

# The Modern Corinth

The American Church Through  
the Lens of 1 Corinthians

Michael Floyd

JPT Books

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## DEDICATION

*For those who love the Body of Christ  
For those who love the Bride  
For those who are grieved by her failings  
For those who are amazed by His faithfulness  
Do not give up on the church  
For she is His.  
He has bought her  
With His own precious blood.  
She shall shine again  
Walking in the light of Christ  
Lift up your eyes, Bride of Christ  
For you are His, and He is yours*

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In the end, all glory for this message and the completion of this book goes to the Lord Jesus Christ. The message is His. He calls His church to return to Him. Those of us who speak and write are simply the messengers.

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## Introduction: The Church in America – or Corinth?

Of all the churches in the New Testament, the American church of today most closely resembles that of Corinth. From the diverse cultural backgrounds represented to the significant moral and theological problems, the American church might be called the “Corinthian church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

The letter that Paul wrote to Corinth that we know as 1 Corinthians has much to offer the church of today. We find that many of the questions and problems Paul addresses in this letter are also found in the American church. The rise of the so-called “post-Christian” and “postmodern” movements has combined with the deep-rooted cultural value of individualism to produce challenges that appear (on the surface) as novelties, but are really the same struggles as that troubled church of 2,000 years ago.

### *The Theme and Purpose of This Book*

This book is a look at the modern church through the lens of 1 Corinthians. We will see that there is little difference between that church of old and the church of today. We will first explore the root cause of the problems (which is worldly wisdom), and then we will look at how that root problem infects the rest of the church. Each chapter is devoted to a particular problem in the church,

and we will first draw out the principles that Paul laid out when dealing with the Corinthians, then we will consider how those principles apply to the church in our day.

### *What This Book is Not*

This is not a commentary on 1 Corinthians. As such, not every verse will be addressed. This does not mean that those verses or passages are less important. On the contrary, Paul says that *all Scripture* is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16). In this book, however, we are seeking the overall teachings and thought patterns of the apostle as we consider the message in light of today's church.

This is not a "do these steps and your church will be great" book. You will find that often more questions are asked than answers given. We are seeking to do what the church has so often failed to do — ask the questions. Peter tells us that some of Paul's writings are hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), but nevertheless we are to seek the answers by first asking the right questions and allow the Lord to give the answers. We believe Scripture is clear when it says,

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. . . . If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." (Col. 1:9; James 1:5).

That is the perspective of this book. Scripture has the wisdom we need, and God grants us understanding through the Holy Spirit to understand and apply the wisdom that is there.

At the same time, it is the nature of faith that we



will not know fully until eternity comes, until we are finally home with Christ (1 Cor. 13:8). Until that day, we must keep our hearts pure, and our eyes on Him.



# Chapter 1

## Corinth – A Snapshot

Corinth was located in southern Greece, west of Athens. It was a strategic city, situated on numerous trade routes of the time. The city was reestablished by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. and populated with Roman military veterans and freedmen.

Corinth became a very prosperous city; at the peak of its influence it likely had close to a quarter million free citizens and a half million slaves. Because of its nearness to Athens and its location along trade routes, it became somewhat of a cosmopolitan city, a fusion of ideas – Greek and Roman, as well as Jewish. Says one writer of Corinth:

Slaves or free, Corinthians were rootless, cut off from their country background, drawn from races and districts all over the empire and, except for the Jewish community, without natural groupings; a curiously close parallel to the population of a twenty-first-century “inner city” . . . with the superficial difference that Corinthians masked their materialism, sexual appetites, and superstitions behind a cloak of religiousness.<sup>1</sup>

The city of Corinth was one big religious/sexual center. The cult of Aphrodite kept 1,000 prostitutes consecrated to worship the goddess of love. The temple of Apollo likewise glorified sex – though this cult was geared

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<sup>1</sup> John Pollock, *The Apostle: The Life of Paul* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2012), 157.

toward homosexual behavior.

The city was so sex-obsessed that people coined a new verb, *korinthiazomai* (lit., “to live like a Corinthian”) to describe the behavior of the area. Into this great metropolis, awash with commercialism, materialism, Greek philosophies, obsessions with sex, and religion, came Paul preaching the gospel.

### **The Arrival of Paul**

Paul arrived in Corinth probably about A.D. 50, after preaching in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). He had very little success in Athens; we are told that he made a few disciples, but then Athens passes out of the story. We know he had been through a difficult time: beaten and jailed in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), thrown out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), plotted against in Berea (17:10-15), and laughed at in Athens.

But Paul nevertheless went to Corinth to preach the gospel. He reminds the Corinthians that he did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Besides telling us Paul’s state of mind, this passage reminds us of Paul’s intention and purpose while he was in Corinth.

Paul ministered in Corinth approximately 18 months. The Jews, trying to staunch the spread of the

gospel, brought him before Gallio, who had just been installed as proconsul of the area (Acts 18:12-17).<sup>2</sup> Gallio's ruling was a watershed in Paul's ministry – and the growth of the church, since he ruled that the Christian faith was in no way an illegal cult.

The Corinthian church apparently grew very fast after Paul withdrew from the synagogue (Acts 18:4-7), with both Jewish and Gentile members. The pressures on the church would have been enormous, given the environment. Though they were quick to be saved and spread the gospel, it seems they were slow to mature, as Paul reminded them in his letter.

The church likely evangelized among athletes and spectators at the biennial Isthmian Games of A.D. 51. His letter contains a note of remembrance when he wrote:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

Some time after he left Corinth, probably while he was in Ephesus, Paul received news of trouble in the church. He apparently made a quick visit to the church that left a painful impression on both him and the church (2 Cor. 2:1). He later wrote a letter of advice that has not survived.

After dispatching the letter, Paul apparently received even worse news from travelers ("Chloe's people," either members of a family or perhaps a trading firm), as well as a letter from the elders of Corinth with

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<sup>2</sup> An inscription of Emperor Claudius that lists Gallio as having been installed as proconsul on July 1, A.D. 51, confirms Luke's accuracy.

questions that demanded a reply.

While the letter is written to a specific church in a specific cultural setting, the underlying principles of the letter are relevant for all churches in all times and places.



## Chapter 2

# Worldly Wisdom in the Church

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . . The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 1:20, 2:14).*

When Paul wrote this letter to Corinth, the church could be said to be in crisis. He was told of factions, divisions, loose living, chaos in the church meetings, and false teaching. All these things, however, were only the symptoms of a much larger problem. It is where he started, and it is where we start. The problem was (and is) *worldly wisdom*.

Paul, along with the other biblical writers, consistently contrasts the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. They are, to use modern terms, polar opposites or like oil and water. They don't mix. Paul would agree with James' thoughts on wisdom:

If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:14-17).

The Corinthian church seemed to have forgotten this.



They were trying to solve spiritual problems by applying worldly thinking—and then boasting about it. What does Paul say about wisdom?

### **Foolishness to the World**

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the wisdom of God is foolishness (“folly”) to the world and its way of thinking. Why is that so? Consider the world’s way of thinking:

- Look out for yourself first; then you can think about other people (maybe).
- Success is measured in numbers, wealth, power, or influence.
- Ethics and morality are subjective, depending on the situation.
- If there’s a God, I must show Him I’m good enough to go to heaven. (But really, He’s not a judgmental God anyway, so it doesn’t matter how I live.)
- If someone harms you, it’s good to retaliate because it shows you stand up for yourself.

Now consider the perspective of God and His Kingdom:

- Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (Phil 2:3-4).
- Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me (Luke 18:22).
- Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these

commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:18-19).

- None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one (Rom. 3:10-12).
- But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. . . . [And] love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:39-41, 44).

The two perspectives could not be farther apart.

### **Eloquent Words or Spiritual Power**

Not only is God's wisdom foolishness to the world, but it rests on true spiritual power – the power of God. The world's thinking rests on well-reasoned logical arguments (or not – sometimes it rests on personal attacks). Worldly wisdom will impress the world and accrue earthly rewards. God's wisdom will grant spiritual power and accrue heavenly rewards (Matt. 6:19-21).

### **Worldly Wisdom Cannot Win the World**

It seems that the Corinthians were trying to use Greek and Roman methods of persuasion in talking about Jesus (hence why Paul mentions "the debater"). Worldly wisdom, which comes from the flesh, can only give birth

to flesh, while spiritual wisdom gives birth to spirit (John 3:6). So, if the wisdom of the world cannot produce spiritual results, why would the believer continue to try that method?

But God's wisdom, when applied in the Spirit, not only can, but *will* make a difference, for it is the power of God. The world sees it as foolishness, but to those who have been saved it becomes more than just an argument. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

While there are many important teachings that we can pull from these passages, these are the main takeaways.:

- First, and most importantly, the wisdom of the world can only build up the world. It will never have any real spiritual impact.
- Second, there is no middle ground. One is either operating in the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of the Spirit – with the corresponding results.
- Third, when applying spiritual wisdom, we must expect to be ridiculed, mocked, and laughed at. That must not deter us.
- Finally, because the things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned, we must not make the mistake of thinking the world can think and act like Christians without being born again (John 3:6, 16-17).

In the following chapters, we'll look at how this

worldly wisdom manifested in the Corinthian church. We'll also discuss what Paul had to say about the situations the Corinthians found themselves in and draw out the principles behind them.



## Chapter 3

# Taking Sides in the Church

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 1:10-12).*

The first situation that Paul deals with in his letter is that of division in the church. Now, we aren't talking about how long the service is or the color of the hymnal here. People were lining up behind their favorite teachers:

- *Paul* – This group may have connected with Paul's special commission to preach to the Gentiles, and thus not worried as much about the Jews (though that was certainly contrary to Paul's own heart).
- *Apollos* – Apollos was an eloquent teacher that Priscilla and Aquila encountered in Ephesus. He only knew of the baptism of John, but they "taught him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). He left Ephesus and went to Corinth with a letter of introduction. This group probably connected with his eloquent, intellectual way of teaching.
- *Cephas* – This is no doubt a reference to the apostle Peter (his Aramaic name is *Cephas*, John 1:42). His commission to preach to the Jews (Gal. 2:7) captured the attention of this group, possibly the

Judaizers that Paul often had conflict with.

- *Christ* – It may be that some Corinthians claimed a special relationship to Christ, owing nothing to any man or apostle; they may have also been an ascetic group, the same group that disclaimed marriage (1 Cor. 7).

How does Paul deal with this division? First, he appeals to the Corinthians “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2:10). Any call for unity in the church has Christ’s authority behind it. He prayed that believers might be one (John 17:20-21). Second, he appeals to the nature of Christ: “Is *Christ* divided” (1 Cor. 1:13, emphasis added)? The implication of the question, of course is, “As Christ is undivided so likewise should you be.”

It’s at this point in the letter that Paul begins his discussion of worldly vs. biblical wisdom. After showing the superiority of God’s wisdom (see our previous discussion in Chapter 2), he returns to the question at hand.

## One in Christ

He picks up where he left off, showing yet one more side effect of embracing the world’s wisdom: *spiritual immaturity*. He writes,

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

The wisdom of the world can never make one – especially a believer – fully mature. Only God and His wisdom can do that. The Corinthians were still thinking as children instead of maturing adults.

The mature believer, Paul tells us, will see that we are all on the same team. We are all servants of God, doing what He assigned for each of us:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building (1 Cor. 3:5-9).

As he will reiterate later in chapter 12, Paul reminds the Corinthians that we are all part of one great work of God. There are many applications of this passage, but the most important one is what we've already said: *Those who believe in Christ and have placed their trust in Him are on the same team.*

### **The Church: God's Temple**

Paul concludes with a final warning about "God's temple." Though many see this as referring to the individual Christian here, Paul is clearly referring to the church as a whole. He writes:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by



fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple (1 Cor. 3:10-17).

There are several things we should notice in this passage. First, the foundation is always Jesus Christ. No man can lay any other foundation, Paul says. When that foundation is laid, others build upon that foundation. Hence the church is built up based on those works (the works being teaching and example).

Second, those who build upon that foundation must take care how they build. Their works will be judged. Paul distinguishes two kinds of work: the kind that will stand the test of fire and the kind that will not. Implicit in this argument is that idea that the Corinthians' division and quarreling fall into the latter category.<sup>3</sup>

Third, anyone who actually destroys God's temple will be destroyed. Why does Paul include this somewhat obvious truth? Beyond illustrating the seriousness of what he is saying, he is making the point that constant division and quarreling tends to have the effect of ripping a building apart and thus destroying what is built. He wants the Corinthians to see the damage that results from their immaturity.

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<sup>3</sup> It's important to note here that Paul is not talking about *salvation* but reward at Christ's coming. He pointedly says that one whose work fails the test *will be saved* "though as through fire" (v. 17, the idea being similar to jumping out of a burning building).

## The Church of Today

Is the church in America any better? Do we not line up behind our favorite teachers, denominations, or schools of thought? Do we not, either expressly or implicitly, say that *we* are right and doing things the right way, subtly (or not so subtly) looking down our noses at others within the church?

When getting to know a brother or sister in Christ, some will often ask, “What Bible teachers do you listen to?” Just as often as not, the question is meant to judge spiritual beliefs, and thus whether that conversation should or would continue. We seem to forget that unless one is just purely anti-Christian, there is much that we can learn from any brother or sister in Christ.

Unfortunately, our divisions go much farther than just hero worship (though that is a major problem). We cut ourselves off from others for just about any reason. We’ve all seen or heard of church splits because of what we perceive as trivial things—the color of the hymn books, how/when the Lord’s Supper is observed, what type of music to use in the worship service (or whether to use music at all), and a host of other things.

Let me say at the outset that differences are good and okay. The gospel, rather than forcing us to become identical, celebrates our uniqueness. Our differences and preferences are wired into us. You like a more traditional worship service, with organs, hymns, etc.? Great! Someone else may connect with God and others in a more modern worship setting. You think that the Lord’s Supper should be observed every Sunday? That’s okay! Jesus didn’t give any specific command on when to do that.

Let me also say that we are talking about *amoral issues*. There are times when we might have to separate ourselves from truly heretical teaching. For example, there's a movement spreading that suggests the following: "It doesn't matter whether Jesus *actually* rose from the dead or not. It only matters that you *believe* He did." That is a dangerous teaching, because the Bible clearly and unequivocally declares that He did actually bodily rise from the dead (as opposed to just a spiritual resurrection). Therefore, if He in fact didn't rise from the dead, the Bible itself is based on a lie – but this is a topic for a later chapter. The point is that we should be separating ourselves from others *only when absolutely necessary*.

Beyond that (but related), there is a dangerous trend in the church today of hero worship (as mentioned above). We have many "Christian celebrities," and that trend alone is responsible for much of the division in the church. We seem to have forgotten Paul's teaching: "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." Those Christian celebrities would do well to remind themselves and their congregations of that.

How do we counter this worldly thinking? A few things to consider:

First, remember Paul's emphasis on the church being one in Christ. We are all on the same team. That places no one above anyone else. We are all God's fellow workers. The church is His building.

Second, on an individual level, consider getting to know people from stream of the faith that you ordinarily wouldn't. This especially includes those from different

cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We can learn much from each other if only we engage.

Third, for both churches and individuals, consider what makes up the core, the fundamentals, of the faith. Remember Paul's words, the foundation of Jesus Christ, in thinking through this. Determine to work with others who have that same foundation and who are seeking to build responsibly on it, even though they may look and sound different than you or your group.

Finally, decide to extend grace to others. Instead of criticizing other parts of the Body for their differences (again, we are talking about issues that are not central to the gospel), celebrate them, remembering that there is room in the Kingdom for all.

Not only is God watching how we build His church, but the unbelieving world is watching us, to see what is different about us. When they see quarreling and division within the church, they see the same as they see in the rest of the world. They are waiting to see an answer to the question, "Is Jesus really in the business of changing people?" We have the ability to give that answer to them.



## Chapter 4

# Tolerating the Intolerable

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? . . . Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6)*

In the last chapter, we made the case that we who are believers should not separate or cut ourselves off from other believers unnecessarily (i.e., over matters that, in the light of eternity, will not have an eternal impact). In this chapter, we are going to look at the other side of that coin. Specifically, we are going to look at the attitude the church should have toward blatant unrepentant sins by one who claims the name of Christ.

Paul learns that a member of the Corinthian congregation had committed sexual immorality. Further the type of sexual immorality was disgusting to even pagan Corinth – and that’s saying something. Paul tells us that: “[A] man has his father's wife.” What does this mean? First, the expression “his father’s wife” likely refers to the man’s stepmother. Second, the expression “a man has” at least denotes sexual relations. Some commentators see this as the man marrying the woman, but that is not necessarily the case. In any event, it was an incestuous relationship that wasn’t even practiced among the sex-obsessed Corinthians.

Beyond the gross sin committed, Paul’s biggest

concern was the attitude of the church: “And you are *arrogant!* You rather ought to mourn” (v. 2, author’s translation). He couldn’t believe that the church would tolerate such sin, let alone be arrogant.

What was the nature of the church's arrogance or boasting? Perhaps they were proud of their “tolerant, non-judgmental” attitude. That seems the most likely explanation. And it may be that such “tolerance” sparked further division in the congregation. Such toleration always causes division – particularly if there are people who wish to uphold a righteous standard. Paul’s judgment is quick and unequivocal:

Let him who has done this be removed from among you. . . . [Y]ou are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (vv. 2b, 5).

Paul is calling for excommunication for the offender – removing him from fellowship.<sup>4</sup> This is the meaning of “deliver this man to Satan.” In Paul’s view, the community of the faithful is a place of authority and safety. Handing this man over to Satan, then, would be putting him outside of that protection.

Though used for years to justify the burning of heretics at the stake, this is not the intent. Rather, Paul is suggesting that the person would experience pain (physical, spiritual, or emotional) that would hopefully lead him to a place of repentance. We are told in numerous places that God disciplines His children (e.g., Heb. 12:5-8). The point of discipline, however, is not destruction but restoration.

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<sup>4</sup> There is no mention of discipline for the woman, and we should not speculate or try to build a theology on the silence of Scripture about this.

Along those lines, there is good reason to believe that Paul is referring to this same man in 2 Corinthians. In that letter he writes:

Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure – not to put it too severely – to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything (2 Cor. 2:5-9).

The idea here is that once the man has repented of his sin, he is to be welcomed back into fellowship, and welcomed back formally.

Why is Paul so intolerant of the situation? Doesn't he realize that we all stumble, that we aren't perfect? Given the context, the sin involved was likely an *ongoing* one. It seems that neither the man nor the church thought much of it – the man certainly was unrepentant. So, this isn't about just stumbling into sin in Paul's view, it's about the testimony of the church.

## **Defiling the Church**

Paul bases his reasoning here on the effect that sin has on the church. He tells the Corinthians:

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:6b-8).

Here Paul uses the analogy of Passover to illustrate his point. Leaven in Scripture is always a symbol of sin. So,



the church is to get rid of the “old leaven.” This points back to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For the seven days of the Feast (which started with Passover), no leaven was to be found in any home of God’s people. To violate this command was to be cut off from the people – to be thrust out of Israel.

Paul is telling the church to live in sincerity and integrity. The church is to be holy before God, and that will not be the case while sin is tolerated. In fact, the leaven (sin) will eventually spread throughout the whole dough (the church) until all is corrupted. Paul’s concern for the purity of the church is so great that he tells the Corinthians:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone *who bears the name of brother* if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (vv. 9-12, emphasis added).

Here Paul makes it clear that if a brother or sister is in open and unrepentant sin, he or she is to be avoided. He is careful to clarify his remarks: “I don’t mean to say that you shouldn’t associate with immoral people of the world [i.e., unbelievers]. Because that would mean you would have to leave the world!” Rather, he restricts his words to one who bears the name of brother (or sister, i.e., one who claims to be a believer in Christ). We are not even to eat with such a one. In that time, sharing a meal was seen as the highest form of communion with another, and so Paul says we are to avoid that with one who refuses to repent

of open sin.

## The Church of Today

Many accuse the church of being hypocritical today (of course many of those same people accuse the church of being judgmental, but that's a topic for another discussion). They see the church preach against sin, and yet be ensnared in sin and scandal. How is the church to handle sin in the fellowship today?

First, we should realize the goal of discipleship: *maturity*. Paul tells us that we are to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph. 4:13-14).

Our goal is to attain maturity in Christ, so that we be firm in our faith. Second, we should realize that discipline is part of that (discipleship and discipline are related words, after all). The goal of discipline, however, is not just punishment. The goal of discipline is *restoration* and *maturity*.

We are to hold both these ideas together: *the purity of the church* and *the good of the offender*. The church must not, under the guise of unity or any other pretense, condone or overlook ongoing unrepentant sin in its midst (whether it be committed by a leader or a layperson). There must be a process in place to discipline and deal with such things.

This is why a one-leader church is a dangerous thing, if not unscriptural. The early churches were led by

a group of men, elders. A group can bring balance and keep each other accountable. Jesus gave one model for church discipline:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them (Matt. 18:15-20).

For too long, the church has neglected these words. What is the point that Jesus is making? *Don't let sin reign in the church.* Sin fractures relationships and causes divisions. The church is to be a part of restoring relationships broken by sin. Many churches do not have processes in place to deal with discipline issues, for fear of being labeled judgmental or even fear of lawsuits (which we'll discuss in a later chapter). The time for that is over. What the church has feared most has come upon her.

At the same time the church must seek *restoration* in the midst of discipline. That is always to be the goal of any church discipline. Judging sin and calling it sin is not the same as judging the person. The church should never fear to proclaim, "We will not tolerate sin in our midst." But the church should also not fear to proclaim, "If you are struggling with sin, there is hope and grace in Jesus Christ, and we as a community offer that to you." The world is watching to see the truth of what we proclaim.



## Chapter 5

# The Pagan's Court

*When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? (1 Cor. 6:1-2)*

There's one thing we know about Roman society that parallels modern society: There were a lot of lawsuits! People were taking disputes to the local magistrates to settle their differences—just as they do today. Unfortunately, Christians were getting into the act—with other Christians.

The wording in chapter 6 suggests that the practice was not just a one-time event or even a “now and then” event. Rather, the tone suggests that Christians were turning to the Roman courts to settle *any* dispute they had with a brother or sister. Paul says that such action is unacceptable for those who claim Christ.

Before continuing, a word of caution is in order here. The disputes Paul refers to are *non-criminal* in nature. They are disputes over property, contracts, and the like—what we would call “civil” cases today. Elsewhere Paul says that the state is to administer justice in criminal matters (Rom. 13:3-4). The church is not to interfere in that. And this of course means that the church is not to harbor or protect criminal offenders. We have seen the consequences of such action far too often in the

last century.

## **The Unrighteous or the Righteous?**

First, Paul asks the church, “Do you *dare* to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints” (emphasis added)? Besides expecting a negative answer, Paul’s question is meant to say, “There is something fundamentally wrong with that approach.” What is wrong? The believer, having the righteousness of Christ, would go to the unrighteous for justice? That is the problem according to Paul.

We as believers should respect the offices that have been established and the work that they do. As Paul says, all authority is given by God, and we are to respect such authorities. Yet, the world is enslaved to the flesh. Why would those who are supposed to be filled with the Spirit turn to the world to settle disputes? In fact, Paul says, the saints will judge the world! This likely refers to believers reigning with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom, where they will be given positions of authority. Based on that, Paul wonders

if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? (1 Cor. 6:2b-3)

If, Paul says, the saints are to judge angels, would they not also be competent to judge the smaller things? And if that is the case, then why bother going to the very people that the saints will ultimately judge?

When Paul refers to “those who have no standing in

the church,”<sup>5</sup> he simply means that there is civil authority and authority within the church. We respect those offices that have been established in civil government. The civil authority is not to interfere in church matters, nor the church assert authority in civil matters (the church will not rule until the Millennial Kingdom). In Paul’s thinking, there is a clear delineation between civil and religious authority.<sup>6</sup>

In saying this, we want to reiterate the caution above. We are talking about *non-criminal* matters. Paul is not attempting to shield Christians from taking responsibility for their behavior. Those who use the name of Christ to practice criminal activity must be brought to light and held accountable.

The fact that Christians are taking each other to (secular) court, Paul says, suggests that there is deep immaturity in the church. Surely there is someone within the fellowship wise and mature enough to handle such questions! The conclusion, then, is that the believers are rejecting biblical wisdom and instead turning to worldly wisdom.

## The Real Issue

Paul then turns to the real problem. As always, it

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<sup>5</sup> The NIV rendering “those whose way of life is scorned in the church” is an overstatement and unwarranted. Paul’s point is more about the fact that they are not believers, and believers have the necessary qualifications to judge those in the church. While we avoid the lifestyles of the unregenerate, we do not “scorn” them, as that would be wholly inappropriate for one called to love.

<sup>6</sup> The implications of this are wide-ranging, and perhaps troubling to some. However, a discussion of church-state relationships is beyond the scope of this book. For now, let it be said that any attempt to push “Christian” or biblical values on a secular society without insisting on regeneration by the Spirit is doomed to fail and ultimately counterproductive.

involves attitudes of the heart. He tells them:

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud – even your own brothers! (vv. 7-8)

With these words, Paul recalls the teachings of Christ. It is better to suffer wrong than to turn around and do wrong to one who has wronged us. To do that would place one in the same camp as the unrighteous – and the Corinthians were acting just like that. And, since the Corinthians are acting like the unrighteous, he reminds them of this:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (vv. 10-11).

Paul reminds his readers (and hearers, the letter would be read aloud in a meeting of the church) that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The Corinthians *were* at one time unrighteous (“and such were some of you”), he admits. We all start in that position – unrighteous, rejecting God, living contrary to His ways. But he reminds them even more forcefully: *You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified!* His point? The Corinthians were not the same! When Christ saves a person, that person is *changed*, not just forgiven. Notice the three things Paul says:

- You were *washed*. Salvation cleanses a person of



unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

- You were *sanctified*. When a person is sanctified, he is set apart for God's use. He is not his own anymore.
- You were *justified*. A person whom God has saved is declared righteous in the judicial sense.

Thus, the Corinthian believers were acting in a manner contrary to their identity. Paul asks, "Why are you acting like the unrighteous when you are righteous before God?"

### **The Church of Today**

Like Corinth, we live in a litigious society today. Did someone wrong you? Take them to court. We even have TV shows featuring judges that will settle your disputes. The legal business is a booming business, and lawyers, once barred from advertising, can now advertise their services freely. The court system itself is becoming so backlogged that many are turning to so-called *alternative dispute resolution*, either mediation or arbitration (binding or non-binding), depending on the location.

Paul is very clear that, for believers, dispute resolution should happen within the community of faith. In whatever form it takes, whether formal process or not, the church must be willing and able to resolve disputes and ultimately restore relationships. Though it has been said before, it is worth repeating: We are talking about disputes that do not involve criminal behavior. The church is not to be a shield for anyone engaging in such behavior.

More concerning is the attitude behind the disputes

in the first place. If we are to be like Christ (and that is surely the goal of salvation and discipleship), then we are to adopt the attitudes of Christ. If someone wrongs us, are we to wrong them back? Paul would say, "Certainly not!" He tells us instead to

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

We are to do good, love them, and pray for them. Any losses we suffer now will be repaid in full in eternity.

Is this an easy teaching? No. It is far too easy to take charge of our own "justice." Yet, Jesus reminds us that such thinking comes from a darkened heart and is the very opposite of the gospel. If we would see and receive grace, we must be prepared to extend it to those who need it.



## Chapter 6

# All Things Are Lawful

*“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything (1 Cor. 6:12).*

How do we know what is acceptable behavior and what is not as a believer? That is a question that apparently confused the Corinthians as much as it does us in modern times. Does it matter how we live? After all, Paul tells us that we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). Whether or not the phrase “all things are lawful,” was a slogan of some in Corinth, it certainly summarizes the attitude of many (perhaps accounting for the church’s failure to remove the incestuous man from fellowship).

Paul had previously written to the churches in Galatia,

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Ga. 5:13).

The believer, in Paul’s view, is called to a life of liberty, but that liberty must not be turned into *license*. The believer does not live in a world of “anything goes.” Though the world says differently, the notion of “anything goes” violates the principle of love, instead of affirming it. If that’s the case, then how do we know what behavior is acceptable? In this passage, Paul gives some

concrete guidance for this question. He gives three principles here for the believers, framing them in the context of sexual immorality.<sup>7</sup>

### **Not all Things are Beneficial**

The first principle Paul gives in answer to the slogan “all things are lawful for me” says that we should avoid practices that are not *beneficial* or *helpful*. The immediate questions that come up are, “Helpful in what way, and to whom?” This goes back to the purpose of the believer. What is our purpose? Jesus gave the best answer:

[Y]ou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31).

The bottom line for the Christian is to operate in love. We are to love God by knowing, serving, and obeying Him. We are to love others in the same manner. In other words, “love your neighbor as yourself” means that we truly love ourselves when we are walking with God, and thus we are to help our neighbor do the same.

The question then becomes, “Will this behavior be beneficial to my walk with Christ? Will it help others in their walk with Christ?” If the answer is negative, then the behavior is to be avoided, even if it is not an absolute sin.

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<sup>7</sup> There are other principles that Paul lays out to guide behavior. For example, Romans 14 deals with freedom of conscience and not placing a stumbling block in front of a believer.

## **I'll Not be Controlled by Anything**

The second principle or question that Paul asks is, "Is this behavior dominating or controlling my life?" We should note that the question is not about a behavior's *ability* or *capacity* to control. Almost any behavior can become a controlling force in our lives. If we went by that standard, we'd hardly do anything. Rather, we are asking, "Does this behavior have a controlling effect on me?"

In asking the question, we are talking about more than just the normal "addictions." We are talking about anything that may take our time and energy away from serving God and loving others. While some might be prone to make a hard-and-fast rule about such things, the only One capable of answering that question for an individual is the Lord.

The Greatest Commandment has application in this discussion as well. Jesus called it the Greatest Commandment because God demands *first priority*. Above all else, we are to love Him with all that we have and are. Anything that controls us has thus supplanted Him as first in our life (and at the same time is less than beneficial, see above).

## **The Body is Meant for Service**

In the passage, Paul adds another slogan (probably a Corinthian one), "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." The implication of this statement is that since what counts is the spiritual, the believer can live anyway he wants to, doing anything with his body that he chooses. Paul counters this by a firm statement: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the

Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13). Just as he would write to the Romans, he could have told the Corinthians the same thing:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Rom. 6:12-13).

The believer is to offer his body in service to Christ, not in service to the flesh.

Paul further emphasizes his point by reminding the Corinthian believers that the believer has been united with Christ (another topic he touches on in Romans 6). He says,

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 prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh” (1 Cor 6:15-16).

The tone of Paul’s argument is revulsion at the idea of joining Christ with anything unholy. It’s no accident that he used the word “prostitute.” The church is betrothed to Christ, and thus turning to anything or anyone else is prostitution.

Paul’s final argument is that to commit sexual immorality is to sin against the body itself, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit is given to the believer to indwell and seal him. Thus, Paul says, the believer’s body is not his own. He has been bought with the blood of Christ. Therefore, why would I treat that which is not my own in a contemptible manner?

While this argument certainly has relevance to other activities that one can engage in (including what types of food to eat), the argument should not be pressed to extremes. We are to manage this temple wisely, to be sure. At the same time, all food has been declared clean by the Lord. As for things such as smoking, drinking, drugs, tattoos, etc., we must apply these principles along with others as we steward the body that we have.

### **The Church of Today**

The church today seems as confused as the believers in Corinth were about what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Worse yet, the church is greatly divided on such matters. What one group sees as absolute sin another sees as an issue of conscience – and yet still many more behave as though “anything goes.” This is surely an example of the world infecting the church, rather than the church influencing the world. What must the church do?

- Seek out those absolute commandments of Scripture: “Do this, don’t do that.” Reinforce the message, but also teach “why” those commands are given. No command of God is ever arbitrary.
- Focus on discipleship, helping the flock to grow to maturity. Certainly part of this is thinking through the principles discussed here and elsewhere in Scripture in guiding behavior, especially in matters of conscience and freedom.

Most importantly, the church must focus on the goal of *loving God* and teaching all to do likewise, giving all they have to Him. That is the ultimate aim of discipleship. For



too long, the church has bought into the “me” mentality of the world, instead of the “Jesus and the cross” mentality of Scripture. Only by first righting the ship can she be steered into the storms that are sure to come.



## Chapter 7

# To Marry or Not to Marry

*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. . . . [I]n view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is (1 Cor. 7:17, 26).*

“Should I get married? Should I stop seeing this person? How do I know God’s will for my life in these areas?” These questions plague many today, and they were much on the minds of the Corinthians in Paul’s day. In fact, these questions were asked by the elders of the Corinthian church to Paul (7:1).

To go along with the divisions in the church, there were apparently some who thought marriage was at best a lower calling than singleness. Some thought that a husband and wife should avoid sexual relations, as if to do so would again be a higher calling. In his typical manner, Paul set out to untangle the confusion around these topics. This section of Scripture is the only one where Paul admits to lacking a clear word from the Lord on a topic, so he gives the church his best judgment.

Paul teaches several general principles here that he then applies to specific groups of people. The general principles we find are these:

- Neither marriage nor singleness is sinful in themselves.
- Each should be content in his or her position in life.

Paul then applies these principles to different groups

within the church: the married, the unmarried, and the church in general.

### **Single or Married? That is the Question**

Paul begins by agreeing with one group's position: "It is good not to touch [have sexual relations with] a woman." It's clear he prefers the single state. He quickly adds, though, that in the face of the pressure for sexual immorality, marriage is preferable. He establishes what a normal marriage looks like: one man, and one woman.

Lest anyone think that sexual relations inside marriage are as evil as outside the marriage bed, he hastens to add that married couples are not to deprive each other. (The phrase is rightly translated "Stop depriving each other" by the NASB, indicating that such behavior was already occurring.) Based on his comments in vv. 3-5, we can say that sexual relations in marriage are not sinful; indeed, they are normal, expected, and even a gift from God.

Paul does, however, still express his preference for the celibate single life: "I wish that all were as I myself am [referring to his singleness]." But he also recognizes that such is a gift, and not all have that gift. In fact, we might go so far as to say that the gift of singleness is the exception rather than the rule.

How do we reconcile Paul's teaching about marriage and singleness with the fact that God instituted marriage? First, we should remember that Paul teaches that neither singleness nor marriage is sinful, nor is either a higher calling in themselves. Second, his preference for singleness is conditioned on certain things: "the present

distress” (v. 26)<sup>8</sup> and undivided loyalty to Christ (vv. 32-35). When God instituted marriage, the world was perfect. Adam and Eve were not yet corrupted by sin. Things are not now as they should have been. Because of that, he does lean toward marriage in certain situations:

- Lack of self-control. Paul says that unmarried and widows should remain single if possible, but if they find that they cannot exercise self-control, it is better for them to marry (vv. 8-9).
- If anyone is betrothed (engaged in today’s terms), he does not sin by marrying. But especially if self-control is difficult, they should marry (v. 36).<sup>9</sup>

But again, Paul should not be considered as teaching against marriage *per se*. In other letters he directs specific people to marry and says that forbidding to marry is a sign of false teachers (1 Tim. 4:13; 5:14).

## On the Subject of Marriage

Paul next turns to those who are already married. How should they conduct themselves within the marriage covenant? He speaks to two apparent types of marriages in the church: marriages where both spouses

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<sup>8</sup> While some hold that “the present distress” refers to the general persecution of Christians, the decay of society, and the Lord’s imminent return, we believe rather that Paul is referring to a specific situation in Corinth – either persecution that was happening, or the severe problems and pressures in the church. Elsewhere Paul admitted a preference for certain people to marry, and he wouldn’t have done that had he based his preference on a thought that Jesus was coming soon.

<sup>9</sup> Some of this advice was no doubt directed toward Corinth specifically, in that if a man thought the situation was unfair to his betrothed (i.e., she was nearing the end of marriageable age), he should marry her. Nevertheless, the general principles remain, that both marriage and remaining single are acceptable options.

are believers, and marriages where one spouse became a believer while married. His comments imply the questions that were being asked by the church.

In the case of a marriage where both are believers, Paul says that they must not divorce. We must remember that Paul was writing to answer specific questions. From the context of the passage and the context of the whole letter, it seems there were some in the church who, as we saw, felt that singleness was a higher calling, and thus wondered if they should separate in order to serve the Lord better. Paul is countering that argument here, not giving broad commands on marriage and divorce (which is why his statements do not contain the exceptions that Jesus gave).<sup>10</sup>

As we mentioned above, Paul also gives a specific command to this group: “Stop depriving each other.” Those same people who held singleness to be a higher calling were suggesting that, “If we shouldn’t separate, then we just won’t have sexual relations, since that would be a hindrance.” In Paul’s view, sexual relations are the norm for marriage, and there should be only one reason (and with mutual consent) to abstain: to devote themselves to prayer. Even then, he calls for an agreement of a time limit, so that they may not fall into sexual temptation. Thus, any practice of withholding sex from a spouse for punishment, etc. would violate this.

Unfortunately, these teachings have been misunderstood in many parts of the church for a long time. Nowhere in these verses is permission to force sex

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<sup>10</sup> Even in the case of the exceptions, Jesus gave them as *permission*, not as *commandments* (i.e., “you *may* do this,” not “you *must* do this”). The preference in Scripture is always for reconciliation and restoration if possible.

upon a spouse. The Old Testament strongly condemns rape, based on the fact that such behavior violates the image of God in a person. The New Testament certainly shouldn't be interpreted in any manner contrary to this. The point of the teaching, is simply to counter the idea that sexual relations within a marriage are sinful or make the marriage "less holy."

To the second group of married people in the church (where one spouse became a believer while marriage), Paul gives instruction that contains his best judgment rather than a specific ruling from the Lord. It's important to note here that he says, "I, not the Lord." He is giving *counsel* not a clear *command*. At the same time, his counsel should be given great weight since he is an apostle of Christ. One would be hard-pressed to make a case for glibly dismissing his advice. Contrary to what many in the church might assume he'd say, Paul tells the believer, "If your unbelieving spouse wants to stay in the marriage, then you are to stay. If he or she desires to separate, then let it be so." The choice, it seems, is up to the *unbeliever*.

The point of Paul's teaching is that both the unbelieving spouse and the children are now in a Christian household, and the believer acts as a strong positive influence in their lives. They are in the best possible position to hear and receive the gospel. (This is what Paul means by "made holy;" he is not teaching that being married into or born into a Christian household makes one holy in the moral sense.) Since the believer is called to peace, the choice of whether to remain in the marriage or separate is given to the unbelieving spouse. The believer is, of course, to pray for the salvation of his

or her spouse and the children, and to witness to them — no matter the outcome.

## **Live as You are Called**

Paul's overall teaching in this passage is this: *Live as you are called*. He wants believers to be content with their station in life. He would later remind Timothy that "godliness with *contentment* is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6, emphasis added). The reason that Paul emphasizes this is found in his instructions to the unmarried. He says that 1) the time to serve Christ is short; 2) troubles are coming; and 3) it's easier for the unmarried to serve Christ with undivided loyalty. This again cannot be taken as a blanket prohibition of marriage, since Paul already said that marriage is perfectly acceptable, and he is giving his judgement, not a clear command of the Lord. At the same time, it is sound advice, which one should weigh carefully.

## **The Church of Today**

The principle of contentment with one's station in life goes far beyond questions of marriage. It is a much-needed teaching for today's church, caught in the midst of a materialistic and discontented society that preaches "better, best" theology. Don't like where you are in life? Do something different. Change your life. Change your spouse. Change your job. Make yourself better and get the best things in life, no matter what it takes to get them.

Unfortunately, this mindset has infected the church in large measures. Worldly-minded people have come into the church and preached this false gospel, meeting widespread success and popularity. The church must



recover the teaching that running the race means that we are striving for an *eternal* crown, not the temporal things of this world that can never satisfy.

The church also must recover a biblical teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In the wake of the sexual revolution, the feminist movement, and the rise of the LBGTQ movement, the biblical definition of marriage and the family is being threatened from without and within. We suggest that the following are some of the enduring principles from this passage that are applicable for today's society:

- Marriage is first a union between one man and one woman.
- Marriage is a sacred covenant between a man, a woman, God, and the community of faith, and thus is not to be entered into lightly, for it is not to be broken.
- Neither marriage nor singleness is a higher calling in themselves, and the church must equip believers to be wise in finding their calling.
- Sexual relations are a gift from God, representing the union of husband and wife, and thus are to be enjoyed within a covenant marriage.

More important than questions of marriage or relationships is the command to be content in the situation that one finds himself. As Paul would later write to Timothy, "But godliness with *contentment* is great gain."



## Chapter 8

# To Eat or Not to Eat

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. (1 Cor. 10:31-33).*

The next question Paul addresses has to do with a topic that we don't really face in the west: eating meat that's been sacrificed to idols. For Corinthian Christians, however, the question was huge. Pagan temples were everywhere, and it was very common to find meat in the market that had been sacrificed to an idol.<sup>11</sup> The question naturally arose in the church whether a Christian should eat such meat. Was it spiritually contaminated? What would happen to a believer (if anything) if he ate such meat?

Of course, this question is one that easily caused divisions in the church. No doubt there were the "teetotalers" in the group, those who said to each such meat was a sin. Then there were those who were "free;" they thought of themselves as mature and knew that idols have no power. They seem to have flaunted this freedom, and this caused even more division in the church. Paul set out to untangle the problems with this question.

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<sup>11</sup> More specifically, the meat that was found in the market would have been the priest's portion – if he didn't use it, the meat was taken to the market.

## Love – The Guiding Principle

As in all his letters, Paul states that Christian love (*agape*) is to be the guiding principle of everything. He writes that knowledge puffs up (can lead to pride), but love builds up (strengthens, encourages). Thus, the believer's first command is to walk in love.

Paul agrees with those in the church who say an idol is nothing. Thus, they are free to eat such meat. At the same time, there are those who came from pagan backgrounds, who still believe in the power of idols and other similar "magical" objects. Paul calls these people "weak," only in the sense that they do not have the same level of freedom of conscience. In their case, Paul says, for them to eat such meat would be to sin against their conscience.<sup>12</sup> The implication, then, is that the conscience is given by God, and anyone who willingly acts against the conscience has sinned.

It is true, Paul says, that "food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8). He hastens to add, though, that this freedom or right of a believer should not be used in such a careless manner as to be a stumbling block to a weaker believer. He paints the following scene:

For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? (v. 10)

Here, Paul depicts an altogether plausible scene. A believer is eating meat known to have been sacrificed to an idol. If a weaker believer (as described above) is there,

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<sup>12</sup> Paul uses similar language in Romans 14, when he is not answering specific questions, but rather giving practical guidelines on Christian behavior.

he might begin to doubt his own conscience and think it's okay to eat such meat. Yet, if he does so, here is what Paul says:

[His] conscience, being weak, is defiled. . . . And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ (vv. 7, 11-12).

The result, Paul says, has many ripples: 1) the weak believer has a feeling of guilt by sinning against his conscience; 2) the "stronger" believer has sinned against the weaker believer by placing a stumbling block in his path; 3) this sin is against Christ, for we are to walk in love toward our brothers and sisters.

### **Freedom to Love**

Therefore, Paul says, if it be necessary, he would rather not eat any meat again, so that he will not be the cause of anyone's stumbling. This leads into his discussion of laying down his own rights for the sake of others. Starting in chapter 9, he lays out the freedom that he and other apostles have:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? . . . This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? (9:1-7).

The rhetorical questions Paul asks here are to lay out his case that apostles and workers for Christ are entitled to

support from the churches they minister to. In addition, Paul says that he and Barnabas have the same rights to have a house and a wife, just as other apostles do.

But, he says, he has chosen to lay aside those rights for the sake of others. He has decided to preach the gospel at his own expense – he was a tentmaker – so that he would not be laid open to any charge of using the gospel for financial gain or to place any hindrance before those to whom he preaches.

In saying that he became “all things to all people” (v. 22), he does not mean that he compromised on moral principles. He says:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak (vv. 19-22a).

In trying to win the Jews, he observed the law of Moses, so that none would be offended. To those who were “outside” the law (of Moses, meaning the Gentiles), he engaged in freedoms not otherwise available to Jews (though he was always conscious of walking in the law of Christ – love). To those who are weak (in conscience), he joins them in abstaining from matters of indifference. (This shows that even unbelievers have a conscience, a sense of right and wrong.) In matters of moral indifference, he became like those around him, in order that he may preach the gospel to them.

## **Self-Discipline – Positive and Negative Examples**

His basic message here is, “Do everything possible to preach the gospel to see the lost saved.” His picture of athletic contests is meant to illustrate this principle. He runs according to the rules (the law of Christ – love), and he trains his body, making it know its master (Christ). He does all these things for the sake of the prize – not only the eternal reward of his own salvation, but the reward at having preached the gospel and seeing the fruits of his labor in the salvation of others. The Christian, then, is to be self-disciplined, showing self-restraint for his own sake and the sake of others.

Beginning in chapter 10, Paul contrasts this example with the example of the Israelites. Paul gives several examples of the Israelites’ lack of self-restraint and the consequences (vv. 7-10). He then reminds the believers that these things were written down for our instruction, so that we might learn from their experience.

His warning in verse 12 should be taken seriously. Those who flaunt their freedom, thinking they are standing firm, should take heed lest they fall. At the same time, he wants the believers to know that temptations are common to all. All share in the same types of temptation, and no temptation is so great that we cannot resist it. When one is tempted, God will always provide a way out.

## **The Road to Sin**

Why must we be self-disciplined and careful how we use our Christian freedom? Paul gives another reason: It can lead to actual sin. In context, Paul is saying that it would be easy for one who eats meat sacrificed to idols to

begin to do so in a pagan temple, thus becoming a participant in idolatry. What is wrong with eating meat in a pagan temple? Paul gives this answer:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (vv. 16-21).

He first points out that when believers share in the Lord's Supper, they are joined to Him and each other spiritually. In the same way, those in Israel who sacrificed at the altar in obedience to God, were spiritually joined with God and each other. In the case of pagan feasts, however, one is not joined with an idol, but with the demonic forces behind it.

Paul sees the world not in terms of having many gods with *Yahweh* being the chief and most powerful, but rather as having one and only one Sovereign Lord. He further divides all beings into two groups: those who acknowledge the Lord and seek Him, and those who reject Him, following after Satan and his demons. Thus, those who participate in pagan feasts are aligning themselves with Satan (whether or not they know it).

Paul sums up his entire argument by a simple statement: "Do all to the glory of God." What he means is that everything a believer does should be in service to Him and giving Him glory. We are to live in peace and



unity with all, giving no opportunity for anyone to be offended with us (as much as it lies within us to do so). Above all, we are to run the race, fighting the good fight of faith until the coming of the Lord.

## **The Church of Today**

There are many teachings that can be taken from this passage, some obvious, and some not as obvious. The main point of this passage is a call for the church to judge behavior in light of 1) the glory of God and 2) the good of others. All other standards fall under this.

Obviously, the believer is to avoid behaviors that are inherently sinful. Paul's clear warning about idolatry is an example. We are either aligned with God or against Him. The questions for us in the west come when we realize that we don't see such things as idol feasts these days. Christians may agree that some obvious things such as seances and Ouija boards are to be avoided (even as games). Less agreement comes when we start asking about things like how Christmas is celebrated (the date coincides with a pagan holiday, and many believe the tree to be a pagan symbol). Is the intent of our heart enough? Is there a place for "redeeming" that holiday?

Rather than giving answers that might seem trite, the purpose of this book (and Paul's instruction) is to *ask the questions*. For too long, churches have simply continued traditions without thinking through their impact on a fallen world. This goes for how we celebrate Christmas, what type of activities we promote at church,

and what types of activities individual believers pursue.<sup>13</sup>

We must be willing to ask the questions in order to seek the good of those around us – believer and unbeliever alike. To go back to how we celebrate Christmas as believers, many unbelievers see the church using what are considered pagan symbols and move to the conclusion that Christianity is no different than any other religion. We might preach differently, but that is lost in what they see.<sup>14</sup>

As another example, what about how our places of worship are used? Should we, as some churches do, allow secular groups use the church as a meeting place? Should we be “renting out” church facilities for weddings, etc.? Do those things constitute participation and condoning of what those people/organizations stand for? Should churches have a bookstore or means of making money? How does that set us apart from the world? These are the questions that church leadership (and individuals, as far as individual activities go) must consider prayerfully under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the goal of commending the gospel to as many people as possible. The time is short (1 Cor. 7:29). There is much left to be done, both within the church (Eph. 4:13), and toward an unbelieving world (Matt.

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<sup>13</sup> Every culture has things to be rejected, things to be redeemed, and things to be restored. It’s the job of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to lead the way in helping believers navigate those questions.

<sup>14</sup> This chapter was written in the middle of the Christmas season, and thus was a central focus in my thinking. As a believer, I personally find no problem with such things as the Christmas tree. Yet, proclaiming the gospel goes beyond my own freedom. Paul calls us to live for the good of others, and not place anything in their way spiritually – believers and unbelievers. It is about giving up my “rights” in favor of seeing others come to Christ and grow to maturity.

28:19-20). Let us therefore consider carefully how we live, that we might do all to the glory of God.



# Chapter 9

## Under Cover of Authority

*I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3).*

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul takes up two subjects seemingly on his own.<sup>15</sup> We can't be sure what prompted him to bring up this subject, but he must have believed it to be important. It is an equally important passage for us today.

Paul's instructions in vv. 2-16 are heavily debated today, especially in the wake of the feminist movement and the American ideals of freedom, individualism, and equality. People generally view this passage in one of several ways:

- Some accept a plain (or literal) interpretation of the passage. Man is to be the head (authority) of a woman, just as God the Father is the head (authority) of Jesus. Within this group, people view "head coverings" differently, though few insist on a literal covering.
- Some tie the passage to cultural conditions of the time and see little relevance to the passage for the

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<sup>15</sup> Note that he doesn't refer to any specific questions or reports, as he did in previous passages, and in chapter 12 he begins by saying, "Now about spiritual gifts . . ." indicating this is a subject that he had been asked about. However, a close reading also implies that he received some information pertaining to these subjects (especially in relation to the Lord's Supper).

church of today.

- Others seek to align the passage with American ideals of equality, teaching that Paul was teaching men and women are equal and have shared authority, and that the idea of “head” does not mean authority.
- Still others affirm the plain teaching of the passage, but simply disagree with it, claiming that Paul was a misogynist or woman-hater.

Given the teaching of Paul and others about the authority of Scripture, we cannot endorse the last view (or anything close to it). We believe the Bible is authoritative in what it teaches, even when we disagree or dislike what is taught.

## **The Head Covering**

The concept of the head covering is usually where most people begin with this passage. Thus, it’s where we start. Roman, Greek, and Middle Eastern societies used head coverings for various reasons, including public worship and as a sign of submission. At first glance, it seems that Paul is taking up the subject somewhat arbitrarily. However, when we look at the previous chapter, we see that Paul is talking about worship in pagan temples, and a primary (though not sole) emphasis in chapters 11-15 is the public worship of the assembly. It was common practice for Roman men to worship in the temple with the head covered, while women were uncovered. In addition, many Roman women who were in higher social classes began uncovering their head in

public, especially those who wore elaborate hairstyles.<sup>16</sup>

When we consider these things, along with the fact that Paul gives instructions to both men and women in chapter 11, it's likely that his first concern is to say, "Here is the proper use of head coverings in public worship." While many see this passage as a correction to women only, Paul gives as much concern to the man as he does to the woman.<sup>17</sup> Taking this perspective, we see the real idea behind this passage as *authority and submission*.

## The Head of the Woman

Paul begins this passage by making this statement: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). This, rather than head coverings, is the main idea of this passage. Before moving on, we should note that the "but" of v. 3 is somewhat significant. In v. 2, Paul says, "Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you." He is saying that the church had largely adhered to his previous teaching, which he gave them in both oral and written forms. When he uses the word *traditions*, though he may refer to routines or "how things ought to be done," he is also referring to his teaching.

Therefore, we can say that the "but" in v. 3 does not constitute a widespread or drastic departure from his teaching on this subject. It is more like a clarification or

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<sup>16</sup> This may be the basis of the instructions in 1 Pet. 3:3-4.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the *Zondervan Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2008), notes on v. 4, where Bruce writes, "It is not suggested that men were acting in this way; the statement gives point to the censure on women."

course correction. Given what we have said above and the tone of these instructions, it seems that *some* in the church were violating the instructions, and thus he is calling the church to correct these members.

What does *head* mean (here and elsewhere in this passage)? The Greek word is *kephalē*, which can mean any of the following:

- the physical head, both of mankind and of animals;
- metaphorically, the source (in the sense that removing the head kills the rest of the body); and
- metaphorically, relating to the authority or direction of God

We can say with certainty that the first definition is not in view here. Paul is not saying that man is the physical head of the woman. Likewise, it's unlikely that the second definition is in view. If a husband dies or the couple divorces, this does not kill the woman.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Paul elsewhere in this passage refers to the woman as being from man, and likewise man through woman, so there would be no need to introduce that concept in v. 3.

There is another passage with similar language that we should consider when seeking the meaning of this passage. The passage is well-known as a passage on marriage, and reads:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to

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<sup>18</sup> But such circumstances do constitute a death of sorts for the woman, though it is not physical. That, however, is a different subject altogether.



their husbands (Eph. 5:22-24).<sup>19</sup>

In this passage, Paul uses the same word, again translated *head*. This passage gives us clues to its meaning. Paul starts by stating that a wife should submit to her husband, and to do so “as to the Lord” (v. 22). Then he gives his reasoning behind the command by using a comparison: *the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church*. If we stopped there, one might think that Paul had the definition of “source” in mind. Yet he continues with the comparison: *as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands*. There is a clear flow in the passage: God to Christ, Christ to man, man to woman. Thus, we see in this passage the idea of “head” involves submission and authority.<sup>20</sup>

While some might argue that Paul is using the word *head* in different ways in these two passages, the language he uses is too similar to make such a view likely. At least in these two passages, we can say with some certainty that Paul uses *head* to refer to authority.

As we mentioned above, this is the real point of 1

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<sup>19</sup> There is much more to this passage in Ephesians, and it is often misinterpreted. Since the primary purpose of this book is an examination of 1 Corinthians, we will not seek to fully explore the teachings and implications of this passage. However, any understanding of headship, authority, and submission requires an understanding of Eph. 5:22-33 along with 1 Cor. 11:2-16, and other passages.

<sup>20</sup> The interesting thing about Eph 5:22-24 is that the Greek of vv. 22, 24 does not explicitly use the word “submit” when referring to the wife. Verse 22 may literally be rendered, “Wives be to your own husbands as to the Lord,” and verse 24, may likewise be rendered, “Now as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be to their own husbands.” Instead of weakening the case for authority and submission, the construction actually strengthens Paul’s meaning, since to understand the passage one must first understand what Paul says about Christ and the church and then apply it to the husband/wife relationship.

Cor. 11:2-16, and it is a point that is so often overlooked. What does Paul say about man and woman? He shows an authority structure:

- God (the Father) is the *head* of Christ. That is, within the Godhead, Christ voluntarily submits to the Father. We see this in Jesus' own words and actions (e.g., John 5:19, 22; 10:18; 12:49).
- Christ is the *head* of the man. Thus, just as Christ submits to the Father, the man is to submit to Christ.
- In the same manner, the husband is the *head* of the wife. So, just as she submits to Christ (Eph. 5:22, 24), she is also to submit to her husband, placing herself under his spiritual authority.

Having stated his main idea for this subject (authority and submission to that authority), Paul now applies the concept to the use of head coverings in the public assembly. The first thing he says by way of application is addressed to the man, not the woman: "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head" (v. 4a). In order to understand this, we must first remember Paul's earlier statement: *Christ is the head of the man*. How is this practice dishonoring to his head?

As we noted above, it was common for Roman men to cover their heads when worshiping in pagan temples. Because many in the upper social classes participated in religious worship, Paul may have been concerned about bringing such social distinctions into the church.<sup>21</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> See the *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, notes on v. 4.

addition, Paul says that “a man ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God” (v. 7), so the idea seems to be when a man covers his head in worship he is veiling or obscuring his head, Christ.

Second, Paul continues by stating, “But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head *uncovered* dishonors her head” (v. 5a, emphasis added). This statement only makes sense if one sees “head” as *authority*.<sup>22</sup> As with the man, we must remember Paul’s earlier statement that *the head of the wife is her husband*. Thus, we must ask, how the practice of praying or prophesying in public worship uncovered dishonors her head? In contemporary Corinthian society women were veiled in public. However, a trend developed especially among socially elite or independent women to lay aside the covering, proclaiming their independence. As an uncovered woman was often seen as immoral, Paul may be dealing with both issues. The veil was a sign of submission to authority – both Christ’s and her husband’s. Thus, for a woman to lay aside the covering in worship was to proclaim an authority that was not given her, causing attention to be placed upon her instead of Christ.

Notice that Paul does not give an argument for the authority of a husband over his wife. Yet, he argues extensively regarding the proper use of the head covering. He is not introducing something new to the

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<sup>22</sup> Whether or to what extent it is proper for women to actively participate in public worship is a matter of debate. At least in this passage Paul seems to affirm the existence of the practice without comment. To suggest from this passage that he either agreed or disagreed with the practice is introducing matters into the text that are not present.

Corinthians, since the idea of head coverings long predated Paul. He is simply arguing for its proper use.

### **What is (and is not) Being Taught**

Before considering how this passage applies to the church of today, we need to take a step back and look at what is being taught, both universally and culturally. In this passage, Paul is talking about a societal or cultural expression of a universal truth.

- The universal truth is that *God created an authority structure. The Father is head of Christ, Christ is head of the man, and the man is head of his wife.* Thus, wives are to be subject to (under the authority and protection of) their husbands. This has been true since before the fall. Indeed, Paul appeals not to the Fall but to the order of creation in his argument here and in his comments in 1 Tim. 2:12-14. The concepts of authority and submission transcend space, time, and culture.
- The cultural expression of this universal truth at that time was the veiling of women.<sup>23</sup> As we mentioned, Paul is not introducing some new doctrine into the life of the church, merely speaking about things that already exist.

Since the veil was an expression of modesty and submission for women, for a woman to appear improperly veiled was to draw undue attention to herself,

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<sup>23</sup> Veils were used for other reasons of course, such as mourning, but Paul's comments are restricted to using the veil as a sign of authority and submission.

violating cultural standards as to what was proper.<sup>24</sup>

## The Church of Today

The teaching of authority and submission is, as we mentioned, a topic that generates much debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. Nevertheless, the principle is solidly biblical and transcends any cultural barriers. (It's not as though God instituted the principle for the believers back then and suddenly said, "Okay, enough of that, you can do your own thing now!") As we've also said, we believe the head covering that Paul mentions was a cultural expression of this truth – an outward symbol of (what should be) an inward reality.

To bring those ideas forward, however, we have to say that if a married woman were to show up in an American church with a veil, attention would immediately be drawn to her. Western society has for the most part abandoned the underlying truth of biblical authority and along with it any cultural expression of that truth. Though some try to maintain the teaching by wearing a hat, the hat cannot be said to be the equivalent of the veil for a number of reasons. They are often flashy and obstructive, often causing attention to be drawn to the wearer – which is one of the things Paul sought to avoid. In addition, many who wear hats to worship show no real evidence of submission. Thus, it has become nothing more than a fashion statement.

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<sup>24</sup> Paul and other writers take up the concept of modest dress in other letters, so that is not his primary concern here. However, a woman who refused to be veiled would appear immodest by standards of the day. It's proper for a believer to adhere to cultural standards to a point, as long as their dress is decent and modest and, especially in worship, does not draw undue attention to them.

We suggest that the church of today must recover a biblical understanding of authority and submission and must teach the people those truths. Is a cultural expression required? We suggest not. If the choice must be made between outward symbol and inward reality, the choice is obviously the latter.

That teaching on authority and submission, however, must be *biblical* in nature. In the same passage in which Paul lays out male authority he also says,

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God (vv. 11-12).

Submission or subordination does not mean that men do not need women, nor does it mean that women are somehow inferior to men. Like all of Scripture, these teachings are easily misunderstood and abused by fallen mankind.

The real issue here, as we have said throughout this book, is using the world's wisdom to determine what right and acceptable. One who does not teach a biblical understanding of authority most likely is not in true subjection to Christ, for he or she has abandoned God's ways of thinking for the world's and embraced the lie of Satan – "you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5).



# Chapter 10

## Family Time at the Table

*When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse (1 Cor. 11:17).*

In the last chapter, we mentioned that Paul seems to be taking up the subjects of head coverings and the Lord's Supper on his own. His thoughts may spring from the last sentences of 1 Cor. 10:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

When beginning the subject of the *agape* meal and the Lord's Supper, it seems he has several of these ideas in mind.

Whereas he partly commended the Corinthians for keeping his instructions regarding authority and worship (11:2), he begins this section with a blunt statement: "In the following instructions *I do not commend you*, because when you come together it is not for the better but *for the worse*" (11:17, emphasis added). Apart from the outward observance of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, he sees nothing good in how they are doing things.

In that time, it was common for the church to come together for a common meal, often called the *agape* (love) feast. People would bring food, usually in proportion to



what they could afford – the wealthy brought more, the poor less (sort of what we might call a “potluck” today). And since the poor or lower-class members often worked long hours, they might arrive late to the meal. The Lord’s Supper, then, would be celebrated after the meal.

## **Divided Fellowship**

Paul immediately identifies the problems with the practices of the Corinthians. He tells them in vv. 18-21, *In the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk!*

The first thing Paul points out is that there are divisions among the Corinthians. Of course, he has already written at length about divisions in the church (chs. 1-3). Here, however, he seems concerned also with social divisions/classes. As we have already noted, the world of Paul’s day was shot through with social distinctions.

The divisions and factions among the believers, he writes, are at least partly necessary so that “those who are genuine among you may be made manifest.” Without such divisions, it would be easy for false believers to hide in the midst of the crowd (“in plain sight,” as it were). These divisions, however, went far beyond just disagreements; they affected how the Corinthians treated each other, particularly when it came to relations between the wealthy and the poor.

The second thing we notice is that some (most likely the wealthy, who brought the most food) were not

waiting for the others (most likely the poorer members). They indulged to excess – Paul says they “got drunk,” which may mean actual drunkenness but also could mean they were gluttons. In any case, this would have left nothing for the other poorer members once they arrived. (Hence Paul’s words, “one goes hungry.”)

The idea is those who had much would share with those who had little, as was seen in the very early days of the church. There we read,

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (Acts 2:42-45).

Note that Luke tells us the disciples “. . . had *all things in common* [and] were selling their possessions and belongings and *distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need*” (emphasis added). The idea was the wealthier members willingly looked out for those who were struggling, instead of looking to their own interests first (Phil. 2:4). This is exactly what many in the Corinthian church were failing to do.

It is this acceptance of social distinctions and the treatment of the poor (treating them as “lesser” members) that evokes such a strong reaction from the Paul. He would no doubt agree with James’ treatment of a similar subject:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or,

“Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. . . . If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (James 2:1-10).

Though James has often been criticized for being almost legalistic in his treatment of works and faith, he shows strong concern for the poor that separates him from the true legalists of the day, the Pharisees. Both James and Paul, then, condemn any type of partiality based on such things as class, race, social status, etc. Paul reminds several churches (including Corinth) that for those in Christ, all are equal.<sup>25</sup>

### **Wash Before You Eat**

It used to be common for mothers everywhere to tell their children, “Wash up before supper” (at least it was common in my home). Paul is telling the Corinthians much the same thing. Their attitude toward each other and the poor has dirtied their heart and soul. Jesus reminds us:

Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person. . . . [W]hat comes out of the mouth proceeds from the

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<sup>25</sup> See 1 Cor. 7:19, where he says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters, and 1 Cor. 11:11-12, where he teaches that in the Lord men and women are on an equal footing (for treatment of this passage, see the previous chapter in this book).

heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (Matt 15:10-11, 18-19).

Why is this important? Paul now transitions to talk about the Lord's Supper and the relationship between the believers' attitudes toward each other and their relationship with the Lord.

He first reminds them that he has already passed this information on to them (during his time there, no doubt). He further tells them that he received these instructions "from the Lord." Thus, they have the highest authority. He recounts the scene in solemn words:

[T]he Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

Then, he reminds the believers that in celebrating the Lord's Supper, they are proclaiming the gospel ("proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," v. 26). Therefore, he says, if one eats the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner, he will be "guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord."

What does it mean to partake of the bread and the cup in an unworthy manner? The word used is an adverb and denotes "irreverently, unworthily," and is only used in this verse.<sup>26</sup> The next verses some shed some additional light on what Paul means. In v. 28, he says that

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<sup>26</sup> Greek *anaxiōs*, "unworthily." The word appears in the KJV in v. 29; however, it is not in the best manuscripts.

a person should first “examine” himself. This word is most often translated “approve” or “test.” It has the basic meaning of “to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), e.g., for metals; to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy.”<sup>27</sup> Further he says in v. 29, “[A]nyone who eats and drinks *without discerning the body* eats and drinks judgment on himself” (emphasis added).

When we take these verses together along with the larger context, the idea becomes clearer: The Corinthians are treating the Lord’s Supper in a common manner, as just another meal. How are they doing that? In disrespecting and despising each others, and especially the poorer members, the believers are disrespecting what Christ did. It is as though they are spitting on the image of Christ. That may be strong language, but Paul’s language is no less severe. He tells the Corinthians that for this very reason “many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (v. 30).

We should be careful to note that the judgment Paul speaks of here is a judgment *of believers*. He reminds the church, “[W]hen we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (v. 32). It is a close parallel to the words written by the author of Hebrews. There we read:

[H]ave you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then

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<sup>27</sup> Greek *dokimazō*, “allow, test, prove, approve.”

you are illegitimate children and not sons (Heb. 12:5-8).

Paul is reminding the Corinthians that they are to examine themselves as sons and daughters of the Lord. In so doing, they will avoid the discipline of the Lord.

## **The Church of Today**

The implications of Paul's teaching are wide-ranging, not stopping with the situation at Corinth. Moving beyond the immediate issue, we can see some general principles at work here:

First, *the Lord's Supper is a family meal*. It is for believers. It may seem that we are stating the obvious here, but in today's world of inclusion and tolerance, it cannot be overstated. Those who are present who have not repented of their sins and trusted Christ for salvation should be given the opportunity to hear the gospel, but should not partake of the Lord's Supper; since they are unregenerate and cannot therefore understand spiritual matters, this surely would place them into the category of not discerning the Lord's body.

Second, *the Lord's Supper is to be eaten by those who are in right standing with the Lord*. Paul tells the Corinthians to examine themselves before they partake. If there is anything in the heart that has not been repented of and forsaken, the believer should rectify that before coming to the table.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> When a church practices these first two restrictions in a biblical manner, they are said to be "fencing the table." The idea comes from erecting a fence around the table to admit only those who should enter. Some churches will only administer Communion to members in good standing of their own church; however, this goes beyond the teaching of the passage. The Lord's Table is to be open to all who have trusted Christ and are in right standing with Him.

Third, *the Lord's Supper is about proclaiming the gospel*. When the church celebrates the Supper, they are proclaiming the truth of the gospel – that Christ died for our sins will come again (“until he comes,” v. 26). Therefore, this should be a time of not only celebration but encouragement and teaching.

Fourth, *the Lord's Supper is to be seen as a time of encountering the Lord in a special way*. When Jesus told the church “Where two or three are gathered, there I am in the midst of you” (Matt. 18:20), He implied that when the church meets together, He is present in a way that goes beyond normal experience.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, though His grace is always with the believer, the historical church has (rightly) held that both baptism and the Lord's Supper are times when the Lord gives grace in a special way, or a way that goes beyond the norm. This time is not to be treated lightly or as a common thing.

With so many churches today adopting a “seeker sensitive” mentality, it is important to not let that erode the seriousness and importance of the Lord's Supper by opening the doors wide to those who are unregenerate. Certainly we welcome them into the church to hear the gospel proclaimed and (hopefully) see it lived out. Yet, when it comes to the assembly, and especially the Lord's Supper, it must be reminded that the unbeliever is watching a family event. We invite them to become part of the family so that they may enjoy the privileges of the

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<sup>29</sup> This may cause confusion for some. Christ, being God, is always present, and especially more so for the believer through the Holy Spirit. However, when the church comes together, it is the visible representation of Christ on earth, and His words of being present in the midst of two or three imply something beyond the normal experience.

family.





# Chapter 11

## Desire the Greater Gifts

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone (1 Cor. 12:4-6).*

With Chapter 12, Paul again takes up subjects that have been asked about or he has received a report about.<sup>30</sup> Paul's first topic is spiritual gifts. This is a topic that has received much attention in the church since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Therefore, we will look at this topic in some detail, considering Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 12-13.<sup>31</sup>

In understanding the New Testament letters, it's often necessary to ask the questions, "What provoked this instruction? Why did the author feel the need to address a topic in this manner?" Applying those questions to Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 12-14, we begin to see a number of problems that the apostle was responding to.

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<sup>30</sup> Chapter 12 starts with "Now concerning [or *about*] spiritual gifts," indicating that he is replying to question, probably from the church in a letter. In discussing the resurrection in Chapter 15, however, he simply asks, "How can some of you say . . ." (15:12). The likely indicates that he received a report that some people in the church were teaching contrary doctrines (note that he uses "some of you," instead of speaking to the church as a whole).

<sup>31</sup> Though chapter 14 also talks of gifts, the emphasis is on their use in the public worship, and the larger context is general disorder in the assembly of the church. Thus, we will deal with this in the next chapter.

## A Fractured Body

If Paul uses the body as an analogy to describe the local church, then it may rightly be said that the church at Corinth was a fractured body.<sup>32</sup> We have already discussed the many divisions within the church; these divisions, as well as the abuses of the Corinthians, resulted from the church's erroneous view of the church concerning the believers' relationships to each other.<sup>33</sup> As he did in his previous discussions, Paul brings the Corinthians back to an understanding their relationship to each other using the human body as a "visual aid."

Before beginning that discussion, however, Paul sets out a point that he wants the Corinthians to keep in mind in the later discussion of spiritual gifts (and one that will have implications for the present discussion as well). He writes,

I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

Why does he give this reminder? In this context, the Corinthians are to remember that one who truly claims Jesus as Lord does so by the Holy Spirit, and though he or she may be different or have different gifts, he or she is still part of the same body.

Reading through the passage, we can see where the Corinthians erred in their thinking, by looking at the instructions Paul gives. We find these thoughts

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<sup>32</sup> While Paul's use of the Body most often refers to the whole invisible church, it is true that a local church is both part of the whole body and a smaller version of the larger body.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapters 1-2, as well as the previous chapter for these discussions.

underlying the passage:

- Those with certain gifts thought more highly of themselves than others without those gifts, and began to see others as unnecessary and even to despise them.
- Those without certain gifts were envious of those with those gifts, and may have begun to see themselves as less important to the body.
- The Corinthians seem to have had a fascination with the gift of tongues and sought after it, to the point of causing divisions in the church; the ones who had it looked down on those who did not have it.

In his usual manner, Paul sets out to correct the errors behind this dangerous thinking. There are several things he wants the Corinthians to understand.

### *Different Gifts, One Spirit*

Continuing his thoughts on the Holy Spirit, Paul tells the Corinthians (in a modern paraphrase), “Look, you all have different talents and gifts, but they are given by the same Spirit. Whether they be tongues, prophecy, faith, healings, miracles, or whatever, they all proceed from the same Holy Spirit, who gives them according to God’s will.”<sup>34</sup> Again, Paul emphasizes the essential unity of believers. Though every believer is different and has

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<sup>34</sup> Because this is not a commentary on 1 Corinthians, we will not deal with the gifts in detail, simply point out that Paul’s point in this section is not to give an exhaustive list of the gifts – there are other lists, such as Romans 12, that contain different gifts. Whether these more “spectacular” gifts continue today is a debated issue within the church. We will touch on this question, though not in-depth.

different gifts, every believer has the same Holy Spirit. In fact, that same Holy Spirit baptized every believer into the body (v. 13, the phrase refers to being joined with, made a part of, the body). As he maintains throughout his letters, the distinctions that are so common in society – Jew/Greek, slave/free – are all done away with in Christ. All are equal at the cross.

### *Many Parts, All Necessary*

Not only are the parts of the body united but each part is necessary. Paul reminds the believers,

If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? . . . If all were a single member, where would the body be? . . . 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.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable (1 Cor. 12:15-22).

Each part, he says, is necessary to make up the whole body. If all were the ear, or all were the hand or foot, there would be no “body.” So it is in the church. Each person that God adds to the church adds his or her own uniqueness to the whole.

The picture Paul paints here is similar to the old-time patchwork quilts, where someone would take pieces of various shapes and sizes and form them together into a beautiful tapestry of a quilt. So it is with both individuals and the church. The Lord takes everything that a believer goes through and experiences, weaving all of those things

together to form something beautiful out of sin and brokenness. In the church, the Lord takes a group of people who are unique and broken and weaves the together to form something beautiful that represents His glory. If even one piece were missing, then the whole work would be changed and something less.

### *Desire the Higher Gifts*

The last problem Paul touches on in this chapter is the priority and importance of gifts in the church. He gives an abbreviated list of the gifts, but emphasizing priority. Note that he says, “God has appointed in the church *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28, emphasis added). The words of position are there to emphasize the priority and importance of these offices and gifts.<sup>35</sup> After these three initial offices are listed, Paul changes to using “then,” as if to emphasize the point. We might read the whole list this way:

God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues (emphasis added).

Notice also that Paul puts the gift of tongues last on the list. This certainly implies that Paul thought that, of all the gifts, tongues was the least important (and he will explain why in chapter 14).

The Corinthians, however, had begun to focus on

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<sup>35</sup> It's instructive to see that these three appear in the same order in his letter to the Ephesians: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). This certainly implies a view of priority among the offices and gifts. It is not within the scope of this book to examine whether any or all of those specific offices or gifts are still in existence or operation today.

those less-important gifts, no doubt because they were spectacular (or to use the modern vernacular, “cool”). Yet, they had totally reversed the priority of things. Paul tells them that the need to focus on the higher gifts. The Greek word Paul uses has the meaning of both *greater* and *higher in rank*.<sup>36</sup> If they are going to seek spiritual gifts (which he encourages), they should seek those that matter most in the church. Yet, he turns to show them “a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31).

### **Love: The Greatest of All<sup>37</sup>**

Though this is one of the best-known and most-quoted passages in the New Testament, few understand how it fits into the discussion of spiritual gifts. As we will see, Paul encourages the Corinthians to seek *love* as the greatest of all instead of gifts. He gives three reasons why love is supreme over any spiritual gifts: 1) Without love, nothing else matters; 2) love embodies the fruit of the Spirit; and 3) love is eternal.

Before continuing, we should pause to look at this word “love.” it is a much used and much abused word these days. The Greek word Paul uses is *agapē*, which the first-century Christians began using to replace the words *phileō* and *eros*. It denotes first the highest form of love, particularly the love of God found in Jesus Christ. Secondly, it denotes a sacrificial love, giving of oneself

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<sup>36</sup> Greek *meγas*, “great(est); big.”

<sup>37</sup> Much of the material in this section is adapted from “The Supremacy of Love,” a blog post by the present author on *The Shepherd’s Voice*, written Feb. 13, 2019. <http://voiceshepherd.home.blog/2019/02/13/the-supremacy-of-love-1-cor-13/>

regardless of any return received.<sup>38</sup> It is this which Paul encourages the Corinthians to seek after.

### *Without Love, Nothing Else Matters*

Paul starts out by reminding the Corinthians what he has reminded other believers: Love is the most important thing (vv. 1-3). He then gives some examples of what he means:

- *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (v. 1).* It doesn't matter how eloquent I speak if I do not do so in love.
- *If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (v. 2).* Even if I am the most super-spiritual person, directly connected to God and His knowledge, if I don't have love in my heart and my actions, none of that matters. I am nothing.
- *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (v. 3).* Even if I do good deeds and sacrifice myself as a martyr, I am still nothing and I gain nothing by it without love.

In truth, anything done without love is done for self. Love is the central issue, the defining character of a believer.

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<sup>38</sup> The KJV rendering of *charity* for this word may seem inadequate in today's usage. However, when translated, *charity* had a wider meaning, encompassing the idea of sacrificial giving.



## *Love Embodies the Fruit of the Spirit*

Paul's second reason that love is the more excellent way is that love, when properly understood, embodies the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 4-7). He then proceeds to tell what love "looks like." If we look at the traits of love and compare them to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), we find remarkable overlap in the traits:

- *Love is not rude* (v. 5a). There is no place in the life of a loving Christian (a redundant term, yes) for rudeness.
- *It is not stubborn, irritable, or resentful* (v. 5b). This corresponds with the fruit of the Spirit where Paul mentions patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.
- *It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth* (v. 6). Love takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, even if the wrong is done to one's enemy. Love speaks the truth, not in condemnation but with an aim to restoration.
- *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (v. 7). Like Christ, love bears all hurts and wrongs, always believing that there is something more beyond the moment. Love endures the hurt, pain, and rejection in the same manner as Christ did.

By contrast, spiritual gifts have nothing to do with character. King Saul actually gave true words of prophecy during the time of his downfall, but we would hardly call him loving during that time. Spiritual gifts are given as tools. Like tools, they can be misused. They neither confer nor spring from character. We have all seen those who

seem to be the most spiritually gifted people turn out to be the most unloving. Jesus said that the world would know we are His disciples by our *love*, not our *gifts*.

### *Love is Eternal*

Finally, Paul shows that love is eternal (vv. 8-12). God created the universe and mankind in love. Love thus will continue into all eternity. These verses have often sparked controversy, but as with many controversies, the point of the passage often gets overlooked.

He starts out in verse 8: “Love never ends.” That is a fairly obvious statement. Love will have no end. It will continue throughout eternity. However, prophecies will “pass away,” tongues will “cease,” and “[the gift of] knowledge will pass away.” He says these things, which in the context represent all spiritual gifts, will end “when the perfect comes.” Whatever this phrase means, whether the close of the canon of Scripture or the second coming of Christ, the point is that the gifts were given until no longer needed.

He reminds his readers that “we know in part and we prophesy in part” (v. 9). To Paul, even the knowledge he had was incomplete. Even the gifts were not complete. He compares the gifts to a child’s way of thinking – incomplete. A child has not grown up yet, and so he needs certain things to help him mature. The gifts, then, were given to help the church mature. Right now, Paul says, we only know partially. “Then,” he says (when the perfect has come), “I will know fully, even as I am known.” At that time, there will be no need for the gifts.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> There is much debate surrounding the meaning of “when the perfect comes.” While such a discussion is outside the scope of this book, we believe that

## The Church of Today

We find many of these same problems in the modern church in America. We see churches split and fractured over spiritual gifts – which ones are still valid, which ones are necessary and/or important, and even questions about whether any are necessary for salvation. There are large movements within the church that focus on specific experiences of the Holy Spirit and receiving gifts (usually tongues, sometimes prophecy) as mark of growth.

It should be obvious, but let it be said at the outset that any teaching that suggests a specific experience(s) or gift(s) is necessary for salvation (i.e., if one does not have it, he or she is not saved) is contrary to the gospel of Christ and is to be rejected. Let it also be said, as was pointed out earlier, *gifts do not equal growth and maturity*. Yes, gifts were given to help the Body of Christ mature, but they are tools for that growth, not evidences of growth.

Like the church at Corinth, the modern church must take seriously Paul's teaching on the unity of the body, the priority of the gifts, and the need to seek the "more excellent way." The church must, if she is to continue to be effective, seek after the higher love that places others before self, considers others more important, and seeks the good of others. Only then will the world recognize the disciples of Christ, by their love.

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an interpretation that it refers to a) the close of the canon or b) the end of the apostolic age presents many problems. One is hard-pressed to justify such an interpretation from the context of 1 Cor. 12-14, where Paul assumes that the gifts *will* continue until such time as they are no longer needed.



## Chapter 12

# Not the God of Confusion

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. . . . earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:33, 39-40).*

In the last chapter, we saw how the Corinthians' misunderstanding of the design of the church and the purpose of spiritual gifts led to further divisions and confusion within the body. It was as though the body were turned against itself, some parts despising other parts and some parts thinking other parts were not necessary. In this chapter, we will continue that discussion, but focus on the use and abuse of the gifts.

At the close of 1 Cor. 13, Paul writes, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Because love is the greatest, Paul tells the believers to "pursue" love. At the same time, he encourages them to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (14:1). The choice of verbs in these statements is not accidental. The believers are to *pursue* love. The word has the meanings of "to persecute, to flee, to follow hard after."<sup>40</sup> By comparison, the believers are instructed to "earnestly desire" spiritual gifts.<sup>41</sup> The Corinthians' focus was to be on love, while at

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<sup>40</sup> Greek *diōkō*, "to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away; to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after; to molest or persecute."

<sup>41</sup> Greek *zēloō*, "to burn with zeal; desire earnestly."

the same time desiring the best gifts, which Paul identifies when he says “desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”

## Speaking to Men and God

When seeking to understand the NT letters and the problems a specific church faced, we must often deduce those problems from what the writer sought to correct. In 1 Cor. 14, Paul focuses first on the differences between the gifts of tongues and prophecy. Reading between the lines, it seems the Corinthians were holding the gift of tongues as far superior to prophecy.<sup>42</sup> To many people, it would have been very sensational, to begin speaking in a language previously unknown to them, and it is easy to think the exciting and sensational things are better and more important. Paul sets out to correct this thinking.

The first thing to notice is that while Paul says that spiritual gifts are to be desired, he emphasizes prophecy. He writes, “. . . *especially* that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1, emphasis added). Why especially that they may prophesy and not speak in tongues? He gives us the answers in the next verses: *The one who speaks in tongues speaks only to God, not to men, but the one prophesies speaks to others for their edification* (vv. 2-3). Paul has come back to a familiar theme: the building up or edification of others. He continues this idea in the next verses with an even more direct approach with his next two statements:

- The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.
- Since the believer, especially in the assembly, is to

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<sup>42</sup> Thus, we see the 20<sup>th</sup> century emphasis on tongues in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is not a new phenomenon.

focus on building up the church, the one who prophesies is *greater* than the one who speaks in tongues.

Paul emphasizes his idea again when he qualifies the statement in verse 5 with, “. . . unless someone interprets, *so that the church may be edified*” (emphasis added). In what sense is the one who prophesies greater? In the sense that he is doing what the Lord calls His disciples to do. He is serving others, building them up in the spirit. This accords well with Jesus’ statements that the one who wants to be greatest will be the servant of others.

Paul goes further, though, elaborating on his meaning so that there is no misunderstanding. In vv. 6-12, he demonstrates that tongues in the assembly without interpretation has no edifying value for others. He plainly asks,

[I]f with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me (vv. 9-11).

His point here is simple. If one speaks in a tongue (another language) and the hearer does not understand what is said, then he or she gains no benefit from it. Thus, the need for an interpreter. Prophecy, on the other hand, as Paul has said, is given in a language that is understood. Thus, those that hear it have no language barrier and can understand it. They are edified, encouraged, exhorted, rebuked, in short *built up*. Therefore, Paul concludes, the

Corinthians should “strive to excel in building up the church” (v. 12b).<sup>43</sup>

Verse 13 contains another “therefore,” linking it back to Paul’s previous comments. His idea is this: *Since the purpose of gifts, including tongues, is to edify the church, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.* His argument in vv. 14-19 repeats his earlier argument, but takes in a slightly different direction. He is concerned that the believer engage all of his faculties in prayer and worship. Notice he distinguishes between “praying with my spirit” and “praying with my mind” (also “sing praise with my spirit . . . mind”). When one prays or speaks in tongues, Paul says, the spirit is engaging with God, but the mind is unproductive.

Because the mind is unproductive, no one else can engage with the one who speaks or prays in tongues. How is one who hears the tongue going to say “Amen” to a thanksgiving, Paul asks (v. 16-17). For all these reasons, Paul concludes that it is better to speak five words with the mind (linking back to the gift of prophecy and/or knowledge) rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

## **A Call to Mature Thinking**

Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers (and by extension us) to think in a mature manner when it comes to thinking (v. 20). In all of his letters, he strives to see the church reach “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of

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<sup>43</sup> We should repeat something here that has been said previously. Paul does not condemn the Corinthians for seeking after spiritual gifts. In fact, he encourages it! Yet, he would have them seek after the best.



the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). In all we do, we are to be aiming for maturity, he says. Thus, he is telling the believers, “Stop thinking like children here.”

He goes on to show that tongues are primarily for the unbeliever, as fulfillment of the prophecy cited from Isa. 28:11-12. His point here is that tongues show the spiritual condition of the unbeliever. The unbeliever cannot understand what is said, and thus will not listen. On the other hand, he writes, prophecy is for believers, not for unbelievers.<sup>44</sup> Why is that? Because prophecy has one overall function: *to edify and build up the church, calling the church back to the Lord.*

So, if an outsider or unbeliever comes into the public service and everyone is praying in tongues (with no interpretations), the unbeliever will think that the people are out of their mind. But if he comes into the church where prophetic messages are given, those messages will penetrate his heart and he is able to fall down and declare that the Lord is certainly present. Paul’s point in all this? The stress should be on the higher gift of prophecy, not on the lesser gift of tongues.

## **Orderly Worship**

Having dealt with the theology behind the gifts and the confusion that is caused when the gifts are misunderstood and abused, Paul now lays down some guidelines for the public assembly, specifically with

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<sup>44</sup> On a side note, the idea that “tongues is a sign for unbelievers” would seem to lend support to those who hold that tongues is still in operation today, since that sign is still needed. Though the next sentence is often rendered “prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers,” the words “a sign” is not in the Greek. Thus it is better to render it as “prophecy is for believers.”

reference to the gifts. We use the term guidelines for the simple fact that Paul did not state in any uncertain terms that this was a word from the Lord (e.g., 1 Cor. 7).

Different traditions quickly developed regarding how the public service should work. These can generally be traced back to different teachings by several of the apostles (James, Paul, Peter, and John are the primary ones).

The real point of this section is that the assembling of the church should be orderly. This does not necessarily mean having a rigid structure that never changes. It does, however, preclude an “anything goes” attitude toward the meetings. There are a few things that should be noted, however. First, the number of speakers using the gift of tongues should be limited and is only to be permitted if there is an interpreter present. Why is that? So that the church can be edified by whatever message is given (v. 27).

Second, Paul gives a similar instruction about prophets. Let two or three prophets speak, he says (v. 28). But notice there is no limitation (“at the most,” v. 27). Also, he seems to encourage anyone with the prophetic gifting to speak (v. 31). Verse 32 is a key to his whole treatment of this topic: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets.” This means that the operation of the gifts does not render the person without conscious thought. They can stop speaking at anytime. He closes with a reminder that God is not a God of confusion but of peace. While the Corinthians were to earnestly desire prophesy and were not to forbid speaking in tongues, the public worship must be orderly (vv 39-40).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Verses 33a-35 have caused much confusion and debate in the church. The specific application of these verses is not within the scope of this book. Let it

## The Church of Today

What can we take away from this passage for the modern church? This question is especially important as there are whole segments of the church who deny the continuing operation of gifts such as tongues and prophecy. What relevance would this passage have to them? First, we should return to the main point of this passage and that is this: *The purpose of any gift given by God is to build up the church.*

This has relevance to all, since even most who deny the continuing operation of the more spectacular gifts readily admit that Scripture does teach that other gifts are given. Whatever gifts one has, the purpose is to edify the body. At the most basic level, this goes against the modern church mentality of “go to church to get something.” The Body comes together to encourage each other and to worship Christ.

Beyond that, this chapter (really, the whole of these three chapters), has much to say to the modern church. Do we not see the same problems? Division due to differences about the gifts. And even in those churches where the gifts are practiced we often see abuses of the gifts and the elevation of tongues over prophecy and knowledge. In those churches where the gifts are not regularly practiced, a sense of tradition is often there. The order of service may not have changed for 30 years. More

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simply said here that whatever view one takes of this passage must fit squarely within the larger context of Paul’s discussion of the public worship and the right use of the gifts. What complicates matters is that few churches today follow the model or guidelines that Paul lays down (i.e., there is generally only one person bringing a message or teaching).

than that, other churches are looked at suspiciously, especially “those people” who do practice the gifts.

Paul’s teachings in 1 Cor. 12-14 were designed to correct all of these problems. We must remember that we all are one Body. If we call Jesus Lord and Savior, we are part of His Body. There are and will always be differences among us. Differences aren’t wrong – indeed, they emphasize the uniqueness with which each person was created. When these unique individuals come together and are joined in Christ, it paints the most beautiful picture of Christ’s love. And that is the true point.



# Chapter 13

## All or Nothing

*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . . If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:3-4, 17, 19).*

Up to this chapter, we have seen how worldly wisdom led to wrong thinking in the church. Many of those issues were what some may call non-essentials. The Corinthians were acting a lot like the world, but they were still treated as believers. Now, however, we come to the end result of worldly wisdom. When worldly wisdom persists in the church, we see that it leads to compromise of fundamental doctrine.

### **A Clear Reminder of the Gospel**

Paul starts off 1 Corinthians 15 with a clear statement of the main points of Christ's life and the gospel message. He begins by noting the importance of the gospel:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved (vv. 1-2a).

He says that what he is about to tell them is the same message he previously taught them. He further reminds them that it is by the gospel, "the power of God unto

salvation” (Rom. 1:16), that they are being saved. Note the tense of the verb is continuous action. Salvation in the New Testament is both a one-time event and a process.

With this reminder comes a warning, however. Notice that he quickly adds these words: “[I]f you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain” (v. 2b, emphasis added). Whatever this verse means, it is clear that Paul is giving a warning. It is at least a warning to continue pressing forward. He exhorts the believers to hold onto what they had been taught, lest they fall away. In that case, their faith *would* have been in vain. With this reminder and warning, Paul lays out the gospel as he formerly taught it to them:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (vv. 3-8).

This statement is both the essence and the proof of the gospel. To understand Paul’s later argument, we will take a detailed look at this passage.

*Of first importance . . .*

Paul clearly believes that what he is reminding the Corinthians is of the highest importance. “This is what is most important for you to remember.” Note that it’s not who speaks in tongues or the operation of the Holy Spirit or anything else. It is simply the gospel.

*In accordance with the Scriptures . . .*

Paul cites two types of evidence for what he is reminding the Corinthians. The first is Scripture. Thus, he uses the phrase, “according to the Scriptures.” There are a few points that need to be made here. First, the Scriptures to the early church would have been what we know as the Old Testament, and they probably used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew. Second, the phrase “according to the Scriptures” has direct links to Jesus’ own words on the road to Emmaus:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:26-27, emphasis added).

Finally, this phrase also has two meanings: a) “according to Scripture,” indicating that Scripture foretold those events; and b) “in accordance with Scripture,” indicating an early Christian test of accuracy of teaching (i.e., a teaching that does align with Scripture).

*Christ died for our sins . . .*

The first thing Paul reminds the believers is the most basic: *Christ died for our sins*. Christ’s death wasn’t because of any sin in His life, but for our sins. In another letter, Paul tells the believers,

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still *sinners*, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8, emphasis added).

His death was a substitutionary death. The righteous in



place of the guilty. The righteous dies so that the guilty may live.

*He was buried . . .*

Why does Paul include this statement? Most likely to place Jesus' death squarely in the context of an historical event. One is buried only if he dies. As Paul told Festus in recounting his own testimony, "[T]his was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). The gospel is clear, and the facts are evident for all who would look at them. He, like Jesus, did everything he could to avoid any appearance of craftiness or twisting of the facts.

*He was raised on the third day . . .*

This, as we will see, is really the crux of the matter. Paul is proclaiming that Jesus rose from the dead. That He really died, was really buried, and *really* rose from the dead. As many have observed over the years, this is the hinge of all Christian faith. If Jesus in fact died for our sins but did not rise, then nothing has changed. In fact, it makes His words unbelievable, because He predicted His death, burial and resurrection. If, however, He did rise from the dead, then *everything* changes (as we'll discuss later), and all His words are true.

*He appeared . . .*

The second part of Paul's proof is eyewitnesses to the events. Obviously, no one saw the actual resurrection. Yet, there are, Paul says, about 502 eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus was alive after being buried (including himself, of course). This is another key part of his argument; he claims there are witnesses who can

substantiate his assertions and teachings. To again quote Paul in that later speech before Festus and Agrippa, “This was not done in a corner.”

*So we preached and so you believed . . .*

Paul concludes his reminder of the gospel message by a simple statement. “This is what we have preached from the beginning, and so this is what you believed.” The implication is that no other doctrine was preached that contradicted that teaching. It’s similar to his statement to the Galatians: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1). He made sure that all knew what happened to Jesus.

## **A Defense of the Resurrection**

Having established what had been taught to them and what had become the foundation of their faith, Paul asks, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:12). It seems some in the church were, like the Sadducees, questioning the very idea of bodily resurrection.<sup>46</sup> No doubt they held rationalistic views. Reading between the lines, it also seems that they were talking about resurrection in a general sense, probably not mentioning Christ. It is here that Paul starts his defense.

The first thing he does is take the teaching to its

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<sup>46</sup> It’s not certain where Paul received his information about this teaching in the church. It could be that he received it from an independent source. It could also be that the letter he was responding to contained questions about this teaching, indicating that some in the church were teaching it.

logical conclusion. As with his letter to the Galatians, it seems the Corinthians had probably not considered the implications of this teaching, and so his statement is meant to shock them. He says plainly, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even *Christ* has been raised” (v. 13, emphasis added). Then, he proceeds to lay out the implications of that:

### *Futile preaching, empty faith*

If, in precise historical fact, Christ was not raised from the dead, Paul asserts, then “our preaching is futile and your faith is empty” (v. 14). The word used to describe the apostles’ preaching and the faith of the Corinthian is the same word: *kenos*, which means “empty, vain, fruitless, void of effect.” In other words, neither Paul’s preaching nor the Corinthians’ faith serves a purpose without an actual resurrection of Christ.

### *False witnesses against God*

The next implication that Paul points out is that they

are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified against God that he raised Christ from the dead, when in reality he did not raise him, if indeed the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised (vv. 15-16).

Why are they now found to be false witnesses against God? Because they are alleging that God did something that He did not do – if the dead are not raised. This is a violation of both the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment (forbidding using the Lord’s name in vain) and the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment (forbidding giving false testimony). Note how he repeats

himself: "If the dead are not raised, then not even *Christ* has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (vv. 16-17, emphasis added). He wants those truths to sink deeply into the minds and hearts of his readers.

### *Hopeless and pitiful*

Paul then gives one final implication of this thinking. If there's no such thing as resurrection then,

*Christ was not raised, and  
our preaching is vain, and  
we are found false witnesses against God, and  
your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

Not only is all this true, but also, "[T]hose also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (v. 18). Those who have died in Christ have no hope. They died with false hope. We won't get to see our loved ones again who were believers.

Thus, Paul says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of *all people most to be pitied*" (v. 19, emphasis added). Think of it: If there is no resurrection, then we are no better than the unbeliever (in terms of our eternal destiny). Yet, we give each other false hope if there is truly no resurrection. Paul says that is just pitiful. It is no more than a delusion, a game of pretend. Indeed, he says, we might as well adopt the attitude, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (v. 32). If Christ has not been raised, then nothing has changed.

## **Christ Has Been Raised**

Paul doesn't stop there, however. He makes it clear that Christ has in fact been raised from the dead. He has already given his proof, made his case. There is eyewitness testimony in addition to the predictions of Jesus and the Old Testament Scriptures. Because Christ has been raised everything changes.

Because Christ has risen, He is now the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep (v. 20). What Paul means here is that Christ was the first to be raised, and since He has been, the rest of the believers will be raised as well. To further cement his argument, he uses the contrast between Adam and Christ (similar to his arguments in Romans 5). Here he shows the representative nature of Adam and Christ. Because of Adam, all who are "in Adam" (the unregenerate) die. Now, because of Christ, all who are "in Christ" (the regenerated believers) live. He assures the readers the Christ will come back for "those who belong to Him" (v. 23) and complete the resurrection that He started. *Everything* changes.

## **The Church of Today**

Do we not see this very teaching slipping into the church today? Several years ago, a well-known pastor of a nationally known church made the statement, "It doesn't matter if Christ actually rose from the dead. It only matters that you believe He did." That is a dangerous thought. Belief, in itself, does not equal reality. That puts the believer on shaky ground, and makes Paul's arguments all the more relevant.

Skeptics of Christianity are right to focus their attacks on the resurrection of Christ. Without it, Christianity itself falls. Without it, the Bible proves untrue

and *untrustworthy*. The church of today must seek the wisdom of God, which is always greater than worldly wisdom and not compromise, not even for a moment, on such a fundamental doctrine. This is the logical conclusion of allowing worldly wisdom in the church: It leads to compromise and ultimate rejection of biblical truth.

May the Lord give His wisdom to His church. May His church, in these difficult times, stand strong against the world which seeks to conform her to its image. And may the Lord confirm the words of Jesus, Paul and the other writers who proclaim that Christ is indeed coming back for His church.



## Epilogue: What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Perhaps as you have read this book, you've realized that you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be that you thought you did; perhaps you prayed a prayer as a child or adult at the front of a church. Maybe you made a decision out of a fear of going to hell. But now, you realize that nothing actually changed. You still struggle with doing things your way. Or perhaps you simply feel the deep void and hear the Spirit whispering in your heart.

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30). The answer given seems simple: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (v. 31). Jesus also gave an answer: "Repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). To be saved, we are to first *repent*. Most people think that the word means "to change one's ways." However, the word really means "to change one's *mind*." In other words, "Change the way you have been thinking about what you have been thinking." We are to change how we think about Jesus. "Oh, He was a great man, a great leader, a great teacher, maybe even a prophet." No. The Bible says He is the very Son of God, God incarnate. The Bible says He died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day. As God, He deserves our worship, obedience, indeed our entire life. We also must change the way we think about ourselves.



We are not “good.” We were born into sin and live a life of selfishness – no matter how it is disguised as “good.” We could never be good enough to merit anything other than the state we are in – eternal separation from God.

When we abandon our old way of thinking, then, we must *believe* in the Lord Jesus. In the Bible that word is a synonym for *trust* or *faith*. We are to place our faith [full confidence or trust] in Christ. We admit that we are nothing. We are sinners living a selfish life and are separated from everything good and holy. We believe that He died to reconcile us (bring us back) to God. We admit our need of Him, not only for the life to come, but also for *this life*. We turn over all that we are to Him.

Even the thief on the cross did this. He said to the other thief who mocked Jesus,

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:40-42).

Notice what the thief proclaimed:

- *We are the guilty ones.*
- *He is innocent.*
- *He is coming into a kingdom.*

The thief didn’t ask to be saved from execution. He entrusted his very life to Jesus, just as Christ committed His life to the Father’s hands (v. 46). In the same way, trusting in Christ means surrendering my life to Him. It is no longer my life, my body. He has bought me with a price – the price of His blood (1 Cor. 6:20). I turn away

from my desire to live my life on my terms and embrace His way.

Is it necessary to actively pray to be saved? No. The Lord knows your heart. Is it necessary to say a prayer out loud? No. Again, the Lord knows your heart. The heart is the issue. In general, I dislike scripted prayers because they can shift the focus from the heart to the words. But, if you have never prayed before and have a strong urge to do so, but don't know how, know that prayer is simply a means of communicating with the Heavenly Father. I suggest starting along these lines:

*Heavenly Father, I come before You in need of Your mercy and grace. I know that I am a sinner, living selfishly outside of You. I believe that You sent Your Son Jesus to die on the cross for me and that You raised Him from the dead so that I may have life with You, both now and in eternity. I give You all that I am, and ask You to save me, live in me, and change me into the person You have called me to be. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Lord and Savior. Amen.*

### **How Do I Know That I Am Saved?**

You can't rely on your feelings. Some feel nothing at all. Some have an intense encounter with the Spirit of God. The Bible says that we can know for certain that we are saved. What we cling to is His promise: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). You will learn to hear His Spirit speak to you, both in your heart and through His written Word. You will begin to notice areas of your life change. As you grow closer to the Lord, you will experience the peace and joy

that He promises. And you more than likely will have the urge to tell of the change. You are now a disciple of Christ.

## **What Do I Do Now?**

You have begun an amazing journey. It is a journey; we are not called to sit around and just wait for heaven. We are called to love God and others actively, as He changes us into His image. There are no formulas in the disciple's life, but there are things that the Lord calls each of us to do, out of obedience and love for Him.

- Be baptized. Notice I didn't say, "Join a church." When you were saved you became a member of the Church (the worldwide Church, aka the Body of Christ). It consists of all who have trusted in Him, whether Jew or Gentile, regardless of "membership" in a local congregation. Baptism is the first step of following Christ. He told the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19, emphasis added).
- Connect with a local community of believers. There are no lone-ranger believers. We were made to walk the Narrow Road with others. Find a community that preaches the Gospel, teaches the Bible and loves and serves each other. The structure, music style and order of worship are less important.
- Read the Word of God. There is no greater joy than knowing Christ, and the Bible is one of the ways God has given to reveal Him. In addition, the Bible was given to train us in righteousness (i.e., now that I'm a disciple of Christ, what does that look like?) It may be that you have already been doing that —

perhaps you grew up in church. If that's not the case (and even if it is), I suggest that you start with John's Gospel. Read a little at a time. Take notes. Don't let it become a "rule" or "have to," rather let it be a "get to." After John's Gospel (perhaps read it a couple times through before moving on), read 1 John, then Galatians. If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, I suggest a modern translation, such as the New Living Translation, English Standard Version or New International Version.

- Listen for the Spirit. As you grow, you will learn to hear the Spirit speak to you. Sometimes it comes through our reading of Scripture. Sometimes it comes through hearing a message from someone else. Often it comes simply as the voice in our heart. Step out in faith and obey what you hear.

Above all, refuse the temptation to do it on your own. Submit yourself in dependence to Christ. Will you stumble? Probably, just like a baby stumbles when first learning to walk. But know this for certain: Christ's grace is always freely available. One who falls never needs to "earn" his way back into God's favor. One only need confess that the attitude of his heart was wrong and repent.

Know that you are not alone on this journey. There are others running the race with you. And Christ is always yours. The greatest prayer that I or anyone could pray for you is Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV).

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*