

Study of 1 Corinthians

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament*](#). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Introductory 1 Corinthians

I. The City

Without question, Corinth was the most important city of Greece. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and was ideally located on the empire's most important travel route from east to west. Fourth in size among the great cities of the Roman Empire, Corinth was noted for commerce, culture, and corruption. Everyone knew what "a Corinthian girl" was, and "a Corinthian feast" was the depth of luxury and license. Corinth was the headquarters for the worship of Venus and for some of the mystery cults from Egypt and Asia.

II. The Church

Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey, after he had met with seeming failure in cultured Athens (Acts 18:1–17). He made friends with two Jewish tent-makers, Aquila and Priscilla, and stayed in Corinth for a year and a half. He reasoned with Jews in the synagogue week after week, and Silas and Timothy joined him after they had completed their ministry in Berea. The ruler of the synagogue was converted and baptized by Paul (Acts 18:8, see also 1 Cor. 1:14–16). Christ gave Paul special encouragement to stay in Corinth (Acts 18:9); after a year and a half, he departed for Ephesus. He left behind a church richly gifted in spiritual things (1 Cor. 1:4–7), but sorely tempted by the worldly wisdom and the wickedness of the city itself.

III. The Correspondence

Paul remained at Ephesus for three years (Acts 19:1ff). It is likely that he made a second visit to Corinth (see 2 Cor. 13:1) to correct some of the problems there. Once back in Ephesus, he wrote them a strong letter about fornication (see 1 Cor. 5:9), but this letter has been lost to us. The church at Corinth then wrote a letter to Paul, possibly sending it with Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who were members of the church (1 Cor. 16:17). This letter asked several important questions about both doctrine and practice, and Paul answers these questions (as well as rebuking them for their sins) in 1 Corinthians. (Note 1 Cor. 7:1, 8:1, 11:17.) He also sent Timothy on ahead to help the leaders unify and purify the church (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17 and 16:10–11). It is likely that the three Corinthian Christians mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:17 carried 1 Corinthians back with them.

Timothy returned to Paul with news that the church had received his letter but that some things were still not right. Paul then dispatched Titus to Corinth to see that the believers obeyed his apostolic orders (2 Cor. 7:13–15). Titus then met Paul (2 Cor. 7:6–

16) with the good news that the offender (1 Cor. 5) had been disciplined and that the church had obeyed Paul's instructions. It was then that Paul wrote, along with Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1), to commend the church and to encourage them to go on and finish the good work. Titus took this letter to Corinth and waited there to assist the church in raising its share of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 12:17–18 and 8:6). Paul made one final visit to Corinth (Acts 20:1–4).

Paul had two basic purposes for writing 1 Corinthians: (1) to reprove the Corinthian Christians for the flagrant sins that were being permitted in the church (1–6); and (2) to answer their questions about Christian life and doctrine. He had received reports of sin from the household of Chloe (1:11) and from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17). His own visit to the city from Ephesus gave him firsthand information about the divisions and disputes in the church. No letter in the NT deals so forcibly with local church problems, and perhaps no NT letter is more neglected today.

1 Corinthians 1

I. Commendation: Their Standing in Christ (1:1–9)

In a most tactful way, Paul opened his letter by reminding the believers of the wonderful blessings they had in Christ. He does this before he reproves them for their sin, for they were living beneath their privileges as Christians. They were not walking in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ (Eph. 4:1ff). He lists some of their spiritual blessings that they were ignoring and thus depriving themselves of spiritual power.

A. *Called of God (v. 2).*

This means they were sanctified (set apart) and members of that elect group, the church! They were not living like saints, but they were saints!

B. *Grace of God (vv. 3–4).*

Grace means that God gives us what we don't deserve; mercy means He doesn't give us what we do deserve. This grace came through Christ by faith.

C. *Gifts from God (vv. 5 and 7).*

Paul discusses spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14, but it is evident that the Corinthians were wonderfully blessed with spiritual gifts, especially the gifts dealing with utterance (see 14:26). They were enriched with knowledge, too. Yet with all their gifts and knowledge, they lacked love (13:1–3) and could not get along with each other. Spiritual gifts do not take the place of spiritual graces.

D. *Testimony for God (v. 6).*

Everything Paul said that Christ could do for them came to pass in their lives. God's Word came true in their lives.

E. *Hope from God (vv. 7–9).*

They were waiting for Christ to return but were not living in the light of His coming (1 John 2:28). Though the Corinthians were sinful on earth, God would be able to present them as blameless in heaven. We should not use this passage as an excuse for sin; rather it should be seen as an encouragement that God is faithful even though we may fail Him.

II. Accusation: Their Sinful State as Christians (1:10–16)

Now that he has tactfully commended them, Paul launches into his discussion of their sins, dealing first with the matter of church divisions. The sad news of their “splits” had come to him from the household of Chloe, and also from the friends who visited him (16:17–18). Why is it that bad news of church troubles spreads so rapidly, while the good news of the Gospel never seems to spread quickly at all? There were divisions and contentions in the church (3:3, 11:18, 12:25), even at the Lord’s Table (11:20–34)! Paul begs them to be “perfectly joined together” (v. 10), which in the Gk. is a medical term that refers to the setting of a bone that was broken or out of joint. Whenever Christians cannot get along, the body of Christ suffers.

Paul explains why they were divided: they had their eyes on men instead of on Christ. They were trusting in the wisdom of men (2:5); they were glorying in the works of men (3:21); and they were comparing one servant with another and boasting about men (4:6). In chapter 3, Paul proves that this infatuation with men was a mark of carnal living, evidence that these “spiritual Corinthians” were actually babes in Christ.

There were four factions in the church. One group followed Paul, and they may have been predominantly Gentiles, because he was the apostle to the Gentiles. Another group followed Apollos, the learned orator (Acts 18:24–28), probably because they enjoyed his wonderful speaking. The third group, probably Jews, leaned toward Peter, the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7), and the fourth group tried to prove it was more spiritual than the rest by following “Christ alone” and rejecting human leaders. Paul explains that Christ is not divided; we are all part of the one body (12:12–31). Christ, not human leaders, died for us; and we are baptized in the name of Christ, not the names of human leaders! Paul goes on to say that he is happy he did not baptize more believers in Corinth than he did, lest the division be even worse. Paul’s associates in the ministry did the baptizing, since Paul’s special commission was to evangelize. This fact does not minimize baptism in any way. Imagine how difficult it would be for an evangelist today to take time to examine candidates and baptize them. (The word “sent” in 1:17 is the Gk. word that means “sent with a special commission.”) Acts 18:8 informs us that many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized, so Paul did practice water baptism.

III. Explanation: The Reason for the Divisions (1:17–31)

The Corinthian believers were divided and not living up to their standing in Christ because: (1) they were mixing the Gospel with the wisdom of the world, and (2) they were glorying in men and were confused about the meaning of the Gospel ministry. In chapters 1–2, Paul deals with the wisdom of the world in contrast to the wisdom of God, and in these verses he gives seven proofs to show that the Gospel is sufficient for all people.

A. Paul's commission (v. 17).

He was sent to preach the Gospel alone, not the Gospel plus man's philosophies. How we must guard against mixing anything with the Gospel!

B. Personal experience (v. 18).

The Corinthian church had experienced the Gospel's power personally.

C. Scripture (vv. 19–20).

Paul quotes from Isa. 19:12, 29:14, and 33:18 to prove that God does not need the world's wisdom; in fact, He will destroy it!

D. Human history (vv. 20–21).

With all its "wisdom," the world was not able to find God or salvation. When we trace human history, we discover a record of man gaining more and more knowledge, but less and less real wisdom, especially about spiritual matters. Review Rom. 1:18–32 to see how the world turned from God. God's plan was so simple and unique that it seemed to be foolishness to the world! God saves those who believe what He says about His Son.

E. Paul's ministry (vv. 22–25).

Paul had preached to Jews and Gentiles across the Roman world. He knew that the Jews looked for miraculous signs and the Greeks looked for philosophical wisdom. But God bypassed both ways to make salvation available through a crucified Christ. This message about a crucified Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews, whose idea of the Messiah was far different; it was foolishness to the Greeks because it seemed contrary to their philosophical systems. But Paul saw that this "foolish Gospel" was God's power and wisdom to those Jews and Greeks who were called. Christ is our wisdom and power; He is all we need.

F. Their own calling (vv. 26–29).

"If God needs man's wisdom and glory," says Paul, "then why did He ever call you?" There were not many mighty people in the church at Corinth, not many nobles or worldly-wise people. But God still saved them! In fact, God deliberately hides His truth from "the wise and prudent" and reveals Himself to the humble. Reflect on the history of the Bible and recall how God called the "nobodies" of history, making great leaders out of them—Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, etc.

G. Christ's sufficiency (vv. 30–31).

Every saint is "in Christ Jesus" (v. 30), and Christ is to every saint all that he or she ever needs. When it comes to spiritual things, we don't need man's wisdom or power because we have Christ. He is our redemption, our righteousness, our wisdom, our all. To add anything to Christ or His cross is to diminish Him and His work and rob them of their power.

Whenever Christians take their eyes off Christ and start depending on, trusting in, and glorifying man, then they cause divisions. Such divisions rob the church of its power.

1 Corinthians 2

This chapter continues Paul's discussion of the Gospel and the wisdom of men. There were Christians at Corinth who admired the philosophies of men (perhaps the oratory of Apollos encouraged this), and they thought that the church would be better off to use man's wisdom and philosophy to win converts rather than the simple and despised message of the cross.

I. The Two Messages Paul Preached (2:1–8)

A. *The Gospel.*

When Paul came to Corinth, it was from a seeming defeat at Athens (Acts 17:32–34) where he addressed the Greek philosophers but won few converts. This experience, plus his conviction that only the plain Gospel is the power of God, led Paul to minister in Corinth in fear and trembling. He did not use the enticing (persuasive) words of the orator or philosopher; he simply preached in the power of the Spirit. He was anxious that the believers put their faith in God and not in people. It is sad when pastors or evangelists make converts to themselves and fail to teach people how to walk with Christ alone. How sad when Christians have to lean on other believers and never learn to walk on their own. In chapter 3 Paul calls these Christians "babes in Christ" (3:1–4).

B. *The mystery.*

But Paul did not stop with a mere declaration of the Gospel, as important as that is. He also taught a deep wisdom of God to those who were more mature in the faith. Sad to say, there were few of these in Corinth! These people had their eyes on human leaders, were comparing men, and were failing to grow in the Word. It is necessary in the local church for the pastor and teachers to declare the Gospel to the lost, but it is also important that they teach God's wisdom to those who are maturing in the faith. It is impossible to build a strong church on the preaching of the Gospel alone; there must be the teaching of the plan and "mystery" of God. (A mystery is a truth hidden in the ages past revealed by the Spirit to those who belong to God's family. It is a "family secret" known only to the initiated, not the outsiders.) Of course, the mystery that Paul taught at Corinth was the program of God for the present age as outlined in Ephesians 2–3: that Jew and Gentile are "one in Christ" through faith, and make up the one body which is the church. This mystery, or hidden wisdom of God, could never be known by the "rulers of this world," because it is understood only through the prompting of the Spirit. Many professed Christians do not really understand God's purpose for this age! This is why our churches are still cluttered with OT "antiques" that do not belong to this age.

In chapters 1 and 2, Paul has contrasted the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of God:

Wisdom of this world	Wisdom of God
1. A wisdom of words (1:17; 2:4)	1. A wisdom of power, not words alone (2:4–5)
2. Man’s words (2:4)	2. The Spirit’s words (2:13)
3. The spirit of the world (2:12)	3. The Spirit of God (2:12)
4. Foolishness to God (1:20)	4. Foolishness to men (2:14)
5. The philosopher (1:20)	5. The preacher (1:31; 2:4)
6. Ignorance (1:21)	6. Knowledge of God (2:12)
7. Leads to condemnation (1:18)	7. Leads to glory (1:18; 2:7)

The Two Spirits in the World Today (2:9–13)

A. The spirit of this world (2:12).

Satan is certainly the energizing spirit in the world today (Eph. 2:1–3). He has given lost men a “wisdom” that inflates their egos and blinds their minds; he has led them away from the simple truths of the Word of God. The great centers of learning today do not want the Bible; they reject the deity of Christ and the need for salvation through the cross. This ignorance led men to crucify Christ—and men (even “learned” men) have been crucifying Him ever since.

B. The Spirit of God.

We must never forget that the Holy Spirit is the One who teaches us the things of God. In v. 9, Paul refers to Isa. 64:4 and states that God has prepared wonderful things for His children here and now.

God has prepared these blessings for us today! How does God reveal these blessings to us? Through His Spirit (v. 10). Just as a man’s spirit within him understands what outsiders never know, so the Spirit of God understands the heart and mind of God and reveals these truths to us through the Word. God wants His children to be “in the know” and not in the dark. This is why He has given us the Word of God and the Spirit to teach us.

Note that the Spirit teaches us in words (v. 13). Here we have the verbal inspiration of the Bible—the very words given by the Spirit. “Comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (v. 13) may also be translated, “combining spiritual things with spiritual words” or “explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.” In either case, the truth is clearly given that the Bible is the Word of God, given by the Spirit of God. We either trust God’s Word, taught by God’s Spirit, or the words of men.

III. The Two Kinds of People in the World Today (2:14–16)

A. The natural man.

This man is the unsaved man, the man who belongs to the world and is happy in it. He cannot receive the things of the Spirit (the Word) because he does not have spiritual

discernment; he does not have the Spirit dwelling within his mind and body. In fact the things of the Spirit are foolishness to him! In 1:23, Paul states that the Greeks thought the Gospel was foolishness. The Greeks were great philosophers, but their philosophy could not explain a God who died on a cross, or, for that matter, a God who even cares about people. Their gods were not interested in the problems of mortals, and the Greek attitude toward the human body was such that they could not conceive of God coming in human flesh.

B. The spiritual man.

This man is the believer who is controlled by the Spirit. (In the next chapter, Paul will deal with the Christian controlled by the flesh—the carnal man.) The spiritual man is a man of discernment and is able to judge and evaluate things with God’s insights. This is true wisdom. The people of the world have a great deal of knowledge, but they lack spiritual wisdom. We could paraphrase v. 15 like this: “The spiritual person understands the things of the Spirit and has wisdom, but the people of the world cannot understand the spiritual person.” We are a puzzle to the unbeliever!

The spiritual person has the mind of Christ (see Phil. 2). This means that the Spirit, through the Word, helps the believer think as Jesus thinks. It is an amazing thing to say that human beings possess the very mind of God! Down through the years, spiritual Christians have predicted things that the people of the world said could never happen, but these events came to pass. The spiritually minded saint understands more about the affairs of this world from his Bible than the leaders of the world understand from their human perspective.

In these two chapters, Paul has been emphasizing the message of the Gospel and the warning that we must not mix it with human wisdom or human philosophy. In the next two chapters, he will deal with the ministry of the Gospel and show that we must take our eyes off of people and keep them on Christ alone.

1 Corinthians 3

In chapters 3 and 4, Paul deals with the ministry of the Gospel and tells us what a minister of the Gospel is and does, and how the church should look upon him and his work. It is sad that we have such extremes today: some churches “deify” their ministers and make gods out of them, while other fellowships “defy” their ministers and refuse to respect them. In these two chapters, Paul gives six pictures of Christ’s servants, three in chapter 3 and three in chapter 4.

I. A Servant to Others (3:1–5)

The word “minister” here is the same word from which we get our word “deacon,” and it means “a servant.” For eighteen months Paul was Christ’s servant in Corinth, feeding people the Word, disciplining them, encouraging them, and helping them win others.

If there were problems in the church, it was not Paul’s fault; it was their fault for being such immature Christians. They were babes in Christ and could not receive the

solid meat of the Word, the deeper truths of the Scriptures (Heb. 5:11–14) about the heavenly ministry of Christ as High Priest. He had to feed them with milk like a nurse! Just like little children they argued and divided into cliques, following human leaders. Read James 3:13–4:17 to see why there are wars and divisions in the church.

A true pastor must be a servant. He must have a servant's mind (Phil. 2) and be willing to put Christ first, others second, and self last. This is not always easy to do! We must pray for our spiritual leaders, that God will give them grace and strength to be servants to others.

II. A Sower of Gospel Seed (3:6–9)

Paul now changes the image from that of a family to that of a field; he portrays the minister as a farmer working in the field. The seed is the Word of God (note the Parable of the Sower in Matt. 13:1ff), and the hearts of the people are the different kinds of soil. The local church is a “spiritual garden” where the pastor acts as the gardener (note v. 9 —“You are God's husbandry [God's garden]”).

On any farm, many different workers are needed. One prepares the soil; another plants the seed; a third pulls the weeds; and a fourth reaps the harvest. But all of them share in the harvest, and each receives wages. “How foolish of you to compare one worker with another!” says Paul. “We are all working together. I planted the seed by founding the church at Corinth; Apollos came along and watered the seed by his preaching and ministering; but only God can give the harvest. Apollos and I deserve no glory! We are nothing, but God is everything!” The church was divided over human leaders, but Paul says in v. 8 that the workers are one, united in purpose and heart; therefore the church should also be one. How tragic when Christians compare pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers in the way the people of the world compare athletes or movie stars! “Laborers together” must always be our motto and motive. We must take care that the soil of our own hearts is not hard and cold and unable to receive the seed of the Word.

III. A Builder of God's Temple (3:10–23)

This section is one of the most misunderstood passages in all the Bible. The Roman Catholics use it to “prove” their doctrine of purgatory, that fire will purify people in the next life and make them fit for heaven; the modernists use it to “prove” salvation by good works; and many evangelical Christians interpret this section as applying to the judgment of individual Christians rather than the building of the local church. While this passage teaches that there will be a judgment of believers' works at the judgment seat of Christ, the basic application is to workers and pastors of the local churches. The local church is compared to a building, or a temple, and the pastor is a builder whose responsibility is to keep the materials in the temple at their very best. Paul was the builder God used to lay the foundation at Corinth, and that foundation was Christ as preached in the Gospel. Along came Apollos, who built upon that foundation, and other pastors followed him. “Each one should be careful how he builds” (v. 10, NIV) is Paul's warning. He then describes three kinds of Christian workers:

A. The wise builder (v. 14).

The first worker uses lasting materials (gold, silver, jewels) and not the cheap, shabby things of the world (wood, hay, stubble). This builder seeks to honor Christ, aiming for quality that will glorify Christ, not quantity that will win the praise of men. Wise builders use the Word, they pray and depend on the Spirit; as a result, their work is lasting. When the fire tries their work in glory, it will stand!

B. The worldly builder (v. 15).

The second builder uses materials that cannot stand the test. This is the Christian worker who is in a hurry to build a crowd, but does not take time to build a church. The materials come from the world—wood, hay, stubble. These workers do not test people's professions by the Word to see if they are truly born again; they merely take them into the church and rejoice in bigger statistics. When this ministry is tested in eternity, it will burn up. The worker will be saved, but there will be no reward. Like Lot, the worker will be saved, as by fire.

C. The destroyer (v. 17).

Finally, the destroyer does not build the church but tears it down. The word "defile" in v. 17 really means "destroy." It takes no talent or intelligence to tear something down; even a child (and the Corinthians were like babies) can destroy something. Sad to say, there are Christian workers whose selfish ministries destroy local churches instead of building them up. God has a severe judgment awaiting them.

Keep in mind that Paul is saying all this to teach the Corinthian Christians to love and respect their pastors and to pray for them because they had this tremendous task of building the local church for God's glory. The Christian who is a "preacher follower" is helping to build with wood, hay, and stubble. The church member who loves the Word, obeys the pastor's teaching of the Word, and seeks to keep the local church at its best spiritually is helping the pastor build with gold, silver, and precious stones. The judgment seat of Christ will reveal that many great churches were not great at all.

In 2:5, Paul warned the Corinthians not to trust in men; now he warns them not to glory in men (vv. 18–23). Immature Christians love to bask in the light of "great men." Paul refers to Job 5:13 and Ps. 94:11 in vv. 19 and 20. Why must we glory in people when, in Christ, we have all things? If Paul or Apollos was a blessing to them, they should glorify God and not the men. All that we have comes from God, whether it be gifted men and women, the blessings of life, or things yet to come. And, if these blessings come from God, we should give the glory to God and not to men.

It is important that new Christians realize their relationship to the local church and the pastor. As members of the family (vv. 1–5), we receive the food and grow (see Eph. 4:1–16).

As "plots" in God's garden (vv. 6–9), we receive the seed of the Word and bear fruit. As living stones in the temple (vv. 10–15, and see 1 Peter 2:4–8), we help the temple grow and be strong for the glory of God. The lives that we live help to determine whether the church is being built with gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and stubble. The Christian is not to glorify his pastor, but is to respect him and obey him as he obeys the Lord (see Heb. 13:17).

1 Corinthians 4

Paul continues in his discussion of the ministry by giving three more pictures of the pastor:

I. The Steward of God's Wealth (4:1–7)

A steward owned nothing; he was a slave who managed his master's wealth. Read Gen. 24 for a picture of the oriental steward who handled Abraham's wealth and did his bidding. Note also Luke 12:35ff; 15:1–8; 16:12–27, and Matt. 25:14–30. The pastor is a servant who is a steward. The word "minister" in v. 1 is literally "the slave who rows on the lowest level of a boat." What humility Paul had!

A steward's responsibility is to be faithful to the Master, and the pastor's responsibility is to be faithful to teach the things of the Lord, especially those truths that relate to the mystery of the church. He will be judged by his own master according to his faithfulness. How tragic it is when Christians judge different workers and compare one with another. In vv. 3–5, Paul presents three kinds of judgment: (1) the judgment of people, which he does not fear; (2) self-judgment, and he says he "knows nothing against himself" (not "by" himself); and (3) the judgment of God, which is the only true judgment. The Corinthians were evaluating different servants of God, comparing one with another, and thinking themselves to be very spiritual. Paul told them they were carnal and that their judgment meant nothing to a spiritual servant of God. A true servant of God is a steward of God's wealth, and his only concern is pleasing God, not men. At the judgment seat of Christ, God will reveal the secrets and give out the rewards, and every man will have his own reward (3:8) and his own glory from God (4:5). To live for the praise of men is to be false to our stewardship.

In vv. 6–7, Paul summarizes the whole matter: they were not to go beyond the Word of God and treat men other than as Scripture allows. They were to love and honor their spiritual leaders, and obey them as they teach the Word; but to compare one leader with another, or to give glory to one over another, was contrary to God's Word and had to be avoided. After all, it is God who makes one believer differ from another; every gift a believer has comes from God! Who dares to boast over a gift?

II. A Spectacle to the World (4:8–13)

The world and its wisdom are contrary to Christ and His ministers. Paul uses some "loving sarcasm" here when he says: "You Corinthians brag about one another and compare one man with another, as though you were kings on a throne! How wonderful it must be to reign as kings and look down on others! I wish I could reign with you. But, no, I must be a hated apostle, a spectacle to the world, a fool for Christ's sake."

The verbal picture he painted was a familiar one to the people of Paul's day. Whenever a victorious general came home from a war, he was given a glorious parade through the city streets. As a way of boasting, he would display the captured nobles and generals. At the very end of the parade came the soldiers who were to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena. Paul compared himself and the other apostles to these

captured soldiers, “appointed to death for Christ’s sake,” (vv. 9 and 10) while the Corinthian Christians were boasting at the front of the parade!

What a spectacle a true servant of God must be to the world! Paul could have been a great Jewish rabbi, with authority and esteem; yet he gave it up for Christ’s sake (Phil. 3) to have hunger, nakedness, peril, and death! The world cannot understand this attitude and calls such a person a fool. How convicted these Corinthians should have been when they compared their carnal living to the sacrifices Paul and the other apostles were making. Paul was a fool; they were wise. Paul was weak; but they were strong. Paul was hated by the world, but they were courting the world’s wisdom. Paul went so far as to call himself the “the scum of the earth—the world’s garbage” (v. 13).

This attitude of heart must be shared by Christ’s servants today as well. How easy it is to settle down and live like the world, accepting the world’s standards and courting the world’s honors, when we ought to beware “when all men speak well of us” (see Luke 6:26).

III. A Spiritual Father (4:14–21)

Jesus warns us that we should call no man on earth “father” (Matt. 23:9), but it is still true that those who lead souls to Christ are, in a sense, “fathering” them. (See 1 Thes. 2:11.) Paul had been their spiritual father in that he gave them the Gospel and helped to lead them to Christ. A sinner is born into God’s family through the Spirit of God (John 3:6) and the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23), but God uses human instruments to bring sinners the Gospel. It had been Paul’s “spiritual travail” (Gal. 4:19) that had made possible a church in Corinth.

The men who followed Paul may have been their instructors, but the Corinthians had only one spiritual father; they should have showed him more respect and listened to his word. Paul had warned them about sin, but they had failed to listen. Now he sent Timothy to help them settle their church problems; if that did not help, Paul intended to come himself. Their own attitude would determine whether he would come with a father’s rod of correction, or with a word of commendation and approval. History tells us that they did not listen to Timothy, so it was necessary for Titus to go to Corinth.

Several times in this chapter you find the phrase “puffed up,” referring to the Corinthians’ attitude of superiority and carnal pride (vv. 6, 18, and see 5:2). What made them “puffed up”? Was it not the leaven of sin in their church (5:6)? As the yeast of sin grew, it inflated them into a false spirituality; therefore, Paul found it necessary to warn them. This “puffed up” attitude often reveals itself in much talking. “Paul will never come here!” they were saying (vv. 18–19). “He writes stern letters and tries to scare us, but he will never come back!” “Be careful!” warned the apostle. “Talk is cheap! When I do come, I want to see how much power these Christians have, and not how much they talk. A carnal Christian is often a bragging Christian, but there is no demonstration of God’s Spirit in his or her life (see 2:4).

Certainly it grieved Paul’s heart to have to write this way to his spiritual children, but he had to be faithful. Just as parents must warn and chasten their children, so “spiritual fathers” must warn and discipline the children of God in love. This is not an enjoyable experience, but it is a necessary one.

These two chapters illustrate the proper attitude of the church toward its spiritual leaders. Such Christians should thank God for them, pray for them, love them, honor them, and obey the Word which they teach and follow themselves. There must never be in a church a worldly attitude of exalting men and ministries. The pastor ministers the Word, sows the seed, builds the temple, dispenses the mysteries of God, suffers shame before the world, and lovingly fathers the church family. These are great responsibilities, and only the sufficiency of God enables anyone to fulfill them.

1 Corinthians 5

Paul now deals with the second problem that had been reported to him: immorality in the church and the refusal of the leaders to deal with the offender. How sad that such awful sin should be “commonly reported” and thus ruin the testimony of the church! Paul gave three reasons why the church had to exercise loving but firm discipline and deal with the offending member.

I. For the Good of the Offender (5:1–5)

Discipline in the church is not like a policeman arresting a culprit; rather, it is like a father chastening his son. The first motive is to help the sinner, to show Christian love in seeking to bring him to repentance. For us to allow church members to live in open sin hurts them as well as Christ and the church. This particular member apparently was living with his stepmother (see Lev. 18:8) in an immoral relationship. The woman was apparently not a part of the church family, otherwise Paul would have had the church deal with her as well.

What a terrible thing for a Christian to live in sin with an unsaved person while the church does nothing about it!

The church was “puffed up” and boasting about its “liberal attitude.” Paul told them that they should be mourning, and the Gk. word he used means “to mourn over the dead.” (Later on he compares their sin to leaven, and leaven always “puffs up” whatever it infects.) Their “broad-minded attitude” toward sin was only hurting the offender and the church, not to speak of the sorrow it was causing Paul and the Lord Himself. Paul judges the man and instructs the church to dismiss him from the fellowship. “But doesn’t Jesus tell us not to judge?” some may ask, referring to Matt. 7. Yes, He does; but this does not mean we should close our eyes to sin that is known by sinners and saints alike! We cannot judge another believer’s motives (which is what Matt. 7 refers to), but we can and must judge the actions of God’s people.

The discipline was to be handled by the church collectively, and not by the leaders alone (v. 4). The matter was known publicly, so it had to be dealt with publicly. If the man refused to repent, he was to be dismissed from fellowship. To “deliver a man to Satan” (v. 5) does not mean to send him to hell, for no church can do that. Rather, it means to cut him off from church fellowship so that he must live in the world, which is controlled by Satan (John 12:31 and Col. 1:13). The purpose of such discipline is not to

lose a member, but rather to bring the sinner to the place of repentance that he might be saved from loss of reward on the day of judgment.

Church discipline is a forgotten ministry in many churches these days. Yet, if we really love one another, and if the pastor really loves his flock, he will see to it that wandering ones are warned and disciplined for their own good.

II. For the Good of the Church (5:6–8)

How foolish for a church to say it is “open-minded” and willing to accept any and all members, no matter how they live! Would you open the door of your home to all who want to enter? Then why should we allow any and all who want to enter to come into the fellowship of the church? It is harder to join many worldly organizations than it is to unite with the average local church! “Your glorying is not good,” warns Paul. “Don’t you realize that one member living in open sin can defile the entire church?” (see v. 6).

Paul used the Passover supper to illustrate his point; see Ex. 12:15ff. Leaven to the Jews was always a symbol of sin and corruption; so, before Passover, they always scoured their houses to remove all traces of leaven. Christians must have the same attitude; we dare not allow the yeast of sin to grow quietly in the church and produce trouble and shame. Christ died for us, not to make us like the world, but to make us like God. “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). This does not mean that church leaders are to be “spiritual detectives” who pry into the lives of the members. But it does mean that each church member must see to it that the leaven of sin is not growing in his or her life. And, if sin becomes known, the leaders must take steps to protect the spiritual welfare of the church.

There are several kinds of Christians that we are warned about in the Bible, believers who should not be permitted fellowship in the local church: (1) the member who will not settle personal differences, Matt. 18:15–17; (2) the member who has a reputation for being a flagrant sinner, 1 Cor. 5:9–11; (3) those who hold false doctrine, 1 Tim. 1:18–20 and 2 Tim. 2:17–18; (4) those who cause divisions, Titus 3:10–11; (5) Christians who refuse to work for a living, 2 Thes. 3:6–12. Those who are suddenly overtaken by sin we should lovingly seek to restore; see Gal. 6:1.

III. For the Good of the World (5:9–13)

The church cannot change the world if the church is like the world. Read these verses carefully and note that Paul makes a distinction between sin in the lives of Christians and sin in the life of unbelievers. Sin in the lives of believers is worse! Paul had commanded them in a previous letter not to fellowship with Christians and church members who had sinful reputations as fornicators, coveters, or idolaters. He did not tell them to stay away from all sinners of this kind, otherwise they would have to leave the world! We expect the unsaved man to live in sin, but even the world expects the Christian to be different. One reason the church today has so little influence in the world is because the world has too much influence in the church.

Faithful Christians are not even to eat with church members who have ruined their testimony by open sin and have never made things right with the church and the Lord. This is a part of the discipline outlined in v. 5. If a faithful church member fellowships in

a friendly way with a Christian living in sin, that member is condoning his sin and disobeying the Word of God.

It shocks some Christians when they realize that God expects us to exercise spiritual judgment in the church. We are not to judge the outsiders; God will do that. But we are to expel from church fellowship any Christian who will not confess sin and make things right. This is not to be done hastily; all parties involved must be permitted to state their case. There must be prayer and the ministry of the Word. There must be sincere Christian love. The very act of church discipline is a testimony to the world and a warning to the church, and especially to new believers, that God expects His children to be different from the world. To condone sin is to deny the very cross of Christ!

1 Corinthians 6

This chapter deals with the two remaining problems that had been reported to Paul.

I. Disputes in the Courts (6:1–8)

It was probably the Gentiles (Greeks) in the church who were the guilty parties in this case, for the Greeks were very much wrapped up in courts and law. Each Greek city had its courts and councils, and it was not uncommon for a son to sue his own father! Of course, the basic problem was carnality (3:1–4); when Christians are immature and not growing, they cannot get along with one another. They lack the spiritual discernment to settle and solve personal problems. How tragic it is when a local church is torn asunder by lawsuits among the members! We are living in an era when lawsuits are the “going thing” and a quick way to try to make money. It seems that the purpose of the court is not justice but income.

Paul is not condemning courts of law (see Rom. 13), for the government is instituted by God for our good. But matters between believers must not be exposed before unbelievers, and certainly an unsaved judge lacks the spiritual understanding to deal with spiritual matters (2:14–16). By dragging one another to court, the church members at Corinth were ruining the testimony of the church and disgracing the name of the Lord.

How should Christians settle personal differences? They must first have the right spiritual values. How trivial these personal disputes become when compared to the great eternal matters we will decide in glory! The church is going to judge the world and the angels! This realization makes worldly disputes rather insignificant. Too many Christians have warped values; the things of this world (especially money) are more important to them than the glory and praise of God.

Matters between Christians should be settled quietly according to the principles of Matt. 18:15–17 and 1 Cor. 6:5. If the two parties cannot reach an agreement, then they should invite some spiritual believers to meet with them and help decide. If the matter becomes known to the church (or outside the church), the members should appoint a group to examine the matter and give spiritual counsel.

Far better that a Christian should lose money than lose his spiritual stature and bring shame to Christ's name! We can find this same attitude in Matt. 5:38–42. Of course, the Christians in Corinth were so carnal that they lacked spiritual vision and wisdom, and thus their church was split into warring factions. "You are brethren!" Paul cried. "Show love for one another!"

There is some question concerning the meaning of Paul's statement about "the least esteemed" (v. 4). Some take it that Paul is using "loving sarcasm" as though to say, "You don't even have a wise, mature Christian in your church who can handle these matters!" Or, he may have been saying, "Far better to lay these disputes before some humble believer in your church than to spread them before an unsaved judge."

II. Defilement in the World (6:9–20)

While we cannot excuse the Corinthians for their terrible sins, we can certainly understand why they fell into them; no city presented more opportunities for immorality and vice than did Corinth. The very religion of the city (the worship of Aphrodite) was nothing but prostitution in the name of religion! These believers had been rescued from lives of horrible sin but were tempted to go back. Paul knew that some of the believers were looking for excuses to sin, so he clearly refuted every argument that they might bring up.

A. *"If we are saved, then we can sin and still go to heaven!" (vv. 9–11)*

Certainly people who are truly born again will go to heaven in spite of their many failings; but the new birth brings a new nature, and a new nature means a new appetite. The Christian still has the ability to sin, but not the desire. Any teaching that makes it easy to sin is not Bible doctrine. "Be not deceived!" Paul listed the awful sins that once had ruled their lives, then reminded them of what Jesus had done for them. "Such were some of you! But you are washed ... sanctified ... justified!" The Christian is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and proves it by breaking with the old life. We do not inherit the kingdom of God by refraining from sin, but we prove that we are going to heaven by the godly lives that we live.

B. *"Don't Christians have liberty? Aren't we free from the Law?" (vv. 12–14)*

Certainly we are free from rules and regulations, but we are not free to sin. Christian liberty is never license. Christian liberty does not mean I am free to do what I please, but that I have been freed to do what pleases Christ. Furthermore, "liberty to sin" is really the worst kind of slavery! We must not be brought under the power of sin (Rom. 6). "But," you say, "if God gave us these physical appetites, certainly He wants us to use them." That's right: use them, but not abuse them. Your body is the Lord's; and if you live in sin, that sin will destroy you and God will someday judge you.

C. *"Can I not use my body as I please?" (vv. 15–20)*

Of course not! To begin with, it is no longer your body; it belongs to Christ. He purchased you with His own blood. Back in Paul's day, a slave could set himself free by saving his money and depositing it with the priest at the local heathen temple. When he had enough money to purchase his freedom, he would take his master to the temple and the priest would give the master the money and declare that the slave now

belonged to that particular god. Christ paid the price to set us free from sin, and we must use our bodies to please Him.

Furthermore, when we sin against the body, we sin against Christ and the Holy Spirit who has made the body His temple. Gen. 2:24 states that two persons joined physically become “one flesh.” How can a Christian join his body—which is a member of Christ’s body—in such horrible sin? How can he defile the temple of the Spirit?

Christians are to glorify God with their bodies. This means the way we care for the body, the way we dress the body, the places we take the body, the deeds we do in the body. It is dangerous for Christians to use their bodies for sin. Remember what happened to Samson and David!

In these latter days, we see a shameless increase of sexual sins. We dare not close our eyes to it. (See 2 Tim. 3:1–7, and note that v. 5 states that these sinners will be professing Christians, and not people of the world!) The attitude of the world is, “Everybody’s doing it, so why be different?” It is sad when Christians think they can violate God’s moral code and get away with it. Sexual sins are sins against Christ (who purchased our bodies), against the Spirit (who indwells our bodies), and against ourselves (v. 18). Single people in particular need to read and ponder Prov. 5:1–23, 6:20–35, and 7:1–27. These are plain chapters, but they warn against sexual license.

Married Christians need to read and ponder 1 Thes. 4:1–8, where God warns Christians in the church against breaking their wedding vows.

This closes the first section of the letter dealing with the sins in the church. Keep in mind that all of these problems—division, immorality, disputes, and defilement with the world—come from one common source: the believers in Corinth were spiritual babes and were not growing in the Lord. They had their eyes on men, not on Christ; they were feeding on milk, and not the meat of the Word; they were unwilling to admit sin and deal with it. Most serious church problems begin as personal problems and sins in the lives of church members.

1 Corinthians 7

This chapter deals with problems of marriage and the home. Beginning with this chapter, Paul is answering the questions the Corinthians asked in the letter they wrote him (see 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Some modern liberal critics accuse Paul of being cruel to women in his teaching, but nothing could be farther from the truth! Paul’s ministry of the Gospel did more to raise the position of women than people realize. Wherever Christianity has gone, it has improved the lot of workers, women, and children. Paul himself must have been married, otherwise he could not have been a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. (He may have been a widower.)

As you read this chapter, keep in mind: (1) that Corinth was noted for its immorality and lack of standards for the home; (2) that Paul was dealing with local problems that we may not face in the same way today; (3) that it was a time of persecution for the Christians (v. 26). In this chapter, Paul discusses the problems of three groups of believers.

I. The Unmarried Christians (7:1–9)

Note v. 8, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows.” Paul is giving counsel to those without mates, and he begins by saying that believers should not think themselves unspiritual because they are single, or that they are especially spiritual because they are married. One version translates v. 1, “It is perfectly proper, honorable, morally befitting for a man to live in strict celibacy” (WUEST). The Roman Catholic church teaches that celibacy is a more devoted form of life than marriage, but Paul teaches otherwise. Celibacy is honorable, but so is marriage (see Heb. 13:4). In v. 7 he says that God gives different gifts to people when it comes to the marriage relationship, and this idea resembles our Lord’s teachings in Matt. 19:10–12. Keep in mind that the Greeks looked down on the body and were prone to separate “body” and “soul” in a manner not taught in the Bible. Paul states that God had given him the ability to live without marriage, and he would that they had the same self-control. But he does not say that celibacy is more spiritual than marriage.

There are, however, reasons for marriage, and the main one is to avoid sexual sin. “It is better to marry than to burn with lust” says v. 9. In v. 2, Paul unmistakably teaches monogamy: every man is to have his own wife, every woman her own husband. Husband and wife must be considerate of one another when it comes to the privileges of marriage. Lack of consideration can give Satan an opportunity to tempt one of the partners, and the result might be tragic. “Incontinency” (the deliberate refusal of the marriage bed) is not necessarily a mark of spirituality. It can be a cause of conflict and sin. If a Christian cannot control oneself, then he or she ought to marry. Of course, Paul is not suggesting that the only—or main—reason for marriage is physical; for a marriage built on physical bonds will fall apart in only a short time. Paul treats marriage in this chapter as a privilege, a blessing from God that can enrich the lives of both partners.

II. Christians Married to Unsaved Partners (7:10–24)

Christians are to marry other Christians (note v. 39—“married ... in the Lord”—and see 2 Cor. 6:14–18). But some of the Corinthians were saved after they had married. What should they do? Should they leave their unsaved mates? Should they refuse the marriage bed? What if the unsaved mate wants to end the marriage? Paul’s counsel is clear: stay where you are and use every opportunity to try to win the lost mate. If the unsaved mate is willing to live with you, remain in the home and be a good witness. The Christian might win the unsaved mate. The children from such a marriage are not “unclean” (illegitimate), as would be the case if an OT Jew married a Gentile; their children would not be accepted into the covenant. (Verse 14 does not mean that children born in a Christian home are saved; only that the Christian mate “sets apart” for God’s blessing the unsaved in the home. God blesses the lost because of the saved.) However, if an unsaved mate refuses to continue in the home, then the believer can do nothing but let the mate depart. “God has called us to peace.” Does the abandoned wife or husband have the right to remarry? Verses 10–11 would indicate that the ideal is to work toward reconciliation, but v. 15 seems to teach that abandonment does break the marriage relationship and thus gives the faithful partner right to divorce and remarry. Christ taught that unfaithfulness breaks the marriage bond and is grounds for the

innocent party to remarry. Keep in mind that Paul is not commanding separation; he is permitting it in certain cases. Ideally the Christian is to patiently bear the burdens and seek to win the lost mate. (See 1 Peter 3 for further counsel.)

The fact that a person becomes a Christian does not change his or her status in society. In vv. 17–24, Paul tells the Corinthians not to try to “undo” their situation, but to abide in their calling and allow Christ to make the changes in His way and His time.

III. Parents of Marriageable Girls (7:25–40)

“No commandment of the Lord” in v. 25 simply means that Christ gave no teaching on this subject as He did about divorce (as noted in v. 10, where Paul refers to His teaching). Keep in mind that in those days, the parents arranged marriages for their children; it is different today. Paul presents several facts for these parents to consider.

A. It is a time to distress (vv. 25–31).

Marriage is a serious matter, and Christians were facing difficult times. These testings were not to cause the married to divorce or the unmarried to be frightened out of marriage (v. 27); but due consideration had to be given to the situation at hand. Living a dedicated Christian life means sometimes forsaking even the good things of the world.

B. Marriage brings responsibilities (vv. 32–35).

One reason why Paul remained unmarried was so that he might devote himself completely to the service of Christ. His calling was such that he did not want to force a wife and family to suffer because of the Lord’s demands on him. While this is not the normal standard for Christian servants, we must admire men like Paul, David Brainerd, Robert Murray McCheyne, and others who gave their all to Christ in this sacrificial way. If these parents wanted their daughters to serve God, then they had to face the fact that marriage involves many cares and demands.

C. Each case is individual (vv. 36–38).

It is next to impossible to lay down rules that fit each case when it comes to marriage. Paul warns them that they must be convinced in their own hearts, and not merely follow the crowd or try to appear superspiritual.

D. Do not be in a hurry, for marriage is for life (vv. 39–40).

The marriage cannot be broken because of some whim or fancy. Too many people (including some Christians) have the idea, “If our marriage doesn’t work out, we can always get a divorce.” Not so, says Paul! When you marry, be sure it is “in the Lord”—that is, be sure you marry a Christian and that your mate is the one God has chosen for you. How tragic to see young lives ruined by hasty marriages.

1 Corinthians 8

Chapters 8 through 10 deal with the church’s questions about meat offered to idols. This was a serious problem to them, especially since the church was composed of both Jews

and Gentiles, and the Jewish believers were anxious to avoid any contact with heathen idolatry. The situation was this: most of the meat in Corinth was slaughtered at the temples. The priest kept part of the meat, but the rest was used for private feasts or sold in the markets. In fact, sacrificial meat was sold at a cheaper price, making it that much more attractive to these poor Christians. If a friend or neighbor invited a Christian to a feast, it was likely that the meat had been dedicated to an idol. Should the Christian participate in the feast? Would some demonic power be present in the meat and injure the believer? Would eating such meat defile the Christian?

We don't face this same problem today, but the basic situation is still with us: does a Christian, because he is set free from the Law, have the right to live any way he pleases? There are many practices that we know from Scripture are definitely wrong, but there are also many borderline problems about which even dedicated Christians disagree. In these three chapters, Paul outlines the basic principles that should govern our lives when it comes to questionable things. Here in chapter 8, he uses the example of Christ and states that we must be controlled by love so as not to cause others to stumble (see Matt. 17:24–27). In chapter 9, Paul uses himself as an example, pointing out that it is not necessary for Christians to use their rights in order to be happy; for Paul laid aside even legitimate rights in order to serve Christ. Finally, in chapter 10, he uses the example of Israel to warn believers about presumptuous sins, particularly those connected with idolatry and immorality.

Here in chapter 8, Paul gives four admonitions for us to follow in discerning right and wrong in the area of questionable things.

I. Consider Your Own Attitude (8:1–3)

Too often strong Christians who know the Bible are prone to be “puffed up” when they deal with weaker Christians. Paul admits here, as well as in Rom. 14, that some believers are strong in the faith and mature, while others are weak and have legalistic views of the Christian life. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up!” (v. 1). In fact, the man who thinks he knows everything is admitting that he knows nothing! Paul is not encouraging us to be “ignorant brethren,” but rather is warning us that a proud attitude is not Christ-like. Knowledge must be balanced with love, love for God and for our brethren. We must not judge one another or reject one another (Rom. 14:4–12).

II. Consider Your Brother's Knowledge (8:4–8)

The Christian life cannot be lived in its fullness if a man is ignorant of the Word. We must always take into consideration that some Christians do not understand the blessings of liberty we have in Christ. They live in religious bondage and try to regulate their lives with rules and rituals (see Col. 2:16–23). Paul clearly states that idols are not real, and that meat offered to idols could never hurt anybody's body or spirit (v. 8). There is one God and Savior, and we worship and obey only the Lord. But some Christians do not have this knowledge. They do not realize that no food is sinful of itself (note Rom. 14:14), and that meat and drink can never make anybody a better Christian. How patient Christ was with His ignorant disciples! And how patient we must be with one another! As a Christian grows in grace and knowledge, through reading and

obeying the Word, he understands the truth, and the truth sets him free (John 8:32). He sees knowledge as a tool with which to build, not a weapon with which to fight.

III. Consider Your Brother's Conscience (8:9–11)

Conscience is that inner judge that condemns us when we do wrong and commends us when we do right. It “bears witness” to us (Rom. 2:15 and 9:1). The Christian’s conscience has been purged (Heb. 9:14 and 10:22) and is termed a “good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:5, 19). Repeated sin not judged and confessed will make it a defiled conscience (Titus 1:15) and eventually a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) that no longer convicts. We must strive to have a conscience void of offense (Acts 24:16).

The new Christian, or the untaught Christian, will have a weak conscience (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12). If he sees another Christian eating meat that had been dedicated to a heathen god, this experience might offend him and perhaps lead him into sin. Because his spiritual senses are not fully developed, he will go to the other extreme and perhaps disgrace the name of Christ (see Heb. 5:11–14). A mature Christian, with a strong conscience, will not be affected by the heathen around him; but the believer with a weak conscience will be confused and, if he follows his brother’s example, might get into trouble.

Paul takes up this same principle in 10:25–33, so we might look ahead at these verses. “Don’t go around being a spiritual detective!” he states. “If invited to a feast, and if you are disposed to go, then go right ahead; but don’t ask a lot of questions. However, if the host tells you that the meat was sacrificed to an idol, do not eat it! Why? So that you can be a testimony to the weaker Christian who might be offended and lead into sin.” Paul then anticipates an argument. “But, you ask, why should we have our liberty limited by somebody else’s immaturity? If we bless the food and eat for God’s glory, isn’t that enough?” No! Believers are to follow a different rule. We Christians must do everything possible not to offend the Jews, Gentiles, or other Christians.

It boils down to this: whatever a Christian does, even if it does not hurt him, must never hurt anyone else. While we may think that this principle limits us, it really does not, for it allows us to be a greater blessing to others and to win the lost to Christ (10:33).

IV. Consider Christ (8:12–13)

Our Lord, in the days of His flesh here on earth, was careful never to cause others to stumble. The incident in Matt. 17:24–27 illustrates this. “Lest we should cause them to stumble” is a wonderful principle to follow, for it means putting Christian love into daily living. Christ died for the weaker Christian, therefore we dare not cause them to sin. To sin against another Christian is to sin against Christ! It would be better to go without meat than to make others fall, says Paul.

We can think of dozens of applications of this principle in modern life. Take the world of amusements, for example. One person might be able to attend a theater and not suffer from it spiritually; but if this act leads a weaker Christian astray, then the stronger Christian has sinned. A mature Christian might be able to read a popular novel and not be affected; but if his selection causes another to stumble, he has sinned. Yes, we have

liberty as Christians; but we are not at liberty to become stumbling blocks to others. What a tragedy if a believer were to backslide, or a lost sinner reject Christ, because a Christian selfishly asserted “his rights” and set the wrong example. “Let no man think only of his own good, but let him think of the good of others,” Paul states in 10:24—that is a wonderful principle to follow!

1 Corinthians 9

In the previous chapter, Paul pointed to the example of Christ and laid down the principle that we should do nothing that would offend another Christian, especially weaker Christians. In this chapter, he points to himself as an example of one who had privileges, but, for the Gospel’s sake, did not use them. Keep in mind that he is still dealing with the problem of meat offered to idols. “Certainly we have privileges as Christians,” he states, “but we must never use our privileges in such a way that we will hinder the Gospel.”

I. Paul’s Claims to Privileges (9:1–14)

While in Corinth, Paul worked with his own hands and took no support from the church. He willingly laid aside even the privilege of marriage. Paul could have claimed the privilege of financial support from the church, and proved this by citing five arguments.

A. *Other apostles and workers (vv. 1–6).*

Paul states his apostleship in no uncertain terms. He had seen the Lord (Acts 1:21–22) and was called to his apostleship by the risen, glorified Christ. His work and ministry in Corinth proved his apostleship. The other apostles, including Peter, received support from the churches and took their wives with them from place to place as they ministered. If other servants had these privileges, then so did Paul!

B. *Human custom (v. 7).*

No soldier supports himself, but receives supplies and wages from his government. The farmer who toils in the vineyard is privileged to eat the fruit. The shepherd expects to get milk and meat from the flock. Is it unreasonable to expect a local church, then, to support the pastor? Verse 11 lays down a basic principle: if others bless us with spiritual things, we should show our appreciation by sharing material (“carnal”) things (see Gal. 6:6–8). It is interesting to note that we have here three more pictures of a pastor: he is a soldier to protect the church and battle Satan; he is a farmer who tends the spiritual field or vineyard and looks for fruit; and he is a shepherd who leads and feeds the sheep. Pray for your pastor; a pastor’s work is never easy.

C. *The Old Testament law (vv. 8–11).*

Paul refers to Deut. 25:4. The OT practice was to have the oxen walk on the sheaves and thus separate the grain from the chaff. Here, and in 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul uses this law to illustrate the principle given in v. 11. If oxen benefit from their physical work, should

not God's servants benefit from their spiritual work? The plowman and the harvester both work in hope, expecting to share in the harvest.

D. The Old Testament priests (vv. 12–14).

The Law allowed the priests to share generously in the sacrifices from the altar. He took the hides from the burnt offerings, all the flesh (minus the fat) from the sin offering and the trespass offering, most of the meal offering, the breast and right shoulder of the peace offering, plus various firstfruits, tithes, and special offerings. If they served faithfully, the people shared generously.

E. Christ's command (v. 14).

Read Matt. 10:10 and Luke 10:7. While Paul personally did not use these privileges, he does not say that they are wrong. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." It is right for Christians to support those who serve them in the Lord.

II. Paul's Sacrifice of Privileges (9:15–27)

Though he had all these privileges, Paul did not use them (vv. 12, 15) and he gives several reasons to explain why.

A. He wanted to make the Gospel free (vv. 15–18).

He gloried in a free Gospel of free grace! As one writer puts it, "Paul's pay was to get no pay!" He preached the Gospel willingly and rejoiced at the privilege. How tragic it is when Christians look upon their responsibilities as burdens instead of blessings.

"But even if I did not preach willingly," says Paul, "I would still have to preach, because God has committed a stewardship (dispensation) to me." There is a practical principle here: we should do nothing that would reflect on the grace of God and the free offer of salvation. We wonder what sinners must think when they attend "Gospel meetings" where a leader spends thirty minutes taking offerings or scolding the crowd for not giving more!

B. He wanted to work independently (v. 19a).

More than one Christian worker has soft-pedaled the message because of money. Some pastors dare not offend members who are "heavy givers." Others are afraid of losing their denominational support or insurance. Paul wanted no master but Christ.

C. He wanted to win as many as possible (vv. 19b–23).

Though Paul enjoyed liberty as a worker, he willingly made himself the servant of all men that he might win them to Christ. This does not mean that Paul followed the worldly slogan, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." That would be compromise rooted in fear. Paul's attitude was based on love, not fear. He was not lowering his standards; rather, he was laying aside his personal privileges. It was not hypocrisy, but sympathy: he tried to understand those who needed Christ and enter into their experiences. He was a Jew, so he used this as a key to open the Jewish heart. He was a Roman citizen, so he used this as a key to open the door to the Gentiles. He sympathized with the weak and encouraged them. "All things to all men" (v. 22) simply means the wonderful ability of accommodating ourselves to others, understanding them, and seeking to lead them into the knowledge of Christ. Paul was no tactless "bull in a china shop" who used

the same approach on all he met. Rather, he used tact to get contact; he willingly sacrificed his own privileges to win the lost.

D. He wanted to gain a lasting reward (vv. 24–27).

What good are daily privileges if we lose our eternal reward? Every Christian needs to govern his or her life “with eternity’s values in view.” For Paul to set aside his personal privileges meant discipline and hard work, and he describes this discipline in vv. 24–27. His illustration from the Greek games was familiar to his readers, for the famous Isthmian Games (similar to the Olympics) were held near Corinth. The contestants had to discipline themselves and lay aside even good things in order to win a prize. If athletes can give up their rights in order to win a fading olive-leaf crown, certainly Christians can lay aside privileges to win an eternal crown! Only one athlete could win each event at the Isthmian Games, but all Christians are given the opportunity to win Christ’s approval.

Paul’s fear of becoming a castaway had nothing to do with his salvation. He is not talking about salvation but Christian service. We are not saved by running the race and winning; we run the race because we are saved (Phil. 3:12–16 and Heb. 12:1–3). The word “castaway” means “disapproved, disqualified”; it is translated “not well pleased” in 10:5. Paul compares himself to the herald who called the athletes into the arena, yet who himself did not pass the tests to be a contestant! Paul was not afraid of losing his salvation but of losing his reward for faithful, sacrificial service.

1 Corinthians 10

This chapter closes the section dealing with meat offered to idols. Paul has cited the example of Christ (chap. 8), his own example (chap. 9), and now points to Israel’s past history. He probably had in mind the overconfident members of the church at Corinth, believers who thought they had such wisdom and knowledge that they did not have to beware of temptation or sin. He warns them in v. 12 and uses a bit of “holy sarcasm” as he calls them “wise men” in v. 15. While the believer has liberty to eat and drink, he must beware of at least three dangers.

I. The Danger of Falling into Sin (10:1–13)

Paul uses Israel to illustrate the temptations and sins of God’s people. While Israel in the OT is different from the church in the NT (note v. 32), there are several parallels between the two.

A. Israel had spiritual advantages (vv. 1–4).

Paul compares its passing through the sea and under the cloud to the believer’s experience of baptism. Just as Christian baptism identifies the believer with Christ, so Israel’s “baptism” identified the people with Moses. Israel was delivered from Egypt by the blood of the lamb just as Christians are delivered from the world and sin by the cross. God opened the sea to let the Israelites through, thus separating them from their

slavery in Egypt; in like manner, the resurrection of Christ has separated the Christian from the world and the bondage of the flesh. The Jews ate manna, and Christians feed on Christ, the Bread of Life, as they partake of the Word. Israel drank water supernaturally provided, and Christians drink the living water (John 4:10–14) of salvation and the refreshing water of the Spirit (John 7:37–39). Some are puzzled by “that spiritual rock that followed them” (v. 4), as though a literal rock rolled along in the wilderness with the Jews. Two explanations are possible: (1) Paul states that a spiritual rock followed them, and certainly Christ did travel with His people and met their needs; (2) the word “them” is not in the original text, so that Paul may be saying, “They drank of that spiritual rock that followed [after the manna was given].” First the bread, then the water followed.

B. Israel fell because of sin (vv. 5–10).

God was “not well pleased” with them (v. 5), which is the same Gk. word as “castaway” in 9:27. They were disapproved; they lost their lives because of sin. They lusted (Num. 11:34); they worshiped idols (Ex. 32:1–14); they committed fornication (Num. 25:1–9); they tempted God by deliberately trying His patience (Num. 21:4–9); they complained (Num. 16:41–50). What a list of sins! Yet, God had to judge their sins even though they had been wonderfully delivered from Egypt. Spiritual privileges never give us license to sin. Rather, they lay upon us the greater responsibility to obey God and glorify Him. (Note on v. 8: Paul gives 23,000 slain, while Num. 25:9 says 24,000. However, Paul is recounting how many died in one day, while Moses records the total number of deaths, for obviously some died later.)

C. Israel is a warning to us today (vv. 11–13).

The people of God, whether in the OT or the NT, must never presume to sin. In v. 12, Paul warns the overconfident, and then encourages the fearful in v. 13.

II. The Danger of Fellowshiping with Demons (10:14–22)

Paul uses the Lord’s Supper to illustrate his point that while idols are not real (8:4–6), Satan can use idols to lead people astray. This is not superstition, for Deut. 32:17 and 21 clearly teach that demons can be worshiped through idols. Just as the believer has fellowship (communion) with Christ in partaking of the cup and loaf, and just as OT priests had fellowship with God as they feasted on the sacrifices from the altar, so an idolater has fellowship with demons in his idolatrous feast. Paul is actually describing “Satan’s communion service” here! Just as Satan has a counterfeit church and gospel, so he has a counterfeit communion service. Anthropologists may study and admire heathen worship and idols, but God says the whole system is of the devil and is actually demon worship. Wherever there are idols, there will be demons.

Of course, Paul is not saying that the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup actually and literally make a person a partaker of Christ. He is not talking about union but communion, fellowship with Christ. It is inconsistent for a Christian to share the Lord’s Table one day and sit at a table of demons the next day.

Christians must take care not to get involved in the devil’s religion. Not everything that passes for Christianity is scriptural. We may think we are sharing half-heartedly in a

religious ceremony, when actually we are opening ourselves up to Satanic attack. The recent rise of Satanism ought to be a warning to the church.

III. The Danger of Failing a Fellow Christian (10:23–33)

As he closes his discussion, Paul now repeats the principle laid down in chapter 8: do nothing that would weaken your brother's conscience or cause him to stumble. Yes, Christians are free and all things are lawful; but not everything builds up (edifies). We dare not use privileges to tear down the work of the Lord. He closes with several very practical guidelines:

A. Live to please others (vv. 23–24).

This is a summary of his teaching in chapter 9.

B. Don't be overly "fussy" (vv. 25–27).

The Christian who goes around asking questions about foods will be a poor testimony to the lost and of no help to the saved. Buy your meat in the meat market ("shambles") without asking questions. All food comes from God and is good for us, and Satan cannot hurt us with meat (8:8). When invited to a feast in an unsaved friend's house, ask no questions. However, if another Christian there tells you the meat came from a heathen altar, and if that Christian is bothered by it, do not eat the meat. It is better to go hungry than to cause that weaker brother to stumble.

C. Live for God's glory, even if it means sacrifice (vv. 29–31).

Paul anticipates an argument in vv. 29–30. "Why should my strong conscience be judged by a brother's weak conscience? And what damage can there be in meat for which I have given thanks?" The answer is: regardless of what we do, be it eating or drinking, we must do it for God's glory and not just to please ourselves. Humanly speaking, it may seem wrong for a strong Christian to bow to a weaker brother, but this is what glorifies God. Making that weaker brother stumble into sin would disgrace the church and the name of Christ.

D. Live to win souls (vv. 32–33).

There are only three groups of people in the world: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church. God expects the church to seek to win Jews and Gentiles to the Lord. If a Christian lives to win souls, these questions about conduct will take care of themselves. It is the idle Christian, the carnal Christian, who frets over how far he can get involved with the world. When believers live to build the church and win the lost, they put first things first and glorify the name of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11

In chapters 11–14, Paul deals with the disorder in the public assembly at Corinth. As you read these chapters, certain problems become evident: their meetings were disorderly and unscriptural; women were taking the lead over the men; various

members were competing for leadership and opportunity to speak; in general, there was confusion and a poor testimony before the lost. Chapter 11 concerns disorder at the Lord's Supper in particular, while chapters 12–14 discuss public worship in the assembly and the principles that should govern our services.

I. The Causes of Disorder at the Lord's Supper (11:1–22)

A. Lack of subordination by the women (vv. 1–16).

Paul is often accused of being critical of women and placing them in an inferior position, but this is not true. He realized that God is a God of order, and that when anything is out of order, there is confusion and loss of power. Paul nowhere teaches that women are inferior to men in the eyes of God, but rather that God has laid down the principle of headship (not dictatorship) that makes Christ the Head of man and man the head of woman. At Corinth, this important principle was being violated. Women were competing with men for public leadership in the church. Furthermore, in the observing of the Lord's Supper, women were not keeping their proper place and were coming with their heads uncovered; it is this matter that Paul now discusses.

Keep in mind that Corinth was an immoral city, with temple "priestesses" who were prostitutes. One mark of a sinful woman was her short hair; such a woman often walked about the city without the usual veil for a covering. In some Eastern countries even today, women do not appear in public unveiled. This is a sign of disrespect to their husbands and would be interpreted as an invitation to sin. In fact, even among the Jews, a shorn head was a mark of immorality (see Num. 5:11–31, especially v. 18). So, Paul warns the women of the church not to lose their testimonies by worshiping in public without a veiled head. That veil (or covering) was a mark of subordination to the Lord and to their husbands and a recognition of the principle of headship.

Orthodox Jewish men even today wear a prayer cap in their synagogue worship, but this is a practice Paul forbids in the local church. Christ is the Head of man; so, if a man wears a hat in worship, he dishonors his Head. If a woman does not wear a covering, she dishonors her husband, because "woman [was created] for the man" (v. 9). Of course, the mere wearing (or not wearing) of a piece of cloth never changes the heart. Paul assumes that these Christian women obeyed the principle of headship from their hearts and were simply not complying outwardly.

Paul gave several reasons why women must keep their proper place in the church: (1) it shows honor to their husbands; (2) it honors Christ, the Head of the church; (3) it agrees with the plan of creation itself, for God created woman for man; (4) the angels watch our worship and know what we do, v. 10; (5) nature itself gives the woman long hair and the man short hair, thus teaching subordination; (6) this is the practice in all the churches, v. 16. How does this matter of "wearing hats" and "wearing short hair" apply to us today? While we do not have all of the same circumstances that Paul had to deal with in Corinth, we must admit that a woman or a man out of place is always a hindrance to the work of God. There ought to be modesty in the local church, both in dress and action. We dare not conform to the world, lest we lose our testimony.

B. Divisions in the church (vv. 17–19).

When there are divisions and factions (heresies) in the church, even though they seem hidden, they will show up in the public meetings. The Lord's Supper speaks of the unity of believers; divisions in the church would negate this wonderful message.

C. Selfish motives (vv. 20–22).

The early church often held a "love feast," a fellowship meal, in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. But at Corinth, the rich came with their bounties while the poor sat on the side with a crust of bread. "Eat at home!" Paul commands them. "Your gluttony and drunkenness are a disgrace to the Lord!" (v. 22). If believers do not love one another, they can never partake of the Lord's Supper and be blessed.

II. The Consequences of This Disorder (11:23–30)

A. They were judged instead of blessed (vv. 23–29).

Apparently Christ had given Paul instructions about the Lord's Supper personally, for the apostle was not in the Upper Room when the ordinance was instituted. Paul's words speak of the broken body and shed blood of Christ for His church which are a constant reminder of His love and His coming again. We look back to the cross and forward to the coming. But the Supper had ceased to be a blessing to the church at Corinth, for the way they abused it was a cause of judgment. Their meetings were "for the worse, not the better" (v. 17)! This is the way spiritual matters always work: if our hearts are not right, whatever should be a blessing becomes a curse.

B. They were chastened (v. 30).

God allowed sickness and even death to come to the Corinthian church because it was partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Paul never tells us we must be "worthy" to eat at the Lord's Table; for if that were the case, no one would be able to partake. Though we are not worthy, we can partake in a worthy manner by understanding what the Supper means: having a heart free from sin; being filled with love for Christ and His people; being willing to obey His Word. Christians often think they can "get away" with carelessness in church, but this is impossible. If our hearts are not right, God has to chasten us to bring us to the place of blessing.

III. The Correction of This Disorder (11:31–34)

A. Self-judgment (vv. 31–32).

If we face our sins honestly, judge them, and confess them, then God will not chasten us. "Let a man examine himself" is Paul's command in v. 28. At the Lord's Supper, we take three "looks": we look within and confess our sins; we look back and remember Calvary; and we look ahead and eagerly anticipate His return. The principle is clear: if we do not judge our sins, God will have to judge us.

B. Mutual love (v. 33).

"Don't think only of yourself!" Paul wrote; "think of others." This is Christian love: putting others ahead of ourselves. How few Christians obey this principle when it comes to worship. We come to church asking, "Will I get anything out of the service today?" when we should be asking, "What can I say or do that will give somebody else a blessing?"

C. Spiritual discernment (v. 34).

While there is nothing wrong with church fellowship meals, the place to eat is at home. It takes spiritual discernment to keep the church doing what it is supposed to do and not get sidetracked on detours. The ministry of the local church is not to entertain or feed the saints; it is one of building one another spiritually that all might be able to go out to win others. It may be put down as a basic principle that the local church is not to do what God ordained the home or the state to do. The church is not meant to raise children, yet people blame the church and Sunday School when their children go wrong!

If we follow these principles, then our assemblies will come together for blessing and not for judgment (“condemnation” in vv. 29, 32, 34).

1 Corinthians 12

This chapter opens the discussion on spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14), and in this day when churches and denominations are emphasizing the work of the Spirit, we need to know what God has to say on this subject. However, we must study these chapters in the light of the problems in the Corinthian church—division, immorality, stunted spiritual growth, and confusion in the assembly. Here in chapter 12, Paul explains the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ as He bestows spiritual gifts upon the members. Chapter 13 emphasizes that Christian graces, flowing from love, are more important than spectacular gifts; in chapter 14 he lays down the principles that should govern worship in the community of the church.

I. We Belong to Each Other (12:1–20)

Division was a major problem in the church at Corinth (1:10–16; 6:1–8; 11:18–22). Each group followed its chosen human leader, exercised its gifts selfishly, and cared little for the health or ministry of the whole body. The Christians at Corinth had received an abundance of spiritual gifts (1:4–7), but they were lacking in spiritual graces—the kind of Christian character that the Holy Spirit longed to form in them. Keep in mind that Christian gifts are not necessarily a mark of Christian character or spiritual maturity. These Corinthian believers were carnal, yet they exercised wonderful and miraculous gifts.

A. We share the same confession (vv. 1–3).

A citizen of the Roman Empire was required once a year to put a pinch of incense on the altar and say, “Caesar is Lord!” This was anathema to believers. No true Christian could call anyone but Christ “Lord,” so this was a definite test of whether or not a person was saved. It is only by the Spirit that we can confess Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9–10).

B. We serve the same God (vv. 4–6).

The church, like the human body, has diversity in unity. Our human members all differ, yet they work together for the health of the body. In the spiritual body of the church, we

possess gifts from the Holy Spirit (v. 4), partake in service to the same Lord Jesus Christ (v. 5), and share in the workings (operations) of the same Father (v. 6).

C. We seek to build the same body (vv. 7–13).

Paul now lists the spiritual gifts and shows that they are given for the benefit of the whole church, and not for the private enjoyment of the individual Christians. We must distinguish between: (1) the spiritual Gift, which is the Spirit Himself, received at salvation (Eph. 1:13–14); (2) spiritual gifts, which are ministries to the church through the Spirit, and not just natural abilities or talents; (3) spiritual offices, which are positions of trust in the local church, as discussed in 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:4; (4) spiritual graces, which are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 13:4–7) in Christian conduct. Paul makes it very clear that each Christian has the Gift (12:3) and at least one spiritual gift (12:7). Not all Christians have spiritual offices, but all Christians should manifest the graces of the Spirit, which are far more important than miraculous gifts.

It is clear from 1 Cor. 13:8 that some of the gifts granted to the early church were never meant to be permanent. When the church was in its infancy (13:11), before the completion of the NT Scriptures, these gifts were needed; but they are not needed today. God can grant them if He pleases, for He is sovereign in all things; but these “sign gifts” are not necessary for the ministry of the church.

D. We share the same baptism (vv. 14–20).

The baptism of the Spirit refers to the placing of members into the body at the moment of their conversion. The Jews were first baptized into the body at Pentecost (Acts 1:5 and 2:1ff); the Gentiles were first baptized into the body at the household of Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:44 and 11:15–16); and ever since, whenever a sinner trusts Christ, he or she is made a part of that same body by the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit places each believer in the body as He sees fit, but each part of the body has an important ministry to perform. “Many members in one body” is the program for this present age.

II. We Need Each Other (12:21–25)

Those believers who possessed spectacular gifts looked down upon the others and thought them unimportant. Yet here Paul teaches that every member of the body is essential to the life, health, and growth of the church. (Read Eph. 4 to see how God uses gifted people to help build the saints who in turn build the body.) No Christian can say to his less-gifted brother, “I don’t need you!” In fact, those parts of our body that seem the least important can do the most good—or cause the most trouble if not functioning properly! Doctors used to list several organs or members of the human body that (they said) were not important. That list is much shorter today!

III. We Affect Each Other (12:26–31)

There should be no division (schism) in the body (v. 25), since we all share the same life through the Spirit. But it is not enough simply to avoid division; we must also care for each other and seek to build the church and strengthen the body. In the human body,

the weakness or pain of one member affects the other members. This is also true in the spiritual body: if one believer suffers, we all suffer; if one member grows in strength, we all receive help. This fact lays upon each Christian the responsibility for being the strongest member possible. Ephesians 4:16 indicates that every part of the body makes some kind of contribution toward the growth of the church.

It is essential that we keep in mind God's method for strengthening the body. He has chosen spiritual leaders, given them spiritual gifts, and placed them in the body as He chooses. There were, in the early days of the church, apostles, and prophets. There are no apostles today, since it was necessary to have seen the risen Christ to qualify for apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:21–22). The apostles were special ambassadors who took the Gospel to the lost, established churches, and delivered God's messages. Prophets were preachers who spoke as directed by the Spirit. They did not expound the Bible as such, but conveyed God's will immediately to the church, and not mediately through the written Word, since the NT was not yet written. First Cor. 13:8–13 teaches that the spectacular gifts that the early church possessed in its "childhood" stage were not meant to be permanent. They were the heaven-sent credentials that told the people that God was at work in their midst (Heb. 2:3–4).

Note that tongues stand last on the list. Apparently the believers at Corinth were given to abusing the gift of tongues, so much so that there was confusion in their public services (14:23ff). In fact, the "tongues members" looked down upon the other believers who did not have this particular gift. So Paul closed by reminding them that we do not all possess the same gifts (vv. 29–30). "Do all speak with tongues?" No. Never let anyone convince you that the gift of tongues is necessarily a mark of special spiritual power or character. This gift was possessed by Christians whom Paul called "carnal—babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1).

It is important that we realize our relationship to one another in the church. Yes, there are many denominations today, but all true Christians, indwelt by the Spirit, are members of His body. There can be unity even where there is not uniformity. Christ never prayed for uniformity in His church, but for the same spiritual unity that exists between Him and His Father (John 17:20–23). We should likewise pray for spiritual unity and do all we can to guard it and extend it (Eph. 4:1ff).

1 Corinthians 13

It is tragic when the world takes a chapter like this (as it does) and divorces it from its true Christian meaning. The unsaved man can no more experience this kind of love than can a marble statue! It takes the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the life, and the empowering of that Spirit, for anyone to display this kind of character in daily life.

Keep in mind that Paul is still dealing with the question of spiritual gifts. Here he is emphasizing the fact that gifts without graces are nothing. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) is more important in the Christian life than the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Whenever the church strives for miraculous experiences rather than Christian holiness and character, there will be division, confusion, and carnality.

I. Love Is Essential (13:1–3)

The word “charity” means “love” in action. It is not simply an emotion; it is the heart reaching out to others. “Charity” today makes us think of giving away old clothes or making gifts to “charitable institutions.” These activities can be Christian love in action, but Paul is demanding much more. The word he uses for love is *agape*, which is love that sacrifices for the good of others.

Notice how he takes up some of the spiritual gifts of 12:8–10 and shows their emptiness apart from love. Tongues apart from love become mere noise, like the clanging of a cymbal. Prophecy without love makes the prophet nothing. This application can also be made to knowledge (spiritual insight given immediately by the Spirit) and faith. Paul is not minimizing these gifts; he is simply saying that they will have no good effect on the individual or on the church unless there is love in the life of the Christian in the exercise of his or her gifts. We might go so far as to sacrifice our body, but apart from love, this act would amount to nothing. Love is the measure of all things.

It is evident that the Corinthians were using their spiritual gifts and offices with an attitude of competition and not of love. The church was divided, and the situation was getting worse because the very spiritual gifts that were supposed to build the church were doing more harm than good! Preaching without love is just so much noise. Praying without love becomes an empty speech. Giving without love is just a ceremony. Is it any wonder that Christ asked Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 21:17)

II. Love Is Effectual (13:4–7)

Gifts have no spiritual effect on the life of the church if there is no love, for it is love that the Spirit uses to build the church. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up,” says 1 Cor. 8:1. Note the qualities of love:

A. *Love is patient and kind (v. 4).*

Love rises above petty things and is generous in the way it treats others. It is easy to “love” when people are lovable; how difficult it is to love when they injure or attack us in one way or another. Think of Christ’s patience with Peter after the times Peter sinned against Him, and you have some idea of what this means. Love not only patiently bears with wrongs, but it positively acts in deeds of kindness.

B. *Love never simmers with jealousy (v. 4).*

Envy is a terrible sin; Cain envied his brother and killed him! How do we react when other Christians receive blessings or benefits that we lack? Do we allow the sparks of envy to burn and then come to a full flame?

C. *Love is not boastful or proud (v. 4).*

“Puffed up” refers to the inward feeling; “vaunteth” refers to the outward displays of self-importance.

D. *Love is not rude or self-seeking (v. 5).*

There is a graciousness about the person who acts from Christian love, a charm that the world cannot give. True love seeks only the good of others; it is unselfish. Can you see this love displayed in Christ’s life?

E. Love is not provoked, nor does it harbor evil thoughts (v. 5).

The word “easily” does not belong here. Christian love shows no irritation, as the flesh too often does. Love does not keep account books of the evil things people do, or the hurts received from them. In fact, love is never glad when others get involved in evil, but love is always glad when others are walking in the truth.

F. Love gives victory (v. 7).

Through Christ’s love in us, we can bear up under anything, have faith, and continue in hope. “It gives us power to endure in anything” v. 7, (WMS). Love always leads to victory!

In these verses, Paul gently rebuked the sins of the Corinthians. They did not have patience with each other in the assembly (14:29–32); they envied the spiritual gifts others possessed (14:1); they were proud and critical (12:21–26); they did not have modesty or grace in their behavior (12:2–16); they sought to uphold their own rights (chaps. 8–10) even if it hurt others; they were easily provoked, and even sued one another (6:1–8); and they rejoiced at sin when they should have judged it (5:1–13). We can also see in these verses a picture of Christ who alone perfectly manifests the love of God to us. We can substitute the word “Christ” for “charity” in this chapter.

III. Love Is Eternal (13:8–13)

The Corinthians were spiritual babies, and, like babies, they were striving for the temporary and neglecting the permanent. They wanted passing spiritual gifts instead of lasting Christian character. Love will never “fail” (cease to have force or authority). These other gifts will pass away; prophetic utterances would be replaced by the written Word of God; tongues would no longer be needed; gifts of special knowledge would be put aside for the teaching ministry of the Spirit from the Word. But love, and the graces it produces, will last forever.

Paul explains that these special gifts were necessary during the infancy period of the church. Special manifestations of the Spirit were the credentials of the apostles (Rom. 15:18–19). God did not always use miracles to attest His truth, but often He did. In Thessalonica, for example, the Spirit revealed Himself in the mighty preaching of the Word, and not in miracles (1 Thes. 1:5–6). In v. 11, Paul uses a simple example from childhood. We do not condemn a child because he talks like a child, but we do condemn an adult for using baby talk. “It is time,” says the apostle, “for you babies to grow up and start talking like adults! Tongues and other special manifestations belong to spiritual childhood. Grow up!” Paul in 14:20 again tells them to quit acting like children.

There will always be room for growth in the church, and while we are growing, we will know and see imperfectly. Corinth was famous for its metal mirrors, so Paul used that as an illustration. One saw only a dim reflection of the real person in those mirrors, just as we see only a dim reflection of God today. But when Christ comes, we shall know Him as we are known by Him! And we shall be like Him!

The church grows closer to perfection through love: believers loving Christ and one another; holding the truth in love; practicing the truth because they love Him. “Building the body up in love” is the way Eph. 4:16 puts it, and this is a ministry all of us share.

Faith, hope, love—these abide forever; and love is the greatest, for “God is love” (1 John 3:18).

1 Corinthians 14

The first thing we want to do is go through this chapter and cross out the word “unknown.” Paul is not discussing “unknown” tongues; those words were added by well-meaning but confused translators. Wherever you find “tongues” in the Bible, it refers to known languages (note Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11). The Jews at Pentecost heard the believers extolling God’s mighty works in their own dialects, so no interpreter was needed. In 1 Cor. 14:10 and 21, Paul definitely states that he is discussing known languages, not a strange “heavenly language” or unknown tongues.

I. The Inferiority of Tongues (14:1–25)

Some want us to believe that the gift of tongues is a mark of superior spirituality, and that Christians cannot truly be spiritual as long as they neglect this gift. Paul teaches exactly the opposite! He gives three reasons why tongues are an inferior gift.

A. *Tongues do not edify (build up) the church (vv. 1–19).*

We must keep in mind that spiritual gifts have as their purpose the building up of the church of Jesus Christ (12:7) and not the personal enjoyment of the believer. Gifts are for employment, not enjoyment. In this section, Paul contrasts tongues and prophecy. Prophecy, you will recall, was the giving forth of the truth of God under the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit. It is not identical to preaching, because the preacher interprets the written Word as instructed by the Spirit; he does not speak the very Word of God. Note the contrasts:

<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Tongues</i>
1. Speaks to men for their good, v. 3	1. Speaks to God for the speaker’s own good, v. 2
2. Can be understood, vv. 2, 5	2. Not understood unless there is an interpreter
3. Edifies the church, vv. 3–4	3. Edifies the speaker, v. 4
4. The greater gift, vv. 5, 19	4. The lesser gift, v. 5 (note 12:10)

Paul makes it clear that tongues, apart from utterances that are interpreted, are of no value to the church. For that matter, they bring no personal blessing to the speaker himself unless he understands what is being said (vv. 14–15). Those who say that Christians should practice this gift in private ignore what Paul says here. In the first place, how can we edify the church if we use our spiritual gifts in private and not to serve others? And, second, if we do not understand what is being said, how can we profit from it ourselves? It is possible for the flesh and the devil to imitate spiritual gifts

and lead a believer into a religion of shallow emotionalism instead of one of solid understanding and faith. This is not to deny the place of sincere emotions in the Christian life, for the fruits of the Spirit certainly involve the emotions (Gal. 5:22–23); these emotions, however, must be instructed by the mind and controlled by the will, or they will be destructive.

B. Tongues do not edify the believer (vv. 20–21).

Some suggest that the gift of tongues is a mark of spiritual maturity and of a deeper Christian life; but Paul says just the opposite. The Christians at Corinth were “babes in Christ” and “carnal” (3:1–4). They boasted of their “spirituality” (8:1–2; 10:12), yet had to be warned by Paul and taught in the most elementary manner. In 13:8–13, Paul explains that their passion for emotional spiritual gifts was a mark of infancy and not maturity. Mature believers have the Spirit and the Word and seek no emotional “crutches” to prop them up. Dr. M. R. DeHaan has an interesting view of 14:22 that backs up this teaching. He says that “them that believe” (v. 22) refers to spiritual Christians who live by faith in God’s Word, while “them that believe not” refers to immature believers without strong faith. God has to give emotional signs to immature Christians to bolster their faith, but the mature believer builds his life on the Word.

C. Tongues do not win the lost (vv. 22–25).

In Acts 2, God gave the apostles the gift of tongues that they might share the Word with the Jews at Pentecost. It was a sign to the Jews that God was at work, fulfilling Isa. 28:11–12. We find incidents involving tongues four times in Acts, and each time they give evidence to Jews present that God is working: (1) Acts 2; tongues are evidence to the unbelieving Jews at Pentecost; (2) Acts 8; evidence to the believing Jews that the Spirit had come upon the Samaritans; (3) Acts 10; evidence that the Spirit had come upon the Gentiles; (4) Acts 19; evidence that the twelve Ephesian men had received the Spirit. But tongues would never reach the unbeliever for the Lord, especially the confusion of tongues that existed at Corinth. It was another Babel! Far better that the unbelieving visitor should hear a message from the Word, something he can understand, and then make his decision for Christ, than hear a confusion of messages he cannot grasp.

II. The Importance of Order (14:26–40)

A. Tongues (vv. 26–28).

Tongues are not to be allowed without interpretation. Only three are to speak, and then in order.

B. Prophecy (vv. 29–33).

Two or three prophets are to speak, and the others are to test their messages to see if they come from God. (Note the gift of “discerning of spirits” in 12:10, and see 1 Thes. 5:20–21). Speakers are to edify the church and maintain proper order. If a speaker gets “carried away,” it is proof that the Spirit is not speaking; for when the Spirit is at work, there is self-control.

C. Women in the church (vv. 34–35).

Relate these verses to 11:5ff and 1 Tim. 2:12. It seems that the women were abusing their gifts and using them out of place. Paul does not say that women have no spiritual gifts, or that they should be slaves to the men. He teaches that both men and women, if acting out of place in the church, tear down the church instead of building it up. Paul also lays a responsibility upon the men; they were to teach their wives spiritual truths, but to do so at home. Sad to say, in many families it is the wife who has to teach the husband!

D. Obedience to the Word (vv. 36–40).

“If any of you are spiritual,” says Paul, “you will prove it by obeying the Word of God!” The Spirit of God never works apart from or contrary to the Word of God, and nowhere is this principle needed more than in the area of spiritual gifts. We cannot be guided by somebody’s subjective emotional experience, but we can be guided by the unchanging objective Word of God.

Note the basic principles for spiritual worship that Paul gives to the church:

- (1) The teaching and preaching of the Word takes precedence over everything else.
- (2) The church must be built up.
- (3) There must be nothing that would hurt the testimony before unbelievers.
- (4) There must always be self-control.
- (5) Everything must be done “decently and in order,” following the Word of God.
- (6) Women are not to exercise authority over men.
- (7) There must be understanding before there can be blessing. It is evident from

Scripture that there was an informality about the meetings of the early church. We must avoid formality on one hand and fanaticism on the other. It is a fine line to toe. A planned service is not an unspiritual service, for the same Spirit can lead in the planning beforehand just as He can lead in the service itself. But even in a planned service, we must make room for the Spirit to lead, lest we grieve Him.

Additional Notes on First Corinthians 12–14

We want to examine the claims of some charismatics with reference to manifestation of tongues and of the Spirit to see if they meet the test, “What say the Scriptures?” Some claim:

A. “There is a baptism of the Spirit after salvation.”

Some teach that it is necessary to “tarry for the power” in prayer and fasting, basing this on Acts 1 and Luke 24:49. But 1 Cor. 12:13 teaches that all believers have been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. This was true even of the carnal Corinthians! There are “fillings” of the Spirit after conversion, and we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18); but we are never commanded in Scripture to be baptized with the Spirit. There is one baptism that takes place at conversion, but many fillings of the Spirit as we daily yield to God.

B. “The evidence of this baptism is speaking in tongues.”

If this is true, then most of the Corinthians had never experienced the baptism, because not all of them spoke in tongues (12:10 and 30). Yet 12:13 says they were all baptized by the Spirit. Therefore, if the charismatics are correct, all of the Corinthian believers

should have spoken in tongues; but they did not. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit before birth, yet never spoke in tongues. Great saints down through the ages have never spoken in tongues.

C. "The gift of tongues is a mark of spirituality."

Not at Corinth! This was the most carnal church Paul ever had to deal with. They were babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1–4). Instead of being a mark of deeper spiritual life, tongues are a relatively inferior gift that has little value to the individual Christian or the church collectively. It is possible to have spiritual gifts and not have spiritual graces, and 1 Cor. 13 clearly teaches this. The important issue is not how many gifts I have, but is my life like Christ's and am I attracting people to Him?

D. "Tongues are for the church today."

There is every evidence that several of the gifts were temporary. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (the imparting of immediate spiritual truth by the Spirit) seemed to have passed away with the completion of the writing of the NT. First Cor. 13:8–13 indicates that these gifts would pass away and no longer be needed. They belonged to the "childhood" of the church. Today the church's life and ministry are founded on the Word of God. Read Acts 20:17–38 for a picture of the ideal NT ministry; here you will find nothing about tongues.

E. "A believer can benefit from tongues privately."

But spiritual gifts are given for the profit of the whole church (12:7), not just one saint. There is no suggestion in these chapters that any gift is granted for the private enjoyment of the believer. In fact, in 14:13–15 Paul clearly states that the private use of the gift of tongues is not right. If there is interpretation, allowing the believer to know what is being said, then there can be spiritual benefit; but without understanding, there is no blessing. The private use of tongues is contrary to the letter and spirit of 1 Cor. 12–14.

F. "The gift of tongues ties believers together."

There is a new kind of ecumenicity among Christians in the charismatic movement that says, "You don't have to deny your basic beliefs to be a part of our fellowship." But did the so-called "baptism of the Spirit" unify the believers at Corinth? The church was divided four ways (1 Cor. 1:10–13)! Yet all of the believers there had experienced the baptism of the Spirit (12:13)! There was discord, division, and dispute in the church; yet there was also the gift of tongues. It has been our experience that the emphasis on "tongues" and "Spirit baptism" divides the church instead of unifying it. The "tongues Christians" think themselves superior to the others, and then trouble starts.

G. "It makes no difference what terms you use as long as you have the experience."

This is a subtle lie of Satan. The very words of Scripture are given by the Spirit, and we must obey them (1 Cor. 2:9–16). It is wrong to confuse the baptism of the Spirit with the filling of the Spirit, for God has definitely separated them. We must base Christian experience on the Bible, and not interpret the Bible by experience. If we understand Bible words and truths, we will understand how to live the Christian life. Notice how many times Paul uses the word "ignorant" in writing to the Corinthians. "Be not children in understanding!" he admonished them in 14:20. It is possible for Satan and his

demonic powers to counterfeit “spiritual experiences” for shallow Christians. But Satan cannot work where Christians understand the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 15

The Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. When Paul preached the resurrection at Athens, some of the people actually laughed at this doctrine (Acts 17:32). Their philosophers taught that the body was the prison of the soul, and the sooner the soul was set free in death, the better off a person would be. The Greeks looked upon the human body as a source of weakness and wickedness, and they could not conceive of a body that continued to exist after death. It was this kind of thinking that Paul had to deal with when he wrote this chapter.

I. The Proofs of the Believer’s Resurrection (15:1–34)

A. *Historical proof (vv. 1–11).*

The Corinthians did not doubt the resurrection of Christ, so Paul began there in his argument for the resurrection of the human body. The resurrection of Christ is an historic fact proved by the message of the Gospel, the testimony of witnesses and the conversion of Paul himself. If there were no resurrection, there would be no salvation, for a dead Savior can save nobody! “Now,” argues Paul, “I know that you Corinthians believe in the resurrection of Christ, otherwise your faith is empty (vain). Christ was a man, and now He has a resurrection body. If He has a glorified body in heaven, why should we believers not have one also?” This is another aspect of the believer’s union with Christ: because He has been glorified, we shall also be glorified one day.

B. *Personal proof (vv. 12–19).*

Paul points to the Corinthians’ own personal experience. He had preached the Gospel to them, they had believed, and their lives had been transformed (6:9–11). But if the dead rise not, then Christ is dead, and that Gospel was a lie! Their faith was vain, and they were still in their sins! The Christian faith is good only if a person lives; there is no hope after death.

C. *Doctrinal proof (vv. 20–28).*

Here Paul deals with the Bible doctrine of “the two Adams.” (He uses this argument also in Rom. 5.) It was through the first Adam’s sin that death came into the world; but through the Last Adam (Christ), death has been conquered. Christ is the firstfruits; that is, He is the first of a great harvest that is yet to come. Christ is God’s “Last Adam,” and He will reverse the wrong that the first Adam brought into this world. When Christ comes, the dead in Christ will be raised (v. 23 and 1 Thes. 4:13–18). Jesus will finally put all things under His feet, including death. In other words, to deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny the future kingdom of Christ. If believers are “dead and gone,” then God’s promise for the future is null and void.

D. Practical proof (vv. 29–34).

Paul mentions several practices in daily life that prove the resurrection of the body. For one thing, the Corinthians were “baptizing for the dead.” There is some disagreement over what this means. Were they baptizing living people on behalf of saints who had died before being baptized (which is not likely), or were they baptizing new converts to take the place of those who had died (which is likely)? In any event, the church at Corinth was still practicing baptism, and baptism is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. (New Testament scholars generally agree that the early church baptized by immersion.) The ordinance has no meaning if there is no resurrection of the dead. In vv. 30–32, Paul cites the many dangers in his ministry, and says in effect, “Surely it is foolish for me to risk my life daily if there is no resurrection!” In v. 32 he argues, “If there is no resurrection, then we ought to eat, drink, and be merry! Enjoy life while we can!” It is easy to see that these practical points make sense. “Shame on you!” he concludes in v. 34. “You ought to have this knowledge!”

II. The Process of the Believer’s Resurrection (15:35–49)

“How are the dead raised?” is the key question here. Paul uses illustrations from nature to show that there is no life apart from death. The seed that is planted dies and bears fruit, and the fruit, while identified with the original seed, is different from it. The resurrection body, like the bodies in the heavens, will have its own kind of glory. It is not the same body that was planted (v. 37), but there is continuity between the buried body and the resurrection body. The physical body laid in the grave is liable to corruption; it is humble, a body of humiliation; it is weak; it is suited to a natural environment. The resurrection body will not decay; it will have power and glory; it will be suited to a spiritual environment. It will bear the image of the heavenly.

The resurrection body of Christ illustrates what Paul is teaching here. The believers recognized Him, so there was continuity between His crucified body and His glorified body. But He was also able to change His appearance. He passed through locked doors, yet He also ate fish and honey (Luke 24:41–43) and invited the disciples to feel Him. It was the same body, yet it was also a different body. The resurrection body retains the personal identity and individuality of the believer, but it will be suited to a new way of life.

III. The Program of the Believer’s Resurrection (15:50–58)

Here Paul deals with the second coming of Christ and what it means to both the living and the dead. “We shall not all die (sleep),” because some saints will be alive when Christ returns; “but we shall all be changed.” This mystery concerns the rapture of the church. When Christ returns, the dead shall be raised first, the living caught up with them, and all will be changed to be like Christ. And all of this will happen in the twinkling of an eye.

Paul closes with a note of victory. There can be no sting in death when a person is a Christian, for Christ has taken out that sting. There can be no victory in the grave, for Christ will one day empty the graves and bring forth His own in resurrection power. How hopeless the Greeks were when they thought about death! Inscriptions on tombs in

ancient Greece and Rome indicate that death was their greatest enemy, that they saw no hope beyond the grave. In Christ we have life and hope!

Verse 58 is often quoted out of its context. Christians can be steadfast and immovable, because they know that if their worst enemy (death) has been overcome, they need fear no other enemy. They can abound in Christian service, for that work will count for eternity. Their labor is not in vain.

Several times in this chapter Paul uses the phrase “in vain.” It means “empty, without content.” Because the tomb is empty, our faith is not empty! But if the tomb is not empty, then everything else is in vain: our preaching is empty (v. 14), our faith is empty (v. 14), and our works are empty (v. 58). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God’s answer to Solomon’s lament in Ecc. 1:2: “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!” Thanks be to God for the victory we have in the resurrection of Christ!

1 Corinthians 16

In this final chapter Paul gives instructions concerning the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and also exhortations to the believers in Corinth concerning their church life.

I. How to Take the Offering (16:1–4)

A local church gets its financial instructions from the Word (“as I have given order”) and not from the world. How sad it is when churches reject the biblical method of financing and adopt worldly methods. All the churches in Paul’s day followed the same biblical pattern; there were to be no exceptions. While these instructions deal with a “missionary relief offering,” the principles apply to Christian giving in general; see 2 Cor. 8–9.

A. *Giving was church-centered.*

Otherwise, why would Paul mention “the first day of the week”? The churches gathered on the Lord’s Day, and this was when they brought their offerings to the Lord. Paul did not encourage the members to send their offerings to him personally. He wanted the church to give an expression of its love for the needy Jewish believers in Judea. Note in Phil. 4:15–16 that Paul was grateful for churches that shared with him. A church member owes it to the Lord and to his church to bring his or her tithes and offerings to the church. This does not mean that it is wrong to give personal support to workers (2 Tim. 1:16–18), but giving to persons must not take the place of our faithfulness to the church.

B. *Giving was regular.*

Paul encouraged them to bring the money weekly, if possible. Some people are paid weekly, others by the month. Paul is saying, “Don’t let your tithes and offerings accumulate at home.” Systematic, regular giving makes for spiritual growth.

C. *Giving was for everyone.*

Giving was not just for the rich, but rich and poor alike. In fact, in 2 Cor. 8–9, Paul tells us that the poor saints in Macedonia gave liberally out of their poverty. Here is the biblical model for giving. The church member who is able to give but does not give faithfully is a thief: he is robbing God (Mal. 3:7–12); he is robbing other Christians, for they pay the bills while he gets the blessings; moreover, he is robbing himself of blessings.

D. Giving was proportionate: “as he may prosper” (v. 2).

The tithe was the minimum standard for giving in the OT, and there is no reason why this standard should not apply to the NT Christian as well. Tithing was practiced long before the Law was given (Gen. 14:20; 28:22), so it cannot be argued that tithing is a legalistic practice.

E. Giving was carefully handled.

Paul was always careful about the handling of money. He wanted church-appointed representatives to assist him, lest anyone accuse him of stealing money for himself. It is right for a church to have a financial system that includes receipts and records. The church’s financial status should always be the best possible as a testimony to the lost, and it will be, if the members are faithful to give and if the funds are carefully, prayerfully dispersed.

II. How to Help the Servants (16:5–12)

Paul outlined his future plans, trusting that the church would want to share in his ministry. He was then at Ephesus where there were both battles and blessings; Paul, in faith, looks at the blessings, not the battles!

Paul dearly loved young Timothy but knew his timidity and fears. Paul encouraged the saints to receive and assist Timothy because the youth was doing God’s work. We should never despise a worker because he is not another Apostle Paul!

Apollos followed Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:24–28), and he and Paul had good fellowship. It is wonderful when successive pastors have good relationship one with another. Both Paul and Apollos were implicated in the church divisions (1:12), but they were careful to show themselves one in the work.

It is important that churches receive the Lord’s servants and treat them right. It is wrong to compare one person with another; this behavior is carnal. The teaching of Scripture is clear on this point. If these servants do the work of the Lord, we should assist them as much as possible.

III. How to Strengthen the Church (16:13–24)

Paul’s commands in v. 13 sound like military orders, suggesting that the church is an army and ought to act like one. “Act like adults!” he exhorts them, and how we need that exhortation today. Too often the church does not have the discipline and maturity of an army. The Corinthians were acting like babies; it was time they grew up and acted like adults.

We must love and appreciate faithful laborers in the church. Paul mentions several workers in vv. 15–19, including his beloved Priscilla and Aquila. Paul could never have

done his work were it not for the assistance of many Christians, and he was glad to acknowledge his indebtedness to them.

Paul closes with his own signature (vv. 21–24). He undoubtedly dictated the letter to a secretary, then took the pen and affixed his own name. This proved that the letter was authentic and not a forgery. “Grace” was always the key word whenever he signed his name.

The words *anathema* and *maranatha* are not translated here; they are Aramaic words that mean, “accursed” and “our Lord come!” What a peculiar combination of words! “If any man does not love our Savior, let him be accursed! The Lord is coming!”

Paul does not end on a note of judgment, however; he closes with, “My love to you all!” which even included the followers of Cephas and Apollos! Even the people who were causing confusion in the assemblies! Even the man who needed to be disciplined! What an example Paul gives us here: he loved them in Christ even though he did not love their sins.