspired records of Israel's history, and confirmed in the experiences of the Roman republic and the American republic, is that only a self-governed, reasonably disciplined people can remain free. When the public begins to lack discipline, and heads down the road of being dissolute, then that same people at some point no longer have the capacity to be free; they disintegrate into being ruled by tyrants. Liberty is lost through those who become libertine. In Christ, then, is true freedom of the spirit. But as political freedom can be lost through lack of discipline, so the saint is warned about his behavior under liberty. “For you were called to freedom, brethren,” the apostle Paul reminded the saints in the Roman province of Galatia, “only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). “Act as free men,” was Peter's contribution, “and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God” (I Peter 2:16). Liberty in Christ must be managed!

- **Meat from pagan sacrifices** - Paul's lengthy discussion in regard to meat offered to idols, with its related side-bars, began in chapter eight. The follower of Christ is free to eat such meat when it is offered in the market place because he knows that idols are Satan-backed figments of people's imaginations. If no one brings the topic up, the saint is free to eat such meat when he is a guest at someone else's house. But if someone points out that the meat on the table was sacrificed to idols, the Christian is to back away from it, in order not to weaken the consciences of the others present. “For why,” is Paul's rhetorical question, “is my freedom judged by another's conscience?” (I Corinthians 10:29). “If I partake with thankfulness,” he adds, “why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?” (I Corinthians 10:30). The point of these queries has to do with the attitude of the saint who so partakes. Of course he has the freedom to eat any of this meat with thanksgiving (“saying grace”). But if he eats such meat when it is clearly meat offered to idols, and he as a Christian partakes anyway, of course he is going to be slandered. But that meat as food cannot be so important to the Christian brother that he is willing to overthrow the consciences of weaker saints or prospects for the gospel. His liberty in Christ is limited by the other man's conscience.
- **For the glory of God** - The issue is not about the outer limits of what a Christian can do; it is about what is profitable for God and the salvation of others' souls. “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do,” is Paul's encouragement, “do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31). And how is that to be practically accomplished? “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,” is Paul's exordium; drawing upon his personal example that he has reluctantly put forth over the course of this discussion, “just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved” (I Corinthians 10:32,33).

God is glorified when saints are conscious of the impact of their actions on others, and how it may impact their desire to be open to the gospel. “By this is My Father glorified,” affirmed the Lord Jesus Himself, “that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). In that context, therefore, the apostle Paul issued this positive challenge, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1).

## Chapter 11:1 - Imitators of Christ

Does God require more of Christians than they are able to achieve? Does He set forth the ideal of the character of Christ knowing that is an unachievable goal for Christ's disciples? Is He operating under the philosophy that it is better to aim at the moon and hit an eagle than to aim at an eagle and hit a rock? When the apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth, saying, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ," is he truly an imitator of Christ? And is it possible for the brethren to imitate him also? The mindset of Catholicism, Protestantism, and "Churches of Christ" is that it is impossible to be a true imitator of Christ. Whether it is the doctrine of "original sin," or "total depravity," or "that as a human, you are always going to sin," the subtle underlying idea is that the power of sin is somehow greater than the power of God. Some try to limit the scope of Paul's statement in I Corinthians 11:1 about being imitators of Christ to the narrow issue of eating of meats offered in the market place. The key line, however, is this one: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Christ did; Paul did; all saints can!

- **The character of Christ** - In so many ways, and in so many contexts, the scripture encourages the brethren of Christ to do their part in assimilating His character. "Lay aside the old self," is the apostle's exhortation to the Ephesians, "and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24). Peter adds his voice, noting that instead of continuing to participate in human nature, true disciples of Christ are becoming "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (II Peter 1:4). The Father's goal is that each child of God "become conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29), to exhibit the character of Christ to the world.
- **Series of single statements** - Scattered through the gospel accounts and the epistles are statements from Jesus and the inspired writers concerning the conduct of the disciples of Christ. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" is one of the character qualities enjoined upon followers of Christ (Luke 6:36). "You shall be holy, for I am holy," is another (I Peter 1:16). Christ left an example for us "to follow in His steps, who committed no sin" (I Peter 2:21,22). The apostle John, in his first epistle, has a number of such statements of imitating our King. "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (I John 2:6). "Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (I John 3:3). "As He is, so also are we in this world" (I John 4:17). As Jesus Himself said, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

It was not easy for Jesus to have and maintain the character of Jesus; it is not easy for saints either. But simply because it is difficult does not make it impossible! While the Christian engages the outer man in renewing the mind and making the countless decisions involved in walking as Christ walked, God strengthens him with power through His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16). In this divinely arranged partnership, the child of God is thus transformed from the inside out; he "has laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and has put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Colossians 3:9,10). Ultimately, this is a matter of faith. Saints are to be of the faith of Abraham, who believed that what God had promised, God was able to perform (Romans 4:21)! God, in the case of the new covenant has promised; do we modern brethren believe that promise?

## Chapter 11:2-5 - Headship and Head Covering

In the time before time on earth, there was rebellion in heaven. Those whom Jesus called “the devil and his angels” did not keep within their prescribed boundaries, and eventually were thrown out of heaven, awaiting their time to be thrown into the lake of fire which was prepared specifically for them. But while earth spins onward, progressing toward the culmination of Judgment Day, mankind labors in the midst of an all-encompassing spiritual war, wherein the prince of darkness tries with all his might and deception to pull mankind into his side of the conflagration. As the god of confusion and agent of destruction, Satan works to overthrow every aspect of the order of God. Hence it is that the natural order between male and female, between a man and his wife is attacked by the deceiver, and this the apostle Paul has to address in regard to the congregation at Corinth.

- **Commendation** - Paul had indicated earlier in the letter that he was going to send Timothy to remind them of the doctrines and practices which he enjoined upon every church. Here he has opportunity to commend the brethren: “Now I praise you,” he compliments, “because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (I Corinthians 11:2).
- **Instruction on order** - Where Satan has opportunity to work, there is conflict over God’s order of things. Hence the apostle notes, “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:3). Christianity is all about submission — submission first to the will of God, and then whatever other submission is designated. As Christ is happy to serve under His Head, so the Christian man should be happy to serve under the Headship of Christ, and the Christian woman happy to serve under the headship of her man.
- **Praying and prophesying** - “Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying,” notes the apostle, “disgraces his head” (I Corinthians 11:4). *Prophesying* simply has to do with “speaking forth” the word of God; because God’s spokesman often made predictions of the future, the word generally carries with it the idea of forecasting the future. But periodically it means the equivalent of preaching, and as the application of this section carries forward from New Testament times to the present, that would be the thrust of this context. Since this “prophesying” would be done to an audience, the setting here is a public one. “But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head,” is an additional perspective, “for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved” (I Corinthians 11:5). Since women are not permitted to teach or exercise authority over men (I Timothy 2:12), the prophesying and praying of women in a public setting would be for female and children audiences.
- **Disgracing the head** - The Head of man is Christ. Thus, when a man prays or prophesies with his head covered, according to divine instruction, he dishonors his Head; he shows disrespect to Christ. Likewise, a woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head — her husband, or whatever male authority figure is overseeing the public setting.

The rebellious prince of darkness counsels rebellion at every turn. Hence if he can get men to be rebellious by praying or preaching with hats on their heads, he is sardonically smiling. Likewise, if he can get women to have close-cropped, male hair styles, and have them pray or do their preaching with their heads uncovered, he chortles as he continues to foment the rebellion against God’s order. A man, when he is publicly before the Lord, should uncover his head in honor of His Head, Christ Jesus. And a woman, publicly before the Lord, should have her head covered, so that she not disgrace the men who fill the leadership role in a more general setting. “Because of the angels,” says Paul!

## Chapter 11:5-10 - More Headship and Head Covering

For God to have the gospel move forward, and for Him to prosecute His warfare against the forces of darkness, He must have order and submission to that order. Satan, on the defensive end of the struggle, must do all that he can to disrupt God's order and God's agenda. A practical point in that warfare, then, is the headship of man over woman, the headship of Christ over man, and the headship of the Father over Christ. One set of details in this final phase of God vs. Satan — for those in the Christian era are those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” — relates to head covering as a participation in submission to God's order. A man, while praying or prophesying in a public setting, needs to have his head uncovered; a woman, praying or prophesying in a public setting, needs to have her head covered.

- **A woman's shaved head** - Among the Gentiles in Corinth, indeed in every society, a woman with a shaved head or close-cropped hair had set herself apart from the normal or natural group of women. Whether or not they were prostitutes or lesbians (our modern word *lesbian* comes from the name of the Greek island *Lesbos*, where was born a female Greek poet Sappho, who wrote emotional and erotic poems about her love of other women), that distinction in “hair style” is disgraceful. “Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head,” are Paul's inspired words, “for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head [while praying or prophesying], let her have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head” (I Corinthians 11:5,6).
- **A man's uncovered head** - This issue of hair and head covering has spiritual implications. “For a man ought not to have his head covered,” avouches the apostle, “since he is the image and glory of God” (I Corinthians 11:7). Short hair on a man, and having his head uncovered when praying or prophesying, shows his willingness to submit to the headship of Christ and thus glorify God. By contrast, “the woman is the glory of man.” Hence arises the distinction in hairstyles and whether the head is to be covered or uncovered in praying or prophesying.
- **Discussion of origins** - Some have argued that Paul's inculcations here are purely cultural connected only to the culture of Greece at that time. The argumentation the apostle uses belies that, for he goes back to Adam and Eve as a basis for his presentation. “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man,” is his first annotation, which can only refer to the first pair, “for indeed man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake” (I Corinthians 11:8,9). This is established as a universal truth underlying all societies, especially within the church of the living God. The apostle then concludes, “Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (I Corinthians 11:10). This is obviously not a small matter, or Paul would not be bringing the topic of the angels into the discussion!

Satan and his fallen angels are continually trying to disrupt God's order and God's offensive thrust. A key part of God's method of operation is through the praying and prophesying that goes on in the church in public settings; and He has therefore communicated through His apostolic servant Paul how He wants that carried out. When the Christian woman is clearly the glory of the Christian man, the Christian man is for the glory of Christ, and Christ is for the glory of God, then one of God's most important messages is proclaimed, even — and maybe, *especially* — to the angelic realms!

## Chapter 11:11-16 - Head Covering Closure

God's warfare with Satan is total warfare, with battle engagements on every front. The All Wise Father, then, makes certain that every area is covered, with instructions to His spiritual army telling them how to conduct themselves at every encounter with the devil and his schemes. It is also important for the saints to remember that their knowledge of the spirit realm — the unseen battleground of the demonic forces against the angels of God — is very limited. Hence, what seems to be a small thing to the saints in the physical realm may actually be of huge significance in that unseen environ. The only guide the disciples of Christ have in order to do their part is the word of God; thus, the instructions need to be taken seriously. A man ought to have his head uncovered while praying or prophesying, and "a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." This could be a major issue in the warfare in the spirit realm!

- **Mutual interdependence** - Because the order is God first, then Christ, then man, and then woman, there is a possibility that Christian men might discount the importance of the women, or that women in rebellion may push the idea that they don't really need the men. "However," Paul is quick to point out, "in the Lord, neither is the woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (I Corinthians 11:11). In marriage, God designed a male role and a female role; the two are mutually interdependent, necessary, and fulfilling when carried out according to God's plan. Similarly, in the church setting itself, God also designed the male role and the female role; the two roles are mutually interdependent, necessary, and fulfilling when carried out according to God's plan. "For as the woman originates from the man," is Paul's reasoned appeal, "so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God" (I Corinthians 11:12). This is astounding! Before the foundation of the world, the All Wise, in planning the prosecution of His warfare against the rebellious angels, formed Adam first and then created Eve out of his side, so that woman could never claim she originated independently of man. Likewise, from that time on, every man has been born of woman, and cannot claim the he is a stand-alone-unit. This mutual interdependence has been orchestrated by the great God (from whom all things originate!), so that brothers and sisters in the Lord can carry out their specified roles in God's spiritual army. Woman in Christ should be delightfully carrying on in their part in the body, and men in Christ should be exhibiting their solid male character in their work in the church of God. With the proper head gear! "Judge for yourselves," Paul challenges, "is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?" (I Corinthians 11:13).
- **Appeal to nature** - It is interesting to look at the busts and statues of Roman and Greek leaders and military figures; the men have short hair. Pretty much universally in all cultures men have short hair, except in the really rebellious totally pagan warrior tribes of the earth. "Does not even nature itself teach you," is Paul's observation, "that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering" (I Corinthians 11:14,15).

The scripture is pretty clear: men need to look like men, and women need to look like women. Men need to have men-length hair; women need to have women-length hair. Men need to remove their head coverings (hats, turbans, whatever) when praying or prophesying; women need to have female length hair while praying or prophesying, or have some additional covering if their hair is too short. "But if one is inclined to be contentious," intones the apostle, "we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God" (I Corinthians 11:16). No options here!

## Chapter 11:17-20 - Wrong Motives

Paul had praised the Corinthian brethren for following the traditions and examples he had set forth for them. He particularly praised the congregation for carrying out the instructions regarding head covering for Christian men and women as they were praying or prophesying in a public setting. It was almost like he was looking for something to praise the congregation for, because there were not a lot of praiseworthy conditions in the church at Corinth.

The congregation was divided. It is apparent that some were using their expertise in Greek wisdom to elevate themselves to leadership of certain factions, claiming to be “of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas, or of Christ.” Paul is righteously indignant over such claimants, pointing out that, “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish, that he may become wise” (I Corinthians 3:17,18). Having praised the church in one area, the apostle now moves on to another area, one that further concerns such division in the congregation.

- **Coming together as a church** - The churches in the first century “came together” as congregations. They were not totally independent, haphazard dots of individuals scattered out, doing their own thing. They met on a weekly basis, and to this gathering in Corinth Paul addresses his next series of comments. “But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you,” is his introduction to his next section of the epistle, “because you come together, not for the better, but for the worse” (I Corinthians 11:17). The assembly of the saints is to be an uplifting, motivating, edifying time, but in Corinth their gathering ended up taking them in the wrong direction. “For, in the first place,” is his introduction, “when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it” (I Corinthians 11:18). Paul had his own female information network, in this case coming through a lady named Chloe, that kept him informed about the circumstances in Achaia. He knew his information network was pretty reliable, but also knew that it might not have the perfectly correct perspective. So he notes that, “in part,” he believes what they had passed on to him. The reports were somewhat devastating, that when the saints actually came together, division was rampant among them.
- **How he knows there are factions** - Paul knew the core people in Corinth; this was a congregation which he had started, and with which he had kept in touch. “For there must also be factions among you,” is his observation, “in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you” (I Corinthians 11:19). His point is not that — yes — periodically there have to be divisions among the congregation to bring true leadership to the top, as some interpret this verse. Rather, he is condemning the division, and noting that it is clear to him that, since certain deadwood had risen to the top, there had to have been factions among them, or that would never have happened.
- **Not to eat the Lord’s Supper** - The congregation in Corinth should have come together on the first day of the week to participate in the Lord’s Supper; the fellowship with the Lord obviously should be at the center of the assembly of the saints. But in Corinth, because of the divisions fostered by certain unscrupulous power grabbers, the assembly had been twisted aside from its God-ordained purpose to serve individuals’ ambitious ends. “Therefore,” notes Paul, “when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (I Corinthians 11:20).

“The goal of our instruction,” Paul had reminded Timothy, “is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (I Timothy 1:5). But when people stray from these things and become petty and personal, ambitious and avaricious, fighting and factious, then bad things happen within a congregation. Under those conditions the Lord’s Supper is just an outward show, the Lord Himself is really forgotten, and Satan is having a heyday inside the church of the living God.

## Chapter 11:20-24 - Abuse of the Love Feast

The early church, following explicit instructions from Jesus to the apostles, met on the first day of the week for “the breaking of the loaf.” This expression contradistinguished the Lord’s Supper from “breaking bread,” terminology used in regard to common meals that members of the congregation might have with one another, or even the whole congregation together at the church meeting place. History notes that the early church often met together and shared a “love feast” in connection with the Lord’s Supper. Jude notes that people who would destroy the church or turn it aside from Jesus’ purpose would use those times, stating, “These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves ...” (Jude 1:12). Thus it was at Corinth.

- **Hungry and drunk** - Paul was making the point that many of the brethren’s purpose in the weekly assembly of the saints was to foster division and further their own personal agendas. “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper,” he iterates, “for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk” (I Corinthians 11:20,21). This is from the love feast side of the gathering; the more ambitious hogs blocked the path to the trough, and some ended up hungry; others got “plastered” at the church meeting! What an example to the community this congregation was! [Side note: poor behavior by those claiming to be Christians should never turn a person aside from following the truth himself.]
- **Houses to eat and drink** - Since these brethren did not have the maturity to handle the love feast properly, Paul basically abolished it in Corinth. “What!” exclaims he, “Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?” (I Corinthians 11:22). It is clear here that he is not talking about the Lord’s Supper, since the Supper by the Lord’s command was to continue as the centerpiece of the assembly. “Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” he continues in his exacerbation. “What shall I say to you?” he asks. “Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you!”
- **Contrasting solemnity** - Having excoriated the brethren for their near riotous behavior at the love feast, the apostle turns their attention to the Lord’s Supper. He begins with the authorship of the Supper, noting: “For I received from the Lord,” he intones, “that which I also delivered to you ...” (I Corinthians 11:23). These remarks should garner their attention and jerk them back to the proper focus. The Supper and the purpose of the assembly came from the Lord Himself; it was not man-made in its origin, and the saints were therefore to govern themselves accordingly. Furthermore, to increase the solemnity of the assembly, the apostle posits his point in these words: “... that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed ...” Jesus instituted communion while the hand of the betrayer was with Him as they reclined at table; He exhibited amazing self-control. Paul further comments on the dignity and orderliness of the Lord in His participation in that Supper, noting “that in the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ ” (I Corinthians 11:24).

The brethren in Corinth were selfish, self-serving, and self-absorbed. What a contrast between them and the Lord. His words, “This is My body, which is for *you*,” established a basis for trying to bring those in Corinth back on track. The Lord gave His body over to death, emphasized in the breaking of the loaf, for these same Corinthians, but they can not step aside on behalf of a hungry brother who has nothing! The Lord offered a cup of fruit of the vine and passed it, emblematic of His shed blood, in an orderly fashion among the twelve, but these Corinthians have to make the assembly a disorderly party of drunks! Perhaps these words got them back on track.

## Chapter 11:23-26 - Instituting the Lord's Supper

The Lord's earnest desire is for His children to have true fellowship with Him. Fellowship is often directly connected with sharing a meal together, wherein meaningful conversation and developing real relationships can take place. When Peter returned to Jerusalem sometime after preaching the gospel to the first Gentiles to be saved, the church was upset at Peter's interaction with Cornelius and those present, expressing their concern in these terms: "You went to uncircumcised men and *ate with them*" (Acts 11:3). That eating with the Gentiles signaled fellowship, and the church was rightly concerned until the situation was explained to them. Hence Jesus, speaking of the fellowship of the eternal kingdom, used this terminology, "Many shall come from east and west, and *recline at the table* with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). And the saints' ultimate fellowship with the Lord is also described as "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7). It makes good sense, therefore, that the Lord Jesus would institute a fellowship meal — whose fellowship would be primarily spiritual — among His disciples to keep them in fellowship with Him, and also with each other.

- **The night in which He was betrayed** - The apostle made it plain that the teaching he had about communion came from the Lord Himself. This is important, because, while the Lord did not specify when the Lord's Supper was to be taken as recorded in the gospel accounts, He delivered His desire to the apostles, who all taught the same doctrine and implemented the same practices. Their practice, as detailed in Acts 20:7, and I Corinthians 11:20 coupled with I Corinthians 16:1-4, establish that Jesus wanted the Supper observed on the first day of the week. "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you," is Paul's recounting, "that Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' " (I Corinthians 11:23,24). While the details are a little challenging to work out, it can be established that Jesus was crucified on Thursday of Passover week, and that He instituted the Lord's Supper Wednesday evening of that week as we reckon time. That was "the night in which He was betrayed."
- **"Do this in remembrance of Me"** - Not only did Jesus break the unleavened bread, He drank of a cup which He called "the fruit of the vine" in contradistinction to "wine," which itself could either be fermented or unfermented. "In the same way," Paul continues, "He took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' " (I Corinthians 11:25). The Supper is clearly an institution of the "new covenant," brought into existence not only by the blood shed on Calvary but especially the blood sprinkled in heaven. Saints have come, wrote the insightful author of the epistle to the Hebrew brethren, "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). This Lord's Supper, then, is a perpetual and integral portion of the new covenant, designed for and implemented on every first day of the week, that the saints should always remember JESUS!
- **A proclamation** - While the Lord's death is remembered in the Supper, it is more of a celebration of His resurrection. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup," is Paul's annotation, "you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (I Corinthians 11:26). The weekly assembly of the saints is the great proclamation to the world that Jesus not only died but rose again on their behalf, to deliver them from the power of darkness and eventually to be able to ushered into the courts of glory.

That the Supper is a proclamation "until He comes" means that He is alive, or He would not be coming again. It is significant, then, that the Supper is participated in by the saints on the first day of the week, the day that Jesus rose from the grave. From the beginning, therefore, the Lord's Supper was instituted as a victory celebration to be shared in by those who have life in fellowship with Christ!

## Chapter 11:26 - Setting the Table

There are two institutions in which the individual disciple of Christ is directly involved with the blood of Christ; immersion, and the Lord's Supper. In immersion into Christ, the believer has his heart initially sprinkled clean from an evil conscience when his body is washed with the pure water. In the Lord's Supper, the disciple of Christ participates in both the body and the blood of the Lord in his *koinonia* or fellowship about the Lord's Table. In these institutions — one for establishing fellowship with Christ in the first place, and the other for maintaining fellowship with Christ from that initial point onward — there are both physical and spiritual elements. In immersion, there is the physical water as the touchstone for communicating all the great spiritual truths connected with the person's salvation and fellowship through the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's Supper, there is the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to provide the physical basis for the saint to comprehend the great spiritual truths connected with his intimate fellowship with the great God of all. The physical elements of the Lord's Supper, then, are emblematic of the saints' participation in the spiritual body and spiritual blood of the Lord. So important is the Lord's Supper that God had numerous types and foreshadows set in motion in the Old Testament to communicate the saliency of the Supper in the lives of the saints. These types such as "a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" constituted "a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16,17).

- **The Passover** - The Passover was designed by God to set the stage for not only Jesus' crucifixion but also the saints' participation in the Lord's Supper. As the Passover lamb was sacrificed, so Christ our ultimate Passover Lamb was sacrificed, appropriately enough on the day of Passover, 30 AD. But as Israel was to congregate once a year at the temple in remembrance of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, so the saints are to congregate weekly as part of the true temple in remembrance of God's deliverance of spiritual Israel from slavery to sin. As there was to be a recounting of the mighty things God did in the land of Zoan at the time of Passover, so there is to be a recounting of the truly mighty things God did in raising Jesus from the dead and exalting Him to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior.
- **The table of showbread** - The Old Testament tabernacle was a foreshadow of the spiritual things connected with the church, "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Hebrews 8:2). The altar in front, for example, was a foreshadow of the cross where Christ was sacrificed; the mercy seat in the holy of holies was a foreshadow of Christ's sprinkling His spiritual blood in the true holy place so that His children of faith might receive mercy. On the right hand side of the tabernacle, on the north side (the tabernacle faced east), stood the table of showbread. On the table were twelve loaves of unleavened bread, each made from about seven quarts of flour, and these unleavened loaves — representing the presence of God — were to be eaten by the priests every Sabbath as the loaves came off the table to be replaced by fresh loaves (Leviticus 24:5-9). This foreshadowed the Lord's Supper, wherein unleavened bread is eaten by Christians (all of whom are new covenant priests) in the presence of the Lord.
- **The king's table** - One of the great honors in the heyday of the united kingdom of Israel was to be able to eat at the king's table. Mephibosheth, grandson of David's dearest friend Jonathan, was honored by David to be able to eat at the king's table "as one of the king's sons" (II Samuel 9:11). This foreshadowed the great honor of being able to eat at King Jesus' table as one of the King's sons!

These Old Testament foreshadows were specifically designed by God to set the stage for what He really desired, fellowship with the saints about His table. As much as Jesus desired to eat the Passover with the twelve disciples, much more has He desired to drink of the fruit of the vine "new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29).

## Chapter 11:27-30 - Lord's Table Etiquette

The writer of Proverbs has an interesting comment about eating with the king. "When you sit down to dine with a ruler," he instructs, "consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite" (Proverbs 23:1,2). Rulers apparently notice such things as lack of self-control, and the exordium clearly has to do with guests' conducting themselves intelligently at the king's table. So when it comes to dining "the great King" at the Lord's Table, saints would be well advised to ask themselves, "What sort of conduct pleases the King?" While someone may have to guess when dining with an earthly king, the great King over all has told his disciples what pleases Him when the brethren come together weekly to participate in the Lord's Supper.

- **In unity** - The apostle Paul opened this epistle expressing concern about the schisms which were developing in the congregation at Corinth. "I exhort you, brethren," he had stated, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). It is clear, since Paul brings in the authority of Jesus Christ in making his appeal for their being of the same mind and same judgment, that the will of King Jesus Himself is that the brethren dwell together in unity.
- **Eating worthily** - The Lord's Supper is not a mere token formality. The Lord's Supper is a spiritual meal of great significance wherein the saints are invited to eat with the King. Because the King is not physically present, some might lose sight of the Supper's importance, forgetting to look at the things which are not seen as contrasted to the things which are seen. But Jesus' clearly expressed that He earnestly desires to eat this meal with His brethren, drinking of the fruit of the vine "anew" in the kingdom of heaven. The saints, conscious then of the presence of Jesus, conduct themselves in a worthy manner, pleasing the King with their unity of purpose and harmony of the Spirit. "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner," intones the apostle, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (I Corinthians 11:27). Better to put a knife to your throat in the presence of an earthly ruler than to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord!!
- **Examination at the table** - Paul had noted earlier that when the brethren in Corinth came together on the first day of the week, it was not to eat the Lord's Supper. They were being selfish and self-serving, currying favor with some and cutting off others. Some had worked at developing factions and had succeeded in placing themselves at the head of those factions, in direct contravention of the teaching of Christ. "But let a man examine himself," adjures Paul, "and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (I Corinthians 11:28). What the saint was to look at was his *motive* for assembling with the brethren. If his motive was to create division (and the Lord will be able to "disclose the motives of men's hearts"), then he would be facing terrifying punishment at the hand of the Lord. "For he who eats and drinks," affirms the apostle, "eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly" (I Corinthians 11:29).

Jesus left heaven to come and sacrifice Himself on earth for His body, the church. If a brother starts turning into a wolf and creating divisions in this body, he is making the King very unhappy. "For this reason many among you are weak and sick," Paul informs the brethren, "and a number sleep" (I Corinthians 11:30). Some brethren were already facing the wrath of the King and were weak or sick. But some "slept"; they were already physically dead and removed from this earth. When the saints assemble at the table, then, in the presence of the King, it is necessary to keep the King happy by maintaining the proper attitude and focus!

## Chapter 11:31-34 - Disciplining Ourselves

The heavenly Father does not like it when His kids start squabbling among themselves and losing sight of their purpose. Satan — the original liar and murderer, the big slanderer himself — loves to create confusion and disruption, knowing that even Christ's house divided against itself cannot stand. God, being super conscious of the nature of the spiritual warfare that is taking place between Himself and the forces of darkness, will act when the members of the local congregation cannot get along. The apostle Paul states that "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord!" Proper reflection will reveal that there is no other crime that can match the seriousness of that guilt. Hence it is imperative that the brethren lay aside any schismatic drives or tendencies, that they eliminate jealousy and envy from their thoughts, and that they truly exalt Jesus as Lord in their lives and focus on edifying the local congregation.

- **Judging rightly** - Some members of the Corinthian congregation did not take the time to evaluate where they were truly at spiritually. They continued to create factions, and they continued to inject Greek philosophy into the sphere of the gospel for their own personal gain. Thus it was that the Lord acted, and some were then weakened, some were then sickened, and some were then put to sleep (they made their exit from this earth and from troubling the congregation). "But if we judged ourselves rightly," Paul says, "we should not be judged" (I Corinthians 11:31). The individuals in Corinth were therefore really to evaluate their interactions within the local body of Christ, and make the necessary corrections in their attitudes and actions. If they did so, the Lord would not have to act. But if they didn't ...
- **The discipline of the Lord** - God is interested in the successful walk of each of His children. His desire is that if any need correction, they will engage in the necessary personal introspection, and then govern themselves accordingly. However, if that does not happen, the Almighty will act. "But when we are judged," Paul affirms, "we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world" (I Corinthians 11:32). The implication is that such discipline will not be pleasant, and that the saint would be well advised to discipline himself rather than Dad's having to come into the picture! It is clear, also, that the Lord's motive for doing so would be to save the individual rather than just let him drift into the destruction and hell that is awaiting the unredeemed world.
- **Proper conduct** - The repentance necessary in the church at Corinth would reflect in changes in their conduct when they came together on the first day of the week to break the bread of the Lord's Supper. "So then, my brethren," encourages the apostle, "when you come together, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment" (I Corinthians 11:33,34). The assembly and associated love feast (if they continued that practice) were to be done decently and orderly. If they were going to be so driven by something such as hunger that they were going to be pushing and shoving and out of control, they were to take care of that before they got the place of the assembly. And if they did not handle this themselves, the Lord would step in.

It is amazing to consider how much selfishness and self-interest can occur within the saints of God. It is clear from letters such as this one to the church at Corinth that Satan can get a toe-hold in the minds of the brethren, and pull them away from the focus and spirituality that would befitting followers of Christ. It also makes it understandable why congregations need spiritual leaders who can reprove and redirect the brethren when necessary. As Paul notes: "And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come."

## Chapter 12:1-3 - In the Spirit

In the absence of the completed word of God, spiritual gifts were necessary for the early church to carry out its mission. Today, if a question comes up, all that has to be done is to find the appropriate scriptures which provide the answer. But in New Testament times, it was not so easy because the sacred writings were still in the process of being lived out and then being written. The panoply of spiritual gifts were available in the local congregations so that the local church could then function in accordance with the dictates of King Jesus, and the brethren could learn to observe all that Jesus commanded. As Paul began this letter to the Corinthian congregation, he noted, "You are not lacking any gift" (I Corinthians 1:7). But because the gift was under the control of the user, there was some abuse and misuse of those manifestations of the Spirit, and the apostle Paul was compelled to write giving directions for the correction of such improper usage. He introduces his topic thusly: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware" (I Corinthians 12:1).

- **Demon priests** - The pagans have always had their demon priests, their shamans, their mediums, their sages, their medicine men. God, in driving such paganism out of Israel in preparation for the coming of Christianity, had to turn His people away from listening to those voices of the darkness. As Moses prepared to make his departure, he instructed the children of Israel before they crossed the Jordan to take the promised land from the Canaanites. "There shall not be found among you," he animadverted, "anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or on who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead" (Deuteronomy 18:10,11). Centuries later, the Lord would speak through the prophet Isaiah to the people, commenting, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isaiah 8:19). These "oracles" would often go into a trance in order to receive their information from demonic forces.
- **Visions from the Lord** - The New Testament apostles and prophets themselves would often go into a trance when receiving information from the Lord. The apostle Peter, for example, in receiving the vision of the blanket with unclean animals on it — which was preparing him for the acceptance of the Gentiles into the church — is described as falling "into a trance" (Acts 10:10). When the apostle John received his apocalyptic visions which are entitled "the book of Revelation," his words were, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10), meaning that he also went into a trance-like state.
- **Clarification** - Many of these Corinthian brethren had come out of paganism. The apostle notes this, stating, "You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led" (I Corinthians 12:2). How, then, were these brethren to tell the difference between the pagan oracles and those who spoke the truths of God. "Therefore I make known to you," Paul clarifies, "that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3). When a medium is in a trance-like state, the demonic forces are going to curse Jesus rather than call Him Lord. And those who would call Him Lord in that state would be those who were receiving revelation from the Holy Spirit and were to be listened to by those first century Christians.

Even today there are those who pay "attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1), whether it results in Catholicism or the New Age movement. But for us who believe and know the truth, we will consult the "living oracles," the completed written word of God!

## Chapter 12:4-7 - Manifestations of the Spirit

Forgiveness of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit cannot be seen. The devil, of course, can take advantage of that fact and offer falsities pretending to offer forgiveness and the Spirit. Because these are in the realm of the unseen, many are duped into believing that they are saved when they are in fact just as lost as ever. But how can a sincere individual know that he is forgiven? In our time we can consult the written, living, and abiding word of God in order to know what to believe and do to be saved. But in the first century AD, the sacred pages constituting what we call the New Testament had not yet been composed, so the early church was dependent upon external, visible signs and prophecies to guide them in the paths of righteousness. Hence it was that God gave what He called *gifts of the Spirit* or *manifestations of the Spirit* to confirm the testimony concerning Jesus, to confirm the doctrines and practices implemented by the apostles, and to enable the early church to function in the absence of the written word of God.

- **General listing** - Paul wants to talk about the abuses that existed in the church at Corinth concerning the spiritual gifts. "Now there are varieties of gifts," he says, "but the same Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:4). This is what the apostle will be discussing over the next several chapters. "And there are varieties of ministries," he adds, "and the same Lord" (I Corinthians 12:5). This is the listing mentioned in the Ephesian epistle: As Paul talks about Christ's ascension to glory, where as the newly crowned King He gives gifts. "And He [the Lord] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers ..." (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts of Jesus to the church are "the varieties of ministries" of the Lord in Paul's comments to the Corinthian brethren. "And there are varieties of effects," he also notes, "but the same God who works all things in all persons" (I Corinthians 12:6). These are the *gifts of grace* given to members of the early church and continuing on until Jesus comes. Paul puts it in these words: "And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly; if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8). Here, the gift of prophecy has to do with simply *speaking forth* the words of God, not an inspired utterance as in the case of the listing of prophets in Ephesians 4 or in the I Corinthians 12 listing. Romans 12 parallels the listing in I Peter 4: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ ..." (I Peter 4:10,11). Today, as well as in the first century, those who speak are to prophesy [uninspired], or speak, the utterances of God, and not their own rogue ideas.
- **Manifestations** - When Paul introduces his topic, he speaks of *gifts of the Spirit*. When he returns to his direct comments, he states, "But to each one is given *the manifestation of the Spirit* for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:7). These, then, are going to be very visible, or manifest, exhibitions from the Holy Spirit working through each who possesses one or more of such gifts.

While not specified in I Corinthians, these gifts were given only through the laying on of hands of the apostles. These manifestations of the Spirit were critical in laying out the direction the early church was to follow, and in enabling the apostles to establish congregations relatively quickly so that they could move the gospel on to the next location.

## Chapter 12:8-10 - The Working of the Spirit

One of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to orchestrate the plan of God on earth. The book of Acts, for example, opens by expressing that even Jesus, after His resurrection, "had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:2). The church had to be brought into existence by the action of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts chapter two, and it had to continue to be guided in its direction and outreach by that same Spirit. Hence, in accordance with the will of Jesus, the Holy Spirit established the kingdom of heaven first in Jerusalem, then extended it to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. Over and over the same cycle was repeated, as the writer of the book of Hebrews noted, concerning the exceedingly great salvation that had been ushered in, and in which all could participate: "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord," the writer commented, "it was confirmed to us by those who heard [the apostles], God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:3,4). These *gifts of the Holy Spirit* are generally listed in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian brethren.

- **Manifestations of the Spirit** - It is important to re-emphasize that these gifts of the Spirit are also called *manifestations of the Spirit*; they had to be so distinctly different from the normal course of human actions and conversations that they served to confirm the word spoken by the apostles. "For to one," says the apostle Paul, "is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit ..." (I Corinthians 12:8,9). If these were standard *wisdom, knowledge, or faith*, they would not be *manifestations*. This gift of knowledge, therefore, would be a gift that brought the special knowledge of the instruction and revelation of the Lord as contrasted to knowledge which could be garnered at a library. If the congregation needed to know about "elders" in the church, for example, someone with the gift of knowledge could communicate the Lord's will in that area. The gift of wisdom would be a gift that especially brought out the wisdom from above in contrast to the wisdom of this world; the wisdom of God again has to come through some process of revelation. The gift of faith would be exhibited in Christians who could expound on the principles of the faith of Christ in contradistinction to the regulations of the law of Moses, and be able to live the types of lives to demonstrate how those principles played out on the stage of action for the glory of King Jesus.
- **Strikingly obvious manifestations** - Other gifts were designed to be very visible to confirm the testimony concerning Jesus, or to verify the doctrines and practices of the early church. "To another," adds the apostle, was given "gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues" (I Corinthians 12:9,10). The healings Philip performed in first taking the gospel to Samaria confirmed that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead, and set the stage for the acceptance of the Samaritans as equal heirs of the gospel of Christ. These other gifts, likewise, were used in all aspects of the life and growth of the first century church, and were critical in laying the foundation of the church upon the apostles and new covenant prophets.

"To each one," the apostle Paul had emphasized, was given a manifestation of the Spirit "for the common good." Thus the early church was able to spread very rapidly to all the world, to be able to go through the tremendous persecution and suffering it endured, and to be established as a historical fact as part of the basis the people of the twenty-first century have for believing in the teachings of the New Testament. Praise God for His infinite and long-reaching wisdom!

## Chapter 12:11-14 - Gifts Resulting in Unity

“There is one body and one Spirit,” the apostle Paul had stated. In the language of an earlier generation in America, the church is constitutionally and intentionally *one*. The Spirit produced that unity, and the brethren were to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3,4). In the first century churches, there was no completed, written set of scriptures called The New Testament. Hence the local congregations were dependent upon individuals having gifts of manifestations of the Spirit in order to effectively disseminate the gospel and to function as a unit for that purpose. The apostle thus emphasizes that gifts were given through the same Spirit, ministries were mobilized by the same Lord, and the effects of grace were given by the same God. Furthermore, the manifestations of the Spirit were given for the common good. The goal was for the church at Corinth, for example, to work together in their usage of their gifts rather than being split into factions.

- **Spiritual gifts distributed** – The church belongs to Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is responsible for orchestrating and directing the affairs of the church in accordance with the will of Christ. Because men and Christians possess free will, the Spirit has to accomplish His purposes without violating that basic parameter. The spiritual gifts, then, were under the control of the possessor of the gifts, and the Spirit would gauge the individuals to whom He was contemplating giving those gifts. “But one and the same Spirit,” Paul again emphasizes, “works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (I Corinthians 12:11). The Spirit wanted to maintain the unity of the congregation in Corinth, the variety of gifts was distributed throughout the congregation through the laying on the apostles’ hands. Some received no gift, some received one gift, some received multiple gifts, and some received latent gifts which would surface later in the saint’s life. The user of the gifts was receiving these instructions in this section of Paul’s letter to correct abuses in the exercise of these gifts.
- **One body** – As there is one Spirit, so also is there one body. As there is one body of Christ – the church – on a large scale, so also is there the body of Christ on a local scale. As the body of Christ on a large scale has one head and is to be united, so the local congregation is to have one Head and to be united. “For as the body is one,” Paul avers, “and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ” (I Corinthians 12:12). The local congregation is to function as a team, with the differing members of the team playing their parts and yet accomplishing the purpose of the whole. This requires unity and cooperation, as contrasted to self-interest and fracturing.
- **Immersed into one body** – “For in one spirit,” is the Wilson rendition of the first portion of the verse, “we were all immersed into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13). The tenor and thrust of the new covenant would parallel this with Acts 2:38. “In one spirit,” parallels the repentant attitude which a person must have in following Christ. “All immersed into one body” contains the same basic thought as immersion in Jesus’ name and into Christ. “All made to drink of one Spirit” is exactly in line with receiving the indwelling Spirit at the believer’s immersion.

Oneness, or unity, is the major driving force of the apostle in this section of the epistle. The backgrounds of the saints, whether Jew or Greek, whether slave or free, was irrelevant. The point was that now they were in the body of Christ, and were to lay aside the self-serving spirit which plagues the world, and subject themselves to the will of Christ. “For the body,” says the apostle, “is not one member, but many” (I Corinthians 12:14).

## Chapter 12:12-18 - God Places the Members

The one true church really belongs to Christ. It also belongs to God the Father, because there is not any super distinction or competition between them. Hence the church at Corinth is referred to by the apostle as “the church of God which is at Corinth.” And this church of God at Corinth was riddled by infighting and division. The apostle Paul, then, is laboring in this epistle to get rid of the factions and contentions inside the congregation. One of the avenues of his approach has been to stress the importance of the Lord’s Supper, and the concomitant concepts of their being in fellowship with the Lord Jesus through His body and blood, and therefore being in fellowship with one another. “Since there is one bread,” he had written, “we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread” (I Corinthians 10:17). “The members of the body,” he had also noted, “though they are many, are one body.” “In one spirit,” was another of his points, “we were all immersed into one body ... and all made to drink of one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:12,13).

- **Part of the body** - One of the great challenges of church leadership is bringing people into the body of Christ, and getting them to understand and feel like they are key parts of the local congregation. Where the flesh has not been totally put to death, there will be those who in some way try to elevate themselves above others in the congregation, and engage in subtle or not-so-subtle put-downs of other members of the local body of Christ. “For since there is jealousy and strife among you,” was the apostle’s earlier comment, “are you not fleshly” (I Corinthians 3:3). Therefore, Paul continues with his instruction and exhortation. “For the body is not one member,” he again stresses, “but many” (I Corinthians 12:14). The Father designed the body of Christ before the foundation of the world, and intended it from the beginning to consist of variegated members, performing different functions. To counteract the feelings of not being welcome, or the put-downs that some Christians experience, the apostle and the Holy Spirit communicate: “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body” (I Corinthians 12:15,16). The value of each member is the value Christ places on him, regardless of whether he places any value on himself or feels like other members do not value him.
- **God’s placement** - Those who put teams together look for different characteristics in the individuals whom they recruit for the various positions on the team. They do not expect that all the team members should be identical, nor do they want them to be. So it is with the body of Christ. “If the whole body were an eye,” queries the apostle, “where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing,” he adds, “where would the sense of smell be?” (I Corinthians 12:17). Obviously it takes each different organ to constitute the physical body, and the application to the spiritual body of Christ is pretty clear. And just as the physical body was designed by God, so also the body of Christ. “But now God has placed the members,” Paul points out, “*each one of them*, in the body, just as He desired” (I Corinthians 12:18). Each has been specifically placed; each is very important in God’s overall plan.

The true church is not of human origin. Man does not set the terms of membership; man does not determine the purpose nor the organization. Hence the church’s job is to function in accordance with the heavenly directives, recognizing that each individual in the congregation is here at this specific time because of the will and design of God. The members of the local body are therefore to appreciate what each brings to the functioning of the congregation, and each member is to recognize how important he is to Christ and the long-term plan of God!

## Chapter 12:19-25 - Spreading the Honor

The Father, out of His abundance, gives to us who lack. From “the riches of His glory” comes the mystery — “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). “God, being rich in mercy,” asseverates Paul, and “because of His great love with which He loved us,” love demonstrated even in the desperateness of our lost and darkened condition, “made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4,5). His character is such that He willingly gives His glory, His honor, His grace, His Holy Spirit, and His mercy! Inasmuch as He expects His children to “become partakers of the divine nature,” it is not surprising if He should constitute the church in such a way as part of its inner workings require the development of His character in each disciple of Christ. Honor, along with grace and mercy, would be distributed from stronger members, out of their abundance, to those who lack and who are weaker.

- **God is in charge** - The Father put all things in subjection under Christ’s feet, “and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Ephesians 1:22,23). Since Christ is the head, then the issue of who is in charge is settled; the directives which emanate from heaven are thus to be implemented by local leaders. “God has placed the members,” Paul had noted, “just as He desired.” The goal of God is for the individual saints to learn teamwork through their interactions in functioning as the local congregation. No one, therefore, is in a position to elevate himself or his personal strengths above the others. “And if they were all one member,” is part of Paul’s reasoning process here, “where would the body be?” (I Corinthians 12:19). A body, by definition, consists of a head, hands, feet, eyes, and ears, as well as many other organs and appendages. Different members of Christ’s body, by that same definition, are not going to be identical in function. The point: “But now there are many members, but one body” (I Corinthians 12:20). Now to the application: “And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” (I Corinthians 12:21). God is in charge, and He placed each saint where He wants in the body. So no one in Christ has the authority to say that they do not need the other members of the local congregation.
- **Need for one another** - God is the One who designed the church to carry out His mission. Consequently, He is the One who knows where each part of the body is supposed to fit, and what they are to accomplish. The different parts of the body, therefore, are not capable of knowing the value of the other members because their picture of what God is trying specifically to accomplish through that other member is too small. No member, then, can say that he doesn’t need the next member. “On the contrary,” avers the apostle Paul, “it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it” (I Corinthians 12:22-24). Those members, which have more visible strength, more visible honor, and more visible attractiveness, can give out of their abundance to those who lack. This in part is how the character of Christ is developed in each member, and so that the body will function with maximum effectiveness.

“But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (I Corinthians 12:24,25). This is how the Head wants to spread the honor and care around; so let’s participate!

## Chapter 12:26-27 - Rejoicing and Suffering Together

The physical body of man is very much a unit. Whether the hurt or the irritation is from a torn toenail or from a throbbing headache, the parts of the body feel the pain together. Likewise those special moments of joy are experienced together as the warmth of the event floods through. God, then, in constituting the church, termed it “the body of Christ” in order for the saints to have a touchstone on which to base their interactions with one another. Each part of the body therefore has honor as part of the body; the hair follicle is of no less value than the heart; it simply has a different function. “God has so composed the body” are the words of the apostle. Just as the physical body of a human being is “fearfully and wonderfully made,” even more so is the spiritual body of Christ. As the physical body is a marvel of engineering, even more so the local congregation is a marvel of spiritual engineering.

- **From the top down** - All things flow from the Head of the body, Christ Himself. Hence it is that He should be the leader in all areas for His body of disciples. “Therefore,” says the scripture, “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in what He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17,18). This High Priest, then, having experienced the suffering and the joy of having lived in the flesh, is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses.” When the saints rejoice, He rejoices; when the saints suffer, He suffers with them.
- **In Christ** - In writing to the congregation at Philippi, the apostle Paul also was appealing to the brethren to function in unity. To do this, he referenced certain foundational qualities, each prefaced with the word *if* for emphasis. “If therefore,” he says, “there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion ...” (Philippians 2:1). It is clear, then, that in the body of Christ there is to be plenty of sympathy (of the right kind), empathy, and compassion in imitation of the kind and compassionate Savior.
- **Being there for one another** - Words like *love* and *care* get thrown around enough so that to some degree they lose their impact. But the concepts are real, powerful, and of the things that last. The apostle notes that the church of God in Corinth was so constituted by the Father that “there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.” It is thusly manifest that in the first place, they should *care* for one another, and secondly, that they should *care* equally strongly about one another. “Rejoice with those who rejoice,” the apostle had encouraged the congregation at Rome, “and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). In Corinth, then, and thus throughout all the congregations of Christ, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (I Corinthians 12:26). Whether in suffering or sorrow, whether in honor or exhilaration, the brethren are to be there for each other, with no animosity or envy over the other brother’s circumstances.

As important as the body of Christ is, the Lord Himself never forgets that it consists of individuals. The Good Shepherd indicated that He would leave the safe sheep for the one sheep that was lost. He focuses on strengthening the individual so that the whole body then is strengthened and can function as He intends it. “Now you are Christ’s body,” is the way the apostle Paul states it, “and individually members of it” (I Corinthians 12:27).

## Chapter 12:28-30 - God Has Appointed

The true church of Christ is being built by Jesus Christ. While there are many man-made organizations claiming to be Christ's church, and there is obviously much twisting of the word and intent of the Great King, the fact remains that there is a church that Jesus is building. He has had, and currently has, the offices He desires in the church, and the specific disciples in place to fill those offices. "But now God has placed the members," Paul had reminded the brethren in Corinth, "each one of them, in the body, just as He desires" (I Corinthians 12:18). As an example of God's placement, the apostle Paul had stated of King David approvingly in his remarks to the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, that "he had served the purpose of God in his own generation," (Acts 13:36). How much more, then, those "upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

- **God's placement** - God has known from before the foundation of the world what He would need to accomplish His purposes, and who He would need to carry out His will. The apostle Paul, then, in speaking to the church at Corinth, emphasizes what God had done to establish the church in the first century, and touched on the roles that were being played out on that stage. "And God has appointed in the church," he notes, "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues" (I Corinthians 12:28). The apostles were first, the doctrines and practices of the new covenant coming through them. The New Testament prophets were second to the apostles, and were critical in the continuing expansion of the church as the apostles had to continue to move on to new ground; while they could prophesy, they could not offer new doctrines. The church, in the words of the apostle, was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). Then in importance would come the teachers of the truths of God, those who could expound upon the principles of the foundation already laid and thus edify the brethren. The visible and miraculous then followed in importance, primarily being used to confirm the doctrines and teachings expounded by the three previously mentioned offices. It is worth re-emphasizing, that God *appointed* these offices and placed the appropriate members in them.
- **The Spirit distributes** - The apostle had made the point that God placed each member in the body just as He desired. He had clearly outlined that each member was important, and that where necessary more abundant honor was bestowed on less "seemly" or "presentable" members. If one suffered, they all suffered; if one was honored, they all shared in the honor. But in terms of function, he is making the point that some have to come first in standing because of what their function in the body of Christ was. "But one and the same Spirit works all these things," he had asseverated, "distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (I Corinthians 12:11). Hence, to put certain members in their places, who had apparently lost a bit of perspective on the roles to be played in the congregation, Paul asks a series of questions to make his point: "All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healing, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?" (I Corinthians 12:29,30).

The question might be posed: Can a person be a Christian without having one of these gifts? The obvious answer is in the affirmative. That being the case, those who were gifted had no reason to think they could look down on those who filled the place of the ungifted. "But earnestly desire the greater gifts," he encourages, bringing up the point that other gifts might be latent in some of the gifted brethren. To help the brethren keep the proper perspective, he is going to go back to the foundational character trait of God, and discuss *love*. "And I show you a still more excellent way," is his introduction (I Corinthians 12:31).

## Chapter 13:1-3 - A More Excellent Way

“The one who does not love does not know God,” the apostle John had stated, “for God is love” (I John 4:8). This is one of those simple apostle John-type statements that can be overlooked in terms of its depth of meaning. Love is a huge topic, and the idea that “God is love” requires some major contemplation. *Love* itself is easily misunderstood by the bulk of the human race, and its tenets are twisted and bent by pure human selfishness coupled with the efforts from the forces of darkness. While the apostle Paul, then, is in the midst of talking about the use, misuse, abuse, and non-use of the spiritual gifts inside the church at Corinth, he introduces a discussion about *love*, introducing the topic through the words, “And I show you a still more excellent way.”

- **In connection with “tongues”** - In examining the way the apostle discusses the use of the gift of speaking in tongues in Corinth, the conclusion can be drawn that the tongue-speakers were among those causing some problems in the congregation. He has to emphasize that the gift of being able to speak a foreign language which the individual had not studied was the least of the gifts, and that those so gifted should earnestly desire some of the greater gifts. To blunt the efforts of those who were using their gift of tongues for self-aggrandizement, the apostle states: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging symbol” (I Corinthians 13:1). Regardless of how eloquent the message delivered in this language, it counted for nothing unless the underlying motive was actual love for the brethren and for the lost. (Angels, by the way, when they speak, always use human language, so the expression “tongues of angels” simply is an expression denoting “the utmost of eloquence.”)
- **Prophecy, knowledge, and faith** - The apostle is going to move up to the next level of gifts to make his point. “And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (I Corinthians 13:2). It is clear that the Lord tests the hearts of men, and is aware of their underlying motives. Paul, in talking about the special gift of faith, obviously has in mind Jesus’ statement about “faith as a mustard seed,” which would also indicate his remembrance about Jesus’ statement about those who with wrong motives prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many miracles. “I never knew you,” was the Lord’s judgment (Matthew 7:23). It is important for the saint to make certain his motive is love.
- **General Christian qualities** - Paul is not going to be limited in his comments only to those in Corinth who possess the spiritual gifts; he wants to be certain that all the brethren are included in the conversation about who needs to have love. “And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor,” he adds to the list, “and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing” (I Corinthians 13:3). Not only are the motives of the more visible members of the congregation being called into question, but also the driving force behind the actions of the less visible.

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,” superadds James, “there is disorder and every evil thing” (James 3:16). Christianity only works if the great character of God — love — is the motivator for Christian action. Wherever deeds of the flesh are present, they work against the purpose of God and the purpose of the church. “For since there is jealousy and strife among you,” Paul had earlier commented about this congregation, “are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?” (I Corinthians 3:3). True peace, true harmony, and true unity only flow from the love of God engendered by the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 13:4-5 - Some Qualities of Love

It is obviously challenging for saints to move from being selfishly motivated to being actuated by love of God and love for others. Satan, the ultimate in selfishness, works his devilish works in the midst of the human mind, and the result is clearly seen as a massive disaster in the race of men. Where love and peace should be, instead there is discord, distrust, and destruction. Among Adam and his first descendants, what should have been a happy family turned into a murderous and tumultuous parade of history. "For we also once were foolish ourselves," Paul reminded Titus and other readers, "disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:3). But God wanted to change that for His special people, the true Israel of God as the saints of the Most High, by sending Jesus as love incarnate into the world.

- **Love is patient** - Much could be written about true patience. Patience has to do with not being anxious about a late airplane arrival, or being able to accept the results of a natural calamity. But it has much more to do with being patient with people in the midst of their meandering thoughts and progress. Paul told Timothy to preach the word "with great patience and instruction" (II Timothy 4:2). It takes a lot of instruction for the dawn of comprehension to occur in most minds, and much patience for that to brighten to full understanding. Then more patience is required for that understanding to fuel the fires of action. "Love is patient," says Paul (I Corinthians 13:4).
- **Love is kind** - Do you not know, Paul queried the Roman brethren, "that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). Kindness requires a thoughtful assessment of the mood and situation of another individual, and the creative ability to do something encouraging and helpful. "Love is kind."
- **Love is not jealous** - There is a form of jealousy that is good. God, for example, is a rightfully jealous God, and His desire for the Christian's unsplintered devotion to Him is beneficial and protective to the saints. Similarly, a wife's yearning and appreciation for her husband's fidelity is a good thing, and a husband's desire for his wife's honor and respect is also beneficial and protective. But jealousy in its twisted and competitive form is one of the most destructive forces on this planet. That type of jealousy ends up trying to tear down everything the object of that jealousy builds; it is suspicious, malicious, envious. Love, on the other hand, is happy and congratulating for any progress of another. "Love is not jealous."
- **Love is not arrogant** - Arrogance was one of those character issues that Paul had mentioned before in this epistle. This egotism, this false superiority, this haughtiness and overweening pride, this superciliousness ... is the exact opposite of the humility expressed in the sacrifice of Christ for the sake of the lost human race. No, "love does not brag and is not arrogant."
- **Love does not act unbecomingly** - Love is aware of the spiritual and emotional condition of others. A disciple of Christ who exhibits love voluntarily bases his actions around those spiritual and emotional needs of others, rather than being selfish and charging ahead on a personal agenda. "Love does not act unbecomingly" (I Corinthians 13:5).

It is comparatively easy to spot character flaws in others. The challenge for the Christian is to be able to work through this list the apostle is laying out for the Corinthians brethren, and to be able to engage in a little honest self-examination. "Am I patient?" "Am I kind?" "Do I exhibit any of the wrong kind of jealousy?" "Am I boastful or arrogant?" "Do I always act becomingly?" If this putting ourselves to the test in these areas results in our making some changes, then "Praise the Lord!"

## Chapter 13:4-5 - More About Love

This passage on love from I Corinthians 13 is a well-known passage. It shows up on napkins at wedding receptions, and graces homes on plaques and ornaments. The grand difficulty, of course, is in getting the teachings on love off the napkin and into the lives of the newly married couple. The challenge is in getting the principles of love from the plaques and ornaments into the actual atmosphere and action of the family. The great test is in getting these words about love from the pages of the New Testament into the lives of the saints. Real love is challenging because it requires a reorientation of the individual. As small children, our needs were "all about us." We needed to be fed, we needed to have our diapers changed, and we needed attention. Even as adults, our physical needs must be taken care of, or we simply do not have the ability to be productive in any other area. But that can lead to a truncation of understanding, and a resultant selfishness set in our habits and characters that must change when we become Christians.

- **Love does not seek its own** - When a man and woman get married, one of the biggest barriers is their own personal selfishness. Often they are self-centered in ways they did not even realize until the reality of making a marriage work forces them to engage in some introspection. Similarly, when a person is immersed into Christ and is thus joined together with Him, the necessity of walking as He walked forces him into the same type of looking inward and making changes. Selfish ambition and personal agendas have to be set aside, and the cause of Christ must come to the foremost. "Love does not seek its own."
- **Love is not provoked** - In the course of personal interactions, there comes a point in which there is some bumping and bruising as lives and personalities collide. Any individual has had conflicting goals within himself which he had to work out; how much more when two or more such individuals have to work and interact together. So when a bump or bruise happens, the Christian thing to do is to handle it with the same grace that God has. Anger or personal offense just complicates the ability to resolve the situation amicably. Hence it is, for Christians, "Love is not provoked."
- **Love does not take into account a wrong suffered** - The build up of real or imagined hurts results in bitterness. And bitterness is a poisonous canker which eats away any goodness of character and leaves the human being an empty and hollow soul, unable to interact in a healthy way with anyone around him. *Forgiveness*, then, begins with God. The follower of Christ, forgiven himself, in imitation of the nature of his heavenly Father, is able to forgive others also. In a discussion, for example, between husband and wife, the couple are able to concentrate on the issue at hand; there is no long laundry list of past offenses cluttering the conversation. "Love does not take into account a wrong suffered."
- **Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness** - Inside each person is a conscience, and that conscience has a pretty good idea of what is right and what is wrong. That conscience is further strengthened in the case of Christians, who have the indwelling Holy Spirit and the conscience guide-book called the Word of God. Worldly people, according to the word of God, "give hearty approval" to those who practice ungodliness. Love, by contrast, "does not rejoice in unrighteousness."

There are a lot of negative, destructive actions and attitudes which destroy relationships and create confusion. Christ's love, however, is positive and edifying. This love works through issues calmly rather than escalating the chaos. This love generates a peaceful atmosphere, open communication, and honest concern for the other person. It is worth each Christian's efforts in investing in understanding and deepening in his participation in this great love.

## Chapter 13:6-8 - What Love Does

Love is not a mere concept. There is action in love, and love achieves the great and positive accomplishments in this life. Throughout the history of the human race, there have been many dramatic examples of what love does. The tales of what a woman would do for her husband, or a husband for his wife, a parent toward a child or vice-versa ... the annals of the world tell the story of what love has done. Without that type of love embedded in mankind, the past would have been much more sordid than it was, and living in the present would be much darker than it already is. Jesus' description, for example, of the events connected with the armies of Rome's destroying Jerusalem (and foreshadowing the events at the destruction of the world) is poignant and relevant: "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). How dark!

- But the love that Christ enjoins upon His brethren is much deeper than the positive love that exists in the human race in general. This love is the *agape* love, the love of God for the soul and eternity of each individual. Hence this love, poured out in the hearts of true Christians, exhibits itself in thoughtful action in regard to the other person's eternity. The powerful picture of *forever* puts the *present* into proper focus.
- **Love rejoices in truth** - When God created everything in the beginning, it was — in His own words — "very good." Satan, by contrast, as the prince of darkness, cannot create anything. All he can do is twist what is straight and corrupt what is good. Love, then, which is from God, "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (I Corinthians 13:6). Love and truth are simply different faces of the same coin. True love is concerned enough about the next person to tell him the truth, to help him be accountable to himself, to the church, and to God. True love does not like lies and deception; it is righteously upset about false doctrine and the allures of the world that pull people off the path of "righteousness and into the fires of hell. Jesus is recorded as saying, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Love is happy with that!
- **Love bears all things** - Because love knows that the other person's eternity is at stake, it "bears all things" (I Corinthians 13:7). Love gives the saint of God the strength to carry the loads connected with getting other people to heaven, to raising a family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. No matter how heavy, nor no matter how long a time, that load can be carried by this *agape* love.
- **Love believes all things** - Love believes that with God all things are possible. Love believes that the most abject sinner can turn to God and become a different person; love believes the persecutor Saul can become the great exponent of God's love as the apostle Paul. Love "believes all things." That is why those who love with the love of Christ love their enemies and pray for them; that is why they keep on opening doors of conversation with the lost, and exhibit great patience with the saved.
- **Love hopes all things** - Because love believes, love "hopes all things." In the midst of earth's darkness, the Father found the way to save those trapped in its lair. Love believes that God is causing all things to work together for good for those who love Him. The Christian, then, can continue in hope, that around the next corner something of great positive eternal value is going to happen!
- **Love endures all things** - Because love sees what the great God has done in the spiritual realm to rescue even one soul, love "endures all things." It just keeps on going and going and going ...

"Love never fails" (I Corinthians 13:8). It is truly the gift that keeps on giving!

## Chapter 13:8-11 - Transitory Gifts of the Spirit

That downward sucking sound is Satan trying to pull the saints of God under with him. Hence, one of his techniques is to get the brethren to become competitive rather than cooperative. In Corinth, for example, those who had the gift of speaking in a foreign language had tended to elevate themselves above the brethren in general, and even over those who had other gifts of the Spirit. This type of false elevation was fostered and fomented by those who wanted to develop factions within the congregation, and manipulate the situation so that they could be the biggest fish in that particular pond. Paul, then, writes this section on love to point out, as he put it, “a more excellent way.” Love abolishes selfish ambition and petty jealousy. Love produces compassion, and an earnest desire for the next brother or sister in Christ to be all that he or she can be. Love wants people to be saved, and for there to be harmony and peace as befits those who are called by the name of the Lord. Those who truly loved would use their gifts properly.

- **Cessation of the gifts** - “Love,” said the apostle, “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” Love, in other words, never stops working and never comes to an end. The time would come, however, when the gifts of the Spirit, that some of the members of the congregation were so proud to possess, would disappear. “If there are gifts of prophecy,” asserted the apostle Paul, “they will be done away; if there are [gifts of] tongues, they will cease; if there is [the gift of] knowledge, it will be done away” (I Corinthians 13:8). The apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knew the time was coming when the gifts, transitory as contrasted to enduring love, would pass away; there was nothing here for the possessors of those gifts to be exalting themselves about.
- **Partial contrasted to perfect** - The gifts of the Spirit were a temporary measure God had to institute until He could get His message completely communicated and verified. “For we know in part,” Paul stated, concerning the special gift of knowledge, “and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away” (I Corinthians 13:9,10). The gifts were extant with partial effectiveness, in effect until what the apostle termed “the perfect thing” could come. It can be established that the gifts of the Spirit were given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, and therefore once the apostles died, the gifts of the Spirit would die out by attrition also. This coincided, by God’s design, with the writing of the book of Revelation by the apostle John, and the completion of the books of the New Testament. The perfect (complete) revelation of God was accomplished, and there was no longer any need for the partial (the gifts of the Spirit). The gifts then ceased.
- **The church in infancy** - The time comes when the boy puts away his toys, becomes a man, and picks up the tools for his work. “When I was a child,” is the way the apostle put it, “I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things” (I Corinthians 13:11). The church, as it began, needed the gifts to confirm the spoken word and the actions of the apostles. But once the word was confirmed and the practices of the apostles established, the gifts — as “childish” — were replaced by the written and abiding word, and the church could now move into maturity.

Part of the apostle’s motive here was to establish the transitory nature of the manifestations of the Spirit. His general point was that since the gifts were temporary and “childish,” there was no reason for any of the possessors of the gifts to get “big headed.” That principle, of course, continues to apply today!

## Chapter 13:12-13 - In the Looking Glass

God has wrapped His glory in thick darkness. This is to protect the material creation until such time as He is ready for Jesus to appear and vaporize the material realm by the brightness of His coming. In the meantime, He has worked diligently to produce a special people who could see and appreciate His glory by the faith revealed in His written word. But until the New Testament writings were completed and collected, this picture was incomplete and, in a matter of speaking, a little fuzzy. Hence those of us who are blessed to live in the final stages of “these last days” are the most blessed of anyone who has ever lived, because for us the whole picture of what we are to see is clearly and completely presented.

- **Now and then** - The gift of prophecy, asserted the apostle, “will be done away.” The gift of tongues and the corresponding gift of interpretation would cease. The gift of the special knowledge the church needed to function would be done away. These “partial” workings of the Spirit would be replaced by that which would be “perfect,” containing the information and direction formerly provided by the gifts of the Spirit. The church, guided in its early stages by those things revealed by those who had the gifts, would now move into maturity and be able to be guided by the completed word of God. “For now we see in a mirror dimly,” commented the apostle, “but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I have been fully known” (I Corinthians 13:12). At the time the apostle wrote (the *now*), the New Testament was not completed, and he could only see in the mirror “dimly,” or unclearly. But *then* (with the writings of the entire Bible finished and available), the beneficiaries would be able to see clearly, “to know fully” just as they would be fully known. The *then* of the apostle Paul is *now* for us; we have everything there is in regard to the revelation of God and His will.
- **What do we see?** - The apostle did not have a totally clear picture of what was to be seen in the “mirror,” whereas the people to come would be able to see as if “face to face.” The apostle Paul picks up the theme of the mirror again in his second epistle to the Corinthian brethren. “But we all,” he then says, “with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:18). What we see in the mirror is Jesus in glory! And, with the inner man (with unveiled face) being able to see that glory, the inner person is transformed into the likeness of that same glory. Hence, as Paul noted in his first epistle, we now know ourselves fully just as we have been fully known. This transformation is for those who will, as James termed it in his letter, “look intently” into the perfect law, the law of liberty. The casual glance will not accomplish the transformation.

*Faith* is when we believe what the Bible tells us to believe about the realm we cannot see with physical eyes. There is no other way to have any real knowledge about the spiritual world. Hence, by faith, we see Jesus in glory as revealed in the sacred page, and by faith we are being transformed into His image and being partakers of His nature. In hope we wait for the final transformation of our body into conformity with the body of His glory, groaning in this present house, waiting for our final adoption. At that point our faith will become sight, and faith will be no more. At that point, our hope will be realized, and hope will be no more. “And now,” says the apostle, “abide faith, hope, love — these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13). Love is the one that goes on and on and on!

## Chapter 14:1-5 - Back to the Gifts

For some people, there could be a sort of twisted satisfaction in being able to stand up and speak in a language they have never studied and which no one present understands. This runs counter to what God really wants to accomplish in Christianity and inside the church. The Almighty has never wanted man to engage in “religious activity” which blurs his focus or distracts his attention. Altars, in the days of the patriarchs, were to be of uncut stones. The priests of the Law of Moses were directed to have no steps leading up to the altar of sacrifice. Everything was to be functional and serve a direct purpose. Even the magnificent trappings of Solomon’s temple were designed to point to the wonders of the spiritual temple of God, the church built out of living stones. The instruction given in the New Testament writings is in consonance with this general principle, and the goal is simplicity and straight-forward edification.

- **No mysteries** - The use of the gifts in Corinth had gotten out of hand. The apostle, then, has written these instructions on the gifts, focusing in particular on the importance of having true love as the guiding motive. “Pursue love,” he says, “yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (I Corinthians 14:1). The church in general and the congregation in particular would not be able to function or to move forward without those having spiritual gifts within their midst. The possession of one or more gifts was a good thing, to be used in love. But if the gift was misused, that which should have been good now turned into something destructive, and puffed up the individual who was now putting on a show. “For one who speaks in a tongue,” intimates Paul, of those speaking in a foreign language without an interpreter, “does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries” (I Corinthians 14:2). Not helpful!
- **For edification** - God’s goal is to have His message delivered as He wants it delivered. He intends for His words to be understood (not necessarily without some work on the part of the listener), and He wants His words to have been verified where necessary. A message in a foreign language could be part of the verification process, as well as healing or other miracles. But in prophesying, the message would get to the hearers. “But one who prophesies,” affirms the apostle, “speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation” (I Corinthians 14:3). This is what God wants His word to accomplish for the sake of the spiritual seed of Abraham. “One who speaks in a tongue [without an interpreter] edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church” (I Corinthians 14:4). A message delivered in a foreign language and then interpreted was on equal standing with prophesying in that the message could be understood by the audience. But the one who just spoke in the uninterpreted language only “edified” himself; he simply put on a display for show. “Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues,” he interposes, aware of the necessity of the gifts for the church to move forward in the absence of the completed word, “but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies that the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying” (I Corinthians 14:5). The goal is the edification of the church, rather than glorifying the individual.

The goal of the truly humble is simply to get God’s job done, honorably and honestly. Jesus led the way, humbly going to the cross because there was no other way. Those who would follow in His footsteps realize that there is likewise a job to be done in the church, and that job is to continue to edify the saints. While the gifts do not exist today, the principle of edification has not gone away! Keep on upbuilding!

## Chapter 14:5-9 - Importance of Being Understood

How can anyone learn and change unless they can understand what is being said? If the message in the assembly on the Lord's Day is in Latin, and no one except the speaker understands Latin, of what use is the message? It is neither encouraging nor enlightening! Hence, in the assemblies of the saints, everything is to be done for edification, motivation, and education. "Greater," says the apostle Paul, "is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues (unless he interprets), so that the church may receive edifying" (I Corinthians 14:5). He will continue to expound on that principle.

- **Profit in prophesying** — Time is short, and life is a vapor! With people dying and going to a Christless hell forever, there is no time to waste in getting out the gospel and in strengthening the saints. Paul, then, illustrates. "But now, brethren," he comments, "if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?" (I Corinthians 14:6). It would be a total waste of this precious time for him to come, speaking in a dialect that was foreign to their ears. But if, on the other hand, he was to bring more revelation from God by the means of his apostolic gifts, or if he was to bring more inspired knowledge, that would be helpful. If he was to bring a prophetic message, or some informative new covenant teaching, that would edify and encourage the saints. He is clearly illustrating how the gifts were to be used in the congregation in Corinth.
- **Illustration from instruments** — The goal of eternal communication is clarity, not confusion. "Yet even lifeless things," notes the apostle, "either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or the harp?" (I Corinthians 14:7). Atonal "music" is discordant and disconcerting; random notes are just "noise." There has to be order and sense in the notes emitted from the harp or emanating from the flute. "For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound," he further avers, "who will prepare for battle?" (I Corinthians 14:8). Great point!
- **Clear speech** — But this conversation is about spiritual issues — the grand themes of the scriptures and the application to the individual. So, as soothing and encouraging as may be the music of flutes and harps, and as key the communication of the bugle's battle call, how much more the words of life! "So also you," adverts the apostle Paul, "unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air" (I Corinthians 14:9). Muddled thinking results in muddled speech; faulty perspective results in faulty application. The brethren who had the perspective of showing off their gift of tongues lost sight of the necessity of edifying the body, elevating themselves at everyone else's expense. Paul brings the proper perspective, and in his own clear thinking brings the proper point: don't speak unless what you are saying is in language that can be understood by all! And that is a principle which carries over to today.

It is interesting how much the apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit have to belabor the point that all things need to be done for edification of the saints. Apparently it is difficult to get someone — even a brother in Christ — who has a selfish agenda to reorient himself. "Arrogant" is a word or character trait which keeps popping up throughout this epistle, and the challenge is to help the arrogant see who they are, and then to repent and do something about that being puffed up. A large dose of humility is what each saint continually needs, and that humility will result in the perspective that all things are to be done for edification.

## Chapter 14:10-19 - Edification of the Church

Sometimes a traveler to a foreign country is sitting in the middle of a conversation in which the foreigner cannot understand a single word! After awhile, the words just seem like background noise, because the visitor has no comprehension of what is happening or what topics are under discussion. The apostle Paul brings forth the general principle in these words: "There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks a barbarian to me" (I Corinthians 14:10,11). The Greek language spread throughout the middle East and throughout much of southern and eastern Europe. But west of Egypt along the north African coast (which was and still is known as the Barbary Coast), Greek wasn't spoken. Hence the Greeks couldn't understand the Barbarians, and the Barbarians couldn't understand the Greeks. The apostle's point is that if a speaker wants to be understood, he needs to speak in a language comprehensible to those who are hearing.

- **Abound for edification** - The church in Corinth put a high value on gifts of the Spirit, having received those by the laying on of the apostle Paul's hands. In his introductory statement, the apostle had commented that "the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift." The brethren possessed the gifts; they just needed to use them properly. "So you also," states the apostle, not wanting the brethren to be barbarians, "since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church" (I Corinthians 14:12). The gifts were not for show, nor to glamorize the gift's possessor. The saints were to take that zeal they had for the spiritual gifts, and use that zeal for the strengthening and education of the church!
- **Necessity of interpretation** - A message in a foreign language, uninterpreted, is wasted effort; no one receives any benefit from it. "Therefore," reasons the apostle, "let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (I Corinthians 14:13,14). Apparently deep within the individual, he had a sense of what he was praying if he offered his prayers in a foreign language, but —unless he could interpret also — even his mind did not know what he had prayed. That, implies the apostle, is not a good thing. "What is the outcome?" he then asks. "I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also" (I Corinthians 14:15). The goal, whether in messages delivered or songs sung, is for there to be clear understanding of the words and concepts communicated.
- **Blessing the "ungifted"** - Some of the concerns of a true teacher and a true promulgator of the gospel are reaching the lost and educating the new Christian. Hence there was to be an awareness in Corinth of the man or woman who was "ungifted," who did not possess any of the spiritual gifts, and who could get left out of the loop if the "gifted" did not conduct themselves properly. "Otherwise," asseverates Paul, "if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying. For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified" (I Corinthians 14:16,17). *Amen* means that one agrees with what has just been said; if the prayer was in a foreign language, how could the one who doesn't understand say that he agrees?

"I thank God," says the apostle, "I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church, I desire to speak five words with my mind [which another person could understand], that I may instruct others, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Corinthians 14:18,19). Good advice!

## Chapter 14:20-22 - Primary Purpose of Tongues

God trained the children of Israel through signs and wonders. As the nation was in the process of formation in Egypt, God used the signs Moses performed in the presence of Pharaoh and in all the land. Ten mighty and massive plagues were used to bring Israel out of slavery with God's outstretched arm. The voice of the Almighty thundered from Sinai in the midst of tempest, gloom, trumpet, and whirlwind. Millions were fed with manna daily, and quail occasionally covered the area outside the camp. All through the nation's history the judges and prophets performed signs, guiding the people into God's truth and calling them to repentance, preparing them for the greatest sign of all — the resurrection of their Messiah from the dead. Following that resurrection, signs continued to be performed among the Jewish people after the implementation of the new covenant, confirming the truthfulness of the witnesses' testimony and establishing that the doctrines of the apostles were the directives of God.

- **Tongues [foreign languages] as a sign** - What the scripture calls "the baptism [immersion] with the Holy Spirit" consisted of three aspects: 1) A sound like a mighty wind; 2) Tongues like flames of fire breaking off and distributed to those so "baptized"; and 3) Speaking in other tongues [languages which could be understood]. This powerful sign was what God used to verify Jesus' resurrection to the Jews and to begin the church as recorded in Acts chapter two, and then used again to extend salvation to the Gentiles. Part of this was the speaking in a foreign language, and this part was so powerful that it is specifically mentioned both times that the baptism with the Holy Spirit occurs. The multitude "were bewildered," Luke the historian recorded, concerning the events on the Day of Pentecost, "because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:6). Again, in the case of the first Gentiles to become Christians, those of Jewish background could not refuse these people's immersion into Christ because of the sign. "And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed," Luke again notes, "because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and glorifying God" (Acts 10:45,46). A Roman centurion and his guests were able to glorify God in languages they had not studied, and which were understandable to the Jewish brethren present. The point in bringing up these two significant events in the spiritual history of this planet is to show that the Jewish people had been prepared to be impressed by someone's glorifying God in a language he had not studied or learned.
- **The gift of "tongues"** - The spiritual gift or manifestation of "tongues" as separate and distinct from the baptism with the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Its use in the local assembly was important and powerful when used in love and in accordance with the dictates of Paul. "Brethren," pleads the apostle, "do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature" (I Corinthians 14:20). The apostle wants them to move past their silly, childish games — to move past the jealousy and strife — and focus on the purpose of the gifts, specifically of "tongues." "In the Law it is written," he points out, " 'By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,' says the Lord" (I Corinthians 14:21). God prophesied through Isaiah that God would use Gentiles' speaking in foreign tongues to try to reach the unbelieving Jew.

"So then," avers the apostle Paul, "tongues are for a sign, not to those [Jews] who believe, but to unbelievers [Jewish]" (I Corinthians 14:22). When a Gentile would speak to a Jew in the Jew's own language — a language the Gentile had not studied — and tell the Jew of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this was demonstrably a powerful sign used in the church to reach the lost among the Jewish people.

## Chapter 14:22-25 - Prophecy in Reaching the Gentile

The Jew was trained to look for signs; the Greeks sought wisdom. “To the Jews,” thusly noted the apostle Paul, “I became as a Jew.” To the Gentile, he became as a Gentile, without compromising his moral behavior. Hence, what was necessary to reach a first century Jew was different than what was necessary to reach the first century Greek. So what was necessary to reach the Jew? Signs, specifically the sign of a Gentile’s speaking to the Jew in the Jew’s language, telling him of God and of God’s great salvation through Jesus Christ. “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people,” was the way Paul quotes Isaiah’s message from God. But most of the Jewish people would not believe in Jesus as the Son of God, as it was written, “Even so they will not listen to Me.”

- **Tongues introduces the Jew to Christ** - The Jew had been prepared for signs; fifteen hundred years of God’s specific efforts had gone into preparation of the children of Israel so that when the Messiah came to earth, a percentage of the Jewish people would believe. “So then tongues are for a sign,” states Paul, in the context of reaching *this people*, “not to those who believe, but to unbelievers.” But as he moves into the context of winning the Gentiles, he wants to introduce the purposes of prophecy. “But prophecy,” he remarks, “is for a sign not to unbelievers [Jews], but to those [Jews] who believe” (I Corinthians 14:22). Once the individual of Jewish background was convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, what he needed from that point was edification and education.
- **Tongues not effective for Gentiles** - The Jews had been trained to look for signs; the Greeks sought for wisdom. An individual’s telling the Gentile about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Gentile’s own language would not have a significant impact. So if a Gentile were to walk into the assembly ... “If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers [Gentiles] enter, will they not say you are mad?” (I Corinthians 14:23). Not effective!
- **Prophecy most effective for Gentiles** - Paul paints a different picture when the church prophesies rather than speaks in foreign languages. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or ungifted man [Gentile] enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you” (I Corinthians 14:24,25). When Jesus used His prophetic abilities to inform the Samaritan woman that the man she was living with was not her husband, she was convicted, drew the conclusion that He was the Messiah, and went and stirred up the whole town. A similar picture is painted by Paul of what happened in the first century churches when the Gentile walked in, and the church was functioning as it was designed to do; the Gentile would be convicted of his sin and convinced that the congregation had the ability to tell him the truth about God. He would physically fall down, like the Old Testament patriarchs, and physically prostrate himself before the Creator in the presence of the holy ones of the first century.

The word of God, whether in written form as it is today or prophetically delivered by spiritually gifted saints in the first century has the power to penetrate the heart of man. “For the word of God,” says Hebrews’ writer, “is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword ... and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). It is incumbent upon preachers and teachers of the word today to deliver it with the same intensity as it was delivered in the first century, calling men “to account.” The truth — and it must be emphasized that it is *the truth* — is to be spoken in love, but it is to be spoken!

## Chapter 14:26-33 - Instructions for Tongues and Prophecy

The gifts in the church in Corinth of Achaia were being misused and abused. Hence the apostle Paul devotes what became three chapters of this letter to correcting and guiding the purpose and use of the gifts in the congregation. These gifts were for the church until the completed written word of God came into existence, then the gifts — given only through the laying on of the apostles' hands — phased out. The church in its infancy needed the gifts; but when it reached maturity because of the completed written word, then it “did away with childish things.” But the church at Corinth was still part of the church in infancy, and needed Paul's instruction concerning the gifts. “What is the outcome, then, brethren?” he asks. “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (I Corinthians 14:26). These were individual presentations by male members of the congregation. And as the apostle emphasized, there was to be no self glorification; rather, all was to be done for edification.

- **Instructions for tongues** - The *gift of tongues* — speaking in a foreign language — was essentially for reaching the unconverted Jew or convincing those of Jewish background of some key point in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the church. One of the key purposes of the *gift of prophecy* was to reach the unconverted Gentile. The apostle, as he begins to wind down this section of the epistle, will focus on these two gifts. “If anyone speaks in a tongue,” he adjures, “it should be by two or at most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and God” (I Corinthians 14:27,28). It is apparent here that the one who possessed the gift of delivering a message or a prayer in a foreign language controlled that gift; there was no spontaneous outbreak of “tongues.” Furthermore, any such delivery of a message in this foreign language was to be done very orderly; each one was to take his turn, and each message was to be interpreted. Finally, if there was no interpreter present, the gifted one was to keep silent in the assembly; and if he absolutely needed to get his message out, he was to go talk to himself and to God by himself.
- **Instructions for prophesying** - Similar instructions were issued by the apostle for those who had the gift of being able to prophesy. “And let two or three prophets speak,” he directs, “and let the others pass judgment” (I Corinthians 14:29). God has always had a built-in feedback system, wherein the faithful followers of Christ could determine what the truth was. In this case, there were other prophets in the congregation to make sure that what the prophet was saying was really true. “But if a revelation is made to another who is seated,” further instructs the apostle, “let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (I Corinthians 14:30-32). Once again, it is clear that the New Testament prophet controlled his gift; he was voluntarily supposed to sit down and shut up if another received a revelation, and that they were only to speak one at a time.

“God,” notes Paul, “is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (I Corinthians 14:33). There is a god of chaos and confusion who works assiduously to destroy the work of God if he can. But the true God is a God of order, so that, as the apostle put it, “all may learn and all may be exhorted.”

These were not instructions for the church in Corinth only; they were the same instructions given in “all the churches of the saints.” What the modern church can gather from these verbalizations is that the assembly is to be very orderly; presentations are to be made one at a time, and they are for teaching and exhortation.

## Chapter 14:34-36 - Instructions for Women in the Assembly

The Women's Liberation Movement, like other so-called "liberation" movements, is a typical leftist gambit producing exactly the opposite of what it promises. It promises freedom, but results in slavery. In any area of human interaction, there are always abuses. There are abusive bosses. There are abusive husbands. There are abusive parents and there are abusive pet owners. And, oh yes, there are wicked-tongued wives who can rip the hearts right out of their husbands. As bad as these abuses are, the proposed solution of government interference is much worse. As governments all over the world pick up the tool called "bullying," they will use their definitions of it to control all person-to-person interactions on the planet. And they will abuse their citizens as they grind their faces in the dirt of slavery, and thresh them with the sledges of "re-education camps." Be that as it may, the women's lib movement has impacted modern churches, and scriptures instructing women in the assembly are often tossed aside as outdated customs of an ancient world.

- **User controlled his gift** - God's goal was for the assembly of the saints to be orderly, where all was done for the edification of the saints and thus for the glory of God. Hence the humble possessor of one of the gifts would be willing to follow the Holy Spirit's instruction as he conducted himself in the sight of God and His holy angels. The man with the gift of tongues would keep silent if there was no interpreter present. The prophet who was speaking would step aside and keep silent if a revelation was given to another prophet. Because the user controlled his gift, he could override God's instructions, but he would do so at the possible peril of his immortal soul.
- **The woman controls her gift** - God's goal is for the assembly of the saints to be orderly, where all is done for the edification of the saints and thus for the glory of God. Hence the humble female, with her gift of being vocal, is willing to follow the Holy Spirit's instruction as she conducts herself in the sight of God and His holy angels. "Let the women keep silent in the churches," is the instruction, parallel with the instruction for men with their gifts, "for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says" (I Corinthians 14:34). Because the woman controls her gift, she can override God's instructions, but she does so at the peril of her immortal soul. "And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church" (I Corinthians 14:35). In a somewhat parallel passage, the apostle notes: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman, being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (I Timothy 2:12-14). The culture in which these statements are made is the culture which started with Adam and Eve.

That these statements universally applied to all the churches then and now is emphasized in Paul's rhetorical questions: "Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?" (I Corinthians 14:36). "Let the women subject themselves," reaffirmed the apostle, "just as the Law also says." If Israel had to consult with a female prophet, be led by a female judge, or be ruled by female monarch, it was because she had sunk to the depths. If it appears that the glass ceiling is broken, it is really that the living room has collapsed into the basement.

## Chapter 14:37-40 - Final Instructions on Gifts

God does not want anyone, particularly Christians, to be flippant about His word. Peter had enjoined those who preach to speak “as it were, the utterances of God” (I Peter 4:11). When God uttered the Ten Commandments from Sinai, those words were not to be treated as the Ten Suggestions. His word, delivered through His servants, is authoritative and final. Jesus, in engaging in a lively debate with the Jewish hierarchy, appealed on the basis that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Hence, when a tested and trusted servant such as Paul would deliver Spirit-inspired teachings, those words were to be treated as if God Himself had spoken. That which is written for spiritual Zion is more powerful than that which thundered from physical Sinai!

- **Authoritative instruction** - One of the problems the apostle Paul was dealing with in this section of the epistle to the Corinthian brethren was the tendency of the brethren to become arrogant about their gifts. Some of those who “spoke in foreign tongues” had gotten out of hand, and some of the prophets needed to have someone checking to make sure that they were in fact saying what God wanted said. Hence Paul’s remonstrance was necessary. “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual,” is the apostle’s gently tendered challenge, “let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (I Corinthians 14:37). Any attempt to discount the previous instructions was crushed by this statement; these words were the command of the Lord Jesus Himself! They were not cultural, and they were not isolated to Corinth. These are words whose principles ring down through the end of this present age. Even if a person made a claim to and was recognized as having one of the gifts such as prophecy, he could not legitimately set aside these directives from the apostle. “But if anyone does not recognize this,” says Paul, and he means *anyone*, “he is not recognized” (I Corinthians 14:38). This recalls the seriousness of Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount, that even if anyone claimed to prophesy in His name or cast out demons or perform miracles, if he was not obedient to the word of Christ, the Lord would say in the last day, “I never knew you.” What a loss!
- **Positive direction** - The gifts were very important in the establishment of the truthfulness of God’s testimony, the direction that God gave the church through the Holy Spirit, and the functioning of the church in the absence of the written New Testament. They just needed to be used inside the divinely appointed boundaries. “Therefore, my brethren,” encourages Paul, “desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues” (I Corinthians 14:39). If the apostle Paul had lain hands on one of the Christians, the gift of prophecy — which was very valuable — could be latent, waiting for the spiritual maturity of the one possessing the gift to develop. And the gift of tongues, though lesser, was important, and those possessing superior gifts were not to forbid the use of tongues as a manifestation of the Spirit.
- **Properly and orderly** - God’s word is the only form of communication which moves an individual from being of the flesh to being born again in the image of God. God’s word is the only communication which life man’s focus from the mundane to the spiritually sublime. As such, it’s truths and means of transmission are to be treated with great care and respect. Hence, in the church of the living God, this final word on the “gifts” is critically applicable: “But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner” (I Corinthians 14:40).

Satan is the god of chaos and confusion, whereas God is the God of peace and order. Much confusion and chaos had broken out in the church at Corinth, and these instructions were necessary to bring the conduct of the congregation back in line with God’s precepts. While the manifestations of the Spirit are not extant today, these principles apply. Proceedings are to be conducted in the assembly orderly, properly, and in accordance with the written word of God!

## Chapter 15:1-4 - Foundational Facts

The apostle Paul is about to answer another critically foundational question: Is there a resurrection of the dead? In a society — Western Civilization — based originally on “Moses, Jesus, and Paul,” it can be too easy to accept as fact not only Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, but also that there will be a general resurrection from the dead on the last day. To process the magnitude of Jesus’ resurrection and comprehend how difficult it would be to believe in such an event, our minds somehow have to be translated back to the environs of the days following Christ’s crucifixion. The disciples of Jesus as a whole were in despair when Jesus was crucified, their hopes having been dashed as Roman nails pinioned Him to the “tree.” Their almost universal response, as they one-by-one heard of the empty tomb, was that the body had been stolen away. But as He demonstrated that His Spirit and soul had rejoined His body (which is the definition of *resurrection*), “by many convincing proofs,” the disciples began to believe in His resurrection, and through that to believe in the general resurrection at the end of the age.

- **Paul’s proclamation** - “Jesus is risen!” is the message that is proclaimed to the world. After the announcement has reverberated a bit among the sons of men, then the reasoned proofs of that resurrection are presented for the minds of men to process. As a reminder of his style when he first came to Corinth, the apostle Paul opens his discussion on the raising of the dead. “Now I make known to you, brethren,” he heralds, “the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain” (I Corinthians 15:1,2). These are supremely powerful claims for those who are obedient to the gospel of Christ: The lost-and-damned-to-hell sinner is saved by this gospel, and the one who is now a saint stands in that salvation by holding fast to that gospel. These are simple words — *saved* and *stands* — but they represent the difference between an eternity in the fires of hell and an eternity in singing the eternal praises of the Almighty in heaven.
- **Christ died for our sins** - The term *gospel*, which means “the good news,” is essentially synonymous with the expression *the new covenant*. The gospel contains the facts about what Jesus did in order to open up salvation for the world, and it contains the commands which the individual must obey in order for that salvation to be applied to him particularly — it is the means “by which also you are saved.” But it also contains all the rest of the teachings of the new covenant necessary to sustain the saint through personal challenges, through persecution, and through false doctrine — it is the means by which “also you stand.” “For I delivered to you as of first importance,” affirms Paul, of the initial presentation of the gospel detailing what Christ has done, “what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3). This, of course, is tremendously great news, that Christ died for our sins, and that was in accordance with Old Testament prophecies that we might know for certain that this salvation is no fairy tale.
- **Christ was buried** - The apostle also notes as of first importance that “He was buried” (I Corinthians 15:4). The burial of Christ, though simple, is critical in the application of the gospel to the new creation in Christ.
- **Christ was raised on the third day** - Paul was also re-announcing that Christ “was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.” This resurrection, verified by eye-witnesses, attested to by affirming miracles, and backed by Old Testament prophecies, is the keystone of the entire message of Christ.

Having laid his foundation, the apostle is going to argue from this point that there is a general resurrection from the dead. The saint of God is intensely interested in the argumentation here, for it is critical in strengthening his faith and enabling him also “to stand.”

## Chapter 15:5-8 – “And that He Appeared”

“Christ,” says Paul, “died for our sins according to the scriptures.” God goes to some lengths to establish man’s need for forgiveness. He implanted a consciousness of right and wrong in man’s heart. He buttressed that by thundering His commandments from Sinai, inscribing them on tablets of stone, and having the written record of them distributed all over the world. He established sacrifice as a means of atonement — going all the way back to Cain and Abel — and implemented organized sacrifices in Israel so that, for members of the human race, the statement of John the Immerser regarding Jesus would make sense: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Christ, the sacrificial lamb, died for our sins according to the scriptures. But that death is not all there is to the story!

- **The resurrection** - A crucifixion in Roman days was not difficult to document. But to document that Jesus’ crucifixion was for the forgiveness of mankind’s sins took considerable preparation and effort on the part of God the Father. Following the burial of Jesus in the garden tomb, the claim of scripture is that the Christ rose from the dead on the third day, and that this was in accordance with Old Testament prophecies. Establishing the truthfulness of this claim required a detailed plan and a careful execution of that plan to establish for rightly skeptical people that Jesus’ resurrection really occurred. Part of that plan required carefully chosen eye-witnesses; part required attesting miracles; and part required fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies.
- **The appearances** - To the apostles, Luke records, Jesus “also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, *by many convincing proofs, appearing* to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The linchpin of God’s proof that He raised Jesus from the dead (and that the Bible is proven to be the word of God) is the testimony of these chosen witnesses. Paul therefore continues his thoughts concerning the gospel in this epistle to the Corinthian brethren, that Christ was raised from the dead, “*and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve.*” The apostle superadds, “After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were, to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (I Corinthians 15:5-8). The apostle is wanting to answer some questions about the general resurrection from the dead, but to discuss that He first has to establish clearly that Jesus was raised. Hence he brings forward a bevy of witnesses who could establish the truthfulness of Jesus’ bodily resurrection.
- **The appearance to Paul** - Jesus’ appearance to Paul was different from the others, as noted by the apostle’s words, that he was “one untimely born.” All the other appearances of Jesus were manifestations of the Christ prior to His ascension. But His appearing to Paul, several years later, on the Damascus Road as a blinding light was as the glorified Christ. This was the Christ who had offered His spiritual blood in cleansing heaven as the great High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, making the sacrifice on the cross operative. This was the Jesus who had taken the heavenly throne of David as the great Messiah. This was the “Lamb as if slain” raised to the position of power to be the Savior of the world.

The gospel not only contains facts about Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, but continues on from there. The gospel includes the records of His appearances as bodily resurrected, but it also continues on from there! The gospel incorporates the record that Jesus was glorified, and in this fashion appeared to Saul of Tarsus. The gospel is not limited to “the death, burial, and resurrection” of Jesus!

## Chapter 15:9-11 – Paul’s Apostleship

In both of Paul’s letters to Timothy, he points out that he was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher. From the time of his immersion into Christ, Paul (or Saul as he was then known) began teaching in the synagogues at Damascus, “increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22). Later, he and Barnabas were set aside by the church at Antioch of Syria to preach to the Gentiles. And while on his first missionary journey, some fifteen or sixteen years after the church began, the full apostleship of Jesus Christ was granted to Paul. Because his apostleship did not develop in the same way as the other twelve, that apostleship was challenged in places like Corinth. But, as Paul explained to the congregations of Galatia concerning the gospel, “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Hence, though he was “as it were, untimely born,” he was fully assured in his apostleship.

- **Least of the apostles** - Paul indicates, in his epistle to the Roman brethren, that he and other Jews were “hardened” against the gospel. These hardened Jews, such as Paul, were often persecutors of the church before they would turn to the Lord. “From the standpoint of the gospel,” Paul explains to the Christians in Rome, “they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28). God orchestrated a sort of “timed release” of Jews into the obedience of Christ to maximize the influence of the gospel in the Jewish society. His purpose in so doing was to extract all the “remnant” who would believe in Christ before the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Paul’s history being what it was, as part of this extraction process, he states, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (I Corinthians 15:9).
- **The grace of God** - Grace, in its broadest sense, has to do with all the gifts that God gives to man, whether it is the air he breathes or the food he eats. Grace, when applied directly to salvation, is connected with the offering of Christ on behalf of the lost. But God’s grace is also involved in His placing people in the body of Christ as servants. So Paul, formerly persecutor and blasphemer, is conscious of God’s working with him in positioning him as one of the very special apostles of Christ Himself. “But by the grace of God,” he says, “I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (I Corinthians 15:10). This servant of Christ matter-of-factly brings out that he was able to labor more than any of the other apostles, but he is also careful to point out that the ultimate credit rightly devolves back to God.
- **The preaching** - Earlier in this letter the apostle had pointed out the importance of preaching. “God was well-pleased,” he had noted, “through the ‘foolishness’ of the message preached to save those who believe” (I Corinthians 1:21). In discussing his relationship with the church at Corinth, while emphasizing his “untimely born” apostleship, Paul points out that the important thing was whether people were able to hear and obey the gospel. “Whether then it was I or they,” says he, referring to the other apostles such as Cephas [Peter], “so we preach and so you believed” (I Corinthians 15:11).

“Am I not an apostle?” Paul had earlier queried. “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” (I Corinthians 9:1). His credentials were fully known to the congregation in Corinth if they would honor that knowledge. And he therefore was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

## Chapter 15:12-19 – No Resurrection???

Without written documents, everything is fuzzy. Memory gets a little cloudy, details are imprecise or lost, information is only partially or even incorrectly transmitted. Hence it was, with no written New Testament, that there was much confusion about the general topic of the resurrection of the dead and the specifics of Jesus' own resurrection.

The saints sometimes get a bit confused in their thinking. Sometimes they draw false conclusions because they don't have all the pieces of scripture they need to make a correct correlation, and sometimes they just don't realize how one piece of information they do have negates a conclusion they have reached. Thus it is, and thus it was in the church at Corinth.

- **No resurrection?** - Rumors circulated among the early churches in the absence of the written record. Paul, in coaching Timothy, pointed out that some "talk will spread like gangrene." Some men, he said, "have gone astray from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some" (II Timothy 2:17,18). But a different problem surfaced in Corinth. "Now if Christ is preached," asseverated the apostle, "that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (I Corinthians 15:12). Here is a classic case of brethren not being able to connect two pieces of information; they apparently believed that Christ was raised from the dead, but at the same time were spreading the idea that there is no general resurrection from the dead on the last day. "But if there is no resurrection of the dead," Paul reasons, "not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (I Corinthians 15:13,14). Paul is trying to help the brethren follow the thought process through to its ultimate conclusion. If there is no resurrection, he points out, then Christ has not been raised (O, they hadn't thought about that!). If Christ has not been raised, then the apostles' preaching is totally empty; it's just hot air (O, they hadn't thought about that!). And if the apostles' preaching was hot air, then their own personal faith was worthless — based on nothing (O, they hadn't thought about that either!).
- **False witnesses?** - What about the testimony of the apostles? To a man they bore witness to that the fact that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead, and that He ascended to the throne of glory. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then ... "Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God," Paul further avers, "because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did *not* raise, if in fact the dead are not raised" (I Corinthians 15:15). The apostle is really calling them out; are they willing to step forward and say that the apostles are all liars by testifying that Jesus rose from the dead?
- **Still in your sins?** - Christ on the cross was the sacrifice; it took Christ's ascension to the heavenly Holy of Holies as High Priest and His sprinkling of the blood there to expiate the sins of the world. The brethren needed to think that through. "For if the dead are not raised," Paul continues in his syllogisms, "not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:16,17). The apostle is really challenging them; do they want to maintain that there is no resurrection in the face of the corollary that they are still in their sins? "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished," he superadds (I Corinthians 15:18).

"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied," (I Corinthians 15:19). To have suffered and bled, and ultimately to die on behalf of a lie — that Christ was raised from the dead — would establish the apostles as pitiful fools! "But now," Paul pauses for effect, "Christ has been raised from the dead!" (I Corinthians 15:20). Hallelujah! He is risen indeed!

## Chapter 15:20-23 – Ultimate Abolition

It is not a lie; it is the most powerful and glorious truth — Christ is indeed risen from the dead! As a whole, the human race does not have a good track record when it comes to dealing with the unpleasant, unknown, or uncomfortable; hence as a whole, people do not rationally deal with death and life hereafter. But for those willing to honestly process the truth about physical death and eternal death, the power of Christ's resurrection from the dead is all-important! If Christ has not been raised, has been Paul's reasoning, then there is no resurrection from the dead for anyone. And if there is no resurrection from the dead, everything is empty, vain. In consequence, he also points out, that if Christ has not been raised, then those who sacrificed everything on earth for the sake of the gospel and the hope of life eternal are "of all men most to be pitied." They sacrificed for a lie. "But," says he, "Christ has been raised from the dead." "He was raised," was a previous point from the letter, and established as fact, "on the third day according to the scriptures."

- **The first fruits** - The first fruits was established by the Lord as part of the Law of Moses from the beginning. On the feast of the beginning of the grain harvest (later known as *Pentecost*), the children of Israel were to bring the first and best of the best of their field to the Lord. This "first fruits" offering set the stage for the usage of that terminology to refer to the "first and best of the best" in the writings of the New Testament. Paul notes, then, that "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (I Corinthians 15:20). He is, of course, the best of the best; and He is the first One to rise from the dead. The rest of the harvest, those who have fallen asleep in Christ (physically dead), will follow Him who was the first to be resurrected, and this will occur at the Lord's second coming.
- **Adam to Christ** - Adam was the first of the race of physical men (not that man is totally physical, but this is the comparison here), whereas Christ is the first of the race of spiritual men. Through Adam came physical and spiritual death. Physical death spread to all mankind — even newborns — because of man's separation from the tree of life. Spiritual death spread to all who are old enough to be in charge of their eternal destiny through their own sin and subsequent separation from God. "For since by a man came death," the apostle explains, concerning physical death, "by a Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:21,22). Natural man's efforts ended in disaster and physical death; spiritual Man's efforts resulted in hope and the resurrection all in Christ to eternal life! "But," he gently brakes the conversation, "each in his own order; Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (I Corinthians 15:23).

What a magnificent plan and opportunity God has for His children of faith! It is true that without Christ, we are "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). But through Christ, we who would have been so hopeless are now brought into the realm where we have the secure hope of our own resurrection from the dead. This "one hope," referred to over and over in the sacred writings, is not a wondering on our part whether it will happen. It will happen. The "hope" has to do with wondering *when* it will happen. Hence, we wait, looking to the skies. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20,21).

## Chapter 15:24-26 – The Last Enemy

When Jesus approached the tomb of His friend Lazarus, he was “deeply moved within” (John 11:38). He was upset and to some degree angry, not only at the death of Lazarus, but that death to mankind had to happen at all. Through sin, spiritual death entered into the world; and through sin, physical death came upon all mankind because of man’s separation from the tree of life. Hence, even Jesus Himself was going to drink of the bitter cup of physical death in order to deliver man from the results of his folly. “In Adam all die,” noted Paul. “Since then the children [spiritual sons of God] share in flesh and blood,” assayed Hebrews’ author, “He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14, 15). “In Christ,” therefore says Paul, “all shall be made alive.

- **The end** - The resurrection of the dead will happen, and for those who are “in Christ,” it will be a happy and glorious resurrection. “Christ,” asseverates the apostle Paul, is “the first fruits,” the first one to be resurrected, “the first born from the dead” (Colossians 1:18). Since Christ’s ascension to glory and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, 30 AD, the gospel of Christ has been going out to all the world and bringing those of an honest and good heart into fellowship with the Lord, delivering them from the domain of darkness and transferring them into the kingdom of Christ. Thus, the saved are prepared for their resurrection — reserved for “those who are Christ’s” — and this resurrection will occur at His coming. “Then comes *the end*,” says Paul, “when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (I Corinthians 15:24). The earth and the material universe will have been destroyed, the wicked will have been cast into the lake of fire, and the saints “will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). All earthly authority has ceased, and the powers of darkness have been cast into the eternal hell fire which was prepared for them. This is *the end*; this is when the kingdom is delivered as a finished product by Jesus to His heavenly Father!
- **Expectantly reigning** - Since Christ has taken the throne of the universe at His ascension and heavenly anointing, He is reigning. In connection with the coronation of King Jesus, Satan and his angels had been cast into Tartarus, the great “abyss” of the book of Revelation. Judgment would have been executed at that point, but the Lord has to wait so He can run a salvage operation in rescuing the sons of men who will listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Hence He reigns, but even He must wait. “For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (I Corinthians 15:25,26). The devil and his minions have already been cast out of heaven, mankind is being separated into sheep and goats, and the stage is being set for the destruction of death itself.

So, death is “the last enemy.” “By man came death,” and “in Adam all die.” Jesus, in being resurrected from the dead, has been placed in the power position where He reigns and rules over all. At the end, He will take His seat on His glorious throne, the great white throne of Judgment Day. Satan and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire. The unrighteous among men will be cast into the lake of fire. “And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire,” is the apostle John’s description of his vision. “This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14). This is how “the last enemy” is abolished!

## Chapter 15:27-28 – All Things in Subjection

The grand conclusion is when Jesus delivers up the kingdom to His Father. At this point all rule and authority other than His will have been abolished; all the earthly thrones will be gone, and all the demonic orders will have been cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Because Jesus humbled Himself by emptying Himself of all divine advantage to take the form of a bond-servant, because He was obedient to the point of death — even so horrible as death on the cross while carrying the burden of all of mankind's sins — “God highly exalted Him.” The nature of this exaltation is such that the Father “bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow — of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth — and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father” (Philippians 2:7-11).

- **The kingdom delivered** - The kingdom of Christ is a prominent feature of the sacred scriptures, going clear back to the prophecy made to David in about 1000 BC by Nathan the prophet. The writings of the New Testament make it clear that this kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, that Jesus is the King who sits on the throne of David in heaven, and that another name for this kingdom is *the church*. The Old Testament saints will be numbered among those who are part of the church at Jesus' second coming, “that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:40).
- **All things in subjection** - When Jesus was raised to the throne on high to rule the Gentiles with a rod of iron, “He [the Father] put all things in subjection under His feet” (I Corinthians 15:27). “For in subjecting all things to Him,” says Hebrews' author, “He left nothing that is not subject to Him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him” (Hebrews 2:8). The process of subduing the earth, extracting all who will hear and follow the voice of the Great Shepherd, and quashing the forces of darkness is still going on. Hence, as Paul has previously stated in this first epistle to the Corinthian brethren, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” “But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.” It is an obvious deduction that the Father, who is orchestrating all this, will not be put in subjection to the Son.
- **Jesus in subjection** - “Then comes the end,” says Paul, “when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father.” When everything is subdued by the power of King Jesus, when the forces of darkness and wicked men have been banished to the eternal garbage heap, the kingdom is finally laid at the feet, so to speak, of the Father. “And when all things are subjected to Him,” is the apostle's annotation, “then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all” (I Corinthians 15:28).

All things are pressing on to the final events and purpose of God. This is what the apostle Paul called “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth” (Ephesians 1:10). What God is doing is enfolding every saint in Christ, and then enveloping Christ in Himself, that He “may be all” and “in all.” But just as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit each maintain their identities in the eternal city, so each saint maintains his identity while being one in God and God in him. “I will give him,” says Jesus, “a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). Each child of God is eternally special in the midst of this awesome, magnificent, and totally complete plan!

## Chapter 15:29 – Baptism for the Dead?

“If there is no resurrection of the dead,” was the apostle Paul’s reasoning, “not even Christ has been raised.” He then goes on in his syllogism, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” But, of course, Christ has been raised from the dead, having established the truthfulness of that fact “by many convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3). The apostle then proceeded to detail the culmination of the concept of the resurrection from the dead, pointing out that the final enemy to be destroyed would be death, and that the kingdom would then be delivered up by Jesus to the Father. But now he wants bring in another reason for the importance of the resurrection of the dead.

- **Five “immersions” of the New Testament** - There are five “immersions” of the New Testament writings having to do with people. The first is the immersion of John the Immerser, which had the title “the immersion of repentance,” which was in water, and which was for the forgiveness of sins. The second is immersion in Jesus’ name, which is in water, which is for the forgiveness of sins, and which grants the indwelling Holy Spirit. The third is the immersion in the Holy Spirit, which happened only twice — once to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost at the beginning of the church, and secondly to the first Gentiles to open the way for their salvation — and which consisted of three signs: the sound like a mighty rushing wind, tongues as of fire breaking off and resting on the heads of those so immersed, and speaking in other recognizable languages not studied by the person upon whom this immersion was outpoured. The fourth is the immersion of fire in the lake of fire for the wicked following the Day of Judgment. And the fifth ...
- **The immersion of suffering** - The apostles James and John, during the days of Jesus’ earthly sojourn, approached Jesus through their mother requesting to be seated at His right and His left hands, respectively, in the coming kingdom. Jesus queried whether they would be able to drink “the cup” He was about to drink, a reference to His suffering in connection with the cross. Upon receiving a brave but somewhat ignorant affirmative, the Lord responded, “The cup that I drink you shall drink, and you shall be immersed with the immersion with which I am immersed” (Mark 10:39). The “cup” and the “immersion” were yet upcoming for Jesus, although He is recorded as speaking in the present tense in Mark’s gospel (in His mind it was already upon Him). As He Himself stated in Luke’s account: “I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have an immersion to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished” (Luke 12:49,50). This immersion for Jesus was His suffering, and the apostles were promised that they would experience this same immersion; they would suffer terribly for the sake of the gospel.
- **Immersion for the dead** - After discussing the ultimate results of the resurrection from the dead, the apostle then comments: “Otherwise, what will those do who are immersed for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they immersed for them?” (I Corinthians 15:29). While there are many fanciful interpretations of this verse, knowing that there is an immersion of suffering makes it simple and straight-forward to understand. *What will those do who suffer immensely for the sake of those who are dead in their sins and trespasses? If there is no resurrection from the dead, why should Christians suffer so much in getting the gospel to the lost?*

The “one immersion” that all who are Christians have experienced is immersion into Christ. But many have had the opportunity, and many will have the opportunity, to experience the immersion of suffering on behalf of those who are outside of Christ and desperately need to hear the gospel before they perish forever. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, why bother?

## Chapter 15:30-32 – Paul’s Suffering

The first real intense persecution the early church experienced was brought on by one Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul. “I am not fit to be called an apostle,” he had mentioned to the Corinthian brethren, “because I persecuted the church of God.” It seems, then, that what Paul had meted out, he received in return. Before Paul’s immersion into Christ, Ananias — who was sent by the Lord to tell Paul what to do and to immerse him — was told concerning this now former persecutor, “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). As James and John and the other apostles were to drink of the cup that Jesus drank, and to be immersed with the same immersion of suffering with which Jesus was immersed, so it was with Paul. He was “baptized” for the dead; he suffered greatly in getting the gospel of glory to the lost.

- **No resurrection?** - “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only,” Paul had earlier commented, “we are of all men most to be pitied.” If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not only have Christians been on the proverbial “lost goose chase,” but more than that, they have suffered intensely for no reason at all. “If the dead are not raised,” the apostle had queried, “why then are they [Christians] immersed [in suffering] for them [the lost]?” He superadded, “Why are we also in danger every hour?” (I Corinthians 15:30). Danger every hour!!! If there is no resurrection, there would be absolutely zero reason to suffer that intensely for a stupid cause.
- **Paul’s protest** - Was Paul a stupid man? The depth of his writings show clearly that he was not impaired in any way mentally. Furthermore, his writings are step-by-step logical presentations, as contrasted to the meandering philosophies of other intelligent, but confused and looking-for-answers men and women. Concerning, then, the idea that he would suffer so much for a stupid meaningless cause, he writes: “I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord; I die daily” (I Corinthians 15:31). Amid much suffering, Paul finally brought the gospel to Corinth, of which the brethren in the congregation were the beneficiaries. That is why he could use the expression, “by the boasting in you”; the fact that the congregation existed and these souls were being saved were his “boast.” And when he opened his second epistle to these same brethren, he also commented on the intensity of suffering he had undergone. “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,” he appeals, “of our affliction which came to us in Asia [of which Ephesus was the regional capital], that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (II Corinthians 1:8,9). It is easy to see why he would “protest” over the idea that there is no resurrection; that was the only hope he had! “If from human motives I fought with the wild beasts at Ephesus,” is his comment in this epistle about the same suffering, “what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” (I Corinthians 15:32).

Nearly everywhere the apostle went, he suffered persecution for the sake of the gospel. Some of that suffering is recorded in the book of Acts, but much of it apparently is not, such as these references to Ephesus. What a picture that must have been, the apostle Paul successfully fending off the wild beasts in the colosseum of Ephesus! “I was,” he said to Timothy, “delivered out of the lion’s mouth” (II Timothy 4:17). To which he added, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.” There is the resurrection of the dead!

## Chapter 15:33-34 – Morals and the Resurrection

People's actions are based on the information important to them, and how they process that information. If mankind can be convinced that there is no resurrection from the dead, and thus there is no accountability for earthly actions, then morals automatically decline. When men in general do not want to think about consequences of their actions — individually or nationally — they gravitate toward meaningless pleasures in order to dull and distract the thinking. When Isaiah, for example, prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians, he also prophesied what the Jews' response would be. "The Lord," he said, "called you to weeping, to wailing, to shaving the head, and to wearing sackcloth; instead there is gaiety and gladness, killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine." The revelers, instead of repenting of their sins and turning to God, came back with this glib response: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:12,13). This, then, was quoted by the apostle Paul to make the point that if there is no resurrection from the dead, then nothing matters, and let's go grab for all the gusto we can get while we are still breathing.

- **The pagan world view** - The pagan world view, which is increasingly that of American and the world's societies, is that all that matters is this life on earth. The truth, of course, is that rather than focusing on "quality of life," mankind needs to focus on "quality of eternity." When men focus on earth, and maximizing their personal pleasures on earth, then they become selfish and brutal in varying degrees toward their fellow men and women. Hence the world ends up with the bar scene, the entertainment environment, the drug culture, and a multiplicity of other venues for mankind to duck personal responsibility. "Do not be deceived," Paul warns the brethren in Corinth about these worldly environments. "Bad company corrupts good morals" (I Corinthians 15:33). The possibility of a Christian's being deceived about his ability to handle certain corrupting circumstances is clearly real. There is a resurrection from the dead, and we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render an account for our deeds done in the body, whether good or bad.
- **Discipline of the mind** - The Christian ends up having to associate with the people of this world, both for business and for personal evangelism. Rather than being deceived, the injunction is this: "Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (I Corinthians 15:34). To share the knowledge of God as revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ takes nearly constant focus on the part of those who carry the message. Sin wages war on the soul of the saint, blunts his focus, saps his spiritual energy, and causes him to miss many opportunities for teaching the truth of Christ. And if it wasn't possible for the Christian to stop sinning, why would the apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit tell him to?

Ultimately, the concept of the resurrection from the dead helps the follower of Christ clear his way through a lot of confusion, and helps him learn to focus on what is important. If something really doesn't matter when Jesus comes, it really is of small importance now; that dent in the car doesn't really matter, or the money that was stolen. At the resurrection from the dead, those things won't be the subject of any discussion. But the things that matter when Jesus comes are the things that should really count now. Are we purifying ourselves, as He is pure? Are we raising our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? Are we conducting ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity? Are we shining as lights in the world, living as children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation?

## Chapter 15:35-38 – The Resurrection Body?

It is very challenging for the human mind to move from the physical to the spiritual. We all begin by learning everything through the five physical sense gates. But to move through the correct spiritual gate, to see and hear in the proper spiritual dimension, is a real step which, sadly, most of mankind will not take. The prophecy of Isaiah, and quoted by Jesus as recorded in Matthew's account, illustrates the failure for spiritual eyes and ears to develop, not only for the Jews of New Testament times, but really for most residents of this planet. "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand," Jesus quoted, "and you will keep on hearing but not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:14,15). Thus, with the teaching on the resurrection of the dead, some in Corinth struggled with the concept of what a spiritual, resurrection body would be.

- **What kind of body?** - The gods of the ancients were variations off the human body, and likewise the depictions of "aliens" created by modern man. It is difficult to picture movement without the appendages, or seeing without the eyes. Hence, the apostle Paul anticipates some difficulty on the part of the Corinthian saints in grasping the concept of a resurrection body. "But someone will say," he posits, " 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?' " (I Corinthians 15:35). In the context of this section of the epistle, this is not an honest question from someone seeking to understand; it is a hostile question from someone trying to make the concept of a resurrection ludicrous. Remember, "some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead." That is why the initial response of the apostle is, "You fool!", castigating the individual for his failure to be able to move from the physical to the spiritual.
- **Seed analogy** - The apostle is willing to meet the brethren at their comprehension level in his attempt to paint the spiritual picture for them. "That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies," is his initial analogy, taking the concept of the seed to the resultant plant as his physical illustration. "That which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else" (I Corinthians 15:36,37). The picture is that just as a kernel of wheat is sown in the ground, just so the physical corpse of man is planted at his burial. "But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own" (I Corinthians 15:38). The wheat plant which arises out of the seed does not look anything like the kernel which was planted; just so, the resurrection body will not be anything like the physical body which was interred. Also, just as each seed has a specific plant which develops from that seed, each person planted in the earth has his own resurrection body which he will receive at the last day.

Satan in his cunningness does everything he can to confuse people about the truths of the resurrection. Hindus, Buddhists, and New Agers have been conned into believing in reincarnation. The Pharaohs and others had their servants buried with them, anticipating that those servants would still be subject to them in a future world. Others have been convinced that once a person dies, they just vanish and cease to exist in any form. But the scripture is consistently emphatic: there is a resurrection of the dead on the last day, and that resurrection body and the spiritual universe in which it lives will not be like this present one!

## Chapter 15:39-43 – Flesh and Glory

God is an imaginative and variegated Creator. For the benefit of man, among other reasons on His agenda, He created a tremendous array of flora and fauna for man's sustenance and pleasure. Whether it is the majestic mountain view, the sweet scent of a lilac, the soft touch of a baby's cheek, or the orchestral strains from one of the grand concertos, the senses of man are delighted by God's design. Man, if he can only take one step back and contemplate, would marvel at the immense creative power of the Almighty, and begin to believe that, if this creation could be so amazing, what He could do in "the new heavens and new earth" would be even more awe inspiring.

- **Flesh** - The seeds give rise to plants, the plant being designed by God to accomplish his purpose. And each different kind of seed produces its specific kind of plant, as Paul notes, "God gives it a body just as He wished." But the same is true of animal life. "All flesh is not the same flesh," he comments, "but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish" (I Corinthians 15:39). Again, God's tremendous creative power is on display in the design of the varieties of flesh, man being the superlative example.
- **Glory** - Not only did the Almighty create the things on earth, He also created the shiny things in the sky. "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies," is Paul's observation, "but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another" (I Corinthians 15:40). By being able to draw on the distinction between the "earthly" bodies which do not shine and the "heavenly" bodies which do, the apostle is using the elements of the physical creation to lay groundwork for the point he is going to make with regard to the resurrection body. And even in regard to those which shine, the apostle notes that they differ according to God's creative desires. "There is one glory of the sun," he remarks, "and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" (I Corinthians 15:41). God is a master at creating things with glory!
- **The resurrection of the dead** - God can create seeds which produce plants far different from the seed which germinated. God can create all kinds creatures with flesh. And God can create all kinds of bodies with glory. "So also is the resurrection from the dead," asserts the apostle. "It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (I Corinthians 15:42-44). With the basis which Paul laid, it is now believable that there is a resurrection body. And what a body that will be: imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual!

The scoffers would snort, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" The apostle shredded these objections with the demonstration even from the physical realm of God's awesome power and ability to create flesh and glory. From seed to plant, he also illustrated the power of God to produce something far different from that which originally dropped into the ground. Thus he combines all these to emphasize "It is *sown* a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body." From this the saint can take great encouragement and hope, from the rigors of daily living to the edge of his own graveside. "It is *sown* in dishonor, it is raised in *glory*." Is this worth pressing on for? "It is *sown* in weakness, it is raised in *power*." Is this worth sacrificing for? "It is *sown* a natural body, it is raised a *spiritual body*." Is this worth suffering for? "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body!!!!"

## Chapter 15:44-46 – First the Natural, then the Spiritual

In the days of Moses, God did wonders in the land of Ham, and awesome things by the Red Sea. But these are small, small in comparison to what the Almighty has done through Jesus. God created the heavens and the earth in six days, but all that He did was create a universe that is wearing out like a garment. When God raised Jesus from the dead, however, and seated Him at the right hand of power, He brought into existence that which is permanent. Jesus is not only “the first-born of all creation,” as the One through whom all things came into being, but He is more importantly “the first-born from the dead,” the One through which all things eternal come into being (Colossians 1:15,18). The crossing of the Red Sea was seen; it illustrated in a demonstrable way the physical power of God. The after effects of Creation are seen; it opens the way to understanding the creative and maintenance power of God. But the resurrection of Jesus out of the depths of Hades and seating Him in glory were unseen, and set the stage for comprehending the spiritual power of God through faith.

- **Resurrection of the saints** - There has only been one permanent resurrection, that of Jesus the Son of God. Other resurrections are recorded in the sacred writings, but none of those resurrections was permanent; each had to die again, awaiting the general resurrection on the last day. But what a resurrection that will be for the saints of God! Listen and contemplate the words of the apostle Paul: “It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body!” The scriptures therefore picture the saints as awaiting eagerly the return of the Lord and their receiving their resurrection bodies – powerful, glorious, imperishable, spiritual.
- **Physical to spiritual** - God’s earnest desire is that people choose to serve Him — the immortal, the invisible, the eternal God — without being able to see or in any way sense Him. Those who are worthy to walk with Him in white are those who faced the challenges of an earthly existence and who, in spite of difficulties, persecutions, and challenges, serve Him by faith. Everything, therefore, is designed by the All Wise to be faith building. Thus, the apostle Paul says, “If there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body” (I Corinthians 15:44).
- **First Adam to last Adam** - To buttress his point that the presence of a physical body sets the stage for an upcoming spiritual body, the apostle brings into view the progenitors of the physical and spiritual races. “So also it is written,” he instructs, “ ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam,” he asseverates, “became a life-giving spirit” (I Corinthians 15:45). Adam was the ancestor of physical man, the first of the eternal living souls. The last Adam, a reference to Jesus as the progenitor of the spiritual race, was the one who was able to bring the lost of mankind back into fellowship with God, and thus was called “a life-giving spirit.” “The first man,” emphasizes the apostle, “is from the earth; earthy” (I Corinthians 15:46). Earthy man, then, has his focus on earth rather than on things above. “The second man [Jesus] is from heaven.” The Lord, then, “the first-born from the dead,” came to produce a set of spiritual offspring whose interest would be on the things of heaven.

“You are from below,” Jesus told the Jewish hierarchy, “I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world” (John 8:23). By helping His disciples to recognize that He was from above, and that He would be the ancestor of special spiritual people, He would also help them to be secure in the hope of a future spiritual body. Through the gospel, He moves truth seekers from a focus on the physical to a focus and appreciation of the spiritual. These truth seekers, then, come to firmly believe that, if there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body, and to then govern their time on earth accordingly!

## Chapter 15:48-49 – The Image of the Heavenly

Abraham was a great man of faith. All true Christians, be they from the ranks of the real Jews or from the ranks of the Gentiles, are called “the seed [or descendants] of Abraham.” What is literally called “the faith of Christ,” (Galatians 2:16), is also called “the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:16). The faith characteristic of Abraham was that he believed that “what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform” (Romans 4:21). In Abraham’s case, what he believed was that God was able to make him a “father of many nations,” which came true as Gentiles began to flood into the church. What, then, would be promised to Christians? What would they have to believe that God was able to perform?

- **Earth to heaven** - The first Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground. As such, he is described by Paul as “earthy.” The first Adam and his descendants are therefore earthly focused — their interests are in buying and selling, planting and harvesting, tearing down and building, marrying and being given in marriage. The second Adam from above was “born from the dead,” as was aptly phrased by the songwriter, “to raise the sons of earth,” born [from the dead] “to give them second birth.” Most of earth’s residents, then, remain in their earthly condition. But those who participate in immersion into Christ are actually spiritually “born from above.” The apostle Paul describes it thusly: “As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly” (I Corinthians 15:48).
- **Image bearers** - Physically, mankind wears the image of Adam. “Through Adam’s DNA, we were all made this way!” But through the faith of Christ, those who obey the gospel are spiritually remade in the image of Christ, the Son of God. “And just as we have borne the image of the earthy,” Paul explains, “we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (I Corinthians 15:49). The thrust of the passage parallels that of Romans chapter six. “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death,” notes Paul in reference to the individual’s being immersed into Christ, “certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:5). The word “shall” is not denoting a future tense resurrection of the body at Jesus’ second coming; it is denoting the certainty that the Christian comes forth from the watery grave in the likeness of Jesus’ coming forth from His earthly grave. Similarly, the I Corinthians passage is pointing out the certainty of bearing the image of Christ following the individual’s immersion in Jesus’ name. Thus the holy one of God has been created in the image of Christ in the inner man, and can learn to walk accordingly.
- **Faith to sight** - All this connected with being born from above takes place in the inner man, in the realm of the unseen. “Though our outer man is decaying,” said Paul, “yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” “We look,” he also stated, “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen” (II Corinthians 4:16,18). But the fulfillment of being the image of Christ in the inner man, and being in the likeness of Christ in His resurrection, will some day bear its fruition in the saint’s resurrection from the dead. Thus what is by faith now will be by sight at the Lord’s second coming and forevermore!

No human power could cause an individual to be born from above. No human effort could cause a person to bear the image of Christ in his inner man. This, then, is the center of “the faith of Christ,” the belief that in this arena “what God has promised, God is able to perform.” Those therefore who truly live by faith ought “to walk in the same manner as He walked” (I John 2:6). Strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, let us demonstrate the transformative power of bearing the image of Christ as a truly resurrected spiritual people.

## Chapter 15:50-52 – Understanding a Mystery

The body you sow, averred the apostle Paul, is not the body which bursts forth from the ground. It is sown in dishonor, he informed us; it is raised in glory. Jesus, then, at His second coming “will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20). Saints don’t get to know much about that new resurrection body except to know that it is bright, shining, and powerful!

- **Spiritual eternity** - One of the great themes running throughout the scriptures is the movement from the physical to the spiritual. “The natural,” says Paul, is “first,” then “the spiritual.” God has worked hard for millennia to produce a truly spiritual people, a people of “the faith,” who are interested in spiritual things and willing to take God’s word as the only exposition of those things which are of that spiritual realm. “They will walk with Me in white,” declared the King of kings, “for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). “Now I say this, brethren,” is Paul’s comment, “that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (I Corinthians 15:50). The *kingdom of God* is another name for the church. The picture is that those who are in the church of the living God, along with Old Testament saints, following Judgment Day, are moved into the eternal kingdom. “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” was Jesus’ statement (Matthew 13:43). The *natural* is gone; all that exists is spiritual. Hence, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Those faithful saints are rewarded for their faith — now complete as spirit, soul, and resurrection body — as they have now inherited the kingdom of God. “The perishable,” was the Spirit-inspired statement, does not “inherit the imperishable.”
- **A mystery** - The apostle is willing to let the brethren in Corinth in on a secret. “Behold,” says he, “I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (I Corinthians 15:51). When the Lord Jesus returns, and His glory splits the sky, not all saints will have died. Some will have met the challenge of the Lord which He stated in these words: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find the faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). They will have maintained their faith through the trials and tragedies of some of the most difficult of times and will in a special way share in the resurrection.
- **The last trumpet** - The scriptures affirm that the Lord Jesus “will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (I Thessalonians 4:15). Paul calls this “the last trumpet.” “We shall all be changed,” he asseverates, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:52). The spirits and souls, intertwined, of the saints who have perished on earth will be brought back with Jesus out of Paradise and will receive their resurrection bodies when they, so to speak, hit the ground. Those who never “fell asleep” will instantly receive their resurrection bodies in that “twinkling of an eye.”

This, then, has been intention of the Almighty God from before the foundation of the world. He spent the eons preparing for a special, spiritual people — those who have been “born from above” as new creations in Christ Jesus. Earthly existence, by His design, has been a mere testing ground. Its entire history has been orchestrated to find those among the sons of men who would lift their eyes to see the Son of God in glory as revealed in the sacred writings. These, by faith, are those who are already shining on the inside, awaiting their completeness in receiving their resurrection bodies of glory. Praise God for His marvelous and almost incomprehensible plan!

## Chapter 15:53-57 – Death Swallowed up in Victory

The fear of death has always plagued mankind. Whether their faces are covered with war paint to mask their fear, whether they drown their thoughts with the “Rebel yell,” or whether they put on the bold face and bluster their way to their end, the fear of death occupies a good sized chunk of their minds. It is “through fear of death,” says Hebrews’ author, that all mankind is “subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:15). But the great Deliverer has come from Zion and has set the captives free! The saint, then, who believes that Jesus has saved him from his sins through the sacrifice of Christ and His intercessory priestly offering, and who believes that God has given him the Spirit of promise as a guarantee of God’s intention to complete His purchase option, also believes that Jesus is coming again to raise him from the dead. He, by the faith revealed in the pages of God’s holy word, is thus set free from fear of death, and eagerly looks to the sky for coming of His Savior and King, knowing that “when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

- **Re-emphasis** - The apostle Paul has repeatedly emphasized to the brethren in Corinth that there is a resurrection from the dead. “The dead will be raised imperishable,” he had just stated, “and we shall all be changed.” He goes on: “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). This is tremendously encouraging and tremendously exciting!
- **The victory** - The time will come when the last trumpet will sound. “But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable,” is the affirmation of the apostle, “and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory!’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Man can conquer mountains, cross over to the moon, and explore the molecular structure of the cell. But man cannot conquer death. Sooner or later the “reaper” comes, and whether he is “grim” or whether it is a time of rejoicing depends on what type of resurrection the individual will receive. For the Christian, the resurrection is a time of great victory, for a great enemy of man has just been swallowed up and has disappeared!
- **The sting of death** - The questions, in a bit of mocking tone, are posed: “ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:55). The saints of God are going to be able to dance on the tomb of death itself, knowing that there is no more sting. “The sting of death is sin,” Paul writes, “and the power of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). There is a sting to death; and the body itself is justified in fearing the pain connected with that sting. Whether long and painful, or short and labored, the final moments approaching a person’s last breath are challenging to face, just as facing the sting of a wasp or scorpion. Through Adam and Eve’s separation from the tree of life because of their sin, physical death passed on to all mankind — so much so that even Jesus Himself had to go through physical death in order that such a death might be conquered. Sin itself derives its power from the law, the initial or continued commands of God. Adam and Eve violated the command of God, and died physically as well as spiritually. Had there been no command, there would have been no violation, and had there been no violation, there would have been no death. But violation occurred, and physical death also resulted. And so it continues until Jesus comes again.

“But thanks be to God,” says Paul, “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:57). Jesus had victory over physical death, and through Him those who are in Christ also will have their victory. This, then, is the “one hope” referenced throughout the writings of the New Testament.

## Chapter 15:58 – “Your Toil Is not in Vain”

“How do some among you,” the apostle Paul queries the Corinthian Christians, “say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” All of Christianity and the truthfulness of the Bible rest on the point expressed by Dr. Luke: “To these [apostles] He [Jesus] also presented Himself alive after His suffering, *by many convincing proofs*, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). From the verity that Jesus’ resurrection occurred is derived the point that all true disciples of Christ will receive the glorious resurrection at Jesus’ coming again. “This mortal,” says Paul, “must put on immortality.” God, then, gives His faithful saints “the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And what a victory it will be! It staggers the mind to contemplate living forevermore with God in an immortal glorious body, in an eternity where there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more crying, no more curse. But that will not happen until the plan of God is finished on earth, and the last soul to be saved comes forth from the waters of immersion into Christ. From now until then, there is much work to be done!

- **Steadfast and immovable** - For the saint, if he maintains his faithfulness, his hope is not a “maybe”; it is a “hurry up and get here!” We wait *eagerly*, Paul commented to the Roman brethren, “for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). But while we wait and hope, we work. “Therefore, my beloved brethren,” Paul again addresses the disciples in Corinth, “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58). It is a tremendous spiritual battle for the saints to advance the faith of Christ against the forces of evil and darkness. Hence it is that there are numerous warnings throughout the New Testament writings exhorting the follower of Christ to hold firmly to his faith while being jostled like a pinball during the years of his earthly sojourn. The saint, then, because of the confidence in his eventual resurrection, is to hold unswervingly to his direction, pulled neither to the right nor left — neither to law nor lawlessness — in forwarding the agenda of Christ. He is to be immovable, not swayed from the positions expounded in what the scriptures themselves call “the apostles’ doctrine.”
- **Abounding in the work** - Until such time as God sees that no one else can be brought to repentance, there is much work to be done. Whether the saint is able to cut a broad swath or swing with a single sickle, the harvest fields stand white for harvest. But such harvesting is labor intensive. In another metaphor, the apostle had spoken of planting and watering the field of God. The exordium, in the face of such planting, watering, and harvesting, is to “abound” in the work. So, get out of those beds, get out of those doors, get out of those comfort zones, and abound in the work in the field of the Lord!!

The Lord Jesus Himself commented that, though the harvest was plentiful, the workers were few. One of the challenges in laboring in the fields and vineyards of the Lord is that the earthly rewards are outweighed by the vicissitudes of standing for the truth and the backlash of human nature. So those are exhorted to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” are encouraged in “knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” It is acknowledged by the apostle Paul that working for the Lord is *toil*, the work often being repetitive and without seeming to have any progress. But the great God of the harvest — who backs the sowing, watering, and reaping — guarantees that the hardworking, spiritually-minded saint, will have reason for rejoicing in the day of harvest. The toil is “not in vain *in the Lord!*”

## Chapter 16:1-4 – Collection for the Saints

In the early stages of the Gentiles' first admission into the church of the living God, there was some confusion about their status. Some maintained that they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses or they couldn't be saved; others, like Paul, maintained that a reversion to the law was unnecessary and even deleterious. When the issue couldn't be settled in Antioch of Syria, it became necessary for Paul, Barnabas, and unnamed others to go to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders concerning this issue. The end result was that the apostles Peter and John recognized that Paul preached the same gospel as they, and that no Gentiles were required to be circumcised. But since Paul and Barnabas had previously brought financial help from Antioch for the poor saints in Judea, the other apostles asked them "to remember the poor," which Paul stated he was eager to do (Galatians 2:10). Hence began efforts on Paul's part to gather a large contribution from the Gentile congregations to be brought to Jerusalem, which they eventually carried with them in the journey recorded in Acts 20. So here in this first epistle to the Corinthian brethren, the apostle inaugurates the first steps of this offering with his instructions.

- **Paul's directive** - The logistics of this offering from the Gentile congregations promised to be challenging. For Paul to organize a collection from each of the key Gentile congregations, to be able to get the offering finally together in one place, and to get it to Jerusalem was no minor undertaking. Corinth would need to follow the apostle's instructions, as would every other participating congregation, in order for him to make it work. "Now concerning the collection for the saints," he introduces his topic, "as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also" (I Corinthians 16:1). These congregations were scattered across an area larger than the state of Montana, and communication was difficult. Hence the apostle had the same basic set of instructions for Corinth, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Thessalonica, Berea, Philippi, and others. Implicit in the letter: follow the directions!
- **The first day of every week** - The first century congregations met on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread, to participate in the Lord's Supper. It would make sense, therefore, that the brethren would make regular contributions on the day of the week the congregation assembled. "On the first day of every week," is Paul's emphasis, "let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" (I Corinthians 16:2). *This was a special offering for the saints in Judea; it was not a collection for the regular work and expenses of the congregation.* Hence those who willingly participated were to set aside monies as they had prospered, and to bring them to the common storehouse every week, so that no major collections would have to be made when Paul arrived.
- **Guarding the offering** - In the days when money consisted of materials of intrinsic value, such as gold and silver, such money occupied physical space and needed to be carried from place to place. Hence there would be Christian men, with swords, guarding a very large collection from these various Gentile congregations who would travel to Jerusalem with that offering. "And when I arrive," states Paul of his intentions, "I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me" (I Corinthians 16:3,4).

This offering was part of God's big plan to bring the Jewish and Gentile sectors of the church together in love and mutual appreciation. As Paul in general terms described this offering for the brethren in Judea, in the presence of the Roman governor Felix, he stated, "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation ..." (Acts 24:17). This answered a portion of a prayer he asked the brethren in Rome to pray, that "my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints" (Romans 15:31). Since God orchestrated everything connected with this offering, it can be concluded that it accomplished its purpose!

## Chapter 16:5-9 – Paul’s Plans

“The mind of man plans his way,” said the wise Solomon, “but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). It was important for the apostle Paul to establish a strategy, to plan his route, and to govern his time. He had told the congregation in Rome, “now I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints,” referring to the offering he was collecting from the Gentile congregations (Romans 15:25). He petitioned the brethren to pray earnestly for him, to strive together with him in his prayers, that the offering would prove acceptable to the saints, and “that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea” (Romans 15:31). His offering undoubtedly proved acceptable, but the scripture records that he was not entirely delivered from the hands of the hostile Jews, but was to spend most of the rest of his life in jail or under house arrest. Paul’s mind planned his way, but the Lord directed his steps.

- **Next stop, Macedonia** - Paul is writing this first letter to the Corinthian brethren from Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia in what is now southwest Turkey. At this point he had not yet decided whether to accompany the gift for the poor saints in Judea, but he is letting the brethren in Achaia know what his plans were before that offering was totally collected and sent on its way. “But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia,” he says, “for I am going through Macedonia ...” (I Corinthians 16:5). When Paul finished what he intended to accomplish in Ephesus, he would go on to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and whatever other locations had established congregations. The history in the book of Acts shows he eventually accomplished this.
- **On to Corinth** - Paul was desirous of getting to Corinth as soon as he could, out of concern for the doctrinal and divisional issues developing there. Earlier in the epistle, he had stated, “I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills” (I Corinthians 4:19). The challenge for Paul’s management of time was that there were so many priorities and so many needs that had to be met. Hence he could not drop everything he was doing and bounce over to Corinth; travel in those days was slow and difficult. “But I shall come to you,” he assures them, “and perhaps I shall stay with you, or may even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go” (I Corinthians 16:6). The apostle had a general idea of what he wanted to accomplish and when he wanted to do it, but it is clear that his plans were not completely fixed. He was, however, also preparing the brethren in Achaia to help him financially to get on to his next place after Corinth, because he was dependent upon faithful saints to assist him in paying for transportation and traveling costs. “For I do not wish to see you now just in passing,” he adds, “for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits” (I Corinthians 16:7). He knows that it is going to require quite a bit of time in Corinth, so he is making the appropriate time adjustments.
- **Remaining in Ephesus** - But for right now, his priority was in Ephesus. “But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost,” he informs the Corinthians, “for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (I Corinthians 16:8,9). The apostle’s experience was that when a door for the word opened, he had better go through it. So he was going through that door in Ephesus, and with the Lord’s help fight off the adversaries; he would come to Corinth when the timing seemed right.

The apostle’s plan worked according to his forethought and he was able to go through Macedonia after he completed what he wanted to accomplish in Ephesus. “And when he had gone through [Macedonia] and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece [presumably Corinth]. And there he spend three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he was determined to return through Macedonia” (Acts 20:2,3). At first his plans went as his mind planned them, but then the Lord really began to redirect his steps!

## Chapter 16:10-12 – Working with Evangelists

The epistles do not read like they are some fictitious letters penned out of the imagination of some ivory towered author. They read like real letters would read, with specifics, details, and people who could not have flowed from the pools of imaginary thoughts. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian church deals with situations that arise out of life and out tremendous spiritual warfare, the types of things that would have never arisen out of the heart or thought of unregenerate man. The apostle warns of the dangers of Greek "wisdom," he is concerned about some serious immorality in the congregation, he answers marriage questions, he deals with the issue of meats offered for sale in the meat market that had previously been offered to idols, he speaks concerning division in the congregation and the Lord's Supper, he gives instruction concerning the use of gifts or manifestations of the Spirit, he answers questions about the resurrection from the dead, and initiates a special offering for the poor saints in Judea. Truth is indeed, "stranger than fiction," and fiction would never have produced such a letter!

- **Welcoming Timothy** - Paul also gives personal instructions concerning some of the brethren who worked with the apostle or who were effective in the kingdom. Timothy is a good example of one of Paul's co-workers who rings of reality. Paul had earlier in the epistle mentioned that he was sending Timothy to them, to remind them, he says, "of my ways which are in Christ" (I Corinthians 4:17). As he approaches the end of his missive, he further writes, "Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am" (I Corinthians 16:10). Elsewhere, in personal communication to Timothy, Paul was concerned about Timothy being a little on the fearful side, and had written to him that "God has not given us a spirit of timidity" (II Timothy 1:7). Here he is encouraging the congregation at Corinth not to overpower Timothy, but rather to recognize that Timothy is doing the Lord's work and operating in accordance with Paul's instruction. "Let no one therefore despise him," he superadds. "But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren" (I Corinthians 16:11). The brethren were not only to accord Timothy the proper respect and consideration, but they were also to help him financially on his way. The parting was to be amicable and peaceful, their having received Timothy and his instructions openly, and being able to send him on his way in a timely manner.
- **Open to Apollos** - After Paul had spent time in Corinth in establishing the congregation, he and his companions — Aquila and Priscilla — traveled on to Ephesus. In Ephesus, the husband and wife team met a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, named Apollos, instructed him more accurately in way of the Lord, and wrote a letter of commendation for him to the church at Corinth. Apollos "watered" what Paul had "planted," and then moved on. Of him, Paul writes, "But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his will to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity" (I Corinthians 16:12). Apollos was an evangelist, and as was the practice in the churches of the first century, he could come to Corinth or not come to Corinth as he chose. He was functioning according to his desire, as he saw the priorities in front of him.

Not only are these comments clearly not fictitious, but they teach modern Christians how to relate to those who labor among them. There are modern Timothy's and modern Apollos', just as there are modern congregations like Corinth. It behooves the saints to govern themselves properly in accordance with similar instructions in the divine writ.

## Chapter 16:13-14 – Personal Instructions

Christians are individuals, and the overall performance of a congregation is simply the sum of the attitudes and actions of those individuals. The congregation at Corinth clearly had a lot of issues, but those issues could only be handled on an individual basis. Jesus in particular, then, and the Bible in general, focus on the individual rather than looking for mass solutions. Jesus said the good shepherd would leave the ninety-nine safe sheep and go after the one sheep that was lost. The mass never has responsibility; the accountability is always placed on the person. Just because a person was born poor does not give him the right to steal. Just because a person had a difficult upbringing does not give him the excuse to bail out on his responsibilities. “The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself,” said the prophet, “and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20). Hence those especially under the terms of the new covenant are exhorted to do their part in taking on the character of Christ.

- **Be alert** - There is a tremendous spiritual war going on for the mind and soul of each person. “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert,” warned Peter. “Your adversary, the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8). If an individual needs to be in a state of awareness in a dangerous neighborhood or area, how much more in the spiritual realm where the saint’s soul is at stake. The apostle Paul states it simply for each of the brethren in Corinth: “Be on the alert” (I Corinthians 16:13).
- **Stand firm** - Satan does everything he can to shake people’s faith. Paul commented to the Ephesian brethren that “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). “Take up the full armor of God,” he mentioned a bit further on, “that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13). Again, to the brethren in Corinth, he issues a brief statement, “Stand firm in the faith.”
- **Act like men** - “No longer children,” is part of the continuing exhortation. “In evil be babes,” the apostle had earlier encouraged them, “but in your thinking be mature” (I Corinthians 14:20). Not only were they to mature in their thinking, but they needed to be able to go into spiritual battle as mature warriors rather than as young and weak. “Act like men,” says he, “be strong.”
- **Love as a foundation** - Ultimately, the *agape* love that is from God is tough, strong, faithful, and unbending. Because the warfare being waged is spiritual rather than physical, the prowess of the individual is not with the physical sword but with the spiritual sword. Speak “the truth in love,” the apostle had also encouraged the brethren from Ephesus. Love tells the truth in as engaging and intelligent a manner as possible, as befits the circumstance. Love, as discussed elsewhere, first of all is concerned about the other person’s eternity. Everything else is really secondary, although it can be used to communicate love for the other man’s soul. “Let all that you do,” then exhorts Paul, “be done in love” (I Corinthians 16:14). “All that you do...” Interesting words!

It was incumbent upon each member of the church in Corinth to lay aside personal issues and agendas and focus on the purpose for which Christ died. They were to be aware, on an individual basis, of the work that Satan was doing in trying to divide the congregation and get it sucked into adopting portions of Greek philosophy. They were to stand firm in their faith, and not be pulled down into the immoral morass of the culture around them. Each saint needed to stand on his spiritual feet like a man, to be strong for the Lord. Each was to be motivated by love for the lost and concern for the saints. If these were to be carried out by most individual Christians, the whole congregation would then exhibit that outlook. And the lessons apply today!

## Chapter 16:15-16 – Subjection to Real Workers

If people are not organized, they do not get very much of a productive nature done. This also applies to the work of the local congregation. Hence the local congregation is a structured body rather than an unstructured one with — when completely organized — elders, evangelists, teachers, special servants, and others who fit in various places on the team. The apostle Paul, earlier in this letter, spent a whole section on the local body of Christ and established how important each member is. In writing to the brethren in Ephesus, he also pointed out that “we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15,16). Each part needs to fit, each part needs to work, and each part needs to work properly.

- **Devotion to ministry** - When Paul first came to Corinth, he personally immersed the first converts in the name of Jesus. Later believers were immersed into Christ by other disciples, as Paul noted, “I thank God I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no one should say I immersed in my own name.” As he thought about it, he then added, “Now I did immerse also the household of Stephanus” (I Corinthians 1:14-16). So Stephanus and his family were among the first Christians in Corinth. As the apostle prepares to close the letter, he once again brings up this prominent family. “Now I urge you, brethren,” he encourages the saints, “(you know the household of Stephanus, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints...)” (I Corinthians 16:15). The saints require a lot of ministry; in fact the saints sometimes seem to require so much ministering to that it can bog down the work of evangelism. That Stephanus and his household would devote themselves to that ministry would be a huge help to men like Paul, who was trying focus on getting the gospel to the lost.
- **Subjection** - The battle for the soul of each individual is intense, and Satan the roaring lion is working inside every possible head. And when saints lose sight of the goal of saving the lost and conserving the saved, then the outcast angel has an opportunity to wreak some havoc. Teamwork requires that someone be in charge, and good teamwork requires that the right people be in charge. The apostle Paul trusted Stephanus and his household. His words to the church in Corinth are “that you be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors” (I Corinthians 16:16). The nature of spiritual warfare is such that the brethren were not to grumble with words such as, “Why does Paul always get to pick his favorites?” In Christ there is to be a lot of cheerful mutual submission because it is all submission to a common goal. Jesus Himself set the stage, showing how real leadership has to make some choices about who does what. The rest of the apostles could have been upset that He always seemed to pick Peter, James, and John; but other than their fighting over who was going to the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, there is a clear acceptance of Jesus’ authority to select whoever He wanted for whatever task He wanted.

The emphasis is to be in subjection to everyone who helps in the *work and labors*. Brethren need to be able to tell the difference between the talkers and the workers. Men like Stephanus were obviously workers who got their jobs done. Such devoted workers are worthy of respect, and their intelligent, spiritual leadership should be followed.

## Chapter 16:17-21 – Rejoicing in Fellowship

God has woven the revealing of Himself in the mesh of real history and through real people. Whether it is in the information recorded in the chronicles of Israel, or the records of Jesus' travels and teachings, the All Wise is step by step revealing the wonders of His mind to the interested sons of men. Luke's history, known as the book of Acts, contains the record of real places, real people, and real and significant spiritual events. And the letters of men like Paul are written of real saints with real problems and real contributions. God in this way communicates the character of His soul and what He desires to reproduce in those who would be "sons of the Most High."

- **Coming of brethren** - When trial and hardship face individuals, they find joy in real fellowship with their true and tested brethren. Only those who had been to the front edge of the battle could have the respect and trust of such a one as the apostle Paul; he would be somewhat "on duty" with anyone not so tested and to whom he would have to minister. But with those who had the same type of battle scars, those who had withstood the same types of tests as that great preacher and teacher of the gospel, he could relax and enjoy the camaraderie. "And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanus and Fortunatus and Achaicus," he informs the Corinthian brethren, "because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours" (I Corinthians 16:17,18). If they were able to refresh the spirit of the apostle Paul, they could certainly refresh the souls of the other brethren!
- **Value of refreshing** - One of the names of the Holy Spirit is "times of refreshing" (Acts 3:19). He would not choose that description of Himself if it were not one of His major functions, and if it were not needed for the saints. Because of the aforementioned intensity of spiritual warfare, even outstanding men such as the apostle Paul needed a mental break. The brethren in Corinth could not give him that because of the reality of physical separation as well as their possible spiritual immaturity. What they couldn't do physically and spiritually, they could do by sending men who could. The apostle was deeply grateful and was willing to compliment the brethren for providing the ability for him to have some special joy.
- **Acknowledgement** - The challenges of leaving a place of residence and providing assistance and encouragement to someone else can be nearly innumerable and unfathomable. Travel in all ages has been hazardous as well as taxing, and for brethren to extend themselves in such a way is worthy of commendation. Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus were such men, and Paul applauds them in these words: "Therefore, acknowledge such men" (I Corinthians 16:18).
- **Fellowship greetings** - It is encouraging to know that there is a "brotherhood" out there who experiences the same sufferings, difficulties, and joys in the name of Jesus the Christ. Apollos, for example, had come to Corinth from Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia. "The churches of Asia greet you," forwards Paul, who wrote this letter from Ephesus. Prisca [Priscilla] and Aquila had been there at the start of Corinth, and had been the ones to send Apollos their way; hence it was fitting that "Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" (I Corinthians 16:19). "All the brethren greet you," he adds, encouraging them to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (I Corinthians 16:20). And finally his own: "This greeting is in my own hand — Paul" (I Corinthians 16:21).

The day-to-day battle is intense, and the war goes on and on. How precious is spiritual refreshment from brethren who can be positive rather than a drain and a drag! How precious the sincere greetings from the brethren! And how precious it is to know there is a caring brotherhood out there as an extension of Christ Himself!

## Chapter 15:21-24 – Maranatha!

Christianity is serious business. Each person's salvation and eternity is serious business. Satan's attacking each Christian and trying to bring each person down to hell with him is serious business. And because the warfare is so intense, the saints of God who are truly committed to the cause of Christ have a very tight-knit fellowship. They like to see each other, communicate with each other, pray for each other, and can greet each other with a holy kiss. People like Aquila and Prisca, who were at the core of the formation of the church in Corinth, could send their greetings "heartily" to the brethren, and the saints in Corinth would know the greeting was sincere. The apostle could likewise send his: "The greeting is in my own hand — Paul" (I Corinthians 16:21). The letter was apparently dictated to another, and then apostle signed it in closing with his own distinctive hand, so that brethren would know that it was not a false letter.

- **Love the Lord** - The great commandment, dating from the days of Moses, was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is an interesting command, because the clear implication is that the individual is going to have to put strenuous effort into loving God. Israel would have a clear reason for so doing, for they had been brought out of Egypt with God's uplifted hand and outstretched arm. For those under the terms of the new covenant, the reasons for loving God multiply. The love of God for each lost person has been clearly demonstrated in Christ's dying for the sins of each and His attempt to rescue each from the fires of hell. So Paul says to the brethren in Corinth, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed" (I Corinthians 16:22). Strong words, strong warning, strong encouragement to the brethren to make their efforts to love the Lord their God.
- **Maranatha** - The scripture repeatedly lets the followers of Christ know what the true condition of the world is. The view from God's throne shows that the residents of this planet, with help from the forces of darkness, have made this place nasty and corrupt. The first time that the gospel of Christ was preached, on the day of Pentecost 30 AD, the apostle Peter pleaded with the people to "be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). Jesus spoke often of the "unbelieving and perverted generation" of His day, and there is no reason to believe that mankind overall has improved any since. Hence it is that saints of Paul's day as well as now would find their righteous souls tormented by the wickedness around them, and would earnestly desire that the Lord Jesus come and torch this place off. "Maranatha!" the apostle appealed. "O Lord, come!"
- **Grace and love** - The apostle had started the congregation in Corinth. He had been led by the Lord to cross from what is now western Turkey to begin the mission foray into eastern Europe, and after having been run out of Macedonia he finally arrived in Corinth. At the beginning of his time in the port, he had no financial support and worked as a tentmaker with a fellow Jew name Aquila. He preached, he taught, he sacrificed, and he suffered for the sake of those lost souls in capital of Achaia, so he once again was laboring to preserve their souls from the distracting and destructive influences working in the congregation. He is in earnest when he then appeals, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (I Corinthians 16:23). And he is sincere when he reassures them, "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" (I Corinthians 16:24).

The apostle Paul loved the eternal souls of each of the saints in Corinth. The instructions, rebukes, and exhortations in this letter were given with the intent and hope that the brethren would take them to heart and make whatever personal and congregational corrections were needed. If they would, many souls would be turned in the right direction for all eternity; if they failed, then much destruction would result. The choice, then and now, is clearly delineated!

## Summation

Praise be to God that there was a congregation in the seaport city of Corinth. Praise to the Almighty for having orchestrated events so that the apostle Paul arrived there, nearly penniless, but fired by the fervency of having the gospel to preach to both Jew and Greek. His early teaching in the synagogue was modestly successful, especially when compared to other locales. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue at the time of Paul's arrival, was one of the first people to be immersed into Christ, and, apparently, very soon the next leader of the synagogue, Sosthenes, was added to the body of Christ and eventually co-authored this letter. Then the gospel went to the Gentiles, and the congregation in Corinth was well on its way.

- **Division** - Where there is apparent success, there are those who want to capitalize on it, who want to use the fruit of someone else's labor and twist the momentum for their own personal purposes. Hence in Corinth, factions were developing, fueled by those who subtly appealed to Greek-style sophistry and were willing to sanction immorality in order to maintain and increase their power base. The appeal of the apostle was for the brethren to be "in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).
- **Immorality** - The pagans, then and now, have been notoriously immoral, sinking to the depths of greed, envy, and sexual impropriety of every kind. The appeal of the apostle was to leave those vices behind, noting, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). "Your body," he said, "is a temple of the Holy Spirit ... glorify God in your body" (I Corinthians 6:19,20). Part of the solution, he averred, was a good Christian marriage. "Better," he stated, "to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7:9).
- **Handling idolatry** - Many in the congregation had come out of idolatry. Some of the weaker brethren still regarded the idols as having some mystical power, although through continuing education they could become conditioned to the idea that gods made with human hands were not gods at all but demonic inspired figments of imagination. The long exhortation of the apostle was that the stronger Christians were to limit their liberty of being able to eat anything offered on the meat market, as an example, so that they would not destroy the brethren with newer faith and less understanding. "Flee idolatry," was the inspired exhortation. "You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (I Corinthians 10:14;21).
- **Gifts of the Spirit** - Gifts of the Holy Spirit were given at the direction of the Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Some in the congregation were abusing those gifts (clearly illustrating that the gifts were under the control of the user), and the instructions were written that all things might be done for edification of the local body of Christ. Whether it was using the gifts of the Spirit, or using "the perfect thing" — the completed New Testament — all things were and are to be done in love.
- **Resurrection of the dead** - Yes, there is a resurrection of the dead. If there were no resurrection, then Christ would not have been resurrected. But Christ is indeed risen; hence there will be a resurrection of all — good and bad — at Jesus' second coming. "We shall not all sleep," also asseverated the apostle, "but we shall all be changed." "At the last trumpet," he taught, "the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." When "this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory!'"

MARANATHA! COME, LORD JESUS!