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## CHAPTER 1

### Paul and Corinth

In the letters to Corinth we really come to learn something of the mind of Paul; and he asked us to follow him, so that we might follow our Lord the more closely. So we want to analyse the relationship between Paul and Corinth in some detail; for we are all in desperate need of learning how to relate to each other better.

Firstly, let's firmly place in our minds the supreme spirituality of Paul. He saw visions which were unlawful to be uttered, he could look back on a string of ecclesias worldwide which were a result of his work, his writings show that he reached higher into the mysteries of God than most other man have ever gone. Naturally speaking, it must have been so difficult for him to relate to immature or unspiritual brethren and sisters! And yet his sense of identity with his spiritual children comes through all the time. Note how he purposefully mixes his pronouns: "*We* know in part... *I* know in part... *we* see in a mirror... *I* spoke as a child" (1 Cor. 13).

Now consider Corinth. Getting drunk at the breaking of bread, some members openly committing incest and other sexual perversions; and being justified by much of the ecclesia. Some had not the knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). The basic truth of Christ's resurrection and the second coming were denied, and Paul was slandered unbelievably. There is fair emphasis on Corinth's willing belief of the vicious denigration of Paul's character, made by some of their elders (1 Cor. 2:16; 3:10; 4:11-14; 9:20-27; 14:18). The depths to which that ecclesia sunk are hard to plumb. And yet Paul believed that they abounded in love for him; he asks them to abound in their generosity to others as they abounded in their love for him (2 Cor. 12:7). Truly Paul reflected his own experience of having righteousness imputed to him.

So the relationship between Paul and Corinth is fascinating, but above all it's instructive of not only how we should relate to each other, but how Christ relates to us. There is a strange paradox throughout the letters to Corinth. Paul uses the most exalted and positive language about them, enthusing about the certainty of their salvation, and yet he also accuses them of the most incredible spiritual weaknesses. There's a clear example in the chapter we've just read. In 1 Cor. 1:8,9, we read of Paul enthusiastically saying that God would "confirm *you* (note that) unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus". But then in v.12 he accuses every one of them of being guilty of factionism and division: "*Every one of you* (the same 'you' of v.8,9) says, I am of Paul...(etc.)". Paul really believed what he says in v.4: "I thank my God always on your behalf (implying: 'You ought to be thanking Him, but I'm doing it for you?'), for the grace of God which is given you...". This was the secret of

how Paul managed to relate to them so positively; He deeply believed that they were in receipt of God's grace on account of their being in Christ.

### The Love Of Paul

So let's just review the positive way in which Paul felt towards his Corinthian brethren. His love for them was "in (his) heart, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). He boasted to others of their "zeal" to give money to the poor, even though it seems they had just made empty promises (2 Cor. 9:2). And in 2 Cor. 9:13 he goes even further; he speaks as if they had already distributed money to other churches. He saw them as righteous, even though they hadn't performed the acts they vaguely spoke of. Paul was surely reflecting the spirit of the Father and Son here. It may even be that Paul mentioned his devotion to Corinth in his 'front-line' presentation of the Gospel to others: "We preach... Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). His great wish was their "perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9). Paul's deep-seated love for Corinth was absolutely evident to all who knew them; it was not an act of the will, which occurred just within Paul's mind. So often our 'love' for difficult members of the ecclesia is no more than a grimly made act of the will. Even in the midst of rebuking them, Paul uses the language of real endearment: "Wherefore, *my dearly beloved*, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). The word "brethren" occurs as a refrain throughout the letters; it appears 19 times in the first letter alone, compared with 9 times in the letter to the Romans (a longer epistle). This is similar to the way in which Jeremiah repeatedly describes the Israel who rejected and betrayed him as "my people" (e.g. Jer. 8:11,19,21,22). Despite all the cruel allegations made by them against Paul, he did not deal with them in the cagey, 'political' manner so common in our circles: "*O ye Corinthians*, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged" (2 Cor. 6:11). It is noteworthy that Paul is here alluding to Ps. 119:32, which speaks of God's word enlarging a man's heart. It was through his application to the word that Paul came to this large-hearted attitude. A smaller man than Paul would have trod mighty carefully with Corinth, making no more than succinct, measured statements. But his deep love for them led Paul to be as open-hearted as can be. Indeed, his pouring forth of his innermost soul to them in the autobiographical sections of 2 Cor. is evidence of how his heart and mouth were truly opened and enlarged unto them. There was no shrugging of the shoulders within Paul at the spiritual plight of Corinth: "Ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you" (2 Cor. 7:3). And it was this basic love which was in Paul's heart which led him to a wonderful spirit of hopefulness; so that even towards the end of his second letter he can speak of his "hope, that as your faith grows, we shall be magnified in you" (2 Cor. 10:15 RV).

### Corinth's Response

This love of Paul found at least some response from Corinth. Titus told Paul of their feelings for him: "He told us your earnest desire (for Paul), your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more" (2 Cor. 7:7). Here they were, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and Gentiles of the Gentiles; in a state of spiritual love with each other. The strange paradox of Paul's great love for them, yet also his repugnance at their evil ways, is perhaps explicable in terms of their spiritual 'in-loveness'. As a spiritual sister (cp. Abigail?) can marry an alcoholic (Nabal?) because she sees the good side in him, whilst not turning a blind eye to his drinking; as a father ever loves wayward children; so Paul felt towards his beloved sons, his attractive young bride (2 Cor.11:2) of Corinth. That there was at least some love for Paul by Corinth is made tragically evident from 2 Cor. 12:15: "The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved". This is surely the language of falling out of love. And Paul was the aggrieved party.

As with so many a father and young husband, Paul had to go through the pain of sensing that the object of his love was keeping him at arm's length, was being partial in their response to the great love he was showing: "You have acknowledged us (our love) *in part*, that we are your rejoicing" (2 Cor. 1:14). Yet Paul took great comfort from their albeit partial response: "Now I *praise you* brethren, that ye remember me in all things" (1 Cor. 11:2); whilst struggling on to make them realize the intensity of his feelings towards them: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears (picture the old boy sobbing as he moved his quill)... *that ye might know the love* which I have *more abundantly* unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4). Despite the spiteful way in which they demanded Paul bring letters of commendation with him (2 Cor. 3:1), Paul jumped at their even partial spiritual response: "Great is my glorying of you! I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" because of their positive spiritual reaction to the visit of Titus (2 Cor. 7:4).

### Hard Discipline

It is often implied that Paul was perfectly happy to put up with the mess at Corinth, and that therefore we should not be unduly concerned at the state of our latter day ecclesias. This could just not be further from the truth. Perhaps the greatest indication of Paul's love for Corinth is seen in his apparent severity towards them, his desire that they really should abide in Christ. Thus in 1 Cor. 4:21 Paul parallels coming to them in love with coming "with a rod". The sarcasm of 1 Cor. 4:8-14 (and many other places), his hard words of 1 Cor. 3:1-3, all indicate that he saw Corinth for the apostates which they were; and responded to this. "If I come again, I will not spare... know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:2,5). This was more than the externally strict schoolteacher with a soft heart, more than dad just laying the law down one evening. What Paul was threatening was radical; it may be that he would have used the power of the Holy Spirit to smite them with literal death. 1 Cor. 11:30 would imply that either Paul or another apostle had done this to them on a previous visit. "I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy" (2 Cor. 11:2) is one of a series of allusions in that chapter to the events of Num.25, where Phinehas was moved with jealousy to slay those who were "unequally yoked" with the things of Belial (cp. 2 Cor. 6:14). Paul had accused his Corinthians of just that; and he was quite willing to play the role of Phinehas.

"I will bewail many that have sinned... if I come again, I will not spare" (2 Cor. 12:21; 13:2) is actually an allusion to Ez. 8:18: "Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here (in the natural and spiritual temple of Yahweh, cp. 2 Cor. 6:16)?... therefore will I also deal in fury: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them". God's anger with Israel as expressed at the Babylonian invasion was going to be reflected in Paul's 'coming' to spiritual Israel in Corinth. Yet for all his high powered allusions, Paul mixed them with the most incredible expressions of true love and sympathy for Corinth. In this we see the giant spiritual stature of that man Paul.

### No Blind Eye

Paul evidently did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's failures. He spoke of them in one breath as being spiritually complete, whilst in the next he showed that he was truly aware of their failures. There's a glaring example of this in 1 Cor. 5:6,7: "A little leaven (which they had in their bad attitude, and also in the presence of the incestuous brother) leavens the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, *as you are unleavened*". They had leavened; otherwise Paul would not have told them to purge it out. But

then he tells them that they are "unleavened". In other words, he saw them *as if* they were unleavened, but he recognized that they had the bad leaven among and within them. There's another blatant example of this in 1 Cor. 8:1,4,7: "As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge... (v.4) we know that an idol is nothing in the world... (v.7) howbeit there is not in every man (in the ecclesia) that knowledge". So Paul starts off by saying that they all knew about the correct attitude to meat offered to idols. But then he recognizes that in reality, not all of them did know, or at best, they did not appreciate what they knew. 1 Cor. 11:2 has more of the same: "I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you"; but then Paul goes on to show how they had blatantly disobeyed the ordinance he delivered them concerning the breaking of bread. Again, Paul sees the Corinthians *as if* they were perfect, but then goes on to point out their failures. This is surely a reflection of how the Lord Jesus sees each of us His people. 1 Cor. 3:1,18 shows how the Corinthians thought they were wise, when actually Paul could only address them as carnal babes in Christ; they were not "wise". Yet in 1 Cor. 10:15 Paul concludes a section with the words: "I speak *as* to wise men...". He treated them *as if* they were wise, when he knew that they weren't in reality. He begins by rejoicing that "in every thing you are enriched by him...in all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:5), even though this was only potentially true- they had been given the knowledge, but had failed to turn it into true wisdom. Likewise Paul spells it out to them that their behaviour was likely to exclude them from the Kingdom; but in the same context he speaks as if it is taken as read that they will be in the Kingdom: "*The saints shall judge the world. And if the world shall be judged by you... we shall judge Angels*" (1 Cor. 6:2,3,9).

It is so significant that Paul did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's faults. In seeking to be positive, we so often do this. But we are asked to relate to each other, as Christ does to us. And he certainly doesn't turn a blind eye to our failures. Yet our problem is that if we don't turn a blind eye, we find it so hard to relate to our brethren. So what is the secret of being able to look at both the good and bad sides of our brethren? I suggest the answer is something along these lines:

At baptism, a new man was born inside us, personified in the New Testament as "the man Christ Jesus", "the Spirit", etc. Yet there is still the devil within us, a personification of our sinfulness. We identify our *real* selves as our spiritual man (note how Paul refers to that side of him as "I myself" in Rom. 7:25). God looks upon us *as if* we are Christ Jesus, He sees us as justified in Him, He sees us as if we are as perfect as Christ; not that we are in ourselves, of course. This is how He wants us to view our brethren; if we see them as God sees us, we will see them as the spiritual man which they have within them. Yet like God, we will not turn a blind eye to their weaknesses. Paul looked ahead to the day when God would have confirmed Corinth "unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor.1:8). We too need to try to live the Kingdom life now; we must live *as if* we are in the day of Christ's Kingdom (Rom. 13:12,13). So in some ways we must see our brethren as they will be in the Kingdom. Thus in 2 Cor. 10:6,15 Paul speaks about the day when Corinth's "obedience is fulfilled... *when* your faith is increased... we shall be enlarged by you... abundantly". "We are your rejoicing, even as you also are ours, *in the day of the Lord Jesus*. And in *this confidence* I was minded to come unto you..." (2 Cor. 1:14). Paul's confidence in them was on account of the rejoicing he looked forward to having concerning them at the day of judgment. Some of his final words to them totally summarize his attitude: "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9). He looked earnestly towards the day when they

would be spiritually matured. We too must recognize that we are all only children. We must look to what both we and our brethren *will be* one day, in spiritual terms. This certainly takes some spiritual vision. Yet Paul had just this: "...having hope, *when* [not 'if'] your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you" (2 Cor. 10:15). He here recognizes that their faith is now weak, and must increase; but he also had written that they were to remain standing in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13). They were weak in faith; this he recognized. But he recognized their *status* as being 'in the faith'. So concerned was he with them that he says that if they were obedient to what he had asked them, then he would be ready to "revenge *all* disobedience" (2 Cor. 10:6). It's as if he was taking them one step at a time in bringing them to realize their errors; like the Lord, he spoke the word to men as *they* were able to hear it, not as *he was able* to expound it or expose their failures. We are seeking the salvation and betterment of our brethren, not simply to air our perceptions of their inadequacies.

### Corinth: Washed And Sanctified

He saw Corinth as truly saved in prospect, by reason of their being in Christ. He quotes the words of Lev. 26:13 "I will dwell in them and walk in them... and they shall be my God" about Corinth (2 Cor. 6:16)- even though those words were said to be describing a status conditional upon Israel's obedience. "He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and *shall* present us (not 'hopefully, if you get your act together!') with you" (2 Cor. 4:14) sounds as if Paul fully expected the Corinthians to be there, and to be joined at the right hand side of the judgment seat by himself and Titus. 1 Cor. 15:51 has the same certainty of their acceptance: "*We shall be changed*". "*We* (Paul and Corinth) know... we have a building of God... eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1), i.e. the spiritual man Christ Jesus within each man who is in Christ. Truly could Paul write: "Our *hope* of you is steadfast, knowing that, as you are partakers of the sufferings, so should you be also of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1:7). *They*, woolly Corinth, would judge the world in the Kingdom age (1 Cor. 6:2). "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, *be with you all*" (2 Cor. 13:14) must have taken some writing, even under inspiration. "*Be with you all*" would have included those Judaist-influenced brethren hell-bent on destroying Paul's work and image, those who had sinned grievously, and those whose doctrinal appreciation was starting to slip. Yet this was how Paul saw them; as being in Christ, and abiding in the love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit; thanks to their baptism into Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and abiding (at least for that present time) in that blessed relationship. 2 Cor. 11:2 even shows Paul likening Corinth ecclesia to the guileless Eve in Eden, not yet having sinned, all innocence and uncorrupted beauty. And yet he saw himself as the Eve who had been deceived and punished by death (Rom. 7:11,13 = Gen. 2:17; 3:13); but he saw them as the Eve who had not yet sinned. This was no literary trick of the tail; he genuinely felt and saw them as better than himself to be- such was the depth of his appreciation of his own failures. Paul saw Corinth as abounding in knowledge and love (2 Cor. 8:7), even though they had some who lacked the basic knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34), and they needed exhortation to confirm their love to the disfellowshipped brother (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Likewise, unfaithful Israel is still addressed as "the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing" (Jer. 18:13); she was seen as a virgin right up until the Babylonian invasion, where she was as it were 'raped' (Jer. 14:17 Heb.). We reflect the same paradox in our efforts to see evidently weak brethren as still sanctified in Christ.

Having spoken of fornicators, idolaters, thieves etc., all of whom were found within the Corinth ecclesia, Paul says: "But such *were* some of you: but you are washed, but you are

sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). The reference to washing, and the Father, Son and Spirit all points back to baptism for the remission of sins (Mt. 28:19). The fact those people had been baptized meant so much to Paul. The significance of our brethren's baptisms should also make a deep impact on ourselves. By this act they became "in Christ". The Corinthians were committing idolatry, fornication etc. Paul was aware of that. But he was prepared to see them as being sanctified in Christ; he counted them as if this was not happening: *for the time being*. There was coming a time when he would no longer accept that they were in Christ, and when he would not spare them in any way (2 Cor. 13:2). The repented of failures of our brethren, however severe they may seem to us, must be overlooked if there is real evidence that they are making effort to abide in Christ. Unrepentant fornication or idolatry is hardly proof of this. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor.5:20) indicates that Paul did not see them as reconciled to God; yet he looked at the man Christ Jesus within them in order to be able to have all the positive feelings towards them which he did. So clear was Paul's vision of their spiritual man that he could actually boast about their 'good side' to other ecclesias (2 Cor. 7:4,14; 9:2). So enthusiastic was Paul about the great grace of God which Corinth basked in, that he actually made other ecclesias truly affectionate of Corinth: "which long after you for the exceeding grace (Paul knew just how exceeding it was to Corinth!) in you" (2 Cor.9:14).

And Paul showed this same spirit in all his dealings with his brethren. He could say in all honesty that "I am convinced, my brothers, that you are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14 NIV)- even though there must have been major problems in Rome, not least the Jew: Gentile division. He was so positive about them that he could write that he was sure that Corinth's labour was "not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58)- and yet he knew that labour was in vain if converts fell away (1 Thess. 3:5). Yet he acted towards them, and genuinely felt as if, they would not and had not fallen away. This was quite some psychological and spiritual achievement, given the depths of their apostasy. Corinth hated Paul, slandered him, despised him. And yet he can write that their love for him "abounded" (2 Cor. 8:7). I take this not as sarcasm, but as a deep attempt by him to view them positively. We are challenged by Paul's example to look at our brethren the same way.

"As God... has forgiven"

We are told to forgive one another, "*as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32). All our sins were forgiven, in prospect, at baptism. All our irritating habits and attitudes, our secret sins, all these were forgiven then. And we must respond to this by counting our brethren to have received the same grace. Seeing we have received this grace, why do we find it so hard to see our brethren like this? Surely the answer rests in the fact that we don't fully believe or appreciate the degree to which God really does see us personally as being perfect in Christ. Paul was so super-assured of his own salvation, of the fact that God really did see him as a man in Christ, and therefore he found it easier to see his brethren in such a positive way. He was so conscious of how his many sins were just not counted against him. He knew that he was "chief of sinners", he didn't turn a blind eye to himself; because he could realistically face up to his own position before God, he found it easier to do the same for his weak brethren.



The fact that Paul saw the spiritual man in all his brethren means that to some degree he saw them all as equal. He seems to bring this point out in 1 Cor. 4:14,17: "As my beloved sons I warn you (Corinth ecclesia)... for this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son...". Paul calls both Corinth and Timothy his beloved sons. The implication is that to some degree, he felt the same towards dodgy Corinth as he did towards the spiritually strong Timothy. Likewise Christ showed his love for the whole church when he died on the cross. This does not mean, of course, that Paul did not have deeper bonds with some than with others. But the fact is that in spiritual terms, he saw all his brethren as equal, in that they shared the same status of being justified in Christ. Whether one had 2% righteousness and another 5% was irrelevant; they both needed the massive imputation of God's righteousness through Christ. As Paul could call both Timothy and Corinth his "beloved sons", so God calls both Christ and ourselves by the same title (Mt. 3:17 cp. Col. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:13) . The reason? Because "he has made us accepted (by being) in the beloved (son)" (Eph. 1:6).

*1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints-* There is a play on words here. By baptism into Christ we are in Him, and are therefore made holy, sanctified; and therefore we are saints, holy or sanctified ones. Paul approaches the various behavioural issues in Corinth by encouraging them to live out in practice what they are by status in Christ, and to make use of the Spirit power potentially available to enable this transformation.

*With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place-* The Jerusalem pattern of gathering collectively in the temple and yet also having home groups was repeated in Corinth. 1 Corinthians is addressed to the singular church in Corinth, which he parallels with "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). Those 'places', I submit, referred to the various house churches in the city. He specifically mentions the house churches of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15). The exhortation that "you all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10) would then refer to the need for the various house churches to all "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment". As we know, there was an issue of fellowship in Corinth, concerning a deeply immoral brother. If he avoided church discipline by simply joining another house church, they were not going to be joined together in "the same judgment", and inevitably division would arise amongst those Corinthian house churches. There was to be peace rather than confusion "in all churches" (1 Cor. 14:33)- i.e. all the house churches in Corinth. Paul's complaint that "every one of you saith, I am of Paul... I of Apollos" (1 Cor. 1:12) surely

makes more sense if read with reference to each of the house churches, rather than every individual member. Paul speaks there as if the believers 'came together' 'in ekklesia' (1 Cor. 5:4), i.e. the various home groups occasionally met together. Hence he speaks of when "the whole church be come together into one place" (1 Cor. 14:23), i.e. all the house churches gathered together for a special fellowship meeting. He says that when they 'came together', then they should make a collective decision about disfellowshipping the immoral brother. Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth, and he describes Gaius as the host of the whole church (Rom. 16:23)- implying that he had premises large enough for all the various house churches to gather together in. The abuses which occurred when the whole church 'came together' presumably therefore occurred on his premises.

*Their Lord and ours*- Paul could be saying that Jesus Christ is Lord both of 'us' and also of all the congregations of believers. But he could also mean (and the Greek rather suggests this) that the same Jesus *understood and interpreted somewhat differently amongst the various believers "in every place"* was in fact Lord of them all. For your interpretation of the Lord Jesus and mine will inevitably differ in some points. Now this must of course be balanced against John's clear teaching that those who deny Jesus came in the flesh are in fact antiChrist. However the idea is more likely that Paul is preparing the way for his repeated appeals for unity- Jesus is Lord of 'they' over there and also of 'us' here. "Theirs and ours" suggests Paul saw himself very much as standing with the Corinthians- which is significant, given his later criticisms and exposure of their behaviour.

1:3 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*- This was no mere formality; the "grace", *charis*, the gift Paul wished them was that of the Spirit in their hearts, and he goes on to develop this idea of the *charis* in :4.

1:4 *I thank my God always concerning you*- The Corinthians slandered Paul, refused his teachings etc. But he can continually be grateful for them. We see here a lovely spirit. h thanks God because of what has been given them by status, and for how he believes God sees them, because of the righteousness imputed to them. Serious adoption of Paul's perspective would solve absolutely every church division and argument.

*For the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus*- There is a clear connection between baptism and the receipt of the gift of the Spirit. By baptism "in Christ", the converts were given a *charis*, a gift or grace, from God.

1:5 *That in everything you were enriched in him*- In detailing the work of the Spirit gift in the hearts of those who believe, Eph. 3:16-20 uses this same word for 'riches', and the same kind of ideas Paul uses in this section of 1 Corinthians 1: "He would grant you, according to the *riches* of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...". The complete spiritual enrichment of the Corinthians ["in everything"] is hard to square with their rather woeful spiritual state- getting drunk at the breaking of bread, denying the Lord's resurrection etc. But the point is that the gift of the Spirit had potentially enabled them not to be like this- and the appeal was for them to make use of the potential they had.



*In all utterance and all knowledge-* In all *logos* and *gnosis*. These were the very things the Corinthians were tempted to seek from secular sources, and to leave Christ for. But they were blessed with everything- every word of wisdom was in Him, provided by His Spirit. They need not look to other sources of these things because all had been made available to them potentially by the Spirit they had received.

1:6 *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you-* The preaching of Christ was confirmed *in* the believers by the gift of the Spirit within their hearts. And this was itself the testimony of Christ to the validity of their conversion to Him. The external miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given to confirm the preaching of the Gospel (s.w. Mk. 16:20), but their withdrawal doesn't mean that the Lord Jesus doesn't still confirm the preaching of His word by the Spirit in an internal sense. This is the significance of the word *in* you. Paul says that this confirmation will work in them "until the end", i.e. the final glorification at the Lord's return (:8 s.w.). It was not temporary nor was it going to be withdrawn. A process is ongoing which is intended to bring us to final salvation at the Lord's return. This confirmation or 'establishment' is achieved by our being 'anointed'- a clear reference to the gift of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21 s.w.). The same word is used in Rom. 4:16, speaking of how the promise of salvation to Abraham is confirmed or [AV] "made sure to all the seed".

1:7 *So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ-* They had been enriched spiritually in every way (:5). But this was only true potentially. And this explains why a baptized believer may not sense the power of the Spirit in their hearts- because they are not allowing the potential to work. Paul is going to be appealing for radical changes in thinking and behaviour- but he begins by saying that all the power for that is already potentially with them. Paul later urges the Corinthians to covet the most useful Spiritual gifts (14:1). But he says here that they already have them all. So clearly enough he means that they must use their potential.

1:8- see on Gal. 6:4.

*Who shall also confirm you to the end, unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ-* The gift of the Spirit given as a confirmation at baptism (see on :6) would continue to work with them, if they allowed it, to present them acceptable at the day of final judgment. We can only be without accusation (Gk.) before the day of judgment by having righteousness imputed to us; this is the great theme of Romans. This is made possible by our part in the Lord's representative death for us (s.w. Col. 1:22). But as Romans 8 explains, this is made true for us in practice by the Spirit working within us to lead us to that end in practice, and seeking to make us in reality what we are counted as by status.

1:9 *God is faithful-* The claims made here for the work of the Spirit may seem incredible, given our weakness, and the evident weakness of the Corinthian believers. But God is faithful- He will really do what He has promised. The faithfulness of God is associated in the Old Testament with His faithfulness to the covenant; and the Abrahamic covenant included within it the implication of the Spirit's work; this is very much part of the "blessing" promised. And God will surely fulfill His part; it is for us to be open to this and believe it.

*Through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord-* We through the Spirit are in active fellowship with the Lord Jesus. It's not a case of mere theological agreement with a set of Biblical principles. Paul assumes that the Corinthians, with all their immorality and misunderstandings of basic doctrine, were in fellowship with

Jesus; and he therefore treated them accordingly. This is a huge challenge to those who feel they can only accept in fellowship those who can jump certain bars of their own creation regarding doctrine and practice.

1:10- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*Now I urge you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment-* This appeal was made for the sake of the fact they were all "in the name" of the Lord Jesus by baptism into that name. They had therefore been given "the spirit of Christ", the mind of Christ. The "one mind" or "same mind" which Paul appeals for us to have is the mind of Christ (see on Phil. 2:5). He's not confusing unity with uniformity, but rather reasoning that if we each allow the mind of Christ to be dominant within us, then we shall have the same mind / judgment because we will each have *His* mind. This is not therefore an appeal to each study the Bible in the same way and reach the same conclusions, or have the same level of discipline for those who fail in certain moral areas. Rather is it quite simply an appeal for us to have the mind of Christ. And thereby we shall be united, regardless of other issues over which we may differ.

"Be perfected together" (1 Cor. 1:10) uses the same Greek word as in Heb. 10:5, where we read of the Lord's one body "prepared", joined together.

1:11 *For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers-* Paul doesn't mean 'They dobbed you in to me, so I'm taking it with you'. That would be responding to gossip. The 'report' would appear to refer to a formal, written statement- that may well have been inspired by the Spirit. Otherwise Paul surely could not have written such confidence that the report was true.

*By those of the household of Chloe-* The 'church' at Corinth was comprised of various house groups; this one was apparently led by a woman, or at least were comprised of her household servants and family. Perhaps like Lydia she had converted her 'household' or extended family, including servants.

*That there are contentions among you-* If they each had the mind of Christ, then there would not be contentions amongst them. Therefore 'contentions' are a sign of not having the Spirit (3:3)- i.e. the spirit / mind of Christ.

The first problem in the Corinth ecclesia, Paul said, was that they were divided. He begins his letter by addressing this problem, not the incest, the drunkenness at the breaking of bread, the false doctrine... See on Gal. 2:2.

1:12- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*By this I mean, that each one of you is saying: I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I am of Christ-* 1 Cor. 3:22 speaks of three groups in the Corinth ecclesia, following Paul, Peter and Apollos. Yet in 1 Cor. 1:12 someone says "I am of Christ" . This seems to be Paul himself- so Christ-centred was he, that he wanted no part in ecclesial

politics nor in the possibility of leading a faction. His Christ-centredness was a phenomenal achievement.

A case can be made that the letters of Peter and Jude were also written to Corinth. Peter visited Corinth, presumably focusing his preaching on the Jewish community, and perhaps he was writing his letters specifically to the Jewish house churches there (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5). The same concerns are apparent as in Paul's letters to Corinth: The need to distinguish between spiritual and unspiritual persons who despised others (Jude 19 = 1 Cor. 2:6 - 3:4; 8:1-3); those who perverted liberty into licence (Jude 4 = 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), becoming slaves of sensuality (Jude 8,10,16,23 = 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 2 Cor. 12:21); some eating and drinking abusively at the love feast (Jude 12 = 1 Cor. 11:17-33); refusing the authority of their elders (Jude 8,11 = 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 9:1-12); both Peter and Paul warn Corinth of the danger of worldly wisdom. Peter's reminder to them about the authority of Paul is very understandable in this case. However, the point of all this is to observe the tenderness of Peter and Jude in writing to the Corinthians ["my beloved..."], whilst at the same time warning them of the awesome judgment which their behaviour was preparing for them. It was the same passionate love for Christ's weak brethren which Paul showed them.

1:13 *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?*- There are times when Paul uses the word "Christ" when we'd have expected him to use the word "church"- e.g. "Is Christ divided?... as the body is one... so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 1:13; 12:12). This synecdoche serves to demonstrate the intense unity between Christ and His people- we really are Him to this world. Think through the reasoning of 1 Cor. 1:13: "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?". The fact Jesus was crucified for us means that we should be baptized into that Name, and also be undivided.

Christ being undivided is placed parallel with the fact Paul was not crucified for us, but Christ was (1 Cor. 1:13). The implication is surely that because Christ was crucified for us, therefore those He died to redeem are undivided. We have one Saviour, through one salvation act, and therefore we must be one. The atonement and fellowship are so linked. Christ is not divided, and therefore, Paul reasons, divisions amongst brethren are a nonsense. *Christ is not divided, and therefore neither should we be* (1 Cor. 1:13; 3:3). Let's remember this powerful logic, in all our thinking about this issue. Paul even goes so far as to suggest that if we do not discern the body at the breaking of bread, if we wilfully exclude certain members of the body, then we eat and drink condemnation to ourselves. This is how serious division is. The devil's house is divided (Mt. 12:25,26); Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13 s.w.). We were called to the Gospel *so that* we might share in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ- i.e. fellowship with Him and His Father, and with all the others within His body (1 Cor. 1:9,10). If we accept that brethren and sisters are validly baptized into and remain within His body, then we simply *must* fellowship with them. Should we refuse to do this, we are working against the essential purpose of God- to build up the body of His Son now, so that we might exist in that state eternally.

1:14 *I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius*- Paul goes on to list others he had baptized, and admits the possibility he had baptized even more than he named.

So we have an example here of a grammatical construction whereby 'None' or 'Not' is not global and absolute; and we need to bear this in mind in the interpretation of :17.

Gaius had a home big enough for the Corinth ecclesia to meet in (Rom. 16:23). Crispus was the leader of the Corinth synagogue and yet he and Gaius were the first people Paul converted there (1 Cor. 1:14). Thus in this case the initial response was from the socially well to do, although the later converts were generally poor. By all means compare with how wealthy Lydia was the first convert in Philippi. Anyone who was a household leader or with a home large enough to accommodate the ecclesia was clearly of a higher social level. Thus the Philippian jailer, Stephanas and Chloe had a "household" (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:15), as did Philemon; and even Aquilla and Priscilla although artisans were wealthy enough to have room to host an ecclesia (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5). Titus Justus [whose name implies he was a Roman citizen] had a house adjacent to the synagogue in Corinth. Mark's mother had a home in Jerusalem that could accommodate a meeting (Acts 12:12); Baranbas owned a farm (Acts 4:36); Jason was wealthy enough to stand bail for Paul and entertain his visitors (Acts 17:5-9). An Areopagite was converted in Athens (Acts 17:34). Apollos and Phoebe were able to travel independently. Remember that most people at the time lived in cramped tiny rooms, so unbearable that most of their lives were lived outdoors as far as possible.

1:15 *Lest any of you should say you were baptized into my name-* Paul did baptize some in Corinth. But he means that he avoided baptizing people because of the way it would likely be used as the basis for factions in the future. He could have taken the position that 'I do not baptize into my name; and if at some later point some are to say I did, well, they are wrong, I did not'. But Paul is more sensitive to human weakness, just as we should be. He often sees ahead to the likely interpretations of his words and actions. Later he will parry possible misunderstandings of his words about resurrection by saying "But some man will say...". We too must move away from a bald truth- error scenario, leaving the misinterpretations of others upon their own heads, but rather anticipate their likely weaknesses; and by all means, seek to not make others stumble.

1:16 *And I baptized also the household of Stephanas. Besides these, I do not know whether I baptized any other-* He doesn't mean 'I don't remember whether I did'; for he would have used a different word. He means that he is not aware of it in that he kept no record of who he baptized, neither formally nor mentally. This is a far cry from those who insist on getting all the details of the candidates they baptize, filling out forms and so forth. Such behaviour is appropriate to admission to membership of a club; but baptism into Christ is into Christ and is not a sign of having joined any human club or institution.

1:17 - see on Mt. 3:8; Gal. 6:14.

*For Christ sent me not so much as to baptize, but to preach the gospel-* See on :14. The construction involving 'not' doesn't have to mean 'Not at all', but rather 'not' with conditions. Sometimes we need to read into the text the idea of "not so much *this*, as *that*". Thus "Christ sent me not [so much as] to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17 AV). Paul of course *did* baptize people, as he goes on to say in that very context (1 Cor. 1:14). Or take Jer. 7:22,23: "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them... concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God". God *did* command sacrifices; but He *not so much* commanded them *as* required Israel's spirit of obedience and acceptance of Him.

Paul's mission was to spread the word; human response to it was not something he unduly focused upon. Inappropriate focus on results in terms of baptisms can lead missionary endeavour into all manner of wrong paths. This is probably hyperbole (i.e. grossly exaggerated language to make a point). The command to preach and baptize as given in the great preaching commission was just one command; preaching-and-baptizing went together. It seems to me that Paul *did* baptize; but using the figure of hyperbole, he's saying: 'My emphasis is on getting on with the work of preaching the Gospel, the fact I've held the shoulders of many men and women as I pushed them under the water is irrelevant; Christ didn't send me to just do this, but more importantly to preach the Gospel'. And may this be our attitude too.

*Not in the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no power-* Paul did not seek to pressure people into baptism because he believed that the simple presentation of the cross of Christ would of itself elicit faith in people. This for all time demonstrates that apologetics and "the wisdom of words" will not persuade men to faith. That persuasion is in the message itself, which is of Christ crucified. No amount of smart arguments from science, archaeology, Bible prophecy being fulfilled etc. will of themselves persuade to faith. The bald presentation of the Gospel of the crucified Christ will of itself be 'powerful' to convert. And I speak from wide personal experience- as well as the clear implication of Paul's argument here. The paradox is that on the cross, the Lord 'made Himself of no power' (s.w. Phil. 2:7), and it was that moment of human powerlessness which is of power to convert. This is the mystery of faith. It is a paradox which is developed in the following verses; what appears foolishness in the eyes of men is in fact the deep wisdom and saving power of God.

Paul had been reconciled, as have all men, by the cross. But he still needed to be converted, and this depended upon the freewill obedience of the likes of Ananias. It really is so, for Paul warned that preaching the Gospel with wisdom of words would make "the cross of Christ... of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17). The effect of the cross, the power of it to save, is limited in its extent by our manner of preaching of it. And we can make "Christ", i.e. His cross, of "none effect" by trusting to our works rather than accepting the gracious salvation which He achieved (Gal. 5:4).

Paul declared unto Corinth "the testimony of God", i.e. "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). This message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", "the wisdom of God", "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:17,23,24; 2:4,5). Indeed, "the cross of Christ" is put for 'the preaching of His cross' (1:17). All these things are parallel. The cross is in itself the testimony and witness of God. This is why, Paul reasons, the power of the cross itself means that it doesn't matter how poorly that message is presented in human words; indeed, such is its excellence and power that we even *shouldn't seek* to present it with a layer of human 'culture' and verbiage shrouding it.

1:18- see on Rom. 1:18.

*For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness-* See on :17 *Not in the wisdom of words.* What seems foolish is the wisdom and saving power of God. There is a temptation to make our witness to the world in terms and colours which appear intellectually or even academically respectable. But we must ever remember the dichotomy here presented- that the wisdom of God will be seen as foolish to those who will not believe it. We can't have it both ways- an argument with secular respectability which is also the power and wisdom of God.

Because we are in Christ, therefore we witness Him; and we witness as He witnessed. *His* witness is in fact ours. But there is a sober theme in Scripture: that the essential witness of Christ was in His time of dying. "The preaching ['the word'] of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18) refers to the way in which the cross itself was and is a witness, rather than speaking of preaching *about* the cross.

Do we feel ashamed that we just don't witness as we ought to? There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. Knowing it, believing it, meant that it just had to be preached. The completeness and reality of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought not to let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Paul spoke of "the preaching of the cross", the word / message which *is* the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. I submit that much of our preaching somehow fails in urgency and entreaty. We seem to be in places too expository, or too attractive with the peripherals, seeking to please men... or be offering good advice, very good advice indeed, background Bible knowledge, how to read the Bible effectively... all of which may be all well and good, but we should be preaching good news, not good advice. The message of the cross is of a grace and real salvation which is almost too good to believe. It isn't Bible background or archaeology or Russia invading Israel. It is the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world... and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. The Lord wasn't preaching good *ideas*; He was preaching good *news*. The cross means that we have a faith to live by all our days; not just a faith to die by, a comfort in our time of dying, as we face the endgame.

*But to us who are saved it is the power of God-* The cross is the power of salvation to us who are 'being saved', in the saving process. The cross is not only the means of our forgiveness, in a transactional sense, as if at that moment in time, God enabled our forgiveness and salvation. For He can and could have saved in any way He chose. The cross is the ongoing salvation of God in that the Lord there is our endless inspiration and His death released and releases the living waters of the Spirit into human hearts- if they continue to believe in Him there, in an ongoing sense.

1:19- see on Job 5:12,13.

*For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise-* The quotation from Is. 29:14 refers to the false 'wisdom' of the unfaithful Jews in Jerusalem at Hezekiah's time. It was perhaps the attraction of the Jewish false teachers which Paul is alluding to. Judaism had a strange



attraction for even hedonistic Gentiles; as pointed out throughout our commentary on Titus. See on :20.

*And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nothing-* There is an allusion here to the Lord's words: "You did hide these things from the wise and prudent, and did reveal them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). Paul alludes to some parts of the Gospels more than to others. The record of John the Baptist, the sermon on the mount, the parables and the record of Christ in Gethsemane are all referred to far more than average. This surely would not be the case if the connections between Paul's writings and the Gospels were *only* the result of the Spirit irresistibly carrying Paul along. We have suggested that Paul's enthusiasm for the record of John the Baptist was because he had probably first heard the Gospel from John; i.e. there was a reason personal to Paul as to why he alludes to much to that particular part of the Gospels. And so with his sustained allusions to Gethsemane, far more than we would expect statistically. Presumably the picture of the Lord Jesus struggling against His own nature, driven to the brink of eternal failure, was an image which echoed in Paul's mind. Likewise the parables were intended to be memorized and meditated upon; Paul did just this, and that's why he alludes to them more than average. This sort of pattern is just what we too experience; there are parts of Scripture which stick in our minds, often for personal reasons. And so it was with Paul. Mt. 11:25 was a verse which was perhaps very much in his mind as he wrote to Corinth; it is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:19; 2:8; 14:20- and nowhere else.

1:20 *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*- As noted on :19, this quotation is from a passage talking about the vanity of Jewish wisdom (Is. 33:18). And it was Jewish false teaching which was the source of the problems at Corinth. Truly Paul despised all worldly advantage and insisted upon the radical principles of the Lord- that true greatness is in humility, wealth is in poverty, worldly learning is the very opposite of Divine wisdom, etc. He mocks, even, such things when he writes to the Corinthians: "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?" (1 Cor. 1:20). Every one of these terms would have been true of Saul the Pharisee, Paul the powerful user of rhetoric, Paul of the razor sharp mind. And he knew his worldly advantage, and despised it.

1:21 *For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God-* This is the paradox; that worldly wisdom does not lead to relationship with God. 'Knowing God' refers to relationship and salvation, not simply claiming some form of belief in the existence of a Divine being or force. Life eternal, living the Kingdom life we shall eternally live, is to 'know God' (Jn. 17:3). The Gospel message begins with the statement that to know God is a gift (Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10); for those to whom it is not given, everything about God remains in parables. And so faith is not reached by reading learned books about science, creationism, archaeology or the historical fulfilments of Bible prophecy. For that is the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God. If that indeed were the path to faith, then the illiterate and simple would be unable to come to faith. Yet the poor of this world are those "rich in faith". But the gift of faith is available for all- who will look to the cross of Christ as Israel looked to the lifted up serpent, and allow the power of it to transform them. Yet faith therefore is not arrived at by intellectual process; it is a gift. From God. And it is the cross of Christ (:18), the foolishness of the thing preached (:21), which leads to knowing God. There can be no real belief in God nor knowing of Him without Christ- for He is the

only way to the Father. Any attempt to reach faith in God by intellectual process is therefore ultimately doomed; it can only be reached through encounter with Christ.

*It was God's good pleasure through the apparent foolishness of the message preached to save them that believe-* 1 Cor. 1:21,25 speak of the Gospel as “the foolishness of the thing preached” (RV) – not that it *is* foolish, but it is perceived that way. The thing preached is clearly the cross- “For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness” (:18).

1:22 *Seeing that Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek after wisdom-* The Jews, like modern Pentecostals, demanded miraculous signs in order to believe; and the Gentiles thought that secular wisdom could be the only way to a respectable faith. But faith in the true God is predicated upon encounter with the crucified Christ. Nothing visible nor intellectual will of itself bring a man to faith; both the Bible and observed experience support that. Whilst there is a tendency to chalk up conversions to various forms of outreach, and it is hard to define why belief is reached, Paul is here crystal clear that the ultimate force in conversion is encounter with Christ crucified.

1:23 *But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness-* The cross was foolishness to the Gentiles and an offence to the Jews. In Roman thought, the cross was something shocking; the very word ‘cross’ was repugnant to them. It was something only for slaves. Consider the following writings from the period.

- Cicero wrote: “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but... the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man... your honours [i.e. Roman citizenship] protect a man from... the *terror of the cross*”.

- Seneca the Elder in the *Controversiae* records where a master’s daughter marries a slave, and she is described as having become related to *cruciarum*, ‘the crucified’. Thus ‘the crucified’ was used by metonymy for slaves. The father of the girl is taunted: “If you want to find your son-in-law’s relatives, *go to the cross*”. It is hard for us to appreciate how slaves were seen as less than human in that society. There was a stigma and revulsion attached to the cross. This was the offence of the cross.

- Juvenal in his *6th Satire* records how a wife ordered her husband: “Crucify this slave”. “But what crime worthy of death has he committed?” asks the husband, “no delay can be too long when a man’s life is at stake”. She replies: “What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man?”.

The sense of shame and offence attached to the cross was also there in Jewish perception of it. Whoever was hung on a tree was seen as having been cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, records Trypho (who was a Jew) objecting to Christianity: “We are aware that the Christ must suffer...but that he had to be *crucified*, that he had to die a death of such shame and dishonour- a death cursed by the Law- prove this to us, for we are totally unable to receive it”. Justin Martyr in his *Apology* further records: “They say that our madness consists in the fact that we place a *crucified* man in second place after the eternal God”. The Romans also mocked the idea of following a crucified man. There is a caricature which shows a crucified person with an ass’s head. The ass was a symbol of servitude [note how the Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass]. The caption sarcastically says: “Alexamenos worships God”. This was typical of the offence of the cross.

1:24 *But to them that are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God-* It has been pointed out that if some NT passages are translated into Aramaic,

the common language of the day in first century Israel, there would have been ample encouragement for memorization. Thus: We preach Christ crucified (*mishkal*), unto the Jews a stumblingblock (*mikshol*), and unto the Greeks foolishness (*sekel*), but unto them that are called... the power (*hishkeel*) of God and the wisdom (*sekel*) of God" (1 Cor. 1:23,24). "To them that are called" raises concerns as to whether faith, therefore, is just a gift given to some. But the call is in the Gospel, and specifically in the outstretched arms of the crucified Christ. All who encounter it are called; but many refuse to respond. Likewise we noted on :21 that to know God is a gift; but it is available to all who encounter His Son.

1:25 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men*- That Almighty all-wise God could inspire 1 Cor. 1:25 is another example of God's humility: "The foolishness of God... the weakness of God". In Jer. 14:21 we find something likewise wonderful: "Do not abhor *us*... do not disgrace the throne of thy glory". *We*, weak humans, are paralleled with the throne of God's glory.

*And the weakness of God is stronger than men*- The same word is used in :27 about the believers being "the weak things". Many times, this word is used about spiritual weakness, especially in 1 Corinthians (4:10; 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 12:22). The foolishness of God has been defined as the cross of Christ; but that is now made parallel to the way God calls spiritually weak persons to be His vehicle of operation. Such an observation was relevant to the Corinthian situation. Those weak believers were used by God on account of their association with the cross of Christ, "the foolishness of God".

1:26 *Consider your calling, brothers; not many of you had worldly wisdom, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth*- The references to 'wise' and 'powerful / mighty' men use the words just used about the Lord Jesus as the wisdom and power of God (:24). He can only be those things to those who are not wise or powerful- or, rather, who recognize that they are not those things. So the attraction of His wisdom and power is to those who recognize they lack those things- the unwise and the powerless. And that is why it is the chain smokers and the asylum seekers and the get rich quick scheme enthusiasts... who have what it takes to believe in Christ as the power and the wisdom of God.

The Lord Himself had implied that it was to the poor that the Gospel was more successfully preached. And Paul observed that in Corinth, not many mighty had been called, but most of them were poor (1 Cor. 1:26-28). "Christianity in its beginnings was without doubt a movement of impoverished classes... the Christian congregation originally embraced proletariat elements almost exclusively and was a proletarian organization". It has also been observed that the New Testament generally is written in very rough Greek, of a low cultural level when compared with other Greek literature of the period. The way he exhorts the Thessalonians to work with their own hands so that the world couldn't criticize them implies the readership of Thessalonians were mainly manual workers (1 Thess. 4:11). Likewise Eph. 4:28. Paul wrote as if the "abysmal poverty" of the Macedonian ecclesias was well known (2 Cor. 8:1,2); and yet he goes on to reason that they had "abundance" in comparison with the "lack" of the Jerusalem Christians (8:14). The Jewish Christians called themselves "Ebionites", based on the Hebrew word for 'the poor'- "it was probably a conscious reminiscence of a very early term which attested by Paul's letters as an almost technical name for the Christians in Jerusalem and Judaea". Even if not all these poor converts were slaves, they were all subservient to their employers / sources of income. Craftsmen would have had to belong to a pagan trade guild, normally involving idol worship which a Christian had to

refuse, and slaves of course had no 'right' to their own religion if it differed from that of their household.

*1:27 Bit God chose the foolish things of the world-* The word *moros* is predominantly used about the spiritually foolish. This was so relevant to the spiritually weak Corinthians. They had been chosen so that in God's strength they could come to glory. Maybe this is why the Lord forbids us to call each other *moros*, "fool" (Mt. 5:22). That is indeed how we are, spiritual blockheads. But we are not to see ourselves nor each other from that perspective- for we are called to be so much more, and it is through that weakness that God is to be glorified in His Son.

*That He might put to shame those that are wise-* The 'wise' here are those who appear to be wise. The fools confounding the wise is an inverse allusion to the Lord's parables, where the wise are saved and the foolish are condemned [e.g. in the parable of the two builders]. But here, the foolish shame the wise. "Shame" is the language of condemnation at the last day- this 'shaming' will happen only then, when those who appeared to be so 'wise', so sorted out, so spiritually and worldly wise, shall be condemned and shamed by the salvation of the transformed 'fools'. This whole approach was very necessary in approaching a church as weak as Corinth. And it has enormous implications for us today.

*And God chose the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong-* The word for "weak" is elsewhere used about the spiritually weak (Mt. 26:41; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14). The 'shame' is in the condemning of the apparently 'strong' at the last day by the apparently 'weak'. These terms effectively mean 'those who consider themselves weak / strong'. Rather like the Lord's statement that it is the sick and not the healthy who need a doctor- we must read in the ellipsis: 'those who consider themselves to be...'. All this is an outworking of the principle that "the weakness of God [in the crucified Christ] is stronger than men" (:25).

*1:28 God chose what is low and despised in the world-* "Low" is *agenes*, without descent. This may be a reference to the Gentiles, but "the world" of the first century despised people who could not prove where they came from. For people were identified by their ancestors and place of origin. Those who were on the very edge of society were those weak ones through whom His strength could work. Accepting this reasoning would make us conclude that the Christian church generally, and not just Corinth, should be comprised of the low, the stateless and those at the edges of society. For this is a general principle being explained here; it is not just relevant to Corinth. And yet in the West, the church is for the middle class. Historians claim that the early church was full of slaves, women and others on the edges. And this is what a mission church comprised of first generation converts will look like. The same Greek word for "despised" is used of the Pharisee despising the sinful publican in Lk. 18:9, and those who understood more of the Gospel despising those who were still stuck in their old ways (Rom. 14:3,10). We note with interest the usage of the same word in Paul's appeal to ask those despised *within the church* to judge matters (6:4). Perhaps that too has a spiritual reference? But it was of course the Lord Himself who on the cross was the despised one; the same word is used about Him there in Lk. 23:11 and Acts 4:11. He there was identified with the spiritually low and despised; for He died for sinners and not for the self-righteous.

*Even things that are not-* The language here recalls Rom. 4:17: "God, who gives life to the dead, and called things that are not, as though they were". The context there is of imputed righteousness. Those who had no righteousness are counted as if they do- by grace. This fits

in with the context here in 1 Corinthians- the Corinthians were woefully immature but in God's strength would be justified by grace through faith- and bring to nothing those people / things which [appeared to] be spiritually strong.

*To bring to nothing things that are-* 'Bringing to nothing' is the language of condemnation at the last day (6:13; 2 Thess. 2:8 etc.). The apparently strong, the things that apparently 'were' spiritually, therefore refer to those who shall appear at the day of judgment and be rejected. The idea of some at the judgment condemning others is to be found in various places- e.g. the men of Nineveh shall condemn the Jews of the Lord's say. So perhaps the picture is of those who appear so sorted out, so spiritually stable, so acceptable in secular terms... being condemned at the last day because they didn't really believe in the good news of Christ crucified, whereas those who were socially, spiritually and intellectually disadvantaged compared to them actually did believe in that saving good news. This is a powerful challenge to today's church.

1:29 *So that no flesh should boast before God-* In Gal. 6:14, Paul says that he will boast [s.w.] in nothing but the cross of Christ. We are not to boast of works, but only of what was achieved for us by grace through our faith in the Lord's cross (Eph. 2:9; Phil. 3:3). Any trust in human strength or wisdom is so abhorrent to God. He chooses the powerless and unwise, or at least those who recognize their lack of power and wisdom, to be the ones through whom He shall work. No wonder the Lord taught that the wealthy will scarcely be saved.

1:30 *But of Him are you in Christ Jesus-* We are "of God" in that we are born of Him by being in His Son by baptism into Him.

*Who was made to us by God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption-* It is those who lack these things, and recognize their lack of them, who are likely to earnestly believe in the Lord's offer of those things through the cross of Christ.

1:31 *That, according to what is written: He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord-* The whole purpose of calling the unwise, unrighteous and unholy is so that when they are saved at the last day, they will be glorying totally in the Lord's grace and in Him, in His characteristics which are counted to them. It is all a question of giving total glory to the crucified Christ and the plan of salvation by grace which is in Him. This is why self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, self congratulation, human wisdom and acceptance within human society... are all the very characteristics of the person who will not truly respond to the Gospel.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Jn. 1:14.

*I brothers, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God-* Paul has just argued in chapter 1 that the wisdom of God is in the crucified Christ, and those who are humanly wise will not respond to it. So Paul reasons that we should likewise present the Gospel with no attempt to make the cross of Christ somehow intellectually respectable, or acceptable in a secular sense. I have previously failed in this and so has so much Gospel outreach. Paul of course as a Rabbi and an intellectual could indeed have presented the Gospel with the trappings of secular wisdom. But he writes here as if he consciously stripped his message of anything like that. His message was after all, that of God in Christ- "the testimony of God". The Greek here seems to specifically mean 'evidence'. Faith is not built upon evidence that is visible (Heb. 11:1,2)- and that includes arguments from science, archaeology etc. The evidence / testimony of God is "the cross of Christ"; and the addition of human wisdom to it makes it of none effect (1:17). This is God's evidence which He provides to us in order for us to have a basis for faith. In encountering the Lord Jesus there, we are challenged to believe in God, as faith in God really is. All the energy expended upon apologetics to provide a supposed basis for faith is therefore in my view misguided. It is psychological encounter with the crucified Christ which elicits faith.

*2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified-* See on :1. The "determined" reflects Paul's struggle with the temptation to make the message of Christ crucified somewhat respectable in secular terms.

The letters to Corinth must have been very difficult to write. Paul was walking an absolute minefield. Therefore he says that his attitude to Corinth was that he wanted to know nothing among them, saving Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2); he wanted to keep his mind fixed upon the Lord Jesus and the intensity of His passion, rather than get sidetracked by personality issues and ecclesial politics. And his letters reveal this. They contain many unconscious allusions to the suffering and death of Christ. Paul refers to Christ as "Lord" throughout all his letters about once every 26 verses on average. And yet in Corinthians he does so once every 10 verses on average. The Lordship and suffering of Jesus were therefore very much in Paul's mind as he wrote. His Christ and cross-centred perspective is a real example to us, living as we do at a time when the body of Christ increasingly distracts us from the central object of our devotion: the Son of God who died for us, and was raised again for our justification.

When Paul faced Corinth, the ecclesia whom he had loved and brought into being with great labour pains, yet now riven with carnality, fabricating the most malicious rumours against him, bitter at his spirituality... he determined to know nothing among them, saving Christ, and Him crucified. The antidote to ecclesial problems and selfishness is reflection upon the cross. By insisting on our rights, Paul says, we will make the weak brother stumble, "for whom Christ died". 'Think of His cross and sacrifice', Paul is saying, 'and the sacrifice of self restraint *you* are asked to make is nothing at all'.



Despite “the offence of the cross”, Paul preached it. “I determined not to know [i.e. ‘teach the knowledge of’] any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. Paul didn’t accommodate his message to the ears of his hearers. There are times when God’s revelation is accommodated to us, but not when it comes to the basic message of Christ and the demands which His cross makes upon us.

2:3 - see on 1 Cor. 8:9; 2 Cor. 12:7.

*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling-* For Paul, his glory was not in heroic "deeds of the body" [see on Gal. 1:10] but rather in the fact that when he first preached to the Corinthians, he was suffering from "weakness... much fear and trembling"- a reference to anything from agitated nervous breakdown to malaria. We have Gal. 4:13 in the same vein: "You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at the first". So it could be that this is a reference to his physical weakness at the time he preached to the Corinthians. But William Barclay understands the Greek words to more imply “the trembling anxiety to perform a duty”, and I tend to run with this. The words are a reflection of the heart that bled within Paul. The man who has no fear, no hesitancy, no nervousness, no tension in the task of preaching... may give an efficient and competent performance from a platform. But it is the man who has this trembling anxiety, that intensity which comes from a heart that bleeds for ones hearers, who will produce an effect which artistry alone can never achieve. He is the man who will convert another. It has truly been said that “the need is the call”. To perceive the needs of others is what calls us and compels us to witness, coupled with our own disappointment with ourselves, our race, our nature.

2:3-5- see on Jn. 15:26.

*2:4 And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power-* This is parallel in thought to Paul's idea that he would preach the cross of Christ without any words of human wisdom. The "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" is thus paralleled to the cross of Christ. Here was and is the demonstration of Spirit and power. And yet in what sense can the cross of Christ be so powerful? I would say that the Lord's death was designed and is empowered to produce faith in God within those who accept it. For the Spirit was released as rivers of waters from His slain body. And especially in the first century context of illiteracy, the cross of Christ had power in that it was the motivation for the living examples of Christian sacrifice which were Christianity's best advert.

The essence of all this is the same today as it was then- the revelation of the person of Jesus isn’t solely through Bible reading and getting the interpretation right; it’s through a living community, His body. It is there that we will see His Spirit / personality in action. I don’t refer to miraculous gifts- but to the spirit / mind / disposition / essence of the Lord, man and saviour Jesus.

*2:5 So that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God-* Paul has earlier defined "the power of God" as the crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1:18,24). Paul correctly perceived that a person's faith 'stands in' the message they first receive and believe. The teacher / preacher therefore has huge responsibility to teach the right thing. Real faith is not

in the wisdom of men, Paul has argued, nor is it predicated upon anything other than the cross of Christ. And so he preached likewise- simply of the cross. The Greek phrase translated "stand in" is the closest we get in the Bible to an explanation of the substance of faith; of what faith is based in. And it is *not* in "the wisdom of men", including apologetics. It is in the "power of God" which we have earlier defined as Christ crucified (1:18,24).

*2:6 We speak wisdom, however, among them that are mature-* Paul spoke only of Christ crucified (:2), and so the true wisdom was Him. The "mature" would perceive this. For we have just been told that God has made Christ to be "wisdom" for us (1 Cor. 1:30). The Corinthians needed exhortation to become "mature" (1 Cor. 14:20); maturity has been reached by some now (Phil. 3:15; Col. 4:12; Heb. 5:14; James 1:4) and yet in another sense it is yet future, when we attain the full measure of Christ's maturity (Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28). The same Greek word is used in all these passages. The idea that faith is predicated upon encounter with Christ crucified will be struggled against, shot down as philosophically lacking, intellectually weak and so forth. But the paradox is that the mature will perceive it. When you reach 'Christ', the maturity that is Him, then we will understand that *all* is of Him and His cross.

*Yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nothing-* The wisdom of this world and its "princes" (AV), its academics and philosophers and chat show hosts, is 'coming to nothing'. Paul has just used the same word in 1:28 of how the despised simple believers shall 'bring to nothing' what seems so smart and wise. The means by which the wise of this world shall be brought to nothing is through the simple believers. And the Greek tense used suggests that this is ongoing- the wise of this world are already "coming to nothing". The world rulers are defined in :8 as those who crucified the Lord; Paul envisaged the overthrow of the Jewish system as being at the hands of the humble Christian believers, including the worldly Gentiles of Corinth. Things didn't work out that way because the Lord's return was delayed until our last days, but the principle remains the same.

*2:7 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery-* Paul doesn't mean that he has shrouded the simple message of the cross in "a mystery". For he has spoken of how his preaching is of the cross of Christ, stripped of literally anything else (:2). He means that the message of God's wisdom, which is Christ crucified (1:24), is so simple that it is received as a mystery by the wise of this world and indeed by all those who do not believe it.

*Even that which was hidden, which God foreordained before the ages for our glory-* The appeal of the cross is "hidden" in that the 'wise' won't see it because they choose not to believe it. The allusion is surely to the usage of the same word in the Lord's teaching that the things of the Gospel had been 'hidden' from the wise, and revealed to babes (Mt. 11:25). 1 Cor. 2:6-9 stresses how the early believers possessed a truth which nobody else apart from them could know. Whilst this feature of true Christianity led into the arrogance and pride which eventually doomed the early church, when and whilst used properly, it bound them even closer together. Nikolaus Walter observes that the first century generally "did not experience religion as a binding force that was capable of determining everyday reality by offering support, setting norms, and forming community". And yet the Truth of Christ enabled just such things to occur. In this, as today, the example of the community is the ultimate proof that the doctrine of Christ which we teach is indeed the Truth and of itself demands conversion.

2:8- see on 1 Cor. 1:19.

*Which not one of the rulers of this world has known. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory-* The rulers or princes of the world therefore referred specifically to the Roman-Jewish leaders who crucified the Lord. As noted on :6, those rulers were already 'coming to nothing' and would be condemned by the simple faith of illiterate Christians. Such talk of the overthrow of empire and ruling systems was criminal within the first century Roman empire. But Paul writes as he does, so important is the message of how simple faith shall gloriously triumph over all secular splendour.

Paul saw the naked, forsaken, mocked, bleeding, spittle covered body of Jesus as glorious. This was another inversion of all human values. And His glory is ours- for :7 has just mentioned that this mystery was foreordained for "our glory". The Lord's glory is ours, and ours is His.

*2:9 But as it is written: Things which eye saw not and ear heard not and which did not enter into the heart of man, whatever things God prepared for them that love Him-* The context is speaking of man's rejection of the crucified Christ. Unbelievers did not perceive [see or hear] that message, neither therefore did it enter their heart. The "things God prepared" are therefore those of the crucified Christ, who died in order to achieve that great salvation "for them that love Him". The 'things prepared' are those of the Kingdom feast (Mt. 20:23; 22:4; 25:34); but the same word is also used of the 'preparation' of the Lord Jesus as our sacrifice (Lk. 2:31). The cross of Christ enabled all the wonderful things of the Kingdom and the salvation experience in Christ. And it is all those things which are not really believed by the eyes, ears and heart of secular man, because the wisdom of this world has blinded them to it.

So the things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

*2:10 God revealed them to us through the Spirit-* Again the allusion is to Mt. 11:25, where the Lord praises the Father for 'hiding' His identity from the wise and prudent, and revealing it [s.w.] to "babies". Those immature, largely illiterate disciples who 'got it' about Jesus are therefore us. Here Paul adds that the process through which that revelation happens is "through the Spirit". This is not to say that one person is zapped by the Spirit and forced to believe, but another is not. There is indeed an element whereby faith is not simply a result of human steel will, but involves the gracious work of the Spirit on human minds. Yet as explained so far in Corinthians, it is our freewill choice to encounter the crucified Christ and believe in God's salvation through Him.

*For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God-* The "things" in view are surely those concerning the Lord Jesus and His kingdom of :9. These are the deep things, and not any apparent profundity of human wisdom or debates. The 'Spirit' is personified as searching around all the depths of God's mysteries because we are going to now read that this Spirit has been given to us, so that *we* might know those deep things. This is all beautifully shown by a comparison of Is. 64:4 and 1 Cor. 2:9: "Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what He has prepared for him that waits for him". Paul quotes this in 1 Cor. 2:9,10: "It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto *us* by His Spirit". The passage in Is. 64 says that no one except God

can understand the things He has prepared for the believers. However 1 Cor. 2:10 says that those things have been revealed to *us*. Because His Spirit is given to us and becomes our spirit.

2:11 *For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the things of God nobody knows, save the Spirit of God-* The spirit of a person is intimately connected to themselves. Only the heart knows its own bitterness in this sense, and likewise an external person can never totally get involved with the heart's joy (Prov. 14:10). This is the wonder of the fact that God's Spirit is given to us; this is the intimacy possible between God and man in Christ.

2:12 *But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, so that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God-* The "we" refers to the same "we" who were speaking / teaching the Corinthians (:13) and refers I suggest specifically to Paul and his preaching team. The spirit of the world is the mindset of "the wisdom of this world". Although Paul had that in his rabbinic days, he disregarded it. The Spirit he had received was in response to his faith in the crucified Christ whom he had encountered. This was God's Spirit, and revealed the things of God; and it was those things which he taught to the Corinthians in his preaching of the Gospel. The "things" were "freely given" in that the Spirit of God as it were searches all of God's things. The connection between Christ crucified and the free gift of God's "things" is developed in Rom. 8:32, where the same words are used: "He that spared not His own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not also with him freely give us all things?". Once we accept the gift of God's Son, then all else, quite literally, is surely going to be given. And those things include faith and understanding. The Greek word for "freely given" is also that translated 'forgive'. Our experience of forgiveness on account of the cross opens the way to receive so much more too- all the things of God's free giving. For the cross not only is the basis for the 'free giving' of forgiveness, but of God's Spirit which knows all things.

2:13 *Which things also we speak about-* The "things" are those of the Gospel of Christ which Paul spoke or taught.

*But not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but in words that the Spirit teaches-* Paul has said that he preaches Christ crucified without any words of human wisdom. They are the "things" in view. The words taught by the Spirit were therefore the words of or concerning the cross. Paul's teaching of the Corinthians was only verbalizing what the Spirit taught which flowed from the crucified Lord. We can now better understand why "the Spirit" is a title of the Lord Jesus in material like Romans, 2 Corinthians and Revelation. He personally is to be identified with His Spirit which He freely gives to all who believe in Him.

*Combining spiritual things with spiritual-* The Spirit in Paul's message would connect with the Spirit within the believers at Corinth. The GNB seems to get the point of this rather difficult Greek: "As we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit". It was and is only to the spiritual that spiritual things make sense; to all others, who do not believe the simple message of the cross and all that is given to us through His work there, the spiritual things remain mysterious and unwise. And I have to add, that those believers who resist the current work of the Spirit will likewise find many things closed and hidden, because the Spirit of those teachings is not being allowed to combine with the Spirit within them.

2:14 *Now the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot know them-* Secular wisdom will not believe in a crucified Saviour. Instead of allowing the crucified Christ to convert them, they rush to Josephus and other early historians to enquire whether Jesus of Nazareth really died on a cross outside Jerusalem. But the point is that there is a power within Him there which of itself converts- if we let it, and humble ourselves to shed our human wisdom. Any references in Josephus etc. are at best confirmations of our faith, but play no part in essential faith in Christ. We must take seriously the repeated reports of the early missionaries, that they could not elicit belief in the message of Christianity or the Christian God amongst the illiterate folk they encountered in Africa or the Pacific islands- until they explained or drew pictures of the crucifixion. Then, all seemed to make sense- to those who felt their own sin and thirsted for forgiveness and connection with the one God. "The natural man" is the wise of this world who would consider the cross and all we have written about it to be foolish. Because human pride has stopped him believing. He will not "know" these things because he cannot- until he quits his human wisdom.

Paul saw the cross of Christ as parallel with "the things of the Spirit of God", the wisdom of God, what eye has not seen nor ear heard, but what is revealed unto the believer and not to the world (1 Cor. 1:18,23,24; 2:7-13). The cross of Christ was the supreme expression of the Spirit of God, and it's true meaning is incomprehensible to the world. In the cross, according to Paul's allusion back to Isaiah, God bowed the Heavens and came down. He did wonderful things which we looked not for. The thick darkness there is to be associated with a theophany presence of God Himself. See on Jn. 19:19.

*Because they are spiritually discerned-* Only the Spirit within a person who has believed in the crucified Christ will be able to 'combine with' or connect with Spiritual things (:13). The Greek word means literally to question; asking questions as we read God's word is therefore an appropriate thing for us to be doing. Paul is not advocating a simplistic approach, nor a shutting down of any critical, analytical approach.

2:15- see on 1 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 2:17.

*But he that is spiritual judges all things; and he is ultimately judged by no man-* Those who have believed in the crucified Lord will receive of His Spirit, and are thereby able to judge or discern the truth of the things Paul was preaching. Such persons will be mocked and despised by the wise of this world; but ultimately, they are not judged by those men. Indeed, they shall bring to nothing all such pretensions in the day of final judgment, as explained in 1:27,28 (see notes there).

In the final analysis, we will meet Jesus alone. There will by God's grace be a moment when we will even see the face of Almighty God- alone. This was the light at the end of Job's tunnel- he would see his redeemer for himself "and not another". Paul possibly expresses the same idea of an unenterable relationship in 1 Cor. 2:15: "He that is spiritual discerneth all things (about God), yet he himself is discerned of no man". Our real spiritual being is a "hidden man" (1 Pet. 3:4). The Spirit describes our final redemption as our "soul" and "spirit" being "saved" ; our innermost being, our essential spiritual personality, who we *really* are in spiritual terms, will as it were be immortalized (1 Pet. 1:9; 1 Cor. 5:5). Notice that Paul styles

the spiritual man "he himself" (1 Cor. 2:15 AV); as if the real, fundamental self of the true believer is the spiritual man, notwithstanding the existence of the man of the flesh within him. Likewise Paul calls his spiritual man "I myself" in Rom. 7:25. He now felt that when he sinned, it was no longer "I", his real, personal self, who was doing so (Rom. 7:17).

2:16 - see on Job 21:22.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ-* The person who knows the Lord's mind is the one who has His Spirit (:11). We have the mind of Christ, who had the mind of God. The spirit of Christ and that of God are the same thing. The idea that men should instruct God is unthinkable- but this is what effectively is the position of those who consider that their human wisdom is the true wisdom, and God's wisdom is foolishness. The quotation from Is. 40:13,14 is about God's people in Babylon being tempted to think that the wisdom of Babylon, perhaps the most advanced in the world at its time, was somehow superior to that of Israel's God. Paul uses the same idea in Rom. 11:34 concerning the false wisdom of Judaism claiming as it were to be superior to God's wisdom in Christ.



## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And I, brothers, can not speak to you as spiritual people, but as carnal people-* The "we" who have the Spirit in 2:13 refer to Paul and his preaching team and not all at Corinth. The Corinthians possessed the miraculous gifts, but were in a more fundamental sense Spirit-less. "John did no miracle", but was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Even the Comforter, which does refer to the miraculous gifts in its primary context, was, in perhaps another sense, to be unseen by the world, and to be *within* the believers (Jn. 14:17). It could well be that the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus concerning the need to be born both of water and Spirit must be read in the context of John's baptism; his was a birth of water, but Christian baptism is being described with an almost technical term: birth of the Spirit, in that baptism into the Spirit of Jesus brings the believer into the realm of the operation of God's Spirit. But as happened with the Corinthians, it is possible to deny the Spirit any space to operate within us; those who resist any idea of the Spirit working directly within the human mind are putting themselves in the same position. This is the answer to those who complain that they were baptized but 'feel' no Spirit operation; the potential was given, and is still there, as chapters 1 and 2 make so clear about the Corinthians; but they were not Spirit-filled because they didn't allow it.

*As infants in Christ-* But they were still "in Christ". And Paul respects them for that.

3:2 *I fed you with milk, not with solid food. For you were not yet able to bear it; no, not even now are you able-* Paul has defined what he initially taught them as being the crucified Christ. And he has proceeded to develop the idea that the presence of the Spirit within believers in Christ will enable them to 'combine with' further Spiritual teaching. But despite their initial belief, like so many today, they had not remained open to the Spirit, and so Paul was unable to share with them the deeper matters of the Spirit. Or if he did, they could not connect with those things because they were lacking the Spirit within them (see on 2:13). The language here and in Heb. 5:12-14 surely alludes to Jn. 16:12, although it doesn't verbally quote it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now". "Able" is *dunamis*, they were not of power to receive Spiritual things; and chapter 1 has laboured the point that *dunamis* comes from the Spirit of Christ received at baptism.

3:3 *For you are still carnal. For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are you not carnal and do you not walk after the manner of men?-* Paul can confidently conclude that they are not Spiritual, and therefore still carnal, because there is no evidence of the fruits of the Spirit. Jealousy, strife and division are the works of the flesh and advertise a lack of the Spirit within (Gal. 5:20). We are not to judge others in the sense of condemning them; but like Paul here, we can quite simply observe whether someone has the Spirit by whether they manifest the fruits of the Spirit. We may find that those who differ from us in some areas of Biblical interpretation clearly have the Spirit; and others who share our theology may be Spirit-less. Note that "strife" here translates *eris*, from whence 'heresy'. The real heresy is division between believers; and yet it is the fear of heresy which so often creates divisions. Paul could have chosen various indicators of the lack of the Spirit amongst the Corinthians; but he chooses the strife and division amongst them as the clearest example of it on a group level. For the joint possession of the Spirit creates unity- the unity of the Spirit. Where this is lacking on a collective level, it is clear that generally, as a community, the Spirit is lacking. This is not to say there were not individuals in Corinth who had the Spirit. But the reasoning here is forceful- any divided church, denomination or community is evidence that on a general, collective level, they are carnal and not Spirit filled.

3:4 *For when one says: I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos- are you not mere men?*- They were "men" rather than being 'spirit' on a collective level; see on :3. The division of the church into groups based around which teacher they preferred or who had baptized them was an evidence that the Spirit received at baptism had not been allowed to dwell within them.

3:5 *Who then is Apollos? And who is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed, and each as the Lord gave to him-* A Christ centred approach makes the person who preached to us a mere instrument, a servant / minister used by the Lord to bring about faith. "Each as the Lord gave to him" could refer to the way that Paul and Apollos were simply fulfilling the ministries given to them by the Lord; but the context is of faith and how one comes to belief. So the reference may rather be to the fact that each of them had believed as a result of the Lord's gift / grace. This was to be paramount in their thinking; the human instruments used in the process were of utterly no account.

3:6 *I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase-* The "increase" in the context is their faith; hence Paul later writes of "when your faith is increased" (2 Cor. 10:15). Faith is a gift from God. This metaphor would have stopped at the planting and watering if the Gospel alone was enough to provoke faith. Paul later explains how that in his preaching he laid the foundation of the Gospel of Christ, but other brethren were building on it, as here in this earlier parable he speaks of his planting the seed of the Gospel and Apollos watering it. He warned these 'builder' brethren to "take heed how he buildeth thereupon", because "every man's work (cp. "ye are my work in the Lord", 1 Cor. 9:1) shall be made manifest: for the day (of judgment) shall declare it... the fire [of judgment] shall try every man's work, of what sort it is... gold, silver... wood, hay, stubble... if any man's work abide which he hath built... he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:6-15). This clearly teaches that successful building up of brethren will have its specific reward at the judgment; and that to some degree their rejection will be a result of our lack of zeal, and we will thus lose the extra reward which we could have had for the work of upbuilding. No doubt if the brethren we have laboured hard with to help, are with us in the Kingdom, this will greatly increase our joy- as compared to the brother who has not had such intense fellowship with his brethren during this life, and whose close friends in the ecclesia have been rejected, he himself only barely passing through the fire of judgment himself ("Yet so as by fire").

3:7 *So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters, but God that gives the increase-* The channels by which God works are not themselves the source of faith. In chapter 1, Paul has tackled the fact that the Corinthians were divided into camps based around various teachers or baptizers. What's significant is that the individuals being so fiercely followed (Paul, Peter and Apollos) did not themselves want that following. And this kind of thing has repeated itself in church history. People want a human leader, a badge to wear, a human identity- and so they will chose persons and even systems which do not want to be treated in that way, but all the same, those people are made to fit the very human needs of the people.

3:8 *Now he that plants and he that waters are one, but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour-* Despite having said that in terms of giving faith and salvation, the channels are nothing- Paul is clear that those who do this work will be rewarded. The planter and waterer are "one" in that they are both being used by God, but they shall individually receive a reward for their work. Whilst salvation is by grace and not according to

works, it is also true that the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of our works in this life. And the judgment process will reflect that; one will reign over five cities, another over 10 cities; just as one star differs from another in glory.

3:9- see on Rom. 15:26.

*For we are God's fellow-workers-* We are co-workers with Him in the building up of His house (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). He could save men directly; but instead He has delegated that work to us, and thereby limited His power to save insofar as it depends upon our extension of it. Only through our preaching can the work of the cross be made complete- and that thought is frightening. God is building up His house, His ecclesia. But because we manifest God, we too are "labourers together with Him", not just puppets in His hand; we too are the builders of His house (1 Cor. 3:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:1). The contrast between "we" and "you" has been noted earlier- the "we" surely refers to Paul and Silas.

*You are God's husbandry, God's building-* "Husbandry" is literally 'farm'. The same word is used of how previously, Israel had been God's farm (Mt. 21:33-38); but now the likes of the Gentile Corinthians were that farm. But they appeared to be likewise yielding no spiritual fruit, despite all the work being done for them. We note that the Father is the husbandman (Jn. 15:1); and yet in another sense, we are the husbandmen. He is working with us through every effort made to promote spiritual fruit in His people. We are labourers together with none less than God Himself whenever we do anything to build up others.

3:10 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder-* The gift ["grace"] of God, the Spirit gift, was Paul's 'wisdom'. For he has explained in chapter 1 that spiritual wisdom is a Spirit gift from God.

*I laid a foundation, and another builds upon it-* The foundation was in converting unbelievers to the cross of Christ (:11). The rejected stone of Christ becomes the foundation stone ["corner stone"] for the faith of every individual and every true church. Paul saw himself as called to break new ground, to lay the foundation of Christian belief where it had not been laid before (Rom. 15:20); but he depended upon others to build upon it. This is in line with the terms of the great commission- to preach the simple news of the Lord's death and resurrection, to baptize people into it, and then afterwards to "teach them all things that I have commanded" (Mt. 28:20).

*But let each man take care how he builds upon it!*- The allusion is surely to the parable of the wise and foolish builders; for Paul has just claimed that he is a *wise* builder, laying a firm foundation. And the tension between wise and foolish is often played upon in these early chapters of 1 Corinthians. His take on the parable is interesting, in that he seems to be arguing that it refers to the work we do in building up others, rather than in laying a personal foundation and building as it were our own house.

Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 3:10-12 is that "every man" will make a convert, and he should ensure they are firm in the faith, lest he lose them at judgment day. These assumptions of Paul reflect his positive way of thought, in a brotherhood that abounded in weakness and failure to live up to its potential. Likewise he writes of marriage as if marriage within the faith was and is the only model of marriage which he knows, even though there must have been many failures to live up to this ideal, as there are today. Paul seems to have assumed

that all of us would preach and make converts (not leave it to just some of our community): he speaks of how "every man" in the ecclesia builds upon the foundation of Christ, but how he builds will be judged by fire. If what he has built is burnt up at the judgment, he himself will be saved, but not what he has built. I would suggest that the 'building' refers to our converts and work with other believers. If they fail of the Kingdom, we ourselves will be saved, but our work will have been in vain. This parable also suggests that the salvation of others, their passing through the fire at the judgment, is dependent upon how we build. This may be hyperbole to make a point, but it is a powerful encouragement that we are *all* elders and preachers, and we *all* have a deep effect on others' spirituality. We have responsibilities to those who respond to our preaching.

*3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ-* In chapters 1 and 2, Paul has explained that the foundation is Christ crucified; he determined to preach nothing other than that. The same word is used in Heb. 6:1 about the foundation of "faith toward God". Paul has explained that faith in God is predicated upon encounter with His crucified Son. And yet atheism was not popular in the first century Mediterranean world. The point is that in reality, we are not really believers in God unless we are believers in His Son; for the Son is the only way to the Father. Paul may be implying that some were seeking to claim to have laid some other foundation, disregarding the ground work Paul had done. The allusion to the parable of the wise and foolish builders suggests that the foundation is laid upon a rock- the Lord Jesus- rather than sand. This is the only valid building. And that rock is defined by the Lord Jesus as being Him and His words, believed and acted upon.

*3:12 But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble-* The builders upon the foundation of Paul's basic preaching work were those who then did the pastoral work of teaching all that the Lord has commanded (Mt. 28:20). The materials they build with refer to the quality of those they build up. Gold, silver and precious stones can pass through the fire (:13)- the final test of judgment day. And these three figures are used elsewhere about the believers. The other corresponding three figures will be burnt up by the fire. Here we see the principle that the final acceptance of individuals is partly related to the quality of the teaching and caring work done for them by third parties. God has built this factor into the algorithm of our salvation in order that we may each one devote ourselves to caring for others spiritually, and so that likewise we may realize our own need for others' help in our own path to salvation.

*3:13 Each man's work shall be revealed. For the day of judgment shall declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire itself shall test each man's work of what sort it is-* The 'revelation' and 'declaration' will be public because in some [unimaginable] form, the judgment experience will be public. We shall each perceive the various factors in the final salvation and condemnation of each person. The judgment process will reveal openly the efforts made by others towards the salvation of others; the fire shall "test" our work with each other. And Paul writes not merely of himself and his preaching team, but of 'every man'; for we are each called to work in building others up against that day. The same word for "test" is used of how we can examine ourselves now at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28); for that meeting is, or can be, a foretaste of judgment day. We can 'test our own selves' ahead of that day (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4 s.w.). Right now God is 'testing' our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4); the judgment process will be a declaration for *our* collective benefit of God's present judgments. Peter seems to allude to Paul's ideas here when he writes that the faithful are as gold who

pass through the fire right now, and are 'tested' with fire through present experience (1 Pet. 1:7 s.w.). Through our response to trial we therefore have a foretaste of judgment day.

At the point of conversion, the secrets of our hearts are in a sense made manifest (1 Cor. 14:25); but secrets are made manifest in the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18; 1 Cor. 3:13). The present judgments of God about us will be revealed at the judgment (Rom. 2:5). Our actions "treasure up" wrath or acceptance (Rom. 2:5). The materialistic believer heaps up treasure for judgment at the last day (James 5:3). See on Lk. 11:23.

1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation (Josh. 6:24). Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the faithful.

3:14 *If anyone's work shall endure which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward-* Our reward in the Kingdom will in some way be related to the work of upbuilding we have done with our brethren and sisters in this life. The "reward" which 1 Cor. 3:14 speaks of is the "work" we have built in God's ecclesia in this life. In agreement with this, Paul describes those he had laboured for as the reward he would receive in the Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). Paul has in mind that the Corinthians were his "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1). He encourages all the Corinthians to likewise abound in this "work of the Lord" (15:58)- i.e. of building up each other. Paul has said in :8 that he is liable for "reward"- depending on the growth of the Corinthians.

3:15 *If anyone's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as having passed through fire-* There is the implication in the New Testament that whoever lives the life of Christ will convert others to the Way. 1 Cor. 3 speaks of the converts a man builds on the foundation of Christ. They, like himself, must go through the fire of judgment, and if they are lost, then he himself will still be saved (if he has remained faithful). The implication is that all of us build up others, and our work is tried in the end.

The accepted will be saved "yet so as by fire" (AV). The fire of condemnation will as it were burn at them and remove all their surface spirituality. And as through death comes life, so through condemnation of the flesh comes salvation of the spirit.

If we invest our lives in seeking to save others and they are burnt up at the day of judgment, then we will indeed experience loss. "Suffer loss" is a term elsewhere used about being "cast away" in rejection at the day of judgment, or 'losing' ones own soul there (Mt. 16:26; Lk. 9:25). This is not teaching that the preacher / teacher will be rejected, for we go on to read that he shall not be- "he himself shall be saved". It's that if we really care for people, then the loss of any man is my loss; we identify with those we love and care for. Hence the faithful of the Old Testament felt that they had sinned along with Israel, and Ezra blushed to lift up his face to God because of the sins of the Israel with whom he was associated (Ezra 9:6). As we see those they laboured for condemned and burnt up, we will feel it as if it were us. This is

why Paul openly admits that he has a vested interest in the salvation of the Corinthians. We too cannot work with others in some dispassionate, at-a-distance manner, as if it were a mere 9-5 job we were doing. If those we served are indeed burnt up, it shall be as if we were, although we ourselves shall be saved. This I believe is the sense of the next sentence: "But he himself shall be saved, yet as having passed through fire".

*3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?*- Paul began the chapter by saying that they were not spiritual (:1); and yet the Spirit dwelt in them. As explained earlier in these notes, the Spirit is given but this doesn't make us spiritual unless we allow that Spirit to take over our lives and allow it free movement. And this was what the Corinthians weren't doing; for they instead gave freedom of movement to their flesh. The "you" here is in the plural; the Spirit was dwelling amongst them as a community.

*3:17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy; and such are you-* Judaism was very touchy about the destruction or damaging of the temple in any way. And Paul transfers that language to these Gentile Corinthians. He began in chapter 1 by appealing for holiness, or sanctification, on a personal level. He reminded them that they had been sanctified, in status before God in Christ and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. But they had to allow that to work out in practice instead of justifying the flesh. The damaging of the temple is being spoken of on a collective, plural level. The concern here is not so much with damaging ones own physical body, but with damaging the temple / church of God. The letter will continue to give examples of that- division, prostitution and immorality within the church, over eating and drinking at the breaking of bread, false teaching etc. Those who stop the community from being sanctified by advocating the flesh are therefore standing against the Holy Spirit, which is amongst the church and within the individual believers. This becomes a form of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

*3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks that he is wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise-* At this stage in the letter, there was in view a particular damaging of the church, God's temple. It was in the belief and teaching of human wisdom. For this stands opposed to the Spirit of God, as Paul has laboured from the start of the letter to this point. Paul is appealing here for a re-conversion- to 'foolishness', in the eyes of the world, by quitting human wisdom. The true wisdom was of the Spirit, which had already potentially been given to them. Chapter 1 has said that they are already enriched with all spiritual wisdom; they had to reject human wisdom, becoming 'foolish', in order to access it.

Job was the greatest of the men of the east (Job 1:3), people who were renowned in the ancient world for their wisdom (cp. Mt. 2:1; 1 Kings 4:30). Thus Job as the Jews would have been full of worldly wisdom, and this is maybe behind Paul's words of 1 Cor.3:18,19: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written (quoting Job 5:13, which is Eliphaz speaking about Job), He taketh the wise in their own craftiness". Job is equated with the false wisdom of the Judaizers, who were using "excellency of speech... wisdom... enticing words of man's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1,4), to corrupt the believers from the "simplicity that is in Christ", "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" (2 Cor. 11:3).

*3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God-* Chapters 1 and 2 have defined the wisdom of God as the power of the crucified Christ. All else is foolishness with God. The whole structure of the argument and language used allows for no incorporation of worldly

wisdom within Divine wisdom. Yet we in this age of all ages are so strongly tempted to proclaim a faith which appears intellectually and scientifically respectable.

*For it is written: He takes the wise in their craftiness-* The impossibility of combining secular and Divine wisdom is underscored by this. The worldly wisdom of the wise is actually what stops them from believing; which is why Paul insisted on preaching the bald message of the crucified Christ with no words of secular wisdom attached to it. For faith would not then be elicited. The quotation from Eliphaz in Job 5:13 raises interesting questions as to the nature of Divine inspiration. The words of the friends are at times wrong, and God later says they are wrong. But here some of their words are quoted as being correct. The view that every single word we read in our translations of the Bible is 'true' can lead us into the problems evident in many Bible fundamentalists. Take the words of Eliphaz against Job (Job 5:13). They were wrong words (Job 42:7). Yet they are quoted in 1 Cor. 3:19. Wrong statements can still be recorded under inspiration and even quoted. Take the mocking of Sennacherib. It's recorded under inspiration, blasphemous as it was.

3:20 *And again: The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are vain-* The vanity of secular reasoning is that it is vain in terms of bringing a person to faith. For true faith is predicated, as Paul has explained, upon encounter with Christ. The quotation from Ps. 94:11 is changed, under inspiration; "men" becomes "the wise" to fit the context of Paul's argument. But it could be argued that secular man is to be identified with secular wisdom. The obsession of our age with education and learning makes these issues poignant. The context of Psalm 94 is a pleading with the faithful in Israel not to adopt the philosophy and belief system of their oppressors. And this is pertinent to Christians- mixing the truth of Christ with secular wisdom is the same error. And the wisdom of the world is thus presented most negatively.

3:21 *Therefore, let no one boast in men. For all things are yours-* The boasting in men may refer to boasting in human teachers and their words of human wisdom. But these "men" are defined in :22 as Paul, Apollos and Peter. In chapter 1, Paul laments how the church has split into factions around these men. So he is here repeating the basic point made there- the cross of Christ is the fundamental basis of faith. Anything else added to it is mere human thinking. To start talking about perceived differences between those three Christian leaders was just the same as worldly wisdom. And surely none of those three men in themselves approved of the divisions being made around them. The "all things" in view are those of 1 Cor. 1:5; the gift of the Spirit had given them "all things" in the Spiritual sphere. Again the appeal is to realize what they have potentially been given by the gift of the Spirit. To start talking about the superiority of Paul's teaching over Peter's was a sign that they failed to be awed as they should by the "all things" given them in Christ. The spirit of Christ gave them the "all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Through the Spirit, God was working all things in all men in the church (1 Cor. 12:6) and will articulate this 'all things in all men' at the final change to immortality (1 Cor. 15:28).

3:22 *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come- all are yours-* If literally all things have been made possible by the Spirit, then there is no need to argue about who baptized us, or the different nuances of teaching between church leaders. These things pale into utter insignificance compared to the all things made possible for us right now. "All are yours" suggests that there was the idea that by having a certain baptism or having some supposed superior teaching of secular wisdom, they possessed more than their fellows. This kind of petty arrogance can so often be seen. Yet

once the immensity of having "all things" is perceived, then such a mentality disappears.

3:23 *And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's*- Another nail in the coffin for Trinitarian views of Jesus being equal to God. If we feel we are Christ's, that we belong solely to Him, and through Him we are therefore also God's... then we shall not feel any allegiance to mere man. No human leader, even within the church, can have our allegiance, nor should we even seek to give allegiance if we are wholly Christ's. Yet there is a tendency in us all, as there was in the Corinthians, to be someone's; someone whom we know, who is visible on this earth. And that in the end is why there are so many denominations and followers of people. The extent of Christ's Lordship ought to drive this from us.

If we believe that all in Christ, all who are 'Christian', will be in the Kingdom... then, we will act joyfully and positively toward our community, abounding in hope. We have to assume that our brethren are likewise going to be there; for we cannot condemn them. Therefore we must assume they too will be saved along with us. Consider how Paul repeatedly has this attitude when dealing with his apostate Corinthians: "For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). See too 1 Cor. 6:3,11; 10:17; 13:12; 15:22,57; 2 Cor. 1:7; 3:18; 5:1.



## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Let a man regard us as servants of Christ*- Paul now begins to justify himself against criticism and gossip, and to lay the basis for his authority in appealing to the Corinthians regarding their serious misbehaviour and wrong teaching. Clearly some did not regard him and his team as "servants of Christ". The word for "servant" is that used by the Lord on the Damascus road in giving Paul authority to do the work he did: "I have appeared unto you... to make you a servant and witness of these things which you have seen" (Acts 26:16). The word *huperetes* is literally an 'under oarsman'. He was rowing, but the Lord Jesus was the captain directing the ship; and Paul was 'under' Him. He plays on this idea in 4:3 where he reasons that therefore it means nothing to him to be *hupo* man's judgment; for he is in fact *hupo* or 'under' the Lord's mastership. This is a liberating principle, and it flows directly from the apparently painless statement that Jesus is Lord and Master. If we are indeed 'under' Him, then we will not allow men to put us down, to make us 'under' their judgment. Their words and judgments will mean the less, indeed, nothing at all. For we are not 'under' them but the Lord.

*And stewards of the mysteries of God*- "Stewards" continues the idea of a 'servant' being 'under' a master. For a 'steward' was a slave within a household who managed day to day affairs. The goods in view were God's mysteries- and not Paul's own. I noted earlier that the Gospel of Christ was only a mystery to those who shut their eyes from understanding it.

4:2- see on Heb. 3:5.

*In this, moreover, it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful*- The same word is used in the parable of the unjust steward in Lk. 16:1-8. But the point was that the steward was found faithful or otherwise by his own master- and not by the gossip of other servants. And Paul goes on to develop this point.

4:3 *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or any man's judgment. I do not judge even myself*- Our being servants *under* the Lord Jesus, accountable to *Him*, means that we are not 'under' any human judgment; see on :1 *Servants of Christ*. This means that quite literally any human judgment of us, whether by our critics in the church or even by our own self in our personal self-assessment, is utterly irrelevant. And yet so many beat themselves up all their lives over the fact that he said that, she thinks that about me, they judged me like this or that. If we are solely and completely under the Lord's judgment, then their view [and our own view of ourselves, whether too harsh or too generous] is irrelevant.

For Paul, the fact that he had only *one* judge meant that he could genuinely feel that it mattered very little to him how others judged him. The idea of worrying only about God's judgment of us rather than man's lies behind Prov. 29:26: "Many seek the ruler's favourable judgment; but a man's judgment [i.e. the ultimate judgment, the only one worth having] comes from the Lord". But this takes quite some faith to believe- for in this age of constant communication between people about other people, we all tend to get worried by others' judgments and opinions of us. But ultimately there is only *one* judge- God, and not the guys at work, your kid sister, your older brother, the woman in apartment 35. The idea of the court of Heaven is a great comfort to us in the pain of being misjudged by men. It's a case of seeing what isn't visible to the human eye.

Paul's thought here is building on what he had earlier reasoned in 1 Cor. 2:15, that the spiritual man "himself is judged of no man". There was only One judge, and the believer is now not condemned if he is in Christ (Rom. 8:1). He that truly believes in Christ is not condemned, but has passed from death to life (Jn. 3:18; 5:24). So however men may claim to judge and condemn us, the ultimate truth is that no man *can* judge / condemn us, and we who are spiritual should live life like that, not fearing the pathetic judgments of men, knowing that effectively we are *not* being judged by them. How radically different is Paul's attitude to so many of us. The fear of criticism and human judgment leads us to respond as animals do to fear- the instinct of self-defence and self-preservation is aroused. We defend ourselves as we would against hunger or impending death. Yet here the radical implications of grace burst through. *We* are not our best defence. We have an advocate who is also the judge, the almighty Lord Jesus; we have a preserver and saviour, the same omnipotent Lord, so that we need not and must not trust in ourselves. By not trusting in this grace of salvation, we end up desperately trusting ourselves for justification and preservation and salvation, becoming ever more guilty at our abysmal and pathetic failures to save and defend ourselves.

The message of imputed righteousness was powerfully challenging. For the whole message of Romans is that our only acceptability is through *God* counting us righteous although we are not... and it is *His* judgment which matters, not that of the million watching eyes of society around us. 1 Cor. 4:3-5 teach that the judgment of others is a "very small thing", an irrelevancy, compared with Christ's judgment of us. The fact that we have only one judge means that whatever others think or judge of us is irrelevant. That may be easy enough to accept as a theory, but the reality for those living in collective societies was far-reaching. Appreciating the ultimate importance of our standing before *God* means that we have a conscience towards *Him*, and a rightful sense of shame before Him for our sins.

4:4- see on Gal. 6:4.

*For I know nothing against myself in my own conscience. Yet hereby I am not justified; but he that judges me is the Lord-* As explained in the previous verses, Paul was under the Lordship of Jesus as his master. Only His judgment therefore was of any meaning; even if his own conscience were clear, this would not justify him. He parallels his justification with his judgment; the Lord's present and final judgment will be our justification by His imputed righteousness. And so a comparison related to time is also introduced; whether we feel justified by our own self assessment now is nothing compared to His justification of us then. This idea is continued in the next verse- "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come".

Paul says that although he does not feel he has done anything wrong, this does not of itself mean that he is justified in God's sight. We cannot, therefore, place too much importance on living according to our natural sense of right and wrong. This is the very error which has led gay 'Christians' to interpret the Bible in the light of their own desires, rather than allowing themselves to be taught by God's word. "It's OK in my conscience" is their only justification. They and many others give more credibility to what they perceive to be guidance coming from within them, than to God's word of Truth. The words of the Lord Jesus in Lk. 11:35 seem especially relevant: "Take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. "It's OK in my conscience" is indeed dark light. Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will

judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience.

“He that judges me is the Lord” alludes to “Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord” (Is. 49:4). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

1 Cor. 4:3-5 appeals to the reality of *God's* future judgment as a basis for not paying too much attention to how *man* judges us. If it is *God's* judgment that means everything to us, what men say or think about us, or what we perceive they do, will not weigh so heavily with us. The ultimate reality of our lives is the sense of God's future judgment, not the awareness of man's present judgment. If we really grasp the simple fact that God alone is judge, that there is only One who *can* judge us, that Christ will come, then we will say with Paul from our hearts: “He that is spiritual... himself is judged of no man” (1 Cor. 2:15). Of course, men *do* judge us; and it hurts. But we are to act and feel according to the fact that ultimately, they can *not* judge us. For there is only One judge, to whom we shall all soon give account.

Paul, misrepresented and slandered more than most brethren, came to conclude: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me [right now] is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The judge is the justifier, according to this argument. Paul is not justified by himself or by other men, because they are not his judge. The fact that God alone is judge through Christ [another first principle] means that nobody can ultimately justify us or condemn us. "Many seek the favour of the ruler ['judge']; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord" (Prov. 29:26). The false claims of others can do nothing to ultimately damage us, and our own efforts at self-justification are in effect a denial of the fact that the Lord is the judge, not us, and therefore He alone can and will justify.

*4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come-* Any feeling OK in our own conscience *now* is irrelevant compared to the fact that the final judgment is not *now* but *then* when the Lord comes. The appeal to judge nothing before that time is directed very much at ourselves in our self judgment, rather than warning against judging others. We are not to judge, not simply because it is beyond our competence, but because *now* is not the time to judge.

*Who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts-* Judgment of others is impossible because we cannot see the hearts of others, nor can we see in darkness. There is an element to which judgment will be public; and hidden things will be made manifest not only to those being judged, but to all of us. The real intentions of others will then be known by us all. And this is necessary to prepare us to live eternally together. The judgment process in that sense is for our benefit and education, rather than because God needs it in order to gather information. The same word for "bring to light" is used of how we can now live 'in the light', with our whole body as it were full of light and having no dark parts (Lk. 11:36; Jn. 1:9). This is the whole sense of our having been 'enlightened' (Eph. 1:18; 3:9; Heb. 6:4; 10:32 s.w.).

We can live in the spirit of judgment day right now, if we allow the Lord's light to operate as intended. He will reveal the hidden things of darkness (the human heart), and will make

manifest the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5). Of course He knows these anyway; but He will make them manifest *to us*. The judgment seat is for our benefit, not God's- He knows our lives and spiritual position already. The day of judgment is to purify us (Mal. 3:2)- not ultimately, for that has been done by the Lord's blood and our lives of faithful acceptance of this. But the fire of judgment reveals the dross of our lives *to us* and in this sense purges us of those sins. Without the judgment, we would drift into the Kingdom with no real appreciation of our own sinfulness or the height of God's grace. The judgment will declare God's glory, His triumph over every secret sin of His people. The heathen will be judged "that the nations may know themselves to be but men" (Ps. 9:20)- self knowledge is the aim, not extraction of information so that God can make a decision. And it was the same with Israel: "Judge the bloody city... (i.e.) shew her all her abominations" (Ez. 22:2).

At judgment God "shall bring forth thy righteousness (good deeds) as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). The sins of the rejected and the good deeds of the righteous will be publicly declared at the judgment, even if they are concealed from men in this life (1 Tim. 5:24,25). This is how men will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 2:29). The wicked will see the generous deeds of the righteous rehearsed before them; and will gnash their teeth and melt away into condemnation (Ps. 112:9,10).

*And then shall each man have his praise from God-* The praise, in the context, would be for the counsels of their hearts. This is exactly the sense of Rom. 2:29, where the same word is used: "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God". This is how critically important it is to be spiritually minded; this is the essence which the Father looks at. And yet "praise of God" at the judgment recalls the Lord's parable of how we shall be praised in that day for having fed, clothed and visited the suffering Lord Jesus in the form of the least of His brethren. With such an awesome prospect ahead, we will not be interested in being judged positively by men; and neither will their negative judgment of us mean anything much.

Whilst we ourselves will feel the need to "confess to God" (Rom. 14:11,12) our failures and unworthiness, we have shown earlier how our Lord will not mention these to us, but instead joyfully catalogue to us those things which have so pleased him in our lives. This will be to our genuine amazement: "Lord, when..?". Keeping a subconscious inventory of our own good works now will surely prevent us from being in this category. 1 Cor. 4:5 speaks of us as receiving "praise of God" at the judgment, presumably in the form of praise for the good works which we are not aware of, as outlined in the parable (cp. Ps. 134:3). "Praise" suggests that our Lord will show quite some enthusiasm in this. Not he that commends himself will be approved [cp. The listing of good deeds by the rejected], "but whom the Lord commendeth" in as it were listing the good deeds of the accepted (2 Cor. 10:18).

There are some instructive parallels here:

"Bring to light"	"Make manifest"
"The hidden things of"	"The counsels of"
"Darkness"	"The hearts"

The hidden man is therefore "the counsels" of the heart. How we speak and reason to ourselves in our self-talk, this is the indicator of the hidden man. This will be 'made manifest' to the owners of those hearts, the Greek implies. "All things are naked and opened" unto God anyway; the second coming will reveal nothing to Him. The making manifest of our hidden man will be to ourselves and to others. The purpose of the judgment seat is therefore more for our benefit than God's; it will be the ultimate self-revelation of ourselves. Then we will know ourselves, just as God knows us (1 Cor. 13:12). Through a glass, darkly, we can now see the outline of our spiritual self (1 Cor. 13:11,12), although all too often we see this picture in the spiritual mirror of self-examination, and then promptly forget about it (James 1:23,24).

*4:6 Now these things, brothers, I have applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes-* The letter opened with a lament that the church had split into factions, after Paul and Apollos. Presumably the reference here is to the mention he has made of Apollos and himself a few verses earlier in 3:22: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours". He may mean that he has addressed the issue of following men by quoting Apollos and himself as examples of those who were being followed- even though they themselves did not want it. The implication might be that there were others whom he could name but didn't wish to, "for your sakes".

*That from us you might learn not to go beyond the things which are written-* The example of Paul and Apollos was of being leaders who did not want a personal cult following. The presence of the article ["the"] after "learn" requires us to read this as: "That you might learn the 'Not beyond the things which are written'". "Written" translates *grapho*, the writings, or, the Scriptures. 'Not beyond the writings' was a Rabbinic expression, and Paul is saying that the Corinthians would see it exemplified in the demeanour of Apollos and himself. The Corinthians were to learn from their example not to go beyond respect of leaders and fall into cult following. 'The things written' would in this context therefore refer to things written against following leaders into a cult situation; and that is what Paul has been writing about so far in the letter. The things written which must not be 'gone beyond', just as the Rabbis were not supposed to 'go beyond the [inspired] writings', would therefore refer to what Paul has just written under inspiration. So whilst turning down any personal cult following, he is also making clear that what he is writing is inspired and should be treated with as much respect as the OT Scriptures.

*So that none of you get puffed up, one against the other-* As noted earlier on this verse, the inspired message so far given was to stop such following of leaders in a divisive, cult-like sense. 1 Corinthians contains many warnings against being "puffed up" (1 Cor. 4:6,8,19; 5:2,6; 13:4). These warnings often come in the context of statements about the Lordship of Jesus, or about the sacrifice of Jesus, the Passover lamb. The fact He is our Lord and died as He did means that we must live Passover lives without the leaven of pride and being puffed up about leading brethren etc. Perceiving *His* greatness will mean that we will not seek to follow men.

*4:7 For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?-* Their differences were made by themselves; the differences were in their following of different leaders. What was 'received' by the Corinthians was the free gift of the Spirit (s.w. 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4). "Boast" translates a Greek word Paul has used in speaking of how we should glory in the Lord and

not glory or boast in human leaders (1 Cor. 1:29,31; 3:21). This boasting would only be made by those who did not have the Spirit; for such boasting is of the flesh and not the Spirit. We noted earlier that the Corinthians had been given the Spirit, and yet they acted as if they didn't have it. Their boasting was done as if they had not received the Spirit. Instead, their lives should have been wholly Spiritual, taken up with the things of the Spirit; so that it would be true that they had nothing in life apart from what they had been given by the Spirit and accepted from the Spirit. And this would utterly preclude boasting in mere men and their human words and examples. Yet the Corinthians had not made use of the Spirit gifts given them, as made clear in chapters 1 and 2; see on 3:1.

*4:8 Already are you filled, already you have become rich, you have come to reign without us-* The ideas of filling and being enriched were used in chapter 1 with reference to how the Corinthians had been filled with the Spirit, but had not made use of it. I suggested on :7 that what was 'received' was the Spirit. Here in :8 Paul is using sarcasm, which was more acceptable to use as a literary figure than it currently is in our times. They considered themselves wealthy, reigning and with no hunger or lack of anything. Paul is saying that they are indeed like this spiritually, if only they would know it; but their arrogant boasting was "without us", i.e. without the support of Paul and Apollos and Paul's team.

*Yes, and I hope that you will indeed reign, that we also might reign with you-* Paul's thought is of the 'reigning' in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:10 etc.). He sees his future reward as related to whether or not they his converts enter God's Kingdom. He has earlier developed this thought in 1 Cor. 3:8,15.

4:9- see on Ex. 7:4; Rom. 3:19; 1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 23:6.

*For I think God has sent us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death. For we are made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men-* The Roman spectacles included men doomed to death who were made to fight as gladiators to the death, either against each other or wild animals. The "last of all" compares with the idea of the Corinthians wanting to be 'first' (:8). Paul is saying that apostles like him were hardly worth following in a cultic sense; for they were indeed on the stage in front of all men, but were set to die a sad death, in shame and rejection. It would seem from 2 Tim. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:32 and 2 Cor. 1:10 that Paul was indeed thrown to the lions at Ephesus but was miraculously delivered. With typical spiritual culture, Paul only alludes to the incident indirectly, and in order to make points for the edification of others. Remember that Paul wrote this first letter from Ephesus. See on :11.

There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probations is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react. It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that offend (Mt. 13:41).

4:10 *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You have glory, but we have dishonour-* Wise, strong and honoured was how the Corinthians felt about themselves; although Paul observes that actually few of them were wealthy, wise and honourable (1 Cor. 1:26). But in their arrogance, they acted like this. Chapters 1 and 2 have explained that those who are fools, weak and not honoured are those through whom the Lord works. So Paul is not only criticizing them for their pretensions, but is pointing out that the way some of them despise him, consider him weak and foolish etc. is in fact placing him within the very categories which God accepts, and who are identified with the Lord Jesus. "We are despised" (1 Cor. 4:9,10; 2 Cor. 4:9,10) clearly alludes to "Him whom man despises" (Is. 49:7). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

4:11 *Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place-* Paul was writing from Ephesus, where he seems to have experienced some terrible trauma which he only indirectly alludes to. See on :9 *For I think...* . Hunger, thirst and lack of clothing are the very categories which the Lord says will typify the least of His brethren; and our attitudes to their needs and situations will be the basis for our final judgment. Paul was writing from "no certain dwelling place". He was no armchair theologian. His Divine inspiration notwithstanding, it is a reflection of his intense spiritual focus that he was able to compose such letters whilst confronted by such basic instability. Many would feel that they could only concentrate on spiritual matters once their basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter were met; but Paul's devotion and focus was far deeper than to require that. His mention of being "buffeted" uses the same word used of the Lord's sufferings in Mt. 26:67. "To this present hour" doesn't mean that all Paul's ministry was lived in this state; for there is evidence that at times he did have access to wealth, and he himself writes of how he had experienced both wealth and poverty throughout his ministry. Maintaining faith and focus despite these oscillations is a mark of how deep was his commitment to the Lord Jesus, and how little secular things mattered to him.

4:12 *We toil, working with our own hands-* To need to do manual work in order to survive was seen as the lowest level of existence in the ancient world. And Paul the one time wealthy intellectual was driven to this. The "we" referred to could possibly be Apollos and Paul. Paul was a tentmaker and lived with Aquilla and Priscilla because they too were tentmakers (Acts 18:3); and Apollos lived with Aquilla and Priscilla at one point, perhaps because he too was a tentmaker (Acts 18:24).

*Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure-* This is the language of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10,11); such things were and are necessary for every believer. The Lord too was "reviled" (Jn. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:23). The source of this opposition was likely also from within the church at Corinth as well as at the hands of the local opposition in Ephesus from where Paul was writing. For Paul goes on to ask the Corinthians not to fellowship with those of their number who were revilers (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10). The 'blessing' in view was perhaps that of forgiveness. Paul forgave these brethren but didn't want to associate with them. Forgiveness and trust / active association are different issues. It was the Lord who was "persecuted" (s.w. Jn. 5:16; 15:20). Paul saw his persecutions as a fellowshiping of the Lord's experience. But more pertinently, it was Paul who had persecuted the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:4) in that he had persecuted all those in Him (Acts 22:4; 26:11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13,23). He uses the same word in speaking of his persecution of the Lord Jesus in Phil. 3:6 and straight away uses the same word in writing of his 'following after' [s.w. 'persecuting'] the Lord Jesus in devotion to Him (Phil. 3:12,14). The energy and zeal of persecution was

redirected into devotion. And in this Paul sets secular man a huge challenge, with all our earlier passion and zeal for success and worldly advantage.

*4:13 Being defamed, we entreat-* The 'defamation' may well have included slander from the Corinthians; for the same word is used of how Paul was reviled or 'evil spoken of' by them (1 Cor. 10:30). The word is also frequently used of the Lord's sufferings, which Paul was fellowshipping both from the world and from his own brethren and converts.

*We are made as the garbage of the world-* The Greek *perikatharma* is a form of the Greek term *katharmata* which was used to describe how a victim was killed to expiate for the people. Paul felt that all his sufferings were for the sake of others' salvation. He was surely alluding to the Lord's sufferings for our salvation, and saw his own sufferings reflecting that. There's nothing worse than to suffer for no cause or end; and Christian suffering is the supreme form of achievement for others through personal suffering.

*The scum of the earth, even until now-* Paul described himself as the offscouring of all things- using the very language of condemned Israel (Lam. 3:45). He so wanted to see their salvation that he identified with them to this extent. By doing so he was reflecting in essence the way the Lord Jesus so identified Himself with us sinners, as our representative, "made sin" [whatever precisely this means] for the sake of saving us from that sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

*4:14 I do not write these things to shame you-* It is significant that when dealing with Corinth's belief of those who sought to totally black Paul's character, by accusing him of being weak, foolish and unworthy of honour (:10,11) he writes that he doesn't seek to shame them. Yet when dealing with their doctrinal apostacy, Paul does seek to shame them: "Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). Shaming people is not always effective for their growth; but in other issues, shame is a valid form of discipline.

*But to encourage you as my beloved children-* Paul writes of Timothy as his beloved child (:17). The Corinthians were so immature, and yet because they were in Christ, Paul felt he stood related to them as intimately as he did to faithful Timothy. Appreciating what it means to consider others as "in Christ" will transform our relationships and feelings toward each other within the church. "Encourage" is better translated 'to warn', as is the same word used of how Paul in Ephesus [from where he was writing to the Corinthians] had warned them night and day with tears for three years (Acts 20:31). Warning others was a large theme in Paul's ministry; he sensed the gravity of the issues to which we stand related, the extreme reality of the future we may miss. The figure of the Corinthians and Timothy being his 'children' connects with his claim in :15 to be their 'father'. Yet he had not baptized Timothy nor most of the Corinthians. But his pastoral efforts with them had been so colossal that he felt they were his spiritual children; and he had been the one who had first introduced the Gospel to Corinth. So those who may not have baptized anyone can still legitimately feel that they have spiritual children.

*4:15 For though you have ten thousand would be teachers in Christ-* Or "instructors". Paul began the letter by expressing concern that they were listening to human wisdom more than spiritual truth. These "instructors" refer to the teachers they had amassed to themselves. But



he doesn't use the expected word for 'teacher'. Instead he says they were no more than a *paidagogos*, a slave who had to take the little children to school, where they would be taught by the teacher (cp. Jesus). This was Paul's *hope* for the Corinthians; and his hope for Corinth is a powerful exhortation to us. But I mentioned earlier on 3:10 that Paul seems to have in mind Matthew's account of the great commission; the basic Gospel was to be taught, people baptized into it, and then the converts instructed in all that the Lord had commanded them. Perhaps Paul is drawing a similar contrast here between him as their "father", and the instructors who came after him.

*You have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus it was me who begat you through the gospel-* See on :14 *But to encourage you.* Paul is not lamenting that they have "not many fathers" as if he wished they had more fathers than teachers; his point is that he is their singular father. Although he had not baptized many of them, he considered them his spiritual children. This would humanly speaking explain his endless patience and passionate care for them.

4:16 *I therefore urge you to be imitators of me-* Literally, 'mimic me'. This continues the imagery of Paul being their father. He has earlier warned against the danger of following leaders, including himself. But he balances this with the observation that he is their spiritual father and they should mimic him. His answer to the problem of following human leaders appears to be: 'Follow me as I am your spiritual father; but not in any cult like sense, and following me means being spiritually minded'. Paul constantly sets himself up as an example to his converts; and whenever he bids them 'follow me', it is in the context of his example as a preacher (Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Cor. 4:16; 10:31-11:1; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). He was their spiritual father, and he wants the converts to have his spiritual characteristics, which included preaching to others. This perhaps accounts for the otherwise surprising lack of specific encouragement to his converts to preach which we observe in Paul's writings. He understood his role to be initiatory- he speaks of his preaching as planting (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 9:7,10,11), laying foundations (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10), giving birth (1 Cor. 4:15; Philemon 10) and betrothing (2 Cor. 11:2). His aim was for his converts to also preach and develop self-sustaining ecclesias. "Paul's method of shaping a community was to gather converts around himself and by his own behaviour to demonstrate what he taught", following a pattern practiced by the contemporary moral philosophers. Paul is set before us as "a Christ-appointed model" of the ideal believer. He himself seems to have sensed this happening when he so often invites us to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:10; 2 Thess. 3:7,9). He does this quite self-consciously, for example: "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved... let no man seek his own, but another's [profit]" (1 Cor. 10:33,24). He even says that he doesn't do things which he could legitimately allow himself, *because* he knew he was being framed as their example (2 Thess. 3:7,9).

4:17- see on Acts 2:46.

*For this cause have I sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord-* See on :14 *But to encourage you.*

*Who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church-* As noted on :16, Paul saw himself as their spiritual father and

asked them to mimic him. He draws a parallel between "my ways" and what "I teach"; he felt that his example was as it were the word becoming flesh. And yet Paul felt keenly his sinfulness. It was this which perhaps gives even more edge to his invitation to mimic him. He sensed that he was a pattern for others, but this didn't make him blind to his own failures.

4:18 *Now some are inflated with pride, as though I were not going to come to you-* 2 Cor. 1:17-19 suggests Paul was being slandered as an indecisive man whose word was not his bond. The implication of how Paul writes here is that his literal presence in Corinth would reveal the 'puffed up' ones as being indeed just inflated and having no substance. This situation would only be possible surely if Paul had some Spirit gift of discernment and even judgment or punishment which he was not afraid to use. James 5 seems to envisage a situation where the Spirit did smite some in the first century churches with disease, and the Lord's letters in Rev. 2 and 3 imply likewise. We recall the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira.

4:19 *But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power-* "Speech" is *logos* and "power" is *dunamis*. There were many words in Corinth, many claiming to be teachers, even thousands of them (:15). The Lord's preaching was with both *logos* and *dunamis* (Lk. 4:36). These teachers were spirit-less; they were all word but no spirit / power. Paul began by writing that the power of God is the *logos* of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). They were not teaching that, instead they were using the words of human wisdom; and so their message was without spirit / power. Paul's preaching was the *logos* with *dunamis* (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 1:5). The problem of words being preached without the spirit is not unknown to us today. Mere fact, mere words, will not of themselves save anyone without spirituality or an element of the Spirit. In :20 Paul will go on to argue that the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom are not [only] in *logos* but also in *dunamis*. There was a danger in the first century, as there is today, of a form of Godliness, a teaching of a correct form of words, which was lacking in "the power [*dunamis*] thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). We are kept by the *dunamis* of God unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). Simply imparting Biblical fact is not the same as spirituality. Theological truth can be held without the Spirit. Paul began in 1 Cor. 1 by pointing out this problem at Corinth; they had potentially been given the Spirit but they were Spirit-less (1 Cor. 3:1).

4:20 *For the kingdom of God is not in talk but in power-* See on :19. The Gospel of the Kingdom was in both *logos* ["talk"] and power; so we are to read this as 'not only in talk, but also in power'. The Gospel demands a response. The Greek word *euangelia* actually implies this, although the English translation 'good news' may mask it. There is an inscription from Priene in Asia Minor which reads: "The birthday of the god [=Augustus] was for the world the beginning of *good news* [*euangelia*] owing to him". The Gospel is not therefore just a proclamation of good news, e.g. an emperor's birthday. *Euangelia* meant the response to the good news; the good news and the response one must make to it are all bound up within the one word. "For the [Gospel of the] Kingdom of God is not [only] in *word*, but in *power*" - the Gospel isn't just so many words and ideas, as a life lived. For in the previous verse Paul has argued: "I will know, not the *word* of them which are puffed up, but the *power*", i.e. what their lives show of the things they profess (1 Cor. 4:19,20 RV). And we must ask ourselves whether our personal Christianity is mere words, or the power of a life living out those words.

4:21 *What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*- This I suggest is better placed with the material in chapter 5. Paul is going to

address the need to take concrete action regarding a major moral issue in the church. And he says he can take either a hard line with them, or appeal to them for love's sake in a gentle way. And he clearly takes the latter course, despite explaining in chapter 5 that he has received specific guidance and revelation from the Lord Jesus about how to judge this matter. But despite knowing he was in the right and they in the wrong, and in need of discipline, he doesn't let possession of truth or moral high ground lead him to take a dictatorial approach. He still appeals in love and gentleness- setting us a great example. The language of "rod" is that of a father disciplining his son (Prov. 13:24; 23:13,14). This is a metaphor pertinent to the context, for Paul has declared himself their spiritual father in :15. In this case, Paul is saying that he could legitimately take a hard line with them; but he chooses to take the path of love and gentleness.

## CHAPTER 5

5:1 Note how Paul deals with ecclesial problems in places like Corinth. He doesn't write to the elders and tell them to sort it out and clean up the ecclesia. He writes to every member of the ecclesia. He confronts the whole ecclesia with his concerns over pastoral issues- not just the pastors. He tells the whole ecclesia of his concern about how they have not dealt with flagrant sin amongst them (1 Cor. 5; 6:1-11). The Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:15-18 doesn't ask us to refer our concerns about others' behaviour in the ecclesia to the elders. He asks us to personally take the matter up with the individual. His church was to be built on individuals who followed Him personally and closely.

*It is actually reported-* The Greek implies it was widely being spread about. Some were boasting about their liberality, as some do today. They were "puffed up" about the matter (:2). It was not a case of quietly accommodating a non-standard moral situation, but of boasting in it and claiming it was quite acceptable and even commendable.

*That there is sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as is not even among the Gentiles-* This alludes to Old Testament condemnations of Israel for being actually worse than the surrounding Gentiles. And Paul is writing to Corinth, a city famed for its sexual immorality. Why is it that believers at times act far worse than unbelievers? The Corinthians were not living by the Spirit but rather by legalism; and obedience to a few laws leads people to fail spectacularly in other areas, because they feel justified. And as Paul explains in Romans 7, the knowledge of God's law provokes within human nature a desire to disobey it. The only way forward, then, is to recognize God's law but live in the Spirit. The legalistic spirit of the Corinthians is reflected in the way that they treated the man too harshly- for in 2 Cor. Paul has to urge them to receive him back lest he be psychologically and spiritually destroyed by their attitude. So, as legalists do, they went from one extreme to another rather than following the way of the Spirit.

*That one of you has taken to himself his father's wife-* The woman may not necessarily have been the mother of the offender. This case involved a man suffering wrong (2 Cor. 7:12), so we can assume that the woman was already married to the man's father, and he took her away from him. Hence "taken to himself...". The end of chapter 4 must be connected with chapter 5; Paul speaks of his choice of dealing with Corinth with a rod, or with the spirit of meekness, and he has in view the case he is now discussing.

5:2 *Instead of grieving, you have become arrogant-* The moral failures of others should cause our grief, as Lot grieved for Sodom. The Greek can mean mourning at a funeral; they were to mourn the spiritual death of the individual, and not boast about it nor be angry with him. His loss was their loss. But as noted on :1, the Corinthians were boasting about this case. Dealing with the offender was therefore a far more nuanced question than simply removing someone from a church because they are immoral. The Lord in writing to the churches in Rev. 1 and 2 doesn't take this approach; so here in 1 Cor. 5 the question is far wider than simply the private misbehaviour of an individual.

Any such separations are brought forth from much sorrow; Corinth ecclesia were told that they should have mourned as they withdrew from one who had left the faith (1 Cor. 5:2). "The whole house of Israel" were commanded to "mourn" the necessary destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:6). Samuel mourned and God repented when Saul was finally rejected (1

Sam. 15:35). Paul wept when he wrote about some in the ecclesia who had fallen away (Phil. 3:17-19). It must be said that 'block disfellowship'- the cutting off of hundreds of brethren and sisters because theoretically they fellowship a weak brother- hardly enables 'mourning' and pleading with each of those who are disfellowshipped.

*Remove the one who has done this deed from among you-* Paul explains his motivation for writing this in 2 Cor. 7:12: "So although I wrote to you, I wrote not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong; but that your earnest care for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God". Paul was surely aware of many such non-standard moral cases in the churches, but he was making a test case of this one. He was not commanding the removal of the person solely for the sake of the offender, but for wider reasons. So it would be unwise to assume from this case that every immoral person in a church must be removed. There was clearly a wider context here.

*5:3 For I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing-* There was a Spirit gift of knowledge which resulted in Paul being as it were virtually present; he was not therefore judging from a distance on the basis of gossip. Hence he can write in :4 that "when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do)". And he alludes to the same phenomenon in 2 Cor. 13:2 "I tell you as if I were present". This ability to be virtually present is used supremely by the Lord, whose presence is to be found in our lives and where two or three are gathered together. If Paul knew this case by the Spirit and was spiritually present in their gatherings to discuss the matter; how much more the Lord Himself.

5:4- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*I command you that in the name of our Lord Jesus-* This decision was confirmed by the Lord Jesus; for Paul commands it by the Spirit. But it's a dangerous path to assume that this is a pattern for all disfellowships, for we have not received an inspired word from the Lord to excommunicate specific named individuals.

*When you are gathered together-* The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul [writing on the specific command of the Lord Jesus, which we do not have in the cases we deal with] to dealing with the moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6). We are all priests, a community of them. This is why Paul writes to whole ecclesias rather than just the elders. 1 Cor. 5:4,5,11 make it clear that discipline was the responsibility of *all*, "the many" as Paul put it in 2 Cor., not just the elders. Even in Philippians, where bishops and deacons are specifically mentioned, Paul writes to "all the saints".

*And my spirit is present with you when you do-* See on :3.

*With the power of our Lord Jesus-* Paul was commanding this course of action with the specific authority of the Lord. We do not have this available to us today when considering specific individuals. Perhaps this is why Paul labours the point- that he is speaking in this case according to a specific Spirit revelation received.

*5:5 Deliver such a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be*

*saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*- Who the Lord Jesus was is who He will be in the future; in the same way as who *we* are now, is who we will eternally be. For our spirit, our essential personality, will be *saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). “Flesh and blood” will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and yet the risen, glorified Lord Jesus was “flesh and bones” (Lk. 24:39). We will be who we essentially are today, but with Spirit instead of blood energizing us. It’s a challenging thought, as we consider the state of our “spirit”, the essential ‘me’ which will be preserved, having been stored in Heaven in the Father’s memory until the day when it is united with the new body which we will be given at resurrection. For in all things the Lord is our pattern; and we will in that day be given a body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21)- which is still describable as “flesh and bones” in appearance (Lk. 24:39).

The purpose of this delivering was in order “that the spirit may be saved”. If Satan is intent on making people sin and alienated from God, why should what he does to them result in them being saved? It is by the experiences of life that God controls, that we are spiritually developed (Heb. 12:5–11). How could the church at Corinth deliver the fallen brother to Satan if no one knows where to locate him? “Destruction” can also imply “punishment” (e.g. 2 Thess.1:9). Are we to think that God would work in cooperation with an angel who is rebelling against Him? Notice that Satan is not described as eagerly entering the man, as we would expect if Satan is constantly trying to influence all men to sin and to turn believers away from God. The church (v. 4) is told to deliver the man to Satan.

One of the big “Satan” – adversaries – to the early church was the Roman authority of the time, who, as the first century progressed, became increasingly opposed to Christianity. The Greek phrase “to deliver” is used elsewhere, very often in a legal sense, of delivering someone to a civil authority, e.g.:

- Someone can “deliver you to the judge” (Mt. 5:25).
- “They will deliver you up to the councils” (Mt. 10:17).
- The Jews “shall deliver (Jesus) to the Gentiles” (Mt. 20:19)
- “The Jews will... deliver (Paul) into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11).
- “Yet was I delivered prisoner” (Acts 28:17).

So is Paul advising them to hand over the sinful brother to the Roman authorities for punishment? The sin he had committed was incest, and this was punishable under the Roman law. Remember that “destruction” also implies “punishment”. Leander Keck demonstrates that the behaviour of the incestuous man was “contrary to both Jewish and Roman law”, rendering him liable to punishment by those authorities (Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) p. 106).

“Satan” here may also refer to the man’s evil desires. He had given way to them in committing the sin of incest, and Paul is perhaps suggesting that if the church separates from the man and leaves him to live a fleshly life for a time, maybe eventually he will come round to repentance so that ultimately his spirit would be saved at the judgment. This is exactly what happened to the prodigal son (Luke 15); living a life away from his spiritual family and totally following Satan – his evil desires – resulted in him eventually repenting. Jeremiah

2:19 sums this up: “Your own wickedness shall correct you and your backslidings shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter” (that they had done).

“The flesh” does not necessarily mean “the body”. It may also refer to a way of life controlled by our evil desires, i.e. Satan. Believers “are not in the flesh, but in the spirit” (Rom. 8:9). This does not mean that they are without physical bodies, but that they are not living a fleshly life. Before conversion “we were in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5). Galatians 5:19 mentions sexual perversion, which the offender at Corinth was guilty of, as a “work of the flesh”. 1 John 3:5 (cp. v. 8), defines sins as the “works of the Devil”, thus equating the flesh and the Devil. Thus 1 Corinthians 5:5 could be understood as ‘Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of Satan/the Devil’, so that we have Satan destroying Satan. It is impossible to understand this if we hold to the popular belief regarding Satan. But if the first Satan is understood as the Roman authority and the second one as the flesh, or sinful expressions of our evil desires, then there is no problem.

We have seen in our notes on Luke 10:18 that Satan is sometimes used in the context of reminding us that physical illness is ultimately a result of our sin. It may be that the spirit – gifted apostles in the first century had the power of afflicting sinful believers with physical illness or death – e.g. Peter could order Ananias and Sapphira’s death (Acts 5); some at Corinth were physically “weak and sickly” as a punishment for abusing the communion service (1 Cor. 11:30); Jesus could threaten the false teachers within the church at Thyatira with instant death unless they repented (Rev. 2:22–23) and James 5:14–16 implies that serious illness of some members of the church was due to their sins, and would be lifted if there was repentance. If the sickness mentioned here was an ordinary illness, it does not follow that if a Christian repents of sin he will automatically be healed, e.g. Job was afflicted with illness as a trial from God, not because he sinned. It was for the help and healing of repentant believers who had been smitten in this way, that “the gift of healing” was probably mainly used in the early church (1 Cor. 12:9). Thus Paul’s delivering the incestuous brother to Satan and also delivering “Hymaenaeus and Alexander... unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20), may have involved him smiting them with physical sickness due to their following of Satan – their evil desires. Some time later Paul noted how Alexander still “greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14,15). The extent of his withstanding Paul’s preaching is made apparent if we understand that Alexander had been struck ill by Paul before he wrote the first letter to Timothy, but had still refused to learn his lesson by the time Paul wrote to Timothy again. Again, notice that Satan would try and teach Alexander “not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20). If Satan is an evil person who is a liar and blasphemer of God’s word, how can he teach a man not to blaspheme God?

The same verb for ‘delivering over’ occurs in the LXX of Job 2:6, where God ‘hands over’ Job to Satan, with the comment [in LXX]: “you are to protect his *psyche*, his spirit”. The connection between the passages would suggest to me that Job was in need of spiritual improvement, even though he was imputed as being righteous (Job 1:1). Whatever, the point surely is that God handed a person over to an adversary, for that person’s spiritual salvation. The orthodox idea of God and Satan being pitted in conflict just doesn’t cut it here. Biblically, God is portrayed as in charge of any ‘Satan’ / adversary, and using ‘satans’ at His will for the spiritual improvement of people, rather than their destruction. The story of Job is a classic example. Are we to really understand that there is a personal being called Satan who’s disobedient to God, out of His control, and bent on leading people to their spiritual destruction? No way, Jose. Not yet, Josette. 1 Cor. 5:5 and the record of Job teach the very dead opposite. And by all means bring on board here 2 Tim. 2:26, which speaks of people

being caught in the Devil's trap at God's will / desire. This is the translation offered by H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 119.

*5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast raises the whole lump of dough?*- Paul is cleverly alluding to a common Jewish maxim that sinners must be removed from the community because just a little yeast affects the whole lump. But he is saying that the attitudes of those who were boasting about this matter were in fact the yeast. He has said that they were "puffed up" (:2 Gk. and AV). And here he continues the analogy. Their boasting had to be purged out- and so he urges them to purge out that yeast so that they might be "a new lump" (:7). Their boasting was the yeast. Whilst indeed the immoral person had to be removed, their attitudes were no better. This is a very telling play on the idea of yeast, and is so true of the wrong attitudes which have accompanied so much excommunication. Those attitudes were as bad and as damaging as the behaviour of the individual being disciplined. Paul makes his point specifically in :8, where he asks them to remove the yeast of "malice and wickedness" and instead be sincere and truthful. He uses the same word for "malice" in describing how things were amongst the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:6; 13:5; 15:33; 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:7). The Greek word for "wickedness" is that used of "that wicked person" (:13). Their wickedness, which they had to purge out, was no better than his wickedness. As noted earlier, the command to remove the individual was not simply for his sake (2 Cor. 7:12); there were far wider issues here. The essence of his sin was to be found in those who were boasting of him, and who would later over harshly condemn him.

*5:7 Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new lump*- See on :6. As a man or woman seriously contemplates the cross, they are inevitably led to a self-knowledge and self-examination which shakes them to the bone. We are to "purge out" the old leaven from us at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 5:7). But the same Greek word for "purge" is found in passages which speak of how the blood of Christ purges us: Jn. 15:2; Heb. 10:2. We purge ourselves because Christ has purged us. This is the connection between His death for us, and our self-examination.

*Even as you actually are*- They were full of yeast, and yet they were in another sense a new, unleavened loaf. The loaf represents the Lord Jesus. They were in Christ and by grace counted as in Him. But in reality they were leavened with malice, wickedness and boasting. This approach surely helped the spiritual Paul in coping with the unspiritual Corinthians. And it helps us in our struggles with all the moral weakness we see in our brethren. We are not to be naively blind to it, whilst on the other hand we are to perceive them as our brethren, justified in Christ.

*For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, even Christ*- They were to live in the intensity of Passover night, awaiting the call to leave Egypt at the Angel's coming, just as we await the Lord's coming. The lamb had been slain; now they were to keep the feast with unleavened bread. The plagues on Egypt are the basis for the various latter day judgments described in Revelation and the Olivet prophecy. Perhaps we too will be shielded from the final ones, as Israel were. The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread, and Paul urges them all to look to themselves in order to purge themselves within of yeast. He was concerned that the expulsion of a failed individual might lead them to not look within, when they were in essence as much at fault as him.

*5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and*



*wickedness, but with the bread of sincerity and truth which has no yeast-* Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. This is echoing Moses' command to keep the Passover feast without leaven, putting Moses' words in his own mouth (Ex. 12:15; Dt. 16:3). Paul saw himself as Moses in trying to save a generally unresponsive and ungrateful Israel.

In Dt. 16:3 the unleavened bread is called the "bread of affliction", whilst in 1 Cor. 5:8 it is called the "unleavened bread of sincerity and Truth", as if being sincere and true and not having malice and bitterness in our hearts is a result of much mental affliction and exercising of the mind. So to keep the feast we have to search our houses, our lives, for anything like leaven- anything that puffs us up, that distorts us from the true smallness and humility we should have, that corrupts our sincerity. By nature we have so much pride in us, so much that puffs us up. We should always find some leaven in us every time we examine ourselves. The Jews used to search their houses with candles, looking for any sign of leaven. So we too must look into every corner of our lives with the candle of the word. Similarly before the great Passovers of Hezekiah and Josiah there was a searching for idols which were then thrown down. Note how Paul calls on the Corinthians to keep the feast "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," which he contrasts with "malice and evil" (1 Cor. 5:8). Truth is set up against evil- not against wrong interpretations of Bible passages.

*5:9 I wrote to you in my letter to have no association with fornicators-* Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians previously which has not been preserved. *Pornos*, "fornicators", doesn't really refer to a young unmarried couple who 'go too far', although that is also not spiritual behaviour. The word refers to prostitutes or those willfully pushing immoral behaviour; we might translate 'pornographers'. The man who had taken his father's wife was therefore involved in a far wider scene of immorality. In 1 Cor. 5:9-13 Paul says that he doesn't intend the converts "to get out of the world" but rather to mix with the greedy, robbers and idolaters who are in the world. We know from later in this epistle that Christians in Corinth were free to use the pagan meat markets, and to accept invitations for meals in pagan homes. The Corinthians seemed to think that because they were self-consciously separate from the world, therefore it didn't matter how they lived within the community. It seems they had misunderstood Paul's previous letter about separation from sinful people as meaning they must be separate from the world. But Paul is saying that no, one must mix with the world, but separate from sin within our own lives. However, by the end of the 1st century, 'going out of the world' became the main preoccupation with some Christians, even though they themselves often developed low moral standards as a result of this. It was these ascetic groups who so over analysed some aspects of doctrine- for they had nothing better to do with their time- that they ended up with false doctrine. They converted only from within their groups, so the world was not witnessed to, the fire of love and compassion for humanity that was the hallmark of true Christianity was lost, and thus by the 2nd century the Truth both doctrinally and in practice had been lost.

*5:10 I did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters. For you must go out of the world to do this-* The Lord likewise mixed with sinful people and shared His table with them in order to bring them to Himself. He came *into* the world rather than going out of it to live on a mountain top. But this does not mean that within the community of Christ we can act just as the world does. It would seem that the Corinthians had misunderstood Paul's teaching; they were reasoning that they should not mix with unbelieving fornicators, but such fornication was therefore acceptable within the

Christian community, and they were boasting about it. Nearly all misinterpretation is not simply a case of intellectual failure; there is a moral, psychological drive behind it, however subconscious. Later in this letter we will read of the Corinthians not believing in the resurrection, getting drunk at the breaking of bread, even using prostitutes within their church services. This was hardly misinterpretation, but rather a desire to justify unspiritual behaviour. And I suggest that all of the classic 'false doctrines' likewise have a subconscious element driving them- the parade example would be the refusal to accept the Lord Jesus had human nature. For that demands so much practically from we who share that same nature.

5:11 *I wrote to you not to keep association, if anyone that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. With such a one have no association, not even to eat-* When Peter baptized thousands of people as recorded in Acts, there is no indication that he as it were screened them for morality. Likewise the 'baptismal interview' of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 focused upon his faith in Christ rather than his personal morality. The spirit of grace which there is in Jesus leads us towards a tolerance of others, in order to patiently lead them towards repentance. The Lord Himself broke His bread with serious sinners- and was criticized for eating with them, seeing that 'eating' with someone was freighted with huge spiritual significance in 1st Century society. The apparent command here not to eat with sinners would appear at variance with the Lord's teaching and example, almost purposefully so. Paul writes here in the context of the breaking of bread (5:8), and in chapter 11, he criticizes the Corinthians for being drunk at the breaking of bread. We know from Rev. 2:20 that there was a female false teacher in at least one ecclesia, who was teaching Christ's brothers to engage in fornication and idol worship. Bearing this in mind, let's observe that the format of the breaking of bread service was in outline terms similar to the 'symposia' of the trade guilds and religious club gatherings of Corinth; a group of likeminded people sat down to a meal, heard an address from a member of their guild or religion about what was of common interest to them all, and then drank wine to the relevant gods. These meetings, however, were characterized by the presence of male and female prostitutes, drunkenness was common, and the commonality provided by the trade guild or religion was really an excuse for an evening of debauchery and idol worship. It would appear that there was a tendency in Corinth for the breaking of bread meeting to be turned into just such an event, featuring drunkenness and idolatry. The word used here in 1 Cor. 5:11 for "fornicator" is  *pornos*, which specifically carries the meaning of a male prostitute- exactly the kind of person to be found at the 'symposia'. The Greek words translated "covetous", "railer" and "extortioner" all carry the idea of someone given over to utter debauchery. Such behaviour would be commonly associated with the drunken sexual debauchery which the symposia could turn into. It seems that the church at Corinth, and perhaps elsewhere, was slipping into this kind of behaviour at the breaking of bread. Paul condemns it in the strongest terms. He's saying that if any brother is acting as a 'pornos', a male prostitute, a facilitator and thereby teacher and encourager of this kind of behaviour, he is not to be eaten with. The Greek construction is rather strange: "Any man that is called a brother... with such an one, no not to eat". The grammar could suggest that one specific individual is being spoken about- "That person who calls himself a brother, yes, that's right, with that one, don't even eat". And the earlier context of chapter 5 makes it quite clear who that person was- the individual who had taken his father's wife, whom Paul had just commanded they separate from (:5) during those times when they were "gathered together" at the breaking of bread meeting (:4). This individual was involved in leading the breaking of bread meeting into gross sexual misbehaviour, alcohol abuse and debauchery. Such a person should not be eaten with, he shouldn't be allowed at that meeting as he clearly had an unspeakably awful agenda. Read this way, this verse doesn't mean we shouldn't break bread

with someone who e.g. struggles with an alcohol problem or who is at times "covetous". The question of whether or not such a person has repented is very difficult to decide. But we don't need to struggle with those questions, because this verse doesn't demand that of us. It asks the Corinthians to exclude an individual with the awful, publically advertised, wilfully perverted agenda described above, and we likewise of course should do the same. In our age any church comprised of new converts will have its share of immorally living folks; the question is whether this immorality is being paraded and gloried in, by them and others.

*5:12 For what have I to do with judging those that are without? Do you not judge those that are within?*- They were already judging those within by having adopted a position on the individual in question. They were being asked to reassess that judgment. But bear in mind that judging can mean either to condemn, or to have *an opinion*. By not judging in the sense of condemning, pre-judging the Lord's final judgment, this doesn't mean that we have no moral position on anything.

*5:13 But them that are without God judges. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves*- As noted on :6, their "wickedness" is described with the same word as used for the "wicked man". They were in essence no better, and the command to remove him was not so much for his sake as for other reasons (2 Cor. 7:12). It was not that wicked people must be removed from the church; for as noted on :6, they too were "wicked". There was a wider agenda here, as noted throughout this chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbour, go to law before the unrighteous and not rather take it before the saints?*- It is likely that this issue is related to that discussed in chapter 5 about the immoral man. That chapter concluded with an appeal to judge those within the church, and this theme continues here. I noted throughout chapter 5 that the case of the immoral man was not simply a case of removing a sinner from the church; 2 Cor. 7:12 is clear about that. The issue was wider and more nuanced than that. It could be that the immoral man had even taken his father to court in order to take his wife from him; for Paul later writes about an individual who "suffered wrong" in the matter, who would surely refer to the man who had had his wife taken from him.

6:2 *Or do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you-* They were therefore "the saints", for this is paralleled with them 'judging angels' in the future age (:3). Paul shows that in terms of salvation, he sees no difference between the Corinthians and himself, despite their deep moral failings and spiritual misunderstandings. Once someone was in Christ, Paul accepted them as redeemed and in prospect saved. He assumed their final salvation- and this is a huge challenge to us, with all our frustrations at the moral and doctrinal delinquency of others in the church. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world" is referring back to Mt. 19:28, which promises all those who have followed Christ that they will sit on thrones of judgment. That this promise was not just to the disciples is evident from Lk. 22:30; 1:33 cp. Rev. 3:21. It's as if Paul is saying: 'Now come on, you ought to know this, it's in the Gospels'. He expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ.

*Are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*- Paul often seems to quote snippets from the Corinthians' statements or even perhaps their correspondence. It seems they were arguing that they were not qualified to judge the moral behaviour of their brethren, and therefore they tolerated the situation which had developed, and even applauded it in the name of liberality.

6:3- see on Heb. 11:7.

*Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*- We have to assume our brethren will be in the Kingdom. Paul did this even with Corinth; he wrote of how "we shall judge angels" when we are all accepted in the Kingdom. And his way of writing to the Thessalonians about the resurrection and judgment assumes that all of his readers would be accepted ("so shall we ever be with the Lord... ye are *all* the children of light"). We too can do nothing else but see each other like that. The impact of this is colossal. We'd rather shy away from it. But meditate awhile upon it.

The Angels could refer to literal Angels who existed and sinned during some previous creation, but who will only be finally judged and destroyed when death itself is destroyed totally at the Lord's return. "The Angels which kept not their first estate... He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day" (Jude 6)- clearly the judgement at the second coming. See on Jude 6; Heb. 9:23; Lk. 11:32.

Or the 'Angels' in view may simply be messengers or local representatives of the nations, whom we shall 'judge' at the time of the Kingdom's establishment. Under the Law, there was a referral system up to Moses, smaller cases being dealt with by the 70 elders and family heads. These 'elohim' must surely point forward to us, the King-priests of the future age. "We shall judge angels" may refer to each believer being in the position to pass judgment on a messenger or representative of, e.g., a town or village. This mention of angel-messengers implies that we will be geographically located in one place in a region, to where cases must be brought by a messenger.

Judging Angels doesn't have to mean that we will condemn them. We are to "judge" our brethren, not in condemning them but in discerning between them, in the same way as we will "judge Angels" in the future. Then, we will not condemn them, but perceive / discern the differences between them.

*How much more, things that pertain to this life?*- The Greek word only occurs in Lk. 21:34 about how the rejected at the last day have been obsessed with "the cares of this life".

*6:4 If then you have to judge things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are of no account in the church-* Literally, seat them down in the judgment throne. The Greek for "no account" has been used in 1 Cor. 1:28 to describe how the Lord uses "things which are despised", in the total inversion of values which we see in the operation of the Spirit. Paul was thought by the Corinthians to be "of no account" (s.w. 2 Cor. 10:10). Here, Paul may therefore even have himself in view; he would be asking them to accept his judgment, which he offered to them concerning the immoral man in chapter 5.

It was usual for the head of the household to automatically be the leader of the religion which his household practised. But for the true Christians, this was not necessarily so to be; for the Lord had taught that it was the servant who was to lead, and here the least esteemed in the ecclesia were to judge matters. Elders of the household fellowships had to be chosen on the basis of their spiritual qualification, Paul taught. The radical nature of these teachings is so easily lost on us.

*6:5 I say this to move you to shame-* See on 4:14.

*What! Is there not among you even one wise man who shall be able to decide between his brothers?*- This is a reference back to 1 Cor. 1:19,20,25-27. The gift of wisdom was given to those "not esteemed" (1:28). Paul laments that despite having been given the Spirit, they were not spiritual (3:1) and therefore lacked wisdom. Paul had the Spirit, and he judged the situation about the immoral brother in chapter 5. But here he laments that there seems not one who has made use of the gift of spiritual wisdom. Christ had been made wisdom to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:30), but there was not a wise man amongst them. Just as they had been richly blessed with the Spirit, according to chapter 1, but were not spiritual (3:1). The Greek translated "decide" is used again in 1 Cor. 11:29 about not discerning the Lord's body, which is His church.

*6:6 But as it is with you at the moment, brother goes to law with brother- and that before unbelievers!*- In terms of 1 Cor. 1, they had turned to worldly wisdom and judgment rather than using the wisdom and judgment given by the Spirit. 'Going to law' translates *krino*; in :5 Paul lamented that they were not 'deciding' between their brothers, using *diakrino*. The same

distinction is found in 1 Cor. 11:31- if we would *diakrino* ["judge"] ourselves, we will not be judged [*krino*] in the sense of condemned. It is the Spirit which enables us to *diakrino* (s.w. 1 Cor. 14:29). But the Corinthians refused to make use of that gift.

6:7 *No, already there is totally a defect in you, that you have lawsuits with one another-* There was a 'lack', a deficit- of the Spirit. For despite having been given the Spirit, they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1).

*Why not rather take wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*- 2 Cor. 7:12 speaks of "he that suffered wrong", presumably the father of the immoral brother, whose wife had been taken from him. But it would appear that the father had launched legal action against his son for going off with his wife. "Defrauded" is used in a sexual sense (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thess. 4:6). The man is here being encouraged not to seek legal redress over the matter; and we note that Paul accuses them all of defrauding their brethren, as if they too were guilty of gross sexual misbehaviour. In the same way, he argued in chapter 5 that they had the same leaven within them which was as it were within the immoral brother.

Paul taught his hopeless Corinthians that they ought not to be taking each other to court in the world, but rather should get brethren to settle disputes between brethren. But then he offers the higher level: don't even do this, but "rather take wrong... rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded". This kind of concession to a lower level is something we will find throughout chapter 7.

6:8 *No, but you yourselves do wrong and defraud- and that your brothers-* As noted on :7, 'defraud' is used in a sexual context in 7:5 and 1 Thess. 4:6. The defrauded were defrauding- they had not allowed the Spirit of grace to break that endless cycle of bad behaviour in response to bad behaviour. The defrauding of brothers was in the form of taking brothers to law (:6).

6:9 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*- If they really believed that, they would not have searched for human justice and retribution. They 'knew' these things but not on the level of deep faith and relationship. Paul's reasoning about not going to law against those whom we consider to be in the wrong is based upon his reasoning that there will be a future judgment, and thieves, covetous persons, extortioners etc.- the very ones we might be tempted to take to law- will not inherit the Kingdom. If we take these types to law, Paul reasons, it's as if we don't know this basic first principle- that they will not be in the Kingdom. And this is surely judgment enough. They don't need our judgment now. Rather should we receive motivation to preach to others from the thought of judgment to come. He uses the "know ye not?" rubric several times in his writings (e.g. 6:19 in this context) to point the new converts back to the implications of the basic doctrines they had recently converted to. If we believe that there will be a righteous judgment, and those responsible who have sinned will suffer the awful experience of rejection... then why seek to judge them yourself, in this life? Why worry about the prosperity of the wicked within the ecclesia if you really believe that the wicked will not be in the Kingdom? That is such an awful thing that one need not worry about trying to judge them ourselves in this life. Take comfort in the fact that judgment is coming... that's Paul's message, built as it is on the implications of basic doctrines.

*Be not deceived-* Neither by their own internal reasoning, nor by false teachers who were claiming that sexual immorality was acceptable and even a condition for entering the Kingdom of God. Hence the emphasis may be that the unrighteous shall *not* inherit the Kingdom, as compared to the claim that they would certainly inherit the Kingdom.

*Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men-* Paul lists sins which will exclude from God's Kingdom; he focuses here on sexual sins, and some of the words he uses could imply prostitution. Clearly these were ongoing problems amongst the Corinthian Christians. They came from a background in which prostitution and sexual immorality were justified as part of religious services, and it is clear that they had imported such practices into the church. It is evident that he does not mean those who have committed one act of theft or adultery would be condemned at the last day (for this would, e.g., exclude David from God's Kingdom). He is evidently referring to those who continue in this way of life, justifying it as spiritually acceptable, and actually committing the prostitution rather than using it. And this was the problem at Corinth. The church is in embryo the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13), and therefore what will evidently be excluded from God's future political Kingdom must be excluded from the church now.

*6:10 Nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God-* Along with the likes of prostitutes, we find greedy and slanderers listed. This continues the approach taken to the immoral man of chapter 5; Paul there made the point that the leaven in that man was within them all. It's possible that the theft, greed, drunkenness, slander and extortion are all specifically relevant to the case of the immoral brother, who it seems was in court with his father. The whole question was it seems far more nuanced than a man simply and solely having an illicit relationship with a married woman. It could be that the reference to drunkenness refers to some particular abuse of alcohol within the church, just as the reference to prostitution apparently does in :9. Abuse of alcohol was common in religious ritual, and it seems it had been imported into the Christian church at Corinth- hence the rebuke regarding abuse of alcohol at the time of the breaking of bread meeting in chapter 11. However it is possible that Paul does have in view 'just' alcoholism. But does this mean that no alcoholic who can't quit will be there? No. On what basis, then, will they be there? Because they are repentant. They have a state of mind that turns back time and again from what they have done. It's easy to point the finger at alcoholics. Theirs is a sin that is open and goes before them to judgment. But we are all, sadly, habitual sinners. We sin, repent, and do the same again.

The language of not inheriting the Kingdom alludes to how Israel in the wilderness were unable to enter the promised land. Their behaviours in the wilderness matched those of the Corinthian Christians, and Paul will develop this point in chapter 10.

*6:11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God-* References to washing, the name, Jesus, the Spirit, God... all inevitably make this an allusion to our baptism into the Name, thus connecting us with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because they had been justified, counted as sinless due to their baptism into Christ, therefore they should:

- a) recognize their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit, and therefore to glorify God in spirit and body
- b) realize that they are not their own, to live their lives just as they wish

c) act as if they are indeed joined to Christ

d) let the power of Christ's resurrection and new life work in them

Clearly enough, the Corinthians were *still* fornicating and getting drunk. Yet, Paul says that this is how they used to be. Evidently he means that they have changed status- and they should live that out in practice. But Paul delves deeper into the psychology of sin's self-justification. They were saying that "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (:13). In other words, we have basic human desires and there are ways to satisfy them. Paul's response is basically that if we are in Christ, then we have vowed to put to death those desires, and to fulfil them is to act as if they are still alive and well. Further, in baptism we are counted to have died to them; and we seek to live the new life, empowered by the resurrection life which is now in the Lord, whose body we belong to. The comfort and challenge comes to Christian alcoholics today: You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified, counted as righteous. Think back to your baptism. That's what happened then. Now, try to live out that life. Act, or at least try to act, how God perceives you. The alcoholic needs to remember, as the Romans also needed to, the colossal significance of the fact they have been baptized. They have a responsibility and also tremendous, boundless possibility because of this. Remind them of it. Leave some photos or reminders of their early days in the Lord around the house. Talk about it...

Paul writes here about believers being sanctified and justified, in that order, and by so doing he reflects his absorption of how his Lord had referred to the Father as firstly sanctified and then justified in Jn. 17:11,25?

Isaiah 30:1 condemns the Jews for seeking forgiveness their own way rather than by the gift of God's Spirit: they "cover with a covering (atonement), but not of my Spirit, that they may add (rather than subtract) sin to sin". Is. 44:3 describes the latter day forgiveness of Israel in similar terms: "I will pour... floods upon the dry ground (spiritually barren- Is. 53:2): I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring". The blessing of Abraham's seed is in their forgiveness through Christ (Acts 3:25,26)- which is here paralleled with the pouring out of the Spirit upon the Jews. This is clearly the language of Joel 2 and Acts 2. Gal. 3:14 puts all this in so many words: "That the blessing of Abraham (forgiveness) might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit". Thus 1 Cor. 6:11 speaks of being washed from our sins "by the spirit of our God". There is a parallelism in Romans between us receiving "grace... the atonement... the Spirit" (Rom. 1:5; 5:11; 8:15), showing the connection between the gift ("grace") of the Spirit and the forgiveness which leads to the atonement. It is hard to overstate how much the New Testament builds on the language and concepts of the Old Testament, especially in view of the large primarily Jewish readership the epistles would have had. Time and again in the Pentateuch and Joshua God promises to give the land to His people- "the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it" is a common phrase. The counterpart of the land under the new covenant is salvation; that is therefore the gift of God now in prospect, with its associated forgiveness of sins.

6:12 *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient*- Perhaps Paul is quoting a phrase used by the Corinthians- "all things are lawful for me". He runs with the idea, but shows that this is not the complete picture. "Expedient" is a favourite word of Paul's in the Corinthian correspondence. The idea is always of what is best for others or in the context of salvation (1 Cor. 7:35; 10:23,33; 12:7; 2 Cor. 8:10; 12:1). Paul will use the same phrase in 1 Cor. 10:23, in the context of not eating food offered idols. It was lawful, but it didn't 'gather together for advantage' (Gk.). The Corinthians lacked the Spirit and were therefore selfish,



thinking of what felt good for them, rather than seeing their own actions and decisions within the wider context of what is good for others in the perspective of attaining the Kingdom, both for them and us as individuals. Again we have a principle which affects so many of the challenges we face today. Whether or not something is admissible within our own consciences is not the complete picture.

*All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any-* This is a valid observation in the context of addictions, or permitting oneself things which may later lead to enslavement. Paul would not be brought under the *exousia* of any policy, dogma, political requirement or agreement- exactly because he was under the sole *exousia* of the Lord Jesus. His Lordship becomes the practical answer to so many quandries regarding which course to follow. We are under His authority or power, the power of the Spirit which we received at baptism. This must be the deciding issue rather than the power of group think, acting as others do, even within a church. Being under the Lord's *exousia* is in fact a call to radical individuality and perception in practice of the true meaning and value of the human person.

6:13 *Food for the belly and the belly for food, but God shall bring to nothing both it and them-* Again this seems to be a quotation from the Corinthian philosophy: "Food for the belly and the belly for food". Human behaviour was seen as simply fulfilling the quite legitimate needs of the body; if the body demanded sex or over eating or drinking, then [so they reasoned] it was legitimate and natural to permit this. But the case of the sexually immoral man who took his father's wife surely demonstrates for all time where this approach leads, when taken to its ultimate term. Again, the Corinthians were going wrong [as many do today] because they left the Spirit out of account, and acted as if there was no 'spiritual' aspect to life. The chasmic difference and tension between flesh and spirit is a major theme with Paul. The flesh with its passions is doomed to destruction, being 'brought to nothing' in human death and at the last day.

*But the body is not for fornication-* If the Spirit of God has possessed us, then our whole being, our bodies included, are for Him. The Corinthians had been given this Spirit, as explained in chapter 1; but they denied its power, and were in practice not spiritual (3:1). Therefore it is not for us to justify the usage of even our bodies for ourselves. The idea of our bodies belonging not to us but to our Lord / Master is lifted directly from the language of slavery. A slave was bought, and therefore every part of him or her belonged to their master, including their very bodies. Given the prevalence of slaves amongst the early Christian population, this was both a liberating and challenging idea. And it is no less radical or those whose souls are effectively bought by employers, the minimum wage culture or oppressive social and family structures.

*But for the Lord-* The message and demand of Christ in moral terms would have stood out starkly and attractively, despite all the first century objections to Christianity; and so it should be with us, living in identical circumstances. In the Graeco-Roman world, sexual immorality was just the done thing. The feeling was that the body is essentially evil, therefore what was done with the body wasn't that great a deal. The call of the Gospel was that the body is for the Lord- something totally unheard of. And Paul places sexual sins at the beginning of his list of works of the flesh in Gal. 5, labouring the point to the Corinthians that sin involving the body was in fact especially bad. This was radical stuff in a culture where prostitution and

sexual immorality were seen as an almost necessary part of religion. Yet the Christian teaching of chastity was actually attractive to people precisely because of its radical difference. And yet we can be sure that this was also a barrier to the general mass of humanity at the time. This is just one of many examples where Christianity consciously broke through deeply held boundaries and worldviews. The self-consciousness of how the Gospel did this was bound to make it obnoxious to the majority.

*And the Lord for the body-* It makes an interesting study to analyze the areas of Paul's writing where he makes most intense use of the title "Lord" for Jesus. One such passage is in 1 Cor. 6:13- 7:40, where Paul addresses issues relating to sexual self-control. Here the density of usage of the title "Lord" is higher than anywhere else in his writings. And he wasn't merely playing with words- the idea clearly is that the Lordship of Jesus is to have a gripping practical effect upon our lives.

6:14 *And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up also through His power-* The Lord's resurrection is ours. The presence of His Spirit / power within us now is the guarantee that we shall be resurrected like Him. What happened to His body shall happen to ours. The resurrection of the body is thus clearly held to be the basis of the Christian hope (and not any idea of the redemption of an immortal soul). All this is the concept of baptism which has just been alluded to in :11. As in writing to the Romans, Paul seeks to remind them of the implications of their baptisms. To share a resurrection like His required them to have His Spirit actively within them. For the Lord's resurrection becomes ours, and His resurrection to eternal life was predicated on the fact He had the Spirit; he was "justified in the Spirit" (1 Tim. 3:16), raised according to His Spirit of holiness, His holy spirit (Rom. 1:4). Rom. 8:11 is explicit: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you".

6:15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?-* We noted on :11 and :14 that baptism is in view here; for we are baptized into the mystical body of Christ. Paul in Rom. 6:13,19 likewise warns against the misuse of our "members" in immorality; because we are baptized into Christ, our members are His and not our own. In chapter 12 Paul will explain that our membership of the Lord's body calls us to practical service within that body- rather than using our members for our own gratification.

Therefore, Paul says, smashing through all Corinth's rationalizations of their sin, "know you not" (isn't it obvious to you?) that we should not become one body with a prostitute. This isn't just because *we* belong to the body of Christ and manifest Him; it is also because we are representative of us all who are in that body, and we wouldn't wish to bring His body, i.e. all the other believers, into such an inappropriate position. What you do, we all do. And the Lord Jesus has delegated His reputation in the eyes of this world to us, who are His body to them. The wonder of being baptized into His Name, entering the body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:14 matches our resurrection with that of the Lord) means that like our early brethren, we will rejoice to suffer shame for the sake of carrying that Name (Mt. 10:24,25). It will be "enough" for us that we know something of our Lord's sufferings. The more we reflectively read the Gospels, the more we will know the nature and extent of His sufferings, and the more we will see in our own something of His.

Pause for a moment to reflect that the Lord's resurrection is a pattern for our own. This is the

whole meaning of baptism. "God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power" (1 Cor. 6:13,14). Yet there were evident continuities between the Jesus who lived mortal life, and the Jesus who rose again. His mannerisms, body language, turns of phrase, were so human- even after His resurrection. And so who we are now, as persons, is who we will eternally be. Because of the resurrection, our personalities in the sum of all their relationships and nuances, *have an eternal future*. But from whence do we acquire those nuances, body languages, etc? They arise partly from our parents, from our inter-relations with others etc; we are the sum of our relationships. And this is in fact a tremendous encouragement to us in our efforts for others; for the result of our parenting, our patient effort and grace towards others, will have an eternal effect upon others. Who we help them become is, in part, who they will eternally be. Job reflected that if a tree is cut down, it sprouts (Heb. *yaliph*) again as the same tree; and he believed that after his death he would likewise sprout again (*yaliph*) at the resurrection (Job 14:7-9,14,15). There will be a continuity between who we were in mortal life, and who we will eternally be- just as there is between the pruned tree and the new tree which grows again out of its stump.

Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't willfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). The Ethiopian eunuch read of his representative Saviour as also being childless, and being as he was, in the midst of a wilderness; and realizing this, he desired to be baptized into Him. Grasping the representational nature of the Lord's death inspires response in baptism, and yet the motivational power of this fact continues afterwards.

*Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid-* We need to read this carefully. Paul is not accusing them of simply using prostitutes. He is saying that they were the body members of Christ [by baptism], but they were acting as the body members of a prostitute. They are therefore accused not of *using* prostitutes, but *being* prostitutes. And this connects with our earlier thoughts in this chapter, that the cult of prostitution as practiced in the surrounding religions had been imported into the church at Corinth. They had 'taken' parts of Christ's body and used them in that way; the suggestion is surely that they had appointed some of their number to be ecclesial prostitutes. And this was likely what was going on at the breaking of bread. For this reason I have some sympathy with the reading of the sexual sins in :11 as specifically referring to prostitution of various kinds. Paul was not going to 'take' Christ's body parts, the believers, and use them as the body parts of a prostitute. Perhaps he had been invited to do so and was turning it down. It could be that Paul has in view a symbolic prostitute such as 'Babylon' but the context here is surely of literal sexual misbehaviour.

6:16 *Or do you not know that he that is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For the scripture says: The two shall become one flesh-* The implication of this reasoning is that the Genesis command that the two shall become one has a specific reference to the sexual act. And this was designed as part of the way God fuses man and woman together within the marriage context. By using the sexual act the Corinthians were declaring that they were married to the prostitute they were using. Seeing their bodies belonged to Christ and were indwelt by His Spirit, they were therefore joining Christ to that prostitute. But the Corinthians didn't sense this indwelling of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit, and so they were unaware of the enormity of the implications of how they were using what was effectively *His* body.

6:17- see on Acts 18:18.

*But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit-* The act of intercourse makes husband and wife "one flesh". In the same way as there is "one *body*... one *flesh*" at this point, so "he that is joined unto the Lord is one *spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:16,17). Highlight, or underline, those phrases "one body" and "one flesh" in v.16, and also "one spirit" in v.17. Don't miss the point. We must "stand fast in *one spirit*, with one mind striving together..." (Phil. 1:27). We are to be one spirit with the Lord, as a man is one body and spirit with his wife (1 Cor. 6:16,17). But that same intense union is to be seen within the ecclesia. We become one spirit with the Lord Jesus by baptism (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13); thus what we feel deep inside us in our spirit, in the spirit-man created within us, is automatically, instantly the feeling of the Lord Jesus. And because He is one with the Father in Spirit, He can therefore relay our spirit to Him. Rom. 8 is teaching that this is really what prayer is all about, and what we request verbally, not knowing what to pray for as we ought, is not really the essence of prayer. Yet the Corinthians were denying the operation of the Spirit, and therefore they failed to feel their personal relationship and connection with the Lord Jesus; and this led to them using their bodies in sinful connections with prostitutes. They failed to realize what Paul will now make explicit in this chapter- that possession of the Lord's spirit means we, our bodies, are His and not our own to use as we please. That principle goes far beyond sexual issues.

6:18 *Flee fornication-* Surely an allusion to Joseph literally fleeing from sexual temptation.

*Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he that commits fornication sins against his own body-* Whilst Paul does have in mind the use of the physical body, we must bear in mind that "the body" in Corinthians is usually used by Paul in the sense of the body of Christ. We also must answer the question as to how sexual sin is a sin against our own body. Sin is surely against God and against persons, rather than against the sack of water, calcium and complex chemicals which forms the human body. The Greek *eis* translated "against" is a very common word in the Greek New Testament, and usually carries the sense of "in" or "within". Within our bodies And the context of 1 Cor. 6 is about how our individual behaviour affects the body of Christ as a whole. Sin is sin not only because it is a technical infringement of Divine law, but because of what it does to others in practice. Sexual sin in particular rarely simply affects two persons. If a sister commits adultery in an ecclesia with a brother, there are many other parties affected, and ecclesias so often divide as the members take sides as to how to deal with the issue, and in their foolish human efforts to apportion blame- "She was more responsible... he was easily led... but her husband is abusive, you can understand how it happened... he has baptized kids and young grandchildren, you can't disfellowship him". The context of Corinthians is warning against turning the breaking of bread meeting into the kind

of *symposium* common in Corinthian society, whereby a group of equals met together to hear a speech of common interest to them, relating to their trade guild or religion, and it turned into a time of drunken revellry and use was made of prostitutes. The command therefore to "flee fornication (Gk. *porneia*) (:18) doesn't so much speak of going too far with your girlfriend (which is wrong but for other reasons), but is a warning against the systematic immorality (*porneia*) of using prostitutes. See on 5:11. Paul is arguing that what's wrong with this is that it's a sin against the body of Christ, against many others within the body, and thus against Christ personally, whose body we are part of and individually representative of. This would explain why he writes of "your ['you' plural] body" (:19).

6:19 *Or do you not know*- Paul says this several times. He is asking them to review their spiritual potential and use it. Chapter 1 opened with the encouragement that they had richly received the Spirit; but 3:1 then explains that they were not spiritual. Paul is asking them to live up to the huge spiritual potential and possibility which comes with being baptized into Christ.

*That your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you which you have from God*- They were unaware that the Spirit was within them- and their behaviour reflected that. 1 Cor. 1 tells them that through being baptized into Christ, they have been given the Spirit; but 3:1 is clear that they were spirit-less. Paul asks them to be aware that because they have been redeemed, bought as the property and slaves of the Lord Jesus, He has filled them with His Spirit so that they might be wholly His. But they had to allow that process and to as it were buy in to it. The Spirit dwelt amongst Old Testament Israel in the wilderness, but they grieved the Spirit of God and were unresponsive to it.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the community of believers as it earlier dwelt in the tabernacle and temple in the form of an Angel and the shekinah glory. The "price" paid for "you" [plural] refers to the redemption of the body of believers by the blood of Christ (:20). By baptism into the body of Christ (which Paul emphasizes in 12:13, where again he speaks of how in body and spirit we are made one with the Lord by baptism) we are His body, and to lock Him into intercourse with a temple prostitute is therefore a statement to the world about Him personally (:15). Note how in :13 "for the Lord... the Lord for the body" is a poor translation in that "for" has been provided by the translators in a failed attempt to make better sense of the blunt original- "the body... [is] the Lord [Jesus]- the Lord [is] the body". The implications of baptism into His body are major indeed. He is us and we are Him. Whilst the word 'baptism' isn't found here in chapter 6, the idea is clearly alluded to in 6:11. Therefore just as surely as He was raised up, so will we be (:14). Sin therefore has implications for Christ personally, and for the wider body of Christ. We sin in [*eis*] our own body, which is the body of Christ. Therefore even if something is considered "lawful" by us personally, this doesn't mean we can therefore do it- because it has effects upon others (:12). And this is exactly the reasoning Paul uses later in his reasoning about the question of meats offered to idols. Paul has said the same about himself earlier in 4:4, where he comments that he has a good conscience, he knows nothing against himself, but this doesn't make him thereby acceptable to God. To some extent, the conscience of others must be factored into our own personal conscience. We will only find the strength and motivation to do so by appreciating that we are together with them in the same one body.

*And you are not your own*- To willingly describe oneself as a slave of Christ was totally against the grain of first century social norms- for to be a slave in any form took away a person's credibility and value. And yet Paul especially in the context of describing his

witness, speaks of himself as a slave of Jesus. He urges the converts to see themselves as "not your own" because they have been bought as slaves by the blood of the cross (1 Cor. 6:19,20). People were trained to take their place amongst fixed categories within society- the whole idea of transformation, of taking ones' place amidst the ecclesia of Christ, of being a saint, a called-out one, of being made free from how others' see us... was all so radical that even those who converted to Christianity likely never grasped the full extent of the ideas.

Slaves in the first century were seen as mere bodies owned by their masters or mistresses. Hence Rev. 18:13 describes slaves as *somata*, bodies. They were seen as both the economic and sexual property of those who owned them. It seems Paul had this in mind when he spoke of how we have one master, Christ, and our bodies are indeed not our own- but they are His, to be used according to His wishes. For many slaves, this would've meant running the risk of death or flogging. And yet despite this radical demand, Christianity spread rapidly amongst the huge slave population of the first century world.

The importance (the *eternal* importance) which attaches to our attitude to materialism is certainly stressed. All that we have is not our own. It's not '*my* money', it's not '*your* car', it's not even '*my* toe' which *you* accidentally trod on. Yet we all cling on to what little we have; we get offended and upset if we 'lose' it, or if we feel it is demanded of us. But not only is our material possession not 'ours'; "*ye* are not *your own*. For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). This is said in the context of warning against abuse of our sexuality; it's not *our* body, so follow God's teaching concerning it. We ourselves, the very essential me, and you, have been bought with the blood of the Lord Jesus. If I don't own even myself, I certainly don't own anything material. *Now*, I am not my own. I am a slave, bought by the Lord Jesus. The fact He is Lord *of all* means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God? Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, in this life, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'. See on Lk. 16:12.*

6:20- see on Mt. 13:46.

*For you were bought with a price. Glorify God therefore in your body and spirit, for they are God's-* In the slave-master analogy, the Lord had bought them with His blood. They were therefore completely His, even their very bodies, and His Spirit was potentially within them. But they had to allow the action of the Spirit within their spirit; and use their bodies and minds appropriately.

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote-* I have to say in preface to this section that what follows is how I understand this passage in all intellectual and expositional honesty. I as a married man can make no pretension to being able to live up to the high standard which Paul seems to be suggesting. As with much in this commentary, I offer the following exposition more to stimulate Bible-minded and prayerful meditation, rather than as a prescriptive statement of how a believer must live.

Clearly the Corinthians had written to Paul; this explains why often in his reply he appears to quote terms and phrases from their correspondence. The Bible which we have bears the marks of the fact that it was written for a primary readership (as well as for us), and the language used is proof of that. Take a read through 1 Corinthians 7 to see what I mean. It is clear that Paul is answering some highly specific questions which the Corinthian believers had written to him. He begins his paragraphs: “*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me... now concerning virgins... now as touching things offered unto idols...*” (1 Cor. 7:1,25; 8:1). We can almost imagine him sitting there with their letter in front of him, answering the questions point by point. But we don’t know what their questions were, and this fact makes the interpretation of Paul’s words here difficult; although of course the study of them is beneficial to us. The fact is, some parts of the Bible which we have were written for its primary readership, and the language used reflects this (Dt. 3:9,11).

*It is good for a man not to touch a woman-* Paul's usage of the word "good" in this chapter must be understood as his clarification of what he means (:8,26). We marvel at how this group of believers on one hand were involved with serious sexual immorality, the use of prostitutes within the church (chapter 6) and boasting that one of them had taken his father's wife (chapter 5), and collectively they warranted the charge that they were lacking in the Spirit, unspiritual (3:1); and yet on the other hand, they were discussing issues such as remaining single for the sake of Christ, or married couples abstaining from sex in order to fast and pray. Perhaps there was a very wide range of spirituality within the church; and thereby we have a huge challenge to the exclusive mindset which many churches have operated, whereby the less spiritual or unspiritual or moral failures are excluded from the congregation. But it may equally be that we find here a reflection of the terrible duality which there is within religious people; extremes of spiritual devotion can beget extreme unspirituality and self-indulgence, justified by the idea that they have been so spiritual in other areas.

*7:2 But because there is so much immorality-* The Greek *porneia* refers to the use of prostitution, and in chapter 6 we saw that this sort of thing was going on within the Corinthian church. The context is not speaking about young couples 'going too far' and being advised to marry in order to avoid that temptation. Prostitution was common in religious practices in Corinth, and it seems likely there were some who wanted to justify practicing it in the church. An argument was being made that seeing human passions could be satisfied as much as physical desires for food (1 Cor. 6:13), the Christian should commit himself to the

Lord's service as a single person, even breaking up marriage to do so, and use church prostitutes to satisfy sexual urges.

*Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband-* I suggest this not an appeal for single people to get married, but rather an encouragement to 'have' sexual relations with their *own* partners- rather than making use of the church prostitutes. This would be the force of the word "own". The next verses speak in this same context. I would doubt the reference is to getting married rather than being single because the majority of people in first century society were married. Singleness was not anywhere near as common as it is today, indeed New Testament Greek refers to either an underage girl, or a married woman. If my approach is correct, then we would need to note that women were also tempted to use male prostitutes in the church, and this would explain the usage of words relating to male prostitution in chapter 6.

*7:3 Let the husband render to the wife her due and likewise also the wife to the husband-* As explained on :2, the problem in view appears to be the usage of religious prostitutes within a religious, Christian context. Paul is saying that sex should be confined to marriage, and both partners should accept this. Sex is a "due", a debt which is intrinsic to the marital agreement; and it should not be avoided on the basis of using prostitutes in the name of religious devotion.

*7:4 The wife has no power over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise also the husband has no power over his own body, but the wife does-* The "power" is hard to interpret. The word really means 'authority' and is used rarely; but one of the other two usages is in 1 Cor. 6:12 where Paul says he will not be brought under the authority of any- perhaps, of anyone. It could be that some teachers in the church were claiming authority over others in these intimate matters. Or Paul may simply be pointing out that marriage is a surrendering of personal autonomy. It is a surrendering of the body to the partner. This kind of language is in fact appropriate to the sexual act itself, both physically and psychologically. Paul may therefore be saying that the sexual act is to be seen as a surrendering of autonomy to the authority of the partner- and that surrender is not to be made to a prostitute, nor to a religious leader, but solely to the marital partner.

7:5- see on Mt. 23:25; Rom. 5:12.

*Do not deprive one another, unless it is for an agreed time, so that you may give yourselves to prayer and then come together again-* "Deprive" is literally "defraud" and continues the metaphor of sex as debt which was introduced in :3. Paul says that sex might be foregone for an agreed period in order to enable total devotion to prayer and by implication, personal connection with the Lord Jesus. This is a very high standard to speak of. We must ask how long we spend each day in communion with the Lord Jesus, how many minutes we are in prayer for, and whether foregoing marital sex would enhance our prayer life. For many of us, the answer would have to be that such sexual 'fasting' would not enhance our contact with the Lord Jesus because we are just not on that spiritual level. But what is interesting is that Paul speaks of this high level of spiritual devotion in the same context as warning against the usage of prostitutes rather than marital partners, and has commented that the Corinthians were generally unspiritual (3:1) and lacking basic fruits of the Spirit. Perhaps Paul is here addressing a very spiritual minority within the church- in which case we are challenged by the way that they coexisted along with the less spiritual in the same church environment. Or it may be that there was a heady mix of the heights of spiritual devotion and the depths of moral



failure which existed amongst the Corinthians. Such mixture would be typical of human nature and the kinds of juxtaposition and tension between flesh and spirit which we find within ourselves and see constantly in others. The spiritually minded alcoholic, the sister with a heart of gold who has affairs... these are all so frequently encountered within church life.

There is an allusion to Mt. 17:21. Give yourselves to prayer and fasting with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle. Paul assumes that prayer will be such a major component in the lives of married believers that they may well chose to temporarily abstain from sexual relationships in order to find a greater intensity in prayer. This speaks of quite some emphasis on prayer; not just a few minutes at the end of each day saying often the same words.

*That Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control-* The temptation in view was that of desiring sexual expression, and that is a deeply internal process. The 'satan' or adversary would therefore refer to the lusts of the human mind. Paul speaks as if their lack of self-control is a given, it exists amongst them. He doesn't argue that they should have sexual marital relationships *in case* they might lack self-control and fall into sin. He states that they lack self-control- for they were lacking the Spirit (3:1). So we get the picture of believers who lacked self-control who were on the other hand very zealous to connect with the Lord Jesus in prayer and would even forego sex in order to focus upon their prayer life. This mixture of flesh and spirit is within each of us and within every church. But the lid is taken off here by Paul, we see the internal workings within the minds and church lives of the Corinthians- because in essence the same conflicts will be seen in all who have not totally surrendered to the ministry of the Spirit.

*7:6 But this I say by way of concession, not by commandment-* This must be linked with 1 Corinthians 7:12: "Now to the rest speak I, not the Lord (Jesus)". The implication is that verses 1-6 were not a repetition of Christ's direct teaching, neither were vv. 12 ff. But therefore we should read verses 7-11 as being 'the Lord Jesus speaking', i.e. Paul is repeating the spirit of Christ's teaching. The content of v. 7-11 concerns being single and not divorcing; it is significant that Paul says that what he said about marriage was him speaking "by permission" or concession, but what he says about singleness is from the Lord Jesus Himself. However, the translation "concession" is not helpful. The Greek word occurs only here, but it means literally 'common knowledge'; he may mean that he is sharing the implications of the Lord's direct teaching rather than His specific commandments- either in the Gospels, or as directly revealed by the Lord to Paul.

*7:7 Yet I would that all men were even as I myself-* The power of Paul's teaching about singleness is backed up by his personal situation. As a member of the Council who condemned Stephen, he would have had to be married. An unmarried Orthodox Jew would have been a contradiction in terms at that time. And yet he is evidently single in his Christian ministry. It seems fairly certain that his wife either died or left him at the time of his conversion, probably taking the children with her. If this is so, it gives extra poignancy to his comment that he had suffered the loss of all things for the sake of his conversion (Phil. 3:8). The chances are that he thought and wrote that with a difficult glance back to that Jerusalem girl, the toddlers he'd never seen again, the life and infinite possibilities of what might have been... And it gives another angle on his description of his converts as his children.

*However each man has his own gift from God, one after this manner and another after that-* Our life situation, married or unmarried, married to a reasonable or unreasonable person, believer or unbeliever; or whether we are wired with stronger or weaker self-control... all these things are a gift from God, and should be seen in that way, rather than ever seeking to change our situation or wishing that somehow we were in another situation. The word "own" links back to the exhortation to have relationships with our "own" partner- and not prostitutes.

*7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows-* The "But I say" may mean that Paul is now sharing what has directly been revealed to him, whereas his other teaching is a reflection of the Lord's 'saying' or teaching as recorded in the Gospels. It would seem from the context of *porneia* and the problem of church usage of prostitutes that the sexual needs of the unmarried and widows were being met by prostitutes, and in this context Paul argues for marriage if they feel their sexual needs are beyond their self-control.

*It is good for them if they live as I do-* Adam alone was "not good". Adam and Eve together are described as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Paul seems to have this in mind when he says three times that "it is good" to be single (1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26). But what's the point of this paradox? Perhaps Paul's point is: 'In the old, natural creation, it wasn't good that a man should be alone. But now, in the new creation, it's good that a man does try to live a single life, because as Adam married Eve, so we are now married to Christ'. Or it may be that attention is being drawn to the fact that God's provision of Eve was the first of God's countless concessions to human need. It was God's intention, ideally, that Adam be single, therefore he was potentially "good" in his single state. But he couldn't handle it, therefore God made him a partner. And therefore Paul says that to live the single life is "good". But in the same way as God made a concession to Adam, so He does to believers now; "but if they cannot contain, let them marry". Whether we agree this makes marriage a concession to human need or not, the fact is that surely single believers should at least *consider* the single life. Likewise Paul's invitation to follow his example of being single in order to devote himself to his Lord must be taken as seriously as his other invitations to follow his example (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:33; 11:1). He knew that he was (in the words of Robert Roberts) "a Christ-appointed model"; the record of his life is framed to give the picture of the ideal believer.

According to :10, this verse 8 is part of Paul's repeating of the Lord's teaching about marriage. But where did He specifically speak about singleness? Surely it was when He spoke about men making themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom's sake (Mt. 19:12). The disciples' comment "It is not good to marry" is picked up by Paul when he says it is "good" to be single unto the Lord. The Lord's response to "It is not good to marry" was that "All men cannot receive this saying, saving they to whom it is given". The Lord Himself made concessions about marriage, and so Paul did the same.

The triple description of the single life as "good" (1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26) uses a Greek word which can mean 'beautiful'. Yet many a lonely, longing sister might not see anything 'beautiful' about her singleness; neither would she go along with 1 Corinthians 7:34, which says that the unmarried woman has the advantage that she can single-mindedly give herself to the things of the Lord Jesus. It may seem to her that she would serve the Lord much better if she were married. And probably so. This raises the possibility that by "the unmarried" Paul may not mean 'the single ones in the ecclesia'. He may be referring to those who had consciously decided to be single, but used the church prostitutes at times. Likewise "the

widows" doesn't have to mean 'all those in the ecclesias who have lost partners'. It could mean those widows who had devoted themselves to the Lord Jesus rather than seeking another partner, after the pattern of widows devoting themselves to the temple (cp. Lk. 2:37). The fact he recommends some younger widows to remarry (1 Tim. 5:14) is proof enough that "widows" doesn't mean 'all widows'. It may be that single and widowed brethren and sisters made open statements of their decision to devote themselves to the Lord Jesus, and so he would be using "unmarried and widows" as technical terms for those who were proclaiming celibacy to the Lord Jesus, and yet it seems were tempted to use the church prostitutes at times. 1 Tim. 5:9 suggests there was a specific "number" of widows in the Ephesus ecclesia who were financially supported by the ecclesia.

"Live as I do" translates a word which better means to remain or abide. This would connect with the teaching in :20 "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called".

7:9 *But if they do not have self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn-* There is a purposeful ambiguity in Paul's comment that it is better to marry than to burn due to unlawful passions (1 Cor. 7:9). Is he referring to the burning 'fire' of judgment (e.g. Mt. 13:40), or of burning in lust (cp. Rom. 1:27)? Surely he intends reference to both, in that burning in lust is effectively condemning yourself, kindling the fire of condemnation yourself. David burnt in lust, and was then smitten with a disease which he describes as his loins being filled with burning (Ps. 38:7 RV). Or consider the Jonah type. He was disobedient and left the presence of the Lord of his own volition, and was therefore cast forth from the ship to the dark waters- in this little type of judgment, he condemned himself. The rejected are told to depart, and yet in another sense they are cast away (Mt. 25:30,41). Sin is therefore its own judgment; in that sense, judgment is upon us right now, and "we make the answer now".

7:10- see on 1 Cor. 9:14; 15:10.

*But to the married I give this instruction; not I, but the Lord-* I take this to mean that Paul at this point is repeating the recorded teaching of the Lord Jesus, rather than sharing things separately revealed to him- he begins doing that at :12. We note his deep connection with the Lord Jesus and how saturated his thinking was by the Gospels; I have elsewhere listed all his allusions to the Gospel records, and in the whole Pauline corpus he is alluding to them at least once every three verses. But there is another option in interpretation here. Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 15:10 show Paul using the phrase "yet not I but..." to differentiate between his natural and spiritual self. Perhaps he does the same in the only other occurrence of the phrase here in 1 Cor. 7:10: "And unto the married I command, *yet not I* [the natural Paul], but the Lord [the man Christ Jesus in the spiritual Paul], Let not the wife depart from her husband". See on Acts 23:6.

*That the wife should not leave her husband-* The context so far has been of Paul warning the Corinthians against using church prostitutes and abandoning their marital partners under the guise of wanting to devote themselves completely to the Lord. We see here a window into how the flesh reasons- even marital breakup can be justified by the flesh as a path to greater spiritual service. "Leave" is the same word used by the Lord in teaching that man should not "put asunder" what God has joined together in marriage (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9). The context of those passages clearly places the 'putting asunder' in parallel with divorce.

7:11 *But should she depart-* This is a classic case of an ideal being stated, but a less than ideal situation being accepted. This theme is found throughout Corinthians, and it is hard for

legalistic or literalistic minds to accept. Although God joins together man and wife, He allows His work to be undone in that He concedes to separation, even when there has been no adultery (1 Cor. 7:11). Prov. 21:9; 25:24 almost seem to encourage it, by saying that it is better for a spiritual man to dwell in a corner of the housetop than to share a house in common (LKK *koinos*) with his contentious wife. The same word occurs in Mal. 2:14 LXX in describing a man's wife as his "companion" (*koinonos*). Throughout the Spirit's teaching concerning marriage in 1 Cor. 7, there is constantly this feature of setting an ideal standard, but accepting a lower one. This is demonstrated by the several occurrences of the word "But..." in the passage:

- It is better not to marry: "*But and if* thou marry, thou hast not sinned" (v.28).
- The same "but and if" occurs in vv. 10,11: "Let not the wife depart from her husband: *but and if* she depart...". Separation is, therefore, tolerated by God as a concession to human weakness, even though it is a way of life which inevitably involves an ongoing breach of commandments.
- It is better for widows not to remarry; but if they do, this is acceptable (1 Cor. 7:39,40; 1 Tim. 5:11)
- This same 'two standards' principle is seen elsewhere within 1 Cor. Meat offered to idols was just ordinary meat, but Paul, like God, makes concessions for those with a weak conscience concerning this (1 Cor. 8). See on 1 Cor. 9:12; 14:28; 12:31.

*Let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not leave his wife-* To be an unmarried woman was very difficult in first century society. Paul is asking a lot here. The command to be "reconciled" indicates that Paul saw right through the argument being presented- that due to a desire to serve the Lord on a higher level, believers were refusing to have sex with their partners or even leaving or divorcing them. And, as is clear from chapter 6 and the talk of *porneia* in this chapter 7, they were using church prostitutes to meet their sexual needs. But Paul perceived that the real problem was the usual raft of human issues which come between marital partners, and their lack of reconciliation was their real reason for ending the relationship. The word for 'reconcile' is used almost exclusively in Corinthians, and Paul will later write of how "the ministry of reconciliation" is fundamental to the Gospel. We are reconciled to God in Christ, we must seek to reconcile others, and the Corinthians needed to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We can assume that their lack of reconciliation with God was underlying their lack of reconciliation with each other, both within their marriages and within the church as a whole. It is simply so that division is a work of the flesh. Division and lack of reconciliation, both between believers and within marriages, can be so easily spiritually justified- apparently; but Paul is insisting that reconciliation with God will have its fruit in reconciliation with each other, and will come to full term in "the unity of the Spirit". But they refused to allow the Spirit to work (3:1) and so they lacked that unity of the Spirit.

7:12 *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord-* See on :10. There are several indications that Paul expected his readers to understand that the majority of what he was saying was basically a reflection of the words of the Lord Jesus. He hasn't earlier said: 'Now I'm going to remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus'. He takes it as understood that as usual, his reasoning has been a reflection of the words of Jesus (in the context, 1 Cor. 7:11 = Mt. 5:32; Mk. 10:9; "put asunder" is s.w. "depart"). But now he says that he is going to go beyond Christ's words (as in 1 Cor. 7:25). This doesn't mean he wasn't inspired; it means that he is drawing their attention to the fact that he is doing something unusual for him, i.e. to give teaching which is not an allusion or repetition of that of the Lord Jesus. My point is that the implication of this is that he expected his readers to take as read that he normally was only repeating the thinking of

Christ. Likewise in 2 Cor. 11:17: "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord" (i.e. as I normally would). Every few verses, even according to our limited analysis, he was making a noticeable allusion to the Gospels. When he says that he is speaking to the Thessalonians "by (in) the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15), this doesn't mean that what he was about to say was more inspired than anything else. What he meant was that he was specifically repeating the teaching of Christ (which he does through a series of extended allusions to Mt. 24 and 25). "To the rest" would be appropriate language to use if Paul were sitting down replying to a letter from Corinth which lists various categories and asks his opinion about them.

*If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her-* It is probably true that in every marriage, the thought arises as to what life would be like if it were to end. The problem was that believers in their low moments were justifying breaking up their relationships in the name of higher spiritual service. And Paul is most clearly arguing against all such reasoning. Most women in first century society automatically followed the religion of their husbands; but we see here an indication of the deeply personal nature of Christian commitment. It was far from automatic that marital partners would also accept the faith of their partners. "Leave her" translates a different Greek term to that used about the believing woman not 'leaving' her unbelieving partner in :13. Here in :12 we have a formal term for divorce. It would have been harder for a woman to divorce her husband, but she could leave or run away from him- and that is the term used in :13. Not being 'together', leaving each other, is therefore parallel to divorce. Documentary evidence for marital status is a concept only of recent times. And in any case, the essence of marriage is being together, not leaving each other but cleaving to each other.

*7:13 And the woman that has an unbelieving husband and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband-* As noted on :12, the stress of Christianity on *individual* conversion and responsibility meant that as Jesus had predicted, families were divided when one accepted Him. 1 Cor. 7 shows that there were times when a wife accepted Christianity but her husband didn't. Yet society expected her to treat him as her head in all religious matters. Plutarch taught that "it is becoming for a wife to worship and know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tightly upon all queer rituals and superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favour". These comments were very relevant to the many sisters who must have discreetly broken bread alone or in small groups. One can imagine all the social and domestic conflicts that Christianity created. This is why the movement was so slandered. And it explains the interpersonal conflicts and tensions caused by true Christian commitment today. See on :12 for the difference between 'leaving' and 'putting away'.

*7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother. Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy-* Those who come to the Faith already married have their marriage "sanctified" by God- if God did not do this, their children would be "unclean; but now are they holy". This connects back to Paul's opening statements in 1 Cor. 1 that all in Christ are "sanctified"; but he has argued that the Corinthians were not appreciating nor acting according to the status they had potentially been given. And here again, because they didn't really believe or feel their own sanctification, they failed to see that their marriages were also sanctified. Every part of their lives was sanctified- including in the case of marriage to unbelievers, and including their children. The implication

is that God does not see marriage in the world in the same way as He sees marriage between His children. The implication of 1 Cor. 7:14 seems to be that if an unbeliever has a relationship with an unbeliever, the resulting children are "unclean", not sanctified, because the parent was not sanctified by being in Christ. "Now *are* they holy" is another example of Paul recognizing that they were in status sanctified before God, even if they failed to appreciate that as they should. Just as the Corinthians were sanctified by status but this was no guarantee of their salvation ultimately, so it would be unwise to argue that the children of believers are sanctified in the sense of being saved eternally. And in any case, surely having a believing parent doesn't mean that their children shall be saved in any case regardless of their personal faith. If we insist on seeing a parallel between sanctification and final salvation, surely we must draw a line at when "their children" are no longer covered by the believing parent when they come to maturity. But this question is not addressed here because quite simply the issue of salvation is not in view at all.

*7:15 Yet if the unbelieving departs, let him depart. The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases-* The 'letting' presumably speaks of agreeing to the separation and not trying to stop it. The metaphor of "bondage" means just that- it is the language of slavery. It may not really refer to the 'marriage bond'; that is just a similarity in the English words for 'bond' and 'bondage'. The believing woman is not to accept effective religious and psychological slavery to an unbelieving husband.

*But God has called us to peace-* "Peace" is elsewhere translated 'to set at one again' (Acts 7:26) and connects with the call to 'be reconciled' in :11. We have been called to live at one with others around us, believers or unbelievers. The woman should not automatically agree with the departure of her unbelieving partner but should realize that God's calling or intention is for reconciliation. But if that is not possible, then He doesn't want us to live in slavery to a situation which is spiritually untenable. Again we see here the acceptance of a less than ideal situation. God has called the believing woman to peace with her unbelieving partner, but if due to the positions of another that is just not going to happen, then the Lord understands that. The only other reference to being called to peace is in Col. 3:15: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts- to this you were also called in one body; and be thankful". The idea may therefore be that throughout all the trauma of marital break up, the sister was to remember that the peace of Christ was to rule in her heart, for this is the psychological position she has been called to.

*7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you shall save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you shall save your wife?-* The thought seems to be that by hanging in there and seeking reconciliation (see on :15), the believing partner has the chance to save their partner. We note that salvation is partially predicated upon third parties. We can save others, we can cause their stumbling also. We also see here a balance regarding the interpretation of Eph. 5:23 where the husband is presented as the saviour of the wife. This is true, but it can also be that the wife saves the husband.

*7:17 Only as the Lord has distributed to each man, as God has called each, so let him walk-* Paul's argument is that it would be wrong to justify ending a marital relationship under the excuse that one is seeking a higher spiritual experience, and all the more wrong to then use church prostitutes. The immediate context here speaks of accepting our marital situation where possible and seeking to reconcile and live at peace with the partner, whether they are believers or unbelievers. The distribution or calling in view therefore refers both to marital

status, and to the nature of our marriage. Those situations which the Corinthians were tempted to wriggle out of were in fact gifts from God- each therefore has "his own gift from God" (:7). This is not the same as saying that our situation must be glumly accepted at all costs; rather is it an elevation of 'the ties that bind' and seeing them as gifts from God. Paul began in chapter 1 by saying that every believer has been given gifts at the point of baptism. Here he is saying that those gifts may not necessarily only refer to talents or characteristics, but also to life situations. He uses the same word to speak of the gift to him of a ministry to preach to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:13). He uses a related word in speaking of how each believer is a different part of the Lord's body (1 Cor. 12:27). We are to run with what we were given- to walk according to our calling, as he puts it here. The 'calling' again is that spoken of in chapter 1; it is not simply a calling to the Kingdom, but a calling to a unique path to that end, which includes marital situation and the nature of the marriages we have.

*And so ordain I in all the churches-* Understanding Corinth ecclesia as a series of house churches explains Paul's comment to the Corinthians that he ordained his guidelines to be practiced in all the ecclesias- i.e. the house churches that comprised the body of Christ in Corinth. He gives some guidelines for behaviour that appear to contradict each other until we perceive the difference between the commands to house groups, and commands about the 'gathering together' for special breaking of bread services. The role of women is a classic example. 1 Cor. 14:34 says that women should keep silent 'in ecclesia' [AV "churches" is a mistranslation]- i.e. a sister shouldn't teach at those special breaking of bread meetings when the house churches 'came together' (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20). And yet within the house groups, it's apparent from other New Testament accounts and from what Paul himself writes, that sisters did teach there (1 Cor. 11:5). Thus in the house church of Philip, there were four women who 'prophesied', i.e. spoke forth the word of God to others (Acts 21:8,9). This to me is the only way to make sense of Corinthians- otherwise Paul appears to be contradicting himself.

*7:18 Was anyone called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised-* It was not possible for the circumcised to become uncircumcised. But Paul uses this example in order to underline the extent to which he so strongly feels that we should retain the position we were in when baptized. He sees that position, whether it be our marital status or the nature of our marriage, or our social situation as slaves, as all part of the gift of the Spirit we received. Those things are gifts, intended for us to use in our path towards eternal life at the end of the process. "Every man hath his proper (Gk. *idios*, his very personal) gift of God...". The ideas are again linked in Rom. 11:29: "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance". This idea of us each being given a gift at the time of our conversion goes back to the parable of Lk. 19:13, where each of us, Christ's servants, are given a gift to work with. The goods of the Father are divided between the sons, for them to use as they think best (Lk. 15:12). "The Kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who *called* his own servants, and *delivered* unto them his goods" (Mt. 25:14). Note how the *calling* of the servants and the giving them the gifts / goods are connected. The idea of called servants is alluded to later, in 1 Corinthians 7:22. We have each been given "gifts" at our conversion. Our 'calling' is related to our situation at the time of our conversion. There is a parallel between God distributing gifts to each of us, and Him calling us (1 Corinthians 7:17). This is to be expected from the allusion back to the parables; the gifts are given to each of us at our conversion or 'calling'.

*7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing- but the keeping of the commandments of God is all important-* Paul is clearly attacking a Judaist influence at

Corinth. As we noted in expounding Titus, Jewish legalism was actually attractive to immoral Gentile Christians- because they felt freed up to commit immorality because they were legalistically obedient to some Jewish laws. The argument was that circumcision was a commandment of God and so it should be kept. Paul is drawing a sharp contrast between circumcision and keeping commandments. The real essence of keeping all Divine commandments was to believe in Jesus as Lord, and to live in love (1 Jn. 3:23). This would preclude breaking up marital relationships and the usage of prostitutes.

*7:20 Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called-* As noted on :18, our calling is personal and individually tailored to each of us. The position we were in baptism was God's purpose for us and part of the intended journey and spiritual process ahead for us.

So Paul wrote that slaves should abide in the callings they had when called, and not unduly seek freedom. This has huge implications when we consider the plight of female slaves, amongst whom the Gospel spread so significantly in the first century. They were the sexual property of their owners, who would personally use them and sub-let them as he wished. This was all part and parcel of being a female slave. For those women / sisters, the moral demands of the New Testament were even harder to follow than they are now. Yet nowhere do we read of Paul insisting that those women refuse their 'duties'; he teaches that they should abide in that position, and try as best they can to live by Christian principles. That appears to me to be a concession to weakness and to the huge difficulty those women faced. If God has so repeatedly made concessions to human weakness, allowing us to live below the Biblical ideal of marriage, then we must in some way respond to this in our dealings with our brethren. Somehow we must do this without infringing the need to uphold the Truth of God's commandments.

*7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry, but if you can become free, do so-* Gk. 'use it'. Our marital status at the time of conversion is being spoken of as our calling, as what we were given, one of the talents given to us, in the language of the parable. This thought alone should make whatever situation we are in seem less of a burden; it's part of the gifts, the talents, we were given at baptism. It's for us to work with it. And the same applies, Paul reasons, if you were called to the Truth as a slave. Don't fret about it, it's one of those precious talents of the parable; although naturally in that context, "if thou mayest be made free, *use it*" (7:21 AV)- note the allusion to *using* the talents in the parable. We are inevitably tied down with the things of this life; but if we can be made free, to serve God directly, as usefully as possible, then surely we should seek to do this. Take early retirement. You can choose to remain at work, and of course, you can glorify God. But you can devote your life and free time to the work of the Gospel, and bring dozens to the knowledge of Christ who wouldn't otherwise have had it. I'd say, and I interpret Paul to say likewise: "If you may be made free, then use it rather".

We can imagine a group of believing women eagerly listening to Paul's latest letter being read out in the house church. They heard of how they had been bought with the price of Christ's blood, that now they were slaves of the Father and Son, that their bodies were truly not their own but *His*. And they would've heard how Paul advised them not to be like other slaves, always dreaming of somehow getting free, but to be content with their situation in which they had been called, to live for the daily joy of being Christ's slave. They were no longer part of the 'household' of their master.



*7:22 For he that was called in the Lord being a slave, is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's slave-* This would have been so liberating for the slaves whose very bodies belonged to their masters. They had been set free. Such freedom or manumission required a large price to be paid, or an extraordinary grace to be shown. And these are all appropriate to the grand metaphor of 'redemption' which is such a major Biblical theme. Many today feel in slavery to family situations, minimum wage employment, or employers who buy the souls of their employees- the school teacher who marks books up to midnight every evening. But we will only feel the freedom if we see life from a spiritual perspective, perceiving the exalted status we have in Christ. And this was what the Corinthians were failing to perceive, as Paul explains in his opening chapters to them.

Although the majority of Corinth ecclesia were poor, there were still some in good standing enough to be invited out to banquets in the course of their business obligations (1 Cor. 8:10; 10:27); and here in chapter 7 we see that some were wealthy enough to consider the economic luxury of divorce. The slave at conversion becomes "the Lord's freedman" and "the free person Christ's slave" (1 Cor. 7:22). Thus this extraordinary unity between social classes was made possible through being "in Christ".

It is unfortunate that most English (and other) translations mask the real force of the Greek words translated 'servant'; for they really mean 'bond-slave', a slave totally owned by his master, totally obedient, totally dedicated to his service. This is the logic brought out in Rom. 6: that before baptism, we were slaves of sin and self. After baptism, we changed masters. We didn't become free, but we became slaves of the Lord Jesus. "He that is called, being free, is the Lord's servant / bond slave" (1 Cor. 7:22). We cannot serve two masters; we are solely His. We are not only slaves, we are slaves whom the Master has come to know as His friends (Jn. 15:15,20). It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus.

*7:23 You were bought with a price. Become not slaves of men-* The price paid to buy us out of slavery was the blood of the Lord Jesus. To become slaves again afterwards is therefore an awful ingratitude to Him. We can become slaves by entering into relationships or employment situations which effectively rob us of our mental freedom to serve Him. The metaphor suggests we were bought out of one slavery in order to become freewill slaves of Him who bought us out of our hopeless situation. Paul surely had this metaphor in view earlier in the chapter when he speaks of a believer not being 'in bondage' (:15), not remaining with an unbelieving partner who wants to end the relationship just because they may provide financial security etc. The same argument was deployed in 6:20: "For you were bought with a price. Glorify God therefore in your body and spirit, for they are God's". Here in chapter 7 Paul is demonstrating some practical outworkings of this- in not becoming slaves of men, and managing our personal relationships in a way that enables us to remain God's slaves.

*7:24 Brothers, let each man, wherein he was called, therein stay with God-* This appears to be a repeat of the teaching in :20. But Paul here appears to specifically address males, whereas in this whole section he is careful to address the needs of both genders. Perhaps he is here alluding to one of the specific questions the Corinthians had written to him (:1).

*7:25 Now concerning virgins-* "Virgins" is clearly a technical term referring to some specific group in the church which we cannot conclusively define. But verses 26-28 appear to be directed specifically to the needs of male believers, as is the preceding :24 (see note there).

Perhaps this advice is therefore being given to the fathers of the virgins they intended to marry; although this interpretation becomes problematic in :37 where a man is to not marry his virgin if he himself feels no "necessity". Likewise :28 speaks of a "virgin" woman having the choice to marry or not. However I have argued throughout (especially on chapter 6) that the practices of the surrounding religions had entered the church, and the use of religious prostitutes had done likewise. The virgins in view may refer to the church prostitutes, called "virgins" in the religious cults. Paul encountered the same situation in the church at Ephesus- see my notes on 1 Timothy. He is seeking to reform the situation, and there he advised that those women marry; and he is saying here in Corinth that they should either be celibate, or marry. But he notes that if these virgins marry, the marriage will have "trouble in the flesh" (:28). A woman who had slept with many of the male members of the church was not going to have an easy marriage if she married one of them and remained in the church. This makes to me the best sense of saying that marrying a 'virgin' will bring "trouble in the flesh"; for marriage does not automatically bring trouble in the flesh but in fact very often it results in blessing in the flesh.

*I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give my judgment, as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy-* The Lord Jesus had not revealed anything specific to Paul in answer to the question, but He had delegated to Paul the freedom to use his own spiritual reasoning to come up with an answer, and to confirm that opinion as being His. The fact the answer is recorded here as inspired scripture is an indicator that the Lord accepted Paul's opinion as correct and therefore inspired by His Spirit.

*7:26 I think therefore that it is good by reason of the present distress that is upon us, that a man should remain as he is-* "It is good by reason of the present distress" uses the same word as in Lk. 21:23 concerning the distress of the last days. Some of us have no hesitation in proclaiming that the time of "distress" of Lk. 21 is upon us. But if it is, then we need to adjust our marriage attitudes accordingly. But the distress may not refer to Paul's sense that they were living in the last days and would soon face persecution. It could also refer to the distress of the particular situation in the Corinthian church, with brethren using some women in the church as prostitutes. The Greek for "distress" means necessity, and the same word is used in :37 about the man who feels no "necessity" to marry. The present necessity may therefore refer here as it does in :37 to the necessity felt for sexual relations and marriage. Paul would then be saying that despite the necessity that is felt by us all, it is better for a man to remain in the marital situation he is in. And it indeed could be that Paul has in view the expectation of persecution and the imminent return of the Lord.

*7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife-* The metaphor of binding connects back to how a woman is spoken of as being in bondage to her husband (:15). Paul is indeed emphasizing the existence of 'ties that bind', and is addressing the natural human desire to break free of them. That basic human tendency was being justified in Corinth on the basis of supposed spiritual devotion, with the use of church prostitutes if required- and Paul is arguing strongly against that. The reference to binding and loosing recalls the Lord's repeated teaching that what we bind or loose on earth is likewise bound or loosed in Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). It may be that the connection is to warn [and also encourage] that whatever decisions we take about relationships is as it were accepted by God- and we therefore have the greater responsibility. And we are to bear in mind Paul's observation that a woman is bound by law to her husband until death (Rom. 7:2); as well as the clear allusion to the idea of God joining or binding together two people in marriage. To

loose that connection, that binding, is to go against God's intention and as it were undo His work.

*7:28 But should you marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marry, she has not sinned. Yet such shall have tribulation in the flesh, and I would spare you-* See the discussion of "virgins" on :25. The only one of the alternatives there suggested which consistently makes sense throughout this section on "virgins" is the idea that this is a technical term referring to cult prostitutes, in fact, church prostitutes. I noted on 1 Timothy 3-6 that such were known in the Ephesian church, and we must give full weight to the Lord's reference to a woman in the Thyatiran church teaching others to commit prostitution in that church (Rev. 2:20). As noted on :25, Paul is calling these sisters to repentance, and the brothers who were using them. He is suggesting they do not marry, but if they do then they can, but he suspects that a former prostitute marrying one of her clients is going to be a troublesome relationship in the flesh. Which seems a fair enough practical observation on a psychological and sociological level.

*7:29 But this I say brothers, because the time is shortened, that from this time forward both those that have wives may be as though they had none-* The reference to the shortness of the time suggests that Paul reasoned as if the Lord's coming was imminent. His teaching about singleness could therefore be understood as for one place and at one time; although we are to indeed live our whole lives as if the Lord's coming is imminent. I discussed on :26 the possibility that "the present distress" has a similar reference. Paul has just been arguing that the married state should be continued; but on the other hand, he is now going on to point out that what goes along with married life and domestic issues can easily become an obsession that blunts our awareness that we are to be living as if the Lord's coming is imminent. Our personal relationship with the Lord and eagerness for His coming is to take emotional and psychological precedence in our hearts above literally all else, including our marital status.

The Olivet prophecy spoke of the time being shortened for the elect's sake. And it seems this happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 says that "the time is shortened". Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was "shortened" by at least 3 years "for the elect's sake". And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times (Mt. 24:20). Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

"As though they had none" may be alluding to Abraham and Isaac in time of persecution.

*7:30 Those that weep, as though they wept not, those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not, and those that buy, as though they possessed not-* The weeping may refer in this marital context to those weeping during the process of bereavement, marital breakup or in desperation at their single state; the rejoicing may refer to those rejoicing in marriage, and the buying to paying a bride price. If indeed the talk about 'giving virgins' refers to fathers giving their daughters away in marriage, then 'buying' would be appropriate to men getting married. But buying, selling and giving in marriage is the Lord's language for the world of Noah's day who represented the world's state on the eve of the Lord's return (Mt. 24:38,39). There was nothing intrinsically immoral in anything they were doing; the issue was that they became obsessed with these matters of daily life and ignored their relationship with God.

In the context of writing about the approaching end of the age, Paul commented that because “the form of this world is passing away”, therefore those who buy anything should “be as though they had no goods, and those who deal with this world as though they had no dealings with it”. This was taught millennia ago by the Mosaic law of Jubilee- that whatever land you bought wasn’t really yours, because the land is God’s. And again, we are not to be “anxious”, because “the Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). And there’s nothing like managing our “wealth”, however small it may be, to make us “anxious”. Paul’s not saying we shouldn’t buy, sell or ‘deal with this world’. He’s saying we should do so *as if* we’re not really doing so, as if this is all an act, a sleepwalk, something we do but our heart isn’t in it. See on James 5:3. We should consider what we buy as not really being possessed by us. Paul practised what he preached: although he evidently had some financial resources (Acts 24:26), he acted and felt as if he possessed absolutely nothing (2 Cor. 6:10).

7:31- see on 1 Cor. 9:18.

*And those that use the world, as not using it to the full. For the fashion of this world passes away-* Marriage and all that goes with it is a using of the world. But we are not to be obsessed with these matters of human existence, learning the lesson from the world of Noah’s day. We are not to use the Lord’s concessions to our humanity “to the full” in becoming obsessed with them. “The fashion of this world”, the external condition [Gk.], shall pass away. Whilst essential relationships between persons shall eternally remain, all else, including marriage, shall pass away. And we are to set our hearts on those things which are eternal. The present tense “is passing away” reflects Paul’s sense of the closeness of the Lord’s coming; and John uses the same words in saying that this world with all its desires, including for marital relationships, passes away (1 Jn. 2:17). The world and all in it has the semblance of permanence; but this too shall pass. Truly the things that are seen are temporal, and only the unseen things are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

7:32 *But I would have you to be free of worries-* Using the same word as in the parable of the sower, which warns that “cares of this world” choke spiritual growth (Mt. 13:22); and we note Paul has just spoken of marriage as being one of the things of “this world”. The same word is used several times by the Lord in urging us to live a life free of care- and Paul saw the danger of domestic life becoming an obsession which led us to disobey that keynote teaching of Christianity.

*He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord-* This is not true for all unmarried people, indeed most young single people are ‘careful’ for the things related to finding a partner. So I suggest that as with “virgins”, Paul is using a technical term, in this case for those who have vowed to remain single for the Lord’s service and who therefore don’t concern themselves with domestic and romantic matters. And this seems to be what Paul wishes for them. But they are not achieve it through using church prostitutes to relieve their human desires.

7:33 *But he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife-* Paul seems to be stating the exaggerated case to make a point; for not literally all married believers are divided between their partner and the Lord. This surely is the whole point of Christian marriage; to love and relate to our partners as service and love towards the Lord. So perhaps as in 14:1-4 and elsewhere, Paul is not making a global statement but is rather

describing how things are in practice on the ground in the Corinthian church. The married were divided between care for their partners, and devotion to the Lord Jesus. But that was not how things should have been. Paul understood 'pleasing' in two senses. On one hand, he did not please men (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4); on another hand, he pleased all men in all things in his efforts to bring them to Christ (1 Cor. 10:33). The same word is used. We can do what is spiritually nice / good / pleasurable for others- but without seeking to please them "in the flesh", as men pleasers. So here in 1 Cor. 7:33 he seems to mean that the married were pleasing their partners "in the flesh", rather than in the Spirit. And this was the whole problem at Corinth, as introduced in the very first chapter; they were of the flesh and not the spirit. I would therefore conclude that this verse 33 is a lament over how things were in their Corinthian marriages, rather than a global statement about the nature of marriage.

*7:34 And is divided-* As noted on :33, such division is not inevitable for the married believer, and I gave reasons to think that Paul is lamenting the situation in Corinth rather than making global statements about how all married believers are in their hearts.

*Also the woman that is unmarried or betrothed is anxious about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit-* The Greek translated "betrothed" is the word for "virgin" used earlier. Paul is saying that this is how a "virgin" should be if indeed she had undertaken not to marry; but instead, the "virgins" at Corinth as in Ephesus (see notes on 1 Tim. 3) had indeed promised to remain single, as did the cultic virgins of the shrines, but they were being used as church prostitutes. Genuine devotion to the Lord required a holiness of body and spirit which a prostitute could not have. It was in this very context of church prostitution that Paul had appealed for a glorifying of God in body and spirit, seeing they were the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:20). This is a strong connection, and it confirms us in understanding the unmarried and "virgin" as technical terms referring to those functioning as church prostitutes.

He encourages these particular unmarried women to stay single so that they can devote themselves to spiritual matters. In the surrounding Jewish culture, the unmarried woman was seen as a reproach. In the local Greco-Roman culture, the unmarried woman would have been perceived as an immoral woman, or one morally disgraced. Regardless of the surrounding perceptions, Paul spoke forth the Spirit's guidance.

*But she that is married is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband-* Again, this is far from a global description of every married woman. It is rather a description of how things were in Corinth. See on 'pleasing' on :33.

*7:35 And this I say for your own profit-* Gk. 'coming together'. The way to helpful unity within the church was to take Paul's advice. Using some sisters as church prostitutes, walking away from marital intimacy etc., was all sure to provoke a situation where the church was not functioning as intended.

*Not that I may cast a snare upon you, but so you may do what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction-* There is an allusion here to Mary and Martha. "Serve" literally means 'to sit beside'; it isn't the usual word for 'service'. The allusion would be to Mary sitting at the Lord's feet. And "distraction" translates the word which is only found elsewhere in the NT in Lk. 10:40, where Martha is cumbered or distracted with her domestic matters. Martha's distraction by domestic matters is being held up as a warning; there was nothing wrong in preparing food, it was the obsessive focus upon it which was wrong. We

note in passing how saturated Paul was with the Gospel records. We who live in an age of such convenient access to them ought to be likewise if we are truly Christ-centred.

*7:36 But if anyone thinks that he behaves himself inappropriately toward his betrothed, if she be past the flower of her age, and if need so requires, let him do what he will. He sins not. Let them marry-* I have suggested earlier that the "virgin" (NEV "betrothed"- which is an interpretation rather than translation] refers to church prostitutes. But "his" virgin would suggest that the Corinthians were asking about male believers who regularly used the same woman, and she was now ageing. Paul considers that it would not be wrong for the brother to marry the woman in this case. The grammar here makes it very difficult to read the male in view as the father of the "virgin"; for he is to marry her.

*7:37 But he that stands steadfast in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desires under control, and has determined this in his heart, to remain betrothed; he shall do well-* "To remain betrothed" is literally as in AV "to keep his virgin". "Keep" can mean to financially keep. Perhaps the brother in view considered that despite having used the sister as a church prostitute repeatedly over a period of time, he would not marry her but would financially support her in her old age. The idea of remaining perpetually betrothed doesn't really make sense nor does it seem appropriate. And if we read this as referring to the father of an unmarried young virgin refusing to give her in marriage, then it would not be appropriate to write that his decision was because of his personal control of his sexual desires. The idea that the "virgin" refers to a believing woman who had formerly been used as a church prostitute seems to me the only approach which is workable in all the references to "virgin" here in this passage.

*7:38 So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better-* By speaking of marriage as 'doing well', Paul clearly is not against marriage. But he sees different levels of response to Divine principles- one choice may be "better" than another. And this is how things are with so many issues of spiritual life; and if we love the Lord we will seek to serve Him on the highest level we can. The choice of levels is surely to elicit in us the desire at least to serve on the highest level.

*7:39 A wife is bound for as long as her husband lives; but if the husband dies she is free to be married to whoever she chooses-* Paul in this chapter has spoken of marriage in the same language as slavery, because he sees both of those institutions as examples of the 'ties that bind' which a believer finds themselves in, or not in, at baptism. And the status is to be seen as a gift from God. This verse is it seems another answer to a specific question about widows. "Whoever she chooses" was a radical thing to say in first century society, where marriage was thought appropriate only between those of the same ethnic or social background. But the new community in Christ featured radical bonding between all groups. There was also doubtless the expectation that elderly widows should remain single in respect to their deceased husbands, and again Paul cuts right across such traditions.

Paul's teaching that remarriage could only take place after the death of the first partner (1 Cor.7:39; Rom.7:1-8) actually elevated the status of women compared to what it was in the local culture. He can hardly be accused of being a woman hater, in the light of this; nor is he giving commandments regarding the place of women which only fitted in with the local culture. Immorality, particularly in terms of temple prostitution, was so widespread that it is hard for us to appreciate the radicalness of Paul's insistence on absolute faithfulness to one's partner.

*But only in the Lord*- This is alluding back to the command to Zelophehad's daughters to marry "whom they think best", but only "in" their tribe, otherwise they would lose the inheritance (Num. 36:6,7). The implication is that those who do not marry "in the Lord" will likewise lose their promised inheritance. And this rather strange allusion indicates one more thing: the extent of the seriousness of marriage out of the Faith is only evident to those who search Scripture deeply. As man and woman within Israel were joint heirs of the inheritance, so man and wife are joint heirs of the inheritance of the Kingdom (1 Pet. 3:7).

*7:40 But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I am certain that I also have the Spirit of God*- We noted earlier that Paul says that his judgment was confirmed by the Spirit. He was free to make his judgment on matters that were without direct guidance from the Lord's own recorded teaching; but his judgment was confirmed by the Lord.

That Paul should encourage single converts to remain single unto the Lord Jesus may seem a tall order, especially as he is making this challenge to a church who were so seriously immature. But consider the expectations on the early converts:

- Converts joyfully selling all their lands and property, pooling the money, and dividing it among the poorer members. Yet we can scarcely raise the money to pay for poorer brethren to attend a Bible School.
- Husbands and wives regularly abstaining from sex so they could the more intensely pray and fast for a period of several days. Surveys of Christian prayer habits reveal that on average we spend around 10 minutes / day praying. And scarcely any fast.
- Elders who spent so much time in prayer that they had to ask others to do some practical work for them so they could continue to give the same amount of time to prayer (Acts 6:2-4).
- Young brethren, "the messenger of the churches", who spent their lives full time running errands in dangerous situations throughout the known world.
- Over zealous brethren (in Thessalonica) who packed up their jobs because they were so sure the second coming was imminent.
- The expectation that the Gospel of Mark (at least) was to be memorized by all converts. Most Christians can scarcely quote more than 50 Bible verses- after generations of Bible study in our community.
- The assumption that all believers would make converts (1 Cor. 3:10-15).
- Believers were regularly persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and forced to migrate long distances unless they made what some today would consider only a tokenistic denial of their faith.

We have somehow hived off the first century church in our mind, as if to say to ourselves: 'Well, that was them, but we're in a totally different spiritual environment'. The same mindset occurs when we consider the zeal of earlier believers. There is no doubt that the more we read the New Testament, the more we will see that the level of intended commitment required was high indeed. The fact many failed to rise up to it doesn't affect this. That single converts were expected to remain single would not therefore have appeared so strange, once the spiritual context of the New Testament church is perceived.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols. We know that we all have knowledge; yet knowledge puffs up, but love builds up-* Paul's whole position about meat offered to idols reflects the fact that he recognised that there would be some believers who still could not escape the sense that the idol is really something to be feared, that in some sense it is alive and accepting the sacrifice offered to it, even though the believer in the other half of his brain knew full well that idols are nothing and there is only one true God. *We all know this*, Paul reasons, and yet some still can't escape their sense that the idol is there, and that if they eat meat offered to it they are fellowshiping with it, even though it doesn't exist. Our tendency would be to be hard on such a person, insisting that they cannot worship the true God and yet also have this sense of the idol. And yet Paul knew that there is a dualism within each of us; we can still have a sense of the false even whilst we believe the true. And the Lord is more gracious than many of us seem to be to this feature of our nature.

It is hard to piece together what was really going on in the politics of the early church, because Paul seems to have submitted to their wishes apart from where essential principle was concerned. Luke in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 make the record sound so positive- as if the conference in Jerusalem solved all the problems, even though it is clear that it didn't, and the Gentile believers were still classed as second rate. It was after this that Paul wrote here: "As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth" (AV). This sounds like an allusion to the agreements hammered out at Jerusalem- 'we all know what was agreed', Paul seems to be saying. There was nothing wrong in itself with the compromises agreed. But it was love that edifies, not a legalistic use of those decrees as 'knowledge'. It all sounds as if there was joy at the conversion of the Gentiles, even though there was "much disputing" about it. And yet it is observable that the whole Acts record doesn't reflect the spirit of controversy and struggle against apostasy which the epistles so insistently reflect. Paul didn't protest being told not to teach Jews by his brethren- but he got on and did so. It was not knowledge of intellectual truth alone which justifies a person- for we know so pitifully little anyway (:2). It is doing what is best for the building up of others, in the spirit of love. Those who so love the idea of 'saving truth' need to remember this; for truth, no matter how pure, will not save of itself. As Fred Pearce remarked many years ago, "It is not an inspired Bible which will save you, but faith in the blood of Christ and God's grace".

8:2 *If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not know anything as he ought to know-* This sounds like another of the allusions to Job (here to 26:14) in the New Testament- particularly once it is realized that 1 Corinthians has several other Job allusions. "Thinks" is literally to show, to account, to have reputation. *We all have knowledge (:1)-* not just some would be leader who says he has it. And anyway, it's not about knowledge- it's about whether God knows *us* in that we are in relationship with Him because we love Him (:3). This is the *knowledge* required., and it was this knowledge which was lacking in those who thought that their academic knowledge was what ought to make them be held in high repute. This is the force of the person thinking / showing / reputed that he 'had knowledge'. "As he ought to know" is an aorist really meaning 'as he ought to come to know'. It is the knowing of relationship which is in view, the process of knowing- and this is developed in the next verse. Their knowledge was just facts; Is. 28:13 speaks exactly to this problem by rebuking Israel for having no relationship with God but rather just treating His word as "line upon line, here a little and there a little... precept [concept] upon concept". And this is how so much Bible



study has been for many. They have glorified it in itself, and have apparently not come to spiritual relationship with God.

8:3 *But if anyone loves God-* This alludes to the first commandment, to love God; and the Lord assures us that this still stands for His people today. The idea of loving God was used in a similar context earlier, in 1 Cor. 2:9, in arguing that human knowledge and learning will not lead us to real faith and relationship with God; but the spiritually minded "love God" and so have His Son revealed to them by the Spirit.

*The same is known by Him-* See on :2. Here we have the same tension between love and knowledge which was introduced in :1. But there is a nuance; for God to know *us* means that He is in relationship with us, and we on our part love Him. It is for us to love Him; it is for Him to know us. This stands as a caveat to our rightful emphasis upon the need to correctly know doctrine about God. Isaac Newton remarked that he was only gathering pebbles on the shore of the ocean of truth. Truly "How little a portion is heard of Him" (Job 26:14). In other words, we will never know God to perfection in this life; but what we can be sure of and rejoice in is that *He knows us*. Paul almost implies that we can easily forget this wondrous fact, because of our obsession with wanting to fully know about *Him*. It was this emphasis upon relationship with God which had been missed by the Corinthians, for they did not have the Spirit (3:1) and were therefore left with only technical knowledge of Him. And that can be so with those who pride themselves on being 'Bible students' and yet resist the entrance and leading of the Spirit, and despise the idea of 'relationship with God' as being nebulous and not really what they think their religion is all about.

Paul will later remark that the Corinthians are living in sin because they do not have the knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). "The knowledge of God" is an ambiguous genitive, meaning both 'our knowing about God' and 'God's knowing of us'. It is mutual relationship which is the intention of Christianity and the person of the Lord Jesus, through whom this "knowledge of God" is mediated.

8:4 *Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol has real existence and there is no God but one-* "We know" must be read in the context of what has been noted on 'knowledge' in :1-3. The technical knowledge was that there is one God and therefore idols have no real existence as gods. But Paul is going to go on to reason about how that knowledge should be used in love in practice. 'Idol' and 'God' are placed in antithesis because idols were seen as the representations of living gods behind them, somewhere out in the cosmos. The implications of there being one God is that such beings have no real existence. Note that Paul has just alluded to the commandment to love God (:3), and here he alludes to the commandment that "God is one". The Lord Jesus likewise quoted those two commandments as being effectively one commandment (Mk. 12:31). Paul had truly meditated upon the Lord's teaching and absorbed it to such an extent that it is everywhere part of his own reasoning and logical process. In this alone he sets us a great example. Eating was understood in first century religious terms as an act of fellowship with others. Hence the anger with the Lord for breaking His bread and sharing His table with anyone whom He could urge to sit down with Him. To eat food sacrificed to idols was felt to be a sign of fellowship with the god whom that idol represented. The food was freighted with such significance in the eyes of those who lived in that worldview. But belief in one God meant that this was not to be the mindset of Christians.

8:5 *For though there are those called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are gods many and lords many-* As noted on :4, the idols were "those called gods" in that they represented them. The location of the supposed gods represented varied- some were thought to be on earth, others "in heaven". Those entities supposed to be represented by the idols were 'gods' and 'lords'. These were two different categories; and the difference is reflected in the next verse, which states that we have only one God, the Father, and one Lord- Jesus.

8:6 *To us there is only one God-* See on :5. The denarius of Tiberius which Jesus used bore the words: *Tiberius CAESAR DIVI AUGusti Filius AUGUSTUS Pontifex Maximus*. Caesar was to be seen as the Son of God. The Lord Jesus was the *only, and begotten* Son of God. The implication is that no other 'son of God' was *begotten* as Jesus was- He was the *real* Son of God, the one and only (Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,18). Caesar was to be worshipped as God (see L.R. Taylor, *The Divinity Of The Roman Emperor*). Julius Caesar was known as Divus Julius after his death; indeed, many of the Caesars were held to have 'resurrected' to heaven and been granted Divine status. "To *us* [and this is the emphasis] there is only one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:4-6) takes on a vital radicality in the light of this. As does NT teaching about His resurrection and subsequent Divine glorification.

*The Father, of whom are all things and we are everything to Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, for the sake of whom are all things, and we exist for His sake-* "All things" have one source; whereas the pagans considered that the various gods were each responsible for different aspects of life. Earlier in this section, Paul has spoken of how we know God and He knows us. This idea of relationship is continued here; we are for His sake, and He is for our sake. All things are of Him, and we are all things ["everything"] to Him. His focus upon us His people is challenging indeed. All things are for our sakes (2 Cor. 4:15). We are all things to Him. This gives a window onto the question of other creations, both now and within infinite time and space. Even the Angels are for our sakes, and are in that sense inferior to us in ultimate terms, according to the reasoning of Hebrews 1 and 2. The focus of the Father is in His only begotten Son, and thereby upon all who are in Him.

8:7 *However there is not in all men that knowledge, but some being used until now to the idol, eat things sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled-* This is a description of how things were in reality within the "all men" of the Corinthian church. Not all had the knowledge; yet in :1 Paul says that they did all have knowledge. He is again playing on the difference between theoretical knowledge, and the spiritual knowing of relationship. Indeed he opened the letter in chapter 1 by doing the same; likewise, they all had the Spirit, and yet they were not spiritual (3:1). They knew God on one hand, but on another they had not the knowledge of God in real spiritual terms (15:34). It was because of this lack of knowledge as it was meant to be, that their conscience was defiled. They thought the gods really existed, because their 'knowledge' that God is one didn't translate into knowledge as knowledge is meant to be. When they ate the food offered to idols, they did so as a real act of fellowship with those supposed gods; the act of eating their food was understood by them in their conscience as meaning that those gods existed, and they were in fellowship with them. Despite this 'weakness', Paul speaks so often of the need to care for the "weak" (s.w.) and retain them within the Lord's body, and to become weak that we might save these weak ones (1 Cor. 9:22; 11:30; 12:22). Without doubt, Paul's approach was to preach the Gospel, get people baptized into Christ whether by his hands or others, and then tolerate their weakness of understanding and moral behaviour whilst making every effort to teach them further and correct them. This is in sharp contrast to the attitude of many today.

When dealing with the problem of fornication, Paul doesn't directly appeal to any legal code, not even the ten commandments, nor the agreement at the Council of Jerusalem, because he was appealing for life to be lived according to the spirit rather than any law. Likewise when writing about meat offered to idols in 1 Cor. 8, he could so easily have appealed to the agreements made at the Council as recorded in Acts 15. But he doesn't. For love's sake he appeals. He asks them "judge ye what I say", he seeks for them to live a way of life, rather than obey isolated commandments as a burden to be borne. It is simply so that brethren and sisters, men and women, prefer simple yes / no commandments rather than an appeal to a way of life. In those communities and fellowships where everything is reduced to a mere allowed / not allowed, there tends to be less internal division than if it is taught that life must be lived by principles. Paul was smart enough to know this, especially with his background in legalism. And yet he chose not to lay the law down with Corinth; instead he appealed to a spirit of life, even though he must have foreseen the strife that would come of it.

*8:8 But food will not commend us to God. Neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. Nor, if we eat, are we the better-* The earlier section in this chapter has spoken of how the critical issue is relationship with God and not technical knowledge. Attitudes to food likewise will not commend us to God. The issue is not about whether to eat idol food or not- Paul will go on to explain that the question is all about love. He introduced the whole section by contrasting knowledge which puffs up with the love which builds up (8:1); and that building up is of others through our sensitivities to them and their weaknesses. Note how Paul uses the same word for "commend" in saying that we shall be 'presented' without fault to God at the last day (2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22). That spotless presentation is by grace; it's nothing to do with whether we were ritually defiled or not by food. That itself is a mere technicality.

*8:9 But take heed, lest by any means this freedom of yours becomes a stumblingblock to the weak-* It wasn't a question of who was technically right or wrong on the issue of idol food. It was a question of having the love which builds up others, by not being a stumbling block to them; rather than who had the technical knowledge. This is one of several passages which warn us not to make the weak to stumble. But none of those passages actually says that we can know *who* is weak. What they are saying is that in God's eyes, there are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that *we* actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak. To understand 1 Cor. 8:9, we must understand what it means to be weak. The Greek word translated "weak" here usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the "sick" brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the "sick" brother in Mt. 25:36). Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same word), we visit *Him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother. Christ on the cross carried the sins of "the weak" (i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the "weak". In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each

other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are "weak" whilst the rest of us are "strong". Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong!'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

8:10- see on 1 Cor. 8:9; 11:3.

*For if a man sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be encouraged to eat things sacrificed to idols?*- Paul may mean this as a hypothetical case; the believer who knows for sure there is only one God could sit and eat at an idol sacrifice, seeing the food as just food and nothing else; and do nothing technically wrong. But by doing so, he would encourage the weaker brother to eat just the same food but as an act of fellowship with the false gods of paganism. But it might also be that the Corinthians were so weak that despite their knowledge of the one God and rejection of the existence of other gods, they still ate in the idol's temple. Interestingly, Paul doesn't criticize them for doing this itself; rather he reasons more subtly that by doing so, they were leading weaker Christians into sin. Later on he will argue that one cannot eat at the Lord's table and at the table of idols: "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). But at this point in 8:10, Paul is saying that one can literally eat food there, if this is not a participation, an active fellowshiping, with the idol. But externally, eating food at the idol's table looked as if they were partaking with the idol / demon. Paul recognized that two men can do the same thing externally and yet understand it quite differently in their hearts. But the problem is that the external behaviour can lead the weaker brother into sin in their heart, or as Paul has put it, "their conscience is defiled".

Our example- and let's not forget, we all set an example of one sort or another- will either edify others towards righteousness, or "encourage" [AV "embolden"] our weaker brother to sin (1 Cor. 8:1,10). We 'edify' others in only one of two directions; this is the point behind Paul using the same Greek word in both verses.

8:11 *For through your knowledge he that is weak perishes, the brother for whose sake Christ died*- This has been the whole theme of the section- knowledge as knowledge alone puffs up, but love builds up. Indeed, possession of knowledge, of 'truth' in this sense, can actually destroy others when that truth is used irresponsibly. And we likewise have all seen this kind of thing happen in conservative church life. We can build others up and we can also cause them to "perish", and thus the death of Christ is made in vain for that brother- thanks to our selfish attitude to the truths we possess by grace. Knowledge or truth of itself cannot just be insisted upon in a vacuum. We are not to shrug and say that "Well that's their fault, his problem, her lack of faith" because an individual weaker in faith and understanding is made to stumble by our indulgence in "truth". This is like the weak Corinthians who believed in

'gods out there' behind the idols being led to worship them- all by observing their 'stronger' brethren flaunting the truth / knowledge they held, in their freedom to eat idol food.

8:12- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*And thus, sinning against the believers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ-* Christ is His body; to persecute His brethren is to persecute Him, to sin against them is to sin against Him. Paul had learnt this principle through reflection on his own sins against Christ insofar as He sinned against His brethren by persecuting them. Even the very weakest, those who still felt the gods existed, are called "believers" and are seen as members of the body of Christ, and as members to whom the Lord Jesus is particularly sensitive. Clearly the scope of acceptance into the body of Christ [which is achieved by baptism] is far wider than many think. Likewise the tolerance is far broader; for our inclination would be to tell those who believe in pagan gods to get out of the church. But Paul doesn't take that approach, indeed in chapter 12 he will argue that the presence of these "weak" within the body is the more necessary for us who consider ourselves strong. The word for "wounding" is used about the servant "beating" the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49; Lk. 12:45). This 'beating' can be done through selfishly indulging in our own truth and knowledge in a way which spiritually damages others. This is the way God looks upon the commonly held idea that "It's OK in *my* conscience". That is not quite the point, as Paul will later develop in chapter 10. The parable of the fellow servant refers specifically to the situation at the Lord's coming. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble.

8:13 *Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh again, so that I do not cause my brother to stumble-* The eating of food referred to is specifically eating food offered to idols, perhaps even more specifically- eating it in the idol temple itself (:10). Paul is obviously aware here of the Lord's strict words for those who make their brother stumble. They shall be treated as Babylon, and cast into the depths of the sea. To not make others stumble must therefore be a paramount consideration. A closed table approach, ever censuring others for their failures and barring them from the Lord's table, seems to me a sure way to make others stumble- and it has done so in so many cases. We must give more weight to the Lord's words and to Paul's teaching here. It's not about me, my conscience, my knowledge, my truth. It's all about attitudes to the weak and not making them stumble.

The AV and some MSS add that Paul would not eat food "while the world standeth"- This could be hyperbole concerning how serious he was, or he could be saying he would not eat such food until the Jewish Law, which was intrinsically part of the Jewish world, was fully done away with in AD70. Col. 2:22 says that the using of the (Mosaic) laws "are to perish" - in the future, i.e. AD70.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my works in the Lord?*- The preceding chapter has spoken of how although we are 'free' to eat idol food, we should not do so for the sake of the weaker others. Now Paul starts to appropriate those principles to himself on a more personal level. Just as their liberty / freedom could cause others to stumble (8:9), so Paul too is "free" but he doesn't use that freedom, nor his authority, in a way which might make them stumble. He had authority / power over them- he had seen Jesus, been commissioned by Him as an apostle, and although he had not baptized many of them, they were his spiritual children and the result of his work for them. But he likewise would not use that power in a way which was harmful for them spiritually- as he has been expounding in chapter 8. This principle of not abusing power, knowledge and truth needs to be programmatic in our lives.

9:2 *If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*- Paul repeatedly speaks of his authority over the Corinthians because he has been the source of their conversion to Christ. He claims to be their spiritual father, and they were his "work" in the Lord (:1) and the proof in fact that he is an apostle to them. And yet he is clear in chapter 1 that he baptized very few of them. We could infer from this that he had preached to them and taught them, but had been careful to get others to perform the baptisms. We could also infer that since he had left Corinth, there had been relatively few baptisms by anyone else; unless we are to understand the entire correspondence as being addressed only to those within the church whom he counted as 'his work'. But that seems unlikely and there is no hint of that being the case. The "others" who didn't count Paul as an apostle would presumably be other purportedly Christian teachers who had visited Corinth and sought to poison them against Paul by claiming he was not in fact an apostle. This would presumably refer to the Jewish satan, an organized attempt to undo and discredit Paul's work in every church he founded. And this would explain the hints we have that Corinth had been troubled by Judaizers. Paul claims the very fact the Corinthians were his converts was evidence enough that he had been 'sent' to them and was indeed therefore their 'sent one' or apostle. Whilst we are not apostles in the sense that Paul specifically was, it remains true that those who bring others to Christ have some authority over them and should be afforded appropriate respect throughout their spiritual journey.

9:3 *My defence to them that examine me is this*- This is language from the courtroom. The Corinthians had written to Paul and he is replying; and they had included the criticisms which had been made of Paul. Yet Paul almost revels in such legal language elsewhere, especially in his letter to the Romans. His idea is that because we have appeared before God's throne and been justified, leaving no outstanding accusation against us, we are free from accusation altogether. And yet he here does make a response to the criticisms. Whether or not to respond to criticism is always a hard choice. Paul's major argument was quite simply that he had brought the Corinthians to Christ. To argue about whether he had been sent to them as an apostle was academic. We likewise should seek to answer criticism by appealing to mega principles, rather than arguing about details. The fruit of a person's life work in the Lord is what is important, and not carping criticisms rooted in personality issues.

It was the Jews and their "false brethren" who infiltrated the ecclesias (Gal. 2:4), and who were responsible for the deaths of many of the first century apostles and prophets. This suggests that the circumcision party within the ecclesias was linked with the Roman and Jewish authorities, and therefore 'satan' is a term used for them all. It got beyond dirty

politics in the church. This would explain why Paul uses legal language in describing his conflicts with the Judaizing element in Corinth: “My defence [*apologia*, a technical legal term] to those [in the ecclesia] who examine me [another legal term, *anakrinein*]. . .” (1 Cor. 9:3). The false teachers were taking the likes of Paul before the civil authorities- they were hand in glove. Rev. 17 and 18 describes ‘Babylon’ as the system which was responsible for these deaths. Whatever other interpretation we may give these chapters (and I would agree there is a strong similarity with the evils of the Roman Catholic church), it cannot be denied that they are full of reference to Old Testament passages concerning Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple, which became a spiritual Babylon. I suggest that it was from within the Jerusalem ecclesia, linked up as it was with the temple system and Roman authorities, that there came much of the persecution of the early church. And this is why ‘Babylon’ in its first century application refers to these things.

9:4 *Have we no right to eat and to drink?*- Paul had authority to ask the Corinthians to provide him with food and drink, basic sustenance. But "we did not use this right" (:12). He had the right- but didn't use it. It seems he was put in a position where he had to be wrong; if he didn't claim basic sustenance, then apparently he was not an apostle, because in first century terms, a teacher had authority to require his keep from his converts. And if he didn't ask for it- then he was not really a legitimate teacher. And yet if Paul had made use of this right, he would have been accused of profiteering. This idea of having the possibility of using concessions but choosing not to is of course exactly what he has just been talking about in the context of marriage and eating idol meat.

9:5 *Have we no right to lead a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*- Singleness was not respected in first century society. A religious leader ought to be married- As with the matter of asking for material support, whatever Paul did in the marital area was likewise going to be criticized. He has explained in chapter 7 that marriage is permissible, but he invites single converts to try following his own example of singleness in order to do the Lord's work. But religious leaders were expected to be married. We can quite imagine the likely gossip this created- that perhaps Paul was gay, or a womanizer with multiple casual relationships. If indeed as a Sanhedrin member, Paul had once been married, we can imagine how that fact would be distorted. He indeed had the "right" to be married to a believer, and to lead her with him around his missionary circuits. As, he says, Peter and the other apostles did. We note he mentions Peter separately, a reflection of the huge respect he had for him. Indeed in the commentary on Acts I have suggested Paul was almost obsessed with Peter and pretended to him. The respect of the intellectual Jerusalem rabbi for illiterate fisherman Peter is quite the lesson in respect within the body of Christ. We note too that the Lord's brothers, who were once so against Him, became leading missionaries in the early church. Paul had a "right" or "power" (*exousia*) to be married; but he did not use that power / right, just as he has been explaining in previous chapters that we are not to use power or knowledge just because we have it, but should seek above all the building up of others to God's glory. And that is the principle we are to take away from this.

“To lead a wife” is literally, to lead around. See on Acts 9:43. It is perhaps significant, given the theme of ‘following’ in the records of Peter, that he became well known for ‘leading about’ his wife, as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have ‘forsaken’ his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he

came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

9:6 *Or are Barnabas and I the only ones who have a right not to have to work for a living?*- Paul likewise did not *have* to work as a tentmaker. But he did; he chose a higher level for the sake of others. The point was that other apostles made use of such a concession; but the fact Paul didn't laid him open to criticism. But whichever way, he was going to be condemned by his critics.

9:7 *What soldier ever serves at his own expense?*- Paul used the metaphor of soldiery in explaining to Timothy the discipline required in missionary work. He saw his work for the converts as having fought for them, risking his life to liberate them in Christ. He could be implying that he in his case had done this work "t his own expense"; for clearly Paul at times did have access to funds. He lived in his own hired house in Rome, and was thought wealthy enough to possibly pay a bribe for his early release from prison in Jerusalem. And yet perhaps Paul is overstating his case here, as he does at times; for in 2 Cor. 11:8 he admits he took material help from other churches whilst ministering at Corinth, so as not to ask them for money.

*Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink the milk of the flock?*- Although he had not baptized many of them, Paul saw the Corinthian church as a vineyard he had planted. They were a flock he had fed; and so he could have legitimately asked for something material from them in return. The One who planted a vineyard and got no fruit alludes to the parable of the wicked husbandmen. God's hopefulness and fruitless care for Israel was reflected in Paul's for the Corinthians. The metaphor of drinking milk from a flock is slightly strange in that it suggests the Corinthians were a flock of cows or possibly goats- and not sheep. For a shepherd doesn't drink milk from his sheep.

9:8 *Do I speak these things after the manner of men? Or did not the law say the same?*  
- See on Dt. 25:4. At first blush it might seem strange to appeal to the immoral, Gentile Corinthians on the basis of an argument from the Jewish law. But I have mentioned elsewhere that there was a Judaistic element at work in Corinth; as noted on Titus, immoral Gentile Christians were attracted to the Judaistic arguments because they felt legalistic obedience to a few laws justified their immorality in other areas. To this day, this is the outcome of legalism in the churches.

9:9 *For it is written in the law of Moses: You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn. Is it for the oxen that God cares-* In another figure, Paul likens himself to a lowly ox treading out corn, and being allowed to eat a bit of it. The argument seems to be that this commandment was not given because God cares for oxen, but for the sake of teaching us a principle. But often Paul uses a grammatical device whereby he argues 'Not [so much] A, but B'. Such a device is common in several other languages. God is clearly not insensitive to animals, as so many cases in the Old Testament demonstrate. So surely we are to read this as meaning that this command about not muzzling the ox was not primarily for the sake of the oxen, but even more importantly for the sake of teaching us a lesson. The treading out of corn connects with the metaphor of judgment day in Mt. 3:12, where we read that the "floor", literally 'the treading place' will be winnowed by the Lord Jesus in judgment. The fruit of Paul's labours for Corinth would be tested by the winnowing of what he had trodden out. He



saw his work as preparing them for judgment, making them true grain, separating them from the husks.

9:10 *Or did He say it entirely for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written. Because he that ploughs ought to plough in hope, and he that threshes, hopes to partake in the harvest-* The context of this argument, both in :11 and the preceding verses, is that Paul would be justified in receiving material compensation for his work. But he elevates that argument to a higher level here. He says that the benefit he ultimately hopes to get out of this is that if his treading out leads to their acceptance at the day of judgment, then he will share in the harvest. He too will as it were eat the trodden out corn. Elsewhere Paul says the same- that his reward in the Kingdom will be a function of whether his brethren are there too.

"He that ploughs" doesn't refer to a ploughman, as some paraphrase Bible versions wrongly claim. The allusion continues to the ox, who ploughs. "He that threshes" likewise refers to the ox, because the same word is used in :9 about the ox treading out the corn. Paul saw all his missionary activity with the Corinthians as the work of the humble ox, up and down the fields, back and forth threshing out the corn. The repetitious nature of teaching Biblical principles so familiar to us, patiently bearing with the same questions- all this humble work is what will lead folks to the life eternal. The parallel likes to imagine that the ox ploughs up the fields looking forward to the time when the crop sown will bear grain which he shall thresh, and get a few mouthfuls of that harvest by God's grace in allowing him an unmuzzled mouth. Breaking up the fields to receive the seed of God's word is indeed hard and thankless work. Paul was far from the modern 'evangelist' doing acrobatics from a stage to impress an audience. Such work is hard, and will only have any reward or true recognition when the harvest has been winnowed at the Lord's return.

9:11 *If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your material things?-* Paul slightly changes the metaphor here, likening himself to the sower. Clearly the sower parable was in his mind, with its purposeful ambiguity as to whether the sower is the Lord Jesus personally, or all those in Him who sow His word. According to Paul's principle of Gal. 6:8, sowing to the spirit will lead to a spiritual harvest; and a material or fleshly harvest from sowing to the flesh. But here he seems to be saying that he does indeed sow to the spirit and hopes for a spiritual harvest, but seeing the flesh / material is far less than the spiritual, he sees no reason why before that spiritual harvest comes, he shouldn't receive some material harvest from them too.

9:12 *If others have this rightful claim over you, do we not have more?-* Clearly the Corinthians were under the influence of other teachers, probably Judaists, who claimed the right to material support from the Corinthians. Or it could be that the "others" refer to the other apostles who had visited Corinth (:5) and who had asked for material support. But as the one who had led them to Christ, Paul felt he had more rightful claim than anyone else.

*Nevertheless we did not use this right, but we bear all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ-* Paul will soon use the very same phrase "bear all things" in saying that love bears all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Love is therefore no mere emotion or passing clutch at the heart. Love involved a carefully thought out policy, looking ahead to how asking for money would hinder the Gospel in this case. The idea of 'hindrance' is fairly common in the NT, and it is individuals who are hindered, or the spread of the Gospel. So we must interpret "the Gospel of Christ" here as referring to the spiritual progress of those who had accepted it; or to the spreading of that Gospel. For the Gospel is in itself an imperative to

spread it. And Paul saw here, in contrast to many evangelists today, that asking for money can in some ways and contexts actually hinder the Gospel's work. Clearly enough, the spread and progress of the Gospel, both to unbelievers and within those who have accepted it, depends upon us to some degree. We, or other people and attitudes, can hinder it. God will not just brush past our dysfunctions. So much has been delegated to us, and we are to act appropriately.

It seems that "the Gospel" is put by a figure for 'the spirituality which the doctrines of the Gospel brings forth, so close is the link between the Gospel and the inculcation of spirituality. We must walk worthy of that pure doctrine, in the abstract sense of doctrine, which we have received (Eph. 4:4-6). The purpose of keeping our understanding of the basic principles clear is that this will lead to true love and faith (1 Tim. 1:3-5).

Paul says he could have asked Corinth ecclesia to support him financially, but he chose not to. Thus he chose the higher of two options. See on 1 Cor. 7:11.

*9:13 Do you not know that they that labour in the temple get their food from the temple, and they that serve at the altar have their portion from that which is sacrificed on the altar?*- This argument from Jewish law might seem inappropriate for Gentile, immoral Christians in Corinth. But Paul's appeal to Jewish argument is likely because of the presence of Judaist influence, encouraging the Gentiles in their immorality by kidding them that obedience to some Jewish laws could of itself assure their salvation. The New Testament is very insistent that the true temple of God is the body of Christian believers (1 Cor. 9:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 3:12; 11:1,2; 1 Tim. 3:15). This string of passages is quite some emphasis. Yet the Lord Jesus was the temple; He spoke of the temple of His body (Jn. 2:19-21; Rev. 21:22). For this reason, the Gospels seem to stress the connection between Him and the temple (Mk. 11:11,15,16,27; 12:35; 13:1,3; 14:49; Lk. 2:46; 21:38). Christ's body was the temple of God. By being in Christ, we too are the temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:21), *our* body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul therefore saw his work for others in the church as being like a priest labouring in the temple. He saw himself as a temple servant, a Levite, able to take literally the food required to sustain life- a far cry from pastors demanding 10% of everyone's cash.

*9:14 Even so the Lord ordained that they that proclaim the gospel should live from the gospel-* Paul's almost rabbinic respect for every word of his Lord indicates how deeply he had them in his heart as the law of his life. He speaks of how "The Lord [Jesus] *commanded* that those who preach the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14 RSV). The Lord Jesus didn't command this in so many words- but it's the implication of His teaching in Lk. 9:1-5; 10:1-12, especially of Lk. 10:4 "The workman deserves his food / keep" (Gk.). But those words of the Lord to the disciples were understood by Paul as a *command*- so clearly did he appreciate that those men following Jesus around Galilee are really *us*, and every word of the Lord to them is in some form a command to us. Another example would be the way Paul states that the Lord 'commanded' that the wife is not to separate from her husband (1 Cor. 7:10). The Lord didn't actually state that in so many words- but He implied it quite clearly. And so that for Paul was a command. He didn't reduce the teachings of Jesus to a set of yes / no statements; rather he saw, as we should, even every *implication* of the words of Jesus as a command to us. You will notice that in both these examples from 1 Corinthians, Paul doesn't explicitly quote the Lord Jesus in the format in which we expect a citation- e.g. 'I'm saying this, because it is known and written that Jesus said, XYZ'. I submit that this wasn't simply because the Gospels weren't in wide circulation when Paul was writing. Rather I think that the indirectness of Paul's allusions and quotations

from the words of Jesus reflect how his mind was *so* full of the Lord's words that he doesn't quote from them in a formal sense, as one usually would quote from literature or the known words of a respected person. Rather did Jesus so *live* within Paul's consciousness, His words were so widely and deeply within the texture of his thinking, that the allusions and quotations are made less self-consciously. 9:16,17- see on Acts 18:4,5.

Yet despite this provision, Paul chose to disobey what he calls a 'command' from the Lord- because he figured that the purposes of the Gospel would be served better long term if he in his case didn't obey that command. Paul was no legalist- for legalism would reason that a command is there to be obeyed; but Paul perceived a higher principle than legalistic obedience. Not only does all this give an insight into the nature of a man's relationship with his Lord when he knows Christ well enough; but it indicates the huge priority placed by Paul upon the spreading of the Gospel. He would even relegate a 'command' from the Lord Jesus beneath the overall aim of spreading the Gospel. This is a line of reasoning which is of course dangerous for *us* to adopt; but it indicates the priority given to preaching. Actually one sees other examples of this in Paul- he observed Torah amongst the Jews, but broke it amongst the Gentiles; he thus relativized obedience to Divine law for the sake of the spreading of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:22). In fact all Paul's decisions in controversial matters seem to have been made based around the ultimate question: 'What would be best for spreading the Gospel?'. Perhaps the Lord was making the same point when He told His preachers to stay in their converts' homes and eat whatever was out before them (Lk. 10:8), i.e. without insisting on eating kosher food. For the Pharisees insisted that an observant Jew could *not* do what the Lord said- i.e. eat 'whatever' was set before them. But the Lord waived that commandment- for the sake of spreading the Gospel. And we do well to get into his spirit as we face the many calls we do in church life.

9:15 *But I have used none of these things, and I do not write these things that it may be so done in my case-* Paul is covering himself against the likely twist of this words, to the effect that he was hinting at wanting money from the Corinthians. We need to think ahead to the likely impact our words and positions are going to have, and the possibility of misinterpretation.

*For it is better for me to die, than that anyone should make my boasting void-* Paul goes on to say that he has nothing to glory / boast of regarding his Gospel work, for he is only doing his job (:16). So what glory of his does he fear might be made void? He has argued that his whole approach to these issues is because he wants to see them saved, and their salvation will be part of his salvation- for will partake in the same hope, the same acceptance of the Corinthians into immortality. If they were to be accepted into God's Kingdom, then they would be his glory. Thus he states in 2 Cor. 1:14 that the Corinthians accepted into God's Kingdom would be his glory [s.w.]. Likewise he would glory in the day of Christ if the Philippian converts were accepted (Phil. 2:16). Paul had constantly in mind this picture of his rejoicing / boast / glory on their behalf at judgment day; and therefore even in this life, he boasted / gloried about them (2 Cor. 7:14; 9:2), and the Thessalonians too (2 Thess. 1:4). The accepted Thessalonians at the last day would be Paul's glory and joy (1 Thess. 2:20). This future glorying which Paul ever had in mind would, however, be made void if the Corinthians turned away from the faith. And by asking them for money, Paul feared he might make them stumble out of the path to the Kingdom, and thus his future glorying in their salvation by grace would be voided. Throughout Corinthians, Paul speaks of his fear that his labour would be void, or "in vain", if they turned away from Christ (1 Cor. 15:14,58; 2 Cor. 6:1). Likewise

if the Philippians and Thessalonians turned away, then his labour also would be in vain / voided (Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 3:15). Paul felt that he would prefer to die rather than see their salvation lost and his glory in them voided. His whole life and reason for being was the salvation of others; and this must be our pattern. This explains his extreme concern for his brethren's path, rather than shrugging his shoulders. His desire to die if they were not saved is clearly alluding to Moses, who asked that his name be taken out of the book of the living so that Israel might be saved, and Paul in Romans 9 applies this spirit to himself. This desire to die if they were not going to be saved reflected how he felt he had nothing to live for apart from the salvation of others- a powerful challenge to our cluttered lives. It provides help in understanding his comment that he did have a desire to die, but to remain alive in the flesh was more necessary for his converts (Phil. 1:23).

9:16- see on Acts 20:26.

*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about. For necessity is laid upon me-* We may need to read in an ellipsis here: 'If I preach the Gospel [from a sense of necessity]. The necessity, in the context, would be the necessity of preaching because he was a paid preacher and needed an income in order to survive. But he goes on to explain that because he is not preaching from the necessity of getting an income, his necessity is of a more spiritual kind. Again we see the contrast between the way of the flesh and that of the Spirit. The necessity he had was one laid upon him by God and the Lord Jesus; and not because of his material needs. "Necessity" is the same word translated "compel" in Lk. 14:23- "compel them to come in" and sit in their places at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The compulsion is laid upon us by the tragedy of human rejection of the places Christ prepared for them, and the wonderful, so easy possibility to be there. Significantly, this same Greek word is used elsewhere about the 'necessities' which are part of our ministry of the Gospel (2 Cor. 6:4; 12:10). The urgency of our task will lead us into many an urgent situation, with all the compelling needs which accompany them. But that compulsion, in this context, was from spiritual reasons and not because we want financial gain in this life.

*For woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel-* The "woe" was because he would not be discharging his need before God to preach. It may be that in these words Paul is alluding to how the High Priest had to have bells so that "his sound may be heard... that he die not" (Ex. 28:35; this idea of the sound being heard is picked up in Ps. 19 concerning the spread of the Gospel). Whatever the predestined and foreknown purpose of God with Paul as a preacher may have been, the fact still stands that the record emphasizes the quite natural spirit of compulsion to preach which arose within him. Paul was under no financial necessity to preach- indeed he himself admits a tendency not to preach, to hold back from giving his all to fulfil that commission he had received to testify of the Gospel of God's grace (1 Cor. 9:16). He asks his brethren to pray that he would be able to "make it manifest" more than he did (Col. 4:4 cp. Eph. 6:20). He voluntarily, and not for financial motive, made himself a slave to all, selling himself as it were into slavery, in order to save them (:19).

9:17 *For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if against my own will, then I have clearly had a stewardship entrusted to me-* The "reward" referred to the financial motives which Paul has just denied having. The fact that true preaching is a carrying of the cross explains why Paul felt that the fact that to preach what he did went right against his natural grain, it was not at all what he wanted to do, and this was the proof that indeed a "dispensation of the Gospel" had been given to him. Likewise Jeremiah complained that the

visions which he had to preach, about violence and judgment, were quite against the grain of his sensitive soul (Jer. 46:5 RV; 47:6). There is therefore no such person as a natural preacher in the ultimate sense. This is a job one would not do for money, not any amount of it.

It seems strange to think that Paul had to *make* himself preach, that he did it against his natural will. But remember his poor eyesight, ugly physical appearance, his embarrassing early life spent persecuting and torturing Christians - no wonder public preaching of Christ was something he had to make himself do. It may be that the reason he went to the wilderness of Arabia after his conversion was that he was running away from the command to preach publicly (Gal. 1:17,18). Several times he speaks of how he fears he will lose his nerve to preach, and thereby lose his salvation; he even asks others to pray for him that he will preach more boldly. It also needs to be remembered that Paul was a passionate Jew; he loved his people. It seems that he "preached circumcision" (Gal. 5:11) in the sense of being involved in actively trying to proselytize Gentiles. But it was Paul the Hebrew of the Hebrews who was called to be the apostle *to the Gentiles*. It might have sounded more appropriate if preaching to the Jews was his specialism, and fisherman Peter from half-Gentile Galilee went to the Gentiles. But no. Each man was sent against his grain. And more than this. It seems that the Lord set up Peter, James and John as some kind of replacement to the Scribes and rabbis. And let's not forget Amos, too. He defended his prophetic ministry, as Paul defended his, by saying that it was something he had been called to quite against his nature. He was not a prophet nor a prophet's son, and yet he was taking from following his flock of sheep to be a prophet to Israel- quite against his will and inclination (Am. 7:14,15).

9:18 *What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel without charge-* This was the question the cynical Corinthians wanted answering. Why was Paul preaching, if indeed it was not for money or personal gain? Paul's decision not to take money from Corinth was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8 "freely you have received, freely give"; although there were other passages in the Gospels, even two verses later in Matthew 10, which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issue of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life.

*So as not to use to the full my right in the gospel-* Paul could have taken wages from the Corinthians for his service. But on that occasion he chose "not to use to the full my right in the gospel"; and he uses the same word in 1 Cor. 7:31, in teaching that although we have to 'use this world' we are to 'use it to the full' (RVmg.). As God operates with us on different levels, accepting non-ideal situations, so we are to deal with each other. Paul could have used his power in the Gospel more sharply than he actually did with the Corinthians (2 Cor. 13:10)- and note how he earlier uses those two words "power" and "use" in saying that he could have demanded financial support from them, but he chose not to use that power / authority which he had (1 Cor. 9:12).

9:19- see on Mt. 20:27 and 1 Cor. 9:16 *Woe to me.*

*For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more-* Far from seeking personal financial gain from preaching, Paul had as it were sold himself into slavery so that he might save others. But he "was free from all" in that he did not

take money for preaching. The idea of gaining or winning *people* rather than money [as he was falsely accused of] alludes to the Lord's words about winning men (Mt. 18:15). When Paul speaks of how he has "made myself a slave unto all" in his preaching (1 Cor. 9:19), there is an evident connection with his reasoning in Phil. 2:7 about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus likewise *made* Himself a servant to all. For Paul, preaching was and is to be a sharing in the cross of Christ. In his preaching of the Gospel, Paul could say that "I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19). Yet elsewhere, Paul uses the idea of the "servant unto all" as descriptive of Christ's attitude upon the cross (Phil. 2:7). The connection of thought reflects how Paul understood that in seeking to gain others for Christ, we make ourselves their servants, and in this sense our witness to them is a living out of the principles of the cross. Being such a "servant unto all" hardly squares well with the image of arrogant platform preachers dazzling their audiences. That isn't the preaching which truly 'gains' people for Christ.

If we can at least grasp the spirit of taking up Christ's cross, there will be a deep sense of fellowship with others who have reached the same realization; and a deep joy and calmness in confidence of sharing His resurrection. *The cross is attainable*. It's not just an awful thing that happened in a few hours of history so long ago, the details of which we flinch from, excusing ourselves that it's just too terrible. Look how Paul alludes to it, and arose to the point where he could truly claim to us that he was living the crucified life. The Lord predicted in Mk. 10:44,45: "and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be *slave of all*. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and *to give His life a ransom for many*". And Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor. 9:19: "I have made myself *a slave to all...*"; and later in 1 Cor. 10:33: "Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but *the profit of the many, that they may be saved*". Through his sharing in the cross of the Lord Jesus, he, the very human Paul, became an agent in the salvation of all men. He too became a 'slave of all' after the pattern of the Lord in His time of dying. We may make excuses about Jesus not being exactly in our position, because God was His Father etc. Valid or not, those excuses disappear when we are faced with Paul's challenge.

9:20- see on 2 Cor. 11:24.

*And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, I became as one under the law-* Acts is full of examples of this. Indeed, Paul's arrest in Jerusalem which led to his journey to imprisonment in Rome was all due to trying to be as a Jew to the Jews, entering the temple and paying for sacrifices. To become something else to others must be done for the sake of connection with them, with their salvation in view- there is a fine line at times between this and the natural desire we have to be as others would like us to be, apparently adopting their positions for the sake of peace and acceptance. The Lord Jesus was by nature one of us, but Phil. 2:5-9 speak as if He 'became' as us- in that He wilfully entered fully into our human situations. And this came to ultimate term in the death of the cross.

*Though I am not under the law-* One of the simplest and thereby most powerful statements that the Law of Moses is not now operative nor required for Christians.

*That I might gain those that are under the law-* Paul is writing this in answer to the aspersion that he was in the preaching business for personal or financial "gain". He is saying that the gain he sought was for the Lord and for his converts- that they should be gained for Christ

and the life eternal. Yet again, He is alluding to the Lord's teaching, which uses the same Greek word for "gain". The Lord taught against seeking personal gain, even gaining the whole world (Mt. 16:26)- instead we should seek to gain our brother (Mt. 18:15, cp. 1 Pet. 3:1). Paul could say that he had 'lost' all the secular things which he once counted "gain" (Phil. 3:7).

*9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law-* Whilst Paul was "not under the [Jewish] law" (:20), he clarifies that this does not mean that he is in total "without law to God". God's law is now not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. The law of Christ is to bear each others' burdens (Gal. 6:2). This was what Paul was doing by trying to relate to others in the burdens they carried, even if those burdens were a self-imposed attempt to keep the Jewish law. He has used the slavery metaphor in :19, saying that he was a slave to all men's salvation; but that is the same as being under the law of Christ, whose passion is the salvation of all men.

*9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some-* The "weak" in NT usage are the spiritually weak. He "became weak" without being spiritually "weak". The "weak" in the Corinthian context were those who still thought that the pagan gods behind the idols actually existed (1 Cor. 8:7,10), those who were smitten with weakness because of their gross sins (1 Cor. 11:30), the weak parts of the body of Christ that need extra care (1 Cor. 12:22). Perhaps Paul has in mind the 'weak' as being those who were taken in by Judaism, who were still "under the law"; for the same word is used about the weakness of the Law of Moses (Heb. 7:18). It is a tribute to the Lord Jesus that someone of His spirituality could be naturally attractive to sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes. Paul likewise sought to connect with the spiritually weak- the total opposite of his earlier Rabbinic mindset, which sought to distance oneself from the spiritually weak. He desired by all means to "save some"- but the Greek appears to mean "somebody". To save just one person was worth it all. As Paul reflected upon how many had turned away, this must have become an every stronger credo for him- to save at least one person is so wonderful that all the grief is worth it. I have had those thoughts at the funerals of those I feel I brought to Christ. By all means I saved somebody, in bringing them to Christ the Saviour. We note that Paul felt that he could play a role in another's salvation. The Lord's saving work has been delegated to us to the extent that we can save some, and also cause others to stumble from salvation.

Minucius records that opposition to the Christian faith was because the believers so closely identified themselves with the crucified Christ that His death and shame were seen as theirs: "They are said to be a man who was punished with death as a criminal and the fatal wood of his cross, thus providing suitable liturgy for the depraved friends". Thus we see how deep was their appreciation of the doctrine of representation: they saw the Lord in His time of dying as representative of themselves. Time and again the words and actions of Paul show that both consciously and unconsciously he was aware that he was experiencing in himself the experiences of his Lord. In his preaching he *made himself a slave of all, weak* that he might gain the weak (1 Cor. 9:19,22). This is language he elsewhere understands as appropriate to the Lord in His death (2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:7 cp. Mk. 9:35).

9:23 *And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker of it-* Here again we may need to read in an ellipsis with regard to "the Gospel's sake". As explained on :10, Paul's hope was that he would be a "partaker" in the final salvation of his converts, just like the ox who ploughs and threshes in the hope he will get a mouthful of the corn finally produced. As it stands here in :23, the "joint partaker" has no reference- joint with what or whom? The sake of the Gospel therefore refers, I suggest, to "the sake of your response to the Gospel". The "all things" which he "did" refer in the context to being all things to all men in order to save them. He did these things for the sake of their response to the Gospel, so that he might be a joint partaker with them of the hope of the Gospel.

9:24 *Do you not know that they that run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run like this, so that you may attain the prize-* There is only one who so ran that He received the prize thanks to His own efforts- and that was the Lord Jesus. But we are in Him, and should run like Him. But we must read this emphasis upon one receiving the prize as an intended contrast to what Paul has just written- that salvation was a matter of being "a *joint partaker*" of the hope contained in the Gospel. We are to run *as if* in a race where only one gets the prize- even though that prize is in another sense a matter of 'joint partaking', a prize received jointly. For Paul felt that the nature of his eternity was tied up in the salvation of his converts. He doesn't want them to think that this idea of joint partaking meant that they were not to run well themselves. They were to run, as he himself did (:26), as if it was a very personal race with an individual, unique prize at the end of the course. And yet in another sense, that prize is a collective matter, a 'joint partaking'.

9:25- see on Lk. 13:24.

*And every man that strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible-* Paul lifts the arguments about receiving material advantage from preaching to an altogether higher plane. We are aiming to receive an eternal, incorruptible victory wreath. Even the highest personal achievements and possessions in secular life are not worthy to be compared with that. The crown is both personal and collective; Paul speaks of the Philippians and Thessalonians as being his eternal crown- if they entered God's Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). Paul's striving [literally, 'agonizing'] was not just for his own crown, but for they to be accepted at the last day. The contrast between corruptible and incorruptible will be developed later in 1 Cor. 15:52; our corruptible body will be made incorruptible at the resurrection of the body at the Lord's return. The crown is therefore to be understood as the change of our bodies, both of Paul and the Corinthians, at the last day. The crown will therefore be very personal and intimate to ourselves- it is in the form of our eternal bodies. And those bodies, that being, shall reflect our efforts for others. If those we work with are saved as a function of our efforts for them, then they shall be part of our crown. Paul's self control was motivated by a desire for others' salvation as well as his own. And this surely is one of the factors explaining the Lord's amazing achievement of perfection within human nature; the motivation came from a desire to save us. For He died primarily "for us". If we are motivated solely by a desire to save ourselves, to get eternity for our personal body, then we will likely fail. We are too dysfunctional to be deeply motivated by that. But enduring for the sake of others' salvation is a more powerful motivator.



9:26 *I therefore run, but not with uncertainty. So fight I, but not as a shadow boxer-* Later we will find Paul answering the aspersions that he is indecisive and not serious (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:17). He was deadly serious, totally focused, because the issues before him affected not only his eternal destiny but that of many others. He uses the same word to urge that the trumpet not give an uncertain sound (1 Cor. 14:8). Various images are used in the Bible to bring home to us our sense of purpose. We are to see ourselves as soldiers disciplining ourselves for action, fighting in the only ultimately worthy cause with victory in sight; as slaves of a great Master; as athletes running a race. Paul saw himself as very much in reality, and not just shadowing boxing. Why does he bother saying this- that he boxes not as one who merely beats the air? Surely because he perceived that many people don't grasp the 'reality' of life, and he stood accused of being one of them. They think it's all some virtual game, online rather than real life. But Paul saw the real issues of eternal life and eternal death very clearly. Those who responded to his preaching and teaching really would live forever; those who rejected it or fell away from it would ultimately remain eternally dead. Paul perceived that we are dealing with the ultimate of all realities: the love of God, His feelings for us, His mission and purpose for us, how every moment the King of the Cosmos is yearning for us, the life eternal, the sense of the future men might miss. And so Paul fought for it all, not uncertainly, and not as one who feels only half in reality. It was his life.

9:27- see on 2 Cor. 12:10.

*But like an athlete I discipline my body and make it my slave; lest by any means, after I have preached to others-* The Greek for "body" is also translated "slave". Paul speaks here not only of the extent of his self-mastery; he is continuing the metaphor of enslavement with which he opened this section in :19. He made himself a slave to all men in order to save them, empathizing with their sensitivities and weaknesses in order to save them. And so continues the theme being developed here; that although he would be a joint partaker with his converts of the same hoped for salvation, yet he ran the race, as they should, as if only he personally was going to get the prize. His salvation, as ours, was personal; and yet on another hand, it was bound up in the salvation of the others in his life. He beat his body (NEV "discipline"), directing the boxing of :26 at himself, in order to enslave himself- but that enslavement was for the salvation of others (:19). If he did not do this, then having preached to others he would himself be rejected. So his argument is that he would be rejected from salvation if he did not enslave himself to the salvation of others. Serving them and their foibles and needs was a necessary part of his own path to salvation. This is a wide ranging principle. If we consider that we shall reach salvation by simply focusing upon our own faith, sitting behind a screen hitting the right buttons, but making no effort for the salvation of others- then we may well find that in the longer term, we shall ourselves miss salvation. This is the danger of the 'out of church Christian' movement.

*I myself should be disqualified-* A castaway, reprobate, rejected. The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in his mind (also in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words here in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (AV). Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

The real possibility of rejection at judgment day was evidently a motivator in Paul's life, and he used "the terror" of the coming day of judgment to persuade men in his teaching of the ecclesias (2 Cor. 5:11), and also in his preaching to the world (e.g. Acts 17:31). Paul's exposition of judgment to come caused Felix to tremble (Acts 24:25). I don't suppose Felix would if he walked into many churches today. The fact is, many will be rejected. The unforgiving believer will be delivered to the tormentors to pay what is due (Mt. 18:34); God is preparing torture instruments for the punishment of the rejected (Ps. 7:13). These are awesome descriptions of the self-inflicted mental agony in which the rejected will writhe. The matchless grace of God and His eagerness for our salvation should not be allowed to blunt the impact of these warnings- of what we can do to ourselves, more than God doing to us. Almost certainly, some of those you know today will go through the terrible rejection process which we are going to explore now. People from all over the world, the living responsible, will see the sign of the Son of man, will know His return is imminent, and wail with the knowledge that they have crucified Him afresh and must now meet Him (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). Our response to the certain knowledge that His return is imminent will in effect be our judgment.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Brothers, I would not have you ignorant*- Paul told the Corinthians that he didn't want them to be "ignorant" of the powerful implications of the fact that they had been baptized into the Son of God, and were on their way to His Kingdom, being in an exactly analogous situation to Israel as they walked through the wilderness. He uses a word which is the Greek word 'agnostic'. He didn't want them to be agnostic, to be indifferent, to shrug their shoulders, at the bitingly insistent relevance of the type to them. And that type of Israel in the wilderness is most applicable to us, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (:11) than to any other generation. Indifference seems to have been a problem in Corinth as it is for us. By contrast, God is provoked to jealousy by our indifference to Him (1 Cor. 10:22), seeing every self-reliant act as an implicit statement that we are "stronger than he". He would not have us "ignorant" or agnostic about the implications of the basic doctrines we believe (1 Thess. 4:13; Rom. 1:13; 2:4; 7:1; 11:25; 1 Cor. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13), nor 'agnostic' to the fact we have been baptized and risen with Christ (Rom. 6:3). These are all things that we are almost too familiar with; and yet he urges us, down through the centuries, to never be indifferent and agnostic to these things.

*That our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea*- Israel left Egypt, passed through the baptism of the Red Sea, and then walked through the wilderness- all in enacted parable of our spiritual experience. They then passed through the Jordan, and set foot in the land of promise (cp. our entry to the Kingdom at the judgment seat). But they had not been circumcised in the wilderness- possibly suggesting that the new Israel will not have cut off the flesh as they should have done in their wilderness walk. It is stressed at least five times in Joshua 5 that Joshua himself personally circumcised each of them, and then they kept the Passover. This would seem to tellingly point forward to our coming to the end of the wilderness walk of this life, and then entering into the Kingdom; to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus (cp. Joshua), who performs the intensely personal operation of rolling back and cutting off the flesh, and then we sit down together and keep the Passover, as the Lord clearly intimated we would (Mt. 26:29). This is how personal relationships in the Kingdom of God will be.

Israel crossing the Red Sea is one of the most well-known types of baptism / the new creation. They were being chased by the Egyptians, and were trapped against the sea. The only way of escape was for that water to open and allow them to go through it. If any Israelite had refused to go through, there would have been no salvation. Going further, it is evident that the people of Israel as a body were going through the death and resurrection experience of the Lord Jesus, through the process of the Passover and Exodus through the Red Sea:

<b>Israel</b>	<b>Abib</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
Ate Passover (Ex. 12:6)	14th	Died on the cross as Passover lambs slain
Left Egypt the next day (Num. 33:3)	15th	
Journeyed three days (Ex. 8:27)	15th-17th	Jesus three days in the tomb

As we come out of the baptismal water, we really are united with the resurrected Lord- a new creation. His newness of life, His deliverance and successful exodus from the world- all this becomes ours. Israel were slaves in Egypt, and then after the Red Sea baptism became slaves of God. Ps. 68:18 pictures them as a train of captives being led out of Egypt, merging into the image of a train of a captivity led into a different captivity. Romans 6 powerfully brings home the point: we were slaves of sin, but now are become slaves of righteousness.

The cloud above them was water, and the water of the Red Sea on each side of them, giving them as it were a complete immersion without getting wet. But there's a sense in which baptism is ongoing, and it was for them. They are described as being "under the cloud" throughout the journey to the promised land (Ps. 105:39; Num. 14:14). We are to die for and in Christ and experience His resurrection life breaking through into our mortal lives as an ongoing process (2 Cor. 4:10,11).

Try to see the historical events which occurred to Israel as relevant to you personally. They were "types of us". Note how 1 Cor. 10:1 speaks of "*our* fathers"- even when Paul is writing to Gentiles. He intended them to see in the Jewish fathers a type of themselves. Israel's keeping of the Passover implied that each subsequent Israelite had personally been redeemed that night. All down the years, they were to treat the stranger fairly: "for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). The body of believers, the body of Christ, is not only world-wide geographically at this point in time; it stretches back over time as well as distance, to include all those who have truly believed. This is why David found such inspiration from the history of Israel in his own crises (e.g. Ps. 77).

10:2 *And were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea-* In a sense, Israel's baptism was an ongoing experience, in that the cloud [of water?] continued over them throughout the wilderness wanderings. The ongoing nature of the act of baptism was outlined in baptism's greatest prototype: the passage of Israel through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). They were baptized into that pillar of cloud (cp. the water of baptism), but in fact the cloud and fire which overshadowed them at their Red Sea baptism continued throughout their wilderness journey to the Kingdom. They went "*through* fire and *through* water" (Ps. 66:12) throughout their wilderness years, until they entered the promised rest (cp. the Kingdom). Likewise, the great works of Yahweh which He showed at the time of their exodus from Egypt (cp. the world) and baptism at the Red Sea were in essence *repeated* throughout their wilderness journey (Dt. 7:19). Therefore whenever they faced discouragement and an apparent blockage to their way, they were to remember how God had redeemed them at their baptism, and to realize that in fact His work was still ongoing with them (Dt. 20:1). He told them in the desert that He was "Yahweh that *bringeth you up* out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 11:45). Therefore the overcoming of Edom, Moab and the Canaanite tribes is described in language lifted from the Red Sea record (e.g. Ex. 15:15-17). Throughout their history, Israel were reminded that what God had done for them in their Red Sea deliverance He was continuing to do, and therefore all their enemies would likewise perish if they remained God's people (e.g. Is. 43:16). See on Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:6.

Bullinger comments that "they were all baptized into Moses" can be literally rendered 'they baptized themselves'. The same verb form occurs in Luke 2:5, where Joseph went "to be taxed", literally 'to enrol himself'. Self baptism is quite valid although not advisable in most cases. And yet the language of 'being baptized' suggests that it is God and the Lord, through the Spirit, who baptize us. And yet we take the step ourselves. Baptism is therefore a fusion of our freewill and God's action.

10:3 *They did all eat the same spiritual food*- This was the manna, which the Lord in John 6 interprets as Him and His word. Perhaps the emphasis is upon "the same"- for the Corinthians were under the influence of false teachers, and there was only one food which would get them through the wilderness journey. Unless we too feed on the Lord Jesus, we shall perish in the journey to the Kingdom. Daily reading of the word, especially of the Gospel records, seems to me to be critical in our age. The food was "spiritual" but the Corinthians were not "spiritual" (3:1), even though chapter 1 begins by saying they had been given the Spirit. Unless we feed the Spirit, we too shall not be spiritual.

10:4- see on Rom. 5:12.

*And did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock represented Christ*- "That rock was Christ". However, Dt. 32 seems to imply that the rock was an Angel. "I will publish the name of the Lord (a reference to the Angel declaring the name in Ex. 34)... He is the rock... He found (Israel) in a desert land... He led him" (vv. 3,4,10). This is all describing the activities of the Angel. Israel rebelled against the Angel (Is. 63:10), "lightly esteemed the rock... of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful" (Dt. 32:15,18). Another link between the rock and the Angel is in Gen. 49:24: "The mighty God of Jacob (an Angel)... the shepherd (the Angel, Is. 63:9-11)... the stone... of Israel". Note that Jesus is clearly the shepherd, the stone and the rock (of offence). The language of 1 Cor. 10 invites us not to interpret "the rock" just as the physical rock. It can be shown that the Comforter was an Angel representing Christ, in fact the same Angel as in Is. 63 which led Israel through the wilderness. It is therefore fitting that "the rock", the same Angel, should be chosen by Paul in 1 Cor. 10 as a type of Christ. What came from the rock was "spiritual drink"- showing that the Rock Angel spiritually as well as physically fed them. Christ's interpretation of the manna as representing the word in John 6 would support this idea of the Angels spiritually strengthening Israel on their journey. Ex. 29:42 implies this happened daily; the Angel stood at the door of the tabernacle each day to speak with them. Perhaps the same is true today for those who through Angelic help feed daily on the manna of the Word. It is possible that Israel tempting Christ in 1 Cor. 10:9 is meant to refer back to 1 Cor. 10:4 "They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ". Tempting Christ was therefore tempting the rock to produce water. The rock was a title of the Angel that was with them, and it was he, representing Christ, whom they tempted. See on Is. 51:9; Rev. 3:22.

Paul is alluding to a Jewish tradition that the rock followed Israel through the wilderness, always giving water. Some traditions suggest Miriam carried it; the supposed "Rock of Moses" is a piece of rock which could have been carried. Paul emphasizes that the point of his allusion is that the water which they drank of represented "Christ", the strength which comes from Him as the smitten rock; he alludes to the tradition just as he quotes pagan poets

and makes a point out of their words (Acts 17:28). The Bible often features this kind of thing; and God isn't so paranoiac and apologetic that He as it were has to footnote such things with a comment that "of course, this isn't true".

It should be evident enough that the rock which Moses smote in the desert was simply a rock; it wasn't Christ personally. The Jewish book of Wisdom claimed that "the rock was Wisdom" (Wisdom 11). Paul, as he so often does, is picking up this phrase and saying that more essentially, the rock represented Jesus personally, and not 'Wisdom' in the Jewish misunderstanding of this figure. It "was" Him in the sense that it represented Him. Likewise He said about the communion wine: "This is my blood". It wasn't literally His blood; it was and is His blood only in that it represents His blood. Paul is describing the experience of Israel in the wilderness because he saw in it some similarities with the walk of the Corinthian believers towards God's kingdom. The whole of 1 Cor. 10 is full of such reference. And this is why he should speak about the rock which Moses smote as a symbol of Christ. The Israelites had been baptized into Moses, just as Corinth had been baptized into Christ; and both Israel and Corinth ate "the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink". "Spiritual food... spiritual drink" shows that Paul saw the manna they ate and the water they drank as spiritually symbolic- just as He saw the rock as symbolic. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 10:16,17 to write of how Corinth also ate and drank of Christ in the breaking of bread, and in chapter 11 he brings home the point: like Israel, we can eat and drink those symbols, "the same spiritual meat... the same spiritual drink", having been baptized into Christ as they were into Moses, and think that thereby we are justified to do as we like in our private lives. This is the point and power of all this allusion. The picture of their carcasses rotting in the wilderness is exhortation enough. Baptism and observing the 'breaking of bread' weren't enough to save Israel.

The Lord Jesus Himself had explained in John 6 how the manna represented His words and His sacrifice. He spoke of how out of Him would come "living water", not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, "flowed abundantly".....as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface ("as out of the great depths", Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him.

The Law of Moses included several rituals which depended upon what is called "the running water"(Lev. 14:5,6,50-52; 15:18; Num. 19:17). "Running" translates a Hebrew word normally translated "living". This living water was what came out of the smitten rock. The Lord taught that the water that would come out of Him would only come after His glorification (Jn. 7:38)- an idea He seems to link with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19; Heb. 2:9). When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. The rock was "smitten", and the water then came out. The Hebrew word used here is usually translated to slay, slaughter, murder. It occurs in two clearly Messianic passages: "...they talk to the hurt of him [Christ] whom thou hast smitten"(Ps. 69:26); "we esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God"(Is. 53:4).

It was in a sense God who "clave the rock" so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). "Clave" implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadowing of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. Yahweh, presumably represented by an Angel, stood upon [or 'above'] the rock when Moses, on Yahweh's behalf, struck the rock. Here we see a glimpse into the nature of the Father's relationship with the Son on the cross. He was both with the Son, identified with Him just as the Angel stood on the rock or hovered above it as Moses struck it... and yet He also was the one who clave that rock, which was Christ. As Abraham with Isaac was a symbol of both the Father and also the slayer, so in our far smaller experience, the Father gives us the trials which He stands squarely with us through. And within the wonder of His self-revelation, Yahweh repeatedly reveals Himself as "the rock"- especially in Deuteronomy. And yet that smitten rock "was [a symbol of] Christ". On the cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". There He was the most intensely manifested in His beloved Son. There God was spat upon, His love rejected. There we see the utter humility and self-abnegation of the Father. And we His children must follow the same path, for the salvation of others.

The rock "followed [better, 'accompanied'] them" (1). We must understand this as a metonymy, whereby "the rock" is put for what came out of it, i.e. the fountain of living water. It seems that this stream went with them on their journey. The statement that "they drank" of the rock is in the imperfect tense, denoting continuous action- they *kept on* drinking of that water, it wasn't a one time event, it continued throughout the wilderness journey. A careful reading of Ex. 17:5,6 reveals that at Rephidim, Moses was told to "Go on before the people", to Horeb. There he struck the rock, and yet the people drank the water in Rephidim. The water flowed a long way that day, and there is no reason to think that it didn't flow with them all the time. The records make it clear enough that the miraculous provision of water was in the same context as God's constant provision of food and protection to the people (Dt. 8:15,16). The rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: "He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness (2). It was living, spring water- not lying around in puddles. The water that came from that one rock tasted as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time.

In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new. In our experience, it's as if He has died and risen for us every time we obtain forgiveness, or any other grace to help in our times of need. We live in newness of life. The cross is in that sense ongoing; He dies and lives again for every one who comes to Him. And yet at the end of their wilderness journey, Moses reflected that Israel had forgotten the rock that had given them birth. The water had become such a regular feature of their lives that they forgot the rock in Horeb that it flowed from. They

forgot that 'Horeb' means 'a desolate place', and yet they had thankfully drunk of the water the first time in Rephidim, 'the place of comfort'.

We too have done the same, but the length of time we have done so can lead us to forget the smitten rock, back there in the loneliness and desolation of Calvary. Not only did his disciples forsake him and his mother finally go away home, but He even felt that the Father had forsaken Him. As Abraham left alone in the Messianic "horror of great darkness", as Isaac alone with only his Father, leaving the other men behind...so the Lord on the cross was as a single green root grown up out of a parched desert. Let us never forget that 'Horeb'; and let's not let the abundant new life and blessing which there is in Christ become something ordinary. God forbid that we like Corinth, like Israel, should drink of that sparkling water each week in our 'place of comfort' and go forth to do just as we please.

### Notes

(1) Marvin Vincent [*Vincent's Word Studies*] comments: "Paul appears to recall a rabbinic tradition that there was a well formed out of the spring in Horeb, which gathered itself up into a rock like a swarm of bees, and followed the people for forty years; sometimes rolling itself, sometimes carried by Miriam, and always addressed by the elders, when they encamped, with the words, "Spring up, O well!" (Num. 21:17)". Whether this is true or not, Paul is alluding to this idea- hence the rather awkward idiom to non-Jewish readers.

(2) There is repeated emphasis in the records that the water came from the [singular] rock. However Ps. 78:16 speaks of God cleaving the rocks. I suggest this is an intensive plural- the sense is 'the one great rock'. The next verses (17,20) go on to speak of how the water came from a singular rock.

10:5 *However with most of them God-* The majority of them (Gk.) were strewn down along the way (Gk.). Faced with the apostasy at Corinth, Paul was pointing out that as the majority of Israel failed to make it, so the new Israel should not be over confident that this feature of the type doesn't apply to them too.

*Was not well pleased-* Repeatedly this phrase is used in the Gospels to describe how God was "well pleased" in Christ (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). The implication may be that it is through being "in Christ" that God will count us acceptable, rather than by our keeping our nose clean of the more public sins of fornication and idolatry.

*For their dead bodies were scattered over the wilderness-* The Greek means to lay prostrate- the very language of idol worship. Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 20 are clear that Israel worshipped idols in the wilderness, having smuggled them with them through the Red Sea. And this was their death. Clearly idol worship was an issue at Corinth, with some of them still believing that idols represented pagan gods who had actual existence (8:7-12). The same image of the carcasses of Israel laying unburied in the wilderness is found in Heb. 3:17. Ps. 91:5-8 speaks as if the condemned generation were struck down one by one, by day and night, and the faithful Joshua was strengthened not to be fearful as he regularly experienced men falling dead literally at his side (Ps. 91:7) and saw carcasses, sometimes in the thousands, laying in the wilderness. The frightened people simply hurried on, with no time to bury the bodies. The journey must've been a fearful and depressing experience, with sudden death a daily reality. They were after all experiencing condemnation; it was a death march. Perhaps the destruction of the rejected will be the same at the last day. And yet that death march of the



condemned generation is clearly used as a type of our journey from baptism to the Kingdom. In a sense we are living out our condemnation now, so that we will be ultimately saved (1 Cor. 11:29-31). It does us no harm to reflect upon the reality of condemnation, so that we may sense more keenly the extent of God's grace in saving us from wrath through Christ. As soon as we start to think that surely all this can't mean that the majority of those baptized into Christ may also fail to make it, we must bear in mind the reasoning of Hebrews and Romans which warns us against feeling like that. On the other hand, God's grace is such that we can have every confidence that very many will reach the Kingdom, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. But the possibility of failure, the sense of the future we might miss, must be deeply felt by us. We *cannot* assume that as a community of believers we are any better than natural Israel. Reflecting for a moment on the possibility that the majority of those we know who are baptized will not make it, we are left with sober introspection- "Lord, is it I?". This thought alone inspires an intensity in seeking to abide in Christ.

10:6 *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they lusted-* Literally, they were 'types of us'. 8:7-12 shows that some in Corinth believed in idols and worshipped them, along with the true God. This was exactly analogous to Israel in the wilderness, and they were to take a warning from this. Hebrews however makes the point that Israel's rejection in the wilderness was solely because they did not have faith. The idol worship mitigated against total faith in the true God- and that was and is the essential problem with idol worship, in whatever form. Gal. 5:17 criticizes some believers for being in a position where the flesh lusted [s.w.] against the Spirit, and the nail biting conflict was too much for weak willed human nature, which fails to have within it the steel will required to resist the flesh. Paul argues there that the Galatians should give themselves over to the Spirit, so that such conflict is not experienced, knowing it will inevitably end in failure. This is a theme of Corinthians- they were not spiritual (3:1), they did not feed the Spirit (:3) they had been given at baptism (chapter 1). And so they lusted after the flesh, and easily gave in.

10:7 *Neither be you idolaters, as some of them were-* Some of them were idolaters as well as Christians (8:7-12). Paul accepted that was how it was, and urged those who were stronger not to make these weaker ones stumble. He never advocates solving the issue by casting them out of the church, and his repeated silence about this needs to be carefully weighed by those who believe in excommunicating weak members from the church.

*As it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play-* Sitting down to eat and drink is used in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 with reference to the breaking of bread service. Israel ate and drank and then rose up to commit sexual sin in the name of idol worship and religious devotion to the golden calf. It seems from chapters 6 and 7 that the believers at Corinth were sing church prostitutes- and we can deduce from this allusion to the eating and drinking that this was being done at the memorial meeting. They were practicing the communion service just as the surrounding cults had special meals to worship their idols, at which they slept with prostitutes. The golden calf incident happened whilst Moses was absent, and he returned to them in judgment. Paul's threats to come to Corinth and judge their apostasy may suggest he saw himself as their Moses.

10:8 *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed-* The fornication in view here isn't going too far with one's unmarried partner, but the fornication associated with idol

worship; indeed, this is the context of most of the NT warnings against “fornication”, and the implication is that fornication was practiced at the breaking of bread, and taught by “Jezebel”, because that service had been mixed with idol worship. Hence Paul has to make the point that feasting and drunkenness shouldn’t be practiced at the memorial meeting- clearly they had turned it into the kind of feast which accompanied idol worship.

The reference is apparently to the worship of Baal Peor and sleeping with the Moabite religious prostitutes (although see later on this verse). We note that Israel were led into that sin by their leaders (Num. 25:4), and perhaps that was the same in the Corinthian church.

*And so in one day twenty three thousand died-* Num. 25:9 gives a figure of 24,000. Perhaps the key to understanding the difference is the phrase "in one day". Num. 25:9 says that 24,000 died as a result of a plague sent to punish them- but it is not recorded how quickly they died from the plague. We can assume that a "plague" took some time period to kill them. But Num. 25:4,5 records that immediately, that day, the judges of Israel were commanded to kill by the sword those who had committed the fornication, and Phinehas arose in response. Those deaths by the sword were different to those from the plague- perhaps 23,000 died that day from these executions, and then 24,000 died from the plague subsequently. Another option is to note that there were 23,000 Levites (Num. 26:62). If each Levite killed a man (which Num. 25:5 "Let every one kill his man" might imply, cp. Ex. 32:27), this would mean 23,000 died in that one day, and if 1,000 died subsequently from the plague, we then have the 24,000 of Num. 25:9. Or it may be that 1 Cor. 10:8 is actually continuing to refer to the golden calf incident mentioned in :7; for Ex. 32:28 LXX says that 23,000 died at that time. The Masoretic text says 3,000. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Ex. 32:28 specifically states that this slaughter happened in one day.

10:9- see on 1 Cor. 10:4.

*Neither let us put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and perished by the serpents-* The usual assumption is that this refers to Israel's complaining about their "light bread" in Num. 21:5, as this is the only recorded incident where they were punished by serpents. But their complaint at that point hardly sounds like putting the Lord to the test. The more obvious reference is to the incident at the place subsequently named Massah, 'testing', when they put the Lord to the test by asking "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. 17:7). The Bible doesn't record that they were then punished by serpents, but this was so in Jewish tradition; and we saw on :4 that Paul is unafraid to allude to such traditions and take lessons from them. Suffering from "fiery serpents" was Israel's common experience in the wilderness (Dt. 8:15). This incident is more pertinent to the Corinthian situation. For in chapter 1, Paul has assured them that the Lord was indeed amongst them by His Spirit; but they were not spiritual (3:1), they refused to perceive His activity amongst them through the Spirit. The miraculous signs of the Spirit had been worked amongst them (2 Cor. 12:12). Christ crucified had been revealed amongst Paul's converts by the ministry of the Spirit (Gal. 3:1,5). And yet the Corinthians were effectively saying, along with the Galatians: 'Where is the promise of the Spirit amongst us which Paul keeps claiming?'

10:10- see on Ex. 12:23; Ps. 78:49; Rom. 5:12.

*Neither let us grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the Destroyer angel-* The reference is to the murmuring of Korah's rebellion against Moses (Num. 16:41,49). Paul

is positioning himself as their Moses; for he spends much of Corinthians answering their various murmurings against him. Likewise the grumbling about the manna (Ex. 16:8,10) was against Moses.

The number of firstborn males after Israel left Egypt was remarkably small (around 20,000, Num. 3:43). Women in most primitive societies have an average of 7 births. This would mean that given a total population of around 2,800,000 on leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:37), there should have been around 400,000 firstborn males. But instead, there is only a fraction of this number. Why? Did Israel eat the Passover? My suggestion- and this is well in the category of things you will never know for sure and can only ponder- is that many Hebrew firstborns died on Passover night. Israel were warned that if they did not properly keep the Passover, "the Destroyer" Angel would kill their firstborn (Ex. 12:23). "The Destroyer" is mentioned in 1 Cor. 10:10: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the Destroyer" (*olothreutes*; this is a proper noun in the Greek). Who was the Destroyer? If Scripture interprets Scripture, it was the 'Destroyer' Angel of Passover night. In similar vein Heb. 11:28 speaks of "He (the Angel) that destroyed (Gk. *olothreuo*) the firstborn".

Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 10:10 not to "murmur as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (i. e. the destroying Angel) implies that the unworthy among the "Israel of God" will also be destroyed by Angelic means if we make the same mistakes Israel of old made. The same Angel that destroyed the Egyptians would destroy God's Israel; they would be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The fact that the Angels will personally minister the condemnation of the unworthy (Mt. 13:49 "the Angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire") when in their lives those Angels gave their charges every chance to repent and to grow spiritually, preserving them from physical danger, is surely a heart rending thought; and a motivation to respond acceptably to the trials God brings into our lives through His Angels.

10:11- see on Gal. 1:4.

*Now these things happened to them as an example-* They were 'types of us'. Israel's sin was their fault, and the judgments for it were called forth by their behaviour. And yet as with all sin, God works through it. The whole process of their failures and judgments for that failure was for our sakes. We must sense the real possibility of spiritual failure, of the eternal future we may miss.

The ecclesia in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) were tempted to commit the same sins in principle as we are tempted to (1 Cor.10:1-10). Twice Paul hammers home the point: "These things were our examples... now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and are written (i.e. the process of inspiration became operative) for our admonition" (v.6,11). Paul seems to read the minds of many Gentile Christians as they quietly reason 'But that was Israel- we Gentiles have been called because we shall do better'; he warns that such an attitude places us in grave spiritual danger: "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (v.12,13). This could be paraphrased as follows: "The Jews ("man") had the same human nature as you; if you think that you can stand up to it better than they, then such spiritual arrogance will lead you to fall'. Such reasoning goes against the grain of what we would naturally like to hear, which is that we will certainly reach salvation just as we are, with no conditions, and without having to have any conflict with our sinful nature. Paul therefore concludes by saying that only the

spiritually wise will grasp his line of argument here: "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say" (v.14).

I have noted that "example" is the Gk. *tupos*, types. The New Testament writers present things like the crossing of the Red Sea and the events in the wilderness as real historical events which were types of the work of Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4; Hebrews 3 etc.). But by the second century, there was a shift away from reading these events as types, but rather they were seen as allegories- no longer were the events so importantly *real*, rather the characters and events were seen as allegorical. It was against this background of ever increasing abstraction that Christians likewise started to move away from the real Christ. Origen in the third century argued strongly that the historical sections of the Bible were to be taken as allegory and not as literally accurate history. He spoke of there being in the Bible "spiritual truth in historical falsehood", and went on to use this as an excuse to explain why the Lord Jesus is presented as human rather than Divine in the Gospels. And so, as so often, an incorrect base attitude to God's word led to seriously misunderstanding it.

*And they were written about for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come-* We are to imagine the inspired Moses [or whoever] writing these things down, with God having us in mind, hoping we would take instruction from them. As these things happened at the beginning of the Jewish age, they had particular relevance to those living at the end of that age. J. Milik argues that Paul's language here is alluding to Apocryphal Jewish writings, which speak of the "ages" as coming to an end in Satan's destruction at the last day. Paul's reasoning is that Christ's death has brought about the termination of the "ages" as the Jews understood them. Satan and his hordes – in the way the Jews understood them – are right *now* rendered powerless and non-existent. As ever, Paul's approach seems to be not to baldly state that a personal Satan doesn't exist, but rather to show that even if he once did, he is now powerless and dead. The way the Lord Jesus dealt with the demons issue is identical. Once we understand this background, we see Paul's writings are packed with allusions to the Jewish ideas about the "ages" ending in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan. Paul was correcting their interpretations – by saying that the "ages" had ended in Christ's death, and the things the Jewish writings claimed for the future Messianic Kingdom were in fact already possible for those in Christ. Thus when 1 Enoch 5:7,8 speaks of 'freedom from sin' coming then, Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* (Rom. 6:18–22; 8:2).

10:12 *Therefore let him that thinks he stands be careful lest he fall-* I have noted on the previous verses that Paul is at pains to point out that we are not to think that the record of Israel's failure is merely dry history. There is a very real possibility that the Christian community could be no better than Israel after the flesh; and only a minority of those who pass through the baptismal water will therefore be saved. Which should make us look closely at ourselves. Paul's only other usage of the standing / falling image is in Rom. 14:4: "To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be made to stand up. For the Lord has power to make him stand". Thinking we stand therefore refers to an assumption that we shall in our own strength stand acceptable before the judgment seat. We shall only be made to stand by the Lord's grace; for in the same passage Paul writes of how every knee shall bow.

10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man-* Paul so often sees to the reasoning we indulge deep within our hearts in the times of testing. "This is unique, without precedent, so I am justified in responding in a sinful way; my unique temptation, which

nobody else can understand, justifies my unusual, outside the book response'. But that is not the case. Every temptation has been shared by others, not least *the Man*, the Lord Jesus. "Overtaken" recalls a similar word used in Gal. 6:1 about being overtaken in sin; so perhaps Paul is asking them to reconsider their previous falls into temptation and sin, and reflect that actually those situations were not without precedent; they were no more and no less than human, and therefore those tests were actually common to all men, and others had successfully resisted.

*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability-* What a comfort to know that God is aware of our spiritual limitations and point beyond which we would sin. I suppose that is why so few of us have been tortured for our faith. He allows us to be tested actually beyond that point- but provides a way of escape. In considering others, we need to be aware that what may be a bearable temptation for one is not so for another believer. Sensitivity is required rather than legalistic rules, especially about forbidding any remarriage after divorce to all and every believer.

*But with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it-* Truly "the sceptre of wickedness won't remain over the allotment of the righteous; so that the righteous won't put forth their hands to do evil" (Ps. 125:3). Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac leaves us all shaking our heads and feeling that we simply wouldn't have risen up to that level of sacrifice. For not only was Isaac the son Abraham had so longed for, but he was the longed for fulfilment of the promises which had been the very core of Abraham's life. Yet 1 Cor. 10:13 appears to allude to God's provision of another sacrifice and thereby a way out of Abraham's temptation / testing- and this passage implies that each one of us are in Abraham's shoes: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted / tested (=Gen. 22:1) beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also *provide* the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it". No longer can Abraham be seen as a Sunday School figure of faith to be merely admired. For we are in his shoes, and the same God will likewise work with us in *our* weaknesses, both testing and providing the ways of escape.

We tend to think that our temptations / tests are so unique that they are somehow unusual, when in fact all that we experience has been and is in essence experienced by other men. It is in fellowship with others, in real connection with them over coffee, as it were, that we come to realize that we are not alone. 2 Cor. 1 reasons that whatever we experience is so that we can strengthen others who are going through the same; but that only becomes real and functional if we have meaningful contact with others and share with them. Each test has *the* (Gk.) specific way of escape. Whether or not we take it or perceive it, God has designed so much potentially in the daily lives of each of us. We need to ask what the intended way of escape is in each case. But the "escape" doesn't necessarily mean the end of the temptation, it means rather a way to bear or endure it.

Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). This is alluded to in a telling way in 1 Cor. 10:13: for the righteous, they will never be tested more than they can bear, but a way of escape will always be made possible. But for the rejected, there will be no escape. It will be something too great to bear, and somehow they have to go on existing in that state. Thus the rejected will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), after the pattern of Judas bungling his own suicide after realizing his condemnation [thus his bowels gushed, although he was attempting to hang himself]; they will also seek the Lord, all too late, and not find Him either (Prov. 1:28; Jn. 7:34). Israel will

seek their lovers / idols and not find them (Hos. 2:7), and then seek the Lord and not find Him either (Hos. 5:6). They will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), seek to their idols, see to the true God- and find none of them. They will exist in unbearable limbo. They will wander seeking the word of the Lord, but not find it (Am. 8:12). Tragically, it was so freely available in their lifetimes (cp. the foolish virgins seeking oil, banging on the door trying to hear their Lord's words and speak with Him).

Put together two Bible passages: Cain felt that his condemnation was greater *than he could bear*, and so God put a mark upon him so he wouldn't be slain (Gen. 4:13,15). Now 1 Cor. 10:13: God will not allow us to be tested *more than we can bear*, but will make a way of escape so we can bear it. I take this as meaning that if God is even sensitive to the feelings of a condemned man like Cain, rather like putting an animal to sleep in a humane way... then we who are saved in Christ can take comfort that even in this life, we will not be asked to bear the unbearable, and yet we have the prospect of eternity in front of us when this life is through. And in a very quiet, sober way, we have to respond with gratitude: 'Wow'.

The idea of a way of escape being provided along with the temptation throws fresh light on Heb. 11:35. Some refuse the legitimate deliverances provided from temptation- and rightly shall receive a "better resurrection".

Yet a way of escape is not always provided from physical trials- especially in the case of those who were soon to be the Christian martyrs amongst Paul's readership. But when faced with situations which make us feel that we will be spiritually swamped by the power of our innate evil tendencies, then we can take courage that although the physical conditions causing the trial may not be taken away, there will certainly be an opportunity made for us to resist the spiritual temptation. Notice how a way of *escape* is provided- implying that initially the temptation is truly too heavy for us, and an escape is therefore made for us by God so that He is not in the position of forcing us to sin. Surely all readers of these words know this feeling only too well- sensing that we are in a position where our evil desires are growing stronger and stronger, not wanting to sin, but feeling that humanly, given a few more moments, and it will be inevitable. It is in these moments that we have to desperately cling to this promise- that God *will* make a way of escape, that he will keep us from falling (Jude 24) by His power of righteousness. Hence verse 14 continues "*wherefore... flee from idolatry*"- i.e. from the spiritual temptations.

10:14- see on :13.

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry*- Some were guilty of idolatry in the Corinthian church, actually believing that the idols represented real gods who actually existed (8:7-12). Paul calls for sensitivity to these weak ones, but urges they all flee from idolatry. The allusion is to Joseph fleeing from temptation with Potiphar's wife. Distancing ourselves from temptation is an important part of spiritual life in practice.

10:15 *I speak as to wise people. Think upon what I say*- The Corinthians were not wise; there was not apparently a wise man amongst them (1 Cor. 6:5). They had been given the Spirit gift of wisdom, according to chapter 1; but they were not wise because they were not spiritual (3:1). But Paul relates to the converts as if they were going to be saved, as if they were in fact spiritual. Seeing we cannot condemn our brethren, we are left with no option but to relate

likewise to those whose weakness and immaturities are so evident to us. Paul never advocates disfellowshipping these individuals. Paul's patience with the Corinthians is amazing. He clearly had no fear of guilt by association with them, and addresses them repeatedly as if they are by status "in Christ"- he spoke to them *as if* they were "wise men" (:15).

10:16 *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?*- Paul is going to build up to the argument that partaking in Christ is exclusive of any relationship with other gods, idols, religions etc. Bearing in mind the Judaist influences in Corinth, Paul uses the Passover terminology for the cup of wine which represents the Lord's blood: "The cup of blessing". The Passover was a prototype of the breaking of bread meeting. The cup is a symbol of God's blessing / forgiveness of us; and we bless it. There is thus a mutuality between us and the Lord as we bless that cup, and are reminded again of the blessing mediated to us through His death blood. "The cup of the blessing" (Gk.) may suggest that a blessing was pronounced over the cup by each believer as they took the cup- for "we bless" it. The reference to "a communion" could suggest that the breaking of bread is but one way of fellowshiping with His body and blood. Baptism, fellowship with the church which is His body, living aware of our connection with His blood- these are all other ways.

Paul expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ. An example is 1 Cor. 10:16 = Mt. 26:26; hence Paul reasons: "The cup of blessing... *is it not* the communion of the blood of Christ?" - i.e. 'Isn't it? I mean, this is familiar to us from the Gospels, isn't it'. It seems likely that the Gospels were memorized by the early converts.

Paul speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor. 10:16), probably using "blessing" in its Biblical sense of 'forgiveness' (e.g. Acts 3:25,26). Whilst there is, therefore, an awareness of our own sins and salvation from them at the memorial meeting, there is not any specific mediation of forgiveness to us through the bread and wine. In prospect, we were saved at baptism, through our Lord's work on the cross. In prospect, all our sins were forgiven then. We must be careful to avoid the Catholic notion that the bread and wine do themselves possess some power of atonement. They are the appointed aids to help us *remember* what has already been achieved. And this is why the early brethren could break bread with joy- not as part of a guilt trip prompted by the worrying remembrance of the standard set for us in Jesus (Acts 2:46).

The declaration that we are in the one body is shown in terms of breaking bread together. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (the sign of sharing in) the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:16-18). All who share in the saving work of the Lord Jesus by true baptism into Him ought to break bread together.

Paul sees the bread and wine as gifts from God to us. It's all about receiving the cup of the Lord, the cup which comes from Him. We should take it with both hands. It seems so inappropriate, given this emphasis, if our focus is rather on worrying about forbidding others in His body from reaching their hands out to partake that same cup and bread. Way back in Gen. 14:18, the gift of bread and wine [which foreshadowed our present memorial meetings]

was a sign of God blessing us. Hence it was “the cup of blessing”, which Paul says we also bless. There is a mutuality about it- we bless God, He blesses us. No part of this wonderful and comforting arrangement depends upon us not passing that cup to our brethren.

*The communion, the fellowship*, was brought about by the Saviour’s body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16). Indeed, “*the fellowship*” is a common NT phrase (e.g. 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3). Because this has been created in prospect, from God’s perspective we are all united in *the fellowship*, therefore we should seek to be of one mind (Phil. 2:1,2). It broke down, at least potentially, the walls which there naturally are between men, even the most opposed, i.e. Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death (Jn. 17).

10:17- see on 1 Cor. 11:29; 1 Cor. 12:15.

*Seeing that we, who are many, are one loaf, one body; for we are all partaking of the one loaf-* Just as Israel partook of "the same" food and water, "which is Christ", so the many within the body of Christ partake of Him. This verse is not saying that participation in the breaking of bread service somehow magically makes us 'one' and therefore it should only be done with those with whom we are in theological agreement. The unity in view here is between the believers and the Lord Jesus. We the many are one with Him, with His body. We are partakers in or of Christ (Heb. 3:14). Paul has argued in 1 Cor. 6 that because believers are one with the body of Christ, they should not be one with religious prostitutes, even Christian ones. And here he will go on to reason that we cannot be one with the Lord Jesus and also with the gods represented by the idols. If we are partakers in Christ, the one loaf, then we cannot partake with idols (:21). Heb. 2:14 uses the same word to explain that the Lord Jesus partook in our human nature; and in response, we partake in Him by acts of identity such as baptism and the breaking of bread, and in a life lived in Him. Here we see the practical power of understanding the representative nature of His sacrifice and His genuine human nature; it is an invitation to both ritual and psychological identity with Him.

The bread represents the body of Christ; at the communion service we express our unity with all who are in Christ as well as with Him. To refuse to break bread with those who are in Christ is therefore to effectively count ourselves out of His body. This doctrine of the one body is as fundamental as there being one God, one baptism and one hope (Eph. 4:4-6). But Paul’s argument here is that we cannot therefore bind ourselves in communion with idols if we are truly in the body of Christ. The boundaries he draws are between the believer and the world, not between believer and believer. As the whole community of Israel were treated as one body of believers, even though there was unbelief, doctrinal and moral error amongst them, so is the body of Christ (:18). One implication of this doctrine of the one body is that we cannot be part of any other body. And this was exactly relevant to the Corinthians, who were turning the breaking of bread service into part of an idol service; see on :21. If we are truly “in Christ”, our whole world will revolve around that; to be involved in any other system of thinking or worship is to provoke Him to jealousy.



To refuse to fellowship a brother is to effectively say that he is not within the Lord's body; for when we break bread, we show that we are one bread and one body (1 Cor. 10:16,17). It is simply not true that refusal to break bread with another is not passing judgment upon them; it most clearly is. And as we condemn, so we will be (Mt. 7:1). The purpose of the cross was to gather together in one all God's children (Jn. 11:52), that the love of the Father and Son might be realized between us (Jn. 17:26). If we support division, we are denying the essential aim of the Lord's sacrifice.

Surrounding Roman culture forbade women to drink wine with men, and only permitted them to do so in special cases if they drank different wine from a different cup. But Paul in conscious reference to this emphasizes the one cup shared by all believers, male and female, in memory of the unity and tearing down of barriers between people achieved by the Lord's death.

The bread represents the body of Christ; but it is hammered home time and again in the New Testament that the *believers* are the body of Christ. By partaking of Christ's body, we are sharing with each other. Paul drives home this point with an Old Testament allusion: "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18). We are the living sacrifices, offered on the Christ altar (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:10). By being placed upon the altar, the sacrifice was counted as the altar. As Christ hung on the cross, all believers were counted as being in Him; Christ and the believers were, in this sense, indivisible on the cross. And they still are- hence the figure of us being the very *body*, the very *being*, of Christ. To personally share in fellowship with Him therefore *must* involve intense fellowship with other members of Christ's body. We must 'discern' the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29), and also judge (same word as 'discern') ourselves" at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 11:31). We discern the Lord's body, and thereby discern ourselves too- because we are part of His body. This further shows that our self-examination at the breaking of bread is both of Christ and also of ourselves (both individually *and* collectively, as the body of Christ?).

10:18 *Behold Israel after the flesh. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?*- "Participants" is the same word for "communion" in :16. Eating the sacrifice meant fellowshiping, having a common union, with the altar it was placed upon, and the god or religious entity the altar stood for. We recall that in chapter 8, Paul seems to say that a believer could eat food sacrificed to idols if he or she didn't believe there was a real god behind that idol; but to do so was wrong because it would encourage those Christians who still believed in the gods to do the same and in their case, actively participate in idol worship. The argument here seems to be that any eating idol food within the temple context meant that you were declaring common union with the idol. But Paul's argument in 8:10 was that a believer could eat food in the idol's temple but should not do so, lest it lead weaker believers into sin. He could have stated this higher and more obvious principle- that such action was effectively declaring common union with the idol. But instead he argues that an even higher principle is not to lead our brethren into sin. This too should be our primary concern- not, in the first place, whether this is right or wrong- but rather, what effect will this have on others? That is not to say that the right / wrong issue is irrelevant- as Paul makes clear here in chapter 10.

"Those who eat the sacrifices" within the Israelite system were the priests. They were allowed to take their daily food from the sacrifices offered to Yahweh. But Paul has earlier used this very argument in 1 Cor. 9:13 to prove that he would have been justified in taking

material support from the Corinthians- because he was likewise involved in ministry work. He chose not to make use of that concession. But here he rather cleverly alludes to the same reality and says that in fact, all the Corinthians were like the priests, eating of the sacrifice, that of the Lord Jesus. This is one of many examples where the NT teaches that we are all priests, the entire brotherhood of believers is "a royal priesthood", every one of us as dedicated to the Lord's service as the Levites were.

The only exclusivity of the Lord's table was that it was not to be turned into a place for worshipping pagan idols. Paul saw the sacrifices of Israel as having some relevance to the Christian communion meal. He comments: "Are those who eat the victims not in communion with the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18); and the altar is clearly the Lord Jesus (Heb. 13:10). Eating of the communion meal was and is, therefore, fundamentally a statement of our fellowship with the altar, the Lord Jesus, rather than with others who are eating of Him. The bread and wine which we consume thus become antitypical of the Old Testament sacrifices; and they were repeatedly described as "Yahweh's food", laid upon the altar as "the table of Yahweh" (Lev. 21:6,8; 22:25; Num. 28:2; Ez. 44:7,16; Mal. 1:7,12). And it has been commented: "Current translations are inaccurate; *lehem panim* is the 'personal bread' of Yahweh, just as *sulhan panim* (Num. 4:7) is the 'personal table' of Yahweh". This deeply personal relationship between Yahweh and the offerer is continued in the breaking of bread; and again, the focus is upon the worshipper's relationship with Yahweh rather than a warning against fellowshipping the errors of fellow worshippers through this action. What *is* criticized in later Israel is the tendency to worship Yahweh through these offerings at the same time as offering sacrifice to other gods. Is. 66:3 speaks of this dualism in worship:

#### **What was offered to Yahweh**

"An ox is sacrificed,  
a lamb is slain,  
an offering is brought,  
incense memorial is made,

#### **What was offered to other gods simultaneously**

a man is killed;  
a dog is struck down;  
swine-flesh is savoured;  
idols are kissed"

And the new Israel made just this same blasphemy in the way some in the Corinth ecclesia ate of the Lord's table and also at the table of idols ["demons"]. Paul wasn't slow to bring out the similarities when he wrote to the Corinthians. It is this kind of dualism which is so wrong; to be both Christian and non-Christian at the same time, to mix the two. But differences of interpretation between equally dedicated worshippers of Yahweh, or believers in Christ, were never made the basis of condemnation.

10:19 *What say I then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?*- In 8:4 Paul has clarified that "an idol is nothing". In chapter 8, he accepts that some of the Corinthian believers entered idol temples and ate their sacrifices without believing in the existence of the idols (8:10). This was not a case of eating meat sold in the market which had been offered to idols. Paul in chapter 8 accepts the situation but urges against it for the sake of not causing the weaker brethren to stumble. But now he seems to be saying that by forbidding eating in the idol temple, he is not presuming the real existence of the gods thought to be behind the idols. But all the same, despite that, he feels that to eat their food in the temples is to proclaim common union with the idols, and this is not possible if we

also declare that common union with the Lord Jesus and eat as it were His food at the communion meal with Him. Note again that the even greater reason not to eat idol food in the idol's temple was in order not to cause weak Christians to stumble. This is paramount, and must forge our positions and behaviour on absolutely everything.

10:20 *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I would not have you sharing communion with demons-* Demons refer to idols (Dt. 32:17; Is. 65:11 LXX calls Gad, the god of fortune, “the demon”). Paul now makes the act of eating idol sacrifices tantamount to having common union with the demons, the gods thought to be behind the idols and represented visually by them. In 8:10 Paul didn't make that direct attack when mentioning Corinthian Christians eating idol food in idol temples, whilst not believing in the demons. There, he argued this was wrong because it made other believers stumble. He could have attacked their behaviour with a direct broadside- but he didn't. This more subtle approach is often required in dealing with the error and immorality of others. Direct broadsides may feel good for *us*- but we must think of what *others* need and the way to achieve that, rather than salving our own consciences about wanting to speak out against wrong behaviour.

10:21- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons-* Paul is stating baldly that it is one or the other. If they ate idol food on the idol altar or table, then they were not really partaking of the Lord's table, in spiritual reality. Perhaps it is to this fact that he alludes when he states that "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (11:20). Their external celebration of the Lord's supper was not that at all, because they also partook of the table and cup of the gods.

Paul speaks of us each one partaking of “the table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21), a phrase used in the LXX for the altar (Ez. 44:16; Mal. 1:7,12)- the sacrifices whereof only the priests could eat. This would have been radical thinking to a community used to priests and men delegated to take charge of others' religious affairs. Hebrew 3:13 gets at this idea when we read that *we* are to exhort one another not to turn away, situated as we are on the brink of the promised land, just as Moses exhorted Israel. As mentioned earlier, the Corinthians had turned the breaking of bread meeting into a religious gathering similar in style and format to the religious feasts of the surrounding cults. Vine comments that “The Greeks and Romans placed images of the gods reclining on couches, with tables and food beside them, as if really partakers of the things offered in sacrifice. In Mal. 1:7, the altar of burnt-offering is called “the table of the Lord”. The "altar" of :18 is the Lord's table. The idol altars were likewise their table.

The "table of the Lord" was Old Testament language for the altar (Ez. 41:22). By eating from it we are partaking of the altar, the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 9:13; 10:18; Heb. 13:10). If we don't partake of it, we declare ourselves to have no part in Him. Yet the very fact we partake of it, is a statement that we have pledged ourselves to separation from this present world; for it is not possible to eat at the Lord's table, and also that of this world (1 Cor. 10:21). The Passover, as the prototype breaking of bread, featured bitter herbs to remind Israel of their bitter experience in Egypt (Ex. 1:14). The breaking of bread should likewise focus our

attention on the fact that return to the world is a return to bondage and bitterness, not freedom.

10:22 *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?*- The Corinthians were told that they would “provoke the Lord to jealousy” by breaking bread with the Lord Jesus and yet also with idols. This is surely an allusion to the “trial of jealousy” (Num. 5:24). A curse was recited and then the believer drank a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drank to their condemnation. Paul’s allusion suggests that each time we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives over the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup. It wasn't possible to eat the Lord's food and that of idols. This was actually counted as total idol worship in God's eyes; thus the prophets likewise consistently taught the need for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, and nothing else. In essence, we have the same temptation; to serve God and mammon, to have a little of both, to be passive Christians; to flunk the challenge of the logic of devotion. As the reality of Christ's crucifixion made Joseph and Nicodemus 'come out' in open, 100% commitment, come on them what may, so serious contemplation of the Saviour's devotion ought to have a like effect on us. It has been well observed: “that air of finality with which Jesus always spoke [meant that] everything he said and did constituted a challenge to men to reach a decisive conclusion”.

*Are we stronger than he?*- Chapter 1 of this letter opened by speaking about the weak and the strong, arguing that God's weakness is stronger than man's strength. What seems humanly smart and clever is actually a vain bid to be stronger than God. To consider that we can have a little of both, to serve two masters, is serious indeed.

10:23 *All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things edify*- I have repeatedly pointed out that Paul's condemnation of any eating of idol food in an idol temple is in apparent contrast to the way that in 8:10 he appears to accept that some did this whilst genuinely not believing in the idols. Paul there urged them not do so because it could lead others into sin. But here in chapter 10 he argues that by eating that idol food, one is declaring common union with them, and therefore any claim to also communion with the Lord Jesus is voided. Because He is rightfully jealous and demands out total devotion. And yet here again in 10:23 he nuances the argument by saying that all things are lawful- yes, they could eat in the idol's temple- but the essential problem with this was that it would not build others up (“edify”) and was therefore “not expedient”. It was therefore prohibited because of the colossal importance of the principle of edifying others and never making them stumble. The idea of 'expediency' is used by Paul with the idea of what is profitable for others; he will soon use the same word in :33 about his concern for their “profit”. His concern was ever what was expedient or profitable for them (2 Cor. 8:10).

“Edify” is literally 'to build up'. This is a major concern with Paul, and it is a common NT theme. The parable of the wise man building *his* house upon the rock of Christ and His word may, at first blush, appear to mean that we build our personal faith on Him (Mt. 7:24). But the Greek word for 'build', which in 1 Cor. 10 is translated “edify”, is usually used about building up others, and is never used about building up ourselves (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:17; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:11). And it is God and His Son who builds up the church (Mt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Pet. 2:5). He works through the efforts of the body of Christ to build itself up (Eph. 4:16); He operates through our building efforts, and the building up of others is done through the gift of the Spirit (Eph. 4:12)- which the Corinthians

refused to use seeing they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). Indeed in 1 Cor. 14:3,4,12 Paul will criticize the Corinthians individually for building themselves up but not thinking about building up others. Edifying or building up others is therefore a strong theme; so major that it dominates Paul's thinking about all the various questions he has to answer throughout the Corinthian correspondence. And it likewise should be our guiding principle. An addiction to having theoretical, propositional truth can lead us to ignore this; we may be right and others wrong, but the question is how can we build them up. And such building up of others is in fact building our own spiritual house. This again has been Paul's theme; that he wants the Corinthians in the Kingdom because they are part and parcel of his own eternal destiny.

10:24 *Let no one seek his own, but his neighbour's good-* In the context of what Paul has been saying (see notes above), the way to salvation involves far more than focusing upon our personal salvation. We get there, as the Lord did, through our focus upon saving others. What this means in practice is that we should be concerned, *truly* concerned, for the spiritual growth of our brethren. This isn't equivalent to a spirit of nosy observation of others' weaknesses. In spiritual terms, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Such a spirit is rare indeed ("all seek their own...", Phil. 2:21); and in 1 Cor. 13:5 Paul will say that not seeking our own (but by implication, that of others) is the essence of love. seeking first the Kingdom (Mt. 6:33) therefore involves seeking it for others as well as ourselves. A few verses later in 10:33, Paul clarifies that this is indeed his sense- he seeks not his own profit, but rather the salvation of others. Truly he could later write to the Corinthians: "I seek not yours (i.e. your money), but you (i.e. your salvation)" (2 Cor. 12:14).

10:25 *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience-* The left over meat from the idol sacrifices was sold in the meat market. Despite their deep immaturity, it would seem some in this very immature church had been caught up in the Jewish obsessions regarding whether the meat they were buying had been offered to idols. It has been commented that such meat was the cheapest meat, and the fact this issue is raised reflects the poverty of some in the church. Some of those very poor members were also those who had been taken in by the Judaist arguments. We have a window here onto the moral confusion there was at Corinth- some using church prostitutes, others not believing the Lord had risen from the dead; and others [and perhaps the categories overlapped in some cases] with an over finely tuned conscience regarding the previous history of the meat they ate. As noted elsewhere, such legalistic attempts at hyper obedience to irrelevant principles can be used to justify the conscience in performing serious acts of immorality in other areas.

10:26 *For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it-* Everything is God's. There is only one God, and so the fact the meat had been previously offered to an idol did not mean that it belonged to an idol, and that eating such meat with that history implied fellowship with the idol. It was eating the meat in the idol's temple as a conscious act of fellowship with the idol which was wrong- hence the Lord Jesus Himself condemns eating meat offered to idols in his letters to the churches in Rev. 2:14,15,20-25. Note that in each of those cases, He links such eating with sexual immorality. Eating with the idol and then sleeping with the cult prostitutes was pure paganism, and typical of Corinthian religiosity. And it had entered the church at Corinth.

10:27 *If one of them that do not believe invites you to a feast and you are inclined to go-* "To a feast" is an insertion; the invitation could likely have been to a meal at home.

*Whatever is set before you eat-* This echoes the Lord's words: "Eat whatever is set before you" (Lk. 10:8 RSV). It could be that there is no semantic connection between the two passages; so perhaps this is purely an unconscious allusion to the Lord whose words were ever in Paul's mind. Or it could be that Paul saw accepting an invitation by an unbeliever as an opportunity to preach, to do missionary work just as valuable as that done by the apostles who were sent forth to preach. In this case, Paul's point was: 'You're all preachers, just like those seventy specially commissioned preachers, and in your everyday contact with the world, you too have a special commission to preach as they did'.

*Asking no question for conscience sake-* See on :25.

1 Cor. 10:25-27 and Rom. 14 give the impression that Paul either ignored or severely modified the prohibitions agreed upon in Acts 15, especially in relation to eating food offered to idols and blood (unless the Acts 15 decrees were only relevant to "Antioch, Syria and Cilicia"). Perhaps with later reflection he realized he had compromised too far; or, more likely, he re-interpreted the decrees and sought to keep the spirit of them, which was that there should be unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. We too may make an agreement and then realize we were mistaken, and it is humility rather than fickleness which should motivate us to act otherwise. Too many are trapped by pride in previously agreed to positions which they later realize were unwise or not Biblical.

10:28 *But if anyone says to you: This has been offered in sacrifice to idols! Do not eat it for the sake of he that tells you, and for conscience sake-* Paul has just explained that the history of the meat is irrelevant. But if someone else at the meal table feels differently, then do not insist on eating and having your conscience. The person who makes the objection is presumably a weaker fellow believer (see on :25). Although as noted on :32, it could also refer to an unbelieving Jew or Gentile whose potential path to the Kingdom would be blocked by a believer insisting that he is doing nothing wrong.

10:29 *Conscience, I say, not your own, but the other's. One may ask: Why is my liberty judged by another's conscience?-* "But it's OK in my conscience" is not therefore an appropriate argument for someone committed to building up their weaker brother. The freedom or liberty in view is that provided by the Spirit- "for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). The Corinthians lacked the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:1), hence they laboured under the bondage of legalism and guilt by association, worrying the prehistory of the meat they ate might make them unclean. It was the Judaists who specifically tried to take believers away from the liberty they had in Christ (Gal. 2:4). Gal. 5:13 contrasts our liberty with the need to "by love serve one another". And so Paul now goes on to argue that our freedom is overridden by the need to not make our weak, unspiritual brother to stumble.

10:30 *If I eat my food with thankfulness, why is evil spoken of me, for that for which I give thanks?-* This is not Paul stating his personal view or complaint, but a continuation of his answer to the objections he could guess would be raised against his teaching about respecting another's conscience more than our own in these matters. He imagined that it could be objected that if thanks were given to the one true God for the food (reflecting the practice of

blessing food before eating it), then there ought to be no objection to eating any meat. That argument was true. But the utterly paramount issue is not to make our brother stumble.

10:31 *The principle is that whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do or do not- do all to the glory of God-* The glory of God is parallel with not making another to stumble from the path to the Kingdom of God (:32). For Paul, "the glory of God" was to be ultimately achieved in human salvation; he so often uses the term "glory" with reference to our final salvation at the last day. It can be that legalistic obedience and insistence upon our rightness of interpretation is not for God's glory, but our own. This is the tendency of legalistic Christianity and those who insist that finding Biblical truth about a matter is paramount *per se*. Greater than anything in these matters is love, the love that seeks not to cause a weaker person to stumble.

10:32 *Give no occasions of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Gentiles, or to the church of God-* see on :31. Making another stumble is not doing all to the glory of God, and as explained in these notes, is the paramount, deciding principle that must forge all our approaches. But even further, we can make unbelievers stumble; that is the context of :27 speaking of behaviour before an unbeliever. Perhaps the objector of :28 is also to be read as an unbelieving Jew or Gentile. We must consider the same principle of making another stumble- even with reference to the world. Unbelievers have the potential to come to faith and salvation in Christ, but we can place a barrier in that path by insisting on our own rightness. That is indeed true to observation; it is perceived hypocrisy which turns so many away from the Christ of the Christians.

10:33- see on 1 Cor. 4:16.

*Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but that of the many, that they may be saved-* The "profit" of another was their salvation; and therefore we have to consider all our actions and positions from the viewpoint of what would be best for their salvation. Several times Paul explains his positions as being because it was "expedient" or "profitable" [s.w.] for others, and always he has in view what will help them to salvation. His views on marriage and all these questions about how to act in various situations were resolved according to what would be "profitable" for their salvation (1 Cor. 6:12; 7:35; 10:23; 2 Cor. 8:10). And he will soon teach that the Spirit is given to each of us in order to "profit" both ourselves and others towards salvation (1 Cor. 12:7). The Corinthians denied the movement of the Spirit (3:1), and so they were left to struggle with all their questions on a case by case basis with no guiding principle to help them resolve them. That principle clearly enough is: What is helpful to their and thereby my salvation, to God's glory? The focus is not to be upon our personal profit or salvation, but upon that of others. And that was what motivated the Lord to the great achievement of the cross. In the same way as the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save, so Paul appropriates the same two Greek words regarding *his* seeking and saving of others (Lk. 19:10; 1 Cor. 10:33). Like Paul, the Lord Jesus didn't please Himself by being selfishly concerned with His own salvation, but pleased his neighbours for their good unto their eternal edification (Rom. 15:2,3). Here in 1 Cor. 10:33; 11:1 he bids us follow his example in that he lived a life dominated by seeking to save others- both in and out of the ecclesia [see context]. This may explain why there is little direct encouragement in Paul's letters to preach; not only was his pattern axiomatically an

imperative to live a life devoted to witness, but the following of Christ as he did inevitably issued in a life of witness.



## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Be imitators of me, even as I am of Christ*- This verse is best linked to the preceding chapter 10, where Paul urges the Corinthians to put the spiritual profit of others before their own personal conscience on some issues. Paul's relationship with and perception of the Lord Jesus is held up by the Spirit as our example. He himself asks us to copy (Gk. *mimic*) the way in which he followed the Lord Jesus (this is what 1 Cor. 11:1 implies in the Greek). His mind was increasingly *saturated* with the Gospels, and with the surpassing excellency and supremacy of the *Lordship* of the risen Jesus.

The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking. Not only does he do it himself, but he encourages others to do it. He doesn't use the word 'modelling'; he uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul:

"Ye became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... ye know how ye ought to *follow* us...an ensample unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication is that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

"Be ye *followers* of me" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1)

"Whose faith *follow* (i.e. that of your ecclesial elders)" (Heb. 13:7)

Be "*followers* of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises", e.g. Abraham (Heb. 6:12)

"Ye, brethren, became *followers* of the churches... in Judea" (1 Thess. 2:14).

So Paul encourages them to mimic him, to mimic Abraham, to mimic the persecuted ecclesias in Judea, to mimic the faithful elders in the Jerusalem ecclesia (e.g. Peter), *so that* they would be better mimickers of the Father and Son. But the idea of mimicking involves a child-likeness, an intellectual humility, a truly open mind. Why Paul used that word rather than a word which simply meant 'to copy' or 'to follow' was perhaps because he wanted to stress that this kind of conscious modelling of your life on someone else involved a real need for openness of mind to the word, resulting in an unfeigned, uncontrived, child-like mimicking. Paul is really encouraging his readers to get involved in this 'mimicking' of faithful examples, of absorbing their spirit into our own by careful, sustained meditation. Will we rise up to it? Or are we still on the level of whizzing through our Bible reading in 10 minutes / day, giving little thought to what we've read throughout the next 24 hours?

11:2 *Now I praise you who remember me in all things*- This reflects the wide range in the church at Corinth. There were those who were obedient to the commands and teaching Paul gave, and at the other extreme, there were those who worked as and made use of church prostitutes. The way the more spiritual remained within such an apostate community is a challenge to us all, not least to those who insist on leaving any community which has the slightest apostasy.

*And hold fast the traditions, as I delivered them to you*- This suggests there was a specific body of practical teachings which Paul gave to his converts; and he frames his language in terms of Moses giving the law to Israel. It was expected that the disciples of rabbis memorized their teaching, and there's no reason to doubt that the Lord's disciples, both those who immediately heard Him and those who subsequently became disciples of their invisible Heavenly rabbi, would likewise have memorized the gospel records of His words. This would

account for the way they are arranged [Mark especially] as series of 'pericopes', small bite-sized sections which lend themselves to memorization. This would explain how Paul can use technical terms for handing on a tradition (*paradidomi*, 1 Cor. 11:2,23) and receiving it (*paralambano*, 1 Cor. 15:1,3; Gal. 1:19; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6); and of faithfully retaining the tradition (*katecho*, 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2; *krateo*, 2 Thess. 2:15); matched perhaps by John's insistence in his letters that the converts retain that teaching which they received "from the beginning".

11:3 *But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God-* The head of "every man is Christ" only in the sense that "every [believing] man" has this relationship with Him. "Every man" to God is therefore those in Christ. "All" shall be made alive at the Lord's return- i.e. all "that are Christ's" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). "All things" is a title of the church in Ephesians and Colossians, and "any man" evidently means 'any believer' in 1 Cor. 8:10. "All men... every man" means 'all that believed' in Acts 2:44,45. So what Paul now writes is specifically about relationships between believers, and specifically in response to the Corinthians' question which we do not have access to. "The head of Christ is God" is a fair nail in the coffin of trinitarianism.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head-* This may well be a criticism of the way that under the influence of Judaism [which we have noted earlier was a problem in Corinth], some of the brothers were covering their heads to pray. The head of the man was Christ (:3), and by acting as if He needed covering for sin and shame before God, they were dishonouring Him. Paul repeatedly uses the same word to argue that in Christ, we are not ashamed [s.w. 'dishonoured'] before God (Rom. 5:5; 9:33; 10:11 etc.). Those who had fallen under the influence of Judaism and its practices had failed to perceive this. And thus they were shaming their Lord, Jesus.

11:5- see on 1 Cor. 6:4.

*But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonours her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven-* I suggest there are a series of allusions to the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5; and the idea of uncovering a woman's head connects with how the woman suspected of infidelity had to have her head uncovered (Num. 5:18). A woman's hair was seen as her glory, and a covered head was associated with shame. It could be argued that the woman was being treated as innocent until proven guilty, and even invited to openly display her glory. The uncovering of the woman's head was a form of shaming (as in 1 Cor. 11:5,6). She had to be shamed whether or not she was guilty; and this led the man to a lose-lose scenario. If she was innocent, then he had needlessly shamed her, she would likely not love him in future, and he had to bear the sin of doing that (:31). If she were guilty, then he had to support a barren wife for the rest of her life, seeing the curses about killing or divorcing her were to be blotted out.

There are several such allusions to Numbers 5 in 1 Corinthians 11. The idea there of drinking unto condemnation or blessing / justification simply has to be understood in the Numbers 5 context. And it is no accident that the language of a woman having an uncovered head also occurs. What's the connection and the bigger picture? I suggest that what was happening in Corinth was that members who had sinned were being publically shamed before the congregation by e.g. the sinful sisters being made to sit in the meeting with uncovered heads. In Middle Eastern societies today, forcing a woman to uncover her head is a source of shame.

Paul is saying that paradoxically, such misbehaviour in the Corinth ecclesia was actually 'shaming' those demanding it; "I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:22; 15:34). The allusions to Numbers 5 would therefore be saying: 'You are publicly shaming some sisters by making them remove their veils / head coverings in your meetings; and by the way in which you eat the Lord's supper, you are also purposefully shaming some (:22). Instead, *you* should be the ones in shame for your behaviour. By doing so, even if indeed those sisters have sinned, you are acting like the husband who uses the Numbers 5 legislation. Instead, whenever you drink the cup, examine *yourselves* and not others, and remember that you are the one who is being tested by the Lord's cup- either to your condemnation or justification'. Paul will soon go on to point out that the Corinthians were wrongfully shaming some within the church at the breaking of bread meetings (:22 "shame" is the same Greek word translated "dishonour" here in :4,5).

Shaved female heads were associated with prostitution in first century Corinth. To shame a woman by making her remove her head covering was effectively labelling her as a prostitute. Paul is against all such shaming behaviour; it is a tendency of religions to shame others, and Paul is deeply critical of it. The irony of course was that according to our notes on chapters 6 and 7, there were church prostitutes operating within the Corinthian church. And yet any sister who got on the wrong side of the leadership was shamed as being a common street whore by demanding she wear her hair uncovered. It ought to be clear enough that these verses speak to a very specific situation within Corinth according to the culture of that time and place; they can not legitimately be used to require women to wear head coverings at all Christian meetings in the world today.

11:6 *For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled-* See on :4. The male eldership were seeking to shame some women, just as they shamed others by not providing food for them at their memorial feasts (:22). Paul is saying that to make a woman take her veil off is the same as making her shave her head. Instead of shaming her, they should allow her to be veiled as she dearly wished to be in that society.

11:7 *For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man-* When we read that man is the "image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7), it seems to me that Paul is stating something which is only potentially true, rather than stating a global principle which is true for all males from birth until death- for he elsewhere says that we must be transformed *into* the image of God (2 Cor. 3:18), speaking of a progressive renewal in knowledge until we come to the image of our creator (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18). This kind of approach is common in Paul- he speaks of a state of being which we should rise up to, as if we already have it. He's surely inspiring us to rise up to our potential.

But another approach is suggested by observing that the whole arguments in 11:7-15 appear very contradictory. Woman was created out of the man, so she is to have her head covered (:8); but "in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (:11). Whether or not a woman should pray with uncovered head is considered to be something they should judge (:13). Long hair should be exposed and gloried in as a woman's covering (:14,15); whereas :10 says she should cover her hair to show she is under her husband's authority. And the more one re-reads this section, the more apparent contradictions appear. An answer could be to remember that there are no quotation marks in the original

text; and that Paul is quoting or alluding to the questions and arguments of the Corinthians. I suggest that he is quoting here from their arguments, which they had been using to justifying shaming some women by making them pray with uncovered heads. I suggest that :7-11 are all quotation from the arguments used by the Corinthians; and then :12 Paul answers all this by saying that "in the Lord" there is no such distinction. He then concludes by saying that contrary to what some wanted to imply, there was no universally agreed practice regarding head coverings in the churches (:16). Those who insist upon a head covering policy as a global truth are totally ignoring Paul's statement. The whole question depends upon local customs and attitudes to women, and whatever they are, in whatever time or place, the principle of :11,12 must be accepted: "In our life in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman was made from man, in the same way man is born of woman; and it is God who brings everything into existence". On this foundation, we are to "judge for ourselves" on these matters (:13), remembering that there is no universal principle to be enforced about them (:16).

11:8 *For the man is not of the woman, but woman of the man-* See on :7. I suggest this is part of the Corinthians' argument which Paul is quoting. It seems they as Gentiles had fallen under the influence of Judaist arguments.

11:9 *For neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man-* This was very much the language of Judaism- that women were created to serve men. It could be that Paul is here quoting it and then goes on to deconstruct it in the section beginning at :11.

11:10- see on Acts 18:18.

*For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels-* If this continues the quotation from the Corinthians' argument, then they would be arguing that because of how the Angels ordained things at the creation, the women should wear head coverings to show they were under their husband's authority. This was a distinctly Jewish attitude; and the reference to "Angels" is again Jewish, seeing Jewish thought was quite obsessed with Angels.

But it could be that at church meetings, indeed the Angel are literally present, and this command was to help those present be aware of this. Great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

11:11 *Nevertheless, in the Lord, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman-* This reference to how things should be in Christ, presumably in distinction and contrast to the ideas Paul has just quoted in :7-10. Paul is seeking to balance their Judaist-interpretation of the Genesis record by arguing that male and female are equal before God and interdependent.

11:12 *For as the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God-* Paul is here balancing their argument that because woman was made out of man, therefore she must be subservient and wear a head covering to symbolize it. He reminds them

that in fact man is taken out of woman at birth. And it is not so that males are superior to females simply because Eve was made out of Adam's bone. For it is God who is the creative source of all things, not man; and His creative power is responsible for not just humans but literally "everything".

11:13 *Judge for yourselves. Is it appropriate that a woman pray to God unveiled?*- The Corinthians had asked for Paul's judgment on this matter. Having explained some principles, Paul now throws the judgment back over to them. But he will argue in :14,15 that the whole issue of whether a woman should be covered or not is misplaced because God has given women a natural head-covering, in their hair. That covering should not be covered by human covering laws, so :15 implies. And this will lead up to the clear statement in :16 that this should not be the matter of contention which it was at Corinth, and there is no inspired standard for all the brotherhood to follow. As Paul puts it here in :13, we must "judge for yourselves" given the local culture and customs we find ourselves in.

11:14- see on Jn. 16:2.

*Does not nature itself teach you, that if a man has long hair it is a dishonour to him?*- This was true within the cultural context of Corinth. Nature does not teach that to all people in all cultures at all times. And "long hair" only applies to some people. Paul obviously isn't speaking about Africans whose hair cannot easily be described as "long". So he is obviously writing in a very limited context- to those at Corinth.

11:15 *But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her. For her hair is given her for a covering-* As noted on :14, this too is culturally limited to a specific time and place. Long hair is no longer seen as beautiful of itself, and again, "long hair" here surely doesn't refer to African Christians. The whole argument is limited to Corinth and the culture of that day. But Paul is making this observation in order to demonstrate that the whole argument about female head-coverings is misplaced. And that would be typical of both the Lord and Paul- to answer an argument or question by stating a mega principle which contextualizes the specific questions.

11:16 *But if anyone seems to be contentious, let them know we have no such custom, neither do the churches of God-* As noted on the previous verses, Paul is saying that contrary to what some contentious members wanted to imply, there was no universally agreed custom in the churches about head-coverings. It was a matter of each judging for themselves within their cultural contexts, but bearing in mind the principles of :11,12 (see on :13). It is typical of many contentious individuals to this day that they will argue and assume that their particular fetish of interpretation must be universally accepted in all Christian churches.

11:17- see on 1 Cor. 7:17

*But in giving you this instruction, I do not praise you- for you come together not for the better but for the worse-* The "instruction" here concerning how the breaking of bread meeting should be run was not an answer to questions- but an instruction. Their behaviour there was so bad that it would be better for them not to do it. For it was for their "worse" rather than their spiritual betterment.

11:18 *For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you-* Corinth ecclesia had cases of gross immorality, even incest; some got drunk at the memorial meeting, used church prostitutes and some even denied Christ's resurrection. There can be no question that such belief and practice was not ultimately tolerated either by Paul or God. Yet notice the first thing which the Spirit 'takes up' with Corinth. It wasn't any of these more obvious things. It was the fact there was a spirit of factionism within the ecclesia- "first of all" this was the issue Paul tackled. Just as he has in chapter 10 argued that the principle of building each other up is far more important than whether or not we personally consider idols and pagan gods to have real existence. This is also the way the epistles conclude (2 Cor. 13:11); Paul doesn't tell them 'Now don't forget what I said about adultery and having concord with Belial'. Instead: "Finally, brethren... be of one mind, live in peace".

*And I partly believe it-* This may not mean that Paul was undecided as to whether it is true or not. For in chapter 1 he has directly accused them of being a divided church. I suggest the sense is rather: 'I believe / know that this is partly true'. Some in the church were in line with the spirit of Paul's teaching (:2). But others weren't. It was this 'part' who were answerable for the divisions.

11:19 *For there must also be factions among you, that they that are approved may be revealed among you-* The allusion is to Mt. 18:7: "For it is necessary that the offences occur, but woe to that man through whom the offence comes!". Causing division within the body is therefore a sin which may exclude us from the Kingdom. It is so obviously true to observed experience that factionism within the church causes 'offences' or spiritual stumbling. It is also true that the "approved" are "revealed" by their correct response to the factionism. How we respond to church division is one of the litmus tests that reveal our spirituality. So many stumble... but it will be no excuse to tell the crucified Lord at the last day that His death and pain for us was rejected by us because of the cranky people in a church we attended. The cross is still there, and His outstretched arms towards us must not be spurned because of an argument here and hypocrisy there. Likewise those who see through those things and will not be swayed from their focus on the Lord who loved them, and who will not spurn His Spirit because others do, are thereby declared "approved" even now. For the essence of judgment day is worked out today. "Approved" translates a word meaning 'tried'; it is in James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is *tried* he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him". The experience of division in the church is the trial through which we demonstrate our acceptance before the Lord, and even have a foretaste of the Lord's acceptance at the last day.

Although sects and divisions should not be within the one body of Christ, in another sense there must be such sectarianism that they which are approved may be "made manifest" by their response to it- in anticipation of how we will all be "made manifest" (s.w.) at the judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). In this we see the Divine ecology; nothing is wasted. There must not be divisions; but even when they do occur, they are used by God in order to manifest the righteous and the principles of true spirituality. Thus trial can easily arise from within our ecclesial experience.

11:20 *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat-* Verse 21 goes on to reason that *the Lord's* supper has become *their own* supper. Our breaking of bread is *far far more* than *just* religious ritual, although on one level it is that. But we must rise well above

this. Israel kept the Passover (cp. the breaking of bread), and yet to God they never *really* kept it. The Corinthians took the cup of the Lord and that of the idols; they broke bread with both (1 Cor. 10:21). But they were told they *could not* do this. They took the cup of the Lord; but not in the Lord's eyes. They turned *His* supper into their *own* supper. They did it, but for themselves. And so in spiritual terms, they didn't do it (1 Cor. 11:20,21). Just as the "*Lord's* passover" became by the time of the NT "*the feast of the Jews*". They turned His Passover into their own. Likewise they turned the house *of God* into their *own* house (Mt. 23:38); and the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now "*their law*" (Jn. 15:25). And so we must just accept the real possibility that we can break bread on the surface, but not break bread. We've probably all done this. Don't let it become the norm. Likewise Israel had to be asked the rhetorical question: "*Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?*" (Am. 5:25). Because they *also* worshipped Molech, their keeping of the feasts wasn't accepted. So I can ask again: Do you *really* break bread? Israel kept their Passovers throughout the wilderness years, one would assume- but they never remembered the day that God brought them out of Egypt (Ps. 78:42)- although notice how although Israel didn't remember God, yet He remembered them in His grace (Ps. 106:7, 45).

11:21 *For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk-* "His own meal" meant it was no longer *the Lord's* meal- see on :20. The idea of a ritual meal, accompanied by abuse of alcohol and religious prostitutes, was typical of Corinthian religiosity. Clearly the Christian church there had turned the communion service into something similar. And worse still, the whole ceremony became a place to flaunt wealth. And yet the meal was supposed to represent the supreme unity enabled by the Lord's death, who on the cross became poor for our sakes.

11:22 *What, have you not houses to eat and to drink in?*- Paul has just been noting that some of them are drunk at the breaking of bread service because they turned the service into a feast similar to those of the idol cults. Paul is apparently telling them to go to their own homes and carry on like this. My response would have been to criticize them for getting drunk. But Paul's primary concern is for the church as a whole, and the damage done to other believers. And so he tells them to do this, if they must, in their own homes. Another possibility is that 'their houses' refer to the houses of the idols whose cults they were clearly still associated with. He would then be telling them to not serve two masters, and seeing they attempted to take the Lord's cup as well as that of idols (10:21) they were unable therefore to properly take the Lord's cup at all (11:20). He may therefore be telling them to go and carouse in the houses of their idols rather than in the Christian church.

Yet another possibility arises from the fact that the church was split into various house groups (listed in chapter 1); but they 'came together' at combined breaking of bread meetings. This wasn't the time to indulge in a huge party, with all the emphasis upon eating and drinking your own food and wine, rather than focusing upon that which God had provided in Jesus. Hence he comments: "*Have you not houses to eat and to drink in?*" (1 Cor. 11:22). Given almost every reference to 'house' in Corinthians is to a house church or to the spiritual house of God, it would seem Paul's idea is: 'It's OK to eat and drink and have a collective meal etc. in your house church meetings. But don't do that when you all meet together for the breaking of bread- it's getting divisive, because of the social differences between the house groups which are made apparent by the choice of food and drink'. They were to 'discern the body of the Lord Jesus' at those gatherings- i.e. recognize that all of them gathered there, the various house churches of Corinth, were in fact the collective body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29). If

anyone was hungry and therefore in need of material support, the combined breaking of bread meeting wasn't the place to raise the issue- he should "eat at home", i.e. take food and support from his local house church (1 Cor. 11:34). That's surely a more reasonable reading, for at face value it would seem the hungry brother lacking food is being heartlessly told 'Well go home and eat!'

*Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who do not have? What shall I say to you?* - The reference to shaming connects to the allusions to the trial of jealousy commented on under :5. To not offend others, to seek to save them, means that we will not despise them. 1 Cor. 11:22 accuses some brethren of despising others [s.w. Mt. 18:10 about despising the little ones] in the ecclesia by "shaming" them. If we perceive the value of persons, the meaning of others personhood, we will not shame them in our words, gestures, body language or actions. No "shameful speaking" should proceed out of our mouths (Col. 3:8 RV). Of course, the true believer in Christ cannot be ashamed- for whilst some stumble on Christ, the rock of offence, the believer in Him will not be shamed (Rom. 9:33; 10:11- s.w. 1 Cor. 11:22). For his or her sure hope of the Kingdom "maketh not [to be] ashamed" (Rom. 5:5). Again, if our hope of the Kingdom is real to us, nobody will make us ashamed, will in reality make us feel despised, or make us stumble. The reality ahead will transfix us so that all human unkindness toward us gains no permanent lodgment in our hearts. We do well to review our way of talking and acting to ensure we do not shame others.

*Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise you!*- This connects to how he praised some of them in :2. But this group who behaved in this way were not being praised.

11:23- see on 1 Cor. 11:2.

*For I received of the Lord that which I in turn delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread-* The order of service which the Lord had given Paul required just a cup of wine and loaf of bread. Their style of feasting was not at all His intention. Note how Paul associates the themes of betrayal and the breaking of bread- and John quotes the prophecy that "He who feeds on bread with me has raised his heel against me" in the context of Judas breaking bread with Jesus. "Is it I?" must be a dominant part of the breaking of bread experience. The hint was clearly enough that there was one present at the original last supper who had betrayed the Lord; and Paul saw those who were also involved with the idol cults as being represented by Judas the betrayer.

11:24- see on Jn. 6:51.

*And when he had given thanks-* Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 after taking the bread and blessing it, and then distributing to the disciples and they to the crowds (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24). The connection surely show that the breaking of bread was not based upon any closed table ideology, but was radically open.

*He broke it, and said: This is my body, which is for you. This do in remembrance of me-* Some manuscripts add "which is *broken* for you". 'Broken' can imply divided and shared out. The gruesome record of the Levite cutting up his wife's body and sending parts of the body throughout all Israel has much to teach us of the power of the memorial service. It was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "take advice and speak [their]



minds" (Jud. 19:30). It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings:

- The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (Jud. 19:1)
- They were 'slain' by permission of a priest
- They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob
- They were "brought forth" to the people just as the Lord was to the crowd (Jud. 19:25)
- "Do what seemeth good unto you" (Jud. 19:24) is very much Pilate language
- A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate.

There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord's 'broken body'- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

Considering how the bread represents the body of Christ leads us to a common query: 'Seeing that "a bone of Him shall not be (and was not) broken", how can we say that we remember the *broken* body of Jesus by *breaking* the bread?'. First of all, it must be understood that 'breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The breaking of a loaf of bread is not necessarily implicit in the phrase (although it can be). However, we must also be aware of a fundamental misconception which one feels is held by many; that the physical blood and body of Christ are *all* that we come to remember. This notion is related to that which feels that there is some mystical power in the physical bread and wine in themselves. Robert Roberts makes the point in *The Blood of Christ* that "it is not the blood as literal blood that is precious or efficacious". And the same might be said about the Lord's literal body. His body and blood were no different to those of any other man.

The fact that we are asked to symbolize His broken body, when it is stated that His literal body was *not* broken, is proof enough that Christ's body is to be understood as something more than His literal flesh and blood. Indeed, 1 Cor. 10:16,17 seems to suggest that the "body of Christ" in which we partake through the bread is a symbol of the whole body of believers, just as much as His actual body which enabled this salvation. Likewise the Passover was not intended to commemorate the red liquid which flowed from the first Passover lambs, but to remember the salvation which God had achieved for *all Israel* on account of that. Christ bore our sins "in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)- and it was more in His mind and mental awareness that this was true, rather than our sins being in (e.g.) His arms and legs. Other uses of "body" which require reference to our whole mind and being, rather than our literal body, include Mt. 5:29,30; 6:22-25; Jn. 2:21; Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; 9:23. Luke's record of the Last Supper shows how the Lord spoke of His body and blood as parallel with His whole sacrifice: "This is my body... this do in remembrance of *me* (His whole way of life- not just His physical body). This cup is the new testament in my blood, which *is* shed for you" (Lk. 22:19,20). Col. 1:20 likewise parallels "the blood of the cross" with "him" (the man Jesus). Rom. 7:4 puts "the body of Christ" for the death of that body; He was, in His very person, His death. The cross was a living out of a spirit of self-giving which *was* Him. The cup of wine represents the promises ("testament") of salvation which have been confirmed by Christ's blood. Note how Jesus quietly spoke of "my body which *is* (being) given for you... my blood which *is* shed for you". The pouring out of His life/blood was something ongoing, which was occurring even as He spoke those words. The cross was a summation of a lifetime of outpouring and breaking of His innermost being, or "body". It is this that we remember at

the breaking of bread. The Passover was comprised of the lamb plus bread. The breaking of bread, the Passover for Christians, is wine and bread. The lamb was thus replaced in the thought of Jesus by His blood / wine. He perceived that His blood was Him, in that sense.

It is also worth reflecting how the Hebrew writer saw the torn veil as a symbol of the Lord's flesh. It is just possible that the physical tearing of the Lord's flesh at His death through the nails represented the tearing of His flesh nature, symbolized in the physical tearing of the veil. But the tearing of the veil was something essential and far reaching- not a surface rip. The Lord's death is surely to be understood as a tearing apart of the flesh nature and tendencies which He bore; and it is this we remember in breaking the bread which represents His flesh. Note that to break the bread in a place was an idiom for breaking the life there (Ez. 4:16; 5:16; 14:13; Lev. 26:26). This was what the Lord asks us to remember- not the physical breaking of His body, but the breaking of His life for us and sharing it with us (Is. 58:7).

11:25 *In the same manner also the cup, after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood-* The breaking of bread brings us before the cross, which is in a sense our judgment seat. There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). The very structure of the Hebrew language reflects this. Thus the Hebrew *baruch* means both 'blessed' and 'cursed'; *kedoshim* means both 'Sodomites' and 'saints'. Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Indeed, the Lord's supper is a place to which the rejected are invited (Zeph. 1:7,8; Rev. 19:7), or the redeemed (Rev. 3:20). Like the cup of wine, being invited to the Lord's supper is a double symbol. And there is no escape by simply not breaking bread. The peace offering was one of the many antecedents of the memorial meeting. Once the offerer had dedicated himself to making it, he was condemned if he didn't then do it, and yet also condemned if he ate it unclean (Lev. 7:18,20). So a man *had* to either cleanse himself, or be condemned. There was no get out, no third road. The man who ate the holy things in a state of uncleanness had to die; his eating would load him with the condemnation of his sins (Lev. 22:3,16 AV mg.). This is surely the source for our possibility of "eating... condemnation" to ourselves by partaking of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner. And so it is with us as we face the emblems. We must do it, or we deny our covenant relationship. And yet if we do it in our uncleanness, we also deny that relationship.

*This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me-* This seems carefully worded so as to free us from any idea that we must break bread at a certain commanded frequency. Or perhaps the import was more practical- in that the cup was being used as means for getting drunk. The idea would be: 'Every time you lift that cup to your mouth and drink, it is to be in remembrance of the Lord- and not in the name of something else, and just as a path towards intoxication'.

11:26 *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death-* 1 Cor. 11:26 AVmg. makes the act of breaking bread a command, an imperative to action: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord's death, till he come". If we are going to eat the emblems, it is axiomatic that we will commit ourselves to shewing forth His death to the world, like Paul placarding forth Christ crucified in our lives (Gal. 3:1 Gk.).

The Passover likewise had been a 'shewing' to one's family "that which the Lord did unto me" (Ex. 13:8), the redemption we have experienced. The description of the memorial service as being a 'proclamation' of the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26 RV) is an allusion to the second of the four cups taken at the Jewish Passover: "the cup of proclamation". This was drunk after the reading of Psalms 113 and 114, which proclaimed Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Therefore our breaking bread is our proclamation that we really believe that we have been saved out of this world, and are on the wilderness path to the Kingdom. God forbid, really, that our breaking bread should come down to mere ritual and habit. It is a very personal proclamation of our own salvation- as well as that of the whole body of believers.

*Until he comes-* This is surely an allusion, but not a quotation, to the Lord's comment that He would not take the cup again *until* He returns (Mk. 14:25). The most evident link between the breaking of bread and the judgment / second coming is in the fact we are to do it "until he come". The Jews expected Messiah to come at Passover, and the Lord seems to have plugged into that fact. 'Until he come' was an allusion by Paul to the contemporary Passover prayer for the coming of Messiah at the Passover meal: "May the Lord come and this world pass away. Amen. Hosanna to the house of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Joachim Jeremias translates the phrase: "'Until (matters have developed to the point at which) he comes', 'until (the goal is reached, that) he comes'". He points out a similar construction in other passages relevant to the second coming (Lk. 21:24; 1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 11:25). Thus each memorial meeting brings us a step closer towards the final coming of Jesus. It would therefore be so appropriate if the Lord did return during a breaking of bread. One day, the foretaste of judgment which we experience then will be, in reality, our final judgment. As we break bread, each time we are 'reminding' the Father as well as ourselves of His Son's work and the need to climax it in sending Him back.

11:27 *Therefore whoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner-* The "unworthy manner" in the context clearly refers to things such as using church prostitutes at the breaking of bread, getting drunk on the wine there as if the whole service was an idol ritual, and in fact not really keeping the Lord's supper because they were also drinking the cup of idols (10:21) and had turned the Lord's supper into their own supper (:20). We come to the Lord's table as sinners; our pangs of conscience are in fact the sign we are there in the right and 'worthy' manner. The Greek for "unworthy" means 'irreverent'; and this is exactly the context. It is drunkenness with the wine, using it as part of an orgy, which is the irreverence in view.

*Shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord-* Noting the earlier allusion to Judas (see on :23), we can rightly assume that again it is Judas whom Paul has in mind. The unworthy are not weak sinners, which is us all, but those who wilfully are betraying the Lord.

11:28 *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup-* We are to eat in a spirit of self examination ["so..."], not of light hearted partying as was happening at Corinth. See on :29 *discern*.

There seems an allusion in this section to Joseph's cup of divination. The Hebrew for "divines" means literally 'to make trial'; their taking of the cup was their trial / judgment. Thus we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves by taking the cup. The word used by the LXX for "divines" in Gen. 44:5 occurs in the NT account of the breaking of bread service: 'everyone should *examine* himself, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup' (1 Cor. 11:28). The Lord examines us, as we examine ourselves. There is a mutuality here- the

spirit of man is truly the candle of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). He searches us through our own self-examination. He knows all things, but there may still be methods that He uses to gather than information. Our hearts are revealed to God through our own self-examination. And is it mere co-incidence that the Hebrew words for "divination" and "snake" are virtually identical [*nahash*]? The snake lifted up on the pole [cp. the crucified Jesus] is the means of trial / divination. Through the cross, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (Lk. 2:35), just as they will be at the last day. Thus the breaking of bread ceremony is a means towards the sort of realistic self-examination which we find so hard to achieve in normal life.

The whole story of Joseph is one of the clearest types of Jesus in the Old Testament. The way His brethren come before His throne and are graciously accepted is one of the most gripping foretastes we have of the final judgment. The rather strange way Joseph behaves towards them was surely to elicit within them a true repentance. He sought to bring them to self-knowledge through His cup. Joseph stresses to the brethren that it is through his cup that he "divines" to find out their sin. He also emphasizes that by stealing the cup they had "done evil" (Gen. 44:4,5). And yet they didn't actually steal the cup. The "evil" which they had done was to sell him into Egypt (Gen. 50:20). They had "stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had "stolen" the cup. This is why he says that "ye" (you plural, not singular, as it would have been if he was referring merely to Benjamin's supposed theft) had stolen it (Gen. 44:15). And the brethren in their consciences understood what Joseph was getting at - for instead of insisting that they hadn't stolen the cup, they admit: "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen. 44:16). Clearly their minds were on their treatment of Joseph, the sin which they had thought would not be found out. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished. The cup was "found" and they realized that God had "found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their "iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph's garment: "This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32).

The cup made them realize their guilt and made them acceptive of the judgment they deserved. And it made them quit their attempts at parading their own righteousness, no matter how valid it was in the immediate context (Gen. 44:8). The cup made them realize their real status, and not just use empty words. Behold the contradiction in Gen. 44:9: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my Lord's bondmen / servants". The Hebrew words translated "servants" and "bondmen" are the same. Their mere formal recognition that they were Joseph's servants was to be translated into reality. Thus they say that Joseph had "found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we *are* my Lord's servants". Describing themselves as His servants had been a mere formalism; now they wanted it in a meaningful reality. And the Lord's cup can do the same to us. The way they were "searched" (Gen. 44:12) from the oldest to the youngest was surely the background for how the guilty men pined away in guilt from the Lord, from the eldest to the youngest. The whole experience would have elicited self-knowledge within them. The same word is found in Zech. 1:12, describing how God Himself would search out the sin of Jerusalem.

Joseph was trying to tell them: 'What you did to the cup, you did to me. That cup is a symbol

of me'. And inevitably the mind flies to how the Lord solemnly took the cup and said that this was Him. Our attitude to those emblems is our attitude to Him. We have perhaps over-reacted against the Roman Catholic view that the wine turns into the very blood of Jesus. It doesn't, of course, but all the same the Lord did say that the wine *is* His blood, the bread *is* His body. Those emblems are effectively Him to us. They are symbols, but not mere symbols. If we take them with indifference, with minds focused on externalities, then this is our essential attitude to Him personally. This is why the memorial meeting ought to have an appropriate intensity about it- for it is a personal meeting with Jesus. "Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face". If it is indeed this, then the cup will be the means of eliciting within us our own realization of sin and subsequently, of our salvation in Jesus.

Joseph's brothers' words are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

11:29 *For he that eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not discern the body of the Lord-* The invitation to *discern* the Lord's body at the memorial meeting uses the same word occurs in v.28: "let a man *examine* himself". It's too bad that the translations mask this connection. We are to examine / discern the Lord's body, and to do the same to ourselves. The two are inextricably related. Meditation upon and analysis of *His* body will lead to *self* examination and discernment. In this lies the answer to the frequent question: 'What should we examine at the breaking of bread? Our own sins, or the facts of the crucifixion / resurrection?'. If we think about the latter, we will inevitably be led to think of the former. In the Corinthian context, the body of Christ is to be understood as the ecclesia. 1 Cor. 12 is full of this figure. The need to discern the Lord's body at the breaking of bread means that we must go beyond reflection upon His physical body. We must recognise / discern His ecclesia too. The immediate context of 1 Cor. 11 is of unbrotherly behaviour at the memorial meeting. If we fail to recognise / appreciate / discern the Lord's physical body, we will fail to recognise His brethren. And if we do this, we have made ourselves guilty of His body and blood, we have crucified Him again. This is why I plead with those who use the breaking of bread as a weapon for division within the Lord's body to think again. The body which we must discern at the breaking of bread evidently has some reference to the ecclesia. We thereby place ourselves in a dangerous position by refusing to share the emblems with others in the body, and disfellowshipping those who do so.

Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 10-12 seems to be specifically in the context of the memorial meeting. The issue he addresses is that of disunity at the Lord's table- different groups were excluding others. It is in this context that he urges believers to "discern the Lord's body" (1

Cor. 11:29)- and the Lord's body he has previously defined as referring to the believers within that one body. For in 1 Cor. 10:17 he stresses that all who have been baptized into the body of God's people "being many are one loaf, and one body". There's only ultimately one loaf, as there's only one Christ. All within that one body are partaking of the same loaf whenever they "break bread", and therefore division between them is not possible in God's sight. "The bread which we break, is it not the *koinonia*, the sharing in fellowship, of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). By breaking bread we show our unity not only with Him personally, but with all others who are in His one body. To refuse to break bread with other believers- which is what was happening in Corinth- is therefore stating that effectively they are outside of the one body. And yet if in fact they *are* within the body of Christ, then it's actually those who are refusing them the emblems who are thereby declaring *themselves* not to be part of Christ.

Our attitude to the cross *and all that is meant by it* is the summation of our spirituality. I normally dislike using alternative textual readings to make a point, but there is an alternative reading of 1 Cor. 11:29 which makes this point so clearly: "He who eats and drinks ['unworthily' isn't in many manuscripts], eats and drinks discernment [judgment] to Himself. Not discerning the Lord's body is the reason many of you are weak and sickly". The Corinthians were not discerning the difference between the Lord's body and a piece of bread, for they were eating the bread as part of a self-indulgent social meal, rather than discerning Him.

The command to *examine* ourselves uses the same word as in 3:13 concerning the way our works will be *tried* with fire by the judgment process of the last day. If members of an ecclesia break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come together unto condemnation. Job knew this when he said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock... for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment.

Judging / examining ourselves is made parallel with discerning the Lord's body: as if discerning His body on the cross inevitably results in self-examination, and vice versa (1 Cor. 11:28,29). We must *discern* the Lord's body, and thereby *examine* ourselves (these are the same words in the Greek text). Yet the Lord's body in the Corinthian context is the ecclesia, the body of Jesus. To discern ourselves is to discern the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29,30 RV). By discerning our brethren for who they are, treating them as brethren, perceiving our own part

in the body of Jesus, our salvation is guaranteed. For this is love, in its most fundamental essence.

If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. This is why the Greek word translated "examine" (1 Cor. 11:29) is also that translated "approve" in 11:19 (and also 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15). By condemning ourselves we in a sense approve ourselves. Our self-examination should result in us realising our unworthiness, seeing ourselves from God's viewpoint. There is therefore a parallel made between our own judgment of ourselves at the memorial meeting, and the final judgment- where we will be condemned, yet saved by grace (James 2:12; 3:1). If we don't attain this level of self-knowledge now, we will be taught it by being condemned at the judgment. This makes the logic of serious, real self-examination so vital; either we do it in earnest, and realise our own condemnation, or if we *don't* do it, we'll be condemned at the judgment. Yet as with so much in our spiritual experience, what is so evidently logical is so hard to translate into reality. The process of judgment will essentially be for our benefit, not the Lord's. *Then* the foolish virgins realise that they didn't have enough oil / spirituality; whilst the wise already knew this (Mt. 25:13). As a foretaste of the day of judgment, we must "examine" ourselves, especially at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). The same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:13 concerning how the process of the judgment seat will be like a fire which *tries* us.

11:30 *For this cause many among you are weak and sickly and not a few sleep-* It was due to an incorrect attitude to the memorial meeting that many at Corinth were struck down "weak and sickly... and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30), presumably referring to the power the apostles had to smite apostate believers with physical discomfort and death. Such was the importance accorded to that meeting by them. This is not the only reference to physical sickness or death being used in the first century as a punishment for apostasy (Acts 5:5; James 5:15; Rev. 2:22,23).

11:31 *If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged-* If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned. This is written in the context of the breaking of bread. When we examine ourselves then, and at other times, do we get to the point where we truly *feel* through and through our condemnation? If this is how we perceive our natural selves, then surely we will be saved- if we *also* believe with joy that God's righteousness is counted to us. See on Lk. 17:10.

Our self-examination must be so intense that we appreciate that we ought to be condemned; if we achieve that level of self-knowledge now, we will not be condemned at the judgment. In the context of the self-examination command in 1 Cor. 11, Paul is speaking of the need to completely focus our attention on the sacrifice of Christ. Yet this command must have its basis in the directive for Israel to search their house for leaven before eating the Passover (Ex. 12:19). "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven... of malice and wickedness"

(1 Cor. 5:8). The disciples' question at the first breaking of bread, "Lord, is it I?" is another prototype of the command to examine ourselves at the feast (Mt. 26:22). Combining Paul's command to examine ourselves that we are really focusing upon our Lord's sacrifice, and the Exodus allusion which implies that we should examine our own lives for wickedness, we conclude that if we properly reflect upon Christ and His victory for us, then we will inevitably be aware of our own specific failures which Christ really has vanquished. But this will come as a by-product of truly grasping the fullness of the Lord's victory. The Passover was to be a public proclamation to the surrounding world of what God had done for Israel. Likewise our feast 'shows forth' (Greek: 'publicly declares') the Lord's death. Our memorial meeting should therefore include a degree of openly declaring to others what spiritual deliverances the Lord has wrought for us. This is surely the sort of talk that should fill up the half hour between ending the service and leaving the hall.

11:32- see on Lk. 13:28.

*But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world-* Apostate Israel are spoken of as the pagan world; and therefore at the day of judgment the rejected of the new Israel will be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32); assigned their portion "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46). If we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27); our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the sermon, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the lord's judgment of us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord". We expect Paul to say: 'But when we judged ourselves, we are chastened...'. But he doesn't; our judgment is what reveals us to the Lord, and is therefore the basis of His judgment of us. Even if we flunk conscious self-examination from an underlying disbelief that we will attain the Kingdom, then this of itself reveals our hearts to Him.

Because of this connection between the breaking of bread and judgment, it would seem that the first century church experienced the physical chastising of the Lord in terms of being struck with sickness and even death *at the memorial meeting* (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Thus at ecclesial meetings- particularly the breaking of bread- the early church confessed their sins and prayed for healing from the afflictions some were smitten with as a result of their sins (James 5:14-16). It's easy to forget that the prophecy of the crucifixion in Is. 53 is in fact a confession of repentance by God's people- as His sufferings are spoken about, so they lead to



the confession that "He was bruised for *our* iniquities... with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:3,5). Reflection on the servant's sufferings elicited repentance. See on Lk. 2:35.

11:33 *Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat-* The eating and drinking at the memorial meeting is a judging of ourselves. It's a preview of the judgment. All of 1 Cor. 11 seems to be concerning behaviour at the memorial meeting. Time and again the brethren are described as "coming together" to that meeting (:17,18,20,33,34). Believers 'coming together' is the language of coming together to judgment. Where two or three are *gathered*, the Lord is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20) uses the same word as in Mt. 25:32 concerning our gathering together unto judgment. We should not forsake the "assembling of [ourselves] together" (Heb. 10:25)- the same word as in 2 Thess. 2:1 regarding our "gathering together unto Him". The church being assembled (Acts 11:26), two or three being gathered (Mt. 18:20)- this is all a foretaste of the final gathering to judgment (Mt. 25:32 s.w.).

*Wait for one another-* Again, despite all the serious abuses present at the Corinthian communion services, Paul's paramount concern is for love to be shown to each other. Waiting for each other may mean literally waiting for all to be present before beginning the service, rather than selfishly focusing upon themselves. But "wait for" can also mean to 'look out for', to wait for another's good- as in James 5:7; 1 Pet. 3:20.

11:34 *If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home-* See on :22. The assumption is that the person has food at home to eat; so I would doubt whether this is a reference to any attending the meetings just in order to be fed. In any case, the hungry remained hungry, because the more prosperous didn't share their food with them (:21). So I suggest Paul is targetting the Corinthian's justification of their feasting by saying that they were eating because they were hungry. His comment is that if you're hungry, then eat at home- not at church. Continually we find the interpretation of Corinthians to depend upon understanding or guessing the content of the questions which Paul was responding to.

*That your coming together be not to condemnation. About the other things I will give instruction when I come-* If we break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). If we feel we are worthy, then, we are unworthy. If we feel unworthy, then, we are worthy.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts-* Chapter 1 has explained that they had been given the Spirit, but they were not spiritual (3:1), and were refusing the leading of the Spirit. Paul wanted them to be aware of the working of the Spirit and how they were to walk in step with that Spirit. The Greek means literally 'spirituals'; it is the general working of the Spirit that is in view here, not specifically the miraculous gifts. By saying "I do not want you to be ignorant", the emphasis might be placed upon the word "not". Maybe they were justifying their lack of spirituality by claiming that Paul had kept them in the dark about the Spirit's working.

12:2 *You know that when you were Gentiles you were led away to those dumb idols, in whichever way you might have been led-* Paul places their idol worship in the past tense, but it is clear from several places that many of them were still involved in idol worship and even drunk the cups of the idols (10:21). This is another example of where Paul assumes his readership are saved and counts them as obedient when he knows that in practice they are not. Ellicott suggests the imperfect tense should be translated "As from time to time ye might be led". This would mean that they occasionally went off to the idol temples and then at times to the Christian church meetings. It is this kind of fickleness which is typical of so many converts to Christ. "When you were Gentiles" implies they were no longer Gentiles; they had a new identity as God's people, spiritual Israel. "Led away" is a strange term to use as it is often used with the sense of 'led away to death'. The idea would be that idol worship leads to death, and therefore there can be no compromise between idol worship and Christianity. They lead to death and life respectively, and nobody can be on both paths. The dumbness of the idols (alluding to Ps. 115:5,7 and Hab. 2:18,19- these were the types of idols which apostate Israel worshipped) is contrasted with the activity and sensitivity of the Lord the Spirit, who causes His people to speak forth the fact He is Lord (:3). The dumb idols claimed to speak through their priests and prostitute priestesses, who supposedly spoke forth the words of the gods at places like Delphi or other shrine. But by contrast, the Lord Jesus speaks in the hearts and minds of His people wherever they are (:3).

12:3 *Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says Jesus is accursed. And no one can say Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit-* The speaking of the Spirit is very different to the speaking of the gods represented by the idols- see on :2. It deeply costs us to accept Jesus as Lord. Yet for so many moments of each day, we deny Him His Lordship in practice. In the first century, accepting Jesus as Lord was a life and death issue. Pliny wrote to Trajan how accused Christians had to both say "The emperor is Lord" and also curse Christ. Polycarp was urged by a Roman official to submit: "What harm is there in saying "Caesar is Lord?""", and yet because he refused, Polycarp was killed (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 8.2). It would seem that there were some Christians who gave in- and even justified it. For 1 Cor. 12:3 warns that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is cursed!", and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit". My suggestion is that this is a reference to Mt. 10:17, which comforts believers that when we are delivered up, "what you are to say will be given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". It would appear that some of the Christians who gave in were claiming that in accordance with this verse, it was the Spirit of God which had made them say "Jesus is cursed!" and deny that "Jesus is Lord". Paul is pointing out that this simply doesn't happen. In our context, the point simply is that to constantly affirm "Jesus is Lord" demands an awful lot from us, and as in the first century, so in the twenty first... we will be sorely

tempted to think that just a few moments of denial when in a tough situation is quite OK. But in this there is the true test as to whether really we are under His Lordship or not. We have no court to face, no lions to fear. Instead, we have the court of human opinion, the lions of social mockery, financial loss, the human negatives that arise from the unselfish living which Christ's Lordship demands of us. Paul had forced Christians to blaspheme under torture- to say things like "Jesus is accursed". He knew from experience that those who truly had the Spirit somehow had the strength not to say those words. And through that same Spirit had had the power to answer Saul: "No, Jesus is Lord", as he tortured them to say "Jesus is anathema / accursed". It could also be that there were false teachers at Corinth claiming to be inspired by God, who were claiming that Jesus is accursed.

*12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit-* Verses 4-6 connect gifts with the Spirit; service with the Lord Jesus (:5); and activities with the God who empowers them (:6). This is an example of where Paul often brings together the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian doctrine in its standard form is wrong in the relationships it presupposes between these three entities. But as the baptismal formula of Matthew 28 makes clear, the believer is associated with Father, Son and Holy Spirit by baptism. Baptism is the point at which the Spirit gifts were given, and baptism associates with Father, Son and Spirit. This I suggest is the reason for the allusion to all three entities here in the context of the gifts of the Spirit.

There is major emphasis within this section upon there being only one and the same Spirit; all the blessing and gifts were all manifestations of the same one Spirit. We wonder why there is such repeated emphasis. I suggest the answer is in appreciating the degree to which the Corinthian church was operating its services in a way similar to the rituals of the idol temples, which had been their previous religious experience. And this is true to observation with modern converts to true Christianity- they will have a tendency to bring with them the practices of religion which they were previously exposed to, despite the apparent change in understanding concerning Jesus as Lord and focus. These cults, especially in Corinth, also featured the idea of spirit possession and speaking in tongues, in the sense of glossolalia / ecstatic utterance. The idea was that a worshipper of the idol slept with the cult prostitutes and in turn, were possessed by the spirit of the god who was represented by the idol. This possession was thought to be expressed in terms of ecstatic utterances and moaning / groaning, and could also produce supposed words of wisdom and knowledge. It was typical for people to have relationships with multiple gods and to claim possession by the spirits of the various gods. I suggest that this was what was going on amongst some in the Corinthian church. But they were claiming that all this was in fact part of their possession by the spirit of the Lord Jesus. To understand the Corinthian correspondence correctly, we need to appreciate this. Hence so much about speaking in tongues in chapter 14 (Corinth was near to the oracle at Delfi where this was common). And it's why there is so much emphasis upon the Spirit of God being one, and responsible for all things. It was not that He, or His Son, were one source of spirit amongst many others. The unity of God and the unity of the Spirit are therefore connected- "one God... one Spirit... one Jesus" (Eph. 4:4-6). If there was only one true God, then there could only be one Spirit. If there were many gods / idols, there would be many spirits, each responsible for a different aspect of spiritual life.

*12:5 And there are diversities of service, but the same Lord-* The gifts of the Spirit are given to enable us to serve the Lord. Never are they for our personal, secular benefit. They are for the service of others, through serving the Lord Jesus. The emphasis upon diversity would be appropriate to a community who favoured the more public, visible forms of service. See on :4.

12:6 *And there are diversities of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone-* "Everyone" means that it can never be the case that only the church leadership are empowered. All are empowered- if they are open to it. "Activities" and "empowers" translate the same Greek term; literally, 'energy'. There is a power of energy within- "*in everyone*"- from God through the Spirit. Such internal empowering is within the human mind. The reference is not simply to the more visible miraculous powers; for as later explained in this chapter, those were not possessed by "everyone". See on :4.

12:7- see on Mt. 25:15.

*But to each individual is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good-* Again the stress is upon the way in which "each individual" has been given the Spirit; see on "everyone" in :6. Paul's theme in this letter so far is that the welfare of others must be paramount in our thinking. The Spirit is given "for the common good". All spiritual gifts and empowerments are not for ourselves; even the energy given within us (see on :6) is ultimately to be used for the good of others.

Although NEV offers "each individual", the Greek literally means 'to each one', and it could refer to how each house church was given a specific gift; although note :11 "each man". I say that because there is New Testament evidence that suggests that not every single individual believer in the first century had miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. That is hard to square with 1 Cor. 12 teaching that 'each one' had such gifts. But remember the context. Paul has been arguing that there is one body of Christ in Corinth, and each house church contributes towards that. The house churches were divided against each other and some groups shunned others. Paul is saying that each of those house groups played a vital role. We can take a lesson from this. Each ecclesia even today has a somewhat different emphasis, and all too easily, ecclesias can divide from each other. And yet this would be a denial of the one body of Christ; we not only need each other individually, each ecclesia needs each other ecclesia in their area, if they are to fully function as the one body. The warning against "schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25) applied in the context to there being schism between local house churches, rather than between individuals.

12:8 *For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit-* Chapter 1 began by stating that the Corinthians as a church were enriched with all wisdom and knowledge. This was true insofar as these gifts had potentially been given to some within the community. But the church was divided, and the individuals it seems refused to recognize their gifts. And so the situation became analogous to that which we meet today- that many read the promises of Spirit empowerment and simply find them so untrue to observed experience. But that is our fault, both on an individual and collective level. See on :10.

12:9 *To another faith through the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings through the same one Spirit-* "Faith" may mean just that- the Spirit gives internal spiritual power to believe, once we have taken the step of faith and baptism. But *pistos* can also reasonably be translated 'conviction'; perhaps the reference is to the Spirit power to convict others of sin, as Peter displayed with Ananias and Sapphira, and which may have been used to smite some with illness as mentioned in James 5. Paul likewise appears to have used it in Acts 13:10. The plural "healings" suggests there were different gifts to heal different illnesses. See on :10.

12:10 *And to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy and to another discerning of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues-* The question that arises of course is whether the Corinthians, who were for the most part not spiritual (3:1) and deeply astray in understanding and practice, actually had these gifts. When we read "to one is given... and to another... to another...", is this Paul describing how things are at Corinth? Or is he saying that these were the potentials? They had been given the gifts of wisdom, according to chapter 1; and yet Paul laments there was not a wise man amongst them (1 Cor. 6:5). They were struck down with sicknesses because of their abuse of the memorial meetings (1 Cor. 11:30); so why were they not healed, if the gifts of miracles, healings etc. were present amongst them? If indeed they had the gifts of speaking in and interpreting foreign languages ["tongues"], then why in chapter 14 will we read that they were talking in unintelligible language without an interpreter? I am therefore driven to the conclusion that these gifts had been given in potential to the community, every single member had some gift ["everyone... to each", :6,7]. But they were not using them, they were focused upon themselves rather than realizing that these gifts were given "for the common good" (:7).

12:11 - see on Mt. 25:15.

*All these gifts are energized by one and the same Spirit, apportioned to each man according as he is willing to receive it-* I have commented earlier on the emphasis upon the "same Spirit" being at work (see on :4), and upon the way that "each man" had been given a gift (:10). So much spiritual energy and potential lay wasted and idle in Corinth. But the key was the fact that they were given to each man "as he is willing to receive it". They were unwilling; because they were self centered and did not perceive that the gifts were given for the good of others (:7). If they had had a true passion to serve others, then they would have been willing to receive the gifts. The situation recalls the parable where the poor man is brave enough to knock on the door of his rich neighbour at midnight because he needs bread to give to another- an unexpected visitor. And the rich man will give him whatever he needs- in order to give to others (Lk. 11:8).

12:12 *For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though being many, are one body; so also is Christ-* The term "Christ" is even used of the believers, such is His unity with us (1 Cor. 12:12). See on Jn. 3:11. The analogy to the human body means that every part is critical for the function of the whole. This is why despite the entire raft of problems at Corinth, Paul begins in chapter 1 by addressing their lack of unity. And he uses the same metaphor in Rom. 12:4,5, arguing that all members do not have the same function, but we are thereby "every one members one of another". This continual focus upon "every one" is in the context of the way that religion generally gives importance to the leadership, and the mass are expected to simply attend and empower the leadership. But in the body of Christ, each member is critical to the function of the whole. If any leave the body or malfunction, then all suffer. This is why Paul is so concerned that "members" of Christ's body should become one body with church prostitutes, because "your bodies are the members of Christ" (6:15). Yet within the same metaphor, we are "every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Undeniably, our membership within Christ is intimately connected to our membership of one another. This is why the practices of disfellowship and division, so common to many churches, are absolutely wrong. They deeply damage the entire community, including those who are responsible for them.

12:13- see on Gal. 3:27.

*For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free-* Christ "shall baptize you" plural (Mt. 3:11) was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized. The strong implication is that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions. For *by one Spirit* are we all baptized into one body" of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit seems to be the baptizer. But how? The Lord Jesus baptizes by the Spirit (Jn. 1:33), although He didn't personally hold the shoulders of those He baptized (Jn. 4:2- doubtless to show that who does this is irrelevant). We obeyed the Truth (through baptism) "by the Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:22). This doesn't necessarily mean that the Spirit made us obey the Truth. Rather is the idea that as *Christ* died and was raised by the Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4), so we go through the same process in baptism, being likewise resurrected (in a figure) by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18-21). It is therefore the Spirit which raises us up out of the water, as it raised Christ; the man holding our shoulders is irrelevant. It is therefore through / by the Spirit that we have our hope of salvation (Gal. 5:5). There is only one resurrection, ultimately: that of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 6:14,15). By baptism into Him, we have a part in that. God in this sense resurrected us with Christ (Eph. 2:5,6), we even ascended into heavenly places in Him, as He rose up into the literal Heavens. And this whole process was achieved by the Spirit. But what does the "Spirit" mean in this context? The Lord Jesus Himself is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The Spirit is what quickens us; but consider Jn. 6:63: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth... the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are (what gives) life". The process of coming alive with Christ by baptism, the raising out of the grave which the water represents, is therefore due to the work of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit and His word. He is "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (Jn. 3:5; the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). We were washed by baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). "He that is joined to the Lord (Jesus) (by baptism) is one spirit (with Him)" (1 Cor. 6:17). We are saved "by the washing (baptism) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly by Jesus Christ" (Tit. 3:5,6). See on Jn. 3:5.

*And were all made to drink of one Spirit-* At baptism, we drink of the Spirit. The Corinthians had done so, but were unwilling generally to continue doing so. We were "made" to do this. It is not all a mere question of freewill response. 1 Cor. 10:4 has drawn the parallel with Israel all drinking the same spiritual drink, which was Christ. In Christ, we are "made" to drink of Christ's Spirit. But this is not an overpowering influence- for the Corinthians had drunk of it but had turned aside to idols, just as Israel had done.

12:14 *For the body is not one member but many-* Paul puts his finger on the psychological problem- that human beings tend to subconsciously assume that they are the only ones. That my immediate issues are paramount. But if indeed we are Christ's, there must be an acceptance that man is not alone. We do not live nor die to ourselves. Our baptism was not only a statement of our relationship with the Lord Jesus; it is also a sign of our entry into the body of the Lord Jesus, i.e. the community of believers, the one ecclesia (Col. 1:24). Members are added to the church through baptism (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 11:24); thus baptism enables entry into the one body of Christ. Whoever is properly baptized is a member of the one body, and is bound together with all other members of that body: "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body... for the body is not one

member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Paul, in his relentless manner, drives the point home time and again. He goes on to reason that just because the hand says it isn't of the body, and won't co-operate with the feet, this doesn't mean that it *therefore* isn't of the body.

12:15 *If the foot shall say: Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body- that would not make it not a part of the body-* When we are first baptized, we can tend to view those who leave our community as simply hard to understand, but we may easily shrug it off. Yet surely we need to do *more*; to *feel* more for them. And to realize that we all leave, in that we can be lost in sin for minutes or hours at a time, having numbed our responsibilities to the Father and Son. And yet, we are in covenant relationship with Him. This means that we do not slip in and out of fellowship with Him according to our concentration upon Him or our spirituality. We likewise shouldn't call those who leave us Mr or Mrs. They are always our brother or sister. We are in a family bond with them. Even if the hand says "I am not of the body, it is not therefore not of the body" (1 Cor. 12:15 RV). These words were written in the context of some of the Corinthian brethren effectively resigning from the ecclesia and joining the various temples of even synagogues in the town. But they couldn't really resign from a relationship with God; resign from the fact that their Lord bled to death for them.

Having reminded us that "by one Spirit are we all baptize into the one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), Paul makes the obvious point- that as members of that body we *cannot*, we dare not, say to other members of the body "I have no need [necessity] of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). To fellowship with the others in the body of Christ is our "necessity"; this is why an open table to all those who are in Christ isn't an option, but a necessity. Otherwise, we are declaring ourselves not to be in the body. Indeed "those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (1 Cor. 12:22). By rights, we ought to be condemned for such behaviour; for by refusing our brethren we are refusing membership in Christ. And yet I sense something of the grace of both God and Paul when he writes that if someone says "Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (1 Cor. 12:15). I take this to mean that even if a member of the body acts like they aren't in the body, this doesn't mean that ultimately they aren't counted as being in the body. But all the same, we shouldn't stare condemnation in the face by rejecting ourselves from the body of Christ by rejecting the members of His body at the Lord's table. That's the whole point of Paul's argument. Naturally this raises the question: "Well who is in the body?". Paul says that we are baptized into the body (1 Cor. 10:17); and this throws the question a stage further back: "So what, then, makes baptism valid?". Baptism is into the body of Christ, into His person, His death and His resurrection; and not into any human denomination or particular set of theology. If the illiterate can understand the Gospel, if thousands could hear the Gospel for a few hours and be baptized into Christ in response to it- it simply can't be that a detailed theology is necessary to make baptism valid. For the essence of Christ, His death and resurrection, is surely simple rather than complicated. Those who believe it and are baptized into it are in His body and are thus our brethren- whatever finer differences in understanding, inherited tradition and style we may have.

12:16 *And if the ear shall say: Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body- that would not make it not a part of the body-* Clearly there was jockeying for position within the Corinthian church, and some were professing that they had left the body. But declaration that we are not part of the body doesn't make us not part of the body. The principle we can take is that even if there are barriers between us and other believers, barriers which they have placed, distances

they have created- they are still part of the body and we still need them. Denominationalism and division over theology are perhaps the most common cause of these distances.

12:17 *If the whole body were an eye, where is the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where is the smelling?*- We cannot all have the same function. Corinth had "ten thousand teachers" (1 Cor. 4:15). There was clearly a desire for prominence, and this contributed to the overall dysfunction of the body. The Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1). They needed to accept the gifts they were given, and realizing them would mean that they would not seek for other positions. They would be more than content to use what they had been given.

12:18 *But now has God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased Him*- See on :17. If the Corinthians had accepted their given gifts and roles to play, they would not have been interested in usurping the place of others. God has gone to so much trouble to potentially enable the perfect functioning of the church; to the extent that according to John 17, the unity / perfect function of the body should be enough in itself to convert the world. But a self focused approach and refusal to accept the gifts of the Spirit meant that this wonderful potential didn't work out.

12:19 *And if they were all one member, where is the body?*- A chronic focus upon being the member we would like to be means that effectively we are destroying the body of Christ-crucifying Christ afresh. It would seem there were many aspiring to be leaders and teachers (4:15)- to be the head. But the head is the Lord Jesus. This aspiration was not only inappropriate but effectively leaves the head of the body without a body. Man is never better than when he has a specific calling, and the ability to achieve and practice that calling. And so it is in Christ. We have specific gifts, designed for usage for others "to the common good". Using them, being Spirit-filled in the ways intended for us, will mean that we have no aspiration to fulfil other roles for which in God's wisdom we were not intended.

12:20 *But now they are many members, but one body*- "But now" would imply that Paul saw them as right then at that moment a functional body. They were not "now" just a few members with effectively no body; they were many members in one body. This is one of many examples of where Paul counts the dysfunctional Corinthians as mature in Christ when in reality they were not.

12:21- see on 12:15.

*Therefore the eye cannot say to the hand: I have no need of you; nor the head to the feet: I have no need of you*- The same word is used in :24 about our more honourable parts thinking they have "no need". Perhaps we are therefore to read in an ellipsis there, to the effect they [think they have] no need; for here in :21 it is made clear that we all stand in need of each other. Again Paul is touching to the core of our subconscious sense that we are sufficient of ourselves.

This is something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done. He likens preaching to drag net fishing (Mt. 13:47), in which one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy.



God's fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the harvest was plentiful during the Lord's ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). So the idea is that if even the Lord Jesus needs us, how much more do we need each other.

As John realized the tendency of some to think they could love God without loving His sons, so Paul here tackled the same problem at Corinth. He knew that some would want to go off on their own, and he shows that such behaviour would suggest that they alone were the whole body. He knew that some would think that they had no need of other parts of the ecclesial body; he saw that some would feel that they were so inferior to others that they had no place in the body. All these are reasons why believers push off on their own. But notice that Paul doesn't actually say 'the eye *shouldn't* say to the hand, I have no need of you'; but rather "the eye *cannot* say to the hand...". Although some may say or feel this, ultimately, from God's perspective, it's simply not valid. Christian disillusion with Christianity mustn't lead us to quit the body. The same logic applies to those who think that the body of Christ is divided; ultimately, there is one body, and from God's perspective this is indivisible. The divisions only exist in the minds of men. Those who say that they don't need fellowship with their brethren "cannot say" this, according to Paul. If they continue on this road, ultimately they declare themselves not of the one body of Christ; although I trust there are many brethren who have done just this who may still receive God's gracious salvation.

12:22 *No, on the contrary, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary-* Many of those who ungraciously storm out of fellowship with the rest of the body, do so because they complain that other believers are weak, unloving, hypocrites, don't practice what they preach etc. And in many ways, their complaints are true (seeing that the Lord came to heal those who need a doctor rather than shake hands with the healthy). But those parts of our bodies "that seem to be weaker...that we think are less honourable... the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty... with special honour" (NIV). The private parts of our bodies are the parts we are most sensitive to, although on the outside they seem weak and hidden. And so Paul reasons that the weaker parts of the ecclesial body should be treated the same. The Greek for "feeble" (1 Cor. 12:21) is used (notably in Corinthians) to describe spiritual weakness: Mk. 14:38; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14. And in some ways, we are all "weak" (1 Cor. 1:27; 4:10). So those we perceive ("that seem to be... that we think") to be spiritually weak in their external appearance, we should be especially sensitive towards. Significantly, the "sick" (s.w. "feeble") in the parable of Mt. 25:44 are the "least" of Christ's brethren, the spiritually weakest; and at the day of judgment, the rejected are condemned because of their attitude towards these spiritually weakest of Christ's brethren.

Our attitude to the spiritually weak is a vital part of our salvation. Christian disillusion with Christianity ignores this at its peril. Thus "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are *indispensable*" (1 Cor. 12:22 NIV); indispensable for our spiritual development and salvation. So we shouldn't be surprised if we don't like our brethren, if there are things which unbearably bug us about the community. This irritation, this clear vision of the weakness of our fellow believers, is a God-designed feature of our spiritual experience. If the day of disillusion and disappointment with the brotherhood hasn't come for you, it surely will do. But remember how *indispensable* this all is. Consider all the miserable complaints believers make about us: they gossip about me, they actually fabricate things as well as exaggerate, she stole from me, he disregards me, her son *swore* at me, would you believe it (I would); they

don't ask me to speak, he's such a hypocrite, and do you know what she did... Let's say every word is true. These weak brethren and sisters who are doing all this are "indispensable" to the salvation of the one who suffers all this, *if* he responds properly. Just walking away from them is to effectively put ourselves outside the body. We *need* them, the Spirit says, we need all the mud, the comments and the undermining and the upstaging and the betrayal, all at the most sensitive and hurtful points.

12:23 *And those parts of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our unattractive parts have more abundant covering-* Paul, as always, is our hero. The one who gave his life, his health, his career, his marriage, his soul, for the salvation of others. Only to have confidences betrayed, to be cruelly slandered, to be threatened, to be so passionately hated by his converts that some even tried to kill him and betray him to the Romans and Jews. He talks of how we must honour those whom we think are "less honourable". He uses a word he earlier appropriates to himself in 1 Cor. 4:10 (AV "despised"). He's saying 'OK, if you think I'm so weak, so despised, let's say I am. But you should receive me, because I'm still in the body'. And to that there was no answer (and still isn't any) by those Christians disillusioned with Christianity.

12:24- see on Eph. 5:31.

*Whereas our more attractive parts have no need of this. But God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked it-* God has "tempered" the whole body together, mingling together the weak and strong. That is exactly why Paul didn't seek to resolve the problems at Corinth by disfellowshipping the weak majority. He is likely writing here with an eye to comforting and explaining things for the 'strong' minority who would have wondered how they could ever retain membership in this church. The allusion is to the way in which the unleavened cakes of flour were "mingled" or "tempered" with the oil (cp. the Spirit) in order to be an acceptable offering (Lev. 2:4,5; 7:10; 9:4 etc.). Paul has already likened his Corinthian ecclesia to a lump of unleavened flour (1 Cor. 5:7); he is now saying that they have been "tempered" together by the oil of God's Spirit. If we break apart from our brethren, we are breaking apart, or denying, that "tempering" of the body which God has made. It's like a husband and wife breaking apart their marriage, which God has joined together. It isn't only that we are missing out on the patience etc. which we could develop if we stayed in contact with our brethren. Our indifference and shunning of our brethren is actively doing despite to the Spirit of grace and unity which in prospect God has enabled His people to experience. The body "maketh increase of itself... unto the edifying of itself in love". By remaining in the body, we are built up from what every part of it contributes to the growth of the whole. To quit from our brethren is to quit from that source of nutrition and upbuilding. The earth in the sower parable represents various types of believers; and the Lord went on to say that the earth brings forth fruit "of itself". The community of itself brings forth spirituality in its members. Some of the most Spirit-filled brethren and sisters you can meet are those who have stuck at ecclesial life all their days, really struggled with personality clashes, with endless ecclesial storms and wrangles- but they've stuck it out. And thereby they have remained in touch with, and been moulded by, that Spirit of tempering together which is so fundamental to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"God has... *given* more abundant *honour* unto that part which *lacked*" (1 Cor. 12:24), as the husband should "(*give*) *honour* unto the wife, as unto the *weaker* vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7). God's dealings with the ecclesia are replicated both within marriage, and within the ecclesia- for we

too should give special respect and sensitivity to the weaker parts of the ecclesial body (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).

12:25- see on 1 Cor. 12:7.

*So that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another-* Paul begun his letter in chapter 1 by lamenting the schisms, and goes on to highlight their lack of care for each other in sexual matters and in the whole question of relationships with idol worship. But the composition of the community of believers had been precisely calculated by the Lord of the body for maximum spiritual functionality. The body was designed to have no schism within it, *so that* each member could care for others. This is why Paul sees schism as the first and foremost problem he must address. It is symptomatic of all the other problems, and it was this which was stopping the path of the Spirit in resolving all the other issues. The tempering of the body, the choice of composition, who was mingled with whom, was and is intended to produce an undivided community. But as we have noted so often, Corinth didn't live up to the potential made possible. And it is the same with us. It can seem that if only this or that person was not in the community of believers, then all would function so much better. But that is not in fact the case- the opposite is true. Who should be avoided are those who cause division, especially by the evil policy of cutting off members from the body.

12:26 *And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it-* In an undivided body, the situation of one member affects all. The idea of all suffering together is repeated by Paul in 2 Cor. 1:5,6: "For as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, even so our comfort is also in abundance through Christ. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which works in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer". The Lord Jesus is a member of the body, and His sufferings and exaltation are ours. But likewise our sufferings are not unique; they are so that we can find comfort from others who have suffered the same, and give comfort to them likewise. The joint rejoicing with the one member is surely alluding to the parables of the lost in Lk. 15:6,9, where the rejoicing over the finding of the lost member is a cause for inviting others to "rejoice with me".

12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ and each individually members of it-* This was perhaps aimed at the spiritually stronger who must have wondered whether Corinth was still part of the body of Christ. This brief statement stands as a huge challenge to all who would draw certain lines of theology or practice or morality in order to exclude others. Paul obviously drew the lines pretty low to say this about Corinth. Again, note the emphasis upon "each [one]" of them being a member of the body.

12:28 *And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then those who do miracles, then the gifts of healing, helping, administration and various kinds of languages-* God set the apostles *first* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 12:28)- but in another sense, God set the apostles *last* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9). It depends from which perspective we look at these things. Pentecostals need to note that healings and tongues are low down the list. "Administration" is likewise these days read as 'leadership'; but it is well down the list. Perhaps the idea also was that there was no use pretending to positions of apostles or prophets, because true apostles and prophets had been "set" by God in the church. Hence Paul

elsewhere speaks of how he had been set or appointed as an apostle (s.w. 1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11); any attempt by the agitators to talk that down was simply going against God's sovereign choice.

12:29 *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*- Paul so often positions himself as Moses. The revolt against the authority of Moses was on the basis that "all the congregation are holy, every one of them" and therefore Moses did not really have the special authority he claimed (Num. 16:3). It seems the same was happening at Corinth.

12:30 *Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with languages? Do all interpret?*- The answer in reality was not 'No, only some do'. Because I have argued elsewhere that these gifts had only potentially been given. Those who had been struck with sickness had no healers in the church (11:30); and chapter 14 will rebuke the Corinthians for not using the gift of interpretation, and not speaking in foreign languages but rather in unintelligible gibberish after the pattern of the idol cults. Yet the Corinthians claimed to have these gifts. I have suggested earlier that they were imitating the claims made within the idol cults, but in their case, were claiming that these were Spirit gifts from God. In reality they were not. But Paul gently doesn't take direct issue with this. Instead he criticizes their desire to have the more public gifts, or at least, their desire to lay claim to them.

12:31 *But earnestly desire the higher gifts*- Although believers were "set" or appointed to have certain gifts and should not therefore aspire to others, there appears here to be the possibility of desiring even "higher" ones. It may be that this reflects the openness of God to serving Him and His people- that we can move above or beyond our calling. Or it could be that Paul is treating their wrongly motivated desires for Spirit gifts in the same way as he treated their wrongly motivated desires for singleness and freedom from the marital ties that bound them. He goes along with them, by saying that indeed singleness unto the Lord is commendable; but warns them against using the church prostitutes in their single state, and against breaking up existing marriages. And so here, having said that we should receive and use the gifts we were appointed to and not pretend to others which were not intended, he now seems to say that of course, God is open to dialogue with man, and may grant even greater gifts "for the common good" if our motivation is correct. But the highest way is a way far higher than miraculous gifts- it is the way of love without exercising those miraculous gifts.

*And I will show you a still more excellent way*- The "way" of love outlined in the next chapter. The "higher gifts" were those which would help others the most; but the way of love was higher. 1 Cor. 12:31-13:12 implies that Paul was faced with the higher choice of the ministry of love and the written word, compared to the lower choice of exercising the Spirit gifts. By all means compare this with the choice which he had in Phil. 1:21-26: to exit this life was made possible to him, but he chose the higher, more difficult and more spiritually risky option of living for a few more years, in order to strengthen his brethren. See on 1 Cor 7:11. The miraculous gifts were given "for the common good", and would have been given to those who truly sought the good of others. But the way of love was a better way. And that is the way open to us. We can achieve even more by that, than by possessing miraculous gifts. This is not only a stern counter to the obsession of Pentecostalism for the miraculous gifts. It means that we should never feel that we cannot serve others as we would wish because of lack of resources or gifts. The way of love, after the pattern of chapter 13, is even more effective.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *If I speak with all the languages of men and of angels, but do not have love-* The description of love in 1 Cor. 13, the outline of the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-26, these are all portraits of the man Christ Jesus. The clearest witness to Him “therefore consists in human life in which his image is reproduced”.

So far in Corinthians, Paul has been arguing that care for others is paramount. In issues like marriage and food offered to idols, the critical issue is what will edify / build up others. And the same principle is used regarding the Spirit gifts. The mere possession of material / physical ability to serve the Lord is not the same as love. At the end of chapter 12, Paul has argued that the ministry of love is more effective in helping others towards salvation than the exercise of the miraculous gifts. The Corinthian clamour for miraculous experience, especially speaking in exotic utterances, was akin to the pagan religious cults- upon which it seems they had based their church life. "If I speak..." could mean that Paul did indeed speak with all human languages- as a travelling missionary he was empowered to have the gift of languages. "Of angels" is likely hyperbole. The pagan cults experienced ecstatic utterances, and they (along with the apostate Judaists who were influencing Corinth) liked to justify their glossolalia by claiming it was in fact Angelic language. I would have been inclined to labour the point that the gift of 'tongues' was the gift of speaking and communicating in intelligible contemporary languages, in order to preach the Gospel. Their usage in Acts 2 is the parade example. But instead Paul takes a higher approach. He says that even if he speaks with every human language *and* Angelic language- it is of no use if he has no love. This is what he has argued in chapter 12- that if we are not achieving the building up of our brethren, then all we do is of no use.

*I have become like sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal-* These instruments soon give a headache if they just continue making the same sound for an extended period. This is another indication that Biblical tongue speaking is not making ecstatic sounds but rather is done to build up others in love. Vine writes of "the celebrated Corinthian bronze". There is a contrast between the unwrought brass or metal which was struck, and the more refined musical sound of the cymbal. Whether refined or totally unrefined, without love, the words spoken would be but noise. A clanging cymbal contributes nothing to music unless it is within a wider context of other contributions; and likewise speaking / teaching without love achieves nothing edifying. This is a much needed caveat to the emphasis placed upon platform speaking; of itself it will produce nothing.

13:2- see on Mt. 7:22.

*And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries, and all knowledge-* Prophecy, knowledge and understanding "all mysteries" are nothing unless we are going to use that knowledge to profit or assist others. In the knowledge oriented world of the information age, we need this reminder as no other generation. Intellectual knowledge alone cannot save; it is only if this is harnessed for others that we can become 'profitable' and as it were find ourselves; otherwise we shall simply "be nothing". The Corinthians were modelling their church upon the surrounding idol cults, with their claims to speak "mysteries" and have exclusive knowledge. They were clearly making these claims in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts. Although they were not spiritual (3:1), Paul doesn't directly attack their false claims. Rather he argues more subtly, that even if he has all such knowledge of mysteries, this of itself is nothing if it is not rooted in the love that seeks to upbuild others.

*If I have all faith so as to remove mountains-* Paul appears to speak of such faith as a gift of the Spirit. Perhaps the miracles of the Spirit were done through granting the believers the gift of faith so that they could achieve the miracles. Surely Paul has in mind the Lord's teaching that faith as a grain of mustard seed could remove a mountain (Mt. 17:20). But that alone would not save the individual doing the miracle. That mustard seed had to grow into a great plant which gave shelter to others (Lk. 13:19). Faith alone will not save; it must have works, and those works relate to the blessing of others. This is the whole theme here in Corinthians. We may have the faith which enables us to eat idol food; but that is not the point. Our impact upon others and care for them is the essential thing.

The fact we copy the language patterns of those we are with was true for Paul. The Gospels were so much in his heart that he can hardly speak or write without some reference, consciously or unconsciously, to the Lord Jesus. Thus in 1 Cor. 13:2 I sense that Paul as he is writing (on a human level) was looking round for a superlative to express just how useless we are without love. And the superlative expression he picks is unconsciously taken out of the Gospels (Mt. 17:20): "Though I have all faith *so that I could remove mountains* and have not charity, I am nothing".

Even if we have faith to move mountains- an allusion to the Lord's teaching in Mt. 21:21- we 'are nothing' without love (1 Cor. 13:2). God so respects faith that He may hear the prayer of a believer, even though He considers that person "nothing" because they lack love. Rather like Elijah bringing fire down from Heaven by his faith- and yet the Lord Jesus seems to imply that this wasn't the right thing to have done, because Elijah lacked love (Lk. 9:55). In our self-examination we may perceive how God answers our prayers, our faith is rewarded... and think we're doing OK. But it could be that we are still "nothing". It's a sobering thought. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 15:2,19 to say that faith can be "in vain", and hope can likewise be merely of benefit in this life. But 1 Cor. 13:3 hits even harder home: a believer can give their body to be burned, for nothing, if they lack love. Remember these words were written, albeit under inspiration, by a believer who did give his body to die a violent death, and who had seen with his own eyes the death of Christians. Surely Paul writes with a warning word to himself; that even that apparent pinnacle of devotion to the Lord can be in vain, if we lack love.

Note how he writes in the first person: "If *I* have all faith... but have not love, *I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:2). It's not only that Paul is warning himself personally; the only other time the Greek phrase "I am nothing" occurs is Paul speaking about himself, also to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:11). There's a kind of association of ideas between the "*I am [nothing]*" and "*Love is [everything]*". Unless we 'are' love, we 'are' nothing.

*But do not have love, I am nothing-* The same phrase is only used, also to the Corinthians, in 2 Cor. 12:11 "Though I am nothing". We are indeed "nothing" of ourselves; only if we have love for others do we become something. We are to connect "I am nothing" with the comment that "it profits me nothing" in :3. If we do not profit or benefit others, then we are ourselves nothing. This continues the theme so often touched upon in Corinthians- that our salvation is wrapped up in that of others. We cannot just focus upon our own salvation and relationship with the Lord. If we do not profit others, then we are nothing ourselves. This explains Paul's passion for the spiritual growth and salvation of the Corinthians and indeed all

his converts. The whole situation is reminiscent of how the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were not allowed to have their own inheritance on the East of Jordan until they had helped their brethren to secure their inheritances in the promised land to the West of Jordan.

13:3- see on Acts 7:59.

*And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing-* Even making sacrifice for others does not make us anything- if it is not done with love. Even dying for our faith doesn't make us any more than "nothing" if we do so without love. See on :2 *I am nothing*. Our "profit" is to that of others. Doing good deeds of charity alone would not save, according to the Lord's teaching in Mt. 6:1-4- if there was the wrong motive; some manuscripts add here "That I may glory". And this certainly makes sense here. The burning of Christians only began under Nero's persecution, so far as history records. But perhaps such punishment had already begun in some places and Paul therefore alludes to it.

Let's not equate true love with the mere act of giving aid to charities. We can give all our goods to feed the poor, but lack true love; the life of love, the love of Christ permeating all our being (1 Cor. 13:3 may well have been written by Paul with his mind on some in the early Jerusalem ecclesia, who *did* give all their goods to the ecclesial poor, but lacked a true love, and returned to Judaism).

There is another possibility regarding giving our body to be burned. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

13:4 *Love suffers long-* "Longsuffering" is used in the sense of patient waiting for response from others, or the patience required to forgive another who at this time has not made recompense (Mt. 18:26,29; James 5:7); and of God's longsuffering with us, as He awaits our spiritual maturity (Lk. 18:7; 2 Pet. 3:9). All the attributes of love in this poem have some reference to our attitudes towards others, and that is the key to understanding each term. Those who refuse to forgive until there is repentance, or who are impatient with the immaturity of others in spiritual terms, are lacking this longsuffering which is in view here. Paul's patience with the Corinthians is really a parade example of what he meant.

I find it deeply concerning that so many who have committed themselves to Christ are unable to confidently answer questions such as 'What is love?'. To expound the beasts of Daniel's visions is relatively easy- this equals that, that refers to this. But to get to grips with "love" appears to have been given all too little attention. Love is patient / long-suffering (1 Cor. 13:4). But let's not think that patience simply means how we react to forgetting our keys or spilling milk. To some extent, whether we take such events calmly or less calmly is a function of our personality, our nervous structure, the kind of cards we were dealt at birth. I

suggest that the long-suffering patience Paul refers to instead has reference to our forgiving attitude to others, rather than applying to whether or not we get frustrated with ourselves. The man hopelessly in debt to his Lord begged for Him to show "patience" (Mt. 18:26). Patience is about not forcing others to "pay me what you owe me". We all have many people in our lives who are in our debt- more such people than we may realize. We have all been hurt by more people, and hurt more deeply, than we realize. Patience is about bearing long with their immaturity, waiting for them, whilst the debts remain unpaid; rather than demanding that they resolve with us before we'll fellowship them.

*And is kind-* The context of this great love poem is the discussion of things like marital decisions, attitudes to idol meat etc. Paul has developed the theme that our salvation is wrapped up with that of others, and therefore love for others is vital within all spiritual endeavour. "Kind" translates a very practical word, meaning useful or quite simply, 'employed' (see the root word in 7:31 "they that *use* this world", "I have *used* none of these things", 9:12,15). 'Love is practical' would be a fair interpretation.

*Love envies not-* The Corinthians were full of envies because they lacked the Spirit (s.w. 1 Cor. 3:3), and Paul was fearful that they would continue to have "envies" (s.w. 2 Cor. 12:20). If we love others then we will not envy them. Envy arises from a sense of inferiority and regret that we are not as the envied. But if love and care for them, especially spiritually, is our passion- then whilst we are not 'above' them, for we too are human, we shall not envy them.

*It is not arrogant or rude-* If we see ourselves as the servants of others, in Christ's place, then we will never act as superior over them.

*Is not puffed up-* Earlier in Corinthians, Paul has warned that "knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor. 8:1). The Corinthians were "puffed up" in their supposed knowledge about sexual freedoms and the freedom to eat idol meat (1 Cor. 4:6,18,19; 5:2). But in those matters, Paul has argued that love thinks of others- and that is the important thing, far more significant than whatever we theoretically know. Let us never kid ourselves that because we "know" some things about God, even know them correctly, that we will thereby be justified. It's not a case of simply holding on to a set of doctrinal propositions which we received at the time of our baptism into Christ. For the day of judgment won't be an examination of our knowledge or intellectual purity. This is not to say that knowledge isn't important. Paul had been arguing that if we truly know that God is one, that idols therefore have no real existence, that we are free in Christ to eat any meat- then this knowledge should not lead us to be arrogantly insensitive to our brother or sister who has a less mature understanding or conscience. Love is... not like that. Love therefore restrains our own superior knowledge and bears with those who don't quite 'get it' as they should. Again, our pattern is God's attitude to us who know just a fraction of His ultimate Truth.

That the rugged and at times abrasive Paul could write a poem about love, albeit under inspiration, reflects the extent to which he had thought about the utter supremacy of love. The device of acrostic Psalms (9,10,25,34,37,119,145) and the use of acrostics in Lamentations and Esther would enable the reciting of them. The repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive sentences is yet another such feature (Dt. 28:3-6; 2 Sam. 23:5; Jer. 1:18; Hos. 3:4; 1Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:12). The same phrase is also sometimes repeated at the beginning and end of a sentence with the same effect (Ex. 32:16; 2 Kings 23:25; Ps. 122:7,8; Mk. 7:14-16; Lk. 12:5; Jn. 3:8 Rom. 14:8 Gk.).



*13:5 Does not behave itself inappropriately-* This poem about love is a summary of Paul's policies so far concerning various practical issues. He has urged that in marital and relationship decisions, we are to do that which is "appropriate"; appropriate to a life dominated by the love principle (1 Cor. 7:36 s.w.). The only other occurrence of the word is again in Corinthians, when Paul speaks of the weaker members of the Christian body with the same word (1 Cor. 12:23). Such members are weak because they do not have love; and yet Paul teaches that our response to them is "necessary" and that they must be retained within the community of the body of Christ. To love the unloving is indeed hard, but it is the essence of love.

*Is not self seeking-* This phrase again builds on Paul's earlier argument in Corinthians- that we should act sensitively to others weaker in the faith, not doing things which may make them stumble, according to the principle "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good" (1 Cor. 10:25). This is quite something. All the time, in every decision, action, position we adopt, we are to think of what would be best for *others* rather than what's cool for ourselves. At the very least, this means that we are to act in life *consciously*- not just go with the flow, reacting to things according to our gut feeling, choosing according to what seems right, comfortable and convenient to us at that moment; but rather thinking through what import our positions and actions will have upon others. It takes *time* to think out what will be beneficial for them. And "love is..." just this. This is a way of life and thinking which it's very rare to meet in people. Almost frustrated, Paul lamented: "For all men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). 1 Cor. 10:25 spoke of seeking not our own good, but the good of our brethren- i.e. "the things which are Jesus Christ's". But according to Phil. 2:20,21, Paul felt that only Timothy understood this spirit of not seeking our own good, but that of the things of Christ, i.e. our brethren. The life of love is therefore a lonely life. So few 'get it'.

*Is not easily provoked-* see on Acts 15:39. Faced by the heights of such challenges, we can easily despair. We are not like this, or not like it very often nor very deeply. But Paul felt the same, even though under inspiration he himself wrote the poem. Paul too realized his failure, the slowness of his progress. When he writes that love is not "easily provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5), he uses the same Greek word which we meet in Acts 15:39 describing the provocation / contention he had with Barnabas which led to their division. Surely he had that on his conscience when he wrote that love is *not* like that.

Here we have an allusion to how slow God was to anger with Israel. As their loving husband He stuck with them for centuries, enduring what would have emotionally shattered many husbands if they endured it just for a few months, and putting up with what most men couldn't handle even for a year. God was slow to anger for centuries, and even then in that wrath He remembered mercy, even in His judgments He desperately sought to find a way to go on with Israel in some form. And we are asked to show that same slowness to anger.

*Keeps no record of evil done-* The mind of love imputes no evil to others, as God doesn't to us (1 Cor. 13:5; AV "thinketh no evil", s.w. to count / impute in Romans). The Greek word can also mean that love keeps no records or count of wrong done. We must forgive our brethren as God forgives us (Eph. 4:32). God expunges the spiritual record of the sin, and will not feed it into some equation which determines whether we can be forgiven. Christ "frankly" forgave the debtors in the parable. The frankness of that forgiveness does not suggest a process of careful calculation before it could be granted. God's frank forgiveness is

seen too in Ps. 130:3: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?". God does not "mark" sin, as our love for our brethren should keep no record of their past sins (1 Cor. 13:5-7 N.I.V.). If we refuse fellowship people because of the *effect* of past sins for which they have repented, then we *are* 'marking' iniquity. God does not deal with us in a manner which is *proportional* to the type or amount of sin we commit (Ps. 103:7-12).

13:6 *Rejoices not in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth*- What Paul is advocating is a conscious outgiving of ourselves to love. Not just being a nice enough person, a reasonable neighbour, partner, parent, a "top bloke", real decent guy. But a love which is actually beyond even that. A love modelled on God's love, and the love of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us crucifixion. Paul's poem personifies love as a person- love, e.g., "rejoices with the truth", hopes and endures. We too are to 'be' love. Not just occasionally, not just in ways which we are accustomed to, which are convenient to us, or are part of our background culture such as occasional hospitality to strangers. "Love is...", and we are 'to be' love, as if our very name and soul and heart is '*agape*'. Love is not an option- it's to be the vital essence of 'us'.

Another possibility here is that "unrighteousness" is being put for 'punishment for unrighteousness'. We will not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked personally known to us, just as God likewise takes no pleasure in it (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). But we will rejoice with "the truth", the just judgment of God which glorifies His Name.

13:7 *Carries all things*- Gk. 'is a roof over'. The idea is of covering over. Atonement means 'covering'. Because God covers our sins, we ought to cover those of others. The simple statement "love covereth all sins" (Prov. 10:12) comes in the context of appealing for God's people not to gossip about each others' failures. And the passage is most definitely applied to us in the NT (1 Pet. 4:8; James 5:20; 1 Cor. 13:7RVmg. "love covereth all things"). "He that goeth about as a talebearer reveals secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter" (Prov. 11:13). Our natural delight in telling or brooding on the moral failures of others, as if life is one long soap opera, will be overcome if we have personally felt the atonement; the covering of our sins. "He that covers his [own] sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The opposition is between owning up to our sins, and trying to cover them for ourselves. If we believe in the covering work of God in Christ, then we will own up to our sins the more easily, confident in His atonement.

The idea of love bearing / covering / carrying all things is the language of the cross- the Lord Jesus bearing, carrying our sins, and covering them. If we really grasp this, it ought to make us take a deeper breath. We are being asked to personally enter into the cross of Christ. To not just benefit from it ourselves, admire it from afar, look at it as Catholics glance at a crucifix over the door, pause for a moment in unthinking respect of tradition, and then go headlong through the door. No. We are asked to get involved in the cross, to participate in it, to bear it ourselves. The mind that was in the Lord Jesus at that time is to be the mind which is in us (Phil. 2:5-7).

*Believes all things*- This is not a call to naivety. The Bible asks us not to believe all things but to believe what is true. Paul's approach to the Corinthians was hardly one of believing all things they said or claimed. The word *pisteuo* also carries the idea of crediting or entrusting. I have shown in the commentary on this chapter so far that the various aspects of love often

allude to God's love for us, shown by His imputation of righteousness to us in Christ. This we are indeed called to reflect; and Paul for sure had to do this in order to be able to write so positively about the weak Corinthians. But this is different to naive believing of whatever facts a human being proffers to us.

*Hopes all things-* The idea of *elpizo* is not 'to hope for the best', nor to just take a generally positive outlook on life. It refers to a solid expectation. Again, Paul's attitude to the Corinthians was a parade example. He wrote, felt and acted towards them as if he certainly expected them to be in the Kingdom. If we are unable and not permitted to condemn our brethren, then we have to act according to our assumption that all in Christ shall indeed be saved.

*Endures all things-* Paul again endured all manner of slander and abuse from the Corinthians, as will anyone who sets themselves to assist others towards salvation. But love endures- and endures all things, there is nothing, no incident, however cruel, that makes us give up. "He that endures to the end" (Mt. 10:22) in practice means he that endures all unkindness, brickbats and slapdowns from those he seeks to serve. Paul uses the same word again in the context of our attitude to others: "I endure all things for the elect's sake" (2 Tim. 2:10).

13:8 *Love never fails-* This continues the idea of love enduring all things (see on :7). Love is never 'blown off course'; the end in view is our salvation, intertwined as it is with that of those whom we serve in love. All forms of burnout- a common experience in the Christian life- result from not keeping that end in view.

*But whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away. Whether there be speaking in foreign languages, this shall cease. Whether there be the gift of knowledge, it shall be done away-* "But whether" suggests Paul recognizes there may be false claims to the prophetic gift. He is not going to go into this, but rather makes the larger case- that whether or not, they are going to pass away and are not the essential thing. The failing, ceasing, doing away of the miraculous gifts is contrasted to the love which does not fail- because [see comment on *Love never fails*] the end view of salvation at the last day is kept ever in view. Prophecy- both in the sense of prediction of the future and the speaking forth of God's word- shall not be needed in the Kingdom. Likewise the gift of knowledge will be obviated by being with the Lord; and there shall be no need to preach in foreign languages once the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord's glory as the waters cover the sea, as anticipated in the Old Testament prophecies of that age. This is not to say that this passage does not also anticipate the fading away of the miraculous gifts in the first century. That too is in view, especially in :11, but Paul is asking the Corinthians to adopt a Kingdom perspective, and not seek to display the miraculous gifts which would not play any role eternally. Love does and will play that role eternally. And this then is to be our focus. The focus on the three gifts of prophecy, foreign languages and knowledge is not incidental. These were the very things practiced and claimed in the religious cults of Corinth, and especially at the nearby shrine of Delfi. The Corinthians were basing their Christian life upon those cults, claiming to be able to do these things in the name of having the miraculous Spirit gifts. Paul could have directly confronted them over these issues- but instead he argues more subtly that the Christian life is supremely about love, about building others up so that they will enter God's Kingdom. At best, focus upon the miraculous gifts is therefore misplaced and immature- and that perhaps could be our starting point in dialogue with Pentecostals.

Paul didn't just start writing his poem about love in 1 Cor. 13. It's wedged firmly in a context, a clearly defined unit of material about the use of the Spirit gifts spanning 1 Cor. 12-14. Having clarified his own authority and personal experience of the miraculous gifts, he proceeds to shew the Corinthians "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). He uses a Greek word four times, although most English translations render it inconsistently. It's worth highlighting the words in your Bible, maybe with a note like "s.w." ['same word'] next to them:

- "Prophecies shall *fail*" (1 Cor. 13:8)
- The Spirit gift of "knowledge shall *vanish away*" (1 Cor. 13:8)
- "That which is partial shall be *done away*" (1 Cor. 13:10)
- "Now that I am become a man [mature], I have *put away* childish [immature] things" (1 Cor. 13:11).

I read this as Paul saying that he used the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in his spiritual immaturity; but in his maturity, he chose not to use them, he "put [them] away". Paul also writes of how the miraculous gifts will be "done away" when "that which is perfect [complete, mature] is come" (1 Cor. 13:10). He seems to be saying that his personal growth from childhood to manhood, from immaturity to maturity, is a reflection of how ultimately the gifts will be no more when the mature state has come; and he wishes to attain that state now in this life, and thus he ceased using the gifts. He asks us likewise in this context to follow his pattern, to be "mature" [AV "be men"] (1 Cor. 14:20). This connects with how he speaks in Col. 3:14 of "above all" having love, which is the seal, the proof, of the mature state [AV "the bond of perfectness"]. In his own way, John spoke of the same state when he wrote of "perfect / mature love", and how he who fears hasn't reached the 'perfected-in-love' stage (1 Jn. 4:18). Instead of flaunting the Spirit gifts, Paul sold his soul for love; he gave himself over to the life characterized by the kind of love about which he writes so powerfully in his poem. Paul laments that the Corinthians weren't mature nor Spirit filled (1 Cor. 3:1,2), and wishes to be able to speak to them as "mature" (1 Cor. 2:6). So often in the decisions we face in life, it doesn't come down to a right or wrong, a yes or no; rather it's a question of what is the mature Christian behaviour, and what isn't.

The same Greek word translated "fail... be done away.... vanish away" is used in many other places concerning the passing away of the Mosaic Law:

- "We are *delivered* from the law" (Rom. 7:6). We are like a woman *loosed* from her husband, i.e. the Law of Moses (Rom. 7:2).
- The glory of the Law was to be *done away* (2 Cor. 3:7)
- The Law *is being done away* at the time Paul was writing (2 Cor. 3:11 Gk.). It was *abolished, done away* in Christ (:13,14)
- Christ *abolished* the law of commandments (Eph. 2:15)

Likewise, the prophecy that "tongues shall *cease*" (1 Cor. 13:8) uses the same word as in Heb. 10:2, concerning how the sacrifices *cease* to be offered. The "perfect man" state of the church, at which the Spirit gifts were to be withdrawn (1 Cor. 13:10; Eph. 4:13) is to be connected with how the Lord Jesus is the "greater and more *perfect* tabernacle" compared to the Mosaic one (Heb. 9:11). The conclusion seems to be that the ending of the Spirit gifts was related to the ending of the Mosaic system in AD70.

Closer reflection upon 1 Cor. 13 suggests that the time of the withdrawal of the gifts was in fact at the time when the Mosaic sacrifices ceased to be offered. There was an interim period

between the death of the Lord Jesus and the destruction of the temple in AD70. During this time, various concessions were made to the Jewish believers; they were permitted to obey Mosaic regulations for the time being, even though the Spirit through Paul made it clear that they were unable to give salvation, and were in comparison to Christ “the weak and beggarly elements”. The early believers were guided through this period by the presence of the miraculous Holy Spirit gifts amongst them, pronouncing, prophesying, enabling preaching in new areas through the gift of languages, organizing the ecclesias etc. But once the ecclesia came to maturity, the written word replaced the gifts. Most if not all the New Testament was completed by AD70, and this was around the time the gifts were withdrawn. Paul uses the same Greek word several times in 1 Cor. 13, even though it is somewhat masked in the translations. The following words in italics all translate the same Greek word: “Prophecies...shall *fail*...[the gift of] knowledge shall *vanish away*...that which is in part shall *be done away*...when I became a man, I *put away* childish things” (:8,10,11).

Paul is predicting how the gifts of the Spirit would be withdrawn once the church reached the point of maturity; but he says that he himself has already matured, and he has “put away” the things of his immaturity- i.e. he no longer exercised the gifts for himself. He presents himself, as he often does, as the pattern for the church to follow. Thus the gifts “shall be done away” in the future for the church as a whole when they are perfect / mature, but for him, he has already ‘done them away’ as he has himself reached maturity. In the same language as Ephesians 4, he is no longer a child, tossed to and fro and needing the support of the Spirit gifts. He laments that the believers were still children (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:13)- yet, using the same Greek word, he says that he is no longer a child, but is mature. In Gal. 4:3, Paul speaks about how he had once been a child in the sense that he was under the Mosaic Law. But now, he has put that behind him. He is mature; and yet here in 1 Cor. 13:10 he associates being mature with putting away the gifts of the Spirit.

13:9 *For we know in part and we prophesy in part*- I have argued above that Paul is seeking to position the miraculous Spirit gifts within a Kingdom perspective. They will not then be necessary. It is the love we show to others now which shall eternally endure in that age. Any Spirit gift of knowledge or prophecy was only a small part of the final knowledge which shall be revealed in the Kingdom age. The idea of 'partial' knowledge may be understood in this sense. But it may also allude to the fact that only some parts of the body of Christ had the gifts of knowledge and prophecy (1 Cor. 12:27 s.w.). Each "part" of the body contributes a measure towards the whole (Eph. 4:16 s.w., also in the context of Spirit gifts). "The truth" refers to the Lord Jesus personally; the term is often used as if it refers to a saving body of doctrinal, theological knowledge upon which salvation is predicated. But we need to be aware that whatever truths we hold, this is just a part of the whole picture. And that whole picture, in the context of this chapter, the final maturity, is the life of love- rather than some even greater array of intellectual truths. The partial revelation of knowledge is only a part of the ultimate picture which is of the body of Christ in His maturity, "the perfect man". Eph. 4:11-13 make the same point. For He is love personified and embodied. But it is still so that only a small portion is heard of God (Job 26:14); to claim to 'have the truth' must be held always in the perspective of a rightful intellectual humility before the Almighty. The idea of knowledge being only partial connects with the figure of seeing only a hazy outline in the mirror of :12.

13:10 *But when that which is perfect comes, then that which is in part shall be done away*- The perfect / mature is the man Christ Jesus, who is the embodiment of love (Eph. 4:11-13). The coming of Christ will bring full knowledge, and all knowledge we have will then be

revealed as having been so very limited and partial. But the mature or perfect state can be aspired to now, in individual life. For love is the bond of maturity- see notes on 13:8-10. In the state of mature, Christ-centred love for others, the partial ministry of the miraculous gifts fades from significance.

13:11 *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I am a man, I have put away childish things-* See notes on 13:8-10. Speaking, feeling [Gk. 'understanding'] and thinking surely connect with the three gifts Paul is discussing- speaking in languages, knowledge and prophecy. He associates the use of those gifts with his spiritual immaturity. He is confessing that the public, dramatic work associated with possession of the miraculous Spirit gifts had taken him up; yet he likens that period to his spiritual childhood (note how he uses the same figure of childhood to describe the dispensation of miraculous gifts in Eph. 4:11-16). He seems to have chosen not to use the gifts so much, because he realized that the real maturity was faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these, Paul came to realize, was love. And a true love must be the end point of our lives, as it was for Moses, as it was for Jacob. If Peter's list of spiritual fruits in 2 Pet. 1:5-7 has any chronological reference, it is significant that the final, crowning virtue is love- a love that is somehow beyond even "brotherly kindness". Love is above all things the bond of spiritual perfection (Col. 3:14).

As noted earlier on this section, "put away" is the same word used three times for the ending or cessation of the miraculous Spirit gifts. Paul was seeking to live the Kingdom life right now. Those gifts would not figure in the future Kingdom experience; it is love, the love we show for others now, which shall be the dominant experience and reality of the Kingdom. And so he had moved on from public usage of the gifts to selling his soul for love.

13:12- see on Eph. 1:18; 4:15.

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know fully, even as also I have been fully known-* The reference is not strictly to a mirror but to a looking glass, polished to act as a mirror. Corinth was famous for such looking glasses. We see "dimly", literally, 'in an enigma'. Even now that the Mosaic law has ended, we see ultimate spiritual reality only through shadows and figures. This must always be the perspective in which we understand any idea of 'saving truth' if we understand that term as referring to intellectual purity of understanding. We are "fully known" to God, but we do not fully know Him. The joy of the Kingdom age will be a mutuality of understanding between us, surely comprehended in the idea of seeing God face to face.

1 Cor. 13 and Eph. 4 are difficult to interpret. A valid case can be made for them meaning that the dispensation of the Spirit gifts was partial, but the completed spiritual man was made possible once the New Testament was completed. I have outlined this in *Bible Basics* Ch.2. But Paul's description of the completed, "perfect" state is so exalted that it is hard to resist applying it ultimately to our position in the Kingdom. "*Then face to face... then shall I know (fully, not from parts); but now (as opposed to then) abide faith, hope and charity*" (1 Cor. 13:12,13) sounds like the Kingdom. So I would suggest we interpret those passages along these lines: 'Now, in the first century period of Spirit gifts, knowledge is partial; a complete state will come when the written word is finished. But even this is relatively partial, only a necessary step, towards the ultimate spiritual reality and knowledge of the Kingdom'. The parable of the talents speaks eloquently of all this.

Moses is the one who saw God face to face (Num. 12:8). Surely Paul saw the depth of fellowship which Moses achieved in this life as indicative of the richness of felicity with the Father which we will all ultimately achieve. Remember that Paul so often presents himself as Moses; but at this point he says that he is like all Israel, seeing dimly through the veil, and still awaiting the status of seeing face to face.

To describe or 'know' the real self is ultimately impossible; we can't write down an inventory of who we really are. Paul perceived this when he wrote that now he only knows himself partially, and only in the Kingdom "shall I know, even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). The aorist here really means "was known"; we shall then see ourselves as God now sees us, marvelling at His patience with our immaturity. We know Him now only partially, *ginosko*; whereas He knows us thoroughly, *epiginosko*. He knows us all around [*epi*], understanding the total context of all our words and actions. This for me is one of the Kingdom's joys; to truly know myself, even as I am presently known by the Father. Until then, we remain mysteries even unto ourselves; and who amongst us has not quietly said that to themselves... The question 'Who am I?' and especially 'Who and how am I to God?' must ultimately remain to haunt each one of us until that blessed day. It would be too simplistic to argue that the new man, the real self of the believer, is simply "Jesus Christ". Our new man is formed in *His image*, but we are each a unique reflection of our Lord. He isn't seeking to create uniform replicas of Himself; His personality is so multi-faceted that it cannot be replicated in merely one form nor one person. This is why "the body of Christ" is comprised of so many individuals both over time and space; and it is my belief that when that large community has manifested every aspect of the wonderful person of Jesus Christ, then we will be ripe for His return. This is why the spiritual development of the last generation before the second coming will hasten His return; for once they / we have replicated Himself in ourselves in our various unique ways to a satisfactory extent, then He will return to take us unto Himself, that where He 'was' as He said those words, in terms of His character and person, there we will be (Jn. 14:3; note that read this way, this passage is clearly not talking about Him taking us off to Heaven). Ps. 69:32 RV says simply: "Let your heart live". In our terms, God is saying: 'Be yourself, let your inner man, the heart, come to the fore, and be lived out'. Even if we feel we haven't got there 100% in getting in touch with our real self, one of the joys of the Kingdom is that we shall know [i.e. ourselves] even as we are now known by God (1 Cor. 13:12). We never quite get there in our self understanding in this life- but then, we shall know, even as we are known.

Paul speaks as if he has in one sense matured into "love", no longer a child but a man; yet he writes as if he is still in the partial, immature phase, seeing in a mirror darkly, waiting for the day when he would see "face to face". Likewise "Now I know in part, but then shall I know..." (1 Cor. 13:12). It's the 'now but not yet' situation which we often encounter in Scripture. In a sense we have attained to the mature state of love; in reality, we are still far from it. Paul is alluding to Num. 12:8 LXX, where God says that He spoke with Moses face to face and not in dark similitudes. Paul felt that he wasn't yet as Moses, encountering God 'face to face' in the life of mature love. He was still seeing through a glass darkly. But some time later, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was now beholding the glory of the Lord's face [as it is in Christ] just as Moses did, "with unveiled face", and bit by bit, that glory was shining from him (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). And hopefully we feel the same- that bit by bit, we are getting there. So let's take Paul's urging seriously: to grasp the utter supremacy of the life of love, to "follow after love", to press relentlessly towards that state of final maturity which *is*

love (1 Cor. 14:1). Powerfully did Paul conclude his Corinthian correspondence: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

13:13 *But now abides faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love-* In the future Kingdom of God, there will be no need for the miraculous Spirit gifts as they were in the first century. Love is "the greatest" because faith and hope will then have been turned to sight and will be no more (1 Cor. 13:13). A theme of Corinthians is the ability of the believer to live on different levels- e.g. 1 Corinthians 7 advocates the single life of devotion to God as the highest level, but goes on to make a series of concessions to lower levels. It seems that in the matter of the use of the miraculous Spirit gifts, Paul is again presenting a higher level upon which the believer of his time could live- a "more excellent way". He wanted to live the Kingdom life now as far as possible. We "have eternal life" not in the sense that we shall not die, but in the way that we in Christ can live the kind of life we shall for ever live- right now.



## CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Pursue love, and in this pursuit therefore earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that of prophecy-* I have suggested throughout this commentary that the Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1); they had been given the Spirit but had not allowed it to work. They were basing their church services upon the religious cults around them, replete with use of church prostitutes [in the name of being single unto the Lord], eating the Lord's supper as if it were a form of fellowship with idols, and copying the claims of ecstatic utterances, gifts of knowledge and prophecy which were rampant in the idol cults [in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts]. Paul could have directly confronted them. But He copied the style of the Lord Jesus when tackling the language of belief in demons / idols. He argued on a higher plane, with all the power which is inherent in using a subtler argument. Just as Paul doesn't mock nor condemn their idea of singleness in order to serve the Lord [but decries their divorces and usage of church prostitutes which it seems to have involved], so he encourages their professed zeal for Spirit gifts such as prophecy. But he says, following on from the argument in chapter 13, that the motive for such gifts must be love, which as defined in chapter 13 means a desire for upbuilding others so that they might enter God's Kingdom. He has explained in 13:8-11 that the way of spiritual maturity will involve a focus upon love, and a de-emphasis upon the miraculous gifts. But Paul is aware that not all have reached that level, and so encourages them in going this lower road of wanting to use those miraculous gifts. But the comments he will make upon the usage of the gifts effectively condemn the Corinthians for using the ecstatic utterances of the idol rituals in the name of true speaking in foreign languages as a gift of the Spirit. They were doing what Pentecostals and the like do today- experiencing ecstatic utterances and claiming this is the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages. And Paul is explaining that they are deeply mistaken in doing so.

14:2 *For he that speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God. For no one understands, but in the Spirit he speaks mysteries-* I take this to be a description of how things were at Corinth, rather than a description of what true speaking in tongues was like. It is a criticism of the situation at Corinth rather than a general statement. *The Songs Of The Sabbath Sacrifice* was a document used in the Qumran community, claiming that the Angelic choirs of praise to God were reflected in the praises of the Qumran community. They saw themselves as praising God with the "tongues of Angels". A similar idea can be found in the *Testament Of Job*, which also uses the term "tongues of Angels" to describe how the praises of Job's daughters matched those of the Angels in Heaven. These two apocryphal writings include many phrases which are used by Paul in his argument against how the Corinthians were abusing the idea of 'speaking in tongues': "understand all mysteries (1 Cor. 13:2)... in a spirit speaks mysteries (1 Cor. 14:2)... speaking unto God (1 Cor. 14:2)... sing with the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15)... bless with the spirit (1 Cor. 14:16)... hath a psalm (1 Cor. 14:26)". It would seem therefore that the Gentile Corinthians were influenced by apostate Jewish false teachers, who were encouraging them to use ecstatic utterance with the claim that they were speaking with "tongues of Angels". And Paul's response is to guide them back to the purpose of the gift of tongues- which was to preach in foreign languages. My point in this context is that even in the Gentile church at Corinth, there was significant influence from Jewish false teachers. So it's no surprise to find that in the area of the nature and person of the Lord Jesus, which was the crucial issue in the new religion of Christianity, there would also be such influence by Jewish thinking. I have noted elsewhere, especially on the letter to Titus, that immoral Gentile Christians found Judaism and legalism attractive- keeping a few Jewish laws was felt to justify their living without any moral compass in other parts of their lives.

14:3 *But he that prophesies speaks to men, words of edification, exhortation and consolation-* Paul has previously laboured the point that building up others is love in action. Therefore the emphasis upon tongue speaking was not right. If they were keen on having the miraculous Spirit gifts, then the one they should be going for was prophecy, because through speaking God's word to illiterate people who had no Bible to read, they would be giving them the words of God which are able to build us up and give us an inheritance into the Kingdom (Acts 20:32). "Edification", or building up, was a major concern of Paul for the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:5,12,26). But is God who builds up the church (s.w. 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1). He works through human mechanisms- in all our efforts to build others up, we have God Almighty behind us. Likewise "exhortation and consolation" are the work of the Lord Jesus and His Spirit as stated repeatedly in Jn. 14-16, the comforter (also see Lk. 2:25, where the Lord is called "the comforter of Israel"). But if we are to probe further as to *how*, mechanically, if you like, He achieves this- it is through the loving labour of others within the church. In the first century context, the gift of prophecy was a clear channel for this. And this, therefore, was the kind of gift they should be seeking if they were motivated by love.

14:4 *He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he that prophesies edifies the church-* This has been the argument throughout Corinthians so far- that they were not focused upon building others up, but were spiritually selfish, because they were not possessed of the Spirit (3:1). I have suggested above that the tongues they were speaking in were the ecstatic utterances associated with idol worship. But it could also be so that although there not Spiritual (3:1), the Lord still worked through them via the miraculous gifts. For He has worked through men who were total unbelievers, empowering them according as His purpose requires; the king of Assyria in Isaiah 10 being a parade example. Again as in :2, Paul is describing the state of things at Corinth. The gift of languages was in order to help others by preaching and teaching for them in their native tongue. Paul could have laboured that point. Instead he cuts to the heart of the matter by saying that when they speak in their ecstatic languages, in imitation of the idol cults, they were [at best] only building up themselves. This is an example of assuming for sake of argument that a false position is true- and then pointing out how if it were true then it must be wrong. The Lord did the same with His assumption, for sake of argument, that Beelzebub existed and the Jews really did do exorcisms. And so here Paul is saying that if love and upbuilding are of the essence, then one would not focus upon just taking in an ecstatic utterance; but on instead prophesying / speaking forth God's word to build up the church.

14:5 *Now I would wish that you all speak with tongues, but especially I wish that you should prophesy; for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, unless he interpret, that the church may receive edification-* All the Corinthian Christians could have been prophets, all could have spoken with tongues (1 Cor. 14:1,5)- but the reality was that they didn't all rise up to this potential, and God worked through this, in the sense that He 'gave' some within the body to be prophets and tongue speakers (1 Cor. 12:28-30). He works in the body of His Son just the same way today, accommodating our weaknesses and lack of realization of our potentials, and yet still tempering the body together to be functional. The fact we fail to realize our potentials doesn't mean God quits working with us. We see in all this the openness of God; He is open to our desire for particular ministries / gifts, whilst on the other hand He sets us within the body with our particular, intended gift. There is an echo of Moses' desire that all Israel were prophets (Num. 11:29); so often Paul sets himself up as Moses. The context of Moses' comment was a challenge to his authority as if he were the

only one endowed with prophetic gifts; and Paul was facing similar criticism from his wayward congregation.

14:6 *But now, brothers, if I came to you speaking with tongues, without speaking to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching- what shall I profit you?*- Again and again, the question is not whether we can or cannot do something, it is whether we profit others. "If I came to you" may be referring to his earlier time in Corinth when he first taught them the things of the Gospel. If he had just spoken in ecstatic utterance, they would not have learned the Gospel. Clearly the gifts of teaching others were of paramount importance in edifying others. We can take the lesson in passing that building others up involves teaching them something- too easily, liberal minded Christian folk can assume that engaging in social activity together is all that is required to build others up. But ultimately, there has to be some teaching ministry.

14:7 *Even things without life which give a voice*- This is a rather laboured phrase if Paul means to simply refer to a musical instrument. Literally, 'Things without a soul which give a voice'. The idea was that the Corinthians lacked the Spirit (3:1); the ecstatic utterances were just noise. There was no Spirit animating them. Those utterances were no sign of spirituality.

*Whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*- Again the word for "distinction" is unusual and could appear out of place, as it essentially means a charge or commandment. The noises made were not saying anything, they were giving no message. In :6 Paul has established the point that the way of love will focus upon teaching others in order to profit them. Just making sounds with no message will not edify others. Making a noise of itself is not helpful- and this is Paul's comment on the ecstatic utterances going on at Corinth. He could have baldly stated that the true gift of tongues is the gift of speaking in foreign languages so that foreigners can understand the Gospel. And what the Corinthians were doing was nothing to do with that, and was merely mimicking the pagan religious practices around them. But Paul bases his argument on a higher level, and his subtly makes his point the more powerful and persuasive.

14:8 *For if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle, who shall prepare himself for war?*- Again, the purpose of speaking or making a noise was for the benefit of others and not for any selfish reasons. "The battle" could refer to the day of the Lord, or the daily spiritual strife. The Old Testament use of 'trumpet' language relates to the following ideas:

- To prepare for war
- To indicate the need to move on
- Convicting others of sin (Is. 58:1; Jer. 4:19)
- Warning of invaders (Ez. 33:3-6)
- A proclamation of the urgency to prepare for the day of the Lord (Joel 2:1)
- The certainty of salvation and God's response to prayer: "Ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God (Old Testament idiom for 'your prayers will be answered'), and ye shall be saved" (Num. 10:9).

All of these elements ought to feature in the work of our twenty first century priests.

14:9 *So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech easily understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air*- This verse is a clear enough condemnation of ecstatic utterances being claimed as Spirit gifts. The speech must be "easily understood". The principle of course goes wider- that if we have the love which upbuilds,

then we will consider the style of our presentation to others. For our aim will be their understanding and subsequent growth. "Understood" translates *semaino*, usually translated "signify". There must be significance to what is spoken. The "tongue" being spoken must be significant to the hearers. Ecstatic utterance simply lacks such significance. The hearer must be able to "know what is spoken". In no way is this true of ecstatic utterances which were and are passed off as 'speaking in tongues'.

14:10 *There are, surely, many languages in the world and none is without meaning-* This is quietly making the point that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak the "languages in the world", and every language has meaning to the native hearer. The words spoken must therefore have meaning; the hearers must "know what is spoken" (see on :9). But there is a word play going on here. "Languages" translates *phonos*, and "without meaning" translates *a-phonos*, literally 'non-language'. So Paul is saying that there are many world languages, and not one of them is a non-language. This seems a pointless tautology until we consider that in saying this, he was likely answering the false claim made by ancient Corinthians and modern Pentecostals alike- that actually, even if we can't understand the language spoken, it is actually a language of some other country unknown to us. But Paul is saying that a language is a language, not a non-language. Analysis of the ecstatic utterances of Pentecostalism show them to be the same as those of pagan religions. The syntax of the utterances, the repetition of the same sounds, is not that of language. It is mere sound. Hence Paul's apparently obvious point- that a tongue language is not a non-language.

14:11 *If then I do not know the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaks a barbarian and he that speaks will be a barbarian to me-* "The meaning" translates *dunamis*, which has the sense of 'power'. The suggestion surely is that their speaking in ecstatic utterances was not at all by the power of the Spirit; remember that the Corinthians were without the Spirit (3:1). If speaker and hearer do not understand each other, then they will be set apart from each other. For "barbarians" and those within the Roman empire were seen as deeply opposed to each other, if not in conflict. The practice of unintelligible speaking was in fact a re-creation of Babel, acting as if under Divine curse rather than His blessing, and would result in division rather than the unity which would upbuild. The Greek *barbaros* comes from the word *barbar*, which was a reference to the perceived harshness and coarseness of language amongst those outside the empire- they were said to speak *bar-bar*. This kind of tension would be introduced within the church by talking to each other in unintelligible sounds.

14:12 *So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to excel in edifying the church-* Paul seems to want to inculcate the spirit of ambition in preaching when he told Corinth that they should be ambitious to gain those Spirit gifts which would be most useful in public rather than private teaching of the word (1 Cor. 14:1,12). In similar vein Paul commends those who were ambitious (from the right motives) to be bishops (1 Tim. 3:1). Perhaps men like Jephthah (Jud. 11:9) and Samson (Jud. 14:4) were not wrong to *seek* to be the judges who delivered Israel from the Philistines. But we must note throughout this chapter that Paul has prefaced it all with 13:8-11, where he argues that the miraculous gifts are something to be discarded as immature. But he concedes to their weakness, and urges them to at least seek those gifts which can edify others. It was clear enough that their motive for desiring the gifts was probably in order to appear like the religious cults around them. But

Paul doesn't specifically accuse them of the obvious; rather he seeks to redirect their self-proclaimed zeal to the great goal of love, which is articulated in terms of building up others.

14:13 *Therefore let him that speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret-* Paul could have baldly stated that their ecstatic utterances were not at all the Spirit's gift of speaking in foreign languages, and they should just shut up. But he gently says that if this is indeed what they claim to be 'speaking in tongues', then they ought to pray for the gift of interpretation- so that they can communicate something to others with the aim of upbuilding them. "Interpret" can indeed mean to translate from one language to another; but the Greek word more commonly means to explain or expound. If indeed God was making them speak in ecstatic utterances, then they had better make a priority of asking Him to give them the ability to explain the utterances to others. For the preface to all this teaching is the poem about love in chapter 13. To love is to build up others. It is explanation and engagement with others which does this- and not making ecstatic sounds. The GNB has it right: "The person who speaks in strange tongues, then, must pray for the gift to explain what is said".

14:14 *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful-* This is not to say that tongues are to be used when praying. For the gift of foreign languages or tongues was clearly in order to preach the Gospel to those speaking foreign languages, as witnessed by the account in Acts 2. Paul is stating the hypothetical situation- if he, as the Corinthians were doing, were to pray as they prayed, in ecstatic utterances, then [at best] his spirit would be praying but he himself would not understand what he was saying. Again the GNB has the idea right: "For if I pray in this way, my spirit prays indeed, but my mind has no part in it". The connection between tongues and prayer was because this was what happened in the surrounding idol cults; prayer was supposedly made through the ecstatic utterances. Whereas Biblically, tongues / languages were in order to spread the Gospel in public preaching [as Paul will go on to point out]. Note that the term "unfruitful" is elsewhere used of those who fall away from faith and shall not be saved finally (Mt. 13:22; Eph. 5:11; Jude 12 etc.). Even if it were claimed that such utterances were 'the Spirit praying within me', Paul says that because there is no good done for others, such behaviour is unfruitful, it does not bear the fruit of the Spirit. So the Spirit can hardly be really within the behaviour if it doesn't bear the fruit of the Spirit.

14:15 *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also-* Prayer and praise must be with the understanding, or [Gk.] the mind. Any mindless, out of control behaviour is simply not of the Spirit. But this was exactly the kind of behaviour which was going on in Corinth and which is to be seen in Pentecostalism today.

14:16 *Else if you bless with the spirit, how shall he that is in the place of the unlearned say the Amen at your giving of thanks, seeing he does not understand what you say?-* We note the practice of saying "Amen" at the end of prayers. It could be that the "unlearned" sat separately from the baptized members. The Lord invited sinners and unbelievers to His table, and this separate seating arrangement reflects the pagan practice of making those not yet affiliated or initiated into the cult to sit separately in a specific "place of the unlearned". Paul's hope was that the visitor would say "Amen", in agreement to the blessings / prayers spoken. This of itself indicates Paul's hope that the unbelieving visitor would have some

participation in the worship. But if they were speaking in ecstatic utterances, it would not be possible nor legitimate for a visitor to express agreement, to utter the Amen, because the visitor would not have understood what was being said. However, the "unlearned" could refer to believers who didn't understand- they were "unlearned" in the sense that they were unlearned in the language being spoken. We note however that :23,24 speak of the "unlearned" as those entering the congregation, but they are differentiated from the "unbelievers". Perhaps they referred to those still undergoing teaching. The references there to 'coming in' certainly suggest a literal entrance to the church and having to literally sit in a particular "place".

14:17 *For you truly give thanks well, but the other is not edified-* Again, Paul is being generous. If they were uttering unintelligible sounds and calling that 'prayer', acting just as the surrounding religious cults did, then they were hardly to be commended for praying well. So I think Paul effectively means us to read in an ellipsis: 'You [may think that] you truly give thanks well, but [you would have to admit that] the other is not edified'. And the whole argument turns around whether our actions are building others up or not. Paul's whole approach here is masterful, and should be given due weight by those who believe that God's truth is best served by a belligerent, confrontational approach, ever seeking to set up a much headlined showdown between truth and error.

14:18 *I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all-* As a missionary, Paul would have used the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages far more than any of them.

14:19 *However in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue-* The contrast is between the tongue speaking of :18, and "in the church". Because the gift of tongues or speaking in foreign languages was not to be used within the church but in order to evangelize the unbelievers. Five intelligible words directed to building up the church, revealing an "understanding" or knowledge given from the Lord, were preferable to 10,000 words in a language which could not be understood. There may be some connection with Paul's comment that they had ten thousand would be teachers in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15); they all claimed to be teachers of each other, but there was no message.

14:20- see on Mt. 18:2; 1 Cor. 1:19.

*Brothers, be not children in your thinking. Yet in malice be babes; but in thinking be men-* This kind of malice has been mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:8; malice characterized their breaking of bread services. Paul sees this as immaturity; whereas we would rather consider "malice" to be something which would end our relationship with a person who is malicious. Paul here prefers to see this as immaturity, and urges their maturity. The way he has to repeatedly ask his converts to not be malicious shows this was a major problem amongst the immature churches of the first century (s.w. Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:1,16). The contrast between "babes" and "men" is misleading; *teleios*, translated "men", means mature, and this is the whole thrust of the argument- that the mature state mentioned in 13:10 and Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28 really could be attained by the Corinthians. And that maturity would have no particular use for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "Be babes" is the same word used by Paul in describing how when he was a "babe", in spiritual immaturity, he used the miraculous

Spirit gifts; but he had matured beyond them, to the maturity of love (13:11). The same figure of progressing from childhood to manhood is used of moving on from trusting in the Mosaic law for salvation (Gal. 4:3) It could be that these manifestations of immaturity were related- a legalistic trust in the Law for salvation inculcated a mindset that sought for evidence of salvation through the external and visible [possessing the miraculous gifts] rather than the internal- the things of the Spirit, culminating in the life of love as described in chapter 13.

*14:21 In the law it is written: By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak to this people, and not even thus will they hear Me, says the Lord-* The New Testament has examples of our being expected to deduce things which at first glance we might find somewhat demanding. 1 Cor. 14:21 rebukes the Corinthians for speaking to each other in languages which their brethren didn't understand. Paul considered that they were immature in their understanding because they hadn't perceived that Is. 28:11,12 states that it will be the Gentile non-believers who will speak to God's people in a language they don't understand. And this experience for Israel was part of their judgment for not having listened to God's prophetic words. So by talking to each other in language they did not understand, the Corinthians were living out their condemnation. Such an argument is subtle, but more powerful than a head on confrontation with them over the fact they were not really speaking in tongues as given by the Spirit, but were just copying the babbling of the mystery cults around them. The argument however presupposes a familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures, which would indicate that they were influenced by Judaizers.

*14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe but to the unbelieving; but prophesying is for a sign, not to the unbelieving but to those that believe-* Speaking in foreign languages was to be used for preaching to the unbelieving. The only time speaking in unintelligible language was envisaged, as explained in :21, it was a sign of condemnation to an unbelieving Israel. By doing this to each other, they were thereby proclaiming themselves to be unbelievers. But despite the logic of that position, Paul refuses to condemn the Corinthians and feels and writes towards them as if they are believers. We too may perceive that the logical position required by the behaviour of some 'believers' is that they in fact have lost faith. But all the same, it is not for us to condemn them. There is no example of Paul deciding to block disfellowship a whole group of baptized believers because of their moral or doctrinal errors.

14:23- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues-* The Greek suggests they assembled together "in one place" (AV). I suggested on chapter 1 that the church in Corinth was comprised of house churches, who at times gathered together in one place for the breaking of bread.

*And there come in-* The missionary drive of Paul was such that he saw in every outsider a potential insider, rather than merely a person to be separate from. Thus 1 Cor. 14:23 implies that the early ecclesial meetings were open for passers by to casually attend; indeed, the breaking of bread seems to have been used as a means of public witness "to shew [proclaim / preach] the Lord's death" and His coming again.

*Unlearned or unbelieving people, will they not say that you are mad?*- The "unlearned" may refer to those not fully instructed in the Lord's way; unbelievers would be those with no faith at all. If they saw a group of people babbling away, they would indeed think they were mad, and that comment is made upon Pentecostal meetings where just the same happens.

14:24- see on Heb. 11:7.

*But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned-* Paul will later command that the gift of prophecy should be used by only two or three at any one time (:29). But he has earlier said that he wishes they would all have the gift of prophecy: "I would wish that you all speak with tongues, but especially I wish that you should [all] prophesy" (:5). He is so eager to go along with them as far as he can. They sought the Spirit gifts for the wrong reasons, but he runs with that and suggests they seek especially to prophesy. But he envisages here, for the moment, all of them prophesying. And he imagines the great positive impact this would have upon an unbeliever. Again, he thinks in terms of the good which could be done for the edification of others- which is the essence of his poem about love with which he has introduced this section in chapter 13.

*He is reprov'd by all, he is judg'd by all-* The purpose of speaking forth God's word as intended was to lead unbelievers to repentance. "Reprove... judge" mean just that. The intention was to convict unbelievers of sin and lead them to repentance. Jabbering in unknown sounds would not do this. We are to note the intention of Gospel preaching- to bring others to repentance, to convict them of their moral need for the Lord Jesus. This is a far cry from the very tame profering of background Biblical information and other 'softer' approaches which characterize so much outreach work in our age.

Paul warned the Corinthians that only a church which was manifestly united, with each member using his or her gifts in an orderly, sensitive and respectful way... only such a church could convict the unbeliever of Truth. And this was all building on the Lord's clear statements in John 17- that the united church would lead to all men knowing of His grace and truth. This is why the Acts record describes the spectacular growth of the early church in the same breath as noting the intense unity and "all things common" between the believers. The mass conversions stopped after the politics of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and the division over welfare matters in Acts 6. While that incredible and genuine unity prevailed, converts were made by the thousand.

14:25- see on 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 9:11.

*The secrets of his heart are revealed-* This must be understood in the context of the person having been convicted of sin by the powerful preaching of God's word (:24). The secrets of the heart therefore refer to sins, and Paul uses the phrase in that way in Rom. 2:16 and earlier to the Corinthians he has said that the secrets of human hearts will be revealed and judged at the Lord's return (4:5). But for those who respond to God's word now, they can have that experience ahead of time. Whenever we come before the call of God in His word, whenever we hear the 'judgments' of God, we effectively come before His judgment. The Lord's preaching to the Samaritan woman had the same effect- she went and told others that He had revealed to her all the sins she had ever committed.



I've pointed out elsewhere how Paul so often alludes to and further interprets the words of the Lord Jesus. In Mk. 4:22 the Lord says: "For nothing is hidden, except to **be revealed**; nor has anything been **secret**, but that it should **come to light**". Paul's inspired allusions to this can be found as follows: 1 Cor 4.5: "who will bring to light the **secrets** of darkness and will **make public** the purposes of the heart"; Rom 2.16: "God judges the **secrets** of people, according to my gospel through Jesus Christ"; and, significantly for our context, 1 Cor 14.25: "The **secrets** of his heart are made **public / revealed**". The context of 1 Cor. 14 is of behaviour at the memorial meeting, following on from Paul's concerns about this in 1 Cor. 11 and 12. The point of the connections is this: As the secret / hidden matters of the heart will be judged at the last day, so they are revealed at the memorial meeting. For there, we stand before the cross, and the hidden thoughts of our hearts are revealed.

*And so he will fall down on his face and worship God-* The falling on the face in worship of God is because the man is having his experience of judgment day ahead of time. The same language is used in Rom. 14:11,12 of sinful man bowing before God in worship at judgment day.

*Declaring that God is among you indeed-* 1 Cor. 14:23-25 seem to imply that unbelievers came into house churches and ought to have been so deeply impressed that they declared that "God is in you of a truth". They were to be the living exemplification of how, as the Lord had prayed in John 17, the witness of Christian unity ought to be enough to convert the world. We need to give His words there their true weight. To see slaves and masters, men and women, Jew and Gentile, all sitting at the same table celebrating their salvation in the same Lord, with offices of leadership and responsibility distributed according to spiritual rather than social qualifications... this would've been astounding to the Mediterranean world of the first century. The way men mixed with women and the poor with the rich would've been especially startling.

14:26 *What is it then, brothers? As it is, when you come together, each one has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. But let all things be done to edify-* I have suggested that what in fact was happening was that the Corinthians were imitating the religious cults around them, falsely claiming to have Spirit gifts when in fact they were just copying the ecstatic utterances and irrelevant exclamations of supposed revelations which were common in those cults. But Paul doesn't specifically say that. He instead argues for the paramount importance of doing things in love, which means with the aim of edifying others. As it was in Corinth, all the babble of supposed claims, including perhaps Judaist influenced members reciting Psalms, was not going to edify anyone and would not convict any unbeliever of their sin and need for the Lord Jesus. I noted on :2 that their behaviour was partly influenced by Judaizers, and this would explain the significance of Psalms being thrown into the terrible confusion which was going on.

14:27 *If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three; and even then in turn, and let one interpret-* The proper gift of tongues was in order to communicate in foreign, intelligible language to those who were hearing the Gospel, as happened at Pentecost. It would be most unlikely that there would be more than two or three distinct language groups present at any one church service who needed this gift. Or perhaps the "two or... three" refers to speaking only two or three sentences at a time and then waiting for the interpretation to be given. There would be no point in talking over each other- otherwise the message would be drowned out in confusion, and no edification could occur. The insistence upon an interpreter could mean that the message given in one language must be translated

into the language of others present. But the Greek translated "interpret" more naturally means to expound or explain. The consistent theme is that God's word must be explained to people in order to build them up. The practice of all speaking in ecstatic, unintelligible utterances was clearly not going to achieve that. "In turn" is a fair translation; but *meros* has been used in the context of this passage for the "parts" of the body of Christ, to whom the gifts were distributed in order to build up the entire body. Possibly the idea was that only the legitimate members of the body of Christ should be displaying this gift.

14:28 *But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God-* The true gift of tongues was that of publicly speaking forth God's word in a foreign language, intelligible to the hearers. Anything else was just a pathetic attempt to mimic the ecstatic utterances of the idol cults- in the name of having a Spirit gift. But we have repeatedly noted Paul's gentleness and wisdom in not directly confronting the Corinthians over this abuse. He seems to be saying that if, as he has established in chapter 13, love of others and concern for their upbuilding is paramount- then there is no place for speaking in an unintelligible way. And if they felt that indeed they had such a gift- well OK, speak to yourself and to God, in silence, so you don't disturb the edification of others. His reasoning is exactly as one might use to children, who appear unable to hear their cherished belief shot down. If this is what you think you have or who you think you are- then do your thing quietly and don't disturb the church. So here again we have a case of Paul allowing something which seems to go against the tenor of his previous explanation of the *ideal* use of that gift. See on 1 Cor. 7:11.

14:29 *And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern them-* The limitation of the prophets to "two or three" is similar to that concerning the limitation of tongue speakers to "two or three". Perhaps the connection is in the fact that if only two or three were giving messages from God, speaking forth His word, then there would only be the need for two or three to speak in languages, assuming each prophet has his own dedicated inspired 'translator' into other languages.

How did it come about that the early church knew which books were inspired and which weren't? Paul and Peter were aware that there would be false prophets within the early church as well as true ones (2 Pet. 2:1). These false prophets wrote down their false teachings and claimed they were inspired. So there had to be a system of deciding whether a prophet was true, or false. There was a Holy Spirit gift which enabled the early church to 'discern the spirits'- to know for sure who was inspired and who wasn't (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Jn. 4:1). 1 Cor. 14:29 suggests that as soon as a person claimed to be 'prophesying' from God, then the person with the gift of discerning spirits was to be present with them and to confirm their words. And Paul goes on to say that anyone who doesn't submit to this, doesn't really have the Holy Spirit gifts. The scenario presented here is radically different to the idea of all present speaking in ecstatic utterances out of their control- which was the picture in the surrounding religious cults at Corinth, and is the Pentecostal scene to this day.

14:30 *But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence-* This may seem to contradict the idea that the spirits of the prophets were subject to them (:32). Prophecy was not a gift which could not be controlled and which led to interrupting another inspired speaker. And we have just read that the prophets were to speak by turn (:29). So why then does Paul appear to contradict the spirit of these principles by saying that if a prophet has a revelation, then the first speaker should fall silent? I would suggest that he is again

making concession to their weakness, despite having established the true principles; and is answering ahead of time their likely objections. In this case, the objection would be that as inspired speakers they could not help but speak forth. Paul is saying that OK, in that case, the other inspired speaker, who likewise 'can't help but speak', should fall silent! The contradiction and tension is purposeful. Because Paul has chosen to deal with their apostasy by indirect and subtle argument, pointing out the contradictory nature of their positions- rather than by direct confrontation.

14:31- see on Eph. 1:22.

*For you all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be exhorted-* The mention of "all" prophesying connects back to Paul's wish that they would all have the gift of true prophecy (:5). The prophetic message was to be given by one speaker at a time- otherwise, the confusion would be such that learning and exhortation would not happen. And the guiding principle in all these judgments is the upbuilding of the church. "Can" is *dunamis*- the power or ability is what is in view. Although they had each been given their potential gift and part to play in the church body, Paul is open to the idea that they could seek other, higher gifts. In his view, speaking forth God's word was the highest gift. And he was prepared to accept that potentially, each member of the church could get that gift. Another angle on "you call can..." is that Paul is arguing that the true Spirit gifts are under the control of the believer. It was not good enough to claim that they were all possessed by a spirit which made them prophesy and carried them beyond personal self control. You *can* prophesy one by one- *if* of course the gifts they had were the real thing and not just the imitation of the idol cult. And this is the theme of the next verse.

14:32 *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets-* See on :31 *For you all can...* . The Corinthian idol cults claimed that worshippers were possessed by the spirit of the demon / idol, to the extent that they were not in control of themselves. And this had been wrongly imported into the Christian church at Corinth. The gift of the Spirit from the Father and Son did not remove freewill or consciousness of behaviour from those who received it. It was not legitimate to claim that their trance like behaviour was because they were out of their minds under some overpowering supernatural influence. The prophet was in control of him or her self. It could be however that the reference is to the command to the prophets to "discern" each other in :29. Any prophetic word was subject to the discernment of other prophets.

14:33- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints-* If the situation in the combined church meetings was from God, then it would not be characterized by confusion. Because, as repeatedly stated in this chapter, it is God's intention to build us up towards an inheritance in His Kingdom. The building up of believers will only be achieved within a background of "peace". We should therefore strive towards peace at the local church level because this is the environment which enables growth; and building up of others is the outworking of love. "As in all the churches" may be a counter to the claim that they at Corinth were a special case and special allowance should be made for them. Paul's comment is that these Divine principles are universal across all churches.

14:34- see on 1 Cor. 7:17.

*Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak-* The spirit of the prophets was subject to them (:32- see notes there). It was therefore quite possible for women to exercise silence; again the evidence would be that the genuine Spirit gifts were not the same as the 'possession' experience of the idol shrines. This controversial verse may mean no more than that the women were not to chatter during church services- as was the habit in many synagogues. Their excuse that they were just asking for more clarification about the message is then answered in :35.

We must give full weight to the intentional contrast with Paul's discussion of women prophesying and praying in chapter 11. He clearly accepted that women should prophecy in the church. And there are New Testament examples of this. But I have noted throughout this chapter that there was a huge difference between the actual possession of the real Holy Spirit gifts, such as prophecy; and the farce that was going on in the Corinthian church, whereby they acted like the surrounding idol cults, imitating their speaking in ecstatic utterances and claims to possessing the gift of supernatural prophecy or speaking forth a supernatural, divine word. These claims were false. They didn't really have the gifts of true Holy Spirit. But this was not to say that there were no sincere Christians in Corinth. Clearly there were some; and there were some women, according to chapter 11, who did have the gift of prophecy. So the key would seem to be in the command for "*Your* women" (Gk.) to be silent. Whose women? The "you" of the context (e.g. :36) are those who in the wrong on these matters, claiming to have the Holy Spirit gift of tongues when they were merely babbling. *Their* women / wives were false claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit gift of prophecy; for in the surrounding idol cults, female prophetesses were popular. The Christian church at Corinth was clearly imitating the cult at nearby Delphi, based around the temple of Apollo. This cult was characterized by women claiming to be prophetesses. And it would seem that the women of the church pretended to the same office. This is why Paul is uncharacteristically blunt and direct on this point- they were to shut up. They were not true prophetesses. I have noted several times that the Corinthians were also under the influence of Judaizers. And so Paul now plays their own logic against themselves- he quotes Jewish scripture and Jewish synagogue reasoning back to them, as if to say: 'If you are really as Jewish and Mosaic Law compliant as you claim- well then in any case, your women should be in subjection to their husbands; "the law" says so'. They could not on one hand claim to be compliant with Judaism and the Jewish law, whilst on the other hand allowing their women to act as the prophetesses of Delphi, but under a Christian guise. I noted on 1 Tim. 2 that a similar problem arose at Ephesus, with the women in the church acting as the priestesses of Diana, but under colour of Christianity.

There are of course other possibilities. Perhaps we are to read this command about women specifically in the context of the memorial meeting, which appears the context here in 1 Cor. 14. However, it is evident that women did possess the gift of teaching by 'prophecy' in other contexts:

- To teach other women after the pattern of Elizabeth teaching Mary, and Miriam the women of Israel- both by the gift of prophecy (cp. Tit.2:3,4). The reference in 1 Tim. 2:9 to how women should "also" pray publicly in an appropriate way suggests that there was an organised 'sisters class' movement in the early church. It has been observed: "Where women were kept secluded in Greek society, sisters would be the only ones who could teach them. Teaching by brethren would be difficult in such circumstances".
- To teach in 'Sunday Schools' (there is ample Old Testament precedent for women teaching children).
- To teach unbelievers. This clearly occurred in the early church. Euodia and Syntyche had

“laboured side by side” with Paul in the work of the Gospel (Phil. 4:2,3 NIV). Priscilla helped Aquila teach Apollos the Gospel (Acts 18:26). At least eight of the sisters mentioned in Romans 16 are described as workers / labourers. Philip’s seven daughters were prophetesses- presumably not speaking the word to baptized brethren, but either to the world or to other sisters.

There's even evidence that there was an organized women's missionary movement in the early church. Clement of Alexandria commented: "The Apostles, giving themselves without respite to the work of evangelism... took with them women, not as wives but as sisters, to share in their ministry to women living at home: by their agency the teaching of the Lord reached the women's quarters without raising suspicion".

All these references to women in the early church teaching would have been anathema to many of the surrounding cultures in which the Gospel spread in the first century: “Not only the arm, but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard...she should speak to or through her husband” (Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 31-32). Likewise the encouragement for a woman to “learn in silence” was a frontal attack on the position that a woman’s duty was to follow the religion of her husband and concern herself with domestic duties rather than religious learning. The way the Lord commended Mary rather than Martha for her choice to learn and her rejection of domesticity similarly challenged the prevailing gender perception. There is no doubt that a 1st century Christian woman was far more liberated than in any other contemporary religion. In our societies too, our sisters mustn’t concern themselves *only* with domestic duties.

*But let them be in subjection, as also said the law-* But the word translated "in subjection" has just been used in :32 for how the Spirit would be subject to the prophet. The question is therefore to what or whom should the woman be subject; and where does "the law" state that. The same word for "subjection" is used about a Christian married woman's subjection to her believing husband (Eph. 5:22; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). And within this same section, Paul has taught that the head of the [married] woman is the man [husband] (1 Cor. 11:3). In this case, the Old Testament reference to female subjection to the husband would be to Gen. 3:16. This seems the obvious reference; but see my comments on *Let the women keep silence*.

14:35 *And if they would learn anything, let them ask their men at home-* A woman was to keep silent and ask her husband [Gk. ‘man’] ‘at [a] home’ if she had any questions (1 Cor. 14:35 Gk.). Generations of mystified yet Godly women have read that verse and thought ‘But I don’t have a man at home to ask. I’m not even married’- or ‘But my hubby doesn’t know a thing about the Bible!’. Read in the context of a house church scenario, it makes perfect sense. The women weren’t to interrupt the combined gatherings with disruptively asked questions from the floor. They were to ask the elders back in their house churches. And that’s why the Greek in 1 Cor. 14:35 strictly makes a distinction, between the woman not speaking / publicly asking questions in the church, but asking the brethren in a house [church].

*For it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church-* As noted above, we must balance this against Paul's encouragement of women to use the gift of prophecy in the church in chapter 11. And chapter 11 would appear to be in the context of the breaking of bread service. So we simply cannot read this as a blanket forbidding of women "to speak in the church". I earlier

outlined the case for thinking that the Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1), and their claims to speak in tongues and prophecy were mere imitations of what was going on in the surrounding idol cults. Those cults in Corinth, especially at Delphi and the temple of Apollo, featured female prophets. Paul gently goes along with the immaturity of the Corinthians on many points, but as in his attitude in other places, he will not tolerate false teaching, people claiming to speak forth God's word when they are doing nothing of the sort. He clamped down on a similar situation in Ephesus in 1 Tim. 2 [see notes there]. And so here he continues the allusion to early Genesis [see on :34 *the law*] by saying that these women were no better than Eve in her shame in Eden. They were bringing shame on themselves and others by what they were doing; those women in Corinth, at that place and time and context, were bringing 'shame' by speaking in the church. Although of course if they had legitimate Holy Spirit gifts of prophecy then Paul was happy for them to use them, as he has made clear in chapter 11. Hence he encourages the Corinthians to prophesy (:39)- but he refers to the true gift of Holy Spirit prophecy and not some imitation of the ecstatic 'prophecies' of the surrounding religions.

14:36 *What? Was it from you that the word of God went out? Or came it to you alone?*- God's word "went out" from those inspired by His Spirit. They were not spiritual (3:1), and their female prophets were not really speaking God's word. God's true word had gone out to many apart from the Corinthians, and they should therefore speak in accordance with it; rather than pleading they were some special case. Paul's comment about "in all churches" (:33) likewise suggests that Corinth were claiming they were a special, unique case- and could therefore do as they wished. This kind of reasoning is often encountered, on an individual and church level. But Paul is saying that God's word is universal in reference and did not come to them "alone" as some unique revelation. He has structured his sentences to allude to how the word of God "went out" from Jerusalem- not Corinth. The word of God going out is used to refer to preaching in 1 Thess. 1:8.

14:37 *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandment of the Lord*- "Spiritually gifted" is literally "spiritual", and the same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:1 where Paul says that they are not spiritual. Again Paul takes the most non-confrontational approach he can. He writes that if anyone thinks himself to be a 'spiritual', then seeing that it would be the same Spirit inspiring that person as was inspiring Paul, then he would agree with what Paul is teaching here. This is a very gentle way of approaching the terrible problems which these false prophets were causing.

14:38 *But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant*- This recalls his comment in 1 Cor. 11:16 about head coverings: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God". Paul seems to allow for the possibility of some in the church remaining in disagreement with his inspired teaching. His desire, it seems, was to state Divine truth and not to cause division in the ecclesia by insisting that all he said about these procedural issues in church life should be enforced at all costs. Considering he was inspired, this is quite some concession. Paul opened this section in 12:1 by writing that he didn't want them to be "ignorant" about spiritual gifts. But now he says that if after all he has written they want to ignore it, well, ignore it. This is not coarseness nor sarcasm. It is grace really, to allow others to be ignorant of what Paul knew was inspired teaching from God. His lack of threat or consequence is noteworthy; and he certainly never threatens excommunication or a

break in relationship with them. After all, he has reasoned earlier that his salvation is bound up with theirs.

14:39 *Therefore my brothers, desire earnestly to prophesy and forbid not to speak with tongues-* "My brothers" reaffirms that he is not breaking off relationship with them. And he still urges them to continue desiring to prophesy, although he means with the legitimate gifts of the Spirit and not in mere imitation of the idol cults. He is at pains to say that despite his own view that the use of the miraculous gifts was immature (13:8-11), he was not forbidding them. This is quite some insight into his wonderful tolerance, arising from the love he felt towards them.

14:40 *But let all things be done decently and in order-* This reflects the multiple appeals in this chapter to do all things with the love which builds up, as defined in the love poem which is the basis for all this teaching about tongues. An orderly rather than a random approach to church life is required, in order to achieve the end of building up others.

## CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, wherein also you stand-* The classic chapter about the resurrection of body, 1 Cor. 15, is also about the resurrection of Jesus. And it is not just a doctrinal treatise which Paul throws in to his letter to the Corinthians. It must be viewed in the context of the entire letter. He has been talking about the correct use of the body- not abusing it, defiling it, in whatever way. And he has spoken specifically about sexual issues. And then in summary, at the end of his letter, he speaks at such length about the resurrection of the body. Seeing that God intends resurrecting our body, our body means so much to Him that Christ died and rose again to enable our bodily resurrection, therefore it matters a lot what we do with our body right now!

The material in chapter 15 stands alone in terms of style, and is clearly a discreet unit. It could be that it is a body of material which Paul had earlier preached to them, and is now as it were transcribing in written form, with a few extra comments thrown in.

"Which also you received" means that they received the same message which Paul had also received. He says this explicitly in :3. What he "received", he asked them to also "receive"; and he uses this same word and concept frequently (1 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 1:9,12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1). 2 Thess. 3:6 speaks specifically of the "tradition received from us". All this suggests a specifically defined body of knowledge given to Paul and then faithfully relayed. We therefore have here a unique transcript of the body of doctrine received and passed on by Paul as the basic Gospel. Yet that body of teaching may not be the entire chapter, but rather the simple fact that Christ had died for our sins and risen again (:3,4). For much that follows, such as the mention of unrecorded appearances of the Lord to James, Peter and 500 others, can hardly be described as core Gospel information.

15:2 - see on 1 Cor. 11:2.

*By which also you are saved-* We are saved *dia* the Gospel, and this presupposes knowing it. The knowledge required is hardly very detailed, but all the same there is a content to it; for faith is axiomatically faith *in* something. There has to be a content to faith.

*If you hold fast the word which I preached to you-* 'Holding fast the word' is a phrase used in the parable of the sower (Lk. 8:15). The word Paul preached was therefore the seed sown by the sower- the basic Gospel. The word preached and sown by the Lord Jesus was therefore that also preached by Paul. The preaching of Jesus was largely practical and had little what we might call theological content. The Greek for "Hold fast" is related to the Greek verb for catechize; and inevitably the illiterate would have been taught the Gospel records by catechism, committing them to memory by repetition. But Paul is saying that they must as it were continue repeating those things in their minds. The wonder and reality of the Lord's death and resurrection and their own salvation was to be continually repeated or catechized within their minds- and likewise with us.

*Unless you believed in vain-* "Belief" can mean just that; but the Greek can also carry the idea of being entrusted with something. The Gospel is entrusted to us- and if we forget it or are no longer transformed by it, then it is been entrusted to us in vain.



15:3-7- see on Lk. 23:55.

15:3 *For I delivered to you first of all that which also I received-* As noted on :1, Paul is ever seeking to build bridges of common experience between him and his readership. What they had received, he too at one point had also received and believed. And he asks them to follow his pattern of further response to it. "First of all" means 'most importantly'. The most important aspect of the Gospel is not the Kingdom of God on earth but the fact that Christ died for our sins.

*That Christ died for our sins-* This was the "first" or most important aspect of the Gospel. Those who are not deeply convicted by their moral guilt and desperate need for forgiveness will never really see any urgency in the Gospel, nor behold the utter wonder of Christ's death for those sins. The Lord died "for our sins" and also "for us", as so often testified in the NT. Our identity with "our sins" must not be forgotten. We are not to see our sin as some abstraction, somehow separate from us.

*According to the scriptures-* It is tempting to assume that this refers to the Old Testament. But the same term is going to be used in :4 regarding how His burial and resurrection on the third day were also "according to the Scriptures". There is little direct reference to these things in the Old Testament. So I suggest that the *graphe*, the written things, may refer to the early Gospel records which were already in circulation. If indeed Paul refers to the OT, then he would be expecting them to have figured things like Christ's burial and third day resurrection from the inferences of types and shadows- surely a big ask of illiterate, newly converted Gentiles with little access to the OT scriptures.

15:4 *That he was buried, that he rose on the third day in accordance with the scriptures-* See on :3 *According to the scriptures*, where I give reason for thinking that the "scriptures" in view are the early Gospel records. They all emphasize His burial, and the third day resurrection.

15:5 - see on Mt. 17:1; Mk. 16:9.

*That he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve-* The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. Mary was the first to see the risen Lord (Mt. 28:1; Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:1). But Paul speaks here in 1 Cor. 15:5 as if Peter was the first witness of the risen Jesus. From his other writings and practice, it's evident that Paul wasn't simply 'anti-women'. But here he's surely making another concession to weakness- for in the first century world, the witness of a woman wasn't acceptable. And so Paul speaks of the first man who saw the resurrected Lord, rather than mention Mary.

15:6 *Then he appeared to above five hundred believers at once-* This is not recorded in the Gospels. The inspired writers were careful to avoid any form of sensationalism, just as we should be. Were there 500 believers at the time of the Lord's death? Probably not; so perhaps these 500 became believers after His appearance to them, and remained so at the time Paul was writing. Or perhaps there were 500 who so believed His words about reappearing in Galilee that they went there, and were rewarded by an appearance. 500 people at one time is

quite something- and there was no major Jewish feast at any time between the Lord's death and ascension.

*Of whom the greater part remain until now (but some have fallen asleep)*- One of the features of newly baptized converts is that they are generally young- often under 25. There are many Biblical examples for young people. The very first converts of the early church were comprised largely of the same age group- and yes, it's possible to Biblically prove this. 1 Cor. 15:6 states that the majority of the 500 brethren who saw the risen Lord Jesus were still alive when Paul wrote to Corinth, about 25 -30 years later. Seeing that life expectancy in first century Palestine was around 50, it would follow that the vast majority of those first witnesses of the risen Lord were under 25.

“Fallen asleep” may not necessarily refer to death, although the NT does envisage the death of believers as a sleep. The Greek term is also used about the spiritual slumbering of those who fall away. The 'remaining' would then refer to abiding in the faith, and that Greek word is also used in that context.

15:7 *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*- Again this is unrecorded in the Gospels. James was at one stage seen as the leader of the early church; but the point is being made that he was not the first to whom the Lord appeared. The order of appearance seems significant to Paul, for he labours the fact that the very last appearance of the risen Lord was to himself, and he was the least of all. We may ask why Paul here lists specifically the appearances of the risen Lord which are not recorded in the Gospels (to Peter, James and 500 brethren at once). Maybe his point was that the risen Lord had appeared to more than they might have realized; and He through the Spirit can likewise appear [albeit in a different form] to His people today.

15:8 *And last of all*- Paul places the appearance to Peter as coming first, even though the Lord first appeared to Mary (:5). He is framing things in this way to place Peter first and himself last. He so often alludes to Peter's words and actions. Paul the intellectual rabbi shows a parade example for all time in his deep respect for Peter, the illiterate fisherman from Galilee.

*As to the abnormally born*- The Greek term means an abortion. Paul felt himself to have been an aborted child, who although aborted, somehow miraculously lived. The LXX uses the word for a stillborn child (Num. 12:12; Job 3:16; Ecc. 6:3 cp. Ps. 58:8). Paul's conscience had been struggling against the Lord Jesus for some time before he accepted Him in Damascus. He had surely heard the call of Christ a long time before he responded to it; the new man had been potentially formed but he had aborted it, and he saw huge grace in the fact he the self-aborted spiritual child should have come to live birth (:10). The LXX references tend to associate 'an abortion' with shame and revulsion. The term was used as an expletive to describe a despised person; it had surely been used about Paul, and he agrees with it.

The whole idea of conversion and changing, even transforming, ones basic personality was deeply unpopular in the culture against which the Gospel was first preached in the first century. Ben Witherington comments: "Ancients did not much believe in the idea of personality change or development. Or at least they did see such change- a conversion, for example- as a good thing; it was rather the mark of a deviant, unreliable person... Greco-Roman culture valued stability and constancy of character... the virtuous Stoic philosopher was one who "surmises nothing, repents of nothing, is never wrong, and never changes his opinion"". Of course, this mindset was attractive because human beings never like changing-

we're incredibly conservative. And whilst we may live amidst an apparent mindset that 'change is cool', we all know how stubborn we are to changing our basic personality, or even seeing that we need to be transformed. And yet, despite the cultural background, the Gospel of conversion and radical personal change spread powerfully in the first century. The radical change in Saul / Paul's life was proclaimed by him as programmatic for all who truly are converted (1 Tim. 1:16)- and for him, this involved a radical re-socialization, seeing the world in a quite opposite manner, losing old friends and considering former enemies his beloved family. Quick, radical, 180 degree change was especially unpopular in the first century- proselytes, e.g., had to go through a lengthy process to become such. Yet Paul presents the change in him as being dramatic and instant on the Damascus road. Perhaps he alludes to how sceptically this was received by others when he answers the charge that he is an *ektroma*, a miscarriage, one born too quickly (1 Cor. 15:8,9). And he says that indeed, this had been the case with him.

*He appeared to me also-* Note that the same Jesus who appeared to the apostles appeared also to Paul, some time after His ascension to Heaven. He is not any fundamentally different to the literal, bodily Jesus who appeared to men after His resurrection. Paul saw that same Jesus. And truly He is the same yesterday, today and for ever. He is not now existing in some nebulous, non bodily form.

When Paul speaks of his sinfulness and weakness, it is nearly always in the context of writing about the privilege and wonder of our commission to preach Christ. He humbly wonders at the trust God places in him, to entrust him with the Gospel. He senses a privilege and responsibility in having been entrusted with the Gospel, to the extent that he can say that his preaching is done more by the grace of God he has received than by the natural Paul (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles-* "Least" could as well be translated "smallest" or "shortest". Hence when Paul embarked on his missionary work, he changed his name from Saul (the tall king of Israel who persecuted David-Jesus) to Paul, 'the little one'. Despite having withstood Peter to his face, according to Galatians, Paul still considered that he was less than them all.

Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners. He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: "As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has "all manner of concupiscence"). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end". Paul's progressive realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God's law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through

accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. Here in one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he now faced his death, he wrote to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:15 that he was "chief of sinners", the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful "to me *the* sinner" (Lk. 18:13 RVmg.). Note that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is rooted in the Lord's words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11).

*Who is unworthy to be called an apostle-* Inadequacy is the characteristic required for being used in the Lord's public service, and the Corinthians needed to learn from Paul's example.

*Because I persecuted the church of God-* The Lord had accused Paul of persecuting *Him*, and Paul would have perceived that all those in Christ were *Him*, and Paul's behaviour to them was his actions to the Lord Jesus personally. With his knowledge of the Gospels he would have reflected upon the Lord's teaching that whatever was done to "the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me" (Mt. 25:41,45). And it is therefore no accident that he uses this very word to describe himself now as "the least".

15:10 - see on Acts 23:6.

*But by the grace of God-* See on :8 *Abnormally born*. Paul saw himself as a stillborn, self-aborted child who somehow by God's grace had a live birth in his baptism by Ananias.

*I am what I am-* We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus. Paul was alluding to the Yahweh Name (as he often does) when he wrote: "... by the grace of God *I am what I am*" (1 Cor 15:10). Paul was especially chosen to bear the Name (Acts 9:15). 'Yahweh' means all of three things: I am who I am, I was who I was, and I will be who I will be. It doesn't *only* mean 'I will be manifested in the future' in a prophetic sense; that manifestation has been ongoing, and most importantly it *is* going on through us here and now. Paul felt Yahweh's insistent manifestation of the principles of His Name through and in himself and his life's work. We are right now, in who we *are*, Yahweh's witnesses to Himself unto this world, just as Israel were meant to have been. Thus he felt "jealous with the jealousy of God" over his converts (2 Cor. 11:2); jealousy is a characteristic of the Yahweh Name, and Paul felt it, in that the Name was being expressed through him and his feelings. His threat that "I will not spare" (2 Cor. 13:2) is full of allusion to Yahweh's similar final threats to an apostate Israel. "As *he is* [another reference to the Name] so *are we* in this world" (1 Jn. 4:17). Appreciating this means that our witness is to be more centred around who we essentially *are* than what we *do*. The fact God's Name is carried by us, the righteousness of it imputed to us, should lead us to a greater awareness of His grace. Paul alludes to how he carried the Yahweh Name when he says that "by the grace of God *I am what I am*" (1 Cor. 15:10). And his response was therefore to labour abundantly.

A theme of Malachi is that Israel failed to appreciate God's Name of Yahweh, and *therefore* they were half-hearted in their service. They gave the minimum to God, they were partial in their generosity, because they despised His Name. The fullness and richness of the Name, of who God is, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV), should lead us to a fullness of response. For the sake of the Name, believers labour (Rev. 2:13). To know the name of Yahweh is an imperative to serve Him (1 Chron. 28:9). The greatness of the Name should have led to full and costly sacrifices (Mal. 1:6-8,9-11,14; 2:2). Thinking upon the Name led the faithful to pay their tithes and fellowship with each other (Mal. 3:6,10). Giving unto Yahweh the glory due to His Name is articulated through giving sacrifice (Ps. 96:8).

There is an interplay between God's calling of men, and human participation in that outreach. The case of Paul exemplifies this. Without the vital work of Ananias, he wouldn't have been able- in one sense- to come to Christ. And yet it was God who called Paul. 'Ananias' means 'the grace of God'. And several times Paul alludes to this, saying that "By [Gk. 'on account of'] the grace of God [i.e. Ananias] I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:14). His conversion was by both God and Ananias. And thus we see the seamless connection in every conversion between God's role, and that of the preacher.

*And His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain-* "Bestowed upon" translates the simple word *eis*, "in". The gift of grace was internal; after baptism we receive the gift [s.w. "grace"] of the Spirit, which is essentially an internal influence. But we must let it operate. Paul is setting himself up as an example to the Corinthians, who had likewise received the same gift [see chapter 1], but who were not "spiritual" (3:1). Paul is ever concerned that the Corinthians had believed "in vain" (:2), and he holds himself up to them as an example of one who had *not* believed in vain.

*But I laboured more abundantly than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me-* As noted above, God's grace worked within Paul's mind. But it so dominated him that it can be put for he himself personally. *Sun*, "with", can carry the idea of possession. God's grace possessed him, and brought forth the labour for others which was the outworking of the love poem of chapter 13. Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 15:10 show Paul using the phrase "yet not I but..." to differentiate between his natural and spiritual self. Perhaps he does the same in the only other occurrence of the phrase, in 1 Cor 7:10: "And unto the married I command, yet not I [the natural Paul], but the Lord [the man Christ Jesus in the spiritual Paul], Let not the wife depart from her husband".

He surely isn't boasting that he was worked and preached harder than others. Rather Paul sees a direct connection between the grace of forgiveness that so abounded to him to a greater level than to others, and his likewise abounding preaching work. He speaks as if a man called 'The grace of God' did the work, not him. So close was and is the connection between receipt of grace and labour in the Gospel (he makes the same connection in Eph. 3:8). Note that in the context of 1 Cor. 15, Paul is demonstrating the reality of the Lord's resurrection. Because of it, he received grace and therefore he preached it.

When Paul speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than all, he seems to be making one of many allusions back to incidents in the Gospels, this time to Lk. 7:47, where the Lord comments that Mary loved much, because she was forgiven much. It was as if the Lord didn't need to have knowledge of her sins beamed into Him by a bolt of Holy Spirit; He perceived from her great love how much she had sinned and been forgiven. Paul really felt that Mary

was his example, his pattern. And so should we feel. The much love which she had for her Lord was, in Paul's case, articulated through preaching Him.

15:11 *Whether I or they-* If it is God's grace which motivates all preaching work, then it matters not which channel was used- whether Paul or other apostles. This is what he has already laboured in chapter 1, explaining that it matters not who preached to a person or baptized them. All was a manifestation of the essential grace of God, and the channel used should not make any difference.

*So we preach and so you believed-* "Our preaching" and "your faith" are paralleled in 1 Cor. 15:14. We see here the degree to which individual initiative in preaching is related to the faith and salvation of others. This is the force of the word "so". Salvation is in some sense dependent upon third party efforts (Mk. 2:5). God has delegated His work to us, and to some degree, the extent of its progress depends upon us. Note that faith or belief is predicated upon hearing the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection. Not upon following the detailed scientific arguments made for creationism, nor by any other attempt to make science 'prove God'.

15:12 *Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?-* Some among them, perhaps just a minority of false teachers, were teaching that there was no resurrection at all. This sounds like a version of the beliefs of the Sadducees, the only group mentioned in the NT who denied any resurrection (Mt. 22:23); and it was a group of Sadducees who were bent on killing Paul and obsessed with destroying his work (Acts 23:7-10 and context). Perhaps their agents were influencing Corinth.

15:13 *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised-* If dead people don't resurrect, then Christ was not raised as claimed. We note here the implicit assumption that the Lord Jesus was a human being, and not some Divine 'special case', let alone God in a Trinitarian sense. And likewise if Paul had believed in an immortal soul or conscious survival of death, he would not have deployed this argument, nor insisted upon the critical importance of believing in a bodily resurrection both of Christ and those in Him.

15:14 *And if Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain-* He preached, and *so* the Corinthians believed (1 Cor. 15:11); his preaching and their faith are so closely related, because there is a degree to which the belief and salvation of others has been placed in our hands (cp. Mk. 2:5). Because Christ rose, we have not believed and preached "in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Because He rose, therefore "awake to righteousness and sin not" (15:34)- for He is our representative. We labour for Him because our faith in His resurrection is not "in vain". Our faith in His resurrection is not in vain (:2,14), and our labour is therefore not in vain (:58) because it is motivated by His rising again. The grace of being able to believe in the resurrection of Jesus meant that Paul "laboured abundantly" (:10). And he can therefore bid us follow his example- of labouring abundantly motivated by the same belief that the Lord rose (:58).

15:15 *Yes, we are found false witnesses of God-* Paul expresses this in terms of breaking the Decalogue ["you shall not bear false witness"] because of the evident Judaist influences at work. We too should try to be all things to all men, reasoning in their terms as far as we can.

If Paul had witnessed that God had raised Christ, but actually He had not raise Him, then Paul had witnessed falsely about God. Note that Paul doesn't say that he had taught a wrong message; his belief in the resurrection was a matter of personal witness. For he claimed to have met the risen Lord.

*Because we witnessed of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised-* The "we" refers to the apostles and all who had seen the risen Lord. Paul again sees their witness as united and not divided; and therefore no factions should develop following various apostles.

15:16 *For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised-* A repetition of the argument in :13, so powerful is it. See notes there.

15:17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain, you are still in your sins-* Paul had earlier written of his fear that they had believed in vain if they no longer held fast to their initial belief in the Lord's death and resurrection (:2). Their profession to believe, their semblance of religion, was vain if Christ was still dead. This was the whole problem at Corinth- they were basing their Christian services upon those in the surrounding idol cults, replete with church prostitutes, eating idol food and claims to ecstatic utterances and prophecies. But this 'faith' or religion was in vain- it was mere religion, if they didn't actually believe the core issue of Christianity, the bodily resurrection of Christ. Any who deny His bodily, literal resurrection are liable to the same rebuke from Paul- that whilst indeed they may be religious, their faith and religion is vain. The point of our faith is that we are no longer 'in our sins'. His resurrection [and not just His death] is what enabled forgiveness of sins. The implication is that the Christian faith is all about the message of forgiveness of sins made possible because of the Lord's death *and resurrection*. And any faith or religion which gives no such forgiveness of sins is vain. And the other way around, the attraction and power of true Christianity is the solid assurance of forgiven sin [and all the eternal consequences of sin] through the death and body resurrection of Christ. Such good news will not be attractive to those who are not convicted of their sins and are looking for mere religion (see on 14:24,25).

15:18 *And therefore also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished-* The reference may primarily be to those who had seen the risen Lord but had now "fallen asleep" in death (:6). Paul sees no other form of salvation apart from sharing in the bodily resurrection of Christ; for baptism into Him means that His resurrection shall ultimately be ours (Rom. 6:3-5). Paul simply would not have reasoned this way if he believed in an immortal soul going to eternity at death. Without the hope of bodily resurrection which is predicated upon the Lord's resurrection, then we have "perished". The Lord Himself had promised that those in Him would not "perish" [s.w.] but should be raised up again at the last day (Jn. 6:39). Indeed John's Gospel several times uses this word for "perish" in the context of the Lord promising eternal life instead of 'perishing'. The articulation of that eternal life will be through the resurrection of the body, Paul is arguing. And that in turn is predicated upon the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, to which we are connected by faith and baptism into it.

15:19 *If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all people the most pitiable-*

"Pitiable" translates 'mercy'- the ones to whom mercy should be shown. The hint could be that they needed the Gospel again preaching to them. They were as many religious people- their 'faith' was just for this life. There was no solid connection to a hope beyond the grave, in the resurrection of the body. They were indeed no better than the surrounding religious cults which they emulated.

15:20 *But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep-* "But now" implies 'right now'. The historical resurrection of Jesus can become new and fresh in our lives. Right now, the Lord has risen. His resurrection is the guarantee that those asleep in Him shall also be raised as He was. But we are not just waiting in hope for that great day of resurrection to dawn. "We have the firstfruits of the Spirit" and therefore eagerly await "the redemption of the body" in the resurrection of the last day (Rom. 8:23). The Corinthians refused to recognize the gift of the Spirit which they had been given (3:1). This in turn led to them not realizing that there was actual proof within them that the Lord's resurrection was for real, and guaranteed their own. The new man created within us by the Spirit, which came to us through the Gospel, "the word of truth", means that we have the firstfruits already within us; we are already the firstfruits of the creation we shall become (James 1:18). And we in turn are the firstfruits of a greater harvest yet to come (Rev. 14:4)- perhaps referring to those redeemed in some way around the time of the Lord's return, or those converted during some 'Millennial' reign. The Lord's resurrection to life eternal was the first-fruit or guarantee of our resurrection (as in Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). And our resurrection to life at the last day will likewise be first-fruit of some even greater redemption or harvest. In this we may have some hint at the resurrection of others to some opportunity of hearing the Gospel and becoming part of the harvest, if they so desire. For if we are the firstfruits (Rev. 14:4), then we must ask who constitutes the greater harvest after us. I have discussed in Revelation 20 the difficulties of the classical view of the Millennium- for that is the common answer given to this question.

Another perspective would be that because we are in Christ, and because God sees the gap between His exaltation and ours as irrelevant, we are called "the firstfruits" too. This is why Rom. 1:4 Gk. and 2 Cor. 5:14,15 RSV speaks as if ultimately there is only one resurrection: that of the Lord Jesus, in which we had a part as being in Him. The appearing of Christ is paralleled with our appearing with Him in glory (Col. 3:4)- because effectively, when He returns, we will appear with Him in the same moment.

15:21- see on Rev. 20:5.

*For since by a man came death, by a man came also the resurrection of the dead-* Paul now makes a series of extended allusions to the events of early Genesis. This, along with references to "first-fruits", suggest there were some in his audience who were aware of the Jewish scriptures. He has alluded to them throughout his arguments to the Corinthians. I have mentioned often how Gentile, illiterate, immoral Corinthians were attracted to Judaism because it offered an apparent way of justification by a few specific works, freeing them up to be immoral in other matters. This was why Judaism was attractive to such an immature Gentile Christian audience. We must emphasize how death and resurrection both came by "a man"- Adam and the Lord Jesus. Clearly enough, the Lord was a man; we see here clearly taught the necessity of the Lord's humanity and representative sacrifice. Trinitarianism makes a fair mess of this clear teaching.



15:22- see on Jn. 5:21.

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive-* "In" Christ speaks of baptism into Him and abiding in Him. All in Him shall be made alive; which makes being in Him by baptism a requirement for salvation. I noted on :20 that the language of resurrection used here is not only limited to the resurrection of the body at the last day. We are to be "made alive" right now by the Spirit; for the Lord Jesus is a life giving Spirit right now to those who will accept it (:45). The "spiritual" state spoken of in :46 is true in some sense for us now who have received the Spirit; hence Paul's lament that the Corinthians were not "spiritual" when they ought to have been (3:1). The Lord had taught that "it is the Spirit that makes alive" and thus guarantees our bodily resurrection (Jn. 5:21; 6:63 s.w. "be made alive"). It is the same Spirit of Christ which now dwells in us which shall also be the means whereby our bodies are made alive at the last day (Rom. 8:11 is explicit about this). The Lord Himself was made alive by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18). So we can see how it was in fact logical that people who refused to accept the work of the Spirit within them would come to reject the idea of bodily resurrection. In this sense, "the Spirit gives life", right now, once we have rejected the way of legalism which "kills" (2 Cor. 3:6). Our Spirit is to become the Lord's Spirit; our essential personality must therefore be immortalized, and this therefore requires the resurrection of the body. For we personally shall be saved.

15:23 *But each in his own order-* "Order" is the word used in the LXX for a troop of soldiers or people (Num. 10:14; 18:22,25). The parade starts with the Lord Jesus, then with us, and then (:24) another undefined cohort at "the end". Paul looks from the perspective of eternity upon these three cohorts. I have suggested on :20 who this last cohort might be, although it is intentionally left undefined.

*Christ the firstfruits, then they that are Christ's, at his coming-* "At his coming" is proof enough that the time of glorification is not at death, which is unconsciousness, but at His return. Preterism has a big problem with this- for if His "coming" was at AD70 then all who are Christ's should have had their resurrection then. We become Christ's by baptism into Him (Gal. 3:29). and so Paul assumes that all the Corinthians "are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3:23). Even if they did not properly understand or therefore believe in the correct nature of the Christian hope, he still assumes that as baptized into Him, they would receive the promised outcome of His resurrection. This has huge implications for how we treat others who clearly have left the faith or fail to understand it, despite having earlier been baptized into Christ. We cannot condemn them ahead of the judgment seat of Christ, so we can only assume their salvation and feel towards them accordingly.

15:24 *Then comes the end-* "Comes" is not in the original. Literally, "then- the end". On :23 I suggested that we are being presented with three orders or standard bearers / troops of people. Firstly Christ, then those who in this life are His "at His coming", and now we have in view a third group. I suggested on :20 whom they might be. If indeed "the end" refers to the end of a Millennial reign (although see on :20), when He will have put down "all rule and all authority and power", He will have reigned until "all enemies" are subdued. This would mean that there will still be enemies of Christ throughout the Millennium; and there will also be human rulers and powers opposed to Him, to some degree, until they are finally subdued at "the end" of the Millennium. As Solomon's reign featured local rulers still existing in surrounding lands, so Christ's Kingdom would still feature local human rulers of some kind, who may not be forced to be subject to Him. It takes time for the little stone to destroy the kingdoms of

men, and totally establish God's Kingdom. Zeph. 3:19 speaks of the Jews getting glory and praise in every nation which have persecuted them. The lands of their dispersion, Russia, Germany, the Arab world etc., will then recognize the spiritual status of God's people. This in itself implies that humanity will not be one homogeneous mass. The *nations* will decide to go up to worship God at Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16); hinting at some kind of high level national decision by their leaders, as well as the individual desire of ordinary people from all nations?

*When he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father-* There seems an emphasis here upon the Lord's inferiority to the Father. "Even the Father" seems to stress the point, having said that He shall give up the Kingdom to God. I suggested in *The Real Christ* that wrong thinking about the Lord Jesus was already developing in the churches at this time, wishing to present Jesus as another god; which is how the pagan cults around them would have perceived Him, for they considered every cult to worship a god. This error came to full term in the doctrine of the Trinity; but Paul here is arguing against it right at its incipient stage.

*When he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power-* Absolutely all kinds of authority apart from that of the Father and Son will be removed. "Abolish" translates a word elsewhere used about the abolition of the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:2,6; 2 Cor. 3:7,11,13,14; Eph. 2:15), as well as the rule of sin (Rom. 6:6; Heb. 2:14). Paul has used the word in his opening chapter to the Corinthians about how all worldly structures and systems shall be "abolished" (1 Cor. 1:28; 2:6). This was a radical thing to put in writing, in a society where the "rule... authority and power" of Caesar was what structured society. All such things were to pass away right now in the experience of the believer. The words are used about sin, about the power of the Mosaic regulations, and also about the authority of Rome. The Father and Son were to be all and in all for all believers; submission to their rule, power and authority [words often used by Paul about the authority of the Lord Jesus] is the way to ultimate freedom from all the secular ties that bind. Even the authority of the miraculous Spirit gifts was to be abolished (s.w. 1 Cor. 13:8,10), and the mature believer was to likewise abolish or put away such things (1 Cor. 13:11 s.w.). Clearly, in the life of the believer right now, the Kingship of Christ is to mean the abolition of all other authorities and principles, be they of sin or the Mosaic law. The reality of Christ as Lord is to be supreme. It is this process of getting people to be like this which shall progress onwards until "the end".

15:25 *For he must reign until He has put all his enemies under his feet-* Having things and persons 'under the feet' doesn't necessarily mean they were to be killed or destroyed. It can mean simply submission before the one enthroned. "All things", a phrase often used for all God's people, are to be placed under the feet of the Lord Jesus (Ps. 8:6- quoted here in :27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8, which teach that it is the church who shall be under the Lord's feet. Rev. 12:8 may teach the same). I noted on Mt. 22:44 and Acts 2:35 that the making of the Lord's enemies His footstool means that they shall repentantly accept Him, rather than being destroyed by Him. "We were enemies" of God, but are now reconciled in grateful, humble submission (Rom. 5:10). This is the whole message of the preceding :24- that all things shall progressively be subjected under Christ's authority and Kingship, thereby becoming part of His Kingdom. To achieve this on a universal level, He shall have to come to earth and destroy those who refuse to submit. But the end in view is that the earth and all upon it shall be His Kingdom, under the dominion of His Kingship. And that process is to begin in the hearts of believers right now.

15:26 *The last enemy that shall be abolished is death-* "Last" doesn't have to have a chronological reference, as if death is the enemy destroyed at the end of a period. It can simply mean the one great enemy. Just as all forms of power and authority shall be abolished (:24), so shall death. The same words are used in 2 Tim. 1:10 of how the Lord Jesus has right now "abolished death"; for through His death He has "destroyed [s.w. 'abolished'] the devil which has the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). This is not only a case of 'Now but not yet'. It is the case rather that for those in Christ, death has been abolished by the Lord's death and resurrection; for our hope of conquering death is certain. That hope is to be spread progressively to others, and by the elimination of all who refuse it, there will come "the end" when death shall have been abolished not just for us but for all on this planet.

As in our own day, literature and thought of Bible times tried to minimize death. Yet in both Old and New Testaments, death is faced for what it is. Job 18:14 calls it "the king of terrors"; Paul speaks of death as the last and greatest enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Humanity lives all their lives "in fear of death" (Heb. 2:17). Facing death for what it is imparts a seriousness and intensity to human life and endeavour, keeps our sense of responsibility to God paramount, and the correct functioning of conscience all important. We see this in people facing death; but those who've grasped Bible truth about death ought to live like this all the time, rejoicing too that we have been delivered from it.

15:27 *For He put all things in subjection under his feet-* In the end, all the enemies of Jesus will be placed "under His footstool" (Acts 2:35 etc.). Yet we were all His enemies, due to the alienation with Him caused by our sin (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). The Lord's footstool is the place where His people are figuratively located, praising Him there (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Lam. 2:1). Ultimately, all things will be subjected under Jesus, placed at the Lord's footstool, under His feet (1 Cor. 15:27). Submission to Him is therefore the ultimate end of both the righteous and the wicked; the difference being, that the righteous submit to Him now, rather than in the rejection and final exaltation of the Lord over them in the condemnation process.

*But when He said all things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is excepted who did subject all things to him-* We may well enquire why this point is being made and so laboured. I suggested on :24 that Paul is arguing against a wrong view of Jesus as being God Himself. But Paul is arguing also against the idea that Christianity is a religion just for this life. He therefore highlights the fact that the whole work of the Lord Jesus in this age is all towards a final glorious end, when He will be subject to the one true God, who shall then be thereby fully manifested ("all in all", :28). That point has not yet come- and this is a powerful argument against Preterism as well as any tendency we may have towards living as if our 'faith' is just to ease our passage through this life, with nothing at the end. Paul picks up from this apparent digression in :29, which is again about resurrection of the body. So the argument about the Son's final submission to the Father should also be read in the context of a series of reasons why the final resurrection of the body is a necessary Christian belief.

15:28 *And when all things have been subjected to him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things to him-* Being under the Lord's feet is therefore parallel with being subjected to Him. And we are to be subject to Him now (s.w. Rom. 10:3; Eph. 1:22; 5:24; Heb. 12:9; James 4:7). The same word is used in the context of the resurrection and glorification of the body in Phil. 3:21: "Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able

even *to subdue* all things to himself". Through the Spirit, He is now at work within us to subdue us unto Himself, and that same Spirit shall transform our bodies into immortality. This is exactly the context of 1 Corinthians 15; see on 15:20 and Rom. 8:23.

*That God may be all in all*- God will be "all in all" through the full expression of His Name. But Eph. 1:23 says that right now, *all* the fullness of God fills "all in all" in the church; in other words we should now be experiencing something of that total unity which will then be physically manifest throughout all creation. Eph. 4:8 states that Jesus ascended in order to give the Spirit gifts to men, as He stressed in His discourse in the Upper Room. Then Eph. 4:10 says that He ascended "that He might fill (s.w. Him that fills all in all with the fullness, Eph. 1:23) all things" (the saints). Note in passing how the phrase "all things" and "all in all" are used about the saints. "All in all" is used solely in this context of the saints (Col. 3:11 is a good example), and this is how we should read 1 Cor. 15:28 "God may be all in all"- i.e. that God may be manifested completely in all His *saints* (not just 'in all creation generally'), whenever they lived and died. So the Spirit was given in order for us to be filled, to come, to the "stature of the fullness of Christ"- which is God's fullness (Eph. 4:13).

15:29 *Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are people baptized for them?*- According to the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, baptism for the dead was practiced by the surrounding religious cults in Corinth to preserve the dead from a bad afterlife, especially at Eleusis. The practice is referenced in Homer's *Hymn to Demeter* 478-79. So again we see the Corinthian Christians emulating the surrounding religious cults (as with using church prostitutes, eating idol food at the breaking of bread meeting, making ecstatic utterances and prophecies in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts etc.). They had no personal belief in a future resurrection, yet they could not escape the nagging doubt about what fate awaits us beyond death. And this led them to baptizing themselves in the hope of giving their dead relatives a better afterlife, even a 'better resurrection'. This is a useful window into the contradictions evident within many religious people. They may personally deny any interest in a resurrection of the body, and yet they act as if they are actually concerned about these issues, especially when it comes to the loss of their loved ones.

15:30 *Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?*- This is an allusion to Lk. 8:23. Paul felt that if he gave up his faith, he'd be like those faithless disciples in the storm on Galilee. Paul found that every hour of his life, he was motivated to endure by Christ's resurrection; this was how deep was his practical awareness of the power of that most basic fact. It could be that Paul felt he was in peril ["jeopardy"] of missing out on salvation if Christ was not raised. But he uses the same word to describe his constant "perils" whilst serving the Lord (Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 11:26). He endured these things every hour, directly because of the Lord's resurrection and the hope of a resurrection like His. This motivated him every hour to endure what he had to. Every hour of his life was a "peril", and only faith in the Lord's resurrection empowered him to endure it.

15:31 *I protest by that boasting in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord: I die daily*- By this he perhaps means that because he was daily crucified with Christ and rose with Him, he was thereby able to rejoice in them; to overcome the pain and hurt which their treatment of him would naturally give rise to, because he could be another person. That new person could rejoice in the Corinthians and view them so positively, all because Christ had

risen and opened up the hope for the Corinthians to be saved, which was Paul's great hope and boast.

Baptism is in a sense ongoing; we live in newness of life, continually dying and resurrecting. Out of each death, there comes forth new life. For His resurrection life, the type of life that He lived and lives, becomes manifest in our mortal flesh right now (2 Cor. 4:11).

15:32- see on Is. 22:13; Rev. 19:10.

*If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die-* Paul's hometown of Tarsus had been founded by Sardanapalus, whose statue was in a nearby town with the inscription: "Eat, drink, enjoy thyself. The rest is nothing". This is incidental confirmation that the Biblical record was not made up. This kind of language usage, reciting a phrase encountered during youth, would be utterly realistic and appropriate for Paul as the author. However it seems that he is also quoting a form of Solomon's words in Ecc. 2:24 as the words of those who have no faith that there will be a resurrection. The rich fool likewise effectively disbelieved in the resurrection, and his words also allude to those of Solomon (Lk. 12:19 = Ecc. 2:24; 11:9).

It is in the context of talking about our hope of bodily resurrection at Christ's return, Paul says that this hope was what had given perspective to his wrestling with wild beasts at Ephesus. The context surely requires that we understand this as referring to how he had been in danger of losing his physical life because of this wrestling, but he endured it with a mindset which looked ahead to the resurrection of the body. The wrestling with wild beasts, therefore, appears to be a literal experience which he had, rather than using 'wrestling with wild beasts' in a figurative sense. There was at Ephesus an amphitheatre, and we also know that there were cases where convicted criminals were forced to fight wild animals; if they killed the animal, then they went free. It seems this is what happened to Paul. He speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of an acute crisis which he faced in Asia (and Ephesus was in Asia) which involved his having been given a death sentence, and yet being saved out of it by "the God who raises the dead". This emphasis on bodily resurrection is the same context we have in 1 Cor. 15:32. As he faced his death in 2 Tim. 4:17, Paul reminisced how the Lord had earlier saved him "out of the mouth of the lion"; and the context there is of literal language, and we are therefore inclined to consider that he was literally saved from a lion in the arena at Ephesus. This also helps us better understand his earlier reference in Corinthians to having been exhibited as a spectacle, as a gladiator at a show, "appointed unto death", in the presence of God and men (1 Cor. 4:9). Note that despite this traumatic experience, Paul chose to continue at Ephesus even after that, because he saw a door had been opened to him for the Gospel, despite "many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8,9). We who are so shy to put a word in for the Lord in our encounters with people ought to take strength from Paul's dogged example in Ephesus.

15:33 *Be not deceived-* This sounds like an appeal not to be deceived by false teachers.

*Evil companionships corrupt good moral habits-* This and :34 are in the midst of an argument about the importance of believing in the Lord's resurrection and focusing ourselves upon our own future resurrection at His coming. So we must understand these moral appeals in the resurrection context. "Evil companionships" is only one possibility in translation; AV "evil

communications" is not too far wrong. The Greek *homilia* means literally 'homily'. The communications or homilies in view would then be the false teaching against which Paul was warning them: "Be not deceived". It was this evil teaching being communicated to them which would corrupt morality. For if Christ is not raised and we shall not be, then there was no longer any binding moral compass upon Christians- for judgment day and the second coming would never happen, and there was no ultimate outcome of our moral behaviour in this life. The same word for "corrupt" will be used in 2 Cor. 11:3 of Paul's fear that false teaching would "corrupt" the Corinthians just as the serpent beguiled Eve.

15:34- see on 1 Cor. 4:14.

*Awake to soberness righteously, and do not sin. For some among you have no knowledge of God-* We died and rose with Christ, and if Christ really did rise again, and we have a part in that, we must therefore abstain from sin, quit bad company and labour with the risen, active Lord. As noted on :33, this teaching is about the result of listening to false teaching which denied the resurrection, both of the Lord and ourselves. The end result of it was sin, and not knowing God; although *agnosia* really means 'ignorance'. Belief in the Lord's awaking would result in their moral awakening. To not believe in the Lord's resurrection was to not know God. There is actually no valid belief in God, or theism, if it is not predicated upon belief in the Lord's resurrection. Nobody can come to the Father except through the Son. "Knowledge of God" may well refer to relationship with God, rather than simply a lament that they did not know the right theology.

One of the greatest false doctrines of all time is the trinity- which claims that there are three "persons" in a Godhead. Trinitarian theologians borrowed a word- *persona* in Latin, *porsopon* in Greek- which was used for the mask which actors wore on stage. But for us, God doesn't exist in personas. He exists, as God the Father. And we practice the presence of that God. The real, true God, who isn't acting, projecting Himself through a mask, playing a role to our eyes; the God who is so crucially real and *alive*, there at the other end of our prayers, pulling at the other end of the cord... What we know of Him in His word is what and who He really is. It may not be *all* He is, but it is all the same the truth of the real and living God. And this knowledge should be the most arresting thing in the whole of our existence. So often the prophets use the idea of "knowing God" as an idiom for living a life totally dominated by that knowledge. The new covenant which we have entered is all about 'knowing' Yahweh. And Jer. 31:34 comments: "They shall all know me... for I will forgive their iniquity". The knowledge of God elicits repentance, real repentance; and reveals an equally real forgiveness. It is possible for those in Christ to *in practice* not know God at all. Thus Paul exhorted the Corinthian ecclesia: "Awake to righteousness and sin not: for some have no knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34 RV). The knowledge and practice of the presence of God ought to keep us back from sin. Ez. 43:8 RV points out how Israel were so wrong to have brought idols into the temple: "in their setting of their threshold by my threshold, and their door post beside my door post, and there was but the wall between me and them". How close God was ought to have made them quit their idolatry. But their cognizance of the closeness of God was merely theoretical. They didn't feel nor respond to the wonder of it. And truly, He is not far from every one of us.

*I speak this to move you to shame-* As in 6:5; but on other matters, Paul did not seek to shame them (4:14). We note his sensitive approach to them, taking a different approach over different issues, just as we should. The "shame" was on "you"- that their collective attitudes

had led to some amongst them having "no knowledge of God". We are all in this together; it is not for us to shrug at the spiritual failure of some amongst us. Just as Ezra and others blushed at their collective shame for the behaviour of the community they were members of (Ezra 9:6).

15:35 *But someone will say: How are the dead resurrected? And with what type of body do they come forth?*- Where and when and how the salvation of the Father and Son will be finally manifested and outplayed isn't the most important thing. The *essence* of their salvation is what needs to concern us. Tragically Bible students have all too often been like the foolish questioner Paul envisages in 1 Cor. 15:35; he was preoccupied with *how* the body would come out of the grave, rather than on the essence of the fact that as we sow now, as we now allow God's word to take root in us, so we will receive in the nature of the eternal existence which we will be given at the judgment. I'm not saying that how we are raised etc. is unimportant; but it's importance hinges around its practical import for us. All too easily we can bat these questions around with no attention to their practical relevance for us.

I mentioned earlier that the only group mentioned in the NT as denying the resurrection were the Sadducees; and these objections from "someone" were typically theirs. Clearly Corinth were under the influence of Judaism, and particularly from the Sadducees who hated Paul because he had been born a Pharisee. I have mentioned throughout commentary on Titus and also here on Corinthians that such Judaism was strangely attractive to immoral, immature Gentile Christians who likely had never read the Mosaic law. Because a few acts of ritual obedience apparently freed them up to continue an immoral life in other areas.

15:36 *You foolish one*- For all his gentleness and tolerance towards the Corinthians, Paul is quite sharp with the false teachers: "You fool" translates a fairly coarse term in Greek. This should be our pattern- patience and endless gentle reasoning with the weak, but standing up to false teachers. Hence the policy of an open table but a closed platform.

*What you sow does not come to life unless it dies*- Death is necessary in the wider plan of salvation; the coming to life must be at some point after death, for we are but a seed sown. Death is the gateway to a 'coming to life' at the last day [not immediately after death]. The necessity of resurrection is therefore Paul's answer to the detailed questions as to how mechanically the dead shall be raised. And it is important to grasp that logical and spiritual necessity of bodily resurrection- and the details and mechanisms then become irrelevant. The Greek for 'come to life' is used of our being spiritually quickened now after baptism (Jn. 5:21; 6:63), when we figuratively die and rise again. The Lord Jesus is now a life giving Spirit (:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). Hence Paul can write of how he dies daily (:31). Note that a seed does not die in the earth, but Paul is using this as a figure of death, a burial in the ground. The external body of the seed decays but the germ within lives. Paul is not teaching here the immortality of the soul, but rather than the very essence of a believer, which is the spirit, shall determine the nature of our resurrected existence. See on :22. It is the same Spirit of Christ which now dwells in us which shall also be the means whereby our bodies are made alive at the last day (Rom. 8:11 is explicit about this). It is of the Spirit that we reap eternal life at the last day (Gal. 6:8). The Lord had likened Himself to a seed falling into the ground and dying, and then bringing forth much fruit when it rises from the earth (Jn. 12:24). Paul is alluding to this because his whole argument is that baptism makes the Lord's death and resurrection a pattern for our own.

15:37 *And what you sow is not the plant body that shall later be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or some other grain-* The allusion is clearly to the Lord's parables of sowing; the requirement is that there shall come a harvest when the seed comes out of the ground. It is not the mature plant which is sown and then reappears. The seed sown is "bare", or "naked". Paul uses the same figure in 2 Cor. 5:3, where he likens the immortalizing of our bodies to our naked [s.w. "bare"] body being clothed upon with immortality. But there is something in common with our life now, just as there is a connection between the seed and the plant. And just as there are different types of crop, so there are different types of people who shall be immortalized- grain, wheat or some other crop which gives the bread of life to others. This may assist us in coping with the widely differing types we find within the church- one may be wheat, another grain.

15:38 *But God gives it a body just as it pleases Him; and to each seed a body of its own-* There is a connection between the seed we are in this life, and who we shall eternally be. In this lies the eternal consequence of the personality we develop now. And yet on the other hand, the body given us, the nature of our eternity, will be a gift from God according to His will or pleasure. Those two elements are brought together in this verse. We shall each be unique- each seed has a body of its own, just as each plant is unique. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our lives as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as "the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord.

15:39 *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes-* Paul labours this point over the next verses. He has introduced the idea of the unique, individual nature of our reward in writing of how each plant has a unique body (:38) and how there are different types of grain. The diversity of the natural creation will be reflected in the spiritual creation, and therefore there is going to be diversity amongst us within the church now- a point which needed making to a group as diverse as Corinth.

15:40 *There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly is one and the glory of the earthly is another-* Perhaps Paul is referring to Angels as the "heavenly bodies", and in so doing making another stab at the teaching of the Sadducees who denied both resurrection and Angels (see on :35; Acts 23:8). We shall become as Angels at the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36), and their varying glories shall be reflected in our own. The supreme heavenly body is that of the Lord Jesus, and we shall receive a body like His heavenly body (:48,49). An alternative is to understand the heavenly bodies as the planets which will now be listed in :41. Just as there are varying glories amongst the diversity of earthly bodies which comprise the natural creation (:39), so there are amongst the heavenly bodies (:41). This variation of glory will be reflected in the diversity seen amongst the glorified believers after their resurrection.

15:41 *There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another star in glory-* The different types of glory will be reflected in the diversity of believers both now and eternally. Clearly Paul envisaged a



gradation of glory amongst the believers. Some make more of God's truth than others. This would have been a most necessary point to labour in a church which was so diverse, with some strong and committed, and others extremely weak. The stronger ones could only relate to the weaker ones by understanding that they would be saved, although their glory might be less than that of others. The Lord likewise taught that some would have more cities to rule over than others; some will trade His talents better than others.

15:42 *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption-* By "the dead" Paul understands "the dead in Christ", for he is predicating resurrection upon association with Christ's resurrected body. "Corruption" has moral undertones- see on :43 and :44. In this case, we have in view not an emergence in immortal form, but rather the idea would be that the corruptible the prone to sin, will be raised in a form which cannot sin, which is incorruptible.

15:43- see on 1 Cor. 8:9

*It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power-* "Dishonour" has moral connotations, the same word being translated "vile affections" (Rom. 1:26), and used of the "dishonour" of condemnation at the last day (Rom. 9:21; 2 Tim. 2:20). Paul has recently used the word about the weaker members of the church whom we might consider to be dishonourable (12:23). "Weakness" is likewise used of moral weakness (Mt. 8:17). These spiritually weak ones will be resurrected in power; yet the same words are used in Heb. 11:34 of how the [spiritually?] weak are "made strong", literally 'made of power', in this life. This theme of morally weak being raised spiritually strong is continued in :44, and in :42 the idea of 'corruptible' being raised incorruptible is introduced. Paul's reasoning here connects with one of the hardest issues posed by the Corinthian correspondence: Paul writes as if all the Corinthians shall be saved, for they are "in Christ". He feels warmly towards them and believes in their final salvation- for he will not ever state they are to be condemned at the last day. And yet he clearly reveals that their behaviour was in serious denial of basic Christianity, in doctrine and practice- and he urgently pleads with them to change lest they lose their salvation. Paul and those who were 'spiritual' in Corinth must have struggled hard over these issues. Paul is speaking in this section of the resurrection of the body at the last day, but he clearly does so in terms which refer to the moral weakness of the weaker ones at Corinth. He can only assume that if they are to be saved, then they shall die in moral weakness and dishonour but be resurrected in a spiritually stronger form. Even though those changes in a moral sense ought to be happening now. This speaks powerfully to us today. For we too wonder at the apparently non-Christian behaviour and beliefs of those who have been baptized into Christ and we therefore have to assume are "in" Him and in hope of salvation. For it is not for us to say they are non-Christian or have fallen from grace to the point they shall not be finally saved. For we are not to judge in that ultimate sense. We can only therefore assume their salvation. And that will mean they at their deaths are sown in moral corruption and dishonour but shall be saved at the resurrection, when they shall be changed. And this of course is a question we have likely asked ourselves too- is the resurrection just going to mean a change of physical nature for me, so that I shall be immortal? Or shall I be changed morally, spiritually, as well? Such change is sadly necessary for us all. But we wonder to what extent it shall be possible... will character and personality be totally transformed by the resurrection process? Or just as it were touched up? And if we hope for such a change in our own cases, to what extent can we deny such hope to weak believers who die in Christ whilst still so terribly immature in faith and behaviour? Paul's approach here is

indeed a comfort. The transformation from weakness to power, from corruption to not corruption, in moral terms, must of course be happening now. But we need the resurrection to make it complete. And like Paul with Corinth, we have to assume that resurrection shall mean moral as well as physical transformation for our brethren. And this frees us from the need to condemn and separate from our brethren in this life. We must assume that resurrection shall transform them to how they must be- as it will us. For none of us surely can claim that we are perfect now and just need immortality to get us to salvation.

15:44 *It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body-* See notes on :43 regarding the element of moral transformation which will be part of the resurrection process. Paul has drawn the tension between natural and spiritual in 2:14; the Corinthians were still natural when they ought to be spiritual, and Paul laments they are not spiritual (3:1). Jude 19 speaks likewise of weak believers as being "sensual [s.w. "natural"], having not the Spirit" as they ought to have. The transformation from natural to spiritual ought to be now; but the final transformation at the resurrection will also have to include this element for us all, and shall not solely be a changing of our nature from mortal to immortal. This is great comfort for those who feel their transformation is not complete and that they go to their grave not fully transformed in moral terms.

15:45 *So also it is written: The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit-* Be aware that the original writers didn't have quotation marks or brackets (consider where Paul might have used them here!). The quotation is from Gen. 2:7. But Paul goes on to say that the Lord Jesus as the last Adam is a life-giving spirit. He will be this in a literal sense at the resurrection of the last day. But His Spirit is about moral transformation; we should receive that Spirit now and be transformed. And the resurrection of the last day will also feature an element of moral transformation as well as physical- see on :43.

There was a first century Jewish speculation that Adam would be re-incarnated as Messiah. Paul's references to Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:45-47 are very careful to debunk that idea. Paul emphasized that no, Adam and Jesus are different, Jesus is superior to Adam, achieved what Adam didn't, whilst all the same being "son of man". And this emphasis was effectively a denial by Paul that Jesus pre-existed as Adam, or as anyone. For Paul counters these Jewish speculations by underlining that the Lord Jesus was *human*. The hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 is really a setting out of the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- and unlike Adam, Jesus did not even consider equality with God as something to be grasped for (Gen. 3:5). The record of the wilderness temptations also appears designed to highlight the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- both were tempted, Adam eats, Jesus refuses to eat; both are surrounded by the animals and Angels (Mk. 1:13).

15:46 *But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and only then the spiritual-* See on :44 for how the Corinthians were natural when they ought to have been spiritual. Again Paul is encouraging them to make the change now, but also comforting the 'spiritual' ones that the immaturity of the others had to be, because the natural comes first. The transformation of resurrection will not only be physical, but also moral. And that is what all of the body of Christ so desperately need.

15:47- see on Mt. 3:7.

*The first man is of the earth, earthy. The second man is heavenly-* I have noted elsewhere Paul's fondness for allusion to the words of John the Baptist, from whose lips he likely first heard the Gospel. Here Paul clearly has in view the words of Jn. 3:31: "He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaks. He that comes from heaven is above all". I have noted on previous verses in this section that Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the body at the last day, but he does so in language which is equally applicable to the moral 'resurrection' and transformation of the believer today. John's words reflect that the Heavenly man, the Lord Jesus, is speaking words of transformation right now. For Jn. 3:32-34 continues: "What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies... He that has received his witness has certified that God is true. For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give him the Spirit by measure". The transforming ministry of 'the Man from Heaven' operates through His Spirit and the words of His gospel. I have noted elsewhere that there was a problem with Judaist influence in Corinth. Heb. 12:25 contrasts Moses as the man who spoke on earth, and the Lord Jesus who speaks from Heaven. So loaded into this verse is a challenge to the exaltation of Moses above Jesus, as well as the teaching that we must be transformed now by the words of the Man from Heaven- and this transformation will seamlessly continue in the resurrection process at the last day.

The apocryphal Jewish *Book of Enoch* held that the "Son of man" figure personally pre-existed (1 Enoch 48:2-6; 62:6,7). The idea of personal pre-existence was held by the Samaritans, who believed that Moses personally pre-existed. Indeed the idea of a pre-existent man, called by German theologians the *ur-mensch*, was likely picked up by the Jews from the Persians during the captivity. Christians who believed that Jesus was the prophet greater than Moses, that He was the "Son of man", yet who were influenced by Jewish thinking, would therefore come to assume that Jesus also personally pre-existed. And yet they drew that conclusion in defiance of basic Biblical teaching to the opposite. Paul often appears to allude to these Jewish ideas, which he would've been familiar with, in order to refute and correct them. Thus when he compares Jesus and Adam by saying: "The first man is of the earth, the second man is from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-47), he is alluding to the idea of Philo that there was an earthly and heavenly man; and one of the Nag Hammadi documents *On The Origin Of The World* claims that "the first Adam of the light is spiritual... the second Adam is soul-endowed". Paul's point is that the "second Adam" is the now-exalted Lord Jesus in Heaven, and not some pre-existent being. Adam was "a type of him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14); the one who brought sin, whereas Christ brought salvation. Paul was alluding to and correcting the false ideas- hence he at times appears to use language which hints of pre-existence. But reading his writings in context shows that he held no such idea, and was certainly not advocating the truth of those myths and documents he alluded to.

15:48 *As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they that are heavenly-* The present tenses ["Such are they"] suggest that those who shall become as the Man from Heaven at the future resurrection shall be transformed right now into His image. Just as we should be spiritual and not natural right now (see on :44 and :46), so we should now be heavenly rather than earthly. We are to be focused upon heavenly things rather than earthly things (Col. 3:2).

15:49- see on :48 and Col. 1:15.

*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly-* Verse 48 has spoken of how we should now be "heavenly", so that we shall then at the

resurrection bear the image of the heavenly One, the Lord Jesus, in every way, physically and morally. We are now being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus through the transformation of the Spirit (Rom. 8:29); and this moral transformation shall continue through the resurrection process. That process will not solely change our physical nature. We are being progressively changed by the Spirit into His image (2 Cor. 3:18) and this shall continue through the resurrection. We are putting on the Lord's image through putting on "the new man" (Col. 3:10). Yet Paul says this shall happen supremely at the resurrection. The image of Jesus is not something physical, it refers primarily to things of the spirit and personality. Again (see on :43,44,45), the change at resurrection will be moral as well as physical.

When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be. See on Acts 9:3.

15:50- see on 1 Cor. 5:5.

*Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither does corruption inherit incorruption-* Flesh and corruption refer both to our physical constitution as well as our moral state. There has to be a change of both those aspects for us to inherit the Kingdom, and therefore resurrection has both a moral and physical aspect. Paul has warned the Corinthians earlier that their immoral behaviour is of a character that shall "not inherit the Kingdom" (6:9,10, as Gal. 5:21). But here he says that it is the resurrection process which shall transform those who cannot inherit the Kingdom into those who shall. See on :43,44 and :45 for discussion of this.

15:51 *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all remain asleep, but we shall all be changed-* What is so mysterious here, what new revelation is there in this teaching of the resurrection of the body? Paul is after all re-stating the basics of the Gospel, as he has stated at the beginning of the chapter. I suggest that the new mystery revealed is that resurrection is additionally going to be a moral transformation. He has rebuked them earlier for having members who were 'sleeping' spiritually (1 Cor. 11:30). Some of them even would be changed by resurrection. See on :43,44 and :45 for discussion of the implications of this. The "change" in view is more than physical immortality- for "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". The change is in addition to being made immortal. It is specifically associated with being made "incorruptible", unable to be morally corrupted, unable to sin.

15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-* See on 1 Thess. 4:17. "A moment" is literally 'in an atom'. The idea is of time that cannot be divided further, and may be a way of signalling that the meaning of time will be changed around the judgment and coming of the Lord. There are references to a trumpet sounding at the Lord's return (Mt.

24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16), but the *last* trumpet suggests a series. This is reason for thinking that the Apocalypse was given at an early stage and the vision of the trumpets (Rev. 10:7) was known to the initial readership.

*For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed-* For the difference between the "change" and being made "incorruptible", see on :51.

"In a moment... the dead shall be raised incorruptible (i.e.) we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). "The dead" here refers to the group of dead believers who will be found worthy. Their immortality will be granted to them together, as a group, "in a moment". Yet in a sense we will each receive our reward immediately after our interview with the Lord- another powerful indicator that the meaning of time must be collapsed at the day of judgment. The words of Mt. 25:34 are spoken collectively: "Come, ye (not 'thou', singular) blessed... ye gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". The corruption and incorruption may refer to the sense that we are now corruptible, we can sin and be corrupted. But the resurrected [i.e. glorified] believers who experience the "resurrection to life" will not be corruptible, they will be unable to sin. See on :42, :43 and :44.

However, this verse has been misread as meaning that all who are resurrected shall emerge from the grave immortal, meaning that the judgment is only for the dividing up of rewards rather than the granting of immortality to mortal bodies. There are a number of objections to this interpretation from other parts of Scripture:

- "We shall all be *changed*... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is *swallowed up* in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54). The rebuilding / raising up incorruptible is the "change", the mortal putting on immortality, death being swallowed up. All these phrases are rather uncomfortable within a scenario of immortal emergence from the grave. If the mortal bodies of saints are even further humbled before the piercing analysis of the judgment seat and *then* swallowed up in victory, clothed upon with immortality- these words find their natural fulfilment.

- Paul speaks of us being *clothed upon* with immortality at the judgment (2 Cor. 5:2,4,10 RV), as if we exist in a form which lacks the clothing of immortality, but is then 'clothed upon'.

- At the Lord's coming, our vile body will be changed to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:20,21).

- God will quicken our *mortal bodies* (Rom. 8:11). The mortal bodies of Paul and the Romans have yet to be quickened; therefore they must be resurrected mortal and then quickened. However, it could be that Rom. 8:11 is one of several expectations of the second coming within the lifetime of the first century believers.

- At the judgment seat, we will receive a recompense for the things we have done, in a bodily form (2 Cor. 5:10). Of the flesh we will reap corruption, of the spirit: life everlasting (Gal. 6:7,8).

- We *will be* justified and *be* condemned by our account at the day of judgment- not at resurrection (Mt. 12:36,37).

- The nobleman came, called his servants, reckoned with them, and only then was taken from the slothful servant even that which he seemed to have- at the judgment, not the resurrection (Lk. 19:12-26). The unprofitable are cast into outer darkness at the judgment, not the

resurrection.

- The sheep go away *into life eternal* and the goats go away *into death*- after the judgment process. It is hard to square this with immortal emergence before the judgment.

- "Come, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) is spoken at the end of the judgment process.

Only then will the faithful inherit the Kingdom and thereby receive immortality.

- The Lord will raise up the dead and quicken (i.e. immortalise) whom He will of those He has raised up (Jn. 5:21).

- 1 Thess. 4:17 teaches that the dead are raised and go with the living to the judgment, where sheep and goats are divided finally. It seems inappropriate for already immortalised believers to be judged and rewarded.

- When a man is tried (always elsewhere translated "approved") he will receive the crown on life- the crown which will be given at the last day (James 1:12 cp. 2 Tim. 4:8). The approval is surely not in the physical fact of resurrection- for the rejected will also experience this.

- If immortality is given at the resurrection rather than at the judgment, we would have to read 'resurrection' as a one off act; and yet it evidently refers to a process, something more than the act of coming out of the grave. The fact there will not be marriage "in the resurrection" is proof enough of this- it refers to more than the act of coming out of the grave. Also, if immortality is not given at the judgment, this creates a problem in respect of those who are alive at the Lord's return. Are we to believe that they will just be made immortal in a flash when the Lord comes, with no judgment?

- Immortal emergence inevitably means that men live with no fear of judgment to come. And yet the very fact of future judgment is an imperative to repentance (Acts 17:31; 2 Pet. 3:11). Admittedly, there is the danger that judgment can be over-emphasised to the point that God seems passive now, reserving all judgment until the last day. Both extremes must be avoided.

Taking the passage as it stands, it is quite possible to place it alongside several other Pauline passages which speak of the whole process of resurrection-judgment-immortalization as one act. This may be because he sometimes writes as if he assumes his readership will all be worthy of acceptance into the Kingdom, and will not be rejected. If we see our brethren as truly in Christ and therefore acceptable with Him, clothed in His righteousness, and seeing we cannot judge in the sense of condemning them, this ought to be a pattern for us. Judgment in the sense of condemnation will not pass upon those who will be in the Kingdom, although this doesn't mean that therefore they will not stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Gospels likewise speak of both the resurrection and the judgment process as occurring at "the last day" (Jn. 11:24; 12:48); as if the "resurrection" includes the judgment process. The way 'the resurrection' can be 'better' or 'worse' (Heb. 11:35) and of two kinds (Jn. 5:29) further indicates that the term cannot be limited to just the emergence from the ground.

However, there is another reason why Paul wrote as he did. I have shown elsewhere that the meaning of time will be collapsed at the period of the Lord's return and judgment. It is therefore quite possible that in terms of time as we know it, the resurrection-judgment-immortalization process will take place in a micro second. To an onlooker, there would appear to be immortal emergence (cp. how the record of creation is described as an onlooker would have seen it). But if we were to break the process down, there would be the resurrection, coming forth as a mortal body, gathering to judgment, discussion with the judge, giving of reward, immortalization. Paul saw the trumpet blast as the signal of both the call to judgment (1 Thess. 4:17) and also the moment of glorification (1 Cor. 15:52).

Against the proposition that "raised incorruptible" in 1 Cor. 15:52 means an immortal emergence in theological terms, the following points should be considered:

- Paul doesn't say 'the dead are *resurrected* incorruptible', but rather that they are *raised* (Gk. *egeiro*) incorruptible. If he referred to actual resurrection, he would surely have used the word *anastasis*. But he doesn't. *Egeiro* is used of rising up from sickness (Mk. 1:37), rising in judgment (Mt. 12:42), the raising up of men as prophets (Mt. 11:11), raising up a Saviour (Lk. 1:69), the raising up of Pharaoh to do God's will (Rom. 9:17), to rise up against, to raise up a building. These are all processes leading to a completed action, not a simple one time action. Therefore it is not unreasonable to interpret Paul's words as does John Thomas: 'the dead shall be rebuilt incorruptible', referring to the whole process rather than just the coming out of the ground.

- The seed is sown "a natural body" (1 Cor. 15:44)- a *psuchikon soma*, a living body. This raises a question as to whether Paul is really talking about a *dead* body going into the grave and then coming out immortal. 1 Cor. 15:36 speaks of the seed as being sown, being scattered, right now (*speiro* in the active voice). This is almost certainly one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- this time, to the parable of the sower. The seed is being sown now, and we respond to it. The seed is sown in the corruption, dishonour and weakness of this present nature (15:42,43). But that seed ("it") will be raised / rebuilt in an incorruptible, glorious body; this is the power of the seed of the Gospel.

All this reasoning is in the context of 1 Cor. 15:35,36: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool...". To max out on the exact form in which we emerge from the grave is *foolish*, Paul says. And yet some of us have done just that. Surely Paul is saying 'Don't get distracted by this issue as a physicality *in itself*. The point is, as the seed of the Gospel is sown in you day by day, so in a corresponding way you will be rebuilt in the glory of the resurrection. So sow to the spirit, for as you sow you will reap (cp. Gal. 6:7,8)'.

15:53 *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality-* When the Lord spoke of how the faithful will be clothed by Him in a robe (Mt. 22:11; Lk. 15:22), He is connecting with the usage of "clothing" as a symbol of the covering of righteousness which He gives, and which also represents the immortality of the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:2-5). The choice of clothing as a symbol is significant; the robe covered all the body, except the face. The individuality of the believer still remains, in the eyes of Christ. What we sow in this life, we will receive in the relationships we have in the Kingdom; there will be something totally individual about our spirituality then, and it will be a reflection of our present spiritual struggles. This is Paul's point in the parable of the seed going into the ground and rising again, with a new body, but still related to the original seed which was sown.

15:54- see on Rom. 1:3.

*But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality-* Note the difference between the mortal and the corruptible. I have argued above that the resurrection transformation will have both a physical and moral aspect; perhaps these two aspects are comprehended here.

*Then shall come to fulfilment the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory-* The same words for "put on", "mortal" and "swallowed up" are found later to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 5:4: "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life". "Swallowed up in victory" is matched by "swallowed up by [immortal] life". The eternal life is the victory- the thrill of victory shall be eternal, rather than a momentary buzz of kudos at the moment of resurrection. The quotation from Is. 25:8 is surrounded by a context which speaks of a very literal manifestation of God upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and the Messianic banquet being held there, which the breaking of bread meeting looks forward to: "In this mountain Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines. He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces. He will take the reproach of His people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it. It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation! For in this mountain the hand of Yahweh will rest". The victory upon Mount Zion had its first application to the salvation of Judah from the Assyrians at Hezekiah's time. This looked forward to the latter day salvation of all God's Israel from death itself.

15:55 *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*- We have noted from :43 onwards that resurrection is going to be both a physical and moral transformation, and that the spiritually incomplete shall be transformed to perfection by it. This quotation from Hos. 13:14 LXX is also in this context. For the book of Hosea is about Hosea's desperate hope for the redemption of his prostitute wife Gomer, in which we see God's loving hope for the salvation of His wayward people. The book contains paradoxical statements about how God on one hand notices and shall judge the unfaithfulness of His people; and yet mixed within those judgments is a tender desire to save them all the same. This was reflected in Hosea's love for his faithless wife. This is exactly what we see in Paul's feelings for the Corinthians.

15:56 *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law-* Again we see Paul addressing the problem of the Judaizers in Corinth. It was law which gave power and actuality to sin, as Paul noticed in his own experience throughout Romans 7, e.g. "I had not known sin, except through the law. For I had not known coveting, except the law had said: You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7). The "victory" given against sin was through the abrogation of law; for we are now "not under law" (Rom. 6:14). If there is a cosmic 'satan' responsible for sin and death, now would be the time, surely, for Paul to refer to it. But instead we see a reference only to sin and death. Death is personified, as a snake, which achieves its kill by the venom of sin.

15:57 *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ-* This is the language of Rom. 7:25, where Paul rejoices that despite our sin and its power, we are delivered through our Lord Jesus. We lost... but we are given victory, on account of being in the Lord Jesus. His victory is therefore legitimately counted as ours. Again we note the present tense: "Gives us the victory", not "Will give us the victory". The essence of resurrection is to be felt and known in our lives right now.

There were in the early church standard acclamations or doxologies which may reflect common phrases used in prayers throughout the early brotherhood- just as there are certain



phrases used in prayers throughout the world today. “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” is an acclamation that crops in up in some form or other in 1 Cor. 15:57; Rom. 6:17; 7:25; 2 Cor. 2:14; 8:16; 9:15. Likewise “God... to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 3:15; Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Eph. 3:21; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Tim. 1:17).

15:58- see on 2 Cor. 8:7.

*Therefore my beloved brothers, be steadfast, unmoveable-* "Beloved brothers" is the language of endearment, and given their known weaknesses, could only have been possible because Paul believed that they would ultimately be changed from their weaknesses. All the angst about separating from apostate brethren dissipates once we accept that since we cannot condemn baptized believers, we are to rejoice in the reality of resurrection meaning both moral and physical transformation. The sure hope ahead ought to inspire stability; nothing, no false teaching, no temptation, no depression at failure, should be able to move us away from that hope.

*Always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour in the Lord is not in vain-* We are to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” Jesus, knowing it is never in vain. And yet it is the work of preaching which has just been defined as not being in vain (:14); the more abounding labour is in the work of preaching (:10). Preaching is the work of the Lord Jesus in that He is working through us to do His saving work, and therefore we ought to be constantly active in His cause. Paul's preaching ministry was proportional to the grace he had received, and in this he saw himself as a pattern to us all (1 Tim. 1:12-16). He makes the connection even more explicit in his argument in 1 Cor. 15:10 and 58: “His grace which was bestowed upon me was *not in vain*; but I *laboured* more *abundantly* than they all” is then applied to each of us, in the final, gripping climax of his argument: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be *ye* steadfast, unmoveable, always *abounding* [as Paul did] in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your *labour* is *not in vain*”. Paul says that God’s grace to him “was not in vain”, in that he *laboured* more abundantly than any in preaching. Yet within the same chapter, Paul urges us his readers that our faith and *labour* is also “not in vain”; the connection seems to be that he responded to grace by *labouring* in preaching, and he speaks as if each of the Corinthians likewise will not *labour* in vain in this way (1 Cor. 15:2,10,58). He clearly sees himself as a pattern of responding to grace by preaching to others.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *Now concerning the collection for the saints, do as I instructed the churches in Galatia-* "The collection" with the article refers to Paul's almost obsessive plan to raise money from his Gentile converts in order to support the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem in time of famine and persecution. Throughout my commentary on Acts I make the point that this plan was forced through by Paul at all stages, and never really came to fruition nor is there any record of the collection being accepted. Paul wanted those at Corinth to do as the churches in Galatia- because he wanted the collection to be a uniform gift from as many Gentile churches as possible. Whether Paul's 'instruction' about this matter was inspired or simply from himself... makes an interesting question to contemplate.

16:2- see on Acts 2:45.

*Upon the first day of the week let each one of you, as your income allows, put some money aside and store it up so that no collections are needed when I come-* Paul didn't want them to take up one big collection when he was personally present, because this might mean that their motivation was emotional. Giving should be from the heart but also not on the cusp of emotional or personal pressure. "Each one of you" may suggest that Paul was wanting each of them, even the very poor, to donate something- and not to leave the giving to a few. "As your income allows" suggests giving should not be irresponsible. And it is emotional, cusp-of-the-moment motivations which lead to irresponsible giving. "Lay by him in store" (AV) suggests they were not to put money into a church collection bag which was then held by a treasurer, but were to save the money themselves, and then donate it when Paul arrived in person. The giving envisaged was therefore all very personal. The two Greek words in this phrase "lay by him in store" are taken exactly from the Lord's teaching in Lk. 12:21 about the man who "lays up treasures for himself" but was not rich towards God. The same word for "put... aside [money]" is translated "lay up" in the Lord's appeal to lay up wealth in Heaven and not on earth (Mt. 6:19,20). Paul is clearly teaching that such 'saving up' of their pennies in order to give to the poor Jewish brethren was indeed building up wealth before God in Heaven.

16:3 *And when I arrive, whomsoever you shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your generosity to Jerusalem-* The approval was to be from them, and not of Paul's appointment. He was very wise in these things. They were to individually save their spare cash each week (see on :2) and then it would be gathered together when Paul arrived; and then it was to be transported by people other than Paul to Jerusalem, even if Paul accompanied them (:4). Paul was after all under false accusation of fraud, and he acted appropriately. "Generosity" is *charis*, "grace". God's gift or generosity to us elicits grace / generosity from us to others. Paul opened his letter by reminding them of the grace given them (1:4); their grace to others was therefore an appropriate response. And he will conclude with the desire that the Lord's grace will continue with them (16:23).

16:4 *And if it be fitting for me to go also, they shall go with me-* As noted on :3, Paul asked for the gathering together of everyone's individual donations to be made when he arrived, and for the church to appoint brethren to carry it to Jerusalem. Paul was carefully separating himself from handling the cash. He considered this entire project such a holy thing that he would only accompany the bearers of the funds if he were felt worthy [a better translation than "fitting"] to travel with them. He felt his worthiness to be part of the project [even though it was of his own devising] was in question; he felt he would accompany the gift if he were worthy of doing so.

16:5 *But I will come to you, when I shall have passed through Macedonia (for I plan to pass through Macedonia)*- Paul's travel plans were not dictated to him by the Lord or direct Spirit inspiration. He had to make his own plans in response to his perception of the Lord's calling and what he thought was best for the progress of the Lord's work. And sometimes his intentions didn't work out- for 2 Cor. 1:15-17 imply that this intended visit didn't happen, leading to the accusation that Paul was fickle and not serious in his promises. The reason he gives in 2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1 was that he wanted to spare them, as if he knew that if he came to them and they had adequately repented, then the Lord would use him through the Spirit to judge them severely in some way.

16:6 *And perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey*- He planned to "pass through" Macedonia (:5), but to for an extended period "stay with you" (as :7). Because of their evident weaknesses and the possibility they would miss the path to salvation, Paul wanted to make a special effort for them. 2 Cor. 1:16 says he intended to visit them twice, on the way to and from Macedonia; and that he wanted to go from Corinth directly to Judea. "Help me on my journey" refers to the practice of accompanying a departing visitor for the first part of their journey and wishing them God's blessing- as in :11.

*Wherever I go further*- This not to be read as a vague wish; rather is it clear from :3 and 2 Cor. 1:16 that he intended to go from them to Jerusalem with the brethren who were carrying the collection money. Perhaps one reason he changed his plans because he knew the collection money was not going to be ready, and he would feel the need to discipline them for this.

16:7 *But I do not wish to see you just in passing; I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permit*- See on :6. His special concern for Corinth is apparent, because he intended to "pass through" Macedonia (:5), but not just pass them by, but rather stay longer with them. He explained in 12:23 that the weaker parts of the body require the greatest attention; and he put this into practice in his own attitude to the very weak church in Corinth.

16:8 *But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost*- Paul was writing to them from Ephesus (which was in Asia, hence the greetings sent from the churches in Asia, :19).

16:9 *For a great door for effective work has opened to me, but there are many adversaries*- An insight into Paul's attitude is revealed in the way he speaks of how a door of preaching opportunity had been opened to him at Ephesus. Surely he is alluding to the Lord's words about knocking in prayer, and a door is opened. He had presumably prayed for the opportunity to spread the word in Ephesus, and he was given the positive answer. We likewise should be praying systematically for the people in our lives, for unreached nations and peoples. Yet the language of a door being opened sends us to Acts 14:27, where the response of the Gentiles to Paul's missionary work is likewise spoken of as a door being opened- presumably, meaning that here was an answer to prayer for response. A door was opened at Troas, we assume also because of sustained prayer beforehand (2 Cor. 2:12). We must ask whether we really desire the Gospel to spread; if we do, it will be reflected in our prayer life. Paul intended to stay longer in Ephesus rather than just passing through (see on

:6) because there were many adversaries. He didn't reason that because there was opposition, this was a 'sign' that he should move on.

16:10 *Now if Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear while he is with you. For he does the work of the Lord, as I do-* The "if" continues the theme of the plans of these early Christians not being at all set in stone or somehow set in stone by God's will. They used their initiative in planning as they thought best, and those plans were therefore at times open ended. The basis for acceptance of Timothy was that he did the work of the Lord Jesus- the Lord was working through him, and that was a good enough reason for believers to work with Timothy. This sets a powerful challenge to the parochialism of many in the Lord's body today. Paul writes to Timothy urging him not to fear, and yet he tries to pave the way so that Timothy would have no reason to fear. Paul's "work of the Lord" was the Corinthians (9:1 "Are you not my work in the Lord?"), and Timothy was sharing in this.

16:11 *Let no one despise him. But set him forward on his journey in peace, that he may come to me. For I expect him with the brothers-* Paul told Timothy to let no one despise him (see on 1 Tim. 4:12). But again Paul was at pains to remove the experience from Timothy; his sensitivity towards Timothy is truly brotherly. The practice of 'setting forward on a journey' implied spiritual blessing- see on :6. Paul expected Timothy to accompany "the brothers" whom Corinth would appoint to carry the collected money to Jerusalem (:3). I get the impression of Paul making elaborate plans, 'expecting' things to happen- when in fact the whole thing barely got off the ground. For he has to delicately write to them in 2 Corinthians about the fact they have not in fact raised any money to send. As explained in the commentary on Acts, I get the impression that time and again, Paul is trying to force through his pet project, and he became obsessive about it, when there was no real enthusiasm for it.

16:12 *But as touching Apollos the brother, I pleaded with him to come to you with the brothers; but he was unwilling to come right now, but he will come when he shall have the opportunity-* "The brothers" are surely those of :11- the brothers whom Corinth were to appoint to bring the collected funds to Jerusalem (:3). The translation "come to you" could as well be translated 'to accompany with', as if Apollos was intended to hover around them, *pros* them. Again we see Paul running ahead of himself. The funds had not been collected, and in fact would not be, so it seems from 2 Corinthians. But he asks the church to appoint brothers to carry the funds to Jerusalem, asks the church to send Timothy with those brothers, and now laments that he had asked Apollos to also accompany them, but he had declined. Not surprisingly- for it was evident that Corinth would unlikely raise the funds, and by the time of 2 Corinthians they had not done so, despite Paul's enthusiastic boasting to others about their willingness to do so. The whole impression is of a single individual obsessed with a pet project, and it doesn't quite work out. Apollos was unwilling to give in to Paul's pleading to join in this project. And yet Paul claims that "he will come when he shall have the opportunity". It is logical to assume that Apollos would have declined an invitation to go to Corinth and accompany brethren to Jerusalem with money which had not been collected, probably never would be, and without the blessing of the Corinthian church, who were surely known as being anti-Paul and a difficult group. But Paul likes to interpret this as 'He can't come at this moment, but he will come when he gets half the chance'. If Paul pleaded with Apollos to come but he declined, then Paul obviously considered that Apollos could make the journey, he could find the time if he wished. But Paul over generously concludes that Apollos does in fact want to come, 'it's just that he's busy right now'. This kind of obsessive even autistic focus can be detected in the sentence structure and path of logic Paul employs in

some of his writing. He was inspired and indeed a wonderful brother, but this didn't make him anything less than human.

16:13 *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong-* These are all military metaphors. Keeping awake, standing still as if on parade, fight as true men, be strengthened. But these metaphors are purposefully juxtaposed with doing all things in love (:14). The true manliness, the real bravery and strength- was to live in love. "Be strong" is literally 'be strengthened / empowered'. This has been the whole theme of the letter- they had been given the Spirit, but were refusing to let it work and empower them. The same word is used in Eph. 3:16: "*Be strengthened* with power through His Spirit in the inner man". This refers to the internal gift of the Spirit "in the inner man" which is available to this day.

16:14 *Let all you do be done in love-* See on :13 for the purposeful juxtaposition with the military metaphors just used. The real strength is in the life of love. Chapter 13 has underlined the utter supremacy of love and Paul repeats this in concluding the letter. Perhaps the immediate reference is to the collection for the poor Jewish brethren which Paul wished them to make; this whole project was to be done in love and from no other motive.

16:15 *You know the family of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia-* It depends how we define Achaia or "Asia", because Rom. 16:5 says that Epaenetus was the first-fruit of Achaia. Perhaps Epaenetus was one of the extended family of Stephanas, perhaps a slave within it. The first convert in Asia, therefore, was an obscure slave. This is typical of how God works with the small things in human eyes.

*And that they have devoted themselves to serving the saints; now I beseech you, brothers-* There is a word play here, masked in the translations: the household of Stephanas 'devoted' themselves to the Lord's service (Gk. *tasso*), and the ecclesia is bidden "submit" (Gk. *hupotasso*) to them (:16). Enthusiastic service by individuals truly influences the whole community. "Serving the saints" is literally "the ministry of the saints", and this term is used specifically about the Jerusalem poor fund project (Rom. 15:31; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1,12). Paul speaks highly of the family of Stephanas because they have devoted themselves to Paul's project; perhaps that is why he calls them "the firstfruits of Achaia" when in fact Epaenetus was (Rom. 16:5).

16:16 *You also be in subjection to such, and to everyone that helps in the work and labours-* See on :15. As noted on :10, all who help the Lord's work are to be respected. "The work" has been defined in :10 as the Lord's work. On one hand, 'God requires not help from man'. And yet He limits Himself, or allows Himself to be limited, in that He has genuinely delegated His work to men. In this sense the men of Meroz were cursed for not 'coming to the help of the Lord' (Jud. 5:23). Here too, those who help the Lord's work are to be respected and supported. But the specific work of the Lord was "the ministry" of the Jerusalem Poor Fund- see on :15. Paul asks the Corinthians to be obedient and submissive to Stephanus as the enthusiast and local coordinator. Anyone who assisted in that ministry, Paul considered worthy of respect and being obeyed.

16:17 *I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. For what was lacking on your part they supplied-* Paul says elsewhere that he did not take material assistance from Corinth. The Stephanas is surely the same of :15 who had devoted himself to Paul's pet

project of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. So perhaps Stephanas brought with him some donation for the fund- and thus caused Paul much joy. We could also assume that these three from Corinth came to visit Paul in order to carry the Corinthians' letter to Paul.

16:18 *They refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, acknowledge those that are such-* Paul sees his spirit as being that of the Corinthians'. He felt at least potentially a unity of the spirit between him and them. If the visitors had refreshed Paul's spirit, then they had refreshed the spirit of the Corinthians. Paul has earlier mentioned this in 5:3: "For I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing". There was a Spirit gift of knowledge which resulted in Paul being as it were virtually present; he was not therefore judging from a distance on the basis of gossip. Hence he can write in 5:4 that "when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do)". And he alludes to the same phenomenon in 2 Cor. 13:2 "I tell you as if I were present". This ability to be virtually present is used supremely by the Lord, whose presence is to be found in our lives and where two or three are gathered together. If Paul knew this case by the Spirit and was spiritually present in their gatherings to discuss the matter; how much more the Lord Himself. And as his spirit could be united with that of the Corinthians, how much more can the Lord's spirit intertwine with ours.

However one surely detects in the whole reasoning here a position whereby whoever was supportive of Paul's Jerusalem poor fund project was going to be commended. And it seems that on that basis, Paul asks the Corinthians to "acknowledge" or respect those three brothers. Paul assumes that his joy at their donation towards the project should be the joy of all the Corinthians. He is very imposing of his enthusiasm upon others.

16:19- see on Acts 20:20.

*The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house-* These churches in Asia were presumably where Paul was located when writing the letter. It would seem more logical to assume he was in Ephesus, where Aquila and Prisca were (cp Acts 16:6; 18:26). This means we should reject the note appended to the KJV to the effect the letter was written from Philippi.

16:20- see on Rom. 16:16.

*All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss-* Given the sexual immorality in the church (see on chapters 5 and 6), Paul had to emphasize a *holy* kiss. But greeting by kissing was only acceptable in the first century between those of the same social class. To suggest church members all kissed each other was radical- for a slave to kiss a master, a Jew to kiss a Gentile etc. Justin Martyr (Apology) claims that it was a well known and strange characteristic for the early Christians to kiss each other in their religious assemblies. We ask whether our love and unity leaves such a noticeable impression these days.

16:21 *The greeting of me Paul with my own hand-* Perhaps suggesting there had been false letters supposedly from Paul (2 Thess. 2:2).

16:22 *If anyone loves not the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha-* Those who departed from the faith didn't just drift away; they were formally pronounced *anathema* ("accursed"), delivered unto the satan of this world. Perhaps Paul had in view those in the church who claimed they had Spirit gift revelation to pronounce Jesus accursed (Gk. *anathema*, 1 Cor. 12:3). Those who said this of the Lord would themselves be accursed. The appeal for the Lord to come, "Maranatha", follows straight on. It is a willing of the Lord's judgment to come, just as David in the Psalms was eager for judgment day to come and resolve all issues of apostasy amongst God's people. "Anathema" was a synagogue term for total excommunication. Yet Paul was very open to fellowship with all at Corinth despite their apostasy. So I suggest he is saying that those who were in the church but didn't love the Lord would be anathema, "accursed", when the Lord returns; and the Corinthians were not to follow the synagogue pattern of labelling some as *anathema* according to their own judgment. "Maranatha" was likely a watch word used amongst the believers when parting with each other. They greeted with a "holy kiss", and parted with the term "Maranatha", a longing for the Lord's coming.

16:23 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you-* "Grace", *charis*, is used so often to refer to the gift of the Spirit. Paul wished that the Spirit's work of internal transformation would continue with them. For this really was his only answer to all their moral and doctrinal problems.

16:24 *My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen-* Given the major moral and doctrinal problems in Corinth, it is highly significant that Paul does not pronounce himself in fellowship with only some of them. He assures *all* of them of his love.