

New Testament Studies

Letters to the Corinthians *(RVS Notes)*

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Letters to the Corinthians

[What follows relates to the background that is common to both 1 & 2 Corinthians. The unique aspects of each book are treated in separate introductions.]

General Introduction—The ancient city of Corinth was a key center of Greece. It had a reputation for vulgar materialism and gross immorality. Plato, in the *Republic*, referred to prostitutes as “Corinthians girls” and the playwright Aristophanes coined the verb “*korinthiazomai*” to refer to fornication. Much of the vice and wealth of Corinth was centered around the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and the more than one thousand prostitutes (called *hieroduolai*) dedicated to her service.

In 146 BC, Corinth was destroyed by the Romans as they completed their subjugation of Greece. For a hundred years, the site lay dormant until its favorable location caught the eye of Julius Caesar who re-founded the city in 46 BC. His successor, the Emperor Augustus, made it the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

In Paul’s day, Corinth was regaining her former prominence as a commercial and political center. Located on a narrow isthmus between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas connecting the Peloponnesian Peninsula with northern Greece, Corinth was a natural seat of commerce and business. Because of her two seaports, Corinth was a bustling center of trade, and many small ships were rolled or dragged across the Corinthian isthmus to avoid the dangerous voyage around southern Greece. Despite numerous attempts, a canal was not successfully cut through the isthmus until 1893.

In addition, Corinth made a comeback as a center of entertainment, vice, and corruption. The temple of Aphrodite once again did a booming “sacred” business, and pleasure-seekers came from everywhere to spend their money on a holiday from morality. Athletics was also a part of the entertainment mix; the Corinthian games ranked second only to the Olympics in competitive caliber.

Author and Occasion—Paul established the Corinthian church during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Persecution in Macedonia drove him south to Athens (Acts 17) and then to Corinth. He made tents with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3) and reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue. When Silas and Timothy joined him (probably with a financial gift from Philippi, see 2 Cor. 11:8-9; Phil 4:15), Paul devoted himself full-time to the Gospel, staying at Corinth for a year and a half. From there he departed to strengthen the disciples in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23).

1-2 Corinthian correspondence—A summary of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence is as follows:

- Paul writes a letter (now lost) in which he instructs the Corinthian church to separate from professing Christians who live immorally (1 Cor. 5:9).
- Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus during his third missionary journey to deal with a variety of problems in the church.
- Paul makes a short “painful” visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) in an unsuccessful attempt to straighten out some problems in the church.
- Paul (now back in Ephesus) writes another lost letter (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 9-10; 7:8) out of deep distress and sorrow in which he commanded the Corinthians to discipline his leading opponents in the church. Titus bore this letter and was entrusted with this mission.
- Paul leaves Ephesus anxiously awaiting word from Titus, going first to Troas and then to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13).

- Titus finally arrives with the good news that the majority of the Corinthians had responded obediently to Paul's sorrowful letter and had submitted to his authority (2 Cor. 7:5-7).
- Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in response to Titus' favorable report and sends it by Titus and another brother (2 Cor. 8:16ff).

So, the upshot for Bible students is that Paul probably wrote four letters to the Corinthians, in several ways included in 1-2 Corinthians:

- The "previous letter" that may be contained in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1.
- 1 Corinthians written in reply to reports from Chloe's people and of the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus and dispatched with Timothy.
- The severe letter, contained in 2 Corinthians 10-13 written after Paul's personal visit to address the situation there that was a complete failure. This was dispatched with Titus.
- 2 Corinthians 1-9, the reconciliation letter probably written from Philippi, when an anxious Paul met Titus and received the news that the situation was in hand.

An approximate timeline helps in following the argument in the Corinthian correspondence:

- 50-52—Paul founds/establishes the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-18).
- 53-56—Paul establishes the church at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-22).
- 54—Paul hears about immorality at Corinth and writes a brief letter (1 Cor. 5:9).
- 54—Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11) and Stephanas and friends (1 Cor. 16:17) visit Paul in Ephesus. Letter with queries brought (1 Cor. 7:1).
- 55—Paul writes 1 Corinthians (sends it with Stephanas and friends). This letter rectified several abuses, including litigation among the Corinthians and abuses at the Lord's Table.
- 55—Paul hears of further problems in Corinth (caused by Jewish teachers arriving from Palestine?) and pays a brief painful visit to the church (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:2). Around this time, Paul or his representative is insulted by the anti-Pauline clique at Corinth.
- 55—Paul sends a third letter to Corinth, called the severe letter (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 9; 7:8, 12). Titus carries it and is to organize the collection for Jerusalem church at Corinth (2 Cor. 8:6). Titus to meet Paul at Troas or somewhere in Macedonia.
- 56—Paul leaves Ephesus and passes up an evangelistic opportunity at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12-13).
- 56—Paul goes to Macedonia and begins evangelistic work there (Acts 20:1-2; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5).
- 56—Titus meets Paul in Macedonia (Philippi or Thessalonica?) and reports his successful visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6-16).
- 56—Paul writes 2 Corinthians 1-9. After hearing of additional issues, he adds 2 Corinthians 10-13 and then sends the entire letter to Corinth with Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-24).
- 56—Paul arrives at Corinth and spends the winter there (Acts 20:3).

1 Corinthians—Godly Wisdom and Its Social Application

Introduction—The Corinthians were Paul’s problem children. This book is an index of the hot issues of that day: church divisions, immorality in community, lawsuits among believers, marriage questions, handling questionable practices upon which believers disagree, the role of women in community, abuses of the Lord’s table, the exercise of spiritual gifts, and doctrinal confusion concerning the Resurrection. It was a potpourri of controversy like our time.

Corinthian society was taken up with social status. The conflicts described in the letter flow from conflicts of social status. The intellectual and spiritual issues are very real but very much enhanced by the fact that people just were not getting along. The status folks in the Corinthian community were impressed with rhetorical skill and philosophical wisdom. Their status was based on birth and wealth and looked down on manual labor and the brethren who were less well off. Lofty philosophical ideals may have led to the justification of benign attitudes towards sexual offenses, towards eating idol meats, towards views that belittled physicality. In other words, cultural divides were framing church relationships and were negating the unity they had in Christ and a ministry empowered by the Spirit that edified the entire body of Christ.

The Corinthian church was defiled, its members were guilty of sexual immorality, of suing each other at law, of using the grace of God to excuse worldly living. It was a divided church with at least four distinct groups competing for leadership, and instead of glorifying God they were hindering the progress of the Gospel. They reflected the city in which they lived. Corinth was a morally polluted place, populated by proud people who reflected the vices of their age. When you are a proud person, depending on human wisdom, adopting the lifestyle of the world, you are going to have spiritual problems.

This letter offers more insight into the problems of a pioneer church than perhaps any other New Testament book. Each problem is met by applying a spiritual principle rather than by recommending a psychological expedient. For schism, the remedy is spiritual maturity (3:1-9); for fornication, church discipline until the offender repents and is restored (5:1-13); for litigation, arbitration by others within the Christian community (6:1-11). Repeatedly, Paul takes practical problems and applies spiritual principles to arrive at concrete recommendations.

Author and Occasion—Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in the mid-50s. Two events prompted the writing of the epistle: (1) receipt of oral reports from Chloe’s household relating to quarrels among the Corinthians regarding various leaders (1:11); and (2) the coming of a delegation from the Corinthians (16:17 identifies Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus as the church representatives) with an offering and a letter asking for Paul’s guidance on a number of issues (see 7:1, 25; 8:1; 11:2; 12:1; 15:1; 16:1).

Purpose—The central theme of 1 Corinthians has been described by one author as “the doctrine of the cross in its social application”. The Corinthians, convinced of their own wisdom and their own ability to “have it all” right then, had developed a cross-voiding spirit. Theirs was the problem of premature exaltation, thinking that the crown of the Christian life could come without a cross.

Paul applies the theology of the cross in a twofold manner: (1) the first six chapters deal with his correction of problems brought to his attention by Chloe’s servants; (2) the last ten chapters address issues raised by the church and presented to Paul by their delegation to Ephesus.

Guiding Concepts

Enthusiasm—The Corinthians were overly attracted by outward impressions. Dynamic leaders,

mesmerizing speakers (3:1-4:21) and flashy, spectacular gifting (12:1-14:40) held their interest and fascination. They were not drawn to notions of dying to themselves or to voluntarily giving up their rights for the benefit of others (6:1-11; 8:1-11:1). They were opting for self-expression (11:2-16; 12:1 et seq.) rather than order and decorum. In all of this, the Corinthians were grasping for a premature sense of exaltation and were forgetting the cross of Christ. The full realization of the Kingdom involves our understanding that just as the cross came before the crown in the ministry of our Lord, so too with His followers. The cross defined the direction of our Lord's earthly ministry and defines our spiritual experience this side of glory.

Wisdom and knowledge—The opening chapters of this book excoriate fleshly wisdom and knowledge. The Corinthians fancied themselves intellectuals and were drawn to a worldly-denying, flesh-denying, secret knowledge that claimed to be redemptive. Many have seen pre-Gnostic elements in the attitudes of the Corinthians. Full-blown Gnosticism was a heresy that besieged the church in the second century, which was built on two principles:

- **Supremacy of knowledge**—The movement got its name from the Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*). Gnostics believed that knowledge itself was redemptive and that truly spiritual people have access to spiritual knowledge that regular, unenlightened people did not have. This belief invariably led to arrogance and elitism among the “enlightened ones.”
- **Matter does not matter**—Gnostics were strict dualists, locating goodness in spirit and evil in matter. They believed that the body, being matter, was inherently evil. The practical ramifications of this led to two entirely different errors. One was that of aestheticism where the body was mistreated or ignored in the pursuit of “spiritual” endeavors. The second error, and the one commonly indulged in, was license. Since matter was not spirit and had no impact on the spirit world, what you did with your matter did not matter. The improper view of the body may have been behind excesses such as that condemned in 1 Corinthians 5, the need for instruction in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, the questions concerning marriage and virginity in 1 Corinthians 7, and the doctrinal problems concerning the physical resurrection of the body discussed in 1 Corinthians 15.

Personality cults—The Corinthians were hero-worshippers. Discussion of the proper view of leadership in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:21 is as apropos in our day as it was in Paul's.

Spiritual gifts—Given the Corinthians' fascination with flash and appearance, their attraction to the “showy” spiritual gifts was a natural. This epistle contains a very substantial development of the presence and proper exercise of spiritual gifting in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12-14).

Summary Outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)**
 - A. Salutation (1:1-3)
 - B. Thanksgiving for the Corinthians (1:4-9)
- II. Divisions in the Church (1:10-4:21)**
 - A. Divisions exalting human leaders (1:10-17)
 - B. Wisdom of God: Preaching Christ crucified (1:18-2:16)
 - 1. Christ, the power and wisdom of God (1:18-31)
 - 2. Preaching Christ in the power of the Spirit (2:1-5)
 - 3. Wisdom revealed by the Spirit (2:6-16)
 - C. Leadership in perspective (3:1-4:21)

1. Spiritual immaturity and divisiveness (3:1-9)
2. Building on Christ, the foundation (3:10-17)
3. Wisdom and foolishness (3:16-23)
4. Faithfulness and judgment (4:1-5)
5. Apostolic humility and Corinthian pride (4:6-13)
6. Fatherly rebuke or affirmation: Challenge to be God's humble servants (4:14-21)

III. Moral Laxness in Community (5:1-6:20)

- A. Immorality in community (5:1-13)
- B. Lawsuits among believers (6:1-11)
- C. Physical purity: Sanctity of the body (6:12-20)

IV. Celibacy, Marriage, and Purity (7:1-40)

- A. Celibacy and marriage (7:1-7)
- B. Advice to believers in various situations (7:8-16)
- C. Stay in the situation in which you were called (7:17-24)
- D. Concerning unmarried women (7:25-38)
- E. Widows and remarriage (7:39-40)

V. Idol Meats Controversy and Christian Liberty (8:1-11:1)

- A. Meat sacrificed to idols and Christian liberty (8:1-13)
- B. Restricted use of liberty: Paul's example (9:1-27)
 1. Paul's apostolic rights (9:1-14)
 2. Paul voluntarily forgoes his rights (9:15-27)
- C. Improper and proper use of liberty (10:1-40)
 1. Warning from Israel's history (10:1-13)
 2. Idol feasts and the Lord's Supper: Beware of the venue (10:14-22)
 3. Believer's freedom: Do all for the glory of God (10:23-11:1)

VI. Issues Relating to Public Worship (11:2-14:40)

- A. Women's head coverings: Women's place in public worship (11:2-16)
- B. Factions at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- C. Use and abuse of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40)
 1. Spirit as source of spiritual gifts (12:1-11)
 2. Unity and diversity of the gifting of the body of Christ (12:12-26)
 3. Offices and gifts in the church (12:27-31a)
 4. Primacy of love (12:31b-13:13)
 5. Prophecy and tongues: Priority of intelligibility and edification of others (14:1-40)

VII. Resurrection of Christ and the Believer (15:1-58)

- A. Resurrection of the Lord Jesus (15:1-11)
- B. Consequences if no resurrection (15:12-19)
- C. Christ as guarantee of our resurrections (15:20-28)
- D. Implications of denying the resurrection (15:29-34)
- E. Nature of the resurrected body (15:35-49)
- F. Change must come; Victory over death (15:50-58)

VIII. Relief Mission; Travel Plans; Final Greetings (16:1-24)

- A. Jerusalem relief mission (16:1-4)
- B. Travel plans (16:5-18)
- C. Final greetings (16:19-24)

1 Corinthians Notes: Godly Wisdom and Its Social Application

I. Introduction (1:1-9) — Paul's letters to the Corinthians follow the usual pattern of his letters and of ancient letters generally:

- Greetings
- Prayer
- Thanksgiving
- Main context
- Special salutations and personal greetings.

In this rather standard greeting and prayer, Paul says that the Corinthians were set apart by God (1:1-3), enriched by God's grace (1:4-6), expecting the return of the Lord Jesus (1:7), and were to be dependent on God's faithfulness (1:8-9).

A. Salutation (1:1-3)—Paul stresses his apostolic authority because it was being challenged (1:12; 9:1ff). He mentions Sosthenes, who may have been Paul's amanuensis or a colleague who may have been well known to the Corinthian congregation and concurred with the message of the letter. He describes the Corinthians as sanctified in Christ, called to be His set apart and devoted followers, and called together in the company of all those who name the Lord Jesus.

1:3—This verse is exactly like Romans 1:7b; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; and Philemon 1:3. They were saved by the redeeming grace of God and that redemption purchased for them peace of and with God.

B. Thanksgiving for the Corinthians (1:4-9) Thanksgiving for the recipients was a normal part of ancient letters and often introduced themes later to be developed. Here, Paul speaks of speech and rhetoric, knowledge and wisdom, spiritual gifts and being strong in faith until the coming of the Lord. All these ideas will play in the content of the letter that follows. Note the apostle's repetition of the name of the Lord Jesus in this segment—eight times in nine verses (1:4, 6, 7-9).

1:7-9—Is Paul speaking of God's grace actively counteracting the sins and faults so prevalent in the Corinthian congregation? Whatever way one takes 1:7-8, Paul assures the Corinthians of God's faithfulness in 1:9.

II. Divisions in the Church (1:10-4:21)—In this section of the text, Paul deals with divisions in the church due to exalting human leaders (1:10-17), the cross as the wisdom of God, albeit foolishness to the world, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1:18-25), how few of them were called from the social elites of the age (1:26-31), how Paul's own preaching was in the power of the Spirit and not in worldly wise and articulate speech (2:1-5), and how spiritual things were conveyed by the Spirit to spiritual people (2:6-16). He then returns to the Corinthians dividing over leaders (3:1-9), how there is only one sure foundation, the Lord Jesus, and that leaders must build on that the foundation (3:10-15), wisdom and foolishness on display (3:16-22), proper judgment that characterized Corinthian attitudes (4:1-5), apostolic humility and Corinthian pride (4:6-13), and that as a father in the faith, he wanted to visit in joyful reunion and not in disciplinary sternness (4:14-21).

A. Divisions exalting human leaders (1:10-17)—The context reveals that the Corinthians were dividing among themselves, favoring specific teachers based on rhetorical or philosophical skills. The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians is a letter of admonition to correct these divisions and the spirit that motivated them. In this section, Paul charges them to sustain a united testimony and adds a plea for

inner harmony among them.

The word used for “divisions” conveys the idea of serious dissensions that were rending the church apart. In the first three centuries of Christianity, believers met primarily in homes of other believers, usually wealthy ones with larger homes. This meant that the Corinthian church was really several house churches, essentially small groups, which rarely met as a whole congregation. This situation could easily accentuate the differences between them.

1:11-12—The Corinthians were marking out turf in terms of following different teachers—Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and the truly spiritual “Christ people”. This is not an unusual situation. The comparison game abounded then and now. Go to any church where two preachers work side by side, or in quick succession, and you will find people comparing them. What they were doing in the church was what they watched the world doing. Traveling teachers, called sophists, abounded in ancient Greece and were keen on making followers for themselves and depending on those followers for their support. Their followers often quarreled about which teacher was “the best.” The Corinthians were bringing the worldly comparison game into the church and playing off the teachers against one another.

1:13—Paul asks three key questions:

- Is Christ divided? There were quarrels and contentions among various groups forming around favorite human leaders. There is something in human nature that enjoys following human leaders and putting down other ones. The Corinthians were guilty of this.
- Were you baptized in the name of Paul (1:13b-17)? Paul is not trying to minimize baptism, but to put it in its proper perspective. The Corinthians were making too much of the practice and even more from the officiant of it.
- Was Paul crucified for you? This will lead directly to the following passage exalting the cross of the Lord Jesus as the wisdom and power of God, despite the earthly wisdom that belittled it.

1:14-16—Paul reflects on those he has baptized. The Corinthian believers had no reason to depend on the efficacy of baptism by him as a sanctifying grace. Paul’s essential work was preaching the Gospel. Administration of baptism was of secondary importance.

B. Wisdom of God: Preaching Christ crucified (1:18-2:16)—In this section, Paul emphasizes that salvation is in Christ and not attained by human wisdom. He preached Christ crucified in the power of the Spirit and illumined by the Spirit.

1. Christ, the power and wisdom of God (1:18-31)—The straightforward presentation of the message of the cross had certain constant elements:

- The promised time of God has come;
- A summary of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus;
- That this message was a fulfillment of prophecy;
- The assertion that Jesus would come again;
- An invitation to repent and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1:18-25—Paul contrasts the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world. His basic point is that the message about Messiah and the cross carries a power quite different than that of human rhetoric and eloquence. Paul came into a pagan city that prided itself on its intellectual and cultural life. His message was that of the Lord Jesus, crucified as a common criminal by the Roman authorities, but was raised from the dead by God, and was now Lord of all, summoning people to faithful obedience. He knew that both Jew and Greek, for several reasons, would think this message was crazy. Indeed, the cross had to do its own work by the power of the Spirit. Simply telling the story released power of quite a different sort from any power that human speech could have. God’s folly is wiser than human

wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human power.

1:19—Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14 to show that the wisdom of those living by human tradition rather than by God's revelation would perish.

1:21-25—The wise man (alluding to Greek speculative thinkers), the scholar or teacher of the law (Jewish religious professionals), and the philosopher of the age (the age's rationalists) are specified, and Paul indicates that they do not "get it". The Jews want miraculous signs and the Greeks desire heady speculative wisdom, but he preached Christ crucified, a stumbling block to both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews desired a political deliverance and the Greeks a moral philosophical standard. The cross looked foolhardy to both. However, lifting high the cross was divine wisdom and the power of the gospel.

1:26-31—This passage is about inverted status. Paul is telling them that they were a bunch of nobodies who became somebodies by the call of God in the preaching of the gospel. Paul speaks of the circumstances in which God's people were called. Roman social status was based on noble birth and/or wealth. By either criterion, most of the Corinthians did not rate because they were primarily from the lower ranks of society. Few of them were from the intellectual class and fewer still from the political powerful and upper classes of society. Celsus, an early pagan critic of Christianity, mocked Christianity's appeal to common people.

In this passage, Paul notes how the call of God in Christ inverted society's assured social status. In Christ Jesus, the wisdom of God, foolishness to the world, had become for them a right relationship with Almighty God, a set apart status to the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and the expectation of a full and complete redemption. Paul is saying that God used the humble things to shame the proud, the things that were not to shame the folks that thought they were the shoguns of the culture. None of the Corinthians had anything to boast about.

1:30—They were in Christ who had become for them righteousness, taking sin on Himself and saving His people from its sorrowful penalty. He had become for them, sanctification, a people set apart to God, making possible their growth in grace, and saving them from the power of sin. He had become for them redemption, deliverance from the ravages of sin and the presence of sin in a wonderful inheritance with Him in glory.

2. Preaching Christ in the power of the Spirit (2:1-5)—Paul came to Corinth in the power of the Holy Spirit and simply preached the Lord Jesus and the efficacy of His death and Resurrection. He did not depend on eloquent oratory or philosophical speculation. Though he came in an unostentatious way, he came in Spirit power. He wanted the Corinthians' faith not to be superficial with a misdirected reliance upon human wisdom, but a real faith generated by the Lord's wisdom and power.

All the secrets of God had been unveiled in the Lord Jesus. However, nobody in Corinth or in the ancient world would have thought to look to a crucified Jew in a remote outpost of the Empire, in a place outside of a rebellious city in a dusty province in Palestine, for the secret to life and a relationship with God. No, it was not to human rhetoric or eloquence that Paul looked to in his proclamation. The truth of the gospel carried its own power, and Paul was happy to keep it that way.

Paul is disapproving of mere rhetoric here. His extensive knowledge and understanding of rhetorical forms were on display in this letter as well as his other letters. He is not opposing skillful speech, but only such speech for its own sake.

3. Wisdom revealed by the Spirit (2:6-16)—It is not that there is no wisdom to proclaim. However, it is a wisdom, deep, rich, and many-sided, but only discernible by those prepared to receive it, who are sufficiently grown-up in spiritual discernment. There is a new creation, a new Kingdom

coming, a new age dawning. However, most do not realize this and persist in old ways of thinking and doing. The gospel in its new wisdom simply does not fit in the old wineskins. How do people know this new wisdom? By the Spirit poured out on believers when they received new life by faith. That does not mean that believers know everything about God. It does mean that they have free access to the mind of God.

2:6-9—Paul contrasts the temporal wisdom of the age with God’s eternal wisdom. In the early church there were two kinds of instruction: proclamation or *kerygma*, a herald’s announcement for a king, and teaching or *didache*, an explanation of the facts and message already announced. Paul preached a secret wisdom from God (2:7) he describes as *musterion*, that is something whose meaning is hidden from those who have not been initiated but clear to those called by God and illumined by the Spirit.

2:9—Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4 to underline the beauty and promise of the Lord’s redemptive mercy. The immediate context related to Israel in captivity awaiting God’s deliverance. God did have plans for His people, and they did not need to be afraid (see Jer. 29:11). Paul applies this principle to the church. Our future is secure.

2:10-16—Paul says that the only person who can truly help us know God is the Spirit of God. Even then not everyone can understand spiritual things. Paul speaks of people without the Spirit (*psuchikos*). They are those who live as if there is nothing beyond physical life, no needs other than material needs, whose values are physical and material. *Pneumatikos* are people sensitive to the Spirit and whose lives are guided by the Spirit.

Our salvation encompasses the Father’s electing grace, the Son’s loving sacrifice, and the Spirit’s ministry of conviction and regeneration. This passage unveils four different ministries of the Holy Spirit. He searches us (2:10-11), indwells us (2:12), teaches and guides us into the truth (2:13), and matures us in faith (2:14-16). The Corinthians were so wrapped up in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that they were neglecting the Spirit’s basic ministries.

2:10-13—Only the Spirit can reveal the Lord’s wisdom and truth to humanity. Indeed, the purpose of the Spirit’s work in revelation and illumination is that God’s people can understand the spiritual truth freely given to us.

2:14-16—Unregenerate humanity, governed only by the soulish nature, does not accept enlightenment by the Spirit. The regenerate, who are guided by the Spirit, draw discerning conclusions concerning spiritual truth and its application to their lives. Verse 16, proclaiming that we have the mind of Christ, seems to imply that God’s people can understand spiritual truth in a way like the Lord Jesus. They can look at life from the perspective of the Lord Jesus with His values and desires in mind.

C. Leadership in perspective (3:1-4:21)—Chapter 3 relates to the Corinthians’ lack of spiritual discernment, correcting their false estimates of, and divisions over, leaders. This was due to their spiritual immaturity and divisive spirit (3:1-9). Paul then speaks of a proper work of the Lord which builds on the foundation of the Lord Jesus (3:10-17) with complete dependence on God, and not on other people (3:18-23). He uses three pictures of the local church in this chapter, that of a family to mature (3:1-4), a field to grow to harvest (3:5-9), and a temple to become a sacramental people (3:9-23). In chapter 4, the discussion of faithful ministry continues. Paul spells out what faithful service looks like (4:1-5), contrasts himself and Apollos with the proud Corinthians (4:6-13), before concluding with a challenge for the Corinthians to become God’s humble servants (4:14-21).

1. Spiritual immaturity and divisiveness (3:1-9)—With their partisan celebrity sects the Corinthians were acting like fleshly people, not spiritual people. Paul points to himself and Apollos. They were mere servants, as were other leaders. God is the one to follow.

3:1-4—The Corinthians were displaying characteristics of spiritual immaturity. In this passage, Paul describes that as *sarkikoi*, as dominated by fleshly desires and interests. This terminology describes human nature ungoverned by God and His Spirit. He says that he can tell that by their partisan spirit, which stirs their strife and factions. You can tell things about people's relationship with God by looking at their relations with their fellows. If a person loves God, he or she will love (do good on behalf of) other people.

When Paul first was among them he was something of a wet nurse, giving them spiritual milk, elementary salvation truths. They could not digest more at the time. Indeed, they still could not. They had not progressed past the basics, despite their pretense of being wise. Their divisiveness, their fascination with human leaders, their entanglement with worldly wisdom, and their jealousy and quarrels among themselves demonstrated their spiritual immaturity.

3:5-9—Paul then explains how their leaders ought to be viewed, using himself and Apollos as examples. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God made the work come alive and grow. The image he uses for growth is agricultural. Paul draws conclusions from this basic premise:

- Their leaders are God's servants and cannot of themselves produce spiritual results;
- The leaders of the various factions should be one, united in God's work;
- Though united in the work, they are subordinate to the Lord who will reward them for faithful labor;
- All is from God and the church is God's work.

He and Apollos are merely workers, like under-rowers on a Roman trireme ship. They plant and water, but God gives the growth. Paul has no quarrel with Apollos. What he has a problem with is the idea of himself competing with Apollos as if they are against each other.

2. Building on Christ, the foundation (3:10-17)— Paul speaks of building on the foundation of the Lord Jesus. Any other foundation is inadequate and will be consumed in the judgment (3:10-15). When builders build on the sure foundation of the Lord Jesus, those given to them by the Spirit, find three things: forgiveness for past sins, strength for the present challenges, and glorious hope for the future.

In this passage, Paul exchanges an agricultural metaphor for a structural one, from the picture of a field to one of a building. He discusses how God's servants can build the church. Whoever works for the Lord, must be careful how they build, not only in the foundation they build upon (3:11) but also in the materials they use. Doubtless he is thinking of lifting high the cross in their preaching, encouraging, and building up their fellow believers, and living lives commensurate with their preaching. The purity and depth of such preaching and lifestyle will stand the test of fire on the day of the Lord's judgment. That day is the Lord's second coming and fire is used figuratively for a purifying agent or of a consuming substance.

3:12-15—The workers, the builders Paul describes in the previous passage need to build on the proper foundation and with the proper materials. He contrasts the types of material that can withstand fire for a time and those which are instantly consumed. It is a warning for those working in ministry, lay or ordained, to attend to their ministries and depend on God and His Spirit in their administration. The main point made is the seriousness with which Paul takes the various tasks of the ministry of Christians, particularly leaders and teachers. Note two things about the fire of judgment described in the passage:

- The wrong materials will be consumed, but the workers themselves will be saved.
- This judgment is a singular judgment, not a reference to some temporary place of judgment called Purgatory.

3:16-17—Here Paul describes believers as the temple of God. It can be taken as meaning individual believers or the assembly of believers as temple in a corporate sense. He will use this metaphor again in chapter 6 to describe the bodies of individual believers (6:20). God's redeemed people, indwelt by the Spirit can be called individually and collectively God's temple.

3. Wisdom and foolishness (3:18-23)—Paul warns the Corinthians not to be deceived into thinking that the wisdom of this age is sufficient to obtain salvation or for building up the church of the Lord Jesus (3:18-20). The following of human leaders like those following sophist teachers and boasting about them was foolish and should cease. They were parading around like shoguns and making others feel inadequate when in fact, they already had godly wisdom within their grasp. Fancy indulging in personality cults, as if they were followers of a pack of squabbling sophists, when the entire cosmos and its truth, mystery, and wisdom were already theirs to explore! The conclusion is that there should be no boasting or glorying in human attainments or human leaders (3:21-22). The ministry of any Christian worker belongs to the Lord and to the Lord's people.

3:18-20—Paul contrasts salvation truth with falsehood, comparing gold, silver, and precious stones with wood, hay, and stubble. We must build in a proper way. The world depends on promotion, prestige, money, and celebrity. The church depends on prayer, the power of the Spirit, humility, and service.

3:21-23—Our heartfelt desire must be for the glory of the Lord Jesus. The Corinthians were glorying in people and dividing them into groups. The great summation is in Christ, and we all belong to Him and to each other. Enough with boasting and the ecclesiastical promenade.

4. Faithfulness and judgment (4:1-5)—The phrase “those entrusted with” in 4:1 means house stewards, a position entrusted to a person to manage the affairs of a household. Such people are to be faithful to their charge. In this, Paul is saying that human judgment is not primary. The Lord Jesus is lord of the conscience and the one who can evaluate service properly. Paul discusses the people's judgment (4:3a) and his own (4:3b-4), before zeroing in on the preeminence of the Lord's assessment (4:4b). Corinthians seemed to think that their new status as believers and the wisdom they imagined they had in the world's eyes gave them the right to pass judgment on people, including their leaders and Paul himself. Paul is emphatic in emphasizing that the task of Christian servants is to be faithful to their calling, not to be jumping through the hoops of judgmental people whom they serve.

Christian workers should expect to be judged by the Lord Himself and should not regard human tribunals as of any particular importance. This text is not one meant to cultivate self-righteousness independent of other people. However, the Corinthians were acting like they were judges (rather than the Lord), and they needed to curb their judgmental habits.

4:1—Paul uses an interesting word of servant here. *Huperetas* originally meant a rower on the lower bank of a trireme, a Roman ship with three sets of oars. The Lord Jesus is the pilot who directs the course of the ship. Paul and the other apostles and leaders were the under rowers who labor as the Master directs.

5. Apostolic humility and Corinthian pride (4:6-13)—Paul compares apostolic humility with the pride and self-sufficiency of the Corinthians. He contrasts himself and Apollos with the proud Corinthians who claimed to be spiritually rich. He makes direct comparison rather than teach by abstract principles to drive the lesson home. The Corinthians were boasting about their talents, positions, and parties. Paul derides their conceit by a series of dramatic contrasts. With sanctified sarcasm, he describes them as kings and the apostles as spectacles at the end of a triumph parade destined for the arena, a spectacle for the universe (4:7-9). He tells them they are wise and the apostles fools (4:10a), strong versus weak (4:10b), honor that comes from people while the apostles were

despised (4:10c-13).

This passage has a triumph parade of a Roman general in its backdrop. He contrasts the humble circumstances and service of the apostolic witness with the prideful living and boasting of the Corinthians. The problem is the rivalry and enmity in the Corinthian church, with different leaders claiming that their wisdom and skill made them special and elevated them from among the others.

4:11-13—Paul describes in detail the hardships he and his fellow ministers had suffered in their ministry, including physical deprivations, verbal abuse, and overt persecution. The deprivation he suffered in his ministry was its authentication. Their lives meant humble service and the willingness to die for the Lord Jesus. They were buffeted (*kolaphhizesthai*), a word used for the beating of a slave, and insulted (*loidoresthai*). To be thus insulted was anathema for Greek wisdom. They (via Aristotle) thought that genuinely great souls could not endure to be insulted.

6. Fatherly rebuke or affirmation: Challenge to be God's humble servants (4:14-21)—Paul concludes this section with a challenge to the Corinthians to be God's humble servants. Paul compares himself to a father and reminds the Corinthians of the crucial functions he performed and the way he performed them. He founded the church (4:14-15). They might have many teachers, but only one father. He points to his own example of his concern and care for them (4:16-17). He wants to visit them in joyful affirmation, not in rebuke and discipline.

4:14-17—Paul's very direct manner of writing is meant to warn them of the seriousness and the perverseness of their prideful actions. He advises them to become imitators of him (as he is of Christ, see 1 Cor. 11:1; Gal 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6, 2 Thess. 3:9).

4:18-21—Paul discusses his own proposed trip to Corinth, addressing those who arrogantly assert that he would not dare be so bold in person as in his letters. Paul gives the Corinthians two alternatives: either he comes with discipline or with a gentle spirit.

III. Moral Laxness in Community (5:1-6:20)—Some from Chloe's household (1:11) not only reported that there were divisions and quarrels among the Corinthians (1:10-17; 3:1ff) but also that there was incestuous immorality (5:1-13) and general sexual immorality (6:12-20) tolerated by the open-minded Corinthians. In addition, there were lawsuits between believers brought to Roman courts rather than being settled amicably among themselves (6:1-11).

The next two chapters are about church discipline, dealing with immoral behavior in the body of Christ. Church discipline is not about a group of the "pious police" calling out the guilty criminals in their midst to protect their sanctimonious corporate purity. Rather, it is a group of concerned brethren seeking to restore erring members of the family of the Lord Jesus.

A. Immorality in community (5:1-13)—Greece and Rome were lax on sexual morality. In many places it was "normal" to engage in immoral behavior with prostitutes, or at orgiastic festivals at some shrines and temples. However, there were some lines you did not overstep. Getting it on with your stepmom was one of them. That is the situation Paul addresses in this chapter. A line had to be drawn, proper discipline decided upon, and an attitude among the Corinthians, proud of their tolerant permissiveness that even the pagans winced at, needed to be addressed.

Paul brings the sin of sexual immorality and the church's indifference to the fore. This was a matter of incest. A man had a relationship with his stepmother. The Old Testament law prohibited such a union (see Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20). However, if the man married his stepmother, Rabbinical law could be applied to allow this. A Jewish proselyte was permitted to marry his stepmother because his becoming a proselyte broke all previous bonds of relationship. Paul will have none of this rigamarole

and applies the Old Testament law strictly. Sin has corporate consequences. To permit it in your midst can weaken or even ruin a local church's testimony. Paul instructs the church to mourn over sin (5:1-2), to judge it and deal effectively with it (5:3-5), and to purge it from their midst (5:6-13). He urges the church to exercise discipline in the matter and excommunicate the offender (5:5, 13).

5:5—Paul's phrase "hand him over to the satan" for the destruction of his sinful nature has occasioned comment. The phrase "the satan" is a Jewish one for "the devil." Paul sees the world outside the church as the sphere over which "the satan" has unfettered power.

"Deliver over to Satan" was to excommunicate the person. When someone is in fellowship with a faithful local body of believers, he or she is shielded from the enemy in many ways. Being expelled from that fellowship, they become "fair game." The excommunication of a believer seemed to involve not only excluding such a one from the assembly but a "shunning" them as well—not associating, eating, or dealing with him. Paul means discipline to be redemptive, that the individual would come to his senses when he is beyond the protective power of the Lord Jesus and his church.

5:6-8—In Paul's world, leaven was used in a metaphorical sense for a bad influence that pervades a substance or a group. To adopt an easy-going acceptance of leaven-like behavior of the old life was profoundly foolish and dangerous. Paul accuses the church of boasting, of feeling proud of their tolerant stance. He compares tolerating sin in community with yeast working its way through the whole batch of dough. This kind of permissive toleration threatens the integrity of the church and the spread of serious sin in their midst.

Many people today have elevated the kind of moral indifference that the Corinthians displayed to a right or even to a virtue. Introducing discipline over sexual immorality causes a storm of protest, indignant accusations of legalism, Pharisaic hypocrisy, lack of love, and a host of other nasty charges. Do the things mentioned in 5:11 build community or tear it down? The answer is obvious and self-evident. The church that tolerates these kinds of behavior is foolishly endangering its life and witness.

5:9-11—Here Paul contrasts sin outside the community with sin within. Paul had written a previous letter to the Corinthians advising them not to associate with immoral people. He did not mean to separate from immoral people in the world at large but with believers or so-called believers who were engaging in immoral conduct.

5:12-13—Rome allowed local Jewish communities to judge Jewish offenders of Jewish civil laws. Paul expects the Christians of his day (still seen as a sect of Judaism by Rome) to follow the Jewish model in correcting the behavior of the erring brother. While the church had no business playing judge and jury to the community around them, they did need to deal with their own community and address incest in their midst.

B. Lawsuits among believers (6:1-11)—Paul addresses the Corinthians' practice of taking non-criminal civil cases to the Roman courts. He is emphatic that they as a Christian community should be deciding such cases among themselves. His directive would not have encompassed criminal cases for those of necessity were tried only by Roman courts. Here, Paul is writing in the backdrop of the Roman practice of allowing Jews to apply their own law in civil property cases. Christians, who were not yet distinguished from Jews as a separate faith, would have had the same privilege.

Here, Paul is concerned that the church is losing its testimony among the people outside the church. They were suing each other, aping the practices of those around them in Corinth. The Greeks were a litigious people. They were famous for their love for going to law. Once again, the believers are taking their directions from the world rather than the Lord. Paul raises three concerns:

- The believers were presenting a poor testimony to those outside their community. Even

unbelieving Jews were able to handle civil cases in their synagogue courts.

- The believers were failing to live up to their position in the Lord Jesus. Since the saints will one day judge the world and even fallen angels, shouldn't they be able to settle their differences in these mundane issues that divided them? These were not friendly disagreements. They were at each other's throats, trying to get their way in the courts.
- The believer had already lost because they were living as litigious and quarreling people with each other. Would the people around them see them as welcoming, forgiving, gracious people on their way to glory in that routine? Hardly!

6:3-8—Christians will be judges of angels in future glory. Surely now in this realm they could find some among them wise enough to render equitable judgments in their disputes. In fact, the reality of these disputes themselves spoke out against their Christian testimony (6:7-8). Instead of being involved in these legal disputes, harming, and cheating one another, why not rather be wronged?

6:9-11—Evil doers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul breaks into a catalogue of sins that is a grim commentary on the debauched civilization in which the Corinthian church existed. The Corinthians were once like some of the people of which Paul speaks:

- Fornicators and adulterers—Corinth was a sexually lax environment where the virtue of chastity was virtually unknown. The word translated “fornicators” was one used of male prostitutes.
- Idolators—Corinth was a place where idolatry and immorality flourished side-by-side. The Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was a Mediterranean-wide invitation to a holiday from morality. A thousand *hierodoulai* (sacred prostitutes) served an eager clientele of debauched idolators.
- Sensualists (*malakos*) literally refers to those who are soft and effeminate. It described someone who lived for luxury and pleasure.
- Thieves and robbers.
- Drunkards (*methos*) refer to those out of control. Those who indulge in uncontrolled drinking.
- Rapacious people (*pleonektes*) refer to those who always reach for more and grab what they have no right to. Robbers (*harpax*) means grasping ones.
- Homosexuals—The ancient world was awash with homosexuality. One author claims that fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors were homosexuals or bisexuals.

There are certain ways of behaving, there are certain lifestyles, which do not fit into God's kingdom. In ancient Corinth and in contemporary Western world, one of the areas where self-deception runs riot is sexual immorality. In communities of close-knit family structures and where everyone knows each other, sexual behavior is usually more regulated. But when people are on the move, live in areas where anonymity prevails, it is easier to be sexually irresponsible and not face the consequences of your behavior. Many in today's world have drunk so deeply of the anything goes culture that they find the mere suggestion of moral restrictions on sexual behavior as offensive. The point Paul is making here is that distorted ways of behaving take us away from the full humanity God longs to restore and see bloom in His creatures. This distortion not only affects the individual, but the community at large. God must put the world to rights, and He will.

They needed to remember who they once were and now are! They were washed, sanctified and set apart as God's people, and declared righteous because of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus.

C. Physical purity: Sanctity of the body (6:12-20)—Paul is working with the Old Testament covenant doctrine that God's relationship with His people was akin to marriage. Christians uniting themselves with someone other than their spouses would defile the sanctity of their relationship with God. Religious prostitution was rapid at Corinth. The idea of the exclusive relationship between

husband and wife and the idea that the human body was for God would be entirely foreign in the hedonistic environment of Corinth.

This text argues against sexual immorality and for believers to glorify God in their bodies. When contemplating an action, they should ask specific questions:

- Is it beneficial for me?
- Will it overpower and enslave me and so have a detrimental effect on others?
- Will the practice support the truth that the body “is for the Lord”?
- Will the practice support the truth that “the Lord is for the body”?

6:12-14—Paul quotes two permissive mantras used by the Corinthians to point out their wrong attitudes. “Everything is permissible for me” smacks of the attitude of a free mortal agent that can do whatever he likes. “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food” and “sex is for the body and the body for sex” suggests a parallel between eating and sex. It intimates that sexual activity is on the level of eating a meal. Satisfying hunger is a necessity, so too is sexual activity without much restraint.

The Corinthians seemed to have two arguments justifying their immorality. First, they claimed all things were lawful to them (6:12) and second, that sex was a natural function akin to eating that needed to be satisfied (6:13). Paul replies to the first by noting that not all things are beneficial and to the second argument by noting that we are not to be mastered by our desires but by the Lord. They saw sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not as a gift to be cherished, a bonding agent with one’s soulmate and only with one’s soulmate. Free sex may be exciting for a while, but it is not enriching and becomes enslaving.

6:15-17—Unholy sexual liaisons are perversions of the divinely established marital union. In the backdrop of this discussion is that the teaching that the Christian’s body is for the Lord is an outgrowth of the teaching that God’s people are members of the mystical body of the Lord Jesus.

Corinth was a wild place. The temple of Aphrodite was reputed to have as many as a thousand sacred prostitutes. Fornication was seen as part of the cultic worship of the fertility gods. Could it be that some of the Corinthians saw no harm in a visit to Aphrodite’s temple, on a holiday from morality? After all, what happened at Aphrodite’s temple, stayed at Aphrodite’s temple. Not only were they offending what belonged to the Lord (their bodies), they were sinning against themselves and their marriages. Eventually, they would pay the piper.

6:18-20—Now to the upshot of the matter. The Spirit indwells our bodies, both individually and corporately. Using our bodies for immorality defiles the temple of God. This defilement is more than just individual; it extends to the entire church. Sexual sins affect the offender’s entire personality, their emotions, their psyche, their physicality. They lead to a callousness of emotion and spirit that is detrimental to the offending person. They also affect the corporate body when sin is not dealt with.

Believers should—

- Consider their bodies and entire personalities are the “temple” of God;
- Consider that they have received the Spirit of God to strengthen them against sin;
- Consider that they do not have the right to pervert and misuse their bodies because they are not their own master.

Up until this point in the letter, Paul is speaking of things that needed correction in the Corinthian congregation. Under no circumstances should the church divide along the lines of personalities or sophisticated rhetoric. Under no circumstances should the church tolerate flagrant immorality or bring each other to pagan courts over issues that they should settle among themselves or abandon moral restraint and follow the permissive guidelines of the culture around them. Now, Paul moves to the

questions the Corinthians had sent with Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus along with their gift meeting the apostle's needs (16:17).

IV. Celibacy, Marriage, and Purity (7:1-40)—Paul now answers questions raised by the Corinthians concerning celibacy and marriage (7:1ff). The Corinthians were asking at least two questions about marriage. The first was whether a believer should get married at all (7:1ff) and the second was whether virgins should marry (7:25ff). A more minutiae breakdown of the chapter is as follows:

- 7:1-2—Advice to those who think that Christians should not marry at all.
- 7:3-7—Advice to those who urge even married people to refrain from sexual relations.
- 7:8-9—Advice to unmarried people and widows.
- 7:10-16—Advice to those in mixed marriages between believers and unbelievers.
- 7:17-24—Instruction to live the Christian life in the state in which they were first called.
- 7:25, 36-38—Advice regarding virgins.
- 7:26-35—Exhortation to concentration on service Christ in view of His impending return and avoiding distractions.
- 7:39-40—Advice to widows concerning remarriage.

Two asides before we begin. First, in 7:10, 12, 25, Paul is not disclaiming divine inspiration for what he wrote. He was referring to whether Jesus addressed the subject while He was here on earth. Second, ancient attitudes about marriage roughly divide as follows:

- Marriage and procreation are vital for humanity and therefore are vital for all those physically capable of procreation.
- Marriage is a distraction and should never be undertaken by wise people except in the rare instances that one might find a spouse equally devoted to a desired lifestyle.
- Marriage is good for most people, but exceptions must be made for those too committed to spiritual pursuits to take the necessary time for marriage.

A. Celibacy and marriage (7:1-7)—Paul seems to agree with those arguing for a celibate life (7:1, 7, 8, 25) in contrast to Genesis 2:18: “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Paul is making this recommendation because of the “present crisis” (7:26, 29) and the superior posture of the celibate life to live devotedly to the Lord (7:32-35). Was Paul anticipating a general persecution of believers? Is this passage one supporting the monastic attitude of the superiority of the single state?

7:2-7—As often happens when many people cast off all moral restraint (think Woodstock), others go in the opposite direction and grow overly severe. In line with some philosophies of the time, there were people in the congregation urging others to celibacy or to abstain from sexual relations even within marriage. Paul clarifies that the celibate state has real advantages provided one is in control of one's sexual passion. But he wants people to be real, especially in the hothouse culture of ancient Corinth. In particular, he advises against married people abstaining from sexual relations, except for brief periods and for specific purposes.

Paul seems to say that the chief reason for marriage was the prevalence of sexual immorality, particularly in places like Corinth. He goes on to strengthen his argument against immorality by asserting that the marriage partners belong to each other and must not practice sexual denial, a kind of celibacy within marriage (7:3-6). There seems to have been a suggestion operative in Corinth that if married people are to be truly spiritual, they must abstain from sexual intercourse. This was a manifestation of thought that considered the body and its instincts evil or necessarily leading to evil. Paul's reply once again treats marriage as a considerate concession to human weakness. The couple's

bodies are not their own. They should not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for prayer. They should not allow their deprivation to open a door of temptation because of their lack of self-control.

B. Advice to believers in various situations (7:8-16)—Here, Paul comments divide themselves into three areas: for believers who have been married but now are not (7:8-9), for married believers (7:10-11), and for believers who are married to those outside the faith (7:12-16). The first of these were mostly widows and widowers. In the culture of the day, divorce was common and there was strong social and even legal and financial pressure to remarry. Paul wants widows and widowers to feel free to resist the pressure to remarry. However, he wants them to be real, particularly in the face of those advocating abstinence in a hothouse culture, to be honest about their sexual desires.

Paul moves on to address Christians and divorce. In 7:10-11, Paul emphasizes the Lord's command to believers not to divorce (Mt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Lk. 16:18). He goes on to address mixed marriages (7:12-16), unions between a believer and an unbeliever. If the unbelieving partner is content to continue in the relationship, then the believing partner must not divorce the unbeliever. The Christian partner should see the relationship as an opportunity to be a blessed influence, both on the unbelieving partner and the children of the union. If the unbelieving partner is not willing to stay in the union, then the believer should let them go.

7:15—Paul says that if the unbelieving partner is not willing to remain in the union, the believing partner is “not bound.” This terminology was used in Jewish divorce documents that permitted the non-initiating spouse to remarry. The matter of divorce has been a pressing issue for the church through the ages. Typically, it has been allowed in circumstances of infidelity, physical and emotional abuse, and abandonment.

C. Stay in the situation in which you were called (7:17-24)—The general principle being applied in this discussion is that Christians ought to live contently in the station of life God has placed them when they were called to faith (7:17, 20, 24). The principle is that Christians should live for the Lord wherever they “are put,” socially, economically, and relationally. This stay in the state in which you were called advice applies broadly. He applies the principle to Jew and Gentile (7:17-20) and slave and free (7:21-24) before moving on to the second part of the Corinthians' queries about marriage (7:25ff). God's calling through the gospel is far more important than social or cultural status. Corinthians were status conscious people. The believers should resist subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to make a change in status their over-arching goal.

D. Concerning unmarried women (7:25-38)—Paul gives advice to unmarried women. The term translated “virgin” was usually used of unmarried women, who were the only ones expected to avoid premarital sex in Greco-Roman culture. Paul discourages but does not prohibit marriage for virgins and remarriage for widows (7:27) for reasons he supplies in the context.

In an age of arranged marriages, his advice is for fathers of daughters getting on in years or perhaps to men engaged for an undue length of time. It may have even been advice for those living in a strange custom of the day, of an unmarried couple living chastely together. His advice is for unmarried women to remain single given the present situation (7:25-35). However, fathers should do what they think is right regardless of the apostle's advice (7:36-38). In conclusion, Paul doubles down on his advice to remain single when addressing widows (7:39-40).

In this entire chapter, marriage is presented as a concession to avoid fornication and adultery. Marriage seems like a second-best calling. Indeed, for certain epochs in church history it was deemed a second-best calling. However, Paul was expecting the near return of the Lord Jesus, and he was concerned with

Christians not being distracted from service. However, for us it must be true that a family home, the product of a happy marriage, is the place where we find the noblest opportunity to live for the Lord Jesus and a place from which we draw rest, security, and strength to live more nearly as we ought within the world around us.

7:25-35—Paul’s advice is not a command from the Lord, but a statement of how he views things at that time. Because of the present crisis (7:26) and that the time is short (7:29), and the present world situation (7:29-31), the real question that poses itself relates to their expenditure of time and energy in service to the Lord. Some commentators think the “present crisis” is a reference to an immediate crisis (a worldwide famine) and an ultimate crisis, the time for the Lord’s return. Those who marry in this situation will have more trouble and he means to spare them these difficulties. The single state offers freedom for godly service that the married state simply lacks.

7:28-31—There is nothing wrong with getting married. Paul’s motive for his advice to remain single was to spare them hardship and suffering that accompany times of trouble and persecution that he seems to anticipate. Is he anticipating the near return of the Lord Jesus? Does he think that overt and general persecution is at hand? Will there soon be an abrupt curtailment of the freedom to witness or even practice the faith openly? Paul does not directly answer these questions.

7:36-38—Paul leaves people the freedom to take or ignore his advice. In 7:36, he is either addressing the single woman’s fiancé or her father who so often arranged marriages in that day.

E. Widows and remarriage (7:39-40)—Widows are free to remarry, but in the Lord. However, Paul’s counsel is for the widow to stay as she is.

V. Idol Meats Controversy and Christian Liberty (8:1-11:1)— Understanding the cultural context is vital to understanding this issue. In the ancient world, pagan temples had restaurant features. Meat was offered to idols before being served in pagan temple dining halls (often as part of worship) or being used for communal meals. Some meat sold in the marketplace also had been offered to idols. The way things worked was that people would come to temples with animals for sacrifice. When sacrificed, the animal was cooked and the family or group of worshippers would have a meal. There was usually more meat than one family could eat, so others often shared that meal. Many times, there were still leftovers. The temple officials would take these to the market to be sold. This presented problems for new Christians coming out of a pagan environment. The idol meats controversy involved—

- buying meat sacrificed to idols sold in the marketplace;
- going to temples and sharing in meals with other families or even sharing in feasts and festivals related to various pagan gods and goddesses, and;
- going to homes of unbelievers and sharing meals featuring idol meats.

Palestinian Jews judged Jews living outside Palestine as unwittingly compromising with idolatry in joining pagan banquets or even buying meat in the regular marketplace. The matter was even more troubling to many Christians converted from pagan backgrounds. Could they have lunch with members of their trade guild or a business associate? Could they eat what was set before them when they were invited to the home of a pagan friend? Could they attend a wedding reception of an unbelieving relative in a temple where idol meats would be served?

Paul’s reply leads to a larger discussion on how believers should utilize their liberty in Christ. First, he lays down the principle that the motivating factor in thinking about your liberty in Christ should be the concern for your fellow believer (8:1-13). He then gives a personal example of how he was ready to forego the exercise of his rights as an apostle for the sake of the Lord’s people (9:1-14). He

demonstrated his love and self-restraint by placing himself on the cultural and social level of everyone so that he might win some for Christ (9:15-27). By way of warning, he speaks of the lack of self-restraint displayed by the Israelites in the wilderness who embraced the idolatry they toyed with (10:1-13). The Corinthians need to heed this lesson from history, avoiding participation in idol feasts and avoid any semblance of idolatry (10:14-22). They were to live out their testimony to the Lord with loving concern for their fellow believers and not make an issue of the source of meat sold in the marketplace. When the source was pointed out and weaker brethren were present, they were to refrain from exercising their liberty. They were to do all for the glory of God. (10:23-11:1).

While this controversy has little direct application to our modern scene, it does apply to the broader question of the exercise of Christian liberty. Paul enunciates four principles for questionable things:

- Knowledge must be balanced by love (8:1-13);
- Authority must be balanced by discipline (9:1-27);
- Experience must be balanced by caution (10:1-22);
- Freedom must be balanced by responsibility (10:23-33).

A. Meat sacrificed to idols and Christian liberty (8:1-13)—Sacrifice to the gods was an integral part of ancient life and entailed both private and public sacrifices. In private sacrifice, one part of the animal sacrificed was burned up on the altar, a second part was given to the priest, and a third part received by the worshipper. Often, there were banquets, sometimes wedding banquets, where family and guests consumed idol meat. The same type of division of idol meats happened at public sacrifices in pagan temples. In these cases, the third part was distributed by the magistrates or others. What was not distributed was sold to shops and markets. So, buying in the marketplace meant that you might be eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Many new Christians came out of pagan environments and believed that eating these idol meats was wrong, even exposing themselves to demons. Paul will see these believers as the weaker brethren. The stronger brethren are those who realize that idols are nothing in and of themselves and it was permissible to eat idol meats. Indeed, at times it was difficult to purchase meat that you knew was not sacrificed to idols. However, Paul's main concern in the controversy is building up one another in faith and not being stumbling blocks to each other.

To understand the importance of this issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols in the day, you need to realize how thoroughly idolatry and pagan sacrifice permeated all levels of Corinthian society. Even if you never attended the idol festivals and ate the meat served, a considerable amount of meat sacrificed to idols ended up being sold in the public market. Were these meats spiritually contaminated? Even if you did not think so, does one of your fellow believers, recently redeemed out of the idolatrous culture, think so? What would he or she think of a fellow believer eating idol meats? Some principles applied to this situation include:

- What is safe for one believer may be quite unsafe for another.
- Nothing ought to be judged exclusively from the point of view of knowledge, but fundamentally from love. Concern for your fellows must govern. Knowledge can make people arrogant and look down upon those they regard as not as advanced as they are. Conduct must be guided by knowledge filtered by love.
- Believers should not exercise rights or demand liberty, which may result in actual harm to other believers.

8:1-3—Paul contrasts the knowledge that meat sacrificed to idols is not spiritually contaminated with the proper concern for the thoughts and feelings of their fellow believers. Knowledge of strong Christians (meaning those who saw nothing with eating idol meats) must be tempered with love to

become the discerning and compassionate knowledge exhibited when one loves God and His people. Knowledge can be a weapon to bulldoze people or a tool to build them up, depending on how it is used. The strong believers needed to put others first, limiting their liberty for their kindred in the community to grow up. You cannot force-feed immature Christians and expect instantaneous maturity.

8:4-6—Paul emphasizes that meat sacrificed to idols is not spiritually contaminated because the idol is really nothing.

8:7-13—However, not all know this. Thus, this knowledge must be exercised with care since those weak in faith may be unable to discern these things. There is nothing inherently wrong with eating meat that was sacrificed to idols, but exercising one's liberty in doing so might cause the weak in faith to stumble. In causing your fellow believer to stumble, you sin against the believer and against the Lord, by wounding the conscience of one who belongs to Him.

8:10-13—Paul speaks of conscience in this text. Conscience is the internal court where a person's actions are judged, either as approved or condemned. This passage speaks of how easily a weak Christian's conscience is defiled (8:7), wounded (8:12), and offended (8:13). Stronger saints must defer to their more immature kin and do no spiritual harm. The weaker believer might misread the strong believers' convictions and thus their liberty and follow them in a way that violated their own consciences. Keeping a good conscience is a basic part of Christian living and discipleship. This is not an excuse for the tyranny of the weaker brother. However, the new Christians may well have seen the darker side of pagan worship, of mystery and fear, and the sense that in eating idol meats, especially in the temple precinct, one was really participating in worship that was unseemingly. The priestly chants, the prostitutes waiting in the wings to "enhance your worship experience" could all be related to the smell of idol meats roasting on wood fires. Strong believers need to balance knowledge with love and not put their weaker brethren to choices they are not ready to make in good conscience.

B. Restricted use of liberty: Paul's example (9:1-27)—This chapter is a personal illustration of the principles Paul is presenting about the mature use of Christian liberty. Paul defends his right to receive support from those to whom he ministers because of his apostleship (9:1-6), because of typical human experience (9:7), because of Old Testament law and practice (9:8-13), and because of the teaching of the Lord Jesus (9:14). However, he refused to exercise this right for the sake of the Gospel witness (9:15-18), for the sake of those outside of Christ (9:19-23), and for his own sake in disciplining himself for the Gospel witness (9:24-27).

1. Paul's apostolic rights (9:1-14)—Many Corinthians thought that their Christian freedom gave them a special privilege in which they could do things not permissible to weaker Christians. Paul's reply is to point to himself. Paul expands upon the theme of Christian liberty and applies it to a wider context than that of idol meats. As a Christian worker sowing spiritual seed, Paul had the right to be supported materially by those who benefited from his Gospel ministry. Yet he did not burden congregations he founded with the provision for his support. Nor did he take a wife as the other apostles had done (9:3-6). Then in 9:7-10, he presents illustrations that God's servants have the right to be supported in their labor, citing common experiences in ancient life, that of the soldier, the vineyard keeper, the shepherd, and the farmer. In 9:11-12, he applies the principle illustrated to those engaged in spiritual work. That basic principle is true today. The Christian worker, sowing spiritual seed, has the right to support from those to whom he or she ministers.

9:9—Deuteronomy 25:4 is such an odd citation in support of his argument. "Do not muzzle the oxen while it is treading out the grain." This command covered a practice in ancient times of oxen, pulling the threshing sledge over the grain or treading the grain out with their feet. The oxen were allowed to eat the grain while they did their work.

9:13—Old Testament priests and Levites lived off the sacrifices and offerings brought to them by the people. They also received special tithes as spelled out in Numbers 18:8-32; Leviticus 6:14-7:36 and 27:6-33. The Old Testament priestly class were supported by the people to whom they ministered.

2. Paul voluntarily foregoes his rights (9:15-27)—However, Paul did not invoke his rights so as not to hinder the advance of the Gospel (9:12b-18). He preaches voluntarily without pay, and the Lord will reward him. He cherished and guarded this privilege. He did this to present a role model for Christian service in situations where payola is ill-advised or not available. He is not now requesting pay or backpay. He is showing the Corinthians an example of self-restraint and in so doing, establishes to them the genuineness of his ministry.

In that day, Greek cities were filled with itinerant teachers seeking payment for their discourses. When people showed interest, the fee increased. There were always “additional services,” more informative classes at increased fees. Not only did Paul not use the kind of oratory and arguments these teachers used (2:1-5), but he also refused to accept money from those to whom he ministered. Many unbelievers then were convinced that traveling teachers and preachers were just involved in religious rackets to take money from unsuspecting people. The wrong attitude toward money had already hindered the Gospel. Consider the episodes dealing with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and with Simon the magician (Acts 8).

9:19-23— Along with their rights, the Corinthians prided themselves on their freedom. They were free because Corinth was a Roman colony with freedoms and rights other cities lacked. They were free because they saw themselves as having true knowledge and wisdom paraded by popular philosophies of the day. They were free because, as Christians, those who had been under Jewish law were now free from it.

Paul began this chapter by asking “Am I not free?” He returns to this idea. As he did not invoke his apostolic rights to ministry support, so too he surrendered his freedom to become a slave to all. “To the Jews I became like a Jew” probably means he continued to go to synagogue taking part in prayers and liturgy to take advantage of opportunities to preach Christ. “To those under the law, as under the law” probably means that when presenting Christ to Jewish audiences, he was prepared to observe the customs and commands of the law. “To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law” refers to his Gentile witness, living alongside them without regard for the regulations of Jewish law. He became all things to all people to win people to Christ.

This passage has been understood as Paul the pragmatic spin-doctor, twisting his message to suit his audience. Rather, this is an example of how a person can come alongside many diverse types of people with a constant message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

9:24-27—Paul concludes by drawing a parallel between the conditioning and training of an athlete in seeking a perishable victor’s laurel wreath with the self-restraint and self-denial of believers in attaining an imperishable crown, eternal life, and everlasting fellowship with the Lover of our souls. The New Testament describes several crowns which will be awarded to believers by the Lord—

- The crown of life (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10) given to those who successfully endure trials.
- The crown that will last forever (1 Cor. 9:25) given to those who master, by God’s grace, the old nature.
- The crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19) given to those who win others to the Lord.
- The crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8) given to those who long for and are motivated by his appearing.
- The crown of glory (1 Pt. 5:4) given to faithful elders.

C. Improper and proper use of liberty (10:1-40)—Paul warns the Corinthians about the improper use of liberty by pointing to Israel’s lack of self-restraint in the wilderness (10:1-13), specifically warns them about eating idol meats as a part of pagan rituals in the temples of the day (10:14-22), and concludes by taking on their permissive mantra (see 10:23, also 6:12) and arguing that liberty must be balanced by responsibility (10:23-33).

1. Warning from Israel’s history (10:1-13)—Behind this passage is the over-confidence of the so-called strong Corinthians. They were in Christ, baptized believers, partaking of the Lord’s table, and knowing that there was in truth no such things as idols. Paul uses Israel’s wilderness generation to warn the Corinthians against a lack of self-restraint. He lists the blessing of the Lord while Israel was in the wilderness. Israel’s privileges did not guarantee their success. The entire generation perished in the wilderness because of their stiff-necked disobedience even though in the beginning they saw the Lord’s great deliverance out of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and supernatural provision of manna and water for multitudes in the desert. Yet the Lord was displeased with most of them, and they died in the wilderness.

10:6-10—Paul reminds the Corinthians of Israel’s waywardness. They became idolaters and worshiped the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6). There was the incident of their dalliance with Moabite women acting as cultic prostitutes (Num. 25:1-9) resulting in spiritual and sexual adultery. They murmured and grumbled against the Lord for bringing them out of Egypt and were severely punished (Num. 14:22-23; 21:6). They revolted and turned away at Kadesh Barnea and wandered aimlessly in the desert until that entire faithless generation died (Num. 14:2).

10:11-13—Paul then brings the lesson home to the Corinthians. The over-confident Corinthians needed to beware of idolatry through the back door. The enemy could use the occasion of eating idol meats in pagan settings as a serious stumbling block in their own lives as well as those of the weaker brethren. There was a temptation to idolatry, to fornication that was so connected to pagan practice, to presuming on the mercy of God by continuing to wander into zones of pagan practice, and to grumble because they had to limit their freedom. These warnings from Israel’s waywardness were meant for future followers that they would not behave as that faithless generation behaved. The Corinthians were to take heed. In participating in pagan meals and festivals in the pagan temple precincts, the menu may not be the issue, but the venue certainly was. The new age was at hand in the lives of the Corinthians. They were mistaking the freedoms of that new age with licentious living that would drag them back to the old ways.

10:13—A most helpful text that is an antidote to falling into sin through temptation. Temptation is not sinful. God allows it as a way of purifying us; Satan as a way of enticing us. Temptation will come, rest assured, but God is there with us to keep us from being overwhelmed by it. His way out is not by way of excluding from temptation but in enabling us to meet it successfully. There is always a way of escaping. Escape (*ekbasis*) is a vivid word. The idea is of an army surrounded and suddenly discovering an escape route to safety.

2. Idol feasts and the Lord’s Supper—Beware of the venue (10:14-22)—Paul makes the connection between Israel’s idolatry in the wilderness and eating meat sacrificed to idols. The meat is not spiritually contaminated. However, there is the danger of going a step beyond just eating sacrificed meat and that is joining the pagans in their sacrificial festivals and feasts in the pagan temples. Paul is telling the strong Corinthians that their exercise of liberty must be balanced by caution. While the idol was nothing, the environment was one in which the enemy was operating. To participate in the family meal of the Lord Jesus and then trot down to the Temple abounding in idolatry, sexual debauchery, course and vulgar activities, is to foolishly make yourself vulnerable to spiritual forces beyond your measure. To use your freedom to go between the Lord’s table, which rescued you from evil, and to

hang around the table of demons earnestly trying to claw you back to your worthless former ways, was madness.

10:14-17—Fleeing idolatry is a warning to both believers of strong and weak consciences. He draws the significance of participating in the Lord's Supper in 10:16-17.

10:18-22—Their participation in pagan festivals in pagan temples is a step beyond in the idol meat discussion. The pagans worship demons and believers have no business participating in such proceedings. Will you participate at the Lord's Supper and then participate at the table of demons? Were they trying to arouse the jealousy of the Lord?

3. Believer's freedom: Do all for God's glory (10:23-11:1)—Christians indeed have freedom, but within limits. Paul lays down three principles: —

- Though Christians have the right to do things like eat meat sacrificed to idols, it may not be beneficial to them or to their brethren to exercise that right.
- Such practices may not build up others or the body of Christ.
- Christians are not to merely seek their own good but to promote the good of their fellow Christians and to seek the glory of God.

10:23-30—Purchasing idol meat in the marketplace is permissible. When addressing the situation of buying meat in the market, Paul is primarily addressing the well-to-do believers who had no qualms about idol meats. Most people in Corinth could not afford to buy meat in the meat market. They subsisted with fish and grain. Paul's de facto advice to Corinthian shoppers: "What you don't know won't hurt you."

However, eating idol meat at pagan festivals in pagan temples is not beneficial for reasons elaborated on above. What about at dinners in the homes of pagan friends? Here, he adopts an ask not, forbid not stance. Paul says go ahead, but if someone points out its source and is offended, then back off. If weaker brethren are present, the stronger brethren must refrain from eating idol meats out of respect for the weaker brethren's conscience (10:27-30).

10:31-33—It is not just the weaker brethren that is in view here. Giving glory to God must be the Christians objective in all things. In the self-restraint in eating idol meats, the two great commandments are joined—loving your neighbor and loving your God. Paul is suggesting that restraint of one's freedom in this situation might have had an evangelistic impact. Perhaps not only the weaker brethren were watching, but the pagan populace as well.

So, what is the upshot of this long discussion of Christian liberty? In questionable matters that may be permissible to me, ask the following—

- Are they beneficial? Will they lead to freedom or slavery (6:12)?
- Will they make me a stumbling block to my fellow believers (8:13)?
- Will they build us up or tear us down (10:23)?
- Will they only please me, or will they glorify the Lord Jesus (Christ 10:31)?
- Will they help win those outside to the Lord Jesus or cause them to turn away (10:32-33)?

VI. Issues Relating to Public Worship (11:2-14:40)—One of the biggest problems for the Corinthians was disorder in public worship. Women were assuming more freedom than they should have and being disruptive (11:2-16), the Lord's Supper and the agape love feasts were occasions to show distinctions and put-downs rather than unity (11:17-34), and there was much confusion about the presence and exercise of spiritual gifts (12:1ff). A more detailed breakdown of this passage is as follows:

- 11:2-16—Whether women should worship with their heads uncovered.

- 11:17-23—Problems arising in connection with the *agape* love feasts.
- 11:23-34—Instruction regarding the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
- 12:1-31—A wonderful picture of the body of Christ molded into a harmonious whole utilizing the various spiritual gifts distributed by the Spirit.
- 13:1-13—Paul's more excellent way, showing that the gifts of the Spirit must be exercised in love for God and for others.
- 14:1-23—Problems relating to the use and abuse of the gift of tongues.
- 14:24-33—Paul's insistence on orderliness in public worship and exercising necessary restraint in overly enthusiastic demonstrations.
- 14:34-36—Paul speaks to the place of women in public worship in the Corinthian church.
- 14:37-40—Summary on orderly worship and instruction on the use of prophecy and tongues.

A. Women's head coverings: Women's place in public worship (11:2-16)— The faith brought freedom and hope to slaves, women, and children. All people, regardless of race or gender, were equal before God, and all believers were one in the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:28). This newfound freedom was heady stuff and could be taken to excess. The Corinthians had done that resulting in disorder in public worship.

In the culture of the day, women were expected to cover their head and hair. The failure to do so was seen as provoking male lust. Think of a woman in our day showing up at worship in a skippy bikini. At the same time, upper class women were anxious to show off their fashionable hair styles. There was cultural clash between upper class fashion and concern for sexual modesty. Paul marshals arguments, related to the culture of the day, to persuade the Corinthian women to cover their heads and hair.

This passage has occasioned considerable controversy in the modern age. The passage deals with the place of women in public worship and their relationship to men. Traditionalists articulate the ontological equality (men and women are created equal and are mutually dependent), functional subordination (women are to be subordinate to men in worship and in the church) stance from this passage. The presenting issue is head coverings for women. Head coverings have been variously interpreted as referring to the use of veils in public worship or an issue growing out of Corinthian women "letting their hair down" rather than "putting it up." Women letting their hair hang loose was a sign in that culture of mourning or sexual looseness. Others see the lasting implications of Paul's argument differently. They see this as culturally conditioned advice with only local and temporary significance.

Paul takes up this issue of his own accord rather than answering one of the Corinthian queries (as in 7:1, 25; 8:1, 12:1). Paul emphasizes the order of authority and administration in the divine structure of reality. Paul asserts three arguments: headship, creation order, and observations from nature.

Traditionalists assert that there is a definite order of "headship" in the church: the Father is head over the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus is head over men, and men are head over their women. Headship controls behavior within the church and Christian homes, not to be applied in the world at large. By respecting the symbols of headship—hair and veils—women are honoring the Lord and showing proper submission to their man. As Christ is under God's authority and every man under Christ's authority, so a woman is under her husband's authority. A woman leaving her head uncovered in worship was seen as an affront to the divine order.

Another issue in this passage is the meaning of *kephale* (translated head). It can mean sovereign, indicating authority, or source, indicating derivation. *Kephale* as head/sovereign is clearly in focus in 11:3; while *kephale* as source seems to be the focus in 11:8, 9, 12a.

11:3-6—Paul says that it is as disgraceful for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered. To show no respect for the cultural symbol was to dishonor both her husband and her Lord. The disgrace of having one's hair cut off or head shaved has a Jewish backdrop. At Jewish law, a woman convicted of adultery had her hair cut off (Num. 5:11-31). Having your head shaved carried a similar implication.

Paul uses "head" (*kephale*) literally (for the bodily part to be covered) and figuratively (for the authority figure in the ancient household). There is a vigorous debate over the meaning of *kephale* in this context, whether "head" or "source." Traditionalists dismiss the interpretation of "head" as source or origin because that would mean that the Father originated Christ, a heretical idea. This extrapolation heightens the heat that surrounds this debate.

11:7-9—Men should not have their head uncovered because they are to be subject to and represent God in authority. Women were to be subject to men and to represent them in authority. Paul argues for women's submission based on the creative order (1 Tim. 2:13). Man was created first and then woman. Women glorify God by submitting to this creative order.

However, the argument has Genesis 2:18, "a helper suitable to the male" in the background. The woman's suitable complimentary enhancement of the situation of the male seems to be the focus, not her ontological dependence.

11:10—What is going on with angels in this verse has occasioned much comment and little insight. Interpretative options suggested include:

- Angels of Genesis 6:1-3, who allegedly lusted after women and so fell;
- Angels present at divine worship and offended by the lack of propriety displayed by the Corinthian women;
- Angels who will be subordinate to the joint heirs of the Lord Jesus (both men and women) so that as such, future rulers should exercise wise choices in apparel and proper demeanor in present-day worship.

11:11-12—In these verses Paul notes that men and women are equal in the Lord and mutually dependent. He qualifies his argument from creation in 11:7-9, affirming the mutual interdependence of the genders. He meant to prove his case for head coverings and no more. Women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and are meant for an interdependent relationship with men. He does not see functional subordination as demoting women and interjecting a fundamental inequality between the genders.

11:13-16—These verses are curious as well. How the length of hair is glory to one sex and shame to the other seems to be very much a cultural matter and not one of timeless eternal significance. Women wore their hair long and men short by custom dictated by the culture, not nature. Is Paul arguing that women's hair grows in a fundamentally different way than men's hair?

11:16—Paul concludes this section by rebuking anyone who contends otherwise as one who merely argues for the sake of arguing.

B. Factions at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)—This passage discusses three matters related to the Lord's Supper: first, the problem of believers making a mockery of the Lord's table because of abuses practiced at the agape love dinners accompanying the Lord's Supper (11:17-22); second, the necessity of taking the Lord's Supper seriously, reiterating its instructions and institution (11:23-26); and third, warning the Corinthians against partaking the Supper in an unworthy manner (11:27-34).

11:17-22—Their actions at the agape love dinners betrayed their divisions and their need to stand out and to be preferred. These meals mirrored the pattern of sacred feasts among the Jews and the Greeks.

They were potluck suppers to promote fellowship, unity, and the body life of the church. The Corinthian church met in well-to-do patrons' homes. These love feasts would occur in multiple rooms in those homes. The high social class may have met in the *triclinium* (the best room), and the lower class may have met in the *atrium* which was in plain view of the *triclinium*. The Corinthians had lost sight of the purpose of these feasts, thus emphasizing social class rather than biblical unity. In addition, the upper class ate better and more while the lower class often went hungry. For some poor slaves, the love feast may have been the only decent meal of the week. In Corinth, the art of generous sharing got lost. The wealthy did not share what they brought but ate in exclusive groups. The Corinthians were treating these as Greek festival meals rather than opportunities to build unity and cohesion in the body of Christ. Division by social class is as wrong as that by race, ethnicity, or cultural bias. The new basis for society was in Christ, and the church was to reflect that in its demeanor. Race and class divisions and distinctions spoke of a profound failure to understand themselves as believers together in the body of Christ.

11:23-34—Paul provides instruction for conduct at the Lord's table. Paul encourages the Corinthians them to look back and reflect on Christ's sacrifice (11:23-26a). The broken bread reminded them of the body of the Lord Jesus given for them; and the cup reminded them of His shed blood for them. Next, they were to look ahead by celebrating the Lord's table until he comes (11:26b). Then, they were to look within and examine themselves to see if they were participating in the sacrament in a worthy manner (11:27-28, 31-32). Finally, they were to look around (11:33-34). The Lord's table is a family meal and the Lord desires that his family get along.

This is a classic passage on the proper attitude, demeanor, and celebration of the Lord's table. It speaks to the institution of the table and its significance in the mystical union believers have with the Lord Jesus that affects all dimensions of our lives. It instructs us as to the proper attitudes we should have in the table's celebration and warns us of receiving the symbols of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus in an unworthy manner.

11:23-26—Their conduct was completely out of step with the spirit of the Lord's Supper as Paul and others had received it. He reiterates those instructions here. Note how his words track the texts in Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; and Luke 22:14-20.

11:27-32—Paul underlines the seriousness of participating at the Lord's table in an unworthy way—they were sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (11:27). They needed to examine themselves, to put themselves to the test as to their heart attitude, their conduct, and their understanding of what they were participating in (11:28-32) to come to the table prepared.

C. Use and abuse of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40)—This passage on spiritual gifts divides into several sections: the Spirit as the source of spiritual gifts (12:1-11), the diversity of the gifts expressed in unity (12:12-31a), the necessity that the gifts be exercised in love (12:31b-13:13), the priority of prophecy over tongues (14:1-25), and teaching that church worship must be done decently and in order (14:26-40).

1. Spirit as source of spiritual gifts (12:1-11)—The Spirit gives gifts to God's people for the building up of the body of Christ. This portion of the text tells us that this is an answer to one of the Corinthians' queries (12:1), provides a surefire test for discerning the presence of the Spirit in a believer's life (12:2-3), indicates that the administration of these useful gifts involved the entire Trinity (12:4-6; cf. 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3-6), describes some of the spiritual gifts given by the Spirit (12:7-10), and concludes by relating the Spirit's sovereign control over the distribution of gifts to produce the spiritual results the Lord desires (12:11).

12:1-3—This portion posits two battle cries: "Jesus be cursed" and "Jesus is Lord". The Spirit would

never empower the first cry, and no one can truly utter the second one except by the Spirit.

12:7-10—This is one of the gift lists in the New Testament (also see Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pt 4:10-11). Some see the composite list of gifts in these lists as encompassing all the gifts given by the Spirit. Others see the lists as illustrative. In this passage, Paul discusses the following gifts:

- Wisdom (12:8)—The ability to understand and apply God's truth in particular situations.
- Knowledge (12:8)—The ability to communicate knowledge of the Lord and His ways.
- Faith (12:9)—A gift of believing God for what He wants to accomplish in the church's ministry.
- Healing (12:9, 28)—The ability to effect physical healing by the Spirit. Some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Miracles (12:10, 29)—The ability to perform acts beyond the purview of natural laws. Once again, some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Prophecy (12:10, 28, 29)—The ability to set forth the teaching of the Lord. This gift may have been two-edged, forthtelling the Word in preaching and foretelling the future or providing a word from God in prophetic utterance. Prophecy is distinguished from teaching, but there is disagreement as to what precisely Paul meant by it. Whatever it was, it was intelligible and its exercise edified the body of Christ.
- Discernment (12:10)—The ability to discern the spirits or matters in situations beyond what Christians are normally called to do.
- Tongues (12:10, 28, 30)—The ability to speak in known human languages previously unknown to the speaker or in ecstatic heavenly languages. Some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Interpretation of tongues (12:10, 30)—The ability to interpret tongues, to elaborate the meaning to those unable to speak in tongues. Once again, some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.

2. Unity and diversity of the gifting of the body of Christ (12:12-26)—Just as the human body is composed for distinct parts that contribute to the whole, so too the church has differing gifts and differing functions that produce the unity God desires. Paul makes the case for diversity as necessary for a unity that works as God intends. We need each other. We need to respect each other. We need to sympathize with each other.

This section unfolds with the apostle's discussion of unity and diversity in spiritual gifts. Diversity keeps unity from becoming an unedifying uniformity. However, diversity can destroy if allowed to run amuck. Paul uses the human body to show that distinct functions are necessary to live, grow, and serve (12:14-20) and that members of the body promote unity as they discover their dependence on one another (12:21-26).

12:12-13—We have experienced the same baptism of the Spirit. This is the incorporation of the person into the body of Christ. It is not speaking in tongues. All true believers are baptized by the Spirit at their conversion. Not all believers (then or now) speak in tongues.

12:14-20—Diversity is vital to that proper operation (12:14-20). If all the parts did the same things, where would the body be (12:17)?

12:21-26—This text emphasizes the mutual dependence and concern the various members of the body must have for one another to operate properly. All are important. Indeed, the least attractive and inconspicuous parts are vitally important and must be treated with due regard and respect. God created the diversity to come together harmoniously to achieve His purposes. Paul wants the Christians to value their fellows and care for each other. Enough of spiritual elitism and snobbery.

In our age, we have been given, through electronic communication, a far more detailed picture of the worldwide body of Christ than any previous generation has ever had. We cannot restrict our sense of being the Lord's body simply to the people we see each week. We are called in some way to rejoice with or grieve with our fellow Christians around the globe who celebrate or suffer.

3. Offices and gifts in the church (12:27-31a)—Speaking to each Christian's part in contributing to the unity of the body, Paul illustrates that in a selective discussion of church offices and gifts. He lists the following gifts:

- Apostles (12:28, 29)—A foundational office for the proclamation of the faith and the establishment of the church.
- Prophets/prophecy (12:10, 28, 29)—The ability to set forth the teaching of the Lord. This gift may have been two-edged, forthtelling the Word in preaching and foretelling the future or providing a word from God in prophetic utterance. Prophecy is distinguished from teaching, but there is disagreement as to what precisely Paul meant by it. Whatever it was, it was intelligible and its exercise edified the body of Christ.
- Teachers (12:28, 29) provide instruction and exhortation in the faith. Pastor-teacher is a special category (Eph. 4:11).
- Miracles (12:10, 28, 29)—The ability to perform acts beyond the purview of natural laws. Once again, some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Healing (12:9, 28, 30)—The ability to effect physical healing by the Spirit. Some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Helps (12:28)—The gift of being helpful/useful in a variety of ways.
- Administration (12:28)—A gift in guiding the church.
- Tongues (12:10, 28, 30)—The ability to speak in known human languages previously unknown to the speaker or in ecstatic heavenly languages. Some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.
- Interpretation of tongues (12:10, 30)—The ability to interpret tongues, to elaborate the meaning to those unable to speak in tongues. Once again, some see this gift as a sign gift belonging to the church's infancy providing credentials for God's servants.

He concludes this discussion by telling them to desire the gifts that edify the body and then speaks of the excellent way that gifts are to be used.

4. Primacy of love (12:31b-13:13)—This chapter speaks of the superiority and necessity of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts and in life in the community of faith (13:1-3). Then the apostle describes the essential character of Christian love (13:4-7), its enduring nature (13:9-12), before concluding that love is greater than even faith and hope (13:13).

Divorced from its context, this portion has been trumpeted as a "hymn of love" or a sentimental sermon on Christian brotherhood/sisterhood. However, this text is in the context of the Corinthians' problems: abuse of gifts, divisions, envy, selfishness, impatience with each other in public meetings, and tolerating immoral behavior. This is not Paul's literary attempt to go pixie and turn on a Hallmark movie. This is love with its sleeves rolled up. Love enriches. Love edifies. Love endures.

13:1-3—Love is the way believers are to exercise their spiritual gifts. The term used is *agape*, a term also used of the abiding relationship within the Godhead. Paul is attempting to counteract the excessive emphasis the Corinthians were placing on spiritual gifts to the detriment of love for the Lord Jesus and for their fellow believers.

13:4-7—Paul lists love's positive characteristics and states love's virtues in their negation of certain

attitudes. Paul lists fifteen characteristics of love:

- Patient (*makrothumein*)—This speaks of patience or long suffering with people.
- Kind—A sense of being “sweet to all.” Kind people do not harbor or promote a critical spirit.
- Not envious—It does not covet other people’s possessions, situations, or gifting.
- Not a braggart—Love has a self-effacing quality. It is far more impressed with its own unworthiness than with its own merit.
- Not inflated with its own importance. People robed in brief authority can be quite a sorry sight.
- Does not behave gracelessly. There is a type of sanctimonious Christianity that takes delight in being blunt, almost brutal. True Christian love never forgets that courtesy, tact, and politeness are lovely things.
- Does not insist on its rights.
- Never blows its top, flying into a temper. This is an exasperation with people who overstep a line. Love masters temper and walks it back with gentleness.
- Does not dwell or store up memory (*logizeshthai*) of wrongs done to it. The Greek word is an accounting term. It enters an item in a ledger so that it will not be forgotten. So many of us do this with past mistakes. One of the great arts of life is to learn what to forget.
- Finds no pleasure in evil-doing. There is no malicious or self-satisfied delight in hearing something derogatory about another person.
- Rejoices with the truth. Christian love does not veil the truth, even when there is a desire deep down to do just that.
- Love endures.
- Love trusts in God and in our fellow pilgrims. We choose to believe the best in each other.
- Love never ceases to hope.
- Love bears with things (*hupomenein*) with fortitude and expectant hope in the Lord’s resolution of all things.

In short, love removes pride, vanity, and self-exaltation, the Corinthians’ *modus operandi*.

13:8-13—Love is permanent, unlike prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. This has occasioned much speculation, even confident assertion, in our era of the modern charismatic movement. Many have taken “when perfection comes” as meaning the completion of the canon of the New Testament at the end of the first century. This, in effect, makes the entire charismatic experience beyond that time illegitimate. Others see “when perfection comes” as referring to the second coming of Christ. Still others see the expression as indefinite and left that way by the apostle, a clue to Bible students that they should do the same. The upshot of the passage is that one day believers will know fully even as we are fully known. The passage drives us to blessed hope rather than bickering interpretations.

The moral demands of the Christian life that are very real are often presented within the framework of duty, a long obedience in the same direction. It can seem like a cold, hard slog to a distant and impossible standard. Paul sees all of life in the framework of God’s future. It has burst onto the scene in the Lord Jesus and in Him we will share His destiny as joint heirs with Him. It is a world of joy, delight, and love to eagerly anticipate.

Love is the abiding reality of that future. Faith will vanish into sight; hope emptied into delight; love in heaven will shine most bright. Paul then places these abiding certainties over and against the things the Corinthians were priding themselves in. He uses three illustrations to speak of the transition from the present to the glorious future he envisions—a child growing to maturity, a mirror only able to show things dimly, and the partiality of things that will be complete in our glorious future.

13:12—Paul refers to seeing things in a mirror dimly. Mirrors at that time were made of highly

polished metal that at best gave poor reflections. What one saw in mirrors were dim and shadowy outlines. Paul is using the mirrors of the day as an illustration of how imperfectly we can perceive spiritual reality.

5. Prophecy and tongues; Priority of intelligibility and edification of others (14:1-40)—This chapter deals with two matters: the relative value of the exercise of prophecy and tongues in community (14:1-25) and the orderly conduct of public worship (14:26-40). Three principles predominate: edification, intelligibility, and orderliness.

14:1-25—Priority of prophecy—Paul argues that in public worship prophecy is to be preferred over speaking in tongues because it conveys intelligible speech that edifies the church while tongues, without interpretation, does not.

14:1-5—Paul lays down his basic point—prophecy edifies, uninterpreted tongues does not. The mistake the Corinthians were making was to emphasize personal edification and expression to the neglect of the church in public worship. Paul notes that they were neglecting prophecy and preaching in favor of the flashier gifts like tongues. Paul contrasts prophecy and tongues noting that prophecy speaks to people, while tongues only speak to God (14:1-4). For purposes of edification speaking intelligibly is preferable. Prophecy edifies the whole church, while tongues edify only the speaker (14:4-5).

14:6-12—He provides vivid illustrations from musical instruments, citing flute, harp, and trumpet. If they produce nothing more than senseless sounds without systematic differences in pitch, tone, and time they fail to communicate anything to the listener. So too with language in the church. The Corinthians should be eager to exercise those gifts that edify the body of Christ.

14:13-17—In these verses, Paul underlines the need for interpretation in the exercise of tongues. A tongue may itself be conveying praise and thanksgiving to God, but if no one else understands that it fails to communicate and to edify others.

14:18—Paul's analysis is not a matter of sour grapes, minimizing a gift he does not have. He spoke in tongues. The apostle wanted to make that clear to the gift-conscious Corinthians.

14:20-25—Paul doubles down on the superiority of prophecy over tongues. He applies the intelligibility principle to outsiders coming to worship. Visitors to worship in Corinth, entering when people were chattering in tongues, would be led in one of two directions. It would resemble pagan cults where worshippers got carried away into ecstatic states and trances. Or unintelligibility of the tongue would simply lead them to think that they had crazy people leading worship. In contrast, the preached word could well bring conviction of sin and of God's presence in their midst.

14:20-21—Paul begins with a strange quote from Isaiah 28:11-12, where God says that, as a mark of His displeasure with rebellious Israel, he would address them by the lips of foreigners (the Assyrians) in speech they cannot understand. The prophet's point was that if Israel would not hear the Lord through the prophets in their own language, God would speak judgment to them through the Assyrians, in a language they would not understand or appreciate. Paul is bringing the Corinthians up short in their insistence on their right of expression. He wants the Corinthians to stop being like children, enamored with flashy stuff.

14:22-25—Tongues are a sign of something miraculous for unbelievers that believers do not need to verify the message. However, if the Corinthians overemphasize the gift of tongues, visiting unbelievers are going to think they are nuts. On the other hand, prophecy's effect on unbelievers can be very wholesome—they might be convicted of sin, realize their accountability, and have their sinful heart and past laid open.

14:26-40—Orderly worship enjoined—Their worship should be orderly and conducive to instruction

and edification.

14:26-33—Paul wants the gifting of the church to have a chance for expression, but he is equally concerned that the services of the Church should not become a competitive disorder. This advice is difficult to apply to the modern scene. The early church clearly had no professional ministry and there was obviously flexibility and spontaneity to the service that in most modern churches is lacking.

A critical point to note when we read these regulations for worship, is that Paul had been with the Corinthian believers for a year and half (Acts 18:11, 18) prior to writing this letter and had not made these rules apparent to them or even had suggested them. The point is that these rules are directed to a specific situation that had subsequently arisen in Corinth. In addition, his advice advocates more participation in worship than may have been natural in other worship settings of the day and certainly in our day. The scene is worship in the house churches at Corinth, comprising at most fifty people and usually less than that. The dynamic would resemble our small group interaction closer than that of our public worship.

14:26-28—These verses provide a short outline of the elements of Corinthian worship—a hymn, instruction, revelation, a tongue, an interpretation of the tongue. Paul lays the burden on the one speaking in tongues to see if an interpreter is present.

14:29-33—There were multiple speakers at the Corinthian services. Paul limits the number so as not to cause confusion.

14:34-35—Another controversial passage. Paul shuts down any speaking role for women in worship. Men were to lead and speak. How this text relates to the earlier passage in 11:5ff, where Paul speaks of women praying and prophesying has occasioned considerable disagreement. Traditionalists take the tack that 11:5ff is saying that women were doing a different sort of thing in public worship than chapter 14 deals with.

Others disagree. This prohibition of women speaking in public worship is set in a cultural situation where women's participation was disorderly. Women were far less trained in the Scriptures and indeed, were frequently illiterate. Paul does not expect uneducated women to refrain from learning. Far be it. Their husbands were to respect their intellectual capabilities, although undeveloped because of their culture in which they lived, and instruct with gentleness. This stern direction is best seen as a cultural one directed specifically to the Corinthian situation. To demand silence of women in church as a universal rule takes the command out of its cultural context and does violence to the spirit of the instruction.

Some textual background adds to the discussion. The command for women to keep silent in assemblies does not occur here in some manuscripts. Instead, they were added at the end of chapter 14, as a kind of appendix. Several serious scholars have concluded that the verses were not Pauline but added by a scribe who was anxious to keep public worship a matter of male leadership only.

Most see these verses appearing here and authentically Pauline. His concern was for order in worship. Perhaps there was disruption of women asking questions aloud and across rooms in the house church. Whatever the situation, Paul's concern is for order, peace, and mutual upbuilding and the current situation was not resulting in that.

14:39-40—Prophecy is more important than tongues, but the church should not prohibit the correct use of the gift of tongues.

What of tongues for our day? Some assert that the so-called sign gifts (tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and miracles) ceased with the completion of the canon of Scripture at the end of the first century of our era, citing 1 Corinthians 13:10. Others assert that the relevance of tongues today is

found in the principle that God used this gift and other miraculous gifts in the apostolic times and in the Old Testament to authenticate the messengers of His Word. Christians today have no such continuing need and should not seek such gifts.

However, there are others to see this differently, that tongues can be an instrument for service and for glorying God. Some see on the evangelical horizon of our day charismatic groups who have rediscovered the importance and power of praise and the energizing power of the Spirit in worship. In their order of worship, some have set aside the tidiness of our liturgical traditions to praise the Lord for extended periods of time and in ways traditionalists find uncomfortable. This focus on praise, this rending of liturgical rituals, has been used of the Spirit to get the faith of many airborne.

However, the gift is not an end in itself and must never be used as a test of fellowship or spirituality. Some churches have adopted a seek not/forbid not stance as to the private use of the gift of tongues, and a standing request to refrain from the public use of the gift given the controversy that frequently attends its use.

VII. Resurrection of Christ and of the Believer (15:1-58)—The background here is how to proclaim Christian truth to a society that discounts any idea of the resurrection of the body. The church was composed of Jews and Gentiles. For those of a Jewish background, the Sadducees denied that there was any life after death at all. There was a Jewish line of the thought that denied any immortality of the soul and any resurrection of the body (see Acts 23:8). In addition, while there are glimpses of life to come in the Old Testament (see Pss. 16:9-11; 73:24), there are quite a few texts that assume a grim pessimism regarding what happens after death (see Pss. 6:5, 30:9, 39:13, 88:10-12; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). For those from a Greek background, most believed in the immortality of the soul, but that belief involved the complete dissolution of the physical body. For the Greek, immortality involved getting rid of the body. Many saw the body as a tomb, their soul shackled to a corpse. Physical resurrection was unthinkable. Paul was derided for proclaiming the resurrection while at Athens (Acts 17:32). The skeptical attitude towards bodily resurrection had invaded the church. Some of the Corinthians were questioning the physical resurrection from the dead.

This classic chapter replies to that skepticism. Paul begins by stating what was faithfully communicated to him (15:1-3). Then he validates the historical reality of Christ's resurrection by citing eyewitnesses, including himself (15:4-11). He argues for the resurrection of believers from the reality of Christ's resurrection (15:12-19), showing that Christ is the first fruits of the believing dead (15:20-28). He calls on the Corinthians to give up their doubts about the resurrection and witness to their faith in the Lord Jesus (15:29-34). He concludes the passage by discussing the nature of the resurrected body (15:35-49) and the victory over death (15:50-58).

The overall point of Chapter 15 is that in the resurrection of Jesus Himself the power of the creator God was at work to bring about the renewal of the world, and that through the work of the spirit this same creator God will give new glorious, deathless bodily life to all His people. Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to understand where they are and who they are in God's entire story. The Lord Jesus' death and resurrection was crucial in the discussion of sexual morality in chapter 6. The discussion of the Eucharist in chapter 11 encouraged the Corinthians to look back to the death of the Lord Jesus and to look ahead to when He comes again. In the lyrical chapter of chapter 13, the end of the chapter speaks of how love is the thing that will last into the new world that God will make. Resurrection is the rock bottom reality for Christians. It is the reality that makes sense of who we are and where we are going in Christ. Christianity is not a set of ideas or a path to spirituality, or a rule of life, or a particular agenda, however virtuous. It is about our new life in Christ and the Lord's resurrection points to our own resurrection and the destiny of the new creation.

A. Resurrection of the Lord Jesus (15:1-11)—Paul reminds the Corinthians that the resurrection is an integral part of the gospel (15:1-2), he then focuses on things of first importance of gospel witness, including Christ death for sin, His burial, His resurrection, and His appearances to believers. He then cites those to whom Christ appeared, including appearances to groups (the apostles as a group in 15:7), and to some five hundred people at one time (15:6), and various individuals, including Peter, the apostle who denied him, James, the half-brother who did not believe in Him, and Paul himself, the arrogant Pharisee who persecuted the Lord's followers (15:3-8). He concludes by reflecting on his own unworthiness and the Lord's matchless redeeming grace (15:9-11).

15:6—The apostolic witness was important to the Corinthians but so was the sheer number of witnesses. Paul specifically notes that five hundred people saw the risen Lord at one time. This is unparalleled and discounts hallucinations as an explanation. There would have to be many hallucinations of exact nature and a couple of a mass nature (appearance to the Twelve and to five hundred people at the same time). That is beyond unlikely, unless one is of a mindset determined to explain it away.

15:7—The James mentioned must have been James, the Lord's half-brother (Mt. 13:55; Acts 1:14; 15:13). The two other James would be included in the cite to the Twelve (15:5).

B. Consequences if no resurrection (15:12-19)— Paul's argument here is designed to show the Corinthians what would follow if there was no resurrection. His strongest argument in the passage is the link between sin and death. If there is no resurrection, we are still in our sins for the power of sin has not been broken. What is the point of being Messiah's people in such a situation? They were hated, reviled, persecuted, and struggling—for what? Christianity in such a situation is just a form of spirituality, another religion alongside others in the marketplace of ancient pluralism. But Jesus has been raised and the power of sin has been broken.

If there is no resurrection, then preaching Christ is empty and meaningless as is the resultant faith (15:14). In addition, Paul's own testimony about the Lord's resurrection is false (15:15-16). A dead, entombed Savior saves no one. But the Lord did arise and that glorious event confirms wonderful truth—

- Truth is stronger than falsehood—The Resurrection is the guarantee of the indestructibility of truth.
- Good is stronger than evil.
- Love is stronger than hate.
- Life is stronger than death.

15:17-19—Paul continues drawing conclusions from the proposition that the dead do not rise:

- Our faith is vain, meaningless, and fruitless;
- We are still in our sins;
- There is no hope for those who had died;
- Persevering through persecutions and hardships was futile;
- Believers are most to be pitied.

C. Christ as guarantee of our resurrections (15:20-28)—Paul explains the order of the events in the coming kingdom. First, Jesus is raised and is already Lord of the world, albeit not universally recognized. In time he will put the world to rights. Paul quotes Psalm 110 (15:25), which is about the king whom God will place at his right hand until all his enemies are brought into submission, and Psalm 8 (15:27), which speaks of God putting all things under his feet. The achievement of the Lord Jesus, and his present reign in which he is bringing the world back to order, is the fulfillment of what

God originally intended human beings to do.

Paul uses three images in this discussion. First, Jesus as first fruits (15:20, 23). As the Old Testament festival of first fruits was a sign of the harvest to come, so the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a sign of the resurrection of believers. When Jesus was raised, it was God's assurance that we would be raised in the future. Second, Adam (15:21-22) as a type of the Lord Jesus in contrast. The first Adam disobeyed God and brought into the world sin and death, but the last Adam obeyed the Father, suffered the penalty of death for our sin, and rose to bring righteousness and life (see Rom. 5:12-21). Finally, the kingdom and the summation of righteousness when the Lord Jesus turns over the kingdom to the Father (15:24-28).

15:27-28—These verses summarize the administrative process in which this present world is brought from its sin and disorder by the power of the Son who, in the economy of the Godhead, turns it all over to the Father, the supreme administrative head.

D. Implications of denying the resurrection (15:29-34)—The implications of denying the resurrection continue. The custom of early believers of baptizing for the dead was meaningless, Paul's own sufferings for Christ, including fighting wild beasts at Ephesus, were foolishness. The upshot of this passage is that baptismal rituals and ministerial sacrifice make no sense if the dead are not raised because the faith is meaningless. Indeed, if the dead do not rise, then let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. The implication is that denying the resurrection of the dead leads gradually or directly to loose living.

15:29—There has been much discussion of Paul's reference to the "baptism for the dead." There seems to have been a practice of vicarious baptism in the early church, or at least at Corinth. Some have suggested that baptism "for the dead" should read as "over or above the dead," meaning that living people were being baptized over the graves of martyrs. Others say the people were getting themselves baptized to fill up the vacant places in the church that the dead had left. Still others say this means that living people were getting themselves baptized out of respect or affection for the dead. Finally, some claim that this practice was utilized for people who intended to be baptized and become members of the church but died while under instruction and before being baptized. Paul simply mentions this practice without approving it and uses it for his argument that there is a resurrection from the dead.

15:32—Paul's reference to fighting wild beasts in Ephesus is best to be taken metaphorically, that his human enemies in Ephesus were like wild beasts.

15:33—Paul supports his position by quoting the Greek poet Menander. The "bad company" points to those who were denying the resurrection and were a threat to the testimony of the church.

E. Nature of the resurrected body (15:35-49)—In this section, Paul discusses the nature of the resurrected body. Greek philosophers asserted that the resurrection of the body was an impossibility. Paul makes the point that the resurrection is not a physical resuscitation or reconstruction. The contrast Paul is making between the physical body, and the spiritual body is between a body animated by soulish life and a body animated by God's own spirit. In explaining this he uses three analogies to point to a spiritual resurrected body—seeds in the ground (15:35-38, 42-48), distinct types of flesh in physical bodies (15:49), and differing heavenly bodies (15:40-41). Paul speaks eloquently of our bodies being sown perishable and raised imperishable, that just as we bore the likeness of earthly Adam so too, we will bear the likeness of Christ from heaven (15:42-49). The overall point is that in the resurrection of Jesus Himself the power of the creator God was at work to bring about the renewal of the world, and that through the work of the Spirit this same creator God will give new glorious, deathless bodily life to all His people.

15:35-44a—Paul uses analogies from the physical life of the world to describe the nature of the resurrected body. His first analogy is seed (15:37-38) which teaches that through dying (decaying in the ground), a seed gives birth by God’s design to a new and different body though one related to the seed it came from. His second analogy involves the body of flesh (15:39) that the various forms of animal life have. The third analogy relates to inanimate objects of creation (15:40-41), both earthly and heavenly. Paul argues that God can take similar physical material and fashion it differently to accomplish His purpose. Paul applies these analogies to the truth of the resurrection in 15:42-44a. God can take a perishable mortal body and give it different order of life in a spiritual, immortal body.

15:42-44— Paul draws four contrasts between our present bodies and our future ones:

- Corruptible vs incorruptible;
- Dishonor vs glory;
- Weakness vs power;
- Natural body vs spiritual body.

15:44b-49—Paul develops the distinction between the natural body and the spiritual body. He puts all life in two categories, Adam and his descendants and Christ and His redeemed descendants. Natural bodies are those like Adam when he was made from the dust of the earth and given the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Spiritual bodies are those imperishable bodies that the redeemed received from the Lord Jesus.

F. Change must come; Victory over death (15:50-58)—We need to be transformed because the way we are right now is inappropriate for God’s new world. This change will be a transforming and an instantaneous one. God has already done a new thing in the Lord Jesus and He will do new things for all the Lord’s people through the power of the Spirit. Let us follow Paul’s argument—

- We are not fit in our present state to inherit the Kingdom of God. God’s people must have more than a natural physical body to inherit the eternal kingdom of God. Before we enter the Kingdom of God, we must be changed.
- The mortal body is perishable and cannot inherit that which is imperishable. This change will be a fantastic one in a twinkling of an eye. Suddenly, the perishable will be clothed imperishable, the mortal with immortality.
- We need not fear this change. The fear of death has haunted humankind. But no more. The victory has been won by our Lord Jesus. Death, the last enemy has been and will be conquered.
- Therefore, since we have glory to look forward to let us be steadfast in God’s faith and service. Our efforts will not be in vain.

He uses the term “mystery” to describe the transformation:

- Not all Christians will die for some will be alive when the Lord Jesus returns (15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15);
- But all Christians dead and alive will receive changed bodies when the Lord returns;
- The change will be instantaneous and complete;
- It will be a change from one kind of body to another.

15:58— If it is true that God is going to transform this present world, and renew us, our bodies included, then what should we do in this present time, with our bodies and with ourselves? What we do to serve the Lord really matters. We do not at present know how God will take our prayer, our service, our music, our teaching, our preaching, our care for each other, our daily work in the world and weave these various strands together into a glorious tapestry of His new creation. That He will do so is part of the truth of the Resurrection. Considering these truths, he encourages the believers to be steadfast in doing God’s work, knowing that He will reward them at His coming.

VIII. Relief Mission; Travel Plans; Final Greetings (16:1-24)—In this section, Paul provides instructions for the Corinthian participation in the relief collection for the Jerusalem church (16:1-4), shares his own travel plans and desire for an extended visit with the Corinthians (16:5-9), provides recommendations for Timothy, Apollos, and the household of Stephanas (16:10-18), before sending his own final greetings and those from his colleagues and co-workers (16:19-24).

A. Jerusalem relief mission (16:1-4)—The Corinthians must have asked about the collection for God's people at Jerusalem. The need in the Jerusalem church may have been for a variety of reasons. Jerusalem church had suffered persecution, the scattering of its members, and had suffered from its early enthusiastic pooling of its resources. In the early days of the church, members shared gladly and very generously with each other (Acts 4:41-47; 4:33-37) to the point of putting themselves at risk. There were many visitors in Jerusalem during that first Pentecost, and the church may have had to take care of many strangers for an extended period as they acclimated to the new faith. There was famine as well (Acts 11:27-30).

Paul describes the manner of collecting, giving as an act of worship according to the believers' means (an instruction that embodies the proportionate giving instruction of Deuteronomy 15:14), and choosing those assigned to carry the gift to Jerusalem. The collection signaled to the Gentile believers that they were part of the same family as their Jewish kin in Jerusalem. It also signaled to the Jewish believers that the Gentiles who had come to faith were part of the same family as they were.

Paul took pains to ensure that the money was handled honestly. He adopts a practice common among the Jewish people outside of Palestine when sending the required annual temple tax to Jerusalem. They would choose respected and trustworthy representatives to take the money, and those travelers bore letters indicating their authorization. The collection was turned into a small number of high value coins, concealed on those bearing the collection. They had a long way to go, by land and sea. There would be danger from robbers all along the way.

In various places where he speaks of this collection, Paul uses nine different words in reference to it:

- *Logia*=extra collection (16:1). This was above and beyond obligations.
- *Charis*=grace (16:3; 2 Cor. 8:4). This is a grace gift freely given.
- *Koinonia*=fellowship; sharing (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13).
- *Diakonia*=practical service (2Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12-13)
- *Hadrotes*=abundance (2 Cor. 8:20). This speaks of the envoys accompanying the gift that the abundance is not diverted and misused.
- *Eulogia*=bounty (2 Cor. 9:5). All true giving is a bounty that we are glad to provide.
- *Leitourgia*=a noble service voluntarily accepted (2 Cor. 9:12). It is used of Christian worship.
- *Eleemosune*=alms (Acts 24:17).
- *Prosphora*=offering; sacrifice (Acts 24:17).

16:2—This is the first mention in the New Testament of special significance given to Sunday. Some will give a wry smile at the thought that the first time anyone refers to Sunday, the point at issue is taking a collection.

B. Travel plans (16:5-18)—Paul makes personal requests related to his travel plans.

16:5-9—The projected journey through Macedonia fits the record of Paul's travel in Acts 19:21 and 20:1-2. Paul is writing in the spring (16:8) and anticipates spending the winter with them (16:6), which fits well with Acts 20:3 referring to a three-month interval. Hospitality was important and the Corinthians would feel honored to provide it for a prominent teacher and founder of the church in

Corinth.

16:10-14—Timothy and Apollos—Paul mentions Timothy and Apollos for distinct reasons. Timothy was a young person, and not a bold who-cares type who could stroll into a church like Corinth and charm or impress everyone with fluent, impressive oratory. He was not a forceful personality and could be intimidated by the sophisticated and arrogant Corinthians. The Corinthians were to welcome Timothy and encourage him to teach and instruct as he was able and back off from the puffed-up arrogance that had plagued so much of church life.

He mentions Apollos for other reasons. It is calculated to defuse any lingering suspicions among the party-spirited Corinthians that there was any difficulty in Paul's relationship with Apollos. In the final sentences he gives commands in ascending scale be on your guard; stand firm; be brave; be strong, do everything in love!

16:15-18—Paul commends the household of Stephanas. Stephanas was Paul's first convert in Achaia and was on the official committee, including Fortunatus and Achaicus, who were sent from Corinth to confer with Paul about the church's problems. They had stayed with him while he pondered his answer, a breath of friendly and supportive Corinthian air that must have been reassuring to Paul. They had proved themselves faithful and the church should be proud to give them the respect they deserve. He encouraged the church to honor these men.

C. Final greetings (16:19-24)—The churches in Asia sent their greetings as did Aquila and Priscilla (16:19-20), and greetings from Paul himself in his own hand (16:21). Aquila and Priscilla were a special ministry couple. The couple is mentioned in the New Testament six times, four of which name Priscilla first. She may have been the more prominent personality or may have been from a Roman aristocratic family having married a Jewish tradesman and tentmaker. They had been expelled from Rome with Claudius' decree in 49. Paul met them in Corinth (18:1-3). When Paul moved from Corinth to Ephesus, the couple packed up and moved with him and assisted in starting the church there. Paul left them to help oversee the ministry in Ephesus while he moved again to Antioch. They then moved back to Rome for Paul greets them in Romans 16:3 and in 16:4 states that they risked their lives to help save his life. See Acts 19:29-30 or 20:19 for situations where this rescue might have occurred. Once again in Rome, they played host to a house church (Rom. 16:5). In 2 Timothy 2:19, they are mentioned again, this time back in Ephesus assisting Timothy in the work of the ministry.

16:20—The holy kiss was a practice of the early church to show Christian affection and their unity in faith. A kiss of respect and friendship was customary in the ancient East. The practice fell by the wayside when opposition to the faith increased. It might have been a subject of slander used by pagan enemies.

16:21-24—Paul writing with his own hand was something of a mark of authenticity. Up until this point in the letter, he had dictated to an amanuensis (a secretarial assistant).

2 Corinthians: Nature and Defense of a New Covenant Ministry

Introduction—2 Corinthians is Paul’s most painful and personal letter defending his apostolic character, call, and credentials. This letter affords an insight into Paul’s career that none of his other epistles give. With the Corinthians, Paul not only had to contend with the spiritual darkness and the evils attendant to living near hedonistic paganism, but he also faced the active malice of jealous and unprincipled leaders who claimed to be Christians.

The accusations brought by these opponents were numerous. They charged that he walked according to the flesh (10:2) and that he was a coward – his letters sounded like thunder, but his actual presence was very unimpressive (10:10). They said that he demeaned himself by working and not taking support from the churches (11:7). They challenged his authority and apostolic credentials (11:5; 12:11-12). They attacked his personal character, claiming that he was boastful (10:8, 15), deceitful (12:16), and insinuated that he may have embezzled funds entrusted to him (8:20-23). In short, Paul was up against slander.

These accusers were false brethren (11:13-15), of Jewish origin (1:22), claiming to be apostles (11:5, 13; 12:11), who, by the clever means of letters of recommendation (3:1), had gained entrance into the Corinthian church. They were domineering (11:19-20), not ready for the hard toil of pioneering for Christ (11:23ff), preached a false gospel (11:4), and were responsible for the divisions in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 3-4).

Author and Occasion—Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in the mid-50s, shortly after he penned 1 Corinthians. Critics attack the unity of the book, but not its Pauline authorship. Various critics have alleged that there are five interpolations (insertions into the original text by later editors) in 2 Corinthians:

- 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4—Some claim that this segment is a separate letter. The insertion of this material allegedly disrupts the flow of thought between 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 7:5.
- 2 Corinthians 6:14-7—Some claim this to be extraneous material.
- 2 Corinthians 8 is seen as an interpolation that does not flow smoothly into the discussion of 2 Corinthians 9.
- Some believe that 2 Corinthians 10-13 was a separate letter, the “sorrowful letter” described in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, 9-10, which preceded the writing of 2 Corinthians proper (that is, 2 Corinthians 1-9).
- 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 is seen as an awkward intrusion by a later editor into Paul’s flow of thought between 11:31 and 12:1.

Of these theories, the one that understands 2 Corinthians 10-13 as the sorrowful letter has garnered the most support among critics. However, there is not a shred of manuscript evidence to support the theory. 2 Corinthians has a cohesive, albeit digressive unity. The difference in tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13 is best explained by a change in the audience focused upon: from the repentant majority of the Corinthians to the recalcitrant minority of the church that still clung to Paul’s critics.

Purpose—2 Corinthians was penned to defend Paul’s apostolic credentials and authority. 2 Corinthians 1-7 discuss Paul’s ministry among the Corinthians before moving into a more general discussion of the manner, message, and character of a true servant of Christ. 2 Corinthians 8-9 delineate the details of the offering for the Jerusalem church and demonstrates Paul’s forthright handling of the collection. 2

Corinthians 10-13 defends his apostleship and denounces those opposing and slandering him.

Guiding Concepts

Judaizing controversy—Even now, this controversy still plagued Paul. The nature, manner, and message of a New Covenant ministry is developed in 2 Corinthians 2-7 as a needed corrective for the teaching of Paul's opponents.

Comfort—2 Corinthians is a book of sadness and joy, conflict and reconciliation, sorrow, and comfort. From the classical text on comfort in 2 Corinthians 1:4-7, through comfort in the midst of conflict (2 Cor 12-13) and the joy of the news of reconciliation (2 Cor 7:5-7), to God's sufficient grace in all weakness (2 Cor 12:7-10), divine comfort is a constant for Paul in the midst of turmoil. Comfort relates to understanding God's perspective on the events of our lives and finding shelter and rest from the storm in His sovereign hands.

Ministry's inner sanctum—More than any other New Testament book, the inner life of a true minister of the gospel is on display here. Paul's feelings about himself, his apostolic ministry, and about his relationship to the churches he founded and nurtured are exposed to view. His pastor's heart is clearly discernible as he opens wide his own heart (6:11-12) and pleads with the Corinthians to do likewise (6:13). Clearly Paul is beyond human emotion as he shepherds the wayward Corinthians with a love which comes only from God.

Christian suffering (1:3-11; 4:17-18; 6:3-10; 12:1-10)—The principle that suffering teaches one how to treat other people is rooted in the Old Testament (see Ex. 23:9).

Christian stewardship (8:1-9:15)—Chapters 8 and 9 of this letter is a primary New Testament passage on the grace of giving.

Summary Outline:

- I. Introduction: Comfort in trouble (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. God of all comfort (1:3-7)
 - C. Deliverance from deadly peril (1:8-11)
- II. Apostolic ministry described and defended (1:12-7:16)
 - A. Change of itinerary defended (1:12-2:13)
 - B. Ministers of the New Covenant (2:14-3:6)
 - C. Glory of Old and New Covenants compared (3:7-18)
 - D. Treasure in jars of clay (4:1-18)
 - E. Eternal perspective in ministry (5:1-10)
 - F. Ministry of reconciliation (5:11-6:2)
 - G. Blizzard of troubles as marks of a sincere ministry (6:3-10)
 - H. Imploring a proper response (6:11-7:16)
- III. Relief mission: Grace of giving (8:1-9:15)
 - A. Examples of generosity (8:1-9)
 - B. Service to the saints: Advice on preparation and commendation of Titus and his team (8:11-9:5)
 - C. Principles of the grace of giving (9:6-15)
- IV. Defense and use of apostolic authority (10:1-13:10)
 - A. Assertion and exercise of apostolic authority (10:1-18)
 - B. Boasting about suffering: Apostolic credentials (11:1-12:13)
 - C. Planned visit to Corinth (12:14-13:10)
- V. Conclusion and final greetings (13:11-14)

2 Corinthians: Nature and Defense of a New Covenant Ministry

I. Introduction: Comfort in Trouble (1:1-11)—Paul writes as a man who knows trouble to people who are in trouble. The word he uses for trouble is *thlipsis*, which describes actual physical pressure on a person. The early Christians faced a pressured life. Their confession of faith might mean abandonment by family, hostility from pagan neighbors, or persecution by official authorities. The answer to this kind of suffering lies in endurance (*hupomone*). The word describes a spirit which not only accepts suffering but triumphs over it. However, we do not have to confront challenges on our own. There comes to us the comfort that is from God. This comfort brings courage and the ability to cope. Even further, Paul speaks of the honor of suffering for Christ. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, said when being bound to the stake “I thank Thee that Thou has judged me worthy of this hour.” The result is that the believer gains the ability to comfort others who are going through trials.

This is a wonderful passage for personal application. Paul is under intense pressure, far beyond his ability to bear, so that he despaired even of life itself (1:8). How did he find encouragement in God and how can we?

- Remember what God is to you (1:3)—Praise Him because He is God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, the God of mercy, and the God of all comfort.
- Remember what God does for you (1:4a, 8-11)—He permits trials to come, controls trials as they unfold, enables us to bear them, delivers us from them, and is glorified through them.
- Remember what God does through you (1:4b-7)—This is the matter of offering comfort to others. Suffering speaks many languages.

A. Salutation (1:1-2)—The mention of Timothy as a co-sender of the letter is intended to bolster Timothy's standing in the eyes of the Corinthians.

B. God of all comfort (1:3-7)—This paragraph embodies the primary emphasis of chapters 1-7—comfort amid conflict. Paul's atypical preoccupation with his own circumstances shows how serious his recent experiences have been. Paul sees his own sufferings as beneficial in driving him to trust God alone. A notable paradox of the Christian journey is that God's grace tends to be most deeply felt during difficult moments rather than in times of ease. While we long for exaltation, it is often in humiliation that we find grace. The greater the suffering, the greater the godly comfort, and the greater the ability to share divine sympathy with others.

Paul can speak comfort to hurting people because of what he has been through. He uses the word translated “comfort” ten times in five verses. It is a versatile word. It can mean “to call someone to come near” or “to make a strong appeal” or “to treat in a friendly way.” Comfort meets people where they are, brings them to a place where they can see new hope, new possibilities, and new ways forward. The heart of true comfort is the reality that what is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of His people. In this letter, God is at work in and through the strange and troubling events that are happening,

Illustration—On bearing and sharing—Elizabeth, the Queen-Mum of Elizabeth II, made many visits to bombed out areas of London's East End during the blitz. Following the bombing of Buckingham Palace, she was said to remark, “Now I can look the East End in the face.”

1:5—In Jewish tradition, the “pangs of Messiah” was a period of tribulation for God’s people. Commentators have read this text in that light. Pain should drive the Lord’s people to trust God for help.

C. Deliverance from deadly peril (1:8-11)—Paul describes a trial while at Ephesus that was almost beyond bearing. We do not know exactly what it was. Various candidates have been suggested:

- Fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32);
- Scourged with thirty-nine stripes (2 Cor. 11:24);
- Ephesian riot instigated by Demetrius (Acts 19:23-42);
- Persecution encountered at Ephesus or elsewhere (Acts 20:19; 1 Cor. 16:19);
- An attack of a recurring malady.

But whatever it was, it drove him back to complete reliance on God and demonstrated to the apostle his utter dependence on the Almighty. The danger of prosperity is that it engenders false independence. We think we can manage things by ourselves.

II. Apostolic Ministry Described and Defended (1:12-7:16)—One reason Paul writes this letter is to answer the insinuations in Corinth about the authenticity of his apostleship, the propriety of his conduct, and his commitment to the Corinthian believers. This portion is an emotional affirmation of his sincere commitment to the ministry in general and to the Corinthians in particular. He defends his change of plans (1:12-2:13) and he describes a glorious New Covenant ministry (2:14-7:16). Paul senses in an acute way his own helplessness and weakness and came to appreciate in a fresh way how completely dependent he was on God to accomplish anything lasting in his ministry.

A ministry is glorious because God is in it. A New Covenant ministry is triumphant in Christ (2:12-3:6), glorious because of the ministry of the Spirit (3:7-18), received and conducted by the power of God (4:1-15), with an eternal perspective (4:16-5:10), based on the message of reconciliation (5:11-6:2), with authenticating marks of ministry—the sufferings of a servant and the sustaining enablement of God (6:3-10). This portion concludes with Paul not only seeking acceptance of his ministry and message but a rejection of the false apostles who so slandered him (6:11-7:16).

Some commentators view this passage as a separate letter accidentally inserted into the middle of another Pauline letter and not as a digression. This view has little to commend it. The first copies were scrolls (codices were later) which precluded accidental insertions.

A. Change of itinerary defended (1:12-2:13)—Paul defends his change in travel plans and answers charges of vacillation and domineering leveled against him. Hospitality was important in antiquity. The inns were poor and often doubled as brothels. Paul's failure to visit as promised appeared to break his word and disrespect Corinthian hospitality. He denies that he acted in a worldly and fickle manner (1:12-14). He reviews his travel plans (1:15-22) and explains his reasons for changing them: he was reluctant to cause the Corinthians grief as he had on an earlier visit (2:23-2:4). He then moves to the subject of forgiving the offender in question (2:5-11) before reciting the events that led up to the writing of 2 Corinthians (2:12-13).

1:15-22—That Paul had to defend himself because he changed his travel plans reveals the pettiness of his critics. Three separate itineraries were involved: Plan A—Ephesus—Macedonia—Corinth—Jerusalem; Plan B—Ephesus—Corinth—Macedonia—Corinth—Jerusalem. His actual itinerary seems to have been—Ephesus—Corinth (painful visit)—Ephesus—Troas (2:12-13)—Macedonia (7:5). To turn this change of itinerary into an argument of vacillation born of selfishness and impulse speaks to the deceitful shrewdness of Paul's opponents. Paul's change of plans related to his genuine concern for the Corinthians and to avoiding unnecessary pain and discomfort.

The trustworthiness of the messenger affects the trustworthiness of the message. Preaching and teaching is always truth through personality. Paul's reply to these critics says two significant things:

- It is through the Lord Jesus that we say "Amen" (let it be so) to the promises of God.

- Then he speaks of the earnest (*arrabon*) of the Spirit (1:22). An *arrabon* was the first installment of a payment, a guarantee that the rest of the payment was sure to follow. The Spirit is that guarantee in our lives. The kind of life the Spirit enables us to live here and now is the first installment of our eternal life in heaven.

1:23-2:4—Here is an unhappy echo of a difficult situation. The Corinthians were torn with divisions and with some who were challenging Paul's authority. Seeking to mend matters, Paul had made a quick visit to Corinth which made things worse. He describes this as his “painful visit.” In response to this, he wrote a severe letter. Some people think the letter was lost. Others think that it appears, at least in part, in 2 Corinthians 10-13. In 1:23, Paul informs them that he changed his plans to visit them so as not to make things worse. His opponents saw this itself as another example of vacillation, even manipulation.

2:5-11—More of an unhappy echo. Once again, we lack definitive information about what exactly is going on here. Was the individual Paul is encouraging them to forgive the incestuous brother denounced in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5? Was it someone who insulted Paul during his painful visit? We do not really know. Paul is exhorting them to forgive and restore. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Letting go of someone else's guilt helps free you from the negative effects of their actions.

Discipline had been exercised, but some felt more was due. Paul pleads for forgiveness. They needed to confront the issue, but having done that, to let it go. The issue in exercising discipline was the correction of the wrongdoer and good name of the church. Discipline must never be an exercise in vengeance. It must never drive people to despair or take their heart and enthusiasm away from them.

Paul 's counsel is pastoral. He doesn't name the offender (2:5-8), recognizes the remedial purpose of Christian discipline (2:6-7), understands the psychological needs of the penitent wrongdoer (2:6-8), appeals to his own conduct as an example (2:10), and warns of Satan's schemes in disciplinary proceedings (2:11). 2:10 seems to indicate that the offense was a personal affront to Paul and not an act of immorality in the church. Forgiveness must be extended for the welfare of the community and to avoid playing into Satan's hands.

2:12-13—Paul curtailed his evangelistic ministry at Troas because of his restless spirit. He was at wit's end over the Corinthian situation when He did not find Titus at Troas as they had planned and so went on to Macedonia. Paul was relieved to find Titus there and receive the good news about the Corinthian compliance and the individual's repentance (2:12-13). He will pick this thread up again in 7:5. From this point to 7:4 is one extended discussion of what it means to be an apostle, servant, or minister of God's new covenant.

B. Ministers of the New Covenant (2:14-3:6)—Paul speaks of participating in the triumph of the Lord Jesus and goes on to speak of being the sweet scent of Christ to some people and the perfume of death to others. He has a triumph of a Roman general in mind here. In these triumphs, there would be priests included, along with others, who would swing censors with incense. He sees Christ marching in triumph with himself in the Lord's train. The fragrance Paul describes was the message, sweet to some and not so to others. Through the apostles, God was spreading a fragrant aroma of Himself, gained in the knowledge of Christ. The proclaimers of Christ were at the same time life-giving fragrance to those who believe and a death dealing drug to those who repudiate the gospel.

Chapter 2 concludes with more of an unhappy echo. People have questioned his motives. Here he defends himself, saying his motives were pure (*eilikrineia*). This word was a compound word built on the words for sun and for judging or assessing. Prospective purchasers of pottery would hold pieces up to the penetrating rays of the Attic sunshine to see if there were any cracks in the pottery. Paul is saying that his message was from God and could stand the scrutiny of the Lord Jesus Himself. Many people in ancient society perceived wandering teachers as charlatans and many philosophers and moralists felt

the need to repudiate that charge, as Paul does in 2:17.

He then moves to his opponents' practice of letters of recommendation (3:1-3). Opponents may have been emissaries of the Jews who had come to undo Paul's work, perchance with letters from the Sanhedrin to accredit them. Paul's letter of recommendation was the Corinthian congregation itself, written not with fading ink on parchment but with the Spirit on the hearts of people. The very lives of the Corinthians in Christ were the result of his ministry among them. He then goes on to assert competence in ministry in the Spirit (3:4-6). The basis of the Old Covenant between the Lord and Israel was a lifeless written Code. The Old Covenant was a deadly thing, producing a legal relationship between God and humanity. You must keep the laws to maintain your relationship with God. It killed hope because people cannot keep the law. It killed life because law violation meant condemnation and death. It innervated strength because law told people what to do without giving them the power to do it. The New Covenant was based on love, a filial relationship. It was life-giving because it changed a person's heart orientation and gave people the strength to do what it told them to do.

C. Glory of Old and New Covenants compared (3:7-18)—Paul compares the old and new economies, each accomplishing distinctive ministries accompanied by glory. However, the glory of the new covenant was so superior that the glory of the old faded into insignificance.

3:7ff—Paul cites the internal attestation of the Spirit as superior to any external human commendation. He intimates that his opponents proclaimed an adulterated message based on the Old Covenant. He continues by underscoring the superiority of the New Covenant, basing his discussion on Exodus 34:29-35. When Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the tablets of the law, his face shone which required being veiled. Paul reasons according to the Jewish principle *qal vahomer*, “how much more.” If such glory dealt with the giving of the law that brought death and condemnation, how much more glorious will be the ministry of the Spirit which brings righteousness. The Old Covenant's glory was temporary and fading, making way for the New Covenant and the ministry of the Spirit.

3:12-18—Paul explains the veiling of Moses face and the fading radiance. A veil covered the Jewish hearts comparable to the veil covering the radiance of Moses' face. Only in Christ is the veil set aside. Under the new covenant, all Christians behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. The Jews still read the law with veiled hearts as many Jews and Gentiles still do today. They veil their hearts to the truth of the gospel in several ways:

- by their prejudice;
- by wishful thinking;
- by fragmentary thinking;
- by disobedience;
- by unteachable spirits.

Paul describes believers, with unveiled faces, beholding in the mirror of the gospel the glory of the Lord and progressively transformed into the likeness of the Lord with ever-increasing glory.

D. Treasure in jars of clay (4:1-18)—In 4:1-6, Paul says that he preaches Christ and himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus. He sets forth the truth plainly, commending himself to everyone's conscience before God. Paul denies that he or his colleagues adulterated the glorious message of the Lord. Teachers like Paul needed to be ready to refute the charge leveled against them that they proclaimed themselves for their own benefit. In 4:7-18, he describes himself and others as clay pots, a most humble container for such a rich treasure as the gospel. He says that he and other believers have a wonderful treasure within in jars of clay so that the all-surpassing power is of God.

4:3-4—Paul returns to the veil. If the gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, blinded by

the god of this age.

4:7-12—Paul provides several paradoxes of a faithful ministry:

- The difference between the value of the gospel treasure and the apparent worthlessness of the gospel minister; and
- A series of paradoxes illustrating the weakness of Paul in discharging his commission and the power of God in persevering him—hard-pressed, but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; struck down, but not destroyed; carrying around in his body the death of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of the Lord Jesus might also be displayed in his body.

The treasure is the point, not the clay pot. Paul begins his inverse brag here. His apostolic credentials are in his catalog of suffering listed here and elsewhere (4:8-12; 6:4-10; 7:5; 11:16ff). Do not look for showy, flashy rhetoric that leaves the problems and sufferings of the world to others. Observe those who are willing to face death for their devotion to Jesus, so that His life can be evident in their human existence.

4:8-9—It is fascinating to compare 4:8-9 with 1:8-9. In 1:8-9, he was under intense pressure beyond endurance, despairing of life, and carrying a sentence of death. He really felt all those things. In 4:8-9, he speaks of being hard pressed, but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, struck down but not destroyed, carrying around in his body the death of the Lord Jesus, that the life of the Lord could be revealed. Paul was learning again not to rely on himself, but on the power of God.

4:12—The deeper his experience of trials and sufferings, the richer the experience of the joys and privileges of robust Christian life.

4:13-15—Paul proclaims the good news of the Lord Jesus through suffering in robust confidence because he shared the psalmist's conviction that faith cannot be silent (Ps. 116:10) and because of his own conviction that the Lord Jesus' resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all believers. How was Paul able to cope?

- He was aware that if a person would share the life of Christ, he/she must share its risks. If a person wishes to live with Christ, he/she must be willing to die with Him.
- He had the memory of the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.
- His personal hardships and suffering helped guide others toward God's light and love.

4:16-18— In this passage, he tells the Corinthians why he does not lose heart when encountering circumstances which might have made people think that he had fallen out of God's care and purpose altogether. He compares glory to glory. The glory of the giving of the law was nothing compared to the glory we have in the gospel (3:7-8). The glory we have in the gospel, like treasure in clay pots (4:6), is nothing compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed.

There is glory through suffering. Paul refuses to be discouraged because—

- His commission as a minister of a new and superior covenant;
- The prospect of sharing in Christ's triumphant resurrection;
- His immediate task of promoting the Corinthians' spiritual welfare;
- His eternal reward outweighed his temporary suffering.

Plato and many philosophers after him contrasted temporal reality and eternal reality. Plato himself believed that the world of Forms or Ideas was the real and unchanging world, whereas the temporary and changing world of sense knowledge was only a world of shadows. Paul does not deny the reality of the visible world but does agree that it is subject to decay. It is the unseen world that is eternal and pristine.

E. Eternal perspective in ministry (5:1-10)—Paul continues his reflection, specifying the sources of divine comfort to believers facing the possibility of immediate death—

- The certainty of the future possession of a spiritual body to replace “this earthly tent” (5:1-4);
- The present possession of the Spirit as a trustworthy pledge (*arrabon*) of future transformation (5:5);
- The knowledge that death involves a departure into Christ’s immediate presence (5:6-8).

5:1-5—He refers to our earthly bodies as a tent, which will be exchanged for a better abode. We will be embodied in our future abode. He continues with the idea of body as clothing. We will be re-clothed. Once again, the future is not about being dis-embodied but re-embodied. Our resurrection bodies have as their model and prototype, the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus.

5:9-10—The doctrinal implications of 5:1-8 for present behavior is pressed home. In 5:9, Paul’s ambition to please the Lord Jesus comes directly from his knowledge that death would terminate his relative exile from Christ and would inaugurate walking in true sight in the presence of the Lord. In 5:10, Paul speaks of the obligation of every Christian to give an account of himself to God. Paul had appeared before the governor’s judgment seat (*bema*) in Acts 18:12. However, Paul’s allusion here is to the day of judgment in which God’s throne becomes the ultimate judgment seat.

Some people see it as odd that Paul, preaching justification by faith, affirms the reality of a future judgment based on works. However, he insists that when someone believes on the Lord Jesus, the future verdict is brought forward into the present. Justification by faith does not mean that God has decided that moral behavior does not matter after all, but that only faith matters. Rather, God condemns sin in the death of the Lord Jesus so that condemnation of those “in Christ” is impossible. In addition, God has given his Spirit to those “in Christ” enabling them to become in their moral behavior, the type of people he has already declared them to be.

People often suggest that since God is a God of love, He surely will forgive everyone any way. Forgiveness does not mean moral indifference. We must not mistake forgiveness for mere tolerance. God does not tolerate evil. He hates it. He will not allow it into His new creation.

F. Ministry of reconciliation (5:11-6:2)—Paul reflects on his motivation for service in a gospel ministry (5:11-15) and then on the message of reconciliation (5:16-21). His motivation for his earnest preaching was twofold: the knowledge of his accountability to the Lord Jesus (5:11) and the awareness of Christ’s example of self-sacrificing devotion (5:14-15). The message of reconciliation with God is one of a new creation in the Lord Jesus (5:17) at the initiative of God Himself (5:18-19). The faithful minister implores others to accept the divine offer and be reconciled to God (5:20). He concludes this passage with a succinct summary of the “great exchange” in 5:21 and an earnest exhortation to receive God’s gracious favor (6:1-2).

In ancient societies, praising oneself was considered inappropriate, which makes the Corinthians’ interest in Paul’s boastful rivals particularly intriguing. However, defending oneself against criticism was acceptable, especially when the group of people involved should have been coming to your defense. In this passage, Paul defends and elaborates on his ministry of reconciliation.

5:11-15—Lord’s love makes us press on—The logic of love outweighs all other logic known to humanity. Love changes everything and gives people the power to face things and do things they otherwise would not have done. God knows Paul’s sincerity and his intentions. Paul hopes that the Corinthians do too, at least in their better moments. However, underneath it all, the driving motivation for a New Covenant ministry is the love of the Lord Jesus. It constrains us, indeed requires us to do things we would not have naturally undertaken.

5:13—What of Paul's of being out of his mind? Suggestions include—

- That was the charge of his critics;
- The apostle is referring to his experiences of speaking in tongues and having visions;
- The Corinthians thought he was excessively emotional;
- Paul is referring to criticism for his own self-commendation.

5:17-19—Paul reflects on the atonement of the Lord Jesus. First, he notes his own profound change of perspective (5:16), then the reality of people becoming new creatures in Christ (5:17). He then moves on to speak of the objective effects of the atonement. Our reconciliation with God is by the divine act by which, on the basis of the death of the Lord Jesus, God's holy displeasure against sin was satisfied, the enmity between God and humanity removed, and human beings were restored to a proper relationship with God (see Rom. 5:10-11; Col. 1:20-22).

5:20-6:2—Paul describes believers as ambassadors for Christ. The Greek word Paul uses for ambassador (*presbeutes*) refers to one commissioned for a task of representing someone else or some other entity.

- A Christian is a citizen of heaven while living and taking part in things in this world.
- A Christian as ambassador acts not only as an agent of the person sending him or her but also as representative. The honor of Christ and of His church are in individual believer's hands. Here, our poor representation can operate as a frustration of God's grace. Our role is not just to discuss God and His commitment to the New Covenant; we are also meant to live out that faithfulness ourselves.

5:21—The great exchange. A wonderfully succinct statement of the effects of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus. Christ became sin's representative bearing its judgment on the cross allowing believers to stand in reconciled righteousness before the Majesty on High.

G. Blizzard of troubles as marks of a sincere ministry (6:3-10)—Paul details the hardships he has suffered (see also 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 4:8-9; 11:23-29) as he seeks to defend himself from the accusations of his critics (6:4-5). He then elaborates the qualities he sought to display and the spiritual assets he relied on in discharging his apostolic duties (6:6-7). In 6:8-10, he deals with the accusations of his opponents before concluding by an unabashed plea that the Corinthians open their hearts to him as he has opened his heart to them (6:10-13). He is trying to break through the crust of their indifference and make them realize what it meant to follow the crucified Lord Jesus.

The great Orthodox preacher, John Chrysostom, described this passage as the blizzard of troubles which Paul had come through or with which he was still struggling. He begins with a triumphant word for the Christian life (*hupomone*), meaning endurance. This is the ability to bear up under difficulty in a triumphant and overcoming way that transforms the situation. Paul speaks of situations to rise above in three categories:

- Internal conflicts (*thlipsis*) that press upon us.
 - These are things that weigh on our spirits, burden our hearts, or disappointments that crush down on us.
 - Inescapable pains of life. The sorrow of life lost, a sickness unto death, the passage of time that relentlessly bears down on us.
 - Anxieties (*stenochoria*), literally "too narrow a place." The term described an army trapped in a tight, rocky pass.
- External tribulations—Here Paul elaborates on his own trials:
 - Stripes and scourging—intense physical suffering.

- Imprisonment—according to Clement of Rome, Paul was incarcerated seven times.
- Tumults—facing the violence of the mob.
- He elaborates on the toils (*kopos*) of the Christian life including being at the point of sheer exhaustion, innumerable sleepless nights because of the burden of all the churches, and fasting, which was compulsory because he lacked resources.
- Paul now turns to the equipment that allowed him to endure:
 - God-given qualities of mind
 - Purity (*hagnotes*)—the careful avoidance of sin; rendering service to honor God as nature demands.
 - Knowledge means understanding what actions are required. This is not speculative knowledge.
 - Patience (*makrothumia*)—This has patience with people primarily in view.
 - God-given qualities of heart
 - Kindness (*chrestotes*)—sympathetic kindliness. A sweet temper that puts others at ease and shrinks away from causing pain.
 - Spirit of holiness—in tune with the Spirit in the honor and service of God.
 - Agape love—unfeigned love or unconquerable benevolence.
 - God-given equipment for the work of the gospel
 - Declaration of truth
 - Power of God
 - Weapons of righteousness

Paul concludes with a series of contrasts:

- Honor and dishonor;
- Ill-repute and good repute;
- Deceivers (*planos*=a wandering quack and imposter (what others called him)) yet true;
- Unknown, yet known;
- Dying, yet alive;
- Chastened, yet not killed;
- Grieved, but always rejoicing;
- Having nothing but possessing all things.

6:10—Artisans (Paul earned his living as a tentmaker/leather worker), toiled, remained poor, and had little social status. This was especially true of those who moved around, as Paul did. Cynic philosophers gave up all possessions to pursue their lifestyle but considered themselves spiritually rich. They owned little or nothing but claimed that the world belonged to them because they were friends of the gods who owned all. Paul had even more reason to apply the phrase “possessing all things” to himself.

H. Imploring a proper response (6:11-7:16)— In 6:11-13 and 7:1-4, Paul makes a heartfelt appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled. He had always desired their best. He had wronged no one, corrupted no one, and had taken advantage of no one. He wanted them to open their hearts to him as he had opened his to them.

In between these passages, in 6:14-7:1, he calls on them to sever their intimate ties to the world. He tells them to flee from idolatry and avoid forming close attachments to unbelievers. He asks five rhetorical questions in 6:14-16 each assuming a negative answer. They reflect a wide chasm between the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and that of the world. He then quotes or paraphrases several Old Testament texts (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; Isa. 52:11; Ezek. 20:34, 41; 2 Sam. 7:14; 7:8),

underlining the need for separation from worldly influences. He stresses the privilege of being the temple of God and the benefits of compliance with his will rather than dalliance with the world. This passage is a warning against presuming on God's love and corrupting the purity of the church.

In summary, he is telling them to separate from worldly influences for three reasons:

- Their nature as believers (6:14-16)—Paul sees believers and unbelievers in stark contrast: righteousness—unrighteousness; light—darkness; Belial—Christ; belief—unbelief; God's temple—idols.
- Command of Scripture (6:17)—A quotation from Isaiah 52:11, with echoes of Ezekiel 20:34, 41. This command is found throughout the Scripture (Num. 33:50-56; Mt. 16:6, 11; Jn. 17:14-17).
- Promise of God's blessing (6:17-7:1).

6:12—Paul speaks of his affection (*splagchna*, literally “bowels”) for the Corinthians. The ancients envisioned the emotions as located in their bowels.

6:16-18—He echoes several Old Testament passages calling for the separation of the Lord's people from worldly influences (see Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; Isa. 52:11; Ezek. 20:34, 41; 2 Sam. 7:14; 7:8). Some commentators see this passage as part of the painful letter Paul refers to in 2:2-4 and 7:8.

7:1—Is Paul implying that the Corinthians have become defiled by sharing meals at idol shrines or ceremonies in pagan temples or even by maintaining membership in local pagan cults? Is this passage one anticipating the idol meats controversy text in 8:1-11:1? Paul's formula for restoring broken relationships is to show appreciation, practice and insist on separation from influences that lead astray, and encourage heartfelt reconciliation.

7:2-4—Paul picks up where he left off in 6:13—open wide your hearts. He defends himself from accusations of exploiting the Corinthians (7:2-4).

7:5-16—This text continues the theme of reconciliation between Paul and the Corinthians. In this passage, the text picks up where 2:13 left off. Paul went to Troas and had an open door for ministry but had no peace because Titus, with whom he had entrusted the severe letter, was not there as planned. Paul was beside himself with the Corinthian situation and went on to Macedonia, hoping to meet Titus there. He does indeed meet Titus and is overjoyed by the Corinthians' sincere repentance and by the way they refreshed Titus' spirit.

7:5-7—God uses three means to bring comfort to his downcast apostle: Titus' arrival in Macedonia, his positive report of his Corinthian experience, and the reassuring news concerning the Corinthian attitudes towards Paul.

7:8-13—The letter Paul refers to was possibly the severe letter that was lost (see General Introduction). His initial regret at causing the Corinthians pain disappeared when he realized that the temporary pain they suffered had produced genuine repentance. It produced in them seriousness of purpose, an eagerness to clear themselves of blame, and indignation over the action that insulted Paul.

7:10—The text contrasts godly with worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to true repentance which proves itself by what people do. It recognizes its wrong and turns from it. Worldly sorrow has the deadly effect of producing resentment and bitterness. Peter's repentance after his denials (Jn. 21:15-19) and Judas' suicide after his betrayal (Mt. 27:3-5) are excellent examples of godly and worldly sorrow.

7:14-16—Paul relates how refreshed and happy Titus was after being with the Corinthians. He had bragged on them to Titus and Titus had seen truth in Paul's boasting. The Corinthians received Titus with enthusiastic respect, seeing the young lieutenant as Paul's own emissary. A representative should

always be treated with the same respect as the person they are representing. Paul earnestly desires to be on good terms with the Corinthian congregation once again.

III. Relief mission: Grace of giving (8:1-9:15)—In the mid-50s, a considerable portion of Paul's time and energy was devoted to organizing and receiving a collection from the Gentile churches for the poor among the people in the church at Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians at Jerusalem were going through challenging times for several reasons:

- After converting to Christianity, many Jews were ostracized socially and economically;
- Community sharing described in Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-35 undoubtedly aggravated their economic plight;
- There were persistent food shortages in Palestine due to famine and overpopulation;
- The Jerusalem church supported a disproportionately considerable number of teachers and provided hospitality for frequent Christian visitors to the Holy City;
- Jewish believers were subject to a twofold tax system—Roman and Jewish—that was very burdensome.

The relief mission for Jerusalem was important both for the material assistance to the poor in Jerusalem and to strengthen the unity of the church as the Gentile congregations shared with their Jewish kin. Paul's motives for taking up the collection included:

- Brotherly love, a tangible expression of interdependence of the body of Christ.
- It symbolized the unity of Jew and Gentile.
- It dramatized in material terms the spiritual indebtedness of Gentile believers to their Jewish kin.
- It marked the culmination of Paul's eastern Mediterranean ministry. He planned to go west and visit Rome (Rom. 15:24, 28).

Paul speaks of the need for generosity, first by noting the fine example of the Macedonian believers and the ultimate example of generosity in the Lord Jesus (8:1-9). before encouraging the Corinthians to finish their preparation for the collection (8:10-12). He then clarifies that aim of the relief mission was not to burden some people unduly while providing others with a surplus, but equality through tough times (8:13-15). He then, in effect, provides letters of recommendation for Titus and his team who engaged in taking up the collection (8:16-24). He underlines the need for the Corinthians to be prepared (9:1-5). Absorbed in their own issues, they had let the mission relief task slide after their initial enthusiasm. Finally, Paul provides principles for the grace of giving, a guide to Christian charity (9:6-15).

A. Examples of generosity (8:1-9)— The Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) had given generously. They gave far more than their meager means and adverse circumstances permitted. Not only that, but they did not confine their contributions to financial aid. They gave themselves fully to whatever service was necessary in the performance of the relief mission.

Paul challenges the Corinthians with the example of the Macedonian churches. He speaks of the promising beginning that the Corinthians had made (8:6) and their desire for spiritual excellence (8:7). He goes on to point to the self-sacrificing ministry of the Lord Jesus as their ultimate example (8:9).

Illustration—One commentator claims to have heard of a pastor, giving an annual money talk to his congregation, telling them that they were giving far too much. He was genuinely worried that they were pushing themselves too hard and putting themselves at risk financially. The Macedonians may have been a similar congregation.

8:9—This verse has been made famous by a well-known Christian hymn by Frank Houghton:

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor
All for love's sake became poor.

Curious that this comes from a money talk, not a flight of profound thought about incarnational theology.

B. Service to the saints: Advice on preparation and commendation of Titus and his team

(8:10-9:5)—Paul provides advice and discusses arrangements for the relief mission. Their giving should be commensurate with their means. The point is not to put one or the other in need but to relieve need and create a situation of equity. He then provides recommendations for those carrying the funds to Jerusalem.

8:13-15—The Corinthian congregation was wealthier than others, particularly the Macedonians. They may have been grumbling about unequal expectations. Paul clarifies that Christian giving does not aim at exchanging financial burdens but rather at an equal sharing of the financial burden and an equal supply of the necessities of life. He illustrates this principle of the equality of supply from the account of God's provision of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness (see Ex. 16:13-36, especially 16:18). Each had what they needed, no more, no less.

Is Paul pressing his luck with these people after all that has gone on between them? There have been tensions between Paul and the Corinthian church. One of those points of contention was his refusal to take money from them for his own support (1 Cor. 9:1-18; 2 Cor. 11:7-11). Now, he is asking for money for others, not himself. Will his enemies make something of this? Will they accuse him of skimming off the top for his own needs? Question the people taking the collection to Jerusalem? Claim that the whole exercise is unfair or fraudulent?

8:16-24—Paul understood his critics would not hesitate to accuse him of turning the collection for the relief of the Jerusalem church into a collection for his own use and lining his own pockets. His response was to ensure that other trustworthy people would share with him the task of taking the collection to Jerusalem. Paul adopts a familiar way of transporting the collection to Jerusalem. Jewish synagogues throughout the Mediterranean would send their annual tribute to the Jerusalem temple via local representatives of high reputation. Paul duplicates this method, having local congregations participating in the collection appoint envoys to manage the funds. He was conscious of being above board to head off false accusations.

Paul commends Titus and the others with him who were spearheading the collection for the church at Jerusalem. Paul is extremely careful to leave no indication of dishonest dealings with respect to the collection. Note the qualities he cites in Titus and his team:

- They had a God-given desire to serve (8:16-17).
- They had a burden for people's salvation and practical help (8:18).
- They desired to honor the Lord (8:19).
- They had a reputation for honesty (8:20-22).
- They had co-operative spirits (8:23-24).

8:18—Some identify “the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel” as Luke.

9:1-5—Paul returns to the subject of taking up the collection at Corinth. He wanted to make sure that the Corinthians were ready with their offering. He had repeatedly bragged on the Corinthian enthusiasm for the relief mission, and he would be personally embarrassed if they were ill-prepared upon the arrival of those taking up the collection. Furthermore, if the delegates from the Macedonian churches arrived at Corinth with Paul on his upcoming visit and the Corinthians were still unprepared,

they would both be embarrassed. The Corinthians did as Paul requested (see Rom. 15:26).

C. Principles of the grace of giving (9:6-15)—Paul details principles of the grace of giving:

- Law of sowing and reaping (9:6)—The law of the harvest rewards generous sowing. We reap to the measure that we sow. Generous giving is a way of life for believers who understand how indebted they themselves are to the grace of God.
- Cheerfulness in giving (9:7)—Giving should result from inner resolve, not from impulsiveness or reluctant compulsion. We reap when we sow with right motives. A gift given in a begrudging manner is hardly a gift at all.
- Grace abounding in giving that enables further giving (9:8-11)—Generosity pays handsome dividends by God's good providence. At times, the Lord will multiply resources when a generous spirit is present. The faithful giver may well be entrusted with more to enhance his or her giving.
- Giving not only meets needs but results in thanksgiving to God (9:12-14). A side note here is that our giving ought to provide for necessities, not subsidize luxuries. We require reliable information and spiritual guidance to address today's pressing needs.
- Our giving is in the backdrop of God's indescribable gift to us (9:15).

IV. Defense and Use of Apostolic Authority (10:1-13:10)—There is an abrupt change in tone at this point in the letter. Defenders of the unity of 2 Corinthians explain the change in several ways:

- Paul pauses in his dictation and hears additional disturbing news from Corinth.
- The abruptness of this change is exaggerated. Both chapters 1-7 and chapters 10-13 are tempered polemic, with tender expressions of compassion in both sections.
- Paul intentionally reserves his criticism until after his commendation.
- Paul is now addressing a different audience. Chapters 1-9 address the whole church. Chapters 10-13 address his opponents, the Judaizing intruders who are slandering him.

Some commentators think these chapters belong to a separate letter. Some think these chapters are the severe letter Paul refers to previously (2:4-5; 7:8ff). Others think that new information surfaced just before writing these chapters and that Paul is writing to a new development in the Corinthian situation. Still others think that Paul had referred to his opponents throughout the letter but saved his overt attack on his opponents until the end of the letter.

A. Assertion and exercise of apostolic authority (10:1-18)—Paul's opponents were aware that a way to undermine Paul's effectiveness was to cast doubt on the genuineness of his apostolic call and ministry. The Corinthians were using superficial externals and listening to confident boasting to gauge credentials. Letters of commendation, authoritarian speech and manner, spectacular visions, polished rhetorical skills, and claims of "pure Jewishness" rated high on their gauge. The meekness and gentleness of Christ, by which Paul was making his appeal, did not cut it.

10:1-11—Paul addresses attempts by his adversaries to diminish him in the eyes of the Corinthians. We can only deduce the opponents' criticisms by Paul's reply to them. The Greek culture did not regard meekness and gentleness as positive traits. Certain affluent individuals within the congregation were captivated by rhetoric, Greek philosophy, and popular trends of the era. Paul did not rate on those lines. They were also annoyed that Paul sought support from other sources instead of relying on them during his local ministry. He was criticized as being forceful in writing but unimpressive in person. The critics taunted Paul about his personal appearance. They looked down on him and saw themselves as superior.

Now as he turns back to dealing with his standing with the Corinthians, he confronts attacks on his

style of ministry, his ministerial demeanor, and his apostleship. He is ready to take his critics on. He is in his person, what he is in his letters.

10:12-18—Paul attacks his opponents. Their boasting and confident assertions knew no limits. The word for “boast” or “glory” appears twenty times in chapters 10-13. Paul accuses his opponents with commending themselves and with measuring themselves by themselves. By his satire, Paul turns his opponents’ boasting back on themselves. He cites Jeremiah 9:24 in noting that self-commendation is obviously out of place.

The false apostles yearned to be highly esteemed, well-paid, and regarded as great leaders and teachers. Paul cautions the church about people who praise themselves yet lack approval from the Lord. Paul is going to boast, but in a vastly unusual way, in his weakness not his completion and achievements. The Corinthians had forced Paul to defend himself, reminding them of his life and ministry. There were significant misunderstandings to correct. The false teachers were not in Corinth to aid the ministry, but to undermine it. Paul’s ministry was not intruding on that of others. He was not building on someone else’s labor. The Corinthians themselves were the fruit of his labor.

B. Boasting about suffering: Apostolic credentials (11:1-12:13)—Paul is jealous for the Corinthians who seem taken with the arrogant self-praise of the Jewish opponents. The situation drives him to foolish boasting (11:1-6). He defends himself for not accepting payment for preaching, attacking the twisted logic of his opponents (11:7-12). He exposes his opponents for what they are—false apostles and deceitful workers, masquerading as the real deal (11:13-15). He begins his own boasting in earnest in 11:16-12:13. He starts by saying that he was driven to this because the Corinthians had foolishly tolerated and were impressed by these false teachers (11:16-21). Paul then describes his heritage, sufferings, and trials (11:21-29), his escape from Damascus (11:30-33), and his visions and thorn in the flesh (12:1-10), before concluding that the Corinthians themselves ought to have been defending Paul’s ministry. They had seen signs, wonders, and miracles done with great perseverance (12:11-13).

Who were these false teachers? They were of Jewish origin (11:22), but from where is unknown. They thought of themselves as apostles (10:7; 11:23), a claim Paul rejected (11:23). They carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1), indulged in self-commendation (10:18), and identified themselves as super-apostles (11:5). They claimed to bear the message of righteousness (11:14), a legalistic righteousness based on external compliance with the Mosaic Covenant. They were self-serving, seeking monetary gain (2:17), and possibly indulging in sensuality (12:21). Strutting compliance with external standards at times hides internal self-indulgence. The false apostles appealed to the Corinthians in three ways: (1) they associated themselves with the original apostles; (2) they appealed to the Corinthian regard for superior rhetoric; (3) they required to be paid (supporting oneself by manual labor was looked down on by Greek upper classes).

11:1-6—Paul supplies three grounds for his appeal to the Corinthians to bear with his boasting:

- His divinely inspired jealousy for them, especially because they were endangered (11:2-3).
- Their willingness to put up with rivals who presented a compromised message (11:3-4).
- He was not in any way inferior to his boastful opponents (11:5-6).

Paul parodies his opponents’ boasting with his own brag sheet. However, the brag sheet looks vastly different for the kingdom of God inverts the values of his opponents. Paul thoroughly dislikes having to do this and describes himself as taking the guise of a madman for rhetorical purposes.

11:2-4—This text makes it clear that the Corinthians were in peril. As Eve was deceived by Satan in the Garden, so they were being deceived by these false teachers. Jewish tradition had Satan disguise himself as a good angel and seduce Eve while the first couple was in the Garden. Paul wants to ensure

the pure and sincere devotion of the Corinthians (11:3-4). The Corinthians were attracted to the false teachers because they claimed ties to the original apostles, demonstrated skilled rhetoric, and, ironically, insisted on being compensated. Paul tells the Corinthians that he may not be able to match their rhetorical gusto, but he did know what he was talking about and his opponents did not.

Illustration: In times past, recitation of significant writing was frequently done before groups of people. On one such occasion a recitation of Psalm 23 was the subject of the evening. A noted orator stood and recited the psalm to sustained applause. Next, a quiet, unassuming man began his recitation in a stumbling manner. At first, there were people in the audience snickering, but then the audience grew noticeably still. As the man took his seat at the completion of the recitation, there was rapt silence. The orator leaned over and said to him: “Sir, I know the psalm, but you, you know the shepherd.”

11:7-12—Paul had sacrificed to minister to the Corinthians. This seemed to have been Paul’s practice. When in a particular place, he did not receive support from locals so as not to be beholden to anyone he ministered to. The critics were turning this against him. The Greeks thought it beneath a free man’s dignity to have to work manually. Teachers were supposed to make money from teaching. Eloquent teachers did very well. If you taught for free, you were admitting in advance that your teaching was not worth much. The super-apostles were claiming that the fact that they expected to be paid well proved their worth, whereas Paul’s refusal to be paid, proved that his teaching was not worth anything. A true apostle would fleece the flock with gusto, like they did! Paul’s reasons for not accepting remuneration for teaching may have been:

- His financial independence would cause the Corinthians to reexamine the financial dependence of the false apostles and re-examine their false and boastful claims.
- He was relying on others for support as a means of serving the Corinthians more effectively.
- He did not want to appear as a common sophist grubbing for money or as one dependent on them as a client.

11:13-15—Paul lets the false apostles have it. He attacks their deceit and their strutting promenade as a masquerade that replicates that of Satan. They were showier and more impressive than Paul, highlighting worship practices that accentuated social divisions, and were offering a different gospel. They were toning down any rough edge to the gospel that did not fit their cultural and social aspirations. If you really believe in a suffering Messiah and pattern your life accordingly, your life will look like—well, like Paul’s life. That was unacceptable to the status-seeking teachers.

The false teachers had spawned a slew of misunderstandings about Paul—his motives, his feelings, his plans, and his general behavior. They hammered him for not accepting pay for his services because he did not want anyone to try to control him. They are accusing him of not loving the Corinthians. They were being the *satan* (the accuser) of Paul of all kinds of things that Paul was not guilty of. They would take the tack of whisperings suggestions in the ears of certain Corinthians and if that did not work, make the overt false accusations themselves. They were in the service of the accuser. They were undoing the work of the gospel by failing to follow through on the deepest meaning of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

11:16-29— Paul recounts his sufferings and frailties and points to these as his authentic apostolic credentials. Paul takes the standards of the Corinthians and the false apostles and turns them upside down. His catalog of suffering and weakness could hardly have been what they expected to see as confirming his authority. Aristocrats typically boasted of their heritage, their achievements, their strengths and so forth. Paul’s brag is about his sufferings and his weakness, something the high brows would never think of doing.

Paul is boasting about all the wrong things. The false apostles were boasting of their imagined achievements, wallowing in a culture of braggadocio fame and success, strutting in their brag with showy rhetoric. Paul is boasting of his imprisonments, his beatings, official floggings, stoning, and shipwrecks. In the ancient world, these are things that would mark you as an unsavory person. These are the kind of things the right people would avoid. The dangers he faced, the hardships he endured were not the sort of thing cultured and educated people would put up with. They would not expect to go hungry, cold, and without sleep. Paul is boasting about things that the “right” people would find demeaning.

By listening to and believing the arrogant promenade of Paul’s opponents, the Corinthians are forcing Paul to sing his own praise. The Corinthians should have been commending him but instead, had remained silent and even doubted him. While Paul engages in this foolish exercise, something of a contest of folly, he did so to help the church—to wake them up. The false teachers boasted to help themselves to what they could get out of the church. Paul describes his opponents:

- They reduce people to abject slavery;
- They devour them. They were extremely money conscious;
- They behave arrogantly, lording it over people. Insulting and demeaning people seemed to them a way to control them.

The super-apostles made three claims that Paul could equal:

- They were Hebrews. They still spoke the ancient Hebrew language.
- They were Israelites, members of God’s chosen people.
- They were descendants of Abraham and heirs to the Abrahamic covenantal promise (Gen. 12:1-3).

If the Bible student compares the list of Paul’s sufferings in the Corinthian correspondence (see 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 4:8-12; 6:4-5; 11:21-29) with the account of his experiences in Acts, one discovers that Luke’s account is much more selective. In intensity and scope of ministry, no apostle or even group of apostles could match Paul’s record of service. He even boasts over one of the Corinthians’ reproaches, his low-status labor as a tentmaker/leather worker. Consider the hardships he bore, the dangers he confronted, and the privations he endured—

- He received thirty-nine lashes on five separate occasions;
- Beaten with rods three times;
- Stoned;
- Shipwrecked three times;
- Often went without sleep;
- Often hungry;
- Bearing with constant ministerial stress.

If his trials at Corinth were any indication, the ministerial burden he bore must have been oppressive.

11:30-33—In this passage Paul describes his escape from Damascus. Aretas IV, father-in-law to Herod Antipas, ruled over the kingdom of the Nabatean Arabs from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D. Luke’s account in Acts 9:23-25, indicates that the Jews were watching the gates to kill Paul. Aretas was guarding the city to arrest Paul. It may well have been that the Romans were still ruling in Damascus and a coalition of Jews and Nabateans, acting through the Roman governor, were trying to arrest and kill Paul. Were the Jews watching inside the city and the Nabateans outside the city? Whatever the case, Paul’s deliverance was providential. Still, slipping out of the city under cover of darkness in a basket was hardly the kind of daring escape that Corinth’s elite would brag about.

In Roman military service, the highest award was the corona muralis (crown of the wall). In besieging

a walled city, the soldier who was first over the wall was decorated. He was one who had taken all the risks, the ultimate boots on the ground guy. Paul concludes his inverted brag session with an inverted corona muralis. He escapes from Damascus by being let down in a basket at night over the wall. He is not after the corona muralis, but the corona Christi. This is the upside-down brag session.

12:1-10—This is the climax of Paul’s brag session; a list he has carefully constructed to pull the rug out from under of the boasting of the rival teachers. He counters their visions and revelations with one of his own, but not an up-to-date vision of an ever so progressive scholar but one occurring fourteen years ago. Not one full of “I” this and “I” that, but told completely in the third person. Not one brilliantly explained by the stunning genius and searing logic of the fiery intellect of the false teachers, but one Paul himself could not explain. It was enough that God knew. The vision exalted the Lord Jesus, not the teacher receiving the vision.

Paul breaks a fourteen-year silence and relates a vision of the “hidden Paradise” of Jewish thought, the abode of the righteous dead located in the third heaven. He clearly speaks of himself in the third person to avoid any sense of his being a special class of Christian. In 12:7ff, Paul relates his “thorn in the flesh” which he received to keep him from becoming conceited. There have been many suggestions for what this thorn was, but all are only speculations. It is remarkable that Paul could regard his affliction as given by God and yet describe it as a “messenger of Satan.” Paul begged the Lord to remove it on three separate occasions and was refused. The message was that the grace of the Lord Jesus was adequate for him because divine power finds its full scope and strength in human weakness. The greater the Christian’s acknowledged weakness, the more evident Christ’s enabling strength. The contrast is striking between 11:30-33, where escape from Damascus involves being lowered in a basket through a wall, and 12:1-6, which describes extraordinary divine visions of being taken up into Paradise. Paul kept quiet about this for fourteen years!

12:7-10— God humbled Paul by allowing Satan to buffet him to keep Paul from becoming proud. This thorn in the flesh has caused much speculation. Thorn (*skolops*) is a word that means a sharp stake using for torturing or impaling someone. It was a physical affliction of some kind that brought constant or recurring pain and distress. Suggestions have included:

- Opposition and persecution.
- His poor (weak) physical appearance, that he suffered from some disfigurement.
- Epilepsy.
- Severe headaches.
- Recurrent attacks of malaria, which haunted the coasts of eastern Mediterranean.

God allowed Satan to buffet Paul, a word meaning to beat, to strike with the fist. Quite a contrast—from vision to thorn; from paradise to pain; from glory to suffering; from blessing to buffeting; from ecstasy to agony.

God helped him cope. God did not supply explanations to Paul’s prayer for relief. There was a message of strengthening and sufficient grace. We do not live on explanations, but on God’s faithful promises. Paul was able to experience God’s power in his life and was able to glory in his infirmities. We minister from our brokenness, not from our completion. Practical lessons include:

- To the resolute believer, the spiritual is far more important than the physical.
- God knows how to balance burdens and blessings, suffering, and glory.
- Not all sickness is caused by sin.
- There is something worse than sickness and that is sin. And the worst sin is pride.
- Physical affliction need not be a barrier to effective Christian service.

12:11-13—The Corinthians should have spoken for Paul and their failure to do so had forced this

boasting session. They had very reason to commend him, for they well knew that he was not in the least inferior to these arrogant, boastful “super-apostles.”

C. Planned visit to Corinth (12:14-13:10)—Paul announces his intention to make a third visit to Corinth. He will not burden them (12:14-18), but he is concerned about the outcome of the visit (12:19-21). Would there be repentance and reconciliation? Would the sins that seemed endemic in the Corinthian situation still cause unrest and disorder? Would this visit be a repeat of his earlier “painful visit”?

12:14-21—He shames them for their lack of appreciation (12:14-18). He was the founder, their spiritual father. He served them well and without requiring financial support. In return, they had been taken in by self-serving critics using crafty and cunning methods to exploit them. Paul was the one without guile and without a self-serving agenda. He points to their lack of consecration (12:19-21). They were guilty of quarreling because they envied one another. They promoted carnal intrigues and plots born of their pride and exaggerated sense of importance. In addition to these “sins of the spirit,” there were sins of the flesh, including fornication and debauchery. They were permitting their old life to take over again, instead of cultivating the new life within. The list gives pause in considering the spiritual condition of the Corinthians. Paul details the marks of a wayward church:

- There is quarreling and strife in its midst.
- There is envy or jealousy (*selos*), the desire to have what is not ours. Emulation can quickly turn into envy.
- Outbursts of anger (*thumoi*). Outbursts of anger that sweep over someone for which afterwards the person bitterly regrets.
- Factions spirit (*eritheia*)—Selfish ambition which has no idea of service; the person is in the situation for what they can get out of it.
- Slandering (*katalalai*) are loud and public attacks and insults.
- Whisperings or gossip (*psithurismoi*) slanderous and underhanded gossip often undetected.
- Conceit or arrogance (*phusioseis*).
- Disorder (*akatastasiai*)—tumults, anarchy, discord.
- Uncleanliness (*akatharsia*)—everything which makes people unfit to enter God’s presence. *Asalgeia* is another word sometimes translated uncleanliness. It does not solely mean sexual uncleanliness; it is sheer wanton insolence. It is an attitude of soul which has never borne and never will bear the pain of discipline. It is an insolently selfish spirit, lost to honor, and will take whatever it wants, where it wants it, in shameless disregard of God and other people.
- Fornication (*pronoia*)—The Corinthians lived in a debauched society which did not regard sexual immorality as a sin and expected men to take their pleasure wherever and with whoever they could.

13:1-10—Paul tells the Corinthians to prepare themselves (13:1-4). Paul will be “strong,” if that is what it takes to resolve things between them. He tells them to examine themselves (13:5-8) to see if indeed they were in the faith. He desires to use his apostolic authority in a proper way for its intended purpose—to build up the church of the Lord Jesus, not to bring it down.

V. Conclusion and Final Greetings (13:11-14)—Paul encourages the Corinthians to listen to his appeal (for a break with idolatry, for a generous and prompt contribution to the Jerusalem relief mission, for a changed attitude toward him) and to live in peaceful harmony and in mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. The mutual greetings of peace may indeed have taken quite an effort for some in the Corinthian congregation.

13:14—The closing benediction emphasizes the Trinity. The grace of the Lord Jesus reminds us of His life and ministry when He became poor that we may be rich. The love of God takes us to Calvary where the Father gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. The communion of the Holy Spirit reminds us of Pentecost, when the Spirit came, formed, and empowered the church of the Lord Jesus.

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