

# Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

## I Corinthians

### An Apostolic Introduction (I Cor. 1:1-3)

In the first 10 verses of I Corinthians, the name of Jesus Christ occurs no less than 10 times. This was going to be a difficult letter for Paul to write, because he was dealing with a difficult situation. In this difficult situation Paul's first and repeated thought was of Jesus Christ. Paul did not try to deal with this by means of a book of laws or by his own mental and spiritual powers, he took Jesus

This introduction tells us about several things:

- 1) It tells us about the Church. Paul speaks of *The Church of God which is at Corinth*. It was not the church of Corinth; it was the Church of God. To Paul, wherever an individual congregation might be, it was a part of the one Church of God. Nor would he have identified a congregation by the particular communion or sect to which it belonged. To him the Church was the Church of God. If we thought of the Church in that way we might remember more of the reality which unites us and less of the local differences which divide us.
- 2) This passage tells us something about the individual Christian. Paul says three things about him.
  - He is consecrated in Jesus Christ. The verb *to consecrate* means to set apart for God, to make it holy by the offering of a sacrifice upon it. The Christian has been consecrated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to be one for whom Christ died and to know it and to realize that this sacrifice in a very special way makes us belong to God.
  - He describes the Christian as *those who have been called to be God's dedicated people*. We have translated one Greek word (Hagios) by this whole phrase. The Authorized Version translates it to *saints*. Nowadays that does not paint the right picture to us. *Hagios* describes a thing or a person that has been devoted to the possession and the service of God. It is the word by which to

describe a temple or a sacrifice which has been marked out for God. Now this person – marked for God – must show himself to be fit in life and in character for that service. That is how it comes to mean *holy, saintly*. But the root idea of the word is *separation*. A person who is *hagios* is *different* from others because he has been separated from ordinary people to belong in a special way to God. When Paul calls the Christian *hagios* he means that he is different from other men because he specially belongs to God and to God's service. And that difference is not to be marked by withdrawal from ordinary life, but by showing there a quality which will mark him out.

- Paul addressed his letter to those who have been called *in the company of those who in every place call upon the name of the lord*. The Christian is called into a community whose boundaries include all earth and all heaven. It would be greatly to our good if sometimes we lifted our eyes beyond our own little circle and thought of ourselves as part of the Church of God which is as wide as the world.

3) This passage tells us something about Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ and then, as it were, he corrects himself and adds *their Lord and ours*. No man, no Church, has exclusive possession of Jesus Christ. He is our Lord but he is also the Lord of all men. A wonder of Christianity is that all men possess all the love of Jesus Christ, that "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

**How do we "look at" the Church of God today? Do we see ourselves as "dedicated to" and "separated for" God? Do we consider ourselves as part of the company of ALL who call upon God "in every place" and "every way?" Is the Lord just "ours" or all who look to Him for "love?"**

### **The Necessity of Thanksgiving (1 Cor. 1:4-9)**

In this passage of thanksgiving, three things stand out:

1. There is the promise which came true. When Paul preached Christianity to the Corinthians, he told them that Christ could do certain things for them, and now he proudly claims that all that he pledged has come true.

2. There is the gift which has been given. Paul here uses a favorite word of his. It is *charisma*, which means a gift freely given to a man, a gift which he did not deserve and which he could never earn by himself. This gift of God, as Paul saw it comes in two ways:
  - a. Salvation is the *charisma* of God which a man could never achieve himself.
  - b. It gives a man whatever special gifts he may possess and whatever special equipment he may have for life. If a man has the gift of speech or the gift of healing, if he has the gift of music or of any art, if he has a craftsman's gifts, all these are gifts from God. If we fully realized that, it would bring a new atmosphere and character into life. Such skills that we possess are not our own achievement, they are gifts from God, and therefore, they are held in trust.
2. There is the ultimate end. In the Old Testament the phrase, *The Day of the Lord*, keeps recurring. It was the day when the Jews expected God to break into history, the old world would be wiped out and the new world would be born. The Christians took over this idea, only they took that phrase as *The Day of the Lord Jesus*, and regarded it as the day on which Jesus would come in all his power and glory. That indeed would be a day of judgment. It is Paul's belief that when the ultimate judgment comes, the man who is in Christ can meet it unafraid, because he will be clothed not in his own merits but in the merits of Christ, so that none will be able to impeach him.

**How do we see our relationship with Christ? How do we look at "our" talents? What is our concept of "Humility" vs. "Pride?"**

### **A Divided Church (1 Cor. 1:10-17)**

Paul was writing from Ephesus to mend a situation which had arisen in the Church at Corinth. Christian slaves who belonged to a lady called Cloe had occasion to visit Corinth and they had come back with a tale of dissension and disunity. Paul twice addresses the Corinthians as *brothers*. By the use of the word, Paul does two things. First, he

softens the rebuke which is given, not as from a schoolmaster with a rod, but as from one who has no other emotion than love. Second, it would have shown them how wrong their dissensions and divisions were. They were bothers and they should have lived in brotherly love.

Paul uses two interesting phrases. He encourages them *to make up their differences* – two hostile parties reaching an agreement. He wants them to be *knit together* – a medical term of mending bones that have been fractured or dislocated. The disunion is not natural and must be cured for the sake of the body of the Church.

Paul identifies four parties in the church at Corinth. They have not broken away from the Church; the divisions are as yet within it. He uses the word *schismata* which means tears in a garment. The great figures that are mentioned are Paul, Cephas and Apollos. They had nothing to do with the divisions. It frequently happens that a man's so-called supporters are a bigger problem than his open enemies. Let's look at these parties and see if we can find out what they stood for.

- i. There were those who claimed to belong to **Paul**. Probably Gentiles. Paul had always preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law. This party probably was attempting to turn liberty into license and using this new Christianity as an excuse to do as they liked. They had forgotten that they were saved, not to be free to sin, but to be free not to sin.
- ii. There was the party who claimed to belong to **Apollos**. There is a character sketch of Apollos in *Acts 18:24*. He was a Jew from Alexandria, an eloquent man and well versed in the scriptures. Alexandria was the center of intellectual activity, where scholars had made a science of comparing the scriptures and finding the most obscure meaning in the simplest passages. The Alexandrians were the people who *intellectualized* Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.
- iii. There were those who claim to belong to **Cephas**. Cephas is the Jewish form of Peter's name. These were most likely Jews; and they

sought to teach that a man must still observe the Jewish law. They were legalists who exalted law, and, by doing so, belittled grace.

- iv. There were those who claimed to belong to **Christ**. This may be one of two things: (a) This may well not describe a party at all, but may be the comment of Paul himself on the whole wretched situation. (b) If that is not the case and this does describe a party, they must have been a small and rigid sect who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Corinth. Their real Paul was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them.

Paul is not belittling Baptism; the people he did baptize were very special converts. His point is that Baptism was *into the name of Jesus*. The phrase in Greek implies the closest possible connection. A soldier swore loyalty into the name of Caesar; he belonged absolutely to the Emperor. *Into the name of* implied utter possession. In Christianity it implied even more; it implied that the Christian was not only possessed by Christ but was in some way identified with Him. All that Paul is saying is, "I am glad that I was so busy preaching, because if I had baptized it would have given some of you the excuse to say that you were baptized into my possession instead of into Christ's." He is not making little of baptism; he is simply glad that no act of his could be misconstrued as annexing men for himself and not for Christ. It was Paul's aim to set before men, not himself but Christ in all His lonely grandeur.

**How do we look at our baptism? Were we baptized *into* the Episcopalian religion, or into "Christ?" How do we look at those baptized into "other" religious faiths? How do we look at those of "non-Christian" religions? How should we look at all of these?**

## **A Stumbling-Block To The Jew And Foolishness To The Greeks (1 Cor. 1:18-25)**

To both the cultured Greek and the pious Jew, the story that Christianity was telling sounded like sheer folly. Paul shows how mere human wisdom is bound to fail. He cites the undeniable fact that for all its wisdom the world had never found God and was still blindly seeking Him. This search was designed by God to show men their own helplessness and so prepare the way for the acceptance of Him who is the one true way.

What then was this Christian Message? Reading the four great sermons in the Acts (2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:36-43) we find certain constant elements in the Christian preaching.

1. There is the claim that the great promised time of God has come.
2. There is a summary of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. There is a claim that all this was the fulfillment of prophecy.
4. There is the assertion that Jesus will come again.
5. There is an urgent invitation to men to repent and receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - i. To the Jews, that was a stumbling-block for mainly two reasons: 1) to them it was incredible that one who had died on a cross could possibly be God's Chosen One. The crucifixion definitely disproved that Jesus was the Son of God. The Cross to the Jew was and is an insurmountable barrier to belief in Jesus. 2) The Jew looked for signs. Then the golden age of God came, he looked for startling happenings. At the time that Paul was writing there were many false Messiahs, and all of them had deluded the people into accepting them by the promise of wonders. In Jesus they saw one who was meek and lowly, one who deliberately avoided the spectacular, one who served and who ended on a Cross – which to them seemed an impossible picture of the Chosen One of God.
  - ii. To the Greeks, the message was foolishness. Again there were two reasons: 1) to the Greek the first characteristic of God was

*apatheia* – *apathy* meaning *total inability to feel*. The argued that God must be incapable of all feeling so that no one may affect him. A God who suffered was to the Greeks a contradiction terms. To the thinking Greek, the incarnation was a total impossibility. To people who thought like that, it was incredible that one now had suffered as Jesus had suffered could possibly be the Son of God. 2) The Greek sought wisdom. Originally the Greek word *sophist* mean a *wise man* in the good sense; but it came to mean a man who would spend endless hours discussing hair-splitting trifles, a man who had no real interest in solutions but who simply gloried in the stimulus of “the mental hike.” The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected.

It looked as if the Christian message had little chance of success against the background of Jewish or Greek life; but as Paul said, “What looks like god’s foolishness is wiser than men’s wisdom; and what looks like God’s weakness is stronger than men’s strength.”

**How do we compare ourselves with the Jews and Greeks of Paul’s day when we “hear” God’s word, not just in the Gospels but in the sermons and lives of those around us? Do we “weight” it to our own expectations and understanding?**

### **The Glory Of The Shame (1 Cor. 1:26-31)**

Paul glories in the fact that for the most part, the Church was composed of the simplest and the humblest people. We should never think that the early Church was entirely composed of slaves. Even in the New Testament we see that people from the highest ranks of society were becoming Christians. But it remains true that the great majority of Christians were simple and humble folk.

It was precisely this that was the glory of Christianity. At this time in the Empire, there were sixty million slaves. In the eyes of the law a slave was a “living tool,” a thing and not a person at all. Christianity made people who were things into real men and women, even more like

sons and daughters of God. It told men who, in the eyes of the world were worthless, that, in the eyes of God they were worth the death of his only Son. Christianity was, and still is, the most uplifting thing in the whole universe.

The phrase which Paul uses to finish this passage reveals that it is only when we realize that we can do nothing and that God can and will do everything that real religion begins. It is the amazing fact of life that it is the people who realize their own weakness and their own lack of wisdom, who in the end are strong and wise. Experience shows that the man who thinks that he can take on life all be himself is certainly to be shipwrecked.

Note the four great things that Paul insists that Christ is for us.

- 1) He is *wisdom*. It is only in following him that we walk straight and only in listening to him that we hear the truth.
- 2) He is *righteousness* (a right relationship with God). Of our own efforts we can never achieve that. It is ours only by realizing through Jesus Christ that it comes not from what we can do for God, but from what he has done for us.
- 3) He is *consecration*. It is only in the presence of Christ that life can be what it ought to be. The Christian walks with him and only in that company can a man keep himself unspotted from the world.
- 4) He is *deliverance*. Jesus Christ can deliver a man from past sin, from present helplessness, and from future fear. He is the emancipator from slavery to self and to sin.

**How do we look at others (person/thing)? How can we help others to see God (Christ) in us and in themselves? How can we reinforce and allow to show through Christ's presence in us (Paul's 4 things that Christ is for us)?**

### **The Proclamation And The Power (1 Cor. 2:1-5)**

Paul remembers when he first came to Corinth, and three things stand out:

1. He came speaking in simplicity. Note that Paul had come to Corinth from Athens. It was there (Athens), for the only time in his life, he had attempted to reduce Christianity to philosophic terms. He had



tried to speak to the philosophers on Mars Hill in their own language, and it was there that he had one of his very few failures. It almost seemed that he said to himself, "Never again, I will from here on tell the story of Jesus in utter simplicity. I will know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him upon the Cross." For most people, the way to the recesses of a man's inmost being is not through his mind, but through his heart.

2. He came speaking in fear. We have to understand this carefully. It was not fear for his own safety; even less was it that he was ashamed of the gospel that he was preaching. It was what has been called "the trembling anxiety to perform a duty." The man who has no nervousness, no tension, in any task, may give an efficient performance; but it is the man who has this trembling anxiety who can produce an effect which artistry alone can never achieve.
3. He came with results and not with words only. The result of Paul's preaching was that things happened. He says that his preaching was unanswerably demonstrated to be true by the Spirit and power. The proof was in the changed lives. Something re-creating had entered into the polluted society of Corinth.

No one can argue against the proof of a changed life. It is our weakness that too often we have tried to talk men into Christianity instead of, in our own lives, showing them Christ. "A saint, is someone in whom Christ Lives again."

**How do we hear/see the "sermons" in Church, the store, the street, the golf course? How do we preach Christ to others?**

### **The Wisdom Which Is From God (I Cor. 2:6-9)**

This passage introduces a distinction between different kinds of Christian instruction and different stages of the Christian life. In the early Church there were two kinds of instruction. One was called *Kerygma* which means a herald's *announcement*, and this was the plain announcement of the basic facts of Christianity, the announcement of the facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and his coming again. 2) The second was called *Didache*, which means

*teaching* and this was the explanation of the meaning of the second stage for those who have already received *kerygma*.

This is what Paul is getting at here. Up to now he has been talking about Jesus Christ and him crucified; this was the basic announcement of Christianity; but, he goes on to say we don't stop there; Christian instruction goes on to teach not only the facts but the meaning of the facts. Paul says that this is done for those who have reached their physical and mental development. He says "Out in the streets, and to those who have just newly come into the Church, we talk about the basic elements of Christianity, but when people are a little more mature we give them deeper teaching about what these basic facts mean." The tragedy is that people are often content to remain at the elementary stage when they should be going on to think things out for themselves.

He insists that this special teaching is not the product of the intellectual activity of men; it is the gift of God and it came into the world with Christ. All our discoveries are not so much what our minds have found out, but what God has told us. This does not mean that it frees us from human effort. Only the student who works can make himself fit to receive the real riches of the mind of a great teacher. It is so with us and God. The more we strive to understand, the more God can tell us; and there is no limit to this process, because the riches of God are unsearchable.

**As a student of God, what "grade" do we put ourselves in?  
How hard are we working to learn from "The Teacher?"**

### **Spiritual Things To Spiritual Men (I Cor. 2:10-16)**

Basic things in this passage:

1. Paul lays down that the only person who can tell us about God is the Spirit. He uses a human analogy. There are feelings that are so personal, things which are so private, experiences which are so intimate that no one know them except a man's own spirit. Paul argues that the same is true of God. There are deep and intimate

things in him which only his Spirit knows; and that Spirit is the only person who can lead us into really intimate knowledge of God.

2. Even then it is not every man who can understand these things. Paul speaks about interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. He distinguishes two kinds of men. a) There are those who are sensitive to the Spirit and whose life is guided by the Spirit. Every living thing has a “soul” – dogs, cats, man that gives it physical life, but the “Soul” in man makes him different from the rest of creation and like to God.

In verse 14 Paul speaks of the man who has a soul (small “s” – physical being) who live as if there was nothing beyond physical life and there were no needs other than material needs, whose values are all physical and material. A man like that cannot understand spiritual things. A man who thinks that nothing is more important than the satisfaction of the sex urge cannot understand the meaning of chastity, a man who ranks the amassing of material things as the supreme end of life cannot understand generosity; and a man who has never had a thought beyond this world cannot understand the things of God. To him they look at (spiritual things) as mere foolishness. For him, the Spirit of God will speak to him but he will not hear.

It is easy to become so involved in the world that there exists nothing beyond it. We must pray to have the mind of Christ, for only when he dwells within us are we safe from the encroaching invasion of the demands of material things.

**How do we see our (S)soul? Are we open to God’s word?**

### **The Supreme Importance Of God (I Cor. 3:1-9)**

Paul has just been talking about the difference between the man who is spiritual, and therefore can understand spiritual truths, and the man whose interests and aims do not go beyond physical life and therefore cannot grasp spiritual truth. He now accuses the Corinthians of being still at the physical stage. In verse 1 he uses a word which comes from (sarx) which means *flesh*. So Paul begins by

saying that the Corinthians are made of flesh, which in itself is not a rebuke because just because he is a man he is made of flesh, **but** he must not stay that way. The trouble was that the Corinthians were not only made of flesh but were dominated by the flesh. To Paul the flesh is much more than merely a physical thing. It means human nature apart from God, that part of man both mental and physical which provides a pathway for sin. So the fault that Paul finds with the Corinthians is not that they are made of flesh (all men are) but that they have allowed this lower side of their nature to dominate all their outlook and all their actions.

What is it about their life and conduct that makes Paul level such a rebuke at them? It is their party spirit, their strife and their factions. This is significant because it means that *you can tell what a man's relations are with God by looking at his relations with his fellow men*, if he is quarrelsome, argumentative, trouble making creature, he might be a regular attendee at church, even be a church officer, but he is not a man of God. But if a man is at one with his fellow men, if his relations with them are marked by love and unity and concord, then he is on the way to being a man of God. If a man loves God, he will also love his fellow men.

Paul goes on to show the folly of this party spirit with its glorification of human leaders. In a garden one man may plant a seed and another may water it; but either can claim to have made the seed grow. That belongs to God alone. God uses human instruments to bring to men the message of His truth and love; but it is he alone who wakes the hearts of men to new life. He created the heart so He alone can re-create it.

**Have there been times in our lives when we deserved some of Paul's "rebuke?" What can we do to prevent ourselves from focusing on the "physical" and concentrate on deepening our relationship/understanding of God's love?**

### **The Foundation And The Builders (I Cor. 3:10-15)**

Here Paul is certainly speaking from personal experience. He was a foundation layer, and was always on the move. Its true he stayed

eighteen months in Corinth and three years in Ephesus, but in Thessalonica, he stayed less than a month, and that was far more typical. There was so much ground waiting to be covered; there were so many men who had never heard the name of Jesus; and, if a fair start was to be made with the evangelization of the world, Paul could only lay the foundations and then move on. It was only when he was in prison that his restless spirit could stay in the one place.

Wherever he went, he laid the same foundation. That was the proclamation of the facts about and the offer of Jesus Christ. It was his job to introduce men to Jesus because it is in him and him alone, that a man can find three things.

- He finds *forgiveness for past sins*. He finds himself in a new relationship to God and suddenly discovers that he is his friend and not his enemy. He discovers that God is like Jesus; where once he saw hatred, he now sees love, and where once he saw infinite remoteness he now sees tender intimacy.
- He finds *strength for the present*. Through the presence and help of Jesus he finds courage to cope with life, for he is now no longer an isolated unity fighting a lonely battle with an adverse universe. He lives a life on which nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He walks life's ways and fights its battles with Christ.
- He finds *hope for the future*. He no longer lives in a world in which he is afraid to look forward but in one where God is in control and working together in all things for good. He lives in a world where death is no longer the end, but only the prelude to greater glory. Without the foundation of Christ, a man can have none of these.

**Have we found all three of these in our own lives? Can we recall specific incidents in our lives for each of these? Have we ever NOT left these in God's Hands?**

### **Wisdom And Foolishness (I Cor. 3:16-22)**

To Paul the Church was the very temple of God because it was the society in which the Spirit of God dwelt. Origen has said, "We are most of all God's temple when we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit."

But, if men introduce dissension and division into the fellowship of the Church, they destroy the temple of God in two ways.

- They make it impossible for the Spirit to operate. When bitterness enters church, love goes from it. The truth can neither be spoken nor heard in that atmosphere. “Where love is, God is,” but where hatred and strife are, God stands at the door and knocks but the door does not open. The badge of the Church is love for the brethren. He destroys that love and therefore destroys the Church and destroys the temple of God.
- They split up the Church and reduce it to a series of disconnected ruins. No building can stand firm and square if sections of it are removed. The Church’s greatest weakness is still its divisions. They too destroy it.

Paul goes on to pin down the root cause of this dissension and consequent destruction of the Church. It is the worship of intellectual, worldly wisdom. Paul shows the condemnation of the wisdom by two Old Testament quotes; *Job 5:13* and *Psalms 94*. It is by this worldly wisdom that the Corinthians gauge the worth of the different teachers and leaders. It is this pride in the human mind which makes them evaluate and criticize the way in which the message is delivered, rather than think only of the content of the message itself. The problem with this intellectual pride is that it always brings out two things:

- It leads to disputes. It cannot keep silent and admire; it must talk and criticize. It is never humble enough to learn; it must always be laying down the law.
- Intellectual pride is characteristically exclusive. Its tendency is to look down on others rather than to sit down beside them. All who do not agree with it are wrong. It tends to cut men off from each other rather than to unite them.

Paul urges the man who would be wise to become a fool. Simply put – he urges him to be humble enough to learn. No one can teach a man who thinks that he knows it all already. The only way to become wise

is to realize that we are fools; the only way to knowledge is to confess our ignorance.

In verse 22 the march of Paul's prose suddenly takes wings and become a lyric of passion and poetry. The Corinthians are doing what is Paul and inexplicable thing. They are seeking to give themselves over into the hands of some man. Paul tells them that it is not they who belong to him but he who belongs to them. This allegiance to one party is equivalent to slavery. In fact they are masters of all things, because they belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

**Do we put our allegiance to one man, organization, church, religion or ourselves? What can we do to put our focus in the correct direction? What can we do to help others correct their focus?**

### **The Three Judgments (I Cor. 4:1-5)**

Paul urges the Corinthians NOT to think of Apollos and Cephas and himself as leaders of parties; but to think of them all as servants of Christ. Then Paul uses another picture. He thinks of himself and his fellow preachers as *stewards (major domo)* of the secrets which God desires to reveal to his own people. Whatever is a man's position in the Church, and whatever power he may yield there or whatever prestige he may enjoy, he still remains the servant of Christ.

This brings Paul to the thought of judgment. The one thing that a *steward* must be is **reliable**. The fact that he enjoys so much independence and responsibility makes it all the more necessary that his master should be able to depend absolutely upon him. The Corinthians, with their sects and their appropriation of the leaders of the Church as their masters, have exercised judgments on these leaders, preferring one to the other. So Paul speaks of three judgments that every man must face.

- (i) He must face the judgment of his *fellow men*. In this case Paul says that that is nothing to him. But there is a sense in which a man cannot disregard the judgment of his fellow men. The odd thing is that, in spite of its occasional radical mistakes, the judgment of our fellow men is often right. That is due to the fact that every man

instinctively admires the basic qualities of honor, honesty, reliability, generosity, sacrifice and love. It is true that we should never let the judgment of men deflect us from what we believe to be right; but it is also true that the judgment of men is often more accurate than we would like to think, because they instinctively admire the lovely things.

- (ii) He must face the judgment of *himself*. Once again Paul disregards that. He knew very well that a man's judgment of himself can be clouded by self-satisfaction, by pride and by conceit. But in a very real sense, every man must face his own judgment. A man cannot get away from himself and if he loses his self-respect, life becomes an intolerable thing.
- (iii) He must face the judgment of *God*. In the last analysis this is the only real judgment. For Paul, the judgment he awaited was not that of any human day, but the judgment of the Day of the Lord. God's is the final judgment for two reasons: (a) Only God knows all the *circumstances*. He knows the struggles a man has had; he knows the secrets that a man can tell to no one; He knows what a man might have sunk to and he also knows what he might have climbed to. (b) Only God knows all the *motives*. "Man sees the deed but God sees the intention." A deed may look noble but may have been done from selfish and ignoble motives; and other deeds might look base, but are done from the highest motives.

We would do well to remember two things – first, even if we escape all other judgments or shut our eyes to them, we cannot escape the judgment of God; and second, judgment belongs to God and we do well not to judge any man.

**Is our allegiance to a *leader* or to God? What "store" do we put on the three *judgments* – fellow men, ourselves, God? Let's discuss each of these.**

### **Apostolic Humility and unchristian Pride (I Cor. 4:6-13)**

All that Paul has been saying about himself and about Apollos is true not only for them but also for the Corinthians. It is not only he and Apollos who must be kept humble by the thought that it is not the



judgment of men they are facing, but the judgment of God; the Corinthians must walk in the same humility. Paul had a wonderfully courteous way of including himself in his own warnings and his own condemnations. The true preacher seldom uses the word *you* and always uses the word *we*; he does not speak down to men; he speaks as one who sits where they sit and who is a man of like passions with them. It is not his own words that Paul insists the Corinthians must not go beyond; it is the word of God, which condemns all pride.

Then Paul asks them the most pertinent and basic of all questions. "What do you possess that you did not receive?" In this single sentence Augustine saw the whole doctrine of Grace. No man could ever have known him unless God had revealed himself; no man could ever have won his own salvation; a man does not save himself, he is saved. When we think of what we have done and think of what God has done for us, pride is ruled out and only humble gratitude remains. The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their souls to God.

Then comes one of those clear outbursts which we see again and again in the letter of Paul. He turns on the Corinthians with scathing irony. He compares their pride, their self-satisfaction, their feeling of superiority with the life that an apostle lives. He uses a vivid picture. When a Roman general won a great victory, he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the "trophies" that he had won; the procession was called a Triumph. But at the end was a little group of captives who were doomed to death. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general; the apostles were like the little group of captives doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and displaying their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and readiness to die for Christ.

In the list of things which Paul declares that the apostles endure there are two especially interesting words. (1) He says that they are *buffeted*. That is the word used for beating a slave. Paul was willing for the

sake of Christ to be treated like a slave. (2) He says, “When we are *insulted* we bless.” We probably don’t realize how surprising a statement this is to a pagan. To the ancient world, Christian humility was a virtue altogether new. This indeed was the kind of conduct that to men looked very foolish, although this very foolishness was the wisdom of God.

**By our words and actions, are we a “true” preacher of God’s life and word? Can we name anything that we have done on our own (by ourselves)? What is humility? Is there any “pride” that we can have? How do we see Paul’s two words (buffeted; insulted) in our own lives?**

### **A Father In The Faith (I Cor. 4:14-21)**

With this passage, Paul brings to an end the section of the letter which deals directly with the dissensions and divisions at Corinth. It is as a father that he writes. The very word which he uses in verse 14 *to warn* is the word regularly used to express the admonition and advice which a father gives his children. He may be speaking with the tone of severity, but it is not the severity which seeks to bring an unruly slave to his knees, but the severity which seeks to put back on the right rails a foolish son who has gone astray – “tuff love”.

Paul felt that he was in a unique position as regards the Corinthian Church. He (Paul) was an old and trusted slave who daily took the child to school, who trained him in moral matter, cared for his character and tried to make a man of him. A child might have many tutors but he had only one father; in the days to come, the Corinthians might have many tutors but none of them could do what Paul had done; none of them could beget them to life in Christ Jesus.

Then Paul says an amazing thing. In effect he says, “I call upon you my children to take after their father.” It is seldom that a father can say that. For most fathers, it is his hope and prayer that a son will turn out to be all that he never succeeded in doing. “Do as I say, not as I do.” But Paul not with pride, but with complete unselfishness, can call upon his children in the faith to copy him.

Then he pays them a delicate complement. He says that he will send Timothy to remind them of his ways. In effect, he says that all their errors and mistaken ways are due, not to deliberate rebellion, but to the fact that they have forgotten. This is so true of human nature. Often it is not that we rebel against Christ; it is simply that we forget him. Most of us need one thing above all – a deliberate effort to live in the conscious realization of the presence of Jesus Christ. It is not only at the sacrament, but at every moment of every day that Jesus Christ is saying to us, “Remember Me.”

Paul moves on to a challenge. They need not say that because he is sending Timothy, he is not coming himself. He will come if the way opens up; and then will come their test. These Corinthians can talk enough; but it is not their eloquence that matters; it is their deeds. The world is full talk about Christianity, but one deed is worth a thousand words.

In the end, Paul demands whether to come to hand out discipline, or cover them with love. The love of Paul for his children in Christ resounds through every letter he wrote; but he says this love sometimes comes with discipline, when necessary, and he is prepared to give it. Paul’s love was the love which knows that sometimes it has to hurt in order to amend.

Paul has dealt with the problem of strife and divisions within the Corinthian Church, and now – because of news that has come to him - he goes on to deal with certain very practical questions and certain very grave situations within the Church.

**How do we “look at” our fellow Christians/ non Christians?  
How do we treat those who have gone against “us” and or  
our beliefs? How should we look at/treat them? What can  
we do to be more like Christ and/or Paul?**

### **Sin And Complacency (I Cor.5:1-5)**

Paul is dealing with what, for him, was a recurring problem. In sexual matters the “heathen” did not know the meaning of chastity. They took their pleasure when and where they wanted it. It was very hard toe the Christian Church to escape this infection. They were like an

island surrounded by a sea of paganism; they were so new to this infant belief that it made it difficult to unlearn the practices that were part of their lives for generations. Yet if the Church was to be kept pure they MUST say goodbye to their old pagan ways. In the Church at Corinth, a specially shocking case had arisen. A man had formed an illicit association with his own step-mother which was expressly forbidden by the Jewish law. She may have already been divorced from her husband, and probably was not a Jew because Paul does not deal with her at all – outside the jurisdiction of the Church.

Shocked at the sin, Paul was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian Church to the sinner. They had complacently accepted the situation and done nothing about it when they should have been grief-stricken. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it. It is not a question of being critical and condemning, it is a question of being wounded and shocked. It was sin that crucified Jesus; it was to free men from sin that he died. No Christian man can take an easy-going view of it.

Paul's verdict is that the man must be dealt with. In a vivid phrase, he says that he must be handed over to Satan - excommunicated. As severe as this seems, it is not vindictive. It was in order to humiliate the man, to bring about the taming and the eradication of his lusts so that in the end his spirit should be saved.

Paul goes on to some very practical advice. Verses 6-8 – originally “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened...” With few exceptions, leaven stands for an evil influence in Jewish literature. It was dough which had been kept over from a previous baking and in keeping it, it had fermented – putrefied.

The Passover bread was unleavened. More than that, on the day before the Passover Feast, the law laid it down that the Jew must light a candle and search his house for leaven, and that every last bit must be cast out. Christ's sacrifice on the cross has delivered us from sin,, as God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Therefore, he goes on,

the last remnant of evil must be cleared out of our lives. If you let an evil influence into the Church, it can corrupt the whole society, as the leaven permeates the whole lump of dough.

Here again we have a great practical truth. Discipline has sometimes to be exercised for the sake of the Church. To shut our eyes to offences is not always a kind thing to do – it may be damaging. A poison must be eliminated before it spreads. Discipline should never be exercised for the satisfaction of the person who exercises it, but always for the mending of the person who has sinned and for the sake of the Church. Discipline must never be vengeful, it must always be a healing process.

**When we exercise discipline to correct a wrong that we have seen, what are our motives? What do we hope to accomplish? What are our “emotions” at the time?**

### **The Church And The World (I Cor. 5:9-13)**

In this passage, it appears that Paul had already written a letter to the Corinthians where he urged them to avoid the society of all evil men. This was meant to be applied only to members of the Church; not that wicked men must be disciplined by being ejected from the society of the Church until they mended their ways. Some Corinthians had taken this to be an absolute prohibition to be observed only if they withdrew themselves from the world altogether. In a place like Corinth, it would have been impossible to carry on a normal life without associating in ordinary everyday affairs with those whose lives the Church would utterly condemn. Paul would never recommend a Christianity which withdrew from the world, to him it was something that had to be lived out in the world.

It is interesting to see the three sins which he chooses as typical of the world – classes of people.

- i. There are the *fornicators*, those guilty of lax morality. The root cause of sexual immorality is a wrong view of men. It declares that the passions and instincts which they share with the beasts must be shamelessly gratified and regards the other person as an instrument through which that gratification may be obtained.

- Christianity regards man as a child of God, and, because of that, as a creature who lives in the world but who always looks beyond it, a person who will not dictate his life by purely physical needs and desires, one who has a body but also a spirit.
- ii. There are those who are *greedy* for this world's goods. Only Christianity can banish that spirit. If we judge things by purely material standards, there is no reason why we should not dedicate our lives to the task of getting. Christianity introduces a spirit which looks outward and not inward. It makes love the highest value in life and service the greatest honor. When the love of God is in a man's heart, he will find joy not in getting but in giving.
  - iii. There are the *idolaters*. Ancient idolatry is paralleled by modern superstition. There have been few ages focused on charms, astrologers and horoscopes, as this. The reason is that it is a basic rule of life that a man must worship something. Unless he worships the true God he will worship the gods of luck. Whenever religion grows weak, superstition grows strong.

Note that these three basic sins are representative of the three directions in which a man sins.

- a) Fornication is a sin against *a man's own self*. By falling to it he has reduced himself to the level of an animal. He has allowed his lower nature to defeat his higher and made himself less than a man.
- b) Greediness is a sin against *our neighbors and our fellow men*. It regards human beings as persons to be exploited rather than as brothers to be helped. It forgets that the only proof that we do love God must be the fact that we love our neighbors as ourselves.
- c) Idolatry is a sin against *God*. It allows things to take God's place. It is the failure to give God the first and only place in life.

It is Paul's principle that we are not to judge those outside the Church (Jewish phrase meaning outside the Chosen People). We must leave their judgment to God who alone knows the hearts of men. The man within the Church is a man who has taken an oath to Christ and can therefore be called in question for how he keeps it.

So Paul comes to an end with this command, “Put away the wicked man from amongst you.” There are times when a cancer must be cut out; when drastic measures must be taken to avoid infection. It is not Paul’s desire to hurt or to show his power, it is the pastor’s desire to protect his infant Church from the ever threatening infection of the world.

**Have we seen these three categories of sin in our own lives? In the lives of others? How do/did we deal with them in ourselves? In others?**

### **The Folly Of The Law Courts (I Cor. 6:1-8)**

Paul is dealing with a problem which was aimed at the Greeks. The Jews did not go to the public courts of law at all. To them justice was more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. Jewish law forbade a Jew to go to law in a non-Jewish court, if they did, it was blasphemy against the divine law of God. It was completely opposite for the Greeks; the courts of law were one of their chief entertainments.

The Athenian law had an elaborate system of arbiters. In a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were notorious for going to law. Certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious nature to the Christian Church, which shocked Paul. His Jewish background made the whole thing revolting to him. What made the matter still more fantastic to Paul was that in the picture of the golden age to come, the Messiah was to judge the nations and the saints were to share in that judgment. So Paul demands, “If some day you are going to judge the world ... how can you go and submit your cases to men, and heathen men at that?” “If you must do it, do it inside the Church.”

Then Paul seizes on the great essential principle. To go to law at all, and especially to go to law with a brother, is to fall far below the Christian standard of behavior. A Christian does not order his dealings with others by the desire for recompense and the principles of justice. He orders them by the spirit of love; and the spirit of love will insist that

he live at peace with his brother, and forbids him to lower himself by going to law.

**Do we look to “get even” with our “brothers?” Do we (can we) reconcile with those who offend us before we go to someone else? Is Christian love part of our reconciliation**

### **Such Were Some Of You (I Cor. 6:9-11)**

Paul goes into a terrible catalogue of sins that is a grim commentary on the corrupt civilization in which the Corinthian Church was growing up. There are certain things which are not pleasant to talk about, but we must look at this list to understand the environment of the early Christian Church; and to see that human nature has not changed very much.

- There were *fornicators* and *adulterers*. We have already seen the sexual laxity as a norm for them, and that the virtue of chastity was virtually unknown to them.
- There were *idolaters*. The greatest building in Corinth was the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, where idolatry and immorality flourished side by side. Idolatry is a grim example when we try to make religion easier.
- There were *sensualists*. The word literally means those who are soft and effeminate, those who have lost their manhood and live for the luxuries of material pleasures.
- There were *thieves* and *robbers*. The ancient world was cursed with them. Houses were easy to break into. The robbers particularly went to two places – the public baths and the public gymnasiums where they stole the clothes of those who were washing or exercising themselves. It was common to kidnap slaves who had special gifts.
- There were *drunkard* (uncontrolled drinking). Normally the Greeks were sober people, their drink was three parts wine mixed with two parts of water. But in luxury-loving Corinth uncontrolled drunkenness was rampant.



- There were *rapacious* men (aggressive getting to which he has no right) and *robbers* (grasping – grabbing that to which it has no right with a kind of savage ferocity).
- There were *homosexuals*. This sin swept like a cancer through Greek life and from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how rampant the ancient world was with it. Even great scholars and influential men practices it. In this particular vice, in the time of the early Church, the world was lost to shame; and there is little doubt that this was one of the main causes of the degeneracy and final collapse of its civilization.

The power of Christ is still the same. No man can change himself, but Christ can change him. There is the most amazing contrast between the pagan and the Christian literature of the day. Into this world, conscious of a tide of decadence that nothing could stop, there came the radiant power of Christianity, which was triumphantly able to make all things new.

**Do we see this in our own day? (Silly question) Do we judge according to the world's standards, or our Christian Standards. How should we judge? Do we judge as ourselves or do we leave the judgment and love up to God?**

### **Bought With A Price (I Cor. 6:12-20)**

Here Paul is up against a whole series of problems. Paul's battle cry is "Glorify God with your body."

The Greeks always looked down on the body - : "The body is a tomb." The important thing was the soul, the spirit of a man'; the body did not matter. Resulted in two opposite outlooks: 1) it issued in the most rigorous asceticism in which everything was done to subject and humiliate the desires and instincts of the body; or 2) (prevalent in Corinth) since the body was of no importance, you could do what you like with it; you could let it satisfy its appetites. If the Christian man is the freest of all men, then is he not free to do what he likes, especially with this completely unimportant body of his?

So the Corinthians argued – let the body have its way. The stomach was made for food and food for the stomach. The body was made for sexual acts and the sexual act is made for it, therefore let the desires of the body have their way.

Paul's answer is the stomach and food are passing things; the day will come when they will both pass away. But the body, the personality, the man as a whole will not away; he is made for union with Christ in this world and still closer union after death.

Paul is not writing a treatise, he is preaching, pleading with a heart on fire and a voice that will use whatever arguments it can find. He says that of all sins fornication is the one that affects a man's body and insults it, i.e. he sins against his own body, which is destined for union with Christ.

He makes one last appeal. Just because God's Spirit dwells in us we have become a temple of God; and so our bodies are sacred, Christ died to save the whole man, body and soul. Because of that a man's body is not his own to do with as he likes; it is Christ's and he must use it, not for his own lustful satisfaction but for the glory of Christ.

There are two great thoughts here:

- It is Paul's insistence that, though he is free to do anything, he will let nothing master him. The Christian faith does not make a man free to sin, but that it makes a man free *not* to sin. Habits should not master us; but the Christian strength enables us to master them.
- It is Paul's insistence that we are not our own. There is no such thing as a self-made man. The Christian is a man who thinks not of his rights but of his debts. He can never do what he likes, because he never belongs to himself; he must always do what Christ likes, because Christ bought him at the cost of his life.

**Have we paid our own debts to Christ? Can we? Do we still look for our own "rights?"**

In the next section of our letter (Chapter 7 through Chapter 15) Paul sets himself to deal with a set of problems concerning which the

Corinthian Church had written to him, asking for advice. Indication that this might have been part of the second letter to the Corinthians. Chapter 7 deals with a whole series of problems regarding *marriage*. Here is a summary of what the Corinthian Church sought and obtained advice from Paul.

- Advice to those who think that Christians should not marry at all.
- Advice those who urge that even those who are married should abstain from all sexual relations with each other.
- Advice to the unmarried and to widows
- Advice to those who think that married people should separate.
- Advice to those who think that if the marriage is one in which one of the partners is a Christian and one a pagan, it should be broken up and dissolved.
- Instruction to live the Christian life in whatever state they happen to be in.
- Advice regarding virgins
- Exhortation that nothing should interfere with concentration upon serving Christ because the time is short and he will very soon come again.

### **Complete Asceticism (1 Cor. 7:1-2)**

We have seen that in Greek thought there was strong tendency to despise the body and the things of the body; and that that tendency could issue in a position where they said “The body is completely unimportant; therefore we can do what we like with it and it makes no difference if we allow its appetites to have their fullest play.” It could bring it to the opposite point of view, “The body is evil; therefore we must bring it into subjection; therefore we must completely obliterate it, and/or we must completely deny all the instincts and desires which are natural to it.” It is this second way of looking at things that Paul is addressing here. At least some of the Corinthians had suggested that, if a man was going to be a Christian

in the fullest sense of the term, he must have done with physical things and must refuse to marry altogether.

Paul's answer faces reality. In effect he says "Remember where you are living; remember that you are living in Corinth where you cannot even walk along the street without temptation rearing its head at you. Remember your own physical constitution and the healthy instincts which nature has given you. You will be far better to marry than to fall into sin."

This sounds like a low view of marriage. It sounds as if Paul is advising marriage in order to avoid a worse fate. Rather he is honestly facing the facts and laying down a rule which is universally true./ No man should attempt a way of life for which he is naturally unfitted. Paul knew very well that all men are not made the same. He says, "Examine yourself and choose that way of life in which you can best live the Christian life, and don't attempt an unnatural standard which is impossible and even wrong for you being what you are.

**How can we apply this to ourselves, our past and our Present? Have we ever focused on our own pleasures? What brought us back to the focus on Christian principles? Have we been instrumental in bringing anyone (family/friend) back to Christ? How did we accomplish this?**

### **The Partnership Of Marriage (1 Cor. 7:3-7)**

This passage comes from a suggestion from Corinth that if married people are to be true Christians they should abstain from all intercourse with each other – idea that the body and all its instincts are evil. Paul declares a supremely great principle that Marriage is a partnership. They must always act together. The husband must never regard the wife simply as means of self-gratification. In a time of special discipline, in a time of long and earnest prayer, it might be right to set aside all bodily things; but it must be by mutual agreement and only for a time, or it simple gets a situation which gives temptation an easy open door.

Once again Paul seems to belittle marriage. This is not an ideal command; it is a considerate concession to human weakness. He would prefer as an ideal that everyone was as he was. What exactly was that? We can only surmise.

We may be fairly certain that at some time Paul had been married. 1) He was a Rabbi and he claimed that he had failed in none of the duties which Jewish law and tradition laid down. Orthodox Jewish belief laid down the obligations of marriage. God had said, “Be fruitful and multiply.” and, therefore, not to marry and not to have children was to be guilty of breaking a positive commandment of God. As devout and orthodox a Jew as Paul once was, it is unlikely that he would have remained unmarried. 2) On particular grounds there is also evidence that Paul was married for he must have been a member of the Sanhedrin for he says that he gave his vote against the Christians. (*Acts 26: 10*). It was a regulation that members of the Sanhedrin must be married men, because it was held that married men were more merciful.

It may be that Paul’s wife died; it is even more likely that she left him and broke up his home when he became a Christian, so that he did indeed literally give up all things for the sake of Christ. It is probable that he banished that side of life once and for all and never remarried. It is not that Paul is really looking down on marriage; it is rather that he is insisting that all a man’s concentration must be on being ready for the coming of Christ.

**Has our marriage (past/present) helped or hindered our journey to God’s love? In what way has it accomplished this?**

### **The Bond That Must Not Be Broken (1 Cor. 7:8-16)**

This passage deals with three different sets of people.

- Those who are unmarried or who are widows. In the circumstances of an age which, as Paul thought, was hastening to its end, they would be better to remain as they are; but he warns them not to court temptation, not to attempt a situation which would be dangerous for

them. If they are naturally passionate, they should marry. Paul was sure that no one could lay down ONE course of action for everyone. It all depended on the person involved.

- Those who are married. Paul forbids divorce on the grounds that Jesus forbade it. (*Mark 10:9; Luke 16:18*) If they must separate, he forbids remarriage. This seems a hard doctrine, but in Corinth with its laxity, it was better to keep the standards so high that no taint of loose living could enter the Church.
- The marriage of believers and unbelievers. Here Paul gives his own judgment, because there is no definite command of Jesus to refer to. There were those in Corinth who declared that a believer must never live with an unbeliever. In the event of one partner of a marriage becoming a Christian and the other remaining a non-Christian, separation must follow at once.

One of the heathen complaints against Christianity was that Christianity did break up families and was a disruptive influence in society. Undoubtedly mixed marriages produced problems.

Paul dealt with this problem with supreme practical wisdom. He said that if the two could agree to live together, let them do so; but if they wished to separate and found living together intolerable, let them do so, because the Christian was never meant to be a slave.

Paul has two great things to say which are of real value.

1. He has the lovely thought that the unbelieving partner is consecrated by the believer. They two have become one flesh and the wonder is that in such a case it is not the taint of the non-believer but the grace of Christianity which wins the victory. A child born into a Christian home, even where only one of the partners is a Christian, is born into the family of Christ.
2. He has the thought that this very association may be the means of saving the soul of the unbelieving partner. For Paul, evangelization began at home. The unbeliever was not to be look at as something unclean and to be avoided, but as another son or daughter to be won for God.

**Did God really forbid divorce? Do we really have to marry only those of our own faith?**

### **Serving God Where God Has Set Us (1 Cor. 7:17-24)**

Paul lays down one of the first rules of Christianity, "Be a Christian where you are." It must have happened often that when a man became a Christian he would have liked to break away from his job, and from the circle in which he moved and begin a new life. But Paul insisted that the function of Christianity was not to give a man a new life, but to make his old life new. What did make a difference was the kind of life he lived. Paul reminds them that slave or free, a man is a slave of Christ because Christ bought him with a price.

**Are we ruled by our human situation, or are we ruled by our Christianity? Does our humanity or Christianity have the highest priority? Are our actions/life dedicated to Us or to Christ?**

### **Wise Advice On A Difficult Problem (1 Cor. 7:25, 36-38)**

These verses deal with the problem concerning virgins. The next section (verses 26-35), give the reason for accepting the advice which runs through the whole chapter. This section *concerning virgins* has always been a problem. It has been given three different explanations.

1. It has been regarded simply as advice to fathers as to the marriage of their unmarried daughters; but it does not read like that; and it is hard to see why Paul uses the word virgin if he means daughter.
2. It has been regarded as dealing with a problem which in later times became acute and which more than one Church Council tried to deal with and forbade – to be married, share the same bed and yet have no physical relations. This must have resulted in an impossible situation. In such a relationship the woman was known as the man's virgin. It may well be that this custom had arisen in the Church at Corinth. If so, then Paul is saying, "If you can retain this difficult situation through self-discipline and self-control and maintain it, then it is better to do so; but, if you have tried it and have found that it is

too great a strain on human nature, then abandon it and marry; and to do so will be no discredit to you.”

3. The above (2) is probably the correct interpretation, but we should note a modification of it. It is suggested that in Corinth there were men and women who had actually gone through the marriage ceremony but had decided never to consummate the marriage and live in absolute continence to devote themselves completely to the spiritual life. If what they planned placed too great a strain upon them, then Paul would be saying, “If you can keep your vow, all well and good, but if you cannot, admit it and enter into normal relations with each other.”

To us the whole relationship seems dangerous and abnormal and even wrong; and so it was; and in time the Church was compelled to tag it as wrong. But given the situation, Paul’s advice is full of wisdom. He really says three things.

- Self-discipline is an excellent thing. Any means by which a man tames himself until he has all his passions under perfect control is a good thing, but it is not a part of Christian duty to eliminate the natural instincts of man; rather the Christian uses them to the glory of God.
- Paul really is saying, “Don’t make an unnatural thing of your religion.” That is the gift of the monks and hermits and nuns. Christianity was meant to abolish normal life; it was meant to glorify it.
- In the end Paul is saying, “Don’t make an agony of your religion.” No man should be ashamed of the body God gave him, the heart God put into him, the instincts that, by God’s creation, dwell within him. Christianity will teach him, not how to eliminate them, but how to use them in such a way that passion is pure and human love the most ennobling thing in all God’s world.

**Is virginity/celebracy wrong? Is it for everyone? Should we strive to be celibate, a virgin, married? How do circumstances change to reverse our decisions?**

**The Time Is Short (1 Cor. 7:26-35)**



It is a pity that Paul did not begin the chapter with this section, because it was the heart of his whole position on it. All through this chapter we must have felt that he was belittling marriage. It looked again and again as if he was allowing marriage only as a concession to avoid fornication and adultery; as if marriage was only a second best.

We have seen that the Jews glorified marriage and considered it a sacred duty. There was only one valid reason, according to Jewish tradition, for not marrying, and that was in order to study the law. You don't have to be dedicated to "someone", but be dedicated to the law/way of life.

This was not Paul's final point of view. Years later when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians, he had changed; for there he uses the relationship of man and wife as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church (*Ephesians 5:22-26*). When he wrote to the Corinthians, his outlook was dominated by the fact that he expected the Second Coming of Christ at any moment. What he is laying down is crisis legislation. "The time is short." One must concentrate on preparation for the coming. The most important humane activity and the human relationship must be abandoned if they threatened to interrupt or to slacken that concentration. By the time he wrote Ephesians he realized the permanency of the human situation and regarded marriage as the most precious relationship within it, the only one which was even faintly parallel to the relation of Christ and the Church.

For us it must always be true that home is the place which does two things for us. It is the place where we find its noblest opportunity to live the Christian life; and it is a pity that it is so often the place where we claim the right to be as complaining and critical and boorish as we may, and to treat those who love us as we would never dare to treat a stranger. It should be the place from whose rest and sweetness we draw strength to live more nearly as we ought within the world.

**How do we, at our age, look at marriage, and or the change of life situations, and how does it affect us and how do we cope with it in our relationship with God?**

## **Marrying Again (1 Cor. 7:39, 40)**

Again Paul takes up his consistent point of view. Marriage is a relationship which can be broken only by death. A second marriage is perfectly allowable, but Paul would rather see the widow stay a widow. We know now that he was speaking only of the crisis situation in which he thought men were living.

In many ways a second marriage is the highest compliment that the one who survives can pay the one who has gone before; for it means that without him/her life was so lonely as to be insupportable; that the married state was so happy that it can fearlessly be entered into again. So far from being an act of disrespect, it can be a mark of honor to the dead.

One condition Paul lays down – it must be a marriage in the Lord. That is, it must be a marriage between Christian folk. It is seldom that a mixed marriage can be successful. The highest love comes when two people love each other and their love is sanctified by a common love of Christ. For then they not only live together, but also pray together; and life and love combine to be one continual act of worship of God.

**What does this do to our belief that “marriage” is forever? Does this send anyone who is divorced out as a “non-believer” or a “non-Christian?”**

## Preamble for Chapters 8 thru 10

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 deals with a problem which may seem extremely remote to us, but was intensely real to the Christians at Corinth and really begged a solution. (Read Barkley's commentary – Pg 71 – 73).

Paul's advice falls into different sections.

- (i) In chapter 8 he lays down the principle that, however safe the strong and enlightened Christian may feel from the infection of heathen idols and even if he believes that an idol is the symbol of something which does not exist at all, he must do nothing which will hurt a brother whose conscience is neither so enlightened nor so.
- (ii) In chapter 9 he deals with those who invoke the principle of Christian freedom. He points out that there are many things that he is free to do which he abstains from doing for the sake of the Church. He is well aware of Christian freedom, but equally aware of Christian responsibility.
- (iii) In chapter 10; 1-13 he deals with those who declare that their Christian knowledge and privileged position make them safe from any infection. He cites the example of the Israelites who had all the privileges of God's Chosen People and who yet fell into sin.
- (iv) In verses 14-22 he uses the argument that any man who has sat at the table of the Lord cannot sit at the table of a heathen god, even if that god be nothing. There is something essentially wrong in taking meat offered to a false god upon lips that have eaten the body and blood of Christ.
- (v) In verses 23-26 he advises against over fussiness. A man can buy what is offered in the shops and ask no questions.
- (vi) In verses 27, 28 he deals with the problem of what to do in a private house. In a private house the Christian will eat what is put before him and ask no questions; *but* if he is deliberately informed that the meat set before him was part of a heathen sacrifice, that is a challenge to his Christian position and he will refuse to eat it.

(vii) Finally in chapter 10:29-11:1 Paul lays down the principle that the conduct of the Christian must be so far above reproach that it gives no possible offence either to Jew or non-Jew. He is better to sacrifice his rights than to allow those rights to become an offence.

### **Advice To The Wise (I Cor. 8)**

It was scarcely possible to live in any Greek city and not to daily come upon the problem of what to do about eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to idols. There were certain of the Corinthians to whom the matter was no problem. They held that their superior knowledge had taught them that the heathen gods did not exist, and that therefore it was possible for a Christian to eat meat that had been offered to idols without a qualm of conscience. In reality Paul has two answers to that. One does not come until Chapter 10 verse 20. In that passage Paul makes it clear that, although he agrees that the heathen gods did not exist, he felt certain that the spirits and demons did exist and that they were behind the idols and were using them to seduce men from the worship of the true God.

In the present passage he uses a much simpler argument. He says that in Corinth there were men who all their life – until now – had really believed in the heathen gods; and these men, who were simple souls, could not quite rid themselves of a lingering belief that an idol really was something, although a false something. Whenever they ate meat offered to idols, they had qualms of conscience. They could not help it; instinctively they felt it was wrong. So Paul argues that if you say that there is absolutely no harm in eating this meat offered to idols you are really hurting and bewildering the conscience of these simple souls. His final argument is that, even if a thing is harmless for you, when it hurts someone else, it must be given up, for a Christian must never do anything which causes his brother to stumble.

In this passage which deals with so remote a thing there are three great principles which are valid.

1. What is safe for one man may be unsafe for another. Something may be no temptation to us, but may be a serious temptation to someone

else. Therefore, in considering whether we will or will not do something, we must think not only of the effect on us, but its effect on others as well.

2. Nothing should be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything should be judged from the point of view of love. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a person arrogant and feel superior and thus “look down” on others. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. Our conduct not by “superior knowledge” but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.
3. This leads to the greatest truth of all. No man has any right to indulge in a pleasure or demand a liberty which may be the downfall of someone else. He may have the strength to keep a pleasure in its proper place; but he must think of his weaker brother.

**Is there anything in our lives (including the past) that was not a problem (safe) for us, but could have been damning to someone else? Does our knowledge of something make it safe for us and all others? Because we can safely do something, is it safe for all others?**

### **The Unclaimed Privileges (I Cor. 9:1-14)**

This chapter seems disconnected from what goes before, but in fact it is not. The whole point lies in this – the Corinthians who considered themselves mature Christians have been claiming that they are in such a privileged position that they are free to eat meat offered to idols if they like. Their Christian freedom gives them, - so they thought – a special position in which they - could do things which might not be permissible for lesser men. To answer this Paul sets forth the many privileges he himself had a perfect right to claim, but which he did not, in case they should turn out to be stumbling-blocks to others and prevent the effectiveness of the gospel.

He claims to be an Apostle. He uses two arguments to prove the reality of his apostleship.

- (i) *He has seen the Lord.* Acts makes it clear that the supreme test of an apostle is that he is a witness of the Resurrection.
- (ii) His second claim is that *his ministry has been effective.* The Corinthians were the proof of that. He calls them his *seal*. The seal was the guarantee of genuineness. The Corinthian Church was the guarantee of Paul's apostleship. The final proof that a man knows Christ is that he can bring others to him. The reality of a man's Christianity is proved by the fact that he helps others to be Christian.

A privilege that Paul might have claimed was **support from the Church**. Not only could he have claimed such support for himself, but for a wife. The other apostles received such support. The Greeks despised manual labor. It is true that every Jewish Rabbi was supposed to teach for nothing and to have a trade to earn his daily bread; but they stressed that there was no more meritorious deed than to support a Rabbi. On every ground Paul could have claimed the privilege of being supported by the Church.

Paul uses ordinary human analogies. No soldier has to provide his own rations. Why should the soldier of Christ have to do so? The shepherd of the flock gets his food from the flock. Why should not the Christian pastor do likewise? Paul uses this analogy and applies it to the Christian teacher.

The priest who serves in the Temple receives his share of the offerings (The Burnt-offering; The Sin-offering; The Trespass-offering; The Meat-offering; The Peace-offering). The priests enjoyed still other benefits including sharing in the tithes.

All of this was behind Paul's refusal to accept even the basic supplies of life from the Church for two reasons – 1) The priests were a byword; 2) his sheer independence. Paul was one of those independent souls who would starve rather than be beholden to anyone.

In the end, one thing dominated his conduct. He would do nothing to discredit or hinder the gospel. Paul was determined that his hands would be clean.

**How do we look at our “pastor” and/or ourselves as “pastor?” How do we support our pastor and ourselves as teachers?**

### **The Privilege And The Task (I Cor. 9:15-23)**

This passage is sort of an outline of Paul’s whole conception of his ministry.

- 1) He looks at it as a *privilege*. The one thing he will not do is take money for working for Christ. It means that a man should never work primarily for money. He should regard his work not as a career of accumulation, but as an opportunity of service. It is a privilege to serve others for God’s sake.
- 2) He regarded it as a *duty*. Paul’s point of view was that if he had chosen to be a preacher of the gospel he might legitimately have demanded payment for his work; but he had not chosen the work; it had chosen him.
- 3) Paul knew that he received daily a *great reward*. He had the satisfaction of bringing the gospel freely to all men who would receive it. That is why the biggest thing in life is not to choose the job with the biggest pay, but the one in which we will find the greatest satisfaction.
- 4) Finally, Paul speaks about *the method of his ministry*, which was to become all things to all men. The man who can never see anything but his own point of view and who never makes any attempt to understand the mind and heart of other, will never make a pastor or even a friend.

**How do we see our “ministry?” Do we require others to conform to our way of seeing and loving Christ? Are we “all things to all?”**

### **A Real Fight (I Cor. 9:24-27)**

Paul takes another line. He insists to those Corinthians who wanted to take the easy way out that no man will ever get anywhere without self-discipline. Paul was always fascinated by the image of the athlete. An athlete must train with intensity if he is to win his contest;

for a laurel crown that will wither in a few days. How much more should the Christian discipline himself to win the crown which is eternal life.

In this passage Paul sets out a kind of brief philosophy of life.

- 1) Life is a battle. We must regard ourselves always as men engaged upon a campaign, as men pressing onwards to a goal.
- 2) To win the fight and to be victorious in the race demands discipline.
  - a. We have to discipline our bodies; often spiritual depression springs from physical unfitness.
  - b. We have to discipline our minds; we can never solve problems by refusing to see them or by running away from them.
  - c. We must discipline our souls; face life's sorrows with endurance, its temptations with the strength God gives, its disappointments with courage.
- 3) We need to know our goal. A distressing thing is the obvious aimlessness of the lives of so many people; they are drifting anywhere instead of going somewhere. And to go just anywhere is the certain way to arrive nowhere.
- 4) We need to know the worth of our goal. The goal is *life*, and surely it is worth anything to win that.
- 5) We cannot save others unless we master ourselves. We cannot teach what we do not know; we cannot bring others to Christ until we ourselves have found him.

**How well are we “equipped” to achieve our goal? In what area are we weak? What can/should we do to strengthen that area(s)?**

### **The Peril Of Over-Confidence (I Cor. 10:1-13)**

In this chapter Paul is still dealing with the question of eating meat offered to idols. The Corinthian Christians' point of view was “We are baptized – one with Christ; received the Body and Blood of Christ – one with Him; therefore we are safe and can eat meat offered to idols and not be harmed.” So Paul warns of the danger of over-confidence.



Paul points to history to show what can happen to people who have been blessed with the greatest privileges. He goes back to the days when the children of Israel were wandering in the desert. In verse 5 Paul speaks of them drinking of the rock which followed them.

The history of Israel shows that people who enjoyed the great privileges of God were far from being safe from temptation; special privilege, Paul reminds the Corinthians is no guarantee of security.

Note the temptations and failures which Paul singles out.

- 1) There is the temptation to idolatry. Men can still worship the works of their own hands more than they worship God.
- 2) There is the temptation to fornication. As long as man is a man, temptations come from his lower self. Only a passionate love of purity can save him from impurity.
- 3) There is the temptation to try God too far. At the back of his mind there is the idea, "It will be OK, God will forgive." We must remember that there is a holiness as well as a love of God.
- 4) There is the temptation to grumble. There are still many who greet life with a whine and not with a cheer.

So Paul insists on the need of vigilance. "Let him who thinks he stands secure take care lest he fall." How many fortresses have fallen because its defenders thought that it was impregnable?

Paul concludes this section by saying three things about temptation:

- 1) He is sure that temptation will come. That is part of life.
- 2) Any temptation that comes is not unique. Others have endured it and others have come through it. When we go thru temptation, we are going thru what others have gone thru and endured and conquered.
- 3) With the temptation there is always a way of escape. No man has to fall to any temptation, for with it there is a way out, and the way out is not the way surrender nor of retreat, but the way of conquest in the power and grace of God.

**How have we dealt with and overcome temptation?**

## **The Sacramental Obligation (I Cor. 10:14-22)**

In this passage there are three ideas; two peculiar to the age that Paul lived; one is always true and valid.

- i. As we have seen, when sacrifice was offered, part of the meat was given back to the worshipper to hold a feast. There it was believed that the god himself was a guest. Moreover, it was often believed that, the god himself was in the sacrificed meat and he entered into the bodies and spirits of those who ate it. The person who sacrificed was in a real sense a sharer with the altar; he had a mystic communion with the god.
- ii. At this time the whole world believed in demons, both good and bad, but more often they were bad. They were spirits who were intermediate between the gods and men. To the Greek every spring, every grove, every mountain, tree, stream, pool, rock, every place had its demon.

Paul believed in these demons; he called them “principalities and powers.” His point of view was this – an idol was nothing and stood for nothing; but the whole business of idol worship was the work of the demons; through it they seduced men from God. When they were worshipping idols, men thought they were worshipping gods; in fact they were being deluded by these malignant demons. Idol worship brought a man into contact, not with God, but with demons; and anything to do with it had the demonic taint on it. Meat offered to idols was nothing, but the fact remained it had served the purposes of demons and was therefore a polluted thing.

- iii. Out of this ancient set of beliefs comes one permanent principle – a man who has sat at the table of Jesus Christ cannot go on to sit at the table which is the instrument of demons. If a man has handled the body and blood of Christ there are things he cannot touch. It was true in Corinth and it is true today, that the man who has handled the sacred things of Christ cannot soil his hands with mean and unworthy things.

**Do we have our own “idols” and sometimes “worship” them? Are all idols “figures” of persons or things? What can we do to recognize them, and what should we do to “dethrone” them?**

### **The Limits of Christian Freedom ( I Cor. 10:23 – II:1)**

Paul brings to an end this long discussion of the question of meat offered to idols with some very practical advice.

- i. His advice is that a Christian can buy anything that is sold in the shops and ask no questions. It is true some of the meat sold could have been offered to the idols, but it is possible to be too fussy and to create difficulties where none need to exist. After all, all things are God's'
- ii. If the Christian accepts an invitation to dinner in the house of a pagan, let him eat what is put before him and ask no questions. But, if he is deliberately informed that the meat is part of a sacrifice, he must not eat it.
- iii. So once again out of an old and remote situation emerge a great truth. Many a thing that a man may do with perfect safety as far as he himself is concerned, he must not do it if it is going to be a stumbling-block to someone else. There is nothing more real than Christian freedom; but Christian freedom must be used to help others and not to shock or hurt them. A man has a duty to himself but a greater duty to others.

We must note to where that duty extends.

- i. Paul insisted that a Corinthian Christian must be a good example to the *Jews*. Even to his enemies a man must be an example of the fine things.
- ii. The Corinthian Christian had a duty to the *Greeks*; that is to say he had to show a good example to those who were quite indifferent to Christianity. It is in fact by that example that many are won to Christianity.
- iii. The Corinthian Christian had a duty to his *fellow Church member*. It is a fact of life that one takes the cue for his conduct from everyone of

us. A younger or weaker brethren is often looking to us for a lead. It is our duty to give that lead which will strengthen the weak and confirm the one that might waiver and save the tempted from sin.

We can do all things to the glory of God only when we remember the duty we must discharge to our fellow men; and we will do that only when we remember that our Christian freedom is given to us not for our own sake but for the sake of others.

**Do we recognize our duty to all others? Have we accepted that duty and how are we putting it into practice? Do we put our primary duty to others or ourselves?**

Chapters 11 to 14 are among the most difficult in the whole epistle for a modern day person in the western world to understand, but are the most interesting because they deal with the problems which had arisen in the Corinthian Church in connection with public worship. In them we see the infant Church struggling with the problem of offering a fitting and a seemly worship to God. It will be easier to follow if we see the various parts that compose it.

- i. 11:2 – 11:16 deals with the problem of whether or not women should worship with their heads uncovered.
- ii. 11:17 – 11:23 deals with the problems which have arisen in connection with the *Agape* or Love Feast, the weekly common meal which the Christian congregation held.
- iii. 11:24 – 11:34 deals with the correct observance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- iv. 12 discusses the problem of welding into one harmonious whole those who possess all kinds of different gifts. It is here that we have the great picture of the Church as the Body of Christ, and of each member as a limb ion that body.
- v. 13 is the great hymn of love which shows men the more excellent way.
- vi. 14:1 – 14:23 deals with the problem of speaking with tongues.

- vii. 14:24 – 14:33 insists on the necessity of orderliness in public worship and seek to bring under necessary discipline the overflowing enthusiasm of a newly born Church.
- viii. 14:24 – 14:36 discusses the place of women in the public worship of God in the Church of Corinth.

### **The Necessary Modesty (I Cor. 11:2-16)**

This is one of these passages which have a purely local and temporary significance, which deals with a situation which has long since ceased to have any relevance for us, yet has an interest for us, because it sheds a light on the domestic affairs and problems of the early Church, because Paul solves the problems by principles which are eternal.

The problem was whether or not in the Christian Church a woman had the right to take part in the service unveiled. Paul's answer was this – the veil is assign of subjection, worn by an inferior in the presence of a superior; now woman is inferior to man, in the sense that man is head of the household. It is very improbable that we are likely to accept this view of women in the light of the twentieth century but of the first century and as we read it we must remember three things.

- i. We must remember the place of the veil in the East. To this day eastern women wear the *yashmak* which is a long veil leaving the forehead and the eyes uncovered but reaching down almost to the feet.

The veil was two things. a) It was a sign of inferiority. b) But it was also a great protection. In the East, then, the veil is all-important. It does not only mark the inferior status of a woman, it is the inviolable protection of her modesty and chastity

- ii. We must remember the status of woman in Jewish eyes. Under Jewish law, woman was vastly inferior to man. She had been created out of Adam's rib and she had been created to be his helpmate.

It is the unfortunate truth that in Jewish law a woman was a thing and was part of the property of her husband over which he had

complete right of disposal. In the synagogue, for instance, women had no share whatever in the worship but were segregated completely for the men in a shut-off gallery or other part of the building. In Jewish law and custom it was unthinkable that women should claim any kind of equality with men.

It must be remembered that this situation arose in *Corinth*, probably the most sexually unrestrained city in the world. Paul's point of view was that in this situation it was better to err on the side of being too modest and too strict rather than to do anything which might give the pagan a chance to criticize the Christians of being too lax or be a cause of temptation to the Christians themselves.

It would be wrong to make this passage apply universally; it was very relevant to the Church of Corinth and has nothing to do with whether or not women should wear hats in church in the present day. But for all the local significance it has three great permanent truths in it.

- a. It is always better to err on the side of being too strict than on the side of being too lax.
- b. Even after he has stressed the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other.
- c. Paul finishes the passage with a rebuke to the man who argues for the sake of argument. Whatever the differences that might arise between men, there is no place in the Church for the deliberately contentious man or woman. There is a time to stand on principle; but there is never a time to be combatively argumentative.

**Do we see anything in our own day and age that we might apply Paul's words? How do we feel about what Paul says to our own micro cosmos? What answer can we give to those who might try to push this on our own church community?**

## The Wrong Kind of Feast (I Cor. 11:17-22)

The ancient world was in many ways much more social than is ours. It was the regular custom of groups to meet together for meals. There was a certain kind of feast called an *eranos* to which each participant brought his own share of the food, and in which all the contributions were pooled to make a common meal (today's *pot luck*). The early Church had such a custom, a feast called the *Agape* or Love Feast. To it all the Christians came, bringing what they could, the resources were pooled and they sat down to a common meal. It was a way of producing and nourishing real Christian fellowship.

But in the Church at Corinth, things had gone sadly wrong with the Love Feast. In the Church there were rich and poor; there were those who could bring plenty, and there were slaves who could bring hardly anything at all. In fact, for many of the poor slaves, the Love Feast must have been the only decent meal in the whole week. But in Corinth the art of sharing got lost. The rich did not share their food but ate it in little exclusive groups by themselves, hurrying through it in case they had to share, while the poor had next to nothing. The result was that the meal at which the social differences between members should have been obliterated, only succeeded in aggravating these differences. Unhesitatingly Paul rebukes this.

- i. It may well be that the different groups were composed of those who held different opinions. If we shut ourselves off from him and form our own little group (clique) while he remains in his, there is never any hope of mutual understanding.
- ii. The early Church was the one place in the ancient world where the barriers were down. That world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians (those who did not speak Greek); there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. The secret of the Christian revolution was that the selfishness of race and class was forgotten in the Lord's Supper, and

a new basis for society found in love of the visible image of God in men for whom Christ died. A church where social and class distinctions exist is not a true church. A real church is a body of men and women united to each other because all are united to Christ.

- iii. A church is no true church if the art of sharing is forgotten. When people wish to keep things to themselves and to their own circle, they are not even beginning to be Christian. The true Christian cannot bear to have too much while others have too little; he finds his greatest privilege not in jealously guarding his privileges, but in giving them away.

**Do we stick to our own “group”? Do we welcome others who have “less” than we or are “different” from us? Are we living the “true” Christian life? What can we do to help “others” to live the TRUE Christian live?**

### **The Lord’s Supper (I Cor. 11:23-34)**

No passage in the entire New Testament is of greater interest than this.

For one, it gives us our warrant for the most sacred act of worship in the Church, the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; and, for another, since the letter to the Corinthians is earlier than the earliest of the gospels, this is actually the first recorded account we possess of any word of Jesus.

The Sacrament can never mean the same for every person; and we don’t need to fully understand it to believe it, we should at least try to understand something of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the bread and wine as He did.

“This is my body,” he said of the bread. One simple fact precludes us from taking this with a crude literalism. When Jesus spoke, he was still in the body; and there was nothing clearer than that his body and the bread were at that moment quite different things. Nor did he simple mean, “This stands for my body.” To him who takes it into his hands and upon his lips with faith and love, it is a means not only of memory but of living contact with Jesus Christ. To an unbeliever it would be nothing; to a lover of Christ it is the way to his presence.



In the original version Jesus said “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” We have translated it slightly differently, “This cup is the new covenant and it cost my blood.” Now a covenant is a relationship entered into between two people. There was an old covenant between God and man that was based on *law*. With Jesus a new relationship is opened to man dependent not on law, but on love, not on man’s ability to keep the law – no man can do that – but on the free grace of God’s love offered to men.

Under the old covenant a man could do nothing other than fear God for he could never perfectly keep the law; under the new covenant he comes to God as a child to a father. However you look at things, *it cost the life of Jesus to make this new relationship possible*. So the wine of the sacrament stands for (is) the life-blood of Christ without which the new covenant, the new relationship of man to God, could never have been possible.

This passage then talks about eating and drinking this bread and wine unworthily. Unworthiness consisted in the fact that the man who did so did “not discern the Lord’s body.” This can mean two things; both are so real and important that it is likely that both are intended.

It may mean that the man who eats and drinks unworthily does not realize what the sacred symbols mean. He eats and drinks with no reverence and no sense of the love that these stand for or the obligation that is laid upon him.

It may also mean *the Body of Christ* again and again stands for the Church. Paul has just been rebuking those who with their divisions and their class distinctions divide the Church; so this may mean that he eats and drinks unworthily who has never realized that the who Church is the body of Christ, but is at variance (division) with his brother. Every man in whose hear there is hatred, bitterness, contempt against his brother, as he comes to the Table of the Lord, eats and drinks unworthily.

Paul goes on to say that the misfortunes which have fallen on the Church at Corinth may be due to the fact that they come to this sacrament while they are divided against each other; but these misfortunes are

not sent to destroy them but to discipline them and to bring them back to the right way.

We must be clear about one thing. The phrase which forbids a man to eat and drink unworthily does not shut out the man who is a sinner and knows it. If the Table of Christ were only for perfect people, no one would be ever able to approach it. The way is never closed to the penitent sinner. To the man who loves God and his fellow men, the way is always open, and his sins, though they be as scarlet, shall be white as snow.

**Do we consider ourselves worthy to receive the Body and Blood of Christ? Do we see division in our own world? Are we “worthy” or “unworthy” when we receive? How do we look at the Bread and Wine?**

### **The Confession of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:1-3)**

In the Church of Corinth, the most amazing things were happening through the action of the Holy Spirit, but in an age of ecstasy and enthusiasm there can be hysterical excitement and self-delusion as well as the real thing, and in this chapter and the next two Paul deals with true manifestations of the Spirit.

This passage gives us two phrases which were battle cries.

- 1) There is the phrase *Accursed be Jesus*. There could be 4 ways in which this phrase might arise.
  - a. It would be used by the Jews. The synagogue prayers included regularly a cursing of all apostates; and Jesus would come under that. Jesus had been crucified. It would be no uncommon thing to hear the Jews pronouncing their anathemas on this heretic and criminal whom the Christians worshipped.
  - b. It is by no means unlikely that the Jews would make proselytism attracted by Christianity wither pronounce this curse of suffer excommunication from all Jew worship. It must often have been a condition of remaining within the synagogue that a man should pronounce a curse on Jesus Christ.

- c. Whatever was true when Paul was writing, it is definitely true that later on, in the days of persecution, Christians were compelled wither to curse Christ or to die. There certainly came a time when a man was confronted with the choice of cursing Christ or facing death.
  - d. There was the possibility that, even in the Church, someone in a mad frenzy might cry out, "Accursed be Jesus." In that hysterical atmosphere anything might happen and be claimed to be the work of the Spirit. Paul lays down that no man can say a word against Christ and attribute it to the influence of the Spirit.
- 2) Besides this, there is the Christian battle cry, *Jesus is Lord*. In so far as the early Church had a creed at all, it was that simple phrase. When a man could say "Jesus is Lord (Jehovah)," it meant that he gave to Jesus the supreme loyalty of his life and the supreme worship of his heart.

It is to be noted that Paul believed that a man could say "Jesus is Lord," only when the Spirit enabled him to say it. The Lordship of Jesus was not something a man discovered for himself as something which God, in His grace, revealed to him.

**How often have we used (or heard) Jesus' being cursed or His name used in vain? What can we in our present day (so much like Corinth in Paul's time) do or say preserve respect for Jesus' name?**

### **God's Differing Gifts (I Cor. 12:4-11)**

Paul's idea in this section is to stress the unity of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole; but unity does not mean uniformity, and therefore there are differing gifts and differing functions.

Paul begins by saying that all special gifts (*charismata*) come from God and therefore must be used in God's service. The fault of the Church, in modern times, is that it has interpreted the special gifts too narrowly. It assumes special gifts consists of things like

speaking, praying, teaching, writing – intellectual gifts. It would be well if we would realize that the gifts of one who can work with his hands, are just as “special” gifts from God. The brick layer, the carpenter, the electrician, the painter, the engineer, the plumber all have their special gifts, which are from God and can be used for Him.

We need to examine the list of special gifts which Paul gives us here, because from it we learn much about the character and work of the early Church.

He begins with two things which sound very much like each other - *the word of wisdom* and *the word of knowledge*. The Greek word for *wisdom* is *sophia*. This is the highest kind of wisdom; it comes not so much from our thoughts (intelligence) as from communion with God. It is this wisdom which knows God. On the other hand, *knowledge* (Greek word *gnosis*) is a much more practical thing. It is the knowledge which knows what to do in any given situation. It is the practical application to human life and affairs of *sophia*. Both of them are necessary – the *wisdom* which knows by union with God the deep things of God, and the *knowledge* which, in the daily life of the world and the Church, can put that wisdom into practice.

Next comes faith. Paul means more than what we might call ordinary faith. It is the faith which really produces results. It is not just the intellectual conviction that a thing is true; it is the passionate belief in a thing which makes a man spend all that he is and has on it. It is that which moves a man into action. It is the faith which turns the vision into deeds.

Next Paul speaks of the special gifts of healings. The early Church lived in a world where healing miracles were somewhat common-place. If a Jew was ill he was much more likely to go to the Rabbi than to the doctor, and he would most likely be healed. It was an age of cures.

There is no doubt that gifts of healing did exist in the early Church; Paul would never have cited them unless they were real. In James (5:14) we see the instruction that if a man is ill he must come to the elders and they will anoint him with oil. It is historical fact that until the ninth

century, the Sacrament of Unction was for healing, and only then (9th century) did it become the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and a preparation for death. The Church never lost this gift of healing. For a long while the Church split man into soul and body, and accepted the responsibility for his soul but not for his body. It is good that we have learned to treat man as a whole – soul and body as one.

Next Paul lists wonderful deeds of power. Almost certainly he refers to *exorcisms*. In those days many illnesses, often all illnesses, and especially mental illnesses were attributed to the work of demons, and it was one of the functions of the Church to exorcise these demons. Exorcism is still a reality in the mission field.

Paul goes on to mention *prophecy*. It would be better translated as *preaching*. The prophet is a man who lives so close to God that he knows His mind and heart and will, and so can make them known to men. This function (preaching/prophecy) is twofold. a) He brings rebuke and warning, saying their action is not in accordance with the will of God. b) He brings advice and guidance, seeking to direct men into the ways God wishes them to go.

Paul then mentions *the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits*. In a society where the atmosphere was tense, it was necessary to distinguish between what was real and what was just hysteria – what came from God and what came from the devil. To this day, when a thing/event is out of the ordinary, it is difficult to tell whether it is from God or not. We must always try to understand before we condemn.

Lastly Paul lists *the gift of tongues* and *the ability to interpret them*. This thing of “tongues” was perplexing to the Church at Corinth. What happened was – at a church service someone would fall into an ecstasy and pour out a torrent of unintelligible sounds in an “unknown language.” This was a coveted gift because it was supposedly due to direct influence of the Spirit of God. To the congregation it was completely meaningless. Sometimes the person so moved could interpret his own outpourings, but usually it required someone else who had the gift of interpretation. Paul never

questioned the reality of the gift of tongues, but he was well aware that it had its dangers; it was very difficult to distinguish between ecstasy and a kind of self-hypnotism.

The picture we get is of a Church vividly alive. Things happened; in fact astonishing things happened. There was nothing dull and ordinary about the early Church. Paul knew that all this vivid, powerful activity was the work of the Spirit who gave to each man his gift to use for all.

**Can we see these “gifts” in today’s day and age? Do we know (personally) anyone with one or more of these “gifts?” Do we ourselves have these “gifts” and how are they manifested in us?**

### **The Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-31)**

Here is one of the most famous pictures of the unity of the Church ever written. Men have always been fascinated by the way in which the different parts of the body co-operate. Paul drew his picture of the Church as a Body. A body consists of many parts but there is in it an essential unity. Plato in his picture of the body – many years before Paul – pointed out that we do not say, “My finger has a pain,” we say, “I have a pain.” There is an *I* (a personality), which gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the *I* is to the body, Christ is to the Church. It is in Him that all the diverse parts find their unity.

Paul looks at this in another way. He says “You are the body of Christ.” This is a tremendous thought. Christ is no longer in this world in the body (his human body); therefore if He wants a task done within the world He has to find a man to do it. If he wants a child taught, he has to find a teacher to teach him; if he wants a sick person cured, he has to find a physician to do his work; if he wants his story told, he has to find a man to tell it. Literally we have to be the body of Christ, hands to do his work, feet to run his errands, a voice to speak for him.

Here is the supreme glory of the Christian man – he is part of the body of Christ upon earth.

So Paul paints a picture of the unity which should exist inside the Church if it is to fulfill its proper function. A body is healthy (and efficient) only when each part is functioning perfectly. The parts of the body are not jealous of each other and do not covet each other's functions. From Paul's picture we see certain things which ought to exist in the Church, the body of Christ.

- We ought to realize that *we need each other*. There is no such thing as isolation in the Church. If the Church is to be a healthy body, we need the work that everyone can do.
- We ought to *respect each other*. In the body there is no question of relative importance. Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone.
- We ought to *sympathize with each other*. If any one part of the body is affected, all the others suffer in sympathy, because they cannot help it. The Church is a whole. The person who cannot see beyond his or her own organization, the person who cannot see beyond his or her congregation, worse still, the person who cannot see beyond his or her own family circle, has not even begun to grasp the real unity of the Church.

At the end of this passage Paul speaks of various forms of service in the Church. Some he has already mentioned, but some are new.

- (i) At the head of everything he puts the *apostles*. They were beyond question the greatest figures in the Church. Their authority was not confined to one place; they had no settled and localized ministry; their word ran through the whole Church. The qualification of an apostle was that he must have been a companion with Jesus during his earthly life and been a witness of the Resurrection (Acts 1:22). Jesus never wrote a word on paper, instead he wrote his message upon men, and these men were the apostles. The man who comes from the presence of Christ has apostolic authority no matter what may be his church denomination.
- (ii) We have already spoken about the prophets, but now Paul adds *teachers*. You cannot exaggerate their importance. These were the

men who had to build up the converts won by the preaching of the evangelists and the apostles. They had to instruct men and women who know nothing about Christianity. We have to remember that this was a time when printing did not exist. As a result the story of Jesus had to be handed down in the beginning by word of mouth. That was the teacher's job, and one will learn more from a good teacher than from any book.

- (iii) Paul speaks of *helpers*. These were those whose duty it was to care for the poor, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. From the very beginning Christianity was a very practical thing.
- (iv) Paul speaks of *administrators*. He is referring to the people who carry out the administration of the Church, which is extremely essential work. In the foreground the preacher and the teacher hold the spotlight; but they could never do their work at all unless in the background there were those who shouldered the routine day to day administration. There are parts of the body which are never seen but whose function is more important than any other; there are those who serve the Church in ways that win no publicity, but without their service the Church could not go on.

But in the end Paul is going to go on to speak of a greater gift than all the others. The danger always is that those who have different gifts will be at variance with each other, and so the effective working of the body will be hindered. Love is the only thing which can bind the Church into a perfect unity; and Paul goes on to sing his hymn of love (Chapter 13).

**How do we see ourselves in the “Body” of Christ? What part do we play in the body? How do we interact with the other “parts/organs” of this body? How do we look at “other” (perhaps hidden) members of His body – i.e. members of other religions?**



## The Hymn of Love (I Cor. 13)

For many this is the most wonderful chapter in the whole New Testament and we will do well to take more than a few sessions to study words whose full meaning a lifetime would be insufficient to unveil.

Paul begins by declaring that a man may possess any spiritual gift, but if it is not accompanied by love it is useless.

- ✓ He may have the gift of *tongues*.
- ✓ He may have the gift of *prophecy* (preaching). There are two kinds of preachers, one whose aim is to save the souls of his people and woos them with the accents of love. Paul was the prime example of this. On the other side of the coin is the preacher who dangles his hearers over the flames of hell (fire and brimstone) and gives the impression that he would rejoice in their damnation as much as in their salvation.
- ✓ He may have the gift of *intellectual knowledge*. This could result in intellectual snobbery. Only a knowledge whose cold detachment has been kindled by the fire of love can really save men.
- ✓ He may have a passionate *faith*.
- ✓ He may practice what men call *charity*; he may give his goods to the poor, but if it is like giving scraps to the dogs (without love) it is pride, and pride is always cruel because it lacks Love.
- ✓ He may give his body to be burned. If the motive which makes a man give his life for Christ is pride and self-display, then even martyrdom becomes of no value.

Hardly any passage in scripture demands such self-examination from the good man as this.

**What are our “gifts?” How do we use these gifts? What is our “motivation?”**

## **The Nature of Christian Love (I Cor. 13:4-7)**

In these 4 verses, Paul lists fifteen characteristics of Christian love.

*Love is patient.*

*Love is kind.*

*Love knows no envy.*

*Love is not a braggart.*

*Love is not infatuated with its own importance.*

*Love is not ill-mannered.*

*Love does not insist upon its rights.*

*Love never flies into a temper.*

*Love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received.*

*Love finds no pleasure in evil-doing.*

*Love rejoices with the truth.*

*Love can endure anything.*

*Love us completely trusting.*

This has a twofold aspect:

i) *in relation to God* it means that love takes God at His word.

ii) *in relation to our fellow men* it means that love always believes the best about other people.

*Love never ceases to hope.*

*Love bears everything with triumphant fortitude.*

One thing remains to be said – when we think of the qualities of this love, as Paul portrays them, we can see them realized in the life of Jesus himself.

**Let us discuss/express how each of us understands each of these attributes, one at a time. What are your thoughts on each of these?**

## **The Supremacy of Love (I Cor. 13:8-13)**

Paul says three final things about Love:

- i. He stresses its *absolute permanency*. When all things that men glory in pass away, love will still stand.
- ii. He stresses its *absolute completeness*. As things are, what we see is a reflection in a mirror.
- iii. He stresses its *absolute supremacy*. Love is the fire which kindles faith and it is the light which turns hope into certainty.

## **The False and the True Worship (1 Cor. 14:1-19)**

This chapter is difficult to understand because it deals with something that is outside most of our experiences. Paul sets two spiritual gifts in comparison with each other. (*Speaking in tongues and Prophecy*)

In this whole section Paul deals with the dangers of the gift of speaking with tongues, and the superiority of the gift of prophecy – telling the truth is such a way that all can understand it.

Let's follow Paul's line of thought in this section.

Tongues are addressed to God and not to men, for men cannot understand them. He goes on to give some illustrations and analogies. Paul does not deny that the gift of tongues exists. If a "gift" was to have value it must benefit the whole congregation, and if the gift of tongues is used, it is useless unless it is interpreted. Paul concludes that in a Christian congregation it is better to speak a few intelligible sentences than to pour out a flood of unintelligible sounds.

Valuable truths in this section:

Verse 3 lays down the aim of all preaching is 1) *to build up*; 2) *to encourage*; 3) *to comfort*.

Verse 5 gives us the things which for Paul were the background and the substance of all preaching. 1) It comes from a *direct revelation from God*. No man can speak to others unless God has first spoken to him. 2) It may bring *some special knowledge*. No man can possibly be an expert in everything, but every man has special knowledge of something. 3) It consists of *telling* (preaching) *the truth*. In the early

church the first preaching given to any fellowship was a simple proclamation of the facts of the Christian story. 4) It goes on to *teaching*. What is the meaning of these facts?

Two broad principles regarding Christian worship emerge out of this passage: 1) *Worship must never be selfish*. All that is done must be done for the sake of all. 2) *Worship must be intelligible*. The great things are the simple things; the noblest language is the simplest language. In the end, only what satisfies my mind can comfort my heart, and only what my mind can grasp can bring strength to my life.

**Do we have the gift of tongues? How does it manifest itself in us? Do others “understand” our gift? Do we worship intelligently and for ourselves or others?**

### **The Effects of False and True Worship (1 Cor. 14:20-25)**

Paul is still dealing with the gift of tongues in this passage. He begs the Corinthians not to be childish. Paul finds an argument in the Old Testament. (*Isaiah 28:9-12*). God through the prophet Isaiah threatens the people with Assyrian conquest because of their disobedience – not listening to the plain language (their native tongue) of the prophet. They will have to listen to the foreign tongues of their conquerors speaking a language they could not understand. So Paul uses the argument that tongues were meant for hard-hearted and disbelieving people, which in the end, was not effective for them.

Paul uses a very practical argument. If any stranger or simple person came into a Christian assembly when all were pouring out a flood of unintelligible sounds, he would think that this was a madhouse and leave quickly. But if the truth of God was being intelligibly proclaimed, the result would be very different.

What happens when the truth of God is intelligently proclaimed:

- *It convicts a man of his sin.*
- *It brings a man under judgment.*
- *It shows a man the secrets of his own heart*
- *It brings a man to his knees before God.*

The test of any act of worship is, “Does it make us feel the presence of God?” When things seem the “darkest” that is when God is closest to us.

**How do we “speak” God’s word to others? Do we speak clearly? Do we scare them away or do we “invite” them to hear God’s word?**

### **Practical Advice (1 Cor. 14:26-33)**

Paul has some “practical” advice. Anyone who has a “gift” should take every chance to execute it, but the Church should not become a competitive disorder. Only two or three should exercise the gift of tongues, but only if there is someone there to interpret. All have the gift of telling the truth, and if someone in the congregation has the conviction that he has received a special message, the man who is speaking must give the other person the opportunity to express it. Do not use the excuse that they cannot stop because the preacher/teacher CAN control his own spirit.

This section of Paul’s letter sheds light on what an early church service was like. There was obviously freedom and informality about it. From this two great questions appear.

- The early Church had no professional ministry. It is true the apostles stood out with special authority, but at this stage there was no professional (ordained?) local ministry. It was open to anyone who had the gift to use it. Has the Church been right or wrong in instituting a professional ministry? It is true that if a man has a message to give his fellow men, no ecclesiastical rules and regulations should be able to stop him from giving it. It is a mistake to think that only the ordained minister can ever bring God’s truth to men.
- There was obviously flexibility about the order of service in the early Church. This informality allowed any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it. It may well be that we have set too much store in dignity and order in today’s day and age, and have become the slaves of the order of service. In the early Church, everyone

came feeling he had both the privilege and the obligation of contributing something to the service. A man did not come with the intention of being a passive listener; he came not only to receive but to give. This had its dangers. There were those in Corinth who were too fond of the sound of their own voices. Many church members think far more of what the Church can do for them than of what they can do for the Church, and are very ready to criticize what is done but unwilling to take any share in doing the Church's work themselves.

**Do we take an "active" part in our worship/Church? Do we serve, or look to be served? If we are active, do we insist that we be heard and our words/worship be followed my way?**

### **Forbidden Innovations (1 Cor. (14:34-40))**

There were innovations threatening in the Church at Corinth that Paul did not like. In effect he asks what right they had to make them. No man completely rises above the background the age in which he grew up, and Paul, in his concept of the place of women in the Church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life.

We already know that in the ancient world the place of women was low. The Jews had an even lower idea of women. It was in a society like this that Paul wrote this passage. In all likelihood what was uppermost in his mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that absolutely nothing must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the least suspicion of immodesty. It would certainly be very wrong to take these words out of their context and make them a universal rule for the Church.

Paul draws to an end. The great rule which he lays down is that a man has received from God whatever gift he may possess, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Church. When one can say, "To God be the glory," then and only then will he use his gifts correctly in the Church and outside it.

**How does our "past" effect our worship in the Church?**

## Jesus' Resurrection and Ours – Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is both one of the greatest and one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament. Not only is it difficult in itself, but it also has given to a phrase in the creed – *the resurrection of the body* - that many people have difficulty in accepting. We need to look at it against its background, and even that troublesome phrase will become a bit clearer and acceptable when we realize what Paul really meant by it. So before we study the chapter, there are certain things we have to keep in mind.

- i. It is important to remember that the Corinthians were denying not the Resurrection of Jesus but the resurrection of the body; and what Paul insisted was that if a man denied the resurrection of the body he therefore denied the Resurrection of Jesus and therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality.
- ii. In any early Christian church there must have been two backgrounds, for in all churches there were Jews and Greeks. First, there was the Jewish background. The Sadducees denied there was any life after death at all. One line of Jewish thought denied both the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. In the Old Testament there is very little hope of anything that can be called life after death. According to the Old Testament belief, all men without distinction, went to Sheol after death – a gray land beneath the world where the dead lived a shadowy existence, without strength, without light, cut off from men and God.
- iii. When we look at the Greek world, we must firmly grasp one thing, which is at the back of the whole chapter. The Greeks had an instinctive fear of death. The Greeks, and that part of the world influenced by Greek thought, did believe in the immortality of the soul. But for them the immortality of the soul involved the complete dissolution of the body. For the Greek immortality lay in getting rid of the body. For him the resurrection of the body was unthinkable. For the Greek immortality lay in getting rid of the body. For him the resurrection of the body was unthinkable.

- iv. Paul's view was quite different. If we begin with one immense fact, the rest will become clear. The Christian belief is that after death individuality will survive that you will still be you, and I will still be I. A second important fact was that for the Greek the body could not be consecrated. In fact it was the source of all evil, the prison-home of the soul. But to the Christian the body is not evil. Jesus, the Son of God, has taken on this human body and therefore it is not contemptible because it has been inhabited by God. To the Christian the life to come involves the total man, body and soul. Paul never said that we would rise with the body with which we died. He insisted that we would have a spiritual body. What he really meant was that a man's *personality* would survive. What he is putting forth is that after death the individual remains. That is what Paul means by the resurrection of the body. Everything of the body and of the soul that is necessary to make a man a person will survive, but, at the same time, all things will be new, and body and spirit will alike be very different from earthly things, for they will be spiritual.

### **The Risen Lord (I Cor. 15:1-11)**

Here Paul is reemphasizing the good news which he first brought to the Corinthians. It was not news which he had invented but which had first been delivered to him, and it was news of a Risen Lord.

In the first two verses, Paul says a very interesting series of things about the good news.

- 1) It was something which the Corinthians had *received*. No man ever invented the gospel for himself; in a sense no one ever discovered it for himself. It is something which he receives within a fellowship.
- 2) It was something in which the Corinthians stood. The first function of the good news was to give a man stability. In a hurting world it enabled him to endure a broken heart or an agonized body and not give in.
- 3) It was something in which they were *being saved*. The Greek word here is a present tense, not past tense. It would be correct to translate it not "in which you have been saved," but, "in which you are being saved." It is not something which is ever completed in this world.



- 4) It was something to which a man had *to hold tenaciously*. Life has its problems to which there seems no solution and its questions to which there seem to be no answer. Life has its dark places where there seems to be nothing to do but hold on. Faith is always a *victory* of the soul which holds on to God.
- 5) It was something which *must not be held haphazardly and at random*. The faith which collapses is the faith which has not thought things out and thought them through. For many faith is a superficial thing. We tend to accept things because we are told to and to possess them merely as secondhand.

In Paul's list of appearances of the Risen Lord, there are two things of special interest.

- a) There is the appearance to *Peter* who denied Him. Here is the wonder of the love and grace of Jesus. Others might have hated Peter forever for his denial, but the desire of Jesus was to set this denying disciple back up on his feet. Love can go no further than to think more of the heartbreak of the man who wronged it than of the hurt that it itself has received.
- b) There is the appearance of *James*. This James is the brother of our Lord. It is clear from the gospel narrative the Jesus' own family did not understand him and were even actively hostile to him (in Mark 3:21 they sought to restrain Jesus because they believed Him to be mad). Here once again we see the amazing grace and love of Christ. He came to bring peace to the troubled soul of the man who had called him mad and who had been His opponent.

Finally, this passage sheds a light on the character of Paul himself. To him it was the most precious thing in the world that Jesus had appeared also to him. That was the turning point and dynamic moment of his life. The final verses of this passage tells us much more about Paul.

- a) They tell us of his complete *humility*. He is the least of the apostles; he has been glorified with an office for which he is not worthy. Paul never claimed to be a self-made man. It was by the grace of God that he was what he was.

- b) They tell us at the same time of *the consciousness of his own worth*. He was aware that he had labored beyond them all. His was not a false modesty. But even at that, he always spoke not of what he had done, but of what God had enabled him to do.
- c) The tell of *his sense of fellowship*. He did not see himself as an isolated phenomenon with a message that was unique. He and the other apostles preached the same gospel.

**How do WE see the Good News of “the Risen Lord?” What is our understanding of “the resurrection of the body?” How do we see our mission as compared to Paul’s view of himself and his mission?**

### **If Christ Is Not Raised (I Cor. 15:12-19)**

Paul attacks the central position of his opponents at Corinth who said “Dead men do not rise again.” Paul’s answer is, “If you take that position it means that Jesus Christ has not risen again; and if that is so, the whole Christian faith is destroyed.”

Why did Paul regard this as so essential? It proves four great facts, which can make all the difference to a man’s view of life here and hereafter.

- a) The Resurrection proves that *truth is stronger than fiction*. The Resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of the truth.
- b) The Resurrection proves *that good is stronger than evil*. If the Resurrection had not occurred, we could never again be certain that goodness is stronger than evil.
- c) The Resurrection proves that *love is stronger than hatred*. Jesus was the love of God incarnate. The Resurrection is the final proof that love is stronger than hate.
- d) The Resurrection proves that *life is stronger than death*. If Jesus had not died and rose again, it would have proved that death could take the best life and break it. The resurrection is the final proof that life is stronger than death.

**How do we see the Resurrection of Jesus as it applies to our own life – physical and spiritual?**

## **The First Fruits of Those That Sleep (I Cor. 15:20-28)**

This too is a difficult passage because it deals with ideas which are strange to us.

Speaks of Christ as “the first-fruits of them that sleep.” Every Jew would recognize this picture. The Passover had more than one significance. It commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. It was also a great harvest festival. The law said “You shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits before the lord, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.” The first-fruits were a sign of the harvest to come; and the Resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the resurrection of all believers which was to come, just as the new barley could not be used until the first fruits had been offered, so the new harvest of life could not come until Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Paul goes on to use another Jewish idea. Because of *Genesis 3:1-19* the Jews believed that all men literally sinned in Adam, he (the Jews) held that all men sinned in Adam and the whole world of men was in him and when he sinned all sinned.

This seems like a strange idea to us and certainly unfair. But that was the Jewish belief. All had sinned in Adam, therefore all were under the penalty of death. With the coming of Christ that chain was broken. Christ was sinless and conquered death. Just as all men sinned in Adam, so all men escape from sin in Christ. Our unity with Christ is just as real as our unity with Adam and this destroy us the evil effect of the old.

So we get two contrasting sets of facts. First, there is Adam – sin – death. Second, there is Christ – goodness – life. And just as we were all involved in the sin of him who was first created, we are all involved in the victory of him who re-created mankind. Whatever else is doubtful, it is true that with Jesus Christ a new power came into the world to liberate men from sin and death.

Verses 24-28 are strange to us. We are used to thinking of the Father and the Son are equal. But Paul deliberately subordinates the Son to the Father. What he is thinking of is this. Using human terms and

analogies, God gave to Jesus a task to do, to defeat sin and death and to liberate man. The day will come when that task will be fully and finally accomplished, and then, to put it in pictorial terms, the Son will return to the Father like a victor coming home and the triumph of God will be complete. It is not a case of the Son being subject to the Father as a slave or servant to a master. It was a case of one who, having accomplished the work that was given him to do, returns with the glory of complete obedience as a crown. As God sent forth his Son to redeem the world, so in the end he will receive back a world redeemed; and then there will be nothing in heaven or earth outside his love and power.

**Do we consider these concepts strange? Do we blame our family, forefathers etc. for our faults and failures? Why do we have “baptism?” What are our thoughts as far as “life” and/or “redemption?”**

### **If There Is No Resurrection (I Cor. 15:29-34)**

Once again, this passage begins with a difficult section – “*being baptized for the dead.*” The Greek word for the preposition “for” has two meanings. When used of Place, it means *above* or *over*. More commonly when used of persons or things it means *instead of* or *on behalf of*. With these two meanings, let us look at some of the ways this phrase has been understood.

- 1) Regarding *over* or *above* some scholars suggest it refers to those *who get themselves baptized over the graves of the martyrs*. At Paul’s time of writing, the time of martyrs had not come.
- 2) It is more natural to take it in the sense of *instead of* or *on behalf of*. It is suggested that it refers to those *who get themselves baptized in order to fill up the vacant places in the Church which the dead have left*.
- 3) The phrase means those *who get themselves baptized out of respect for and affection for the dead*. Many have given their lives to Christ because of the unseen influence of one who has passed over to the other side.

4) These are good but in the end we think it can refer to one custom, which has correctly passed out of Church practice altogether. The custom sprang from a superstitious view of baptism, that, without it, a person was necessarily excluded from heaven. Paul is not condoning nor condemning

From that he goes on to one of the great motives of the Christian life. In effect he is asking "Why should a Christian accept the of the Christian life if it is all to go for nothing." The man who thinks that this life is all, and that there is nothing to follow it, may well say, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die."

Take away the thought of a life to come and this life loses its values. Take away the idea that this life is a preparation for a greater life to follow and the bonds of honor and morality are lost.

So Paul insists that the Corinthians must not associate with those who say that there is no resurrection; for this would be to risk an infection which can pollute life.

**How do we see our baptism? How do we see our life here and now? We do look forward to the life hereafter.**

### **The Physical and the Spiritual (I Cor. 15:35-49)**

Through all this, we must remember Paul is talking about things that no one really know anything about. He is talking not about verifiable facts, but about matters of faith. He is trying to express the inexpressible and to describe the indescribable with human ideas and human words which is all he has to work with.

- He takes the analogy of the seed which is put in the ground and dies, but in due time it rises again; and does so with a very different kind of body from that with which it was sown. So our earthly bodies will dissolve (die); they will rise again in a very different form; but it is the same person who rises. Dissolved by death, changed by resurrection, it is still we who exist/
- In the world, even as we know it, there is not one kind of body; each part of creation has its own. God gives to each created thin a body

suitable for its part in creation. If this is true, it is only to be expected that He will give us a body fit for the resurrection life.

- In life there is a development. Adam was made from the dust of the earth. But Jesus is more than a man made from dust. He is the incarnation of the very Spirit of God. Now under the old way of life, we were one with Adam, sharing his sin, his death and having his body; but, under the new way of life, we are one with Christ and we shall share his life and his being. It is true that we have a physical body to begin with, but it is also true that one day we shall have a spiritual body.

All through here Paul has maintained a reverent and wise reticence as to what that body will be like; it will be spiritual, it will be such as God knows that we need and we will be like Christ. In verses 42-44 Paul draws four contrasts which shed light on our future state.

- 1) The present body is corruptible; the future body will be incorruptible.
- 2) The present body is in dishonor; the future body will be in glory.
- 3) The present body is in weakness; the future body will be in power.
- 4) The present body is a natural body; the future body will be a spiritual body.

**Let us discuss how we see our bodies today here and now and how do we see ourselves in the hereafter? What do we look for after we pass from this life?**

### **The Conquest of Death (I Cor. 15:50-58)**

Once again we must read this as we would read great poetry, rather than as we would a scientific treatise. The argument follows a series of steps until it reaches its climax.

- i. Paul insists that, as we are, we are not fit to inherit the Kingdom of God. We may be equipped to go on with this life – in this world – but not for life in the world to come. A man always needs to be changed to enter into a higher grade of life; and Paul insists that before we can enter the Kingdom of God we must be changed.

- ii. He insists that this extreme change is going to come in his own lifetime. In this he was wrong, but he looked to that change coming when Jesus came again.
- iii. Paul then goes on triumphantly to declare that no man need fear that change. The fear of death has always haunted men. He declared that the fear of death was so natural to man that all life was one long effort not to think about it.

Why do we fear death? Partly because we fear the unknown. But even more so it comes from the sense of sin. If a man felt that he could meet God easily, then to die would only be, as Peter Pan said, a great adventure. But where does the sense of sin come from? It comes from a sense of being under the law. So long as a man sees in God only the law of righteousness, he must see himself as a criminal before the bar with no hope of acquittal. But this is exactly what Jesus came to abolish. He came to tell us that God is not law, but love, that the centre of God's being is not legalism but grace, that we go out, not to a judge, but to a father who waits for his children to come home. Because of that Jesus gave us the victory over death, its fear is gone in the wonder of God's love.

- iv. Finally,. At the end of the chapter, Paul does what he always does – suddenly the theology becomes a challenge; suddenly the speculations become intensely practical; suddenly the sweep of the mind becomes the demand for action. He ends by saying, “If you have all that glory to look forward to, then keep yourself steadfast in God's faith and service, for if you do, all your effort will not be in vain.”

**Do we fear death? Do we have the faith and hope of the life to come with Christ? What is our vision of life after death?**

## Practical Plans (I Cor. 16:1-12)

There is nothing more typical of Paul than the abrupt change between chapter 15 - where he has been walking in the loftiest realms of thought and theology and discussing the life of the world to come - and chapter 16 – which deals with the most practical things in the most practical way and is concerned with the everyday life of this world and the administration of the church. There is no reach of thought too high for Paul to scale and no practical detail of administration too small for him to remember. There might be times when his head was in the clouds but his feet were always planted firmly on the solid earth.

He begins by dealing with the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem which was an undertaking very dear to Paul's heart. The synagogue had officials whose duty it was to collect from those who had and to share out to those who had not., and Paul did not want the Christian Church to be behind the Jewish and the heathen world in generosity.

But to him this collection for the poor at Jerusalem meant more than that.

1) It was a way of demonstrating the unity of the Church, of teaching ALL Christians (scattered throughout the world) that they were not members of a *congregation* only, but members of a Church, each part of which had obligations to the rest. 2) It was a way of putting into effect the practical teaching of Christianity. Paul provides his converts with an opportunity of translating into action the teaching of Christ on the virtue of love.

It has been pointed out that, in different letter and speeches, Paul uses nine different words to describe this "collection."

- 1) Here he calls it a *logia* which means *an extra collection*, which was the opposite of a tax which a man had to pay; it was an extra piece of giving.
- 2) Sometimes he calls it a *charis* (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:4), which describes *a free gift freely given*, something given in the overflowing love of a man's heart, however small it be. Paul does



not lay down a flat rate which each one must give, but they must give as their prosperity demands.

- 3) Sometimes he uses the word *koinonia* (1 Cor. 8:4; 9:13) which means *fellowship* and the essence of fellowship is *sharing*.
- 4) Sometimes he uses the word *diakonia* (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13) which means practical Christian service – from which we get our word *deacon*. Sometimes the limitations of life keep us from giving personal service and that our money contributions can go where we cannot go.
- 5) Once he uses the word *hadrotēs*, which means *abundance* (2 Cor. 8:20) where he speaks of the envoys of the Church who accompany him to guarantee that he does not misuse the *abundance* that has been entrusted to him. Paul did not seek abundance for himself but was content with what he could earn with the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow.
- 6) Sometimes he uses the word *eulogia* (2 Cor. 9:5) which in this case means *bounty*. The gift is given as a bleak and unavoidable duty, given with a grudge. All true giving is a bounty which we are supremely glad to give.
- 7) Sometimes he uses the word *leitourgia* (2 Cor. 9:12), which in Greek was originally a service of the state voluntarily accepted. Christian giving is something which should be volunteered. It should be accepted as a privilege to help in some way the household of God.
- 8) Once he speaks of this collection as *eleemosyne* (Acts 24:17). That is the Greek word for *alms*.
- 9) Lastly he uses the word *prosphora* (Acts 24:17) which is the word for *an offering and a sacrifice*. In the real sense that which is given to a man in need is a sacrifice to God. The best of all sacrifices to him, after the sacrifice of the penitent heart, is kindness shown to one of his children in trouble.

At the end of this section Paul commends two of his helpers. The first is *Timothy* who was a young man. Paul's commendation is that

they are to respect Timothy not for his own sake, but for the sake of the work he was doing. It is not the man who glorifies the work but the work which glorifies the man. The second is *Apollos* who emerges from this passage as a man of great wisdom and whom the Corinthian party wanted to be attached to his (Apollos') name. He was wise enough to know that, when a Church is torn with party politics, there is a time when it is wiser to stay away.

**How do we see our "giving?" Which one(s) of the 9 usages do we associate with? How do we see and or help those who are not members of Advent? How can we help – do more – in our own situations?**

### **Closing Words and Greetings (I Cor. 16:13:21)**

This is an interesting passage because of its practical nature and shedding light on the day to day life of the early Church.

Paul begins with a series of five imperatives (commands). The first four have a military background and are like a commander's orders to his soldiers. Then the metaphor changes. Whatever the Christian soldier be to those persons and things which threaten the Christian faith from the outside, to those within the Church he must be a comrade, friend and a lover. In the Christian life there must be the courage which will never retreat and the love which will never fail.

To Paul while in Ephesus, there had come Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and they brought him first-hand information which filled in the gaps in his knowledge of what was happening at Corinth. His commendation of Stephanas is interesting because he had put himself in the service of the Church. A man became a leader of the Church, not so much by man-made appointment, but by the fact that his life and work marked him out as one whom all must respect.

Verses 19 and 20 are a series of greetings sent from Aquila and Priscilla – man and wife – who move across the background of Paul's letters and the Book of Acts. They were Jews, and like Paul, were tent-makers. They found their way to Corinth where Paul first met them (Acts 18:2). From Corinth they found their way to Ephesus from which now Paul sends their greetings to their old friends in Corinth.

There is one great thing about these two. In those early days there were no church buildings, in fact it was not until the third century that we first hear about a church building at all. The little congregations met in private homes. Wherever Aquila and Priscilla went, their home became a church. When he writes from Ephesus, he sends greetings from them and from the church that is in their house. The Christian “wayfarers” found an inn of peace where Aquila and Priscilla lived. God grant to us to make our homes like that!

“Greet each other with a holy kiss,” writes Paul. The kiss of peace was a lovely custom of the early Church. It was apparently given at the end of the prayers and just before the congregation received the sacrament. It was a sign and symbol that they sat at the table of love, joined together in perfect love. This kiss (not given promiscuously) eventually faded and came to be called simply “The Peace.”

And so at the end, Paul sends his own autograph greeting on the last page of the letter which some secretary had take down for him. He warns them against anyone who does not love Christ. And then he writes in Aramaic the phrase “*Maran atha*,” which probably meant “The Lord is at hand.” It is strange to see an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek church. It probably had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand.

Two last things Paul sends to the folk at Corinth – the grace of Christ and his own love. He could have ended with a warning or a rebuke in righteous anger, but his last word is love.

**Do we recommend other members of our “little church” to others? What can we do to open our homes and hearts to others to see Christ’s love?**

**The End of First Corinthians.**