

# **NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS**



by  
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## **PREFACE**

The notes offered in the following commentary are intended to assist the reader to gain a more detailed appreciation of the great Apostle's explanations and exhortations in his letters to the Corinthian congregation. They were first prepared as a series of papers presented to the New Covenant Fellowship members in Melbourne.

The King James Version of the Bible has been very influential to Christians since 1611. However, many versions in more contemporary English have become available. In these papers the New King James Version has been used because it is more amenable to study and understanding for Bible students today. Other versions have also been used to assist with this commentary.

As we read and think about the letter Paul wrote to the members of the Corinthian congregation, we should bear in mind the fact that what he wrote was in the form of letters, the most personal form of written communication. Because the inspired Apostle wrote so many letters, we feel we know so much about him. In his letters the Apostle opened his mind and heart to the people he had come to love, and we can sense his mind grappling with the problems of the early Church, especially when the newly converted believers were misguided and mistaken.

It seems to me a pity that nowadays Paul's letters are still sometimes called epistles, because the word 'epistle', meaning a letter, is seldom used in speech and writing in these latter days. What Paul was writing to the Corinthians were letters, not formal and discursive treatises. Paul wrote his letters on papyri which was composed of strips of the pith of a certain bulrush that grew on the banks of the Nile River. These strips were laid on top of one another to form a substance very much like brown paper. This fact seems to me to be providential because the dryness of the Egyptian desert was particularly suitable for its preservation, because papyrus, although very brittle, will last indefinitely as long as it is not subjected to moisture. And so it is that Paul's inspired letters, originally written on papyri, have been preserved to be read and studied throughout the Gospel Age, and are freely and readily available to us now, nearly two thousand years after they were written.

For the most part, Paul's letters were written to meet an immediate situation. They were not theological treatises nor systematic arguments, but human documents written by a loving friend to those he had come to love and to whom he had given his heart and mind in God's service through Jesus Christ. Paul's letters seem like living documents to us today because they were written to deal with a threatening danger or a pressing need, and it is because human need and the whole human situation have not changed that the Lord God speaks to us through Paul's words today.

There is one other thing that we should note about Paul's letters. He did not normally write them down himself, but dictated them to an amanuensis or secretary and then added his own authenticating signature. We actually know the name of one of the people who wrote from Paul's dictation. In Romans 16:22, Tertius the secretary inserted his own personal greeting before the letter finishes. In 1 Corinthians 16:21 Paul wrote, "*The salutation with my own hand – Paul*", meaning that the letter came with his signature and was indeed from him. See also Colossians 4:18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:17 in this connection.

This explains a great deal. At times, Paul is hard to understand because his sentences occasionally begin but do not seem to finish clearly, and some of his explanations become rather complicated. Obviously he was not seated at a desk carefully writing coherent sentences, and improving them as to continued to write, but must have been walking about in some small room dictating thoughts as they came to him while his secretary strove to write everything down. When Paul composed his letters, he must have had in mind the people to whom he was writing, and was speaking from his heart to them in words that came readily to him in his eagerness to advise and help.

In the notes on Paul's two letters to the Corinthian Church, I must express my gratitude to the most helpful comments by William Barclay in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians'. I have followed his arrangement of the passages in the letters as he has quoted them, and have benefited greatly from his thoughts and commentaries, and wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to him. I have also benefited from George E. Gardiner's book 'The Corinthian Catastrophe', particularly his comments on and exposition of the Charismatic movement and Pentecostalism that have surfaced in recent times. M.L. Soard's detailed comments in his book on 1 Corinthians have also been helpful and instructive, and I acknowledge my indebtedness also to his work.

**Russell Collins**  
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## CORINTH AND ITS CONGREGATION

### Introduction

When Paul went to Corinth the city was one of the best-known cities of the Roman world. It was a city of commerce, culture, religion and vice, a city which in many ways resembled the civilisation of our own time. Some commentators have said that the letters to the Corinthians are the most relevant writings in the New Testament for people of our own day, and I think that many Christians would agree with this.

Paul arrived in Corinth approximately one hundred years after Julius Caesar had restored the city from the rubble and ashes of a previous devastation. The newly restored city had undergone great growth and prosperity, and was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

Corinth was situated on a narrow neck of land between two harbours, Cenchreae on the east and Lechaenum on the west, and the city of Corinth welcomed travellers and commerce from every part of the known world. Corinth lay on the highway from mainland Greece to the Peloponnese, so that all military and commercial traffic north and south passed through this important city. The result was that Corinth was a city into which wealth flowed. When Paul spoke of *“gold, silver, and precious stones”* in 1 Corinthians, chapter three, he used an illustration with which his Corinthian readers would have been familiar.

Some fifteen kilometres outside Corinth the Isthmian Games were held every four years. They were the most splendid and best attended of the Grecian festivals. Preparations for the games took months, and delegates and athletes went from all parts of the known world. The main events were racing, boxing and wrestling, to all of which Paul made reference in chapter nine of the first letter.

Overlooking Corinth, high on the Acropolis, was the magnificent temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and fertility. One thousand priestesses practised prostitution as part of the religious rites. Corinth was a city addicted to vice. Long-haired male prostitutes were a common sight on the streets, and were the background for Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 11:14, *“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him?”*.

## PAUL'S VISIT TO CORINTH

It was from Athens that Paul went to Corinth, a city of prosperity, sport, politics and immorality. He had had a discouraging experience in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), and at Corinth new problems awaited him. The Lord assured Paul of His presence and protection in a vision, as recorded in Acts 18:9,10; *"Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city' "*.

The first contact the Apostle made was with a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, victims of the expulsion of all Jews from Rome by order of the Emperor, Claudius Caesar. Aquila and Priscilla were tent-makers by trade. Paul also had skills in that trade, so he lived with them in Corinth while he continued his ministry.

Soon after that, Silas and Timothy, who had been in Macedonia, joined this small company of believers, and, with Paul, presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ every Sabbath in the local synagogue. Two influential men were converted, Justus whose home was next door to the synagogue, and Crispus the chief ruler in the synagogue. So a New Testament congregation was established, which included a cross-section of the citizens of Corinth: males and females, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters. Paul commented about this in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, and in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

The Apostle stayed almost two years in Corinth, teaching, preaching and organising the congregation. He then moved on to Ephesus, where he stayed for three years. At Ephesus he received letters from the Corinthians asking for his advice concerning marriage, and the problem of eating meat which had been offered to the idols of the temple. In addition to these matters, Paul received disturbing reports of deteriorating conditions in the congregation. To answer the Corinthians' questions, and to counteract those conditions and wrong conduct of the members of the congregation, Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthian congregation.

## **SORTING AND ARRANGING PAUL'S INSPIRED LETTERS**

### **Introduction**

As already mentioned, in Paul's day Corinth was a city of commerce and prosperity, wealth and luxury, but also a hotbed of drunkenness, immorality and vice. Paul had to remind and caution his Christian converts about that social situation, and did so in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

*"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."*

In that city of immorality and vice, some of Paul's greatest work was done, and some of the mightiest triumphs of Christianity were accomplished. Paul stayed longer in Corinth than in any other city except Ephesus. He had left Macedonia with his life in peril, and journeyed to Athens. He had little success there, and had moved on to Corinth, where he remained for about two years. We realise how little has been recorded of Paul's work there when we find that the whole account of that period was compressed by Luke into seventeen verses (Acts 18:1-17).

One event worthy of mention was that in AD 52 a new governor named Gallio was appointed to Corinth. Gallio was a person well known for his charm and gentleness. The Jews tried to take advantage of Gallio's new appointment and his good nature, and took Paul before him, charging Paul with teaching behaviour contrary to Jewish law. But Gallio was a Roman, and refused to have anything to do with the Jews' charges or take any action. So Paul was free to continue his work in Corinth before moving on to Syria.

### **Collecting and Arranging Paul's Letters**

When Paul was in Ephesus in AD 55, he learnt that all was not well in Corinth, and wrote a letter to the congregation there. On the basis of such evidence as we have, it seems that the correspondence to Corinth is not recorded in the correct order in the New Testament, and some of it may be missing.

It is known by scholars and historians that it was not until about AD 90 that Paul's correspondence was collected and efforts were made to piece the fragments of papyrus together. In many

congregations the letters, or fragments of them, must have existed only on scraps of papyrus, and piecing them together would have been difficult. So it seems that, when the letters to Corinth were collected, not all the pieces were discovered, and they were not always arranged in the correct order. This is suggested by the following information.

1. There was a letter which Paul wrote before 1 Corinthians, because in 1 Corinthians 5:9 he wrote, *"In my other letter I told you not to have anything to do with immoral people"* (CEV).

This clearly refers to a previous letter, which some scholars believe has been lost. Other scholars, however, believe that the previous letter is contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1. That passage certainly suits what Paul said he wrote about. If we take that passage out of its context and read straight on from 2 Corinthians 6:13 to 7:2 we get excellent sense and connection, as though that passage in question was included later and was not originally where collectors of Paul's writings put it. And so it is that some scholars call this passage 'the previous letter'.

We must remember and be aware that in Paul's letters, as in all the inspired books of Scripture, there were no chapter and verse divisions. The chapters in the Bible were not introduced until the thirteenth century, and the verses were not introduced until the sixteenth century, so the arranging of Paul's letters would have been difficult so early in the Gospel Age.

2. News had reached Paul from various sources about trouble in the Corinthian congregation.

(a) News of disputes and disagreements went to him from members of Chloe's family (1 Corinthians 1:11,12).

(b) News was delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus during their visit to Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:17,18). These three believers were able to fill in the gaps in Paul's information.

(c) Further news arrived in a letter in which the Corinthian congregation asked for Paul's guidance concerning a number of problems. In 1 Corinthians 7:1 Paul wrote, *"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me"*. His answer is contained in 1 Corinthians which he sent to Corinth by the hand of Timothy, as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:17.

3. After the Corinthian congregation received Paul's letter, matters became worse. Although we have no direct record of it, we can infer that Paul paid a personal visit to Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 12:14 he wrote, *"Now for the third time I am ready to come to you"*. So if there was a third time, there must have been a second time. We have the record of only one visit, the account of which appears in Acts 18:1-17. We have no record of a second visit. In those days, however, it would have taken only two or three days to sail from Ephesus to Corinth, so such a journey would not have been considered to be a major undertaking at that time.

4. The visit to Corinth did not achieve anything for which Paul had hoped. Matters increased in bitterness, and failings in conduct resulted in Paul writing an extremely severe letter. We learn about that letter from 2 Corinthians 2:4. In that letter Paul said, *"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears"*.

In 2 Corinthians 7:8 Paul wrote, *"For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while"*. The censorious letter was the result of Paul's anguish of mind, and was so severe that Paul seemed sorry that he sent it.

Most scholars believe that chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians are the severe letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians and were inserted in the wrong place when Paul's letters were put together.

These are their reasons.

1. The severe letter cannot be 1 Corinthians or any part of it because that letter is not a deeply-anguished letter. When Paul wrote it, matters, on the whole, were being dealt with and were more or less under control.
2. But when we come to 2 Corinthians, we find a surprising situation. In chapters 1 to 9 everything appears to be resolved; there is complete reconciliation and all are friends again. But at chapter 10 there occurs a sudden change. Chapters 10 to 13 consist of the most heartbroken cry Paul wrote. The chapters show that he had been hurt and insulted as he had not been before or afterwards by any congregation. His appearance, his speech, his apostleship and even his honesty had all been under attack.

3. Most scholars maintain that to gain the actual chronological course of Paul's correspondence with Corinth, we ought to read chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians before chapters 1 to 9.
4. If 2 Corinthians chapters 10 to 13 constituted the severe letter that Paul wrote, it could have been sent to the Corinthians with Titus (2 Corinthians 2:13 and 7:13).
5. Paul was deeply concerned about this letter, and was eagerly waiting for Titus to come back with an answer. He set out to meet Titus as recorded in 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5 and 7:13. Somewhere in Macedonia, Paul met Titus and learned that all was well. Then, probably at Philippi, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians chapters 1 to 9 as a letter of reconciliation.

By considering these events and developments, we can gain an understanding of what *"the care of all the churches"* (2 Corinthians 11:28) must have meant to Paul.

### **Summary of the Corinthian Correspondence**

This is an endeavour to summarise the probable chronology of the Corinthian correspondence from such records as are available.

1. *"The previous letter"*, which may be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1.
2. The arrival of the people from Chloe's household, of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and of the letter to Paul from the Corinthian congregation.
3. 1 Corinthians was written in reply and sent with Timothy.
4. The situation in Corinth grew worse, and Paul paid a personal visit to the congregation which was such a failure that it almost broke his heart.
5. In consequence the severe letter was written, which was almost certainly contained in 2 Corinthians chapters 10 to 13, and was sent with Titus.
6. Anxious for an answer to his letter, Paul set out to meet Titus. Paul met him in Macedonia, learnt that all was well and wrote, probably from Philippi, 2 Corinthians chapters 1 to 9, the letter of reconciliation.

### **Concluding Comment**

Christian believers should not be troubled by the fact that some of the matters discussed are not as clear or decisive as we might wish them to be. It is surely extraordinary that Paul's inspired words, written nearly two thousand years ago on sheets of papyrus, and scattered in various congregations throughout the Roman Empire, should have survived at all.

The survival of Paul's letters, with all their guiding moral and ethical principles, and all the exhortations and advice for Christian living acceptable to God at all times and in all places, has been overseen by God's protective providence. And so we have today advice and instruction relevant to our lives because God saw to it that all that was needful for Christians and their eternal salvation written by Paul so long ago would be available and accessible now and at all times to every sincere enquirer.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF 1 CORINTHIANS, Paul's First Recorded Letter To The Corinthians**

This letter was one of anger, satire, reproof, correction and instruction. It was written to a congregation which had been established upon the most authoritative foundations and had had the best of teaching and example. But the congregation failed. Instead of victory through faith in Jesus Christ there was tragedy; instead of Christian witness there was shame. The Apostle wrote, *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!"* (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Instead of evangelism there was behaviour deserving of ridicule. *"Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?"* (1 Corinthians 14:23).

In those early days of Christian evangelism, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were in evidence, and the Corinthian congregation was, in fact, a charismatic one. The Apostle wrote, *"So that you come short in no gift [charisma]"* (1 Corinthians 1:7). But the members of the Corinthian congregations were misusing the blessings given to them, and Paul devoted three chapters to trying to set them straight on this issue (1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14).

The Corinthian congregation was immature. Paul wrote, *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:1). The Apostle referred to this matter again in chapter 13:11, chapter 14:20, and in his closing words of chapter 16, verse 13.

The Corinthian congregation tolerated immorality among its members, as mentioned earlier. The Apostle must have been shocked to learn of a member of the congregation living immorally with his step-mother, an action of which even immoral pagans disapproved (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some members of the congregation were even involved with prostitutes, and had to be reminded that their bodies were members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of*

*Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two', He says, 'shall become one flesh'. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).*

We readily see from Paul's letters to the Corinthians that heresy was infiltrating the congregation. The doctrine of the resurrection was being questioned by some members, which led Paul to address this fundamental Christian teaching in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. *"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* (1 Corinthians 15:12).

### **The Problem of Immaturity**

It was said earlier that the congregation at Corinth was immature, and its immaturity was evident in its failure to grasp fundamental Christian teaching and its failure to recognise and reject immoral behaviour amongst its members.

Paul used three analogies to describe Christian development and growth: a building, a battle and a body.

The analogy of the building is in chapter three, in which the Apostle said, in effect, that an unfinished building is an eyesore, and told his readers to finish what he began and to take care how they should build.

The image of the battle is in chapter nine, and alludes to the brutal boxing matches of the Isthmian games. Paul said that an unfinished contest was a waste of time and a loss, and exhorted his readers to go on to the crown, that is, to be victorious.

The analogy of the body is the theme of chapter twelve, and there Paul said that a non-functioning body was a tragedy, and an unco-operative body was suicide. He was beginning to deal with the congregation members' misuse of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and told the members not to cause disunity in the congregation by desiring selfishly to possess the showy gifts of the spirit such as speaking in foreign languages and healing the sick.

The three analogies Paul used will be considered in more detail, when we come to them.

As we consider the problem of the immaturity in the congregation at Corinth, it is important to understand what spiritual immaturity is not. In the first place it is not the lack of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians had all the gifts, as the Apostle said in 1 Corinthians 1:7, *"You come short in no gift [charismata], eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"*.

Immediately after acknowledging the presence of the charismata among them, Paul dealt with divisions in their midst. *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). What the Apostle said is that spiritual gifts and spirituality are not one and the same.

In the second place, immaturity is not, nor is it caused by, lack of learning. The Corinthians were great admirers of education and knowledge, and Paul cautioned them along these lines in chapters 1 and 2. In 1 Corinthians 3: 18 and 19 he counselled the Corinthians to gain wisdom from the right source, that is, from the Lord and His chosen Apostles and disciples, because the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Again, in 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul said that the believer had to capture people's thoughts and lead them to obey Christ. So, gaining a better spiritual education, while being admirable and desirable, is not the answer to spiritual immaturity.

Thirdly, immaturity does not come about because of a lack of good teaching. The Corinthians had the best of teachers, Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, Silas and Timothy, and Paul said he gave them the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7), that is, words given to him by the Holy Spirit.

*"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."* (1 Corinthians 2:12,13).

So it was that the Corinthians had all the gifts, were well taught in the Word, and had the best of teachers, but in spite of these great privileges, they remained carnal minded and scriptural babes.

So how do we know that the Corinthians were immature? We know that this was the case through Paul's letters.

### **Evidences of Immaturity**

1. The first evidence of immaturity is selfishness. The Corinthians were suing one another in the secular courts because they considered that they were being defrauded (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). They were misusing their Christian liberties with no thought of the effect that misuse would have on others.

Further evidence of selfishness was the eating or not eating food offered to idols. Paul gave clear advice to the Corinthians on this subject in 1 Corinthians 8, and his advice occupied the whole chapter. The believer is free to eat or not eat food offered to idols, but if such eating causes a fellow-believer, whose conscience is weak, to stumble and perhaps fall, the matter has serious consequences, as the Apostle said.

*"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:9-13).*

The Corinthians were behaving selfishly at their meetings by eating and drinking and having a meal together, and somehow confusing this practice with the observance of the Lord's supper. Paul had to set them straight on this matter and did so in 1 Corinthians 11:20-32.

The selfishness of the Corinthians was further seen in their misunderstanding and misuse of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. They were using the gifts for self-edification, and Paul devoted three whole chapters, 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14, in order to deal adequately with this matter.

2. The second symptom of spiritual immaturity is division. The Corinthians were divided amongst themselves over personalities, and spoke of different divisions, the 'Paul' party, the 'Apollos' party, the 'Peter' party, and the 'Christ' party in 1 Corinthians 1:12. Paul took up this matter more fully in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.

There is, of course, a time and a place for division. In 1 Corinthians 10:20,21, the congregation was commanded not to have fellowship with those who worship devils. Further, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, believers were commanded to avoid unrighteousness, darkness, impurity, idols and the unclean. But there is not a word about believers separating themselves from fellow-believers over personalities, such division being evidence of spiritual immaturity.

3. A third symptom of immaturity at Corinth was criticism. It seems that the majority deprecated Paul because they thought that they had outgrown him and outdistanced him spiritually. Paul wrote, *"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you"* (1 Corinthians 4:3). But in 1 Corinthians 4:8 he introduced cutting satire; *"You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us - and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!"*. The attitude of those people is seen in a quotation from them which Paul used in defending his apostleship. *"For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible"* (2 Corinthians 10:10). This was caustic and contemptible criticism, a mark of spiritual immaturity.

4. The fourth symptom of immaturity and lack of spiritual development was the Corinthians' toleration of evil among their members. They saw nothing wrong with resorting to secular courts for settlement of disputes. Blatant immorality among members of the congregation did not disturb them. Indulgence in sins of the flesh, from which they had been set free at the beginning, was widespread and accepted. Gluttony and drunkenness were practised with meetings to observe the Lord's Supper.

In spite of these deplorable failings, the Corinthians believed they had achieved a spiritual stature, evidenced by the presence of spiritual gifts (mainly speaking in foreign languages) which placed them, in their own estimation, above the other congregations and above Paul.

It was to correct the failings outlined above, and to halt their downward moral slide, that Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian congregation.

Paul must have felt deep disappointment in having to write as he did to a congregation on which he had devoted so much time and effort, a congregation arrested in development, charismatic in practice, immoral in living and heretical in doctrine.

Unfortunately Paul did not succeed. The limited knowledge that has come down to us of the congregation at Corinth is of an assembly which continued the course described in the letters and eventually died with the city.

## **Conclusion**

But Paul's letters, inspired by the Holy Spirit, live on, warning, teaching and correcting us who live now in a similar environment to ancient Corinth. It is our Christian duty to learn from Paul's inspired words, and to obey the Spirit's counsel given to him by the Lord for all true Christians to benefit throughout the Gospel Age, and everyone in the age to come.

We should always bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus to the crowds who had gathered to hear His sermon on the mount. He said these words specifically to His disciples when He spoke.

*"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus meant that His Church should be *"salt"* and *"light"* in the world, salt being a source of preservation to hold decay in check, and light to dispel darkness and cause the truth of the Gospel message to shine for all to see. Our Lord went on to say that when salt loses its taste it is worthless, and light hidden under a clay pot is no hindrance to darkness.

And so it was that the congregation at Corinth, instead of holding evil in check, was overcome by it, and instead of giving light for all to see, persisted in darkness. It was God's desire for the Corinthian congregation to make their mark on the city, but instead the city of Corinth made its mark on them, and the group eventually perished in darkness and oblivion.

## PAUL'S FIRST RECORDED LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

### Preamble

In the previous paper, it was pointed out that Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthian congregation before he wrote what is now known as the first letter to the Corinthians, because he said, *"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people"* (1 Corinthians 5:9). This implies that there was a previous letter, and that matter has received comments in Paper 1.

### PAUL'S INTRODUCTION

#### 1 Corinthians 1: 1 to 3

1. *Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,*
2. *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*
3. *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians, the name of Jesus Christ occurs ten times (KJV). The letter Paul was writing was difficult because he was writing to address a difficult situation, and in doing so he was thinking constantly of the Lord Jesus Christ Who appeared to him on the Damascus road and appointed him as a chosen vessel *"to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15). In that difficult situation, Paul's mind turned to the Lord Jesus to help him deal with the problems he faced.

In this introduction Paul dealt with three main matters.

1. Firstly there is something about the Christian Church. Paul wrote of *"the church of God which is at Corinth"*. Paul stressed that it was not an isolated organization, it was a congregation that was part of the whole Church of God. To Paul, each separate congregation, wherever it may have been situated, was part of the whole Church of God, which he had been appointed to form.

2. Secondly, there is something about Christians. Paul said three things about them. They are as follows.

(a) Christians are consecrated to Jesus Christ. The verb 'to consecrate' ('hagiazō') means to set a place apart for God, to make it holy by the offering of a sacrifice upon it. Christians have been consecrated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to be one who knows by faith that Christ died for him or her, and knows also that Christ's sacrifice in a very special way makes him or her belong to God.

(b) Paul described Christians as those who have been called to be God's dedicated people. William Barclay pointed out that this whole phrase is a translation of one Greek word 'hagios', which the King James Bible renders as saints. As we understand that word in our everyday use of English, it does not give us a sufficiently full or exact meaning. The word 'hagios' describes a person or thing that has been devoted to ownership by God and to His service. So if people have been marked out as especially belonging to God, they must show themselves fit in character and also in the life they lead for such service.

The basic idea, however, is separation. People who are described by the word 'hagios' should be different from others because they have been separated from ordinary life and living in order to belong especially to God. This word 'hagios' was the adjective by which the Jews described themselves; they were the 'hagios laos', the holy people who were quite different from other people because they belonged to God and were set apart for service to Him. When Paul used 'hagios' to describe Christian believers, he meant that they are different from other people because they belong to God through Jesus Christ and are dedicated through Jesus to God's service. This also means that they should display qualities which will distinguish them from ordinary folk who are not believers.

(c) Paul addressed his letter to those who have been called and are members of the company of those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord. Christians are those who are called into a world-wide community of God.

3. In the third place, there is something about the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul mentioned Jesus and those who have been called to be God's dedicated people, along with all others who *"call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord"*. Jesus is our Lord, said Paul, but He is also Lord of all. No individual and no congregation has exclusive claim to Jesus Christ, so that through Him God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.

## PAUL'S THANKFULNESS

### 1 Corinthians 1: 4 to 9

4. *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,*
5. *That you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,*
6. *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,*
7. *So that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
8. *Who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
9. *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Three things are made clear in this passage of thanksgiving.

1. Firstly there is the promise which came true. When Paul preached Christianity to the Corinthians, he told them that Christ could do certain things for them, and hence proclaimed that all he pledged that Christ could do had come true. People cannot be argued into Christianity. Christians can only say, 'Try it and see what happens' believing that if the challenge is taken up, the claims that are made will come true, not necessarily all at once, but in the course of time, if the enquirer persists in faith.

2. Secondly, God has given His spirit to believing people. Paul referred to God's gift as charisma, and this word means a gift freely given, a gift which is not deserved and could never be earned by the person receiving it, no matter how hard he or she might try. As Paul saw it, this gift of God comes in two ways.

(a) Salvation is God's charisma. To become children of God and therefore members of God's family is something we do not deserve and could not possibly earn or achieve by ourselves. Salvation is an unearned gift and comes from God's grace, mercy and love, as Paul also wrote in Romans 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*.

(b) God has given to each of us whatever special gifts we may possess and whatever abilities we may have for life, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 1 Peter 4:10. If we have the ability to use words wisely and memorably, to sing well or play a musical instrument, to paint or draw well or use our hands creatively and purposefully, these are gifts from God. Such gifts as we may

have should be used as God wants us to use them, not for our profit or prestige, but for the glory of God and Jesus, and for the benefit of fellow-believers and our tried and trusted friends.

3. In the third place there is to be an end to the present social order. In the Old Testament, the phrase "*the day of the LORD*" keeps recurring. The Jews believed that this would be the time when God would take action to take over the affairs of the world and bring in an entirely new world order in which everyone would be judged. Christians took over this belief, but took "*the day of the LORD*" to mean 'the day of the Lord Jesus' and understood this to mean the time when the Lord Jesus would return in power and glory to judge the world of human beings. The return of the Lord Jesus, according to Scripture, is a time of judgment for the world, and this time of judgment is not some kind of hearing in which the whole human race, including the resurrected millions, will appear one by one before the Lord Jesus to hear judgment and sentence passed upon each. In the new righteous world order, ruled over by the Lord Jesus Christ, God's rightful King, judgment of earth's millions raised from death will last for one thousand years, during which the whole world of mankind will be enlightened, blessed, and invited to believe in God and the Lord Jesus, conform to the righteous standards of the new world order and so live for ever [see note on page 28].

## **DIVISIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION AT CORINTH**

### **1 Corinthians 1: 10 to 17**

10. *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
11. *For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*
12. *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."*
13. *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*
14. *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,*
15. *Lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.*
16. *Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.*
17. *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*

Paul then began the task of correcting the situation that had arisen in the congregation at Corinth. He was writing from Ephesus. Christians who belonged to the household of a lady called Chloe had visited Corinth, and brought with them unfortunate news of dissension and disunity among the members of the congregation at Corinth.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians as *“brethren”*, indicating that he was writing to them in love to show them how wrong their dissensions and divisions were. The Corinthians were fellow Christian believers, and they should have been living in mutual love.

In writing to bring them together in love, Paul told said, *“Now I plead with you, brethren .... that you all speak the same thing”*, or, as in the CEV, *“to get along with each other”*, that is, to try to agree and not take sides, but to make up their differences. He wished them to be knit together, a medical term used of the mending of bones that have been broken, or the joining together of a joint that has been dislocated. The lack of unity was unnatural, and needed to be cured for the sake of the health and well-being of the whole congregation.

Paul identified four parties or divisions in the congregation at Corinth. Members of the parties had not left the congregation or broken away from it, but had remained within it. The word Paul used to describe them is 'schismata', which was the word used to describe tears or rents in a garment. It seems he had in mind that the congregation in Corinth was in danger of becoming as unsightly as a torn garment. We should note that the great Christians who are named, Paul, Cephas and Apollos, had nothing to do with these divisions. Without their knowledge and consent, their names had been used by the Corinthian factions.

The four factions were:

1. Some members claimed to belong to Paul. Perhaps this was mainly a Gentile party because Paul always preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law of Moses. It may well be the case that members of this party were attempting to use their new-found Christianity as an excuse for doing as they liked. They had failed to understand that the good news of the Christian gospel brought with it the obligation to live and behave according to Christian teaching. The Jews were free from the Law, but were not free to do as they wished, whereas the Gentiles were not under the Law.

2. A second party or faction claimed to follow Apollos. Apollos, mentioned in Acts 13:24, was a Jew from Alexandria, an eloquent man well-versed in the Scriptures. Alexandria was the centre of intellectual activity and the people were enthusiasts for literary graces. It seems likely that those who claimed to belong to Apollos were intellectuals who were turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.

3. Some claimed to belong to Cephas. Cephas is the Hebrew form of the name Peter. These members were probably Jews who proclaimed the belief that Christians had to observe the Mosaic Law. They were legalised people who exalted the Law, and by so doing neglected and even belittled the truth of grace and mercy available under the New Covenant through the Lord Jesus.

4. There were also those who claimed to belong to Christ. This statement can have two meanings:

(a) There was no punctuation in Greek manuscripts and no spaces between words. Some scholars argue that this statement may not describe a party or faction at all, but may well be the comment of Paul himself. Some scholars contend that the passage should be punctuated in this way. *"I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephas, but I belong to Christ"*. This understanding, therefore, is that Paul outlined three factions and then made his comment that he is *"of Christ"*.

(b) But if the above is not the case, and the fourth statement does in fact describe a party or faction, then that party in all probability was a small and rigid sect who claimed to be the only true Christians in Corinth, and who were conducting themselves as though they were the only true members of the Church. If so, the party would have been a small, intolerant and self-righteous group.

### **Paul's Comments on Baptism**

It should not be contended that Paul was somehow belittling baptism in this passage. The people Paul mentioned that he baptised were special converts. Stephanas was probably the first convert (1 Corinthians 16:15); Crispus had been the ruler of the Jewish synagogue at Corinth (Acts 18:8), and Gaius had probably been Paul's host (Romans 16:28). The whole point, however, is that baptism was, and should be, into the name of Jesus.

The phrase *"into the name of Jesus"* in Greek implies the closest connection, and implies complete possession. To give money into a person's name was to pay it into that person's account. To sell a slave into a person's name was to give that slave into the undisputed possession of the person named. A soldier swore loyalty into the name of Caesar, so that he belonged absolutely to the emperor. In Christianity the phrase implies even more; it implies that the Christian is not only possessed by Christ but is also identified with Him. So what Paul was saying is this, somewhat paraphrased, 'I am glad I was so busy preaching, because if I had been baptising it would have given some of you the excuse to say that you were baptised into my possession instead of into Christ's'.

Paul was not making little of baptism; he was simply glad that no act of his could be thought of as annexing any one for himself and not for Christ. It was Paul's claim that he set before people the sacrifice of Christ in the simplest terms and not with high-sounding words or emotive, spell-binding rhetoric. It was ever Paul's aim to set before his hearers not himself, but Christ the only Saviour and Redeemer.

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[The reader is encouraged to read of this new order, often referred to as the Kingdom of God, in Scriptures such as Isaiah chapters 2, 35, 65 and 66, the four New Testament gospels, and 2 Peter 3:15. Also, our books 'The New Era' and 'The Few and the Many' have many more detailed expositions and comments on the new world order. These and other books are available from the New Covenant Fellowship free on request to any who are interested.]

**CHRIST'S DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION**  
**A Stumbling Block to the Jews and Foolishness to Gentiles**

**1 Corinthians 1: 18 to 25**

18. *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*
19. *For it is written:  
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."*
20. *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*
21. *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*
22. *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;*
23. *But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,*
24. *But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*
25. *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

The message of Christianity seemed to be foolishness both to Jews and Greeks. By Greeks, the Apostle meant Gentiles as a whole. The Apostle began his letter by referring to two quotations from Isaiah to show how human wisdom can easily fail. The first is from Isaiah 29:14, and the second is from Isaiah 33: 17 and 18, and they read as follows:

*"Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvellous work among this people, a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."*

*"Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off. Your heart will meditate on terror: 'Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?' "*

The Apostle stated the undeniable fact that the world had not found God, and was groping in blindness trying to find Him.

It would seem that God intended to demonstrate to human beings that they were helpless, and needed to be prepared to accept and understand the one true way to find and understand Him, that is, through Jesus Christ His only begotten Son. God had promised for centuries that He would send a Saviour and Redeemer, and did so in sending Jesus Christ just as He had promised. But He did so in a way that needed to be explained by the apostles and disciples. The words of the risen Christ come to mind when He said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Luke 24:25-27).

So what was (and is) the Christian message? The Christian message is clearly and concisely stated in four great sermons in the book of Acts: 2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; and 10:36-43.

In these momentous sermons that are at least five certain and constant elements:

- (1) the claim that the promised time of God had come;
- (2) a summary of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus;
- (3) a claim that all of this was the fulfilment of prophecy;
- (4) the assurance that Jesus will come again;
- (5) an urgent invitation to men and women to repent and believe and receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

(1) To the Jews, the message brought a *"stumbling block"*. The word for *"stumbling block"* in Greek is 'skandalon', which means, according to Strong's Concordance (reference #4625), 'a trap-stick (bent sapling), i.e. snare (fig. cause of displeasure or sin)'.

There were two main reasons for this.

(a) It was unbelievable to Jews that someone who had died by crucifixion could be God's chosen Saviour and Redeemer. They looked to their own law which said, *"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God"* (Deuteronomy 21:22,23). To Jews the fact of Jesus' death by crucifixion disproved without question that Jesus was the Son of God. It seems extraordinary to us that even with such Scriptures as Isaiah 53 and many other such Scriptures

fully available to them, the Jews did not expect a suffering Messiah. His death on the cross was, and is, a barrier to most Jews for belief in Jesus.

(b) The Jews were looking for signs. They were looking for startling happenings that would enable them to know that God was redeeming them by sending them their Saviour. They received amazing signs, Jesus' miracles, including the restoring to life of persons who had died, and His words of life, all of which they failed to grasp because such signs were not what they were looking for. They were looking for a mighty conqueror, a kingly leader who would lead them out of bondage to Rome, give them pre-eminence over all other nations, and establish them as the leading nation over all other nations on earth. Such things were not God's intention because the Jews were a disobedient people, gainsaying and stiff-necked, with hypocritical, vain and obstinate leaders who rejected Jesus and His many rebukes of them, resulting in God's rejection of the nation. They disqualified themselves because the promises made to them were conditional upon their faithfulness and obedience to Him.

In Jesus they saw one who was meek and lowly, who avoided spectacular demonstrations, who acted as a servant and was put to death by crucifixion. Such events seemed to the Jews an impossible image of the chosen one of God.

(2) To the Greeks, the Christian message was foolishness. There were two main reasons for this.

(a) The Greeks thought that the main characteristic of a god was 'apatheia', from which is derived our English word apathy. But in Greek the word 'apatheia' means more than apathy; it means total inability to feel anything.

The Greeks argued that if a god can feel joy, sorrow, anger and grief, it means that for a moment or two some human beings could influence the god and can somehow be greater than the god. Therefore, the Greeks would argue, a god must be incapable of all feeling so that no-one could ever affect him or influence him. A god that suffered was, to the Greeks, a contradiction in terms. Plutarch, the great Greek historian and philosopher, went further and declared that it was an insult to a god to involve him in human affairs. The very idea of incarnation, of the Son of God becoming man, was utterly rejected by the Greek mind. To thinking Greeks, the incarnation was a total impossibility, and they thought that the man who suffered as Jesus had suffered could not possibly be the Son of God.

(b) The Greeks sought wisdom. Originally the Greek word 'sophist' meant a wise person in the good sense, but it came to mean a person with a clear mind and a cunning tongue, who with appealing and persuasive rhetoric could make the questionable or even the bad appear good and acceptable. The word sophistry in English means subtle but fallacious reasoning, likely to be appealing at first, but found to be deceptive and fallacious when thoughtfully considered and analysed.

William Barclay in his book on Paul's letters to the Corinthians commented that it is impossible to exaggerate the almost fantastic mastery that the silver-tongued rhetorician held in Greece. Plutarch said, 'They made their voices sweet with musical cadences and modulations of tone and echoed resonances'. They thought not of what they were saying, but of how they were saying it. Their thought might be poisonous as long as it was enveloped in honeyed words. The sophists were very popular in ancient Greece and Rome, and large crowds gathered to hear them. The Greeks in particular were intoxicated with fine words and eloquent expression, and to them a Christian preacher with a simple message seemed a crude and uncultured figure to be ridiculed and scorned rather than to be listened to and respected.

So it looked as if the Christian message had little chance of success against the background of Jewish or Greek life. But, as Paul said, in effect, *"Even when God is foolish, he is wiser than everyone else, and even when God is weak, he is stronger than everyone else"* (CEV).

## GLORY ONLY IN THE LORD

### 1 Corinthians 1: 26 to 31

26. *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*
27. *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;*
28. *And the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,*
29. *That no flesh should glory in His presence.*
30. *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption --*
31. *That, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."*

Paul obviously gloried in the fact that the Church, for the most part, consisted of down-to-earth and humble people, some of them even being slaves. The early Church in New Testament times did, however, attract some members from high ranks of society. For example, there was Dionysius at Athens (Acts:17:34), Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Crete (Acts 13:6-12), the noble ladies at Thessalonica and Beroca (Acts 17:4,12), and Erastus, the city treasurer, probably of Corinth (Romans 16:23).

In the time of Nero, Pomponia Graecina, the wife of Plautius, the conqueror of Britain, was martyred for her Christianity. In the time of Domitian in the second half of the first century, Flavius Clemens, the cousin of the Emperor, was martyred as a Christian. Towards the end of the second century, Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan the Emperor, saying that Christians came from every rank in society. However, the fact remains that the great mass of Christians were ordinary and humble men and women.

It was precisely this, the number of humble people drawn to Christ, that was the glory of Christianity. We should remember that in the Roman Empire there were some 60,000,000 slaves. Under Roman law a slave was a living tool, an object rather than a person. A master could cast out a slave, especially an old one, as readily as he could throw out an old spade or worn-out tool. He could amuse himself by ill-treating his slaves, and could even kill them. For slaves, there was no such thing as marriage, and even the children of slaves belonged to the master, as lambs belonged not to the sheep but to the shepherd.

Christianity made people who were no more than objects or living tools into real men and women, and what is more, into sons and daughters of God. It gave self-respect to those who had no respect, and gave the prospect of life everlasting to those who had no prospect of a happy future. Christianity made humble people understand that even if they did not matter to others, they mattered greatly to God. Christianity told people who were worthless in the eyes of the world that, in the eyes of God, they were worth the death of His only Son. Christianity was, and remains, the most uplifting teaching and belief in the world.

Paul finished this section of his letter with a quotation from Jeremiah 9: 23 and 24. *"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight', says the LORD."*

It is only when we realise that we cannot do enough to save ourselves, and that God can and will do everything necessary for us, that real Christianity begins. People who realise their own weakness and lack of wisdom are in the end the strong and wise ones in Christ, the only way to God the Almighty Father. Experience tells us that those who think they can take on life all by themselves will certainly meet with disappointment and possibly even disaster.

We should note the four great matters or attributes which Paul said that Christ is for us.

**1. He is wisdom**

It is only in following and obeying Him that we can walk uprightly, and only in listening and attending to Him that we learn the truth. His words are our complete guide and authority.

**2. He is righteousness**

Paul insisted that righteousness means a right relationship with God. We cannot achieve this by our own effort, but it is ours through Christ by what He has done for us by taking away our sins and enabling us to be regarded by God as His children and heirs, joint-heirs with Christ.

**3. He is consecration**

It is only in Christ that life can be what it ought to be. As believers, we do our best to walk with Him in His ways, and in such exalted company keep our feet in the path that is narrow and free from distraction and doubt.

**4. He is deliverance**

Jesus Christ can deliver men and women from sin and from feelings of helplessness, and fears of future problems that we might not be able to endure. He can deliver even from death, as He said to Martha. *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"* (John 11:25,26).

## THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT

### 1 Corinthians 2: 1 to 5

1. *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.*
2. *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*
3. *I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.*
4. *And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,*
5. *That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Paul remembered the time when he first went to Corinth when three things were prominent.

(1) Paul went speaking in simplicity. He had gone to Corinth from Athens, where, as far as we know, he attempted to speak about Christianity in philosophical terms for the first and only time. On Mars Hill he had talked to the philosophers and endeavoured to address them in the language to which they were accustomed, as recorded in Acts 17:22-31.

That occasion was one of Paul's very few failures because his sermon in philosophical terms had very little effect, as recorded in Acts 17:32-34. Following this experience it would seem that Paul resolved to preach Christ and Him crucified in simple straightforward terms, and not in learned philosophical terminology.

It is certainly true that the simple factual account of the life and death of the Lord Jesus has a unique power to convince and move human hearts. When ordinary and humble people are presented with the simple truth of Jesus' ministry and atoning death, the effect on sincere, enquiring people is one of hope, forgiveness and power to press on with a new life, all of which are lacking in philosophical analysis and argument about the meaning of words and discourse analysis. In short, for most people the way to affect a person's inmost being lies not only through the mind but through the heart as well.

(2) He went speaking in fear. The fear was not fear for his own safety, nor was it any sense of shame of the Gospel he was proclaiming. It seems to me that the fear was a deep sense of anxiety about the task that confronted him. The phrase he used of himself is the same phrase that he used of the way in which conscientious slaves should serve and obey their masters in Ephesians 6:5. It is the fear that conscientious speakers or performers experience when confronted with an important speech or part in a play or musical presentation. The experience is one of a keyed up, anxious state of mind which tends to make a person's heart beat faster before the performance or presentation begins. This feeling of being keyed-up and anxious helps performers to remain alert and give of their best, resulting in a better presentation or performance than a casual approach may bring about.

(3) He went with results and not with words alone. The result of Paul's preaching was that significant things happened. He said that his preaching was demonstrated to be true by the Spirit and by power. The demonstration or proof was the change in the lives of those who listened and believed. This power to change lives had come to Corinth, the city of vice and corruption. No one can argue against the evidence of a life changed for the better, a life changed from former immorality and evil to a life of true Christianity involving kindness to one's fellow human beings and concern for their welfare.

## THE WISDOM OF GOD

### 1 Corinthians 2: 6 to 9

6. *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*
7. *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,*
8. *Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
9. *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

This passage introduces a distinction between different kinds of Christian instruction and different stages of the Christian life. In the early Church, there was a clear distinction between the two kinds of instruction. Firstly, there was what is called in Greek 'karygma'. This word signifies a herald's announcement from a king, and in the present context means the plain announcement of the basic facts of

Christianity, that is, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and His promised return. Secondly there was what is called in Greek 'didache', which means teaching and explaining the meaning and significance of the basic facts of Christianity which had already been announced. This second stage of instruction is meant for those who had received knowledge or who had previously received 'karygma', the basic facts of Christianity.

The two levels of Christian instruction are what Paul was writing about here. So far he had been talking about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but went on to say that interested hearers should not stop there. Christian instruction teaches not only the facts but also the meaning and significance of the facts. Paul said that the more advanced teaching applies to those who are 'teleioi', meaning more advanced students who are mature in their faith.

Paul was not implying a kind of caste or class distinction between Christians. He was simply pointing out that there is a difference of the stages at which Christian believers may find themselves. Some are babes, that is, they are at an elementary stage of Christian belief and understanding, while others have progressed to a more advanced stage, with an understanding of what Jesus has done for them and everyone, and what will follow if a believer continues in faith and obedience.

Paul used a word here which has a technical sense. He wrote, "*We speak wisdom among those who are mature, ... we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery*". The Greek word 'mysterion' means something the meaning of which is hidden from those who have not been initiated, but is clear to those who have. The word describes, for example, a ceremony carried out in some society whose meaning is clear to members of the society, but unintelligible to the uninitiated. What Paul said, in effect, is that he and more mature believers have gone on to explain things which only mature believers who have devoted their lives to Christ can understand.

Paul insisted that this special teaching is not an intellectual matter, it is the gift from God which came into the world with Jesus Christ. Our understanding of salvation and eternal life and how to please God is not what we have found out by our own efforts, but what God has told us. But these discourses do not free us from our own effort. We must continue to study and strive, and the more we study and strive to understand and obey, the more God will tell us and help us, because His riches are infinite and cannot be measured.

## SPIRITUAL THINGS TO THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUAL

### 1 Corinthians 2: 10 to 16

10. *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*
11. *For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*
12. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*
13. *These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*
14. *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*
15. *But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*
16. *For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

There are some basic matters in this passage.

1. Paul wrote about the Spirit of God. By the Spirit of God, I understand that Paul meant the expression of the mind of God, because it is my understanding, and also the understanding of many Bible students, that the Holy Spirit is not a person or a spirit being, but is a power or influence from God which He can use in any way He pleases. God is able to direct His power and influence to believers to make known to them spiritual matters which they would be unable to know and understand without guidance. God may reveal these deep matters to them by influencing their minds in ways not understood by them or us, but made clear nevertheless, and understandable by God's power and direction. In expressing these thoughts, it should be stated that many Christian believers and I reject the doctrine of the Trinity and consider it untruthful, unscriptural and dishonouring to our Heavenly Father.

2. Paul spoke about interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. He made a distinction between two kinds of people.

(a) The first are 'pneumatikoi'. These are people whose lives are guided by the Spirit. 'Pneuma' in Greek literally means 'breath', which would be an inaccurate translation in this passage. Being rendered as 'spirit' in this passage is appropriate since the context is concerned with the education of spiritual Israel. Paul was dealing here with the empowerment of the Christian mind by the Holy Spirit.

(b) The second is 'psuchikos'. 'Psuche' in Greek is the beastly nature, translated in verse 14 as 'natural man'. In a broad sense, 'psuche' is the carnal aspect of human nature.

So in verse 14, Paul wrote of persons who are 'psuchikos'. Such persons live as if in their lives there is nothing beyond physical life and material needs. Their values are all physical and material. People such as these cannot understand spiritual things nor the things of God. To these people, the things of God appear as foolishness. It is easy for some people to become so involved in worldliness that to them nothing exists beyond it. We ought to pray for the mind of Christ, that He may continue to influence our thoughts and keep us safe from the potentially diverting attractions of material things.

## GOD IS SUPREME

### 1 Corinthians 3: 1 to 9

1. *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*
2. *I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;*
3. *For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*
4. *For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos", are you not carnal?*
5. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*
6. *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*
7. *So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.*
8. *Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour.*
9. *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.*

In the preceding paper I wrote about the difference between the person who is spiritual (in Greek 'pneumatikos'), and therefore is able to grasp or understand spiritual truths, and the person who is interested only in material and earthly, physical matters (in Greek 'psuchikos'), and therefore is unable to grasp or understand spiritual truths. (I am grateful to William Barclay for the Greek words and their meanings.) Paul in this context accused the Corinthian congregation of being still at the beginning stage of their Christian lives when they should have made significant progress in their Christian development.

Paul used two new words to describe them. In 1 Corinthians 3:1 he called them 'sarkinoi', a word derived from 'sarx', which means 'flesh'. When Paul said that the Corinthians were made of flesh, that is fleshly human beings, the comment in itself was not a rebuke because all human beings are made of flesh. But what he meant was that they should not allow fleshly thoughts and desires to control their minds. They should progress to spiritual matters which are beyond the understanding of the fleshly-dominated mind. According to Paul, the trouble with the Corinthians was they were not only

'sarkinoi', but they were also 'sarkikoi', which means that they were not only made of flesh, but were dominated by the fleshly aspects of life, that is, they were allowing the lower side of their nature to dominate their entire outlook and all their actions.

It seems that what Paul meant by the flesh was more than a physical state or condition. He meant that the flesh was human nature, that characteristic of men and women that is both mental and physical, which in combination can make people susceptible to allowing fleshly and earthly thought to crowd out the spiritual understanding that the Apostle and his helpers were striving to inculcate and develop.

What was it about the life and conduct of the Corinthians that caused Paul to rebuke them as he did? Surely it was their partisan attitude with its glorification of human leaders combined with augmentation and the existence of factions. Instead of working together in harmony, some were arguing with one another, and some were saying that they were following Apollos, others were saying that they followed Cephas, others again were saying that they followed Paul, all of which indicated to Paul that they had not grasped the basic message that he brought to them. He had to emphasize to them that he and his helpers were working together to bring God's message to them in unity and harmony. He used a simple fact from gardening to make his meaning clear. In a garden one person may plant a seed and another may water it, but neither can make the plant grow and develop. That ability belongs to God and God alone. So it was, Paul explained, that he planted the seeds of the Gospel message, Apollos and other helpers watered them, but God made them sprout and grow. What mattered, Paul wrote, was not those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow.

The one who plants, said the Apostle, is just as important as the one who waters. Apollos and I have worked together for God, and you are God's garden and God's building, commented the great Apostle.

The lesson that Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand is that God uses human instruments to bring to men and women the message of His truth and love, but it is He alone who moves human hearts and minds to a new way of life. God, and Jesus His Son, created the human race in their image. The race fell from grace by disobedience, but God's blessing and grace can be regained by anyone through Jesus Christ simply by faith and obedience without any material payment.

## THE FOUNDATION AND THE BUILDERS

### 1 Corinthians 3: 10 to 15

10. *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.*
11. *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
12. *Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*
13. *Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*
14. *If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.*
15. *If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

Paul in this passage spoke of himself as an expert builder and one who laid foundations. He was for the most part on the move, though it is true that he stayed for eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11), and for three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). His stay of only a month or so in Thessalonica was more typical of his ministry because there was so much ground to be covered. There were so many who had not heard of Jesus Christ, so Paul could only lay foundations and move on. It was only when he was in prison that he stayed in one place for as long as his term of imprisonment lasted.

Wherever he went he laid the same foundation, which was the proclamation of the facts of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection, and the offer and prospect that in Jesus Christ and in Him alone people who believed could find three benefits previously unknown and unavailable. They are as follows.

1. Forgiveness for sins, past and present. Those who listened to Paul and believed found themselves in a new relationship with God. They became God's friends and not His enemies, and where once they saw His hatred they subsequently saw His love, and where they once saw a remoteness they came to see tenderness and closeness to God through Jesus.

2. Strength to deal with the cares and concerns of this life. With the presence and help of Jesus Christ they found courage and strength to cope, live with and overcome what was previously to them an adverse society. They could enjoy their new lives with Christ in which nothing could separate them from the love of God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

3. Hope for the future. Believers found that they no longer lived in an hostile environment in which there was no future hope or prospects for betterment., but an adverse progression through life which would end in death. Believers found that they lived in a world where God was working His purpose out and working all things together for the eventual good of everyone, and where death would be no longer the end because of God's promise of a resurrection of everyone, small and great, to a new life in circumstances of peace and safety, in a restored and reconstituted earth where righteousness will prevail. Without the foundation of Jesus Christ none of these things would happen. And so it was that on this foundation of Christ, others built.

We know from history that it was not long before others built on the foundations that Paul laid but with distorted and incorrect teachings and practices that led large numbers of people astray. These matters will all be dealt with in God's Kingdom, when the human race will be resurrected and brought to a true understanding of God's purpose in circumstances that will be thoroughly conducive to the enablement of all people to see that they will live forever if they will believe and obey.

The day of judgment that Paul mentioned is not some extensive arrangement of a great court of judgment before which everyone will appear and be sentenced, but a period of one thousand years, during which all members of the resurrected human race will be enlightened, and will have the opportunity to learn of what Jesus has done for them and how, by faith and obedience, they may gain everlasting life (Revelation 20:4) [see note on page 45]. Suffice it to say that the fire mentioned in the passages quoted in this paper from 1 Corinthians chapter 3 is symbolic of the destruction of error and untruth which will occur in the world order to come, when truth and righteousness will prevail and be the basis of God's promised Kingdom as recorded many times in His sacred Scriptures.

## **WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS**

### **1 Corinthians 3: 16 to 23**

16. *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*
17. *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*
18. *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.*

19. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness";*
20. *And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile".*
21. *Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours:*
22. *Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come -- all are yours.*
23. *And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

Paul declared that the Church was the temple of God because it was the company or society in which the Spirit of God dwelt. If members or anyone brings dissention and division into fellowship of the Church, they will destroy the temple of God in two important ways.

1. If dissention and division are brought into the Church, the operation of the Spirit cannot continue. Once bitterness is caused or allowed to enter the fellowship of the Church, love will be driven out. The truth of the Gospel can neither be spoken nor heard in an atmosphere of hatred and strife. Anyone who destroys the love of brethren for one another destroys the unity and harmony of the Church and in so doing destroys the temple of God.

2. Dissention and division can split up the Church and reduce it to ruin. No building can remain standing if supporting sections of it are broken and removed. If the Church's main support of loving fellowship is undermined and removed, the Church will fall and be destroyed.

Paul continued to pin down the cause of dissention and division which would result in the destruction of the Church. The cause that he wrote about is the worship of intellectual worldly wisdom. He proceeded to show the condemnation of that wisdom by referring to two Old Testament texts.

The first is Job 5: 12 and 13, *"He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them."* The second is Psalm 94:11, *"The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile"*. It is by this worldly wisdom that the Corinthians were assessing the worth of different teachers and leaders. The Corinthians were criticising and evaluating the way in which the Christian message was delivered to them, the correctness of the rhetoric, the influence of the oratory and the subtleties of the arguments, but they were failing to heed the vital content of the message itself.

The Corinthians suffered from intellectual pride, which consists of two important characteristics.

(1) People with intellectual pride are argumentative and cannot keep silent but must keep talking and criticising. They cannot tolerate contradiction and always consider that they are right, and are not humble enough to learn.

(2) People with intellectual pride are characteristically exclusive. Their tendency is to look down on others and consider all who disagree with them to be wrong. People with intellectual pride cannot think that they may be mistaken, and so they tend to cut people off from one another instead of uniting them.

Paul urged anyone who wished to be wise to become a fool firstly, which is really a striking way of telling people to be humble enough to learn. Those who think that they are wise and knowledgeable cannot usually be taught by others. So what the great Apostle said is, that the way to become wise is to realise that we are ignorant and foolish, and the way to gain knowledge is to begin by confessing our ignorance.

In verse 22 of 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the Apostle pointed out to the Corinthians that many or perhaps all of them were really following a leader and virtually belonging to that leader. He told them that, in fact, none of them belonged to any person, but rather it is the other way round. The identification with some party or person amounted to a form of slavery by those who should have been rulers. They were, in fact, already rulers because they belonged to Christ, and Christ belonged, and always belongs, to God. The Corinthians should have realised that they had entered into a fellowship and love that was really as wide as creation, and should not have confined their thought to narrow limits, but should have become limitless in their outlook as they learnt about God's promised Kingdom and all of its future blessings to the whole human race.

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[This matter is worth more discussion than can be offered in this paper, but is discussed more fully in some of our publications such as 'The Few and the Many' and 'The New Era', which are available free of charge to any who may wish to read them.]

## THREE JUDGMENTS

### 1 Corinthians 4: 1 to 5

1. *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*
2. *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*
3. *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.*
4. *For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.*
5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

Paul urged the Corinthians to think of Apollos and Cephas and himself as servants of Christ and not as leaders of parties or factions. The word that Paul used for servant is 'huperetes', which originally meant a rower or oarsman on the lower bank of a Roman warship or trireme, that is, one of the slaves who pulled one of the large oars which moved the great ships of war through the seas. Some commentators have understood Paul's imagery as that of Christ directing the Christian work of evangelism that was being done, and Paul with his helpers taking directions from the Lord and working obediently in His service.

Then Paul introduced another illustration. He described himself and his fellow workers as custodians of the work of explaining God's mysterious ways which He desired to reveal to believing people. He used the word 'oikonomos', which means the steward or chief servant in charge of the whole administration of a house or estate, controlling the staff and the whole of the necessary supplies to be ordered and delivered.

But he himself remained a slave to the master. I think that the point Paul was making was that whatever position in the Church disciples may have held, and whatever prestige they may have enjoyed, they still remained servants of Christ. That also applies to us today.

That thought brought Paul to the matter of judgment. An 'oikonomos', that is a chief servant, had to be reliable, and his master had to be able to depend completely on him. The Corinthians with their factions and their regard for Church leaders as their masters,

must have made judgments of their leaders, preferring one or other of them to other leaders. Hence Paul wrote of three judgments everyone must face, in the sense of being critical.

1. The judgment by others. In this case, Paul said that that was only a small thing to him. But it should matter to us, because the judgment of us by others is often right. All of us look for and admire the basic qualities of honour, honesty, reliability, generosity, sacrifice and love; and if we see these qualities in a person, albeit to a greater or lesser degree, then we have confidence in him that he will act wisely and honourably in matters that concern us, and we will be content with him as a leader. But we must keep in mind that the judgment by others must not be allowed to deflect us from what we believe to be right, and we must be ready to acknowledge that the judgment by others is often more accurate than we would like to admit.

2. The judgment we make of ourselves. Again, in this instance, Paul disregarded that. He was well aware that our judgment of ourselves can be clouded by self-satisfaction, pride and conceit. However, we must all face our own judgment, and we must work towards developing and maintaining the Christian qualities of character and morality which the Lord Jesus and His chosen apostles taught.

3. The judgment by God. This is the only real and righteous judgment, and His judgment is final. There are two main reasons for this.

(a) Only God knows all the circumstances. He knows our struggles and the secrets and thoughts of our hearts, and how well we may have succeeded or failed in our obedience to Him.

(b) Only God knows all the motives. People see only the deed, but God sees the intention. Many a deed that looks noble may have been done from selfish and undesirable motives, and many a deed that appears selfish and intended to ingratiate the doer, may have been done from the highest motives. Only He Who created the human heart and mind knows their innermost workings and can judge righteously.

So we should always remember that we cannot escape God's judgment, and that judgment belongs to Him; therefore we will all do well not to judge anyone.

## THE HUMILITY OF THE APOSTLES AND THE PRIDE OF THE CORINTHIANS

### 1 Corinthians 4: 6 to 13

6. *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.*
7. *For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*
8. *You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us -- and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!*
9. *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.*
10. *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured!*
11. *To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.*
12. *And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;*
13. *Being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things until now.*

What Paul had been saying about himself and Apollos was true also for the Corinthians. Not only he and Apollos had to be kept humble by the realisation that the judgment they were facing was the judgment by God, but the Corinthians had to adopt a similar humility. Paul had a wonderfully courteous way of including himself in his warnings and condemnations. He did not talk down to them but shared their feelings and emotions. His attitude was not condemnation but pleading, not adverse criticism but compassion. The Corinthians ought to have been following the word of God, which condemns all pride.

Paul asked the Corinthians the most basic question, *"What do you have that you did not receive?"* No one could have known God unless He had revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Men and women could never have won their own salvation; it was made freely available to them by God's grace through faith without money and without temporal offerings. When we think of what we have done and not done, in comparison to what God has done for us, pride is

ruled out and only humble gratitude remains. The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their prospect of everlasting life to God and God alone.

The Apostle then directed his attention to the Corinthians, comparing their pride, their self-satisfaction and their attitude of superiority to the life that an apostle had to live. He chose the vivid and striking illustration of a Roman general who had won a great victory, then led his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies that he had won. But at the end of the procession came a small group of captives who were doomed to die in the arena by being exposed to wild beasts. The Corinthians in their pride were like the Roman general parading the trophies of his victory, while the Apostles were like the small group of captives who were doomed to die. The Corinthians thought that their Christian life meant displaying their privileges and their achievement, but to Paul and his helpers it meant humble service and a readiness to die if necessary for Christ.

In the list of trials which Paul declared that he and his helpers had to endure, he used two interesting words.

1. He said that they were buffeted (Greek 'kolaphizesthai'), the word used for beating a slave. This signifies that for the sake of Christ, Paul was willing to be treated like a slave.
2. Paul further said, "*Being reviled*, (Greek 'loidoresthai') *we bless*". These statements would have been surprising, to say the least, to non-Christians. In the ancient world, Christian humility was a virtue that was completely new, and the kind of conduct that looked foolish to unbelievers, but what looked foolish was in reality the wisdom of God.

## **PAUL A FATHER TO THE FAITHFUL**

### **1 Corinthians 4: 14 to 21**

14. *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.*
15. *For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*
16. *Therefore I urge you, imitate me.*
17. *For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*

18. *Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.*
19. *But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.*
20. *For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.*
21. *What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*

With this passage, Paul brought to an end the section of his letter which dealt directly with the dissensions and divisions within the congregation at Corinth. He wrote as a father, and the word in verse 14 translated 'to warn' is in Greek 'nouthetein', the word regularly used to express the reprimanding and advice which a father may give to his children, as in Ephesians 6:4. He may well have been writing with severity, but not the severity which brings an unruly child back to obedience, but the severity intended to cause a foolish child not to wander away or go astray.

Paul seemed to feel that he was in a unique relationship with the Corinthian congregation, comparable to the father of a family. In the ancient world, there were tutors (Greek 'paidagogos', as in Galatians 3:24), but tutors were not fathers or teachers. A tutor was a mature and trusted slave who took a family child to school each day, trained him in morality, cared for his character and prepared him for manhood and adult life. A child might have had many tutors, but he had only one father. And so it was that the Corinthians might have had many tutors, but none of their tutors could do what Paul had done for them; none of them could bring new life in Christ Jesus to the Corinthians as Paul had done.

Paul called upon the Corinthians to be like him. He did so not with pride but with unselfconsciousness, desiring his children in the faith to copy him in his devotion to Christ. He said that he would send them Timothy to remind them of his example and what he had taught them, because they seemed to have forgotten the lessons he took to them. They were not to think that because he was sending Timothy he was himself not coming to them. He would come if the way opened up to him, and would test them to see if their deeds matched their words. It was not a matter of words, no matter how high-sounding such words were, it was a matter of deeds. The Lord Jesus did not place importance on words. He said "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matthew 7:16), that is, by their deeds and actions, not by their words.

Finally Paul wished to know whether he was to come to discipline them or keep company with them in a loving relationship. Love as Paul knew it, in the sense of 'agape', was that sometimes discipline was necessary and he was prepared to exercise it, knowing that sometimes hurt is necessary in order to set things right.

Paul had dealt with the problem of strife and division within the Corinthian congregation, and then proceeded to deal with some very practical matters and certain most serious situations within the congregation of which news had come to him.

## SIN AND COMPLACENCY

### 1 Corinthians 5: 1 to 8

1. *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles -- that a man has his father's wife!*
2. *And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*
3. *For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.*
4. *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
5. *Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*
6. *Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*
7. *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*
8. *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

In this very early period of the Christian Church, Christian morality was completely new to society and the world in general. In the matter of sexual relationships, the Gentile world did not know the meaning of chastity, nor did Gentiles see any need for it. They engaged in sexual relationships whenever and wherever they wished, so that it was difficult for new converts to Christianity to escape the influence of this general attitude. The newly-converted Christians were a small group completely surrounded and outnumbered by an idolatrous society. It must have been very difficult for those early Christians to cast off the conduct and practices which generations of loose-living had been considered part of their lives and conduct. But if the Church was to become firmly committed to Christian morality, the old sinful ways had to be renounced and overcome.

In the case of the congregation at Corinth, however, a particularly shocking case had arisen. One of the members had engaged in an illicit association with his own stepmother, and evidently was still involved. Such a relationship would disgust even heathens and non-Christians, and was explicitly forbidden under Jewish law (Leviticus 18:8). The woman involved must have been a Gentile because Paul did not seek to deal with her at all, so she must have been outside the jurisdiction of the Church.

Paul was clearly shocked to learn of the sin, but was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian congregation to the sinner. They had evidently accepted the situation and had done nothing about it when they should have been alarmed and deeply shocked. The word Paul used for the grief they should have shown was 'penthein', a Greek word used for mourning for the dead. It was, and it always is, the case to dismiss sin or have an easy-going attitude to it. If any of us may cease to take a serious view of sin, we are in danger of failing in our Christian duty. It is not a matter of being critical and condemnatory, it is a matter of being greatly troubled and even shocked. We should always remember that it was sin that brought about the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, and it was to free us from our bondage to sin that He died.

Paul's verdict was that the man in question in the Corinthian congregation had to be handed over to Satan. In other words, he had to be rejected as a member of the congregation and told not to continue to meet with them. The world was looked upon as the domain of Satan (John 12:31; 16:11; Acts 26:18 and Colossians 1:13), just as the Church was and remains the domain of God. The verdict was serious but not in any way vindictive. It was intended to bring about the reforming of the sinful man so he would not continue in his illicit relationship, and perhaps would realise that if he came to understand Christian morality, he would know that he would eventually be saved when God's kingdom would be established. The action Paul commanded was not solely to punish but rather to awaken, as if in sorrow for one who had gone astray and had to be called to account and disciplined.

Paul then continued with some very practical advice. Verses 6 to 8 of 1 Corinthians 5 have been modernised in some translations. In the original manuscript they literally read as follows *"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole loaf? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For our Passover sacrifice has been sacrificed – I mean Christ, so that*

*we feast not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of wickedness and evil, but on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*". This statement by Paul was given as an illustration in Jewish terms. With very few exceptions, leaven in Jewish literature stands for evil or evil influence. Leaven often meant dough which was left unused from a previous baking, and had in the meantime fermented. The Jews identified fermentation with putrefaction, and thus they understood that leaven often signified a corrupting influence.

The Jewish Passover bread was unleavened (Exodus 12:15; 13:7). On the day before the Passover feast, the Law laid down that every Jew had to light a candle and search the house thoroughly for leaven, so that every last fragment had to be found and cast out. The date of this search was the fourteenth of Nisan. Paul took note of that fact and wrote that our sacrifice has been crucified, even Christ, and it is His sacrifice that has delivered us from sin, as God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Therefore, as Paul continued, the last fragment of evil had to be removed from the lives of Christians. If evil came into the Christian Church and was allowed to remain, it could corrupt the whole Church, just as leaven permeated the whole lump of dough.

So in this fact we are led to a great practical truth. Sometimes it may happen that discipline must be exercised for the sake of the Church. If we shut our eyes to offences, it may not be a kind thing to do, it may even be damaging. A poison must be eliminated before it spreads, and a weed must be removed before it spreads throughout the garden or garden bed. This is really the whole principle of discipline.

Discipline if or when necessary should be exercised for the benefit of the person who has gone astray and for the sake of the Church. It should not be exercised for the satisfaction of the person exercising it, and must not be vengeful, but must be for prevention or cure or both for the sake of the whole Christian membership.

## **THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD**

### **1 Corinthians 5: 9 to 13**

9. *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.*
10. *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

11. *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person.*
12. *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?*
13. *But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."*

The letter we are considering is known as the first letter to the Corinthians. But the Apostle wrote "*in my epistle*" implying that a previous letter had been written by him to the Corinthian congregation. As I said in a previous paper, some scholars believe that this previous letter has been lost without trace, but other scholars think that it is contained in the passage from 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1. Certainly the passage in 2 Corinthians contains the message that Paul said he wrote about, and if we take it out of its present location in the text and read straight on from 2 Corinthians 6:13 to 7:2 we find excellent sense and connection. This may well be the case, but we cannot be certain because in Paul's original letters there were no chapter or verse divisions, and the arranging of Paul's letters, which were written on sheets of papyrus and were left lying in various congregations visited by Paul, would have been very difficult in about 90 AD, some thirty or forty years after they were written.

In writing as he did to urge the Corinthians to avoid the company of evil men and women, Paul meant that directive to apply only to members of the congregation. He meant that any members of the congregation guilty of wicked and evil conduct had to be disciplined by being banned from the society of the congregation until they repented and discontinued their evil ways. But some of the Corinthians took Paul's meaning to be an absolute prohibition. Such a prohibition would mean that the Corinthians had to withdraw themselves from the world completely. Such a withdrawal would, of course, mean that in a place like Corinth, it would have been impossible to carry on a normal day-to-day life with any and all persons whose lives would be condemned by the Church.

But Paul did not mean meant such a general prohibition. He would not have recommended that Christians should withdraw from the world. Practical Christianity had to be lived and practised in the world at large, and certainly not in secluded abbeys, convents and monasteries, as happened in later centuries.

Paul chose three types of sinning which he regarded as typical of the world in general, and named three classes of people.

1. Those who are fornicators and guilty of lax morality. Christianity alone can guarantee freedom from such conduct and can also guarantee purity of living. The basic cause of sexual immorality is a wrong view of humankind, because it depicts human beings as no better than animals. Such a view as fornicators have means that the passions and instincts which human beings share with the animals must be shamelessly gratified. But Christianity regards men and women as children of God, people who will not live and allow themselves to be carried away by purely physical needs and desires. Each Christian has a body, but each also has spirituality which enables Christians to see and understand that each is a son or a daughter of God, and should not indulge in moral laxity.

Fornication is a sin against a person's own self. Committing such a sin reduces people to the level of animals and in the case of Christians, such sins have allowed their lower nature to defeat their spirituality, and thus they would have sinned against the light that they should have had within them.

2. Those who are greedy for this world's goods. Only Christianity can overcome this desire. If we judge things by purely material considerations, there is no reason why we should not dedicate our lives to the task of getting. As the poet William Wordsworth wrote, 'The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers'.

But Christianity brings with it a spirit which looks outwards rather than inwards. It makes love the highest value in life and service the greatest honour. If we have the love of God in our hearts, we will find joy not in getting but in giving. Greediness is a sin against our fellow men and women and against our brethren. It regards people as persons to be exploited rather than brothers and sisters to be helped. It ignores the fact that the evidence which shows we love God lies in the fact that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

3. Those who are idolaters. Ancient idolatry has parallels in modern superstition. Nowadays many people have great interest in mascots, charms and objects that are supposed to bring good luck, and also in astrology and horoscopes. I think the reason that this is the case lies in the fact that human beings as a whole wish to worship something. Of course people should worship the true God through Jesus Christ and commit their lives accordingly, but instead,

great numbers prefer to worship objects and practices that may bring them good luck. Modern idolatry includes adulation of sporting heroes, war heroes and the affluent. It seems that when religion becomes weak, superstition becomes strong. Idolatry, the worship of images and material things is really a sin against God. It allows material things and people to take the place of God, and is a failure to give God the first and only place in life.

Paul laid down that we are not to judge those outside the Church. 'Those outside' was a Jewish phrase used to describe those who were not the chosen people.

We must, of course, leave their judgment to the Lord God, Who alone knows the hearts of men and women. But those who are within the Church have special privileges and responsibilities. They are committed to Christ and can therefore be called to account for the way they keep or neglect their commitment.

Paul then brought this section of his letter to an end. He wrote, "*Put away from yourselves the evil person.*" He was referring to Deuteronomy 13:5, 17:7 and 24:7. We know from our experience that there comes a time when a cancer must be removed, and times when drastic measures must be taken to avoid the spread of infection. Paul was not endeavouring to make a show of his power, nor did he wish to hurt anybody. It was his fervent desire to protect the infant Church from the ever-present invasion and influence of worldliness.

## **BROTHERS TAKING ONE ANOTHER TO COURT**

### **1 Corinthians 6: 1 to 8**

1. *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*
2. *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*
3. *Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?*
4. *If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?*
5. *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?*
6. *But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!*
7. *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?*
8. *No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!*

Paul then dealt with a problem which especially affected the Gentiles. Jews did not normally make use of the public courts at all; they settled matters before the elders of the village or township, or the elders of the synagogue. The Jewish law expressly forbade Jews from going to law in non-Jewish courts.

But it was quite different for the Greeks. They were a litigious people, and the law courts were one of their main entertainments. If there was a serious dispute in Athens, the matter was referred firstly to a private arbitrator, then, if not settled, the matter was referred to a public arbitrator consisting of forty Athenians in their sixtieth year. Then, if still not settled, the matter was referred to a jury court consisting of from two hundred and one to one thousand or more citizens of more than thirty years of age.

And so it was that in Greek cities legal proceedings followed the practices in Athens, so that every man became, to a certain extent, a lawyer, and spent a great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. These activities made the ancient Greeks notorious for their love of going to law.

From this love the Greeks had of going to law, it is reasonable to deduce that Greeks who had become converted to Christianity took their love of going to law into the Christian Church. This tendency and practice shocked Paul, because his Jewish background made the whole concept and practice distasteful to him, and his Christian principles made it even more so. He wrote, *"When one of you has a complaint against another, do you take your complaint to a court of sinners? Or do you take it to God's people? Don't you know that God's people will judge the world?"* (CEV).

Paul's meaning was clear. He was taking the Corinthians to task because they were seeking justice from unjust people, that is, unjustified, unbelieving people, instead of settling disputes with advice and help from believing Christian brethren.

What made the matter even more troublesome to Paul was that, in the age to come, the Kingdom Age of God, the Messiah was to judge the nations, and the saints were to share in that judgment. So Paul said, in effect, if some day you are going to judge the world, including angels, the highest created beings, who will be subject to your judgment, how on earth can you even think of taking your problems with brethren to be judged in a court of unbelievers? If you must do such a thing, that is, take your disputes to be judged, do it within the congregation, and give the task of judging to brethren of whom you think the least, for these humble people who are destined by God's grace to judge the world, will gain from the experience of judging according to God's requirements.

Then Paul seized upon a great essential principle. To go to law at all, especially against a fellow Christian, was to fall well below the standard of behaviour required from a Christian believer. All Christians should have the love of God in their hearts and minds, and should be prepared to suffer loss and injury rather than inflict loss and injury on someone else, especially if that someone else is a fellow Christian. Going to law could involve the taking of vengeance, and such is always an un-Christian action, as Paul wrote in Romans 12:19. The spirit of love should always require that Christians live in peace with one another, and not jeopardise that state of unity and harmony by going to law.

## SOME OF YOU WERE LIKE THAT

### 1 Corinthians 6: 9 to 11

9. *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,*
10. *Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*
11. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

Paul next exposed details of the sins of the debauched civilisation in which the Corinthian congregation was living and growing. Certain of those sins are unpleasant to talk about, but we must look at Paul's catalogue of them to understand the environment of the early Christian Church, an environment to which some aspects of our current civilisation, here and abroad, have a close resemblance.

#### **There were fornicators and adulterers**

We have already noted that sexual laxity was part of everyday life in the Roman Empire at that time, and that the virtue of chastity was practically unknown. It must have been difficult to be a Christian in the society of Corinth.

#### **There were idolaters**

The most conspicuous building in Corinth was the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, where idolatry and immorality flourished together. Idolatry is an example of what happens when religious devotion and practice are made easier for people. An idol usually began by being a symbol of a god and making the worship of the god easier by providing some object or image in which the god's presence was to be seen and identified. But some people began to worship the idol itself and not the god represented by the idol. It is one of the dangers of life that people will worship the symbol rather than the reality which the symbol represents.

#### **There were sensualists**

The Greek word that Paul used was 'malakos', which means literally those people who have become soft, and live only for subtle pleasures and luxury. According to scholars, the word describes what we would regard as a life of luxury in which people have lost all inclination to pleasure, and live only for an existence that makes no demands of them.

### **There were thieves and robbers**

These people were very numerous in Corinth. It was easy for them to break into houses and steal. The robbers frequented two places in particular: the public baths and the public gymnasia, from where they stole the clothes of those who were bathing or exercising. The laws which were enacted show how serious this problem was. There were three kinds of theft punishable by death:

1. theft to the value of more than fifty drachmae, which was equivalent to about two months' pay;
2. theft from the baths, the gymnasia and the ports and harbours to the value of ten drachmae, the equivalent of about two weeks' wages;
3. theft of anything by night.

So it seems that the early Christians lived in the midst of a thieving population.

### **There were drunkards**

The word used in Greek was 'methos', a word used to signify uncontrolled drinking. Even little children in ancient Greece drank wine. The name for breakfast was 'akratisma', and the main food was bread dipped in wine. The reason for constant wine drinking was, of course, due to inadequate supplies of suitable drinking water. Normally the Greeks were sober people, and their drinks consisted of three parts of wine mixed with two parts of water. Nevertheless, in luxury-loving Corinth, uncontrolled drunkenness abounded.

### **There were rapacious men who were also robbers**

The Greek word used for rapacious is 'pleonektes', which signified, as the Greeks defined it, 'the spirit which is always reaching after more and grabbing that to which it has no right'. It meant really aggressive acquiring, the aim of which was to obtain in order to spend, so that life might consist of more luxury and greater pleasure. The people who acted in this way did not care of whom they took advantage as long as they could go on acquiring. The word translated as robbers is 'harpax', which means grasping, and signifies the spirit which grasps that to which it has no right, with a kind of unbridled ferocity.

### **Homosexuality**

Finally Paul mentioned homosexuality. In ancient Greece and Rome, few people were exclusively homosexual. In Paul's day, considerable sexual experimentation was taking place, and the bisexual lifestyle was considerably more common than we today

would think. The prominent Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato had sexual relations with males, both men and boys, and fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors had relationships with men as well as with women. Nero was the Roman Emperor when Paul was writing, and Nero had sexual relationships with women as well as with men and boys.

After this dreadful catalogue came Paul's declaration, "*Some of you used to be like that*" (CEV).

We today as Christian believers are confronted by the media, notably television and radio, as well as newspapers and magazines, highlighting the subject of homosexuality, and advocating the lifestyle of same-sex marriage, that is, men living with men, and women living with women in the same relationship as the traditional Christian union of a man and a woman in accordance with Biblical teaching. Christian believers must declare themselves opposed to this modern-day advocacy of same-sex marriage. We do not need to preach on street corners or speak on public forums, but we do need to be prepared to declare our opposition to a homosexual lifestyle if challenged or if our opinion is asked.

It is unlikely that our opinion would be sought, but if it were, then what could we say? If an enquirer were sincere in dealing with his or her homosexuality, I can suggest only one way, which is to have faith in Jesus Christ as the only way and the only means of access to God, our Heavenly Father. From the earliest appearance of Christianity, Christian faith has given people power, power to become new people and children of God. There were in Corinth, and there have been in countries all over the world, men and women who have been, and now at this time, are living proof of the reviving power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. People cannot change themselves, but Christ can change them when they believe into Him. In the Corinth of Paul's day, there was a prevalence of decadence that nothing could stop, until there came, through Paul and his helpers, the power of Christian faith, which alone was able, for those who believed to become new people.

## **BOUGHT WITH A PRICE**

### **Corinthians 6: 12 to 20**

12. *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

13. *Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*
14. *And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.*
15. *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!*
16. *Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two", He says, "shall become one flesh".*
17. *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*
18. *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*
19. *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*
20. *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

In this passage, Paul responded to a number of problems. He concluded with the exhortation, *"Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"*. The Greek philosophers and the Greeks in general looked down on the body. They argued that the important thing was the soul, that is, the human spirit; the body was a thing that did not matter. The Corinthians maintained that, since the body was of no importance, you could do as you liked with it, and could let it satisfy its desires. They continued with this attitude when Paul preached to them the freedom that is in Christ, and continued to think it was acceptable to let the body have its way. They went on to argue that the stomach was made for food and food was made for the stomach. Food and the stomach naturally go together. In just the same way, the body is made for its instincts; it is made for sexual activity and sexual activity is made for it, therefore we should let the desires of the body have their way.

Paul's response was clear. Stomach and food are things that will pass away. But the human being as a whole will be raised to life again in God's due time. The individual person is made for spiritual union with Christ in this world, and closer union with Him in the age to come. So what is the situation if a person commits fornication? That person gives his or her body to another person, for Scripture says that such a relationship makes two people into a united body, as we are told in Genesis 2:24. So if a Christian should behave in this way, his or her body, which belongs to Christ, has been given in union to someone else.

We must keep in mind that Paul was not writing a learned treatise, he was preaching and exhorting with great fervour, and using whatever words he could find to convince his readers. He wrote that, of all sins, fornication is the one that affects the body and defiles it. Paul was saying that in the matter of salvation, other sins are external to the body, but in the case of fornication, the person so doing, sins against his or her body, which is destined for union with Christ now and in God's Kingdom.

Paul made one final appeal. Because God's Holy Spirit dwells in us, we have become a temple of God, and so our bodies are sacred. Christ died to save each of us as a whole person, body and mind. Christ's sacrifice has made it possible for each of us to become a redeemed person with a pure body. Therefore our bodies are not our own to do with as we may like; they are Christ's and we must use them, not for our own desires, but for Christ's glory.

So, in this passage, Paul expressed two great and lasting thoughts:

1. Paul insisted that, although he was free to do anything, he would let nothing take control of him. The Christian faith allows us freedom to sin, but on the other hand, it makes us free not to sin. It may well be easy to allow habits and tendencies to take control of us, but Christian strength enables us to take control of them. The experience in our lives of Christian power makes us take charge of our bodies, and not allow our bodies to take charge of us.
2. It was Paul's insistence that we are not our own. A Christian should not say that he is a self-made man or that she is a self-made woman. A Christian should not think of rights but of debts. Christians cannot do what they like, because they do not belong to themselves. They must always try to do as Christ commanded, because Christ has bought them, that is, all of us, and all people in the future, with His life given on the cross.

## 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 7

### **Preface**

In the section of Paul's letter to the Corinthian congregation which commences with chapter 7 and extends to the conclusion of chapter 15, Paul considered a number of questions concerning which the Corinthian congregation had written to him asking for his advice. He began this section of his letter by writing *"Now I will answer the questions that you asked in your letter"* (CEV). Each problem and the answer that Paul gave to it, will be outlined in the course of this commentary.

In 1 Corinthians 7 the great Apostle dealt with a number of problems concerning marriage. To begin with, a summary is presented here relating to matters which the Corinthian congregation had asked about and obtained advice from Paul.

Verses 1 and 2: Advice to those who thought that Christians should not marry.

Verses 3 to 7: Advice to those who maintained that those who are married should abstain from all sexual relations with each other.

Verses 8 and 9: Advice to unmarried people and widows.

Verses 10 and 11: Advice to those who thought that married believers should separate.

Verses 12 to 17: Advice to those who thought that if a marriage is one in which one of the partners is Christian and the other is not, the marriage should end and be dissolved.

Verses 18 to 24: Instruction to live the Christian life in whatever circumstances the individual person happens to be.

Verse 25 and verses 36 to 38: Advice concerning virgins. Paul exhorted that nothing should interfere with concentration on serving Christ because the time was short and Christ would soon return.

Verses 38 to 40: Advice to those who wanted to remarry.

In considering this chapter we must keep two facts in mind.

(1) Paul was writing to citizens of Corinth, which by reputation was a very immoral city. In such an environment it would be better for believers to be too strict than too lenient.

(2) Every answer that Paul gave seemed to be dominated by his belief that Christ's return was to take place in the near future. It seems, therefore, that Paul thought he was giving advice for a somewhat temporary situation. If, at that stage, Paul had understood that Christ's return was not to take place for many centuries, his advice might have been somewhat different, but that is only speculation. We know that when Paul wrote to the Thessalonian brethren, it had been revealed to him that before the Lord Jesus would return, a wicked system would arise, and he told the Thessalonians about it as recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 to 12. It seems that Paul was not told everything he needed to know at one time, but was given revelations by the Lord from time to time.

## **THE NEED FOR SELF-DENIAL**

### **1 Corinthians 7: 1 and 2**

1. *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*
2. *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

In my previous paper it was pointed out that in Greek thought there was a strong tendency to despise the body and matters concerning the body. Greeks as a whole considered the body unimportant, so that people could do as they liked with it and allow bodily desires to be fulfilled when and where people pleased. But Paul told the Corinthians that Christians must deny the immoral instincts and desires of the body, and this resulted in some of the Corinthians who had been converted saying that they must deny all physical things and refuse entirely to marry.

Paul's answer was very practical. He wrote in effect to remind the Corinthians that temptations to behave contrary to Christian morality were present everywhere. He told them to remember their natural healthy instincts, and to follow these. He said that it would be far better to marry than to fall into sin.

At first reading, Paul's advice sounds to some commentators like a very materialistic view of marriage, and that he is recommending marriage in order to avoid falling into immorality. I do not agree that

Paul was intending to convey that meaning. He was facing some of the facts of life, and advising the Corinthians not to attempt a way of life for which they were unfitted by nature. Paul understood that some people should not try to follow the Christian path by allowing themselves to be surrounded by temptations. His advice, as I understand it, was for each of the Corinthians to examine himself or herself and choose the way of life in which each could best follow the Christian way, and not to attempt a standard which might be impossible, and even wrong, to each individual making a choice.

## **THE PARTNERSHIP OF MARRIAGE**

### **1 Corinthians 7: 3 to 7**

3. *Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*
4. *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*
5. *Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*
6. *But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.*
7. *For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.*

Paul's message is clear - marriage is a partnership. The husband and wife must always try to act in agreement together. The whole marriage relationship is a partnership in which both husband and wife find gratification and the satisfaction of their desires, both spiritual and physical. To make a satisfying and fulfilling partnership requires discipline, and married Christians should pray for the Lord's help to maintain and sustain their married relationship, especially if such may come under unexpected pressure or unforeseen tensions, because, after all, everyone of us is a fallen human being whether married or unmarried.

Some commentators have suggested that Paul seems to belittle marriage in this context but to be fair to the great Apostle, he wrote that what he had said was not a command but a concession to human weakness. He said that he would prefer everyone to be like himself. But what did he mean? Paul was a single man during his years of evangelism and ministry, but was he ever married? He may have been married, and there are good reasons for thinking so.

Firstly, Paul, before he was called by the risen Christ, was a devout and uncompromising Jew, and it was his own claim that he had not failed in any of the obligations which Jewish law and tradition laid down. Orthodox Jewish belief laid down the obligation of marriage. God had said *"Be fruitful and multiply"*. Not to marry and have children was considered by Jews to be guilty of breaking a positive commandment of God. Scholars have said that the age of marriage was believed to be eighteen years, so it would be highly unlikely that such a devout and orthodox Jew, as Paul was, would have remained unmarried.

Secondly, Paul may have been a member of the Sanhedrin, for he stated that he gave his vote against early Christians in Acts 26:10. It was a requirement that members of the Sanhedrin had to be married men, because married men were considered to be more merciful.

Thirdly, there is also the possibility that if Paul had been married, his wife had died, but it is even more likely that she left him and broke up the marriage when Paul became a Christian, so that Paul did indeed literally give up all things for Christ.

In any case, even if Paul had been married, it was no longer an active commitment. A married man could not have managed the life of journeying and evangelising that Paul pursued. His desire that ideally others should be in the same state as he was might have come from Paul's belief that he evidently had at the time concerning the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. Paul must have thought that time for believers was short, so earthly ties and physical matters should not be allowed to interfere with believers' lives and long-term activities, so believers should at all times be ready for the Saviour to appear.

So, all things considered, Paul was not disparaging marriage, but was insisting that everyone had to be ready for the return of Christ in the near future.

## **THE MARRIAGE BOND MUST NOT BE BROKEN**

### **1 Corinthians 7: 8 to 16**

8. *But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;*
9. *But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*
10. *Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.*

11. *But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.*
12. *But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.*
13. *And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.*
14. *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.*
15. *But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*
16. *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*

The above passage deals with three different groups of people.

Firstly it deals with those who are unmarried or who are widows. It seemed to Paul at that time that the Lord Jesus' return was imminent, as has been said above, so he thought it would be better for those who were unmarried, and for widows, to remain as they were, but he did warn them not to allow themselves to be tempted and fall into immorality. If they were passionate people by nature, then they should marry. Paul, however, did not attempt to advise the same course of action for everyone; each situation depended on the person or persons involved.

Secondly, it deals with those who are married. Paul forbade divorce for the same reason that Jesus forbade it, as recorded in Mark 10:9 and Luke 16:18. If a separation had taken place, however, he forbade remarriage. This may sound hard, but in Corinth, with its extensive laxity, it was better to maintain high moral standards so that no hint of loose living could enter this congregation, nor the Church in general.

Thirdly, this passage deals with the marriage of believers and unbelievers. On this matter, Paul had to give his own judgement because he did not know of any command of the Lord Jesus on the subject.

It seems that there were some in the Corinthians congregation who thought and declared that a believer must not live with an unbeliever, so that in the event of one partner in a marriage becoming a Christian and the other remaining an unbeliever, separation must at once follow. Paul dealt with this problem with great practical wisdom. He understood the difficulty and refused to ignore it or make it worse. He said that if the two married partners could agree to live together, let them do so, but if they thought it best to separate, then let them do that.

Paul then wrote two things which are of permanent value.

1. He put forward the appealing and compassionate thought that the unbelieving partner in a working marriage is consecrated by the believing one. The two have become one flesh, and it is just possible that the grace of Christianity may well succeed in bringing the unbelieving partner to Jesus Christ. Christianity, when it is conscientiously and patiently practised, has an infectious quality which can involve all who come into contact with it. A child born into a Christian marriage, even one in which only one of the partners is a Christian, is, according to the great Apostle, born into the family of Christ. In a working marriage relationship between a believer and an unbeliever, the unbeliever is brought into contact with the realm of grace, a realm that was hitherto one which was unknown to the unbelieving partner.

2. Paul also put forward the very encouraging thought that the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever may bring about the salvation of the unbelieving partner. The unbeliever was to be considered, not as someone unclean and to be avoided, but as a potential son or daughter to be won for Christ and God. It seems that Paul understood the fact that human love has on occasions led people to the love of Christ, and through Him has led to the grace, mercy and love of the Heavenly Father.

## CHRISTIANS SHOULD ACCEPT THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES

### 1 Corinthians 7: 17 to 24

17. *But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.*
18. *Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.*
19. *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.*
20. *Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.*
21. *Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.*
22. *For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.*
23. *You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.*
24. *Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.*

In the above passage, Paul stated one of the first rules of becoming a Christian, namely, 'Be a Christian wherever you are and in the circumstances of your existence'. It must surely have happened that many who have become Christians have wanted to leave their jobs and the society in which they lived, and then begin a new life in new circumstances. Paul, however, stressed that the function of Christianity was not to bring about completely new circumstances, but to make the converted believer a *"new creature"*; that is, the Christian should put off the old life and its worldly ways and begin a new life in Christ; that is, following Jesus' example.

Racial differences and differences in customs were no longer important; what was important was the kind of life to be lived. Paul reminded the Corinthians that, whether they were slaves or free persons, they were all slaves of Christ because Christ bought them with a price. Christians have all been purchased by Christ, so that whatever their human status may be, they are free of all bondage or commitment to others in God's sight, because they belong to Christ.

Paul made it clear that Christianity does not make people rebel and openly complain or express discontent with things as they are; it makes them, in whatever their circumstances, conduct themselves as slaves committed to Christ. Even the most lowly work should be done without complaint because it is done as unto the Lord Jesus.

## **PAUL'S ADVICE ON A DIFFICULT PROBLEM**

### **1 Corinthians 7:25**

25. *Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.*

### **1 Corinthians 7: 36 to 38**

36. *But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.*
37. *Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.*
38. *So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.*

The two passages quoted above will be considered together because they concentrate on the problem of the treatment of virgins. The verses between, that is, 1 Corinthians 7:26-35, give reasons for accepting the advice which runs through the whole chapter, and will be considered immediately after this section.

Paul was endeavouring to deal with a problem which in later times became very serious. It became the custom later on in established congregations for a man and a woman to live together, sharing the same house and even the same bed, the idea being that if the man and the woman could discipline themselves to share their spiritual lives in such close unity, without allowing physical desire to enter into their relationship at all, it was especially meritorious. We can appreciate the idea behind the practice, which was an attempt to cleanse human relationships of all passion, but we can readily see how dangerous this practice was, and how it must frequently have resulted in an impossible situation for fallen human beings. It was the custom in such relationships for the woman to be known as the man's virgin. In the course of time, church councils came to forbid this practice for reasons that would be and are obvious to all of us.

Some scholars believe that the custom described above had arisen in the congregation at Corinth. This may well have happened, and if so, then Paul said, in effect, 'If you can live in this situation and if your self-discipline and self-control can maintain it, then it is good to do so; but if you have tried it and have found it too great a strain on human nature, then abandon it and get married because that will be no discredit to you'.

To us, the whole idea of the relationship described above is obviously dangerous and likely to bring discredit to the Christian life, and should be considered as wrong. However, in this situation, Paul's advice is wise. He said three things.

1. Self-discipline is an excellent thing, and if men and women can control all their passions, then that is really excellent, but it is not the Christian's duty to eliminate natural instincts. Christians should so use them to the glory of God.
2. Don't make an unnatural thing of your religion. Monks, hermits and nuns have done this, denying natural human feelings in order to be truly religious, and separating themselves from the normal life of men and women in order to serve God. But Christianity was not meant to cause abandonment from ordinary life; it was meant to bring glory to it.
3. Don't make an agony of your religion. We should never be ashamed of the bodies God gave us, and the minds and hearts that God has put into us, as well as the instincts that by God's creation dwell in us. Christianity teaches us not to try to eliminate these things, but to use them in such a way that our passion is properly managed, and our human love is the most ennobling thing in all God's world.

## **THE TIME IS SHORT**

### **1 Corinthians 7: 26 to 35**

26. *I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress -- that it is good for a man to remain as he is:*
27. *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*
28. *But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.*

29. *But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,*
30. *Those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess,*
31. *And those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.*
32. *But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord.*
33. *But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please his wife.*
34. *There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please her husband.*
35. *And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.*

This section contains the actual position regarding marriage that Paul held. Some critics have thought and written that Paul was belittling marriage in this seventh chapter.

To some commentators it has seemed that Paul was allowing marriage only as a concession to avoid fornication and adultery, as if marriage was only a second best way of life for Christian believers. I do not believe that Paul really believed this. He was brought up as a Jew, and Jews glorified marriage and considered it a sacred duty. According to Jewish tradition, there was only one acceptable reason for not marrying, and that was to study the Law.

We should take into account that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, his belief was that the return of Christ to earth was to occur in the very near future. He believed that the time was short and that everything must be done to prepare for Christ's second coming. Important human activities and close personal relationships should not be undertaken if they threatened to interrupt or reduce the believers' concentration and preparedness for the impending moment when Christ would appear and invite believers to go with Him.

It has already been mentioned in the previous paper that Paul was to receive from the Lord more information about His return, to the effect that a long time was to elapse before His return would take place. We know this from the information he gave to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. When he wrote to the Ephesians, some years later, he had changed his view of the time of the Lord's return, and used the relationship of man and wife as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-26). By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he had realised the enduring nature of the situation, and regarded marriage as the most precious relationship within it.

For us as Christians now, it is true that home is the place that does two things for us. Home gives us the noblest and best opportunity to live the Christian life, and it is the place where we find comfort and rest, and draw strength to go into the world outside and try to live as Christ would want us to live.

In this chapter, Paul tended to look on marriage as a possible distraction to believers because he thought that people's lives at that time had only a short time to run. But the day came when he saw marriage as the loveliest relationship on earth.

## **MARRYING AGAIN**

### **1 Corinthians 7: 39 and 40**

39. *A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*
40. *But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment -- and I think I also have the Spirit of God.*

Paul's view of the marriage relationship remained consistent. The relationship can be broken only by death. A second marriage is perfectly in order, but Paul would rather see the widow remain a widow. As we have seen, the great Apostle believed that the time was short, and the Lord Jesus would return to earth in the very near future.

In some ways, a second marriage is a high compliment that the surviving partner can pay to the memory of the one who has passed on. It means that without the former partner who has died, life has become lonely and hard to bear; and it also means that life was so happy with the former partner that marriage can be entered into again without fear. A second marriage should not be thought of as an act of disrespect, but rather as an act of honour to the memory of the one who has died.

But Paul laid down one condition; the marriage must be in the Lord, that is, it must be a marriage between a Christian man and a Christian woman. It is a known fact that marriages between people of different religions may not be successful, and actually seldom are so. The highest love occurs when two people love each other, and their love is sanctified by a united love of Christ. The married couple can live together and worship together, and their love and life combine to be dedicated to the worship of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

## MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS

A problem that is remote from us now in the twenty-first century, but was very real to the Corinthians in Paul's day, is the problem concerning whether or not to eat meat which had been offered to idols or false gods. Paul dealt with this problem in some detail in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

First it will be helpful to state the problem as it was, and to consider in broad terms the solutions which Paul offered in order to assist converted Corinthians in the way they should respond when confronted by the matter in their Christian lives.

To begin with, sacrifice to the gods was an unavoidable part of life in the ancient world. Sacrifices were of two kinds, private and public. The whole slaughtered animal was placed upon the sacrificial altar, but only a small portion was burnt as a token, which portion could often be as insignificant as some of the hair cut from the animal's forehead.

In private sacrifices the animal was divided into three parts. Firstly, a token part was burnt on the altar. Secondly, the priests received the ribs, the top part of one of the back legs, and the left side of the face. Thirdly, the worshipper received the rest of the meat, and with that a banquet was given. This was especially the case when a wedding was to take place. Sometimes these feasts were in the house of the host, and sometimes they were held in the temple of the god to which the sacrifice had been made.

The problem which confronted the newly-converted Christians was whether or not they should take part in such a feast. Should they, as believers in the Lord Jesus, actually eat meat that had been offered to an idol? If they decided that they should not do so, then they would exclude themselves from most social occasions.

In public sacrifices, that is, sacrifices made by the state, and such sacrifices were commonly made, the situation was as follows. After the required amount of the meat had been burnt, and after the priests had received their share, the rest of the meat was given to the magistrates and some others who qualified for a share. If the magistrates and others received more meat than they needed, they would sell it to the shops and markets. Therefore, even when meat was bought in shops and markets, it may already have been offered to an idol. So it came about that people did not know whether they might be eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol.

A further complication in the ancient world was that people believed in demons and devils. It was believed that these beings were always about and seeking to gain entry into individuals, and if they did so they would injure the body and mind of the person to whom they gained entry. It was thought that one of the special ways in which these beings gained entry into individuals was through food. One of the ways of avoiding this personal invasion was to dedicate the meat to a god whose presence in the meat was then able to put up a barrier against evil devils and demons. As a consequence, nearly all animals were dedicated to a god before being slaughtered. If this was not done, meat had to be blessed in the name of a god, as a defence against the devils and demons, before it was eaten.

So most meat was in some way dedicated to one of the popular gods. Therefore the problem for the Christian was, should he or she eat such meat? The matter is one of historical interest only to us, but to those in Corinth or any other Greek city it was a problem that pervaded all life, and had to be settled by newly converted Christians.

Paul's advice on this matter falls into seven sections.

1. In chapter 8 he set out the principle that, however safe the stronger and more enlightened Christians may have felt from the involvement of idols, and even if they believed that an idol was a symbol of something that did not exist at all, they were not to do anything that might hurt or bewilder a fellow believer whose conscience was not as strong or as enlightened as theirs.

2. In chapter 9 he gave advice to those who asserted the principle of Christian freedom. He pointed out that there were many things that he was free to do but that he abstained from doing for the sake of the Church. He was well aware of Christian responsibility.

3. In Chapter 10, verses 1 to 13, he counselled those who declared that their Christian knowledge and privileged position made them safe from any contamination. He referred to the Israelites who had all the privileges of God's chosen people, but which, in spite of such favour, they disobeyed God.

4. In chapter 10, verses 14 to 22, he used the argument that anyone who had sat at the Lord's table could not also sit at the table of one of the Greek or Roman gods, even if such a god was nothing at all. It would be wrong to eat food offered to false gods and also partake of the Lord's supper which was, and is, an especially commanded memorial to the Saviour.

5. In chapter 10, verses 23 to 26, he advised against being overly particular. Christians could buy food offered in the shops and markets and ask no questions.

6. In chapter 10, verses 27 and 28, he dealt with the problem of what to do in a private house. In this situation, Christians should eat what is put in front of them and ask no questions. But if they were specifically informed that the meat set before them had been sacrificed to a false god, then that fact was a challenge to their Christian commitment, and they had to refuse to eat the meat served to them.

7. In chapter 10 verse 29 to chapter 11 verse 1, he declared the principle that Christian conduct has to be above reproach, and should not offend either Jew or Gentile. It would be better to sacrifice rights and privileges rather than to allow rights and privileges to become in any way offensive.

## **ADVICE TO BELIEVERS**

### **1 Corinthians 8: 1 to 13**

1. *Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.*
2. *And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*
3. *But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*
4. *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.*
5. *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),*
6. *Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*
7. *However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*
8. *But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*
9. *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*
10. *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?*

11. *And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*
12. *But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*
13. *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

We have seen that in Greek cities it was extremely difficult for Christians not to come up against the problem of what to do about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, and that matter arose for the Corinthian believers every day. Some of them were sufficiently advanced in the Christian faith not to be troubled by the problem. They maintained that their superior knowledge had enabled them to realise that the gods worshipped by the majority of the citizens did not exist, so it was therefore possible for a Christian to eat meat offered to idols without fear of doing wrong.

Paul gave two answers to that situation, one of which is not recorded until chapter 10, verse 20. In that passage Paul explained his agreement with the truth that the popular Greek and Roman gods did not exist, but he also knew that spirits and demons did exist, and that they were the influence behind idol worship and were using that to divert men and women from the worship of the true God.

However, in the passage under consideration in chapter 8, he used a much simpler argument. He said that in Corinth there were people who had become Christians who had believed in the gods of Greece and Rome, and seemingly some of them could not quite rid themselves of the belief that the idols were really something, even though the idols were somehow false, something that did not exist. So it was that whenever they ate meat offered to idols their conscience troubled them.

In responding to this situation, Paul argued that if Christian believers contended that there was no harm in eating meat offered to idols, such a contention could trouble the consciences of weaker brethren, and hurt and bewilder them. Paul's argument was clear. Even if an act or deed was harmless for an established Christian, if it caused hurt to another brother or sister such an act or deed had to be given up. Christians were, and always are, under an obligation not to do anything which may cause another to stumble, or to do something wrong.

Although this passage in chapter 8 deals with matters which lie outside our experience, it contains three principles which remain valid for all Christians today.

1. What is safe for one person may not be safe for another. As Christian believers we may be strong enough to resist one temptation or another, but it may well be the case that another brother or sister may not be strong enough. Something may constitute no temptation to us, but it may be a strong temptation to someone else. So, in considering whether or not to do something, we must think not only of its effect on ourselves, but also of its effect on others as well.

2. Nothing should be judged from the point of view of knowledge only. Everything should be judged from the point of view of love. There is a certain danger in knowledge, because it tends to make people feel arrogant and superior, and tends to make them look down unsympathetically on those who do not have the same extent of knowledge. The attitude of intellectual superiority which stems from knowledge is dangerous for a Christian to have or display. Our conduct as Christians should always be guided, not solely by knowledge, but by considerate and sympathetic love for others. It may well be the case that, for the sake of our brethren, we ought to refrain from doing and saying certain things that seem in order to us, but may not be in order for others.

3. The third principle is related to the second, but is somewhat wider in scope. No Christian believer ought to indulge in a pleasure or demand a liberty which may be destructive to another. One Christian may be strong enough to keep a particular pleasure in its proper place, and for that person such a course of action may be quite safe. But for another who witnesses such a course of action, the example set may cause him or her to stumble and perhaps fall. Therefore, in whatever we do we should not think only of ourselves but also of others. An indulgence which may be the downfall of someone else would no longer be counted as a pleasure or pastime, but as a sin against the master, the Lord Jesus.

## UNCLAIMED PRIVILEGES

### 1 Corinthians 9: 1 to 14

1. *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?*
2. *If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*
3. *My defence to those who examine me is this:*
4. *Do we have no right to eat and drink?*
5. *Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?*
6. *Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?*
7. *Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?*
8. *Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?*
9. *For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain". Is it oxen God is concerned about?*
10. *Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.*
11. *If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*
12. *If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.*
13. *Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?*
14. *Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

At first reading, this chapter seems unconnected to what the Apostle had previously written, but this is not the case. The point the Apostle was making to the Corinthians was that there were some who considered themselves so mature and greatly privileged that they

were free to eat meat on any occasion even if it had been offered to idols. They considered themselves to be established Christians with freedom and special privileges to do things that might not be permissible to less mature brethren. Paul responded to that attitude by setting out the many privileges that he himself had a right to claim, but which he did not claim in case such privileges should be seen as stumbling-blocks and hindrances to others. Unbelievers might have said that Paul was preaching and ministering for what he could get from doing so, without having to work or labour for wages as others had to do, and such adverse criticism would have detracted from the effectiveness of his proclamation of the Christian gospel.

### **The Claims Made By Paul**

1. He claimed to be an apostle, a claim which set him in a very special position, and he put forward two arguments to prove his claim. The first argument was that he had seen the Lord. The book of Acts makes clear that the test of an apostle was that he had been a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15 and 4:33). This is of great importance. In the New Testament, faith is almost always trust in God or the Lord Jesus or both, rather than in a creed or in a statement of belief. Paul wrote to Timothy saying, *“I know the one I have faith in”* (2 Timothy 1:12; CEV). He did not say that he had a philosophy, or an ethical system, or a creed, but said, *“Now follow the example of the correct teaching I gave you..”* (2 Timothy 1:13; CEV). Indeed, Christianity begins like this with all believers, namely a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, and to be a Christian is to know Jesus personally and have a personal relationship with Him.

2. Paul’s second claim was that his ministry had been effective, and that the Corinthian believers were the proof of his claim. He called them his seal (1 Corinthians 9:2).

In those early times, a seal was extremely important and was a guarantee of genuineness. The fact that the Corinthian congregation existed was the guarantee of Paul’s apostleship, and the proof that we have come into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus is that we can bring others to Him, just as Paul did. The reality of our Christianity is evidenced by the fact that we can help others to become Christian believers.

### **Claims That Paul Could Have Made**

Paul could have claimed support from the Church, not only for himself, but for a wife as well if he had been accompanied by one. Other apostles did, in fact, receive such support (1 Corinthians 9:5),

but Paul chose not to do this even for himself. It is certainly true that every Jewish Rabbi was supposed to teach without monetary reward and have a trade to earn a living. Jewish Rabbis, however, took good care to fix in people's minds that to support a Rabbi was meritorious, and pleasing to the Lord God. Paul certainly had good reasons for claiming support from the Church, but chose not to do so.

He strengthened his stance by drawing attention to everyday human situations. Soldiers do not have to provide their own food, so why should soldiers of Christ have to do so? Those who plant vineyards share in the fruits, so why should those who plant churches not do the same? Shepherds get their food from the flock, so why should Christian pastors not do the same? Even Scripture states that the ox which worked the threshing machine was not to be muzzled but was to be allowed to eat some of the grain (Deuteronomy 25:4).

The priests who served in the Temple received a share of the offerings, as we have already seen, namely the ribs, the top part of a back leg and the left side of the face. But they also received more, as Paul was well aware, so it seems worthwhile to know the special privileges the priests received to enable us to know something of the material benefits that Paul could have claimed but chose not to do so.

I am grateful to William Barclay for the following details.

At the Temple in Jerusalem, there were five main offerings:

- (1) The burnt offering. The animal offered was burnt whole except for the stomach, the entrails and the sinew of the thigh (as written in Genesis 32:32). But in these offerings, the priest received the hides, and carried on a flourishing trade with them.
- (2) The sin offering. In this case, only the fat was burned on the altar, and the priests received all the flesh.
- (3) The trespass offering. Again the fat alone was burned and the priests received all the flesh.
- (4) The food offering. This consisted of flour, wine and oil. Only a token part was offered on the altar and the greater part was given to the priests.
- (5) The peace offering. The fat and entrails were burned on the altar, the priests received the breast and right shoulder, and the rest was given to the worshipper who had brought an animal for sacrifice.

But the priests enjoyed further privileges:

- (1) The first fruits of seven kinds – wheat, barley, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive and honey.
- (2) The Terumah. This was the offering of the choicest fruits of every growing thing. The priests had the right to an average of one-fiftieth of any crop.
- (3) The tithe. A tithe had to be given of everything which may be used as food and is cultivated and grows out of the earth. This tithe belonged to the Levites, but the priests received a tithe of the tithe that the Levites received.
- (4) The Challah. This was the offering of kneaded dough. If the dough was made with wheat, barley, oats or rye, a private individual had to give to the priests one twenty-fourth part, and a public baker had to give one forty-eighth part.

All the foregoing information relating to support from the Church was in Paul's mind as he refused to accept even basic supplies from the congregation at Corinth. There are two main reasons for his refusal:

1. The privileges, the greed and their lives of luxury made the priests notorious, and it was a matter of common knowledge among the people. Paul well knew how the priests used religion for material gain and grew fat from idleness and over-indulgence in their lives.

2. The second reason was Paul's independence. He probably carried his independence too far, because it seems that he hurt the Corinthians by refusing all aid. Paul may have been one of those people who would go hungry rather than be in anyone's debt.

One thing dominated Paul's conduct. He would do nothing that would bring discredit to the Gospel message or hinder its proclamation. People tend to judge a message by the life and character of the one who brings it, and Paul would not allow anything in his life to contradict the message that he took to Corinth, and for that matter, the message that he took to all the towns and cities in the areas and provinces that he visited.

## **THE PRIVILEGE AND THE TASK**

### **1 Corinthians 9: 15 to 23**

15. *But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.*

16. *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*
17. *For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.*
18. *What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.*
19. *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;*
20. *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;*
21. *To those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;*
22. *To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*
23. *Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.*

In this passage Paul gave an outline of his concept of his ministry.

1. He regarded his ministry as a privilege. He would not take money for working for Christ. This was Paul's choice, but we ought not to conclude from this that any of us should work for nothing. It stands to reason that we are obliged to earn a living to support ourselves, but as Christians in the Master's service we should not expect to receive money when we endeavour to bring the Gospel message to people with whom we make contact or who come to us.
2. Paul regarded his ministry as a duty. Paul's point of view seemed to be that if he had chosen to be a preacher of the Gospel, he might legitimately have received payment or at least support for his work, but he had not chosen the work; the Lord Jesus had chosen him for the work. He was indeed a "*chosen vessel*" and could not cease from his ministry, nor would he accept any payment for it either in cash or in kind.
3. Although he received no payment, Paul knew that he received a great reward. He had the satisfaction of bringing the Gospel freely to all who would receive it, and received the satisfaction of a job well done. To have brought an individual to Christ is not something that can be measured in financial terms, but is a joy and a reward that is beyond all measurement.

4. Finally, Paul spoke about the method of his ministry, that he was to become all things to all people. It does not mean that Paul was being hypocritical or was guilty of pretence; it means that Paul was able to get along with anyone he spoke to, and was ready to listen to anyone who came to him. It seems that he had the ability of accommodating himself to others. There are unfortunately some who cannot see anything but their own point of view, and who do not make any attempt to understand the minds and hearts of others.

In any attempts that we make to bring people to belief in Christ, we must strive to listen to them and strive to understand their thoughts and attitudes. Paul was the supreme missionary who won more people for Christ than anyone else, and who saw the need to become all things to all people. As far as we are concerned, one of our greatest necessities is to learn the art of getting along with people, an art which often means knowing when to speak and when to listen.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE REQUIRES SELF-DISCIPLINE

### 1 Corinthians 9: 24 to 27

- 24. *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?  
Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*
- 25. *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*
- 26. *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.  
Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.*
- 27. *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

Paul then took up a different topic. He wanted to impress on the Corinthians that the Christian way of life is not an easy way, but needed serious and earnest self-discipline. It seems that Paul was very interested in the dedication of athletes. An athlete must train intensely and consistently to be able to win a contest, and Corinthians knew how thrilling contests could be, for it was at Corinth the Isthmian Games were held, by reputation second only to the Olympic Games. Each athlete undertook strict and rigid self-discipline and training to win a crown of laurel leaves, which would, within days, wither and die. How much more, wrote Paul, should Christians discipline themselves to win a crown that would last for ever?

In this passage Paul set out a brief version of the Christian life in five aspects:

#### 1. Life is really like a battle.

A lazy soldier cannot win battles, and a slack contestant cannot win races. The Christian should regard himself or herself as always being engaged in a campaign, pressing ever onwards to the goal of eternal life.

#### 2. To win a battle or to be victorious in a race or contest demands self-discipline.

Christians should discipline their bodies with nourishing food and appropriate physical exercise to keep their bodies as fit as reasonably possible to enable them to maintain their commitment to study and spiritual development.

Christians must also discipline their minds to think earnestly of the help and advice available to them in the Scriptures. Life can bring problems to all of us, and we must not refuse to acknowledge such problems as may occur, or try to run away from them. We must endeavour to face whatever problems or sorrows that come to us with calm endurance, resist temptations with the strength that God and Jesus give us, and deal courageously with disappointments that may occur from time to time.

**3. As Christians, we need to remain well aware of our goal.**

It should be of concern to us that for many people their lives seem to be aimless. They are drifting about without going anywhere, instead of moving or striving to reach some goal. Christians all have a goal - to praise and worship God through Jesus Christ in faith and obedience, believing that we will one day be graciously and mercifully rewarded with eternal life in heaven where God and Jesus dwell.

**4. Christians need to know the worth of our goal.**

The great appeal of Jesus' message is that it rarely contained penalty and punishment. The gracious words of the Lord Jesus come to mind, *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:25-30; KJV). As has already been said, the Christian goal is life eternal, a goal that surpasses all other goals,

**5. Christians cannot save others unless they have self-control.**

It is certain that Christians cannot serve or save others until they have control of themselves. We cannot teach what we have experienced and have come to know if we have not taken charge of ourselves, and we cannot bring people to Christ until we ourselves have found Him.

## THE DANGERS OF OVER-CONFIDENCE

### 1 Corinthians 10: 1 to 13

1. *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,*
2. *All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,*
3. *All ate the same spiritual food,*
4. *And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*
5. *But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*
6. *Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*
7. *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play".*
8. *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;*
9. *Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;*
10. *Nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*
11. *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*
12. *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*
13. *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

It seems from this passage that Paul had in his mind the matter of Christians eating meat that had been offered to idols, and the over-confidence of some of the Corinthian Christians in this regard. Their point of view was that they had been baptised and were united in Christ and therefore were safe, so that they could eat meat offered to idols and come to no harm. Paul did not take them to task for what appeared to be their over-confidence, but warned them by showing from history what happened to people who had been blest with great privileges.

Paul began by reminding the Corinthians of the days when the people of Israel were travelling in the desert. Many wonderful things happened to them. They were led through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:19-31). They had the cloud from the Lord which went before them by day to lead and protect them, and by night a pillar of fire to give them light (Exodus 13:21; 14:19). Both of these miraculous experiences gave the Israelites close union with Moses, so it can be said, as Paul wrote, that they were baptised into Moses as the Christian is baptised into Christ. In addition they had eaten of quails and manna which the Lord provided for them (Exodus 16:4-18).

In 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul wrote of the Israelites drinking of the rock which followed them.

William Barclay pointed out that this event is not taken from the Old Testament but from the Rabbinic tradition. Numbers 20:1-11 tells us how God enabled Moses to draw water from the rock for the thirsty people, and the Rabbinic tradition was that from that time onward, that rock followed the people and always gave them water to drink. This was an alleged event with which all the Jews were familiar.

All these privileges were granted to the children of Israel yet, in spite of them, they failed. When the people feared to enter the promised land, and all the scouts except Joshua and Caleb took back a pessimistic report, God's judgement was that the whole generation would die in the desert (Numbers 14:30-32). When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law, the people persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf and they worshipped it. They were really guilty of spiritual fornication, even though they were in the desert, involving the Midianites and Moabites, and thousands perished in the judgement of God (Numbers 25:1-9). We should note that Numbers 25:9 reports that 24,000 perished, but Paul has said the number was 23,000 (1 Corinthians 10:8). By way of explanation it seems that Paul was quoting from memory. Paul rarely quoted Scripture with word-for-word accuracy.

When Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a grumbling revolt, judgement fell on many who then died (Numbers 16). In addition, because they grumbled on the way, the Israelites were bitten by serpents, so that many died (Numbers 21:4-6). The history of Israel shows us that people who enjoyed God's greatest privileges were not necessarily safe from temptation, so Paul reminded the Corinthians that their privileges were no guarantee of security. The benefits they were granted depended on their continuing to live in faithfulness.

We should note the temptations and failures which Paul pointed out.

**1. The temptation to idolatry.** By and large we do not now worship idols in material form, but many men and women indulge in hero worship. They also tend to worship material things and the works of their own hands rather than worship God.

**2. The temptation to fornication,** meaning either marriage infidelity or giving one's time and devotion to unchristian deeds in opposition to what the Scriptures tell us is right and pure Christian living.

**3. The temptation to try God's mercy too far.** Some people tend to behave wrongly at times, thinking that God's mercy will be given to them. We should always remember that God expects us to be as holy and righteous as we can be, knowing that we will fail from time to time because of weakness of the flesh, which failures He will forgive in His grace and mercy when we confess them and ask forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

**4. The temptation to grumble.** Christians should not murmur or complain because whatever happens to them is permitted by God, and by faith they are His children, part of His family and destined to be eternally saved and blest. Christians should really be the most joyful people in the world.

In view of all this, Paul insisted on the need for vigilance. He wrote, *"Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall"* (CEV). In Revelation 3:3 Christ warns the church of Sardis to be on the watch. So Paul concluded this section by saying three things about temptation.

(1) He was certain that temptation will come. That is part of life. But the Greek word 'peirasmos' (Strong's #3986), translated as temptation, has more the meaning of a test or trial. It is something that is allowed, not to make us fall, but to test us, so that we may become stronger by resisting and overcoming it.

(2) Temptations that come to us are not unique. Other Christians have had similar experiences and have endured. When we are tempted we are experiencing what other Christians have experienced and, by the grace of God, have endured and conquered.

(3) We should remember that with temptation there is always a way of escape. The word that Paul used is 'ekbasis' (Stong's #1545), the meaning of which is a way out of a mountain pass. The idea is of an army surrounded and then suddenly seeing an escape route to safety. So we, as Christian believers, need not fear temptation because God will provide a means of escape, meaning, I think, a way, not of surrender or retreat, but a way of conquest in the power and grace of God.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE TO CHRISTIANS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

### 1 Corinthians 10: 14 to 22

14. *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*
15. *I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.*
16. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*
17. *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*
18. *Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?*
19. *What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?*
20. *Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.*
21. *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.*
22. *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?*

Paul wrote about three important things in this passage. Two of them were confined to the time in which Paul lived and ministered, and the third remains true, then and now, in Christian life and worship.

1. In Paul's day, when a sacrifice was made in a pagan temple, some of the meat was given back to the person who provided it, and that person usually served it to guests in a feast. It was believed by the pagan people that at such a feast, the god itself was also a guest and that the god was also present in the meat that was to be eaten. In this way the god entered into the bodies and minds of those who ate the meat. Therefore they believed that a real communion was formed between the god and the worshipper.

2. In those days everyone believed in demons. The demons could be good or bad, but mostly they were bad. They were believed to be spirits which existed and operated between the gods and humans. For those pagan people, every place and natural feature had its demon: every tree, every mountain, every river or stream, every pool, even every rock had its demon. There were gods in the air and in the wind, in the lightning, the thunder and in the sun and stars, in earthquakes and storms. The world was full of demons.

Paul believed in these demons, as he knew who they were. They were, and are, the “*spirits in prison*” mentioned in 1 Peter 3:18-20. Jude referred to them as “*the angels which kept not their first estate*” in Jude 6. These were originally heavenly angels who were permitted and empowered by God to appear as human beings before the flood of Noah’s day, surely to be of help and support to people of those early times. But the angels, how many we are not told, misused the power that God gave them, and remained in human form, married “*the daughters of men*” and in this way fathered children. Such conduct was contrary to God’s original creation of heavenly and earthly people, and brought about God’s punishment on the angelic beings who knowingly acted in this way, as we are told in Jude 6 and referred to by Peter in 1 Peter 3:18-20 as mentioned above. We now often refer to the disobedient heavenly beings as the ‘fallen angels’. This matter is more fully dealt with in the publications such as ‘The Dead – Where are they?’ and ‘Do the Dead Communicate?’.

Paul may have referred to these demons as “*principalities and powers*” in Ephesians 1:21 and 3:10. I think that Paul had in mind, and was telling the Corinthians, that idols were nothing, and stood for nothing, but that the whole matter of such worship was the work of demons, by which they seduced men and women from the worship of God and the Lord Jesus. When people worshipped, they thought they were worshipping gods, but in fact they were being deluded by demons. Such worship brought people into contact with demons, and therefore was tainted. Meat offered to idols was of no consequence, but eating of it served the purposes of demons and, and as far as believers were concerned, was therefore distracting and potentially spiritually harmful to immature brethren.

3. Paul pointed out an important and permanent principle contained in what he wrote. The eating of meat and eating of a meal have nothing to do with the Lord’s Supper. Committed Christian people recognise and appreciate that the Lord Jesus instituted a simple ceremony in remembrance of Him, in particular His death (Matthew 6:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-30; 5:7,8; 10:16,17).

It was true in Corinth and remains true in our day and beyond, that those who follow the Lord Jesus must always strive to do their best for Him, and not allow distractions, however appealing, to turn them aside from commitment to His service, and always remember to observe the Lord’s Supper in obedience to His request, which comes to us from Him as a command.

## CHRISTIAN FREEDOM MUST BE WISELY DISPLAYED

### 1 Corinthians 10:23 to 11:1

23. *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.*
24. *Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.*
25. *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake;*
26. *For "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."*
27. *If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.*
28. *But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols", do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness..."*
29. *"Conscience", I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?*
30. *But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?*
31. *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
32. *Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God,*
33. *Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*
- 11:1. *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Paul concluded his somewhat lengthy discussion of meat offered to idols with some very practical advice.

1. Paul wrote that Christians can buy anything that is sold in shops without asking any questions. It may well have been the case that the meat had been offered to some god for fear that demons might have entered into it, but it was possible for believers to have been too concerned and to have created difficulties where none needed to exist. After all, everything belongs to God.

2. If Christians accepted an invitation to a meal in the home of an unbeliever, they could eat what was served to them and ask no questions. But if they were specifically informed that the meat was part of a sacrifice to a pagan god, then they must not eat it. The reason seems to be that the Christian or Christians involved were told by someone or some persons present whose conscience was or

whose consciences were disturbed by the belief that to eat such meat was wrong. Christians must not eat for fear of creating a stumbling-block for less mature believers.

So, as far as we are concerned, an important truth is brought to our attention from a situation that existed in the past. We as believers may do many things with perfect safety, but there may be things that we ought not to do if they are likely to be a stumbling-block to someone else. Our Christian freedom is real, but it must be used to help others and not shock or hurt them. We all as Christians have a duty to ourselves as servants of God and Jesus, but a still greater duty to others.

We should note the extent of that duty that Paul identified.

1. Paul insisted that the Corinthians had to act as a good example to the Jews as well as to those who opposed them.
2. The Corinthian Christians had a duty to the Greeks around them, meaning that they had to set a good example to those who were indifferent to Christianity. It is sometimes the case that unbelievers were and are won by example rather than by preaching, which reminds us of the saying that actions speak louder than words.
3. The Corinthian Christians had a duty to the other members of their congregation. It remains a fact of life today that other believers may take the cue for their conduct from each one of us. We may not be aware that younger believers may be looking to older and mature brethren for a lead in conduct and demeanour. It is always our duty to give that lead as best we can to strengthen other brethren, especially younger ones who may be trying to decide the direction and purpose of their lives. We do all things to the glory of God and His Son when we remember the duty we must discharge to one another. Our Christian freedom is given to us not for our own sake only, but for the sake of others with whom we live, enjoy fellowship, and with whom we may come in contact from time to time.

### **Problems With Public Worship**

Chapters 11 to 14 are among the most difficult in Paul's letters for us to understand, but they are of great interest because they deal with the problems that had arisen in the Corinthian congregation in connection with public worship.

The infant Church was struggling with the problem of offering an orderly and appropriate worship to God which would set a good example to unbelievers, some of whom might be interested in the spiritual truths which the Church had to offer. The following is a summary of the various sections of the great Apostle's advice and instructions in these matters with which he dealt.

1. Chapter 11:3-16 deals with the problem of whether or not women should worship with their heads uncovered.
2. Chapter 11:17-23 deals with the problems that had arisen in connection with the Agape or Love Feast, a meal in common which the Christian congregation held each week.
3. Chapter 11:24-34 deals with the correct and proper observance of the Lord's Supper.
4. Chapter 12 deals with the problem of presenting in an orderly and harmonious way the contributions of those who possessed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is in this section that we are given the picture of the Church as the Body of Christ and each member as a part in that body.
5. Chapter 13 contains the moving presentation of love, by which the Apostle showed the Corinthians and all believers the more excellent way.
6. Chapter 14:1-23 deals with the problem of speaking in foreign languages.
7. Chapter 14:24-33 deals with the necessity of orderliness in public worship by bringing discipline and due restraint to the enthusiasm of the newly-formed Church.
8. Chapter 14:34-36 deals with the place of women in the public worship of God in the congregation at Corinth.

## **RULES FOR WORSHIP.**

### **1 Corinthians 11: 2 to 16**

2. *Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*
3. *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*
4. *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head.*
5. *But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.*
6. *For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.*
7. *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.*
8. *For man is not from woman, but woman from man.*
9. *Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.*
10. *For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*
11. *Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.*
12. *For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.*
13. *Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*
14. *Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him?*
15. *But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.*
16. *But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*

William Barclay in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians', on page 114, wrote as follows: 'This is one of those passages which have a purely local and temporary significance. At first sight, they look as if they have only a historical interest because they deal with a situation which has long since ceased to have any relevance for us. Yet, such passages have a very great interest because they shed a flood of light on the domestic affairs and problems of the early Church, and, for those who have eyes to see, they have a very great importance, because Paul solves the problems by principles which are eternal'.

The problem was whether or not in the Christian Church a woman had the right to take part in church services if she was unveiled. Paul's answer, which seems to us to be rather blunt, was as follows. The veil was, and still is in the Middle East, a sign of subjection worn by an inferior in the presence of a superior. Woman is inferior to man in the sense that a man is the head of the household, therefore it would be wrong for a woman to appear unveiled, and equally wrong for a man to appear veiled at public worship. Now, in the twenty-first century, this view of the inferiority and subordination of women would be largely unacceptable in western society, but we must read Paul's words to the Corinthians in the light of the first century, not in the light of the twenty-first century. As we read Paul's words, we should remember three things.

1. The first is the place of the veil in the Middle East today. Women in that part of the world wear a long veil which leaves the forehead and the eyes uncovered, and reaches almost to the feet. In Paul's day, the veil that was worn was even more concealing. It came right over the head with an opening only for the eyes, and reached right down to the feet. Respectable Middle Eastern women would not think of appearing in public or at social occasions without it.

The veil had two main functions. Firstly it was a sign of inferiority, and secondly it was a great protection. Scholars maintain that verse 10 in this passage is very difficult to translate. The CEV translation reads: *"And so, because of this, and also because of the angels, a woman ought to wear something on her head, as a sign of her authority"*. The Greek literally means that a woman ought to retain 'her authority upon her head'. The majority of translators take the meaning to be that the veil signifies that a woman is under a man's authority.

In the Middle East today, the veil is very important. It signifies not only the inferior status of a woman, but it also is the inviolable protection of her modesty and chastity.

2. The second important thing to remember is the status of women in Jewish society in Paul's time. Under Jewish law women were greatly inferior to men. Woman had been created from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:22,23), and had been created to be the helper of man (Genesis 2:18). It is the unfortunate truth that in Jewish law, a woman was a kind of chattel and part of the property of her husband, over whom he had dominance.

In the synagogue women had no share in the worship, but were segregated from the men in a gallery or some part of the building that was shut off. In Jewish law and custom it was unthinkable that women should have or claim any equality with men. In 1 Corinthians 11:10 there is the statement that women should be veiled *"because of the angels"*. The meaning of this phrase is uncertain among scholars and Bible students, but it probably goes back to Genesis 6:1,2 which tells us that *"the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose"*. The *"sons of God"* were evidently angels to whom God gave the power to appear and live as human beings, probably to assist people to live peaceably in those early times. I put forward this understanding because of Hebrews 2:5 which states, *"For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak"*.

When the angels in times before the flood of Noah's day assumed human form, they were tempted by the charms of mortal women and so sinned by marrying them and fathering children. The angels were those who *"kept not their first estate"* (Jude 6) and *"who sinned"* (2 Peter 2:4). It was not God's intention that the angelic beings should behave in this way, and so they still remain under His punishment until a future time when His final judgment will be made. The great Apostle may well have had in mind the old Jewish tradition that unveiled women were a temptation even to angels, for an old Rabbinic belief was that the beauty of women's long hair tempted the angels to sin.

3. As far as the womenfolk wearing veils was concerned, it should be kept in mind that this situation arose in Corinth, probably the most promiscuous city in the ancient world. Paul took the view that in the wearing of veils it was better to err on the side of being too modest and strict, rather than to follow any practices that either might give unbelievers the opportunity of criticising the Christians as being too lax, or even of being a cause of temptation to the Christians themselves.

It seems to me to be a mistake to give to these words of Paul a universal application. The whole matter was intensely relevant to the congregation at Corinth, but has no relevance that I can see with whether or not women should cover their heads in church at the present time. Nevertheless there are three great and permanent truths in what Paul wrote.

(1) It is better to err on the side of being too strict than on the side of being too lax. It is better to abandon practices or privileges which may cause some brethren to stumble than to insist on them. Christians should always think twice before ignoring or flouting custom or convention in case they shock or disturb other brethren.

(2) Paul emphasised the subordination of women, but he also emphasised more directly the essential partnership of a man and a woman. There is a subordination in the marriage relationship as indicated in Ephesians 5:22-28. But it is based on love, so that the relationship may be more pleasant, fruitful and more fulfilling for both partners.

(3) Paul finished the above-quoted passage with a rebuke to anyone who might want to argue just to be argumentative. There is no place in the Christian Church for men or women who may wish to be deliberately contentious. There may be some occasions when a Christian must take a stand on principle, but there must not be an occasion to be provocative or argumentative. Differences of understanding in spiritual matters may occur from time to time, but Christians must agree to differ and yet remain at peace with one another.

## **AN EARLY CUSTOM MISAPPLIED**

### **1 Corinthians 11: 17 to 22**

17. *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.*
18. *For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.*
19. *For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.*
20. *Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.*
21. *For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.*
22. *What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.*

The people of the ancient world were very sociable, and it was a regular custom for groups of people to meet together for meals. According to William Barclay, there was a certain kind of feast called an 'eranos', to which participants took some food, and all contributions were pooled to make a common meal.

The early Church had such a custom which was known as the Agape or Love Feast. To this feast all the Christians went, taking whatever they could; the contributions were pooled, and they all sat down to a common meal. It was a very friendly custom, and a means of producing and nourishing Christian fellowship.

But in the congregation at Corinth, things had gone wrong with the Love Feast. In the congregation there were rich people and poor people, those who could take plenty and those who could take only modest contributions, and also slaves who could take very little or nothing at all. In fact, for many poor slaves, the Love Feast must have been the only decent meal they had in the whole week. But, unfortunately, in Corinth the practice of sharing did not continue. The rich people did not share their food, but ate it in small exclusive groups, while the poor people had very little. This conduct resulted in aggravation of the social differences between members of the congregation instead of doing away with the distinctions that the different social classes brought about. Paul clearly and without hesitation rebuked this situation.

The ancient world was socially divided. There were free people and slaves, there were Greeks and barbarians (meaning for the most part people who did not speak Greek), there were Jews and Gentiles, there were Roman citizens and ordinary people, and there were the educated and cultured and those who were largely ignorant. The Christian Church was the only organization where all groups could and did come together. In the Christian Church, the selfishness of race and class was overcome in church services and meetings, especially at the Lord's Memorial Supper.

A congregation where social and class distinctions exist is not a true Christian Church. A Christian Church should be a group of men and women united to one another and all united in Christ, that is, by Christian principles, and in service to God through Him.

A church is not a true church if the practice of sharing is forgotten or does not exist. In our society, most Christians are able to provide for themselves in everyday matters, so the problems of poverty and really poor people are not found among us. But differences of understanding in spiritual matters occur from time to time in our midst, so we as believers must be ready to listen and discuss these matters, and be able either to make changes in our understandings or agree to differ peaceably and with all good grace, and at all times conduct ourselves in ways fitting for saints, as Paul said in Romans 16:2 and Ephesians 5:3.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

### 1 Corinthians 11: 23 to 34

23. *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;*
24. *And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*
25. *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*
26. *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*
27. *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*
28. *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*
29. *For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*
30. *For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.*
31. *For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*
32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*
33. *Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*
34. *But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

This passage is of great interest to Christians because it contains the warrant for our most serious and solemn act of worship in the Lord's service. Paul's words concerning the Lord's Supper were written before any of the Gospels, and are actually the first recorded account that we possess of any words of Jesus concerning the memorial to His death and shed blood.

As Christians, we should all do our best to understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of the bread and the wine as He did.

*“This is my body”* He said of the bread. When He said these words, He was still in His body of flesh, and it was clear that His body and the unleavened bread were quite different things. What Jesus meant was that the bread represents His body, and is a reminder to believers that He, in His fleshly body, was put to death as the one and only ransom paid to God to free us and all the human race from sin, and therefore, in the course of time, from death itself. All believers who partake of the bread should remember Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for them, and that they make a living spiritual contact with Him as they eat of the bread at the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus also said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood”*. William Barclay pointed out that the passage should be translated 'This cup is the new covenant and it cost my blood'. He went on to explain that the Greek preposition 'en' most commonly means 'in', but it can, and regularly does, mean 'at the cost of' or 'at the price of', especially when it translates the Hebrew preposition 'be'. A covenant is a relationship entered into between two parties, and in modern-day terms is more usually called a contract, and is usually legally binding. In Old Testament times, God made a covenant with His people Israel, and that covenant was based on law. God made certain promises to His people that He would bless and prosper them on the condition that they kept and observed His law (Exodus 24:1-8). But, as we all know, the Israelites, being sinners, could not keep God’s law, and needed to be delivered from it.

With the Lord Jesus a new relationship was opened to all men and women, dependent not on law but on love, and this relationship can be kept and observed by anyone if he or she comes to Jesus in faith and through Him to God, Who offers to all believers free mercy and grace and eternal life to all who remain faithful until death.

Under the Old Covenant, people could do nothing other than fear God, because they could not keep the law and were always in default. But under the New Covenant, people can go to God as children to their father. We must always bear in mind that it cost the life of Jesus to make this new relationship possible. *“The blood is the life”* as the Scripture tells us (Deuteronomy 12:23), and it cost Jesus’ life and His blood to deliver us all. And so it is that the wine of the Lord’s Supper stands for the very life-blood of Christ without which the New Covenant, the new relationship of men and women to God, could not have been possible.

The passage under consideration goes on to talk about eating the bread and drinking the wine unworthily. The unworthiness consists of *"not discerning the Lord's body"*. These words can have two meanings, and it seems likely that both were intended by the Apostle.

1. The words may mean that those who eat and drink unworthily do not realise what the symbols mean, that is, that they eat and drink with no reverence and no sense of the love that these symbols stand for, or the obligation that is involved for them.

2. The words may also mean that *"the body of Christ"* stands for the Church, which those words do in chapter 12 of Paul's letter. Paul had just rebuked those who had divided the Corinthian congregation with their divisions and class distinctions. So the words in question may mean that the people who eat and drink unworthily are those who have not realised that the whole Church is the body of Christ, and that there should be harmony and unity among all, whether free and wealthy ones, or ordinary folk and slaves with neither money nor possessions. All who hold in their minds and hearts feelings of hatred, bitterness and contempt of others when they come to the Lord's Supper would be those who eat and drink unworthily. So to eat and drink unworthily is to do so with no sense of the greatness of the Lord's Supper, and no sense of being somehow in dispute and seriously at variance with those for whom Christ died.

Paul continued by writing that the misfortunes which had fallen upon the congregation at Corinth may have been simply due to the fact that some members had come to the Lord's Supper while they remained divided amongst themselves, and telling them that the misfortunes were not intended to destroy them but to discipline them and bring them back to the right way.

We should always keep in mind that the Apostle's words forbidding to eat and drink unworthily do not shut out the man or woman who knows and realises that he or she is a sinner. If the Lord's table were only for perfect people, no one could come to it. The coming to the table of the Lord's Supper is not closed to the penitent sinner. To all who come to God in love through the Lord Jesus, the only way, the Lord's Supper is always available, even as Isaiah wrote, *"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow"* (Isaiah 1:18).

## MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

### 1 Corinthians 12: 1 to 3

1. *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:*
2. *You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.*
3. *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

In those early days of the Church in Corinth, there were miracles caused by the action of the Holy Spirit. These were unprecedented events such as people speaking in foreign languages, healing of sick people, casting out of demons who possessed people, that is, casting out of evil spirits which took control of people's minds and bodies, and other manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit. But in those times, some people became hysterical and deluded, and did not know how to distinguish between behaviour that was hysterical and delusional and behaviour that was in reality the work of the Holy Spirit. So in this chapter and in the next two chapters, Paul dealt with true manifestations of the Spirit.

This passage contains two basic and foundational statements and denials.

1. If you are led by the Spirit, as Paul wrote, you will say that "*Jesus is Lord*". This phrase, as far as the early Church was concerned, was a fundamental statement of belief as recorded in Philippians 2:11. The Greek word for 'Lord' was 'kurios' an important word because it was the official title of the Roman Emperor. The demand of those who persecuted Christians was 'Say Caesar is Lord (kurios)'. 'Kurios' was the word by which the sacred name Yahweh was rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures. When people said "*Jesus is Lord*", it meant that they were giving Jesus the supreme loyalty of their lives, and under God, the utmost worship of their hearts.

In this context it was evident that Paul believed it was only possible to say with conviction and understanding, "*Jesus is Lord*", when the Holy Spirit enabled people to say it. The Lordship of Jesus was not something that people discovered for themselves, but was something that God in His grace revealed to them.

2. The terrible statement calling Jesus accursed might have arisen in four possible ways.

(a) The statement would have been used by the Jews. The prayers in the synagogue regularly included cursing of all those who renounced their faith, and in Jewish estimation the Lord Jesus would have come under this category. As Paul well knew (Galatians 3:13) the Jewish law laid down, *“Anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse”* (Deuteronomy 21:23). As Jesus was crucified, that is, hung on a tree, it became quite usual for Jews to curse this person (Jesus) Who was executed as a criminal under the permission of Rome, and Whom Christians worshipped.

(b) It is probable that the Jews would and did make converts to Judaism, and in doing so, required such converts to pronounce a curse on Jesus or suffer excommunication from all Jewish worship. When Paul was telling Agrippa about his persecuting activities, he said *“By punishing them often in all synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme”* (Acts 26:11). So it could have been a condition of remaining in the synagogue that a convert must pronounce a curse on Jesus.

(c) It is true that in the later terrible days of persecution, Christians were compelled either to curse Christ or die. In the time of Trajan, Roman Emperor from 98 to 117 AD, it was the test of Pliny the Younger (62 to 114 AD), governor of Bithynia, to demand that a person accused of being a Christian should curse Christ. There were certainly times in history when Christians facing death were confronted with the choice of cursing Christ or being killed.

(d) There was a possibility that, in the early congregation of Corinth, some person overcome by frenzy or hysteria, perhaps even possessed by an evil spirit, might curse Jesus and claim it to be the work of the Holy Spirit, so Paul laid down clearly that no one could say a word against Christ and attribute such a terrible assertion as if it were due to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In some present-day evangelical meetings, some persons have become so emotional that they have behaved in a manner inconsistent with wisdom and good Christian control of their minds and emotions. It is always good to express joy and gratitude in the salvation offered by the Lord Jesus, but in our day the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit have passed away, so it remains to all believers to express happiness and gratitude in a manner of calm

delight and controlled enthusiasm that is pleasing to the Lord, and likely to influence unbelievers and doubters to enquire further into the Christian way, which leads to a sound mind now and great blessings in the coming Kingdom Age.

## DIFFERENT GIFTS FROM GOD

### 1 Corinthians 12: 4 to 11

4. *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*
5. *There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.*
6. *And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.*
7. *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:*
8. *For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,*
9. *To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,*
10. *To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*
11. *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

What Paul said in this passage was meant to stress to the Corinthians the essential unity of the Church. The Church is, in fact, the body of Christ, and, like the human body, every part in it should perform its own particular function for the good of the whole. Unity, however, does not mean uniformity, and so within the Church there are different gifts and different functions. But every gift of the Spirit is designed not for the glory or edification of each or any individual member, but for the good of the whole body of the Church.

Paul said that all special gifts ('charismata') have come from God, and must be used in His service. We should do our best to examine and understand the special gifts that Paul mentioned, because in doing so we learn much about the nature and operation of the early Church.

He began with **wisdom and knowledge**, two attributes that sound much like each other because we understand that wisdom is really the right and proper application of knowledge. The Greek word translated as wisdom is 'sophia'. The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined wisdom as 'striving after the best ends and using the best means'. The highest kind of wisdom that Paul had in mind was, and is, I think, communion with the Lord God which comes to us by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only way. The Greek word for

knowledge is 'gnosis' a more practical attribute, the application of wisdom to human life with its ups and downs, that is, its trials and difficulties as well as its joys and blessings. The two things, 'sophia' (wisdom) and 'gnosis' (knowledge) are both necessary; wisdom which comes from knowing God and the deep things of God, and knowledge, which in the daily life of the world and the Church can put wisdom into practice.

What comes next in the great Apostle's list is **faith**. It seems that Paul meant more than simply belief that something is true, that is, not just intellectual conviction, but passionate belief that stirs people into action, and makes them devote all that they have and all that they can do to convince others into seeing what they see and into doing what they are doing to glorify God through Jesus Christ. It is the kind of conviction and belief that turns vision into deeds.

The next matter in Paul's list is the special gifts of **healing**. William Barclay in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians' pointed out that the early Church existed in a world where healing miracles took place, and William Barclay also provided some examples of these on page 129 of his book. Such examples as these are not really relevant to the gifts of healing by the Holy Spirit because they do not come from the Holy Spirit of God. The miracles of healing by the Holy Spirit must have taken place in the Church because Paul wrote of them as facts.

Nowadays we must acknowledge that believers do not possess the gifts of miraculous healing, because the Apostle told us in Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians that such gifts would pass away, as we will see when we come to that chapter. James told us in his letter that if any person is ill, he or she must come to the elders of the Church, and they will anoint the one who is ill with oil, and pray over him or her in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick person and the Lord shall raise up him or her (James 5:14,15).

Some Christian people maintain that the miraculous gift of healing has remained with the Church, and services and meetings of healing are still held for people to be miraculously healed. It seems to me that such activity does not have Scriptural support, as can be seen in Chapter 13. The path to healing is by prayer, as James wrote, and it is by prayer to God in the name of the Lord Jesus that healing will be granted or not granted, depending on the will of God, because all prayer should be made with the provision that the requested outcome will be in accordance with God's will.

Paul next listed the **power to work other miracles**. It seems that he was referring primarily to **exorcisms**, the power to cast out demons. The Scriptures provide many examples of people whose minds and bodies were possessed by demons, and who were healed by the casting out of those demons by the Lord Jesus and His chosen apostles and disciples. In those former times, many illnesses, especially mental illnesses, were attributed to the work of demons, and it was one of the functions of the early Church to exorcise those demons. The matters of possible demoniac possession and mental illness nowadays are best left to the expertise of legally qualified practitioners, but for ordinary believing Christians the option of fervent prayer is always available to the humblest Christian.

**Prophecy** was next mentioned by Paul, and by it he clearly meant preaching and exposition rather than foretelling the future. But the preaching and exposition were miraculously given, and had a twofold function. The first was to bring rebuke and warning to men and women, telling them that their actions and mode of living were not in accordance with the will of God. The second function was to bring advice and guidance, with the objective of directing men and women into the ways that God in His mercy and grace wished them to go.

**The ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits** is next on Paul's list of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. In the Corinthian congregation many manifestations of the Spirit were occurring, and it was necessary to distinguish between what was real and actually from God, and what was hysterical and unintelligible and coming from the devil. In our day, we have the Scriptures and the strength that Jesus gives us by faith and prayer to enable us to distinguish between what has come from God and what has come from other sources such as prominent unbelievers and evolutionists and policies of worldly leaders and un-Christian governments, behind which will be the influence and machinations of Satan.

Paul finally listed the gift of **speaking in foreign languages and the ability to interpret them**. I prefer not to refer to the gift of speaking in foreign languages as the gift of speaking in tongues, because the term 'tongues' has led to people thinking that unintelligible babble and meaningless hysterical utterances were meant. Neither of the two was meant by the Apostle. The gift of which he wrote was the gift of speaking in foreign languages, languages which were fully understandable to those who knew and spoke them, but were not understandable at all to the majority of the hearers present at the time, as recorded in Acts 2:6-11.

The matter of speaking in foreign languages caused much perplexity in the congregation at Corinth. At worship services an individual would speak audibly in a foreign language which no-one understood. The gift was greatly coveted because it was taken to be the direct influence of the Spirit, and gave prominence to the speaker, but was nevertheless meaningless to the congregation unless someone was able to interpret what was said. Sometimes those who spoke were able to interpret what they said, but usually someone else was required who had the gift of interpretation. Paul did not question the reality of the gift of speaking in foreign languages, but was well aware of the dangers of utterances that might have come from other sources such as demoniac possession.

However, the impression we gain is of a congregation very much alive. Astonishing things happened and nothing was dull and ordinary. But Paul knew that all this remarkable and powerful activity was the work of the Spirit, which gave to each individual a gift to use for the benefit of all.

## **THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

### **1 Corinthians 12: 12 to 31**

12. *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*
13. *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*
14. *For in fact the body is not one member but many.*
15. *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body", is it therefore not of the body?*
16. *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body", is it therefore not of the body?*
17. *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?*
18. *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*
19. *And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*
20. *But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.*
21. *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you".*
22. *No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

23. *And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,*
24. *But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it,*
25. *That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*
26. *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*
27. *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*
28. *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*
29. *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*
30. *Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*
31. *But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.*

This passage is one of the most famous descriptions of the unity of the Church that has been written. Paul drew a comparison between the Church and the human body. The human body consists of many parts which are integrated in their co-operation. The unity comes from the individual's personality, and what the personality is to the body so Christ is to the Church. It is in Him that the individual members find their unity.

Paul said to the Corinthians, and also to us, that they (and we) are the body of Christ. This is a statement of the greatest significance. The Lord Jesus did not remain on earth in His human body, and chose to delegate to the Church the work of proclaiming and spreading the Gospel message in the world. So, symbolically we have to be the body of Christ, we have to be the hands to do His work, our feet must, as it were, run errands for Him, and our voices must speak for Him. And all this is the great glory of each Christian, each Christian is part of the body of Christ on earth.

Paul drew a picture of the unity which should exist within the Church to enable it to fulfil its proper function. A natural body is healthy and efficient only when each part is working as it should be working. The parts of the body are not jealous of one another and are not covetous of one another's functions. So from Paul's picture we see certain things which ought to exist in the Church, the body of Christ.

There are three.

1. We ought to realise that we need one another. No-one should work in isolation and no-one should be so engrossed in what he or she is doing that he or she neglects to be aware of the work others are doing. To be healthy, a Church needs to provide tasks and duties which suit as many of the individuals as possible in the promotion and furtherance of the Gospel message.

2. We ought to respect one another. In the human body there is no question of relative or individual importance. If any limb or organ ceases to function, the whole body is disrupted. And so it is with the Church. If anyone thinks that he or she is more important than others in the Christian Church, the possibility of real Christian work is greatly diminished and perhaps may be gone altogether.

3. We ought to sympathise with one another. If any one part of the body is affected, all others should also suffer in sympathy. The Church should be a united and co-operative organization. If anyone cannot see beyond his or her organization, congregation or family circle, such a one has not understood the unity of the Church.

At the end of the passage under consideration, Paul spoke of various forms of service in the Church.

(1) At the head of everything he placed the apostles. They were the greatest figures in the Church. Their authority was not confined to one place; they had no settled and localised ministry, but their commission and authority pervaded the whole Church. The Apostles were those who had the closest contact with Jesus during His days on earth and were eye-witnesses of His resurrection. Jesus did not commit His message to writing, but to individuals chosen by Him, and those individuals were the Apostles.

(2) Paul next wrote of teachers. He had already spoken about prophets, that is, preachers who proclaimed the Gospel message, but then spoke about teachers. These were, and still are, vitally important. They were the ones who had to build up the converts who were won by the preaching of the Apostles and evangelists. They had to instruct men and women who knew nothing about Christianity. They had to understand and explain the basis of the Gospel message, the new way of life which came to the world for the very first time.

The first written Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, was not written until about AD 60, some thirty years after the crucifixion of Jesus. The beginning of the story of Jesus and the Gospel message had to be handed down by word of mouth. That was the teacher's task, and we should remember and take into account that a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than from books. Nowadays we have books in abundance, but it is still true that it is through believing and committed Christians that people really learn about Christ.

(3) Paul mentioned helpers. These were people whose task was to bring relief to the poor, orphans, widows and even strangers. From its very beginnings, Christianity was intensely practical. Some believers then and now might be poor speakers and have no gift for teaching, but everyone could and can be a helper.

(4) Paul next spoke of 'kuberneseis' which may be translated as administrators. The Greek word refers to the work of a pilot who steers his ship through rocks and shallows to the harbour. I think Paul had in mind people who carry out the administration of the Church, work that is vital to the Church's existence and progress. While preachers and teachers may hold the limelight, the Church would founder and fail without administrators in the background who shouldered the task of organization and proper oversight of necessities such as the management of finance and the payment of obligations.

Later Paul went on to speak of a greater gift than all others. That gift from God is **love**, the only attribute that can bind the Church into a real and active unity, because love will not pass away.

## THE CHAPTER ON LOVE

For many believers, this chapter is the best-loved in the whole New Testament, and we will do well to study it carefully and endeavour as best we can to understand all that Paul wrote about the **supremacy of love**. Paul began by declaring that miraculous gifts of the Spirit would be useless and to no avail without love.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

#### 1 Corinthians 13: 1 to 3

1. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*
2. *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*
3. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

Some may have had **the gift of speaking in foreign languages**. It was a characteristic feature of Gentile worship in those early days of Christianity that the dominating sound of trumpets and the clash of cymbals accompanied the worship of pagan gods and goddesses. Paul's point was that such noisy activities would be useless and distracting in Christian worship if love was not present.

Other believers may have had **the gift of prophecy**, by which Paul meant preaching, as explained in the previous paper. The gift of preaching was, and is, to convince people to believe in the Lord Jesus and come to God through Him. This gift, given miraculously, passed away, but preachers taking the Gospel message to people are still needed. But always the preachers need their preaching to be based on love, and come from love. It seems relevant to mention here that as time went on, preachers arose to speak of hell as a place of fiery torment. They strove to put fear into the minds of their hearers, a message contrary to love and the love of God, and a message which would terrify rather than save.

Others again may have had **the gift of knowledge**, that is, knowledge given miraculously by God without having to study and learn. There is a danger in the accumulation of knowledge that some may become intellectual snobs and look down on others with contempt. But the point remains, knowledge, whether miraculously given or gained by dedicated study, does not help people to come to God through Jesus Christ unless accompanied by love.

Some may have had **passionate faith**, by which the great Apostle must have meant a deep conviction that a believer has that leads him or her to believe that he or she has salvation and eternal life. But such a faith must be based on love and accompanied by love.

Some may practise **charity, and give goods to the poor and needy**. This should be done willingly and sympathetically with love, and not as a more or less grim duty with a sense of contempt for those who are not as fortunate as those who are giving.

Finally, some may even **give their bodies to be burnt**. Paul may have been thinking of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were thrown into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, as we are told in Daniel chapter 3. It is also possible that Paul may have been thinking of some Christians who actually believed they were creating a public example of giving their lives for Christ by an exhibition of martyrdom. In any case, Paul was emphasising his point that such actions were of no value unless love was involved and present.

The above passage of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 should lead us to examine ourselves to ensure that in all the things we believe and do, we must be led and motivated by love.

## THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

### 1 Corinthians 13: 4 to 7

4. *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;*
5. *Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;*
6. *Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;*
7. *Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

In this next passage Paul listed fifteen characteristics of Christian love. We should note that the Apostle did not attempt to offer a definition of love, although the Greek word is 'agape' (Strong #26),

which means unconditional love that seeks the benefit of the other party. Rather Paul told us how to recognise love by observing its accompanying characteristics and manifestations.

### **1. Love is patient**

William Barclay pointed out that the Greek word 'makrothumein', as it is used in the New Testament, describes patience with people rather than patience with circumstances. The fourth-century Church father John Chrysostom said that it is used of those who are wronged and have it in their power to avenge themselves but will not do so. The word in question describes people who are slow to anger, and it is used of the Lord God in His relationship with men and women. In our dealings with others, however difficult and unkind others may be, and however others may hurt our feelings, we must exercise the same patience that God exercises with us. Such patience is not a sign of weakness but of strength; it is not defeatism but rather victory, and it is the only way to victory over our natural and worldly instincts.

### **2. Love is kind**

Kindness is more than goodness, and there is and has been much goodness in Christianity, but at times without kindness. It is a historical fact that Philip the Second of Spain (1527-98) was very religious, but founded the Spanish Inquisition and thought he was serving God by putting to death those who thought differently from him. The famous Cardinal Pole (1500-1558) was a Roman Catholic Archbishop who declared that murder and adultery could not compare in wickedness with heresy. These are extreme examples of those who thought that they were doing good but were in fact persecutors of those who disagreed with them, and were not acting with the love that the great Apostle proclaimed. Close to modern times and to ourselves striving to follow the Christian way, there may well be the spirit and an attitude of criticism and fault-finding among believers toward other brethren, which would lead to thought and conduct not based on love.

### **3. Love knows no envy**

There are really two kinds of envy. The first covets the possessions of other people and is difficult to avoid because it is a human failing. The second is worse because those who have it grudge the fact that others have what they do not, and wishes that others had not got whatever they might have. This second class of people have a meanness of mind, a condition and attitude contrary to love, as all envious attitudes are.

#### **4. Love is not boastful**

Love should make one aware of one's unworthiness, and should make one modest and self-effacing about any personal attainments or merits. Brethren who strive to possess and show love think of it in wonder that others will also love them. Love should make a believer conscious and mindful that his or her best is never good enough, but in sincerity that God through the Lord Jesus will receive them in mercy and grace to be members of His family.

#### **5. Love is not proud**

Love should not make sincere people think that they are important. William Carey began life repairing shoes, yet became one of the greatest missionaries and linguists that the world has seen. When he went to India, he was regarded with dislike and contempt. At a dinner party a snobbish person wished to humiliate William Carey, and said in a loud voice to him, 'I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoemaker'. 'No, your lordship' answered Carey, 'not a shoemaker, only a cobbler'. He did not even claim to make shoes, only to mend them. William Carey was one not to claim self-importance, an attribute we should all strive to display.

#### **6. Love is not rude**

It is significant that in Greek, the meaning of 'grace' and 'charm' are conveyed by the same word. Some Christian people are often blunt or even brutal. There may be strength in this tendency, but no grace or charm. There should be, in committed Christians, a graciousness which takes into account that courtesy, tact and politeness are qualities to be admired and put into practice.

#### **7. Love is not selfish**

Some people insist on their privileges and what they consider that life owes them, and others who are mindful of their responsibilities and what they owe to life. It would be good for society in general if people would think less of their rights and more of their duties. If we as believers started thinking about our place and rights, we would be in danger of drifting away from Christian love.

#### **8. Love is not quick-tempered**

Those endeavouring to practise Christian love should not become irritable and exasperated, especially with others. If we should lose our tempers we lose self-control and set a bad example, when we should be showing tolerance and Christian understanding. If we could control our tempers, we would be well on our way to good Christian control.

### **9. Love does not keep a record of wrongs**

The word for keeping a record of wrongs is the Greek word 'logizesthai', which is an accountant's word for entering up items in a ledger or journal so that they will not be forgotten. One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget and not to retain grudges or memories, wrongs or things hurtful. Christian love should enable us to learn the lesson of forgetting.

### **10. Love rejoices in the truth**

Christians should recognise and be ready to defend the truth, as it is stated by Paul in 1 Timothy 2: 5 and 6 that there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, as was attested in due time, that is, in a time chosen by God. Truthfulness in all matters of everyday life would also be included, even in matters that would be to a Christian's disadvantage to acknowledge and not conceal.

### **11. Love finds no pleasure in evil**

William Barclay suggested that it might be better to translate this sentence as 'Love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong'. He further suggested that the intended meaning is the malicious pleasure that comes to some people when they hear something derogatory about someone else. It is a strange feature of human nature that sometimes we may prefer to hear of the misfortune of others rather than of their good fortune. It seems easier to weep with those who weep rather than to rejoice with those who rejoice. Christian love has none of that malice which takes pleasure in hearing unpleasant things about other people.

### **12. Love is supportive**

Translators have variously rendered this attribute as 'bearing' and 'enduring'. The Diaglott has 'covers all things'. The statement may correctly be rendered as 'love can cover anything'. The sense that the Apostle may have had in mind is that love will not expose the faults and mistakes of others but will remain silent about them. It may also mean that those whose lives are governed by love can bear to endure insults, injuries and disappointments, the kind of love that Jesus Himself possessed when He said of those who mocked, insulted and afflicted Him, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34).

### **13. Love is hopeful**

Hope is one of the three virtues with which Paul concluded the whole passage on love. One day there will be no need for anyone to hope any more because God will have established the new world order under His rightful King, the Lord Jesus, and there will be no need to

hope, that is, there will be no further need to hope for something better because all that God has promised will be accomplished and will last forever.

#### **14. Love is trusting**

This characteristic has a twofold understanding:

(a) In relation to God it means that love takes God at His word, and can take every promise that is addressed to 'whoever' as knowing that it means him or her personally.

(b) In relation to our fellow men and women, it means that love believes the best about other people. If we show people that we trust them we may help to make them trustworthy in their dealings with others. If we indicate that we do not trust people, we may make them untrustworthy. It is often true that we can help people to be what we believe them to be, and that love can make honourable even the dishonourable by believing the best.

#### **15. Love never fails**

The version quoted by William Barclay has "*love bears everything with triumphant fortitude*". He pointed out that the Greek word used here is 'hupomenein', and is usually translated as 'bear' or 'endure'; but what it really describes is not just the spirit which can passively bear things, but the spirit which can conquer and change the very nature of the things mentioned because it is love that can bring about the complete change in a person from worldly pursuits to Christian faith and salvation.

When we ponder and seek to understand the qualities of love that Paul portrayed, we realise that we can see them written for us in the life of Jesus Himself.

### **LOVE IS SUPREME**

#### **1 Corinthians 13: 8 to 12**

8. *Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.*
9. *For we know in part and we prophesy in part.*
10. *But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*
11. *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

12. *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.  
Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am  
known.*

In verses 8 to 12 of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul had three final things to say of Christian love.

(1) He emphasised its absolute permanency. When all the things in which people take delight have passed away, love will still be there. We may be reminded of the words in the Song of Solomon 8:7, *“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it”*. Love is unconquerable and will last forever.

(2) He stressed its absolute completeness. As things are in our lives these days, we see only images as in a mirror. History tells us that Corinth was famous for its manufacture of mirrors. These mirrors were made of polished metal, of which only the very best of them gave only an imperfect image. The modern mirror as we know it, with its clear and exact image, did not appear until the thirteenth century. It seems that what Paul was saying was that in this life we see only reflections of God in creation and in His Word, and are left with much that is mystery and riddle. We are helped greatly by the Gospel and what the New Testament tells us of the Lord Jesus, but even the revelation that we have of Him can be grasped only in part by us because the finite cannot adequately grasp the infinite. Our knowledge is still comparable to the knowledge of a child.

But the way of love will lead us finally to the Kingdom of God when, by God's mercy and grace, we will be with God because God is love, and only those who have come to love Him sincerely in this life and the next, will be able to see Him and be admitted to His presence in Heaven.

(3) He stressed its absolute supremacy. To the Christian believer, faith and hope are great, but love is even greater, in fact, the greatest of all God's perfect virtues, primarily because love will never come to an end and disappear, as faith and hope eventually will. For the present, faith without love would be cold and uninviting, and hope without love would lead us nowhere. Love gives warmth and desirability to faith, and also gives light which turns hope into certainty of the fulfilment of all God's gracious promises.