**1 CORINTHIANS**



**Who was the author?**

Paul the Apostle – the fact of his authorship has never been seriously challenged. The style, language and theology that are discussed are all typical of Paul’s writings.

**When was it written?**

The letter was written around A.D. 56. This is approximately 5 to 6 years after Paul visited Corinth (AD 50/51), spent 18 months there as part of his second missionary journey and established the church there. See Acts 18:1 – 17 for details of his time spent there.

**Why was it written?**

Reports had come to Paul that there were a number of problems within the church that needed to be addressed. Some of these reports had come verbally and some had come by letter. When he was in Ephesus some of these matters had been reported to him and it appears that he wrote to the church to address the issues. He refers to this letter in chapter 5:9 – 11 but the actual letter is not extant. Following his letter the problems were not wholly resolved and other issues had arisen. A delegation arrived from Chloe, a member of the church, to tell Paul about the divisions within the church and to ask for his guidance. Before he could write a letter a further delegation arrived from the church with a letter asking for guidance on certain matters (chapter 7:1, 16:17). In response Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (4:17) to help to correct the situation. Before Timothy could reach Corinth Paul sent a letter ahead of him (16:10). This letter is what we know as 1 Corinthians.

**Key themes**

The importance of the Cross and resurrection

Spiritual gifts and their use in love

The dangers of remaining in the world and continuing in sin

**What were the problems that needed addressing?**

Corinth was a typical Greek port city. Both sexual immorality and idolatry were rife. Corinth was so renowned for its sexual immorality that the term “to Corinthianize” was a proverb meaning to practice prostitution. Much of the prostitution was tied to the many temples in the city which were full of idols. The chief deity of the city was Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of licentious love. It is believed that as many as 1,000 professional prostitutes served in the temple dedicated to her. Some of the pagan practices of these false religions affected some in the church resulting in misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and acceptable worship.

The Greeks were also known for their love of philosophical debate (see Acts 17 and Paul’s visit to Athens) and for legal disputing. Most of the converts in the church were from a Greek background and some were having great difficulty in leaving their old world, habits and practices behind.

In all there are at least ten problems that Paul needed to address within the Corinthian church:

* sectarianism
* incest
* lawsuits
* sexual immorality
* marriage and divorce
* eating food that has been sacrificed to idols
* wearing veils
* correct observance of the Lord’s Supper
* spiritual gifts and their use
* the resurrection of the body

We need to remember that Paul is writing to a young church that is grappling with how they should behave together and as a witness to their community. It is certainly not a model church but the remedies and approaches that Paul advises are timeless when we may encounter similar problems today. The church was a dynamic, vibrant expression of the gospel. It valued the work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts but the use and abuse of the gifts were a significant problem and one that can occur today in charismatic and Pentecostal churches.

OUTLINE

Chapter 1:1 - 9 Introduction, greeting and thanksgiving

**PAUL RESPONDS TO ORAL REPORTS REGARDING THE CHURCH - Chapters 1:10 – 6:20**

Chapter 1:10 – 17 The problem of rival factions within the church

Chapter 1:18 – 2:5 The cross of Jesus is the necessary centre of the gospel message

Chapter 2:6 - 16 The contrast between spiritual and natural people

Chapter 3:1 – 23 The contrast between spiritual Christians and carnal Christians

Chapter 4:1 -21 The correct attitude to have towards the Apostles

Chapter 5:1 -13 A case of incest in the church

Chapter 6:1 – 11 Lawsuits between believers

Chapter 6:12 - 20 The seriousness of sexual immorality

**PAUL RESPONDS TO THE LETTER FROM THE CORINTHIANS – Chapters 7:1 – 16:4**

Chapter 7:1 – 16 To those currently or previously married

Chapter 7:17 – 24 Marriage – analogies with circumcision and slavery

Chapter 7:25 - 40 To those who have never married or those contemplating marriage

*Chapters 8:1 – 11:1 Concerning food that has been sacrificed to idols*

Chapter 8:1 -13 Introducing the problem and solution: tempering knowledge with love

Chapter 9:1 -18 A second application: Money for ministry

Chapter 9:19 –27 The underlying motive: saving as many as possible

Chapter 10:1 - 22 The danger of license – the idolatry of Israel and idol feasts in Corinth

Chapter10:23 -11:1 Summary: balancing freedom and restraint

*Chapters 11:2 -14:40 Concerning worship*

Chapter 11:2 –16 Head coverings

Chapter 11:17 -34 The Lord’s Supper

Chapter 12:1 -31a Spiritual gifts: diversity with unity

Chapter 12:31b – 13:13 The pre-eminence of love

Chapter 14:1 – 25 Prophecy and tongues: the preference for intelligibility

Chapter 14:26 – 40 Prophecy and tongues: the preference for order

Chapter 15:1 – 34 The certainty of the Resurrection

Chapter 15:35 – 58 The nature of the Resurrection

Chapter 16:1 – 4 The monetary collection for Jerusalem

Chapter 16:5 – 12 The travel plans of Paul and his co-workers

Chapter 16:13 – 24 The formal closing of the letter

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER ONE**

1 - 9 Introduction, greeting and thanksgiving

Paul opens his letter in a traditional way for his times by stating at the outset the name of who the letter is from. He names himself and also Sosthenes who he describes as “our brother”. Sosthenes may have been the person who wrote the letter as Paul dictated it. Some believe it is the same man who became the synagogue ruler in Corinth in Acts 18:17. If so he was a converted Jew who may have become a Christian after Paul left Corinth or just before he left.

Paul describes himself as someone who had been *“called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God”.* He is setting out his credentials before he comes to the purpose of the letter. As we will see there were a number of issues that he needed to deal with in the church and he wanted them to recognise that his writings and teaching carried authority of the highest order.

He then identifies who he is writing to. Firstly he is writing to the church of God in Corinth. He describes them as being those who are being sanctified in Jesus, made holy in accordance with the purpose and calling of God upon on their lives. Secondly he says that this letter is also addressed to everyone else everywhere who have called upon the name of Jesus.

His greeting concludes by wishing them grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst this is a familiar Christian greeting it also serves to remind the Corinthians of the fact that the Father and the Son are co-equal. In this first chapter we find mention of Jesus on numerous occasions. This is deliberate on Paul’s part. The church in Corinth was renowned for their emphasis on the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to ensure that they did not lose sight of the importance of Jesus’ life and sacrifice nor of the equality within the Triune Godhead.

Paul thanks God for the riches of God’s grace that they have received. This grace again is *“given to you by Christ Jesus”.* The gifts they have been given all stem from Jesus and are distributed to them by the Holy Spirit. While awaiting His return they should stand strong and use the gifts He has given them. Paul says that in this way they will be blameless when He is revealed. There may be an inference that if they do not use their gifts then they will not be confirmed as blameless on that day, echoes of the parable of the talents?

In verse 9 Paul reminds them that God is always faithful and that it was He who called them into Jesus’ fellowship. They are not to rely on their own faithfulness or Paul’s; they can rely on God’s unchanging character of faithfulness. Those whom He has chosen and called will persevere to the end upheld by Him.

 **1:10 – 17 The problem of rival factions within the church**

Paul now turns to the first problem within the church, that of division. His emotions regarding this issue are strong. He has known many of them personally. He now pleads with them in the name of Jesus to be reconciled to one another. Divisions within a church are a very serious issue and must never be ignored. Paul is responding to reports he has heard via members of Chloe’s household that divisions have emerged, there are different factions within the church. As holy brethren they have been called into united relationships with both God and one another. There is no room for factions in the church.

The divisions seem to have occurred because some in the church were looking to different people for their inspiration. Paul mentions himself, Peter (Cephas), Apollos and Christ as being those to whom people were looking. Each group is in the wrong. No matter how gifted Paul, Peter and Apollos may have been they are not the author and finisher of the faith of the Corinthians. No man can be looked to for salvation. Even those who claim to be of Christ’s party are not blameless. By separating themselves on this way they are acting as if they are superior to the other believers in the church and it implies that others are not of Christ.

He reminds them that none of those men they have looked to were crucified for them. No one in the church was baptised into their names. It is Jesus alone who was crucified for them and in whose name they were baptised. Paul digresses slightly to emphasise that he baptised very few people in Corinth precisely because he did not want people to think that they had been baptised in his name. His calling was to preach the gospel, emphasising Jesus’ work upon the cross. By now in just 17 verses Paul has mentioned Jesus 15 times. He wanted to ensure that they got their focus back on him and not on any man, no matter how gifted they may be.

 **1:18 – 25 The cross of Jesus is the necessary centre of the gospel message**

Having mentioned the cross in verse 17 Paul now expands on its importance. The cross will always divide the opinions of men. For many in the world the cross appears to be foolish. After all how could someone dying on a cross outside Jerusalem so long ago really have such a powerful and far reaching effect as is claimed by Christians? Paul answers this by declaring that the wisdom of men and the world is foolishness in the eyes of God. We know that the enemy of men’s souls has darkened their understanding so that they cannot grasp the truth of the gospel. Only a work of the Holy Spirit can bring enlightenment to people such that they can respond positively to the gospel.

Paul knew full well that the message of the cross of Jesus was a stumbling block to many. For Jews who looked for a sign it was not what they expected. How could a man dying the humiliating death of a criminal be their awaited longed for Messiah? To the Greeks who prized wisdom, philosophy and debate above all things the message was both strange and indeed foolish.

He would not be dissuaded from preaching about Christ crucified. He believed that the centrality of the work of Jesus upon the cross was vital. It was through Jesus’ sacrifice that men could be forgiven, set free and given new life in fellowship with Almighty God. Jesus is both the power and wisdom of God incarnated. At the cross sin, death and hell were dealt a decisive blow by Almighty God.

**1:26 – 31 Glory only in the Lord**

Looking at their backgrounds Paul was able to say that few of them had been clever, powerful or influential before they became Christians. None of them could boast about what they were before God called them. God calls the most unlikely of people to be His children. He chooses the “foolish”, “weak” and “base” rather than the rich and famous. He does this because no one can boast in His presence. Now His people are all equal in His sight. They are all sinners saved by His grace, washed clean of their sins through the shed blood of Jesus, made holy and righteous, redeemed from hell. It is all through the obedient work of Jesus at Calvary.

This wonderful work of Jesus on their behalf means that none of them should be boastful or regard themselves as superior to others in the church. Everyone needed to be saved from the consequences of their sins. The same blood of Jesus had accomplished salvation for all of them equally. Instead of glorying about who they saw as their mentors, leaders, guides or heroes of the faith they needed to glory only in the Lord.

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**CHAPTER TWO**

**2:1 – 5 The cross of Jesus is the necessary centre of the gospel message (continued)**

Paul's train of thought continues from chapter 1. The chapter division is perhaps not helpful here. Remember that the chapter divisions were not in the original letter.

Paul reminds them about how he first visited them and the message he concentrated on. It is worth looking back to what had happened to Paul prior to arriving in Corinth. In Acts 16 he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. In Acts 17 a mob rioted in Thessalonica. Moving on to Berea they were well received until the mob from Thessalonica arrived to attack Paul and he had to make an escape. He then moved on to Athens and after debating with some of the Athenians he was laughed to scorn when he mentioned the resurrection (Acts 17:32) and he moved on again this time voluntarily. Interestingly whilst there were some converts in Athens we hear nothing further about the church there in the New Testament, Paul did not return there.

With this recent background of his experiences since arriving in Europe it is perhaps not surprising that Paul says he came to Corinth "in weakness with great fear and trembling". His approach in Corinth was his usual one of initially debating in the synagogue, attempting to prove that Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews had been awaiting. When they rejected his message he reached out to the Gentiles. There was again trouble from some of the Jews opposed to Paul's message.

Here in chapter 2 Paul says that his approach with them had not been an intellectual one. As a brilliant scholar he could have used powerful intellectual arguments but he did not do so. He had not used oratorical devices or clever reasoning. Instead he had concentrated on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Greek in verse 2 reads literally *"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him having been crucified".* This means that he had preached about someone who had been killed but was now alive. In other words he preached both the cross and resurrection of Jesus. A crucified Jesus could be no Saviour. It is the fact of His conquering death, sin and hell as demonstrated by the resurrection that makes Him a Saviour and not just a martyr.

Paul says that his preaching to them was not just a clever speech but had been accompanied by "a demonstration of the Spirit's power". We cannot know for certain how this was manifested to them. Nothing is mentioned in Acts about miracles or deliverance and it is unwise to argue from silence. However as later in the letter he would refer to spiritual gifts including healing and miracles we can perhaps infer that the Corinthians had seen healings and miracles when Paul was with them.

Their faith needed to be based on God's power rather than the persuasive words and ideas of men. The same applies to us.

**Chapter 2:6 - 16 The contrast between spiritual and natural people**

Whilst Paul may not have used human wisdom in his preaching and proclamations concerning Jesus instead he says that he had taught them wisdom that originated with God and not man. He had not brought words of wisdom as seen by the world of his time or that which pleased the rulers of his time. their wisdom would one day come to nothing, it has no eternal value. God's wisdom is rooted in eternity before time began. Now, says Paul, that wisdom is being revealed to people by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is able to take what is in the heart and mind of God and reveal it to people. The Holy Spirit is able to reveal spiritual realities to people. However not everyone can comprehend what the Spirit is saying and teaching. Only those who have received the Holy Spirit are able to discern what He is saying. The most able scholars and most intellectually qualified people in the world will never accept the message of the gospel unless they have received the Holy Spirit. They will not understand the message and will consider it to be folly, just as many in Athens had done when Paul visited there.

This is the great division between mankind. It is not between rich and poor, strong and weak or any other manmade division. God has divided people between those who receive the Spirit and those who do not, between spiritual and natural people.

Those whom God has given the Spirit (as a response to their faith in Jesus Christ) are able to discern the deep things of God whereas to the natural person, the one without the Spirit, God's truths and message are nonsense. True wisdom requires a person to be guided by the Holy Spirit. They can then have discernment concerning spiritual matters.

We remember that Satan is a deceiver and will try to trap us. He is seeking those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). We need the Holy Spirit's guidance to see through his deceptions and lies.

We remember that if any man lacks wisdom then the place to go to is God not the wisest of men (James 1:5).

 Paul ends the chapter by reminding the brethren that they have "the mind of Christ". It is for this reason that believers can have insight into some of God's plans, thoughts and actions to the extent that He will reveal them.

The Holy Spirit gives the believer:

 revelation

 inspiration

 illumination

The natural person (us before we became Christians) cannot receive the guidance, insights and understanding that is available to the spiritual person. Whilst the natural man may grasp something of the existence and power of God through nature, conscience and the general grace of God toward mankind, it is only those who have received the Holy Spirit who are capable of a deeper, maturing knowledge of God. It is nothing to do with natural intelligence or ability it is all God's work in us.

Whilst we may be a "fool for Christ " (1 Corinthians 4:10) we do not remain foolish. We are encouraged to mature in faith and understanding, to leave behind the "milk" of teaching that is appropriate for spiritual babies and move on to the "meat" of more mature understanding. This theme will be explored by Paul in the next chapter.

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**CHAPTER THREE**

**3:1 – 4 Time for the Corinthians to grow up**

Paul has already alluded to the fact that as Christians they have now become more than natural or physical people but they now have become, through Christ, spiritual people. The Holy Spirit has come into their lives when they committed their lives to Jesus. The world may well be divided into natural and spiritual people but sadly there is too often a third class of people, spiritual people who are behaving as natural people. It seems there are many within the Corinthian church who came into that category. They bore the name of Christ but lived as if they were still part of the world. This will show itself in a number of issues that Paul needed to deal with in his letters to them.

This section begins by Paul calling them "brothers and sisters" . This is both a term endearment, a declaration of their relationship together and with him but also an indication that Paul did not regard himself in any way superior to them. They were all blood bought children of the living God.

We should remind ourselves that when this letter was written the church in Corinth had been in existence for at least five years including eighteen months when Paul was with them. Whilst some may have been recent converts others will have been part of the church for some years by now. This is why Paul is so saddened that he cannot teach or speak to them as if they were mature believers but instead as babies. A baby cannot feed itself but needs to be fed little and often. They cannot chew and digest solid food. Similarly children squabble over the slightest things and often cannot express themselves meaningfully.

The Corinthians are unable to move on to mature teaching because they were still behaving like infants. One example of this is that they were squabbling among themselves as to who was the best preacher, some "following Paul" and others "following Apollos". In truth they should have all been saying "I follow Jesus".

**3:5 – 9 A picture of the church as a field**

Using the work amongst them of Apollos and himself as examples Paul shows how God grows His church. The analogy is an agricultural or horticultural one. God gave tasks to His servants (Paul and Apollos) in order to plant the seed in the field that is the church and to water that seed so that it could grow and bear fruit. It wasn't Paul or Apollos that caused the plant to grow, it was all God's work. If that is the case why should the Corinthians boast that they followed either of the men (or indeed any man)?

The servants who have laboured will receive rewards from God for their work. They should not be looking for the applause of men but the applause of heaven. All who work for God are co-workers together. All are needed because their gifts are complementary.

Paul concludes verse 9 by reminding them that they are God's field and also God's building. In the following verses he explores the picture of the building.

**3:10 – 15 A secure foundation**

The picture of the church as building begins by Paul saying that he used the grace gift that God gave him to lay a firm foundation in Corinth. He says that he was a wise builder and that someone else continued building on the work he had done. Building the church needs to be done carefully. Just like a natural building needs careful planning and orderly construction if it is to last then so does the church.

Paul emphasises that there can only be one secure foundation for the church and that is Jesus. Perhaps we are reminded of Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24 - 27). Without an adequate, secure foundation any building will fall down no matter how elegant and beautiful it may look to the eye. The church is founded on the testimony of Jesus and His redemptive work for mankind. It cannot be built on a foundation that seeks solely worldly things such as wealth, success or fame.

The work of Jesus is a solid foundation but it is necessary that this foundation is built on correctly, with care. A building may have firm foundations but if the walls, floors and roof are made from sub-standard materials or poorly designed then that building will not last. Paul describes the work we do to build the church in terms of materials. Only those materials of strength and substance will survive (gold, silver, costly stones). if we build in an inferior or inappropriate way it will not last (wood, hay, straw). The testing of work will be done by God and Paul says the process of testing is the test of a refining fire. He is teaching in relation to Judgement Day when every man's work will be tested. For the believer it is not a judgement for punishment but a judgement for ascertaining rewards. If we build with inferior materials we will be saved for eternity but "as one escaping through the flames". If we have worked with a motivation of personal fame, fortune or seeking power then those things will be burned up on the day of judgement. We will have received our reward (see Matthew 6:5). How much better to build well and receive the reward for our labours.

The Corinthians would be well acquainted with the idea of a Judgement Seat (*bema*). There was such a seat in their own city and in Acts 18:12 - 13 Paul stood before it himself to be examined by Gallio the proconsul of the region. It can still be seen today in modern day Corinth (see below)



**3:16 – 17 God's temple**

Paul will return to the idea of believers being temples of the Holy Spirit in chapter 6. Here he reminds them that not only are they the place of God's dwelling in that they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit but also collectively they are the place where God resides, He is there in their midst. There is a solemn warning to anyone who might cause division in God's Body.

**3:18 – 23 Fools for Christ**

Paul has already at length described the superiority of God's teaching and ways compared to the worldly wisdom and ways. Here he encourages them to lay aside any pretence they have of being superior to other believers or of following any human leaders without acknowledging God's superiority. Paul is so excited about what God has done for believers that he speaks in verse 21 almost hyperbolically about what God has done.

Dewey Bertolini helpfully paraphrases the message of much of this chapter as follows:

*"Dear Christians in Corinth, Please! Stop bragging about your achievements, or those of the men who you follow. We are not in competition with one another. Everything you have has been given to you by God as His special blessing to enrich your life. I, Paul, am just a humble servant whom God sent to you as gift from God to bring the gospel message to your city. Apollos was a gift from Good to teach you and establish you in your faith. Peter was a gift from God who preached the first gospel message ever and got the whole thing going. All of the beautiful sights and sounds this world has to offer are gifts from God for you to enjoy. Life itself is a gift from God for you to experience to the full. Even death is a blessing since it is a doorway to heaven where you will live with Jesus forever. Think about the many things you can be thankful for right now, right here in the present. Look to the future and all of the blessings that God will shower upon you tomorrow. You are blessed people who are joined together as one with Christ, just as Christ is one with God. Now, put your petty little differences aside and start acting like it."*

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**CHAPTER FOUR**

**4:1 – 2 A Matter of Trust**

Paul now addresses the issue of how the church members should regard their leaders. Instead of putting them on a pedestal and revering them they needed to recognise that they were only *servants* of Jesus Christ. Yes they had an important role to play in the church and the proclamation of the gospel but their role did not imply that they had an elevated status within the church. They were followers of Jesus just like every other Christian. Paul is probably having in mind the words of Jesus at the Last Supper about the fact that He came as a servant and demonstrated it by washing the disciples feet (John 13:1 - 17). The word used by Paul for servants is used for someone who was a "lower rower" in the galley ships of his time. These were seen as the lowest of the low, enduring appalling conditions and the most vulnerable should a ship sink. We also should note that leaders or ministers are servants of Jesus and not servants of the church.

Not only are leaders *servants* they are also *stewards.* They have been entrusted with something precious that needs to be protected. They are not usually closely scrutinised on a daily basis but there will come an appointed time when they have to give account to their master for what they have done. They are stewards of what Paul refers to as the "mysteries of God". What are these "mysteries"? A mystery is a secret that can be discovered or passed on. The mysteries of God are those things which were now being revealed by faithful ministers concerning the gospel. God's plan of salvation had been shrouded from full view in the years prior to the coming of Jesus. Now this plan has been made known. Paul says that the revealed plan of salvation must be faithfully preserved by good stewards and then passed on to others who will be faithful with what they have been entrusted.

**4:3 – 5 Handling Criticism**

Paul had his critics within the church at Corinth. In these verses he basically says that he doesn't worry about the fact that people were judging him. The only judge who really counts is God. There will come a day when His perfect judgement will be revealed. Until then we should not judge one another. If we do we do so imperfectly because none of us knows the true heart and motives of another person. Each of us is accountable ultimately to God and no one else. Of course this should not lead us to live arrogantly or boastfully with one another. We are those who should encourage and build one another up. As James writes in his letter in chapter 3 (verses 1 - 12) our tongues are the most difficult of all things to control so we need to take great care how we think and speak of others.

**4:6 – 7 Gifts from God**

Paul has used both himself and Apollos as examples previously of people who the Corinthians were regarding too highly . They were forming factions or cliques around the names of these teachers and leaders (and others). Here Paul takes the Corinthians to task for their boasting about their leaders. After all weren't these people just gifts from God (see Ephesians 4:11 -13). So why boast about something that they had not done themselves.

**4:8 – 13 Selfless Service**

This next section is written in a highly sarcastic manner. Paul uses sarcasm as a tool to open their eyes that have become blinded to how they were thinking and behaving. They thought that they were spiritually full but in reality they were only full of themselves. They thought they were spiritually wise but instead they were spiritual babies. They thought that they were spiritually rich when in fact they were impoverished. These rebukes are very strong. Perhaps we might see a reflection of Jesus' words to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14 - 22. These immature Christians needed to learn a lesson from the experience of the apostles. They had been hounded, mistreated, attacked, persecuted because of the stand they took for Jesus. Paul uses a picture that they would have been familiar with in verse 9. When a Roman army defeated an enemy they would bring their captives and force them to march in the victory procession. often they were stripped and beaten before the procession. They were totally humiliated. The lowest, most insignificant of those captured would bring up the rear of the procession. They were men condemned to death, sometimes thrown to wild beasts in the auditoriums. Paul says that the apostles have been treated like this by the world. Surely they deserved better than this at the hands of the church? The apostles have endured so much and yet they still persevered strengthened by the Lord. They responded to curses by blessing those who cursed them. They endured all things even being treated as the scum of the earth.

**4:14 – 17 A Heartfelt Plea**

Now Paul appeals to them to take to heart what he says because of their relationship. He regards himself as their father in the faith. He knew many of them personally having spent eighteen months ministering to them. As a good father he warned them that their behaviour and attitudes had to change. True fatherly love does not overlook faults. It seeks to rectify them through counsel and action. A starting point would be that they began to imitate him as a faithful servant of Jesus. They should imitate him by obeying the word of God and live it out. He is saying not only do as I say but do as I do.= He is going to send Timothy to them to remind them of what they had been taught and what they had learnt by Paul's example. Doubtless he would report back to Paul what he had found and seen during his visit.

**4:18 – 21 A Visit Planned - be Prepared!**

Paul tells them that he hopes to be able to come in person and see for himself how they have responded to his letter and advice (as the Lord wills). There is an underlying threat here - mend your ways or you will see what I am capable of ("wait till your farther gets home").

He wasn't interested in seeing any arrogant boasting. The only power and authority he was interested in seeing was the Holy Spirit's power present amongst them. He didn't want to hear any more talk about faith, he wanted to see demonstrations of faith in action amongst them.

His final words concerning his proposed visit give them options as to how he will come to them. Depending on their response to his letter and Timothy's visit he would either come intent on further disciplining them or he would come with gentleness and love. The choice was theirs.

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**CHAPTER FIVE**

In the next few chapters Paul deals with a number of issues that he has been made aware of within the church at Corinth. Whilst they may have been specific situations the principles he outlines are helpful for all time.

**5:1 – 5 A public scandal**

Corinth was renowned as a very sensual city. Almost total sexual freedom was very much part of their society, as indeed it was throughout the Roman Empire at the time. However a matter has been reported to Paul that would scandalise even the pagans amongst whom the church lived. It appears that a man in the church was involved in an incestuous relationship with either his mother or step-mother. Throughout human history there have been societies that would tolerate adultery, murder and even cannibalism but there are none that have condoned incest. Yet it appears that the church in Corinth were continuing to allow this man to be a part of the church without challenging his behaviour. Paul is astounded that this should be the case. Instead of mourning over the situation it appears that the church was proud of their tolerance. The church leadership should have taken immediate and decisive action to discipline the man. Their failure to do so meant that the church and its reputation would be tarnished. The leadership, it seems, were more concerned to be shown to be tolerant than to deal effectively with sin within the church.

This is a problem where God's grace is abused and used as a basis for licence. Whilst there is forgiveness available to a sinner there needs to be a recognition of their sin and repentance. In this situation Paul says that the church should have taken action to put the man out of fellowship. This would send a message to everyone in the church that sin will be dealt with and to those outside the church that they had high moral standards that will not be compromised. Church discipline is important and needs to be scripturally applied. Jesus set out the standard procedure to be taken in Matthew 18:15 - 17. It seems that these procedures had not been applied in Corinth which is why Paul says drastic action now needs to be taken with this unrepentant immoral member of the church.

The four steps outlined by Jesus are:

1. Go to the sinning person privately. If they are unrepentant move to step 2.

2. Return to the sinning person with one or two witnesses. If they are still unrepentant move to step 3.

3. Tell the church that a disciplinary process is in place with the individual (no mention at this stage of the sin). If they are still unrepentant move to the final step.

4. Treat the person as an unbeliever, excluded from the church.

In all of this the aim must be to restore the erring member but if they are unrepentant then that will have consequences.

The persons removal has a two-fold purpose:

1. To remove an ungodly influence from the church

2.To give them over to the lifestyle they have chosen with the subsequent consequences (see also Romans 1:24,26,28)

Paul does not mince his words when he describes what action should be taken with the man who has shown no repentance foe his sin. He says that the man should be "delivered over to Satan". By this he probably means that by removing him from the protection of the church the man will be back in Satan's domain. Satan may afflict his flesh and by experiencing this he may be brought to repentance, and by inference to restoration to the fellowship. This all seems rather drastic but to use a familiar picture by removing a bad apple from a basket you are able to save others from becoming contaminated. Without drastic action the whole witness of the church could be destroyed. We should also remember that all disciplinary action must be done in love and not from a spirit of anger or pride. We should note that Paul only deals with the man in this situation perhaps we can assume that the woman concerned was not a member of the congregation.

**5:6 – 8 Personal sincerity**

Paul now speaks to them to remind them that by allowing sinful behaviour within the church they are not doing good, certainly nothing to be proud of. He uses the picture of the effect that a little yeast can have in baking. A small amount of yeast will permeate the whole loaf. In Scripture yeast is often seen as a symbol of sin and its infectious nature (see Matthew 16:6,12). Paul here reminds them of the Passover story recorded in Exodus. In particular he speaks of God's instruction in Exodus 12:14,15 concerning leavened and unleavened bread. For their new journey God wanted the Israelites to break with what they had been used to eating in Egypt. As they were breaking away from slavery so they were to break from the Egyptian food. This is one reason why God was so angry when they grumbled in the Wilderness about wanting to go back to Egypt to enjoy the rich food they used to eat. In effect they were saying they preferred slavery and the conditions of slavery to God's deliverance and provision.

Paul says that now Jesus has become for us our delivering Passover Lamb (see also John 1:29) then we should not go back to our old ways nor envy the world and its purported pleasures. We are now to live lives characterised by sincerity and truth.

**5:9 – 13 Separation from the world?**

In verse 9 we are told that Paul had already written to them. This letter has been lost and is not included in the Bible. We do not therefore know all that he had written to them about. However, in these verses, he does address one of the issues he had raised which it appears they had misinterpreted.

He had written to them that they should not associate with sexually immoral people. It appears that they had taken this to mean only people outside the church, many of whom would have been seen as sexually immoral. Paul had actually been referring only to sexually immoral people within the church. By interpreting his letter incorrectly the church had disassociated itself from the world and were therefore unable to make an effective witness for God in their city. They would be unable to carry out Jesus' command to tell the world about the free gift of salvation (Matthew 28:18 - 20). The reality is that God expects us to live amongst sinners to be a light into their darkness, to be the salt that prevents further corruption, to set an example of purity and holiness in an impure and unholy world. It is the sexually immoral *within the church* that we are to exclude and disassociate ourselves from.

Paul goes further and widens the advice to include anyone within the church who is greedy, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. When speaking of these people we need to remember that Paul is speaking of those who habitually behave in these ways. Paul says they should not even eat with such people. When an important part of their life together revolved around sharing meals this would mean that these people would be distanced from the church fellowship

Paul then says that it is not their responsibility to judge the behaviour of those outside the church. We should expect unbelievers to behave like unbelievers. There is enough to concern ourselves with inside the church. It is God's responsibility to judge people outside the church. The attitude of judging others is always dangerous for Christians as there is the danger of becoming Pharisaic. We must not make our freedom in Christ an excuse for sinful behaviour but nor must we stand in judgement on fellow believers if we are not prepared to lovingly help them to change. We should remember the advice given in Hebrews 10:24 to spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

Paul ends this section with a quotation from Deuteronomy 13:5 where God tells His people to purge the evil from amongst them. In the OT this meant putting them to death. Thankfully churches operate under New Testament grace.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER SIX**

In this chapter Paul deals with two particular situations that appear to be emerged within the Corinthian church. Both are still relevant to today's church. Both are examples of the dangers when the ways of the world are brought into the church.

**6:1 –11 Lawsuits and disputes**

In the time when Paul was writing one of the foremost entertainments that people looked forward to going to was the local court. Frequently people brought their disputes to the courts to be heard by judge and jury. The juries were very large, apparently a minimum of 201 people. It was a real spectacle where skilled orators would bring their clients cases before the whole town. All the dirty washing was done in public. The jurors had no qualification other than age. Their own character was never disputed. This is the background to Paul's comments here.

Paul is appalled to learn that the church members were taking their quarrels and disputes to these local courts. They were taking their disputes to be decided by unrighteous, ungodly people. Surely they had the wisdom and love within the church to deal amicably with disputes that arise. He wasn't amazed that disputes might have arisen amongst them, just their way of dealing with them.

Paul makes the statements that the Lord's people would one day judge both the world and even angels. There is much dispute among scholars as to what this precisely means. Is it indicative of what will happen when Jesus returns? Is it related to His Millennial rule? Is it only bad angels that we will judge? We simply do not know for certainty but Paul is emphasising that if God is willing to use His people as judges surely they can judge amongst themselves with the help of the holy Spirit and the scriptures.

Their witness before the people of Corinth has been badly damaged by going to court against one another. Paul says it would be better for them to be cheated or wronged than parade their grievances before the ungodly. These ungodly judges will pronounce judgements on the godly, what a terrible situation.

Paul then lists ten categories of people who will not be part of God's Kingdom and some of these would be sitting on the Corinthian juries:

* fornicators
* idolaters
* adulterers
* homosexuals
* sodomites
* thieves
* coveters
* drunkards
* slanderers
* swindlers

What a list! Then comes the sting from Paul as he says that among you that is what many of them had been (11). Thankfully he uses the past tense because now these believers had been washed clean of those sins , they had been set apart from God (sanctified) and they had been justified before God through Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf. By going back amongst the people outside the church there was a danger that they might fall back into their old ways. Better to settle problems within the church than become ensnared once more in the world's systems and ways.

**6:12 –20 Sexual immorality**

In Corinth the issue of sex loomed large. The huge temple dedicated to Aphrodite dominated the city. It was full of male and female prostitutes. Each Sunday hundreds, if not thousands of Corinthians would go to the temple for sexual intercourse. It was the natural thing for them. By moving on from legal disputes to this issue Paul was actually creating a link. When you start to involve the world in your affairs you will end up involved in their affairs, doing the things they enjoy.

In Greek thinking the life of the mind and soul was paramount. The body was worthless and so what you did with it was not important. It was just a shell in which your soul lived and that soul would be liberated from the decaying shell upon your death. If the body is worthless then it doesn't matter what you eat or drink or who you have sex with.

It is this kind of thinking that Paul is seeking to challenge in this passage. He says that your body is created lovingly by God and it is important what you do with it. Whilst we may have the liberty to do all things, having been set free by Jesus, not all things are beneficial for us to do. Our witness is sullied if we simply behave as the world around us behaves.

Paul makes the case that our bodies belong to God and that when we are saved we become members of Jesus Himself (15). We are united to the Lord in spirit. How awful it is then for us to use our bodies in ways which are dishonouring to God whether that be in gluttony, in drunkenness or especially in having sex with a prostitute. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit , how can we then unite that temple with someone immoral. By having sex with a prostitute the Spirit's presence is defiled. Paul reminds the Corinthians that heavy price as paid for their freedom, the death of Jesus. In the light of this they should ensure that whatever they physically do will bring honour to the Lord. Sex is a wonderful gift from God but it must be used in accordance with His directions and not the world's.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

From this point onwards in the letter Paul is replying to questions that the Corinthians had asked him in a letter concerning a number of areas and situations of life both within the church and in society as a whole. The first question that he deals with revolves around the subject of marriage. When looking at the advice given we need to bear in mind a number of things:

1. The authority ruling the city was Rome and the state was no friend of Christians or the church.

2. The culture of the city was Greek and their moral codes are very different to what we experience today.

3. Greek thought was dominated by the idea that the body was not important. This led to two opposing ideas. Either the body needed to be ignored (asceticism and abstinence) or the body could be indulged in any and every way.

4. Corinth was renowned as a sexually immoral city where temptation was everywhere.

5. Paul was writing a letter, not a handbook on how to have a happy marriage.

**7:1 –16 Christian marriage**

In the light of the society they lived in there were those who were saying that in order to differentiate themselves from their neighbours Christians should abstain from all sexual relations, they should be entirely celibate even if they are married. Paul teaches that within God's ordained boundaries sex is good. Husbands and wives should fulfil their marital duties to one another which includes sexual intercourse. Marriage is much more than just a sexual relationship but sex is an important part of a marriage. Both husband and wife are taught to yield themselves to one another. The danger in denying our spouses is that Satan may tempt one or both spouses to succumb to temptation to look for sexual gratification elsewhere and in Corinth there were plentiful opportunities to indulge in the temptation. Our flesh can at times be very weak and self-control lacking.

In verse 5 Paul teaches that the only time a married couple should desist from sex is when they have mutually agreed (no one sided decisions), for an agreed time and for an agreed purpose (for a season of prayer). Paul stressed that there should be equality in sexual relationships.

It appears that Paul was unmarried at the time. Some commentators believe that he may have been married at some time on the basis that he may have been a rabbi and member of the Sanhedrin, both of which require that a man was married. However the evidence for these assertions are inconclusive. By the time of this letter it is clear that he is not married and he sees this as being a desirable state of affairs. His advice in verse 8 is that if someone is single and cannot control their sexual desires then it is better for them to marry. Basically in this section he is saying to believers *"if you can cope with being single, remain single. However if you are burning with sexual desire, get married. If you do get married celebrate your sexuality, have sex often and enjoy it to the full!"*

In verse 10 Paul turns to two questions:

1. What about divorce and remarriage between two Christians?

2. What about divorce and remarriage when a Christian is married is to an unbeliever?

Firstly, he states in verses 10 and 11 that it is the Lord's command that as a matter of principle divorce should not be considered as an option for a Christian (see Matthew 19:4 - 6, Malachi 2:16). Jesus *permitted* (note not *commanded*) divorce in only one situation and that was if one of the spouses commits adultery (Matthew 19:9). In this situation it is the adultery that destroys the marriage rather than the divorce itself. Note that Paul uses the word "separate" rather than "divorce" as the action that should be taken and leaves the possibility of reconciliation open (verse 11)

Secondly, in verses 12 - 16 Paul addresses the situation when one spouse is a Christian and the other is an unbeliever. Interestingly he says that he is now giving his advice and not the Lord's command. He advises that if the unbelieving spouse is willing to remain married then the Christian should not seek to divorce them. If however the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave then the Christian should let them leave.

Paul says that the Christian will *sanctify* the unbelieving spouse. His use of this word does not imply that the unbelieving spouse will automatically be saved because of their spouse's faith. It means that the blessings of God that rest upon the believer will spill over into the life of the family. The believer may be the only source of God's grace into a home. It is possible that God may use the loving witness of a believer to bring the unbeliever to faith (see also 1 Peter 3:1- 7).

Similarly the children of a mixed marriage can know the blessings of God in the home. They are no longer totally "unclean" but are seen as "holy" until such time that they can make a considered decision to follow the Lord or not.

Paul does not see it as a good thing for believers to marry non-believers. He would later say in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that a mixed marriage is to be avoided. The situation he is dealing with here is where one of the spouses becomes a Christian after marriage.

**7:17 –24 Changing status**

Paul now turns to the wider question of what a new Christian should do concerning their relationships, jobs and so on. The basic answer is that they should remain in the same state as before. He reiterates this in verses 17, 20 and 24. He emphasises that a Jewish convert should remain a Jew (these days termed a Messianic Jew). A Gentile convert does not need to be circumcised in order to be a Christian . this addressed a problem in the early church (see Acts 15:1-2).

In a slave based economy it would be common to find believers who were slaves. Paul's advice is that they should remain slaves unless they had the opportunity to have their freedom (granted or bought). We should also consider his letter to Philemon. In their standing before God they were spiritually free and that as what was really important. they had been bought with the price of Jesus' blood and were now part of God's family and joint heirs with Christ. The freedmen in the society were now the willing slaves of Jesus. They should all ensure that they did not give in to the pressures of the world and become again slaves to men, to sin.

**7:25 –40 Celebrating singleness**

Paul again does not have a command from the Lord but instead shares his opinion as someone who God has entrusted with the gospel and care for the church.

Paul begins by saying that in the present time of crisis it is better for people to remain as they are. He foresaw a time of increased persecution of the church and beginning new relationships or ending current ones is not advisable. Be content with your present condition and find strength in that when times get tough.

Paul teaches that someone unmarried has more opportunities to serve the Lord without the responsibilities of family. Their devotion is undivided. This does not mean that he denies the value of families and married life. He again teaches that people should marry if they are settled in their mind that it is the Lord's will (v37).

The final verses deal with the situation where a woman becomes a widow. Paul would rather she did not remarry but if she does then it should be to a believer (whether the deceased husband was a believer or not is not relevant).

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

Paul continues to address questions put to him by the Corinthian church. In this section of the letter he answers a question concerning the eating of food that may have been sacrificed to idols. In doing so he also addresses the wider issues of Christian freedom and responsibility.

**8:1 – 3 When knowledge can be dangerous**

Paul is going to deal with the issue of eating food that has been sacrificed to idols but before he does so he establishes an important principle that can help us in dealing with situations where fellow Christians may take differing viewpoints. There is danger when someone has received knowledge and understanding that they can be become proud or "puffed up" in their own estimation of themselves. This will lead to them looking down on others who have not received the same knowledge or revelation. Rather than glorying in our understanding or knowledge we should remember that the basis of our relationships is love and specifically the fact that we are all loved by God. In contrast to being puffed up by pride we should seek to build on the basis of love and seek to build up our fellow believers on the basis of love and not by vaunting our so-called superior knowledge. Something can very easily be inflated but will not last, for instance a balloon, but if something is built it will last. Knowledge puffs up self; love builds up others.

**8:4 – 6 One true God**

Corinth was a polytheistic city which was the norm for the region at this time. There would be idol statues in the streets, temples dedicated to Greek gods around the city. It was a difficult society to live in if you believed there was only one true and living God. Many if not all of the church members in Corinth will have been brought up with the all pervading atmosphere of idolatry. Paul is at pains to emphasise to them that there really is only one God, Christianity is a monotheistic faith. We worship the one Creator God, the Father and there is one Lord, Jesus. Paul reminds them that everything ultimately was created by God and that every breath they live comes from God.

**8:7 – 8 Food that has been sacrificed**

It was normal practice in the worship of the Greek gods to dedicate and sacrifice food, particularly meat to that god. The cooked meat would then be distributed in a number of ways. Some would leave a small portion near the idol and then eat the remainder. Some would give some meat to the so called deity's priests and then eat the rest. Some of the meat would end up in the local market on the butcher's stall. If the sacrifice was part of the rituals of a local guild or society then most of the meat would be used at a feast following the worship.

It seems that some in the church had realised that the idols were false representations of unreal gods and that sacrificing to them is meaningless. With the sacrifice being meaningless then they had no difficulty in eating the meat, it had no superstitious hold on them, it was meat that, ultimately, God had created.

Others in the church believed that it was wrong to eat this meat because of their association with the worship of pagan gods. They had not yet received the revelation of the truth that their fellow believers had concerning the food. They therefore felt a degree of guilt in eating the food or shunned it entirely. Paul says of this people that "their conscience is weak". He states that food does not bring us nearer to God, which should be our life goal. Eating food does not do us spiritual good or harm.

**8:9 – 13 Considerate behaviour**

Paul is concerned that the believers who see no spiritual harm in eating the meat will, by their words or actions do harm to their brethren for whom eating the meat is a problem. If the "weaker" brother sees a "stronger" brother eating in an idol's temple they may be tempted to do the same in violation of their own conscience. In their own eyes they will have sinned and brought into condemnation. We should do nothing that may cause our brothers to stumble. We cannot use our Christ-bought freedom to act irresponsibly towards them. To use an example, if God has shown someone that having an alcoholic drink in moderation is allowable and not a sin and that believer has a friend who has difficulty with or is addicted to alcohol then the first brother should abstain from drinking in the friend's presence so that the friend will not be tempted to drink. We must be careful not to offend a sensitive or younger Christian by exercising our freedom, we must not cause them to stumble. If we are motivated by the love of God we will seek to build and strengthen others in their faith even if it is at the expense of exercising out freedom. All of us have different areas of weakness and we need to be sensitive to the weaknesses of others.

Paul speaks very strongly on this issue. He says that if we wound our brethren in this way then we are actually sinning against Christ (12). For himself he says that if it would cause people to stumble for him to eat meat then he would rather abstain from eating it at all times.

*To sum up the chapter:*

Mature believers should not become proud of their maturity or knowledge and flaunt their freedom. Strive to act in love so that you do not cause a weaker or younger believer to stumble.

Weaker or younger believers should seek to ensure that their convictions are based on God's Word and not simply on manmade rules or superstitions.

There is a place of moderation to be found where we balance our freedoms and our responsibilities.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER NINE**

It seems that some of the people in the Corinthian church were calling into question Paul's authority and rights as an apostle. In this section of the letter Paul defends his position as a genuine apostle and deals with what responsibility churches should have towards those who serve them. He would return to some of these issues again later in the letter.

**9:1 – 18 Paul's rights as an apostle**

Paul uses a serious of rhetorical questions to bring into focus the fact that he could genuinely claim to be an apostle. The early apostles were marked out by the fact that they had seen the risen Jesus and were then instrumental in building the foundations of churches as they obeyed Jesus' Great Commission to take the gospel to all nations. Unlike people such as Peter and John who saw the resurrected Jesus before He ascended to heaven, Paul had met Him on the road to Damascus some considerable period after the Ascension (Acts 9:5). Nevertheless Paul was adamant that he should be regarded as an eye-witness of the Resurrection.

He appeals to the Corinthians that they at least should recognise him as an apostle even if others did not. He had been instrumental in the church's foundation (see Acts 18). Many of them had been saved during the period of his ministry there. He says that the fact that they are now part of the church is a seal proving the genuineness of his ministry.

In verses 4 to 6 he points out that others who worked for the Lord as apostles were entitled to monetary rewards, food and drink and to have believing wives. In contrast Paul and his friend and companion in ministry ,Barnabas, did not appear to be provided for by the church.

He uses examples from secular life to how that anyone who labours has a right to reward. He uses the example of soldiers, shepherds and vinedressers to show that no one works for nothing or without an expectation of reward. He then appeals to scripture (Deuteronomy 25:4) to show that even an oxen who labours will be fed. Surely if animals are fed then men are worth their hire. Having sown spiritual seed amongst them wasn't he entitled to some material harvest from them?

Having established that he had a right to reward from them he then points out in verse 12 that when he was with them he did not ask for it. We learn from Acts 18:3 that he had worked as a tent-maker alongside Priscilla and Aquila.

In verse 13 Paul reminds them that those who served in the Temple received their food from the offerings of sacrifice made in the Temple. He reminds them of Jesus' instructions to the disciples when He sent them out on mission (see Matthew 10:9,10, Luke 10:7).

From verse 15 Paul says that he is not teaching in this way to shame them into paying him. He delighted to preach the gospel irrespective of whether he was rewarded materially. He felt compelled to preach. His reward for preaching is knowing that he is doing the Lord's will which is reward enough.

**9:19 – 23 Becoming all things to all men**

In these verses Paul establishes that although he has been set free by the Lord he has deliberately chosen to lay down his freedom in order to reach people with the gospel. Using examples that they would recognise he teaches important principles for ministry:

1. find common ground with people you contact

2. avoid projecting yourself as a "know it all"

3. make other people feel that they are accepted

4. be sensitive to the needs and concerns of others

5. actively look out for opportunities to tell people about Jesus

We see some of these principles put into practice by Paul in Acts 16:3 where he circumcised Timothy so as not to offend the Jews in Derbe and Lystra, in Acts 18:18 he shaved his head and took a Nazirite vow, in Acts 21:20 - 26 he instructed his travelling companions to do nothing to offend the Jews in Jerusalem.

Perhaps we can think of activities that we could participate in to make contact with people outside the church without compromising out faith.

**9:24 – 27 The need for self-discipline as we focus on the finish line**

In a society that was morally corrupt the church needed to ensure that they exercised self-control (a fruit of the Holy Spirit). Using the familiar picture of a runner training to compete in athletic games Paul says that if a runner wants to win a race they need to train hard and run hard. If Christians want to achieve all that the Lord intends it will take self-discipline and dedication. In verse 27 Paul speaks in terms of subjugating his flesh in order to achieve what God has called Him to do. At the end of the chapter Paul speaks of his concern that he might not qualify for the prize if he doesn't live in this way. This does not mean that he was worried that he might lose his salvation but that he might not be able to continue to have the joy of preaching and teaching God's word, which he rejoiced in doing.

Paul *disciplined* himself, *denied* himself and *limited his freedom* in order to make sure that he didn't disqualify himself. This is an example to us all.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER TEN**

In chapter nine Paul had begun to deal with the issue of freedom and our responsibilities towards fellow believers to ensure that we do not use our freedom to cause them to stumble. In chapter ten he continues with this theme and deals with further issues that the Corinthians faced living in a city dominated by idolatrous practices.

**10:1 – 13 Warnings from Israel's history**

In this section Paul gives a powerful example of what can happen to God's people when they choose to exercise freedom rather than self-control. He uses the story of the Israelites in the wilderness to speak to the Corinthians who were both Jews and Gentiles. The powerful lesson is that a whole generation of disobedient and rebellious Israelites became disqualified from entering the Promised Land. They began well but did not maintain their close, obedient walk with God.

In the first few verses we are reminded of the Exodus story (found in Exodus chapters 13 and 14). God brought about the escape of the Israelites from the brutal slavery they had been enduring in Egypt. He led them by a cloud and enabled them to safely cross the Red Sea, destroying the pursuing Egyptian army in the process. We are told that they were "baptised into Moses" (v2). This probably means that they were united to Moses in a similar way that Christians are baptised into Christ

In the wilderness God miraculously provided both food and drink for them all. Paul says that their source of provision was Jesus (v4). However despite all that He had provided for them (freedom, food, drink) because of their behaviour God became displeased with them and a whole generation apart from 2 men (Joshua and Caleb) perished in the desert.

In verses 6 to 10 Paul reminds them of what the Israelites did that so seriously angered God. So what did they do?

1. some became idolaters (v 7) - see the incident recorded in Exodus 32 where they made a golden calf to worship instead of the living God

2. some behaved sexually immorally (v 8) - see the incident recoded in Numbers 25:1 - 9 when some of the Israelites worshipped the Baal of Peor and engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite women. On that day 23,000 men were killed because of their sin

3. the people complained and grumbled about God's provision (v 9) - see Numbers 21:5 - 6. They said they preferred Egyptian food, forgetting the slavery they had suffered there.

4. they complained against Moses and Aaron who were God's appointed leaders (v 10) - see Numbers 14:2, 36 and 16:41 - 50. As a result of their grumbling a plague decimated the camp.

In verse 11 Paul emphasises that the experiences of the Israelites should act as solemn warning to the church. They must not take God's mercy and grace for granted, He expects obedience from His people. In verse 12 Paul warns that believers need to be vigilant. If we think we are strong in an area we may become complacent and let down our guard. Temptations are a part of life for everyone but as believers we have the confidence that God knows our limitations, strengths and weaknesses. Verse 13 teaches that when temptations come God will always provide a way to overcome them, a way out. Often this involves the use of the word "no"!

**10:14 – 22 Idol feasts and the Lord's Supper**

Idol worship was a major expression of religion in Corinth. Pagan temples were numerous, popular and powerful. Today we may not put our trust in wooden statues and images but we are surrounded by many who bow down to the plastic credit card and money. The idols of today may look different but their power over us is just as powerful. Anything that we rely upon or invest our lives, finance and emotion in apart from God is a form of idolatry. No wonder Paul tells the Corinthians to flee from idols.

In these verses Paul challenges the Corinthians concerning the meal they have to celebrate the Lord, the Lord's Supper. He speaks also of the importance in the Jewish faith of food sacrifices. Eating food in a religious context is not wrong of itself, in fact it is commanded by Jesus, but we need to ensure that the food has not been dedicated to an idol so that we do not take part in a pagan feast. We cannot live in both worlds. The Israelites in the wilderness at times had a foot in both camps. At times they worshipped God as commanded and at other times they willingly took part in pagan, idolatrous feasts. By eating the meat of a valid sacrifice they expressed their obedience to and unity with God. When they ate of a pagan feast they ruptured the relationship they had with God.

In verse 20 Paul states that meat sacrificed to idols are actually being sacrificed to demons. This is a strong statement but makes the point very clearly. We are either of God's household or the Devil's. As believers we cannot dabble with such things as mediums, ouija boards and horoscopes. By doing so we open up our lives to demonic influences. There is a warning in verse 22 that our behaviour may rouse the anger of God. The Israelites were testimony of the danger of doing that. We are being warned that we cannot both follow the desires of Christ and the crowd at the same time.

**10:23 – 33 The believer's freedom**

Sometimes it can be difficult to decide when we must defer to the sensibilities of weaker believers and when we should not. Paul gives a brief rule of thumb, we should be both sensitive and gracious. By using our freedom to do anything we want we may find that our actions are not beneficial or helpful to those around us.

Returning again to the issue of meat in the market he says it is best not to ask the question of whether it has been offered to an idol. In that way no one's conscience could be troubled. If we become anxious about every action we may make we run the risk of becoming legalistic and negating the grace of God. Ultimately everything belongs to God and He has given everything to mankind to enjoy. If we know that something is a problem then we can deal with it but we do not need to go around looking for potential problems (this way madness lies!).

In all of this we need to be sensitive to the needs of young or immature Christians who are still trying to work out how to turn their backs on their former, sinful ways. With gentle teaching both in word and deed those who are more mature can guide the younger believer in the ways of God's grace. We must not stand in judgement on them or we run the danger of becoming modern day Pharisees.

The love of God should permeate every aspect of our lives so that we are truly doing everything for His glory. As a guiding principle we should question ourselves by asking "is this likely to glorify or bring honour to God?" We should look for ways that bring the best for those around us and not just for ourselves. We must not be insensitive and carry on with what we want to do regardless of what effect it may have on others. Nor must we be so oversensitive that we dare not offend others when they do need to be challenged. We also need to ensure that we do not just go along with the flow and be those who always say "yes" to the crowd even when we know it is not the right thing to do. In all things we are to follow the example of our Lord and Master Jesus, just as Paul sought to do, to model Christ-likeness to those around us.

In 11:1 Paul encourages them to follow good examples in order to best serve the Lord. His guide was Jesus' example and he says that as he follows Jesus so the Corinthians will have a strong example if they watch his own life as an example.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

Paul continues to address questions raised about church life. The main theme of the chapter is ensuring that there is no irreverence in public worship.

**11:2 – 16 Head coverings in worship**

Before bringing his teaching Paul thanks the Corinthians that they have already been obeying the traditions, principles or teachings he has previously brought them.

He firstly deals with an issue that had arisen within the Corinthian church as to whether women should have their heads covered in worship times. There are broadly four interpretations of why Paul taught as he did here.

1. Paul was misogynistic in his attitude towards women. Yet it is him who speaks of women being equal with men (Galatians 3:28)

2. Paul was reflecting his Jewish background in his attitude toward women, However, in Judaism it is men who have their heads covered as a mark of respect to God, not women. In brining this teaching he is going against all he would have been taught as a good Jew.

3. Some say it was because of the reputation for loose sexual morality in Corinth in that a prostitute would uncover their heads as a sign or symbol of their profession. However Paul says that this teaching held good for all the churches even where culturally there would not have been a problem with a women having an uncovered head.

4. Some say it was Roman and Greek culture that taught that a woman uncovering her head was irreverent. However there is plenty of evidence to suggest that many women went to pagan temples with their heads uncovered and were not thought of as irreverent.

So none of these theories are wholly convincing. The key really is verse 3 where the core principle is found. It is about God's ordained order of authority in society: God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of every man (so every man is subordinate to Christ); man is the head of woman (so women are to be subordinate to men). This may not sit comfortably with the perceived wisdom of 21st century Western Europe but God's Word is clear. His pattern for the family, the church and society is God, Christ, man, woman. When men do not recognise their place within God's pattern then family, church and society become disjointed. No man has the right to have authority over a woman unless he is first truly and fully under the authority of Christ. Pauls' teaching is not that the woman is inferior to man but the relationship is a balance of complementing one another in partnership. Remember if men expect submission from their wives then they also need to love her as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25).

The issue of the symbolism of the head covering should not detract us from seeing that Paul *expected* women to pray and prophesy in public (see v 5).

In verse 10 Paul says that this issue of authority is important "because of the angels". We need to realise that angels watch the behaviour of people and can be affected by them. If they see people rebelling against the authority of God it may encourage them to also rebel in the heavenly realms.

In verses 13 to 16 Paul speaks of the need for men to have short hair and women long hair. Whilst we do not have a true picture of what Jesus looked like the likelihood is that He had short hair which was the norm for a Jewish man of His time. John the Baptist and Samson were exceptions to the general rule.

**11:17 – 34 The Lord's Supper**

This next section must have made uncomfortable reading for the Corinthian church. Paul has heard about problems encountered by some people over the issue of celebrating the Lord's Supper (communion, Eucharist).

Celebrating the Lord's Supper is a central part of the worship times of most churches. It should be a time when we come together as part of His Body, all sinners saved by God's grace, united in our appreciation of what Jesus did at the Cross, remembering His love. In Corinth it seems there had arisen disputes and division at their celebration of the Supper. Paul is very critical of the behaviour of some of the believers.

The Lords' Supper should be a source of spiritual strength. We should go away afterwards with a deeper appreciation of God's love, amazed that we are counted worthy of bearing His name. From what we read here there were some who would actually leave after the Supper feeling condemned and empty rather than accepted and full.

It had been reported to Paul that at the time of communion some people were drinking so much wine that they became drunk. We need to remember that in the early church communion was often taken as part of a full meal. It seems that others ate the food they have brought with them without sharing with their brethren. Some went away hungry whilst other were drunk (21). Some were more concerned about their own wellbeing that they overlooked the fact that they were part of a Body of believers, a fellowship of equals. Those who had nothing to bring to the meal were humiliated by the actions of those who had brought much but were unwilling to share. We are to take communion with Christ and with each other. It is a time of both spiritual and social interaction.

Into what should have been a positive and uplifting occasion had come divisions and cliques. Paul says that these divisions reveal those who truly are following the Lord and those who were paying lip service. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper and Paul reminds the Corinthians of what Jesus had commanded. He says that the Lord revealed this command to him (23 - -25). We need to remember that this letter was written before any of the Gospels so they are not Paul's source.

Paul says that before anyone takes the bread and wine they should examine themselves. Remember Jesus instituted the memorial at a time when He was being betrayed, when sin was attacking Him. We need to have an awareness of our own unworthiness that is transformed by His loving sacrifice when we come to take bread and wine. When we take the emblems it proclaims all that Jesus did on our behalf. We do this until He returns (26).

Paul encourages us that when we take the emblems to recognise (discern) His Body. This refers both to His physical body and His Body on earth (the church). There is a solemn warning that if we do not take communion seriously it can have both a spiritual and physical effect on our bodies. The Lord may chastise us when we fail to take His sacrifice and the remembrance of it seriously. We dare not treat something as sacred as the Lord's Supper with a disregard of its significance,

Paul concludes this section by saying that he would give further instructions when he visited them.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER TWELVE**

From chapter twelve through to chapter fourteen Paul is dealing with the issue of spiritual gifts, their origin, their value and their operation. The Corinthian church was evidently one in which spiritual gifts operated (see chapter 1:7) but rather than being used for the building up of the church they were causing divisions and factions. Paul seeks to bring comprehensive teaching to help the church to value and use spiritual gifts for their God-given purpose. He then teaches on the valuable contribution that each believer has in the strengthening of the church to fulfil what God intends for them.

**12:1 – 11 Spiritual gifts**

Paul is concerned that the Corinthians are not led astray and unwittingly stray from the truth of God's ways and word. That is why he begins by saying that he doesn't want them to be uniformed. Before they became Christians many of them will have experienced times of ecstasy and emotional feelings when they participated in pagan worship. Now they have become aware that what they had experienced was not from God because the idols they had worshipped were nothing at all. It is necessary to test any spiritual experience to discern whether it is from God or from another source (the world, the flesh and the devil).

The primary test that Paul gives them is to check whether what is said or done is honouring to Jesus and His Lordship. Today it is still a valid test. So many false teachers go astray precisely in this area that they have a wrong conception of Jesus. Their meetings may feel very spiritual but the reality is that people are being deceived.

Paul says that only those truly inspired by the Holy Spirit can say "Jesus is Lord". This speaks of both Jesus' authority and deity. Both of those aspects of who Jesus is would be denied by a false speaker or by someone inspired by a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. So when we see spiritual gifts in operation the question we need to ask ourselves is "does this exalt Jesus or does it degrade or criticise His Person and His finished work?" We must remember that simply saying "Jesus is Lord" is not enough if we are not "walking the talk" (see Matthew 7:21), we need to live a life surrendered to His authority.

God has given us two different types of gifts, natural and spiritual. People who are not Christians will receive natural gifts from God even if they do not acknowledge it. Only Christians can receive spiritual gifts as well as natural ones. Spiritual gifts are supernatural rather than natural.

Paul reminds them that all spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. It is God at work for a purpose in the giving of each and every gift.

Here Paul lists nine spiritual gifts. We should bear in mind that this list is not exhaustive or the only list given in scripture (see also Romans 12:6 - 8, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 4:10,11).

The gifts listed here are:

1. A message or word of wisdom - the God-given ability to apply biblical truth to life's situations (see Acts 6:10, James 3:13,17, 2 Peter 3:15)
2. A message or word of knowledge - the God-given ability to understand and teach the truths of scripture or a message from God to unlock a situation (see Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:3, Colossians 2:2)
3. Gift of faith - this is not the faith that saves us but an enduement from God to believe for something miraculous (see Romans 1:12, 2 Corinthians 8:7)
4. Gifts of healing - the God-given ability to restore someone to physical health (See Acts 3:1 - 10, 9:36 -- 43)
5. Miraculous powers - the God-given ability to counteract natural laws (see Hebrews 2:4)
6. Prophecy - the God-given ability to proclaim His word or to predict God's future actions (see Acts 7:54, 21:9)
7. Discerning of spirits - the God-given ability to identify deceptive or erroneous doctrines taught under the influence of demonic spirits (see Acts 8:14 - 23, 1 Timothy 4:1 - 3)
8. Speaking in different tongues - the God-given ability to speak and pray in a language (either human or angelic) that the speaker has not previously learned (see Acts 2:5 - 12, 10:46, 19:6)
9. Interpretation of tongues - the God-given ability to translate a message given in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:26 - 33)

Paul does not here examine each gift or explain their uses (or abuses). He takes for granted that when he names the gifts they will have an understanding of what he is referring to . Without going into definitions in depth there appear to be three broad classes of gifts covered - gifts of speech, gifts of knowledge and gifts of power. All of the gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and He gives them to whomever He chooses to do so.

**12:12 – 26 Unity and diversity in the Body**

With so many diverse gifts being given it is easy to imagine that a church where they are being all used could end up rather chaotic. As God is not the author of chaos then we must ensure that His gifts do not bring chaos or division. Paul addresses this by teaching on the fact that the church is the Body of Christ and just as each part of a human body needs to function correctly to ensure robust health so too each gifted person in the church needs to use their gift appropriately. In chapter 13 he will teach on the proper use of gifts within the overarching necessity of love being our motivation. In chapter 14 he will give some more detailed teaching on the use of tongues and prophecy. Here he emphasises that they were all part of the Body of Christ and each should play their part in ensuring that the church functions in a healthy way. By using the examples of hands, eyes and ears to show that God has given each part of the human body a vital function. In the same way everyone in the church has a part to play. We should not boast about the gifts we have been given or belittle others, all are necessary for the functioning of the church. If one part of the body suffers the whole body suffers, if one part of the body is honoured or well thought of then the whole is honoured.

**12:27 – 30 Gifted people in the Body**

Here Paul makes mention of differing gifts that people have and again emphasises that all are given for the purpose of the whole Body being built up. He speaks of:

* apostles
* prophets
* teachers
* workers of miracles
* gifts of healing
* gifts of helps
* gifts of guidance
* different kinds of tongues.

Some of these are repetitions of what he has already written in verses 8 to 10 but others have been added. The point he now makes is that not everyone is an apostle, prophet etc. In other words we do not all have the same gift or gifts but whatever gifts we have been given must be used for God's glory. He encourages them to seek the "greater gifts" but he does not tell us here what they are. In chapter 14 he picks up this idea more fully. He ends by introducing chapter 13 which he describes as the most excellent way, the way that the gifts can be used to most glorify God. As we seek the gifts we should ensure it is not from selfish motives but we should pray that the Body is equipped with all the necessary gifts no matter who receives the gift.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

This chapter is perhaps one of the best known and loved in the whole Bible. It has been termed a "hymn to love". It is often chosen as a reading at a wedding. We need to appreciate that it is actually part of a section of the letter where Paul is dealing with the topic of spiritual gifts. It is not just an encouragement to love or speaking of love s being a gift (it isn't) but love is the means through which we are to effectively exercise the gifts we are given by God. We may be supremely gifted by God but if we do not use those gifts from a heart of love then they will be wasted, worthless.

**13:1 – 3 Love is essential**

Paul ends chapter 12's discussion on spiritual gifts by saying that he will then show them the most excellent way. Spiritual gifts from God are wonderful but the most excellent way of using the gifts is from a heart of love. It doesn't matter what gifts we have been given , without love they are useless.

Paul specifically mentions four gifts: tongues, prophecy, knowledge and faith. He says that we can exercise these gifts and even see amazing results from using these gifts but if they are not used with love then we can just be making a noise, shifting a mountain and so on but not actually achieving anything of lasting value. He then says that even giving away our property or our lives can achieve nothing if the motivation for doing so has not been from a heart of love. In our giving and our receiving love has to be at the centre.

Being baptised in the Spirit and receiving and using gifts of the Spirit does not make us a loving person. Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), not a gift. By submitting to the Holy Spirit's guidance He will produce the fruit of love within you.

**13:4 – 7 Love is effective**

In order for spiritual gifts to be exercised effectively Paul shows that certain personal characteristics need to be in operation. Paul does not define love, he describes it and its effect. He talks about behaviour rather than feelings. If we are to be people of love -

 We should be:

Patient

Kind

Not envious or jealous

Not boastful

Not rude or proud (lack of courtesy)

Not domineering, aggressive

Not irritable (easily angered)

Not resentful of others

Not spiteful

We should:

Rejoice in truth

Protect

Trust

Hope

Persevere

When we use the gifts of God undergirded by these aspects of a loving nature then the gifts will be more effectively used and the Body of Christ will be built up.

**13:8 – 13 Love is eternal**

Here Paul teaches that one day all the gifts of the Spirit will come to an end. When perfection comes then there will be no further need for the gifts. Using the analogy of a child growing up he shows that in the world there comes a time when we leave behind the things of childhood. In Paul's time a Roman boy at the age of 12 would go to a temple dressed in *a toga virilis*, the robe of man and bring his toys and leave them at an altar as a symbolic action to say that he was moving on from childhood to adulthood. When we come to heaven we will no longer need the gifts of the Spirit for perfection will have come for us. We will have advanced beyond gifts. Toys are useful in order for children to learn but eventually they need to be put behind us, so to with spiritual gifts.

Paul teaches that at the moment we are seeing God obscurely, like the reflection in a mirror. One day we will see God face to face and we will truly know Him just as He already knows us fully. Corinth was famous for the production of fine polished copper mirrors. Theses mirrors were good for their time but not clear like our modern day glass ones, their reflection was not totally clear.

What will remain and will abide are three things, faith, hope and love. Paul says that the greatest of these three great things is love. Until the day of perfection we still need to use the gifts we have been given and so in chapter fourteen Paul returns to their use within the church.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

After the important digression of chapter 13 where Paul has taught that the use of all spiritual gifts must be motivated by love and the supremacy of love over all things, Paul now returns to his teaching on the proper use of some of the spiritual gifts especially in the context of public worship. The use of spiritual gifts with love will always produce a people of God who are edified when they come together. Using the gifts without love will produce division and hurt. The whole chapter focuses on just three of the gifts, the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation of tongues and the gift of prophecy. It seems that the church in Corinth had elevated the gift of tongues above the other gifts. This chapter brings an important corrective.

**14:1 – 25 Tongues and prophecy contrasted**

The gifts that Paul teaches on are speech gifts. The Lord miraculously gives a person words to say either using an unknown tongue or in the person’s natural language. When the message given is in tongues then there is the expectation that someone (perhaps even the speaker) will be also be given the interpretation of the message for all to hear. We should perhaps note that where most translators use the word “tongues” it could just as easily be translated as “languages”. This would perhaps “demystify” the whole issue of the use of the gift.

The gift of speaking in an unknown language has been a cause of much division and disunity within the church especially since the outpouring of the Spirit at the beginning of the last century. It was a problem back in Corinth in Paul’s day. It seems there were some who so over-valued the gift that they took a superior view and looked down on other believers in the church who had not received the gift. Equally there were those who under-valued the gift and were dismissive of the gift or claimed it was not a true gift from God at all. Paul speaks to both groups of people. He emphasises that the gift truly is of God and that he is thankful that he uses the gift “more than all of them” and desires that they all had and used the gift. His concern is that there is no division in the church and as long as they used the gift with a motivation of love and edification then there would be no division.

Paul emphasises that if someone is given a message in tongues then it is vital that there is an interpretation of that message. The interpreter could be the speaker themselves or someone else. If no interpretation is given then the message has no value in the building up of believers, it will just seem like nonsense words or sounds. Whilst the speaker in tongues may edify themselves the aim should surely be to edify the church. This can only happen if the message is interpreted.

Paul contrasts tongues with prophecy. When a prophetic word comes then all present will hear it in a language they can grasp. Because of this Paul says that the person who uses the gift of prophecy is greater than the person who uses the gift of tongues (5). In speaking a word of prophecy a person is using their voice as a mouthpiece for a message from God. When we recognise that faith comes from hearing the word of God we will appreciate the value of this gift.

When we speak in tongues essentially we are speaking to God, only He knows every language. We are speaking spirit to spirit. If God wants the message to be one of encouragement or challenge to a church then He will give a gift of interpretation so that the message is intelligible to the hearers. Prophecy is essentially speaking a message from God to people without the need for interpretation. We can conclude that tongues is usually a gift to be used in private whereas prophecy is a gift for use within the church. Whilst a message in tongues (without interpretation) will benefit solely the speaker, a prophetic message will benefit more people. Paul will clarify their use further later in the chapter.

If we are simply making a noise in using the gift of tongues then we will achieve nothing of lasting value. Spiritual power should not be equated with volume of noise. The “noise” needs to be intelligible. Paul uses the example of pipes and trumpets to make his point.

It is essential that in prayer we pray not only with our spirit but also with our minds, We need to use our minds to think through what we are saying to God. In the same way Paul reminds his readers that he would rather speak five intelligible words that will edify his readers than ten thousand that are unintelligible or meaningless to his hearers.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul encourages them to be mature in their outlook. They needed to leave behind childish ways (see chapter 13). He quotes from Isaiah 28:11 ,12 where God spoke to the Israelites that He would give then signs or messages that would speak to them. These messages would come form “foreign lips”. Sadly He also said that His people would ignore the messages. Paul takes this scripture to teach that essentially the public use of tongues will be used by God to convince unbelievers of His reality. On the other hand prophecy is used to speak to believers. He warns that the overuse of tongues when unbelievers are present will actually be detrimental to the gospel as they would believe that the speakers are mad. If unbelievers hear genuine prophecy then God uses it to convince them of His reality, their sinfulness and are brought to repentance. It would appear perhaps that if there are no unbelievers in a meeting then tongues should not be used.

**14:26 – 40 Tongues and prophecy controlled in public worship**

Having discussed the contrasts between the use of tongues and prophecy Paul now gives more detailed advice regarding their proper use in their worship services. No doubt some of this advice was intended to be corrective to ensure that their meetings were not chaotic or disruptive.

He firstly says that when they come together there were some elements of worship that each might contribute:

* A hymn
* A word of instruction
* A revelation
* A tongue
* An interpretation

All of these have the potential to build up the church. Paul then cautions that the use of tongues should be limited to 2 or 3 message and only if they can be interpreted. If there is no one present who has the gift of interpretation then the tongues speaker should remain silent. Similarly there should be no more than 2 or 3 prophetic messages in a meeting. The use of both gifts needs self-control. The spirit of the prophet is controlled by the prophet, he or she can remain silent until the time is appropriate. In all of this Paul emphasises that there should be order in a meeting because this reflects God’s character as a God of order and not of chaos.

Verses 34 and 35 are open to misuse. Some have used it to claim that women should always be silent in church. However earlier in the letter (11:5) Paul has said that women were able to pray and prophesy in public. So is Paul contradicting himself? No, Paul is establishing again the principle of submission that runs throughout scripture. This may go against the spirit of today’s world but that is not the point. In prayer a woman is addressing God (and is in submission to Him), in prophesying a woman is a vessel for God to use to bring direction. It is not her who is teaching the church, it is God. From what Paul says it seems that during their meetings women were interrupting the leaders and cutting across the meeting. They should instead ask their own husbands for explanations at home (again the principle of submission). Sadly too many men have not taken their responsibility as spiritual heads seriously and are unable to teach and advise appropriately. Paul knows that he would face opposition for taking this stance (modern opposition is nothing new!). This is why he emphasises that it is God’s command not just human advice (37).

In verse 36 Paul reminds them that whatever is prophesied must originate with God and not in the mind of the person purporting to prophesy God’s Word. The Holy Spirit will never contradict the written word in prophetic messages.

Paul closes this important section on spiritual gifts by re-emphasising the importance both the gift of tongues and of prophecy. Both must, however, be exercised in an appropriate way.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

Paul has finished his teaching on spiritual gifts and their use. He turns next to the topic of resurrection. He is teaching on belief rather than behaviour. It appears that within the Corinthian church there were a number of people who did not believe in the possibility of the resurrection or that Jesus really rose from the dead. In Greek society and philosophy bodily resurrection was regarded as an impossibility, only a person’s soul could me immortal. Paul teaches that Jesus really did die and rise again, the importance that event and truth has for believers and the future consequences of our own resurrection. For Paul the reality of Jesus’ resurrection was of the utmost importance and it should be for us too.

**15:1 – 11 Jesus’ Resurrection**

Paul is not teaching them something new. He is reaffirming what he had taught when he was with them. At the centre of the good news (gospel) of Jesus are His death, burial and resurrection. No matter how wonderful His teaching was, how many miracles He performed, how caring and loving He was, without these three events we would not have a gospel that saves. It is essential that we grasp the extent to which these are fundamental to our faith. If we are to be saved and remain saved we must firmly adhere to what Paul teaches here concerning these events.

Paul presents the gospel in a nutshell in verses 3 and 4.

1. Jesus died for our sins
2. He was buried
3. He rose from the dead on the third day

The purpose of Jesus’ death is clearly stated to be on account of our sins. Whilst we believe that Jesus can deliver us from our fears, illnesses and so on, the greatest thing He has done for us is deal with our sins which cry out against us before God Almighty. This was in accordance with the prophetic scriptures that foretold the coming of a Saviour from our sins. See for instance Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

To those who claimed, and still claim, that Jesus did not really die we can say that His body was horribly abused and violently treated at the Cross (and before), witnesses who knew a dead body when they saw one had declared that He was dead and further witnessed His burial in a sealed tomb. Paul will go on to list the subsequent resurrection appearances of Jesus. The witnesses are numerous; Jesus was seen alive shortly after His burial and for an extended period (forty days until the Ascension). Some of those witnesses had been friends of Jesus, but not all. His half-brother James had been antagonistic towards Jesus during His ministry years and yet following the resurrection he became leader of the Jerusalem church and wrote a letter that bears his name.. Another half-brother Judas (Jude) wrote a letter that is included in the New Testament. The evidence is there for those who will genuinely examine the claims. If we treat the evidence in the same way that we would usually examine historical evidence then the claims of the resurrection of Jesus stand.

Even after Jesus ascended to heaven He met Paul on the road to Damascus. This encounter changed Paul’s life forever and for eternity. From being a persecutor of the followers of Jesus he became a hard-working apostle proclaiming the good news of sins forgiven, grace and mercy received, eternal life as a reward of faith.

Every one of us will experience death and burial (or cremation) but only if we trust Jesus for our salvation will we experience the promised resurrection to eternal life. Paul worked hard together with many others, many unnamed, who established the truths of the gospel in the early church.

**15:12 – 19 The Risen Christ, Our Hope**

The Greeks believed in the survival of the soul or spirit after death but not in the resurrection of the body. Modern day Spiritualists will teach that our spirits continue after death but not that there is a resurrection of the body. Seemingly within the Corinthian church there were some who could not accept the teaching concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Paul has to insist that the idea of resurrection was not only possible but had happened in Jesus’ case and would for believers in the future.

In these verses he says that if Jesus’ resurrection was not truth then their faith is in vain. Worse still we will have told lies concerning God because we believe and teach that God raised Jesus from the dead. If our sins have not been atoned for then they continue to stand against us in the sight of God, they have not been atoned for. If Jesus was not alive then those who believe in Him are to be the most pitied people in the world for they have believed a lie and built their lives and hopes around that lie.

**15:20 – 28 The Last Enemy Destroyed**

Paul says that Jesus truly was resurrected and in doing so He was a first-fruits of a mighty harvest to come. In Old Testament Law the Jews brought the first-fruits of their harvest to God on the third day of the Passover. Death came to mankind through the disobedience and transgression of the first man (Adam) but the cure for death came through the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus (the last Adam). Everyone has been subject to death because of the sin of Adam but now there is the possibility of life for all who are in Christ. The penalty for sin has been dealt with by Jesus.

Paul says that Jesus’ resurrection would lead to two things. Firstly it would lead to the raising of all Christians. This will happen when Jesus returns (23). On that day the dead in Christ will rise to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15 – 17).

At His Coming, the Greek is *parousia* meaning a royal visit, not only will the dead rise but with Jesus reigning all of God’s enemies will be defeated. Jesus; return and reign will re-establish God’s rule over all things. The last enemy to be defeated is death itself (see Revelation 20:14, 21:4).

**15:29 – 34 The Effects of Denying the Resurrection**

Verse 29 is a verse that commentators have greatly discussed without coming to a firm conclusion. The problem concerns what does “baptised for the dead” mean. Some of the explanations are as follows:

1. Some say it means “baptised *over* the dead” and that people were being baptised over someone’s grave.

2. Some say it means that because of the witness of someone who has died a person decides to be baptised themselves.

3. It may mean that someone is baptised in preparation for the own approaching death.

4. As Christians die others are being born again to take the place of those who have departed and so are baptised.

5. Christians are baptised because of their belief in Saviour who died (and rose again)

6. Proxy baptism – someone is baptised on behalf of someone else.

The clearest meaning is option 6. Perhaps in Corinth there were people either in the church or even outside the church who were going through a ritual of baptism on behalf of a departed loved one. Perhaps someone had made a commitment to follow Jesus but had died before they could be baptised and so someone stood in their place and was baptised for them by proxy. Incidentally this practice of baptism by proxy is a core belief of the Mormons. In their system a person can be baptised even for long dead ancestors to ensure that they became part of their church. There is no scriptural support for this.

Paul does not approve of the practice no matter what the reasoning was. He is simply showing that some people were doing things that were worthless if there is no resurrection. He goes on to say that the hard work and suffering he and they faced daily were also worthless if there was and is no resurrection. If there is no resurrection then this life is the only one we have and so we need to be wise how we live it. Paul quotes a familiar proverb *“Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die”.* He is not commending this attitude merely pointing out that this is a logical conclusion if this then is our only life, make the most of it. It leads to a life of indulgence, permissiveness, extreme pleasure and selfishness. He advises them to be wise about who they mix with. Being with people who have a wrong outlook will affect our beliefs and morality. If we have knowledge of God we need to apply it to our lives.

**15:35 – 49 A Glorious Body**

In this section Paul addresses the question of what our resurrected bodies will look like. He also shows that God can create a body for us even if our earthly body has been completely destroyed by decay, battle or cremation. He uses the analogy of sowing a seed. What a farmer or gardener sows in the earth looks nothing like the full grown plant. God brings new life from a seed that this is sown in the earth. So it is with our resurrection body. We are “sown” in corruption and are raised incorruptible. We die in weakness and are raised in power. Each person has been born of the dust and bears the image of the first man (Adam). When resurrected we will bear the image of the heavenly man (Jesus).

**15:50 – 58 Our final victory**

Our human bodies are unsuited for life in God’s eternal Kingdom. That is why they have to be changed. In a place of total purity there is no place for corruption. God will change us at the sounding of the last trumpet. At that glorious trumpet call the dead in Christ will raise and their bodies will be instantly changed to incorruptible, immortal ones. This is the final victory over death. Paul exults over this marvellous truth and quotes from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, prophecies of the ultimate triumph of life over death. This tremendous victory has been achieved by Jesus, His sacrifice for sin and His resurrection from the dead. We should note that there will be a generation of believers who will not experience death as they will be alive when Jesus returns. They will still experience the change from a corrupt (albeit live) body for an incorruptible one.

In the light of this ultimate victory Paul calls on the Corinthians to remain steadfast and strong in their faith. They should continue to work for the Lord until He comes or calls. With the security believers have concerning eternity there is stability in the present.

What of all this for those who do not believe in Jesus? If we look at Daniel 12:2 and John 5:25 we see that when Jesus returns all will be resurrected but those who are not saved will suffer the resurrection of judgement. For them the sting of death will produce eternal consequences of separation from God.

**1 CORINTHIANS**

**CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

Paul is coming to the conclusion of his letter to the Corinthian church. He has dealt with a number of problems that have come to his attention and now he concludes with some practical advice as to how the believers can show that they are “Abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58). There are five practical things that they can do which are written about in this chapter.

1. Through giving to the Lord’s work and His people who are in need.
2. By visiting God’s people, ministering to them
3. By encouraging fellow believers to remain steadfast, firm in their faith
4. In bringing believers together
5. By passing on greetings, blessings

**16:1 – 4 A collection for the Lord’s people**

The believers in Jerusalem were suffering from both poverty and famine. In Acts 11:28 Agabus has prophesied about the famine. God was preparing His people for what was to come. In response Paul was organising a collection for them (see also Romans 15:25-31, 2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:1). Here he gives practical advice to encourage the church members to set aside a sum of money each week and when he came to visit he would collect the money rather than just having a special offering on the day he came. The word he uses for “setting aside” infers that this is money should be in addition to their regular weekly giving. The systematic approach to giving is to be commended. Without using emotional pressure, he presents the need and advises a constructive longer-term approach to meeting the need. He would give letters of introduction for some of their members to take the money. If they want him to he will accompany them.

**16:5 – 11 Visits**

As well as giving money we can give our time. Here Paul talks about visiting them not just to collect the money but to spend time with them. He wanted to give to them as well as receive. Of course, he was a man much in demand by churches and so here he talks of the church in Ephesus. He couldn’t be in two places at once even if he wanted to. A door of opportunity was open for him to minister in Ephesus which he was eager to take and so he would stay there for a while. The door of opportunity also entailed opposition, we are in a battle to seize each God-given opportunity. Paul was staying to help in the spiritual battle in Ephesus

In his absence Paul will send Timothy to Corinth. Paul commends him to the church. They should not look down on him because of his youth or be hostile towards him. Paul expects Timothy to be well received and be enabled to return to him in Ephesus.

**16:12 – 18 Commended people and attitudes**

Apollos was well known as a preacher by the Corinthians. He had carried out evangelistic work in the city (Acts 18:24 – 28, 1 Corinthians 3:3). Paul says he had been reluctant to return to them but would do so. His reluctance may be because he did not want to encourage the factional problems within the church (1 Corinthians 1:12).

In between the news and talk of individuals Paul includes a brief exhortation in verses 13 and 14. He says that they needed to be two things, both tough and tender. They had to be on their guard, courageous, standing firm in the faith and strong. At the same time, they also had to be people characterised by love (1 Corinthians 13). We have to avoid the two extremes. We cannot allow our love for people to be mere sentiment. We also cannot allow our strength and firmness of faith to become so hard that we become exclusive and unapproachable to outsiders. We cannot become so hard that we have no love for those who disagree with us or behave in a way that is contrary to our beliefs. W are called to love both God and our neighbour, whoever that may be.

In verses 15 to 18 Paul speaks of a number of believers, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. Stephanus’ household were the first converts in Achaia (the region including Corinth) and they had devoted themselves to serving the Lord’s people. Paul says that the Corinthians should submit to those who have proved themselves to be servants of the Lord. All three men are commended because they brought refreshment to Paul’s spirit and doubtless to others also.

**16:19 – 24 Final greetings**

Paul begins to round off his letter by passing on greetings. We would normally greet people at the beginning of a letter but Paul does the opposite. This is not mere formality but there is a genuine warmth as he sends greetings from people they know and others who they do not know but who are part of God’s wonderful family. Apparently, there is an African tribe who when asked “How are you?” will reply “I am fine if you are fine”. That captures something that Paul would commend amongst believers. With that attitude there is no room for envying another’s blessings.

Paul mentions two people who the Corinthians would know well, Aquila and Priscilla. Paul had initially met them in Corinth (Acts 18:1- 3). They were Jewish tentmakers (or leather workers) who had come to Corinth after being expelled from Rome. They had followed Paul to Ephesus and worked with him in the church there (Romans 16:3 – 5). They are also mentioned in Acts 18:18, 26 and 2 Timothy 4:19. The church that met in their house sent greetings. Paul encourages the believers to greet one another with a holy kiss. This is a physical expression of love and care. This expression should not only be warm (hearty) but also holy.

In verse 21 Paul signs his name to the letter in his own hand as a sign that it was genuine. Clearly an assistant (an amanuensis) had physically written the letter dictated to him by Paul.

He ends the letter with two expression concerning love. The first looks strange at first sight as he says in verse 22 that anyone who does not love the Lord should be accursed. Remember he is writing to a church and not to the world at large. Perhaps he means that if there are those in church who do not actually love the Lord then they will hold back God’s blessing. Paul only uses the term “accursed” twice in his letter, here and in Galatians 1:8 where he is opposing those who taught contrary to the truth of the gospel.

He ends with a final prayer that they might experience the grace of God in their lives (personal and corporate). A church as divided and confused as that in Corinth needed the grace of God to change and thrive.

Finally, Paul sends a greeting of love to them all, whether they supported him or not.