

# 1 CORINTHIANS



*A series of sermons on the  
Apostle Paul's first letter to  
the Church at Corinth  
by  
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# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 1*

## ***"The Reason It Was Written"***

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### **Acts 18:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1**

- 1. A City Of Degradation**
- 2. A Church In Division**
- 3. A Crisis Of Doctrine**

**N**ow as you can see from your study sheet, we're starting to read from Acts chapter 18 - you might think it's a bit strange to be reading from the Acts of the Apostles when we're starting a study in the book of 1 Corinthians, but what I want to do for you, as your title outlines, is explain the reason that this book was written: "The Reason It Was Written". It's important, I believe, to lay a foundation, a contextual foundation in an introduction to this book of the Bible. So much of the false doctrine that is around today is because of men, some very sincere people, even believers, who take verses out of context, but we want to settle down the historical and biblical context of what we find here in the book of 1 Corinthians.

So let's read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles chapter 18: "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them". Scholars tell us that this was approximately AD50-51, and of course you will know that Paul is now on his second missionary journey. As he goes on this journey, he comes to the city of Corinth and he meets two people, two Jewish people, a man and his wife: Aquila and Priscilla. He joins with them - they are Jews who, verse 2 tells us, have been ordered out of Rome because of the anti-Semitic policies of the Roman government at the time, Claudius the Governor had cast all the Jews out of Rome. But Paul has been drawn to these people because they are Jews, and also, as we read on in verse 3, they were also tentmakers - they had the same trade as the apostle Paul. "And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers". So he stayed with these two, and he worked with them making tents day after day. If the timetable that we have in the Acts of the Apostles of Paul as he's in the city of Ephesus is something to go by here, we can tell that Paul probably finished his tent making at 11:00am, and he began preaching the Gospel right through to 4:00pm in the afternoon. We know that because of the certain places that Paul was preaching the Gospel during the day, he could only have been there in the afternoon. So he was plying his trade tent making very early in the morning, and then at about 11:00am he would go and preach the Gospel right through the day until 4:00pm - and you know the apostle Paul, he wasn't a well man, and to be doing that in the heat of the day under the Mediterranean sun was something else, yet he did it and God blessed him in it.

So we read on: "He reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ". When Silas and Timothy came Paul give up his tent making, and he began to rely upon their support, and both of them in the synagogue ministered to the Jews. But as we see from verse 6, when the Jews opposed themselves, and blasphemed themselves, against Paul, "Paul shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles". The Jews, as Paul and Timotheus and Silas went to them in the synagogue, were hostile and blasphemous toward the Gospel. So Paul left the Jews and decided that he was going to preach... he said:

"henceforth I will go onto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized". So Paul, as he was preaching the Gospel now to the Gentiles, was finding that there was fruit for his labour - there were people believing the Gospel and there were people getting baptised as a witness of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But despite the success of the Gospel among the Gentiles, the next verse that we're going to read insinuates and implies that Paul was downcast for some reason - some scholars would even say that perhaps he had a touch of depression. He felt apprehension at the great task of going to the city of the Corinthians and preaching the Gospel, and he needed a touch from God, he needed encouragement, he needed strength - and by the very hand of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself we see that that is exactly what he got. Verse 9: "Then spake the Lord" - that's the Lord Jesus - "to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city". The Lord told him: 'There's nobody going to hurt you', and I believe deep down in my heart that Paul feared getting stoned again, getting beaten as he had done many times in other cities preaching the Gospel, sometimes left for dead. He was going into a city, as we'll see a little later, which was one of the most ungodly cities on the face of the earth, and he feared the consequences of his preaching the Gospel - even though it was beginning to bear fruit and people were being baptised and coming to Christ. Well, we read in the next verse: "he continued there a year and six months", he spent 18 months or so in that place of Corinth. Day by day as he ministered among those who were believing in Christ, and he was getting more and more encouraged, it says 'teaching the word of God among [those who believed]', his heart was being knit together with those who were coming to faith in Corinth one by one.

Now a massive clash was inevitable. I want you to picture this: the apostle Paul is coming in as the first preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into an extremely pagan and idolatrous, and immoral city of Corinth. It was inevitable that there was going to be a power encounter, a clash between godliness and ungodliness. Paul was coming preaching the straight and the narrow way, the way of God - yet Corinth was a city that stood for the broad way that leadeth to destruction, the way of sinful flesh. Hallelujah! We've got the hindsight tonight in our Bible study to know that truth won the day. The church of Jesus Christ was formed, a little assembly, and as we read through the book of 1 Corinthians especially, we find that it wasn't too long until this little newly formed church began to bear the marks of the surrounding Corinthian lifestyle that they had known before their conversion. The church of Jesus Christ in Corinth that was meant to stand for righteousness and truth and sanctification in the Holy Ghost, was beginning to mirror the city that it was based in. As Horatius Bonar, that great saint of God, said: 'I looked for the church and I found it in the world; and I looked for the world and I found it in the church'. That is exactly what happened to the church in Corinth. They began to resemble and assimilate the city in which they lived, and all the sins that went along with it.

Three years later, after Paul had visited this little place on his second missionary journey, as he was in the city of Ephesus, he received a letter from the church of Corinth. They were describing to him the awful difficulties that they were finding, facing the world and all the flesh and the devil that they had to grapple with in their own hometown. Now the book of 1 Corinthians that we have before us tonight is Paul the apostle's reply to that letter he received from the church of Corinth when he was residing in Ephesus. It is also a reply to the verbal account that he received from the house of Chloe that we read about later in this book of 1 Corinthians, that there were divisions among the people in this church, and it was brought him by word of mouth, a messenger of three people.

I want us to look this evening, because we often hear this cry among the church of Jesus Christ: 'Let's get back to the New Testament church'. My question is: 'Do you really want to get back to the New Testament church?'. Of course we want to get back to the ideals of what is laid down for the principles of the New Testament church, but if we were to go back to the reality of what the New Testament church was like -

specifically in the book of 1 Corinthians - we would be in serious trouble! Not only where there troubles known within the church, among the church, there were troubles known to be in the church by the world outside - they knew that the church in Corinth was a shambles, and it was only reflecting the sinfulness that was outside in the town of Corinth. It was defiled, they were wrapped up in immorality, they were wrapped up in drunkenness, they were wrapped up in what we called 'antinomianism' - which is simply 'against the law' it means in Latin, which means that they believed that the principle of grace that we have in the Gospel could let them do as they liked. As Paul addressed it in Romans: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?' - they thought because the slate had been wiped clean, and they'd been forgiven, that they could go out and do what they wanted because God had forgiven them - and it brought such immorality into their lives and into the church.

In chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, if you turn to it, and verse 12, you will see that there were divisions in the church - we'll look at this, probably, next week - but there were at least four factions, political sects if you like, coming through in the church. They all had their leaders and they were following them. It was a defiled church, a divided church, and it was certainly a disgraced church - because the church exists, 'ecclesia', the Greek word for 'church', are the 'called-out ones' to be a light and to be salt in the generation, to be a witness to the glory of Jesus Christ in a dark and a dead world, but this church was disgracing the name of Christ.

I want you to imagine a church like this. This is a church that is wrecked by divisions. Powerful leaders promote themselves, they have a band of loyal followers, they're charismatic personalities. One of those leaders, probably, is having an affair with his own stepmother - and instead of disciplining that man, the church of Jesus Christ, some of them at least, boast of the freedom that he has in Christ to do such a thing! 'He's forgiven! He's a child not of the law but of grace, and he can do it!'. Some of the church were suing each other in the secular courts before men in the world, some of the church liked to visit prostitutes. Of course, they weren't all that bad, in the other side and faction of the church they made a backlash against this awful immorality and sinfulness, and they went to the other extreme and said that because of their brethren's immorality men and women in Christ should remain celibate, they should not touch a man or a woman, they should have no sexual relationships and that ought to be the Christian ideal. Among that church the debate raged about how far a man or woman who is converted should break their associations and their habits from their pagan sinful past, and how holy they really should be.

We move from immorality and we look at church practice, and we see that among them there were disagreements about the role of men and the role of women in the assembly which only served to add to the confusion of how the church operated in Corinth. We read later on that there were alleged prophecies in the book, people who were speaking in tongues - or at least reported to be speaking in tongues - yet they were doing it on a regular basis, but they weren't doing it according to the biblical plan and principle that the Holy Spirit had laid down. All it was doing was adding chaos to the church! If you think that all that wasn't bad enough, you find, as we get to chapter 15 of the book, that there were even those - and mind they were believers - who did not believe in the bodily resurrection, future tense, of believers; nor did they believe, past tense, in the real bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a church of Jesus Christ, and I would hazard a guess that there's no modern church upon the face of the earth that has such a cluster of problems facing them all at one and the same time - but this church did.

What a church as an example of how we ought to behave, how we ought to be holy, how we ought to regulate ourselves in an ungodly generation - because our generation is filled with drunkenness, they are drunk on wealth, alcohol, intoxication, drug abuse. They intoxicate themselves with every type of immorality and vice, and we as believers find ourselves a little bit sympathetic, I hope, with the Corinthians in the first epistle, because we too are trying to live godly, Christlike lives in a world that is full of ungodliness and wickedness. The first thing I want you to see in our introduction tonight is the city of Corinth that Paul is writing to, and where this church resides. The first thing about it is this: it is a city of degradation. There are

three ways in which we find this as we look into historical records. Now, by the time that Paul actually came to the city of Corinth - he arrived here in autumn AD50-51 - it was a Roman colony. Now you will know, if you know your atlas, that Corinth was in the middle of Greece, and it once was ruled by the Greeks - it was a great city when they ruled it - and then there was a revolt against the Romans, and they lost the revolt and Rome took over the city of Corinth. When Paul comes to the city of Corinth, Rome has been ruling in Corinth for over 100 years.

Now as we come to it, Corinth is a strategic commercial harbour - that's the first thing I want you to take down on your notes - it was a strategic commercial harbour. The location of Corinth on the map was the secret of its opulence and its financial and material success. Now I want you to look up here on the screen - I had a laser pointer, I'm trying to keep up with technology, but some of you are that blind that you couldn't see it up here on the board, so I had to get a stick, and there's a white bit on the stick for those of you who are blind so that you can see it! Now, if I can get my bearings, you can see over here that this is Greece - OK? And that little dot, the number 5 there, that little black dot is Corinth, and you can see that Corinth is just on a little peninsula that joins the ocean to the west - the Adriatic Ocean or the Ionian ocean - and the Aegean Sea over here. Now what that means, simply, is that Corinth was a harbour for both the west ocean and the east ocean. People who were travelling from the west on trade would come and they would dock in the harbour of Corinth. People who were coming from the eastern world would do the same. People who were travelling down from Athens, the capital, would come right through Corinth to travel down into this region that is now part of Greece. People who were coming up from the South would also go through Corinth. So you had all the nations of the world, if you can zoom in there David, you would see it maybe a bit clearer - you have all the nations, almost, of the known modern world coming through this little metropolis of Corinth - it is like the centre of humanity and civilisation of its day. It's controlling these two seas, the Aegean Sea and the Ionian Sea, all the traffic - and you can imagine the goods that were pouring through the gates of the country through Corinth, coming on into Greece. Dean Farer (sp?) writes in his commentary about it, listen to this: 'Objects of luxury soon found their way to the markets, which were visited by every nation in the civilised world. Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Selician goat's hair, Lyconian wool Phrygian slaves'. In fact, he calls it 'the Vanity Fair of the east'. Some men in the day called it 'The Bridge of Greece', and you can see why it's called that - it's bridging the two peninsulas together, but it's almost bridging the whole known world together. Someone even called it 'the lounge of Greece' - everyone went to Corinth to rest and to live it up, it was an extremely wealthy place, it was populous, and it was a pluralistic city.

If you go to chapter 1 you will see this, that it talks about Jews, it talks about Greeks, it talks about Romans - the whole book talks about a man called Gaius, which is a Roman name; Crispus, Justus, Fortunatus, Achiacus. If you look at chapter 1 and verses 26 to 29, Paul says: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'. Now we know that this part of Greece, Corinth, was an extremely intellectual place; it was an influential city in the whole of the Mediterranean world, the aristocrats lived in it. Not only where the the rich and the high-fluting, the first-class and upper-class of society, but Paul tells us that there were also slaves, poor people and the uneducated. It was a hotchpotch of every aspect of a cosmopolitan metropolis that you could imagine, and the population is reckoned to be around 500 to 700,000, which in its day was an extreme population when you consider that this little piece of land is only about four miles wide - 500,000 to 700,000 people.

Now, it was a strategic commercial harbour, but I want you to see the wisdom of the great apostle here because Paul was not just rolling the dice or casting lots to go to Corinth to witness and to preach the Gospel, because he knew that if he could have a Gospel base in Corinth every Tom, Dick and Harry from all over the Mediterranean world would be passing through it and would have an influence of some kind in the Gospel. There was wisdom to the apostle Paul's missionary journeys, you should note that. It was a strategic point for



the Gospel, and one of the reasons why Paul is writing this letter is because the Gospel witness was at stake because of the behaviour of the church at Corinth at such a strategic point. People were going away, and what kind of a perception of Christianity were they having when they were looking at the Christians from the city of Corinth?

It was a strategic commercial harbour, but it's also strategic for the Gospel - but the second thing I want you to see about the degradation of this city is that it was a hotbed of heathenism, a hotbed of the heathenism. Corinth, and Greece of course, had many gods - but probably the most famous god of them all was Aphrodite, the goddess of love. If you go to the next slide there David, you will see - this is an old picture of Corinth, I don't know whether you can see it clearly - but you can go to Greece and you can see this today, this is the ruins of Corinth. It's called Acro-Corinth, and this is a hill up here which is called the Acro-Corinth Hill - scholars tell us that on top of that hill was the temple of Aphrodite. She was worshipped by these people, and I don't want to go into too much detail, but I have to do it for your understanding of this book - the cult of Aphrodite has been called 'a cult dedicated to the glorification of sex'. It's something akin to the worship of Baal and Ashteroth in the Old Testament, and in the old Corinthian city that was owned by the Greeks it's said that up in that temple to Aphrodite there were 100 vestal virgins, a hundred ceremonial religious prostitutes, and they would be serving Aphrodite the goddess of love there - and if you wanted to bring devotion and worship to that goddess you would go and copulate with those prostitutes in that temple. The historians tell us that at night those prostitutes, all 100 of them, would come down from that temple and they would infiltrate the whole of the town, and they would ply their wares at night for money, and then in the morning they would go back to the temple.

That is the kind of city that Corinth was, that is the kind of heathenism that was apparent in that particular day. One Greek proverb came out of the practice of these prostitutes, and went like this: 'It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth'. In addition to the temple of Aphrodite there was the temple of Apollo - this is the temple of Apollo, you can see it today, that's the ruins of it. The temple of Apollo is right in the city of Corinth. If you thought the worship of Aphrodite was bad, Apollo was the god of music, the god of song, and the god of poetry - but he was also the god of ideal beauty for the male sex, the ideal figure, a kind of Adonis. We're told that there were nude statues of Apollos everywhere around the city, and they were in sensual poses. It's very difficult to believe, but the devotee's of the god Apollos were encouraged to have physical displays of their devotion with what was called 'the boys of Apollos'. You can read between the lines, but it's safe to say that Corinth was not only a centre of prostitution, but Corinth was a centre of child abuse and homosexuality in the first century world.

The reputation of Corinth was so bad that there was a term that was coined out of 'Corinth' which meant 'to fornicate', 'to Corinthianise'. They took the name of the city and used it for that awful sin, or a person who was called 'a Corinthian girl' was said to be a loose woman. Aelian, the late Greek writer, said that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was always shown as being drunk - to be a Corinthian was to be a man, a caricature that was reckless, riotous, full of debauchery and immorality. Not only was there a temple to Aphrodite, not only was there the shrine and temple to Apollos, but there were many other gods and religious shrines - most notably Aesculapius, the god of healing, as well as sites of worship for the god Isis, the Egyptian goddess of the seafarers. They even borrowed other gods from other countries, and there was the Greek counterpart of Isis, Poseidon - you may have heard of the film 'The Poseidon Adventure', the Greek god of seafarers.

Perhaps you weren't religious like that, and you didn't follow any of the gods in Corinth, but even if you didn't 'a little bit less than religion' was the philosophy that pervaded in the society. There were, pervading people's minds and hearts, the average 5'8" Joe Bloggs in the street, the ideals of individualism: 'I am who I am. I will do what I want. I will do everything my way'. The ideal of equality: 'We are all equal and we can

all do as we like'. The ideal freedom without any restraints or laws, just freedom and liberality to excess - and significantly in Corinth there was the ideal of distrust of any authority whatsoever. I hope you're beginning to paint in your mind a picture of the city of degradation, Corinth.

The third thing: it was a strategic commercial harbour, secondly it's a hotbed of heathenism, but thirdly it was also a centre of athletics. If David goes to the next slide you'll see here an actual town plan of Corinth, and there was in Corinth what is called the Isthmian Games, and they were second only in importance to the Olympics, and you know how popular the Olympics were in Greece - well this was the second best. It was held every two years in the city of Corinth, it lasted several days, it took up athletics, equestrian, and musical competitions. It was conducted in Corinth's huge stadium, and I hope you can see it there - that's it there, the massive outdoor stadium at the top left, and some of them were held in the indoor stadium just below it. The outdoor stadium seated 18,000 people, the indoor stadium held 3000 people. So this was a city that wasn't just popular for sin and for trade and for religion and for excess, but it was popular for everything, it was the place to be! Even at this great athletic event there was great extravagance and licentiousness. Corinth, in the Mediterranean world in the time that we're looking at it, it was beginning to eclipse - I believe it had already eclipsed the city of Athens that we all know too well. Gordon Fee, the commentator 1 Corinthians, says this: 'At once Corinth was the New York, the Los Angeles, and the Las Vegas of the ancient world'. Charles Swindoll says: 'It was a sailor's favourite port, it was a prodigal's paradise, it was a policeman's nightmare, and it was a preacher's graveyard'.

Do you want to know what Corinth was really like? Turn with me to Romans chapter 1 for a moment - David, you can turn that off, I think that's all the slides for tonight, I'm doing that so that you can really get a picture of this in your mind before we launch full scale into the book. Now of course Paul is writing in the epistle to the Romans to the church in Rome, and he's categorising the various sins that are found in the church of Rome, but what you have to remember is where Paul was writing this epistle from. Does anybody know? Hazard a guess! Corinth! Paul was writing this epistle from Corinth to the church at Rome, and as he writes it I wonder was he looking out of his window - and remember that Corinth was a colony settled by Rome, and people say that when there was a colony settled by Rome it was like a little Rome, all that happened in Rome was happening in the colony. So we read, verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them".



Do you think he was thinking of Corinth as he was writing to Rome? You might say is it any wonder that Paul in chapter 2 and verse 3 of 1 Corinthians, if you look down that it, he says: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" - wouldn't you be if you were called to be the missionary and the evangelist to the city of Corinth where there's no other believer? The modern-day Sodom of the world - 'So what?', you might say, 'What are you telling me all this for? Why are you going into so much graphic detail?' - the reason why I'm telling you all this at the beginning of our study is that if the love of God in Christ Jesus could take root in a place like Corinth, it can take root anywhere! It was the most populated, wealthy, commercially minded and sex obsessed city of Eastern Europe, but it was the most powerful witness of the Gospel when Paul the apostle was there, and it proves that the Gospel is powerful anywhere! Paul, who is writing the book of the Romans, could also say that where sin abounds, grace doth more abound! Does that not encourage you? You wouldn't think it to look at some of you! Does it encourage you?

A city of degradation, yet God moved in. That's why this epistle was written. The second thing I want you to see on your sheet is, the reason why the book written: because there was a church in division. In 1 Corinthians 1 verse 26 and following we read about division. Verse 13, if you look at it, he says: 'Is Christ divided?', now why does he ask this? Because the church is the body of Christ. Paul says in the verse before: 'Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ'. Is Christ divided? Are there factions in the body of Christ? 'Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?' - there were divisions.

Let me give you a bit of a background about Corinthian society and culture. In the city of Corinth there was what was known as 'patrons', it came from Roman society to have a 'patron', and it was just someone who was well-to-do, he was an influential person who took care of individuals and families, and perhaps even at times entire associations of people. He would call those people he was in charge of his 'clients'. So there were these patrons in charge of people, they were rich, wealthy, intellectual, influential, and they would look after little plebs of society. They were people who would provide land, provide jobs, provide money, and even provide legal protection if necessary for the less well-off in their society that were their clients. Now if they did that, if they scratched their client's back, their client had to scratch their back - they had to in some way reciprocate the favours that these patrons were giving to them. With various services including political support and positive public relations, they would try their best to keep well in with their patrons. If you like, if I can make a modern illustration, it's a bit like politics today. You've heard about the 'cash for questions' scandal, that's exactly what was going on in Rome. If you wanted to get something done you paid your patron cash, or you looked after him, or you advertised and gave him free advertising, and he would look after you - he would even fight your case in law if you did what was right by him.

Now, Paul seems to indicate, I believe, that this was beginning to enter into the church and it was causing disunity. There was arrogance among men; men standing up and saying: 'I am on behalf of Apollos', 'I am on behalf of Paul', 'I am on behalf of Peter', 'I am on behalf of Christ' - arrogance and immaturity. They were standing up pretending and setting themselves forth to be the most mature, the most spiritual of the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth. But what I hope most of you know by now, if you're not too old in the Christian faith maybe you don't know it but you'll learn it very soon, sometimes the most immature are often the ones who think that they are most mature. That's why Paul gets sarcastic in chapter 4 verse 8, he says: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you'. He's being sarcastic, 'You don't need the apostle Paul any more, you don't need anybody else, you're great mature Christians in your arrogance and even in your immaturity'.

I believe that their arrogance probably came from the flowery rhetoric that they were able to use, these were great orators that Paul is preaching to here in the church of Corinth. You see, what was in Corinth and in Rome in these days was, if you like, the philosophy of the Sophians. Now, I don't want to blind you with science tonight, but it's important that you know what the Sophists are. You've heard of the name 'Sophia',

it's the Greek word for wisdom. The Sophists were people who thought they were the wisest all, wiser than anybody else, and they proved their wisdom by their oratory, by their flowery rhetoric, by how they could speak. To have wisdom was to be able to stand in the great amphitheatres and to speak with great authority and beauty, and they emphasised not so much the content of what they were saying, they didn't look at the truth and the arguments and even the philosophy, all that they were concerned about was the form and how they delivered those things.

Can I remind you, and perhaps jog your memory, that in chapters 1 to 4 what does Paul address? It is the preaching of the cross that we believe in as the church, which is foolishness unto the Greek, and a stumbling block to the Jew, and we don't preach it with - what? Wisdom of words! Lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. It's not how we're preaching the message, it's the message, the foolishness, literally, of the message that is preached that is the power of God unto salvation - first to the Jew and also to the Greek! Do you see it? These men thought that they could take Paul on, and I believe there's fair evidence in this book that one of the divisions was caused by these Sophists. Go into chapter 11 about the Lord's Table, and we see that some people were eating it before the rest - and it was probably the rich who were eating it before the poor, they thought they were greater than the poor, greater orators, flowery in their rhetoric. As we find Paul refusing the money that the church at Corinth wants to give him, you find in their reaction that they can't understand why he'd want to do that, because that's that they live for! They live for material possessions! We find as we go through into the book that believers are taking one another to court, and the likelihood is that it is these patrons that are representing the ordinary believers before the court, doing them favours because these believers were doing them favours in return.

You move on and you find that perhaps there were also sexual favours that were being given, but the main point of all this and me telling you is to show you that these patrons, in fact these leaders of the factions, had a great reluctance to break from the social conventions which served their own interests and reputations in their pagan past, but as they were converted they couldn't let go of it. I believe that above everything else in this book, it is more than likely that it was the social elite that was behind most of the problems in this church!

A church in division, and as we move on through the book we'll look in more detail at that division - but let's look at the third point, because it was not only a church in division, but what sort of filters out of that is the fact that it was a church that had a crisis of doctrine. As we look, and I have been looking at this book, and you know it's heavy stuff, and there's a lot of controversial issues even in Christendom today within this little book, there's a lot of deep subjects. We're going to spend I don't know how many weeks on it, digging and trying to get the answers - no preconceived ideas, but coming to the truth of God. As you look at all the different and varied subjects - there's marriage, there's divorce, there's incest, there's the Lord's Table, there's the headcovering, there's resurrection, there's giving, there's all sorts of things - and you wonder: 'Well, what's the common denominator? Is it possible to have a common denominator? Was there one specific problem in the whole of this book?'

I believe if you look closely you can find, yes, there is. It can be split into a couple of things, but ultimately it could be defined as this: their pagan religion. They had never let go of the remnants of their pagan religion. Now let me prove this to you, most noteworthy: there was a philosophy in Corinth - now stay with me, because this is important, don't say it's too difficult, some of you can watch a detective film for three hours and don't find out the result until the end, but you stick in there, so stick in here tonight and you'll be blessed. There was a philosophy called 'dualism'. Let me explain it to you: it put the material universe on one side, that means things, your body, things that you can touch, the sensual universe on one side; and it put the spiritual universe on the other side, things to do with God and eternity. It said that essentially the spiritual was potentially good, it was good; but the physical, the material universe, was bad - that's what's called 'dualism' and it was deeply embedded in Greek philosophy, particularly from the days of Plato on, and

eventually culminating in what is called 'Gnosticism' which was often the heresy that Paul was speaking against in many of his epistles.

They believed that the body was bad, what the body did was bad, the earth was bad; but the spirit was good. Now you might find a bit of sympathy with that kind of deduction, but I want you to see that that is of the devil himself. The majority of the common people took the view that the body was bad, the majority thought the body was bad - now that leaves a question for us all: what do you do with the appetites that your body has? You have to eat, you have to drink, you have to rest, you have to walk, you have to keep moving to keep alive, there are certain natural affections and instincts that we have also that many of us, if not most of us, have to execute at some time in our lives. So what did they do? Well, there were two different groups who dealt with this problem differently. Most of them in society decided: 'We'll not touch these things at all. We'll not ever eat food, or try to eat as little of it as we can. We'll lock ourselves up from the world, and keep away from all the influences of the world. We'll not ever get married, we'll be celibate for the rest of our days, and we'll suppress any sexual passions or nature that we have and ignore it, and try to work it all out of us and get all of this bad physical stuff away - because it is bad matter'.

They denied themselves, they're called ascetics. We have them with us today, they're called monks. They lock themselves away from the world, because they think that by getting away from the world they can get away from sin - but the fact of the matter is: sin is in the breast and in the heart, and it's not matter that is inherently evil, it is the soul, it's man's nature. But the common people, now I want you to note this in the light of 1 Corinthians, the common people decided to address this problem a different way. They thought to themselves: 'Well, if everything in matter is bad, and everything in the spirit world is good, eternity is the spirit world, heaven, and God, and everything that will happen after death is the spirit world, so we'll not be taking the physical into the spirit world - so why not indulge it as much as we can now and live it up? Because there's a day coming when we'll never be able to do it, and there'll be no consequences anyway because the world to come is spiritual!'. The common people followed that philosophy, and let me tell you this tonight as we begin this book: all the major problems in the book of Corinthians come from either one of those two positions. One position that says don't touch the things of the world, the body, material matter, because they're evil; or the other extreme that says: 'Well, we're in the spirit and we can just live it up, the matter's gonna be all burnt up one day, so let's sin and enjoy it!'.

Is it all coming together? Let me prove this to you. This living it up and indulging is called 'hedonism', the love of pleasure. If you go to - we don't have time to look at it, but just record this in your memory for future days - if you go to chapter 5, chapter 6, Paul talks about immorality, those who were indulging in sexual immorality for pleasure. If you go to chapters 8 through 10 he talks about men who were eating food that was sacrificed to idols, just indulging because it's not of the spirit, it's matter, it's evil, it's going to go in the end. In chapter 11 at the Lord's Table verses 17 to 34, people who were getting drunk at the Lord's Table because it didn't matter - it's matter! All of them indulging their bodily appetites, indulging them! Then if you go on in the book you find that it comes internally, where people are asserting their own rights and having little regard for others. You have the law of the weaker brother, they don't care about weaker Christians, they don't care that they will look at their example and fall into sin. If you go into chapter 6 it talks about lawsuits, they don't care that they're taking their brother or sister in Christ to the law in front of the world around them. If you go to chapter 11 about the headcovering, you find that the people are flaunting the social conventions of the day with respect to that, they don't care what the convention is! There's competition and chaos with regards to spiritual gifts, they want to do what they like, they want to indulge it all.

Then if you go to the opposite extreme, not the love of pleasure, but the shunning of pleasure - asceticism. You find it also in this book, the other faction in Corinthians, they were saying: 'You need to be celibate, that's God's ideal - don't get married! That's how you'll not fall into this sexual immorality' - chapter 7's all

about Paul addressing that. Perhaps the greatest evidence of how they believed anything of the body was wrong is chapter 15, on the resurrection. They've got to such an extent of believing that the flesh is wrong that they don't even believe that there's any place for the body in the resurrection. Do you see it?

Now as I close tonight I want to tell you this as we start our studies: the relevance of this epistle is overwhelming to me, because tonight as we speak the church of Jesus Christ seems stronger than it has ever been only if your sole criteria is the value of its material assets and the number of bums on the pew, if you'll excuse the phrase. Someone has said of America: 'The church in the US is 3000 miles wide, and yet only half an inch deep'. So few of us in the West have experienced persecution, so few of us have experienced what it is to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ, and even you find in the church emerging today there is a hedonism. There is a desire, it's called the 'health and wealth gospel' - 'If you please God, if you have faith, name it and claim it, take it, whatever you want - millions of dollars, millions of pounds, and it will be yours'. It's all revolving around me, mine, self - indulging in materialism!

You get these leaders coming up in the church and all they have is management skills, and it's plaguing the church - models of church planning, how you can make your church effective from the business world's perspective. The church-growth manuals are full of all the principles of secular growth! Patrons! Yet what is lacking in the Western church today is an exhibition of compassion, of forgiveness in the personal relationship every day, the coal face of relevant faith - not a parody of Christianity, but real Christianity in shoe leather that weighs up to all the evangelical verbiage that we bandy about our mouths! What this world needs, and what Christ wants - this is the message of Corinthians - is a Christian that says they're Christian and acts like a Christian! Not an ascetic revolt that reacts against the immorality of the day and abstains from things, and defines themselves as a Christian by what they do not do - but what this world needs and what Christ wants is a Christian defined not by what he doesn't do, but what he is!

William Baird in his book 'A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture', listen to this, says: 'Paul's principles in Corinthians are a paradigm for how to minister among Urban churches and areas today' - and I believe he's right. For if people in this district get saved, the problems that we are dealing with in Corinthians are the problems that we're going to face - but let me tell you this: our church, and every church, stands in the west at a crossroads, and it must decide whether to institutionalise its Christianity or whether it is going to personalise its Christianity! What our community needs today is the personal touch... the personal touch.

Father, we thank Thee tonight for the wondrous gospel of grace that can reach to the very depths of humanity, and can raise to the very heights of heaven the one who has faith in Christ. But Lord, we know that that grace also brings with it sanctification, that is also by grace, but we have the responsibility to walk in the grace of God. Father, we, as the Corinthians, have been called to be saints, sanctified saints. Father, we pray that as we go out from this place, as we reside as a church in this area, that we will not institutionalise ourselves but that we will personalise the gospel and touch the men and women around us with the grace of God unto salvation, because we must remember: such were some of you. Help us Lord, we pray, for Christ's sake, Amen.

## *1 Corinthians - Chapter 2*

# *"Grace Greater Than Their Sin"*

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### I Corinthians 1:1-9

**W**e're turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. You remember that last week we looked a little bit into the book of the Acts, and we also looked at a few verses of the book of 1 Corinthians, and we got a real feel for the place - the reason why this epistle was written, at least one of the reasons, was the city of Corinth. We looked at a couple of the other reasons, and we'll be teasing them out in the weeks that lie ahead. We begin to read at verse 1 and we'll be reading right through to verse 9:

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord".

Our title tonight is "Grace Greater Than Their Sin". You'll remember last week that we looked in some detail at the city of Corinth, and we found out that it was a strategic commercial harbour with regards to the Mediterranean world at that time. We saw on the map that we had in front of us how every point on the compass, almost, had to come through the city of Corinth on their journeys of trade and business. From the North, from Athens; from the south, the little peninsula of Greece; right up from East and West - everybody in the known world came through this city of Corinth, it became a kind of metropolis, a place where people stayed, and because of that there was a great wealth and opulence in the city of Corinth. So much so that in trade you could get absolutely anything under the sun in the markets of Corinth. Because it was a centre and a commercial harbour, it also became a city of real vice - a hotbed of heathenism. We saw the various temples, the various gods that were worshipped, the awful devotion was given to these gods in all kinds of sexual immorality. We found that this was a centre of immoral fornication, a centre of homosexuality, and indeed as Paul wrote Romans chapter 1 from Corinth - and that's important to note - I believe he was looking out of his window as he thought of the Roman sins that were beginning to bear on this great city. We heard about the thousand prostitutes that would come down from the Acropolis and from the temple, and would infiltrate the whole town in the evening.

It was a terrible place of sin, so much so that the name 'to Corinthianise' was a synonym for the sin of fornication and sexual immorality. Gordon Fee, the commentator, said: 'At once this was the New York, the Los Angeles, and the Las Vegas of the ancient world'. I didn't tell you last week that archaeologists have found, in the modern age, clay models of the human reproductive system that were actually offered as sacrifices unto the god Aesculapius, who was the god of healing. We read between the lines, and we suspect that the reason why these clay models of human genitalia were given to these gods was because of the venereal disease that was incurred because of their awful immorality.

It was also a city that was a great mixture of nationalities and religions, and cultures and peoples. We see it particularly in the church of Corinth: there were Jews, there were Greeks and Gentiles, all sorts of them, and various people from various parts of the world. There were poor people, there were very rich people; there was the middle-class; there were patrons and there were slaves. But one thing that we do gather from the book of Corinthians is that the church was a mirror of the world at this time, the city of Corinth. Not only in their present walking away from the ways of God, not only in the fact they were falling back into the sins that they were saved from, but they too had this real multicoloured spectrum of immorality in their lives before their conversion. Perhaps some of the most famous verses in the book of Corinthians are found in chapter 6, if you look at it, and verses 9 to 11 depict the lifestyle of these saints before they were converted: 'Know ye not', verse 9 of chapter 6, 'that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'.

These people had this type of sinful background that we find in the culture of the city of Corinth. I heard of one man that went away from the Bible reading last week and said that he was going to christen the city of Belfast 'Corinth'. It's true, isn't it? As we look down at the characteristics of the city of Corinth in its day, we can see great parallels and similarities with our own society, our own nation, and indeed the Western world that we live in. But the difference between us and Corinth in its day, to a large extent, is that we as the church of Jesus Christ in our particular circumstance and environment are somewhat sheltered from the type of sins that the people in Corinth experienced. We, as Christians today, to a large extent - I don't want to generalise - but most of us have never known the horror of interacting with the type of sins, and people committing the type of sins, that we find in the city of Corinth. We, to a large extent, are not on the coalface of real life as it is in our society. We don't face the problems of immorality that people have to face on a daily basis. We could spend all night going into the reasons for that, but perhaps one of the greatest reasons is the fact that most of us in the Western church are second generation Christians. Certainly, I would say, a lot of us in this church have been born into Christian homes - not all of us, but many of us. That is a great blessing, we don't seek to underestimate what that means - to be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but what it can also mean is that we're not exposed to the horrors and the ravages that sin has on normal lifestyles. We've never experienced first-hand, perhaps not even second-hand, what sin can really do in the home and in the personal life.

I wonder, as I'm looking and studying this book of 1 Corinthians during the week, if the unconverted - if you like, the great unwashed and unchurched around us - were to get saved and were to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, could we really handle it? Could we handle the dilemmas, the knots that seem to be untieable of immorality, personal problems? I think we would be faced with real dilemmas and real headaches. There are problems coming from that type of background, there's no doubt about it. These Corinthians came to Christ, and many of them brought those problems with them - although they were immoral, they were fornicators, they were effeminate, and Paul said 'such were some of you', some of them found it very difficult letting go of the baggage that they had before they were regenerated by the Spirit of God.

But do you know something? In the study that we're going to look at tonight there's a commendable feature that comes with people who have been forgiven out of great sin. That's right! A commendable feature, something that great sinners have that is a great feature. It is simply this: great sinners tend to respond to great grace. I want you to cast your mind back to the Gospels, to Luke chapter 7 - you don't need to turn to it - and verse 47, as the Lord Jesus Christ is in the home of Simon the Pharisee. There is a tremendously immoral woman that comes to the Lord Jesus, she bows down before Him and she weeps at His feet, and washes His feet with her tears. Then she takes her hair and dries His feet, and she kisses His feet, and Simon the legalistic Pharisee, in his own mind, is saying: 'Surely, surely the Lord knows, even by the demeanour

and dress of this woman, what type of a woman she really is?'. Of course, the Lord knew Simon's thoughts and replied to him: 'When I came into your house you didn't anoint My head, you didn't wash My feet with your tears. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little'. The antithesis of that is that to whom much is forgiven, that person loves much. The person that has had a great volume of sin within their life, when they turn to Christ and that volume disappears there is a great capacity in their heart left to love God and to accept the wonderful grace of God that is greater than all their sin.

With the past of great sin that these Corinthians had there was, I believe, a greater capacity for them to grasp the great grace of God that is greater than all our sin. That's how Paul, believe it or not, reacts to this very sinful immoral church. He reacts in grace! I want you to grasp this this evening. You heard last week of the type of city that these people were living in, you heard about the type of sins that the church of Jesus Christ was imbibing and was filtering into their everyday practice, and even their sacraments - as they broke bread they were getting drunk! They made holy things unholy, yet as Paul comes to write to them in a letter of instruction, what is the first thing that he brings to them? Grace!

How would you react if you were asked to address these problems? I know how I would react! I would get pen to paper very quickly and say: 'Dear Corinthians, are any of you saved at all? Corinthians, you call yourselves Christians? You can't be Christians unless you behave like Christians!'. But what does Paul say? As he writes to them in the first nine verses he's basically saying: 'Look, look at what you are! Look at what you have in the Lord Jesus Christ!' - and it's only when he tells them what they have in the wonderful riches of the grace of God that he then moves on to exhort them and to encourage them and to rebuke them in the ways that they should be going. Look at verse 10, after talking about the great grace of God he says: 'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind', and he goes on right through the whole book starting to correct their inaccuracies in the understanding of the spiritual life and the carnal life, their sinfulness, their backsliding. But note what he does: he comes to them first of all and he ministers to them the great grace of God.

Now, if it wasn't the apostle Paul I would say that that was madness. It wouldn't be my first instinct, but what you've got to see is that there is method in the madness of Paul - if we can call it madness at all - because this old man knew, in all of his godly given wisdom, that these people would listen to him more carefully, that they would take his rebuke of their lifestyle more readily, if they got a fresh glimpse of the grace of God toward them. Now listen, yesterday we began a study in the book of Philippians, and we saw in the first two verses that in the very introduction of the book there's like a little microcosm and model of the theme right throughout the whole book and we unpacked it yesterday, we saw that Paul even in his introduction was showing them what he wants them to know. It's no different in the book of 1 Corinthians, and I want us to do this tonight.

You remember I told you - if you weren't here yesterday, I was telling the people that a Roman letter in the ancient Greco-Roman world, when Greeks and Roman were writing letters they always began with a salutation, with a greeting. Now we normally end our letters with 'Yours Sincerely', 'Hope You're Well', 'God Bless You', and all the rest at the end of the letter - but in those days they began with the salutation, and it usually began with the writer identifying himself; and then it followed on as he told them who he was addressing it to, the recipients of the letter; and then it usually tailed off, before he got into the guts of the letter, with a general greeting. If he had heard that the people were well he would praise his God or gods for the fact that they were doing well, and hoping and trusting and praying that they would do even better in the days that lie ahead. Now Paul, generally in all of his letters, follows the normal Greco-Roman convention in writing letters. He doesn't do it in any particularly different way, but what he always does is he usually adds to it.



There are usually differences and digressions, and I want you to do a wee bit of detective work like you did yesterday morning and look for what these differences are. Just look at the first verse first of all, he says: 'Paul, called to be an apostle' - now there's the difference. He's defining who he is and what his calling is. Usually it would just be 'Paul', but Paul the apostle is saying: 'I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God' - there's another difference. He's qualifying where he got his apostleship from. So there are three differences: he says that he's called; he says he's called to be an apostle; and he says he's called to be an apostle in the will of God. So the first thing that Paul is doing that's different than ordinary letter writing in this type of ancient world is: he is asserting his apostleship - that's very important. He's showing these people in the church of Corinth who disputed that he was an apostle - and we know that from chapter 9 verses 1 and 2, if you care to look at it: 'Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord'. There were people teaching, disputing, perhaps some of these leaders in the factions in the church, who were doubting, disputing whether Paul was really an apostle. But Paul, right at the outset of this letter, is establishing, re-instituting his authority as an apostle.

Now what is an apostle? It's a sort of emissary of the Lord, a representative of the Lord, a person who's coming and is an ambassador for the Lord - and specifically a person who has the right to speak for the Lord and on the Lord's behalf. Now if you didn't know the background of this letter you would think that Paul was being a bit proud, and revelling and glorying in the fact that he was an apostle - but you'd be wrong if you fell into that assumption simply because Paul knew that he needed to communicate to these Corinthians that he had a right to speak about what he was going to speak about. He had a right to put them right, he had a right to teach them because God had chosen him in Christ as an apostle, and specifically the apostle to the Gentiles. Now you can reason that in your own mind, even if you looked at our own present-day and you thought about a doctor or a person who claimed to be a doctor, but they had no medical degrees, they'd never been trained, they'd never had any experience in operating upon anybody or treating anybody. If they went along to a conference, to speak at a medical conference, they wouldn't get a hearing - why? Because they have no right to speak on the subject, they are not an authority on the subject. Paul, right away, wants these people to know: 'I am an authority on what I am about to say'.

There were various reasons why he did that, not just the fact that people were doubting his apostleship, but also the fact that he was not one of the twelve - I'm talking about the twelve disciples that we read of in the Gospels. The apostle Paul was not one of that number - so some people doubted, because of that, that he was an apostle at all. Of course, there were some false teachers coming into the church saying that he was not an apostle, and they were saying that they were apostles - so Paul had to counteract their accusations and claims. There are three things that he really wants to lay down as he says that he is an apostle, called of Jesus Christ by the will of God - it's the fact that he is related to Christ as an apostle, he is in communication and has the authority of Christ in what he's saying to these people. He's saying also that he is related to God, it's 'by the will of God' - God has chosen him as an apostle, and God is bringing this message to the church at Corinth. But perhaps the most immediate and specific to these people is the fact that as he comes to the church, he has authority over the church in the name of God and in the appointment of Jesus Christ to set them right in their doctrine and in their practice.

Now we know from the history books that when the Jewish Supreme Court, which you know was called the Sanhedrin, was asked to arbitrate in a serious dispute or to give an interpretation regarding Jewish law or tradition, they sent a messenger along who was called 'apostolos' - that's the word we get 'apostle' from. He went along with the message and the verdict of the Sanhedrin, and as far as he was concerned he had the full authority of the Sanhedrin, and he wasn't speaking for himself, he was speaking for the Sanhedrin and he brought their message - but he was more than a messenger because he had the authority of the body, and it meant that he was an ambassador. Representing and bringing the message and the mouth of God - that's what

of Paul was doing. That's why, in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 20, he says: 'We are ambassadors unto you in Christ's stead, pleading with you: be ye reconciled to God'. In Ephesians 6 and verse 20 he said: 'I am ambassador in bonds', as he's writing from prison the book of Ephesians. He's a representative of Christ even in prison!

So you see how important it is that he asserts his apostleship as he brings this message to the Corinthians. But not only does he mention his apostleship and assert it, but he also asserts how he was called to be an apostle. This is very important, he says: 'Paul, called to be an apostle'. He's saying: 'Look, I haven't appointed myself; I haven't been appointed by the Sanhedrin, or a company of Jews, or a company of Christians, or a hierarchy of a church, or by a bishop, or by a pope; I have been appointed and called by God to be an apostle'. I want you to note and ring - if you ring or mark your Bible, ring these words - look at verse 9, he mentions this word 'called' many times in chapter 1: 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord'. Verse 23: 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God'. Verse 26: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called'. In fact, the word 'church' - I've told you this many times - 'ecclesia' in the Greek means 'the called out ones'. It's commonly understood that it means 'called out of the world', but that is not what 'ecclesia' and 'the church' means, to be called out of the world. They are called out of the world, but it means to be called unto God, to worship God. To be brought out of the world, yes, but specifically to worship God. Paul is saying in the same sense: 'I have been called to be an apostle', but he's going a step further and he's saying: 'In the same way that I have been called to be an apostle, God has also called you to be saints'.

You see, what you have to understand about the Damascus Road experience that Paul had in the book of the Acts, it was recorded in the book of the Acts - Paul had his salvation experience and his call to service experience at the one and the same time. Did you ever notice that? What Paul is saying here is: 'In the same way that I was called to be an apostle through the will of God on the road to Damascus, at the point that I was saved, the call for you to serve God and be a messenger of God and ambassador of God is something that happened at one and the same time, simultaneous to your conversion'. You can't split the two: you're saved to serve.

Paul adds just a little name to this introduction that is very intriguing, just to prove that our service comes at our salvation - no matter who we are, whether we're an apostle, or whether we're an ordinary disciple. He says this: '...through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother'. There's a whole debate goes on about whether Sosthenes actually wrote this book or not - of course he didn't, Paul wrote the book, but he may have been the scribe, he may have been Paul's personal secretary. He certainly was Paul's companion as he's writing this book, as he names him, and I have little doubt that he's the same Sosthenes that you find in Acts chapter 18. We don't have time to read that, but let me give you a bit of his history. He was a leader in the synagogue, you may remember that Crispus was converted in the book of Acts chapter 8, and Crispus was the leader of the synagogue. When Crispus was converted and left Judaism as a whole to follow Christ, Sosthenes took Crispus' place as the leader of the synagogue, and it caused great unrest - as you can imagine - when this man Crispus was converted. But how much more unrest can you imagine was created when the second replacement, Sosthenes, was then converted to the Lord Jesus Christ? I was reading David Prior (sp?) today on the book of 1 Corinthians, and he was relating how he was at Oxford University at the time, in the early 1960s, when it was the heyday of the Humanist Society. The president of the Humanist Society in Oxford University was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, there was a real uproar, there was an extraordinary business meeting that took place as they thought about the successor. They appointed a successor, and to their astonishment the one who had been elected to the new presidency of the Humanist Society was converted again to Christ! There was another General Meeting, but the uproar was immense - how all their philosophy and their way of life, and their understanding and world view of God - whether He's

there or not, or what our purpose in life is - was just turned on its head. Exactly the same thing happened when Sosthenes came to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the book of Acts we read that this was an enemy of the Gospel, if ever there was one. Sosthenes is recorded as being beaten for his involvement in bringing Paul the apostle to the civil court in the city of Corinth. Now we don't know why he was beaten, there are some ancient manuscripts that tell us that he was beaten by the Jews because they thought that he didn't make a good enough case before the magistrate, some manuscripts say that he was beaten by the Greeks because they felt that he was wasting their time over a flimsy item of Jewish religion. But no matter what it was about, this man was so opposed to the Gospel of Christ and Paul the apostle that he was willing to get beaten up for it all and his opposition of it! But what a triumph of grace that this man Sosthenes is converted, and is now mentioned in the epistle to Corinth, who once was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth! Paul says of him: '...and Sosthenes our brother'.

Was he an apostle? No. I learn a wee bit about how God works, because Paul, in the reproductive system of spirituality, was giving birth to his own likeness, wasn't he? A man totally opposed to the Gospel, a man who was a zealot for Judaism, a man who was trying to bring Paul himself before the civil court, yet that man is gloriously converted by the grace of God. We can produce like people who are converted in the same way as we are, but what I want you to notice is simply this: Sosthenes was not an apostle. Paul was an apostle, but it didn't matter to Paul whether you were an apostle or not an apostle, you were still a brother and you could still serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let's banish this absolute nonsense that you have to be a pastor, that you have to be a preacher, that you have to be a missionary, an evangelist, to be able to serve the Lord Jesus Christ - we've got to get out of this ecclesiasticism!

I heard of a man today who waters his grass with a big sprinkler system that is the state of the art. You've never seen anything like it, it waters every single blade of grass in the whole garden. One day his little daughter was wanting to help him, you know what it's like, and she got her little watering can, and she filled it up and she was going around watering all these little bits of grass, helping her Daddy. You might say: 'What a comparison! There is no comparison at all between a little watering can and the sprinkler system', but here's the thing: to a parched little tuft of grass, what does it matter? Whether it's Paul the apostle, or Sosthenes the unknown to the 21st century, to men and women who are dying in their sin it doesn't matter who gives them the water of life, as long as they get it and as long as they drink it and as long as they're satisfied!

Well, what a lesson Paul has given us in the first couple of words. What is the lesson? Oh, it's grace! For in verse 3 we have it: 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ'. He's changed here the conventional Roman greeting, instead of just saying: 'Greetings', he's using the word 'grace', he's saying 'peace' because that's what comes when the grace of God is shed abroad in your heart. Then from verses 4 through to 9 he's giving that prayer, the wishing of well to the person he's writing to. In this second section he's giving thanks to God on the behalf of these Corinthians for grace. Now are you asking yourself - I hope you are, because I was certainly asking this today - how can Paul be so positive, how can Paul be so thankful, when there's such trouble rife in this church, when they're divided, when there's so many abuses of holy things and so much immorality? How can he do it? This is how he can do it: because he knows and has a grasp of the character of his God. We'll see this, and we'll tease this out, but chiefly it is this: our God is a God of grace.

In spite of their sin, they were these things...let's look down the list: one, citizens of heaven. Verse 2, first part: 'Unto the church of God which is at Corinth', the church of God which is at Corinth. Their identity was not 'Corinth', their identity was the fact that they were the church of God. Our identity as believers is not the city that we live in, the country that we belong to, it's not a certain preacher or theologian that we follow and adhere to, but our identity is with Jesus Christ for we are in His church. Every church, indeed every

Christian, has two addresses: Corinth and Jesus Christ; Thorndyke Street, Templemore Avenue, and Jesus Christ. What this message is communicating to the Corinthians specifically, and to us today, is: no matter if you live in a little hellhole like Corinth, a place of immorality and godlessness, you can live in Jesus Christ a holy, a sanctified, and a spiritual life - and if it can be lived in Corinth it can be lived anywhere, do you agree?

Now, if I was to tear out of my Bible the first nine verses of the epistle to the Corinthians it would be very difficult to say anything good about this lot, wouldn't it? In fact, I wouldn't be preaching to you a message of grace, it would be a message of instruction - but the amazing thing that is in the first nine verses: Paul sees these believers in Christ. Isn't that the way we are? For if you took Christ away from you, the first nine verses of your epistle written unto men, if you took Christ out of your life what would you be? Just like the Corinthians! You mightn't have committed any of their sins, but you know that you of all men are most miserable in your heart without Christ, without the glorious life of His resurrection. We have the same weaknesses, the same flaws and vulnerabilities of other people who are blind without Christ. I wonder are you here tonight, and maybe you're discouraged, maybe you're downhearted, maybe that temptation that you continually succumb to and fall underneath is just getting the better of you more and more and more - and you wonder when it's all going to end. You need to see the grace of God afresh.

Church life is difficult at times, and sometimes when there are problems in the church - the way it is in the church of Corinth - the grass can be greener on the other side. If you were in Corinth and you were trying to live the life of the Lord in that little church, I'm sure the temptation to church-swap was very real to you. But the amazing thing is: Paul first and foremost sees this church not in their sin, but sees them as being in Christ. Let's face it tonight: every church has its problems. We've got our problems, the churches down the road have got their problems, but equally every church - if it is the true church, made up not of bricks and mortar, made up not of a denominational connection, but made up of living stones that have been hewn out by the Spirit of God and set in place by Him, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb - they're in Christ! No matter how much sin they're in, they're in Christ! It's hard to think of that, isn't it? But in spite of their sin they were still citizens of heaven.

Secondly, in spite of their sin they were still sanctified in Christ and called to be saints. The second part of verse 2: 'church of God which is at Corinth to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints'. Now 'sanctified', some people tell us, happens to you after you believe six months down the line, a subsequent experience to conversion, and it makes you holy. Now, could you say that these people were holy? Practically, were they holy people? Of course they weren't! But Paul was saying: 'You are sanctified' - positionally he's talking about, they're in Christ. They've been set apart for Christ and to Christ, and they needed many things in their life, but they were set apart for God and for His glory. A better translation of 'called to be saints' is 'saints by calling', that's what he means. You are saints by divine calling, it's not something that you're going to try and attain to, it's not something that is only for dead Christians who did a great thing in their life, and hundreds of years later the church of Rome decides to canonise them and make them into saints - that is rubbish! It's something that is in your life, that is a living reality where you realise that you are a saint, and you've been called to that reality.

Now look down at the Authorised Version, because you will see that 'to be' is in italics, isn't it? Now that means that it's not in the original scriptures, that the translators have put it in so that we can understand what is trying to be said. But you could literally read it 'called saints', called saints! What Paul is saying is: 'You've been sanctified, you've been set apart, you are now called saints - when are you going to live up to your calling?'. This is a favourite phrase and name for Christians that Paul uses, he uses it 60 times or so in all of his letters, and it's talking about what we are positionally in Christ. It's not a matter of good works - oh, I wish I had time, I never do have the time, but sure Hebrews 10 and verse 10 tells us, listen: 'By the which will we are sanctified' - how? By trying your best? By doing good works? - 'through the offering of the body

of Jesus Christ once for all'. Verse 14: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified'. We are sanctified by the blood of Christ, that's our position, now that's different than practice and holy living, and living up to the name that we have as saints. But Paul's exhortation is exactly that: if this is what you're called, if this is what you've been made by the grace of God, you've got to live up to your name, you've got to be seen to be set apart! Everything's going for you: Christ has saved you, Christ has given you a new nature, what's stopping you living as saints?

The purpose of being in Christ is to be like Christ - that's what this epistle is all about. Now you're sitting here tonight saying: 'Look, how can I live like Christ? It's hard for me, you don't realise what I'm up against. I'm wrestling against sin daily. I can't get over this temptation', and for somebody like you it's extremely hard to imagine yourself as absolutely pure, spotless, holy, unimpeachable and without blemish, isn't it? Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles that people have getting saved, and even Christians have grappling with in their own life, is resting in the peace and the security and the satisfaction of knowing that you are accepted with God in the Beloved. Presidents don't always act presidentially, diplomats don't always act diplomatically, kings don't always act kingly; but they're still presidents, and they're still diplomats, and they're still kings - Christians don't always act Christlike, but they're still saints, that's wonderful, isn't it? It's amazing! This is the message he's coming to these wicked people with!

Thirdly, in spite of their sin they were still members of the body. He says: 'with all that', verse 2, 'in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours'. You're not an individual, everybody saved is sanctified in Christ - it's not just the Iron Hall that's sanctified in Christ, we know that. It's not just the fundamentalists, or the premillennialists - do I have an 'Amen'? No, I don't?! All in Christ - Paul didn't agree with these ones, did he, on everything? We mightn't agree with some people on everything, or anything, but if they're saved by the grace of God they're still saints. We're united in a body, it's nothing to do with a particular persuasion, it's nothing to do with what you are as an individual, it's nothing to do with the party that you belong to, or the faction or the political movement or the theological doctrine that you hold, it's because you're in Christ.

We've got to move on. Fourthly, in spite of their sin they were still recipients of God's grace. I'll tell you, my heart has been warmed today - verses 3 and 4: 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always' - every time I get a chance, it means - 'on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ'. Do you know the grace of God is wonderful? It has past benefits, it has present benefits, it has future benefits - and they're all found in this passage. The past benefits are here: the grace of God which was given to you - not as the Authorised 'which is', the Greek is 'which was given to you and confirmed in you'. The Greek tense literally means, it's in the aorist tense, an action completed at a particular definite moment in time - grace! You don't work for it, you're not going to get it some day and qualify for it, it's been given to you at conversion!

What's grace? It's favour, unmerited, unrepayable - it doesn't need to be repaid again to God, He doesn't expect it to be repaid again, and in fact you cannot repay it again. Let me tell you this, maybe there's somebody in this gathering tonight and they have never really known the joy of the grace of God, the unmerited favour, not of works lest any man should boast. Let me tell you tonight that the grace of God cannot coexist with three things: one, guilt, it cannot coexist with guilt. God is not up there saying: 'One false move, my boy, and I'm finished with you'. If you're in Christ that's not the way God works. He's not up there in heaven, He's not saying 'I'll save you only if you try never to sin again, if your life weighs up to it'. Let me tell you what the word of God says and what God is saying from His heart: 'if you're justified by faith', Romans 5, 'you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience'. It is the grace of God that we stand in, and you've got to accept the reality of the joy of God's forgiveness and enjoy it and rest in it!

Grace cannot coexist with obligation: 'Right, He's saved me and now I have to try and repay Him'. That's not grace, you can't repay the grace of God - it's not a loan, it's a gift! It's free for the taking, and of course we serve God with all our heart, and we owe a great deal of love toward Him in service, but it's not through trying to repay it's because we belong to Him, it's because we have a new nature. We're children and we're trying to obey and please our heavenly Father! Thirdly it cannot coexist with human merit. You know, there are a lot of people, poor Roman Catholic people, people in the cults, people in many religions that are trying to work their way to God, and they believe that it is through human merit that they will get to heaven. Grace cannot coexist with human merit. Some people believe you only get grace when you're good enough! How can that be? The Scriptures teach that our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God! The good things that we try to do don't impress God. How does that type of mentality of salvation weigh up with the tax collectors and the drunkards and the sinners and the demoniacs and the prostitutes that the Lord Jesus went about preaching good news to and forgiving their sins? It doesn't weigh up! The thief on the cross hadn't that privilege that perhaps you want to have! What about the Corinthians, the ones Paul is extending the grace of God to? Think about it...

We sit down and we watch the television and the news and we see starving people in Africa, we see poor people in Afghanistan, we see people losing their homes through floods in Vietnam and in Asia. We say: 'How come I'm so comfortable? How come I'm so happy? How come we don't get any of this in our country?'. When you ponder it for a moment, do you suddenly go 'Oh, eureka, I deserve it and they don't!?' Is that the way it is? No, it's not the way it is. We don't deserve anything, and that is what the grace of God is: that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

We've got to move on, we've so much to get through. Spiritually gifted, also in spite of their sin, verses 5, 6 and 7. This is present grace, God lavishes on them a provision, everything they needed! This phrase 'not lacking any spiritual gift' could also mean 'you are not deficient in the exercise of your spiritual gifts'. It's not that they had them and they weren't using them, boy were they using them - to excess, that was one of the problems causing chaos in the church! But they had things, spiritual gifts, that God had given to them - he lists speech and knowledge. They had been endowed with eloquence, flowery preaching; they had been given the teaching of Paul and Apollos and other great preachers; they had great knowledge given to them - but still they were disobedient, but Paul didn't ignore the fact that God had blessed them richly.

Now you remember from last week, I hope, that there were people running around believing that they were the elect - the only ones that had the knowledge of God. It was the seeds of Gnosticism, people who were believing that they had a special light of God from heaven and they knew a little bit more. They were going around like prophets revealing things to people. There were the Sophists, Sophia, who believed in wisdom and flowery speech - not so much the content of what you were saying, but the way you were saying it was what was important to them. Here you have those two things: speech and knowledge, but Paul is making a bit of sarcasm, and he's saying that the grace of God has given all of you speech and knowledge! Not just these high and mighty people that are claiming to be over you all in the church, but everybody in the church has been given the speech necessary - the word is actually 'logos', the word of God that was with God in the beginning. Everybody has been given in the church 'gnosis', that's the word that we get Gnosticism from, it's not just a select few but everybody has been given it - you don't need a guru, you don't need a modern-day prophet or a priest, all you need is Jesus Christ and to be one of His children and you've got everything you need.

They had spiritual gifts, and verse 6 tells us that that was proof of their testimony. I would have been running here with both feet in my mouth and saying: 'You don't have a testimony', Paul says that they had miraculous spiritual gifts that proved they had a testimony. Sixthly they were awaiting Christ's return. The Greek literally means, if you look at verses 7 to 9, they wait with eager anticipation and with activity. They were

revelling in the gifts that they had, and Paul later on tells them that what they have today is nothing compared to what they're going to get one day. Do you remember it? Tongues shall cease, remember that passage? 'Tongues shall cease, then that which is perfect shall come; you see through a glass darkly now, but then you shall see face-to-face'.

In spite of their sin they were eternally secure. Verse 6 mentions the word 'confirmed': 'Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you', it's the same word in verse 8, 'Who shall also confirm you'. It is absolutely definite, it's a legal term in the Greek language which is a guarantee that settles a transaction. God is saying through Paul: 'God has settled the contract of your salvation'. Can I ask you tonight: if God has told you in His word how to get saved, if He tells you it's through grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone, and He tells you that after you're saved He will perpetually cleanse you in the precious blood of His Son - will He abandon you? Will He let you go? Will He go back on His promise? Never! Why? Verse 9: 'God is faithful'.

This is imputed righteousness, and how often Paul mentions in this book and in his epistles the phrase 'in Christ'. Look how many times he mentions Christ in this first chapter, what's his argument? It's all about Christ, it's not about you Corinthians, even the awful life that you're living - it's about the grace of God unto salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that, eighthly, he is confident of their perfection. Imagine! He's telling these people: 'One day God is going to have you presented before Him absolutely blameless, unimpeachable, faultless!'. For those He predestined, He called; and those He called, He justified; those He justified, He glorified - and that's all at the one and the same time, you can't separate them. If you are justified, my friend, there's a day coming when you will be glorified. He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

I'm finished. How can he be so optimistic? I'll tell you how he can be so optimistic: because he is confident in the faithfulness and the grace of God. Friends, do you know what we need? We need to get our eyes off our human frailty, and we need to get our eyes onto the faithfulness of our heavenly Father.

Let me finish with this story, if you have to go you can go. Some people will say: 'But is that not a licence to sin?'. There was a pastor out on the golf course on one occasion - too many of them are out too often! But he was out there anyway, and he got a phone call on his mobile and it was a police officer to say that his young son was down in the prison jail and he needed to be bailed out. He thought it was a joke and he took some of his pastoral staff with him from the golfing green, down to the place, and what embarrassment he had when he saw it was his own son. One of the first things that those pastoral friends said to that son was: 'How could you do that when you know who your father is?'. If he was feeling guilty, that made him feel all the more guilty. What is Paul saying in these first few verses? 'This is who your Father is, how can you do it?'



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 3*

## *"Dealing With Division - Part 1"*

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### 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. ***Listen To The Plea For Unity (verse 10)***
2. ***Locate The Parties Of Division (verses 11-12)***
3. ***Learn The Principle Of Oneness In Christ (verse 13)***
4. ***Labour The Priority Of Preaching The Cross (verses 14-17)***

First Corinthians chapter 1, then, is our reading for this evening. If you can remember, two Monday nights ago we looked specifically at the city of Corinth and all that it meant for Paul to be writing a letter into such a situation as was going on the city of Corinth - and we thought of it under the title of "The Reason It Was Written". Last week we looked specifically at the grace of God that Paul ministers to these great sinners, and if you're familiar with the book of 1 Corinthians - and I would urge you, please, to read all of it in the subsequent weeks - you will see how far this church had backslidden, and indeed imbibed the culture and the morality of the city of Corinth. There were many many problems - I don't think there's ever been a problematic church just like the church at Corinth - yet Paul came, and before he corrects them and ministers to them he gives them the grace of God that is greater than all our sin.

We're going to look tonight at the division that was in the church and how Paul dealt with it, and how Paul exhorted them to deal with it, and indeed how we as believers in this modern contemporary age ought to approach and face division within the church Jesus Christ. We're beginning to read at verse 10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions", or strife, "among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect".

One of the reasons, I believe, the cults are so successful in recruiting people in the day and age in which we live, is because of the tremendous unity that they experience in their ranks. Disunity and lack of harmony is not tolerated whatsoever, you're just simply put out. In the world in which we live, particularly in the church in which we live and move and have our being, many folk who name the name of Christ are disillusioned with the division and the lack of unity there is among those who name Christ Jesus as their Lord. It seems that, in the church at large today, and as a little microcosm in local churches right across our land and across the Western world particularly, division is a great problem. Strife is rife within the church at large, and within local assemblies. Now, if you've lived upon this earth for any length of time, you realise that quarrels and problems and troubles and arguments are a part of life in general - you can't avoid them. From your infancy and youth you stamp your feet, you throw your toys down, and you have quarrels right from the very beginning. You go through your teenage stages and you fight, and you rebel against authority and your parents. There are so many aspects of quarrels in life - in the sports field, in the office, between businesses, in politics - we see it in our own land, and even between nations that we're seeing on a larger scale in the day

and age in which we live, between Islamic nations, particularly Iraq and the United States and our own United Kingdom. Strife is a problem right throughout the whole spectrum of life's experience, on small levels and on large levels. But the church Jesus Christ is not exempt from it, the reason why that simply is is that the root of all strife and contention and quarrels is sin.

You don't need to look any further than the church of Jesus Christ at Corinth to see that the church is made up of saints, yes, as we saw in the first verses of this chapter, but saints are not people that are portrayed on stained glass windows, but they are simply sinners who've been saved by the grace of God. You remember last week we could look at the list of the lifestyle of what these people lived in before they were converted. There were homosexuals among them, adulterers, idolaters, thieves and murders, and all kinds of wicked people - but God had saved them by grace. The problems that the church is facing in Corinth are because they're still sinners, and the root of all quarrels and strife is sin. The root of all sin is self-will, because from the day that we are born until the day that we die the real seed of sinfulness is ego - looking after number one, putting yourself first and before other people. That's the real motivation behind sin, right from Adam and Eve in the very beginning, they thought that God was robbing them of something. Satan came along to them and said: 'Yea, hath God said? If you eat of this fruit you'll be as gods - God is trying to deny you of something that is your right!'. And because they felt: 'Well, I've got to look after number one, not look after God or worship God, but look after me', sin came upon all flesh, and death because of that sin.

If we look at the book of James, if you'll turn with me to it, the epistle of James chapter 4 verse 1. James tells us where problems come from in life in general, and specifically in the assembly, he says: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not'. Strife and war and problems and quarrels come about in an assembly, and indeed in the whole universe, because of people looking after their own self interests, looking after ego, number one.

John MacArthur, the expositor and preacher, has said this about strife in the local church, and I think it's tremendous - listen very carefully: 'Strife brings fractured fellowship into the church of Jesus Christ, which robs Christians of joy and effectiveness. It robs God of glory, and it robs the world of the true testimony of the gospel - a high price for an ego trip'. It robs Christians of joy and effectiveness, it robs God of glory, and it robs the world of a genuine authentic testimony of who Jesus Christ is in the world today. I think, and I hope that you agree with me, when I say tonight that there are few things other than strife in the church that will demoralise Christians, that will discourage them, drag them down, will weaken the church of Jesus Christ. One of the biggest problems we face today in Christendom in the West does not come from that big bad world outside that we're all so afraid of, but it comes from within! Bickering, backbiting, fighting - few things so effectively undermine the testimony of the gospel before the world than the behaviour of believers who are quarrelling and fighting among themselves.

Now, I know this is the way preachers always get on about quarrelling and fighting, but I want you to see that Paul had great sins to deal with in the church at Corinth, you know all about them: incest, getting drunk at the Lord's Table, all sorts of adulteries, worshipping idols, many great sins that we put at the top ten of transgressions as we know them - but what is the first sin that Paul deals with in this epistle? Divisiveness, and of course the problem of divisiveness is the problem of people. You go to your work - maybe you don't work, but you live in a neighbourhood, you rub shoulders with people day by day - and you've heard the saying that where people are there will be problems, and that is exactly the same in the church of Jesus Christ. We've got problems because we're ordinary people with ordinary problems, and we're just sinners, we're trying to conform ourselves by the Spirit of God more to the image of Christ day by day as we get to glory - but we're still people, we're still human beings! Now we all know the promises that the Lord Jesus gives us, I quoted one of them in our prayer, that He will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. We were singing in our first hymn about the unity that there's meant to be within the

church of Jesus Christ. In the prayer that is commonly called the high priestly prayer of the Lord in John 17, He prays that all of God's children, the church, would be one and would reflect the glory of God in the world today. We've got to ask the question: with so many divisions, so many quarrels and differentiations of doctrine and practice among those who name the name of Christ, has the purpose and the plan of Christ and God in Christianity been frustrated? Has the plan been shattered?

Conversely we have to ask: is it impossible that it should ever be fulfilled? Will we ever get to the realisation of a united church of Jesus Christ, united in truth and grace and in love? Well, my simple answer to that question is: no, it's not impossible; and no, Christianity and the plans of God in His church are not frustrated. I quote this man, a very wise man, Roy Lauren, in his answer to that question: 'But as long as Christians behave as humans and not Christians, it will be impossible' - did you get that? As long as Christians behave as humans and not as Christians, as long as they remain under the dominion of the flesh and refuse the dominion of Christ, there will be the kind of factionalism that existed in the church of Corinth.

There are two types of men mentioned in the book of 1 Corinthians. There is the carnal man, and there is the spiritual man; and the carnal man deals in division, and the spiritual man deals with unity. Paul, in these comments from verses 10 to 17, outlines for us a wonderful plan of how we in our day and age ought to deal with division. The first thing that he tells us to do is listen to his plea, and indeed the plea of the Holy Spirit through Paul, for unity within the church. It's found in verse 10: 'I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment'. What an impassioned plea gives! 'I want you all to be unanimous in your faith for the Lord Jesus Christ'. Now this is something that can't be created by a basis of belief, or by a constitution of doctrine, or by the commandments and regulations of men, but Paul tells us that this is something that begins in the mind and moves on to the heart. Verse 10, at the end: 'that ye be together, joined in the same mind and in the same judgment'.

As we've been going through the book, the epistle to the Philippians, on Sunday mornings, one thing that we touched on particularly yesterday morning was that in relation to humility in the church of Jesus Christ and unity among Christians, one thing needs to be established in the Christian mind and the Christian heart, and that is called 'attitude'. Walking through the town sometimes I see these teenagers with this on their T-shirt: 'I have an attitude problem' - I was thinking of buying maybe a hundred of them for some people, Christians, that I know! 'I have an attitude problem' - they don't need a T-shirt because it's written all across their face! An attitude will determine first of all, not a constitution, not a doctrine, but what is our attitude to life, what is our attitude to other believers, what is our attitude to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Lordship in my life - that will determine whether we are united or whether we are divided in the church!

Now people get this idea of Christian unity that we have to surrender our minds up to somebody else, that we have to give our wills over to some church leader, and we're not allowed to think any more for ourselves, and somebody else acts on our behalf. That is the thing of cults, strange Eastern religions, that is not the unity that Christ speaks of in His word - the unity in the Spirit. It's not some kind of dictatorship, but it is a unity nevertheless, but a unity that is based on the common leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ - a surrender not to a human being alone, but a surrender to Him, to His word, and to His Spirit as His Spirit guides us through the word to its precepts and principles.

Let me illustrate it to you like this: in 1887 a very famous musician by the name of Leopold Damrosch organised a musical festival in the city of New York. He trained so many groups, there was going to be a massive orchestra that would come to this festival, and singers that were going to join in, that he had to train them in various different cities at different times, all separated. There was a choir in New York, there was a choir in Brooklyn, in Newark, in Philadelphia, and Albany - and they were all drilled separately and taught separately, and trained, but they were all brought to concert perfection in their abilities. When they were all

brought together into New York for that final grand finale of a festival and celebration concert, they all sang in perfect harmony - what was the reason? Because they were all drilled by the same leader to the same pitch and the same note. When that is done there will be harmony! As Paul says in verse 10, we will be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.

Now verse 10 really begins the proper letter that we have before us. We've got past all the introduction and the salutation of the letter, and he's now breaking the letter into two parts. The first part, in chapters 1 through to 6 verse 20, is a response to the problems that Paul heard about by word of mouth. There were three messengers that came to him, hearing from the house of Chloe that there were problems in the church, and in chapters 1 through to 6 Paul addresses those verbal problems that have been relayed to him. Then in the further chapters, in chapter 7 through to the end, chapter 16, he deals with the problems that were written to him specifically by the Corinthians on a previous occasion. They wrote a letter to Paul outlining all the problems that they had. So the part that we're entering into tonight is Paul dealing with the problems that he'd heard verbally from the house of Chloe.

Let me give you a little lesson before we go any further, because there's a great principle here about how to deal with problems and divisions within the assembly. I'm not getting at anybody tonight, because I haven't the mind to even remember if anybody has done this, or who they were anyway, but people at times have come to me and said: 'Now, I'm going to tell you something here, and I don't want you to tell the person that I've told you this..'. Have you been there? Chloe didn't do that - 'I'm going to tell you something, but I never want it ever to come out that I've told you this, and it's awful, you're never going to believe it, and the testimony of this brother has been just brought down and you men better do something about it, but I don't want you to tell anybody that I've told you this' - Chloe, whoever she was, and we know very little about her, but I know this much: she was upfront, and she didn't mind her name being put to this accusation, because she was determined that the problems in Corinth would be sorted out. She wasn't dealing in tittle-tattle, she was dealing in the welfare of the testimony of Jesus Christ in Corinth, which was a strategic place for the Gospel to go right across the whole Mediterranean - that's what was in her heart, that's what ought to be in our heart! Not pulling someone else down by gossip!

What a lesson we have here, that we ought to face problems like men! Deal with them like men! Some of the men running around are more like women, the way they get on, the way they talk, the way they gossip! Friends, we need to stand up to the problems that we have within our assembly, within the people within our assembly, if we have them we face up to them in the right way - that is what Paul is pleading with the Corinthians to do: face your problems. That's why he uses the word: 'I exhort you, I beseech you'. Now the Greek word for 'beseech' there, or 'exhort', is the word 'parakalio', which is the word we get 'parakletos' from, which is the word we get 'the Holy Spirit' from. I told you recently, I can't even remember when it was, that 'paraklete' means 'to come alongside', and that's what the Holy Spirit does for us - He comes alongside, He helps us, He strengthens us, He takes our arm and helps us through. That's what the Lord said in John 14: 'I'm going away, but I will not leave you orphans, I will send another parakletos unto you, another comforter to come alongside you and carry you and help you'. In 1 John 2 verse 1 it's translated 'advocate', one who represents you, one who defends you and stands on your behalf.

Now why does Paul use this word here? He says: 'I want to help you. This is my motivation, I'm not coming to hammer the living daylight out of you because you've failed, but I want to come alongside you to exhort you and to help you and to build you up'. That displays his spirit, doesn't it? Paul knew their sins, boy did he know them, and we had a little glimpse into them - nothing like what Paul knew them as - but yet he comes to them, and not only does he say 'I want to help you', but he calls them brothers! We saw earlier, in an earlier study, that he calls them saints; and then we saw last week that he ministers the grace of God to them; and then in verse 10 he now calls them 'brethren'. He's showing them affection and love, that he's concerned, that he wants to come alongside and lift them up by the arm. But that's not all he's wanting to communicate:

remember in the first verse he asserted his apostleship? He was wanting to declare to these Corinthians: 'I have authority, I've got a right to tell you these things', but now in verse 10 he's no longer asserting his authority, but he's coming to them and he's moderating his harshness, and he's showing them that he is a brother just like them, but go a step further: this is the implication of being brethren in Christ, you've got to act like family members.

There's got to be that filial love, treat one another in a brotherly fashion, with a brotherly love. Look at verse 9, he says: 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord'. 'You've been called into the fellowship of His Son, but now I also implore you by the same name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you fellowship with your brothers and sisters, that you agree with one another, and you eliminate any division with one another'. He uses the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because the basis of his plea for believers to be unified is the fact that we are all one anyway in Christ! Do you see it? We're all unified, we're all stuck together in the body of Christ. We've all different jobs, we're different members, but the basis for his plea for these Corinthians to be united together is because ultimately not only does it dishonour the witness of the church, but it dishonours the name of the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I could go on a long treatise about denominationalism, and there's a great danger of denominationalism in our world today, but that's not specifically what this passage is talking about because Paul is writing into a local assembly, a local church situation. He's telling believers in a church just like this: 'I want you all to agree'. Did you hear that? I want you all to agree! Now, are you saying in your head or in your heart: 'Well, that's impossible, there's no way that that can be possible, how could it even be possible in a church like Corinth'? But do you know something? God doesn't give us the word of God and these standards on the basis of our human ability, He gives us commands, He gives us promises on the basis of divine provision. God never ever, right throughout the Scriptures, demotes His own standards and practices because of our human limitations, but He does the exact opposite: He provides the strength and the ability that we need to do what He commands - that is the miracle of salvation in Christ! He can make us into something by grace that we could never of ourselves ever be!

It's not impossible, it's not impossible that we should all agree, it's not impossible - as he says in verse 10 - that we should all speak the same thing. All speaking the same thing! I think nothing is more confusing for new Christians in the day and age in which we live and even unbelievers looking from outside inside through our glass windows at how believers fight in the local church, how they bicker, how they all seem not to be saying the same thing but saying different things altogether! One thing is for sure: a church locally cannot be spiritually healthy, it cannot be harmonious and effective in the world, unless they have unity in love and in truth of doctrine in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in unity with Christ, in unity with His word, His ways and His will.

Now the problem in Corinth, and the problem with many of us today, is that there were divisions. Paul says: 'I want there to be no divisions' - the word for 'divisions' is the Greek word 'schismata', which is the word we get 'schism' from that we were singing about in our first hymn: 'The Church's One Foundation'. The word 'schism' simply means 'to tear, or to rip apart'. Physically it means to break something to pieces, but there's a deeper meaning than just to separate, there's a metaphorical meaning: the difference of opinion that can come between two people - schismata - a division of judgement, dissension. Let me give you an example of this within the Gospels. Remember the Lord Jesus came to the disciples and said: 'Whom do men say that I am?'. The disciples said: 'Well, some say you're Elijah, some say that you're another great prophet, some even think perhaps you are the Christ'. Then of course you know what ramified, that Peter was asked: 'Whom do you say that I am?', and he said: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God'. But John reports that after that there arose division in the multitude because of Him, John 7:43, and the word for 'division' there is 'schisma' - there arose a schisma in the multitude because of Jesus, and there are still divisions today in the world - the greatest division of all between the saved and the lost, because of the division that Christ makes.

You remember He said Himself that He had not come to bring peace on the earth, but to bring war, to bring division in the household between a father and a son, and a mother and a daughter, and a husband and a wife.

Sadly, even within the church of Jesus Christ, there is this schismata, this separateness, division of judgement and dissension - and particularly in relation to doctrine. Turn with me to Romans 16 - it's just across the page, of course, from 1 Corinthians - verse 17. Paul tells the church of Rome: 'I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them'. One of the greatest threats to the church of Jesus Christ is schism over doctrine. There should be unity in our doctrine, I'm talking about fundamental doctrine not secondary points - although I believe in the local church there should be unity upon those things for the working of the wheels of the mechanism of how we practice things according to the word of God. But on fundamental issues there ought to be unity, we ought to be saying the same thing - but I would take it even further and I would say that there's got to be unity in decision-making within the church of Jesus Christ. There's got to be unity among the elders who make the decisions, there's got to be unity among the church that the elders make the decisions, there's got to be a confidence in the elders that they are godly men, and they are making decisions in prayer and supplication, and that they are seeking God's will by the Holy Spirit. We need, even on that level, to be thinking the same thoughts, to be speaking the same words, and to be all agreeing - and I say this: if we are not all agreeing, it is divisiveness!

I've heard, I don't know who it is, I know nothing about it, I just bring these things to you - if the cap fits, wear it! - but some people have favourite elders. Favourite elders! 'He's my elder' - I probably don't fit into any of your categories it all! - but you'll see later this is exactly what Paul is reprimanding within the church of Corinth. You don't have favourite anything! You're all the one thing, you're the body of Christ, you've all to think the same thing, you've all to speak the same thing, for you are the same thing! There are to be no schisms among us, and that's why he tells you: 'You're to be perfectly joined together', verse 10, made complete. Now that word in the Greek is used in classical Greek and New Testament Greek, and in the New Testament Gospels it's used of mending nets. In Galatians it's used of bones, dislocated joints, being joined again. It's spoken of as broken utensils being mended, and torn garments being darned. We're to be joined together, we're to be made complete - not just externally, that's to happen, 'in the same judgement' Paul says; but also internally, 'in the same mind'. We're not to walk around saying: 'Oh, I agree with him' - in the same mind, internally. We are to be bound together according to the will of God, and it all comes down to attitudes - attitudes!

Are there any attitude problems in this assembly? From the top down, when a decision is made and you don't think it's the right decision, that you quibble with it? You maybe even quarrel over it, you discuss it with other people, you don't come to the people who make the decisions and face them with it like Chloe did? You have your own little 'Councils of Jerusalem', maybe over a cup of coffee! This is division! Division is carnal! What happens when there is division in the church ought to be what happened in Acts 15. Let's take a little bit of time, I'm never going to get through this tonight, but Acts 15 verse 2. There arose a controversy in the city of Antioch over Judaising, those people who said: 'Well, you can get saved, and Christ died for you, but you still have to keep the law, you still have to keep the commandments and be circumcised and go through all the ritualistic ceremonies of Judaism'. Of course, this caused a great fiasco within the church, and many of the epistles are written into this situation. We see it in verse 2 of chapter 15: 'When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question'. So they went to the apostles to ask them what they thought of this dissension - now note, please, they went to the right people first! They didn't go and tittle-tattle, they were concerned, and this is the sign of whether you're really concerned about the work of God - who you go to with the problem!

So we find that the apostles met over this matter, they discussed it, we read on in the chapter that they prayed and they settled it. Their decision was put in a letter and it was circulated around the churches that were involved, and this is what they were able to say at the end of it all, and this is the way decisions should be made in the assembly - verse 28: 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things', and he lists for them all the requirements that need to be made. But look at what they say: 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, here are the directives that we have found as we have given ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word of God'. If there's a problem bring it to the elders; if there's a problem, elders, pray over it, seek the Holy Spirit - but one thing's for sure: if both of us do that, the church of Jesus Christ will be of one mind, they will be saying the same thing, thinking the same thoughts, there will be no schisms among them but they will be perfectly joined together - just like the early Church at the beginning! It was said of them in Acts 4 and verse 32: 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common'.

How do you deal with division? Well, you need to listen to God's plea for unity in the church, but secondly you need to locate the parties of division. If we look at verses 11 and 12 we find that Paul gives us and defines for us various factions that there were in this church. The strife was being caused, the disunity, by loyalty to men rather than loyalty to God. These men were vocal in their opinions, they had little mottos that they shouted all over the place that showed who their identity was to: 'I am of Paul', 'I am of Apollos', 'I am of Cephas', 'I of Christ'. Now let's take a moment to look at each of these, because it's important that we understand what Paul is saying.

First of all he says that there was the 'Paul Party', his own party. If you turn to chapter 4 and verse 15, Paul says: 'Though there are a lot of teachers coming to Corinth and telling you what to do - though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel'. Paul led these Corinthians to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the year and a half ministry that he had in Corinth he preached to them the gospel of the liberty of Christ, that they could be set free from all their sin, and set free from any legalism or any laws that their religion was binding them to, and they came to know Christ through the apostle. Probably because of that a lot of people put him on a pedestal, and began to follow the apostle. Some scholars believe that the licentiousness that was in the church at Corinth, the fact that they seemed to be doing all sorts of things that Christians ought not to do, this antinomianism as if the laws of God didn't exist and they were just living it up and going into all sorts of sins, that this was coming because they were misunderstanding the grace of God in salvation. In Romans 6 Paul says: 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' - some people believe that they thought the grace of God allowed them to abound in sin, and it was probably the little group that followed Paul, Paul preaching the gospel of grace.

Well, we don't know about that, but one thing we're sure about is this: differences in churches usually grow around personalities. Is that not the case? Oh, eventually they become articulated around some matter of doctrine or a dispute of some kind of theological importance, but the likelihood out of all the schisms and divisions is that they originate with a personality clash. There may well be theological disagreement, but the strife emerges because personal relationships are not good! If we were all giving in to the other, if we were all giving in to the Lord Jesus in our attitude, in our understanding of the word of God, in our surrender to Him and one another, there would be no personality problems, there would be no divisions.

But then there is the 'Apollos Party', it's interesting to me that three out of the four parties are all against Paul, and he was the one that led them to the Lord Jesus in the first place! The 'Apollos Party' - Paul left Corinth after year and a half ministry there, and then Apollos arrived. We read in Acts chapter 18 all about him, if you look at Acts chapter 18 for a moment you see what a great man this man Apollos was. Acts 18 verse 18: 'And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence



into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow'. So he left, and we read on in the passage, we don't have time to read it, but verse 24: 'And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John'. And we read on that in his eloquence he was able to persuade many men to trust Christ.

We know that this man Apollos came from the city of Alexandria in Egypt, which probably was the most respected university city in the modern world of that day. He was intellectual, he was extremely scripturally astute, he was eloquent in his delivery of the word of God and in his preaching, and I'm certain that the Greeks - who loved eloquence, remember the Sophists that we talked about in weeks gone by who didn't really care what you were saying as long as you said it the right way - they would have just lapped up Apollos. They were enamoured with rhetoric and with argumentative skills, and we read later on the Paul even admits himself that he wasn't a great preacher in style that came across, that perhaps the language that he used, or the tone of his voice, he didn't impress the Greeks - but this man Apollos did. If Paul, perhaps, was the source - I don't mean the direct source, it wasn't Paul's fault, it wasn't Apollos' fault - but these people's misunderstanding of their preaching, of their eloquence, led to their licentiousness, doing all sorts of things in the Paul camp, and then in the Apollos camp it led to elitism: 'We want to be the best preachers, we want we to be loved by everybody for the way we preach, or the way we sound, by how intellectual we are'. We know that in the church at Corinth there was this intellectualism that had arisen, probably from the Apollos faction.

Then we move on to the 'Cephas Party'. 'Cephas' is an Aramaic transliteration of the word 'Peter', it's the apostle Peter that is being talked about here. We don't know if Peter ever visited Corinth, but one thing is for sure: I'm sure the church had heard about the apostle Peter, the great pillar of the church, the great apostle to the Jews, one of the original twelve - Paul wasn't one of the original twelve, neither was Apollos - oh but this man was, Cephas! 'He's the best out of that three, that's for certain! We'll follow him, he saw the Lord, he walked with the Lord' - and no wonder, with all the credentials that Peter had, that a personality cult arose around him, probably mainly of Jewish believers. We know from this book that there were people who were falling into the Judaising camp, legalists believing you had to obey the law, believing that you had to withdraw from the world, you had to remain celibate, and they probably came from the Cephas Party.

Then fourthly there is the 'Christ Party', and this takes the biscuit, this is the best of them all! 'I of Christ' - at a quick glance you would think: 'Well, they're quite commendable, they're saying we don't want to be led by any mere man, we're too holy to get into all this party political staff within the church of Jesus Christ, we are people that want to be taught directly from the Lord. The Lord is our Leader, the Lord is our Captain!'. They probably thought that human authorities of any kind were unnecessary, that you didn't need to follow elders or deacons or anything like that - but instead they claimed: 'We belong to Christ'. That's what it means, these men are in as much fault as the other three, because in theory what they're saying is not: 'We belong to Christ', but 'Christ belongs to us and not you other three'. We don't have to go very far till we find that spirit, do we? David Prior speaks of it like this: 'Their emphasis and their language are usually above reproach, and their hotline to God can be very intimidating. The net result of their presence in the church is that most other people feel spiritually inadequate - 'We don't get clear messages from the Lord, we have no comparable sense of immediacy in prayer, we cannot match such unswerving certainty about the will of the Lord' - and there is always a faint but discernible error of spiritual superiority when members of this group are present, and it is not easy to cope with their comments such as "The Lord has told me that..."

There was a group that later became the Gnostics, who believed that they were the elite, not that they belonged to Christ but that Christ belonged to them - and you had to be one of them, you had to be enlightened just like they were, or you wouldn't be saved. Do you know what is a tragedy of this church at

Corinth that is brought to us in AD95, 40 years after Paul wrote this letter? Clement of Rome, a Christian in the early Church, says that these cliques and these divisions were still in the church, and he mentions the party of Paul, he mentions the party of Apollos and Cephas, but strangely he doesn't mention the party of Christ. Do you know why? Because these are usually the ones who say: 'This church isn't holy enough for me, I've got to move on', and they break away - and here they broke away.

We have to close all this up tonight, but what have we learnt? I'll tell you what we've learnt: we need go no further in this book to realise that spirituality produces humility, spirituality produces unity, but it is carnality that produces pride and division. Someone has rightly said: 'The smallest man in the church is often the biggest problem!' That man who's never been big enough or mature enough to be trusted with anything in the church is able to tell you how to run the church! Carnality that leads to pride and division, small statured Christians who are Christianity's biggest problem. It is not the giant critic from without that is the problem, but the little contender that is within that is the problem. We have a danger in this church, in churches like our church, and in the West in general with all the wealth that we have of becoming sermon-tasters who follow after men and lose our focus, what it ought to be.

What ought it to be? Turn with me, and we read this for our final statement tonight - Hebrews chapter 12. Keep your study sheet for next week. Hebrews chapter 12, and before I read it can I ask you: where is your focus? Is it on a pet doctrine? Is it on your favourite preacher? Is it on your particular tippie of theology? The writer to the Hebrews says in verse 2: 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'. Did Paul die for you? Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Let's bow our heads: Father, we pray that You will deliver us from Christian celebrities, from putting men on pedestals and following them, bringing obeisance to them. Father, would You protect us from division, Lord, that we will be of one mind, that we will speak the same thing, that we will speak the same words to one another, that we will seek guidance of God and know that the Holy Spirit is leading us. For Lord, we know all too well that when this world looks at the church and sees all the divisiveness and bickering and quarrelling they can't see Christ, because they can't see past the Christians. Lord, how will they ever see Christ if we don't fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith? Lord, lift our eyes upon Him, to look full in His wonderful face, that the things of earth - the carnal things - may grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and His grace. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 4*

## *"Dealing With Division - Part 2"*

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### 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. ***Listen To The Plea For Unity (verse 10)***
2. ***Locate The Parties Of Division (verses 11-12)***
3. ***Learn The Principle Of Oneness In Christ (verse 13)***
4. ***Labour The Priority Of Preaching The Cross (verses 14-17)***

**W**e're turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 again. You didn't receive a study brochure tonight because you were meant to keep last week's one, and I hope you did, if you didn't there are probably some spare ones about, you can get them on the way out. I'm sure somebody beside you will share theirs with you if you haven't got one. We only got through the first two points of our message last week, and we'll deal with the latter two again tonight, but we'll read all the verses as we read them last week from verse 10.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions", remember we saw that the Greek word is 'schismata', which we get the word 'schism' from, or we often use the word 'split', "no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment". That phrase 'perfectly joined together' was a phrase that was often used of the knitting of broken bones together again, or the sewing of garments - "joined together in the same mind in the same judgement. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions", or quarrels, or strife, "among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect".

Our title last week was: 'Dealing with Division', and we'll look at the second part this evening - but last week we meditated for a few moments on the fact that there are few things that so effectively undermine the testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world today as division among those who call themselves Christ's ones. If you look down at your sheet you'll see that the first way that Paul exhorts those in the church in Corinth who were in division, to sort out the division and deal with the division, was first of all to listen to the plea of God's Holy Spirit for unity through the apostle Paul. He pleaded with them that there be no schisms, no divisions, verse 10, among you but that you all be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement - you all think the same thoughts and speak the same words. Remember that this is something that can't come about by church constitutions, or even by basis of belief or the commandments of men, but it's something that begins in the mind, it is something that evolves out of a heart that is in a right attitude toward Christ first and foremost, and also in a right attitude to our brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. That will only happen when we hear the plea of the Holy Spirit through the word of God, that we all be perfectly joined together and that there be no divisions among us.

The second way that we saw that we deal with disunity within the assembly and within the church at large is to locate the parties of that division, whatever the division may be. In Corinth, specifically in verses 11 and

12, we see the parties outlined very clearly. Paul had got word from three messengers from the house of Chloe that there were strifes and quarrels among them, and chiefly there were four parties that had evolved in the church at Corinth: those who were saying 'Well, I of Paul', probably those who followed Paul's gospel of grace but followed it into licentiousness and antinomianism, which means that they lived absolute liberty to the excess, where they were indulging in all sorts of awful sins because they felt that they could do that because God had forgiven and God would cleanse all their future sins too. So they plunged themselves into the varied sins of Corinth. We don't know whether that's a fact, but it's probably the case. Then there were those who said 'Well, I am of Apollos', he was a great orator, he was the intellectual one from Alexandria in Egypt. He was the one who the Greeks would have loved to have listened to in all his eloquence and flowery speech. That's probably where the piety and the intellectualism within the church at Corinth arose, from this sect of those who followed Apollos. They weren't as concerned about what Apollos was saying, as much as the way he was saying it. Then there were those who said 'I am of Cephas', the Aramaic word for 'Peter'. These were probably Jews, those who wanted to still follow the law, who wanted to still get all men circumcised and go through all the Jewish law and rituals of ceremony and practice, but of course we know that that is contrary to the gospel, and the book of Galatians teaches us that. Then there are the most pious and pompous and hypocritical of them all who say 'I am of Christ. We do not follow a man, in fact we don't follow the authoritarianism or a hierarchy of any men, we belong to ourselves but we follow Christ. We are above all the rest in our sort of spiritual knowledge, and first-class special experiences'.

So these are the parties that Paul could locate in the church of Corinth, but really we could narrow it all down to this: Paul is telling them that there are two types of people in this church of Jesus Christ in Corinth, and indeed in the church of Jesus Christ today worldwide, there are those who are spiritual and there are those who are carnal. The spiritual's spirituality will be evidenced in humility and in unity; and carnality will be evidenced in pride and divisiveness. It all comes down to where your focus is, and the verse that we ended with last Monday evening was Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2. We're not to look unto Paul, we're not to look unto Apollos or unto Cephas, but we are to look unto Christ: 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross'. If our focus is on the Lord Jesus we will not have loyalty to mere men.

Now the context of all the teaching and practice and principles that are found in the letter of 1 Corinthians obviously is written into the situation of a local church, and we must always apply it to our modern-day situations in our local churches. But I believe that the principles that are applied to the local church here in our text, verses 10 to 17, can also be applied to the present situation within the worldwide church and the divisions that are found in it. So we don't just apply these truths to our own specific locality and assembly, but they must be applied to the church of Jesus Christ at large because we must remember - as this book and as the book of Ephesians specifically outlines for us - that the mystery of the church that was revealed to Christ was for one worldwide church where there were no barriers and no schisms and no denominations. I believe that that was the spirit that many of the great reformers had, and many of the historical Christians that we call the heroes of our faith all down the years had within their hearts and minds.

Martin Luther said on one occasion: 'I pray you leave my name alone, do not call yourselves Lutherans but Christians'. John Wesley said, the founder of Methodism: 'I wish the name Methodist might never be mentioned again, but lost in eternal oblivion'. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who was a Baptist, said: 'I say of the Baptist name: let it perish, and let Christ's own name last forever. I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living'. What did Paul say? 'Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?'. Now I want, tonight, to deal with the party spirit and divisions within the local assembly, but I also want us to apply within our hearts and minds this divisiveness that there is that pervades within the worldwide church of Jesus Christ - because ultimately all divisions, whether they're local or whether they're worldwide, all come and stem from the same fundamental problems in the body of Christ.

Let me say right away, before we enter into these verses, that the Bible does not aspire or teach false ecumenism. False ecumenism is simply to deny our fundamental differences and creeds with regards to the gospel and salvation. A prime example and illustration is how many in the Protestant faith are denying the Protestant heritage and the gospel of justification by faith, by grace, ultimately, through God and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and His imputed righteousness unto us, not of works lest any man should boast. They are smudging the demarcation line between that and a gospel of works, a gospel of ritual and religiosity that we find in the Roman Catholic Church. They're saying very sincerely, and with a very loving but misguided spirit: 'Let's all come together and deny our fundamental differences, and let's fellowship one with the other' - even though both of them have two different ways of getting to God, and even two different understandings of God and His salvation. We deny that tonight on the authority of the word of God, we do not countenance or bless any false ecumenism, and I don't want you to misunderstand anything that I'm saying tonight - but let me say this: in our opposition to false ecumenism, we as modern-day Bible believers must stand and be seen to stand with historic biblical Christianity and affirm what is to be known as true ecumenism.

There is false ecumenism, but there is also true ecumenism, where genuine Bible believers who are born-again by the Spirit of God are able to come together in fellowship. The irony today is that those who probably opposed false ecumenism the most vehemently are those who are the most vehemently opposed to true ecumenism. It's strange, isn't it? It's strange that many fundamentalist Bible believers today probably couldn't have fellowship with Luther if he was around today. Many of them couldn't fellowship with John Wesley, or with George Whitfield, or with C.H. Spurgeon. Many of us quote him, many of us read their books, we even wish that we were a bit like them and follow after their standards and the example that they set for us - but yet if they were around today many of us would feel an inability to fellowship with them for one reason or another. It is even more ironic that those, perhaps, who oppose the segregation of Christianity today and delineation of denominations, are those who are the most exclusive and those who are the most divisive themselves.

We must address this according to the word of God and find out where the biblical balance is between false ecumenism and true ecumenism, which is Christian unity that the Bible teaches and which Paul is specifically teaching in these seven verses that we've read together tonight. Anthony T. Evans said these very telling and prophetic words: 'The church of Jesus Christ worldwide today remains the most segregated aspect of Western society'. The church of Jesus Christ today worldwide remains the most segregated aspect of Western society. I hope you will agree with me from your reading of the New Testament that when God had the first thought of the church of Jesus Christ, and revealed that great mystery to Paul, that it was not in view that He would have many things in one place, many churches in Belfast or in Corinth or in Ephesus, but one thing: the church of Jesus Christ in many places right across the globe. You notice that, that these letters are addressed to the church of Corinth, the church at Ephesus, not the first or the second or the third, but the church of God at Corinth.

Let me say that, if you look in the Encyclopaedia Britannica you will find this was the early dream and idealism of the Brethren movement - that labels would fall. For a short period of time in their history it was realised, where there were men and women - clergymen from Anglicanism, ministers from Presbyterianism, Baptists and all sorts of people from different backgrounds who met together and united just under the name of Christ, around the table which was not Baptist or Brethren or Presbyterian or Anglican, but which was the table of the Lord. They fellowshiped without any man-made restrictions or rules - but the massive irony of their history was that that idealism and that biblical dream was shattered by party spirit and by loyalties to men.

The principle that we find within this text here guard us, any of us, against schism in the local assembly and indeed in the church at large. We want to deal with our last two principles that will help us deal with division

and indeed prevent division in the assembly. The first that we find is in verse 13: 'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?'. Here it is: we need to learn the principle of oneness in Christ, we need to learn the principal of oneness in Christ, and Paul uses three rhetorical questions, and the answer to those three questions are 'No' every time. Verse 13: 'Is Christ divided?', the answer is 'No'. 'Was Paul crucified for you?', the answer is 'No'. 'Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?', the answer is 'No'. The implication of those three rhetorical questions is this: if Christ is not divided why are His people divided? If Christ is not divided in body at Corinth, why are there four factions among the church, probably meeting in four different locations, four different houses?

This ought not to be the case, and the central principal: 'What I, Paul, say, is this: is Christ divided?'. It is the unity of the body of Christ, that we as believers are all one in Christ, and if that is the case we never should be instrumental in disrupting or destroying the unity that is in the body of Christ. We saw last week that the embers of their strife and quarrels and cliques was fuelled by combustible pride. There was pride welling up, and as we saw from the book of James, strifes and quarrels and contentions among all believers start from pride within. Lust - we lust after our own name to be seen, to be proud, for people to follow us, to adhere unto us, to bring us obedience. Exactly the same thing happens here, because men had become more concerned with not the issue of baptism, but with who baptized you. They were running around, we believe, boasting about who baptized them. It wasn't the fact that their faith was made authentic by baptism, but they seemed to go a bit further and say how authentic their faith was with regard to the person that baptized them. Whether it was Paul, whether it was Cephas, whether it was Apollos, whoever it might have been - that was what became more important to them, not their baptism but their baptiser!

We find out in the first verse that Paul asserts his apostleship, and he's showing them his authority, but you've got to understand that at no point did Paul the apostle ever seek to bring men and women to himself - he is always bringing men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants people to know that when they're converted, no matter who they're converted through, no matter what denomination or organisation they come to Christ through, no matter what man or woman baptizes them - it doesn't matter, we are all united and one in Christ, and we ought not to be divided - why? Because there is this principal of oneness in Christ, it is a contradiction to think that the arm of the body of Christ could be severed, or the eye could be plucked out, or the nose could be taken away, because we are all one body.

Doesn't the letter of 1 Corinthians bear that out? Turn to chapter 6 verse 17, he says: 'But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit'. We aren't 110, or 115, or how many people there are here tonight, we aren't 115 spirits. We are joined to Christ and we are all one spirit. Chapter 12, if you turn to it, and verses 12 and 13: 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit'. It is a contradiction to have a local church schismata, a split, it's a contradiction! I would go further to say it is a contradiction to have splits in the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. It weakens the witness and testimony of the Gospel, and worst of all it grieves and brings shame to the One who bought them, the One who died to make them one. Let me say to you tonight, no matter who you are or where you come from: if, like these Corinthians, you have to be baptised by a certain man, or you have to be baptized in a certain water - whether it's the Lagan or the Jordan - or you have to be baptised on a certain day, no matter what holy day it is, you have lost the plot! The spirit that is found in the Corinthians here can be found right across Christendom today, and the tragedy of it is this: many are willing to split local churches and schism the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ at large over mere trivia!

Of course it's not trivia to them, it's fundamental to them, and that's the sign of their Corinthian spirit - when people make things that are non-fundamentals into fundamentals it is a sign that they have lost the plot! Now can I address our folk here in the Iron Hall for a minute, because I'm glad as your Pastor tonight that I'm not

a Baptist. I didn't hear any 'Hallelujahs'! I'm not Brethren. People say to me: 'What are you people in the Iron Hall anyway? Are you Baptist, are you Brethren, or are you somewhere in between?'. They want to pigeonhole you, they want to put a label on you - I'm not Baptist! Even when I was in the Baptist, I'm not a Baptist! I'm not Brethren - though people would like to make us Baptist, and some of you might want to make us Brethren, we're not! But there is a danger that when we stand in the position of non-denominationalism that we also fall into the position of the party in Corinth that said: 'We are of Christ, we're not Baptist, we're not Brethren, we're not Presbyterian, we're not Church of Ireland, we're not any of these factions - we're of Christ'. We have to guard against not only denominationalism but making our own denomination of the little Iron Hall! 'We alone are right', and if an H-bomb fell on the Iron Hall we'd all have a dilemma about where we're going to go on Sunday morning, because the Iron Hall was the only place that was right! We need to guard not only against that, but against little denominations within the Iron Hall! That's what Paul's talking about: little factions that break out, subdivisions and parties and doctrinal beliefs. We all have our different beliefs over many things, but what Paul is preaching against is making a schismata, a division without or within according to these secondary differences.

I'm not unaware of the fact that the local assembly has to have practical consensus, and as Paul says himself we all have to have the same mind and we've got to think the same thing with regards to doctrine and with fundamental truth, and even with secondary issues. There are practical things that have to go on the assembly, and we have to try and understand the word of God - hopefully being led by the Spirit of God - and come to conclusions on certain things. Paul is saying that that is what you ought to do, the elders ought to do that, it ought to filter down to the deacons and down to the members - but don't make divisions! Surely these truths must still affect our relationship in the Gospel with those who are not of our persuasion? There's this thing in Ulster, I don't know where it comes from - maybe it's our Celtic blood, or something to do with the Scots or the Irish or whoever we come from - sometimes I wonder who we're coming from with all this fighting going on. What is it that we can't just hold our convictions, we've got to hold them and hammer everybody else around us! Why is that?

In 1730 a 26-year-old by the name of George Whitfield, he was already famous in England for his evangelistic preaching, and he arrived in America. He was a Church of England cleric - never forget about that - and he was welcomed in the Americas by his co-labourers, and do you know who they were? They were Baptists, they were Presbyterians, they were Quakers, they were Lutherans, they were Congregationalists, they were Dutch Reformed, and anyone else who - as far as he was concerned - preached the Gospel and preached an individual, personal conversion. As he crossed the Atlantic he wrote to one of his clergymen friends in England, and he said this: 'The partition wall has for some time been broken down out of my heart, and I can truly say that whoever loves the Lord Jesus, the same is my brother and sister and mother'. I can say 'Amen' to George Whitfield, and if you can't you're not standing with historic biblical Christianity, if there is a wall of partition in your heart!

Lucian, the unbelieving Greek writer who lived in AD120-200, he observed the Christians around him and the fellowship that they had one for another, and he wrote this: 'It is incredible to see the fervour with which the people of that religion help each other. In their wants they spare nothing. Their first legislator', and in brackets he put 'Jesus', 'has put it into their heads that they are brethren', and because they knew that they were brothers and sisters in Christ - what was it? It was the principle of the oneness in Christ - we are one in Christ, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ no matter what divisive names we use.

Let me say that the best way of maintaining unity in the local assembly and in the worldwide church of Jesus Christ is our fourth point of dealing with division: it's to labour the priority of preaching the cross. Verses 14 to 17 outline it, but specifically verse 17: 'Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect'. You see, what happened was they lost the plot in Corinth because they got waylaid from the Gospel, from the cross. They got taken up with not

just the issue of baptism, but with who baptized them, with what sect they were in, and they got on their little hobby horse - perhaps the sect of Paul was their licentiousness and the efficacy of grace; perhaps the sect of Apollos was their intellectualism and their flowery oratory; perhaps the sect of Cephas was their legalism and their Jewishness; and the sect of Jesus was their gnosticism, how they were the chosen of God, how they knew everything and they didn't follow men. But whatever it was they each had their little hobby horse, but the danger of hobby horses is this: it eclipses the cross!

I don't know whether you've ever heard the Southern Gospel song: 'What kind of church would my church be, if every member was just like me?'. Do you know what some of their churches would be? Sitting at home with me, I, and myself! The 'David Legge denomination', just me. There was an old Quaker on one occasion and he left that many meetings, one place after another, that a man said to him: 'What church do you go to now?'. He says: 'Well, I've found the true church at last!'. 'How many belong to it?', he said. 'Well, just the wife and I, but I'm not sure about Mary...' - that's the way some of us are, isn't it? Now listen, don't misunderstand what I'm saying tonight, because you know me all too well - I hope, at least, maybe you think you don't really know me - but the word of God teaches, and I will teach from this pulpit, that doctrine is important. If the book of 1 Corinthians teaches anything, if you turn to chapter 11, it outlines that doctrine is important. Chapter 11 and verse 18: 'For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it'. So there are certain divisions that are necessary, why? Verse 19: 'For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you'. There are certain divisions that have to happen because it's the division between truth and error! We have to make a division when truth and error are opposed to one another, and we must always use the truth. But the antithesis of that, and the other side of the coin that we are not exempt in any shape or form from ignoring, is the fact that we must also unite together over truth and the truth that is the fundamental truth.

In this assembly we must continue to maintain biblical practices and principles and standards. For the practical and sensible working of the local assembly in every sphere there has to be accepted doctrine and practice, even in secondary matters, but Paul is still saying to us that we should never allow carnal things to divide us internally or to divide the church externally with other true believers in Christ. It never ought to be done! Why? Paul said, verse 17: 'I have always kept the main thing', the main thing - that was my wee paraphrase, it wasn't based on the original Greek - keeping the main thing, the main thing. 'I did not come to baptise, it's important, but what is all-important? You're divided over baptism, I'm telling you not to be, what I'm telling you to be is divided over the cross'. That is the demarcation line for the church of Jesus Christ, the only thing that we should divide over is truth and all that truth enshrines. In verses 14 to 16, if you look at it, you see, as we said, they were idolising the baptiser - and Paul gave a great sigh of relief. He says in verse 14: 'Thank God I never baptised hardly any of you, but Crispus and Gaius, and maybe a few more - the household', verse 16, 'of Stephanas: besides I can't even remember, and I thank God that I can't remember, who I baptised' - do you know why? Because they all would have been running away and idolising: 'Do you know who I was baptised by? The apostle Paul! What do you think of that?'

In John's gospel in chapter 4 and verse 2, do you know what we read? That the Lord Jesus never baptised anyone, what a temptation it would've been! Imagine, if you had been baptised in the water by the Lord Himself you wouldn't have needed to set yourself apart, people would have done it for you! They'd have been whispering: 'He was baptised by the Lord Himself!'. They would have made you into some kind of saint, put you in a glass window, maybe even have worshipped you! Paul is in danger himself of creating a cult around himself, and he says: 'I thank God I didn't baptise any of you'. Now listen, I don't want to create confusion, but I just want to challenge any misunderstandings that any of you have with regards to what the Bible teaches. You might be asking in your mind: 'Well, what are the things that are essential and the things that are not essential to our position as Christians and Bible believing Christians? What grounds should we separate from others upon, and what ground should we definitely not separate on?'. I cannot answer all these questions tonight, it would take another 50 minutes to go into this, but I hope to go into it probably in the rest



of our studies throughout 1 Corinthians. But let me say this: what was characteristic about the Corinthians was that they were dividing over non-essential matters. Now listen: they were dividing over carnal matters, they were forming sects around the personalities of men - Paul, Apollos, Cephas - and we must never do that, for that is carnality. No personality cults, no Christian superstars. One woman got up in the middle of a Sunday morning church service and objected and complained and shouted out loud that she was hearing more every Sunday about John Calvin from the pulpit than she was hearing about Jesus Christ!

There's a danger that we fall into this trap of following men, no matter how great these men may be. We're not meant to preach men, we're not meant to stand behind men. We're not meant to divide over carnal matters, like the rich and the poor that the Corinthians were dividing over. Those who were full, and those who were hungry at the Lord's Table, they weren't even waiting on one another, they were just feeding themselves and getting drunk - and there was this carnality that was entering into the church, and it ought not to have been so. We must never divide over carnality. Then there was intellectualism - not intellect, there's nothing wrong with intellect, God gave you it, so you use it - but intellectualism, where the intellectual were looking down on those who didn't know as much as they did. Sometimes we can do that, people who haven't had the privileges that we have had in the word of God and the teaching that you have had, and we can look down at them, and we can even think that it's a ground to separate from them - and it's not! Then there was false spirituality, because as you come near the end of this book you find those who, because they had certain spiritual gifts, they believed that they were more spiritual than others.

We all fall into this trap of sometimes thinking that because of our persuasion, because of our denomination, because of our creed, that we are more spiritual than other believers. Is that right? Is it right? It's not right! Why? Because we're all one in Christ, and unless there's a better Christ that you've got that I haven't got, or somebody down the road hasn't got, that's the only moment that you'll be better than anybody! Martin Lloyd-Jones, who I respect, and who's teaching I have benefited from on many occasions, on one occasion preaching in Bethesda Chapel in Sunderland on the 4th of November 1970, urged the British Evangelical Council not to let non-essential matters divide their united witness to the world. He outlined the book of Corinthians for them in an hour or so, and he said that from chapters 1 to 14 these Corinthians believers were urged by Paul not to divide over silly non-essential matters. Then in chapter 15 he began to expound that great chapter on resurrection, and he outlined for them the things that we ought to mark ourselves out as different in, and things that we ought to divide on, the things that we ought to stand for. It's not that the other things aren't important, they are very important for the working mechanisms of a local assembly, but for our witness to this world who only see faction and division and schism, these are the things that we ought to stand for!

Turn with me to that passage, and I want to take you through the points that Dr Lloyd-Jones made - chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. Here it is, and Paul is literally doing this, he's saying: 'These are the things that you've got to make your stand for, these are the things that you've got to divide in Corinth over'. 'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures'. He saying: 'This is what's important!' - it's not that the other things aren't important, that's why he's writing to them, to sort them out. But this is the issue that divides, this is the issue that you will stand or fall at: one, the Scriptures, according to the Scriptures - he doesn't just throw that in for some kind of pietism, to show that he was an apostle - that is the foundation of all that we believe. This gospel, our teaching, is according to the Scriptures; it's crucial; it's fundamental; it's essential. Our foundation - now this is a fundamental to divide on - our foundation is the word of God, not tradition of men! Whether it be Evangelical tradition, or Roman Catholic tradition, or pseudo-catholic tradition, or Protestant tradition, we know no tradition but the tradition of the apostles. That is a fundamental: the tradition of accepted Biblical doctrine - why? Because the word of God is inspired - it is revelation, it's not opinion, it's God's revealed

word and truth. It's authoritative and we must believe it - and the word of God, if we take it and put it into our lives, and into our churches, and into the worldwide church, it would dispel liberalism on one side that denies the word of God, and it would dispel ritualism and traditionalism that equally denies the word of God!

That is the position we ought to stand in, and secondly he says: 'I deliver, first of all, all that which I also received, but I declare', in verse 1, 'unto you the gospel'. I declare the gospel - what is the gospel? It is the fall of man, it is the fact that man needs to be saved; and the fact that man, if he is not saved, is abiding under the wrath of Almighty God - that is a nonnegotiable of Christianity, that we need salvation, the fall and its consequences if we don't get salvation: hell. The Scriptures, the fall, and thirdly God's plan of redemption: 'Christ', verse 3, 'died for our sins according to the scriptures'. That is the only message of hope that is revealed in the Old Testament, right through all the prophecies and all the ritual and all the signs and typology, right into the New Testament where we meet the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

One, the Scriptures; two, the fall; three, the plan of redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ; and four, the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is central to everything that we hold and believe, and it's interesting that in chapter 15 and verse 7 Paul links this fundamental belief in the Lord Jesus with His glorious resurrection. Look at it, verse 7: 'After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles'. Why does he link the centrality of our belief in the Lord Jesus with His resurrection? I'll tell you why: because of the seed of man He was born of David but, as Romans chapter 1 teaches us, 'He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'. It's not the fact that He lived a perfect life - all-important that that was - for us, but that's not what saves us, but it's the message that Christ died according to the Scriptures. We must stand and be divided, but also be united with those in Christ, with those who hold to the substitutionary effective death of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary. We must stand with all those who believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus, we must stand with all those who believe in the glorious hope of His returning that we read about in verse 28: 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all'. We must believe that the consummation of all things will be in God through Christ.

He is God, and He is God's Son - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we believe in the Triune Godhead, three Persons, one substance. There we stand with the apostles, and there we stand with the Reformers, there we stand with Christians of every age, and we ought not to be divided if we stand with them on these things. The emphasis of Paul in his message to these Grecian Christians in Corinth is significant, as significant as his message was to the believers in Rome. I don't know whether you've ever seen this or not, but in Rome people were vaunted with great power and might. It was a centre and the seat of the power of the world, the great empire that spanned the whole of Europe as we know it, and as Paul comes to them with the gospel - what is the note that he strikes? 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ', why? 'Because it is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek'. Then he comes to the Greeks in Corinth with all their boasted wisdom and culture, and he strikes the theme of his message in these words that you find in chapter 1 and verse 23: 'We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men'.

To Rome it was the gospel of the power of God, and to Greece, to Corinth, it was the gospel of the wisdom of God - and, my friend, it is the gospel that this world is crying out for! But it's the gospel that they cannot hear, because of our divisiveness! I am not calling for some kind of flower-power, happy-clappy smudging of convictions and principles, and I say with Martin Luther: 'Cursed be that unity for which the word of God is put at stake' - cursed be it! But equally, my friends tonight, before the word of God, for the gospel's sake, let us have unity in the truth! The best pulpit for the gospel is Christian unity in truth.

Can I read you in closing a story that I read recently that spells it all out? Listen to it very carefully. Someone has imagined the carpenter's tools holding a conference. Brother Hammer presided, and several suggested that he leave the meeting because he was too noisy. Replied the Hammer: 'If I have to leave the shop Brother Screw must go also, you have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything'. Brother Screw then spoke up: 'Well, if you wish, I'll leave, but Brother Plane must also leave too - all his work is on the surface, and his efforts have no depth'. To this Brother Plane responded: 'Brother Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right'. Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper: 'You ought to leave too, because you're so rough, and always rubbing people up the wrong way'. In the midst of all this discussion in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth. He had arrived to start His day's work. Putting on His apron, He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the gospel. He employed the hammer, the screw, the plane, the rule, the sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work, when the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and remarked: 'Brethren, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord'.

We need to focus on the One whose glory we share, and who in what is known as His high priestly prayer in John chapter 17 prayed: 'For the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one'.

Father, with every fibre of our being we abhor false unity, false ecumenism that denies the gospel and denies the glorious work of Thy Son. Father, we know that what fellowship is there between light and darkness, between God and Belial. We would not seek to have such fellowship, but yet, our Father, we acknowledge tonight that the church of Jesus Christ is worldwide; the communion of the saints is a mysterious reality; and Father, we are not divided, we are all one in Christ no matter how we feel or how we think. We know, our Father, that one thing that this old world needs to hear tonight is the united cry in the gospel. Oh, Father, that You would know nothing in us save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. We pray that men and women from all backgrounds would lay down their tradition, lay down their preconceived ideas, and take up the word of God, and take up the gospel of God alone without labels and without restrictions and loyalties to men, and go and preach it - and that there would be no uncertain sound that would come from this church. Lord, in a day that is yet to be, may there be a certain cry from the city of Belfast, that men and women will hear and see that we're all thinking the same thing, and speaking the same words, that Christ Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Amen.

*1 Corinthians - Chapter 5*  
***"The Foolishness Of God vs  
 The Wisdom Of Men"***

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**1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5**

- 1. *The Gospel's Message Is The Opposite Of Worldly Wisdom (1:18-25)***
- 2. *The Gospel's Grace Is The Opposite Of Worldly Pride (1:26-31)***
- 3. *The Gospel's Power Is The Opposite Of Worldly Persuasion (2:1-5)***

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 1, and we are in our fifth study tonight - we took a break last week, and were mightily blessed through the ministry of our brother Bill Freel. We're taking up again, and we're hopefully finishing the first chapter of 1 Corinthians and entering into even the second chapter tonight, God willing, if time permits us. So we want to take up where we left off in the last study two weeks ago, but we'll just read the last verse that we studied on that last week, verse 17, to get the flow right through the whole of this chapter and the first five verses of chapter 2.

Verse 17: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God".

So we look tonight at this study under the title of 'The Foolishness of God vs The Wisdom of Men'. Several weeks ago I give you a bit of a biography of the Moravian people, that great movement of Jesus Christ that was moved of God to take the gospel right across the world - they were really the beginning of the modern missionary movement as we know it today. You remember that they had that 100 year prayer meeting, where 24 women and 24 men separated themselves and took an hour each and each day worked around it; and everyone that was sick, someone took their place; and everyone that died, someone stepped into the gap -

and for 100 years they had this prayer meeting that gave birth, for 300 years, to missions right across Europe. Well, I was reading about the Moravians this week, and one thing I picked up was that when they were beginning their mission in Greenland they found that the natives were so ignorant that they were at the end of their tether as to how to share the gospel with them. Because they couldn't even understand language, or they couldn't read or write, they decided that they would first and foremost educate the people of Greenland. The results were so disappointing, they felt they were banging their head against a brick wall, that they decided to give up and pack up and leave Greenland.

While one of the missionaries was awaiting a ship to take him home he began to translate a portion of the Gospels in the New Testament. After he had finished translating that portion, he decided that he would test the translation by opening the word of God and reading it to the native people. As he did that he read to them about the death, the crucifixion, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. After finishing reading the portion of Scripture in their own native tongue there was a pause and there was silence for a period, and after that period of silence the chief of the tribe stood up and asked that the missionary would read the portion of the gospel again. After he finished reading it again the chief said: 'Is what you read true?'. He said again: 'Is it true?'. When the missionary replied: 'It is true', the man from Greenland asked the question: 'Then why didn't you tell us this at the first hand? Why did you have to leave it until now? We will listen now to the words of this Man who suffered for us! You cannot go, you will have to stay and tell us about this suffering Man who suffered for us!'

What I want you to see is simply this: that even way back hundreds of years ago, and even in the passage that we're reading tonight, Paul could testify, the Moravians could testify, and we ought to be able to testify tonight in our gospel outreach and proclamation that the cross always conquers where the wisdom of man fails. Paul, in this passage, is addressing those in Corinth who claim to be wise - of course, they're in the church of Jesus Christ, but they're very proud of the human worldly wisdom which they have. In fact, if we reminisce to the previous weeks of our studies, you'll remember that they were using this worldly wisdom to divide the church and to promote personalities - even their own personalities, to push themselves forward in the place of Jesus Christ. But Paul is showing them, and we'll see in this study this week, that their so-called worldly human wisdom means absolutely nothing - it is worthless in the sight of God. The reason why he says that is: one, that wisdom that they have and are purporting and have pride in cannot save anybody, and that wisdom cannot further the cause of Jesus Christ.

In fact, the wisdom that they are purporting to have does the exact opposite: it destroys things. It's destroying this church in Corinth. Those who are saying: 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ', it is bringing division into the church of Jesus Christ - but we'll see it's more sinister and devastating than that this week, because it actually opposes the tenets and the fundamentals of the gospel of God's grace that is in Christ. Paul is saying that to adhere to such worldly humanistic wisdom is to oppose, is the exact opposite and antithesis of everything that the gospel is, and the gospel of Jesus Christ stands for. Their fundamental problem was that they misunderstood what true wisdom really is, the nature of true wisdom. Paul was telling them right at the outset: human wisdom, the wisdom that they are priding themselves in, the wisdom that they are using to divide the church of Jesus Christ, is based on human arrogance and leads ultimately to destruction - but true wisdom, the wisdom of God, is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed from heaven and that gospel is the only thing that leads to life and leads to health.

I hope you see the difference. In verse 17 he tells us quite clearly and categorically: 'That is the reason I did not come to preach baptism unto you, but I came to preach the gospel, and I didn't come to preach it with the method of wisdom of words' - why? 'Because I didn't want the cross of Christ, the message of the cross, to be of none effect. I didn't want you to miss the point, because the most important thing of all that I will preach is the cross - and if you miss that you will miss the wisdom of God!'. Corinthians, Paul is saying, Christians tonight in Belfast, never ever allow human wisdom and human eloquence to obscure the power of the cross.

Make sure that you don't have human wisdom, even theological wisdom, make sure that you have the wisdom of God because there is a difference! We're going to see the difference in the three points that you have before you, which really outline the chapter that we've read together.

The first difference is this: the gospel message is the opposite of worldly wisdom. The gospel message is the opposite of worldly wisdom. What we have to realise, and this is elementary stuff but it's necessary to lay down this foundation, is that there's only two types of people in this whole universe. I don't know whether there's anybody here tonight that's not converted, but you need to hear this and I want you listen specifically to this: there are only two types of creatures, those who are perishing and those who are being saved. In verse 18 Paul tells us that: 'For the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but unto us which are being' - literally - 'which are being saved it is the power of God'. Those two positions - those who are perishing, and those are continually being saved and going to glory - are two diametrically opposed positions. They are not the same, they cannot be merged, the lines of demarcation cannot be smudged. They are two black-and-white, fundamental absolutes that are not the same and cannot ever be confused.

One of the fundamental evidences that they are not the same, that they are absolutely different, is because they have two different responses to the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ. If you want to know whether you're saved or not you don't ask the question: 'Well, do you believe in God? Do you believe the Bible? Do you believe Jesus was a good man, a prophet, or even the Son of God?'. Those aren't the questions, the great demarcation line that will decide whether you're among those who are perishing at present and will perish in the lake of fire or those who are being saved by the grace of God at present and one-day - ultimately their salvation is now sealed, but will be realised in a future day - is: what do you think and what is your response to the cross of Christ?

Of course these two groups respond in two absolutely diverse ways. For those that are perishing their human wisdom that they stand upon, that they use as the foundation of their life, causes them to conclude that the cross is absolute foolishness. You see, human wisdom is for those who are perishing, and if you stand upon intellect or reason or rationale, you must know that you are perishing! That is one good reason for not choosing human wisdom, because it ultimately leads to the place the Bible calls hell. But those, the Bible says, who the Spirit of God is working in, has initially done a work in salvation and is doing a work in day-to-day and ultimately would bring to fruition when we go to glory and are made to be perfect in the image of Jesus Christ, their whole perspective of what wisdom is has been changed. The Spirit of God has wrought a work in their mind and in their heart so that they're changed from this camp of those who are perishing, who see the cross as foolishness, and they begin and are brought by the Spirit to see the cross as the power of God unto salvation!

I'll tell you this: that change cannot be made by anything or anyone but by the Spirit of the Living God, for that is the greatest change, the greatest turnaround, the greatest transformation that is known in the universe. What is the point that Paul is making? He's saying that the wisdom of this world is diametrically opposed to the very message that saves! He is appealing to the Corinthians upon the grounds of the message that you have believed, and that has saved you and has placed you in the church of Jesus Christ, and has set you on your way to glory: 'I plead with you, you're now believing something that is totally opposed and the opposite and antithesis of everything that has saved your soul from hell!'. To support that claim he appeals, and he quotes the Old Testament as he often does, he quotes Isaiah chapter 29 verse 14 and verse 19. If you look at verse 19 of this passage, this is him quoting it: 'For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent'. He's quoting how Isaiah was speaking to the Israelites of old, and whenever they were in trouble, when they were facing judgement and wrath from other nations, what did they do? They failed in this as well, rather than looking to God in faith for help, what did they do? They looked to their own human worldly wisdom, as James calls it: earthly wisdom.

So in verse 20 he asks these questions, the first two are inferring, talking about the Israelites: 'Where is the wise man?', Isaiah 19:12, he mocks the Egyptians because they thought that their wisdom was as great as the ways and wisdom of God. Remember Pharaoh and all Pharaoh's magicians before Moses, they thought that they could reciprocate the great wisdom of the God of Israel, but God is saying in Isaiah and also through Paul: 'Where is the wise man now? Where is the scribe? Where is the scholar?'. Isaiah in his book also ridiculed the Assyrians because they had great arrogance, they thought that they could outwit the God of Israel, that they were cleverer. I think Paul is alluding also to the Jewish scribes that were probably in the camp of Cephas in this church specifically, who were still adhering to the law of Moses - circumcision and all the rest of it. Paul is saying: 'Where is the scribe? Where is the legal scholar of Judaism now before the wisdom of God?'. It's all the wisdom of this world.

He goes on: 'Where is the disputer of this world?'. Some translations put it: 'Where is the philosopher of this age?', and this is specifically contemporary to Paul's day, for he's moving now within the Greek world of Corinth where there's all the philosophers standing in the marketplace, philosophising and debating about what is truth and what is the universe that we live in. Where are they now? This is all human wisdom. So Paul asks the rhetorical question to end them all, and of course the answer to it is 'Yes': 'Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' - has He not? Did He not in Isaiah's day? Of course He did! He defeated the Egyptians, He defeated the Assyrians, and there's a day coming when He will defeat all of the wisdom of this puny little futile world! One day, praise His holy name, everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, everything that sets itself up opposed to the revelation of God's word and God's gospel, will be pulled down and will be frustrated finally! Isn't that wonderful to know?

I'll tell you something even better than that, for us presently at least, it's this fact that Paul is telling us in Corinthians: that all the wisdom, the human earthly wisdom of this world, is confounded and frustrated here and now in the person and in the truth of Jesus Christ. It's already defeated! That's what Paul is really meaning, that's what Paul is really getting at. One day, finally and ultimately, all human wisdom will be frustrated - but today as we, week after week, faithfully we hope, try and preach the gospel, we are frustrating the human wisdom of this world - why? Because the human wisdom of the philosophers, of the scholars, of the Judaisers, of the intellectuals, all over this world in Paul's day and in today's day, would never ever lead them in their mind to the conclusion that God, to save human beings, would send His only begotten Son to die on a cross, to bleed, to be buried, and to rise again the third day - never happen! That is how God frustrates today the wisdom of this world, the wise ones who exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Do you see the wisdom of God? This is tremendous, that actually by acting in this way God is frustrating human wisdom, because they label this gospel of a dying Redeemer as foolishness! In doing so God has actually frustrated their human wisdom!

You'd be forgiven for thinking: 'Well, if these wise men are really seeking after truth surely whatever path they follow, whatever religious path or philosophical path or scientific path, would ultimately lead them to truth?'. What is God doing? He sees that ultimately in the depths of their heart there is a depraved, rebellious human nature - and professing themselves to be wise, if they continue to lean on their own understanding and rely on all their intellect and all their prideful human wisdom, their mind will never ever bring them to the truth of God - why? Because to their wisdom it is folly! Do you see it? I do not think I am wrong in saying that God is actually confirming man in his sinful rebellion by choosing something that the wise think is foolish. Making their wisdom foolish...and as Romans tells us 'professing themselves to be wise, they are made fools'.

Verse 21 tells us that: 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by its human wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe'. Isn't that wonderful? They're all sitting in their seats of learning with their beards to their feet, and philosophising about what is truth, when we will know God, when we will be as high as God, and in a carpenter's shop in Nazareth the God of heaven

has come to dwell with men and they're missing it because they can't get off their high pinnacle of human learning and get down to God's foolishness which is above their learning! T. S. Eliot, the author who was not a man of God, far from it, said in a poem: 'All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance, and all our ignorance brings us nearer to death, but nearness to death no nearer to God, where is the life we have lost in living?'. That is where the wisdom of men leads you. It's not that men can't know about God, Romans 1 tells us that we can know about God from creation around us, the law of God is written on our hearts - but what it's talking about is in their own wisdom they couldn't be brought into an intimate knowledge of God, a relationship through salvation, and cleansing, so God chose a way that confounds their wisdom - what is it? It is the way of faith. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Not 'that think', not 'that philosophise', not 'that intellectualise', but those who believe.

In verse 22 he expands this assertion and he says: 'For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom'. These were the particular ways that their various versions of worldly wisdom had been foiled through the gospel of Christ. The Jewish standard of what was wise was to be able to see signs. You remember when the Lord was on the earth the Jews were always asking Him for a sign, you can read about it in Matthew 12, John 2, John 6. Even when He performed signs, He never performed them at their bidding, but even when He did perform them it didn't satisfy them - and they thought to themselves: 'I think if He's really Messiah, He would never deny the Jewish people a sign to show that He is who He says He is', so they rejected Him! What upon? The grounds of their own worldly wisdom. So He became a stumbling-block to them.

The Jews required a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom - what was the wisdom the Greeks sought after? What was their foundation of human understanding? Well, it was the exalted standards of the pagan philosophers, the poets. They thought it was absolute idiocy to think of a suffering God. How could God suffer? It's not rational! They wanted a gospel that was based upon their own human intellectual speculation, but the gospel that Paul is preaching, the gospel that is in the word of God is not down to speculation, it is revelation! 'Can I have no part in it?', the Greeks thought to themselves, so they rejected it too.

But here we have the wonderful contrast, and praise God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - that we are found in that contrast tonight. Verse 23: 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness'. What did Paul do? Did he intellectualise the gospel for the Greek? Is that what he did? Did he Judaise the gospel for the Jews? Did he make it more acceptable? Did he do signs and wonders to prove that he was an apostle of God? Did Christ pander to all their fleshly lusts to see with their eyes rather than to have faith? No, what did Christ say? 'An adulterous and perverse generation seeketh after a sign', but what did he do? He preached the message that had been delivered unto him of God, and he didn't change it one iota!

Oh, we need to hear this message today! He didn't dilute the gospel, he didn't reduce the message to something that they could accept, but it was a stumbling-block and he gave it to them as a stumbling-block - a 'scandalon', that's literally the Greek word. It was a scandal to them, the Jew, to think that their Messiah could be nailed to a cross, because Deuteronomy 12 told them that cursed is anyone that hangs upon a tree, he was a malefactor, he is a criminal, and my Messiah could not die in that way! Boy, was it a stumbling-block for a Jew to die on a Roman cross. To the Greek it was foolishness to think of this little Jew, as far as they were concerned, dying as a common thief - not even able to overcome His human enemies, yet it is testified that He's overcoming sin and death and hell there and He's saving the world from all their sins? Foolishness! It cannot be!

Well, thank God tonight that there was one group that embraced it. Look at it, verse 24, and you mark every word in this verse and don't make any mistakes about it: 'But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God'. The only difference between those who rejected



the gospel and those who accepted the gospel was the power of the Holy Spirit in their life calling them! How does a person change from being one of those who are perishing to one of those who are being saved? I'll tell you what has to happen: the grace of God through the Holy Spirit has to touch their understanding and make it melt until they no longer see the gospel as foolishness, but they perceive it as the power of God unto salvation, and they believe!

Thank God that He touched me, and I can accept that - I don't understand it. Do you understand it? Why there are millions out there who have never been touched, but you're touched? I can't understand it, but do you know why I can believe it? Because of verse 25: 'Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men', and the fact that I can't understand it unless I'm God, and my ways become His ways, and my thoughts become His thoughts, I'll never understand it! But thank Him I can believe it! As the song says: 'Because He touched me' - He touched me! I no longer see Him as a fool, I no longer see His message as foolishness, but I see Him as the Christ and I see His message as the power of God unto salvation!

I hope you're seeing the difference tonight that the gospel message is the opposite of worldly wisdom, it turns worldly wisdom on its head - and we shouldn't be afraid that we don't understand everything to do with the gospel or God or salvation! Do you understand it all? Talk to me afterwards if you do, 'cos I'd love to have a chat with you! I'll never understand it, but would there not be something wrong if we believed in an omniscient, omnipotent Deity and we could understand it all? Sure that would be a contradiction in and of itself. Those who know the reality of the wisdom and the power of the gospel, do you know what they will never do? They will never exalt man's wisdom over it.

Let me ask, we're going to fly on here, but let me ask: in our methods, how we present the gospel, do we reflect this? Do we? Or do we find ourselves finding in our hearts, or even in our actions, trying to marry in some way Christianity to the world's beliefs or to the world's value systems or standards, when it is utterly and diametrically and fundamentally opposed to everything that this world has or believes or stands for? It's not the world's standard that we need to adjust to to give them the gospel, it's God's standard! We ought to be changing, we ought to be changing, but not to the world, to the standards of God. I heard a story today about a man hanging on a cliff shouting for help, and a voice from heaven said: 'Let go'. He shouted back: 'Who's saying that?'. The voice came back: 'God'. He thought for a minute and then he shouted back: 'Is there anyone else up there?'. God tells us to give the gospel, He tells us the way to give the gospel, He tells us what the power of the gospel is, and we ask: 'Is there not another way?'. Surely this isn't working, surely there must be other wisdom - listen tonight: the gospel message is the opposite of our worldly wisdom!

Secondly, Paul develops his argument in inviting these believers to look now at their own personal experience of what their conversion was. He shows them that the gospel's grace is the opposite of worldly pride. Verse 26: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called'. 'Remember when you were called, Corinthians, there wasn't many of you who were wise in worldly standards, very few of you were influential, very few were noble' - now that doesn't mean that not any noble, or any wise, or any of these types of people can be saved, you need to think of the Moravians themselves and Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, and even Lady Huntingdon who in the 1700's was a great force for good in our land, and we could name many others. In fact Lady Huntingdon said that her salvation was owed to the letter 'M' in this verse! 'Not many', it doesn't say 'not any'! But generally speaking Paul is saying: 'Look, you're the big men now, you're putting your chest out and asserting your authority in the church, and you're even using this proud worldly wisdom to divide the church of Jesus Christ - but you weren't like that when you were saved! The world wouldn't have looked at you when you were saved'.

Well, that brings them down to size because they had forgotten what they really were, and they had appealed to human wisdom. You see men like that in the church, they get saved and all of a sudden they get into some dry theory of an argumentation about some insignificant doctrine, and before you know it they lose their zeal and they lose the simplicity that is in Christ, and they get this sort of aura around them: 'I know more than you because I have this doctrine!'. It's sad because the experience that we have when we are saved is forgotten, and this makes clear in this passage the way that God sees us all at conversion and right throughout our lives, and this is it - now you mark it, if you've got a superiority complex you watch this, and if you haven't watch it because you should have because we've all got one - it's called an old nature. 'But', verse 27, 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are' - that's how God sees you!

People who the world wouldn't have respected before you were saved, God still sees you like that! Do you know why? We often think: 'You know, this grace business, God chose me and it means that I don't really know why He chose me', and that's true in the sense that there was nothing in you, qualifications or attributes or morals, for God to choose you and say: 'Well, there's a good man, I'll have him, he's useful to me'. That's not the way it works - but I'll tell you this: there is a reasoning behind why God chooses you, but you're not going to like it! It's because you're base, it's because you're wicked, it's because you're despised, it's because you would never get anywhere outside the church of Jesus Christ! And do you know what ultimately the reasoning of it all is? To shame the things in the world that profess to be wise, God takes up an old sinner and uses him, and that is the greatest confounding of worldly wisdom that you will ever see!

That is the only basis for boasting. Paul is not trying to belittle these believers, he's trying to remind them that their only basis for boasting is the fact that God chose them to shame the wisdom of the world. When you first experience grace, you don't feel superior, do you? When you were saved at first did you feel superior? If you did you're not saved at all! Because it is that humility that comes through the mourning, the sorrow that leads unto repentance with the weight of your sins, conviction upon your shoulders and the guilt and the blame that makes you cast yourself on God for mercy rather than judgement! Now here's the question: how do you feel tonight? Do you feel a little bit better than you were then? Do you? You might know a bit more, you might have learned a bit more, you might be a wee bit more mature, but do you know what the grace of God teaches us? You're no better, and if you think you're any better the possibility is that you're worse.

Oh, there ought to be no superiority complexes, from God's position and perspective nothing has changed. Rather He has chosen the lowly, why? To confound the things that are mighty, why? Verse 29: 'That no flesh should glory in his presence', that no-one should glory! If you're elect of God, you're called of God and you've put faith in God, that's who the Bible calls the elect of God - it doesn't mean the elite of God! You're not anything special, only that God has made you special by choosing you and by saving you! I praise God tonight, if there's anybody in this meeting and they're not converted, they're not saved, and they're a deep-dyed sinner just like all of us - for there is no difference, and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God - is it not good news to you tonight that God chooses the weak, God chooses the despised and the wicked things of this world! Those are the people He saves!

To dispel any remaining pride or doubts in their minds he reminds them why they believed in the first place. I think there were some of them walking around thinking: 'Well, I know it was grace, but I really believed because I was wiser than those people out there, I sought after God. I sought God's way. I was more powerful, I was powerful enough to receive salvation' - but do you know what verse 30 says? 'But of him' - of Him - 'are ye in Christ Jesus'. The reason why you're saved is not because you had more sense, or you were wiser, or you were more powerful, but by grace were you saved through faith, and that not of

yourselves - but because you are put in Christ by His grace, the wisdom of God to us is Christ, and it is of Christ and His God and Father Jehovah that you are saved! It is of Him!

That means we ought, as believers, to stop following worldly wisdom and recognise that it is in Christ, He is the total and utter embodiment of all divine wisdom. The wisdom that He engenders, it produces in verse 30: righteousness, holiness and redemption - and if you want to have any of those things it's not through theology, although theology is good, it's not through learning, but it is through a relationship where you become more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ through fellowship with Christ and in Christ! The purpose of all that is verse 31: 'That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in his learning'? 'Let him glory in his denominational persuasion'? 'Let him glory in his theology'? 'Let him glory in his great preaching ability'? No! 'Let him glory in the Lord'!

The Gospel's grace is the opposite of worldly pride. Thirdly and finally, the gospel's power is the opposite of worldly persuasion. You see this all affects the way that we present this message. Paul tells us in the first five verses of chapter 2 that this message is not to be presented according to the world's wisdom. If it's the opposite of worldly wisdom, if it's the opposite of worldly pride, therefore it's the opposite of worldly persuasion. You don't present it the way that the world would present it! The Corinthians were obviously, like those in their world, presenting it with logic and argument and with rhetoric. They were more interested in the way they were doing it rather than what they were saying. But Paul says that if you're presenting the Gospel here's the way to persuade people: focus centrally and fundamentally and essentially on the message of the cross!

Is that not what he said first of all in verse 17? 'He sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest' - what? - 'the cross of Christ', it's a synonym for the Gospel. It is the gospel! I have to be careful, and I didn't want to allude to it last night in the Gospel because we have to beware but we say in front of unbelievers, but there are certain methods today on television and in the media to get people to believe the Gospel and to persuade them, and I have no doubt that God in His sovereignty can take up absolutely anything. In Philippians He took up people who were preaching Christ in contention and saved people through them - but I'm telling you this: this is not the method that we are to adopt, to tell people 'Oh, you'll have a better life, you'll fill the void within your soul, this is what you've looking for, you would pay a million dollars to get it but you can get it by faith in Christ and all your worries will be away!' - this is a gospel about blood! It's a Gospel about nails, pain, anguish, wrath, hell! It's a gospel about taking up that cross and following that crucified Christ! It's no picnic, but I'll tell you this: that's where the power of God is, in that cross.

Paul says this is the divine mandate and design that I have been given to preach this gospel, and he was fulfilling it right across the Mediterranean world and he wasn't going to stop with the Corinthians. It was the opposite of the message that those who were splitting the church were preaching. They had all their difference slants on the Gospel, their different slants on God's truth - but what does he say? Look at verse 1: 'I declared unto you the testimony of God'. Oh, let's be done with worldly wisdom, let's be done with the methods of worldly persuasion, and let's take God's design - it's not the foolishness of preaching now, literally it's the foolishness of the message that is preached, the foolishness of this cross, this blood, the judgement of God upon His Son - take it! Why? Because the power is in it, that is what will save people: the cross! If you present a message in arrogance like the Corinthians, or in eloquence like the Sophists, people may be swayed by your rhetoric or your sophistication or your method, but Paul is saying they'll not be swayed by the Holy Spirit!

We need to avoid this today - I love singing, and you know that, and we could do with a bit more lively singing sometimes in this place - but I'll tell you this: you see working people up into an emotional state with music, and then coming and lingering with them and pleading with them over and over again, and almost in a

sort of hypnotic trance moving them emotionally to the decision? That is not the Holy Ghost! It's taking the testimony of God, and I'll tell you: if you take the testimony of God the best thing that you can do is just give it and walk away, and leave the Holy Spirit to do the work.

Well, in verse 2 he says: 'For I determined' - you can't get much clearer than this - 'not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'. Jesus, He's central; the cross is central in all of its magnitude, yet in all of its simplicity - this is the most effective dimension of the gospel, and what is this that he took? This is what he presented to the Greeks, not some kind of intellectual argument, he presented the cross! What did he present to the Jews? Did he go into the tabernacle? He went to the cross! He went to the cross because it is the most offensive dimension of the gospel. Isn't that amazing? We shy away from preaching hell, but you know that's not the most offensive thing about the gospel, the cross is because that was hell on the Son of God! Perhaps that's why people aren't preaching it today. I happen to agree with C.H. Spurgeon when he said: 'Whatever text I preach the gospel from, by hook or by crook I will find a way to Calvary from it'.

Friends, we need to preach the cross, and we need to be assured of the effectiveness of the cross because it alone is the power of God unto salvation. In verse 3 he personalises it, he says: 'When I was with you, you can't deny that when I was there that this was the message I preached, this was the message that you first believed. I didn't come in arrogant pomp and pride, not in human strength', but what does he say? 'In weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching', verse 4, 'was not with enticing or persuasive words of man's wisdom', but what was it in? 'The power and the demonstration of the Spirit of God!' Do you know what that word 'demonstration' literally means? It's a technical legal term to describe an irrefutable evidence offered to a court, and Paul is saying: 'You saw it with your own eyes'. The power of God!

I must close, but do you know something? Don't misunderstand me, but we don't need to resort to the arguments of worldly wisdom to get people saved. In fact, if we're doing that that's maybe why people don't get saved. We don't need pop stars that are converted, we don't need actors or sports personalities, we don't need to sit scientists in the pulpit and get them to argue to show us that science is wrong and the Bible is true - we don't need that, why? Because the cross is the power of God unto salvation, this is supernatural! But also you don't just want anybody to preach the cross, why? Because it has to be preached - and God help me here - in the demonstration of the power of God! E.M. Bounds, that great man of prayer, said: 'The preachers who are the mightiest in their closets with God are the mightiest in their pulpits with men because our sufficiency is of God'.

I have to close but I've one story to tell you, and this details it all. Before I mention these men I want to say to you, you've maybe heard of D.L. Moody, you've maybe heard Billy Sunday, you've maybe heard of Billy Graham, and all these men if you listen to them there's nothing too spectacular - and I say this humbly, knowing my own station - about these men and their preaching. I've listened to tapes recorded years ago in the Iron Hall of Pastor Tocher, I've listened to W.P. Nicholson, and I'll be honest with you: my heart dropped when I heard them. Not with wisdom of words...so what was it about them? The demonstration of the Spirit of God!

This is the story: G.H. Lang in his book 'God At Work In His Own Lines' tells of an illiterate draper in Cornwall called Mr Gribble. Mr Gribble invited people into his home and he used to read a penny sermon to them, and there were people saved. After a while he got confidence and he was able to say a few words of his own free will, and there were hundreds of people getting saved. J.M. Darby wrote to S.T. Tregelles in a letter, and he wrote this: 'There are few men who can preach the gospel more fluently than you and I can, and we see few souls saved, and they tell me there is an illiterate brother called Gribble, and when he quotes

scripture there are people swept into the kingdom'. G.H. Lang in his book says: 'Mr Darby's question is well worth pondering'. Why? Because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

'Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are, my glorious dress.  
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

When from the dust of death I rise  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
E'en then shall this be all my plea:  
Jesus has lived and died for me'.

We love Him, Father, because He first loved us. We pray that we will see His dying love and boast in nothing but that cross, and take up that cross and follow Him, and lose our lives of earthly wisdom down here, and gain a life of heavenly joy up yonder. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 6*

## ***"God's Wisdom Understood"***

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### **I Corinthians 2:6-16**

- 1. *God's Wisdom Is Hidden From The World (verses 6-9)***
- 2. *God's Wisdom Is Revealed By The Spirit (verses 10-16)***
  - i. Through Revelation (verses 10-11)*
  - ii. Through Inspiration (verses 12-13)*
  - iii. Through Illumination (verses 14-16)*
- 3. *God's Wisdom Is Received By The Regenerate (verses 14-16)***

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 2, and our portion for study tonight is verse 6 through to verse 16, but we'll read from verse 1 just to get the flow of the chapter as we left off last Monday evening.

Verse 1 of chapter 2: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ".

Last week we looked at the subject: 'The Foolishness of God vs The Wisdom of Men', and tonight after spending some time on that subject we want to home in on the wisdom of God specifically, and God's wisdom understood. I think every parent at some time in their life, and I'm waiting for the day coming up in the not-too-distant future, will hear the famous words: 'That's not fair!'. Whether it's to the stamping of feet, or to the screeching of a voice, in teenage years or early toddler years, the terrible two's or whatever it may be - sometime you may hear those words: 'That's not fair, everybody's doing it, why can't I do it? It's just not fair!'. Even when you seem to explain, as an adult in child's terms, 'Son, it's for your own good', or 'Love, it's for your own good. Listen to what I'm saying', it just doesn't seem to make sense at times to children, the reasoning and the decision-making process of the adult mind.

You know better than I do that it may even take years, maybe even decades, for those children to see the sense in your adult decision-making. It's not particularly because they're rebellious or iniquitous, or terribly sinful, although that comes into it, but it's probably more to do with the fact that they're just too immature to understand the human wisdom or to grasp your reasoning in coming to the decision that you have made. They just see a thing that they want as children and they want to get it, they don't think of all the implications, and they don't have particular wisdom to make a decision upon. They don't understand your adult wisdom probably primarily because they are immature.

Really what Paul is saying in this passage specifically tonight is that the wisdom of God is only for the mature, not for the immature but for the mature. Now you know that you see things clearer in your adulthood than you did when you were young, and I'm still waiting for the day when things are going to become clearer and clearer to me in future! But what is the case in the natural realm, Paul is simply saying that it's no different in the spiritual realm. There is spiritual immaturity, and those who are spiritually immature cannot grasp the wisdom of God. There is a process of development, a process of sanctification, a process of maturity, and Paul speaks here of a wisdom for the spiritually mature - a wisdom that they can understand.

So he has already said that the wisdom of God is not something that the wise men of this world will understand. In fact they think that God's wisdom is foolishness. But there is a wisdom, it's not that God's wisdom is in essence intrinsically foolish, it's not that the gospel is foolish or God is foolish, it is foolishness to those who do not believe - but to those who are mature it is the wisdom of God, and they understand it and perceive it and can conceive it as such. Now what is the relevance of all this to these Corinthians? Well, you know as well as I do in chapter 1 we saw that in verse 13 of the chapter Paul was asking the question: 'Is Christ divided? Some of you are saying that you're of Apollos, of Cephas, some say 'I am a Paul', some even say 'Oh, I am of Christ, I'm not of a mere man, I'm of the Christ of God". But really the basis for all their pompous pride and divisiveness and schism was upon their own human understanding, and their claiming to have human wisdom: 'We're wiser than the group called Cephas, we're wiser than those adhering to Apollos, or Paul, we're wiser than those adhering to Christ' - but it was all based upon the foundation of their human wisdom.

They were showing evidence, according to Paul, and it's still seen in the church of God today, of believing human wisdom rather than divine wisdom. The irony of it all is that they thought that they were wiser than anyone else, but really what they were doing was showing their spiritual immaturity - and the proof of their spiritual immaturity was that they were using the wisdom that they had to divide the church of Jesus Christ into schisms. Whether it was human allegiance to a philosophy of a man, or a particular leader they were following and adhered to and idolised, whatever it was their self-exalting human wisdom was causing immature division within the church of Jesus Christ - and it was ultimately keeping them from God's divine wisdom. They thought they were wise, but they were making themselves fools, because in their immaturity they couldn't see the divine wisdom of God that unites the church and does not divide the church. Ultimately they were forfeiting spiritual growth and spiritual unity, so Paul has to come again and remind them of what true wisdom is: 'Sit up, Corinthians', he says, 'True wisdom is not to be found in the world, it is not to be found in philosophies of men, it is not to be found in following a human leader - but the wisdom of God can only be given through Christ and through the Spirit of God'.

Let's follow his reasoning in this thesis that he gives. The first thing that he says in verses 6 through to 9 is: God's wisdom is hidden from the world. That's the first reason why you shouldn't go to the world, that's the first reason why you shouldn't depend on human wisdom even if the person is a Christian, because God's wisdom, true wisdom, divine truth, is hidden from the world. Now I believe that one reason Paul was addressing this is because he didn't want them to fall into this trap of thinking that the Christian faith is in itself, in essence, foolishness. It is foolishness in the eyes of the men of the world, but Paul is reiterating to them: although it's foolishness to the world, it is only revealed to those who are truly mature, those who are

truly wise. Look at verse 6: 'Howbeit we speak wisdom', we do speak wisdom - it's not that we're always talking foolishness, but we do 'speak wisdom among them that are perfect'.

God's wisdom is only to be understood, Paul says, by those who are perfect. You might say to yourself: 'Well, is that not a bit elitist?'. Surely this was one of the problems in the church of Corinth? One was saying: 'Well, I'm better than you because I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, I am of Apollos, I am of Christ' - is this not just engendering and breeding even more their elitism? Who are these perfect people? Is this a special spiritual superclass that is in the church of Corinth, those who are more spiritual than another? Well, if we look at the Greek word for 'perfect' here, it's the word 'telios' which has been translated in other places in our New Testament as the word 'complete'. Some translations translate it as 'mature', it came to mean 'a member', being fully initiated into some kind of an organisation or a group or a club. Really what it is saying is that this wisdom of God is for those who are spiritually mature, and it doesn't mean those who are more spiritual than the low Christians, but what Paul is actually saying is: those who have come to full spiritual life in Christ, those who have been inaugurated into the church of Jesus Christ and been given the life of God.

Remember last week that we saw that there are only two different classes of people, spiritually speaking, in this world. There are those who are saved and those who are lost. Those who are lost see the wisdom of God as foolishness, they don't understand it, it's ridiculous to them - whether they're Greeks or whether they're Romans - for the Jew it is a stumbling-block, for the Roman and the Greek it is foolishness that this One dying on a cross could bring redemption. So what has to take place is a supernatural act of grace whereby God's Holy Spirit changes the perception of a creature, so that what is previously foolishness to a man becomes the wisdom and the power of God. That is who Paul is talking about when he speaks of those who are perfect, of those who are mature - well then, why is he telling the Corinthians to do it if they're saved? Simply because they are not living up to their name. They ought to have been mature in their faith, not looking after the wisdom of this world, human wisdom which is foolishness unto God, they should be looking for divine wisdom because that is what they were saved through first of all - they ought to be mature Christians in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, in Galatians 1 and verse 4 reiterates that when he said: 'Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father'. It is God's will, and it was Christ's purpose in going to the cross, to deliver us from this present evil world - so how could anybody be said to be a mature Christian who is living in the world, hankering after the philosophies and the wisdom of man's human ability and aptitude? Paul is more or less saying: 'That's not what saved you, Corinthians, so why are you starting to look after man's wisdom now?'. Paul is saying that a worldly Christian, a worldly-wise Christian is foolishness of the highest order and extreme, and he's rebuking them for seeking human wisdom. In fact, what he does is he takes the terms that they themselves use in human wisdom and he redefines them. He uses the word 'wisdom', he's using now the word 'mature', he uses later the word 'mystery', the word 'secret' - he uses even the word 'spiritual' that they used of themselves to set themselves above other believers whether they were in the other camp or the other schism or the other faction.

Paul takes these words and he applies them to ordinary believers, to show them what true wisdom is. He was trying to teach them that wisdom is not acquired, the wisdom of God is not something that you climb up a ladder and you qualify to be given because you're something special as a believer, that you're a cut above the rest. It's not acquired, but the wisdom of God, he says, is revealed! It is something that is given to us by grace through faith in the Spirit of God. Well, you might think that that's obvious, you might even think that that's not what he's talking about here - but I want you to note the difference: in chapter 3, God willing, that we'll start to look at next week, he does talk about two types of Christians, and anybody familiar with the book of 1 Corinthians will know that he speaks of the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian. But that is not the difference and the contrast he's making in chapter 2, don't fall into the mistake of thinking it's the same, but this is a contrast totally different for it is a contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian, the child of



light and the child of darkness, the one who sees the Gospel as foolishness and the one who sees the Gospel as the power and the wisdom of God. That is the difference, and that is all the difference in the world, and that's why Paul says: 'Don't be running to the world as children of light to get wisdom, because God's wisdom is hidden from the world!'.

Isn't that enlightening? Especially for young people, to know that the worldview, whatever the world perspective on things: morality, immorality, or in our age amorality - whatever their perception is of God and faith and religion and the church, whether it changes from age to age it doesn't really matter: ultimately the worldview of our age contemporary to Paul, or our age contemporary to us, is opposed, diametrically opposed and different and other than everything that is divine truth and the revealed wisdom of God. You remember that! Always be careful what you hear espoused in the world, because most of the time it will be contrary to God's wisdom and God's Word. That's why it is foolishness to try and assimilate the world into the church, and try to bring the church up to speed with the way the world thinks.

Just to prove to you that this is what Paul is saying he gives a tremendous example of how these two wisdom systems are different, the human wisdom system of the world, and God's wisdom system of divine truth. He talks in verse 6 of the princes of this world, look at it: 'Yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought', or come to nothing. 'Princes', it's a word that simply means 'rulers', those who are powerful in our society: our political leaders, our Prime Minister, our Kings and Potentates. Now as you look at them, look at Tony Blair and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and President Bush, and you can go through them all - even members of Parliament, you tend to look at them and feel that they are important people, and it's right that we should do so because we're to respect the powers that are ordained of God. But we can look at them as items and idols of success, the epitome of what it is to be wise, what it is to get to the top echelons of society - but Paul is saying the opposite here, he says: 'No, princes and rulers, potentates and political leaders are not the epitome of wisdom'. They may be the epitome of human wisdom, but if they have rejected the Gospel they are foolish!

This wisdom, he says in verse 6, is not the wisdom of princes and potentates and political leaders. Now let me give a little bit of rebuke and encouragement to your mind here, because I feel that too often we look at the world and we judge them as the normal ones, don't we? It's as if we're looking into the world from outside, from Mars or outer space or something. Now we know we're all different, we know we're not the same as the hoy-polloy that are on their way to destruction, but we look in on them and we think they're normal in what they do, what they say, the way of life that they live - but it is the exact opposite! We need, in our minds as believers, to change our perspective and our worldview - they are not the elite ones, whether they're Prime Ministers or Kings, they are not the high-flyers! We're not the odd ones, we are the ones who are right with God! It is the opposite, you've got to turn it on its head - they're the ones to be pitied, they're the ones to feel sorry for! Whether they've got power or authority, or prestige or kudos, it doesn't matter because Paul is saying that without God it is all foolishness! Ultimately, in verse 6, he says that when Jesus Christ comes to this earth again, in His ultimate return when His feet stand upon the Mount of Olives, all of their earthly, human, wise achievements will come to nothing!

Well, that levels the playing field a bit doesn't it? We shouldn't envy those who are in the world, we shouldn't envy those who are in the high echelons of successful society. Why should we not? Chapter 1 and verse 25 is why we should not: because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. The foolishness of our God is greater than the position and prestige that they have been given, that only men can give to them! The weakness of our God is stronger than the power that even the great President of the States has with his little red button! You shouldn't envy them, at the same time we shouldn't be intimidated by them. Paul uses a metaphor for their immaturity, and he's almost saying: 'Look, you're like children in your hankering after wisdom. Your wise thoughts are like the little playing games of children, simplistic reasoning of a child'.

You see that this is a theme in this epistle. If you turn to chapter 13 Paul says of his own experience in this great chapter upon love, and in verse 11: 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things'. He wants the Corinthians to mature, to not hanker after the wisdom of men and human wisdom, but the wisdom of God - to grow up! If you don't think that's enough, if you turn to chapter 14 and verse 20 he spells it out categorically: 'Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children', in the wisdom of the world be children, 'but in understanding', the understanding and wisdom of God, 'be men'. Their trouble was they had imbibed and assimilated the world's philosophies in Corinth, and the way people lived and way people practised in their lives, all that they had to do, that they didn't know any longer where to find the true wisdom of God - they had become ignorant of it.

So Paul reiterates for them in verse 7: 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory'. This wisdom of God is not like human wisdom, but it is mysterious wisdom. It is the wisdom of the Gospel, it is a wisdom that is so mysterious that it's still hidden to unbelievers today. It is a wisdom that is so mysterious that in the Old Testament it was hidden, and it's only been revealed in the New Testament through our Lord Jesus Christ, and specifically in Paul's epistles. All the mysteries, look at the book of Ephesians, it's only revealed there - but there was a time when it was hidden, and it's still hidden to those who are in the camp of the foolish wisdom of this world.

When Jesus came He revealed that He would have to die on the cross, and three days later He would have to rise again - but no-one knew about that before He came, did they? In fact, in the counsels of God before He planned the creation week, it was there, according to this verse in verse 7, ordained before the world unto our glory. God had predestined in His eternal counsels before time began that this is the way it should be! Hidden before even creation was planned or made! These things are hard to understand, aren't they? But the fact of the matter is this: that this is above human understanding, and the wisdom of this world which is only temporal leads to destruction, but Paul is saying in verse 7 that the wisdom of God ultimately leads to life, eternal life, satisfaction. It leads unto our glory.

Paul brings a masterful illustration here to hammer this point home, and we're going to get it tonight no matter how long it takes us getting it. It's a perfect illustration because it comes, it's plucked straight out of the Gospel in the last week and the last days of the life of our Lord Jesus. Look at it in verse 8: 'Which none of the princes of this world knew', this wisdom of God, 'for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory'. None of the powerful rulers of Paul's day, none of the powerful rulers of our day - if they do not trust in Christ - have the wisdom of God. But it was exactly the same when the Lord Jesus Christ stood before Herod and Pilate, they did not have the wisdom of God. There they were at the pinnacle of society, they had as far as the naked eye could see everything that this world and money and pleasure could offer - but they didn't have the wisdom of God, because if they did they would not have crucified the Lord of glory!

Now what an illustration is that! Herod did not understand, Pilate did not know God's true wisdom. Why did they not know? If you look at chapter 1 and verse 23, the preaching of Christ crucified, that was standing before them ready to be crucified, to the Jews - Herod a Jew - it was a stumbling-block. 'How could He be Messiah, King of the Jews? I'm going to put Him to death! Cursed is anyone that hangs upon a tree, Deuteronomy says'. Pilate, the Roman, the Gentile: 'It's foolishness!'. He couldn't see any fault in this man, but foolishness to think that this man could reign as a King, He could die on a cross, He could rise again one day! They did not have the wisdom of God, and even though they had everything that human hands and philosophies and esteem and pride could pander to them, they did not have the wisdom of God.

Some commentators believe that when it talks about princes here that we could even interpret and go into the spiritual realm - and you know and I know both, that we would have to say that behind Pilate's hand and behind Herod's hand there was the hand of evil itself directing the affairs of the crucifixion. What God meant for good, we know and believe Satan meant for evil - but you can find times within the Gospels where the devil doesn't really know what he's doing, because one minute He's saying: 'Come down from the cross if you're the Christ', and the next minute he's trying to stop Him going to Calvary through Peter: 'Oh, You're not going to die, Lord - far be it from Thee! Put it out of Your mind!'. In one sense what it's saying here is that even the spiritual, demonic realm does not have the true sovereign wisdom of God.

That's a blessing to my heart, I can tell you that! For we attribute to the devil and to his hordes and demons, I believe, at times far far too much. Do you see what this passage is saying? Do you see what Paul's illustration from the crucifixion of Christ is really saying? We said it last week, you would nearly think to hear some Christians that if you really sought after wisdom and you became so intellectual and you tried to find out with your mind what true sincere truth really is, you would find God. That's not what the Bible teaches. Do you know what the Bible teaches? The exact opposite! If you use all the human wisdom that is available to you in this earth, not only will that lead you into foolishness, not only ultimately will it destroy your eternal soul, but it will lead you to the crucifixion of the Lord of glory - because that's what it led Herod and Pilate to! Isn't that astounding stuff? Do you see the impact of what Paul is saying? You Christians who have been saved by the Spirit of God and the grace of God, what are you doing now? You're running after the world for human wisdom - do you know what I'm telling you? When you run after the world for human wisdom, you're siding yourselves in the camp of the crucifiers!

Devastating, isn't he, to any seeking after worldly wisdom? That's why I say to you tonight, Christian, don't be intimidated by this world, don't be intimidated by their so-called wisdom - because wisdom without God leads the world to crucify the Lord of glory. And if He was here today they would crucify Him again, over and over again and again, because that's all the wisdom they have and that's all that their wisdom leads them to. You hear some of the wisest people in the world, it seems that when they go into University - some of them - and get to the highest pinnacles of learning in Oxford and Cambridge, I don't want to just pooh-pooh those universities, but in all their universities, the more men learn at times the more antagonistic and blasphemous they come before the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is that not the case? Professing themselves to be wise they become absolute fools, and what it really betrays is, as it betrayed in the person of Pilate and the person of Herod, that the more of worldly wisdom and human esteem that you heap upon yourselves it proves that you've no wisdom at all!

Paul is laying down the law that human wisdom had no place in the church, for it is human wisdom that crucified the church's Lord - and if you crave human wisdom it places you among the company of those that crucified our Lord. Now you might say: 'Well, Paul wasn't there, how would he know?'. Well, apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we'll look at later, Paul experienced this in his own personal conversion. If you turn with me to 1 Timothy - we haven't got time to look at all the portions speaking of Paul before he was converted, but you know he was a Jew of the Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, in the law he was blameless as far human beings can be spoken of. But in this chapter, 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 12 and 13 he says: 'And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief'. All of his human wisdom, yes even his religious wisdom, did not lead him to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ and God's salvation was by grace through faith, it led him to persecute the church in ignorance!

Paul knew what he was talking about here. Now let's ask the question for a moment: what are the apparatus of human wisdom? What are the faculties that men and women use to bring themselves human wisdom? Paul gives us it, verse 9, and let me say this is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verses in the

whole of Scripture. It has got absolutely nothing to do with heaven, nothing to do with the future or the eternal state, more it has got to do with today: what is the believer's today through the wisdom of God. Verse 9: 'It is written', he's quoting Isaiah, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard', back to Corinthians now, 'neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. What are the human faculties of learning? Eye, ear, and heart. That word 'heart' is the Greek word that also means the mind, we could say: eye, ear, and the mind - that is how men learn, the human faculties alone that they can bring wisdom to themselves. But Paul is saying that if that is all that they use they will never ever perceive the mysteries of God.

The scientist can use his eye and observe experiments and nature, but he will never just with his eye bring to him the wisdom of God. A philosopher can listen to arguments of men, philosophies of men, theories and hypothesis of men, but he will never just through listening or even through looking learn the wisdom of God. A mathematician can use his mind, a theologian can use his mind and even use the word of God with his mind, but that alone - to think with the mind - will never bring to him the wisdom of God. The senses alone that men use for human wisdom cannot perceive God's wisdom. Neither can a man know God externally. We have evidences of God in the lights of the sky, the stars, the trees, nature - but he can't really know God fully through nature. Nature will not save you, neither can man know God internally, although Romans tells us that God's law is written upon our hearts - we have something in us that is, if you like, on God's side, a conscience no matter how seared or buried it may be - but a conscience cannot save you!

Man cannot know God internally or externally, he cannot know Him objectively or subjectively, he can't know Him experientially with the eyes or with the ears, he can't even know Him rationally with his mind. The greatest two human resources that men have: experimental resources, rational resources, mean absolutely nothing in the sight of God! Isn't that astounding? Ultimately what it will turn out to mean if you seek after these things is that you will reject God's truth and turn against God's truth, and crucify the Lord of glory. I say to you again, I hope the message is getting through here, don't be intimidated by the wisdom of this world. Don't be frightened by what they say about God. I don't care whether it's Stephen Hawking, he talks about a Big Bang, and he's been the most famous man in this particular century perhaps for the fact that he seems to have found some kind of a scheme in his mind to explain it, hypothetically speaking - you can't prove it, it's only a theory. He believes he's denied the existence of a personal God. Einstein said that his discoveries and the discoveries of science have obliterated the idea of a personal God. They may believe in some kind of a force out there other than ourselves, but it's not a personal God that we can know, and we can love, and that we can be near and will ultimately save us.

Don't be worried about Charles Darwin. On Sunday nights I believe there's this programme going on, and it's the top 100 or so Britons. Darwin, I believe, is going to be right up there at the top of it, he's going to be up there. He's on our - is it our five pound note, or ten pound note? - he's on one of them. Don't be intimidated! This is the wisdom of men, this is wisdom divorced from God. What Paul is actually saying to the believers was: 'This is the wisdom that you're dividing over!'. You're on shaky ground to have your viewpoints adhering to men, to your dogmas devised from men, because God hides His wisdom from men. He hides His wisdom from those who are wise in their own eyes, He frustrates men's wisdom, He confounds men's wisdom, He pulls down men's imaginations that exalt themselves against God!

I'm glad I'm on God's side, I can tell you that - are you not? If you turn to Matthew chapter 11 we find that Paul is only saying what the Lord Jesus spoke of. You remember He upbraided the cities where most of His mighty miracles were done, Chorazin and Bethsaida. He said that it would be better for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than it would be for them. They were so puffed up in their knowledge, they believed that heaven had come down to dwell with them - but the Lord actually said that they were practically in hell because of their rejection of the Messiah. But do you notice what He says as He lifts His eyes to heaven in verse 25: 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and

earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes'. It seemed good in God's sight that that is the way things should be done.

If you turn to chapter 13, now this is very perplexing but this is the truth of God and we must accept it, in verse 10 he says: 'And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand'. The Pharisees and the Scribes, men and women that were listening to Jesus' words, seeing His great miracles, were only using the faculties that they had of human wisdom - the eyes to see with, the ears to hear with, and the mind to think with, but it was not God's wisdom and that was proved in them concluding the gospel of Christ as what? Foolishness.

Dr William Ostler visited, as it was in that day, a very modern and new hospital in the city of London. The staff were proudly showing him around all the new equipment and beds in every part of the building, and Dr Ostler picked up some of the patients charts detailing all their conditions. He noticed on the charts a system of abbreviations, and one of them was 'SF', scarlet fever; another one was 'TB', tuberculosis; and 'D', for diphtheria; and so on and so forth they went on in their abbreviations. But finally he saw these initials: 'GOK', and they were all over these charts - 'GOK', and he didn't understand what it was. He was a great doctor himself, and so when he got an opportunity he turned to one of younger doctors and he said: 'Doctor I say that you've a sweeping epidemic of GOK in this hospital, because it's written all over the charts. I'm unfamiliar with this term or what it means, can you tell me - what is 'GOK', G-O-K?'. The young doctor says: 'Well, when we can't diagnose what a disease is, we just say 'God Only Knows, and we put 'GOK". 'GOK', God Only Knows.

My friend, listen, if our nation and our people could get a good dose and epidemic of 'GOK', that God only knows, it would do them all a world of good - because man needs to admit that he doesn't know anything without God! Well, it poses a fundamental question to us: well then, how can we know God? If you can't know God with your eyes or your ears, or with your mind, if you can't bring yourself to God in any way through human understanding or learning or intellect, how can we really know God? It must be impossible! Well, if it were left entirely up to yourselves, yes it would be impossible - but hallelujah, in verse 10 of our passage it says this, I love this word 'but' - don't you? Right through the Scriptures? - 'But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit'.

God's wisdom, is our second point, is revealed by the Spirit. You see, maturity cannot be found by human wisdom because salvation is not found by human wisdom. These Corinthians started off in the Spirit of God being saved, and they were trying to mature in their Christian faith through human wisdom and it wasn't possible because they weren't saved by that in the first instance. But not only is it impossible to be mature and to be saved through human wisdom, it's not necessary! Because God hath revealed unto us by His Spirit the wisdom of His own heart, and man cannot come to God on his own, but - praise God - God has come to man! The Spirit of God has invaded the world, the territory of man. The Spirit of God has saturated this world with the gospel of God and the knowledge of Christ, and has shown God to men!

This is tremendous, isn't it? You wouldn't think it to look at some of you, but I think it's tremendous! Now how has God revealed this through His Spirit? Well there's three things in these verses that we have to notice. Verses 10 and 11, through revelation. Look at verse 10: 'God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' - but it's that wee word 'revealed', you could circle that. 'Revealed', where we get 'revelation' from - and that is what the Bible is. The Bible is God's revelation, and notice that it says the Spirit searcheth all things - Psalm 131 tells us that: you can't escape the

Spirit of God, the presence of God. He knows everything, He is everywhere, He can absolutely delve into all things and all people's minds and the dark places, the chambers where polluted things hold empire o'er the soul - He knows! But not only can He delve into all things in this universe, He can plumb and fathom the depths of the deepness of the mind of God! That's amazing! The deep things of God are known by the Spirit.

It's hardly surprising when He is God Himself, how anybody can argue that the Holy Spirit is not God - He's some kind of fluid or influence - He knows all things because He shares divine omnipotence with God the Father and God the Son. I was thinking today how much I know of God, or how much we know of God, I imagine it's definitely less than 1% - wouldn't you agree with me? One per cent - probably 0.0000...whatever% - I don't know if you could even put it in percentages, but everything is known by the Spirit of God - everything! There is not a thing about God that is God that He doesn't know, and therefore, Paul is saying, He is a reliable source of human insight into God's wisdom. If you want to know about God go to the Spirit of God who is our Teacher.

To support the assertion he uses the analogy of the illustration of our own spirit. He says the Holy Spirit is a bit like your own spirit, what does he mean? Well, I can't read what you're thinking - maybe it's: 'When's this guy going to finish, he's always going on too long and never gets through his sermons' - I don't know what it is, but I can't read what your thoughts are and you can't read what my thoughts are. But my own spirit knows exactly what my thoughts are, and what Paul is saying here is that you can't peer into the mind of divinity with your own futility, you can't do it! But there is One who, like your own spirit knows your thoughts, the Spirit of God knows God's thoughts, and the Spirit of God is able to reveal God's thoughts unto us. That is what revelation is, the Spirit of God is the Godhead's agent of transmission and communication. The first step in that communication of His truth and wisdom is revelation, it is the Bible.

Isn't it true? The Holy Spirit is the Author of the word of God, isn't He? He has inspired these pages, He has given us the word of God, and that's why He knows what the mind of God really is. He used human agents, He used the apostle Paul, and James, and He used other writers in the Old Testament, the prophets, all sorts of men and apostles and prophets to write the word of God - and although it was human men writing with human words, it is still the pure word of God! It is a revelation of God from God! Now how could the Corinthians be proud of their own wisdom when they had been given the wisdom of God from the hand of God, and it is the word of God? Oh, that these men could get this, oh that we could get this in our day: wisdom is not acquired, wisdom is revealed. Do you see the difference?

It's revealed by revelation, secondly it's revealed through inspiration - verses 12 to 13: 'Now we have received' - there's the word. 'Revealed' in verse 10, there's the word you need to circle: we have received through inspiration. How the Bible came - how did we get this revelation? Well, it came through inspiration. This is the process of communication, the communication is the Bible, the revelation - but the process of how we got the revelation is inspiration. This wisdom cannot be discovered, you can't dig in some spot with an 'X' on it on a treasure map and find the wisdom of God. You can't acquire it, neither can you discover it, it can only be received - it can only be given and received.

Now if something is received it must be given, and we find it the end of this verse: 'we might know the things that are freely given to us'. Isn't that wonderful? We can receive the word of God and the wisdom of God, why? Because it has been freely given unto us. It was given unto the apostles, the apostles and New Testament writers wrote these things down so that we have God's revelation - and praise God's name, they didn't write down their own ideas and their own interpretations, but they wrote down what God gave them, and that is why scripture - all scripture - is given by inspiration of God, all of it!

There's so much misunderstanding about the word of God today, especially in theology. Liberal theologians and even neo-orthodox theologians are now saying: 'Well, the Bible contains the word of God'. 'It contains',

notice the subtle difference - 'Well, we don't know that every bit of it is the word of God, but the word of God is in there somewhere!'. It doesn't contain the word of God, it is the word of God! Every word of it is the word of God, not some kind of subjective thing, but everything they wrote. Remember what the Lord Jesus said to the devil when he tempted Him? 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'. That's why he nails it here in verse 13: 'Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth', not in their words. God didn't communicate divine ideas to men and they wrote it down in their own words - no! God communicated divine thoughts, and those thoughts were transmitted through divine words. There's a difference, and you must note the difference: God gave God's word in His own words.

We believe in verbal inspiration - we don't believe in it - we believe in verbal plenary inspiration - look at your basis of belief - which means not only that this is the word of God inspired of God, but every word is inspired of God, and even the very order of the words, in the original languages now, is inspired of God! We're not talking about translations, sure it's different in every single language where there is a translation! But in the original scriptures written by the apostles delivered unto the saints every word was from God.

Revelation through inspiration, but it's necessary, if we're to understand it, to have illumination - and that's how God's wisdom is communicated to us today. Verse 14: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ'. I wish we had time, but did you know it's possible to read the word of God and not understand it? Remember the eunuch? Philip said: 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' - he didn't understand it, Isaiah 53. It's no surprise that you still don't understand it today, because they have eyes to see but they see not, they have ears to hear but they hear not, they have minds to think but they think not.

This isn't human wisdom, this is divine. In John chapter 5 we find there that the Lord Jesus said that the Scriptures were where the Pharisees would learn of Him, but they were experts in the Scriptures and they couldn't see Him. Now you explain that! We need illumination to understand the word of God, that's why theologians who are liberal and churchmen and cultists don't accept it, it doesn't make sense to them - yet the fact is that because men do not believe the word of God, because they believe the Gospel is foolishness, they are confirming themselves in the realm of the natural not the spiritual! Because they are natural they cannot appraise or appreciate or discern the wisdom of God - that's why it's dangerous to listen to natural men, no matter how clever they are, because we need God's illumination.

I love McCheyne, and on his daily reading notes - I don't use them now, but I used to - he used to quote Psalm 119 and verse 18, what is it? 'Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law'. We need God to open our eyes. He has given the revelation, it's by inspiration, but we need illumination - and there were a few people who were inspired of God to write the word of God as we have it, but Paul is saying all men who have the spirit of God and who are in Christ can see the illumination of God. We don't need a modern discovery, we don't need a special man to interpret it, we don't need an organisation - no church, or cult, or movement has an exclusive right to the pages of this book, or authority exclusively to interpret this book. There's no special mystical key or experience that men need to have, they just need to have the Spirit of God - it's not a private interpretation!

Well, we must finish tonight, but let me say this: I believe that even for a man to be saved he needs to be illumined of God. Don't think I'm on a hyper-Calvinistic bandwagon here tonight, because I'm not. Even old Wesley believed that, and he was an Armenian if ever there was one: 'Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I awoke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee'. Don't let that frustrate you - can I just say before I close, don't let it annoy you or confuse you, it's a

different perspective altogether. The Father's perspective of my salvation is that He chose me in Christ before the world began, that's His perspective. The Son's perspective is that I was saved at Calvary where He shed His precious blood, and rose again the third day. The Spirit's perspective is when He convicted me and then He regenerated me, He saved me there and then at that moment. What's my perspective? When I heard the Gospel and I believed it, that's when I was saved! When is it? Do you know what the answer is? It is an eternal salvation, and it's not finished yet.

That's the wisdom of God and men can't understand it unless they can understand the mystery, because God's wisdom is received by the regenerate. I have to finish, the question is asked: who knows the mind of God? Do you know what the answer, I believe, to that question is? Humans don't know the mind of God, but how does Paul end? 'We have the mind of Christ', do you know what that word for 'mind' is? 'Nouse' (sp?) - did you ever hear the slang 'nouse'? Do you know where else it's used? In Luke 24 and verse 45 where it says of the two on the road to Emmaus, that Christ drew beside them and opened up their 'nouse' that they might understand the Scriptures.

We had in this chapter the teaching of the Gospel, its agency and propagation, its preaching, its instrument of understanding, its revelation - and it reveals God to man, and man to himself, and the crux of it is the cross. Apart from this Gospel there is no message or meaning to life, and apart from the cross there is no meaning to the Gospel - and I say in conclusion to all these two chapters: God forbid that we should glory in anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



# 1 Corinthians - Chapter 7

## "Baby Christians"

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### 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

1. **They Are Never Ready For Meat (verse 2)**
2. **They Thrive On Strife And Quarrels (verse 3)**
3. **They Enjoy Factionalism (verse 4)**
4. **They Exalt Man Above God (verses 5-9)**
  - a. *Not understanding the Spirit's sovereignty*
  - b. *Not understanding the Lord's method*
  - c. *Not understanding the Body's co-operation*
  - d. *Not understanding the Labourer's reward*

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 3, and we'll take time to read the first few verses right down to verse 9. The subject this evening is 'Baby Christians'.

Verse 1: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building".

'Baby Christians', a baby is a person, a little person who is utterly dependent upon another. It is a person who is amused, often times, by rubbish - you can give it the box of the toy and not the toy, and it will be more amused with the box than the toy. A baby is a creature that seems to put into its mouth anything that it finds lying on the ground. As that little baby gets older - and it doesn't need to get too old, I can tell you, to go into little tantrums when it doesn't get its way. When we look at the figure, or the metaphor, or the illustration, the analogy that Paul gives us of baby Christians, we see that he's talking about people who are always dependent upon others, who never learn to have spiritual independence and growth individually. They are often amused by rubbish, by things that don't really matter, they'll put anything into their mouths, they'll feed themselves on anything except the word of God, and they are often - within the church of Jesus Christ - prone to tantrums. That's what a baby is like, and if you can imagine what an adult like that would be, you have now imagined what the Corinthians Christians were like in the days of Paul.

Imagine the tragedy of an adult, a grown man or woman, that behaves like a baby! A man who has never developed, a man who has never grown! There are several genetic and medical conditions that actually realise this awful tragedy and monstrosity of a nightmare for people, when they see children that do not age, that don't appear to age at least - they are ageing in years, but they never grow, they never mature. It's a tragedy to see. What is further a tragedy to see is if you went to China, which I mentioned in my prayer, and you see there parents who take their little children and they put shoes on their feet that are too small for them because they believe it's great have small feet, something beautiful to have small feet - so they force their

children not to grow by putting shoes on them that are too small so that they'll have small feet. It's a tragedy, isn't it?

But imagine: not something genetic, not something that is forced upon you by another, but something that is actually an intelligent reasonable choice - to choose to stay a baby! To choose to never grow! Imagine, if you will, a 40-year-old man turning up for work with a dummy in his mouth and his favourite toy underneath his arm! Someone related to me today what it would be like to see a 70-year-old man in a play pen with a rattle in his mouth and toys around him. What would it be like? It seems absolutely ridiculous, and it is ridiculous! But what is more ridiculous than that human illustration, Paul is saying, is a Christian that has at his disposal all of the power and riches of God; yet he fails, willingly, to grow and to mature - he is still a babe in Christ.

The awful fact that we have to face tonight is that there is a reality called 'Baby Christians'. There is such a thing as an underdeveloped, immature Christian. Paul speaks to these people in verse 1 and he says: 'Brethren', he looks upon them as believers, brothers. This is the staggering thing about it, that he's not saying, as he said at the end of chapter 2, that these people are natural, they're not even saved, they're not living like Christians so they're not saved, that's not what he's saying! He says that they are babes in Christ, positionally they are in Christ, and he calls them brothers - they are real Christians yet they have never developed. I believe that he calls them brothers because he wants, as he did in chapter 1, to show them affection, to show them grace before he comes in very hard and rebukes them. He wants them to realise that his strong words of exhortation and rebuke are coming from a heart of strong affection and love and compassion towards them - and let me say before I go on any further that I hope you understand in some of the rebukes and exhortation and encouragement that I give to you tonight, and I have been before the Lord, this is from a heart of love, it is from a heart of compassion toward you, it is from a heart of a shepherd - I hope - that wants God's best for you, and wants you to enter into the joy of the Lord that He has prepared for you, and the maturity and the growth that He wants for you.

We must not, tonight, miss the import and the significance and the magnitude of this illustration that Paul is giving to us. Look at verse 1: 'I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ'. Now I want you to note that Paul, I believe, is speaking about the first time he was with the Corinthians. He is speaking of when he came to them and he led them to Christ, and then they were babes in Christ, they were mere infants, and he says: 'You're carnal'. Now that word 'carnal' simply means 'fleshly', it means 'worldly' - the opposite to spiritual, to be rooted down and have your tent pegs in this world, to be a fleshly Christian. When these Corinthians were first converted, like many people - and some of you can testify to this tonight - when you're first converted you don't really understand everything that takes place in your conversion, you don't understand and are given a great revelation of all things spiritual that God ever wants to reveal to you right throughout your whole spiritual life and pilgrimage. Even when you get converted, although you don't know everything, there's still a baggage of worldliness that often comes into your new life in Christ. You don't let go of everything that you had in the world and it takes a little bit of time.

Some Christians get saved and they think, initially, that they're going to live just as they lived before, in the same sort of way. When Paul first ministered to these believers in Corinth he realised that the process of sanctification had only started, and that there was a long road ahead of him - they had not yet naturally developed the way that the Holy Spirit would develop them one day. So I want you to see that: that when they were first converted they didn't know everything about salvation and sanctification, and they brought with them much of the baggage of the world before their conversion. Then when we go into verse 2 - now don't worry about the lights flashing, they're not bothering me until I can't see the Bible, so don't you worry about them either - verse 2: 'I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able'. So when he first came to them and they were converted - and he realised that they could never be, right at conversion, fully spiritually developed - he knew that they couldn't take the

meat of God's word, he had to feed them with milk, not solids. Like a baby, a baby would right away choke on solids if it was fed with them from birth - all that he could feed them with and all that they were able to receive and digest were the simple basic truths of the word of God. They were not ready for anything else, and there's a lesson in that right away, because there are many people that I see coming in and out of this church and they get so taken up with the depths of prophecy, the intricacies of Scripture, and they have not yet learned the basic simple truths of the milk of God's word - and some of them are backslidden tonight who used to come to this Bible study. It is important to realise, when you're first converted, that you will never understand everything and there's a lot of growing process that has to come to pass.

These Corinthians, like all people converted, were not ready for anything else, and it was fully understandable and it was appropriate for their condition at that time as babes in Christ - but the dilemma and the difficulty for the apostle Paul was this: they were still there as babes! That's what they were like when he first led them to Christ, that's what they were like when he was revealing to them the basic ABCs of the Christian life and faith and truth, but they're still there! And they still weren't ready, the apostle said, to receive the meat of the word of God! I don't care what way you look at this, this is abnormal. It is just like the little child that has never matured, never grown up - but it's more than that, it's something that is not genetic, and it's not even forced on them by another, it is voluntary - they are choosing not to grow as believers, they are choosing not to take the meat of God's word but to still feed on the milk! It's abnormal and it is unnatural, it's a lack of natural development.

So Paul is distinguishing that there are two different types of Christians. In chapter 2 he talked about the spiritual man and the natural man. The natural man is unconverted and does not perceive or discern spiritual things, and the spiritual man is a man who is regenerated by the Spirit of God and made alive to God, and made to be able to see the truths of God and see the Gospel as the power and wisdom of God - it no longer is foolishness. But now, as he's coming into chapter 3, he's not talking about the saved and the unsaved, but he's talking about spiritual Christians as opposed to carnal Christians. So he says that not only are there two camps in humanity between those who are saved and are lost, but there two camps even within Christendom - those who are carnal and those who are spiritual. It's not that you're spiritual and then you stay spiritual the rest of your life, and it's not that you're carnal and you have to remain carnal - sometimes you can be spiritual one day and carnal the next day, and vice versa. You can go into bouts of each of these conditions: spiritual and carnal. But what I want you to see is that Paul sees those who are spiritual not as the ones who are extraordinary, he sees the Christians that are carnal and fleshly as the ones who are out of the ordinary because it was abnormal, unnatural development - they should have grown!

They are Christians, but Paul says they are still men of the flesh. Now let me reiterate tonight, if you're a young believer, that the Bible does not expect young Christians to be spiritual instantaneously - but what we have here are Corinthian believers after they were converted, after they were feeding upon the milk, they failed to move forward and they frittered away their lives and remained babes still in flesh. Now although it takes a little bit of time to mature, to become spiritual believers, to grow up from being babes to adult Christians, it doesn't take as long as many of us think. It doesn't take as long as some of us think it should and ought to take, because as you look at Paul here you find that these Corinthians - and you know the background that they had, we went into that in our very first study, they were from an awful, pagan, immoral, amoral background - and the probability is that since Paul led them to Christ, and is now writing this letter, there are only 3 to 5 years maximum that have passed. Note that: 3 to 5 years, yet Paul is expecting natural spiritual growth in these believers - in fact he thinks that at this stage they should be spiritual and not carnal, yet they are still babes. Do you know what he's saying effectively? 'You've remained babes too long, it's time you were spiritual!'

Challenging stuff, isn't it? When you think about it, this is why the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood at Calvary, isn't it? He didn't just shed His blood to save us from the penalty of sin, but He shed His blood to

save us and deliver us and emancipate us from the power of sin in our lives, so that we could become conquerors through Him that loved us. He died that we might have removed in our lives all of the hindrances to the Spirit's power and effectiveness in our testimony. Yet it's sad to find today, Christians who achieve no progress year after year after year - the tragedy of even decade after decade, 40, maybe even 50 years without any progress whatsoever since the day that they first believed! Believers are even filled with amazement when they see a young man or a young woman after three years of conversion going upward and outward, breaking out and for God - they think it's out of the ordinary, it's abnormal, it is not normal! That is normal, that is natural! Let us change our perspectives if they are unbiblical, and I believe that they are - this is not unusual, to see a man or a woman break through for Christ after a couple of years in the faith.

In the light of that, can I ask you all here this evening - and I plead with you to recognise that this is coming from a heart of compassion and concern, and I have been asking myself this before God in the place of prayer - how long is it since you have believed? How long since you first fed on the milk? And here's the next question: are you, today, spiritual? I put it another way: are you, today, normal in the sight of God? Paul is saying that we all ought to have an insatiable passion to grow and to not wait for another - to grow and to seek God until we see that growth, such a growth that we become spiritual and mature! We need to ask several questions of ourselves tonight, and one of the questions that we need to ask as the church in the West and in Ulster this evening is: why does this not happen? Why is it that so many believers are saved and still on milk, and do not develop to maturity on to meat, and become spiritual people but remain carnal? Why is it?

Well, I can't enter into it all tonight because I want to do with the whole of this passage, but there is a twofold answer I believe: first and foremost, carnal Christian leaders allow carnal Christianity to happen. That may be because the elders, I mean the older people, not the oversight but the older people, do not instruct the younger as we find in Titus 2 and various other passages. But it may be, and I think this is the probable reason, that these leaders, a great number of them, are unspiritual themselves and are carnal and cannot teach spirituality! The second reason is most likely also the mirror image of this, that there is no appetite, or at least generally speaking to a large extent, there is not an appetite within believers. There is not a desire within Christians to seek after God's truth, God's meat, God's maturity, spirituality - and if there is that desire, there's not the willingness to pay the cost, to pay the price! Because of that and many other reasons, the consequence, as Watchman Nee said, is that the church is overstuffed with big babies. The church is overstuffed with big babies.

What we want to do tonight is look at the characteristics of what a baby Christian is. We find them all in this passage, the first is found in verse 2 as we have already alluded to it: they are never ready for meat, they never get ready for meat. Because they stay babies too long they get to such a stage that they are unable to absorb spiritual, real spiritual teaching and truth. We can see that at large in our nation today, where the word of God and the preaching of the word of God is relegated to epilogue status - it's put at the end of meetings, it's shoved out of the way, as little as possible. Now Christians can watch a 3 and a half hour long film, an epic, sit before it and take it all in, follow the plot - but they can't sit for half an hour or 45 minutes or even an hour under God's word and think about it!

There is a famine in God's word and there is a famine in doctrine, doctrine is diluted and made to seem unimportant - but that is not, I believe, what Paul is talking about here. I'll tell you why: because the Corinthians, above perhaps every other church that Paul had ever written to, knew a great deal of spiritual truth. Remember the wisdom that they were priding themselves in? If you look for a moment to chapter 1 and verse 5 you can read it for yourself, Paul was rejoicing, remember, in grace for them '...that in every thing they were enriched by Christ, in all utterance, and in all knowledge'. In all likelihood, when Paul came to them and taught them spiritual truths, they were able to grasp it, they were able to understand what the great apostle said - but the problem that they had that distinguished between spiritual Christians and carnal

Christians was that that understanding was purely and only in the mind. They knew everything, but what made them carnal was that they didn't have the power to express in their life that which they knew! That, perhaps, is the fundamental distinction between those who are spiritual and those who are carnal - it is not how much you know, it is how much you implement of what you know!

We are plagued today in the church of Jesus Christ in the West with people who can grasp so many things so well, and can even teach and preach them well, but they themselves are unspiritual! I'm not setting myself up as some kind of Pope or Ayatollah to hammer everybody else in a pulpit; but I'll tell you, as I move among some men I find them extremely unspiritual. Spirituality doesn't lie in some kind of a wonderful mysterious thought or thoughts about Christ or about prophecy or about the old or the new covenant, it doesn't rest in that. It rests in actual spiritual experience, not just what you know, but how what you know has affected your walk and how you have experienced God in your life! Cleverness does not matter, even eagerness for the truth are useless because the essential path that God blesses and God deigns to be spiritual is the path of obedience to the Holy Spirit of God - now you mark that! He, the Lord Jesus said, would not leave the disciples comfortless, orphans, but He would come - and what did He say He would do? He would lead them into all truth.

All else apart from that path of obedience is simply a transmission of knowledge from one mind to another - I hope that that's not what I'm engaged in every Sunday morning and Sunday evening and Monday evening: just transmitting what I have learnt in the study to you, and you go home and maybe even transmit it to someone else. That is carnality of the highest kind - and what many people today, especially in our circles, need is not increased spiritual teaching, but an increased obedient heart to the Spirit's command. In fact, if you don't have obedience to the Spirit's command in the teaching of the word of God, the more teaching you get the more carnal you get! Does that mean we need to stay away from meetings and start to consider for a while whether we've put into practice what we believe and have been taught? Well, I'm not espousing that, I want to get you to the meetings - but sometimes I wonder!

Carnality, to heap to ourselves some kind of a knowledge, and then we begin to believe and deceive ourselves into thinking that we're spiritual because of what we know. We say: 'Well, how else could I possibly know so many spiritual things unless I myself were spiritual?'. But that is not the touchstone of spirituality, rather it is: 'How much do I know from life experience?' - and if it's only in the mind it is merely Corinthian, and it is the carnal product of the mind.

What I'm talking about is...you talk to some people, and I'm not being ostentatious here, but you talk to some people about certain spiritual experiences that either some other man has had that you've read about, or that you have had, or a friend of yours has had, and they look at you and they go: 'Aye' - ever get that reaction? 'Aye' - it's foreign. Oh, the truth's all there, but ask about experience and reality - and do you know the only conclusion I come to? It's this: some believers never grow up! They never mature! Now the Lord knows my heart tonight, and if you are carnal I pity you - like a child gazing into a cage where there's a stray puppy confined that can't get out, and the child has pity on it. I pity you. I have been praying before God for a heart of grace and love, for you to realise that by remaining carnal and a babe in Christ just feeding upon milk, you limit your own spiritual capacity because you refuse to grow. You fit, you fit into this definition of a carnal Christian. Listen what Roy Lauren, the author says: 'Many Christians are parasitic consumers' - you know what a parasite is, something like a leech that latches onto you and sucks life from your life - some Christians are like parasitic consumers. He goes on: 'They have arrested their own development because they have ceased to search for food themselves. They are content have someone else find it for them. They have also ceased to pray, being satisfied with being prayed for. They do no form of spiritual work since they pay their preacher to work for them. In other words they live off another, they nurse off another, they are being fed by another, and they never come to spiritual maturity, they are never ready for the meat'. Is that you?

Let us move on to the second characteristic in verse 3: they thrive on strife and quarrels. This is another evidence, he talks about envying among them, strife and divisions - jealousy is another translation of it, jealousy and strife. He mentioned this as the cause of division in Corinth in chapter 1 and verse 11, and two more times he's going to mention it: chapter 3 verse 22, and chapter 4 verse 6. He's always coming back to the fact that they are divided because of their humanistic wisdom and reasoning, because of their carnality! He says: 'Even the ones that are saying, 'I am of Christ', the motivation behind it is jealousy and strife'. They're trying to set themselves up as spiritual when they're carnal! As one man has said: 'The fact is this: any sectarian boasting is but the babbling of a babe' - any sectarian boasting is but the babbling of a babe!

Now listen, this is extremely important, because those who are never ready for meat, and those who thrive on strife and quarrels - essentially those who are carnal, they are babes in Christ - they have a camouflage so that others do not see, or at least they think they do not see, that they are only babes. They know deep down, they maybe don't admit it, but they know that they are essentially unspiritual so what they do is they get a camouflage, and it's usually a little crusade, a little hobby horse that they like, that gives them a feeling within their heart of rightness - 'I'm right!'. It's not righteousness, it's just rightness. Have you ever met these people? They are 'one issue people' - one issue. They fight for that little issue, they would die for that little issue it would seem, they turn every conversation round to the hobby horse or this issue of contention - and I ask you tonight: are they are not babes? Are they not the ones who never grow up? And I'll tell you, as I've been before God for grace, sometimes I feel it hard and my patience wears thin, and I could grab some grown men and shake them and say: 'For God's sake, man, grow up!'.

Some of us are no different than politicians in the lobby of Parliament arguing party politics, men - and I say it reverently - men in a pub fighting over a horse or a dog that they've put a bet on. If you think that I'm being too low or too hard, Paul says that when you do these things - look at the end of verse 3 - you walk as mere men! Now you might put some kind of a facade and an air of respectability on your particular quarrelling and arguing, because you're doing it over so-called spiritual matters, but Paul says it's no different. It's all from the same source! What is the source? It is the flesh! Now it doesn't matter if it's the flesh of party politics, it doesn't matter whether it's the flesh of sinful revelling, even if it's spiritual argumentation from a motivation of pride - it is the flesh!

This is devastating stuff, because Paul says you are living like mere men. What is a mere man? It is like the natural man in chapter 2, without the Spirit! He says you're living like a man that doesn't even have the Spirit of God! What could be more awful than to conceive in your mind of a Christian who had to live without the Spirit of God? Yet there are many people in our churches today and they're living as if they didn't have the Spirit of God in their life, because the churches are wrecked! I wonder if there's a church this side of Iceland that has not had a split in it within the last ten years or so? It is all from the flesh, ultimately from the flesh, the quarrelling over these things, the strife, the envy - it stems from jealousy! Imagine, could you tonight, I ask you this from the depths of my heart: could you be living as a Christian as if you didn't even have the Spirit of God? A mere man.

Let me ask you it in this simple question: you live in number 32, and next door to you in number 34 there's a man who is not a believer, and his whole family aren't believers. You've got a nice house and he has got a nice house; you've got a good job and he's got a good job; you've lovely children and he has lovely children, they're all going to good schools, they've got prospects ahead of them. You go to church because you're a Christian, but he goes to church yet he's not a Christian. Can I ask you a simple question: what's the difference? You're not going to tell me it's because you're saved, are you? Is that difference enough? Paul is saying: 'No it's not' - it's not different enough. You've got to be seen not to just walk as mere men - what makes us distinctive as believers? What are we living for? He's saying your life will tell what you're living for!

People come in and out of church, and they show their face once in a blue moon, and they don't do anything in the assembly, and they watch others breaking their back working for Jesus, needing help and they won't give any hand - and they think that they're fooling everybody going in and out week after week! We can see where their priorities lie! You're not fooling anybody! I can see right away when a man's priority is his work - and we all have to work, and I am in a position where I can say certain things and I have to be careful. But I know other people, even people in levels of Professorship in medicine, but they chose not to go all the way up the ladder, not to be one of these people that never had an hour to go to a prayer meeting, or never had an opportunity to take free time to give out a tract, so they chose a job between 9 and 5 - they excelled in it, so much so that people were showing documentaries about them on the television, Professor Verner Wright (sp?). They made a choice that showed where their priorities lay, and it marked them out as spiritual.

You're not fooling anybody. The tragic fact is that this baby Christian generation, if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from much of the church our lives would just go on as usual. Are we living just like mere men? These baby Christians, they're never ready for meat, they thrive on strife and quarrels - verse 4 says that they enjoy factionalism. These splits, they thrive on it! It's not something that they put up with because of truth or martyrdom, they want to see it, they love a good fight, a good argument! These are the people, I think, that take their stand when there's nothing to stand on, when there's nothing to stand for or fight for. They love to divide on a point of rightness, not a point of righteousness but a point of rightness - usually because it's a point of pride and it makes them feel better than the next one! God give us more protestants in the truest sense of the word, pro-test-ants, who'll stand up against error and against untruthfulness. Sometimes I feel that some of these so-called Protestants, I define them as pro-pest-ants! They're a nuisance to God and to His church and to the witness! 'Everything's an issue to die for', and much of it - and this is what I want you to see tonight - much of this is just to cover over that they have nothing else worth fighting for! Only human wisdom, human personalities, human parties - they are trying to camouflage, to cover over that they don't have a real spiritual vital walk with Christ! Someone has said: 'Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, and small minds discuss people - all to hide carnality'.

The fourth characteristic is that they exalt man above God, verses 5 through to 9. The reason why they exalt men above God, first of all, is because they don't understand the Spirit's sovereignty. They see a man with a gift, a tremendous gift that the Lord uses, and they set him up on a pinnacle over another man that doesn't seem to have as much of a flamboyant gift - but they are priding the man, ignoring the fact that the Spirit is the one who has given the man the gift. These people are not demi-gods, they are servants, Paul says: 'I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase', and in verse 5 he says: 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers' - now that's not an ecclesiastical title, that is the description of a servant of Christ, one who ministers to others.

Now what makes them different? What makes one man different from another in his gift? It is simply this, look at the end of verse 5: 'even as the Lord gave to every man'. Another translation puts it: 'even as the Lord has a sign to different men'. Now worldly leaders, what do they seek? They seek fame and prestige, and they force their own ways upon others, and they force their face into the limelight - but Paul is saying Christian leaders shouldn't be like that, they should seek only to serve and follow the will of God. We should never make preachers or teachers into celebrities. We are not to celebrate the servants of the Lord, but the Lord Himself! If we recognise the sovereignty of the Spirit we will realise who makes one Christian to differ from another. Paul says: 'I am what I am by the grace of God'.

If you turn to chapter 12 of this epistle he talks about spiritual gifts, and we'll come to it in a later study, in verse 11 he says: 'All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will' - as the Spirit wills, the sovereignty of the Spirit. In chapter 4, if you look at it, and verse 7 he addresses it specifically: 'For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'. You're glorying in men's

gifts as if they had achieved it, but God has given them it! We will exalt men when we don't understand the Spirit's sovereignty.

They also exalted men because they didn't understand the Lord's method. He used an agricultural metaphor, he says: 'I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase'. Paul planted the seed when he shared the Gospel with them, and then Apollos came along when Paul had left Corinth and he watered, he disciplined them and taught them the ABC, he fed them on the milk - but what he is saying is: 'Although I planted the seed and Apollos watered, it was the Lord who made the fruit grow! It was the Lord who gave the life. Our human leadership that you're hankering after and following and worshipping, it accomplished absolutely nothing apart from the Spirit's power that unctonised it'.

Now I want you to note something here, because there's a danger when we talk all about the sovereignty of God, and last week we were talking about inspiration and illumination and so on, that we sit back and we say: 'Well, that's the way it is. You sow the seed, somebody comes along and maybe says another wee word that builds upon yours, but you've got to stand back and God will do the rest. God will do the rest, sit back and God will do it all!'. The answer is: God does it all, but He does it all through us - and God wouldn't have given the increase, I believe, if Paul hadn't planted and Apollos hadn't watered. What Paul and Apollos could do God wasn't going to do, because He commanded them to do it. That's important, as we heard at the Breaking of Bread yesterday morning Florence Nightingale said that she worked very hard, very very hard, and yet she did nothing, God did everything. As another has said: 'There is only one way to make dreams come true: wake up and go to work!'. We can't attribute any blessings that we have in the church to mere men, but we recognise when God works through men that it is God that giveth the increase - and it should bring loyalty not to the men, but loyalty to God.

Well, thirdly they exalted men above God because they didn't understand the body's co-operation. In verse 7: 'Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one'. They're working together, they're not opposed to one another! They're like a team working for the one purpose, united, serving the same Lord. What Paul is effectively saying is: 'The basis of your division is that Paul is saying something different than Apollos, and Apollos is saying something different from Cephas, and Cephas is saying something different than the Lord Himself - but the basis of your division is wrong because we're all saying the same thing! We are all working for the same Lord, so you shouldn't be divided at all!'.

They didn't understand the body's cooperation, and they didn't even realise - as verse 9 says - that they are fellow-labourers with God, they are a team working for God, that the church is God's field, it's not our field, it's not the Iron Hall's field, it's God's building! He has a unified field, not divided into sections! He doesn't have a building that has a segregation down the middle, but it's one building, one field, and it's all God's and He's the leader!

I heard a story about a lovely old lady who was well past her threescore and ten, and she came to her Pastor's door and knocked on it. He opened the door, and she had a big basket of fruit and vegetables, and she just handed it to him and said: 'Pastor, something the Lord and I raised for you' - something the Lord and I raised for you! Imagine being called fellow-labourers with God! God does all the work, but the mighty thing about it is that all His work that He does, a lot of it is through us.

Fourthly, they didn't understand the labourer's reward, they didn't realise that they would be rewarded. Three marks of spirituality that we've seen as we've been going through this epistle, and the Lord has in a wonderful way married it all with the book of Philippians, is that spirituality is marked by maturity, unity and productivity. The three things: maturity, unity and productivity. Productivity is our work for the Lord! If



we work it is duty, but if we stay it is mutiny - and I ask the question to you tonight: are you a worker, a fellow-worker with God; or are you a waster?

You know there's this air of pretentiousness today, where people will not work unless they get a pat on the back, unless they get recognised - when it is an invitation to work with the Almighty! But we want the praise of men...strange, isn't it? Do you know that you're saved to serve? Do you know that if you don't use the abilities God has given to you, you might lose them? You could stay as a baby right throughout your whole Christian life! Do you not realise the passion and the pleasure and the power that there is in working for Christ, and even the joy that there is in it of itself? No matter about people getting saved, no matter about the blessing it incurs, the joy to serve the Lord! Let me read you a poem that I read today, and boy it did me good, listen to this - it's called 'Work', it's by an unknown author - and I haven't finished yet. Listen:

'Work!

Thank God for the might of it,  
The ardor, the urge, the delight of it -  
Work that springs from the heart's desire,  
Setting the brain and the soul on fire -  
Oh, what is so good as the heat of it,  
And what is so glad as the beat of it,  
And what is so kind as the stern command,  
Challenging brain and heart and hand.

Work!

Thank God for the pride of it,  
For the beautiful, conquering tide of it.  
Sweeping the life in its furious flood,  
Thrilling the arteries, cleansing the blood,  
Mastering stupor and dull despair,  
Moving the dreamer to do and to dare.  
Oh, what is so good as the urge of it,  
And what is so glad as the surge of it,  
And what is so strong as the summons deep,  
Rousing the torpid soul from sleep?

Work!

Thank God for the pace of it,  
For the terrible, keen, swift race of it;  
Fiery steeds in full control,  
Nostrils aquiver to meet the goal.  
Work, the Power that drives behind,  
Guiding the purposes, taming the mind,  
Holding the runaway wishes back,  
Reining the will to one steady track,  
Speeding the energies, faster and faster,  
Triumphing over threatened disaster.  
Oh, what is so good as the pain of it,  
And what is so great as the gain of it?  
And what is so kind as the cruel goad,  
Forcing us on through the rugged road.

Work!' - listen to this last verse:  
 'Thank God for the swing of it,  
 For the clamouring, hammering ring of it,  
 Passion of labour daily hurled  
 On the mighty anvils of the world.  
 Oh, what is so fierce as the flame of it?  
 And what is so huge as the aim of it  
 Thundering on through dearth and doubt,  
 Calling the plan of the Maker out.  
 Work, the Titan; Work, the friend,  
 Shaping the earth to a glorious end,  
 Draining the swamps and blasting the hills,  
 Doing whatever the Spirit wills -  
 Rending a continent apart,  
 To answer the dream of the Master's heart.  
 Thank God for a world where none may shirk -  
 Thank God for the glorious splendour of work!'

You will be a carnal Christian if you don't realise that work for God will be rewarded in glory.

As I close I want to say in one or two minutes: how do you come from being a carnal Christian to a spiritual Christian? What's the problem? The problem is the flesh. What can we do with the flesh? Maybe you're a young Christian, and Christians struggle with the flesh, they try to beat the flesh and conquer the flesh and tame the flesh - but you can't do it. Can I say a startling thing tonight? Even the blood of Christ can't cleanse the flesh - do you know what the only answer for the flesh is? Crucifixion. Where was the flesh crucified? Calvary. Crucify the flesh, the lusts thereof. It's irredeemable, you can't make it better. Don't pray for God to make you better, pray for God to make you dead - that old nature crucified with Christ, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our bodies. Is it any wonder he said: 'I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified', because it's the answer to everything.

Our Father, Thy word testifies very clearly that they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts, and we are to live in the Spirit, and if we are to live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit. Thy word tells us on another occasion that he who has died is freed from sin, and we thank Thee that One has died on our behalf, and we can sing with great might: 'My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole, is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul!'. But our Father, all of us on a daily basis struggle with the old man, the old nature, the sinful flesh, but Lord help us as Paul has instructed us to reckon it dead because it has been crucified with Christ, there's no longer power in it over us. Lord, let some soul tonight, ravaged with sin and temptation, hear this: 'Sin shall no longer have dominion over you'. Let us all move from our carnality into God's spirituality, to the glory of Christ we ask it. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 8*

## ***"Built To Last For Eternity"***

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### 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

1. ***The Labour***
2. ***The Foundation***
3. ***The Excavation***
4. ***The Materials***
5. ***The Examination***

I want you to turn first of all 2 Corinthians chapter 5, of course we are still in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, but we want to take a few preliminary readings of the Scriptures - just a couple of verses that will help us in the understanding of our subject tonight 'Built to Last for Eternity', or if you like 'The Judgement Seat of Christ'. Second Corinthians chapter 5, and just one verse, verse 10 - and remember now that, the same as 1 Corinthians, the book of 2 Corinthians is written to believers, to Christians in the little town of Corinth. "For we must", verse 10, "all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad".

Then going back a couple of books to the book of Romans, Romans chapter 14, and again the same theme in this verse, Romans 14 and verse 10 - lifting it out of the context of Paul rebuking these Christians for judging their other brothers in Christ in the church, but he puts it within the context of the judgement seat of Christ, and he says: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ".

Then one more reading before we come to 1 Corinthians again, Revelation chapter 22, Revelation 22 and verse 12. The Lord Jesus is now speaking in His revelation to John: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be".

Now, over to 1 Corinthians now for our text this evening, 1 Corinthians chapter 3. You'll remember in the last study we were looking at 'Baby Christians', the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian, that there are two kinds of Christians. We'll read from verse 10 which is our text for this evening, verses 10 through to 15 - verse 9 to get the context: "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry", or you are God farmers, but here's another illustration: "ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire".

It's very easy, I think, in Christian service and in Christian work to get discouraged and to be too negative. We live, as it were, in a day of small things in these days, and there's not too much of revival around us in the West at least - and you can become very negative and very discouraged, but it is important not to be foolish also and to be realistic, and to face the problems that we have honestly and with a degree of realism,

and ask the question: 'Well, why are these things happening?'. One of the questions that we ask within the Christian church as Christian leaders and as members of the church is: 'Why is there so little commitment today with regards to Christendom and membership within the assembly?'

You could say: 'Well, it's symptomatic of what is at large. People generally don't commit themselves to anything'. You only need to look at the institution of marriage and you see that people want all the perks, all the buzz of what it is to be married, live together and have a sexual relationship, yet they don't want the commitment - so they live together to see if it seems to be alright with them, if they fit one another, just like trying on a new shoe, and if the size doesn't fit, well then they'll move on to someone else. They want the buzz without the commitment, but you know friends I think there's a deeper problem with regards to the church of Jesus Christ, why there is not the commitment - we could go a little further and say, why is there not the sacrifice. Why are we crying out for workers? Why is the mission field crying out for missionaries? Why are pulpits crying out for preachers, Pastors and teachers? I think that at the crux of it all there is a fundamental problem, a common denominator.

I wouldn't be so general and silly as to say that there is only one problem - I think there is a myriad of problems. But I believe that certainly part of the problem is that the church of Jesus Christ, especially in the West, has lost the true vision of what the judgement seat of Christ really is. Now note what I say: the true vision - because much of the church believes in the judgement seat of Christ, of course part of the church lump it altogether into one general judgement, which is incorrect according to our understanding of the Word of God at least, but apart from that even those who believe in the judgement seat of Christ which is purely for believers, they lack a true vision of what that will really be like. You know what the Word of God says, that without a vision the people perish - and I believe that there is a perishing within the church of Jesus Christ, among God's people, because they lack a true vision of the accountability that they will have in eternity for the works that they have done in the flesh, before Jesus Christ, as believers, whether they be good works or whether they be bad.

I fear that there is this perception within the mind of many that the judgement seat of Christ is some kind of Sunday School prize-giving, that we're all going to get a pat on the back. If you were at most Christian funerals today, without being too harsh and insensitive, everybody, it seems, gets the 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' when they get to glory. But in the understanding of the whole gamut and balance of Scripture, these things cannot be, and there's something missing! Why is it within a society that people can profess faith, and as one pastor said to me recently it's discouraging that so few are coming to Christ, but those who are coming to Christ don't seem to go on well with Christ - why is this? Why is it that people think they can come to Christ and live as they like? We have this great doctrine of eternal security, and we believe that once we're saved, once and for all we're always saved - but you have in the whole of East Belfast maybe hundreds of people who would testify that they're backsliders, and they seem to be content to sit in their sin having professed faith in the Lord Jesus, but continue a life of habitual sin which is contrary to the Word of God!

Sometimes, I think, in error, a good dose of saved and lost would do some of them a bit of good! We don't believe in that because it's not in the Word of God, but the sentiment of it seems to do people good - and some of those in the holiness movement, and the 'saved and lost' movement are some of the most sanctified people that you could ever meet. Now, they're in error, but we've got to ask the question - looking at them - is there something missing in our theology that can guard against this mistake of professing Christ and thinking that you can live as you like in grace? I believe here it is, this is the missing piece - of course once you're saved you're always saved, that's in the Word of God as clear as you can read those words on the black-and-white pages that you have before you, but my friend it is not like this: that as soon as you're saved you can live as you like, as soon as you're saved the whole slate is wiped clean and there's no accountability for you - that is not the Christian faith! There is the judgement seat of Christ, and it is no Sunday School

prize-giving, rather it is a fearful testing of the works that you have done for Jesus Christ, and the life that you have lived.

Friends, the reality of the Word of God brings you firmly down to earth with a bump, with regards to the judgement seat. It's for believers, that is very clear, we've read that already in 2 Corinthians 5, speaking to believers in Corinth he says: 'we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ', so this is for believers, not for those who are not saved, but for those who are saved. That's who it's for, you ask the question: 'When is it?'. We read from Revelation 22, the Lord Jesus said: 'Behold, I come quickly; and I bring with me my rewards'. We believe, according to the Word of God, that the judgement seat of Christ will take place after the rapture of the church - as soon as you are raptured. Who would say here tonight that they're looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus? That's the way we ought to be, every day looking out the window expecting the Lord: 'Perhaps today, perhaps today Lord'. But never forget, in all the euphoria and ecstasy, that in the twinkling of an eye that we are taken up to be with the Lord, we will be in the air for the divine tribunal of the judgement seat of Christ! The question is: are we looking forward to that?

Where will it be? Well, specifically the word for judgement seat is the word 'bema', it was a raised platform that was used during the Olympics and the athletic games. It was where the umpire would sit and distribute the prizes for those who had won first, second and third prize. Another word it has been translated as: 'a footstep', it can also mean a footstep, in other words that our footsteps as Christians, whatever we've done, wherever we've gone, whatever we have been will all be scrutinised with the all-seeing eye of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, before I go on any further, I can't go into all the judgements that there are in the Word of God, but I want to say categorically and clearly that the judgement seat of Christ is not a judgement upon our sins. It is not a judgement upon our sins. The reason why I say that is because - Hallelujah! - our sins have already been judged. Two thousand years ago, 30AD or thereabouts, on a hill called Calvary, upon the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is and was the Lamb of God, our sins were judged - Christ died, and result of His death was that we are justified, we are cleansed and made perfect in the sight of God. At that moment when He cried: 'It is finished!', our sins were all judged, and the judgement of our sin was exhausted on the Person of the Lord Jesus. Now, that is what Paul means when he says in Romans 5: 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God'; Romans 8 'Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ' - no condemnation, or if you like no judgement of sin for those who are in Christ.

So, if you're sitting here fearful, and you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, don't be worrying about being judged for your sins one day - that will never happen! Your sins are under the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the danger is that we do not realise that although, as believers, we'll never be judged for our sins, the Bible is extremely categorically clear that we will be judged upon our works - not judged for salvation, but judged according to service! Now a lot of people have got problems with this, and some of the Christian paperbacks that I read in these days about grace find it nearly impossible to marry the principle and the idea of grace with being judged for your works, it just doesn't seem to come together for them. Maybe that's a problem with you, you wonder: 'How can you be saved by grace, and God accepts you no matter what you have done, yet on the other side of the coin - although it's nothing to do with salvation - one day you're going to come before the Lord Jesus Christ and He's going to judge you according to the works that you've done in the flesh, whether they be good or whether they be bad?'

Well, one of the theologians that many of these people that believe in such a strong view of grace, one of their pet theologians is John Calvin - who was one of the greatest ever of the Reformation. Now listen to what he says about this matter: 'There is no inconsistency in saying that God rewards good works, provided we understand that nevertheless men obtain eternal life gratuitously'. Did you get that? There's no contradiction, as long as we can see in our minds that to be saved, to get eternal life, God gives us that gratuitously - that means He gives it to us and He expects nothing back. He indulges us in salvation with His

grace, and He asks nothing in return - but when it comes to our service, that's a different matter, and He will judge us according to our works.

Now, already in this chapter Paul has been using the illustration and the analogy of a farmer. He has talked about how he went out and he planted the seed, and sowed the seed, Apollos came along and he watered the seed, and then God gave the increase. He's been using how the Christian servant, and individual Christians, are like farmers; and now he comes to another analogy and he talks about the church and individual Christians as a building. You see that in verse 9: 'Ye are God's building'. What he's saying now in this analogy is: be careful how you build your building! Now listen, Iron Hall, tonight: Paul is saying to us as an assembly, to elders, to deacons, to members: 'Be careful how you build this building' - now not the building across the street, the building that is the church of God, lively stones, people - be careful how you do it! Then he homes in, and we can apply it in this way as individuals: be careful how you build your own personal building, your personal life before God - why? Why be careful? Because there's a day that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is going scrutinise how we've built the building of the Iron Hall, the people, and how we've built our lives individually - that's the reason why we must be careful!

Now the first thing we get out of Paul's analogy is this: the labour, that's your first point. 'According', verse 10, 'to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon'. Now the whole Bible is full, the New Testament especially, of analogies and illustrations of Christians as people who are expending themselves, and putting all their energy out in such an elasticity to win a prize - now you can't miss that. You get the picture of a runner running a race, you get the picture of an athlete wrestling, the analogy of a warrior fighting until he wins the battle; you've got in this chapter itself a farmer sowing, you've also got a mason, a builder, building in places, you've got a fugitive fleeing for his life and existence; in other places you've got a besieger coming and storming the heavens for the riches that are there for him! But in all of the analogies that you have of a Christian running the race and living the Christian life, there's a strenuous activity that is careful - why? Because, as Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 says: 'God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'.

Now listen, banish the thought - banish the thought! - that there is any type or conceivable Christian existence that means you are saved and you do nothing for Christ! There is no such a thing! I'm not saying you can't be saved and be static, you can be saved and be static - and that's what we were reading about, about these carnal Christians - but what I'm saying is that that is not in the perfect mind of God for you, that's not what He wants for you! Rather God wants you to be a labourer, and the sense of this illustration in this verse is 'a life-builder'. God wants you to be a life-builder in the church of Jesus Christ, here in the Iron Hall; but He wants you to be a life-builder in your own personal capacity, building up yourself for God. Let's move away from thinking that this is primarily to Christian workers and professional Christian servants, like missionaries and Pastors and evangelists and teachers, and people that are on a payroll of some kind, that has got nothing to do with this verse! This is general to every single believer that is born-again of the Spirit of God: 'Therefore', the Spirit of the Living God says to you tonight through Paul, 'take heed how you build thereon'.

Now this is my question before I go any further this evening: are you careful how you are building up your life? How careful are you? Or are you careless? Do you give any thought to the fact that you are creating a building to the glory of God, or at least you're meant to be? One day that building is going to be scrutinised and analysed by the Son of God, are you diligent making your living, or are you diligent making a life, building a life for God? Now I would be bold enough to say tonight that if you're not, it's because you're not living in the light of eternity; and if you're not, it's because you're not living in the light of the judgement seat. That's the first thing I want you to see tonight, that you're a labourer.

The second thing that Paul tells us is that he has already laid down for this church in Corinth the foundation. Look at verse 11: 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. Now you would be tempted to say that the master-builder is the Lord Jesus Christ, and in one sense that's true; but Paul in verse 10 actually calls himself the master-builder. In this sense, as an apostle, he had a unique ministry in laying the foundation of the church, the early Church, and here in Corinth specifically, he laid down the foundation of apostolic Christianity - and no human being could ever re-lay that foundation. Remember that people in Corinth were saying: 'Well, I'm wiser than Paul, and we follow Apollos, and Cephas', and even 'we follow Christ' - they were following the human philosophies and wisdom of Corinth and all the rest of Greek philosophy, but Paul is saying 'That is not the wisdom and the foundation that I laid down, but I laid down for you, as God's master-builder, one firm fundamental foundation, and that is Jesus Christ'.

Now this is very important in the days in which we live, I'll tell you why: because there are little churches, new churches rising up here and there - and there's nothing new under the sun, the prophet says - but they seem to be new to the eye. There's even one down the road, and they have along the top there at Hollywood Arches: 'The Church of Christ' - to be a church of Christ, you have to have the foundation of Christ, and that has to be the foundation of Christ that the master-builders, the apostles, laid down in the church - which has been laid down, past tense, and does not need to be laid down again! Young people, understand this, this is fundamental - and if anybody springs up and says: 'I have discovered something new about Jesus Christ, I have discovered a new message, a new revelation about the Lord Jesus', they are laying down a foundation that is opposed to the foundation that the master-builder has already laid down, which cannot be laid again - that is so important! The church of Jesus Christ must always be built on Jesus Christ's work, and Jesus Christ's Person. You will find, I believe with most of the cases, if you analyse some of these new movements, new cults and new churches, the very thing that they do is demean the work and the Person of Jesus Christ. They demean Him to be some kind of a prophet, not the Son of God; demean His work as having to be added to by your own good works, and by joining their particular cult or religion. So beware, and also realise in this charismatic age of confusion, that the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ has been laid in the apostles and in the prophets.

But you know, we can err on this side too, because many evangelical churches are built on the reputation of a famous preacher, or maybe even a special method of evangelising or teaching people, or maybe even a doctrinal scheme, a prophetic scheme - and all these things are right - or a scheme to do with salvation, the way you understand salvation, we need to have all these things to understand the Word of God and they're so important - but let us never forget that the church is not built on a personality! That is why the Corinthians needed to hear this: it's not about Paul, it's not about Apollos, it's not about Cephas, it's about the foundation that the church is built on - Jesus Christ, and you can never lay another foundation, it has been laid! If you're laying another foundation, you're building a church contrary to Jesus Christ and to the will of God.

But let's go a step further, because this isn't only fundamental for the church, like our church here, but it's fundamental for your own personal growth in the Lord Jesus - because if your life is to adequately stand before the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus, it will not be able to stand on anything but Jesus Christ Himself. Now I don't want to confuse judgements here tonight, but I'm just concerned that there's maybe someone here that's not a believer: you will not have a leg to stand on when it comes to your judgement if you're not standing on the foundation of Jesus Christ. There is no other foundation to be laid for eternity only the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you're not standing on Him tonight, I urge you, I plead with you to stand on that solid ground! The ground of His death and His resurrection, and faith alone in Him as the only Saviour, the only name given amongst men whereby we must be saved!

But let me take it a step further to you believers: this passage teaches us that you can stand on the foundation of Jesus Christ, but not have a good building. You mark that. You can be saved, you can be redeemed, you can be safe for all eternity, rescued and redeemed from the fires of hell, standing in the promises of Christ

your King, through eternal ages let His praises sing - but your building is derelict! That's why I believe that, reading in between the lines in these verses, what needs to happen is excavation.

We've looked at how we are labourers, and there needs to be this foundation, but that foundation has already been laid. Before you build upon that foundation, in fact even before you build that foundation there needs to be excavation - when you first get saved, you have to dig up all the filthy, rocky ground to lay a perfect plot to put the foundation rock in. But you know sometimes as Christians things can grow over our foundation, a bit like those in the minor prophet's day where they took so long building the temple that all the moss and the weeds had grown over it, and God was saying how they had lovely sealed houses, they had beautiful luxurious houses, but the house of God was lying waste - the foundations had already been built, but they hadn't gone any further! What needed to happen was that all those weeds needed to be cleared away.

Let's me show you what I mean. The Master-builder, the Lord Jesus, talks about this in Luke chapter 5, turn with me for moment. Luke chapter 5 verse 36: 'And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish'. Now, what's the Lord Jesus talking about? He's saying that if you get a really bad rip on an old shirt, you don't get new material and cut a piece out and put it onto the shirt, because the part that you sew around will rip away again and you'll have another hole - you get a new shirt! Friend, if you want to be saved - maybe you're not converted - you can't reform your life, you need to be given a new life! Equally, believer, if there are over growing weeds over the foundation of Jesus Christ, and your building is derelict, I'll tell you what you need to do: you need to go and excavate that site again, you need to dig it all up - not build on rocky foundations, but come again and realise that you stand upon the only foundation which is Jesus Christ, and start building again!

Now maybe you think that I'm reading too much into this, but you need to remember that when the Lord Jesus was talking about the wise man and the foolish man in the Sermon on the Mount, He was talking to those who followed Him, He was talking to believers. He said: 'If you don't dig down deep your foundations till you come to the granite rock, and build on that rock alone, when the storms come your building will come down!'. I believe that primarily what the Lord was talking about when He was speaking of storms was judgement storms. When the judgement storm comes, it can apply to unbelievers, but we need to apply it to ourselves tonight: are we on a rocky foundation that is overgrown with sins? Is this not what the Old Testament prophet said in Hosea 10? 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy', now we have the farming analogy, 'break up your fallow ground' - excavate! - 'for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you'.

It just may be that we as believers, when we're contemplating the judgement seat of Christ, that we need to clear away all this nonsense of overgrown weeds in confession and in cleansing, and putting away the old nature as far as we possibly can. Never let it be said, I hear it said in the churches today, 'Oh, we're of such-and-such a persuasion, that's not the way we understand it, and the Word of God says clearly that that is the way to do it' - let us never say this in the Iron Hall! 'We don't do it this way' - what does the word of God say? In anything that we do, if we have to go back to the balance, back to basics, and excavate and find our true foundations, we need to do it!

Personally we need to do it, and that is why Paul says: 'Take heed how you build!'. I'm told that the Post Office has a department in it called 'Dead Letters', and whenever mail is miss-sent or has the wrong address, or no identification at all, it's sent to this Dead Letters department. On one occasion, one year in the United States, there were over 14 million letters that went to the Dead Letter department - one out of a thousand letters that were sent ended up there. I firmly believe that there are 'dead letter' Christians - what do I mean? I mean people who have never ever arrived at what God wants them to arrive at. Now I know that we all



cannot say that we have arrived, and even Paul said in Philippians: 'I have not apprehended that for which Christ has apprehended me', but what I'm talking about is a certain extreme of maturity that God wants for us - they've never got there! I wonder is that you? You're a frustrated messenger of the good news, you're a letter that God has told to go out and you've never gone out, you've never found your destination - you're sent, but maybe you haven't even gone! You've been dispatched but you've never arrived at your intended destination, and you're sitting here tonight static as a Christian, and you've no purpose! That's why Paul says: 'Take heed how you build!'. Could it be that we, or you, or me, need to start digging rather than start building? Start breaking up old ground and finding the foundation again that we ought to be building on.

Now we're getting to the crux of the matter, because Paul comes now to the materials that we ought to build with, verse 12: 'Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble'. Note that those aren't one whole material, as if you could see a mud hut with diamonds and gold sticking out of it - there are two different buildings. One building is of gold, silver and precious stones; and the alternative building is of wood, hay and stubble. But here's the point that Paul is making: you, as a believer - now remember what he's been talking about at the start of the passage, carnal Christians and spiritual Christians - you as a believer have a choice of what materials to use.

When Paul wrote to Ephesus and when Paul wrote to Corinth, he knew that there was a great difference between the rich and the poor, a greater difference than there is in our day. The rich and the poor would live close to one another, but the differentiation between their two houses was absolutely unbelievable. The rich would live in great houses of marble, gold leaf over it, precious jewels and all the rest; and then the poor would be in some kind of a mud hut shack with walls of plywood, and they would put stubble in for installation, and have a thatched roof. But the image that Paul is giving us here is, to the Corinthians who live in a situation such as that, if there was a great fire that went through the whole city of Corinth or went through the whole city of Ephesus: what would be left standing? The great palaces, the houses of the rich and the prosperous! But those who were built with wood, hay and stubble would be exterminated.

Two classes: precious stones, precious metal, things of this earth that are worth nothing. To build with one and not to build with the other, Paul says, for if you build with the other it will all be going up in smoke one day at the judgement seat of Christ. What Paul is saying is that it's possible to have a life that is well-founded on Jesus Christ, but is badly built - so take heed how you build! Be careful what materials you use to build with!

So what are these materials, what do they represent? We're not really told what they represent, but certainly we can say this much: that the gold, silver and precious stones are imperishable objects; then you go to the wood, the hay and the stubble, and you see that they are the opposite, they are the perishable things. Now for imperishable objects like gold, silver and precious stones you have to go down under the surface of the earth to get them - you have to dig deep. There's no easy access for these things, there's no quick fix to get gold and silver and precious stones, you have to hunt them out, you have to dig up ground - and then when you dig up gold and silver and precious stones, they have to be heated and smelted and refined, then when that happens they become valuable, they're very costly and expensive, and they are also durable and non-combustible when they go through the fire. They cannot be manufactured by a man, they're something out of this world, if you like, other-worldly: gold, silver and precious stones.

But then when you come to the perishable objects: wood, hay and stubble - those are things that are found on the surface of the earth, aren't they? Things that are easy to find, they're in plentiful existence, they're close at hand, they can be gained at the minimum of labour. They are common, they are cheap, they are ordinary, they can even be ugly - and they are combustible. If you like, they are products of nature as we know it and as we can see it. Do you see what Paul is saying in the depth of his teaching here? If you really want something spiritual that will be able to withstand the judgement of Jesus Christ upon believers at the bema,

you need to dig deep in your spiritual life - don't just take what's on the surface. It will not be easy, it's not an easy road, but you'll have to hunt these things out, you'll have to dig up the sin in your life, you'll maybe have to go through the furnace, the smelting pot, you'll have to be refined, it'll be costly for you, it'll be expensive - but it will stand at that judgement day!

The choice is yours, Paul is saying, the best things are not always the easiest things to acquire, they cost you. You'll have to labour for them, you'll maybe even have to give much sacrifice for them, you'll maybe have to pass through fires of purification and refinement to get them - but on the other hand, the most common things are never the best! They cost so little, they're no trouble to procure, and you can even weave them together and paint them and make them attractive into lovely patterns, and polish them with bright surfaces, but the final test that God will give to these products is not the test of appearance but the test of endurance!

I hope you would agree with me when I say that perishable objects are in the majority, aren't they? But imperishable objects are in the minority. You have imperishable objects in small quantities in restricted areas - they're hard to find - while perishable objects are found in large quantities, in promiscuous abundance everywhere, you don't have to search for them. Let me illustrate it like this: if I was to bring into the meeting tonight a hundred pounds worth of stubble, and a hundred pounds worth of gold. The hundred pounds worth of stubble would maybe need one lorry, maybe three lorries, to be brought into this building - but the hundred pounds of gold could be held in your pocket. You have to search this out, it's costly, it's not everywhere, you're not seeing it in every Christian that you look at around you in the church. The world that we live in, the human wisdom that Paul is speaking against in this epistle, is impressed with quantity, but God is impressed with quality! As D. L. Moody used to say, he would rather weigh his converts than count his converts! How deep they are, how heavy they are!

When God is judging, on this judgement day at the bema, our works, it doesn't say that He will judge how many there are of them, but He says that He will judge what sort they are! What sort they are! We believe in democracy in this country, but I'll tell you with regards to spiritual matters on the best issues the majority are usually wrong. If you want this deep spiritual life, if you want to stand and endure the furnace of the judgement seat of Christ, I'm urging you in the spirit of Paul - which is the Spirit of God - to choose with care, to take care as you build upon this foundation already laid, because there are few people even in the church today who have the courage to live with the eternal goal in view. Now what is the motivating factor in all of this? This is the motivating factor: the final examination, the final divine inspection.

Now I want to read a translation to you by Arthur S. Way of verses 13 to 15, and listen to them very carefully: 'The great day shall make it plain, and the revealing agent is fire - yes, what is the true quality of each man's work, that fire, nothing less, shall test. If any man's structure which he has reared on the aforesaid foundation stands the test, he shall receive his work's wages; but if anyone's structure shall be burnt to the ground, he shall thus forfeit his life's work, though he himself shall be rescued' - now mark this - 'yet only as one who is dragged out through the flames of a burning house'. That's serious stuff, isn't it? I want you just to imagine, and come with me for one moment, to a moment in eternity - no-one knows where, no-one knows when - when you will be shut out to all realisation of anything but the holiness and the all-seeing eye of the Lord Jesus Christ scrutinising your work and everything that you have done in His name. Just you and Him, and you're naked in your soul before Him, and your life's work is being reviewed. Paul says every man's work will be scrutinised - now not the man, the man will not be scrutinised, your salvation and your sin. Salvation is something that is received, but your works is something that will be rewarded, and this is what Paul is talking about: on that day, the judgement seat of Christ, the fire will come down - for our God is an all-consuming fire - and whatever is perishable will burn, and whatever is imperishable will stand. The fire is not there to cleanse or to purge our works, it is there to try and to test our works - and it will destroy whatsoever is perishable.

Paul says that our life's work will be rewarded. Verse 14, if your work abides you will be rewarded; verse 15, if your work is burnt up you will suffer loss - a reward of gain and a reward of loss. Listen, let's get personal tonight: how are you building? How are you building? What will stand? What will fall? What will be burnt up? Or will you stand there on that day and feel lost? What will be lost? You'll not be lost, it says that you will be saved, you still will be saved, the man will be saved - but imagine what it would be to see all your labour for Christ, all your possessions that you thought you'd achieved for Him, and all the fruit of your labour burnt up before the holiness and the righteousness of Jesus Christ - a saved soul but a lost life!

There is no glory in such an end, but I'm telling you this upon this passage of Scripture: that will be the end of many. Not the end of them in salvation, that's not what we're talking about here this evening, but it will be the end of their building! Do you know what the picture is here? Fireballs from heaven raining down upon your little house that you have laboriously built and constructed by yourself, and you're within it, and all of a sudden you're overwhelmed by a sudden burst of flame - and you decide you better escape! You escape down a blazing corridor and get out, just about by the skin of your teeth! Is that the way we want to go before the Lord Jesus? Let me say this this evening: this is not a matter of misfortune, this is not a matter of privilege or responsibility, this is a matter of your choice! Will you make choices in time, for eternity? Imagine this for one moment: that you are actually putting, word by word into the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very sentence that He will say to you on that judgement day, by the life that you are living. You are telling Him now what He will say, it's in your control! You are manufacturing, as His servant, His own adjudication.

Do you remember in Corinth - and we'll get to it in the not too distant future, in chapter 11 - that they were eating and drinking damnation unto themselves around the Lord's Table, and many were weak and sickly among them, and many slept? Do you remember what Paul said to them? If you would judge yourselves, you wouldn't be judged. That's what the Lord is saying to His people tonight, that's what He's saying to you and me individually: if you would only set up a bema in your own heart, a judgement throne; if you would adjudicate for your own actions, your own feelings, your own footsteps, a self-erected judgement seat, you would be delivered! Call yourself to account before God, before God calls you to account before Christ.

Can you imagine this for one second: that somewhere in the universe, perhaps existing in the mind of God, there is a draft that says what you could have been for Jesus? Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, given such a dispensation of the Holy Spirit and all of His fullness, that you could be filled with all the fullness of God and have the glorious power of His resurrection that brought Him back from the dead - all of this at your disposal, and God knows what you could've been, and He will judge you through Jesus Christ on that day according to what you've become rather than what you should have been!

Chopin, on one occasion in a concert, which no-one knew was full of mistakes, had a standing ovation from the audience because the audience couldn't tell - but there was one old man in the audience who wasn't clapping, and that was Verdi, his old instructor and teacher - why? Because he knew his mistakes! No-one else could see it, but he could see it! In the service that you give for the Lord Jesus, maybe other people can't see it and you're calling their bluff, but there's a day coming when every man will give an account and all these secret things will be made manifest in the sight of the Lord Jesus.

We don't have time to go through all the crowns that are available in reward for those who have been faithful to the Lord Jesus, but I ask the question of you tonight: there is the incorruptible crown for a victor - if you're not victorious over temptation, could you ever hope to get the incorruptible crown? There is the crown of rejoicing for soul-winning - if you don't regularly win people for the Lord Jesus Christ, can you ever hope to have the soul-winner's crown of rejoicing? There's a crown of righteousness for those who love the Lord's appearing - if you're not looking for the Lord's appearing, could you ever hope to get that if you're living just for the here and now? There's a crown of glory for the shepherds - if you're not shepherding the flock, could

you ever hope to get that? There's a crown of life for the martyrs, not just for those who die in Christ, but I believe for those who have died internally for the Lord Jesus. The poet put it like this:

'He would have me rich, but I stand there poor,  
Stripped of all but His grace.  
And memory will run like a haunted thing  
Down the years that I cannot retrace,  
And my penitent heart will well nigh break  
With tears that I cannot shed,  
And I'll cover my face with my empty hands  
And I'll bow my uncrowned head'.

You say: 'David, my chance is gone, I missed it. My life is gone, I had to look after someone who was ill and I couldn't do what I wanted to do for the Lord Jesus, circumstances have changed in my life'. Listen this evening to the Lord Jesus Christ, the woman that came and wept at the Lord's feet and dried them with her hair, and anointed that ointment upon them, what did the Lord Jesus say? 'She hath done what she could'. Have you done what you could? What can you do for Him now in your retirement, in your studies, in your prayer life at home that's maybe all that you've got? Listen to the words of the Lord: 'She hath wrought a good work on me, because she did what she could'.

I haven't been able to share all that's in my heart to you tonight, but I'll leave you with the words of George Whitfield: 'Oh, could I always live for eternity, preach for eternity, pray for eternity, and speak for eternity - I want to see only God'.

O Father, we would long to be something, something for Thee in eternity. Lord, not to stand empty-handed with all our works and efforts, those that we have even done, to be burnt up before the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, the only thing that really gives us help and comfort with the judgement seat of Christ is the fact that it is the judgement seat of Christ, our Saviour and our Merciful Redeemer - and Paul could pray of Onesimus that on that day he would find mercy. Lord, may we too on that day find mercy, but Lord on this day may we judge ourselves that on that day we will not be judged. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 9*

## ***"Needed Knowledge For The Church"***

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### 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

1. ***Something You Do Not Know (verse 16)***
2. ***Something You Ought To Know (verse 17)***
3. ***Something You Thought You Knew (verse 18-23)***

**W**e're turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, and I do hope you bring a pen with you - the study sheet that you have in your hymnbook is not so that you can look at something rather than look at me, it's there for your benefit take notes. You will need to take notes, and this outline that I give you week after week is by no means the whole of my outline, I wouldn't want to give you that - not only because you might want to preach it again, but you mightn't take note of what I'm saying! I hope that you'll take note of some of the things as we go through them. The subject tonight is 'Needed Knowledge for the Church'. We begin our reading at verse 16 - remember we are following on now from the account of what it will be to stand before the judgement, the bema, seat of the Lord Jesus Christ as believers, and face the possibility of having our building, which are the works that we have done, all burnt up as nothing before the Lord. We have been exhorted to build a good building, not of corruptible things, but of incorruptible things such as gold, silver and precious stones.

Now Paul is still in this train of thought, and he says in verse 16: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again", it is also written, "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's".

You maybe have heard the phrase, or the sentence and statement: 'Desperate times require desperate measures' - that's too often true in the days in which we live, that desperate times require and necessitate desperate measures. I would say that the church of Jesus Christ in this day of small things has got too desperate in the measures that they are resorting to, not only to spread the Gospel, but also to teach the truths of God to the church of Jesus Christ in the local assembly. I've had experience of being in a local church capacity, and having it said at diaconate level that we should get questionnaires and go around the doors and ask unbelievers what they think a church really ought to be, and what they think should be in a church for their specific needs. I remember being appalled at such a suggestion, not because we don't want to help the world around us - of course, that's one of the reasons why we're left here, to rescue the perishing and to care for the dying, to meet not just their spiritual needs but on some occasions their physical needs and temporal needs. There's a great danger that in doing this we fall into the trap in this day of small things, of getting desperate and resorting to the wisdom of this world, and human wisdom rather than the wisdom of God that we have been given very clearly within the revelation of God, within the Scriptures.

You, as you have travelled with me through this quite long epistle, and we've been taking it slowly verse by verse and statement by statement, you couldn't have failed to see if you've been here on previous evenings

that God, through His Spirit in Paul, categorically tells us that we are always to reject human wisdom, the wisdom of this world, in favour of the wisdom of God that we have revealed to us within the Scriptures. In that light we're going to see this theme again this evening, and we're going to see it in verse 16, where we're told that there is perhaps something - if we're relying on our own human wisdom - that you may not know. Maybe if you're here, and you're long in the tooth, you may know this, but there's a chance that you may not know this or that you've forgotten it. Verse 16: 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?'. Something that you may not know: that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.

Then in verse 17 we want to look at something that you ought to know: 'If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are'. Then in verse 18 we're going to look at something that you thought perhaps you knew, that maybe you are wise and that you have some amount of wisdom, but Paul reminds us: 'Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise'.

So let's study this in more detail, and we'll look first of all at verse 16 - something that you do not know, or certainly something that the Corinthians did not know, and that's why Paul says: 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God'. Now we want to spend some time on this word 'temple' within the New Testament Scriptures. You will know, of course, that the New Testament is written in originally in Greek, and we have only one word in English for 'temple', and that is the word 'temple', but in the original Greek language in the New Testament there are two words that the Holy Spirit uses for this one English word that we have 'temple'. The first Greek word is 'hieron', and that is the word for the literal, material, physical temple that you see in Jerusalem in our history books - the literal bricks and mortar, if you like, Herod's temple and the temple that the Lord Jesus Christ, we know, went through and scourged all the hypocrites and the traders out of - that is 'hieron', that's the Greek word that the Holy Spirit uses. But then there's another word in the Greek which is 'naos', and this is used within the New Testament Scriptures when the Holy Spirit is talking about the temple figuratively or symbolically. When He's not talking about the literal bricks and mortar temple that you can touch, but a temple that is representing the place where God dwells, and it's not always necessarily the place that you can see, which is the Old Testament temple of God.

Now it's important that we understand this, so that we understand what Paul means when he says 'temple' right throughout the book of 1 Corinthians. For us to do this I want us to see where these two words are used in one particular passage, so I want you to turn to John chapter 2 for one moment, John chapter 2 - and do take a note of these things, because they'll help you, I believe, in your understanding of the Scriptures and even as you witness, perhaps, to folk who come at times and knock on your front door.

John chapter 2, and we'll read from verse 13: 'And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple', now that's the literal temple, that's the word 'hieron', the literal physical temple, 'And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple', again 'hieron', 'and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple', now there's a change of word here, 'naos', not 'hieron' that the Jews have been using, and that the Jews have been worshipping in, but now 'naos'. That tells us that the Lord is changing the emphasis now, and we know now upon the change of this word that the Lord is now not talking about the literal Herod's temple, but He's now talking about His own body. And if He's not pointing physically with His own hands and fingers to His own body, and I suspect He probably is, He's certainly in His change of word of 'temple' pointing to Himself in linguistics. 'Destroy this naos and in three days I will

raise it up'. There you have it categorically, His resurrection He's talking about. 'Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple', naos, 'the temple of his body'.

Now if anybody is in any doubt of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the grave, you have it very clearly here, that He claimed that He would rise again the third day, and you can see it. He said in verse 19: 'Destroy this physical temple that is representing my body, and I will raise it up'. Of course the cults that peddle their lies and false doctrine around our doorsteps, they don't believe that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Christian Science, they believe that all it was was in the mind of Christ a belief that was yielding to spiritual understanding, as if He had just risen from the dead in the mind of His disciples and in His own mind - because He believed it, it sort of happened in some kind of metaphysical sense. The Jehovah Witnesses, or as it should be called 'Russellism', they believe that no-one really knows what happened to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, they even gave the suggestion that perhaps His body dissolved into gases and disappeared. Liberal theologians, modern theologians today tell us, and still keep on telling us, that it is no essential part of faith, the faith of Christianity, to believe that Jesus had a bodily physical resurrection - is it not? He said it Himself, and you can defeat them all in a few words, He said: 'I will raise it up'!

Now that's clear enough for me, and then you have John's commentary on it, that He spake of the temple of His body: 'When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said'. But what I want you to see clearly is this, that here is this word 'naos' spoken of figuratively as the temple of the Lord's body, and if we go to chapter 1 of John we see that it says that the 'Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us'. While the Lord Jesus Christ was on the earth, in the Gospels as we read of Him, He was God's temple, He was the temple where God's presence dwelt. I hope you can see that clearly, that this word 'naos' is spoken figuratively of the temple of the Lord's body.

But we move on, and if we read 1 Corinthians 6, just a few chapters on from where we're studying tonight - 1 Corinthians chapter 6, we find this word 'naos', the figurative use of the word 'temple', once more. This time it's referring figuratively to the body of believers, that means your body and my body that we're dwelling in this very evening, chapter 6 verse 19: 'What? Know ye not that your body is the', naos, 'the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?'. So this word is used of the literal physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ when He was on the earth, because God dwelt in the body, God manifest Himself in Christ's flesh. But now as we go into the New Testament dispensation of grace, and we see that the Holy Spirit has come upon the church at Pentecost in a way that He has never done in any other dispensation of time, we see that the individual believer is now called the temple of the Holy Ghost - that means you, where you're sitting now, and me where I'm standing, we are literal temples of the Holy Ghost.

Now we're not going to run ahead of ourselves, in a couple of weeks, God willing, we'll be dealing with this in more detail - but all I want you to see is that this word 'naos' is used figuratively of individual believers. If we go into Ephesians chapter 2 we see that it's not only used individually of believers, but it's used universally of the church of Jesus Christ - now not the local church that we are as we meet here this evening, but the church universal made up of every local church that names the name of Christ. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 18: 'For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple', that's naos again, a figurative temple, 'in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit'.

The church universal, everyone that names the name of Christ, as they're seen from heaven in the Spirit - whether they're black, white, whatever background they come from, or whatever continent or country they

are found in - they are all one temple, figuratively, for the presence of the Holy God of heaven to dwell in. So this word 'naos' is used of the body of Christ, it is used also of your individual body as a believer before God, it's used of the universal church, but in 1 Corinthians 3 that we're looking at tonight it is none of those renderings, but what it means in its context is what we are this evening as a meeting of believers in the local assembly, in the local church of Jesus Christ - that's what Paul is meaning when he says 'naos'. Look at this verse here, verse 16, again: 'Ye are the temple of God'. We know this because of the context that he has been writing about the local church and how they have to guard the truth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel, and how they have to build a good building in the local church - and here the local assembly is called 'the temple of God', or more literally rendered 'God's temple'.

If you don't believe me look at verse 9: 'For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's farmers, God's husbandry, ye are God's building'. I want this to sink in this evening: the local church, as we meet here at this very moment - now grasp this - is God's temple, God's holy temple. That means, at this particular age and dispensation of God, that God dwells within the local church. That means God is here! This is what God has chosen now to build up, this is God's work, this is where God makes us grow, this is where God saves, God glorifies Himself - this is God's building! Now, if we could just get this into our heads tonight that this is the temple of God! Now I'm not talking about the bricks and mortar, or the building that we're meeting in, I'm talking about the people that are met together this very night, and that whenever we meet together in this fashion as the church of Jesus Christ, God is here!

I tell you, if we could really grasp hold of this and let it sink into our minds and into our meetings, I think it would be a very different place. I think there would be a very different atmosphere as we came into this building, not because there's anything special in the building, but because we know as we are met together in this fashion that God is here. Do you not think that we would tiptoe our way in? Do you not think that we would cut out some of the idle chitter-chatter, and we'd start to concentrate our minds and our hearts on the fact that the Lord is here? I'll tell you, as I've been before God today seeking God's face, and dissecting this message, I've been challenged about the way that I prepare my messages before God, about the prayer that I put into my messages, about the way that I dissect the word of God and present the word of God, about the way that I tend the flock of God - because this isn't a job! This isn't a way to put in a spare hour on a Monday night, this is the temple of God and God is here! At least, we're meant to believe that He's here...

Sunday School teacher, would it make a difference in how you prepare your lessons, how you teach the children, to know that you're doing it on behalf of the temple of God? I tell you, would it make a difference in the way that you come clad to the house of God? I'm not one of these people that believes that you have to wear a three-piece suit and a hundred pound hat on your head, that's not found in the word of God. But I'll tell you, in our casual nature that we come into God presence, it can be seen at times in our dress - and I do get distressed at times, when I see people dressed in certain ways coming to worship God, the immodesty at times that there is in some of the sisters, and we have to turn our eyes away because we don't want to look at their legs, we want to look at the Lord!

If we wanted really to believe that God was here, I tell you, it would make a difference...it would make a difference in the things that we say in our speech; it would make a difference in why we're undecided over church membership, it wouldn't be just an option, it would be something that we'd have to do because God's here and this is the temple of God. It would make a difference in obeying the Lord and meeting around His Table, because He is there and He's looking for those who want to be there and remember Him. It would make a difference in whether we obey the scriptural injunction and ordinance to be baptised, because it's a command of the Lord to the Lord's people who are the temple of God! It would make a difference in how deep we dig in our pocket as we give to the Lord, you know it's shameful! Shameful! You know that our Treasurer never divulges who gives what in this church, but I tell you he doesn't need to, because I know that



the high percentage of giving is from those who can't afford to give - the elderly of the congregation - because it's always the same no matter where you go.

Oh, would it not affect our giving if we really believed that God was here. Elders, would it not affect the way we make decisions, the way we plan, if we realise that we have been called upon by God to direct the flock of God, which is the temple of God? Deacons, would it affect your service, would it affect the way you put the hymn books out, the way you turn the lights on? I'll tell you, I've been really touched today by this, but what we find in this verse is this: if there's anyone here in this meeting this evening who's a stirrer or who's a troublemaker, it ought to affect the way that you're conducting yourself, because you're now in the temple of God, you're in the temple of God.

This is what Paul is talking about: Christ's body, His holy body that God had prepared for Him, it's called the temple of God, the believer's body is called the temple of the Holy Ghost, the universal church is called the Holy temple in the Lord, and the local church here is called God's temple. I'll tell you, if you go back into the book of Exodus and you see the tabernacle, and you see those pillars being put out, and the oblong building - a bit like the building we're in this evening, a similar shape - and they got these nine foot hangings of twined linen, and they put it over these pillars, and there was only one door to go in, through the Eastern entrance. You had to go past the altar of the burnt offering, and past the laver, and then you go through the door and find yourself in the Holy Place. Then you see that big veil that you find talked about in the New Testament, the veil that was rent from top to bottom when the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross - and if you were to go through that veil you would come into a place called the Holy of Holies. Do you know what it's called in the Greek? 'Naos', the place where God's presence dwells. I'll tell you, if you know your scriptures you will know that there was only one man who was allowed to go into that place once a year, and if anyone else stepped into that place they were put to death - not by Jewish laws or lawyers, but by the Lord God Almighty. Yet that was the place that God wanted to talk with His people, and I'll tell you this - better than all of this Old Testament typology - that Holy of Holies is the place that we are in this very moment, in the New Testament local church. Do you believe that?

Well, I have been brought to believe it today by the forceful evidence of the word of God, that this is the place that God wants to talk to us, this is the place where we stand in the foundation of the blood, this is the place that we have fellowship with God between the cherubim - and I think if it really was, and if we believed it, we'd be careful about what we did in it, and what we said when we're here, and when we come here, and when we go out of here, and what we say about those people in here! What does the book of Hebrews say? 'Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil - that is to say His flesh'. This word 'naos' is used in the book of Revelation, apocalyptically, of the temple that one day will come to pass that you can read about for yourself in Revelation. It's also used of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, which are the temple in the new and heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. All of this word 'naos', figuratively, as the temple of God, is pointing towards: this is the very presence of the living God, and the place where He has chosen to dwell in this age is the local church, the assembly.

I tell you, this is no social club, this is no political party, this is the temple of the living God. Well, does it make any difference? Will it make any difference? This is something, perhaps, that we don't know, or at least that we've forgotten. The reason why it's so special is, as verse 16 tells us: 'The Spirit of God dwelleth in you', as the temple. You can't be in the local church without having the Holy Spirit in you, you can't be in the church universal without having the Spirit of God dwelling in you - no matter what any church or theologian says. But I tell you, if the Spirit of God is in you, and you come among God's people into the temple of God - does it make any difference in the way that you behave?!

Oh, this is something in this day and age that we need to know, but there's something pressing that Paul wants us to know, that he feels in verse 17 that we ought to know: the seriousness of the responsibility of being in the temple of God. It's this: 'If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy'. Sometimes when I hear people talking after I preach in these Bible readings, you'd think I wrote the Bible, I didn't write the Bible! I just give you what God has said - sometimes I might get it wrong, I'm not infallible - but these are the words of God: 'If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy'. And I'll tell you better than that, the word for 'defile' in verse 17 is the same word as 'destroy', where it says 'him shall God destroy' - so you could read it like this: 'If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy'. 'If any man corrupt', is another translation, 'the temple of God, him shall God destroy'.

You remember I told you that only the high priest, one man, once in the year, on the Day of Atonement, was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies - and anybody else who went in and dared to even put a foot in that place would drop dead, because it's holy! I don't think people realise the seriousness of what it is to defile and corrupt the temple of God - now remember what we're talking about here, it's the local assembly, the local church where God dwells. Any attempt to reach out your hand to corrupt that local assembly, or to defile it, or to destroy it by words or by deeds - now listen carefully man: God will destroy!

We tend to dilute God's words, you know, at times - but if you turn to 2 Samuel for a moment, 2 Samuel chapter 6, and I know this is the Old Testament, but I'm just giving you an illustration about how the place where God dwells is so important. Second Samuel chapter 6, and we read about a man called Uzzah, we read from verse 1: 'Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God', now that was just the place where God's presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies, a gold box which was the visible sense of God's presence, '...the ark of God from thence whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims' - there you have it, God presence. 'And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God'.

Now, if you've got a good marginal Bible, you look to the margin for that word 'error', and it says 'rashness'. God struck him down for his rashness, he was too quick with the things of God - if I could say it like this: he was too familiar with the things of God, and his familiarity bred contempt, and he thought that he could just put his hand out because he'd been with the ark of God so long he thought he could just steady it. God struck him down, and it says in verse 9: 'David was afraid of the Lord that day' - I'll tell you, it makes you afraid when you see the fear of the Lord in this way.

We'll go to the New Testament for a moment, to Acts chapter 5, some of you will know where I'm going to - Acts chapter 5, the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Nothing can make us believe other than that they were children of God, disciples. Verse 1: 'A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things'...and the exact same thing happened to his wife in verses 10 and

following, and the fear came upon the church because these people - now mark this - were playing fast and loose with the temple of God.

I hope the fear of God's coming on you, I can tell you it's coming on me - I can't feel it at this very moment in time. Now don't get me wrong this evening, because I don't believe that Paul is talking here about people who are poor builders that will stand before the judgement seat of Christ, but I believe Paul specifically in verse 16 is talking about people who want to destroy God's building totally. I believe what he's talking about is what we find in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, where he warned the elders in Ephesus, who he asked to come to him, he told them: 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them'.

I believe that what Paul is saying here to the Corinthians is this: the devil has his disciples and his false teachers who want to come in and to destroy and to corrupt the building of God, don't you be found in the devil's work! Don't you be found following the devil's disciples! For perhaps in the fact that you are following them, and their fruit is found in you, for all you know you mightn't be one of the Lord's at all! That's what Paul is warning against. In these days that I hear of splits here, there and everywhere, over the carnality of men - it's never over doctrine, and often doctrine is used - God forgive men for this - doctrine is used as an excuse for separation over carnality. I'll tell you, I wonder, I really wonder is this destroying the building of God?

You can fill in the gaps, but all I know is that in Matthew chapter 18 the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea!' Because if you see the seriousness of what the local assembly is, the temple of God where God dwells, and you realise that - as Paul says in verses 16 and 17 - that it's holy, the place where we worship the Holy One, the place where we lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting, praising and praying to God. We should realise that as we look around the Holy Word of God and preach it, and testify the holy gospel of God, that we are on holy ground - and if you realise you're on holy ground there's a whole lot of things you'll not say, and a whole lot of things you'll not do.

I think we've lost this. Remember Jacob, he had the dream of the ladder going to heaven - do you remember what he said? He was afraid, this is what happens - and it's not a bad thing sometimes to be afraid of God - he was afraid and said: 'How dreadful is this place, this is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven'. God said to Moses out of that burning bush: 'Take the shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground'. The Psalmist said: 'Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever', but Isaiah, in chapter 64 of his prophecy, lamented: 'Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste'.

Well, something they didn't know was that they were the temple of God; something they needed to know was that a man or woman that by their hands or by their words seeks to destroy the temple of God betrays their lineage and their parentage as of the devil, or they're following the teachers of the devil even if they are the children of God, and they need to beware because they can be destroyed. Something you thought you knew in verse 18: let no man deceive himself. Now we don't have time to go through all the Scriptures, but Paul in chapter 6 and verse 9 says to let no man deceive you, certain people will not enter into the kingdom of God - and he gives a whole list of immoral types of people that can never get into heaven. I warn you this evening, that if you're living a lifestyle like this, chapter 6 and verse 9, you will never be in heaven - never be in heaven! I don't care how many times you professed Christ, or how many sinners prayers that you have prayed, you will never be in heaven.

Then he says, in chapter 15 I think it is, and verse 33, he talks about how evil communications corrupt good manners: 'Be not deceived!' Most of the main New Testament writers talk about how you can deceive yourself, I hope you remember 1 John chapter 1 verse 8: 'If any man say that he have no sin, he deceives himself'. John's just talking there about the nature of sin in us, if you think that because you're saved that that sinful nature has been eradicated out of your body - and there are some believers that believe this - you're deceiving yourself! The truth of God is not in you! Then he goes on in verse 10 I think it is later on in chapter 1, and he says: 'If you say that you have not sinned', and now he's talking about practical sin, doing wrong things before God - if you say that you've never done things wrong, you deceive yourself and you call God a liar!

You could go on to other apostles like James in chapter 1 and 22, and he talks about pure religion and undefiled, and he talks about how if your tongue's not right, and your deeds aren't right, you're deceiving yourself about your conduct before God. You go into Galatians and it says: 'God is not mocked, be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap'. You see, all this is testifying that believers are often guilty of deceiving themselves about themselves before the Lord - literally 'deceiving yourself' could be translated 'giving a false impression, whether by appearance or by statement or by influence, that you are something that you are not all'. The tragedy is you can even deceive yourself that you are that thing, and as the man has said: 'People might think you're a fool, but you don't need to open your mouth and prove it to all of us' - and that's what people often do. It's because they deceive themselves about the wisdom that they think they have.

The church of Corinth were corrupting the building of God and the temple of God by trying to fuse together the wisdom of men with God's wisdom, they were trying to marry the Greek philosophy of Corinth with the Christianity of Corinth, and it couldn't happen. If you look at verse 18 for a moment, Paul says: 'If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world', the Greek word he uses for 'world' there is the word 'aeon', which literally means 'age'. He's talking about 'age', the wisdom of this present age that the Corinthians were living in. 'If any man seems to be wise in the wisdom of this age, it's foolishness with God'. Then look at verse 19: 'For the wisdom of this world', now he uses a different word for 'world' there, the word 'cosmos' which means the material world. Now why does he use two different words? One 'aeon', meaning this age that we live in; the other 'cosmos', meaning the world around us, the material world, the trees, the fish, the mountains, the sky. Paul is communicating to this church, listen: those who are wise in this age's wisdom need to realise that it's only the material wisdom that you see around you, it never considers the spiritual divine wisdom of God - it's never spiritual!

Let's whittle this down and bring it home to us this evening, what are we talking about? If you're looking around you as a Christian to the material things of this world, the material wisdom and philosophy of this age, you need to realise that you're not spiritual and you can never be spiritual if you dwell only in that realm. That is not the wisdom of God, and there's a warning here to elders and to pastors and to leaders within the church, this is what Paul is saying to us this evening: don't run the church by human wisdom! I'll tell you, it's a revelation to some people to realise that you can't run the church like a business; and when you're appointing leaders and deacons and people to positions, that you don't appoint them concerning the position that they have in society, or how good they are at finances, or how high up the echelons of their own particular professions they have arisen - God says that is foolishness! There's a day coming when we will stand before the judgement seat of Christ, and we will answer for this: whether we have built the church on human wisdom or divine wisdom!

Don't you ever forget that the world depends on promotion and prestige, and influence and money, but that's not what the church depends on - the church depends on prayer, the Holy Spirit, humility, sacrifice. You go into the Acts of the Apostles, perhaps when the church was in its purest, at the very beginning, and you'll see

that the church didn't own any property, they had no influence in politics our government, they had no treasury - Peter said to the man at the temple: 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk'. These leaders in the early church were ordinary, uneducated individuals. They weren't worried about money or numbers, they didn't bring celebrities to get a crowd - yet the Acts of the Apostles says they turned the world upside-down.

I'll tell you, this is something that we perhaps thought we knew, how to direct the church, how to build a church - Paul says, don't you run the church with human wisdom. How are we operating? Let's ask the questions - elders, deacons, members - how do we operate as a church? In the material wisdom of this age, which is of the 'cosmos', which is never spiritual, or do we seek God for His wisdom and direction? He's saying something else here, he says: 'Don't judge the Scriptures by the wisdom of this world'. Now I don't watch the television on the Lord's Day, apart from the fact that I don't even have the time to watch it even if I wanted to, but I taped a programme last night that I haven't had a chance yet of watching, about Moses and some of these miracles that took place that we know of in the Old Testament Scriptures. It's done by a man called Jeremy Bowen, but it's on the BBC - and he did a programme recently on the Lord. But I read a little outline about the programme in the Daily Mail on Saturday, and I hope it's factual because this is what the programme is all about: 'The terrible plagues', and I quote, 'of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea are two of the most amazing stories in the Bible. Now new research shows that they could have been real events' - isn't that wonderful! I'm sure you're glad you came here tonight to know that the BBC now testifies that we can believe in the parting of the Red Sea, you can go home and believe it now! Put your head on the pillow, no more doubt about it, the BBC testify to it!

They go on: 'Could Moses have been led to the Promised land by the distant eruption of the San Torini volcano?'. Huh! 'The subsequent incoming wave might have looked like a wall of water'. This is tremendous, I tell you, God is and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and believe in Him. I'll tell you, it's harder to believe in all this nonsense than it is to believe in a God who can do miracles! It's remarkable! Then they believe that this natural cataclysmic event, whatever it was, of a volcano and then a tidal wave, that it all seemed to coincide with the children of Israel standing at the edge of the Red Sea wanting out for their lives - isn't that amazing? It all came together for them. Do you know what their problem is? They have found 600 Egyptian chariots under the sea, and they have excavated them, and found the word of God to be true - and they have to explain it away rationally in their own wisdom.

My friends, don't you let the wisdom of this world intimidate you. Young people, whatever you learn at university, at school, I'm not saying that science is incompatible with the Bible - far from it - but I'll tell you this: if you try and change the Bible to be compatible to recent current scientific speculation, or cultural practices, or social values, do you know what you do? You defile, destroy and corrupt the temple of God. There's an NIV Bible that has come out in the United States of America and this does exactly what I'm talking about, it's called the 'All-Inclusive New International Version'. There's an outcry from evangelical conservatism in America, do you know why? Because it changes all the first masculines, 'he', in relation to things like: 'Except a man be born again', it's now 'Except a person be born again' - and even at times when it really matters to have a masculine definition, to perhaps even God, it's changed - why? Because they have taken the wisdom of men over the wisdom of God.

Let that never be levelled at us. I'll tell you, Paul says clearly and categorically that the way to be wise is not to assert your wisdom, but to become a fool and to be willing to learn. I tell you, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and these men - like Haman in the book of Esther - will hang themselves on their own gallows. Don't be deceived into seeking the wisdom of this world over the wisdom of God - I'll tell you why, here's what Paul says: because all things are yours! Some of our young people hanker after the bright lights and the wisdom of this world. Just look, for a moment in our closing minutes of our meeting, to the possessions of the child of God that you'll never find in the world. Verse 21 and 22, God's servants are yours

- they were all running after Paul and Cephas and Apollos as if they belonged to these people, Paul says: 'You don't belong to them, they belong to you'. Do you know that I belong to you? You don't belong to me, I belong to you - a gift to the church is preaching and elders and leaders. They are there for the benefit of the church of Jesus Christ, and God's servants are yours. Take it a step further, that means the ministry is yours - it's not for me to take pride in, it's for you to take practice in.

What other possessions? The world is yours, he says in verse 22, the world. This 'cosmos' is the word he uses, the physical world - what do I mean? I mean the birds, I mean the trees, I mean the mountains and the lovely springs. Isn't it wonderful to know that even this 'cosmos', this universe, the material universe around you is not working against you, it's not working to the plan of the Labour government, it's working to the plan of God - and that means it's working for you. Do you know what A.T. Robinson once said? 'The stars in their courses fight for the man who is the partner with God in the world's redemption'.

The world is yours, verse 22 life and death are yours, abundant life. Your life has been given to you to glorify God, and even in the hard times and good times you can glorify Him, because all things work together for your good! Even if death comes, as Paul could say: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' - you're not a victim to death, you're a victor through death. You're no slave of death, but death has been made the undertaker of God to bring you into the very presence - presence - of Jesus Christ. If that's not enough, the things present, he says in verse 22, and the things future. I was told by a brother going out the door yesterday morning or evening that in America it's getting to the stage, because of the large Muslim community, that is going to be hard in future days to preach John 14 verse 6: 'Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me'. That frightens me, but I'll tell you this: it's good to know tonight that the things of the present and the things of the future are working for us, they're for us.

If that wasn't enough here you have it, verse 23: 'You are Christ's; and Christ is God's'. Remember the wee group in chapter 1 and verse 12 who said: 'Oh, we are of Christ', do you know what Paul says? We're all of Christ - there's nothing special about you, we're all of Christ, and Christ is God's. We are joint heirs with Christ, and we're going to get everything from Christ. Remember he said at the very beginning: '...unto the church of Corinth, which are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to the saints' - He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world, He saved you in Christ at Calvary, He regenerated you in Christ at the moment of your salvation, He's sanctifying you in Christ now in your pilgrimage down here, He's going to raise you in Christ at the redemption of the body, and He's going to bring you in Christ to glory, perfect and spotless to the glory of Christ - why? Because Christ is in God, hallelujah! Isn't that wonderful?

Is it any wonder he said all things are yours? Can you go away with that in your heart tonight? All things are yours - what will you do about it? I hope you'll be what you should be in the temple of God. A red hot evangelist one day was walking down a main street in the city of London, and he put on tails and striped trousers and a top hat. He wrote on the front of the top hat: 'A Fool for Christ's Sake', and as he walked down the street everybody laughed and tittered and jeered at him and mocked him. As they took a second take at him, when he passed them, they looked at the back of his top hat, and it said: 'Whose Fool Are You?'. Whose fool are you, believer? The wisdom of this world, or the wisdom of God?

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 10*

## ***"The Servant Of Christ"***

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### 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

- 1. Is To Be Held In Regard By The Church**
- 2. Is To Honour His Responsibilities To God**
  - a. Directed by the hand of God
  - b. Declaring the mysteries of God
  - c. Discharging faithful service to God
- 3. Is To Have A Right Attitude Toward Himself**
- 4. Is To Hope For Reward At The Bema**

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 4, and we're beginning to read at verse 1. The subject and our theme for tonight's study is 'The Servant of Christ'. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God".

It seems to the careful observer today that the servant of the Lord is evaluated with different criteria than Paul would have evaluated him in his epistle here. Servants of God are evaluated today under the criteria of those that are most successful, those who are most influential, perhaps those who are most gifted and those who are most effective in their Gospel ministry. Perhaps their ministry is weighed, and either found wanting or found valued by the fact of the membership of the church - how many people there are in the pews, the attendance at the worship meetings and gospel meetings. Perhaps they are weighed on the academic ability that they have, the honorary degrees that they have, the degrees that they've earned, the degree that they've bought, or whatever degrees that they have; whether you've written a book, written an essay, or an article, or a pamphlet, or a tract; whether you've been invited along to the great conventions and conferences that there are in Christendom. Too often this is the way that the service of God within the ministers of God is weighed and evaluated, but I want to say categorically on the foundation of these five short verses that we have read together this evening, that to evaluate God's servants in this way is totally displeasing and dishonouring to God Almighty. That will become very clear as we look into our study this evening, and what we will find is this: God wants us, as the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ, to recognise the New Testament gifts within the ministers of the New Testament, the ministers of Christ. So we are to recognise the gift that men and women have been given in the church of Jesus Christ - whatever that spiritual gift may be, here specifically to men, the ministers of Christ, we're to recognise it - but we are to never ever fall into the error of exalting the man.

There's a balance here that is called for, a balance to regard and to recognise the gift that God has given to the servants of Christ, but on the other hand not to fall into the mistake that the Corinthians were making - and that was to exalt men within the church higher than the ordinary member within the church. Paul gives the instruction that we are to regard the servants of Christ by saying in verse 1: 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ'. He says that you've to account these men that are servants of God as the

ministers of Christ, you're to account them. Now that little word 'account' just simply means that you're to deliberately suppose them to be the ministers of Christ, there's something that you're supposed to look at them as.

Now I want to tease this out, because it's so important, before we go any further, that we understand what Paul means when he says that you're to account these men of God as the ministers of Christ. This word 'account' is used in Romans chapter 8, if you turn to it, it's used in a different context, but it gives us an idea of how Paul the apostle uses this word 'account'. Romans 8 and verse 36, and you know the famous passage, verse 35 says: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted', there's the word, 'we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter'. Paul is writing to Christians in persecution, and he is simply saying that there are those in society, particularly within the Roman Imperial civilisation of the day, that were against Christianity and accounted Christians as people who were worthy of being slaughtered like sheep. But here's the point I want you to get this evening: that was the way that the world accounted the ministers of Christ, but at least they accounted them! They accounted them worthy of slaughter.

Now my question, or I should say Paul's question, and the Holy Spirit's question to you this evening is: how do we account the ministers of Christ? How do we account them? That's what that word 'account' means in regard to 'suppose them to be', what do we suppose them to be? Another use of this word is found in 2 Timothy, if you turn to it, I'm going to make you work - or I should say, the Bible work this evening, because we want to see that all this is firmly rooted and grounded in the word of God. Second Timothy chapter 4, 2 Timothy 4, and Paul is talking about how all those in Asia who had named the name of Christ had forsaken him, and he said: 'At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge' - there's the word 'account', 'laid to their charge'. He prayed that God would not lay to their charge the fact that all in Asia had forsook the apostle Paul, in fact the one who had brought them to Christ and brought them the gospel originally.

But do you see the meaning of this word? The question that we are asking in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 1 is: how do you charge the ministers of Christ? How do you regard them? What do you charge them with? Let's get a broader meaning of this, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, 1 Corinthians chapter 13 which is the great chapter on love that in several weeks - I don't know how many, mind you! - we'll, God willing, get to. It describes what love is or what charity is, and in verse 5 it says that love: 'Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked', and here's the word, 'thinketh no evil', it's translated here as 'thinketh'. So Paul is asking us: how do you account, and what do you account to, the ministers of Christ? What do you put to their charge? What do you charge them with? And, fundamentally, how do you think when you think about the ministers of Christ?

Paul, right at the very beginning of this chapter, is asking us to tread the middle ground of biblical balance - what is that? Not to exalt men, neither belittle men who are given gifts of God! And I hope, God willing, that by the end of this meeting and this study that we'll be treading on that middle ground - not to worship preachers, or theologians, or pastors, or ministers, or evangelists; but on the other side of the coin not to go home on a Sunday and have roast preacher for dinner! There's a middle ground: not to treat the ministers of Christ, as they stand in the pulpit, as some kind of performance, some television-like activity where you're watching and you're giving your marks out of 10. As it was said of Ezekiel to those who were listening to him in his great prophecies to Judah, that he was like one who sang a great and beautiful song, it was like entertainment to them - that's not the way the minister of Christ is to be regarded, and accounted, and charged, and thought of. I believe within our sphere of Christendom today, and you understand what I mean by that, evangelical conservatism, that there are too many connoisseurs of the preaching of the word of God, and not enough people whose conversation becometh the Gospel of Jesus Christ!



So Paul gives us instructions here in these verses, the first thing he says is that the minister of Christ is to be held in regard by the church. We'll see that in verse 1: 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ', and then he goes on and he tells us that if we are the ministers of Christ that we are to honour the responsibilities that God has given to us. There are three things that he tells us in which we can honour those responsibilities, the first is to be directed by the hand of God; the second is to declare the mysteries of God; and the third is to discharge faithful service to God. Then we'll find that we're not only to be refraining from judging the servants of God within the church, but the servant of God is to refrain from judging himself in his own heart - he's to have a right attitude toward himself. Then we'll finish off in verse 5 back at that great scene in eternity, the judgement seat of Christ, where every child of God will stand and be judged for the works that they have done in the flesh whether they be good or bad - and Paul's prayer and hope is that every servant of Christ will have the hope of reward at the bema.

So let's start and see how Paul instructs us to hold the servant of Christ in regard within the church. Now to pave this middle road, we're not saying that the servants of Christ are six foot above contradiction, and let me show you a healthy example of that in the Acts of the Apostles. Turn with me to Acts chapter 17, Acts chapter 17 and verse 10, and it says: 'And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind', now there's the first step. This is a healthy church because they're able to recognise God's man with God's gift, and regard God's gift in God's man, the minister of Christ. They're able, as James says, to receive the word of God with meekness. That's your responsibility when you hear the word of God from a man of God, you've to receive that word with all readiness of mind.

That's one side of it, look at the other side: 'and they searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so'. They recognised the servants of Christ, they recognised the gift of God that they were to the church, but they didn't take everything from their mouth and were spoon-fed and never tested the spirits to see if these things were of God, so they searched the Scriptures - and remember this, this is the great apostle Paul and Silas his friend, and they are even searching the Scriptures to see that what they said was the truth of the word of God! Now there's the healthy balance: to recognise on the one hand God's servant, but not to exalt him to such an extreme that you don't search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. This is what Paul is saying, that we are to have a healthy regard for the servants of Christ within the church of the Lord Jesus: 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ'.

Now we need to ask the question: who are the 'us' that Paul is speaking of in this verse? Is it just the apostles, Paul, like himself, or Peter, or some of the rest of them? Is that what Paul is getting at here? Well, if you turn back to chapter 1 verse 12 you find what the fault was here in the church, remember that there was this factionalism, this divisiveness and schismatism within the church, where they were all splitting up. Verse 12: 'I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ'. You see there were people in this assembly that were personality people, I mean that some of them liked Paul because of his Jewish lawyer, legalistic mind, where, as we see in the book of Romans, he could dissect everything into a theological and theoretical argument. He was analytical in his mind, and there were some people and they liked the way Paul did it, they were like that. Then there were others in this church and they liked Apollos, they liked the flowery eloquence with which he preached. They followed Apollos because they liked his way, then there were others who followed Cephas, which was Peter of course, and they were probably the humble ordinary poor folk that liked the rough, gruff fisherman and the way he put things, the way he taught the word of God. Then there were others who were so high and mighty, a bit like exclusive people, and they wouldn't follow any man, they would follow Christ and Christ alone.

But do you see what Paul is saying here in chapter 4 and verse 1? He's clubbing them all together, and he's saying: 'No matter what man you have been following, I want you in the church of Corinth to regard and account all of us' - have you got it? - 'all of us as the ministers of Christ'. You see, they had fallen into this trap of humanistic carnality. In chapter 3 and verse 4 Paul nails it as carnality, and let me say this evening that personality worship within the church of Jesus Christ - no matter who that personality is - is carnality! Chapter 3 and verse 4: 'For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?'. Oh, it's carnality alright, and in verse 21 we find he goes on further and he says: 'Therefore let no man glory in men, it's not for you to glory in men, for all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours'. You're not to be split up in these personality factions, because all of these men are the servants of God, and Paul is now saying: 'I want you to regard them as such'.

Now I think this is powerful, because we could fall very easily into the interpretation that Paul here was talking about the apostles, but he was not because Cephas was an apostle, Peter and Paul himself was an apostle, but I'll tell you: Apollos wasn't an apostle - and isn't it just wonderful and beautiful to see the humility of Paul that he was able to lump in with two apostles, Paul and Peter, Apollos; and it didn't matter one iota that he wasn't an apostle, all that mattered was that he was a recognised servant of God who was the gift of God to the church of God, and this church was to recognise him as such! Paul saw no difference, oh there was a difference in roles, but what Paul is trying to get across to these believers is: recognise the gift, recognise the gift, but don't exalt the man! The irony of this truth is the fact that those who are most critical of preachers, and even in the church here, apostles and so on, are the ones who when they find the man that they're looking for, the man that they like, they are the very ones that make that man into some kind of a demi-god and worship him.

This is exactly what happened in this church, but Paul is saying - and I want you to hear this clearly - don't exalt the man! Don't exalt any man! But do regard the gift! Now this church had fallen out of balance on both extremes, because not only were they exalting these men but they were actually disregarding the gift that God had given to them in the very person of Paul the apostle. They were disregarding and belittling the gift of God in the apostle, and you can see this if you turn and look at verse 9 in this very chapter, chapter 4: 'For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, it's almost as if we're last because of the way we are being treated by the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth, as it were appointed to death, some of us have to die: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ' - I think there's a bit of sarcasm there - 'we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day'. There were even those within the church of Corinth who were belittling and disregarding the gift of God in the apostle Paul.

If you don't believe me turn to chapter 9, chapter 9 and verse 1, we find that they were even doubting his apostleship: 'Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?', they were doubting that, 'Are not ye my work in the Lord?', they were even doubting perhaps that he was the instigator in their own salvation. In verse 3: 'Mine answer to them that do examine me', examine me, 'is this' - there were those in the church of Corinth who were doubting that the apostle Paul was God's man, and they were actually sitting on the judgement seat, the bema, and judging Paul! If we go into the second letter of Corinth, 2 Corinthians chapter 10, we find that this great sin comes into fruition, chapter 10 and verse 8. He's brought to the point of having to boast in his credentials: 'For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed'. They were doubting his very authority to teach the word of God and to lead the church of Christ, and they failed to recognise that Paul was the gift of God to them!

I hope that we don't fail to recognise these things, for when we turn to Ephesians chapter 4, if you'll do it with me - now bear with me, I know you're turning to a lot of passages, but we're here to study the word of God, not to hear the wisdom of men. Ephesians 4 and verse 8, speaking of our Lord Jesus: 'Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men'. Now here are the gifts, verse 11: 'And he gave some, apostles', only some, 'some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers' - now these are the gifts to the church, and Paul is saying: 'You've got to recognise these gifts, you've got to err on the side of caution, regard them as from God, respect them as being from God to the church - but don't exalt the man!'

Now this is a hard balance to strike, Paul helps us to understand it by telling us what these servants really are. He says they are the ministers of Christ, verse 1, and there's a word within the New Testament that is used sometimes of ministers - now, of course, 'minister' is not an ecclesiastical term for a man in a pulpit, but 'minister' means servant. There are various Greek words for the word 'minister', there's the word 'diakonos' (sp?), which is the word that we get 'deacon' from which simply means 'servant'. Then there's another word which actually means 'public servant', or we would use the phrase today 'civil servant' - and at times this is used of the servant of the Lord as he executes the service for his Lord Jesus Christ, but that's not the word that is used here. The word that is used here actually literally means 'an under-rower', an under-rower. 'Hooperates' (sp?) is the word, and in Paul's day they used to have these long rowing boats - maybe you've seen the film 'Jason And The Argonauts', and you know all about these great longboats. Sometimes there were two tiers on them of rowers, the people at the top had longer oars, and the people at the bottom shorter; but they all had to work together. This is the word that is being used here of the servants of Christ, under-rowers - but the point is this: that on these longboats there was always a master, or as you would see it in rowing today there was always a Cox, and they would tell the rowers where to sit in the boat, they would tell the rowers where to row, how to row, and what direction to row. The point that Paul is making is this: these servants of Christ are under-rowers, and they've got to listen to the Master of the boat and do what He tells them to do.

This word 'hooperates' which came to mean 'under-rower' literally was a description and came to mean an illustration of any subordinate person that was acting under another person's instruction and direction. If we look to chapter 3 and verse 22, you might think that there's a bit of a contradiction here, what Paul is really saying is that these servants of Christ are to obey the Lord and the Lord alone, not to follow after men or obey men - yet in chapter 3 verse 22, as we found out last week, Paul was actually telling them: 'Whether you follow Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world or whatever; all things are yours'. He told them last week that even the servants of Christ belong to them, but let me say this - and we better not make this error - they only belong to the church in the sense that they are listening to the voice and following the orders of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is only in that capacity that they belong to the church. What Paul is saying here is: 'You've got to regard the servants of Christ, because they are the under-rowers, under the orders of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ - and you ought to recognise it! They're acting for Christ!'

Now, my friend, what this simply means in simple layman's terms to us here this evening is that the servant of Christ, in whatever assembly you belong to and in this assembly, only obeys the word of Christ - only the word of Christ. If the servant of Christ is obeying the word of Christ, and the assembly is obeying the word of Christ as well through the servant of Christ, there'll be no problems, there'll be no schisms, there'll be no factions - but the point is this: the servant of Christ must obey the word of Christ, and the direction of Christ, to the exclusion of any other voice no matter what that voice may be! Do you know why that is? Because it is Christ who gives the gift, it is Christ who will require an account at the judgement seat of Christ for the stewardship of that gift, and therefore the one that is given the gift answers to Him and ought to obey Him only.

Now, my friend, there is always a balance in these biblical things - that doesn't mean the servant of Christ can behave how he likes, because if the church holds the servant of Christ in regard, in esteem, as the gift of God - not exalting him now, but as the gift of God - the servant of Christ also has to realise that he has to honour certain responsibilities toward God. Here we have them in these verses, the first that we've already said is that he is to be directed by the hand of God, directed alone by the hand of God. Now listen to this carefully: he's not to be directed by men, he's not to be directed by any denomination, or by a committee, or by a bigger salary, or by poverty, or by the state of his home - he's to listen to the voice of Christ, and the voice of Christ alone, to the exclusion of everything else! That means that I have to bring to you from this pulpit what the Lord tells me, and with respect: I don't listen to what people tell me to preach, I preach - I hope, before God - what He leads me to preach, from the hand of God what I believe the word of God teaches - that's what I've to preach, because I've to answer to Christ one day not to you! What one wants me to preach, the other doesn't want me preach; and the way one wants me to preach, the other doesn't want me to preach that way - and if I listened to people I wouldn't know what I was doing! But I, and all servants of Christ, are to honour the responsibility given to us by God of being directed by the hand of God and the hand of God alone.

The reason Paul gives is because we're stewards, we're stewards. The word here 'steward' in the Greek is the word 'oikanomos' (sp?), 'oikos' is the Greek word for 'house', and 'nemo' is the verb 'to arrange', so if you put those together you get 'oikanomos' which means 'to arrange a house'. That's what a steward is, like a housekeeper, or if you like a manager of land or a household estate. This is someone who oversees something that is owned and possessed of another. That's what the servant of Christ is, he's a steward, so he doesn't dictate the terms, he doesn't decide what he's going to bring to the assembly because he's a steward of things that don't belong to him, and he has to do what he's told and give it the way God tells him to give it.

Campbell Morgan, many of you will know, was called 'the prince of expositors'. He looked very deeply into this Greek word 'oikanomos', and he was trying to find the nearest English equivalent of that word that he could find, and do you know what the word was that he came up with? It might seem astounding and even ridiculous to some of you, but here it is: 'housewife' - housewife! A steward of the home, why? Because the housewife is responsible for feeding the family, the housewife is responsible for keeping the family comfortable, keeping the family tidy, warming them up when they're cold - and you couldn't get a better word for the servant of Christ in the assembly. They're to feed the flock, they're to keep the flock, they're to make them comfortable in a positive sense, they're to keep them tidy and they're to warm them up when they're discouraged, when they're downhearted, and when they're lukewarm.

You only need to go into Luke chapter 12 to look at some of the parables of the Lord, Luke chapter 16 to find out how He uses this illustration of stewardship. You go into Galatians chapter 4, and you find that he talks about how children are put under a tutor or a governor, and the word 'governor' there is the word 'steward' - how someone, the parent puts the child underneath their care, and they're the steward of their child. You go to Romans chapter 16 and verse 23, and Paul commends a man called Erastus, who he says was the chamberlain of the city - and that literally is 'the treasurer' of the city. He was given jurisdiction of the finances, it wasn't his own money, he couldn't treat the money as if it was his own, but he was a steward of the money - and you see the picture that Paul is painting here, that these are the servants of Christ and you're not to exalt them as if what they're coming out with is their own wisdom, and their own opinion, and their own humanistic truth. You're to regard them as the servants of Christ, because they're bringing to you the word of God!

Stewards - and I believe that Paul uses this word 'steward' comprehensively of the preachers of the Gospel and the teachers of the word of God - and just in case you think that all this is preaching to myself, and you're getting off the hook tonight, you're wrong! Because in Titus chapter 1, if you were to turn to it for a moment, Titus chapter 1, we find that overseers within the assembly are called stewards, and they have a

stewardship, and they will be answerable concerning that stewardship. Titus chapter 1 and verse 7: 'For a bishop', that just means an elder or overseer, 'must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre'. Elders in the meeting this evening, you have a stewardship before God in the execution of the will of God, not the will of man, but the will of God before God - and let me tell you that you'll have to answer to God about your stewardship.

Now, everybody loves getting the boot into the elders, but if you turn further on to 1 Peter for a moment, you find that this stewardship is not just to one or two or more that we could call the servants of Christ, it's not just to overseers. In 1 Peter chapter 4 we find that it's general to all believers, verse 10: 'As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God'. Now listen friends, there is none of us can get off the hook before the word of God, we're all stewards! We might be stewards with different degrees of responsibility, but we're all required to obey the word of God - why? Because we, one day, will be answerable to God! The servant of God is to honour his responsibility to make sure that he is directed by God in his stewardship before God.

Then we find another reason that Paul gives: we're to declare the mysteries of God. He is responsible to honour his declaration of the mysteries of God. Now we learnt in the epistle to the Ephesians, and even in this same epistle of Corinthians, that 'mystery' doesn't mean what we have in the English word 'mystery' - it's not something that is mysterious, that is a knowledge that is withheld, that is not what 'mystery' means in the Bible. 'Mystery' in the Bible means something that has been hidden in a past age, something that is beyond our natural humanistic apprehension, that you couldn't conjure up in your mind or even your heart, but something that in the age, in the dispensation of grace, has been revealed by God. Something that you couldn't apprehend in your own mind, something that had to be given from God - divine wisdom, divine revelation! The manner in which God gives it is His way, the time that God gives it is in His time, and the way that God gives it is through the Holy Spirit, and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit - and we learnt all about that in this very epistle. But specifically, as we go through the New Testament, we find out that there are a number of things that can be classified as the mysteries of God.

We're going to look at these tonight. We turn first of all to the book of Ephesians - this will keep you awake, if nothing else, turning the pages - Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 19, Paul is: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints', and then he asks prayer of the Ephesians, 'And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel'. Now what's Paul saying here? This is what he's saying: the Gospel is a mystery, you couldn't have thought the Gospel up! If you were Paul you couldn't have done it, if you were Apollos you couldn't have done it, if you were Cephas you couldn't have done it - this is something that is not of human wisdom, that you can't just conjure up, that the Lord Jesus Christ could come from heaven, that He could go to a cross and die and bleed in your room and in your stead, be buried, bear your sin, be raised again the third day in the power of an endless life and offer to all men salvation if they would believe - now who could ever have thought of that? That God should so love the world that He would give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life - could you have thought of that? That's a mystery, and we are stewards of that mystery, and we will be judged as to how we take it and declare it.

We can move on and go to 1 Timothy chapter 3, 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, Paul says: 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness', or piety, 'God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory'. My friends, is there greater mystery than the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ? The One that was the Word with God, was God without whom nothing was made that was made, yet the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us! Who could ever have thought of that? It was disclosed throughout all the eternal ages of the past to men in their wisdom, and you couldn't have apprehended it or thought about it, but God revealed it! I'll tell you

this, we have a responsibility to declare it, no matter what the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses or the church of God believe, we've to declare Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and God manifest in flesh.

We go to Ephesians 5, and I haven't got time here this evening to go into all of these, Ephesians 5 and verse 30, and we see that the church of Jesus Christ is also a mystery: 'For we are members of his body', verse 30, 'of his flesh, and of his bones'. Imagine this: that we, as believers, are members of the flesh, the bones of Jesus Christ! Verse 32: 'This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. Sure it's a mystery, isn't it, that the Lord in His own death could unite together all sorts of people from all nations and tongues and people and colours and backgrounds of creeds, and bring them all together in one body as the church Jesus Christ? Could you have thought about that? Could you have apprehended that? Could the Corinthians in all their wisdom have grasped hold of this? God had to reveal it! It's what God has revealed that we have to declare!

First Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 51, Paul says: 'Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump'. There is the mystery of the rapture that was never declared before. John 14: 'I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there are ye may be also', and I tell you we've got a duty - no matter what other churches are doing - to preach the rapture, preach that Jesus is coming! In Romans chapter 11 we see the mystery of why Israel is blind today, but it says that blindness in part, hardness in part, is only happened to Israel, but when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in then the blindness will cease - and no matter what any church or theologian says about Israel being over and done with with God, and the church being Israel, which is a load of nonsense, we are to preach what God has revealed! The mysteries of God! That's what we've to give.

Oh, we could go on and talk about the spirit of disobedience, the spirit of antichrist that already works in the children of disobedience in this age, and it's a mystery. We could look at the mystery of the seven stars, and the angels in Revelation 1; Ephesians 3, the mystery of the ways of God in grace. W.E. Vine published a book on one occasion called 'The Twelve Mysteries of Scripture', and I'll tell you there might even be fourteen or more, but the one fundamental common denominator of truth about it is this, and this is what Paul wanted to get across to the Corinthians: every single one of them could never have been apprehended by the wisdom of men, it was all revealed by God.

Now in verse 1, that word 'mystery' I believe is comprehensive of all these twelve or fourteen, or how many you want, mysteries of God that you find in the word of God, and he's saying it's your duty to be a steward of those mysteries. You're not to come to an assembly or to a church and give your own opinion, and give your own human wisdom, and no matter what men and women around our world are doing in the churches of our land and our globe, we are to present what God has revealed! The Scriptures support these mysteries, but so ought the servants and the stewards of God in how they declare them.

Then he goes on and he says: 'You're a steward, and it's required in a steward that a man be found faithful'. That word 'required' is the Greek word 'zaeteo' (sp?), which is the word 'to seek', it's the word 'to seek'. It can also be used as 'to demand'. If you want to say it this way: 'What God seeks in men and women of God today', more, stronger than that, 'What God demands in those who have been given the truth of God is faithfulness'. It doesn't matter what churches are doing, it doesn't matter what men, theologians, politicians, and those media-moguls are saying: we are to stand for the truth, and be faithful stewards of the word of God. 'Faithful' means to be trusted, to be reliable no matter where you are, no matter who you're talking to - and I'll tell you that if you're going to be faithful in this day of apostasy, in this day of backsliding and lukewarmness within the church Jesus Christ, in this day of human opinion and business-mindedness in the ruling of the assembly, it will cost you to be faithful!

There's a demand of it - do you know what the demand of the faithfulness of the steward of Christ is? Revelation chapter 2 verse 10, the church at Smyrna: 'Be faithful unto death' - what a demand! There's a detail in the faithfulness, the Lord said in Luke chapter 16 verse 10: 'he that is faithful in that which is least'. There's a destiny and a delight in this faithfulness, do you know why? Because those who are willing to be faithful unto death, and faithful in that which is least, one day will stand at the bema judgement seat of Christ and will hear: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord' - but it will cost you, and I warn you it will cost you. It cost Daniel to be faithful, it cost him to go into the den of lions; it cost Abraham to be faithful, yielding up his only son Isaac to the Lord; it cost the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace to be faithful and not bow down to the idol; it cost Stephen, the first martyr, being stoned to be faithful to Lord; it cost Peter being crucified upside-down; it cost Paul himself as he's beheaded for the Gospel and the testimony of the Lord Jesus; and it cost Esther as she went into the presence of her King to plead for her people - but she was a faithful steward that could say: 'If I perish, I perish'.

I tell you, this is what God looks for in men and women in this age, and that's what the Lord will be looking for when He comes again: those servants that do not know the day or the hour when He will return, but those servants whom the Lord will find doing. We're to be directed by the hand of God, to declare the mysteries of God, and discharge faithful service to God. We're to have a right attitude toward ourselves. We don't have full-time to go into this, but you see here that Paul said: 'Look, I'm not fussed about how you judge me' - imagine these Corinthians, and you know the sins that they were dabbling in - they had the gall and the brass neck to be judging the great apostle Paul, the word is 'questioning him, examining him, investigating him'. Now let me say this: we ought to judge righteous judgement according to the word of God with regards to doctrine and with regards to conduct and holiness and way of life, but what Paul is saying here is that we have no jurisdiction to judge the things that are unseen - that being the motivation and the service of the servants of Christ.

Do you know what Paul says? 'It's a small thing to me for you to judge me' - he said that to the church - 'I don't let the church judge me. And whether you praise me to high heaven, or whether you criticise me down to hell, it doesn't bother me one bit'. My friend, you beware of flattering the preacher, and on the other hand you beware of criticising the preacher - but the point is this: if you do a service or a work for the Lord: 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant' - don't be affected by what the church says! Then he goes on and he says: 'It is a small thing that you judge me', and then he says, 'It is a small thing that man judges me'. Literally, if you look at your margin, it says 'man's day', which means the philosophy of the world. 'It doesn't matter to me that I'm going against the flow of the world, and the world thinks I'm mad in the head'. Then he goes on and he says: 'I don't even judge myself'. Don't get down from the pulpit and pat yourself on the back, and say: 'Well done, Paul. You did it well tonight' - and on the other side he doesn't dissect and do a post-mortem of what he's just said, but if he believes that he's the man of God with the word of God, he doesn't start to judge himself. I'm not talking about self-examination, that's encouraged in the word of God. Do you know what he saying? He's warning any of us not to get on the bema of God's judgement with our brethren and sisters in Christ, or even with ourselves. What does he say in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15? 'Study', be diligent, 'to show thyself approved', presentable - to who? God!

Can I finish on this note: the reason for all this was that the servant of Christ would have the hope of reward at the bema. Who is qualified to judge the servants of Christ? Only God. Let me just say that this verse has come up in conversation with some folk after the night I spent on the judgement seat of Christ, because this verse says 'every man will have praise of God'. They think that this means that all of us, no matter how we live our lives, will have praise of God. Now, I firmly believe that if you're a Christian you must have done something in your life, at least, to merit at least something of the praise of God - but that's not what this verse means. This verse means that every man will have his due praise of God. They're running around praising Apollos and Paul and Cephas, Paul says: 'No, if anyone is worthy of judgement and praise, he'll get it from Christ!'. I know that because the definite article is in the Greek language 'he will get his due praise of God'.

The question that we end on tonight is: what commendation will you have of God on that day? I know I'm over my time, but I have to tell you this story in closing. There was a woman at the end of the 19th-century in Paris, and she was being investigated for massive fraud. Her name was Madame Hoombear (sp?). She was a poor country girl from a humble background, but she always aspired after the high life of Parisian society - so much so that she married well above her means and station, and she gave out and announced to everybody that she had immense wealth. She told the story on one occasion how, travelling with an old gentleman in the next compartment to her on a train, he took seriously ill. She was there, and she was there to be able to save his life, and because she saved his life as a result he bequeathed all his property to her at his death. It was said that the deeds of that property were supposed to be in a certain safe that she kept in her salon, which sometimes could be seen, and on the door of that safe there was a wax seal so that no one could get through - and on the strength of that great bequeathment she borrowed literally millions of francs. Year after year she borrowed that money until her creditors got so uneasy with it that they stopped giving her the money, and then the matter was brought to court and the judge decided that the safe should be opened in the presence of witnesses. When it was, it was found to contain only one copper coin worth half a penny!

The manifestation revealed her poverty, her bankruptcy, as well as her deceit - and you know what the Bible says, and I leave you with this sobering word: 'We will all be made manifest at the judgement seat of Christ'. I pray that we will all be found faithful.

Our Father, we pray that on a day we will not be ashamed, but we pray that now, in time, when there is time, that we will make the difference for eternity - that it will be said of everyone gathered here today, that every man will have his due praise of God. Amen.



*1 Corinthians - Chapter 11****"The Difference Between Those Who Think  
And Those Who Are - Part 1"***

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**I Corinthians 4:6-21**

- 1. They Recognise Gifts Are Of Grace**
- 2. They Taste Of Apostolic Hardships**
- 3. They Beget Children In The Gospel**
- 4. They Portray Example Worth Following**
- 5. They Display Power Rather Than Words**
- 6. They Exercise Correction AND Compassion**

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 4, and we begin to read at verse 6, and God willing we hope to deal with all the verses down to the end of the chapter. Now keep in mind our subject tonight, because this will help you to understand these verses that seem so different in places: 'The Difference Between Those Who Think And Those Who Are'. Verse 6: "These things", and I think Paul is getting at all the things that he has said thus far, "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?"

Now you will only have needed to be with us a couple of the weeks in our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to realise that there were a number of believers within this church of Corinth that felt themselves to be superior to the great apostle Paul. That, perhaps, is very difficult for us to assimilate into our minds and hearts when we know so much about the lifestyle of the apostle Paul and what a great man of God he was, and we also know so much about the terrible sinful way of life of these Corinthian believers. Yet, nevertheless, because - as we learnt in the first couple of chapters - they had brought into their thinking and into their so-called Christian way of life, human wisdom, to such an extent, in the philosophies and the thought systems of the Greek world in which they were living, that they concluded that their wisdom - of

course they thought it was the wisdom of God itself - but they concluded that their wisdom was wiser than the wisdom of God through the apostle Paul.

Of course, their human wisdom led them to exalt one another over one another, and there was the Apollos faction, and the Cephas faction, and the Paul faction, and the Christ faction. Of course, they weren't following these individuals themselves in the sense that they were in the church - they were no longer in the church, they had gone on their missionary journeys - but there were other leaders who were giving their loyalties to these men, and they were esteeming these men higher than we ought to esteem men within the church of Jesus Christ. These men, Paul never ever names them, he only names who their affiliation was to - Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, and Christ - but whoever these men were, they were setting themselves up as superior to the apostle Paul. They had an inflated ego, they had a greater sense of their own importance than they should have had. Of course, their importance was only in their mind - and that's what I want you to see this evening, as we embark into this great study of these verses from verse 6 right through to verse 21. They thought they were something - that's the key: they were thinking about great deep spiritual things, and Greek philosophies, and the human wisdom of men that they were equating with the wisdom of God - but what they thought they were was not what they really were!

This is what I want you to grasp, and I think that if we could narrow down what Paul is saying in one short sentence, the whole of the spiritual truth to one fundamental common denominator, we could see it as this: Paul is outlining for us the difference between those who think they are, and those who really are. I hope you know that this evening, that there is a great difference between thinking and being. This Christian life, and this is the pitfall that the Corinthians made, it's not just about thinking, it's not just about theology or philosophy or ideology, it's not about that! That comes into it to an extent, and we must know doctrine, and doctrine must assimilate and precipitate down into our hearts and into our walk in the Christian conversation and way of life that we have - but there is a great deal more to the Christian life than thinking!

I think I'm right in saying that we could almost go into any New Testament book right now, and we would find that there is this demarcation line that every apostle and believing writer has ever been inspired with, and it's simply this: that there's a difference between your talk and your walk. There's a great difference between what you say and what you are. You could put it like this: what your belief is, and how your belief affects your behaviour - there is a great difference. We must not be ignorant of that, as the Corinthians were.

So Paul begins this, to show them the difference between thinking you are something and really being something. He begins in verse 6, and he says: 'These things', everything I've taught you up to now, all of these spiritual illustrations and figures that I've given to you, 'brethren' - and that's a very tender word, he's coming now in tenderness to them - 'I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes'. I think what Paul is really saying there is: 'We didn't set ourselves up as leaders, Apollos and Paul and Cephas, we didn't say 'Follow us', but men seem to want to follow us - so I'm going to demote myself in your eyes, demote Apollos and Cephas and Paul, so that I can deflate your human pride'.

Do you see why he's doing this? Why he is about to demote himself in the eyes of these believers? Because he wants them to see clearly that you're not to worship a man, you're not to follow a man, you're not to set a man up on a pedestal. So Paul begins to show up these factions and these schisms within the church, and he's wanting to give these believers a real lesson in humility. So he begins, and here it is, and it's reminiscent of what we learnt last Monday evening: 'That ye might learn', verse 6, 'in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another'. Now Paul could be talking about absolutely anything when he says 'not to think of something above that which is written', the canon of Scripture - the word 'canon' in that simply means 'measuring stick', and that's just what the Bible is, the canon, the measuring stick of Scripture. We're meant to measure all our beliefs and all our behaviour according to the measuring stick of the word of God, and as he narrows it down that could be applied to any

subject in our lives, but as he comes to this issue of worshipping men and following men, and splitting the church over the issues of what personality you follow, he says: 'Don't be esteeming men to an extent that you don't find written in scripture'. Do not think of men above that which is written.

It's so important in this matter of following people and personalities, that we don't err as these Corinthians erred, and think of these people to an extent that Scripture doesn't allow us to. But let me give an air of caution here for a moment, because in the same way as you're not to think of men above what scripture legislates, neither are you to think of them less than what scripture says either. What am I talking about? Well, you've to give men within the assembly the due honour that they're worthy of. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 13 for a moment, and this is important because I don't want people jumping on the bandwagon of these verses and thinking that they don't have to respect and honour certain positions within the church of Jesus Christ. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 7: 'Remember them which have the rule over you' - remember them! That's the oversight, the elders, you've got to remember them. It's not all right to forget them, or to forget what they say or what they have legislated, hopefully, in the word of God - you've got to remember them, that's what scripture outlines, that's what's written.

Verse 17, here's another thing: 'Obey them that have the rule over you'. As far as they are working and operating according with the word of God, that which is written, you've to remember them and you've to obey them. A lot of churches don't like this in these days in which we live, everybody has a view about something and everybody wants to implement it and take their own faction and their own view of things. That's what the Scriptures say, in the same way you're not to esteem men above that which is written, you're not to give them any less regard and honour than what the scripture says. Verse 24: 'Salute all them that have the rule over you', remember them, obey them, salute them. I tell you, I have seen people pull their sleeves up ready to hit them in this place! That's a long way off from remembering them and obeying them and saluting them, isn't it? This is what is expected of the ordinary believer in the assembly of Jesus Christ - we're not to put them above any other men and think that they're supermen, or they're some kind of saints with halos around their head, but you've got to give these men the honour that they're due. It's the same in any assembly, whatever assembly you come from.

It's important, you see this is why it's so important to do what Paul is saying and to learn what is written about how we ought to behave toward one another. So he tells us this, if you look at verse 17 for a moment in Hebrews - I've lost my place, Hebrews chapter 13 - verse 17, the second half this time: 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for it is profitable for you'. This is profitable, the word of God doesn't tell us to do things that are not for our own good.

Now, my friends, we must move on and look at chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians again, because we mustn't forget that Paul here is outlining the difference between those who think and those who really are. In verses 14 to 21, the second half of the chapter, he brings this message to them in tenderness - but the first few verses, in verse 6 through to 13, he comes with a real pointedness, and he lambastes these people who think they are something when they're nothing and demote even the very apostle Paul, the apostle of God to the Gentiles. The first thing that he says is the difference between those who think something about themselves and those who really are is this: those who have really got it, who are really moving on with God, who are really spiritual - they recognise that gifts from God are given by grace.

This is very important, these people who are puffed up - that's what he writes about them - at the end of verse 6: 'that no one of you be puffed up for one against another'. Do you know what that Greek word 'puffed up' literally means? 'To blow up', 'to inflate', it's derived from the Greek word that was used for a set of bellows that you bellowed the fire up with. This is what Paul is talking about: there are people in the assembly and they're puffed up with their own self importance, with their own pride, and it's harming the work of God!

This was, I believe, the root to the many and various sins that there are in the church of Corinth - now we don't have time to go through them all, we've already dealt with some of them, the next week we study we're going to be looking in chapter 5 at an awful sin of incest within the people of God, within the church of Jesus Christ. We'll be looking later on at drunkenness at the Lord's Table, about the dissolving of the marriage bond and various other sins - but at the bottom of all these sins, the one chief problem was the mother of all sins: pride! Men and women in the church of Jesus Christ who were puffed up, inflated, blown up, the fires of their own self-esteem were raging, and they loved people pouring more fuel upon them.

At the end of our chapter, verses 18 and 19 use this phrase twice: 'Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you', verse 19, the end, 'and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up'. You go to chapter 5 and verse 2, talking about this incident of incest: 'And ye are puffed up', even in that awful sin he's telling them that they're proud in the midst of it. Chapter 8 and verse 1, look at it: 'Now as touching things offered unto idols', a totally different subject, 'we know that we all have knowledge' - oh, they knew all about the theological arguments about these things, but he's warning them again, here's their chief problem - 'Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth'.

You see this pride is the opposite of love, and all you have to do is go to that great chapter of love, 1 Corinthians 13, and look at verse 4, and it says: 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, charity is not puffed up'. If the Corinthian church was addicted to any sin under the sun, it was addicted to pride - and that was the root of all their other sin! Now what Paul is getting at here with regard to these factions and this following of men, was the pride of personal gift, the pride of personal gift. They thought: 'Well, I'm good at preaching', or, 'I'm a good evangelist', or, 'I'm good at Sunday School teaching', or whatever it may be. They took pride in the one they were following, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, and they got puffed up with this - and they were beginning to attribute these spiritual skills to the men themselves and their human ability.

That's why Paul says in verse 7, look at it: 'For who maketh thee to differ from another?'. The word 'differ from another' there simply means to distinguish, to discriminate. Paul is not denying that there are differences within the church of Jesus Christ, of course there are differences. There are different gifts, not everybody is given to preaching, not everybody is given to singing, not everybody is given to helps - and we could go through all the list, and we'll be dealing with these gifts sometime later in our epistle - so Paul is acknowledging that there is a distinguishing and a difference and a discrimination. But what is the foundation of this discrimination and all these differences? They felt that it was because one was superior to the other! They were saying to themselves: 'It's because of me that I'm different!'. Do you see the mistake between those who were thinking they were something, and those who really knew what they were? They were attributing the gifts of God to men, and that's what led them to boast about it.

'What hast thou', Paul says, 'that thou didst not receive?'. This is a gift, this is something of grace, you don't receive something that you give to yourself or achieve for yourself! 'Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'. You're walking about like peacocks because you can do this, that, or the other for the Lord, and you have this ability for the Lord - but if you really believed that it was a gift of God you wouldn't be glorying in it in yourselves, because you would know that God had given it to you, and if God wanted God could take it away. You see this is a fundamental difference that we've got to grasp tonight, that those who think they are something before God often attribute the things that God has given them to their own self-esteem. Men are different, men are different: Apollos was the great orator, boy what it would have been to hear Apollos preaching with all the flowery rhetoric and language, and his great illustrations and alliterations and all the rest. Then you get Paul coming along, this fundamentalist preacher who's so legalistic, in the sense of being a lawyer, with the doctrines of God - he's a real theologian. Then you get Cephas who's a firebrand - and you might like Cephas, or you might like Apollos, or you might like Paul, but remember what Paul told us at the end of last week's study: that they're all from God! They're all

the servants of Christ, they're all stewards of the mysteries of God. It doesn't matter what your taste is, it doesn't really matter what I like, whether I like a loud preacher - and you would imagine I do! - or a soft preacher, or whatever it is, it doesn't matter!

We have to see that the gift is not of men, but the gift is of God. We are reminded of that in verse 1 of the chapter: 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God'. It's that little word 'us', Paul included Apollos and Cephas and whoever else was a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. What did we find out last week? You're to regard the man - that's what Hebrews 13 tells us, remember them that have the rule over you, obey them, salute them - but don't exalt them over which the Scripture exalts them! It's important to get that balance, and I'll tell you it's important in both extremes not to pull the feet from under men, not to continually criticise men and demolish them; but at the other side of the coin it's important not to exalt them and blow their head up - and sometimes that's the most dangerous thing that you can do, because the body is a sensitive creature, when you pat it on the back the head expands! Sometimes it's harder to listen to the praise of men than it is to the criticism of men.

I think it was George Whitfield standing at the door one evening after his sermon, and a lady said to him: 'You know, that was absolutely wonderful, that was the best sermon I've ever heard'. He said: 'I know, the devil has already told me that'. You see, this is a tact that the devil often comes with. A.W. Tozer was in the pulpit one night, or just about to get into it, and the chairman was introducing him - about what a great writer he was, and a great prophet of the twentieth century and all the rest - and Tozer was then asked to get up to pray, and he stood up and bowed his head, and he said: 'Lord, forgive that brother for what he has just said, and forgive me for enjoying it so much'. There's a danger, and we've got to beware of it - and I need encouragement, don't be stopping encouraging me, I need it! - but there's a fine line, we've got to be very careful.

What is the point of what Paul is saying here? It simply this: he wants us all, the church at Corinth, the church in the Iron Hall, to get our eyes above to Jesus Christ - why? Because every good and perfect gift cometh down from above, that's it. If I can preach and you can't, and you can preach better than I can, it doesn't make a button of difference because it's of God - God has given and God can take it away. It's nothing to do with me, or education, or ability - it's of God! This is the difference between those who think they are and those who really are. You don't walk around because of your ability like a proud peacock, but you recognise that it's the gift of God and it's by grace, and if God really wanted He could take it away like that.

Let me show you this from John the Baptist, because he was a man who was rooted and grounded, no airs and graces about himself - John chapter 3 and verse 27: 'John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven'. Verse 30: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' - there you have it! Listen, if you've got anything that's worth having for God and for Christ and for the cause of the gospel, do you know where you got it? You got it from God! All the praise and all the honour and all the glory ought to go to God!

As we move on we find that Paul changes his tone somewhat, and in verse 8 he enters into some - I think you could call it sarcasm: 'Now ye are full', look at it, 'ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you'. You're full and we're empty, you think you've got everything - of course you have! - you think you've got everything, so that means you must have everything. You think you're rich, so that must mean that you are rich. You think you're reigning as kings, so because you think it that must mean that it is all right. You often hear this statement that sarcasm is the lowest form of humour - I don't know whether that's true or not, because I find in the word of God that men of God used it. I'll tell you better than that: our Lord Himself comes very close to it. Turn with me for a moment to Revelation, the church's letters, seven of them, Revelation chapter 3 - and you know this verse

too well, chapter 3 and verse 17, He's talking to the church at Laodicea, and He says: 'Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked'. Is that not what Paul's doing? Campbell Morgan calls it 'matchless satire', trying to bring to these believers that the way that they're thinking about themselves is not the way they are - it's a kind of shock treatment to get them into the real world.

Job uses it, you know his accusers, look at Job chapter 12, and all his accusers are around him, and they have sympathised with him for a while, and then they give their high-fluting wisdom - and it's human wisdom now they're giving, not the wisdom of God. They give Job all their opinions, and in verse 1: 'Job answered and said, No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you'. Sure, what's that but sarcasm? 'Oh, you're the know-it-alls, you've got all the knowledge and you've got all the answers - no doubt wisdom will die with you'. I think the greatest case, perhaps, of sarcasm in the Scriptures is 1 Kings chapter 18, turn with me - I know we're turning to a lot of verses, but it's important that we do this to keep you awake. First Kings chapter 18 - this is Elijah, he's throwing the gauntlet down to these prophets of Baal, and in verse 26 their god doesn't answer its prophets by fire: 'And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened'. Sure, he's only poking fun, isn't he? He's poking fun, it's sarcasm to get them to waken up to God really is.

Let me give you a final one, and then I'll give your fingers a rest. Psalm number 2, because if you think that God could never use this, I want you to see this very clearly in Psalm 2. Verse 1: 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' - this is pride in the nations of men - 'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed'. Now they're standing up to Christ and to God, the rulers of the earth: 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision'. Can you tell me that's not a sarcastic laugh? God in heaven laughing at men's attempts from their thrones and dominions to oppose the Almighty God, and He laughs sarcastically!

Thank God the Corinthians hadn't got that far, but I believe some men in our province do - when God says: 'I will mock when your fear cometh, and laugh at your calamity'. I think we're safe to say, from Paul's use of sarcasm, that he's really trying to tell these Corinthian believers that this is not God's way. God's way is not to attribute to yourself great wisdom, or great fullness, or great riches, or great talent, or great ability - that's never ever God's way. All you have to do is look throughout the Scriptures and go to Genesis 18 and look at Abraham, and when he comes to intercede before God for the city of Sodom, because his nephew Lot lives in it, what does he say? 'Lord, I've come to You, and I dare to lift up my voice, one who is a creature of the dust'. Listen to the humility there! Jacob is being hunted down by his brother Esau for the crimes that he has done against him, and what does Jacob do when he comes to intercede before the Lord? He says: 'I'm not worthy of the least of your mercies'.

Oh, there's plenty of occasions like this - Gideon, the judge, who said he was from the least of the tribes of Judah; Moses said: 'I'm not qualified to speak, why should I go unto Pharaoh?'; and Peter, who is astonished at the miracles of our Lord Jesus, he says: 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' John the Baptist: 'I'm not even worthy to loosen the shackles of His sandals'. Paul himself said: 'I have nothing in myself, but my sufficiency is of God, and I am the less of the least of all the saints'. This is powerful stuff - but do you know what's even more powerful? You come to Philippians chapter 2, and it says of our Lord: 'He counted it not robbery to be equal of God' - let me translate it like this: 'He saw it not as a thing to be grasped at, His equality with God'. It doesn't mean He wasn't God, He is God! But it wasn't something that He tried to

portray before men all the time to get men to respect Him, but it says: 'He made Himself of no reputation!' What about that?

Imagine that these men couldn't bring themselves to do it, but the prophets of old, and the great apostles, and the Baptist himself, even their Lord was able to do it! That's the difference between those who think and those who really are. Now, can I just say this to you: if you look at verse 8 of chapter 4 of Corinthians, these three things that these people attribute to themselves, look at it: 'ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings' - would I be right, I believe I am right, in saying that these three things are three things that will not be realised by the individual child of God and the church of Jesus Christ until the millennium reign of Christ? Look at it again: full, rich, reigning as kings - do you see what these believers were doing? They were attributing to their personal present experience now in time things that would not be realised until the millennium reign of Christ - in other words, they were not in God's will, but they were proportioning reward to themselves already before the judgement seat of Christ!

That poses the question to us all: are we rewarding ourselves and resting before we ought? What does Paul say? 'I would that ye did reign' - what does he mean? Because if you did reign we'd all be full, we'd all be rich, we'd all be resting, we'd all be reigning and there'd be no divisions because we'd all be following our Chief Captain, the Commander of the Lord of hosts, the Lord Jesus Christ - but we're not reigning! We're going to find out in just a minute what was happening to those who really were, not those who were thinking, but those who really were - they were suffering! You see, that's the order friends, because you look at the Paul says to Timothy - 2 Timothy, don't turn to it, 2 and 12: 'Those that suffer with Him, shall reign with Him'.

The difference was, as your second point tells you, those who really were - not those who were just thinking, but those who really were - were tasting of apostolic hardships. Let's take time to look down these verses, verse 9, I want to read it, if you would allow me, in another translation - Way's translation, you'll not be able to buy this off the shelf. Listen to it, verses 9 to 13: 'It seems to me as if God has exposed His apostles to public view, like the doomed wretches who close a triumphant procession; that we - like them - have been exposed in the amphitheatre before the eyes of the world, aye, of angels as well as men. We maintain the old crude absurdities in Messiah's cause. Your faith in Messiah is quite a philosophy, but we feel ourselves poor weaklings - you are strong enough to stand alone, you are men of distinction; we are abject outcasts, we have never known your privileges. From the outset to this day we have been suffering hunger, suffering thirst, we have no decent clothing, we are victims of mob violence, we are homeless men, we have to toil hard, working with our own hands'.

I tell you, there is a great difference here: this is the difference between those who think and those who are, because while these Corinthians were philosophising in their ivory towers, fighting over childish differences and divisions and rivalries, the apostles - Paul says - 'We, the apostles, who are last, are counted as doomed men'. That's what that means, if you look at verse 9: 'For I think that God has set forth us apostles last, as it were appointed to death' - literally doomed men, condemned criminals. Let me take you to Imperial Rome for a moment, the great victorious general comes back from battle, and he has his great victorious army and battalions behind him. They throw up the rose petals of victory, and they're trampled on the ground and the perfume of victory goes right throughout the great city. But do you know what comes after all the gifts that are obtained for men from the spoils of battle? There are the criminals and prisoners and the vagabonds that they have taken with them. That's what Paul means when he says: 'God has set us apostles last' - doomed like these criminals in the triumphant procession who are going to be fed to death!

Look at verse 9: 'For we are made a spectacle' - and if you don't believe that, and you think it's farfetched, do you know what the word 'spectacle' is in Greek? 'Theatron' - look at your margin if you've got a good margin Bible, the word is 'theatre', literally 'theatre'! 'We are the apostles who have been made a spectacle' - do you

know what they would do with these prisoners and criminals that brought up the rear in the triumphal procession? They would take them all to the great amphitheatre, and they would have a celebration - all the gladiators would come out and fight with one another and with the wild animals, and then at the very end they would bring out the dregs of humanity, the worthless creatures of the earth, these criminals from battle, and they would feed them to the lions. They wouldn't have any armour, they wouldn't have any weapons, they were without hope - doomed men. Do you know what way James Moffat translates it? 'God means us apostles to come in at the very end, like doomed gladiators in the arena' - and do you know who are those who are looking in, the spectators? Look at verse 9: 'a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men' - do you see this? The Corinthians in their ivory towers thinking they've got everything and they know everything, and here's Paul coming along to compare to them those who really are, those who really have the truth of God, those who really are serving Christ - and what's happening? They're made a spectacle, like doomed criminals fed to the lions, and the angels are looking down astonished at what they can suffer for Christ, and men are looking on and attributing them as fools for Christ!

The difference is: this is the real thing. I'll tell you, you hear of Vietnam, and you hear of China, and you hear of Brazil, and wherever else in the world where your brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering - but I want to warn you: don't treat it like an entertainment! What I mean by that is, not getting gratification out of it, but talking about it in such a way as if it's not real, or in such a way as if you could never go through it one day!

They are fools, verse 10, for Christ - the word is 'moros', it's the word we get 'moron' from. As far as the world was concerned they were moronic! Look down this list, it's very important: 'ye are wise; we are weak', the apostle's weak, 'but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour', it hasn't stopped, 'we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted'. Could be said of the servants of Christ today that they're hungry? That they're buffeted? That they're naked? That they have no certain dwellingplace? I read of John Wesley, and even an Irish evangelist, who went around on a horse back preaching in Gallic to the people that didn't even know English, and he would have bedded down in a hedge for the night in the wind and the snow and the hail, and then got up the next morning and on his horse, and went and preached the Gospel - no certain dwellingplace!

This is a change from today: 'And they labour', verse 12, 'working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer'. If their wage that the church was giving them wasn't enough, they would go out and work for a wage. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about the churches that say: 'Lord, we'll keep them poor, You keep them humble', and they nearly starve men to death - and thank God I'm far from that experience here, I'm well looked after in this church. But my friends, there's a disturbing trend that goes the opposite way: that men of God, so-called, in the ministry of God are moving and working and living for money! It's not being defamed, but it's being 'famed' now - being defamed means being injuriously spoken of, that means people speaking about you and injuring your reputation. That's what was happening in the apostle's day, but men will go anywhere to get their reputation had in honour!

'We entreat: we are made', now you mark this, 'as the filth of the world'. Do you know what 'the filth', that literally means in the Greek? 'The offscouring', you burn the potatoes and you've to clean the pot, and you scour off all that black dirt - maybe you do it quite a lot some of you, you scour off the black dirt, and it just goes to the rubbish, it's good for nothing - that's what that word is. Useless, scum, worthless, that is what the apostles were attributed as - the filth, the offscouring, it's exactly the same word. It was also used of these criminals that were fed to the lions that were useless, that were an expense to the public and were thrown in the sea or killed by any other way. It just represents the most abject and despicable of all men, the rubbish of humanity - and they would even get these men and sacrifice them to their pagan gods because they were worthless, they didn't have any family, they didn't have any jobs, they weren't bringing in any income or



revenue to the government - they were worthless, sacrifice them! Picking up an old tramp, and putting him to death for their god - that's what the Christians, that's what the apostles were like to them.

We don't have time to read it, that's what all the Christians were like - Hebrews chapter 11, you go home and read it, verse 37 and 38. That's what Paul went through, 2 Corinthians 11. My friend, can I - I've so much more to say to you - but can I finish on this note: that's what our Lord went through. Do you remember what He said? 'Is the servant greater than the Master?' - is the servant greater than the Lord? I'll tell you this: He went through it in almost the same order. You look at these verses: hunger - there He is, the temptation, face-to-face, eyeball to eyeball with the devil himself. He's been forty days fasting and praying in the wilderness, and He is an-hungered the Bible says. Last night we were thinking of it, John chapter 4 - what's the next thing? 'And thirst', He comes to the woman at the well and He sits down on the well and declares to her: 'I thirst'. In Mark 14 we find that He's buffeted, He's stripped naked, He's beaten, He's spat upon, He's mocked, He's blasphemed. He has no certain dwelling place, the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests - but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head. Do you see it? He's reviled, Peter says, but He reviled not again. In John 15 He's persecuted, and He says: 'If they persecuted me, will they not persecute you?'

Friends, we sing: 'To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all I ask is to be like Him' - and oh, we sing it with great gusto, and great feeling, but we need to waken up and smell the coffee! Because this is to be like Jesus! Do we really want to be like Him? Who can lift their eyes from these words and not feel the flame of shame on their cheeks as you think of how at times we think we are, but we are not? Don't get me wrong now, these Corinthians weren't unsaved, but they were just a group of believers who wanted a road to heaven with no thorns on it. Let me read you, in conclusion, what Leonard Ravenhill says about that little word 'the offscouring of all things': 'Any man who has so assessed himself filth of the earth, has no ambitions and so has nothing to be jealous about. He has no reputation, and so has nothing to fight about. He has no possessions, and therefore has nothing to worry about. He has no rights, so therefore he cannot suffer any wrongs. Blessed state! He is already dead, so no-one can kill him - and in such a state of mind and spirit can we wonder that the apostles turned the world upside-down?'. Here's the warning: 'Let the ambitious saint ponder this apostolic attitude to the world, let the popular unscarred evangelist living in Hollywood style think upon his ways'.

Our Father, there's nothing better for our egos than to read a good dose of this biblical biography of these men of God, these apostles who were counted last, criminals, the scum of the earth for Christ, and who were willing to be thought of us such and treated as such. While others were content to live within the sound of church and chapel bell, they'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. Lord, one who gave his life for Christ could say: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose'. Lord, may we be a people that lose our lives down here, that we may find it again up yonder. Amen.

## *1 Corinthians - Chapter 12*

# ***"The Difference Between Those Who Think And Those Who Are - Part 2"***

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### **I Corinthians 4:6-21**

- 1. They Recognise Gifts Are Of Grace**
- 2. They Taste Of Apostolic Hardships**
- 3. They Beget Children In The Gospel**
- 4. They Portray Example Worth Following**
- 5. They Display Power Rather Than Words**
- 6. They Exercise Correction AND Compassion**

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 4, and you'll remember if you were here at our last study before the Christmas break that we only got the first two points of our study accomplished that particular evening, and so we've another four to do tonight. You ought to have, if you were at that meeting, that study sheet - maybe you've got an extra one as you came in this evening - but don't worry, I'll refresh you with all the points that we've already gone over. The title that you have been given is: 'The Difference Between Those Who Think and Those Who Are' - the difference between those who think they are, and those who really are. We'll begin our reading at verse 6 where we began our last study, just to refresh your minds:

"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day". This is where we'll be taking up our study specifically tonight: "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye?" - what do you want? - "Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?".

You will remember that in our last study we found out, and it has been a common theme in the first four chapters of this first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, that there were those in Corinth who were puffed up. This word and phrase occurs right throughout both first and second Corinthians, to be puffed up - and the

original Greek word has the sense of the bellows that were used to puff up or to fan the flames of a fire. Paul is saying that there were those in Corinth who were puffed up in the human pride of their worldly wisdom. They were puffed up in that pride to such an extent that they actually felt themselves superior to the great apostle Paul, the apostle God had chosen to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and ultimately the apostle who had brought them to Christ and who had planted and founded this church in their city of Corinth.

Now we don't want, in any shape or form, to communicate to you this evening that thinking is not important, that the mind is not important and wisdom is not important - of course these things are very important. It is to the mind, first and foremost, that God communicates His truth, and hopefully it makes that 16 or 18 inch journey from your mind into your heart, and then from your heart down to your feet into your walk. So all the truth of God must start within our minds, before it can be applied and assimilated into our walk day by day as human beings, so thinking is important, but what we are stressing this evening in our study is that although thinking is important there is a great, a massive, a fundamental difference between thinking - just thinking - and being.

It's alright thinking that you're spiritual, and of course there were these patrons right throughout the whole church at Corinth who had these followings of slaves and ordinary people doing for them all sorts of favours that they wanted and demanded of them, whether they be financial and possibly even at times sexual. They were puffed up in their own humanistic pride because of their wisdom, and they thought that they were spiritual, and the church thought that they were spiritual - and the church put them on a pinnacle, and that's why Paul has had to come in chapter 4 and say: 'Look, there are men within the church of Jesus Christ that are God's gifts to the church, and you've got to recognise those gifts to the church, but don't exalt the man'. Recognise the gift, but don't exalt the man.

You know there's a great danger for all of us, no matter who we are and no matter what position we hold within the church of Jesus Christ - whether we feel it's a responsible position, or we feel that we're an ordinary Joe Bloggs 5'8" sitting in the pew that doesn't really matter much in the church. There's a great danger that no matter who we are or what we do for Christ, that we can think we are spiritual, and thinking is a million miles away from being. So we want to look again tonight at the fact that there is a difference, a great difference, between those who think and those who really are.

We learnt last week as we looked at the sufferings of the apostles and these early Christians, and those who really were spiritual, that the fact that to be spiritual in Paul's day - and I'd say to be spiritual in our own day, even in our comfortable Western society - it is a painful thing, and it's a costly thing, and it's not a thing that engenders pride within the head or within the breast. We see that as Paul makes this comparison, he says in verse 6, he compares the apostles, he talks about Apollos as well and all the faithful servants of Christ, to what these men are purporting to be a spiritual man of God, and how they are portraying themselves as the leaders within the church of Jesus Christ. Paul actually begins to demote himself before their faces, and demote Apollos and Cephas, and even our Lord Jesus Christ in humility and in the servanthood that He brought even in Himself that all His followers also must bring - he demotes himself and all the faithful servants of Christ in order to deflate the pride of the Corinthians.

Now let me say tonight, that I want to jettison any foolish, human, proud thinking that some of us may have within our minds. We need to finish this carnal perception, perhaps, that we are spiritual, or that we think we are spiritual if we're not! Now you may be spiritual, I'm not saying you aren't - but we've got to see that there's a difference in thinking a man is spiritual, or thinking that you yourself are spiritual, and being spiritual! And it's all the difference in eternity! We've got to put away our human ideologies of wisdom, and our little boxes that we have to check to tell us whether a man is spiritual or not - and we've got to come back to the word of God, and as verse 6 says: we are not to think of men above that which is written. That's our

foundation, the canon of Scripture must always be our measuring stick when we weigh ourselves up and when we weigh others up. We've got to get back to that which is written.

Now what is this spiritual reality, not the thinking about it but the reality of being spiritual. Well, our last study - and I'll refresh your memory, and if you want to take these down feel free to do so - the first thing that we noted from this portion of Scripture was that spiritual men don't get puffed up because of the gifts that God's Holy Spirit has given them, but in fact they are the opposite: they recognise that these gifts are of grace. Verse 6 and 7: 'For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?' - that's grace, receiving something from God that you haven't earned and that you're not deserving of - 'now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'. They're walking around the church like proud peacocks because they can preach, or because they're an evangelist, or because they're good at this, that and the other, and they're not recognising that it is given to them by the hand of God, and it's of grace - and if God wants to, He can take it away!

We saw that the root of all the Corinthian's sins through the first and second epistle is this pride, the pride of human gift that they attribute to human wisdom and not the hand of God. What has Paul told them to do, and what has he been exhorting us in the Spirit to do? It's to lift our eyes off men and to get our eyes on God who gives the gifts to the church! A hymn I love and have often quoted puts it well, and I don't apologise for quoting it again:

'Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;  
Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;  
Once His gifts I wanted, now the Giver own;  
Once I sought the healing, now Himself alone.

All in all forever, Jesus will I sing,  
Everything in Jesus, and Jesus everything!'

That's Paul's theme: get your eyes off men - not the gifts but the Giver. You see how he does this in sarcasm - G Campbell Morgan called it matchless satire. He says: 'Ye are rich, but we are poor'. He's prompting them to think: 'Why do you think you're so rich, and we the apostles are so poor?'. He's being sarcastic to try and awaken them to the reality that they only think, it's only in their mind, it's only the conjecture of their own proud puffed up heart that concludes that they are spiritual! We've seen already Paul lambast them for being the opposite: carnal, worldly, fleshly. If you're going to be spiritual - this is hard, now - you have to be a man or a woman that recognises that the gifts that you have are from God, and they're by grace, and they've got nothing whatsoever to do with you in your attainment of them.

Then the second thing that we learnt is in verses 9 to 13, and we're not going to take time to go through these verses one by one; but a spiritual man, as opposed to one who thinks he's spiritual, actually tastes of the apostolic hardships that the original apostles tasted of. Verse 9 says that they were appointed unto death, that literally, we saw, meant 'doomed men' - they were on death row because they were the apostles of God. In fact, I would almost say that it was a qualification by default of being an apostle that you were martyred for Christ. We read on and it says in verse 9 that they were made a spectacle unto the world, and that Greek word was 'theatron', which is the word we get 'theatre' from. It was as if the whole world of humanistic men and spiritual angels were all gathered around to an amphitheatre, and after all the entertainment, all the criminals, the vagabonds, the off-scourings of this world were brought out without any weapons or armoury and fed to the lions and made a laughing stock - and these apostles and early Christians were made a spectacle just like that, that's what Paul's saying. They are made fools, verse 10, 'moros', the word that we get 'morons' from, fools, defamed, the filth of the earth, the off-scouring of all things - if you can paraphrase it

today: the scum of the earth. That's what you're looking for if you want to be spiritual. I wonder would all the hands raise this evening to claim it by faith?

Well, you can read it for yourself in Hebrews 11, and all that it is - I want you to really grasp this this evening - all that this spiritual road is, is conformation to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sufferings. We will come to it in our studies in Philippians, Paul cries: 'That I might know Him' - oh, we all want that! - 'and the power of His resurrection' - oh, give me that! - 'and the fellowship of His sufferings' - oh, not that! That's part of the package, it's part of the discipleship, and the trouble with these Corinthians that they wanted a thorn-less road to heaven, and there wasn't one, and Paul was trying to bring them into this reality by his sarcasm! I was reading today William Law's great Christian classic from hundreds of years ago 'A Serious Call To A Devout And A Holy Life', and John Wesley read this on one occasion before he joined the Moravian group and founded Methodism, and he was greatly impressed. He actually became a sort of disciple of William Law, if you like, and followed some of his teaching and got spiritual guidance from him. But after he read this great book and treatise, 'A Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life', he stated that he was convinced at the end of reading it, and assimilating it, and inwardly digesting it, more than ever, of the impossibility of being half a Christian - the impossibility of being half a Christian! That's what we're talking about here, the difference between those who think and those who are.

Let's move on to our final four points. The third thing that is the great difference that qualifies anyone to be spiritual is that they beget children in the Gospel. Verses 14 and 15, look at these verses: 'I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel'. Now I want you to note in verse 14 how tenderly the apostle Paul comes to them, it's a bit reminiscent of chapter 1 - you remember - with all their catalogue of sins, and qualifications for the judgement of God upon them, remember that he came to them in tender grace and showed them the forgiveness of God. Now he comes tenderly to them in verse 14, he says: 'I'm not coming to shame you, I'm not coming to show you up' - and let me say tonight, in what I have to bring to you from the word of God, I'm not here to hammer you, or to make you feel more guilty, or make you feel you're not up to it. It's not my achievement in any shape or form, it's not my endeavour or goal to ever do that. I come to you as Paul did, not to shame you, but as beloved sons tenderly, but yet pointedly - notice the two-edged sword of Paul, tenderness on one hand and pointedness on the other - and he says: 'Although I'm coming to you not to shame you, beloved sons I warn you!'.

You see, warning is needed - why? Because in verse 15 he says, and if I can translate it like this for you: 'Even though you may end up having countless thousands of guardians in Christ, at least you do not have many fathers'. You see, all these teachers were coming in and flooding the church of Corinth, telling these people what was right and what was wrong, and what they should do and what they shouldn't do. These men and women, simple as they were, were putting these people up higher than the apostle Paul, and putting the apostle Paul down. These people were guardians to them, instructors for them, and teachers among them, yet it was Paul who had brought them to Christ - that's his point! 'Though you have thousands upon thousands of instructors, you've only got one father in Christ - and that's me, because I was the one that came to you and brought the Gospel to you first, not them! I was the one who brought you to faith in Jesus Christ. I was the one who nursed you upon my breast and give you that milk as babes, and set you on your way and encouraged you'.

But you see, they had esteemed these instructors in Christ greater than the apostle Paul, and the word 'instructors' simply means 'a child trainer'. Of course it implies that these Corinthians were still children, and they still needed a child trainer, but the word in the original Greek is 'padagogos' (sp?) which means 'a guide or a guardian of boys'. Literally it's two words put together, the word for a boy and the word for a head, and it means 'a child leader' - and the Revised Version translates it 'tutors'. 'You have many tutors', it's the same word as you get in Galatians 3 where the law of God in the Old Testament is described as 'a schoolmaster',

some translations have it 'a tutor to bring us to Christ'. These instructors were like tutors. Now think about a tutor for a moment: a tutor has a duty to instruct, and direct and to guard children - if you like, it's their job. The tutor profits from it, a tutor maybe even gets wages off it. In these days, sometimes these guardians were slaves, and they would have got their keep from this, and been able to live among the family and been given lodgings and food and clothing by looking after these children. But you can see right away, can't you, in this illustration of Paul that there is all the world of difference between a man who has to look after children for a duty and a man who has borne children and who is their father!

Of course there's a difference, Paul didn't just look after these people, Paul had had these people - he had given birth to these men and women in Corinth. He had a right to do what he's just about to do and instruct them. You know the difference between a parent and a teacher - sometimes, I would have to say today, some of the teachers are better to the children than the parents are - but in an ideal world you know that there's all the difference: you can have the best teacher ever, but they will never know the love in their heart and the commitment that the parent of the child has. It's a different relationship totally, but do you see what Paul is saying? It's the same difference between those who think they're spiritual and those who really are! That's the point he's making.

You see these Corinthians behaved so often like children, and as we come sometime in the future to 1 Corinthians 13, the great chapter of love, what does Paul say himself, trying to exhort these Christians on to spiritual maturity? 'When I was a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child, I spake as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things' - I grew up! - 'You Corinthians need to grow up!'. The trouble is bringing up children - and I still have it ahead of me - is difficult, and those who have gone through it know how difficult it is, but you in the spiritual realm can identify with Paul - because sometimes when you're bringing children up they get to know a little, and they think they know a little bit more than you know, and they begin to tell you what they want rather than what they really need. You see what's happening in this church, it's exactly the same, Paul has given birth, led these people to Christ, and they've come to faith in Christ and all of a sudden they know everything that they need! You get this even here, people come to faith in Christ and they know right away the type of church that they want, and all that they need, and the meetings that they need to go to, and the meetings that they don't need to go to, and the fact they don't maybe need to be baptised or go to the Lord's Table - and they're able to cherry-pick it all! You're behaving like children if that's the way that you take the Scriptures into your heart and into your mind, and the attitude that you have to the holy ordinances of God, and you need to grow up!

This was Paul's predicament, he had to listen to their childish talk - and it's not young people I'm talking about alone here, sometimes leaders in the church have to listen to mature men, so-called, and the childish talk that comes out of their lips because they've never grown up! This was a plague in Corinth, and it has always been a plague within the church, but Paul says: 'Now, you're going to listen to me now, not these tutors that are only doing it out of duty and profit, what they can get out of you - but I have begotten you, I've begotten you!'. That's a powerful word 'begotten', of course it's used through the Scriptures in a natural sense of babies that are being born from their mother, but when we go into the spiritual it's used in John 3 and verse 3 where Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born again, begotten of heaven, he cannot see the kingdom of God' - spiritual birth. You go into the books of Peter and Jude and it talks about false prophets and false teachers, and one of the illustrations that these apostles give of these wicked men of the devil is that they're like natural brute beasts, natural brute beasts, as if they're begotten from the beastly kingdom of nature. The description of them in 2 Timothy 2 and 23 says that people like this, and other people that follow them, gender strife - strife-genderers - in other words begetting strife. You know these people that sow the seeds of discord and division within the assembly, they beget trouble.

The other use of this word in the New Testament is exactly the way that Paul is using it here: an instrument of salvation through the Gospel, someone who comes along and tells a person that they're a sinner, and tells

them that there is a sinner's Saviour that has been provided in the Lord Jesus at Calvary through His death and resurrection, and lets them know that by faith He is there for the taking for salvation, and they give birth to that person through the Gospel!

Now my question to you, very soberly this evening, is: which are you? First of all: have you ever been begotten of heaven, have you ever been born again by the Spirit of God? There could be someone in this meeting tonight and you're religious, and you've been brought up in a Christian home, and you go to all the meetings that you can - but you've never known the experience. I'm not talking about praying a prayer, I'm not talking about believing a certain amount of theological principles, I'm talking about an experience with God in your heart! That's what this is. Or maybe you're one of these people that's a natural brute beast, and still following after the lusts and inclinations of your wicked fallen nature, and maybe you're trying to bring other people astray. Or you could be one of these people that genders strife, and you've got nothing positive to reproduce, but all the fruit that comes from your lips and hands and life is unprofitable and causes division in the assembly. Or are you a man or a woman, a young person, that begets other people in the Gospel?

We can do without the others very easily, but we could do with a few of these fishers of men about the place. Paul talks about it in Galatians chapter 4 and verse 19, to the Galatians he says: 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth pangs for you again until Christ be formed in you'. Paul is taking upon himself the figure of a mother who is laden with child, and the birth pangs come upon her and she begins to know the travail of bringing a child into the world. He takes that whole illustration in the physical, and those who are spiritual beget children in the Gospel. It's in the Old Testament too, it says in Isaiah: 'As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children'. I do not say this in judgement, I hope you understand it, one time I was taking a visiting preacher home on one occasion - he was in the passenger seat and we were discussing various spiritual things. During the conversation he just happened to remark to me that he used to belong to a church who over emphasised the need for soul winning. My heart dropped when I heard that, and I'm not judging the brother's motives because maybe he meant something that I did not understand, but I know this: there is a certain teaching that goes about of the providence and sovereignty of God that makes people come to the false conclusion that we are not to win souls, and we are not to go out and find people for Jesus - and it's a lie from the pit of hell! I believe in the sovereignty of God as much, and more than, anybody - but I'll tell you this: you have it in black and white here. We are to beget other men for Jesus Christ, we are the channels through which they are to come to faith. Oh, I know they're born of God, but does Paul not say: 'How shall they hear if there is no preacher?', and I'm asking you this evening: are you a soul winner?

Now let's get this, this is what I'm talking about: this facade in our minds of what is spiritual, and you can pick and choose what you want - this soul winning club is not an exclusive one, it's for every child of God! It's not just the apostles, it's for every person that's been brought to faith. As in the physical we've been told: 'Go forth, Adam, and multiply', God says the same to us as spiritual children. I hate this nonsense people say: 'Oh, that's for the evangelists and the pastors, that's for the people that can do that sort of thing' - no it's not, it's for every single believer that has ever been born to God to win others to Christ. They're not all evangelists, they're not all pastors, they're not all teachers, but they're all to be soul winners! All of them!

What's also in this thought is that so often new converts don't really ever know the pain, the turmoil, the anguish, the agony that goes in - now mark what I'm saying - on the human side to their conversion experience. They never know - Paul says: 'You've forgotten, you're oblivious to it, I begot you in the Gospel! I was the one who spent the nights in prayer, the nights in fasting, the nights before ravenous beasts going towards you - I was the one! The half hasn't been told you Corinthians what I went through to bear you'. That's the way, isn't it? I often think of the story of the Lord Jesus going across Galilee towards the land of the Gadarenes where there is that madman, that demoniac, and he's possessed. Everybody loves the story, don't they, of how the Lord went and delivered him - nobody could tame him, and the madman fell at the Lord Jesus' feet and worshipped Him, and before he knew it he was right and sitting clothed in his right mind

delivered from all the devil and all the evil and sin. All the people heard about it, didn't they, and they saw the man, and it was miraculous, it was fabulous! It was probably talked about for the next hundred years or more, and we're still talking about it - but none of those people saw the storm that was in Galilee as Jesus was going there! They didn't see the storm.

So often there's a storm and there's a wrestling on the human side, and was that not the case in Gethsemane? Was it not the case at Calvary? This is right throughout the whole Scriptures that there's never the crown until there's the cross! Let me read you some of what these old men of God said about soul travail, and begetting souls for Christ, and what it really means. This is Charles Grandison Finney, and you mightn't agree with all his theology, in fact you probably don't agree with all my theology, but nevertheless he got it right on this one. Listen, he said: 'I once knew a minister who had a revival fourteen winters in succession. I did not know how to account for it', maybe that's what you've just thought, 'till I saw one of his members get up in a prayer meeting and make a confession. 'Brethren', said he, 'I have been long in the habit of praying every Saturday night till after midnight for the descent of the Holy Ghost upon us, and now brethren', and he began to weep, 'I confess that I have neglected it for two or three weeks" - two or three weeks! 'The secret was out', Finney says, 'that minister had a praying church'.

Listen on, it says in the life story of John Smith: 'I have often seen him come downstairs in the morning, after spending several hours in prayer, with his eyes swollen with weeping. He would soon introduce the subject of his anxiety by saying: 'I am a brokenhearted man. Yes, indeed, I am an unhappy man - not for myself, but on account of others. God has given me such a sight of the value of precious souls that I cannot live if souls are not saved - oh, give me souls or else I die!'. That's a spiritual man. The spirit of the age, sadly, has invaded the church - what is that? Men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. There was a book written, I think by a Christian sociologist, not so long ago, and it was all about the infiltration of materialism and lukewarmness from the world into the church - and do you know what he called the book? 'Amusing Ourselves to Death', I'll preach a sermon, I hope, one day on that - but do we beget children in the Gospel? Are we willing to pay the price of that travail, that anguish, that tribulation to see them won? That's the difference between those who think and those who are.

Then the fourth thing is that they portray an example worth following. Paul said: 'Look, follow me, follow me'. Now you might say: 'Well, is this a contradiction of what he said? He's telling these people not to be following men, and now he tells them to follow him'. Well, the point of this is that he is their only father who has begotten them in Christ, and they're to follow him in that capacity, and also if you were to turn to chapter 11 and verse 1 he says, qualifying it: 'Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ'. 'So as long as I follow Christ, you follow me'. The word 'follow' is the Greek word 'mimetes' (sp?) which is the word that we get our English word 'mimic' from - some translations say 'imitators', 'be imitators of me'. We're all good at saying 'do what I say', but how many of us - and let's be honest here tonight - how many of us could stand up truthfully and say: 'Look, you do as I do'?

To prove this he sent Timothy, verse 17, and if there was ever a man that was doing what Paul was doing it was Timothy. You can see that in Philippians 2, we'll come to it in our study, but he was the epitome and example of a faithful servant and steward of Christ that Paul was talking about - and when Paul wanted to show them what he was like, so that they could follow him, and he couldn't get there, he sent Timothy because Timothy was the epitome of Paul's life. Who have we to point to today and say: 'There is a man, there is a woman, who's like Christ'? Could somebody level that against you? Are you someone that others could look up to? Sometimes I feel like Psalm 12 verse 1 when the Psalmist said: 'Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men'. There is a need today, if there was ever a need, for godly men who are like Christ, and godly women who are like Christ. Make sure, friends that if you're ever going to take anybody as an example, that you take people who are and not people that think, not



just people that think but people who are - because there's a grave difference, and I'm telling you there's some people who can tell the difference.

Fifthly, the difference is that the people who really are display power rather than just words. Paul said: 'I'll come to you', and in verse 20, the end of verse 19 he said, 'I'll not just come in speech like those who are puffed up, but the power', verse 20, 'For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power'. Here is the supreme test: where is the power? Is it in the mind? Is it in a man's ability to teach? Paul is saying: 'No, it's not just an argument, but it's an unction. It's not just in the faith that you espouse, but it is in the force that you experience in a life of holiness'. 'The Word' in scripture, 'logos', communicates the expression of the thought of God, that's what it means 'In the beginning was the Word'. Christ was the expression of the thought of God, He declared and revealed God to us. I'm not demeaning Christ, because He filled in all the capacity both the word and the power, but if we come alone with an expression of thought - whether it's human thought or divine thought given from a carnal vessel and instrument, we leave people - the church and sinners - short. Paul is saying: 'It's more than this, the kingdom of God is not just an expression of human thought, but it's power, it's the manifestation of the power in Christ' - isn't that what he said? The Gospel is found in the power of Christ; the Gospel, as he said already in Romans 1:16, is the power of God unto salvation. When you bring Christ in the fullness of the Spirit of Christ in your soul, and you take the Gospel of Christ in that capacity, you know the power of Christ!

Now here's the difference: there's a lot of men who can talk and women who can talk, and I wonder at times do those who talk the most pray the least? Many a man will sit for hours and talk with you about this that and the other, and debate in committees and on boards, and you name it about everything under the sun; but there are few men and women who will take time to pray for the power of God. These men and women of spirituality display power rather than just words - what am I saying? I'm saying that you need to be a follower of Christ as the apostles were in Acts chapter 6, who gave themselves continually to the word of God and prayer. You need to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, who went out on a regular basis into the night, a great while before day, and prostrated Himself before God and prayed - that's why, in a human sense, He knew the power of God in His ministry. 'Men ought always to pray', He said, 'and not to faint' - always means always! The crux of Paul's message and my message to you this evening is this: you can't have apostolic power without apostolic practice, it's all about being not about knowing!

Then, we'll see next week the exercise, correction, and compassion - when it was a hard thing that needed to be done, they did it. They weren't these soft people that just like to be loved by everyone, but if there was a hard thing that needed to be done in the assembly Paul was going to do it. That's the mark of a spiritual man. Before I finish I just want to say this to you so that you don't miss anything that I'm saying: all that Paul has said the spiritual man ought to be is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ - everything! In John chapter 13, if you want to turn to it you can, John chapter 13, and we're finishing with these couple of thoughts, you have it here. Verse 13: 'Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you'. He's given us an example: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!'

Now don't go away from this meeting this evening and say: 'I'm going to try to be better, I'm going to try to be spiritual, I'm going to try to do all these things that Paul has told us to do', because you'll fail! It's only through the power of God and the Spirit of God that Peter, the great failure, could say: 'Whereby are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature'. The way that we live the spiritual life is through the divine nature of Christ that is imparted to us by faith and by faith alone! The head begins to swell and the heart stops growing, and I want to tell you this evening that those who think they are in the majority, and those who really are in the minority. When you get to

the top of the mountain, and I'm not speaking from experience, there'll never be a big crowd waiting there to greet you, but it's the only road that really counts. As Joan of Arc said, abandoned by those who should have stood by her: 'It is better to be alone with God, His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare, and dare, until I die'. There's a great difference between thinking and being, and I hope both you and I will learn to be.

Our Father, we don't want to be like men, and follow men, and become the partisans of men. But, oh God, we want to follow Christ, but we cannot see Him - Him having not seen, we love - but we can't see Him to follow Him, we see Him in the Spirit and the Scriptures, but we know that Thy truth also testifies that we ought to be able to see Him in each other, we ought to be able to follow the example of each other as we follow Christ. Lord, make us godly men and women who are able to stand for truth, but also to beget souls in the Gospel. Lord, that we would see souls saved through our individual witness and through the testimony of the Gospel even in this place. Lord, we pray that we'll be worth imitating as we imitate Christ and mimic Him. Oh God, we pray that we will fulfil all that we are to be through the Spirit. We thank Thee for our Saviour, and we would not ask to be anything that He was not; and therefore we pray that we will be able to take the suffering as well as the glory. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 13*

## *"Discipline In The House Of God"*

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### I Corinthians 5:1-13

1. *The Obligation (verses 1-2a)*
2. *The Execution (verses 2b-5)*
3. *The Explanation (verses 6-8)*
4. *The Ramifications (verses 9-13)*

Now we're coming to a new section that deals specifically with one of the sins of immorality that is found in the first letter of the book to the Corinthians, and of course the sin which was rife within that particular church. Chapter 5 verse 1: "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person".

Now we're taking our study this evening under the heading 'Discipline in the House of God'. As I've said already, we're entering into the second division within Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and it deals with their second greatest problem, their second greatest sin. The first problem the church in Corinth had was that they were divided, and divided over the following of their particular favourite spiritual leader and preacher and teacher. The second problem is not division, not the fact that they're divided, but the fact that they are disgraced. As verse 1 says: 'It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife'.

Now in verse 21 of chapter 4 we ended the last section, where Paul mentioned: 'What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?'. He's talking to them of how it might be necessary that he doesn't just write a letter to them exhorting them and rebuking them in the things that they should be doing, and that which they should not be doing, but they might goad him into coming to them and correcting them with a rod. We saw just at the tail end of last week's study that it is necessary, and the mark of a spiritual man and particularly a spiritual leader within the church of Jesus Christ, that he uses the rod of correction when it is necessary that it is used. He's not soft when there is a time called for for hardness.

Now this is a fitting link when we see what the theme of chapter 5 is. It is astounding, as we read these verses, to see this particular sin that actually was in existence among the people of God, believers, Christians taking the name of Christ in the church of Corinth - it's absolutely astounding! But what is more astounding than the fact that this sin existed is the attitude that the people of God had in Corinth to this sin, how they put up with it. There was an attitude of tolerance, to turn a blind eye to the immorality that there was in Corinth, to ignore it - and probably their ignorance of it was the fact that they were so taken up as to whether they would follow Apollos, or Cephas, or Christ, or Paul; that they had got their priorities wrong and they had let this immorality spread beneath their feet while they were bickering and arguing about irrelevant things.

This can happen in any church, and I want you to remember how we can commend the church of Corinth for many things - they were made up of many wise men, although they seemed to be puffed up in their human wisdom yet many of them were wise. They knew the word of God, some of them were eloquent preachers, very intellectual. It says that they came behind in no gift, they were a church that was filled with spiritual gifts that were genuinely of the Spirit of God. We could apply this to our own day and age, that it doesn't matter how big a church is, it doesn't matter what a church has going for them or how many spiritual gifts they have, or the great preachers that stand in the pulpit - it is possible, it may even be likely, that in the day and age in which we live that immorality is breeding underneath the floorboards! Perhaps the church itself, or even the leaders in the church, are ignorant to it - but the terrible possibility is that it is going on.

Let me give you an example of this in the book of Revelation, if you turn with me to chapter 2, you know of the writings to the seven churches, the letters that are given to them by the Lord. Remember that this is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking, and in verse 18 of chapter 2 He talks to the church at Thyatira, verse 18: 'And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire', isn't that wonderful? The Lord Jesus Christ, if you want to know what the Lord Jesus looks like now - it is not the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, that often we picture on the stained-glass window or in the storytelling minds of our childish imagination, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ancient of Days, high and lifted up, who is coming one day very soon as the Judge of all the earth; and His eyes are as a flaming fire of holiness and righteousness that devours all sin and cannot look upon iniquity, and are like a laser beam into the very depths of the souls of all His children on the earth even now. So He looks down at this church at Thyatira, and He says, commending them: 'I know', verse 19, 'thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first'. That's very commendable. If the Lord could say that about this church, I think we would be well pleased. But then He goes on: 'Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols' - and He goes on in the judgement that will come to this woman Jezebel.

I don't know, I'm not going to go in this evening to all the prophetic significance of these verses, but just taking it in its perfectly literal interpretation: obviously in the church at Thyatira there was a woman called Jezebel, and she was encouraging false worship to God - but what the Lord Jesus Christ had against the church was that with all that they had going for them, they were putting up with that woman! That was a sin, a sin just like the sin in the church at Corinth, where the church was not prepared to deal with what was known sin. Almost reminiscent of the words of Peter himself in his epistle, Paul is just saying in chapter 5 that judgement must begin in the house of God. If we can't sort ourselves out, how are we going to tell the world how to be saved and how to live aright? The picture I have in my mind when I think of this is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself coming up to the temple, and with those eyes that could not be seen by ordinary men - but He still had that spirit within Him of those eyes of flaming fire - He saw that they had made His house, and He said: 'My house, which ought to be a house of prayer, a den of thieves and robbers'.

Remember now, this is the Christ, and He took a whip and he scourged them and pushed all the money changers and the dove sellers out of the temple. We know that today as the cleansing of the temple, when the

Lord Jesus said in John's record: 'Take these things hence' - that's what He said, because it is God's desire that His temple should be cleansed. The temple today that God inhabits is the church of Jesus Christ, and in our capacity it's the local church - but the sad thing about it in our contemporary age is that most local churches have discarded the discipline of church discipline. I don't know whether they think it's archaic, whether they think perhaps it's outdated or it's not politically correct in the day and age in which we live - but I would put before you this evening that the day and age in which we live, even in the church, is more Corinthian than it has ever been, and therefore there is a need for Corinthian discipline within the church today more than ever.

Roy Lauren, the biblical commentator, said these words: 'If there is a need for a mission of evangelism to the world of natural men, there is equal need for a mission of correction to the church of carnal men'. I believe that if the church would judge itself with regards to immorality and to known sin, and get rid of the rot, it would be easier for the world around us to be persuaded of our reality! So this is the theme of Paul's fifth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the first thing that he simply lays down for us is the obligation of church discipline, of discipline in the house of God - the obligation, in other words the need for discipline. The problem with this church was exactly this, that they did not see the need for discipline - otherwise they would have disciplined.

In verse 9 this is clear, because Paul, if you look at it, and we'll look at it in more detail later if we've time, said: 'I wrote to you in an epistle not to company with fornicators'. It's not the epistle, I believe, that he's writing now, it was a previous letter that he had written to the church that subsequently has been lost - we don't have it - but in that he warned them not to company with fornicators. Now the very fact that he has to write another letter to them saying the same thing implies that they didn't listen to him the first time, and they didn't see that there was a need, that there was an obligation upon them to discipline these people in the church. I wonder, as you're gathered here this evening, do you see a need for church discipline? Do you see this as something that people who are really tight, or really strict, or orthodox, or eccentric, or fundamentalist do? Or do you see it as something that is laid down within the word of God that is not an option for us to pick and choose, but is an obligation that when there is a known sin within the local assembly it has to be - has to be - dealt with?

This particular sin was the fornication of a believer. Sometimes people say: 'Well, are you sure? I mean, are you sure that this was a believer that was committing this particular sin? I mean it seems such an awful abomination in the eyes of God for someone who knew Christ to engage in such an awful thing'. Well, let's look down at these verses till I prove to you that it is a believer. 'It is reported', verse 1, 'commonly that there is fornication among you' - now who is he writing to? He's writing to the church of Jesus Christ, and he says that this fornication is among them. If that's not enough for you he goes on: 'Such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles'. Now, was Corinth in Greece? Yes. Where the Greeks among the Gentiles? Yes. So what's he saying? That they're Jews? No. There is a differentiation made here that they've been brought out of the Gentile races unto Christ, and they are the church. So he's saying that the man that is committing this sin is committing something that the Gentiles wouldn't even commit, so he's come out of the Gentiles and he's a believer.

If that's not enough for you, you go to verse 11, and it says: 'But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator'. Of course 'the brethren' are only brothers and sisters in Christ, there can be no other meaning than that, so it proves that he's a saved man. In verse 5 he talks about what we ought to do with people like this: 'Deliver such an one unto Satan' - how can you deliver a man to Satan if he already belongs to Satan, if he's not a believer? You can't do it... 'for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' - an unsaved man's spirit will never be saved and delivered on the day of the Lord Jesus. I hope I've given you enough reasons to show you that this is a man who is saved by the grace of God, yet this man is committing such an awful sin in the eyes of God.

What makes it so terrible is that it has come to the ears of Paul. He says in verse 1: 'It is reported commonly'. Now if you turn with me back to chapter 1 and verse 11 you find that the partisanship within the church, the party spirit, was also reported to Paul: 'For it hath been declared unto me of you', verse 11, 'my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you'. Now the house of Chloe reported unto him about the fightings that there was and the factions within the church, but this is a different report that is coming to Paul in chapter 5 and verse 1. It wasn't an individual report, but the sense of it is that it is come abroad - it's common knowledge, it's all over the place within the church and outside of the assembly, it's common knowledge that this is going on! 'I don't need somebody to come, one person from a specific house, to tell me something that I don't already know, because it's noised abroad in the church and even in the world that this is going on!'.

That's the sense of this statement, and it's not slander, it's not backbiting, this is something that is proven - it's a known fact, it's indisputable that this fornication was going on within the church, it was there for all to be seen - if you like, it was on the very front page of the Corinthian Times, everybody knew about it. The problem was: everybody knew about it, but nobody wanted to do anything about it! Fornication, he says - now, if you know anything about that word 'pornea', it's the word we get 'pornography' from, it has many meanings. It really means any immoral sexual illicit behaviour outside and, at times, even inside the marriage bond. But here Paul gives us, as he does on many occasions, as the Scriptures usually do when fornication is mentioned, he gives us what exactly he's specifying. He says this sin that is not even heard among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

Now that word 'have' in the Old Testament doesn't just mean 'have' in a sexual capacity, but it actually means to marry this woman, to 'have' within the marriage bond this woman. Of course, the woman is specified as his father's wife - and we know that your father's wife is your stepmother. It's not his mother here that is spoken of, it's his father's wife. To make this sin even worse, if we were to go this evening into 2 Corinthians, we would find that at the time of this particular sin his father was still alive when he was committing fornication with his stepmother. So his father is living, and this man takes away from his living father his stepmother and commits fornication with her. The likelihood, because Paul doesn't specify this sin as adultery but as fornication, is that she had divorced this man's father, maybe through this fornication I don't know, but it seems perhaps that she is not married any more to his father, but he has taken her away and now he has set up home, is the implication, a marriage bond with this woman who is likely not a believer because Paul doesn't mention any discipline to her whatsoever. So he's in an unequal yoke, in an illicit fornicatory relationship which is equivalent, the Old Testament law says, to incest - and it's as bad as having your own mother to have your stepmother!

This is the sin that is right smack in the middle of the church of Jesus Christ, and is in the whole view and blaze of the assembly without shame - and no-one lifts a finger to do anything about it! It's terrible, isn't it? What makes it even more terrible, as Paul says, is that this is a sin that isn't even named among the Gentiles. Jewish law forbade it, but Roman law also forbade it, and even the Greeks. Now you know from your studies already in the book of Corinthians, and from reading these portions in your own devotions, that the Corinthians were no angels when it came to immorality - but the fact of the matter is that even they weren't as low as this particular sin! The tragedy and the implication as we try and apply this to our own particular age is staggering: that the church, although we're washed in the blood and we are meant to be sanctified, we're meant to be holy and different, and do the things that we never did before and stop doing all the things that we practised in our past, it is still possible for people in the church to commit even viler sins than those outside of the church - and I fear that it is going on within the body of Christ!

I only need to talk to unbelievers and men who have been put off Christianity because of the business colleagues or a family member that have done the dirty on them, and they think: 'Well, I have greater moral

standards than that man' - and listen, they do have greater moral standards! They make the false equation, but yet the false equation that they make is upon the false testimony of the child of God. Do you see how devastating it is? To make it more personal to our own hearts, when you think about it and take one step further it's unbelievable almost to imagine that the natural conscience of an unregenerate man could actually act on a higher moral level than the dulled conscience of carnal believer. We need to take heed if we think we stand, lest we fall.

That was their problem, for verse 2 tells us they were puffed up - this word meaning the bellows of the fire, or it could be likened to the blowing up of a balloon, you have to puff at it. It was their sin that led them to these factions in chapter 4 and verse 6, in verse 18 he talks about it again, how they flagrantly said: 'Oh, you'll never come to us and set us straight', and they were puffing against Paul that he was weak in his correction of their sins. So they were proud about the servants of God that they followed, and they were also puffed up in pride about their selfish ideas about the wisdom that they prided themselves in, that was not the wisdom of God but the wisdom of men - and now it's no longer the servants of God and their selfish wisdom, but it's now their flagrant sin, and in the face of it they're puffed up! They're not ashamed of this! They're proud of their toleration of it!

Paul says: 'When you should have been on your face mourning, you have not mourned, that this deed might have been taken away, that God would have answered your prayers and maybe taken the one away who is sinning, or maybe even brought them back in repentance'. Their noses are so high in the air that they couldn't smell the stench that was among the church that God could smell! I believe that this is the Laodicean spirit when the rulers in the church and the people in the church have this self-satisfaction where they feel that they have need of nothing! This church put up with it. Let me say that with all the exhortations that we have within the word of God to love our brethren, and to be meek and long-suffering, to forgive one another, to be at peace with one another, there is nothing, nothing at all in the word of God speaks of peace at any price - nothing.

You need go no further than this passage of Scripture to see that Paul, inspired by the Holy Ghost, is saying that sin that is known sin in the assembly must be dealt with. I wonder is that perhaps why there is so much trouble in the assemblies of our land today: because there is no rule and they're not following the precepts and the principles of the word of God, and we need to sit up as an assembly and make sure that we are in accordance with the word of God as well! We've seen already that there are rulers in the church, there are people that God has set over to oversee the assembly, and those rulers have to rule! There are times that they rule and they have to use a rod! Don't you forget that. Although it might be in love, and it must be in love, it must be in correction, it must be with a view to bringing people back into fellowship, those rulers with the rods are not wee boys to be made fools of. Sometimes I wonder...this is an obligation, a scriptural obligation: the need, the need for church discipline.

Then Paul goes on and talks about the execution, now I thought in hindsight that maybe that wasn't a very good choice of word - the 'execution', we don't want to get into that! Maybe 'the exercise' would be a better phrase 'of church discipline', which is really speaking of the method. Now people come to me quite a lot and say: 'Did the Lord not say 'Judge not that ye be not judged', Matthew chapter 7 verse 1?'. Yes, He did say 'Judge not that ye be not judged', but if you remember our studies in the Sermon on the Mount - what the Lord is talking about there, that is if He's not contradicting Himself and the rest of Scriptures, is the judgement of motives. In other words, the things that you and I cannot see - for instance, if you see a man in the assembly walking down the street with his sister, and you don't know his sister, you immediately think he's having an affair with another woman. It is to put 2 and 2 together and make 5; it is to use evidences that you don't have in your mind, facts that you think you have but don't really have, and make an assumption and conclusion. You can't judge the unseen, that's what the Lord is saying: 'Judge not that ye be not judged'.

But that's not the judgement that we have here, it's not something that says that you put up with sin that you know is rife and flagrant within the assembly, you close your eyes to it and you become ignorant to it, and you forgive everybody - that's not what this is. Then someone says to me: 'Well, what about the word of God that says that you're to forgive your brother 70 times 7?'. Well, that's right, you're to forgive your brother 70 times 7 - but let's clear this one up, because I get fed up listening to these things. Matthew's gospel chapter 18, the danger is that people pluck these little verses out of their context in the passages that we find them in. Matthew chapter 18 verse 22, Peter said in verse 21: 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven'. Oh, that's great, isn't it? Let's just forgive everybody! Let everybody do what they like in the assembly, and let's just forgive them and turn a blind eye to them - is that what it means? This verse is in the context where the Lord addresses the subject of church discipline. If you look at verse 15: 'Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican'.

Now, what's the Lord saying? He's saying that if a brother offends you, or is offended at you, you've to go to them and sort it out. If they won't heed you've to take another brother or two brothers, and if they won't heed them you've to bring it to the church, and if they won't heed the church they've to be put out, and cast out and treated like a publican or a sinner! If they come back to you in repentance, 70 times 7 forgive them - don't take it out of the passage and the train of thought that the Lord Jesus has here! Although there are times even when our brethren don't ask for forgiveness on a personal level, don't confuse what is a personal level, which is a personal realm, to the realm of the assembly. You would never say: 'Let all the prisoners out!' - unless you were one of our politicians! - you would never say that, you would say: 'Let them face what's coming to them, because there has to be justice, there must be justice'. Even if a man is repentant, we would say he must serve a sentence - you wouldn't just let him go, would you? Why? Because it's a different realm we're talking about here: there is the realm of the state; there is the realm of the home; and there is the realm of the assembly. Sometimes things operate differently in those realms.

What is the scourge of assemblies, I believe, today is what we could call 'papering over the cracks'. Do you know what that is? I've done it: you've got a crack in the wall, you think: 'This is right good paper, it's quite thick' - she doesn't know this - and you just paper over it, and you hope that it'll not be seen. But you know what happens, when the paper gets wet, and after some time when maybe somebody knocks against it, the crack comes in the paper because there's no foundation there. What has to be done is you have to get an instrument to pull out all the loose gravel, and clean out the crack - maybe even make the crack bigger, and it looks worse at first, and then you have to fill the crack up - and it takes time for the crack to harden over again, and then you paper over it and it lasts! What we have today within churches is cosmetic dealings with these factions and problems, and it's papered over and the thing festers and gets worse and worse and worse.

Whenever you address the subject of church discipline people say: 'Oh, you're just looking for a fight. You're wanting to bring trouble to yourself, trouble into the assembly, you're wanting to dig up problems that aren't even there on the surface - you're looking for trouble! Just leave everything be, let it be at peace'. Let me say to you tonight that that is the peace of the graveyard, where the deadness and bitterness of strife and envy and maliciousness and hatred and backbiting and rebellion is allowed to fester under the ground in death! That won't do. It may be the semblance of peace, but the wound needs to be cleaned out, it needs to be painful, it needs to be smarting, and then it needs to be sewn up and healed.

My friends there's no other way, this is the way it must be, and anything else is a farce, and the blessing of God will never come upon it. This is the way God operates, this is God's word, this is even what God does Himself - Hebrews 12:6: 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he



receiveth'. Paul says in verses 3 and 4 'I judge', 'I have judged', he didn't have a committee on it, he didn't have a church vote on it, no-one raised their hands, he didn't even talk or need to talk to the parties involved - now I'm not saying you don't need to do that, but all I'm saying is this: the sin was so blatant and obvious that there was no doubt about it, it had to be dealt with. There was no discussion, there's no politics involved: 'How many people will we lose?', 'Who will we offend?' - it had to be dealt with! That's it.

He's hundreds of miles away, but there's the singularity of his judgement. He sees it, he's not prepared to sweep it under the carpet, and he says: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ', verse 4, 'when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one unto Satan'. Now this is tremendous, the authority that he has to do this: 'When you're gathered in the name of Jesus Christ' - now this proves that these believers know a lot more, even in their flagrant sin, than what some believers know today. Matthew 18, where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord He is in the midst, and He's in the midst for discipline, His authority is on the church for discipline. They knew it. Paul says: 'When you're gathered together in His name, His power is there, Jesus Christ is there. You are there as the church, my spirit is there with you, I agree with what you're doing and I want you to deliver such an one to Satan'. Do you see the authority here? Jesus is there, He's putting His stamp upon it. The apostle is there in spirit, he's putting his stamp upon it. The church is together, they're putting their stamp upon it - and they're delivering this one to Satan, and even Satan's made to put his stamp upon it!

The believer is put into a sphere, excommunicated into a place, the world, the place where Satan is god, that lieth in the lap of the wicked one - and, if you like, he's fresh meat and fair game for the devil to do with him as he likes. This is frightening stuff, to deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. What is the destruction of the flesh? There's different schools of thought, one basically thinks that if you commit a sin like this, or any sin and you're excommunicated from the church, and you're outside in the world, that the devil gets his clutches on you physically and you get some disease and you die. Well I'm not saying that could never happen, and it certainly happened to some of these believers as we'll see in chapter 11, when they were getting drunk around the Lord's Table many were weak and sickly among them and many slept - died. But I don't believe that this is what this means here, the destruction of the flesh, because the flesh in Corinthians usually if not always means that old nature within you, the old man that actually led this individual into his incestuous relationship with his stepmother. The thought is here that for this man's own good you're to put him out of the church, and allow him into the realm and the sphere where Satan rules, that Satan may bring him down so far that that desire and fleshly nature within him is quenched and he comes back repentant to the church of God again.

Why? So that on the day of the Lord Jesus his spirit may be saved. I'm not getting into a discussion about whether this was a power that the apostle had of himself and we don't have it today, he may have had a supernatural ability to actually deliver people unto Satan - and he does it to two heretics who blasphemed, we read of it in the book of 1 Timothy. But I know this: the world is still the realm of the devil, and if you deliver such an one to the realm of the world and excommunicate them from the church, the devil will deal with them! Now the big problem that Paul had in his day - surprise, surprise - is the problem that we have today, for very few churches discipline people. Those that do discipline people find that when they put them out of their church, there are a hundred and one churches that are ready to open the doors and invite them into theirs. But what is worse than that, I feel, is when even the church that excommunicated them invites them in themselves! Surely that's worse?

My friend, if you know better than God's wisdom, you go down the road and set up your own church and put your name over the door, and do what you like - but here we'll be following God's wisdom, and you mark that. I've got past friends falling out with me, I've got long past people not liking me, I've got long past people calling me a liar and a hypocrite and all the names that you can think audibly and on paper - I don't care, I'll stand with God. We'll do what's right, and my friends: it's because God says it, and more than that, if

you would follow the wisdom of God you would find out that it's the best for the person that's underneath it. The reason why they're to be disciplined is so that they would come back in repentance, realising what they've done; being ostracised from the assembly, being dealt with by the devil, being cut off from the fellowship, that they would be shocked into realising what they've done, and they repent. And I'll tell you, if they repent, they're to be embraced and forgiven and accepted once again - and I believe that in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 this very man repented and was accepted again.

Don't you think that overseers have some kind of sadistic thrill with wielding the big stick. They must remember too that discipline must never be exercised for the satisfaction of the person who exercises it, but always for the mending of the person who has sinned, and for the sake of the church. It's not to be vengeful, it's always to be curative; it's for the good of the assembly, but it is for the good of the disciplined! Remember that.

That the execution of it, and then there's the explanation for it, the reason for discipline in the church. Paul said in verse 6: 'Your glorying is not good'. You see they were tolerating - this isn't a small sin, but they had tolerated small sins. Just as the oak tree lies in the belly of the acorn, so big sins lie as seeds in respectable little white small sins, as you might want to call them - falsely so. The fact of the matter is this, more than anything in this chapter, that sin always thrives where there is a toleration of it. When it is ignored and when there's a blind eye turned to it, it will always thrive. That's why Paul says: 'Know ye not that a little leaven' - know ye not? These big proud Corinthians, and you don't even know this? All your knowledge and all your spiritual gifts, do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? It's logical that if you bring in a little leaven and put it in the dough that it will fill the whole of the loaf of bread - and if you bring a little sin into the assembly, or you allow a little sin to grow, it is logical that it will filter right through and affect. People will see and say: 'Well, if they can get away with it, I can get away with it!'

They didn't know it, that the whole assembly would be affected, because leaven imparts its nature to all with which it comes into contact. It contaminates, and even the old leaven that they hadn't previously dealt with, the remnants of their old life and their past sinfulness, had to be dealt with - put away the old leaven. The point is this: their indifference actually convicted them, I believe, with the offence, because they were guilty of the spread of the evil in the assembly because they didn't do anything about it.

Now here is an illustration that Paul gives to them as an explanation, the reason why we need to discipline in the church. The end of verse 7: 'For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us'. Focus on the Lord, that's what he's telling them, that's the answer to all your problems: focus on the Lord. But he says: 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' - now notice he doesn't say: 'Christ my passover is sacrificed for me'. See, you can't say that. You can say: 'For the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me', but you can't say 'My passover was sacrificed for me', it's 'Our passover was sacrificed for us' because he's talking about Exodus, where there was the Passover. The children of Israel were delivered from Egypt through the Red Sea and towards the promised land, and each household was told to take a lamb without blemish and without spot, to slay it, put the blood in a basin, put it on the doorposts and the lintel, and God would see the blood and would pass over them. But each lamb was not for an individual, it was for a household. What Paul is saying in this illustration is that 'the church of Jesus Christ today is my household'.

Now here is what the Jew had to do the night before the Passover. They were to go to the place where the leaven was kept, and they were to scrub it clean of all leaven. They were to go to the kneading trough where the dough was kneaded, and they were to scrub it and sweep it and even scrape it so that there would be no leaven on the board at all. They were to light a candle and go into every crevice of the house and every cupboard of the kitchen, and make sure that there was no leaven left. When they had done all of that they got on their face before God, and then lifted their hands toward heaven and said: 'O God, I have cast out all leaven from my house, and if there's any leaven that I do not know of, with all my heart I cast it out!'. Where

the blood of the Lamb was there was to be not one iota of leaven. You know that leaven is a picture of sin, don't you? Here it's a picture of sin in the assembly, and Paul is telling us that this is what we've to do as Christians: we're to ransack our soul and our church of all leaven!

In verse 8, we're to eat the feast, to keep it - and it's not talking about the Passover now, or even the Breaking of Bread - it's talking about the feast of Christ, the Christian life. We're not to eat it with old leaven of malice and wickedness, sitting around the table of the Lord looking daggers at somebody across the way - that's not to happen, and that's to be disciplined! That's to be disciplined, and all forms of wickedness that wreck assemblies - because you can't sit at the feet of Christ and eat His feast, and hate your brother. 'If any man say 'I love God', and hateth his brother, he is a liar' - you're a liar. It's to be ate in sincerity and truth, and that word 'sincerity' means 'unalloyed and pure' - that is the assembly that God blesses, and that is the assembly that God takes forward. Sincerity and truth.

Then there's a fourth thing, the ramifications - verses 9 to 13. The sphere, the implications, the effects of this - now don't get worried about this lost letter. You've wrote many a letter that was lost, and none of them were inspired, and Paul did the same. You're not going to make all of his letters inspired now, are you? He wrote a letter to Corinth that wasn't inspired - otherwise we would have it in our Bible, because God has made sure that we have all of His word before us. He tells them in that other letter that was lost not to company with fornicators, now he explains this in verse 10, which writes off the interpretation of the exclusive brethren that you can't ever have company at all, whatsoever, even to eat a meal, with people that are unbelievers - and even in the ships out in the Irish Sea, where they're fishing, when they sit down and one's an exclusive and one's not they put a big plank between them on the table so they don't have to look at one another! That's the ridiculous extremes that men get to. I went to school with a young man who was put off Christ and Christianity and everything because his family wouldn't have anything to do with him, and he actually came to the point of lying to tell them he was saved so that he could eat his dinner with them! I'm sure that's of the devil himself - we know that, commonsense tells you that, and Paul tells us in verse 10 that we are not to be isolated from the world. We are to be separated from the world, but what is he talking about here? He's talking about brethren, the brethren that do this thing you're to isolate yourself from and separate yourself from, because it will contaminate believers. He lumps in, and I want you to see this in verse 11, covetousness with fornication, the love of money, grabbing money, robbing people, fleecing people, squeezing the poor of every penny for your own devices, being convicted of dishonesty in business or financial affairs, or tax fraud - he links it to adultery, do you know why? Because God said in the commandment, the last one: 'Thou shalt not covet your neighbour's wife', it comes from the same seed as lust.

Look at all the other sins, we don't have time: idolaters, railers - that's people, as Harry Ironside said, whose tongues are loose at both ends, and there's a pivot in the middle and they just spin around at everybody. Isn't that what some people are like? They never stop talking - listen: you beware, because one day someone might tap you the arm and say 'Come on in here till we have a word with you about your slander, your backbiting, your talking, your scandal'. That's as big a sin, Paul says, as going with your stepmother. We go on: drunkards, extortioners, with such do not eat. This isn't the Lord's Table, he's telling them: don't fellowship and don't socialise - why? For their good! Verse 12, you can't judge the world and I'm not asking you to judge the world, God will judge them one day. The church isn't to judge the state, it's not to judge the home, it's to judge the church. You cannot judge those who are without, God will judge them, but you - look at it - you are to judge them which are within! And when you put them without, verse 13, God will judge them. This is the word of God, the discipline in the house of God that is preventative, it's preventative against the sin and the leaven spreading. It is purgative, to cleanse out the temple of God from all sin. It's punitive, for it chastises the individual who has sinned - but praise God, and let us remember this, it is curative. The aim is to bring those people back into restorative fellowship.

Our Father, we pray that Thou will forgive us if we ever have a flagrant disregard for the holiness of Thy temple, that Thou art here and we cannot just do as we please. Our Father, we pray that all of us will submit to the authority of Jesus Christ who is present with us at this moment, the authority of the apostle in his doctrine and teaching, the authority of them that have the rule over us, the authority of the word of God - that we will do Thy will. Father, for those who have been disciplined, who will be disciplined; we pray, our Father, that they will see the error of their ways, and that they will repent and do the first works, and with open arms that we will be able soon to receive them again into our fellowship. Lord, unite us together in the bond of peace, not a false peace, but the real. For Christ's sake, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 14*

## ***"Revelation Or Litigation?"***

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### **I Corinthians 6:1-11**

- 1. Rebuke Based On The Christian's Destiny (verses 1-3)**
  - i. We will judge the world (verse 2)*
  - ii. We will judge the angels (verse 3)*
- 2. Ridiculous Attitudes Concerning Christian Behaviour (verses 4-8)**
  - i. Lack of discernment and wisdom (verses 4-5)*
  - ii. Lack of concern over witness to the lost (verse 6)*
  - iii. Lack of humility to suffer wrong (verse 7)*
- 3. Required Reflection On The Christian's Cleansing (verses 9-11)**
  - i. The nature of the Kingdom (verse 9-10)*
  - ii. The nature of the cleansing (verse 11)*

**L**et's turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, 1 Corinthians chapter 6. This is our fourteenth study this evening, if you haven't been to any of our other studies and you want to be updated, all the tape ministry is available upstairs, and you can get that on your way out.

We're looking tonight at the subject of 'Revelation Or Litigation?', and we're reading the first 11 verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 6, beginning to read at verse 1: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God".

There once was an ancient Greek playwright, who in the course of one of his plays introduces a character who is seen to be looking at a map of the world. He asks the question to those round about him: 'Where is Greece?', and in answer to that question Greece is pointed out to him geographically on the map, and he replies to them: 'Well, there must be some kind of mistake, because I cannot see any lawsuits going on!'. Lawsuits and going to the law were so prevalent in Greece that it was one of the most common characteristics whereby the Greek Empire, if you like, was known. Of course, Corinth in Greece was known and had this reputation of people, for every little reason, taking their friends, their relatives, their neighbours, their countrymen to the law courts over trivia - things that didn't really matter, but they always dragged them to the law courts to sort them out there.

Of course, I think you would agree with me that the United Kingdom is getting a similar reputation today. We seem to be a people that go to the courts quicker than we have ever done, and look for compensation of every kind no matter what has befallen us - and, most likely, a lot of the time things that haven't befallen us, but we'll chance our arm anyway! But you must remember that this letter is written to the church, the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth. You would like to think they would be different, and that they would not have imbibed or assimilated in their lifestyle the way of life of those outside in the world. Of course, the sad fact, as we have found as we have gone through these first five or so chapters of 1 Corinthians, was that this was the biggest problem, perhaps, of the church of Corinth - they were carnal. Paul had to speak to them, and he didn't beat around the bush, he told them: 'Ye are carnal'.

The standards of the wicked, depraved city of Corinth were beginning to filter into the church. The way of life that these men and women had before their conversion, they were starting to revert back to them once again. Here we have it, here they were following the example perhaps of their previous way of life before conversion, and the things that were going on around them in their workplace and in their neighbourhood, and they were taking people to court. But the thing that Paul is really speaking against in chapter 6 is: they were hanging their dirty linen out, as it were, the dirty linen of the church, in public! It wasn't that they were taking unbelievers to court, but they were taking one another to court! Believer taking believer, brother taking brother to the law!

Now verse 1, perhaps in the translation that we're reading tonight, which we love so well, maybe doesn't make it terribly clear. It says: 'Dare any of you, having a matter against another', and the literal 'another' there actually insinuates 'another brother'. It could be literally translated: 'the other', and it is pointing towards those who are sanctified in Christ, washed in Christ, redeemed, their lives are changed, going to the law courts against one another in litigation. So Paul lays down in chapter 6 broad principles that were not just applicable to the legal times of Paul's day and even the ecclesiastical times of Paul's day, but they are applicable to the law today and applicable to the church of Jesus Christ today, because we believe that the word of God is inspired - all of it - and is profitable for our learning. But in saying that we must be balanced, and it's important that we never interpret any portion of Scripture to the exclusion of other portions of Scripture. It would be very easy to run into 1 Corinthians 6 tonight and say: 'You're never ever to go to the law courts, never!'. Of course, that would be wrong, because Paul doesn't say that. He's talking about brethren taking other brethren to the law courts, and you know and I know that in Acts Paul actually went to the law courts of his own free will himself, and he said - we have his words: 'I appeal to Caesar'. He looked to his Gentile patronage that he had through Rome. You might think he's wrong for doing it, and there are scholars that think he made a mistake - well, if you think you know better than the apostle Paul, you're some man or some woman. But nevertheless, he did it, and we could go through the Scriptures tonight and show you that this is not what Paul is meaning here, that you never go to law, and there are some friendly lawsuits - that's what they're called today - that are necessary to go through with regards to red tape and things that have to be done in the eyes of the law of the land that you have to do.

Let me also say that what Paul is talking about here in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians has got absolutely nothing to do with criminal cases, nothing to do with criminal cases! So if you're a rapist, or you're a murder, or you're a child abuser, or you're an extortioner, any sin you like to name that is a criminal offence in the eyes of the law and the state of our particular land - the church will not be a shelter to you! It will not. And although the Catholic Church has decided it would be a shelter, and it was greater than the law of the land, it has found out to its detriment that it is not! Let me show you that this is what the word of God teaches, turn with me to Romans chapter 13, and you would have to believe that Paul was contradicting himself to believe that he's talking about criminal law in 1 Corinthians 6. Romans 13 verse 3, in the whole chapter he's addressing the authorities that are ordained of God - even wicked authorities in lands where the worship of God is prohibited - God has allowed all rulers, kings, and potentates, and presidents, and prime ministers to sit on their seat of rule. Verse 3: 'For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not

be afraid of the power?' - he's asking a hypothetical question insinuating to them that they ought to be afraid of the power of the law of the land - 'do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same'. If you do what's good and you keep the law, you'll not be afraid of those that enforce the law. Verse 4: 'For he', that is, a man who enforces the law, 'is the minister', or the servant, 'of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil'.

Now there it's sanctioned: Paul has put a stamp of inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the fact that we ought to fear the law of the land, obey the law of the land, and it doesn't even matter - let me say - that you get converted...if you've committed something criminal you must pay for it! So I hope you see that Paul isn't legislating any cover-up here, but what Paul is talking about is the airing of petty differences in the church before the world - silly disputes, trivial matters, personality problems, silly gripes and sinful vexations and insinuations. That's what he's talking about. Of course, if you look at the last verse of chapter 5 that we finished off last week, verse 13, he says: 'But them that are without God judgeth'. It's not our job in the church to judge people outside the church, we're not to judge the world. That was the mistake of the Roman Catholic system, they believed in the unification of church and state, and they believed that they should have sway over the state and ruling the state - and even in the Republic of Ireland today there are still laws that I believe will be rectified very soon, that say that the Catholic Church is a law unto itself, and in the matter of paedophiles and so on they can overrule themselves. That will be changed, because we know everything that is going on in Ireland at this present day. But you see there's a mistake of thinking that we can judge the world, we're not here to judge the world, Paul says you're to judge the church - therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. We're to judge the church, not to judge the world.

Now Paul tells them, verse 1: 'Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?'. You're to judge yourselves, so what are you running to the law courts of Corinth for? So the first thing that we see here is a rebuke from the apostle that is based on the Christian's destiny. The motivation for this rebuke is absolute and utter amazement - you can see that in the English: 'Dare any of you, dare any of you?'. Campbell Morgan, the great expositor, said that in that statement there's a balance between amazement and indignation. At the one moment Paul's breath has been taken away at the fact that they're running to the law courts rather than judging among themselves, yet his anger is boiling over righteously because he knows this shouldn't be done, and he knows that even the very gospel is at stake and the name of Christ because of their actions. Morgan says that it could be translated like this: 'How dare any of you?'. You see, that's the sense: 'How dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust?'. But it's more pointed than that, because in the original language the emphasis is on the word 'you' - 'How dare any of you?'. The point that Paul is making is the distinction of those who were running to the law, and their destiny in the future. He's saying: 'Out of all the people on the face of God's earth, in all humanity, you of all people shouldn't be running to the law courts!'.

Now why is that? Well, you will remember, I hope, that at times Paul through this epistle has been talking to these believers positionally - in other words, the way God sees them in Christ, their standing in Christ. In chapter 1 we saw that, in verse 2 he says: 'Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord'. They are saints, they are called, they're in Christ, that's their position. Then there are other times that he talks to them practically - in chapter 3, if you look at, and verse 1 he says to them: 'Ye are yet babes in Christ - I would love to speak to you as unto spiritual, but I have to treat you as carnal'. Verse 3: 'For ye are yet carnal: for there are those among you still envying, strife, divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?'. Now you've got to realise the background here of the apostle Paul: Paul was a Jew of the Jews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, blameless concerning the law - and in Jewish custom they never ever went to the civil law courts. That's why the Scribes were called lawyers at times within the Bible, because they were experts in the Jewish law, and if you had a complaint against another you went to the synagogue, and it was

sorted out in the house of God, in the synagogue. You see, so that's the background of Paul, and then he's had revealed to him the mysteries of the church that have never been revealed before, he's been telling them how they ought to discipline within the church - and they've the power and the presence of Christ, his apostolic seal, to do so - and he's astounded, with all the knowledge that he has and his Jewish background, that with this position that they have in Christ: 'You who are sanctified, you who are called, you who are set apart, you who are the saints of God in Christ, you of all people - how dare you run to the law courts for litigation, rather than revelation that God would give you!'

Now that rebuke, 'How dare you?', is based on two factors of the destiny of the child of God. The first is verse 2: 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' - do you not know? Now this is very interesting, because you remember that Paul was rebuking these Corinthians because of their puffed up pride, you remember that. They had pride about their sects - they followed Apollos, Paul, Cephas, and even the Lord - and they had broken up into their factions, and they were proud about these servants of God that they followed. Then they were proud about their sin, we saw that last week, that there was incest in the house of God, and yet they were proud about it! Well, they're still proud, but of course you remember in chapter 1 what he really addresses is their pride about their wisdom. They thought that the human wisdom that they had intellectually was far superior to the apostle Paul, and by default they were saying that it was more superior than God's revealed will and God's wisdom. Paul says right throughout this passage, verse 2: 'Do you not know?', verse 3, 'Know ye not?', verse 15, 'Do you not know?', verse 16, 'Do you not know? Know ye not?', verse 19, 'What, know ye not?'. They thought they knew everything, and they knew nothing! So Paul says to them: 'Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world?'

Now if you know the sermon that Paul preached in Acts chapter 17, you will know that in verse 31 he said this: 'Because God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead'. One day very soon, praise His holy name and thank God for it, because this place is in a mess, one of these days Christ is coming again! But He's coming to rule with a rod of iron, and to dash the potter's vessel in pieces, and He is the Man that God hath appointed to judge the world! Remember in John chapter 5 the Lord Himself said that 'the Father judgeth no man, but He committed all judgment unto the Son', and it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge this world. But Paul is saying: 'Do you not know that just as He will judge the world, and positionally you are in Christ, called to Him, sanctified by Him, saints according to His name, that you in Him will judge the world also?'

Now the obvious question is: when will this happen? If you turn to chapter 4 and verse 8, you remember Paul rebuked these people because they were living it up spiritually, and sarcastically he said in chapter 4 and verse 8: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you'. 'I wish we were reigning today, because that would speak that we are in the millennium reign of Christ, the thousand years when Christ will reign as far as the sun shines'. They were attributing to themselves the blessings and the rewards of the millennium kingdom before the millennium kingdom had come. You see, you get this pattern right throughout the whole of Scripture - Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 and 12: 'If we suffer with him, we will reign with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us'.

This realm that we are living in is the realm of sacrifice, this realm is the realm of suffering, this is the realm where we take up our cross and follow Christ day by day, when we deny ourselves, when we lose our soul that we might find it one day. But the millennium kingdom is the time when we will receive reward, and when Jesus says, and Paul says, and the apostles say that we will reign with Him and we will judge the earth. Sure, isn't that tremendous? Did He not say to the apostles in Matthew 19 that they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel? Look at chapter 2 of Revelation for a moment, and let me say that I'm not sure that this is just for every believer, because there seems to be a measure of faithfulness that is



attached to reigning with Christ right throughout the whole of the Scriptures. In chapter 2 and verse 26 the Lord says: 'And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations'. Look at chapter 20, and of course that's the chapter where there's the Great White Throne judgement for all those who are outside of Christ, and in verse 4 John says: 'I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years'. There seems to be this connection that, if we suffer for Him, we will reign with Him.

Now I'm not going to go into all that tonight, for I'm not sure that I can do that, but all I know is that this should stimulate us to become overcomers. It should stimulate us to endure hardship with undeviating fidelity to our Lord Jesus Christ, because there's a day coming when this world will be judged, and we may be called to judge the world with Him! What a privilege! Look at verse 11 of chapter 20 in Revelation, John goes on: 'I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'. Now you often hear it said that the believer will not be at that judgement, that is nonsense! The believer will be at that judgement, but he will not be being judged, he will be doing the judging! Have you ever thought of that? At the beginning of chapter 20, we read it, in verse 4 who is sitting on those thrones? The saints who are judges with Christ. This is tremendous! Every man that has ever lived in humanity, I feel, is going to be here, all standing before God - those who are being judged. Praise His name, we'll never be judged for our sin...that was a very weak 'Amen'!

In John 5 the Lord said: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life'. There is now therefore no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus - hallelujah! We'll be there, but we'll be on the bench with the Master helping Him in the judgement! Now don't ask me how we'll be doing it, I don't know whether we'll be called to witness - that man heard the gospel, you gave him a tract, you spoke to him about his soul, and he's unrepentant - I don't know whether that's what will happen. The Bible doesn't declare those things, but I know that it says: 'Know ye not that we shall judge the world?'.

Another thing, verse 12, that everything fled from the face of Him that sat upon the Throne - everything, everything! 'I saw God', the One that is sitting on the Throne, John 5 says, is the Lord Jesus Christ - for the Father doesn't judge any man, He committeth all judgement to the Son, and here we find it says: 'I saw God' - are you going to tell me He's not God? He's God alright, and all the world flees from standing before the face of the Lord Jesus Christ on that Throne, and it says that the earth and the heavens will flee away - and if you had any doubt about where in the whole universe is going to hold every person that has ever lived in humanity, well have no doubt about it, because the whole universe will flee from the face of God, and the only one that will be left is the unrepentant sinner! If that's you, I urge you in the name of the Lord to flee from that wrath to come! Flee to your Saviour, as He stands now not as your judge, but as your potential Redeemer.

What is the point of Paul's rebuke? It's this: you're going to judge the world one day, can you not even judge a little bit of trivia that's in the assembly, but you have to drag it before the law courts and hang your dirty linen out in front for all the world to see? Do you know what he's talking about? These people, and some of them can be Christians, who make mountains out of molehills, and love to make mountains out of molehills.

The insinuation in verse 2 about these smallest matters, matters of trivia is a translation, is that they weren't even worth being judged upon - they're not genuine, they're sinful vexations. Yet these people that want the thing judged, for them it's the end of the world - it means everything! You know what I'm talking about: people that are hyper-sensitive, and if you look at them the wrong way, well that's you finished - and you mightn't even be looking at them the wrong way at all! People who are vengeful in their spirit, this is what I'm talking about, people who want to get their own rights and their own back, and wants their pound of flesh. The Bible says that a child of God with that attitude and that spirit denies their identity as a son of God, and denies their destiny as a judge of the world. Do you see it?

The second reason he gives for this rebuke is based on the fact that we will judge angels. Verse 3: 'Know ye not that we shall judge angels?'. Now if we go to Jude verse 6, just before the book of the Revelation, you have this here - turn with me to Jude verse 6: 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day'. This is talking about fallen angels of course. I believe it's talking about Genesis chapter 6, where the sons of God came down on earth and defiled themselves with the daughters of men - demons! And from that prodigy there was giants that walked across the whole earth - nephilim! And God had to come in a flood because the wickedness of man's heart had got so great, and man had made himself so vile in the sight of God, and He wiped the whole face of humanity out by the flood! But these angelic fallen beings have been reserved for judgement in eternity, and you need to know - believer - you're going to take part in that judgement of them!

How does that make you feel? That's a great dignity, that's a great destiny. Don't you think that this is too much for a child of God, because one day God brought the sons of God before Him - those angelic beings - even some of them fallen, and Satan was among their host. God said to Satan: 'Have you seen My servant Job, that there is none like him in all the earth?'. It will be men like Job, men like Noah, who it says when all humanity was whoring after the flesh, and men were defiling themselves with men, and women with women, and humans with animals, and sons of God - demonic beings - with the daughters of men - there was one man, it says in Genesis chapter 6, who remained pure and blameless in his generation. The Bible says that Noah was perfect. Do you know what that word for 'perfect' means? It's the word that is used 44 times in the Old Testament Scriptures for a lamb without blemish and without spot. It is the Hebrew word 'tamim' (sp?), it is the word that we derive 'contaminated' from, and when all of the world was thinking only evil continually in their imagination, there was one man that remained uncontaminated from it all! There was another man called Enoch, and there are other men throughout the Scriptures, and they will be men who are worthy to judge these angelic figures - and you may be among their host, isn't that wonderful?

I can see those poor people that were sawn asunder, those people who were counted the scum of the earth for Christ, the off-scouring of all things, and the devil gave them hell! Yet I can see it, they are facing him, the tempter, the accuser, who has dogged their heels from birth to death - and he is judged of them! That's tremendous, isn't it? But do you see the point? This is your destiny: but you can't even judge over trivia?

Well, we must move on: Paul continues by saying that it's ridiculous, the attitudes concerning Christian behaviour that have worked themselves out. We see that Paul was looked down on, we found that right throughout this book, they thought their wisdom was greater than his - but Paul says in verse 1 that these judges in the secular system were unjust. He says in verse 6 that they are unbelievers, in verse 9 he says that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God - these people are unrighteous. In verse 5 he uses sarcasm again, and he says: 'I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you?'. You're all puffed up in your wisdom, but there doesn't seem to be a wise man among your company! That statement, 'Is it so?', could be read like this: 'Has it come to this, that there isn't one wise man among you?'. They were some of the most educated men in the whole of Greek society, but they were ignorant of the spiritual things of God. That's a good lesson to learn, because I find today that some men who had a zeal and a fire for God, they get education - and I'm not against education - but they lose all the fire and the zeal that they ever had.

These ridiculous attitudes are threefold, I think. In verses 4 and 5 we see the lack of discernment and wisdom. Now this verse has often been misunderstood, if you look at verse 4: 'If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church'. Now you could read that as thinking: get the most ignorant, immature Christians, the most carnal believers that you have - forget about those elders - and let them judge in this matter. That's the way it seems to read here, and there have been two interpretations of this. The first is that Paul is saying: 'If this is your destiny to judge the world, and to judge angels, even the least people among you, the most immature people among you, because they are children of God, should be able to judge in such trivial matters as this'. Now that could well be the meaning here, and that's the meaning that the Authorised Version gives us - but I prefer more this meaning, which is in most of the revised translations, and it reads like this: 'If then ye have to judge things pertaining to this life, do ye set them to judge who are of no account in the church?'. That seems to be what the Greek is saying: 'If you are the ones who are to judge the church, do you bring men into the church, as it were, who are not esteemed by the church, who are unbelievers, unsanctified, unrighteous to judge over you?'

I think you see what he's saying, I believe this is the interpretation because in verse 5 he says: 'I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man' - it's a wise man he's looking for, not an immature man, not an unskilled, unspiritual man. Whatever the interpretation is, both keep the train of thought which is his total and utter amazement at how they go to the secular world to sort out their internal disputes. Now can I say this: secular status means absolutely nothing in the church of Jesus Christ - nothing! They found this out to their detriment, but the problem was the foundation of their belief in verse 28 of chapter 1: they didn't realise that the wisdom of men is foolishness with God. What men esteem is not what God esteems, the base things of the world, the things which are despised hath God chosen; yea, the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things which are. That's God's order of importance.

Now I'm led to believe that the third stage of higher education among the Greeks in this particular time, as Paul was writing to them, was to be trained as students in legal studies. The likelihood is that there was, among the believers in Corinth, legal minds - young men who were competent in litigation, yet they still couldn't do the thing right! What they lacked was someone spiritual. A brother said to me last Monday night: 'Does it not amaze you that elders aren't mentioned right throughout the whole book, and they're not even addressed like they are in other books where Paul encourages the elders to sort out the problems?' - and he's right! But do you know why that is, I think? Perhaps because there wasn't a wise man among them - they were running to other sources to rule and to judge in the church! When they should have been looking within for men that they could recognise to rule, they were looking outside to men who weren't even believers.

Why were they doing it? This is the tragedy of it all: because they were esteeming and reckoning human ability, the way pagan Corinth did things, as better and more effective than the way God wanted to do things. Oh, we can get a lesson out of this, can we not? I know there are times when the children of this world are wiser than us, but I do know that in the churches of our land and parts of our world tonight, people are setting aside the revelation of God for the way they think they can do things better. Whether it's reaching the lost dressing up as a clown, or swallowing a goldfish, or doing all sorts of things from the pulpit to bring people in to a false gospel - my friends, let's do it God's way, for God's way is the way! The main point Paul was making here, and this is what we have to grasp, is that to go to the world, and to look to the world's way as the best way, is to effectually demean the gospel of Christ! They were communicating to the world around: our doctrines are right, but we have neither the grace to get along, nor the government to get together.

The second ridiculous feature and attitude that they had was a lack of concern over their witness to the lost. They couldn't get on - their fighting and their petty differences, verse 6 - and they're ignoring the serious consequences. The irony of this is that they're fighting, probably over pieces of land with one another;

amounts of money with one another; reputations of their name; and spiritual prestige - that's probably the things that they were fighting over - yet in chapter 5 there's a man in the assembly sleeping with his stepmother, and they don't want to be bothered! You see, that's a characteristic of carnality: you fight over nonsense, and you're not concerned about what's important. The world saw it, and the world concluded: 'Well, this is the Christian, this gospel doesn't work, this gospel is a farce, this gospel is deficient' - and the deficiency was not in the gospel, the deficiency was in Corinthian carnality. The gospel was muffled by their moaning, by their griping, by their fighting - the gospel was suffering because their carnality was prospering - and the faith of the gospel was being dwarfed because their witness was defective!

In verse 6 what does it say? 'Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers'. Let me tell you this, do you know what Paul's saying? We need to hear this - this assembly, every assembly in our land, some of them being wrecked with splits, and bickering, and fighting, and backbiting, and you-name-it - and most of it's over trivia! Paul is saying: the only one that wins when brother takes brother to the law is the wicked one! The world watch on, the power of the gospel is diminished because the power of the gospel goes hand in hand with the purity of the gospel, and the church and the Christian can never go higher than they go deeper - they are like the well-developed tree: the taller they stand the deeper they go down. In the strategic place that the Corinthians were in, the filthy depraved city, what was important to the gospel going forward was that they had a clean heart, because a clean heart gave them a strong character, and a strong character gave them a fruitful career. They needed that purity.

The third attitude that was ridiculous was a lack of humility to suffer wrong. I think the first insinuation here was Paul was saying: 'Well, if you bring a judgement to the church, accept the judgement'. You see you find - and don't desire to be a judge, it's alright in the razzmatazz and in the limelight of being up at the front all the time; it's a different thing when everybody comes to you with problems and they want you to judge, but they always want you to judge for them, don't they? If you don't judge for them, well, boy, you'll know about it. That's why James said in chapter 3: 'Don't desire to be many masters, because you come into a greater condemnation'. I think that's what Paul was saying: 'These things shouldn't even be brought to be judged upon' - but in verse 4 it's seen more when he says: 'Even if you bring these'...these things are things of small business, he uses the word 'to defraud a brother', a brother defrauding a brother, you ought to let yourself be defrauded. That speaks of land and money and reputation, and that's what believers are still fighting over today! But the point that Paul makes is: don't just stop from bringing these things to be judged, but you ought to suffer wrong, you ought to be willing to be judged in the wrong, to be defrauded by another. Their ridiculous attitude was seen in the lack of humility to suffer wrong, yet they made a fuss over nothing.

The third thing that Paul tells them is that they required reflection on the Christian's cleansing. Now we see that from verses 9 to 11 Paul knows a lot about the classification of sin, and let me say this to anybody aspiring to ministry of any kind - and elders know this - that part of the fallout of being responsible in the church is to get an education in sin that you don't really want to know about. I'm sure Paul didn't want to think about incest and fornication of the kind in chapter 5, but he had to, because that's one of the pitfalls, by default, that you deal with. There are so many terrible sins in society today, and Paul had to know what was going on in the church - but he was reminding them of the nature of the kingdom of God: that there are certain sins and certain sinners that can never get in.

He goes through the list in verse 9, there's a reason for doing that and you'll see it in a minute: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators', that's unnatural, unusual sexual affairs - it has such a wide meaning, and we couldn't go into it this evening, but some of these people had dabbled in this before their conversion, and Paul had to be trailed through all the definitions of these things because he had to deal with them! 'Neither idolaters', people who worship other gods, and there was all sorts of that in Corinth, 'nor adulterers', you know what that is, another man or another woman's partner and spouse, 'nor effeminate', that simply means those who want to look and behave

like women - Darby translates it 'those who make women of themselves', and that didn't start in Hollywood, it started way back! 'Nor abusers of themselves with mankind', that was in Corinth - homosexuality. It was in Sodom, it was in Noah's day - it's nothing new, it destroyed Greek and Roman society, and it will destroy ours eventually. What all of this is telling us is that it's not the environment that makes a man depraved and evil, that's a lie - it can affect you, I'm certain of that, but it's not the environment, because you go through all the epochs of humanity and you'll see that it is the heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. 'Nor thieves, nor covetous', you might say, some people have said: 'Why does Paul link covetousness with all these other filthy sins?'. Well, let's work backward: why do men steal? Covetousness. Why do men abuse themselves with mankind? Because a depraved lust within them causes them to covet another man. Why do men dress up and look like women? Because they want to. You can go right through this list: adulterers, wanting another person's spouse; idolaters, wanting another god to sit on the altar of your heart; fornicators, wanting another satisfaction - and covetousness is the root of all these sins. It's serious, and what Paul is saying right throughout this whole list: if you continually, habitually, are characterised by this type of lifestyle listed here, be not deceived - you are not saved, and you will not be in heaven!

I want you to get that tonight if you need to hear it: revilers, that's one maybe you haven't counted on - a man that uses abusive language, and talks about others. If that's your way of life you'll not be in heaven. That's the word of God! Extortioners, if you squeeze the poor and make it look as if you're helping the poor, but all you're doing in trying to help them is to take more money off them - whether you're a paramilitary or whether you're a landlord, or whatever you are, or a boss, it doesn't matter: if that's your way of life, the word of God says 'ye shall not receive'. Don't you be deceived! These things aren't palatable, but Paul gave it out anyway. Here's the tremendous thing - and give me five minutes please - Paul says that the nature of the cleansing must be understood by you: such were some of you - literally 'these things were some of you!' 'You were steeped in it when I came and found you in Corinth and led you to Christ, I lifted you out of this, and all that you needed was the gospel, and the gospel was the power of God unto salvation'. Think of it! All it was was a wee rickety old man, bald and with a crooked nose, walking into a hell-hole like Corinth: 'I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified' - and he turned it upside-down!

Isn't it amazing grace, how sweet the sound? 'Ye are washed' - He has washed us in His own blood, and He had washed these Corinthians in His own blood, and washed them in the water of sanctification because they were new creatures in Christ Jesus, they were born-again. He goes on: 'But ye are sanctified, but ye are justified' - and they were sanctified, it says here, before they were justified. Now what does that mean? He's pointing here to the fact that God saves us, primarily, that the life of God should be seen in us through the life that we live. That's what the world sees, isn't it? What's the point that Paul is making? If you're forgiven, and you're arguing over the smallest things possible, and you're running to the world for your defence: just as Christ has forgiven you, you forgive your brother.

I wonder is there someone here tonight and you've something against a brother, or someone has something against you? Can you see what Christ has done for you? Are you forgiven by Him? Then, for Christ's sake, forgive your brother. Harry Ironside tells a story of when he was a wee lad, and he belonged to an assembly in the city of Toronto. There was a bit of strife and trouble in the assembly, and they followed these principles of getting together and sorting the thing out, and his mother took him along to that particular meeting. He says little pitchers have big ears, and he remembered absolutely everything that happened at that meeting. But he was horrified, he says, as he saw two men that he esteemed as men of God - and he had been brought up by his mother to respect these men - so indignant, so cruel, so hateful to one another. All he said he could remember was one man springing to his feet with clenched fists, and saying: 'I will not put up with this! I will put up with a great deal, but I will not let you get one over me! I have my rights!'. There was an old Scots brother in the meeting who was hard of hearing, and he cupped his ear, and he said: 'Brother, I didn't catch that one, could you say that again? What was that?'. He said: 'I have my rights!' - the old brother

looked him eyeball to eyeball, and he said: 'Do you really mean that? What are your rights? If you had your rights', he said, 'you would be in hell'. Wasn't he right? If Jesus had His rights, you would be in hell; but Jesus didn't come for His rights, He came for His wrongs - and He got wrongs done to Him. Harry Ironside said that that man looked at the old Scotsman transfixed for a few seconds, and then he began to break down and tears rolled down his face, and he said: 'I've been wrong brethren, you judge this whatever way you will'. He sat down and he put his head in his hands, and in three minutes that problem was sorted.

'Ye are washed', and as God has forgiven you, so forgive one another. Isn't it wonderful to be washed, and to be cleansed? Imagine if you had committed one of those things, but if you're washed it's all gone! Hallelujah! It's gone for all of us, praise God!

Father, we thank Thee for Thy blessed Son, we thank Thee that when we see the face of Jesus it will not be wrath, and we'll not flee away; but He will bring us into His bosom, into His very bleeding side. He will take us to be with Himself, to His home for all eternity - and we shall be forever with the Lord. What a prospect and a destiny we have in Him! Lord, we pray that we will live down here as heavenly citizens, and live up to our calling as the saints of God. Lord, help us to love one another, for by this shall men know that we are Thy disciples. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 15*

## ***"Christian Liberty And The Christian's Purity"***

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### I Corinthians 6:12-20

1. ***The Danger Of Transgressing Liberty – Principle (verse 12)***
2. ***The Danger Of Desecrating The Body – Purpose (verses 13-18)***
  - i. ***As the physical extension of Christ (verse 15-18)***
  - ii. ***As a living temple of the Holy Spirit (verses 19-20)***
    - a) *The presence of the Spirit (verse 19a)*
    - b) *The purchase of Christ (verses 19b-20a)*
    - c) *The purpose of life (verse 20b)*

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 6 is our study tonight, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 - this is our fifteenth study, and we are beginning our reading in verse 12. We're studying under the title 'Christian Liberty And The Christian's Purity'. Beginning to read at verse 12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's".

I think you would agree with me when I say that we live in an age that is infatuated with the human body. Millions of pounds are spent by year on diet books and vitamins, fashions, fitness clubs, exercise bikes and other equipment and cosmetics. There's a magnificent concentration on the human body. Day after day we are bombarded through the media with finely tuned bodies and trimmed bodies that are paraded before us - and we are led to believe that that's the way we ought to be, that's what we ought to strive towards. Now, I know that for some of you it's got past that now, you couldn't even strive towards that if you wanted to! But even for the young people, no-one seems to tell us that this parody of beauty and perfection is usually derived from an artist's graphic airbrush, or thousands of pounds of plastic surgery. But there is a fascination with the human body, and it seems that coming along - paired with that - there's also an obsession with sexuality.

Of course, you don't need to look too far to see how our present humankind exploits sexuality for everything from ice cream to the sale of cars in advertisements, to obscene pornography in daily newspapers and tabloids - even to the depths of the type of pornography that is found on the Internet. We live in a sex-mad society, a society that is obsessed and fascinated and infatuated with the physical, with the sensual, with the body. Of course, the old prophet was right when he said: 'There's nothing new under the sun' - that's what Solomon said. But we know that the same was the case, almost 1900 years ago or so, in the apostle Paul's

day in the city of Corinth. I know, and you know, if you're honest with yourself, that on a daily basis we are bombarded with the greatest effulgence of filth that we feel, perhaps, humanity has ever known, and we almost could be forgiven for thinking that it is impossible to stay pure, it is impossible to remain a child of God that is uncontaminated by everything that is going on in our society. You may be forgiven for thinking that, but the fact of the matter is: it has been as bad as today, and we could almost say that at some stages in earth's history it has been worse than it is today - I know that's hard for some of us to except, but that's the facts.

The city of Corinth is the case in point. If you want to find out a little bit about that, you can get the tape about our introduction, and we went into great detail about the various evils and vices that went on in this Greek city. But these believers in the church at Corinth had the same dilemma that you and I have: how do we react to all the immorality and promiscuity that is going on around us in our sex-mad and body-mad society? You see, the danger that we can fall into is the danger that the Corinthians fell into, and it is a twofold danger of two extremes. You can either ignore the body totally - in other words, ignore the media, ignore the world around you, shut yourself in a darkened room, never look out of a window again, and try to suppress and deny the appetites that you have within you, the desires, the inclinations, the drives. That's one option, of course the other option is not to ignore but to indulge. That's the other extreme that is very dangerous to fall into, but many are falling into it today - 'You can't win! If you can't beat them, join them! - and the only way to dull this fiery passion within the human breast is to indulge it, satisfy it, quench it'.

Now the Greeks and the Romans believed, philosophically, something different about the body than we do today. They believed that the body was like a prison, it was the tomb of the soul, and true paradise was to get out of your body and sort of ascend into this mystic paradise. They believed that this tomb for the soul really had no value, so this physical body that you're in tonight really was not immoral, it wasn't moral, it was amoral. It didn't matter to God, and it doesn't really matter to men, and eventually one day at the end of the world this body would be destroyed - it wouldn't continue on into the end of the age. Now because they believed this, and because they lived in a body-mad society like ours today, they fell into the two mistakes we've just been talking about. First of all they indulged their bodies - this was a group in Greek philosophy called the hedonists, they believed in hedonism, which simply means that you turn your body over to all the lusts of the flesh that you can possibly get your hands onto. Since it's only the soul that survives, and the body's going to be destroyed, well then you should let the body do what it feels like; and if it feels good, well then you do it. They handed their bodies over to every conceivable lust that you could imagine. Corinth was a city, as we learned in previous studies, that was gripped by hedonism, by this worship and love of pleasure.

Then there was the other extreme, as I've said - the ascetics, or asceticism. We would liken that to monasticism today, monks that lock themselves in rooms and shut out the world, and don't talk, sometimes don't eat, don't use their natural affections and passions. The ascetics believed that the world was so evil, and the body was so evil, had no worth, that you should deny the body the passions and appetites that are natural to it by self-discipline, self-mutilation, and try and curb and suppress and starve the human passions.

Now Paul comes into the church at Corinth, and as you have found out as we've gone through the studies that the philosophies of the Greek city were filtering into the church, they had been delivered from them at conversion, but they were resorting back to them in their humanistic wisdom. So we find in this particular instance that they are imbibing the two philosophies of Corinth. There's a group, and we'll come to this in a later week, who believed it's good not even to touch a woman - don't exercise your human desires, stay single and chaste all your life - and we'll see that Paul said: 'Well, that's maybe the preferred option but there are people who can't handle that, and don't have that as a gift. You can't lay that down for someone that doesn't have chastity as a gift, saying single'. But here tonight we're dealing with the other extreme, and that is that of indulgence, hedonism, where there were actually - imagine it - people in the church of Jesus Christ who were saying: 'Right, the body is not going to be resurrected, the body has no eternal value, the body is



not immortal or moral, it is amoral, it means nothing. If these are the desires of the body and they're wanting to pull my soul down, I should just give in to them because only the soul will survive'.

Paul comes into the midst of this mess and he teaches them in this chapter that liberty, true freedom, is found only in Christian purity. True liberty is found only in Christian purity, and it can only happen - not when we give over our body to its passions, senses, lusts and appetites, but when we give our bodies over to God. As Paul told the Romans who had the selfsame philosophy in Romans 12 verse 1: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world'. If we learn anything tonight it's that Paul is urging these indulgent, carnal, fleshly, immoral believers to give their bodies over to God, and that true Christian freedom and liberty is found in Christian purity.

I want to take this slowly so that especially the young people in our gathering understand it, because this is particularly contemporary to you. The first thing that Paul does for us in verse 12 is he outlines a principle, he outlines a principle. Now I believe that this was a statement and a slogan that was very well known all around the church in Corinth, and I believe it was something that Paul had taught them on a previous occasion - verse 12: 'All things are lawful unto me'. You see the Christian gospel proclaims to us that we have been freed from the law, as the hymn says: 'O happy condition, Jesus hath died and there is remission'. Now that simply means that the first five books of the Bible, the Mosaic law, we are no longer chained beneath all the rules and regulations, and we don't live by a list of rules and regulations, but we live by the law of the spirit in Christ Jesus which has set us free from the law of sin and death, the law of Moses. So we don't concentrate on keeping a list of laws and rules and regulations like the Old Testament saints did, and so Paul preached this gospel of grace. You see that's what grace means: not through what we earn, but a free gift of God; not for keeping rules, but given to us in mercy and grace.

But you see, what happened in the church was that these Corinthian carnal believers took up this slogan and they went around and used it as a banner over their heads when they were committing all the types of sin and fleshy indulgences that you can imagine. 'Oh, I can do this', they said, 'because all things are lawful for me. There's no law in Christ, we're free from the law, we're forgiven with grace and therefore we shall sin - and the more we sin, the more grace abounds toward us'. So they took up this true saying and they used it in a false capacity. Now it's important that we understand what it's saying here, because believe it or not there are Christians today in our modern world that are making the same mistake with this statement: 'All things are lawful for me'. What does it mean? Does it mean that I can go out and do anything? That I don't have to obey any laws of God, or even any laws of the land, all things are lawful for me - there's no law against anything for the Christian. That's what they heard Paul say. Now you would know, if you were here last week, that when you look at verse 9 he says: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God'. So you can rule all them out right away - if you've done any of those things you've broken the law of God, and that can't be what Paul is talking about here, otherwise he's contradicting himself.

So we have to say that this statement: 'All things are lawful unto me', has to be steadied on two legs. Now here's the two legs that you steady them on this evening: the first is this, the ten commandments. You say: 'Oh, the ten commandments have passed away' - well, that's correct, we don't obey the ten commandments as a sense of rules and regulations whereby we come any nearer to God. But I'll tell you what has happened in Christ: we are enabled to live the spiritual reality of the moral law that is enshrined within the ten commandments by the Spirit, as we walk in the Spirit and do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. It's not done through trying, it's done through allowing Christ to live through you, it's a spiritual thing - but nevertheless we are called to do it. We're not out to break the commandments, surely that's not the case.

So you have to keep steady on that leg when you think of this thing that 'all things are lawful for me' - nothing is lawful for the Christian that transgresses any of the moral law of God, I think you would have to accept that, wouldn't you? But then we go into the New Testament and we find that all of the moral law is echoed, except the Sabbath day of course, but in James chapter 4 we have another principle, and it goes like this: 'Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?'. So if you in your travels, when you do certain things that you feel are lawful for you and there's no law against, you gradually become nearer and nearer and nearer the world, you will become a friend of the world - and as a friend of the world you will become an enemy of God, and you can see that could not be lawful for a Christian. You understand that? So somewhere in between these two facts - the Old Testament that's lived through the Spirit by the Christian, and this principle of friendship with the world being enmity toward God - there is a liberty that allows us freedom to do a lot of things, and we would have to say a lot of things that there are no laws against.

Now what are these things? I believe what Paul is talking about here are natural things, the things of life, the natural appetites of the body - he is talking about the body, isn't he? He's talking about things that we like, things that we enjoy. There are some people in our gathering this evening that have a real keen ear to music, and you enjoy music, listening to music. You need to be careful in these days what music you listen to, but nevertheless there's no law in the Bible that says that you can't listen to music - no law there, it's perfectly legitimate to do that. Then there are some people who have a keen eye, and through the eye-gate they like to look at architecture and can appreciate the aesthetics of architecture, they love to look at nature, the birds, the trees, and all sorts of things that God has created - and they appreciate it. Some even take pen to paper, or a brush to paper, and paint them, and take great pleasure in artistry and in creating things and sculpting things, and making things with their hands, and woodwork, and carpentry. You can see that these are natural things. There are some people who like to travel, they like to sight-see, they like to go to other countries and experience other cultures, they like to try and speak other languages and learn from other people. There are some people that like their food - and I can see among you who that is that likes their food tonight, and that's not a crime. It's a crime to indulge these things, it's not a crime to enjoy these things - and who of us doesn't enjoy a big chunk of pavlova or a big steak, you enjoy it!

I think what Paul is talking about here is that we are free, there's a certain amount of liberty in Christ, and freedom where we're allowed to enjoy certain things. There's a lot of things we are free to do in the range of our human nature and our appetites, and let me just say that even among Christendom there are some old wrinkled Pharisees that wouldn't even let you enjoy your pavlova! That's the truth, isn't it? Some of them can't even smile, God help them! Big long face tripping them up everywhere they go! Well that's not the liberty that we have in Christ, and I believe that what Paul is saying here is that the Christian life is a natural life. Now I don't mean in the sense that we are naturally sinful and we naturally indulge things when we're outside of Christ, but what I'm talking about is: as God created us with certain healthy appetites, the Christian life is a life that acknowledges those, and in that sense it's a natural life.

Now here's where the problem enters in Corinth, because these Christians were interpreting this law of liberty as a law of licence. They were using the freedom that they had in these legitimate appetites to indulge their appetites, and they ignored the fact that in the same way as we have some privileges in our Christian faith, we also have some responsibilities. With the privilege of Christian liberty there are some bounds, and we have to acknowledge that - no matter how loudly you shout that you're free and liberated in Christ, you have to acknowledge that there are certain boundaries to Christian freedom. The moral law that we have mentioned, preventing your enjoyment taking you into the world, as James said, and becoming an enemy with God - but the problem in Corinth, and the problem today within the church, is that people put a fullstop at the end of this statement 'All things are lawful unto me' - fullstop, but there's not a fullstop there, there's a comma. He goes on, look what he says: 'but not all things are expedient' - all things are not expedient.

Now if you look at your margin, if you've a good margin Bible you'll see in the margin that that word 'expedient' could also be translated 'profitable'. Now let's first of all take what Paul originally meant, what he first meant in this statement: 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient'. Let me illustrate it to you like this: say I loved art, or I loved golf - and I don't love golf, and I don't love art either! - but say I did, and it was a passion. There was something in me that had a desire to swing a golf club around, or to paint a picture now and again - it's perfectly legitimate, there's nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves. But say, for instance, I indulged that desire so much that every Monday morning and afternoon I was out on the golf course; and then I came to the Bible Reading and I had nothing to say to you. You get to the point there where the indulgence that is perfectly lawful has moved into a realm where its legitimacy has become licence, and it is preventing me in one of the responsibilities that I have as a child of God. In other words, it has ceased to be profitable to me and it has become unprofitable toward me.

I hope you can see this distinction, I'm trying to go as slowly and as definitely as I can for you to grasp this. Paul is saying that you can't let these things take control of you. You have a nature, yes; and that nature cries out for certain legitimate things, yes: food and drink, and relationships and so on - but you have got to learn to control that nature, not let that nature control you. Do you see where he's going now? Because you don't just have natural passions and appetites, but you have a God-given responsibility. Take mine for instance: I could never take - and I don't want you to start weeping now! - but I could never take up a real sport, I could never take up an in-depth hobby - why? Because my calling from God is to be delved every day in the ministry of the word of God and the ministry of prayer, praying without ceasing, so that I can give the bread of God to the people of God and that they be fed. There's nothing wrong with now and again getting a break and going away somewhere, or kicking a football around for half-an-hour, there's nothing wrong with that - but if we're to take up those things to such an extent that they control us, and move us away from a God-given responsibility, they have ceased to be profitable and have become unprofitable - they're no longer expedient.

Now there's another application of this, and it doesn't just come to your responsibility to yourself, but also your responsibility to your brother, and we may come to this in a later stage. 'Am I my brother's keeper?', was the great question - the answer, spiritually, is 'Yes', to a certain extent you are your brother's keeper. There is what is called in the Scriptures the law of the weaker brother. Let me give you an illustration: one young Christian feels he can take a drink and handle it and never get drunk, and he goes into the pub and into the club and he takes a drink, and he can handle it - but wee Sammy can't handle it, but he doesn't know he can't handle it, he's never had a drink. He follows that Christian into the pub, and he sits down, and he can't handle it, and he gets taken away - now there is an illustration for you! You haven't got responsibilities just to yourselves, but you've responsibilities to your brother. But the whole point that Paul is getting here, and this is the original way that he gave this particular statement 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient' is: you're never to use your liberty to legitimatise your sin! Never!

Liberty is never to be used as an excuse for immorality or impurity. He expands it and he says, if you look at the second half: 'but I will not be brought under the power of anything'. If what my nature loves becomes such a preoccupation and a desire that it begins to bind me and hold me, it has ceased to be profitable. One translation puts it like this: 'All things are within my power, but I will not put myself under the power of any of them', because when you do that here's what happens: you lose your liberty that is in Christ. One Bible scholar put it like this: 'The great fact of the Christian faith is not that it makes a man free to sin, but that it makes a man free not to sin'.

Let me ask you before we go on any further, whether you're a believer or whether you're not a believer, this applies to us all: whose slave are you? Whose slave are you? What is it that's mastering you at this particular time? What particular natural appetite or passion are you giving yourself over to, are you bound by? Paul says: 'I will not be bound by anything - legitimate or illegitimate!'. Do you see what he's saying here? It's not

just sinful things, it's things that are not profitable to me as a Christian. Not necessarily things that are sinful in and of themselves, but things that are not spiritually profitable, even legitimate things. Do you know what we've got here? I wish I had time to tease it out, but I don't: we have the principle of sacrifice. I've been talking to some men of God recently, and they have been saying to me how they lament that this principle seems to have become extinct among the church of Jesus Christ, the idea of sacrifice - that you should give up certain legitimate things, not because you have to, not because there's a rule that says you need to, but because you know you want to! You choose eternal things over temporal things, spiritual over material.

Let me give you an illustration: Anthony Norris Groves was one of the early Brethren, and he left a dentist's practice where he was getting thousands and thousands of pounds on the regular basis that was unheard of in those days, and he left to be a pioneer missionary. He had an interest in horticulture, but in his life story - I think it's an excerpt from one of his diaries - he says this: 'I haven't even time to cultivate a flower'. If you were there you might put your arm around him and say: 'Now you've got to slow down here. Anthony, this is too much, and God doesn't expect this of anybody, you're not superhuman'. Well, of course this man had accepted the principle of sacrifice - nobody had told him to do it, maybe God hadn't even told him to do it, but he had a desire within his heart that he should fill every moment to be spent and spend for Christ, and he did it.

This word 'expedient', I want you to look at it. The word 'expedient' comes in our English from a root that we derive the word 'expedition' from, and the actual Greek root isn't a million miles away from that either. 'Expedition', you would know, carries the sense of helping on our way - do you see it? 'Helping on our way'. Paul is saying: 'Everything, anything is lawful for me as a Christian with the liberty of grace that I have, but not everything helps me on my way - especially those things that master me and bind me and control me, rather than me controlling them'. Now you would know, wouldn't you, even if this text wasn't in the Bible, this is what astounds me: with the certain amount of discernment that you have in Christ, it's common sense that there are certain things that take you away from Christ rather than bring you near to Him. Sure anybody with two eyes can see that!

Let me illustrate it for you, this is when the rubber meets the road: you have an opportunity of a job promotion, and the job promotion means a bigger wage, a bigger house, and a bigger company car - but the job promotion also means less fellowship, less time at the meetings, less time to serve the Lord. What do you do? What is happening today is people take the promotion, they don't think about it all, they just take the promotion. There was a day, not so long ago, that men forwent promotions for the house of God. What about overtime? You have to do overtime, and you get a few more pounds for it, and it lines your pocket - and I don't withhold that from you, it's lawful, it's legitimate, perfectly legitimate. But it means that the length of overtime you're doing, you're regularly forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, and you're missing out - what do you do? Do you go for the overtime or do you come to the meeting? Here's another one: we are not what could be called Sabbatarians, but we still believe that on the first day of the week the church meets - but more and more people are choosing to work than to come to the gathering where God's people are met. I'm not talking about doctors and nurses, and necessary employments as those, but I'm talking about people who have a choice! All that communicates to me - maybe I'm too simple - is that you're choosing the physical over the spiritual.

Let me go to the other extreme: you're out every night of the week that God sends you, and every hour of the Lord's Day at meetings, meetings, meetings - serving the Lord so much that you haven't got time for the Lord, or you haven't got time for the family the Lord has given you! You see there's two extremes here: there is the hedonism and there is the asceticism. These things of themselves may be respectable desires like employment and like occupations, but sometimes - I think this is really what Paul is getting at - the more respectable things at times can be the more dangerous, because the stealth of them means we don't see the bite of them! Before we know it they've got us in their grasp, and we're taken.

The problem in Corinth was not so much legitimate things, but they had taken this to an immoral extreme and were doing things that were not only not expedient, but were blatant sin, and they were using their liberty to commit fornication. Now let me say that we've got to say as Christians, there's very few dos and don'ts in the New Testament, but what there is is the law of love that means that you don't need a law about it, you don't need a law about it, because the law of love is meant to be written on your heart - and love tells you that thing is not right or it is right, and Jesus would like you to do it or Jesus wouldn't like you to do it. Do you agree with me? There's no law written down that you can't feed your child on bread and water like the dog, is there, anyone? But you wouldn't do it, because you love them, and you give them the best that you can possibly give to them. What Paul is saying here in verse 12 is: 'Freedom is liberty, but with the limits of edification; those things which bring you forward, bring you nearer to Christ'. Then in the end of verse 12 he's also saying: 'Christian freedom is also within the limits of self-control'. You control things, don't let things control you. Do you see it? These Corinthians were in danger of transgressing their liberty through this misunderstanding.

Here's the second danger they fell into: the danger of desecrating the body. Now we looked in verse 12 at the principle of what Paul was teaching here, but here he tells us of the purpose of the body - verses 13 to 18. Now let me remind you again: the Corinthian view of the body was that the body didn't really matter, and it's epitomised in this statement - it's another slogan that they used in Corinth - in verse 13: 'Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats'. It's a slogan, that's that they were shouting: 'Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats'. In other words, if you're hungry, what do you do? You eat. If you have a sexual drive and urge, what do you do? Well, if you're hungry and you eat, when you have a sexual drive you satisfy it. Well, that's common sense, isn't it? That's rational, that makes sense, there is an obvious parallel there. Paul says: 'No, you're making a mistake'. It's perfectly natural to eat, that's what Paul says, we'll see that he goes on to say it - but you've got to realise, Corinthians, that it's not essential to eat, in eternity that is. It's not essential that meat goes into your belly in eternity, neither is it essential that in time, when you come to eternity, that you've had sexual relationships. When you stand before God that will not matter, in fact that will all be destroyed - that's what Paul says in verse 13: 'God shall destroy both it and then'. God will destroy the belly and the meat, and He will destroy the sexual reproductive system too, it's not needed any longer.

He's trying to bring a bit of perspective to them, that you should not be living for appetites that are not eternal. Food is legitimate, sexual relationships within marriage are legitimate; but you're not to live for food, and you're not to live for sex. God has created both of them, but you need to realise that they're both temporal, and God will destroy both of them and they won't go on into eternity. Many people would be forgiven for thinking that the comparison is right: 'food for the stomach, and the body' - but remember what the Corinthians were saying the body is for, they weren't saying 'the body for sex', they weren't saying 'the body for marriage', they were saying 'the body for fornication', subtle, isn't it? The devil is subtle, and Paul is saying: 'Yes, the belly is for the body', but look what he goes on to say in verse 13 in the middle, 'but the body is for the Lord'. The belly is for the body alright, but the body's for the Lord; and the body has an eternity, and the belly won't - some of you should be shouting 'Praise God' with some of the bellies that you have! But it's talking about the stomach, it will rot in the grave - and to cement this for us, so that we don't misunderstand, Paul brings to them in verse 14: 'the body will continue, your philosophy is wrong'. The stomach won't, the appetites won't, the reproductive system won't, the respiratory system of breathing air and needing it to make blood won't, because you won't need blood - but you'll still have a body!

Verse 14: 'God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power' - and there's a day coming, praise God, when we will be raised again who are in Christ because the body is for the Lord. In that sense, our bodies - this is the difference between the Christian view and the Corinthian view - our bodies are to be instruments to the glory of God. The body is not for fornication, he says, it's not for eating, it's not for

the indulging of appetites, but it's to glorify God in some of these legitimate things - but one day it will be for the glory of God, hallelujah, when He bursts us out of the grave and changes us into His own likeness! Wonderful!

Now that sheds a bit of light on it. Whenever people say to me: 'It's my body, I'll wear what I want' - no, that's not the case. You can't wear what you want, ladies. You can't wear a skirt as short as you want, and a top as low as you want - that's not your prerogative. It's not your body, it's the Lord's body. You can go further, verse 15: 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?', they are the members of the body of Christ. Verse 19: 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost', the end of verse 19, 'ye are not your own'. Verse 20: 'Ye are bought with a price' - you can't do what you want with your body. Don't be falling into Corinthian indulgence: the body is for the Lord. I think that's wonderful, isn't it? In everything that's going on, we could almost fall into the trap of being brainwashed and indoctrinated to think that the body is for sex, or the body is to be filled with food, or the body is to be dolled up like some kind of dummy in a shop window - the body is for the Lord! It's wonderful. It encourages me, and what a high fulfilment it is to have you body given over to the Lord.

This next thing is even more beautiful, if it possibly could be: 'and the Lord for the body'. Do you see what's going on here? All these Corinthian young men and women are running around with these passions and hormones going over the place, and they've been used with Corinthian prostitution, where they went up to the temple on the Acropolis, and there's a thousand lady prostitutes - and it is normal, nobody bats an eyelid if you go and visit them because it's seen as spiritual worship. They've been brought up this way, and all of a sudden they are converted, and they have to stop it - and some of them can't stop it, and some of them are falling headlong back into the middle of it! But God is saying through the apostle: 'If you give your body over to the Lord, He will control your passions. The Lord is enough for your body, the Lord is enough to control your needs, to suppress your appetites spiritually, and to help you with whatever problem you have' - and I mean that!

I wonder am I talking to someone - let me say that we've all got our weaknesses where this is concerned - but do you believe tonight that if you give your body over to the Lord, He'll take care of it? The body is for the Lord, but remember the Lord is for the body. Sure it's wonderful - all your weaknesses give up to Him. The fact of the matter is that the body can never attain its true dignity and immortal destiny unless we give our body over to the Lord, and one day we're going to have a body like unto His glorious body. As He said after He was resurrected to the disciples: 'A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have', we will have a body of flesh and bones - but the animating force of our body will not be the flesh, will not even be the soul, but will be the spirit, and we'll have no need of food. We may be able to eat food, just like the Lord did, but we'll have no need to fill any of our appetites. Because He bought us and He saved us, and He raised from the grave Himself, God who raised Christ will raise us.

Now here's the goal of our bodies today, let's go through it quickly, three points. It's as the physical extension of Christ, verse 15: 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?'. Just the way you have fingers and toes, and eyes and ears, and you use them for yourself; you as a body are a member of Christ, and God wants to use you. So he says this: 'If you're joining yourself to a harlot, you're effectively - because you're a physical extension of Christ - associating Christ with a harlot'. Now I'm not going into this, because it's awful, and the reason why we know it's awful is Paul says: 'God forbid, perish the thought!'. You have been made one with Christ, and you should go as a child of God who's one with Christ, and make yourself one with a harlot - and by doing so you make Christ, the member of Christ that you are, one with a harlot! The terrible thing is that there are churches in our land that are teaching this, Bishops in the Church of England who are legitimatising cohabitation, homosexuality, and you name whatever sin you want, and they're putting their stamp on it - and God will damn them! God has declared His will and His word.

Verse 16: 'What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh', Genesis quoted, 'But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit' - that is the most intimate relationship that is possible: to be of one spirit, or one mind, with the Lord Jesus Christ. Sure if you were one mind with Him you wouldn't do anything like this, would you? You would do what verse 18 says and flee fornication, just like Joseph did in Potiphar's house when his wife came on to him - what did he do? Did he stand and quote verses to her? He took to his heels and he ran! You couldn't see him for dust! That's what we are to do, and you know it amazes me because James says with regards to the devil: 'Submit yourselves unto God, resist the devil and he will flee from you' - but when it comes to fleshly lusts, the word of God says: 'Flee youthful lusts', flee them! Don't resist them, don't stare them eyeball to eyeball.

Saint Augustine in his unconverted days was a slave to lusts, and when he was converted he said: 'Will I ever be able to keep pure, and keep away from the things of this world?'. He took as his text Romans 13 and 14: 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh'. He determined that he would never go to that red light district of the city in order to be tempted again to the way of life that he lived, but one day he was forced to go there on business. As he was there all of a sudden his eye glanced a beautiful girl that he had relations with in his unconverted days, and they looked at one another, and it was as if her face illuminated in beauty toward him. She opened her arms and she beckoned him, and she said: 'Austin, Austin, where have you been for so long, we've missed you so' - and he turned around and put his back to her, and he lifted his long philosopher's gown and he started to run! It didn't look too dignified for a doctor of religion or a professor of rhetoric running down the street with a whore running after him, and she called: 'Austin, Austin, why do you run? It is only I!'. He looked back and he exclaimed: 'I run because it is not I, it is not I'.

'It is not I that liveth', Paul says, 'but Christ that liveth in me; and the life I now live, I live not by my own power, or my own effort, or my own suppression of passions and appetites, but I live by the power of the faith of the Son of God who loved me and give Himself for me'. This is serious business because when you commit fornication, and I warn you, you sin against your own body, Paul says in verse 18. Now what does that mean? There's been speculation - 'You sin against your own body'. Well, most sins are done outwardly, aren't they? They're done to other people or to other things, but this sin seems to be done internally, it's done with your own body. People say: 'Well, drunkenness is like that, you put intoxicating liquid into your body and you get drunk, and drugs are like that as well, and there are other sins like that' - but that's not what it means, because Paul says very clearly that this is the only sin like it. It could mean the intimate nature of this sin, that when you commit this intimate sin you can never be intimate exclusively in the same way toward anyone else.

Let me tell you what I believe it means: other sins that are internal are internal by external means, the drink is external, it's put in; the drugs are external, it's put in. But this is a sin that is inflicted on your own body by your own body, where you violate yourself - it's psychological, it's spiritual, it's theological; it's against God, it's against the other party, and it against fornicator's body - and if you don't already know it from reading between the lines tonight: extramarital sex whatsoever is forbidden to the child of God.

Secondly, the danger of desecrating the body involves not only a physical extension of Christ, but a living temple of the Holy Ghost, because that's what you are. You remember in chapter 3 we looked at how the church, the local church, was the temple, the 'naos' of the Holy Spirit. That meant the Holy of Holies, not the external building of the temple of Jerusalem, but that actual part where God dwelt. There were so many shrines in Corinth where these false pagan gods were worshipped through various sexual rites and rituals immorally, that the Corinthians couldn't fail to miss the analogy here, and it's simply this: the Holy Ghost is in you, and you are the temple of the Holy Ghost, and therefore you should be holy! God should be marked with holiness in your temple, the presence of the Spirit is in you, child of God, not when you get the baptism of the Spirit - it was in these old carnal believers, and if they have the gift of the Spirit every child of God has them, I can tell you that. But also they were purchased: 'Ye are not your own', verse 20, 'bought with a price'. 'The precious blood of Jesus', as the hymnwriter said:

'Not my own, but saved by Jesus  
Who redeemed me by His blood.  
Gladly I accept the message,  
I belong to Christ the Lord.

Not my own, my time my talents,  
Freely all to Christ I bring  
To be used in joyful service,  
For the glory of my King'.

He bought you at Calvary for His own purpose. Thirdly, the purpose of life, verse 20, the purpose of your body, the purpose it was bought, the purpose the Holy Ghost was put in it, is that you should glorify God in your body - not through monastic mysticism, but this really encourages me tonight: through a practical personal purity that is possible, that puts the worship of God not just in a spiritual sphere, but in a physical sphere here and now! Why? Because the world doesn't need holiness of buildings, the world needs holiness of bodies, they need to see you as a holy man of God.

We're going to sing our final hymn now, but before we do can I ask you: have you ever been brought to the point of surrendering your body to Jesus? Of putting your body on the altar for Christ? That was asked of the Virgin Mary, and it was a big price because her husband thought she had been double-dealing him and cheating on him, didn't he? Isn't that right? Then the whole town thought it, and they talked about it, and the old bishops of the Church of England are still talking about it! But she took the price of what it meant to use her body, give it over to God whatever the cost. What did Paul say? 'I bear in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus'.

Put your hand up if you've one mark on your body that you suffered for Jesus. Let me say this, we'll not even sing our hymn because I want to say this: if there's somebody here tonight, and you have fallen into this kind of sexual sin, let me say three things. Paul said to the Corinthians: 'Such were some of you, but ye are washed'. Jesus said to the woman caught in the act of adultery: 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'. The Holy Spirit says to you tonight in 1 John 1 verse 9: 'If you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness'.

Let us bow our heads: Lord, all of us stand guilty with our mouths dumb when we come before Thy word, and all of us are sinners, and Father we pray for Thy cleansing when we have been contaminated in this filthy world and allowed ourselves to be overtaken in faults and led ourselves into temptation. Forgive me, our Father, but Lord there could be some soul here tonight and they're stuck in this sin - they're maybe a believer, or person that takes the name of Christ who has fallen, they may be an unbeliever who is looking for deliverance or hope - Lord, would You reveal to them that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Would they come to that fountain tonight, life-giving and free, and be cleansed from all iniquity? Give them the grace to do it, Lord - it's hard, but it's necessary - for Christ's sake. Amen.

Let me just say if anybody wants to talk to me after the meeting I'll be free and more than willing to speak with you, thank you.



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 16*

## ***"Marriage: To Be Or Not To Be?"***

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### I Corinthians 7:1-7

1. ***Being Single Is Honourable (verse 1)***
2. ***Being Single Is Testing (verse 2)***
3. ***Being Single Is Not For Marriage (verses 3-5)***
4. ***Being Single Is A Gift (verses 6-7)***

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 7, and we're taking up the subject tonight of marriage, and we will be spending several weeks - as I've said - on this such important subject in the day and age in which we live. We're looking specifically tonight at: 'Marriage: To Be Or Not To Be, That Is The Question'. Now I want to encourage you, if you know of young married people, or people who are engaged, or people who are contemplating marriage, or people who are single, or even people who are in a situation that they are divorced or separated or going through difficulties, I want you to let them know that these meetings are being held. The beauty of going through scripture verse by verse is that we encounter subjects that aren't too often dealt with, pulled out of the air, when people preach in such a way that they just take up different subjects from week to week - but when we're going through the Scriptures systematically, as we do on a Monday evening, we hit these subjects that are so important, and we're not allowed to just jump over them no matter how difficult they may be, we've got to grapple with them and deal with them, and that's for all of our benefits. Therefore I would like these studies, whether by tape or by inviting people along to these meetings, to go as wide is possible - because it's so important in these days that these particular truths, God's people are hearing them and heeding them.

We're just taking up the first 7 verses of chapter 7: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your inconsistency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that".

Sticking out like a sore thumb is the way that many single people feel within the church of Jesus Christ today. I think that's understandable when we consider that much of church life is pro-family, what I mean is that it's architected and engineered in such a way that it provides for family life - and that's only right in the day in which we live, because the majority of homes and nuclei of the population are still families: husbands and wives and, if God blesses them, with children. But the difficulty is that that is not the norm for some people, that is not their experience - and it's not surprising that people who are single, or people who are separated, even people who are divorced, people who have no children even, feel at times that they don't fit in to church life. Let me say that that has perhaps always been the case, but more and more all of us - whether we're married or not married, separated, divorced, single, whatever your situation might be - all of us as Christians are beginning to feel in our society that we don't fit in. All of us don't fit in any more.

It used to be normal to know of marriage enshrined as an institution of society, but that is no longer the case. Before our eyes day by day we continually see in our media how the foundations of the marriage bond are being wrecked and shattered, and there is a monumental attempt to pull down the marriage bond as never there has been before. All of those, no matter what your particular situation might be, who follow the sexual ethics of the Bible, and not of this world and the philosophies of this society, will stick out like a sore thumb. Now I don't want to single anybody out this evening, but whether you're single or whether you're married, or whether you fall into another category that we will deal with in this chapter, the truth of the matter is that no matter how difficult we believe our particular life situation might be, the truth of the matter is: life today for the Christian is difficult, no matter what your circumstances are. It's difficult to live as a Christian full-stop in today's pagan and sinful environment.

Now in chapter 7 through to chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians Paul begins to answer questions that these Corinthians asked him in a letter that they had previously written to him. I can imagine Paul, as he is writing this particular chapter and the chapters that follow, sitting at his desk - if he had a desk - with that letter that the Corinthians wrote to him open in front of him, as he reads down it and answers one-by-one their specific questions. In chapter 7 alone he answers their questions about marriage, about celibacy, about divorce, and eventually widowhood. We'll find as we go through the rest of these chapters that he answers questions on meats that are sacrificed to idols, whether Christians should eat them or not; and there's a great monumental chapter on spiritual gifts, and what gifts we should seek after, and what we should not, and what don't need to be used. We'll see those in the weeks that lie ahead, but in this chapter - and particularly in these first 7 verses - Paul deals with the subject of marriage, but he deals with it in the answer to their question in verse 1: 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman'.

"Concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good...". Now they obviously asked the question: 'Is it good for a man not to touch a woman?'. Paul is coming back and answering: 'Yes, it is good for a man not to touch a woman'. He answers this practical question. Now, let me give you a bit of the background to this passage because I believe, perhaps more than any passage in the whole of the New Testament, this particular passage has been misunderstood. Under the Roman law there were four different types of marriage bonds or marriage customs. The first were the marriage of slaves, and slaves were seen in Roman society as sub-human. Therefore they weren't given many of the privileges that the hoy-polloy and the hierarchy of the upper class were given. When they wanted to marry one another, a slave to a slave, they were given what they called 'tent companionship' - in other words, they were permitted to shack up as long as their boss, their master permitted it. Their master, if he agreed to it, allowed them to get together and have 'tent companionship', but because he was their master and they were the slaves he could say at any point when they ought to separate. In fact, he could send one of the partners away, he could tell them to marry another partner, and they would have no say in the matter. He could even sell one of the partners against the will and choosing of the marriage bond.

The fact of the matter is that, as we go through the New Testament, we find that many of the early Christians were slaves, they were not the upper crust of society. So they actually either had lived in this type of lifestyle and married situation, or they were presently living in it as these epistles were written to them. The second type of marriage in Roman society was what was called 'usis', and it was a kind of common law marriage. It said that when you co-habit with someone for at least a year your bond was recognised as a type of marriage. Then there was the third which was called 'coemptio in manum' (sp?) which literally was 'the father of the bride could sell her to whoever had the highest price' - some of you might like that one! He had the prerogative to sell her off to whom he willed. Then there was the fourth, that was the patrician class, the nobility, the upper-class. Their marriage bond took the form of a service, and in fact that particular service is where we derive our modern marriage service from. This might surprise some of you, and I hope it rocks some of you who think you know it all, but the Roman Catholic Church adopted this particular marriage service. Through the Reformation this service largely came unaltered, of course the Catholic Church

Christianised it from its pagan Roman past, but as it comes to us through the reformers and right through to our present modern day it is almost unchanged as we know it as the marriage service.

It involved two families who both organised the event. The bride had a matron of honour, the groom had a best man, they exchanged vows, they gave one another rings - and they were placed on the third finger of the left-hand. The bride had a marriage bouquet and there was a wedding cake - identical, almost, to what we do today. I don't know what that makes you feel about the marriage bond or not, but that's the fact of the matter. What added to the complications in Roman society of the four different types of marriages was that, not only were these marriages common, but divorce was extremely common as well. It wasn't unheard of for people to be divorced as many times as 20 and over! It seems astounding, hardly believable. Also within the society there was an active feminist movement that had developed, and wives were beginning to compete with husbands in the businesses; some of them were even wrestling with their husbands physically as a prowess of strength, feats of physical ability - how would you like to be married to one of them? It seems that no longer had wives any interest in being a housewife, or being a mother - in fact, so much so, that the history books tell us that by the end of the first century childless marriages, by choice, were extremely common. Vows, marriage vows and commitments, began to be ignored more and more.

It's a fact of history, incidentally I would draw your attention and indeed our nation's attention to the facts that lax views in marriage, wherever they are found in societies in history, always eventually lead to social corruption and the state eventually crumbles. When the marriage bond crumbles, the foundations of the state crumble, and I believe it will not be long until our society economically perhaps, certainly politically, perhaps even militarily, will be plunged into chaos - because before our eyes we are seeing the foundations of society being removed.

Now the early church, as you can deduce from all that, had those among them who had these type of backgrounds. Some people who had co-habited, lived together as slaves or in common law marriages, some who had been sold off by their father to the highest bidder, some even in patrician marriage who married the person that they loved and wanted. There were others who were divorced, there were some who were divorced and remarried, I don't know, maybe some who were divorced and remarried maybe 20 times over. So it's hardly surprising when we consider the background all these people who Paul says: 'Such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are cleansed, ye are sanctified', that these people who lived in this kind of Corinthianised environment could come to the great apostle and say: 'Look, is it not better that people just don't get married?'.

Verse 1: 'Is it not good for a man just not to touch a woman?'. Now you remember in chapter 5 we had the awful occasion of incest, and of a man taking his father's wife, which was his stepmother, and co-habiting and eventually marrying that woman in the assembly. There was this sort of flamboyant disregard to the laws of God, and a liberty that was licence really - they said: 'Because our sins are forgiven we can do whatever we like; because this body isn't worth anything, it's going to die in the grave, well my body wants to do this thing so if it feels good I do it, it's not going to make any difference to my eternal destination'. They were called hedonists, lovers of pleasure. Rather than restraining physical appetites, especially sexual, they satisfied them and they fed them as far as they could to quench them.

Now in chapter 7 we see the opposite extreme, the opposite approach to the difficulties in Corinth which was not to quench and satisfy the appetites in hedonism, but rather to deny the appetites absolutely through asceticism. Rather than saying: 'Well, I'll just satisfy every fleshly lust and appetite that I have', they said: 'We'll deny it, don't even touch a woman, don't go into any physical relationship whatsoever. If the body is evil then they must be evil, and you must abstain from them'. Now Paul comes right away to these young Christians who are saying: 'Well, what's right now?' - they've been converted out of this background - 'I'm not married, should I marry? Sex in my past, sex in Corinth was only filthy, it could come under the

definition of fornication within the word of God, therefore surely it's still evil now after I'm converted?'. Then there were people who were converted whose husbands weren't saved and wives weren't saved, and they were asking the question: 'Well, am I to have unification physically with a person that's not a Christian? That's what I did before I was saved, surely then we should get divorced, or at least we should lived together as a married couple and not enter into the sexual bond?'

You see the confusion that was going on in this church, that maybe we don't face today - but I'll tell you we're going to face it more and more and we need to grapple with these things. So Paul begins by saying first of all in verse 1: 'Being single, staying not married, not touching a woman, remaining celibate, is honourable'. It is honourable! Now look at that word 'touch' in verse 1, because it's a word that can be misunderstood. It actually is a Jewish euphemism for the sexual act, you can find in the Old Testament and that's exactly what it means. So really we're talking about the sexual bond here, and Paul is saying: 'It's good for a man not to enter into that bond'. The word for 'good' means 'morally excellent, wholesome' - it's a good thing, morally, not to go into this situation. Kenneth Wuest translates it well like this: 'It is perfectly proper, honourable, morally befitting for a man to live in strict celibacy'.

In verse 6 Paul makes this very clear: 'I speak this by permission, not of commandment'. In other words, Paul is not laying down a law here to say that you must be celibate because marriage is bad; neither is he saying you mustn't be celibate because to be celibate is bad. He's saying this: 'I'm saying this not as a commandment given by God, but I'm laying down spiritual principles. I'm not saying marriage is bad, I'm not saying celibacy is always good, but I am saying in answer to your question that to be single and to abstain from sex can be good'. It can be good, it can be honourable.

Now I don't want you to misunderstand anything that I am saying, I certainly don't want you to misunderstand this portion of Scripture - but let me say this: I may be a bit more explicit tonight than some of you would like, but you've got to waken up to the real world in which we live. Our young people are being taught their sexual ethics through the soap operas and through the cinemas and through their schools, and if we don't tell them what the word of God says they will imbibe it and they will have an excuse too, because no one told them any different! Maybe some of us would need to go back to the book and realise that Paul is extremely explicit in some of the things that he says here in this passage. We need to learn them tonight.

Now, right away people pose a question, and we have to answer some of these questions. When Paul says: 'Yes, I agree with you, it's good sometimes for a man not to touch a woman', right away the critics and liberals say: 'Well, Paul is obviously against marriage. Here it is, proof right away'. In verse 7 he says: 'I wish that all men were like myself' - he was single too - and later on he explains why it's good to be single, he would say he feels for him it's better to be single. They all conclude: 'Well, there it is in black-and-white, how can you argue? Paul is against marriage clearly!'. Let me say that Paul categorically is not against marriage, we'll see that very clearly. If you want it proved to you, we turn to 1 Timothy chapter 4, 1 Timothy chapter 4, and he speaks of the falling away and the signs of the last days which will be the apostasy in the church, but also the falling away in society. Chapter 4 of 1 Timothy verse 1: 'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats'. So to forbid to marry is a mark of the last days apostasy, and Paul would be aligning himself with that if he was saying categorically marriage is wrong and you have to remain single.

Turn to another text, Hebrews chapter 13 this time and verse 4, this is even more explicit, Paul says: 'Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed' - marriage bed - 'undefiled'. It is a holy thing, the physical, sexual marriage bond relationship - and it's Paul, I believe, in Hebrews, because I believe he wrote Hebrews, who says this. But perhaps the greatest commendation Paul gives of marriage is found in Ephesians chapter 5,

turn with me to that, Ephesians 5, because there he actually uses the marriage bond as an illustration of the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ as the bridegroom, and the church of Jesus Christ as His bride which He bought with His own blood. Verse 22: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body'. So you can see clearly that Paul cannot be, if he's not contradicting himself of course, and he's not, he cannot be against marriage.

So then what does he mean when he says: 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman' in chapter 7 verse 1? Well, first of all you've got to realise that this chapter in Corinthians is not a manual on marriage, it's not an A-to-Z on marriage. It tells us a great deal about marriage, let me say that, but it's not an A-to-Z. It's specifically answering the questions that the Corinthians had about marriage, that must be understood. Also, if you want a panoramic view of what the Bible has to say about marriage you have to take all the verses together, and when you do that as we have done in a measure this evening looking at those three portions, you will realise that marriage is commended by God and all the men of God throughout the canon.

Now, hopefully that's cleared up. But then another question arises, because people ask the question: 'Well, what about Paul? Was he ever married?'. Some people believe he wasn't married; some believe he was a widower, his wife died at some period; some people believe that he was deserted by his wife when he converted to Christianity. The reason why they believe that he was married is because it was Jewish tradition to be married, and it was expected of every pious Jew that he married at the age of 18. Paul boasts on occasions for various reasons, not out of pride, of how he fulfilled all the law and how he fulfilled the orthodox requirements of a strict upstanding Jew in society - and because of that people say that he had to be married to fulfil Jewish tradition. Well, I don't believe that that is proof at all that Paul had to be married, because John the Baptist who was the greatest preacher and prophet ever apart from the Lord Jesus was not married himself, and of course the Lord Jesus was a Jewish bachelor. So I don't think you can use that as grounds, but perhaps one of the more heavier and weightier evidences that Paul was married, they say, is that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body. Now we don't have time to look at this verse, but in chapter 26 of the Acts of the Apostles in verse 10, Paul tells how when he was persecuting Christians before his conversion, he actually put his voice - and the insinuation is he put his vote - towards their death and their persecution. The only way he could put his vote towards it, is if he was in a voting body and he was a member of the Sanhedrin. People who believe that Paul was married say therefore it's proof, because to be a member of the Sanhedrin: one, you had to be married; and two, you also had to have children. Again I don't believe that proves Paul was married, simply because those rules to be married and to have children to join the Sanhedrin were only introduced as rules in the late first century, perhaps even the early second century, and it was long after Paul died when those rules were brought in.

What do I believe? I don't know, I don't know whether he was married or not. One thing I do think is: if he had been married, he probably would have brought some of his own experiences into the passages where he speaks on the subject of marriage, but he doesn't do that - and again that's not proof, and as far as I'm concerned the jury is still out. But it doesn't really matter, because in chapter 7 what we do know is this, that when he writes these words he isn't married. Now to understand what he means when he says: 'Being single is honourable', we've got to really grasp the problem that there was in Corinth. I can almost see Paul's mind ticking as he writes these words, going back to Genesis 2 verse 18 where God said over perfect creation: 'It is not good that man should be alone', so God created out of man a helpmeet. In the same way as when a man and a woman marries today they become one flesh, the original man and wife were literally one flesh because Eve came out of Adam. So God had pronounced, and Jewish tradition had said throughout all the years, that to be married was good - but it didn't just do that, it went on a little bit further, and he says because God commends it and because God said in Genesis 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth', they went on a step further in extremism and said: 'It is a sin not to be married'.

You see the danger of extremism and taking the Bible a little bit further than it really goes and reading between lines. Nowhere in the Old Testament does the Bible actually require marriage, but the Jews had followed that line. I believe that in Corinth there were Jews who were pushing single people in Corinth to get married again: 'You have to be married! It's a sin not to be married!'. Yet on the other side of the coin there were these dear Greek people who had a background in the paganism of Corinth and all the type of marriage bonds and divorces and ritual prostitution and all the rest that we've looked into in past weeks, and they were looking at their background and saying: 'You can't get married, just don't get married at all, don't get involved with any physical sexual relationships'.

As we've gone through this little book we've found that it's got so much to say to modern, contemporary, urban society that we live in today. You find even within the church that there are the same wings of extremism. They mightn't preach it from the pulpit, but there are people who look down on single people, on unmarried people, as second-class citizens - and some of them will testify that they feel that way. There are some in wider Christendom who believe that not to be married is spiritual, and the Roman Catholic Church in all of its falsehood and blasphemy takes this particular verse and uses it as proof, they say, that men of God like priests ought to be celibate and take a vow of chastity.

There was a monk called Mehilo Tolotos (sp?) and he died at the age of 82 in the year 1938, so we're not going into the dark ages, and it's testified - I find it hard to believe - that he never once saw a woman, never even saw one! His mother died in childbirth, and as soon as that happened he was taken and carried up to a monastery on the peak of a mountain in Greece. There he would live the rest of his life until he died, and he never saw a man, he never saw a woman, he never saw a beast. That monastery operated in that way for 900 years with people who never even looked upon women, because they saw it as very spiritual, as near perhaps as you get to a heavenly life here on the earth! Yet in the false Roman Catholic system you can see both extremes, because for their priests they don't allow them to marry; yet for ordinary people they count it as sacrament to be married! They encourage to be married rather than to be single. There are even states in the United States of America years ago that enforced marriage on their citizens, so the two extremes are not thousands of years back in Corinth as we speak, but they're with us today. There is a danger that we can have in our own preconceived minds: marriage is good, celibacy is bad; celibacy is more spiritual, and marriage is less holy.

Now I want you to see tonight Paul's genius, as he is inspired by the Holy Spirit to clear up this mess and confusion. I wonder how you would handle it? Do you ever wonder at Paul's lack of prejudice? Paul could have sided with the Jews: 'That's right, I know my Torah! I know that the word of God testifies that marriage is good, so I'll side with the Jews and they're right, and you single people ought to all get married'. Because of his upbringing, that's the way he could have got on. Or he could have went with the Greeks because of his own experience - he was single, he could have said: 'I've chosen this for myself because it's best, and I want all of you to do the same. In fact, you have to do the same' - but he didn't. You can see clearly, and I say this to the overseers and to those who counsel people at times, that it is essential in situations like this that you keep your own prejudicial, personal circumstances out of it. No matter what has happened to you, no matter what you have experienced, or your family experiences, you have to plough this middle furrow.

So what does Paul say? He says it is honourable to be single, it may even be desirable to be married, but one is not more spiritual than the other. I hope you can see that that's what he means: 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman', but it is also good, the inference is, to be married. Neither is sub-spiritual or super-spiritual, and the problem in Corinth was not just marriage but it was pride - that was the root of all the problems! They were grasping out at all times, in all of their questions, and in all of their disputes to see ways where they could be more spiritual in the eyes of their brethren over other people, that they could get one over their brother! Do you see that? The lengths that they would go to to look more spiritual!

So the first thing I want you to see is: Paul is saying that singleness, celibacy, is honourable, but so is marriage, and one is not more spiritual than the other. The second thing that we must see is that being single is testing or tempting. It's good, Paul says, but there's temptation involved. 'Nevertheless', verse 2, 'to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband'. This is the danger of being single, especially in Corinth, that you could fall into fornication - and that's what the Roman Catholic Church have fallen into! They haven't seen this, they haven't read on into verse 2, they haven't realised that the sexual desire, when it is unfulfilled, is dynamite - it's so strong that at times it cannot be controlled in that capacity! It's not natural.

Now added to that, the internal problems of passion, is the external problems of attraction and the lust that is all around them. You couldn't walk up High Street in Corinth without right away raising temptation, being face-to-face with some kind of fleshly lust, because licence was the norm of the day - and it's the same today, isn't it? You can't look anywhere, on the television, on a billboard, to a newspaper, without this type of temptation! If you're single, how much harder it is! Paul is warning that to be single is to be tested and to be tempted, and he says that if you're like this and you're burning in passion you should avoid fornication by having your own wife. That sexual frustration, the only way to release it is not in the brothels of Corinth, it's not in looking at pictures, it's not in going with another person, it can only be released in the marriage bond that God has blessed. Now let me say that Paul is not saying that this is the low level that marriage is, he's not suggesting that the only reason to get married with another Christian and look for a spouse is to prevent immorality. He has a very high view of sex as you've seen from these other scriptures, but what Paul is doing is he's being concretely real with the threat that sexual temptation is in the life of a single believer! He's being a realist!

I'll tell you, we need more realists today - not these people that walk with their nose in the air, and you'd think that butter wouldn't melt in their mouth. We need people that will acknowledge their weaknesses, and run from them and help others to do the same - and therefore Paul says: 'If that's you, let every man have his own wife, and every wife her own husband'. Now you will notice, if you're a Mormon, that it's not two wives or five husbands, it's one - one!

You will know, I hope that there are several purposes in marriage and we don't have time to go into them all. The first that we encounter in Genesis is procreation: 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth' - to reproduce and have children. The second is pleasure, and in the book of Proverbs especially and Song of Solomon, the chief among them all, you find that sexual relations are there as a beautiful thing of pleasure, and Solomon tells his son: 'Rejoice in the wife of your youth', and the Hebrew word is 'be exhilarated' in the wife of your youth. The third reason is partnership, a helpmeet, or it could be translated 'a helper suitable for him' - the friendship bond in marriage is a key ingredient to success. But the fourth reason is what Paul is talking about here, not procreation, not pleasure, not partnership, but purity - to remain pure, to be able to protect your body from sexual immorality, and to meet the appetites and physical needs that are natural and God-given in the way that God has ordained. That's the only way!

So Paul is saying, you see the balance here, I wish people wouldn't lift Paul's words and verses out of context and take them to extremes as they so often do. He's saying that although singleness is good, and it's good for a man not to touch a woman, it is not superior to marriage, and there are dangers and perils and temptations in singleness that marriage doesn't have. The third thing you need to notice is that being single is not for married people, it's not for marriage - verses 3 to 5. You might say: 'Well, well done David, that's an obvious one - celibacy is not for marriage'. Well it's not that obvious, you see what you have to remember is there were people here who believed that it was spiritual not to have this physical sexual bond, it was spiritual to remain celibate - but for some of them it was too late, they had already been married maybe before conversion, or after conversion before they had realised this 'high spiritual light and teaching' - it was too late for them to remain single and celibate, they couldn't divorce, therefore they began to behave as celibate in

the marriage bond. Their over-zealousness, their fanaticism and extremism led them to neglect and to deny the needs of their spouse. I think it was probably more common of those people who were converted and their spouse wasn't converted, and they decided: 'Well, I can't sleep with a person that's not a Christian, so I'll remain celibate'. Can you see this?

So they were being single in the marriage bond. Paul said to them, and we'll see it in a later week, verses 10 to 17: 'It doesn't matter whether you're a believer and your wife's a believer, or whether they're a believer and you're not or vice versa, you are not to deprive your husband or your wife of your duty'. God sees marriage as sacred, He sees the sexual union as sacred, He sees it as pure, proper; but He also sees it, Paul is saying, as obligatory - it's a privilege, it's a pleasure, but it is also a responsibility in the marriage bond! People going into marriage have to realise this, that Paul says both have a duty to satisfy each other in this regard, and one wife or husband has no more rights over their spouse. 'Let the husband', verse 3, 'render unto the wife due benevolence' - the word there 'due' is 'duty', in fact it could be literally translated 'debt'. You have a debt to your spouse to satisfy them physically, and vice versa - but notice the emphasis: it is not your right, it's not a right, it's something that you have to seek for them and they ought to seek for you, not in selfish lust but in the giving of Christian love, and it's your debt, it's your duty.

Paul enforces this by saying in verse 4: 'The wife hath not power of her own body', everybody would have said 'Amen' in Corinth, where women were trodden on the ground - but wait a minute, Paul says: 'Neither has the husband authority over his body'. There is equality in marriage you know, there's different roles, but there is equality in Christ of male and female. It's the same in the church, there is neither male nor female, there's different roles. But in this bond you are not your own, and we saw in chapter 6 that strictly speaking the body is for God and we're to present it as a living sacrifice, but in the marriage bond the body is for your spouse, and it's not an optional extra. It's not, let me say, as some believers seem to see it, and I've read some books like this, where it's seen as a necessary evil which spiritual Christians only engage in to produce children - and it's a chore almost!

The same way as marriage is intended to be permanent, so is the bond which is the deepest expression of love on a human level in its beauty and in its power to unite. Paul says in verse 5: 'Don't defraud one another', another translation: 'Stop depriving one another', and it's a command of Scripture as legitimate as any other command that's in the word of God. If you don't like that don't get married, it's as simple as that. Paul says the only exception, here it is, the only exception is if, by consent: 'for a time', verse 5, 'that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer', that you separate in this physical capacity. Now we hear a lot about 'consent', don't we, in the age of consent? But we don't hear too much about this type of consent! Where there is a consent between a husband and a wife to separate physically for a period of time is too fast and to pray to God! It's amazing this, it has to be for a specific time, for a specific purpose, and together agreed - and the word, literally, 'agreement' is the word 'symphony'. That is what the marriage bond should be, a physical symphony but also a spiritual symphony - and here's a question for all of us: is there ever a time when you're in your marriage bond that you decide that you're going to have a time of prayer and fasting? When there's a burden that God puts upon you so great for some particular thing, that you've each got the liberty to go away and drop everything and seek God - and I'll tell you, some of the reason why husbands and wives don't go onward and upward with God is because of their husband or their wife holding them back!

Thank God if you've got a good wife - I better say I've got a good one! - but thank God for a good husband that doesn't pull you down to their standards, but pull you up to Christ's standards. This is what Paul is saying: the general rule is that the only time you break away from this physical relationship is to make time to pray, special undivided attention for spiritual things by mutual consent for an important reason for a brief period - but after that, and see this in verse 5, here's the danger, after that: 'come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your inconsistency'. In other words, you know if you've been on a mountaintop experience that that's the time that the devil longs and loves and often does pull you down, and be careful when you



enter out of the spiritual time, when your defences are down and your pride is up, that Satan doesn't enter and you fall into sin - perhaps even sexual sin. The only reason to abstain from this relationship is not to be more spiritual, can I say it's not to use sex as a manipulative tool or a bargaining chip, do you know why? Because you can't bribe someone with something that you owe them. If you're using sex like that in the marriage bond, you're using it as a tool of Satan, you need to know that.

The fourth and final thing is that being single is a gift. Now verse 6 troubles a lot of people and gives them the colly-wobbles, because Paul says that 'I speak this by permission, and not of commandment'. We say: 'Well, there you are, he doesn't even believe himself that he's being inspired, this isn't a commandment!' If you go to chapter 14, don't go to it now, verse 37, he says that all that he's written is inspired of God - so that clears that up right away. What Paul is referring to is not what's commonly thought, what comes in verse 7, he's referring to what he has already said in verses 1 through to 5, that he has spoken by permission and not of commandment. Now what does he mean? He's saying: 'I'm not saying you have to be married, I'm not saying you have to remain single, I'm saying that there are right things for different situations'. Then he goes on in verse 7 to say: 'I wish everybody was like me, because I'm single'. What he's saying is: 'I wish people had the independence I have to serve the Lord, I wish they had the freedom', and in fact we'll see in later studies that in verse 26 he says he wishes that they were single for the present distress that there was. I believe that a lot of complications in this passage, where people think Paul is contradicting himself, can be answered in the fact that Christians were being persecuted - and Paul is saying: 'If you want to help yourself and not get hurt by seeing your wife burnt at the stake, or your children fed to the lions, you'd be better not getting married until all this distress is over'. That clears up a lot of complications when you look at it that way.

But Paul didn't expect people to be just like him, but the point that he is making is: there is not one that is more spiritual than the other. If you're single it is honourable to say single in purity. If you're married it's honourable to stay married in purity. To marry or to not marry is, in Paul's case, a matter of conscience, a matter of circumstances - but here's the main point: it's a matter of gift. I've got people sometimes who come to me, especially young people, and there are a lot more than you would imagine. They're afraid they're going to be left on the shelf, and they feel - particularly young men - that in this area, difficult area, of sexual appetite that they could not remain single for the rest of their days - it's impossible, absolutely impossible. Now I think that if that is the case you do not have a gift that is spoken about here, it is a gift to remain celibate! It's a gift to be married, and the word is 'charisma' which means 'gift of grace' - it's the grace of God that you have a wife or a husband, and it may be the grace of God that has given you a gift to be celibate. But people look at the fact that they're single, and perhaps God has called them to be single - and I'm not saying God has called you to be single - but people look at it as a problem, and Paul says: 'It is not a problem, because if God has given it to you for life or for a particular season, it is a gift!'. It's a gift of grace! It's in God goodness, it's not a consolation prize, it's a high calling and God wants you to embrace it now, and perhaps for the rest of your life if necessary, if He calls you to do so! We'll see in later weeks how you can use this great gift of singleness that God has given to you.

Sure you would know that if you try to use a gift that you don't have that's wrong. If you're trying to be celibate and haven't got the gift, you will end up in frustration and perhaps immorality. Jesus even said that there are some eunuchs that are eunuchs for the kingdom of God, but not everybody can take that command. You can't take it my friend if you can't admit it, but neither is singleness required of God - it's whatever gift you're given. We're going to find out later in Corinthians, when we come to spiritual gifts, that Paul's message is this, and the whole message of the word of God is: discover your gift, be faithful to God in it, and don't envy other people and discredit their gifts. The married were saying: 'You should be married', the unmarried were saying: 'You shouldn't be married'. I don't know where you are this evening.

Amy Carmichael went from Northern Ireland to work in India with girls who were rescued from slavery and prostitution. She raised them in her Dohnavur Fellowship, and you would know if you've heard of her, that her life touched thousands of people, her books have blessed millions and are still touching lives today - but as a young girl she was extremely attractive. She wanted to get married, but she knew that her great work for God couldn't be done if she was married, it would be impossible. She had a real struggle with this - I'm not saying you're called to be single, don't get me wrong - but she was, and she struggled and wrestled with it, and it was deeply personal, so much so that she couldn't share it for more than 40 years until she was helping another girl in the same situation. She wrote this in her diaries, listen: 'On this day many years ago I went away alone to a cave in a mountain called Erimah (sp?). I had feelings of fear about the future. This is why I went there, to be alone with God, and the devil kept on whispering: 'It's alright now, but what about afterwards? You're going to be very lonely' - and he painted pictures of loneliness, I can see them still. I turned to my God in desperation and said: 'Lord, what can I do? How can I go on to the end?'. He said to me in the words of Psalm 34:22: 'None of them that trust me shall be desolate'. 'None of them that trust me shall be desolate' - that word has been with me ever since'.

Whatever your gift and calling is, my friend, one thing there is for all of us to do: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4: 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour'. Do come back next week, we'll be looking at the few verses following from these that speak of the divine principles for marriage. We'll be looking at people who are married to non-Christians, and the situation of peoples whose husband or wife leaves them. We'll be looking at a little bit on divorce and other things, and the principles for a good marriage under God. Then we'll be dealing with singleness again, and how to use your singleness, in a couple of weeks time. So don't forget about these studies, and do come back under the sound of God's word.

Our Father, life is difficult today whether we're married or not. None of us, no matter what we are going through, have a monopoly of pain. Father, with all the effulgence of filth that is around us, many of us have fallen, and many of us will find it difficult to stand as things wax worse and worse. But Lord, we thank Thee that with the promises and the precepts come the power, and we pray that all of us will sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts, and that we will present our bodies in our marriages, in our celibacy, in our singleness - no matter what shape or form it may take - that all our days we will spend and be spent for the Master. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 17*

## ***"Marriage Matters"***

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### I Corinthians 7:8-16

1. ***Unmarried And Widows (verses 8-9)***
2. ***Divorce (verses 10-11)***
3. ***Mixed Marriages (verses 12-16)***

**W**e are looking tonight at 'Marriage Matters', and we'll be covering quite a bit of ground with many issues related to marriage, but we're beginning our reading at verse 8 of 1 Corinthians and we'll finish at roundabout verse 17 or so.

"I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches".

Now let me just say that in this evening's study I'll be touching on a number of very controversial subjects. The likelihood is that there will be some of you who will disagree, and disagree profoundly, on some of the things that I will say tonight. That's no surprise, because there are greater and more godly men than I who disagree with what I'm going to teach from the word of God this evening. Let me also say it is not my intention, in any capacity, to offend anyone unnecessarily, to ostracise anyone, to single anyone out or to make them feel uncomfortable. I hope that any of you who know me will know that there is no condemnation in my heart towards anyone. I hope you will take that from my heart, honestly and truthfully, as I express it to you this evening.

But yet, with all of these matters that touch us individually and corporately as families and among our friends with relation to marriage, divorce, widowhood, widowers and so forth; those who are single, and those who are virgins, nevertheless there comes times when we have to set aside our own individual circumstances and not allow them to prejudice how we understand and interpret the word of God. I'm seeking to do that, and I would request that you do it also. The last time I addressed the subject particularly of divorce, when we were going through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 on Sunday mornings, there was one individual - and he's not here tonight just in case you think you know who it is - but who caught me at the door and said to me: 'You don't realise some of the problems and the suffering and the pain that people who go through these experiences and circumstances have in their lives - for many people who are divorced it's not their fault'. Well, if he had been listening during the course of my message, I outlined the fact that for many people it is not their fault - we live in a day and age where divorce can be forced upon you without your

consent. I did make that known, and I want that to be known tonight. I'm not saying that we have all the answers, and that we have yet perfected the application of these spiritual truths that we're going to look at this evening. If at any time in our study this evening I sound clinical, or I'm delving into details that seem to be unaware or ignorant to the pain that you are going through, forgive me - it's not my intention. But it is my intention this evening to get to the bottom, discerning what the mind of God is with regards to these spiritual truths.

Paul begins by speaking again to the unmarried, and this time he brings along with the unmarried into his conversation those who could be classed as widows. Our last study, verses 1 to 7, touched on those who are unmarried and have been such, and whether it would be right for them to get married or just to stay single. I would encourage you to get that tape to really understand the context of all the circumstances contemporary to the people in Corinth that Paul was speaking to. Tonight in verses 8 and 9 he talks about those who are unmarried and those who are widows. Now what I want you to notice before we even look at the subject of unmarried people and widows is how he begins this sentence in verse 8, because it's repeated right throughout this passage, and it will help our understanding and interpretation of it.

He says: 'I say therefore'. Now in the Greek language it's the same expression that's used in verse 10, where he says: 'And unto the married'. It's the same expression as verse 12 too: 'But to the rest speak I'. It really is a connective part of language, which in Greek is 'de', and in our English it would be better translated: 'now'. It's a verb that's used when a man is speaking or commanding something, so you could change verse 8, verse 10, and verse 12, the beginning of them to say: 'And now'. Verse 8: 'And now to the unmarried'. Verse 10: 'And now to the married'. Verse 12: 'And now to the rest'. So we see right away, by the connective verb of speaking, he is differentiating between classifications of types of people in relation to marriage bond that he's speaking to. Now that's very important as we go through this passage, that Paul is commanding things to different situations of people related to the marriage bond one way or the other - whether they're single, whether they're married, whether they're divorced, or whatever.

This phrase suggests that Paul is taking up these situations, and he's applying one specific rule to them all. That's also very important, because as you see in verse 8 he says: 'now I say to the unmarried'; verse 10 'now I say to the married'; verse 12 'now I say to the rest' - he's saying the one thing to all of them. Now you might think that that is to over-simplify the matter, but I think if you analyse it yourself you will see that he says to all of them: 'I want you to stay as you are...I want you to stay as you are'. Now we'll see this as we go through, but one proof of that is verse 17 where he concludes the whole matter, and he says: 'But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches'. Verse 20 as well, and we'll see this next week as we enter into this realm: 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called'. So you understand that the main point and the main theme of everything that Paul is saying through these verses this evening is: 'Stay in the same place as you were when you were converted'. I think if we understand that it will help in our interpretation.

So we see this in verse 8, because he's reiterating what he's already said with regards to the single life. He extends it this time to widows, and he said: 'I wish that you were just like I am'. If you find yourself single, and you've got the gift of singleness - as we saw last week, and it is a gift - stay as you are. Don't be seeking to be married. He expands this to widows and he says: 'If you find yourself a widow', some would say this word 'unmarried' could actually mean widowers, 'if you find yourself in that predicament, stay as you are'. Of course, in these days in the early Church there was great pressure on folk who are unmarried to be married, but especially upon widows - more so than widowers, because women tended to depend more in those days on their husband to get by financially and in all sorts of ways with regards to support. There could be a temptation of them feeling insecure, and feeling lacking without being married - but Paul says: 'Hold your emotions for a minute, because as far as I can see it's better to stay the way you are'.

In fact, he uses the word that he used in verse 1 and he says: 'It's good, it's good for you to stay this way. It's good for them if they abide even as I am'. He uses the same statement to prove - as I've said, he's saying he wants you to stay as you are, verse 26: 'I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be' - it is good to stay single. What was the present distress? Well, people were being murdered for their faith, being martyred. He's saying to single people: 'What's the point of getting married, only to see your wife and your children slaughtered, and persecuted, and martyred?'. He's saying to widows: 'Don't get married again at the present distress, because the chances are you'll be widowed again, and you don't want that do you?'

If you look at verse 37, again: 'Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin', not get married, 'doeth well', or doeth good. The word right throughout those three verses is 'kalos' (sp?), the word 'good', and it means 'morally upstanding'. There is nothing wrong with staying single, or if you're a widow there's nothing wrong with staying a widow - in fact, the Bible commends it: 'It is good'. Now Paul says in verse 8: 'If they abide', and that insinuates that it is their choice, he's not telling them to do it, but it's their choice: if you abide as he is, well, that's commendable; but it's not the rule, it's not a command. This is shown in the fact that he says: 'It is good for them if they abide even as I' - 'I had a choice whether to get married or not, but I took the choice, not a command, but I can do it: stay single. It's good if they want to do it and they do do it'. It's not a right or wrong issue, we saw that last week. The emphasis is on Paul's conscious decision.

Of course, if you think about it for a moment, and if you read any of the Acts of the Apostles you would see very clearly that it would have been difficult, I'll not say impossible, but difficult for Paul to live the kind of missionary life that he did if he had been bringing a wife along with him everywhere. This is what Paul is trying to say: if you've got the gift of being single, it's necessary that you stay single. As we'll see in a couple of weeks time there are certain things that single people can do for the Lord that people who are married cannot do because of all the burdens of marital life and family life with children. John Berridge was a countryside preacher, and historians say that if he had lived in the city of London, or perhaps Edinburgh, he would have been one of the most famous preachers that ever lived. But because he preached around the little villages of England he became known as 'the countryside Whitefield'. He was quaint and eccentric, he probably would have admitted that himself, but all that did was add to his appeal as a preacher. The people came in their droves to come and hear him preaching in the fields. In fact we're told that in one year he led more than 4000 souls to the Lord Jesus Christ. He evangelised non-stop for 40 years of his life before he passed on to glory. John Berridge insisted that his ministry would be most effective if he remained unmarried, to such an extent that he became worried that the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield hadn't done likewise, and they had went and got married. Whitefield had married a woman with whom he had spent less than a week, and she died in 1768. Poor John Wesley had marital woes, his wife left him.

Writing to Lady Huntingdon, who some of you may know was the patron of those English evangelists in those days, Berridge observed these words, and I quote you, and listen to this carefully - here's some advice: 'No trap is so mischievous to the field preacher as wedlock, and it is laid for him at every hedge corner. Matrimony has quite maimed poor Charles Wesley, and might have spoiled John Wesley and George Whitefield if a wise Master had not graciously sent them a brace pair of ferrets' - what about that! 'Dear George has his liberty again, and he will escape well if he is not caught by another tenterhook. Eight or nine years ago, having been grievously tormented with housekeeping, I thought of looking out for wife myself, but it seemed highly needful to ask advice of the Lord. So, kneeling down before the table, with a Bible between my hands, I besought the Lord to give me direction'. And the Lord gave John Berridge Jeremiah 16 and 2: 'Thou shall not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place'. He relinquished all his thoughts of marriage and gave himself to pleasing the Lord, as Paul says, without distraction.

Perhaps dear John Berridge is erring on the side of those who said: 'It's good for a man not to touch a woman', and condemning those that are married. But he's right as far as he was concerned, that was the gift that God had given to him, and it made his ministry more effective. However, Paul says there is an exception to this gift of singleness and it's found in verse 9: 'If they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn'. There is a good reason why you should not stay single, and it's simply this: if you cannot stay single. That's the point! If you cannot contain, if you've a lack of power over your self-control, Paul says: 'Let them marry, for it's better to marry than to burn'. 'To burn' simply means to be inflamed with passion, a type of turbulent emotional struggle within you towards sin. If you struggle with this, and if you yield to it, it will distract you and devastate your whole spiritual inner life and outer life.

The only way to have an antidote against this is to get married. Let me say this: I don't think that Paul is just saying 'Get married if you're burning with lust', but I believe Paul is saying not just 'if you cannot control yourself', but 'if you are not exercising self-control'. That's the point: not just if there's a struggle going on within you, but the implication is that the people he's talking to here were doing what married people ought to be doing, but they themselves were not married. They were committing fornication, what he's already talked about at the end of chapter 6, and they were probably going to these ritual pagan prostitutes and exercising this idolatrous worship that was in the form of sexual rites and rituals. Paul is saying: 'Rather than do these things, it is better to marry and exercise your sexual passions and appetites in God's ordained way'.

Now often this verse is applied, and I don't think it's wrong in one sense to apply it to those sexual desires that inflame those who are young among us, but the specific application is to those who are already committing the sins of lust, that's who the application is too. Those who are not controlling, not 'cannot', but those who cannot contain and are not containing their sexual appetites. Paul says: 'If you're single, if you are widowed, stay as you are - with one exception: those who are not exercising continence'. I hope you can see that as regards to the unmarried and the widows.

Then he moves on to this next statement: 'And now to the married I command'. He's really touching on the subject of divorce, look at verses 10 and 11: 'I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife'. Now I said this last week, but I have to reiterate it, that 1 Corinthians 7 is not an A-to-Z of marriage, it's not a textbook that gives answers to every eventuality and every question with regards to marriage, and it certainly is not a textbook on the subject of divorce. What 1 Corinthians 7 is doing is answering the specific questions that the Corinthians had, and therefore we must assume that if they had questions on marriage, and now Paul is addressing the subject of divorce, they must have asked a question that touches on the issue of whether Christians ought to be divorced or not.

Now I believe that the statements of Paul in verses 10 and 11, the brevity of it and the clarity of it are astounding, and also the things that Paul leaves out in these verses strike us and ought to make us sit up in our interpretation of it. One author said that this definition of Christians and divorce is simple, authoritative, uncompromising and uncomplicated. Let's not complicate things this evening, let's read the Scriptures as plain as they are within the word of God. The two questions that were in the Corinthians minds, I believe, considering the answer that Paul gave them, was first of all: 'What is the position when a wife separates from her husband, when a wife decides to separate from her husband?'. Verse 10, look at it: 'Let not the wife depart from her husband'. The second question is: 'Should a husband ever divorce his wife?'. Verse 11: 'But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband', there it is, 'put away his wife'.

Now in order to understand what these questions are asking, and what the answers Paul is giving to them are, you've got to understand that there are different Greek words used in this portion of Scripture. I want to take this slowly so we don't misunderstand everything. If you look at verse 10, look at the word 'depart': 'Let not

the wife depart from her husband'. That word 'depart' in the Greek is the word for 'separate'. It is clearly the word for 'separate', yet there is a different word that is used in verse 11 where it says at the end: 'Let not the husband put away his wife'. Now in the English or Authorised Version they are distinct with different translations because they are different words. Verse 11 'put away' is literally the word 'divorce'. Now there is an error that many commentators and Bible teachers make, and that is to say that both these words mean 'to divorce' - they do not! If they meant 'to divorce', Paul would have used the same word in both instances, he would not have confused us in our understanding of these things.

The first means 'separate', the second means 'to divorce', that is quite clear. But when Paul answers their two questions, Paul answers it in a command, look at verse 10: 'To the married I command'. Now if you were with us last week, Paul was giving some advice, but at no point yet has Paul commanded believers to do anything. He is now doing something that he hasn't done before, this issue is so important that he says: 'I'm commanding you, and I can command you with authority because it's not really me that is commanding you, it's the Lord'. Do you see that? 'I command, yet not I, but the Lord'. Now why is he saying this? Because Paul is simply reiterating in verses 10 and 11 the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It's the Lord's command, he's echoing what the Lord has already said, and primarily he's reciting the portion of Scripture found in Mark's gospel chapter 10 verses 2 to 12. Now we don't have time to look at that, but if you want to look at it at home please feel free to do so, for it's so important.

So Paul says, in the light of what the Lord taught in Mark chapter 10, here's his answer: one, a wife must not separate from her husband - however, he goes on, there may be circumstances that will come into the marriage that leave it impossible for that woman to continue to live with that man, and she should try to remain married, but if she cannot she is permitted to separate but she is to remain unmarried in the position of separation. I think that's clear enough for you to see: 'Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart', or separate, 'let her remain unmarried' - she should remain unmarried. The reason being, in Mark chapter 10, the whole point of what the Lord Jesus was saying in answer to the Pharisees was: if you are divorced and remarried you are in danger of committing adultery, and that's what the Lord Jesus taught and that is simply what Paul is reiterating. If a woman is to separate herself from her husband, she is to remain unmarried. You will notice that in Mark 10 the Lord Jesus doesn't mention a second marriage, and Paul the apostle here, as he addresses divorce, doesn't mention second marriage at all - he doesn't mention second marriage as an option for a woman that separates with her husband.

I hope you're picking all this up as we go along. He's saying that the ideal is not to depart, don't depart; but he makes a concession. Do you see what he's saying here? Stay as you are! Stay as you are! The only concession is that if things get so bad - and I don't think God wants any woman to stay in a situation where she is abused physically, mentally, verbally, maybe even spiritually - if things get that bad and she has done all that she can, she is permitted to separate. Notice the different word, she is permitted to separate - but she must not marry! Is that not clear? 'Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried', the only other alternative is, 'or be reconciled to her husband'.

You see, I think that sometimes we get confused about these issues simply because Jesus and Paul were not as concerned about divorce as we are. They were more concerned with the permanency of marriage. In the Gospels and the epistles where Jesus and Paul address the issue of marriage and divorce, they are concerned chiefly to pronounce that if anyone after divorce remarries it is the equivalent of adultery. You can go through the passages where the Lord and Paul speak on divorce, and I think that you will see that very clearly. They are opposed to divorce, but the strength of their statements is to prohibit remarriage.

Now the big question that we need to ask in the light of the context of what we're reading here is: this permission and this concession Paul gives for a woman to separate from a husband, do you think it was because of the reasons that we give today? Now there are legitimate reasons, as I mentioned: abuse, physical

or whatever - you can't expect a woman to live in that situation, or even, for that matter, a man. But do you think those were the cases that Paul was instituting in Corinth? I don't think they were at all, as a matter of fact the likelihood is that they were probably immoral cases where there was so much lust and sexual immorality and fornication that Paul has been dealing with already, and ritual prostitution, that the likelihood was that a woman could actually want to be separated from her husband in the sense of a sexual separation to perform ritual prostitution - and we know that these Corinthians believers faced this temptation. The other alternative explanation could also be that there were those who were saying: 'Well, I'm a Christian and surely it's better not to get involved with sexual matters because in my unconverted past they were source of real sin and condemnation to me. Therefore, would it not be better for me to just cut these off totally and to divorce my husband even though he's a Christian?'

Paul says to both those situations: 'Even if your wife or your husband is tempted to go into this sexual ritual of worship in the pagan world, you're to stay with them as long as you can', and even in the other alternative, if you're wanting to cut off all relationships with your husband or wife because you feel that it's marked of your past, you're not to depart, not to separate from your spouse. Do you not think that if Paul was believing that there were grounds, as many say there are grounds to divorce on the ground of adultery and fornication, do you not think Paul would have brought this exception clause in here in the Corinthian situation? Do you not think he would say: 'Yes, it's OK if they've committed fornication, or if they've committed adultery'? But the point that Paul is wanting to bring across to these believers is the permanency of marriage. The question that we ask is the wrong question, it shouldn't be: 'When am I allowed to get divorced? Can I get remarried?', the question ought to be, long ago, 'Am I marrying the right person?' - because this thing is permanent!

Young people, I address you, and I'm not trying to condemn those who have been divorced or remarried, I'm chiefly trying to instruct our young people - as you will hear in marriage vows and ceremonies over and over again - this is not to be entered lightly or unadvisedly because of its permanency! Paul says to a woman who perhaps has a temptation to leave her husband: 'Stay as you are, with one concession, if things get so difficult you have to leave, and if you leave you're to remain unmarried' - that's black and white, I hope you can see that.

But he answers the second question saying that a husband must not divorce the wife: 'Let him not put her away'. It's a different word, the word for 'divorce', and really the first lesson that we get here is that there is a responsibility that's mutual in marriage. It's not just the responsibility of the wife to stay maybe in a difficult situation, and I'm not saying how difficult that situation can get - and we all know that in marriage we all will have difficult situations at some time or another, and if we're honest we may even admit that there's times we would like to get out. That's not speaking personally, by the way, just in case you quote me!

What Paul is making clear is: separation is undesirable, but it is permitted. But in verse 11 divorce is prohibited. Can you see the difference here? These two words that are used, they are different. The word for 'separation', there's a concession; but with regards to divorce it's just a clean break of prohibition: 'Let not the husband put away his wife'. It is concurrent with Mark chapter 10, Luke chapter 16, that tell us that marriage is permanent and that divorce is not for the child of God. There is significance in the fact that Paul doesn't quote from Matthew chapter 5, where there is the exception clause: 'except for the case of fornication'. Why does he not quote from Matthew 5, or Matthew 19 where it's repeated? Well it's significant that he doesn't do this, and it's so significant in the light that in chapter 5 of Corinthians he was dealing with a case of fornication, and in chapter 6 he's dealing with the theories and teachings with regard to fornication - you'd think it would be common sense when he enters into the realm of divorce, that he would bring the exception clause in 'except for fornication' - but he doesn't!

Why doesn't he? He doesn't because it is irrelevant to this particular situation. It's irrelevant to the discussion because Matthew's exception clause, as Matthew's gospel is primarily to the Jews so is that statement, and it



speaks of a time, I believe, in the betrothal period which is a bit like our engagement period, where there was a covenant entered into which was almost akin to 100% marriage but it wasn't quite there, the consummation of the marriage still had to happen. But if the wife was found to be unfaithful in that betrothal period, the husband had grounds to terminate the covenant and officially have a divorce, and it was purely Jewish. That's why Matthew writes it to the Jewish mind, but when Paul comes now to speak to Corinthians where fornication is rife inside and outside of marriage, he leaves the exception clause out - why? Because it's Jewish! Because, for the Gentile believer, there is no exception to marriage, but marriage is permanent. When you consider that many of these pagans, even those who were converted, were going to pagan ritual prostitutes and committing fornication probably, Paul would have had every right if there was an exception to come in and say: 'These fornicators, you've got grounds to divorce them' - but he didn't do it! The Lord's command, and Paul is only reiterating what the Lord says, is that marriage is permanent, and God hates divorce - as Malachi 2:16 says.

He addresses the unmarried and the widows, he addresses the subject of divorce, and then he comes in and speaks into mixed marriages in verses 12 to 16. In verses 12 to 14 there's a Christian converted, this is the scenario, after he is married to an unbeliever he gets saved, and his partner is willing to continue with him. So this man gets saved after he is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever wants to stay with him. In verses 15 to 16 you have a different scenario: a Christian who gets saved, but their partner is not willing to continue the marriage. Now Paul address this and says: 'Now speak I, not the Lord' - now that doesn't mean that what Paul is going to say isn't worth the paper it's written on. It doesn't mean it doesn't have any authority, but what he's saying is that the Lord in Mark chapter 10 didn't deal with this type of problem, so I'm not quoting any passage - which proves that he was quoting Mark chapter 10 before - he says: 'I'm not quoting a command of the Lord, but I'm giving you advice', and as we look at verse 40 we see that that advice is from the Lord, because all Scripture is God breathed: 'But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God'. He's showing that what he says comes from God, but it's something that the Lord Himself didn't cover in His teaching upon the earth.

But it is the same advice...he's giving the same advice to the first couple and the second couple. The man who gets saved after he's married and his wife wants to stay with him, what does Paul say? 'Stay as you are', but there is one concession: that couple - the guy gets converted after marriage, and Paul says 'Stay as you are', but the other person that's not saved doesn't want to stay in a marriage, but Paul says that's the only concession, the only concession. Let's look at it in a bit more detail so that we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. He says: 'But to the rest', verse 12, that means all the circumstances that he hasn't already covered in unmarried and widows, and those are thinking of divorcing their husbands. Here is a situation that's different. Now you've got to note couple of things, and I know we're being very detailed tonight, but this is important. You've got to notice that the situations in these verses are dependent upon the attitude of the unbelieving partner. It is not the Christian who's deciding whether to stay or not with a non-Christian, it's the non-Christian who's deciding whether to stay or whether to go. There is no insinuation that it is expected that a Christian should think of divorce!

I hope you can see that. The possibility of divorce lies only with the unbeliever in these verses. In verse 14 Paul gives the reason why they should stay as they are: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy'. Here's the reason why the Christian should remain married: because their husband or wife, who is an unbeliever, is made holy, is sanctified. The likelihood is that some of these over-zealous Christians in Corinth were saying: 'I've got to get divorced now, because I'm a Christian and my husband's not, so we've got to sever this bond. It's an unequal yoke'. Remember that they were married before they were converted, and then there's the other ones who are saying: 'Well, perhaps my wife or my husband is still engaged in this pagan ritualistic immoral fornicatory worship, I have to divorce them!'.

What does Paul say? 'Stay as you are' - why? What's the grounds? Here's the grounds: literally in the Greek 'sanctified is the unbelieving husband', and 'sanctified is the unbelieving wife'. They are sanctified! Even if your husband or wife is an unbeliever and you're saved, they are sanctified in you - now that doesn't mean they're saved, it doesn't even mean spiritual progressive sanctification that you have in the Christian life, but it's taking the naked word 'sanctified' in its literal meaning 'to set apart' - they are set apart in you! Because of that it makes them different, they are set apart socially. If I could illustrate it like this, say Thorndyke Street - I don't know who lives there, whether there's any believers live in Thorndyke Street - but take for instance that Thorndyke Street was more pagan than it already is, and there wasn't a believer in it. Then all of a sudden Sammy gets saved, gloriously saved, and he is the only one in his house that's saved - Paul is saying that his wife, even though she's a pagan, and still worshipping her pagan gods, is set apart. She's different now because her husband is saved, and he goes on to say even their children are different, they're set apart. He says that their children are holy.

Now what this simply is is holiness by association, you find it in Exodus 29:37 where the altar of God is described as most holy, and then Moses adds 'whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy' - whatsoever associates with the altar shall be holy. Now here's the train of thought that Paul is bringing to us tonight: if your wife is set apart, even though she's a pagan, even though she's maybe worshipping her pagan gods in awful rituals, there's no need to put her away or to separate from her because she is sanctified in the Lord. Now this is important, because many godly men and scholars who try to tell us that it's legitimate to be divorced as a Christian and then remarried, use Old Testament passages to prove this to us. They say that there are times in the Old Testament where God commanded His people to divorce, and that is true. God commanded His people in Ezra chapter 9 verses 1 and 2 to divorce the wives that they took from the false tribes they were forbidden to marry from. You find it in chapter 10 as well, they were told to divorce them; in the book of the Nehemiah you find exactly the same thing in chapter 13 - and they say: 'There it is, that there are some times that God allowed divorce'. But you can't use that as an example! Because these people were in an unequal yoke, but we are now in the New Testament and Paul is saying by revelation that in the New Testament, even when there's a husband saved and a wife not, that the wife is sanctified by the husband and they are made holy by association and there's no need to separate, there's no need to divorce!

The situation has changed, and if I could be pastoral just for a moment, does that not encourage your heart, dear soul? If you're married to an unbeliever, that if you were under law you would be cursed, but under grace you're blessed and your husband's blessed too and your wife, and your wee children also, because of Christ. Isn't that marvellous? My friend, we have to get to the bottom of this because there is a lot of confusion about it. In verse 15 Paul really ties the whole matter up, he says: 'But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart' - if the unbelieving separate, is the word, let him separate. So here you have the believer, but the unbelieving partner wants to terminate and finish the marriage and leave. They are determined on separation, and if that's the case, Paul says: 'You've got to put up with it, there's nothing you can do about it'.

Now I think what's being talked about here concerning the word is 'separation', but we live in a situation today where you're divorced and you can do nothing about it. We have to address and apply these Scriptures to these situations, but what is amazing to me as I've been studying today is the amount of expositors that assume that this expression 'not under bondage' is legitimate proof to say that you're allowed after a divorce to get remarried, if you've been deserted by another party that you're free to marry. The opening statement in verse 15, now I'm going to clear this up hopefully tonight - I'm sure not for everybody, but I'm going to try my best - verse 15: 'But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart'. Now there again is the inference, what is it Paul has been saying right along? 'Stay as you are'. Hasn't that been the point all along? Stay as you are - if they depart, let them, and stay as you are.

But he goes on: 'A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace'. He's not enslaved, and so, scholars say, this means that he is no longer under the marriage bond and he's free

to get married again. Now you see this word 'enslaved', it is derived from the word 'doulos' in Greek, and if you go right throughout your whole New Testament every time Paul uses it it's used in a figurative sense. The ordinary word that Paul uses for a marriage bond is not the word derived from 'doulos', but it is a word 'deo', that's the word he uses when he's talking about a legal ritualistic dutiful bond of marriage - but that is not the word he's using here. Let me prove this to you, because later on in this chapter he uses the word for the bondage of marriage, verse 39: 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if he be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord'. So there is the marriage bondage, if you like, legally and spiritually in the eyes of God; and the only way that can be dissolved is at death.

But that's not the word Paul is using for 'enslaved' here, let me prove to you again - Romans chapter 7 and verse 2: 'For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law', 'deo' again, the word for the legal, spiritual covenant of marriage. But this is not the same word that Paul is using in 1 Corinthians 7. In fact, this is the only time that Paul ever uses the word in relation to marriage here. Here it is, but it doesn't mean that once you're divorced you're free to marry again - the point is that you're not bound to maintain a marriage when a partner has deserted you, you not to try and make them stay with you, and try and convert them for the rest of your life. You can't restrain your spouse from departing from you, and in that case you're not bound to be enslaved to some kind of mechanical retention at all costs of a relationship that is totally abandoned.

Anyway, the word that is used for separation is not 'divorce', the word in verse 13 is 'to divorce', the word in verse 15 is 'separate' with regards to both husband and wife. Divorce is not in view. But here's the question: even if divorce was meant in that verse, to read into this phrase 'under bondage' that you're allowed to remarry is not only fanciful exegesis, but I would say to you it's irresponsible practice, because you're building on one little word that is disputed the whole marriage institution of divorced people getting remarried again. In my humble estimation that is a tragedy, if all you've got is a misinterpretation of one word in 1 Corinthians 7, and I believe that's all they have.

Add to that the fact that church leaders of the first five centuries, 500 years, with the exception of one, taught that 1 Corinthians 7 verse 15 does not permit remarriage to believers who are deserted. If you weren't convinced, the end of verse 15 says: 'God has called us to peace'. It's referring to all these matters of mixed marriage, that peace is to be the common denominator. Whether the partner that's living with you is willing to stay with you, you're to live with them in peace and let them remain, you're not to push them out - that's the point. But equally so, if the other partner refuses to stay with you you're not to try and coerce them against peace to stay when they're determined to leave, but you're to live in peace whatever the case is and only separate if necessary.

The chief reason to do this is found in verse 16: 'For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?'. Is that not encouraging to you who are married to an unbeliever? To know that, I'm not saying you should put up with things that are criminal and illegal and absolutely unforgivable, don't misunderstand me and don't twist my words - but I am saying that you know and I know that people who live with unconverted folk have to put up with an awful lot at times. But isn't good to know that what you put up with could lead to the salvation of your husband or wife?

Now give me a couple of minutes as I conclude tonight. This passage has been misused and abused to mistreat people who are divorced, people who are remarried, and treat them like lepers. I want to challenge this assembly that we are not to shun people like this or look down on them, and we have a challenge today more than ever in the climate that we live in to deal with these problems and apply these Scriptures to our contemporary situation. We must honour the biblical principles and apply them to our changing world today, and I want to say this clearly: divorce and remarriage is not the unpardonable sin! It's not! Whether before

conversion or after conversion! What I don't want to come across as saying is that in some way everything else is almost forgivable, but this is not forgivable - that's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that we must resist the current itch in evangelicalism to find proof texts where they cannot be found to legitimise divorce and remarriage among children of God, and it is rife today more than it has ever been. We must do what Paul was doing, what our Lord was doing: holding forth the ideal of marriage for our young people, who are now being conditioned to think that in certain circumstances I can get out of it and I can start all over again! We do them a great disservice. What the world needs to see is what these texts are teaching us: that when we are converted, that in whatever state we find ourselves - single, widowed, married, divorced - we are to stay as we are when we received the calling of God, and glorify God in it, even if our partner is unsaved and God alone knows perhaps one day they may be saved.

A lady had an unbelieving husband, she tried her best in every way and she sought advice of her Pastor. She said: 'I've done all to persuade him but to know effect'. He said: 'Madam, talk more to God about your husband and less to your husband about God'. It's not either or you know, both are necessary - but what will speak to your unbelieving husband, and what will speak loudest to an unbelieving world, is Christian marriages that hold together and don't look for divorce.

Father, we come before Thee tonight, and Lord we pray for each head bowed here - those in marriages and those outside marriages. We pray for those who have been divorced, and Lord we do want them to know that we love them, and we don't in anyway look down upon them - for many of them it was not their fault. Our Father, we live in an awful day where people are being hurt round about by immorality on every side. Lord, we want to love those folk and care for those folk, and even folk who are remarried - Lord, we don't condemn anybody, but we are seeking to walk in Thy word and according to Thy will. We pray especially for these young people here tonight, that those who are married and those who are considering marriage will not enter it lightly or unadvisedly, but with due consideration they will realise the permanence of it in the eyes of Almighty God. Lord, help us in our marriages - we pray for the single folk here and the widows who are trying to walk a path of purity that is very difficult at times. We just pray that all of us will put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, for Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 18*

## *"Stay As You Are"*

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### **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

- 1. *The Guiding Principle (verse 17)***
- 2. *Applied To Jewish Rites (verses 18-19)***
- 3. *Applied To Social Status (verses 20-24)***

**W**hen we embarked upon this chapter 7, we embarked, as it were, upon a sub-series found within this book. There are many different issues addressed by the great apostle in 1 Corinthians, that's why it's so interesting - at least I think it's interesting, I don't know about you - these Monday nights, I hope you do. There is so much covered in one particular book, but in chapter 7 we have been slowing down, as it were, in order to really get everything that Paul is saying concerning marriage, relationships, celibacy, single life, those who are divorced, whether it is legitimate to be remarried, and also those who are widowed, and those we will be looking at later on who are virgins, and what they ought to do with regards to the things of God concerning the situations in which they find themselves in these personal relationships. So we'll be looking these weeks at marriage matters, and we'll be doing that, I think, for a week or two yet - but tonight I want to home in on the real principle that is behind all that Paul says, because we found out in the last study two weeks ago when we looked quite considerably at the subject of divorce, that the principle that was coming out from everything that Paul said and the varying situations that Paul addressed, the one principal was: stay as you are. It is better to stay as you are than alter your circumstances.

So we're going to look at a few verses tonight that really, if you like, unpack that principle behind all that Paul says in this chapter. We begin reading at verse 17 through to 24: "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God".

'The grass is greener on the other side' is a condition that many of us fall foul of in our lifetime at sometime or another. I don't know whether there's anybody here this evening suffering from this. When we think of it in the context of relationships and marriage and so on, and even some of the things that Paul touches in these verses that we've just read, perhaps there are some gathered with us this evening saying: 'Well, I wish I wasn't married, I wish I'd never got married'. That would be a terrible thing to say, wouldn't it? But you know, there may be times that even in the context of what Paul says, that it's easier at times to serve the Lord, and some of you may be tempted to say: 'Well, if I didn't have the ties, the restrictions of a family home, a wife, children, a husband, well, I could be on the mission field or something, or I could be an evangelist roaming from house-to-house and hedge-to-hedge with the Gospel'. Some could say the opposite: 'Well, I feel I'm left on the shelf, and I wish I were married - oh, if there was anything I would want, I would long to be married'.

Paul talks about slaves and masters in this passage, and perhaps some people are saying: 'Well, I wish I was unemployed, I wish I hadn't work to go to in the morning'. Or maybe you're unemployed, and you think: 'Well, I wish I was employed, I really want to be employed', and you're obsessed by this. Maybe you're obsessed by the job that you have, getting promotion within it; or maybe you would long for a better job, or a job that you have true satisfaction in - and maybe the whole motivation for that is because you just would like a bit more money to buy some of the possessions you want, to have a more luxurious and affluent lifestyle.

Now we have to be careful to say that some of those things are wrong, not all of those things are wrong - but what is wrong, according to the New Testament, is to be preoccupied with those things, to let those things take over your life so much so that all that you think about is those things, and you begin to change your external circumstances to achieve your one purpose and prime goal in life, no matter what that is. But what is definitely wrong is if you go further, just like the Corinthians did, and if you make the conclusion and the equation: 'Well, if I only wasn't married, then I would be more spiritual', or 'If I was married', or 'If I was married to a better Christian they would encourage me in the faith and I would be more spiritual', or 'If I wasn't married to a non-Christian the way I am, perhaps I would be able to be more spiritual and have a more spiritual home. If my husband was saved, perhaps if I went to a better church, if I had more of an education, if I had more money, if I had more things going for me I might be more spiritual for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the furtherance of His Gospel'.

That was akin to what the Corinthians were saying, and they made a fatal mistake - not only to say those things, but they went a little bit further to drastically change their external circumstances in order to bring these things into being which they thought would make them more spiritual. This was the Corinthian problem. Equally today, some try and change society around us. They make the equation in their minds: 'Well, if only I could infiltrate society, even as a Christian, and change society - relieve poverty, help the sick, go to the land where there there's famine and bring aid to them - well then I would contribute a little bit more and it would make me more spiritual, and it would make the world a better place'. Now both of these scenarios are fatal for the spiritual life and for your growth in maturity, because both of them miss the fundamental point of why the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. The Lord Jesus did not come to earth to instigate external societal revolution in this world, but the Lord Jesus came into the world in order to instigate spiritual revelation in the hearts and in the lives of individuals.

Now don't misunderstand me this evening: although we seek as much as we can to influence always for the good and for the right wherever we are found in life from day-to-day, I hope none of us are foolish enough to think that we in some way can turn the world upside-down to such an extent that we change fundamentally and philosophically this world system. You cannot do it! Even when the Lord Jesus Christ was face-to-face with Pilate in John chapter 18, He confessed to Pilate that that was not His goal in coming to earth. He said: 'My kingdom is not of this world'. Although there is coming a day when His kingdom will come upon the earth in fulfilment of prophetic Scriptures, the Lord Jesus in His first advent had come to set up a kingdom in men's hearts, not to change or instigate some external changes and revolutions in society and in the institutions and governments of our world - but rather to penetrate the hearts, the personal lives of individuals, and change that way.

I believe personally that Christianity cannot help but radically affect society in which Christians are living, and that ought to always be the case - institutions ought to be affected when Christians are living within a generation. But what we cannot fail to miss is that the primary purpose of the Gospel is internal, a change from within that affects without. Now what I want you to see this evening is that the Corinthians were trying to change their external circumstances to affect themselves internally. They thought that by changing their externalities they could become more spiritual. So what was happening was, the married were saying: 'Well, if I could just get a justification for getting a divorce and not been married, well then I'd be freed from all the

sexual temptations that I have believed from my past life is so terribly sinful, and I could be freed to be holy and righteous for the Lord'. Those who were slaves were saying: 'Well, I don't believe it's right that I should be a slave. I'm told that I'm now free in the liberty with which Christ has made me free, and to be no longer entangled with the yoke of bondage - so how can slavery be right?'. Slaves were beginning to seek emancipation, and seeking what they saw as their human rights.

What we've got to see tonight from the teaching of Paul is that Christianity has not been brought to this world by the Lord Jesus Christ to destroy governments, to destroy societies, or to break up families. Don't misunderstand me, the Lord Jesus said that He had come to bring a sword, the Lord Jesus said that He had come to put at variance a husband and wife, and a son and a daughter; but that is the default if you like, that is the fallout and the overflow, the effect of what the Gospel does - but that is not the primary purpose of the Gospel, the primary purpose of the Gospel is to change individuals, not to change countries or to change governments or to change whole families all at once, but to work on the individual. The main point of what Paul is bringing to us through this passage is: Christians can be Christians anywhere in any situation - and although Christianity ought to bring, when Christians are living in a society, better government, better society, better families; the main point of what Paul is saying being Christian really means is that you can be a Christian anywhere in any situation, even if the government, the institutions and your family is not changed.

You see you can be a Christian in a dictatorship, and you can also be a Christian, as you know, in a democracy - but you can even be a Christian in anarchy, when everything is against you, against government, against civilisation. You can be a Christian if you're a man, you can be a Christian if you're woman, you can be a Christian if you're a child, if you're an adult, if you're married, if you're single, if you're divorced, if you're a Jew, if you're a Gentile, if you're a slave, if you're free you can be a Christian! Even though those external circumstances are not altered you still can be a child of God. If you live in Iraq you can be a Christian as well as you can live in the United Kingdom and be a Christian, in Vietnam or in China, in Germany or in Dublin. Paul is saying: whatever you are, wherever you are, you can live, exist as a Christian.

Now please do not misunderstand what Paul is saying, and what I'm expounding this evening: he's not in any shape or form justifying corrupt governments or immoral societies - in fact one day God's going to come and judge societies and corrupt governments. He is saying that the Gospel is not to revolutionise social institutions, rather to revolutionise men's hearts and affect society, if necessary, through that. Christianity doesn't mean that you cease to be a husband, or you cease to be a slave; but Christianity means you become better husband, you become a better wife, you become a better slave or son or daughter or citizen or student, or whatever you are. In other words, this Gospel is so radical and so powerful that it can be planted and take root anywhere across the face of the globe, no matter what is going against it! Isn't that tremendous? That where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound - and no matter how deep-dyed your sinful background is, praise God: anyone, and I say that, anyone can be a Christian! You don't have to engineer external circumstances before you come to Christ - it's just as well, because I don't think any of us here tonight would have been taken in by Him if that was the case.

So Paul begins here in this paragraph, and you would almost think he was digressing from off the main track of talking about marriage - and that is true of the content. He has digressed to talk about those circumcised Jews, uncircumcised Gentiles and slaves - and although he has digressed with the content, the overall concern is still the same and we'll see that. If you look at verse 15, Paul was talking about the mixed marriage, in other words a Christian married to a non-Christian. They got married and they were both non-Christians, and then one of them was converted, and there was this situation where one was saved and one was not. Paul says in verse 15: 'But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace'. In other words, if you get converted and your wife or your husband is not converted, you're to seek to live with them in harmony and peace; and if that is not

possible, the partner wants to leave and separate, you're to allow them to separate from you - but the common denominator, and the fundamental operating factor is this: that we are to live in peace.

If you become a Christian and you want to push them away because they're not a Christian, that is not living in peace - that's a recipe for war and dissension! But equally so, if they want to leave you, they want to live their own life, you're to let them go the Bible says, because that will be the only way to have peace. Now as Paul moves on from that idea of a mixed marriage, he impacts this principle: God has called us to peace. Now he picks up that theme and he presses it home, and this is the point that controls everything throughout this whole chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians. Let me show you this, remember the slogan that the Corinthians were crying in verse 1: 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman'. Some of them are married, and because of their promiscuity before marriage and even their adultery during marriage, they decided: 'Now we're converted we can't have anything to do with sexual relationships whatsoever', and they tried to sever the relationship they were in. Or, if I could put it like this to you: they sought to change their present status, and they sought to do this because they believed it would be more spiritual not to be married.

'I'm spiritual', they concluded, 'now therefore I shouldn't be in a relationship that I deem to be unspiritual'. So they saw the status of marriage, some others saw the status of celibacy, as having more religious and spiritual significance, so they sought after it to change their situation to be more spiritual. They were forced to drastic action because of this teaching they were imbibing. But Paul comes along, and has already done this, but he's really nailing it now, and brings this spiritual principle to them: stay as you are - in order to bring to their minds and hearts the true perspective of what spirituality really is. He comes to them and says: 'You say, well we've got to get divorced because we're married, and we don't think that's spiritual', other ones say: 'Well, we're going to stay celibate even though we're roaring with sexual passion, can't control our actions, because we believe it's more spiritual' - and Paul comes in and he says: 'Remain in whatever social setting you have been in at the time of your conversion'. Have you got that? Remain in whatever social setting you were found in at the time of your call.

Now let's break this up to make it more simple: God's call to be in Christ, in other words when you're saved and you hear that call of God's Holy Spirit, and you answer that invitation of grace, that salvation experience transcends the setting in which you were found at that time. What do I mean? Well, if you were an adulterer like some of these, if you were a fornicator like some of these, no matter what your background was - a thief, a murder, an extortioner, you know the list that we've come across in this epistle - that conversion experience transcends all that. When you're forgiven your calling in Christ transcends the settings and the circumstances that you were found in. But Paul tells us that not only does it transcend those circumstances, but it makes them irrelevant! Paul is saying that conversion creates such a change in the relationship that we have with God, one minute being in darkness, the next being in light; one minute being an enemy of God, the next being a friend and a son of God; that we don't need to change any of our relationships with people. Because the relationship with God has been changed so drastically we don't need to start changing our externalities around us in our settings and our circumstances. You see, even our relationships are transformed in conversion!

You might think: 'What's this boy talking about? He's going down a line here that I've never heard of'. Well, look at verse 14, you remember this mixed marriage - one's converted, one's not converted - here is the principle: 'the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy'. Here's this husband saved perhaps the wife's not saved, but the wife is sanctified now in her husband, the children are now made holy in the home - they're not saved, they're not going to heaven, but because of this transcending relationship where we are transformed when we're converted into Christ, it affects our relationships without us having to do anything about it! Do you see that? You don't need to divorce the wife to make her sanctified or to make you



sanctified. You don't need to shun your children and throw them out the door, but conversion has actually changed the circumstances that you are in when you were converted!

Now why does Paul say that? This is why he says it: because you're no better off in one condition or the other. Remember we saw this in the week we spoke about celibacy and singleness? He said it's good, it is morally good for a man not to touch a woman, to remain single; but it's equally morally good to be married. One is not better than the other, one is not more spiritual than the other, and he's saying exactly the same thing here: when you're converted the relationships that you are in when you are converted are affected by your conversion, so much so that even if you weren't married to an unbeliever, even if your children weren't saved, one is not better than the other! Have you got it? It's understandable, but perhaps you envy the little Christian home - your wife or your husband is not saved, or some of your children are not saved, and you envy that, and you really feel: 'Oh, the grass is greener on that side, that's for sure'. Well, I know that desire is worthy, and I encourage you to pray for their salvation of course - but don't for one minute think that you in some way are less spiritual, and that you would be more spiritual if you had the opposite scenario! That was the mistake that they were making.

So Paul moves now from this mixed marriage to illustrate it in two other times of social conditions. He talks about circumcision and he talks about the slave. I believe that the lack of passion when he's describing these two things shows that it wasn't really a problem in Corinth, circumcision and uncircumcision, maybe slavery was a bit of a problem but I don't think it was too big a problem, because Paul's lack of passion shows me that he's only using these things as an illustration - it's as if they're already convinced about these other things, and he's using them being convinced on these things to convince them that they don't need to affect their external circumstances with regards specifically to marriage. So, the issue of concern for the Corinthians was: 'Well, we have to change our status, we have to change our situation and our circumstances', and so Paul comes and gives them an example of Judaism and the Gentiles, slaves and masters, and he comes and enshrines his whole argument in this phrase: 'Stay as you are', or a better translation, 'Remain as you were when you were called in Christ'.

Look at verse 17: 'But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk', that word 'walk' could be translated 'let him remain as he was when he was called in Christ'. He opens the paragraph with this statement 'let him remain'; he concludes the two illustrations, circumcision in verse 20, with that same statement; and in verse 24 he closes the whole thing by saying: 'Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide'. So I hope you're beginning to see the principle, but let's tease it out a bit more - first of all the guiding principle in verse 17. This is very easy to understand, he's saying simply: 'Live out your Christian lives in the situation where God called you, because those things are relevant to your life in Christ'. Can I put it like this, here's a paraphrase of it: 'Do not be in a hurry to change the external circumstances of your life simply because you have become a Christian' - have you got it? Don't be in a hurry to change your external circumstances, because now that you're saved your setting has become relevant to your Christianity - and the fact is this, reading between the lines, God in His sovereignty has saved you at that moment in time, in that situation, to be in that scenario for your good and the good of others.

The theme in these verses is very clear that it's the word 'calling' that's right throughout the whole passage that is central to his argument. Let me outline what he means in this. First of all 'calling' describes conversion. Remember in chapter 1 verse 9: 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' - it speaks of the conversion experience. That is chiefly what this definition is within this passage. Therefore Paul is saying that when you were called, when you were saved, that call came to you as an individual personality in a given social setting. I don't know what your job is, I don't know what you were dabbling in, I don't know what your personal relationship was in the home or with a partner or whatever it may be - but in verse 18 twice, in verse 21 and 22 twice, he uses this word emphatically 'calling', to mean 'you were converted'. So when God called you and saved you in your various situations and settings,

when He saves you He renders those situations now irrelevant. In other words, it doesn't matter what your situation is, 'for when God calls you', he says, 'you're to remain in that situation'. Change is not necessary! 'Stay as you are' is the principle.

Why does he say that? Simply because you are able to live the Christian life in whatever setting the call of God took place on your life. On the other hand, because those settings are irrelevant, if they do change, a change takes place that's out of your control, or it's better for a change to take place at some time, that too is irrelevant. It's not a rule, black-and-white, but God is just saying: 'When I called you, I've called you in a particular certain situation and scenario, it's better that for the meantime you stay in that situation and don't drastically change your circumstances'. What you're not to do is seek a change as though it will have some kind of spiritual significance - Paul says it does not. Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying, or misquote me, I'm not talking about that if you were a prostitute before you were converted, that when you're converted and God calls you you stay a prostitute, or a drunkard, or a pimp, or a racketeer, or a drug dealer, or doubtful occupations - Paul is not talking here about things that are inherently immoral, he's talking about neutral situations, domestic situations. He's talking here in a passage about marriage! That when you are called by God you are to stay in the calling that you are in, provided it's not sinful, not drastically change your circumstances or situations with the motivation that you think that you'll become more spiritual!

Paul is saying that God, by calling you in a situation, He is actually calling you to that situation - are you understanding this? The situation becomes sanctified to you, you don't need to change it! Just like the mixed marriage of the Christian husband and the Christian wife, you don't need to change your wife to one that is a Christian, she is sanctified because of what has happened to you. In a sense this means, as far as I can see, with regards to culture, custom and work that there's nothing secular any more to the believer - you can't divide the secular from the spiritual, but everything becomes spiritual to you and sanctified to you because of your changed relationship with God! The Christian life, Paul is saying, can be lived out successfully where you are when you were called - you don't have to make drastic changes like divorcing your wife, or going into a monastery, or getting circumcised if you weren't before, or deciding: 'Well, I've had enough time as a slave, and I'm a Christian now, I've got rights so I'm going to get rid of this slavery and be emancipated'.

Paul wants them to see that your faith in Christ gives significance to your social setting, the time and the place that you were saved - you don't need to change! I hope you're understanding me and not misunderstanding me, but I'm bringing this to you not to confuse you but to encourage you, and even to emancipate you. If you've been under some kind of guilt and cloud of: 'Och, if I had this', or 'If I was like this', or 'If my situation and my home scenario was like this I would be more spiritual, I would be better and more effective for God' - that is nonsense! Don't be running around trying to change your external situations with the preoccupation that you're going to become more spiritual, because it doesn't work like that! Paul is saying that it doesn't matter if you have that thing or don't have that thing, it doesn't make one iota of difference with God.

Now that is the guiding principle, I hope that's hammered out enough. But now he comes and he applies it to Jewish rites, or maybe it would be better in hindsight 'racial ties' - verses 18 and 19. Now he's not talking in a religious sense about circumcision, he's talking socially about the Jews and Gentiles: 'Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised'. Paul is saying that the Gospel eliminates the situation in which you were saved, have you got that? If you were a Jew and you get saved it's irrelevant whether you were circumcised or not, it's irrelevant, the Gospel transcends all that - you don't need to go and get uncircumcised. If you're a Gentile and you're saved, that's the situation in which God called you, so you stay as a Gentile, you don't try and be a Jew!

In chapter 12 we'll see this in weeks to come, verse 13, Paul outlined this very clearly spiritually: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and

have been all made to drink into one Spirit'. There's now no distinctions socially among those who are saved, the Gospel has transcended all of that and made it totally irrelevant. If you are circumcised when you were called, don't become uncircumcised, and vice versa. You might say: 'Well, that can hardly happen, if you're circumcised to become uncircumcised' - well, believe it or not, it was happening in Paul's day. There was a surgical procedure to reverse circumcision, do you know why? Because some of the Jewish businessmen, when they were in the baths with Gentiles, felt inferior, and they wanted to be like those who were 'in the world'. So they were changing their situations, the Judiasers were coming into the church and saying: 'You need to keep the law, you need to keep religious Jewish rites and be circumcised', and Gentiles after conversion were being circumcised - Paul says circumcision means nothing, as well as uncircumcision!

Don't misunderstand me again, we're talking spiritually here. It means nothing to God whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, I'm not talking prophetically here I'm talking in the light of the salvation of grace and the age of grace. It doesn't matter to God, but that doesn't mean that you cease to be a Jew or a Gentile when you get saved. I was talking to a man recently and he had an argument with a man who said once a Jew is converted he ceases to be a Jew - that's exactly what Paul is saying is not happening! That doesn't happen, you still are ethnically a Jew and racially a Jew, but what Paul is saying is: it's irrelevant spiritually what nationality you are, what you are socially doesn't matter to God, and that's why you don't need to change it, you don't need to affect any external changes in your circumstances. Changing doesn't make a difference, it wasn't a religious point it's a social point.

It's interesting that he makes no exceptions here as he does in the rest of the passage, because there are no exceptions to the Gospel - you're either saved or lost. What you are socially or racially or ethnically doesn't mean one pick or iota of credit with God. It's a gospel of grace, and that's why Paul was so hard and determined on it. You might say to me: 'In Acts 16 verse 3 Paul got Timothy circumcised', that's right, he did! Do you know why he got him circumcised? He got him circumcised for a pragmatic reason, because those he was going to witness to wouldn't have even listened to Timothy. But then, when there are Jews saying: 'Well, it does affect you spiritually whether you're circumcised or not', when the Jews started to make it of religious significance whether to do this or not, Paul is vehement in his opposition of it. He's not making rules here, he's not saying you can't do it and you can do it, he's saying make sure you don't do it - whether it's getting married or not married, becoming a slave or not a slave, becoming circumcised or not circumcised, Jew or Gentile - don't do it if you think it's going to make you more spiritual, because it's not!

I wish we had the time to look at Galatians, because it's all outlined there, but what Paul is just saying is that it doesn't count spiritually. Verse 19: 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God'. How astounding! If you were a Jew, and you heard this great Jew, Paul the apostle, speaking and saying: 'Circumcision is nothing', you would be devastated! Because for the Jew, circumcision was everything - it was a sign of God's covenant with His people, but Paul could see the danger it was to the gospel of grace, and I believe the Corinthians were able to see it - that's why he's using this example. It's a danger, you're not to see this as making you more spiritual. Now Paul says: 'You can see that, can't you, Corinthians? Now apply it to marriage, now apply it to your relationships - here it is: marriage is nothing, celibacy is nothing, because they all belong to the categories that are irrelevant!'

Paul doesn't want to be misunderstood, like I don't, but he often was, and I'm sure I will be too! He says at the end: 'but the keeping of the commandments of God' - now that doesn't mean circumcision or uncircumcision, it's a bad translation. What it's saying is this: what really counts is not circumcision or uncircumcision, not the sociological conditions, but what counts is the commandments of God! He sees the commandments of God not as the ritualistic ceremonial keeping of the law, but rather as the ethical life of the blameless, perfect believer in holiness and righteousness of God in a world that is dying and damned - that's what he sees as important! You see, the danger was that these antinomian Christians in Corinth, that means people that didn't believe in the law - in other words, they thought they could do absolutely

everything, every sin going - he didn't want to give them some kind of a licence and say: 'Well, it doesn't matter whether you keep the commandments of God or not'. He wants them to know that these ritual things are irrelevant, the situations you find yourself in when you're saved are irrelevant - but that doesn't negate us from keeping the commandments of God as Christians.

Then after he applies this to Jewish racial ties, he applies it to the social situation in verses 20 to 24. Again 'calling' here doesn't mean if you're called to be a slave, in other words that's your calling and vocation - that's not what it means, it means if you're called to be a Christian when you're a slave, that's the sense of the Greek there. You're to live out your Christian calling in Christ in the situation of your calling vocationally, where God has called you in Christ, you're to stay in that situation because your Christian faith sanctifies your vocational calling. Notice the difference of how he says this here, he doesn't say 'Stay as you are', but he says 'Don't let it trouble you'. If you're called in the Lord being a servant, verse 21, 'care not for it' - that doesn't mean 'don't care two hoots about it', it means don't be anxious, don't let the thing trouble you that you're now a Christian and you're also still a slave.

Why does he not say 'stay as you are'? Simply because you have no choice but to stay as you are if you're a slave, it's not in your hands, it's in your master's hands. But what Paul is saying is: whether he lets you free, or whether he keeps you, don't let it trouble you. It's the same point made in a different way, but he gives an exception and he says, verse 21: 'but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather'. In other words, if you're a slave and you're kept a slave, well don't worry about it, be content; but if you're made free use the opportunity for freedom for the best of your ability. So you see that this is the rule that he's laying down, that you have to do this and you can do that, but he's saying: whatever way you're called, stay in that calling, and if there's an occasion to better your circumstance that's the exception - but realise that you can be a Christian in the very situation in which God has saved you, in which you're in tonight, apart from sin of course, you can thrive as a child of God and God can bless you, and you don't need to change your externalities to be more spiritual.

When God called you, you aren't given a new occupation, but your old occupation is given a new significance - that's what Paul is saying. Let's break this down so that we understand it. Let's look at the first illustration again, circumcision. To the circumcised, Paul says, don't change your situation if you're circumcised. To the uncircumcised he says the same thing, don't change your situation. What's the reason for saying those two same things to two different situations? Because neither of them counts spiritually with God, they don't make any difference. What's Paul's conclusion? Stay in your call, stay as you are. The second illustration is slavery. To the slave he says, don't be concerned about your situation as a slave. He gives an exception: if freedom is granted, make use of your freedom. What's the reason that they should be content as slaves? One: because to the slave, you need to know that spiritually you are free in the Lord Jesus Christ - verse 22: 'For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman'. It doesn't matter that you're found as a slave when you become a Christian, because you're free in Christ. To the free person he says: 'Well, if you're a Christian...ye are bought with a price', verse 23, 'be not ye the servants of men'. In other words, you're Christ's servant, at the end of verse 22, you're Christ's slave. So even if you have freedom from slavery, don't forget that it doesn't make a difference because you're still Christ's slave! Do you see that?

The conclusion in it all is: stay in the calling where God saved you in the first place. Let's wrap it all up with an application, because it's so important that we know what Paul is saying to us today. It's simply this: Christians are needed everywhere. Christians are needed in every situation, among people who are servants, among the masters, among workers and employers, the poor as well as the rich, the lowly as well as the high. The Christian life, the beauty of it, is that it is designed to operate on every level of humanity! That's why external changes don't need to be made - as one author said: 'Christianity does not create an artificial greatness, but teaches that true greatness is in humble places. After all, true greatness does not consist in doing great things, but rather doing little things in great ways'.

The world is full tonight of men who are abject slaves to passion and habit because of so-called freedom. They may be monarchs in the eyes of men, but before God they are menial slaves to sin, and the last word that God leaves to us - all of us, no matter where we find ourselves tonight, is: 'Brethren', verse 24, 'let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God'. Are you a mother changing nappies, filling baby's bottles? Are you a mother of teenagers, and your heart's being broken, and you wish that they were grown-up, and you wish perhaps that you could get away from it all? Are you a housewife, and when you're at the kitchen sink, you think: 'Is there not more purpose to my life than this? Is there nothing more that I can achieve for God, for myself, or for my family?'? Maybe you're fed up being a teacher, lack of discipline; or you're a banker, or a lawyer, or a labourer, and you would long to be something else - listen, this is what Christianity is! Let every man abide as he is when he's called, for he can abide with God in it! No matter how menial it is, if you add God to your life you immediately subtract all the evils. No matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, the proverb is true that you can bloom where God has planted you - for that's where God has called you! You don't need to take drastic actions to alter your circumstances, thinking that it will make a difference and you'll be more spiritual - it won't do that, and it certainly won't bring more joy to you.

Listen to what Robinson Crusoe says - a great scholar he is, on his deserted island, after his heart had been changed by finding a Bible in a chest and opening it up and reading it - it had been salvaged from the shipwreck. This is what he wrote: 'I learned to look more upon the bright side of my situation and less upon the dark side; and to consider what I enjoyed rather than what I wanted. This gave me sometimes such secret comforts that I cannot express them, and which I take notice here to put those discontented people in mind of that, who cannot enjoy comfortably what God has given them because they see and covet something that He has not given them. All our discontents about what we want appeared to me to spring from the want of thankfulness for what we have'. What situation do you find yourself in? I know it's not the most desirable, I know you wouldn't have planned it that way, I know you didn't even choose it, but contentment is realising that God has already provided everything we need for our present happiness.

Listen to this story: once upon a time there was a stonecutter who lived alone. Though he had acquired great skills he was very poor, he lived in a tiny bamboo hut and wore tattered clothing. One day as a stonecutter he worked with his hammer and chisel upon a huge stone, and he heard a crowd gathering along streets. By their shouts he could tell that the King was coming to visit his humble village, and joining in the procession the stonecutter gazed in awe as the king, dressed in marvellous silk, was greeted by his subjects. 'Oh, how I wish I had the power and glory of the King', he thought, 'He has soldiers at his command, there is no-one more powerful than the King'. His cry was heard in heaven, and immediately the humble stonecutter was transformed into a powerful King. He found himself riding on a great horse, waving at the crowds of people who had flocked to see him. 'This is power', he thought. As the summer progressed, however, the new king watched the effects of the heat upon his people. Men and animals became weary in the summer sun, the plants withered under the powerful rays of the sun, and as he looked at the sky the new king realised that the sun was more powerful than the earthly rulers. 'How I wish I were as powerful as that', he thought, 'I wish I were the sun'. Immediately his wish was granted, and the stonecutter relished his new role as the sun. He gloried in the power he felt as he surveyed the kingdoms below. He sent his bright rays to the earth, he watched kings and princes hide under their parasols, he watched as powerful warriors became weak under his gaze, even the crops in the field were under his command. Then one day a tiny cloud moved over the land, shielding the earth from the sun's bright rays. Seeing that here was something more powerful, he thought: 'I want very much to be a cloud'. Again his wish was granted, he blocked the sun himself - he felt so important, he gathered all his strength becoming a gigantic cloud, and he began to pour down rain on the earth. Rivers that were formed previously were no more, and water flooded the streets of the cities and the farmland - everything, trees, animals, people, seemed to be awed by his power. Only the massive rocks were unswayed. Again he had discovered something more powerful than he - 'There is nothing', he thought, 'as

powerful as a rock, how I wish I were a huge stone' - and his wish was granted. As a stone, there he sat in the countryside, motionless and powerful, unmoved by sun or wind or rain - and he felt exempt from all the forces that shaped the existence of those around him. Then one day a man approached carrying a bag. When he stopped, he pulled out a chisel and a hammer, and he began to chip away at the rock. Realising that the man with the tools was more powerful than any rock, he cried out: 'Oh, I want to be a stonecutter'. Once again the heavens heard his cry, and he became a stonecutter; once again he lived in a bamboo hut and made his living with hammer and chisel - but this time he was content.

Hebrews says: 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for whatever they are, He has said: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee''.

Father, we pray that You will help us to effect the changes that we can, which are internal changes. But Lord, help us to accept those things that we cannot change, those situations that we may have found ourselves in when we were converted, and have been such a pain and a burden to us. Perhaps, our Father, we've looked over the fence and said: 'Oh, if I could be like them', but Lord, You know and Your word has taught us tonight that that is foolish, for we are in Christ and Christ is in God, and we have all things. Lord, I just pray tonight that you would lift the burden from some souls here tonight - those who are striving for something that they think is spirituality, that cannot be achieved, that they would accept the grace of God and all the riches that are in Him now. Help us, our Father, not to lose the joys of today for discontent about tomorrow. Let us realise that at this moment we have everything that we need to be satisfied in Him. Take us now to our homes, we pray, for Christ's sake, Amen.

## 1 Corinthians - Chapter 19

# "Advantages Of Singlehood And Advice For Widowhood"

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### 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

1. **The Benefits Of A Single Life**
  - a. **Fewer External Pressures (verses 25-27)**
  - b. **Fewer Internal Problems (verse 28)**
  - c. **Fewer Temporal Preoccupations (verses 29-38)**
    - i. Less distraction away from spiritual things
    - ii. More concentration on spiritual things
2. **The Bounds Of Married Life**
  - a. **Duration: Life (verse 39a)**
  - b. **Termination: Death (verse 39b)**
  - c. **Exhortation: Stay as you are (verses 40)**

**T**urn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, we're reading from verse 25 tonight - and God willing, if time permits, we hope to finish this chapter which we've spent several weeks in looking at the subject of marriage, and many other related subjects which come within the boundary, if you like, of relationships, and man and woman intimacies.

Verse 25 through to the end of the chapter: "Now concerning virgins", or that could be translated 'unmarried', "I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful". Paul's just saying there, as we've seen already in this passage, that Paul himself was a single man. We looked into all the various arguments as to whether he was married at one point or not, and if you want to know that - I believe, personally, that he was not married, or at least he had been married at some time, he's not married in this chapter that's for sure. It was not necessary for the apostle to be married, and certainly as he writes this he wants all believers as far as is possible to be unmarried if that is possible for you - i.e. if you have the gift of celibacy which he has already talked about. But even he, who had the gift of celibacy, recognises in verse 25 that it's because of the mercy of the Lord that he has been able to be faithful in his singlehood. That's what we will all need, whatever our circumstances are - whether we find ourselves divorced, singled, widowed, whatever the capacity is in which we live, we need the faithful mercy of God as our portion.

Verse 26: "I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be" - for a man to remain single. "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the

Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare", or a noose, "upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God".

A little girl on one occasion was caught eavesdropping through the keyhole of her spinster aunt. As she was kneeling down there her mother caught her, and said: 'Dear, you should not eavesdrop, it's wrong to eavesdrop'. 'But Mummy', she said, 'Aunt Emma ended her prayers so funny!'. 'What did she say?', said the mother. 'Well, when she finished praying she said, 'World without men, O me!'. For many single people, world without men, or world without women, is the prospect that they have for the rest of their days - but whether it is singlehood, widowhood, or even indeed marriage, Paul has a great deal to say to us in these verses that we're looking at tonight from verse 25 to 40. We're going to see this evening the advantages of singlehood, but also some advice to those found in widowhood. I believe that all of the principles and the guidelines and precepts that you will find apply to singlehood and widowhood in this passage, many of them can be applied to marriage - indeed, in any circumstance in which we find ourselves. The reason why that is, is that the issue that Paul primarily is dealing with is how we can serve the Lord most effectively. No matter what situation or capacity we find ourselves, how we can, to the best of our ability, use our energies, use the gifts that God has given us, use the opportunities and the circumstances that God's providence has led us into for the full extent of service that we can bring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The two specific cases that we are given tonight is: if you have the gift of singleness, and if you want find out what that is look at the previous tape that we did - the tape people up in the upper room will give you help there - we looked at how the gift of singleness is something that is given by God, and if you don't have that gift of singleness you can't expect to live a celibate life. Paul is saying here tonight that if you have that gift of singleness, you should serve the Lord without the distraction of marriage - but if you haven't the gift of singleness, well then you should serve the Lord without the distractions of frustrated sexual appetites, you should get married. If it's not your gift to be single, get married and serve the Lord as best as you can in the marriage bond.

But the general rule that we're going to see bore out by the apostle in this passage is that, whatever capacity we find ourselves in, we're to make sure that we put all our energies, times and gifts into serving the Lord to the best of our ability. The reason why we're to do that is found in verse 29: 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short' - the time is short! The time is short in which we have to live, specifically the time was short for these Corinthian believers - we'll see why that is a little bit later - but even if we take it for ourselves, in our own situation, the time is short, as we all know, for Jesus is coming back again. We're instructed in the New Testament to look for the glorious appearing and imminent return of the Lord Jesus. Whether the Lord calls us to be with Himself through death, or whether He bursts through the clouds and brings us to the air to be with Himself, the time is short - and because the time is short, Paul says, whether we're married, whether we're single, whether we're virgins, engaged or widowed, whatever capacity and situation we find ourselves in: we're to use everything that God has given us in His grace, and the circumstances we find ourselves in, to the glory of God to the best of our ability.

So my question right at the outset of our study tonight is: are we doing all in our power to serve the Lord? I want to be absolutely sure that I am not talking about being a pastor, so-called, or an elder, or a deacon, or a



missionary, or an evangelist, or a full-time children's worker, or whatever label you want to put on this - we've got to get away from this ecclesiasticism of thinking of clergy and laity, that there are people in the pew who listen, and there are people in the pulpit who work. As far as the New Testament is concerned every child of God born-again is a worker, and is a servant of Jesus Christ. We all have a responsibility to serve the Lord in whatever capacity He has called us in.

If you go to your average Christian bookshop you'll find that there's a lot of literature on the shelves and resources giving advice and counsel on Christian marriage - but there's very little about being single as a Christian. Even that which there is concerning being single as a Christian, of what there is the theme often is: 'how to cope with being single'. The insinuation, almost, behind the writing of these books is that being single is a predicament, that it's like a disease, it's second-best, you haven't got your goal or achieved what you really wanted. This is completely and entirely contrary to scripture! We only need to look at this portion of Scripture, in verse 1 Paul said: 'It is good if a man doesn't touch a woman' - 'calos' (sp?), 'it is morally good' if a man doesn't get married, it's as good as being married. In verse 7 he expresses the desire: 'For I would that all men were even as I myself'. He acknowledges that not all have that gift, but he wishes in verse 8: 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I'.

I don't know what your situation is as you've gathered here tonight, but I'm aware that some of you are single, and some of you may find yourself in a single capacity - but the word of God is not despising this in any shape or form, and in fact we'll see tonight that there are benefits of a single life, and you're not to view a single life as a problem. It's not something to cope with, but the single life, Paul says, is a gift from God! It is something that we are to embrace, not as a consolation prize, but as a high calling of God which He can use for His glory in a way that He cannot use married couples. Let's see tonight the reasons why the single life and singlehood is a benefit.

Look at verse 25: 'Now concerning virgins', I already said that this verse means 'unmarried', it can mean male or female. The word itself probably is referring specifically to females, but we can take the general meaning tonight and apply it to all who are unmarried, man or woman. He's coming to widows later in verses 39 and 40, we'll see that in a few moments later on in our service, but all these truths can be applied to single people, male, female, to widows, to widowers - and really to anyone, even those in our contemporary situation who find themselves single through divorce of no fault of their own. Paul says: 'I am teaching you here, not in a commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment', or my opinion, 'as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful'. Now we saw in previous verses, such as verse 10 and verse 12, that when Paul says: 'I'm giving this not in commandment, not of the Lord', it doesn't mean that he's not inspired, or that he doesn't have any authority to say what he's saying. He's simply saying that the Lord Jesus in the Gospels had nothing to say about virgins and those who were unmarried, He didn't specifically teach anything concerning this situation - but yet Paul, as he brings us this teaching, is giving us his opinion as the apostle of God with apostolic authority, and we know later on in verse 40 that he not only gives it with his apostolic authority, but verbal inspiration - because God's Holy Spirit has given us these verses as His holy Word.

I believe that, although Paul is saying that the Lord didn't give any specific instructions and teaching with regard to singlehood and virgins, Paul is probably also alluding to something that the Lord Jesus did say. I want you to turn with me to Matthew 19 verse 12, of course His disciples said to Him in verse 10: 'If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry'. In other words, He's been outlining how marriage is permanent - we'll see that again in verses 39 and 40, and how there's no grounds for divorce whatsoever, apart from the betrothal period within the Jewish culture that we find in Matthew's gospel. This can be seen and evidenced in the fact of the reaction the disciples bring: 'Well, if that's the case of a man with his wife, it's better not to marry!'. 'But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for

the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it'. This is a gift from God, and some people have decided that they will not get married, and they've been able to contain themselves for God, for His kingdom, and for the glory of the Gospel - even the Lord says that not all can receive this saying.

So this isn't a commandment that Paul is giving us tonight, saying that we ought to all stay single, but what he does say is that it's trustworthy advice. He's giving his opinion, and don't forget that he's inspired by the Spirit of God. He's saying to us, as we've seen right throughout this chapter, that being single is not more spiritual than being married, and being married is not more spiritual than being single - but there is one scenario within the present historical church situation that, as far as Paul is concerned, makes more sense. There is not one that's morally better than the other, but as we find from verse 26: 'I suppose therefore that this is good', that a man or woman remain single, 'for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be'. So we've seen already that one is not morally superior to the other, one is not more spiritual than the other, but for some reason Paul says - because of what's going on, the present distress - it makes more sense, and my qualified trustworthy opinion to you is that it's better, if you are single, to remain single for the present distress.

Of course we have to find out what this present distress is, and the Greek word simply means 'a stress', a literal stress or a calamity. Because this calamity is described as being 'present', we have to discern that it is something that was going on within the Corinthian society at that very moment that Paul was writing to them. In fact one modern translation translates it like this: 'the impending distress' - not just something that was going on at that minute, but something that the apostle thought was going to get worse and worse and worse, to such an extent that it was better for believers who find themselves single to stay single because of the impending distress. Now if you're familiar with any sort or form of church history, you will know that even as Paul was writing to the Corinthians there were believers being imprisoned, arrested, beaten, and even martyred for their faith in the Lord Jesus - all in fulfilment of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He told them in John 16: 'They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God a service'.

What is this impending distress Paul talks about? Well I believe that one of the things, at least, he's speaking of is the first phase, if you like, of the Roman persecution begun under Nero. Many of you will know of Nero, of course he was the Emperor when Rome burnt, and of course he had a hand in the burning down of Rome - he got so intoxicated with his own power. Ten years after Paul wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians, he began to almost, some would say, lose his mind with regards to persecuting Christians - so much so that he refined the torture of Christians into a diabolical art. His name 'Nero' became synonymous with sadistic torture. We read in history books of Christians being sewn into animal skins and thrown to wild dogs, and being torn apart, eaten live, and left unburied, dead. We read of Christians being dressed in clothes that were soaked in wax, and then hung up in Nero's gardens and set alight as human torches, burnt alive. We also read in Foxe's Book of Martyrs that in the very city of Corinth there was a man who was the treasurer of the city, we find him in Romans chapter 16 verse 23, probably an early convert of the apostle Paul - his name was Erastus - and we find that he was martyred in Rome for the Lord Jesus Christ under these persecutions of Nero. So we see the immediate situation that these Christians were living in, and as the 10 years of Nero's persecutions went through, and as the greater phases of his persecutions were executed, you would be able to discern - wouldn't you, I hope - that it was difficult to be a Christian in first century society. If it was difficult to be a single Christian, in other words no family or marital ties, how much more difficult would it be to be a married Christian with a family going through persecution?

All would suffer - if your husband was put in prison, you would suffer, wouldn't you, and the children would suffer? If your wife was put to death, the children would suffer the loss of their mother; and if one was beaten another would suffer in the family; if one was tortured another would feel the anguish of it. If the

father was taken away who would care for the family? Who would teach the children the things of God, which is the father's duty? Who would care for the mother and comfort her in the difficulties and in the distresses? What I want you to see this evening is what Paul is addressing: practical problems arise when you decide you're no longer going to be single in this situation, you're going to get married. Not only do practical problems arise, but your ministry's effectiveness decreases. Because you have these problems of family, worrying about others, being responsible for your children and food on the table and so on, it can also decrease your ministry's effectiveness. You can't just run away and hide from the Roman government, you can't decide to be a hero for Christ with a band of Christians - and therefore, Paul is saying, if there is a time when you find yourself single, to stay as you are. That time was the impending distress that we read of here in verse 26.

Leon Morris put it well when he said: 'When high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships'. When high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships! Let me illustrate this for you in this way: some of you can remember World War II, the outbreak of it. You will remember that Adolf Hitler's troops got through Belgian and eventually came to the border of France, and the day came when those Panther tanks went over the Belgian border into France and went through the nation of France like a flaming fire. We read in our history books that in 40 days those Panther tanks of Hitler were in the French capital, Paris. There is a book written: '40 Days That Shook The World', and in 40 days the nation of France was taken over by the Nazis. I want you to imagine this in your mind for a moment, villages being plundered and destroyed, homes being crushed, great cities within France being destroyed, family being smashed, tanks rolling down main roads, the French people running for their lives! The French were really put to the test - but what I want you to grasp in your mind is mothers running down the lanes and the streets of French towns and villages with babies in their arms, fathers trying to hide their sons. The question I'm wanting you to answer is this: is that type of situation and time in history a time, men, for you to get down on your knees and propose marriage? It's not, is it? It's not the right scenario or situation, and I imagine - I don't know this for a fact - but if you were to go back to the records of the marriages that took place in this particular era in French history, you'll find that there were very few. The impending present distress necessitated that the people weren't thinking about those things, they were running for their lives!

Maybe some of you who are so zealous are thinking to yourself: 'Oh, have I made a mistake? I've went and got married, and I could do more for the Lord if I wasn't married, and maybe my reward would be greater in heaven' - listen: don't misunderstand what we're saying this evening. Singleness is not more spiritual than marriage; marriage is not more spiritual than singleness; but what the Bible is saying is that there are certain things you can do as a single man or woman that you cannot do as a married man or woman with children. Don't say: 'I wish I weren't married', unless you've got good reason for saying that! But this is what Paul says, he anticipates this question in our minds perhaps, verse 27: 'Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed'. The danger is that you say: 'Alright! I'll get divorced' - that's what these Corinthians were doing - 'I can serve the Lord better if I don't have a wife or husband'. No: 'Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. The present distress really necessitates, if you want to take my good advice, stay as you are!'

Now can I just make a bit of a detour for one moment, because I think this is tremendous pastoral advice the apostle gives here. We've seen this as we've gone through this epistle, how Paul has such balance when it comes to pastoral counselling. I learnt very early on, and I think that it was a good lesson that I've used since, that it's a good practice when you find yourself in a moment of distress and calamity and turmoil, not to make rash decisions or quick decisions - because when you're in an emotional turmoil usually your mind is not the clearest. That is exactly what the apostle is saying here: let the air sit, let the mist of battle and persecution fall before you make a rash decision - if you're married don't seek a divorce; if you are unmarried, don't look for a wife - it's clear and plain, isn't it?

He's saying: 'Cherish your singleness'. If you're single, see it as a blessing from God, take its advantages because its advantages are many. I want to proclaim tonight to you, if you are single and you find yourself in that situation, and the large pressure of society makes you feel like some kind of second-class citizen and leper, you have been given a gift by God that not many are given! There is still the gift of singleness, and can I say in a prophetic note that when we read in Matthew 24 of some of the things that will befall this earth: persecutions, earthquakes, wars and rumours of wars, pestilence, famines, all sorts of deaths, there is coming a day even before the rapture of Jesus Christ when I believe that as these birth pangs come upon the scene of this earth that it may necessitate that some believers - certainly some are tonight at this very moment in countries where they're being persecuted - rather to choose singleness than marriage, because of the impending distress.

If you have this gift thank God for it, and use it. Now I want you to see tonight, that's the first thing: you will have fewer external pressures in the impending distress, you'll not have to worry about the persecution among your family and your children, but you'll just be looking after yourself towards God and the cause of Christ. The second benefit of a single life is fewer internal problems, not just external pressures, but internal problems. Paul says that it's not wrong to get married, verse 28: 'If thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I would spare you'. If you don't get married you will have fewer internal problems.

Now what does he mean when he says 'trouble in the flesh'? When he talks about 'flesh', he's not talking in the spiritual sense about the old Adamic nature, our sinful flesh theologically. He's talking about circumstances of life that will come upon you if you find yourself a family man or woman in persecution circumstances. You see, you can be stronger in persecution if you're single, you can stand up in a greater way for Christ, and do greater things for Christ if you haven't to worry about the ramifications for your family, your wife, or your children. So Paul says you have less trouble in the flesh, but on a practical note, of course, I think he's also talking about the natural problems of marriage. We saw in previous studies that whenever a young man or young woman find themselves with these natural sexual appetites, Paul says that the way for an outlet for these appetites is to be married, and God has blessed marriage in such a capacity. Although marriage solves many problems, you have to realise that marriage creates problems as well. Maybe it creates more than it solves for some people, because when two people come together the problems of human nature are intensified - you've got two sinful human natures that are coming together as one person. Both of them still have their own characteristics, their own emotions, their own temperaments, and their own wills and ways. They are two sinners, and no matter how holy they are as Christians, they still have pride, there's dishonesty deep down in their heart, there is thoughtlessness and selfishness - and this may even be increased if the other partner is an unbeliever. It's not always the case, but it could be the case.

So what Paul is saying here is: not only can you be a better Christian in persecution if you're single, but you have to realise that marriage in itself often causes hardships. There are sacrifices that are called for, you have to adjust yourself in ways that singleness doesn't call you to do. Let me say, young people, that sexual problems aren't necessarily solved through marriage - although marriage is the only legal and lawful, before God, outlet for sexual passion - it is not always the solving feature, because perhaps the worst sexual organ that we have a problem with in our bodies is our minds. Marriage will not solve a problem that is in your mind. Of course, many people may get married because they are lonely - but as the divorce courts testify today, some carry their loneliness into marriage and end up making the other person lonely when they eventually leave them.

If you're sitting here single, and you think you've got problems being single, Paul is saying to you tonight that you need to realise that if you get married you'll have more problems. Not the same problems, but problems of a different kind. Don't think that the grass is greener on the other side. As Warren Wiersbe has said: 'The cheapest thing is the marriage licence, and then the price goes up'. That's so true, and many

historians, Christian historians, think that Wesley and Whitfield would have been better off if they had remained unmarried. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying here tonight, I'm saying that if you have been given by God the gift of singleness, supernaturally as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the best life that you can live is a single life - but if you're not given that gift, you can't live the single life, and you must live the married life. But whether you live the single life or the married life, you're to do all to the glory of God!

Let me encourage those who are married, as I encourage myself for a moment here tonight: there is the capacity in marriage to glorify God, and to work together with God pulling the family toward God rather than pulling the family in two directions. This is very important, because we live in a society today where selfish marriage is the norm; where you just set up a little home - us four and no more, or whatever it is - and you live in your domestic affluent capacity, and have no thought of God, even as Christians, but just provide for yourself. Now marriage can be the most useful of unions for God, or it can fall into the category of being the most selfish partnership on the face of God's earth. There's something to learn for us all tonight: if you remain single there will be fewer pressures, there will be fewer internal problems - but thirdly: there will be fewer temporal preoccupations.

Paul says that the time is short, verse 31: 'this world, the fashion of this world, passeth away'. The word for 'fashion' is 'form', the Greek word 'schema' - and what Paul is saying here is: 'Marriage is not an eternal thing'. Marriage will not last for all eternity, it will pass away - the word used for 'pass away' was used in the theatre of the changing of scenes. There's going to be a day when there will be no more marriage. Remember the Lord Jesus was asked the question about someone who had married several times, their partner had died, whose wife will she be in heaven? And Jesus said: 'In heaven we will neither marry nor be given in marriage like the angels are' - I'm not entering into what capacity we will know our husbands and wives, the Bible is largely silent on these things, and I wish to be silent too. But although marriages may be 'made in heaven', what the word of God is saying here is that they will not be carried over into heaven in the capacity that we know them here today. This world will pass away, the scene will change, and marriage will pass away also.

This phrase 'time is short', could be translated 'time has been shortened', and I think what Paul is saying here for these persecuted Christians, for many of them, they're suffering premature deaths - I don't mean that they have died before their time, what I mean is that they have died young men and women because of this persecution. The time has been shortened. Life at best is very brief, but when we consider how our lives could be taken one day in persecution, and how some believers are being martyrs and laying down their lives for Christ as we speak, and as we also realise that we're in the end times and the hastening of the Lord Jesus is coming very soon, Paul is saying: 'In the light of all these things, I want you to do five things - no matter what capacity you find yourself in relationships'.

Here's the first thing, verse 29: 'both they that have wives be as though they had none'. That's the first thing that he wants: they that have wives must be as though they had none. Now, what he's really saying here is that a husband is to behave as if he's on military service - you've seen it on the news here, the folk going in boats and ships over to the Gulf, and their wives waving. They've to go maybe for months, perhaps years, but they're prepared to go - that's what Paul is saying here. There are sacrifices that need to be made. Turn with me for a moment to 2 Samuel chapter 11, this is the story of David - and you'll remember that he committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. He decides to con Uriah, make him drunk, and also send him to the front line of the battle so that he's murdered - but Uriah, in this, was a more righteous man than David. In verse 11 we find, verse 10: 'And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house? And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing'. He was a soldier when he

was at home, as well as when he was on the battlefield, and he knew that his brothers were on the battlefield laying down their lives - as we know that some of our brothers and sisters are laying down their life for Christ - he wasn't prepared to live it up! He was a soldier.

Now this doesn't mean that we neglect our husbands or our wives, of course the rest of Paul's epistles that we've studied on many occasions tell us that that is not an option. We're reprobates and evil, the word of God says, if we don't provide for our own and those of our own household - but what Paul is telling us, and we need to hear it in our materialistic affluent society today, is that the Lord's work must come first! You don't often hear that, what you hear today is: 'The Lord comes first, then the family comes next, and then the Lord's work comes next' - I don't know where that order comes from, in fact I don't think there ought to be any order whatsoever, because if the Lord is first in your life your family will be up there too, and the work of the Lord will be up there. You don't need to make a top ten of things to do! What Paul is saying is that the Lord's claims are paramount, and marriage is no excuse for reducing the Lord's work. You wife, your husband, whatever your relationship is, it ought to be a help to you not a hindrance in the work of God!

We need to hear this today, and I'm never going to get through all of this chapter tonight, but I want us to really ponder this: are you a help or a hindrance to your husband or wife in the things of God? A Scottish preacher, a well-known one, on one occasion was experiencing public criticism because of a stand he was taking biblically. Almost every day there were negative reports of him in the newspapers. A friend asked him: 'How are you able to carry on in the face of this opposition?', and he replied quietly: 'I am happy at home'. Now, that means a lot, to be happy at home, but Paul is saying that you can't put the temporal over the eternal. What he's calling on wives to do is to stand beside your husbands in the work of the Lord! I believe the insinuation right throughout the Scriptures is, that if you can find within yourself to do this, you will share in the reward of your husband at the judgement seat.

If I can cast your mind back to whenever David spoke words concerning those that were abiding with the stuff, that's the way he said it, the soldiers were on the battlefield but there were those who were left behind in the camp looking after the goods and the weapons. He said of those that abide with the stuff: 'he will have his part with he that goeth down to battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff'. I know, maybe when you're at home, wives, maybe even husbands, and your partner is out serving the Lord - and they're maybe out serving the Lord an awful lot, and at times you feel the spirit of resentment welling up within your heart. You think to yourself: 'Well, why can't I be out there doing as they're doing? Why can't I have a purpose like they have a purpose?' - will you see this? That there's a day coming when your partner will stand at the judgement seat of Christ, and if you've stood with them and supported them and stayed with the stuff the reward will be split! Is that not encouraging? I wonder, I just wonder, whether those in the shadows and behind-the-scenes will have the greater part?

That's what Paul says for those that are as they are married, they're to behave as if they are not married. Then it says: 'And they that weep, as though they wept not', sorrow must not be allowed to engulf the soul so that we become totally self-centred and our service for the Lord ceases. No matter what circumstances come into our life, even bereavement, it's not meant to be the finish of our service for God. He goes on: 'they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not' - every emotion is to be brought under the lordship of Christ, under control. We're not to be excessive in our sorrow, we're not to be excessive in our joy, we can control our emotions. How many stop serving the Lord because of emotions? Whether they're sorrowing because of what another brother has done to them, or whether they're over-joyous because they're newly married, or because they've got a new family or a new job, or more wealth, and they stop serving the Lord for a moment.

Then he goes on: 'they that buy, as though they possessed not' - finances and possessions, Christians who are more concerned about accounts and businesses and cars than their Christianity - the time is short! Jesus is coming! It's time to get the priorities right! Then fifthly he says: 'those who use the world, as though they did

not make full use of it'. Friends, pleasure is not immoral, enjoying yourself is not immoral, but as one author said: 'In times of affluence, ease, permissiveness and inordinate self-acceptance, it is easy to live for pleasure'. To live for more leisure, more recreation, more holidays, more comfortable homes, earlier retirement, occupying these interests - they're not all wrong - but occupying them at the expense of spiritual neglect. Paul is saying all these pass away, distract away from spiritual things, but if you're single you can concentrate more on the spiritual things. As Paul says in verses 34 to 35, the one that's unmarried, their body and their soul is given over to the Lord - that doesn't mean they're more holy, it just means that their body doesn't have to worry about looking after a family, their body can be totally consecrated to the Lord as well. He's only stating a fact.

Now Paul says in verse 35, this isn't a noose put around your neck, I'm speaking to your profit, so that you can serve the Lord without distraction. If you've got the gift of celibacy, use it; don't get married if you've got it! But if you haven't got it, get married - this isn't a noose, he's not trying to drive us down a road that we cannot go. He speaks then in verses 36 to 38, I personally believe, as J.M. Darby translates it and William Kelly translates it, to those young men and young women who hold their own virginity. If they can hold their own virginity, not necessarily fathers with their daughters, or even fiancées with their fiancée, but rather if you can honour God in this way by not getting married, don't get married and honour God - but if you do get married it's not a sin, but it's better, Paul says, concerning the present distress, not to marry.

Will you allow me five minutes or so as we look at the bounds of marriage finally, verses 39 to 40? Again he tells us that marriage is insoluble, and let me say this: that this is the law of last mention, and when God mentions a thing for the last time as He does here, we need to sit up and take note because He's giving His final thoughts on the important matter of marriage and divorce. He says that the only way that marriage can be dissolved is through death. The duration of marriage, verse 39a: 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth', the termination of marriage, 39b, 'but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will', the exhortation: 'But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God'.

Paul is giving here advice to widows and widowers. He's saying here that if you have been widowed already, why get married in the present distress and suffer to be widowed again? There's so much comfort, so much instruction in these passages, and this one passage, chapter 7, that we've been looking at over these weeks - and we can apply it to those who are single, widowed, even divorced in the capacity today, those who are married, all of us. What God is doing in this chapter is He's putting walls around marriage, restrictions around marriage, and principles - not to make marriage a prison, but to make it a safe fortress for those who enter into it.

If you want to enjoy the full extent of marriage or singlehood, the best thing to do is to take God's advice, God's principles. Don't forget please, this evening, the main point of what Paul the apostle is bringing to us in all of these lessons as he closes this passage: the time is short, and because of the brevity of time and the transitory nature of everything that's around us, we've got to give ourselves completely to the service of God no matter what situation we find ourselves in. The important things are not the things of time, like money and marriage and health, but the things of eternity! I wonder have you got there? We're standing as a nation on the brink of war, and when a boy goes to war the sum total of that war for his mother is that that young boy comes back one day in one piece. She gets down upon her knees and prays that he'll have a safe return, and that's all she's concerned about in a war, but that's not what the government's concerned about in a war. The government sees the bigger picture, and they're prepared to sacrifice hundreds upon thousands, even millions of mother's sons to defeat the enemy and to keep the glory of the nation. Paul is saying: you see in your home, you see in your marriage, you see in your singlehood and your widowhood? Look at the bigger picture!

There are sacrifices even here that need to be made for eternity. Here's a hymn we often sing to the lost, but I think we need to take a leaf out of it tonight:

'Life at best is very brief,  
Like the falling of a leaf,  
Like the binding of a sheaf:  
Be in time.

Fairest flowers soon decay,  
Youth and beauty pass away,  
Oh, you have not long to stay:  
Be in time'.

Let's sing our final hymn together, 469 - of course, what else can we say but the spirit that the apostle is looking for in our lives is none other than the spirit of our Lord Jesus that went to Calvary and made the ultimate sacrifice for us. The last verse of this hymn says:

'Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small.  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all'.

Whatever situation you find yourself in: that is what God wants! Your soul, your life, your all.

Let's bow our heads - and let me just address us all individually: those married - do you give your partner slack to serve the Lord? Do you allow them? Do you make sacrifices? I know you would love to see them a bit more, but friends it's eternity you're meant to be living for. We're not excusing neglecting children, that's not what we're talking about, or neglecting wives or husbands, but we're talking about mutual sacrifices for the kingdom of God. Single person: do you view your singlehood as a curse or as a gift? Are you using it for the Master? Those widowed: don't let your service end. It's tragic what you're going through, but God still has something for you to do. Even those divorced, left, deserted, not of your own fault: God can still work through you. He can work through us all, if we give our all to Him.

Lord, we thank Thee for grace. We thank Thee for enablement to be what Thou hast planned us to be in Thy sovereign will and mind: to be like Jesus, to give our all, to lay our lives down for His cause. May we do it, Lord, for the time is short and the fashion of this world passes away. May we live for eternity, for Christ's sake, Amen.



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 20*

## ***"Light, Liberty And Love"***

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### **I Corinthians 8**

- 1. Does Your Knowledge Blow-Up Or Build-Up? (verses 1-3)**
- 2. Is Your Liberty A Hazard Or A Help? (verses 4-7)**
- 3. Does Your Clear Conscience Have Catastrophic Consequences? (verses 8-12)**
- 4. Does Love Regulate Your Living? (verse 13)**

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 8, and it would be great if you could get some of these tape recordings and spread them about, because I really feel that the truths in the first epistle to the Corinthians are so relevant - not only to the world in which we are living in, and we saw that in recent weeks as we looked at the subject of marriage and all the related subjects that surround marriage. We're going to see tonight that this is particularly relevant to many questions that are being asked within the church of Jesus Christ, as to is it right to do this, or wrong to do that, and with regards to the classifications of sins. We find today in the church of Jesus Christ that there are many things being done by Christians that, perhaps 10, 20, 30 years ago would not have even been considered - things that would have been considered sins, which are not considered sins any longer. There are certain things within the word of God that we are told not to do and we're told to do, but there are certain things that, if you like, are grey areas. We want to look at this subject tonight under the title 'Light, Liberty and Love'.

"Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him. As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend".

Now the specific problem that we're looking at this evening of whether or not to eat meat that is offered as a sacrifice to idols is specifically relevant to many believers across the world today, particularly when they have been converted out of paganism in heathen lands. This is a real contemporary issue for them: ought we to eat meat that has been offered to idols? Of course, in our Western, modern, affluent world this isn't really an issue specifically, but we will see tonight that the issue does exist in a general sense in the question, if you like: how far does our Christian liberty go? How far does our freedom in Christ go, specifically into the areas that the Bible says nothing about? There are certain areas in modern life that the Bible doesn't have specific commands concerning. Now I'm sure, if you're a parent here this evening, you will have to admit, and maybe even as a leader in the church or even personally in your own everyday experience, there have been certain

issues, certain questions, certain grey areas in your life where you've sat with your head in your hands, and thought: 'What do I do here? What's the right thing to do as a Christian? What's the wrong thing to do? Is there a right thing? Is there a wrong thing? Is there a command here, or is there a principle that I ought to follow as a believer?'

Now I would say that today in Christendom some of the most heated debates centre around these questionable issues. Some feel that certain things are wrong for a Christian to do, yet those things that they feel are wrong are not specifically forbidden through any verse or any command in the word of God. Let me give you a few examples, and I don't have time to enter into the specifics of them tonight, and maybe I will do, and I certainly have done in the past - but we want to look at the principles this evening. You've heard believers in this day and age say: 'Well, it's alright to drink a glass of table wine. I mean, there's no commands within the word of God that says you can't drink wine, in fact wine is right throughout the whole of the Bible as being drunk - even by our Lord Jesus Christ'. Now, as I've said, we're not entering into whether the wine that the Lord drank is the same as the wine today, I happen to believe that wine today could be categorised under 'strong drink' that you find forbidden within the Scriptures - but that's another subject entirely. Certainly we could never say that the Bible has a command that says you ought not to drink wine. What about smoking? Well, there's no commands in the Bible that says you ought not to smoke, or play cards, that you ought not to put makeup on your face or go to a dance. Sunday activities, like shops that are open, apart from the Old Testament prohibition on the Sabbath day - of course, the Lord's day isn't the Sabbath day, so that doesn't count right away - there's nothing said about this. In fact, the likelihood is that the first Christians, perhaps, had to go to their work on the Lord's day - and I'm not encouraging that.

What about television? Some Christians say that you shouldn't have a television, other Christians say: 'Well, you should have a television, but you should regulate your watching of the television'. Others say: 'Well, it's alright to watch television, and it's alright to watch anything on television as long as it doesn't affect you'. Some believers say: 'Well, I don't think you should go into politics as a believer'; yet other believers go to the other extreme and say: 'Well, it's your duty to be in politics as a believer, to try and change and affect things in the government and in society for good'. Some believers say: 'Well, you can like classical music, but you're not allowed to like popular music - one is right, and one is wrong'. Some say: 'Well, I don't think you should go to the theatre', and others say: 'Well, I don't believe you should go to the cinema'.

Now, as I said, we're not entering into these individual things, specifically for one reason: because the Bible has nothing to say specifically about those things, because some of those things weren't even invented in Bible days. I think that's why much time is spent arguing about these subjects, because the Bible doesn't specifically forbid them or commend them. We as Christians, as we read and study the Bible, can't speak authoritatively on them, or at least as authoritatively as we can about certain commandments - like we know that the Bible says: 'Thou shalt not kill'; 'Thou shalt not steal'; 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', and all the commandments that we know are in the Decalogue, the law of God. We know also that the Old Testament has many other commandments that are reciprocated in the New Testament, and we know that there are commands - and we mentioned them tonight in the announcements - to be baptised, to remember the Lord around the Table: those are commands that we're absolutely certain about, things that we should do, and there are other commands of things that we ought not to do. There are black and white, right and wrong subjects. But the dilemma that we're coming to this evening in 1 Corinthians 8 is: what do we do about things that the Bible doesn't speak about? Things that the Bible is silent on...

Now to a large extent the two reactions that are normally had by people when faced with things that the Bible doesn't speak about are found in Corinth and they're found in the church today. The first is the reaction of legalism, and legalism is simply this opinion: that all is black or white, everything is either right or wrong. People who live by the philosophy of legalism live as Christians by a list of rules, things that they can do and things that they can't do. Everything is either good or bad, whether the Bible mentions it or not you can put it into some kind of category today. So, what happens is they develop a list of other rules that are extra-

biblical, added to the Bible, that you'll not find within the word of God - a bit like what the Pharisees did when they had their 600+ rules added to the law of Moses. They believe that if you keep all the 'do's' of those rules, and don't commit any of the 'don'ts' of those rules, well, that is true spirituality - almost to the extent that it doesn't matter what the inner man is like, as long as you keep all of this rule of do's and don'ts.

They are law-controlled Christians, and the word of God would testify that the letter killeth. They are Christians who will suffocate themselves by trying to keep man-made rules, they will not grow, the word of God will become irrelevant, and their rules will become more important - and they will never mature as believers. But that is a very common reaction to those grey areas that aren't mentioned within the word of God, and that we have with us in today's society. The other extreme is that which Paul, I think, is talking about here, which is licence. Believer it or not, licence is like legalism in the sense that it knows no grey areas. But it knows no grey areas because there's not much black at all, in fact everything is white almost! Everything is acceptable if it's not strictly forbidden from the Bible, specifically the New Testament. These people who adhere to license believe that they have a right to be free as a Christian, and that freedom is virtually absolute and unqualified - as long as their conscience is free, as long as they are comfortable and feel comfortable doing something, well it's alright.

The Corinthians, I believe, fell into that category. They reasoned that in three ways, that they could do what they liked, three ways we find in this passage. The first is this: 'We know that we all have knowledge', we know that we all have knowledge - you see that in verse 1. "Now as touching things offered unto idols", Paul says, "we know that we all have knowledge". Now he was talking about the 'we', that group of believers in Corinth who had a great deal of knowledge about this specific issue. 'We know that we all have knowledge', what is the knowledge about? The second reasoning for their licence was called 'Well, we know that an idol is nothing', that's the knowledge that they had - and they were right, and Paul agreed with them, that there is no significance in an idol, because an idol represents a god who doesn't exist, and if he doesn't exist why should we be afraid of eating meat that is sacrificed to an idol? They had that knowledge. The third reasoning is: 'We know that food is not an issue with God'. So you see this: they have this knowledge that an idol means nothing, therefore the food that is sacrificed to an idol must mean nothing to God as well, and therefore the whole issue generally of what you should eat and what you should drink doesn't matter to God. It doesn't commend you to God, it doesn't make you more spiritual or less spiritual - a bit like what we thought about in previous weeks, when we talked about whether it's more spiritual to be married than to stay single. What was Paul's conclusion? None of them are more spiritual, one is not more spiritual than the other, but there may be certain circumstances - in his context, the present distress - that it was advisable to stay single, but one was not more moral than the other!

Well, the Corinthians may not have had that knowledge when Paul was speaking to them concerning marriage, but they had it concerning these sacrifices. They knew that there's no such a thing as a false god, it is just that, it's false, it doesn't exist! Therefore the meat that's offered to it, it won't contaminate you, and food is not an issue with God. So they said: 'What the problem, Paul? Why can't we eat this meat that is offered to the idols?'. Here we go, because in recent weeks we found that Paul found himself in a fix, didn't he? He was between two, and we've marvelled at his wisdom and godly insight when he's been able to come down the middle with the biblical inspired balanced interpretation and instruction to these people. We could say tonight: 'How's he going to get out of this one?'. Well Paul, in a marvellous way, of course by the inspiration of God's Spirit, gives a general, a universal principle that can be applied not only to this context, but to all doubtful behaviour right throughout the whole of the New Testament period and the age of grace that we are living in tonight.

In this chapter, chapter 8, Paul states the principle. We'll see next week in chapter 9 through to chapter 10, Paul illustrates the principle. He illustrates it by saying: 'I came to you as an apostle, and I had a right when I was living with you to eat in your houses, at your tables, for the labourer is worthy of his hire - muzzle not the ox, the law says, therefore I had a right to be paid and to be looked after, but I didn't take my right! It was

my right, but I didn't take it'. He illustrates it personally, and then we'll see later on in chapter 10 right through to the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 11, he applies it to this specific issue of eating meat, and there he says you ought not really to eat it - not because it's moral or immoral to do it, but because of the ramifications of doing it, and we'll see this this evening.

But let's look tonight at the principle which is found particularly in verse 9: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak". 'You're right, Corinthians, yes, you have knowledge! Maybe there are weaker believers in the church that don't realise that these idols mean nothing, and think that what you eat and drink commend you to God - but you've got that knowledge, and it's wonderful, and you're right, idols mean nothing and meat doesn't mean anything with God. But you have to exercise that Christian liberty in the given area that is not forbidden in scripture by considering the effect that you have you have on other people, especially your brethren in Christ'. There is the principle: yes, you're right, you're allowed to eat this meat, there's no significance in it to God or to men - but you have another consideration as a believer, and that is the effect it will have on your brethren and on the church and on the witness of it.

Now let's look at their specific cultural problem so that we can draw this principle out and apply it to our problems today. The hot issue in Corinth was eating this meat sacrificed to idols. If you remember in our first week, Corinth was a centre of idol worship, and there was this Acrocorinth - this temple on the Mount of Corinth - and they worshipped pagan gods there. People, ordinary people, would have brought their animal before a priest to be sacrificed. Now there were only parts of the animal that were burned and sacrificed and ascended to the false god, the leftovers of the animal were divided among the priests and the city officials, or else sold in the public markets. Obviously there were so many sacrifices being made that the priests couldn't eat it all nor the city officials, so a lot of it went down to the marketplace. Now the problem for the Christian, the dilemma was that when they went to the market there wasn't a little sticker that this was meat sacrificed to an idol, and this meat that wasn't sacrificed to an idol. So the likelihood is when they were going down for minute steak or whatever it is, they could be buying meat that was sacrificed to an idol - so they didn't know what to do.

Another problem was that to a large extent when you were invited to public banquets, they used meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Even if it was a private dinner party, or even a marriage ceremony, the likelihood is that the meat that was being ate was sacrificed to an idol, because they believed that if it was sacrificed to an idol there would be no demons attached to the meat. In other words, if you could get your hands on this meat, this was the best meat that you could eat. So you could see the sticky situation that these believers were in: on the one hand they couldn't absolutely give up their family and their friends for the interests of the gospel, they were trying to be in the world and win those out of the world, but on the other side of the coin these relationships where this meat was being eaten were full of temptations and meant that it might be easy for them to be drawn away back into their old pagan lifestyle that they had been previously delivered from in Christ.

Some argued: 'Well, it's not wrong. The answer is: just forget about it and go and eat the meat, and do what you like, you're free in Christ' - and in a sense, they were right, because there was no significance in the idols and meat doesn't matter at all to God. Then some on the other hand said: 'Well, we don't think that's right, because in our past we worshipped these idols, we know it's bad to worship idols, and we don't want people in the world thinking that we're still in the midst of practising this paganism!'. So, undecided and arguing amongst themselves, they brought to Paul this issue - and he needed all the practical wisdom to unite them, rather than to divide them - and we know how divided they were in Corinth, don't we?

Now here are the principles, let's take time in teasing these out, and let's apply them to our own situations today. The first is this, Paul is asking 'Does your knowledge blow up or build up?'. Does that knowledge you have blow up or build up, verses 1 to 3? Some were not bothered, Paul says: 'We know that these', including

himself, 'have knowledge. We know that it's not a sin to do this particular thing', but he warns them, 'Knowledge puffeth up'. We saw, and you can turn to it in chapter 1 verse 5, Paul commended them at the very beginning: 'That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge'. These were clever people, but the problem was that there was this feeling of being egotistical, they had a superiority complex in the knowledge that they had. Paul was warning them: 'Your knowledge is in danger of puffing up, making you arrogant' - why? Because these Corinthians were mature in knowledge, but not mature in love.

Someone has rightly said: 'Some Christians grow, but other Christians swell'. These Christians were swelling - the knowledge was correct, it was theologically accurate, all their i's were dotted and their t's were crossed, but Paul is trying to make them see the distinction: knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. 'You're right! But you can be right, Corinthians, in a wrong way!'. Love edifieth, or buildeth up, is the sense - so these believers were solid in doctrine, but they were weak in love. They were strong in self-love, but weak in brotherly love. Now you couldn't say that Paul was decrying doctrine, because Paul's the greatest doctrinal teacher in the whole of the New Testament. He's not minimising doctrine, but he's warning us: doctrine is not enough! Oh that we could hear that tonight: it is essential, but although it is essential is not sufficient, and in and of itself - without love - it makes arrogant, Paul says.

It is wrong to be all love, as so many are today, with no doctrine - but Paul is saying here that it is equally wrong to be all doctrine and no love. Arrogance, as we've seen as we've gone through this epistle, this statement 'puffed up' comes over and over again - it was perhaps their biggest problem, the underlying problem of all their sins. The word is used six times 'arrogant' of them, they were proud and self-satisfied - but Paul is saying: 'Look, you've got all the knowledge', and here's the amazing thing: he's agreeing with them! 'Your knowledge is right, but you're wrong!'. Sure, we in Ulster couldn't hold those two things together, sure we couldn't? But Paul did: you can be right and wrong at the same time, because of the way that you're right - without love.

We're not going to steal our thunder for future weeks, but turn just for a moment to chapter 13 - I trust you'll give me time tonight to deal with all this...that's another way of saying 'You're going to be late!' Verse 1: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and', watch this, 'understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up!' They had right knowledge, but they never once thought of how their right knowledge was affecting other believers in the actions that they were executing.

Let me just give a warning here tonight, because this has come very forcibly to my heart today: do you remember in Matthew chapter 18 what the Lord Jesus Christ said? He said it would be better that a millstone were put around your neck, and that you were drowned in the depths of the ocean, than that you offend one of these little ones of mine. And I know He may have had children around Him, but I know what He was talking about, for Paul talks in this passage about those for whom Christ has died - not offending them. The mature Christian, what Paul is really saying is he has a double barrel in his gun: he's a man that thinks right, but he also acts right; he's a conceptual Christian, he's got it all upstairs, but he doesn't leave it there - he's a relational Christian. In other words, he knows how to relate the truth of God that's in his head to himself, to other people around him.

That's a different thing, isn't it? I would vouch to say to you tonight that most of the divisions that take place in our land, in the churches, are not doctrinal, they're not conceptual, but they're relational. They're not fighting over doctrine - they may appear to be, but what's at the bottom of that is they can't hold their doctrine in grace! They can't agree to differ in grace. Paul is just saying to us that knowledge, we may think:

'Get all the knowledge you can', and do get all the knowledge you can - but know this: knowledge doesn't solve all the problems that there are. Go upstairs and the child won't go to sleep because it's afraid of the dark, what do you do? Do you go in, open the door, and say: 'Now son, you're going to have to get over this here, because this is just ridiculous! Do you think there's something frightening in the dark? Do you think the bogeyman is going to jump out of the cupboard and eat you all up?'. You don't do that! Why? Because a child in that situation doesn't need logic, it needs understanding. You know you're right, but does he know you're right? Does he understand why you're right?

This is exactly what Paul is saying: these babes in Christ, and these Corinthian believers - and I happen to think that they may have been Jews - they were flaunting their freedom to the expense of those who were only converted. As someone said: 'Love without truth is hypocrisy, but truth without love is brutality'. I hope, dear believers, that we never ever become the right orthodox people who can hurt everybody and anybody, or feelingless fundamentalists who are arrogant but cannot edify others. Paul gives a warning to us this evening if we're about to fall into that sin, verse 2: 'If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know' - God help you if you think you know it all, because Paul says you know nothing - nothing! Someone has defined knowledge as the process of passing from the unconscious state of ignorance to the conscious state of ignorance, to moving from thinking you know everything to knowing that you know nothing!

In verse 3 he says: 'But if any man love God, the same is known of him' - this is the fundamental truth that you need to get to grips with, what is it? It's that you don't learn truth primarily from going to Bible College, or from getting books off your shelves, or even from coming along and listening to a preacher or a teacher, but true knowledge is relational as well as conceptual - not only in the way that we relate to other people, but primarily only one way can we get true knowledge, and that is from God! 'But if any man love God, the same is known of him', communion with God, loving God and being loved by God, and the implication is that when we're in that relationship of fellowship that we will begin to learn how to love others as God loves them.

Oh this is getting near the bone, isn't it? A good test as to how watertight your knowledge is, man or woman, is: did you get that knowledge on your knees, or did you get it on your high horse? Does it make you love others, or does it make you despise others that don't have the great enlightenment that you have? Do you know what Paul says? Verse 3: it's one thing to know doctrine, but it's another thing to know God. Knowledge on its own puffeth up, but if you know God you'll love others - and what he's driving at is that love will set the limits on your Christian liberty. As we've been looking on these Sunday mornings in Philippians chapter 2 verse 4, you will think about the things of others and not about the things of yourself. You'll not be thinking about what your right is, or your freedom is, but you'll be looking after other believers - and your love will set limits on your liberty. Lord Bacon put it well when he said: 'Desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall, the desire of knowledge in excess caused man to fall, but in love there is no excess - neither can man nor angels come into danger by it' - you can't love too much.

There's the first principle, does your knowledge blow up or build up? Does it destroy or does it edify? Secondly: is your liberty a hazard or a help? Verses 4 to 7 - now note this, Paul is saying: 'Look, you have the right knowledge, the idol means nothing, some of them are fakes, some of them', as he says in chapter 10 verse 20, 'are manifestations of demons, but they're not true gods'. He quotes the Psalmist in verse 5: 'There be many gods, and lords many' - that doesn't mean they actually exist, it means in the minds of men across the world, the heathens, there are all these gods. But he says that there is only one true God, they're only called gods they're not real. Corinthians, you're right, in verse 6 he nails it down: 'But to us there is but one God', and he gives the God in the triune form, you mark it, 'one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord', given to God alone that title, 'Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him'. Oh these Corinthians were right on, they were Trinitarian in their doctrine, they knew there was only one true God, and He has come in the person of Jesus Christ to us, His Son. But Paul says in verse 7: 'Howbeit

there is not in every man that knowledge - you've got that knowledge, but not everybody has it, not every new believer in Corinth is thinking in those right ways now!'. You see some of them were thinking that that idol was a real god, they knew that they had the right God, the true God, but they thought that this idol was an evil god and he still existed, and if a piece of meat was sacrificed to him then there would be some kind of a curse on that piece of meat and, if they ate it, they would imbibe in some way that curse.

What Paul is saying to the stronger brethren is: 'If they see you sitting down in the temple eating that meat, or if they see you buying it in the market, and they think 'Well, if he does it, it must be OK', and they go against their conscience not to do it - their conscience, being weakened, is defiled'. I hope you see this all coming together: even though the act in and of itself is not categorised as a sin in scripture, and it is not a sin, it is not morally or spiritually wrong, it becomes wrong when it's committed against the conscience of the one who does it. Do you see it? These Corinthians were strong, they had a clear conscience about it some of them, they could go and eat that piece of meat and think nothing about it because they knew the idol didn't mean anything and meat doesn't mean anything to God, but what about the wee fellow that's just saved? He sees it, and he's lived a life of total pagan worship, and he thinks: 'That can't be right! But if he has done it, then it must be right!', and so he goes and does it - but he can't do it with a clear conscience, in fact he transgresses his conscience, and the Bible says that then it becomes a sin for him.

Now maybe we're hearing things here tonight that we've never known before, or we've never heard. This is what the New Testament teaches, that a thing can be a sin for one man and not for another. It can be regulated by the conscience of the one who commits it, and to violate your own conscience is to do something you feel is wrong. We're not talking here about things that are commanded and prohibited in the Scriptures, that are clear black and white sins - that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about things that the Bible doesn't speak on, and if you feel that a thing is wrong and you go and do it, you violate your conscience, it causes confusion in your heart, even resentment and perhaps feelings of guilt - because in your own mind you have committed a sin! Even if that thing, in the eyes of God, is not a sin, in your mind it's a sin, and it robs your peace and your joy.

You see that's what Paul said in a parallel passage in Romans 14, we're not turning to it, we don't have time, but he said this: 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin'. Do you see this distinction? The thing in and of itself, a piece of meat can't be sinful or not sinful, it's a piece of meat. But if a person comes and feels that he shouldn't eat it, the Bible says because he has transgressed his conscience he has sinned, and it's robbed him of his joy and his peace, and it may even lead him into temptation - as he is meant to pray for not to happen in the Lord's prayer, it might lead him into the associations of his former way of life.

Now here's the point that Paul is driving at: anyone who causes such a weaker brother to defile his conscience helps that brother into sin - do you see it? That wee grey area might be alright for you, you might see that you have every right in your freedom and liberality in Christ to do as you please - but Paul says that it's not just you you've to consider in this equation, but it's your brother in Christ and whether he can handle it if he saw you doing it. Do you see this? He's not coming in here like some of us would do, and say: 'Look, it's right', or, 'It's wrong, it's as simple as that' - but he does the same job, doesn't he? Without inventing sins he's able to show us what is the conduct of a Christian. We need to ask ourselves tonight and apply it to our own lives: is our liberality as a Christian a hazard to a weaker believer, or is it a help to them to build them up and edify them?

Here's the third principle bore out: does your clear conscience have catastrophic consequences? Verses 8 to 12 - oh, don't you make this mistake believer, especially those younger among us: don't think that because you're free in Christ that anything goes. What Paul is now saying is: freedom is inseparably tied to responsibility. We know that food isn't an issue with God, it's not an issue! The Lord Himself said that: 'There is nothing from without a man that, entering into him, can defile him; but the things which come out

of him, those are that which defile him'. Remember Peter having the vision in the book of Acts, the Lord dropped a sheet down from heaven with all the unclean animals on it and he told him: 'Kill and eat'. Now I know He was talking to him about going and preaching to the Gentile nations, but do you not think there's a literal interpretation of that as well? He said: 'Don't call what God has said is clean, don't call it common! Kill and eat!'. He went to the Gentiles and he preached the Gospel to them, for as one man has said: 'It makes no difference for food's sake, ceremonies sake, or God's sake' - it doesn't make any difference, these things that the Bible doesn't speak about, but what Paul is coming to is this: it makes the difference for conscience sake.

Think of this scenario for a moment: there's a mature believer, and they go up to the Acrocorinth, and they sit down and they dine at a table with all these pagans. They're eating a big steak that has been given as an offering to one of these idols. There is a weak believer sees him going up the hill, and that was the old way that he used to go. He's reminded of it, and he decides: 'Well if he's going up, I'll go up and see what he's doing', and he goes up and he sees him sitting down with all these ungodly men and eating this meat. Consequently, do you know what happens? Verse 11, through that mature believer's knowledge the weak brother perishes for whom Christ died. That word 'perish' could be translated 'ruin', and it has the sense 'to come to sin', to come to sin.

My friend, this is tremendously contemporary and applicable and relevant to us tonight: you can cause a person to sin by leading them into a situation that they cannot handle. You may be able to handle it, and bully for you - but it's not just you you're to think about! Paul is saying it's never right, not only to violate your own conscience, but to cause or encourage another believer to violate their conscience - because you run the risk of causing them to ruin, to sin, to perish, and they're a brother for whom Christ has died! What does that mean? It means that our Christian liberty must never be used at the expense of a Christian brother or sister who has been redeemed at such a price! Their price is the blood of Christ, and we shouldn't cause them to sin at the expense of our arrogance! The voice of the Christian's conscience is the instrument of the Spirit of God, and it's like a doorkeeper standing at those dangerous places He doesn't want us to go into because He knows we'll perish in them. You wouldn't dream of giving a baby a razor blade to play with, setting it down in the middle of a busy road to play with its toys, or giving it a box of matches to play with the fire - but we all know that when that baby gets a little bit older those restrictions will be moved, and they'll be free to do as they like. But Paul is saying: 'Although they're free to do what they like, they can influence the babes in Christ'. We should never expand our actions and our habits: one, before our own conscience permits it, we should never do a thing that we feel is wrong, because then it's sin it's not of faith - but neither should we ever be in the position of encouraging another believer to defile their conscience. Causing a brother to fall is not just a sin against him, but do you know what Paul is saying here, and this frightens me: it's a sin against the Lord!

Love for others will make you limit your liberty - here's the final point and principle that bears out to us today: does love regulate your living? Verse 13: 'Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend'. He restates the principle: life is controlled by conscience - conscience can be wrong now - but conscience is to be strengthened by knowledge, your conscience is to be regulated by the word of God; but knowledge, the knowledge that you have, must be tempered by love! Your conscience might say it's alright - maybe you don't have the knowledge, maybe you're the weaker brother! But even when you get the knowledge and your conscience is redirected, like the compass to the magnetic field of the earth, you're still to have your knowledge tempered by love.

I'm sure that all of us have fallen down with that on one occasion: is our conduct, even when we know we're right, always regulated by love? Imagine what would happen this evening if we all went away from this meeting deciding that from this time on we would live by love. Could you calculate the effect, the impact that would have on your family, on your neighbourhood, at your workplace, even in this church! Imagine it! One of the most penetrating statements of the Lord Jesus is found in John 13, listen to this: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.



By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another'. Now I don't know what version you have, but I notice that mine doesn't say: 'They will know that you're my disciples if you become serious students of the word of God' - is that what it says? 'They will know that you're my disciples if you pray all the time'? 'If you attend all the meetings in your church, or even in the town'? 'Or if you give all your time, all your talent and all your money to God's work'? All these things are valuable and desirable, but not one of them, Jesus said, this is the point Paul's driving home: not one of them will be the magnet that will draw people to the knowledge of God! Not one!

John, in his first epistle, said: 'This is how men will see God, who no man has ever seen right throughout time nor will ever see, when you as the church of Jesus Christ love one another, and when people in the world see the love of the family they will be drawn into the open arms of the Father'. True love, agape love, the love of God was sorely lacking in Corinth. What about here? Come on now, is this church, is this pulpit just a knowledge factory, cranking out facts and figures, and facts and more facts that are rarely ever impacting our lives or being practised? Is your knowledge, theologian, tempered by love? All you have to do to modernise this passage is to remove the word 'meat', and read in its place one of these other things that constitutes a problem for modern day Christian living, and you find this: Paul says 'Whatever it is, if that thing makes my brother to be offended, I will never do it again as the word stands lest I make my brother to offend'. Yet all we hear today is: 'Rights! Rights! Rights!'. Listen to what one author says: 'Paul is willing that his brother suffer instead of his brother's soul. He is willing to enjoy fewer temporal things, that his brother may have greater eternal things. He is willing to limit his strength in order to aid his brother's weakness. He is happy to suspend his knowledge in order to aid his brother's ignorance - thus he comes to a conclusive decision: in all questions of conduct he is willing to regulate his liberty by love'.

You know, I think we get ourselves into the muddles we do because we ask all the wrong questions. Is the question: 'Is this a sin?' - that thing you're thinking about, is it a sin? Is that what the question is, is it a sin? That wasn't the question that Paul answered, he didn't say: 'Well, that's a sin, and that's not a sin'. Do you know what the question is? 'Is this the conduct of a Christian?' Are those the same questions? I don't think so. 'Is this a sin?', and 'Is this the conduct of a Christian?' - surely Christians have a higher existence and life than just abstaining from things that are wrong! God help you if that's all that you live for! It's higher than that, it's what Paul says in chapter 10: 'Whether I eat, or whether I drink, or whatsoever thing I do' - oh, here's the test of your grey area and your doubtful experience - 'I do to the glory of God'. I trust that you apply these principles to your problems, and I believe God will bless you for it.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that has made us free. We pray that we will never become entangled again in a yoke of bondage. Deliver us from legalism that operates on a list of do's and don'ts, thinking that that is spirituality. Lord, we do know that he that loves the Saviour will keep His commandments, and we pray that we will keep the commandments that He has given us; but Lord we pray that they will not add to them. Lord, lest we think that this is a licence to sin, surely we realise tonight from the mirror of Thy word that if we know the love of God in us; if we are keeping ourselves in the love of God every day; if we love the Lord our God with all our soul, with all our heart, with all our might and with all our strength, and love our neighbour as our self, we will never do anything or be found anywhere that cannot glorify the God of all heaven. Lord, we thank Thee that our faith is not about laws, but it's all about love. Lord, it is our chief complaint that our love is weak and faint. Lord, we would pray that we would learn to love Thee more, and learn to love the brethren, for Christ's sake, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 21*

## ***"The Worker's Rights"***

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### I Corinthians 9:1-14

1. ***He Proves His Authenticity (verses 1-2)***
2. ***He Maintains His Liberty (verses 3-6)***
3. ***He Defends His Entitlement (verses 7-14)***
  - i. *Defended by warfare (verse 7a)*
  - ii. *Defended by farming (verse 7b)*
  - iii. *Defended by shepherding (verse 7c)*
  - iv. *Defended by law (verses 8-11)*
  - v. *Defended by precedent (verse 12a)*
  - vi. *Defended by priesthood (verse 13)*
  - vii. *Defended by the Lord (verse 14)*

Chapter 9 and beginning to read at verse 1: "Am I not an apostle? am I not free?", some versions and I think most scholars believe that that verse should be the other way around: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel".

I think you would have learned, if you've been with us through these studies in recent weeks, that the Corinthians for the most part thought more in terms of 'I' rather than 'we'. They thought of themselves individually rather than their collective responsibility to one another in the Lord Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters. As a result of that, when they considered their freedoms in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we saw last week in chapter 8, they focused on the benefit that they received personally from the freedoms that they had in Christ, and they failed to consider the repercussions of exercising their freedoms - how it affected their brethren and sisters in Christ. All they seemed to be concerned with was the rights of liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what the repercussions were for their brethren and sisters. So Paul had to teach them that while their freedoms were valuable, and while their liberty in Christ was a right that they had of grace, those freedoms, those liberties, were not more important or more valuable than the Gospel itself.

I think that we'll see that more clearly tonight in the illustration that Paul gives us of this principle in his own life. Christians, he's telling us in principle in chapter 8 and now by his own example, Christians when it is called upon them ought to feel able to disregard their freedoms readily and eagerly when they need to do so

for the purpose of the gospel and for the betterment of their brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. The principal was laid down in chapter 8 and verse 9, let's remind ourselves again: 'Take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak'. We saw last week that their Christian liberty, although it was their right and although the Corinthians were thinking in terms that were theologically accurate, absolutely correct and sound, Paul was coming in with a new principle that was unknown to them: that their liberty was to be limited and regulated by love.

It's alright being truthful and having all the truth at your disposal, but Paul says that that is not enough: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding gong, or a tinkling cymbal; and I am nothing if I have no love - even if I have all knowledge and understand all mysteries and give my body to be burned, if I have not charity I am nothing!'. We saw that clearly: that our rights end whenever another person, especially a brother or sister in Christ, is offended. If we offend one for whom Christ died, and we cause one to stumble for whom Christ shed His precious blood at such a cost, it is a great expense.

But what Paul is showing us here this evening in chapter 9 is an illustration, a personal illustration, how he didn't just practice what he preached, but he preached what he practised - which is more important. This wasn't something that just came out of his head and he hadn't done it yet himself, this was the way Paul had lived experientially. In verses 1 to 14 we're going to see tonight how he sets forth what was his right as a minister of the gospel of Christ, what was his entitlement as an apostle of Jesus. Next week, verses 15 to 18, we will see, and we'll see a little bit of it tonight, but we see it bore out more and explained more in the later verses, the reason why he didn't take advantage of what was his right as an apostle. Later on in verses 19 to 27 we're going to see how Paul was not only willing to give up wages, not willing just to give up his food and his drink, but he was willing to give up anything and everything, whether it was his right or not, for the sake of winning other people to the Lord Jesus Christ - that by any means he might win some.

Now this is very hard for us to swallow, because we live - although we're Christians - in this Western, affluent world, and in the free West that I hope we don't take for granted at the present time, we're told to value our freedom. But we can err on the side of valuing our freedom to such an extent that we're unwilling to give up our rights for anything. Because of that we have a society that is obsessed in the extreme with what is their individual rights. Paul is coming in here in chapter 9 trying to encourage these Corinthians to forfeit their rights for the sake of others. He does this by describing his entire ministry as one that never grasped or grappled or wrestled for his own rights, but one that was a life of servitude, sacrifice and one of accommodating others for their good.

Now let's look at this example of the principal that he's already laid down to us. The first thing that Paul does is he proves his authenticity. What he's really concerned with, before he enters into describing his rights, he has to argue for the fact of whether he's an apostle or not. We assume right away that that was disputed by the Christians who were in Corinth: 'Am I not free?', verse 1, 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord'. They questioned the fact that he was an apostle at all.

Now to answer that accusation he gives four questions, rhetorical questions, to which there are obvious responses. Am I not free? Now, if you've been following this book with us in recent weeks, you will see that the Corinthians have seen their freedom and their liberty as something so precious that they were even willing to offend the weaker brother to safeguard it. Paul's coming in here right away and saying: 'Well, am I not free? If you're defending your own liberty, am I not free? Am I not an apostle?'. Remember that 'apostle', although it simply means 'the sent one with a commission', we're talking about the narrow terms and definition of an apostle: i.e. one of the twelve, one who was the chosen of the Lord Jesus. Although Paul was not one of the original twelve, we know that he was classed and esteemed as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Consequently, not only was he free as a Christian, but you would imagine that if he was an apostle he had liberties that other Christians didn't have. In other words, he had an authority and a jurisdiction over the church that you or I do not have. He was a central leader with all the apostles in the church, and therefore he had responsibilities, but he also had freedoms.

Therefore, what he's really saying here at the beginning is: 'The church doesn't have authority over me, am I not free? Am I not an apostle?'. It's the reverse: 'I therefore, as an apostle, am free and have authority over you in Corinth. You who are so fond of asserting your own liberty, so I, Paul, cherish my liberty very well. As an apostle I need my liberty as a responsibility to rule in the church of Jesus Christ'. So you see how he's answering them right away, and then he goes on to prove his apostleship: 'Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?'. We read between the lines and assume that they were saying: 'Well, if Paul is saying he's an apostle and Acts chapter 1 verse 22 says that to be an apostle you had to see the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, Paul wasn't one of the original twelve disciples that were with the Lord when He was on the earth, therefore Paul cannot be an apostle'. But he comes back and he says: 'Have I not seen the Lord Jesus Christ?'

Of course it's a rhetorical question, and he's implying the answer: 'Yes, I have seen Him'. The requirement of being an apostle was to see the risen Lord Jesus, and we know from the book of Acts alone that the apostles saw the Lord Jesus risen on at least three occasions. Now let me prove this to you, if you turn to his conversion in Acts chapter 9 for a moment, and this is the primary example of when he saw the Lord, Acts chapter 9. You know the Damascus Road experience, I'll not take time to read the first three verses - verse 4: 'And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks'. He saw the Lord! But that is not the only occasion, for if you turn to chapter 18 - although this is a vision, nevertheless he claims to have seen the Lord, the risen Christ, in the vision - verse 9: 'Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision'. The Lord spake by a vision, so it wasn't just audible it was visual: 'Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city'. A third occasion, chapter 22 - it's another vision admittedly, but yet it's still a sight of the risen Lord - verse 17: 'And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me'. The mark of an apostle was to have seen the risen Christ, and Paul was defending the fact that he had the mark of apostleship - 'Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?'

The signs of the apostle, and this is an important one because there's men claiming to be apostles around our land - in fact, only last Thursday night we received a bundle of tracts and leaflets through the door and one of the deacons gave one to me to read to see what it was all about. I began to read, and the first couple of lines right away smacked of heresy - this guy, I don't even know who he was, but his Christian name is Malcolm, said 'Malcolm, an apostle of Jesus Christ, sent by God'. There are men even in Belfast who think that they are apostles of Jesus Christ - have they seen the risen Lord Jesus? I think not! The mark of apostleship, but then there's the signs of apostleship, 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Verse 12, and he's telling the Corinthians - they should know this, they've seen this among themselves - 2 Corinthians 12 verse 12: 'Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds'. Paul had performed these signs of an apostle among them, they shouldn't have any doubts whether he was an apostle or not

So: he had the mark of an apostle, he had seen the risen Lord; he had signs of an apostle, signs and wonders and great mighty works and miracles. Then he says in our passage in Corinthians 9 that he also had the seal of the apostle: 'Are ye not my work in the Lord?', verse 2, 'If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord'. What he's saying, if I can paraphrase it, is: 'If anybody should know that I'm an apostle it should be you, because not only have you seen these signs of an apostle, but you are my seal as an apostle, you're my work in the Lord, you came to Christ through me' - all

you have to do is read Acts 18 to find that out, that he had founded this church in Corinth. Many of the first saints were actually led to Christ by the apostle himself, and though it might have been sympathetic for someone who had never known the apostle Paul to hear his claims and doubt that he was an apostle, but these Corinthians of all men were not ignorant - they knew the truth, they themselves were his seal of apostleship, or proof that he was an apostle

Of course, you may know that a seal in ancient times was used on containers of merchandise, or maybe a stamp on a letter, to indicate the authenticity of what was inside it. It also stopped people tampering with the contents, or even substituting or altering it. Paul is saying: 'You, you who are doubting me, are the very proof, the authenticity that I am an apostle to the Gentiles'. Because of that he says in verse 3: 'Mine answer to them that do examine me is this' - and that's not really in reference to what follows, it's in reference to what has come before. 'My answer to those who doubt my apostleship, who examine me forensically like in a law court, my answer to them is this'

Now let me say that there will never be another apostle like these apostles, and don't ever believe anybody who says - I don't care where they come from or what theological camp they adhere to - they cannot be an apostle in the sense of these early apostles. We can never reciprocate what Paul is saying here and owning as his own, but I do want to draw two general evidences, not of an apostle, but of an authentic worker for Jesus Christ that we can take out of Paul's example. In verse 1 and verse 2 the two things we can take generally is, one: an authentic worker and server of Jesus Christ will have an experience of Christ, they will have an experience of Christ. 'Have I not seen Christ Jesus our Lord?'. Now obviously you have to be born again, and that would be elementary to even state that this evening - but the sad fact is that there are men in pulpits across our land and they're never seen Christ in salvation! Yet they claim to serve Christ! But that's not how I want to apply it, that's taken as read right away, but what we're talking about here is a living, vital relationship and communion with the Lord Jesus. That's the first thing of authentic service for the Lord

The second thing is this: a fruitful work for Christ. Not only an experience of Christ, but a fruitful work for Christ: 'Are ye not my seal of apostleship, my work in the Lord?'. Do you see this? On the one hand you have faith: an experience of Christ at conversion, and after conversion; and on the other side you have fruit for Christ. If there are two marks of an authentic servant and worker of the Lord Jesus it is both of those: faith and fruit, and that was the reason why Paul could come in as a servant of Christ with great authority - not just of apostleship, but of the fact that he knew Christ. It was obvious he knew Christ, and he had borne fruit for Christ, so he could be dogmatic before the church of Christ. If I can put it another way: he knew what he believed, and he stood up and he proclaimed what he believed with authority, and he saw fruit from proclaiming what he believed with authority.

What a picture of the authentic worker for Jesus. I just wonder why, perhaps, we have so little passion in our pulpits in this day and age in which we live, why we've so little conviction among the saints of God and among men that open the word of God and preach from its pages. I just wonder, looking at this great man of God the apostle Paul, is it because less and less people have an authentic experience of Christ? Not just at conversion, but every day! Is it because they don't have an authentic experience of the truths that they espouse when they preach? Is it because they have never proved these truths in their own lives or in their churches? Is it because they have never seen the fruit of their labour as they adhere to these principles of work and spiritual truths? As Vance Havner, I think it was him, on one occasion said: 'Don't deal in untrafficked truth' - don't deal in untrafficked truth. That simply means: don't be telling other people to do things that you're not prepared to do yourself, or maybe you've never experienced yourself.

It was Vance Havner that said: 'I read of a man who had studied Arabic until he could read it, but he couldn't speak it well enough to order a cup of coffee'. One may have a head full of theology without any testimony of actual experience. There was once a famous writer who studied medicine and was absolutely commended, so good at dissecting corpses, dead bodies, looking at the anatomy and the physiology of the human form -

but he didn't like working with living people! There are those who enjoy theology and dry doctrine, but they don't care for living experience, a knowledge of Christ and experience of Christ! Seeing that experience of Christ borne out in fruit from your life for Christ, every day and every hour - this apostle Paul wasn't a man who read some theological book and espoused to its claims. He said: 'Have I not seen Christ Jesus our Lord?'

After all, is that not what Christianity is? An experience of Jesus Christ, and Paul bore this balance out that the book of James preaches to us: that faith without works is dead, and he had both of them. In verse 3 he says: 'That's my answer to them that do examine me in this'. Now, the other thing that these Corinthians were trying to do to him was push him into a narrow unnatural bracket of human life. They were saying: 'Well, if you're an apostle you should live like this, if you're a servant of God this is the habitual lifestyle that you should be portraying'. They were trying to deprive him of rights that were normal to ordinary human beings, they were setting him on a pinnacle as such. That's so relevant, because I find as we look abroad in Christendom that those in the church often feel it's their right to legislate what their leaders and the leader's families should or should not do - when most of the time they don't apply those truths to their own lives

I'm not singling anybody out, I'm not referring to my own personal experience here, or anything anybody's doing or saying to me in the meeting - don't misunderstand me at all. You know what I'm talking about. They want the missionaries to have a certain lifestyle, but they can have another one personally: 'That's terrible, a missionary living like that', but you're not prepared to live like that. You're not prepared to deny yourself where perhaps you expect others to deny themselves. And the point is, Paul is saying: 'Although I am an apostle, I'm entitled to the same privileges and joys as the rest of you'. That's what he's saying, he's saying: 'Although I am an apostle, these things are my rights'.

So he's not just proving his authenticity, but he's maintaining his liberty, verses 4 to 6. He begins to ask questions about rights, his own personal rights, and the answers again are so obvious that one can easily sense Paul's sarcasm as he asks them. Here's the first one: 'Have', verse 4, 'we not power to eat and drink?'. That basic, isn't it? 'Do we not have a right to food and drink, as we minister the Gospel to you? Are you going to starve us, make us thirst to death as we are giving to you words whereby ye may be saved, the eternal life, the well of waters springing unto eternal life, this water that will make you never thirst again and you're not going to give us a drink or a meal?'. This is what was happening, verse 5: 'Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Do we not have a right to bring our believing wives along with us, like the other apostles, when we're going on a missionary journeys?'

Incidentally, there's a couple of things by digression we may note, that a wife in the Lord ought to be in the Lord - see what it says here? First: 'a sister, a wife', young people note that: there is to be no unequal yoke, and if it applies to an apostle it applies to a Christian - and if you're going to consider a wife, it ought to be a sister in the Lord as well. Another thing to notice is the Roman Catholic Church would say that it's required that a man of God, a minister, a priest, whatever you want to call him, ought to be celibate - but here you have Paul saying that the other apostles were not celibate, they brought their wives along - and in fact look at one who did bring his wife along: Cephas, which is the Aramaic word for Peter, their first pope! He brought his wife along with him, maybe they don't know that, but he brought her along. 'And also as the brethren of the Lord', does that mean Peter wasn't a brother of the Lord, or the apostles? No, it means the natural brothers of the Lord that Mary and Joseph had after she give birth to the Lord Jesus - the half-brothers and sisters of Christ - those brethren brought their husbands and wives along.

Paul says: 'Do we not have a right?'. Incidentally, isn't it lovely when we were pondering last week how those who are married because of the present distress, because of how short it is to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, they should live as if they're not married? Do you know one way of getting round that, rather than leaving your wife at home? It's bringing her along with you - I think this is lovely, that the wives went, they led them about as well as the other apostles. Paul says: 'If I want to have a wife, have I not a right

to have a wife? Are you going to say I have to be celibate?' - that's what they were saying, because he was saying: 'I wish you were like me'. 'I have a right to be married if I want to'. Then thirdly in verse 6: 'Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?' - he's saying: 'Are I and Barnabas the only apostles not worthy of being paid for the work that we're doing for the Lord among you?'

Some evidently thought, and I think at least that Paul's refusal to take advantages of these rights proved, that he actually lacked these rights, that he wasn't worthy of the rights - and they said: 'Well, if Paul doesn't demand a wage from us like other apostles have, and if he hasn't brought a wife along with him like the rest of the apostles, it means that he doesn't have those rights. And if they're the rights of an apostle, that means he's not an apostle at all'. You can see where reason gets you at times, and so Paul has to come in here and affirm his apostolic rights, and he pointed to this fact: that although he supported himself making tents to provide for his own needs, and even as we find in the New Testament he provided for the needs of others by doing this, although he did this he had a right to be fed at their table and paid from their finances. But he stepped aside from those rights, he even step aside from marriage which was his right, he had foregone these rights - why? For the greater good of the Gospel!

You may be surprised that Paul is going down, after talking so much in chapter 8 about your rights, foregoing them, now he's starting to establish in a legalistic way, like the lawyer he was, the reason why he has rights. Do you know why he's doing it? To show them that he didn't grasp at them, he had foregone them that they may come to Christ, and now they're holding that very thing against him. Look what he says in verse 12, although we're running ahead of ourselves, the end of it: 'Nevertheless we have not used this power', or these rights, 'but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel'. Now listen, if you give up your job to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is saying that you have a right to be supported, but this is what he's also saying: there can come times that you should not demand your rights at the expense of the gospel. Do you see how this principle in chapter 8 that we spent so much time on is being illustrated by Paul himself here? And I think that this policy is so refreshing in the mercenary world of Christian ministry that we live in today: Paul didn't see himself as being employed, he saw himself as being called! He didn't use his position for profit, but he found a greater service in sacrifice, a greater joy in laying his life down and foregoing his rights, and he wasn't in an 'If the price is right' ministry. Let us get away from this cursed thing, this Achan that is in the camp of evangelicalism today. If you think that there are abuses on one side, there are surely abuses on the other - yes, there are churches that are starving, there are pastors and ministers today - and thank God that I'm not one of them, I'm well cared for here - but there are churches who won't support their workers when they have the ability to do it! God forgive them!

Sam Jones said that when asked about finances in his early ministry, he always replied: 'I leave that with the brethren', and Sam added, 'and I really did, for when I left the brethren still had it'. On the other hand, there are those not only who withhold what is the due of the ministers of Christ, but there are workers, preachers, missionaries, who are fleecing and sponging off congregations who don't have the wherewithal - yet they're demanding it as their rights! There are congregations left without shepherds because they can't keep a man in the custom to which he is used. What is Paul saying in all of this? He's saying: 'You're not seeing what really suffers - yes, the congregation suffers; yes, on occasions the servant of God suffers; but the gospel is what ultimately suffers'. Oh that we could see the bigger picture in all of this politicking, at times, that goes on in ecclesiastical halls.

He proves his authenticity, he maintains his liberty as his right, and then in verses 7 to 14 he defends his entitlement. In verse 7 he begins to build the case further, and he appeals to seven pieces of evidence - he's going now down a legal route here to prove why it's his right to have a wage. Verse 7: 'Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?'. One preacher called this chapter, as he preached on it, 'Questions, questions, questions' - there are so many questions in the chapter, aren't there? But they're rhetorical, they're obvious, the answers to them stare us in the face as he goes down. The first thing he does

is he defends his rights in three ways from the customary realm of society of his day - things that ordinary people knew.

The first is: he defends his right by the illustration, the allegory of warfare: 'Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?'. Now this comes home to us this particular night as we find our nation at war, and we ask ourselves: 'Do any of our soldiers', and we thank God for them, 'do any of them buy a ticket to Baghdad with their own wages?'. Do any of them buy a machine gun and grenades out of their own pocket and their family allowance? They don't do it! They don't go to war at their own expense, they don't pay for the things they need, they don't have to have another job to work at night, because their service is for the country and the country pays their way. Do you see where he's going? Then in the customary area he talks about a farmer, or a vineyard dresser, and he defends his right by farming: 'Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?'. Have you ever seen a vineyard farmer going down to the supermarket and buying a bunch of grapes? Sure it's ridiculous! He doesn't do that, he eats of his own fruit. Then he talks about shepherds, he defends his right by the allegory of shepherding: 'Who feedeth a flock', a shepherd, 'and eateth not of the milk of the flock?'. Do shepherds have milkmen? Of course they don't, they eat of the milk of the flock; or men who milk the cows eat of the herd, the milk of the herd in our nation.

Paul is really saying that all these customs show us that common sense dictates this: that he that lives for the gospel ought to live off the gospel, and as people in the world have a right to make a living from their own work, surely a Christian should be provided for by the Christian? I don't think the analogy should be ignored either, that he uses this picture of a soldier: one who has courage, one who has loyalty, dedication, enduring hardship. That's what should be the mark of a servant of God if he's going to be supported of children of God, to be courageous and loyal and dedicated, enduring hard times. The same with a vinedresser, what does he do? He plants something that bears fruit - and what are we planting in our churches? Is it bearing fruit? A shepherd is one who takes care of the flock, doesn't leave the flock, provides food and watches for the souls of the flock. Those servants should be looked after, Paul says.

Now watch what he does: he's defended it by warfare, by farming, by shepherding, and now he defends it by law - verses 8 to 10. He says: 'Say I these things as a man?'. You see you had these hyper-spiritual people in Corinth, like you have in churches today, and when you give an illustration from life, ordinary life, they say: 'Oh, that's worldly'. Paul says: 'Say I these things as a man? Is it a merely human point of view that I'm talking about here? Does God not confirm this in the law of God?'. He defends his right by the law of Moses, and Paul believes obviously that the law of the Old Testament undergirded moral principles and his moral right to receive a livelihood from his ministry. If you have a good marginal Bible you'll see that he says in verse 9: 'For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn', and it's quoted from Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse 4.

Now thank God we're free from the law, oh happy condition - but please don't for one moment think that the law is all cruel, because behind the God of the Old Testament law there is the same compassion that we find in the very bosom of the Lord Jesus Christ. For even that old law that condemns to death so many sinners, has enough compassion to protect an old ox treading at the corn - isn't that lovely? It reminds me of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord God of heaven takes note even of the little sparrow that falls, how much more are ye than many sparrows? Now I know that Paul says at the end of verse 9: 'Does God take care of oxen?', and he's meaning: is God really talking about oxen here? That's what he's saying - it doesn't mean that God doesn't care about oxen, we know He cares for the sparrow, but what he's saying is: 'Is that the point God is really getting at, or is God undergirding a principle here that transcends just farming?', and that's exactly what He's doing.

We know that there were two methods of treading out the grain that were practised, and at times they would take the stalks of the grain and spread them over a flat hard surface called a threshing floor. The oxen or the horses would drag a weighted board across the grain by walking around and around a central position,



around a pole if you like - and this grain would be crushed. But there were other times that the animal simply walked on the grain with their feet and trod it out, and what the law is saying is that the farmer isn't to muzzle the oxen treading out the corn, but the oxen is permitted when it's hungry to bend down to the corn that it's treading and eat of it. 'Does God take care of oxen?', or verse 10, 'saith he it altogether for our sakes?' - isn't that lovely? It's for our sakes even that old law was given, there's a deeper moral principle undergirding the law, and it's summed up when he says in verse 10 that: 'he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope'. Those who are threshing ought to have hope in sharing in the harvest, do you not think that's fair?

I think at times there are double standards operated in the church of Jesus Christ with regards to missionaries and servants and evangelists and so on, but Paul says to Timothy: 'There ought not to be, but the one that labours among you in the word of God ought to be due double honour!'. In verse 11 he said: 'If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?'. What he's saying? 'We sowed spiritual seed among you, and surely we have every right to reap material harvests' - do you know what he's doing? He's setting the spiritual and the material in contrast, and he's saying: 'Surely it's insignificant if we've given unto you the words of eternal life and are building you up and feeding you spiritually, that we should receive material things from you?'. Do you know what the problem was? They esteemed the material things greater than that which was spiritual.

I wonder do we do that today? It'll be borne out, as one man said: 'You'll know how evangelistic a church is by looking at the budget', how much they spend on it. My friends, surely the spiritual is more important? In verse 12 he indicates that these Corinthians, they were supporting other workers that weren't even labouring among them at this particular time. Look at it: 'If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Do we not deserve it?'. I think it's probably these other Christians, maybe Apollos, maybe Cephas who came after Paul had settled the church there and lead them to Christ. He defends, not only by the law, but by precedent: 'You've done this for other people, surely I have a greater right when I'm the apostle to the Gentiles, and I led you to Christ in the first place'.

He's building up some case here, isn't he? But here's the point, the crescendo, the climax, the second part of verse 12: 'Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ'. Others who came after Paul claimed their right and got it, but he didn't claim it! That's his point: 'It was my right', and he's built up the case not to get what is due, but to show them that he had foregone it for their good - why does he do it? Not to show how big a man the apostle Paul is, but to show them that they ought to do it too for the brethren - forgo their rights. He said, and this is tremendous: 'but suffer, I suffer all things' - do you know what that Greek word is? It's the word 'endure', 'stego' (sp?) - and it can be translated like this 'to pass over in silence'. He's saying: 'I put up with not being given enough food on the table, not enough drink to quench my thirst. I had to work on tents with my own hands for my own needs, and the needs of my brethren, and I suffered it in silence - why? That it would not hinder the Gospel!' - that's why! I tell you, a dose of this would be good for all of us. How many of us would pay our own way to get the gospel out?

He says: 'I did this not to hinder the gospel', look at that wee word 'hinder' for a moment. It's a Greek word that I'm led to believe is a surgical term for making an incision, a cut. What he's really saying is: 'I didn't want, with financial needs, to cut the body of Christ to such an extent that it would wound the gospel'. At all costs he was trying to avoid the impression of a financial interest in the ministry that God had given him. He defended by precedent, now he defends it by priesthood sixthly - verse 13: 'Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?'. You know that these priests and Levites got their food from the temple offering, and shared in what had been sacrificed on the altar. Then in verse 14: 'Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel' - he concludes in the same way as the Lord Jesus Himself. This isn't just mere human wisdom, the Lord Himself said that the workman is worthy of his meat, Matthew 10:10

- and to the 72 He said in Luke 10:7: 'The labourer is worthy of his hire' - defended by the Lord, and his conclusion couldn't have been stronger than that!

What a case! Defended by warfare, farming, shepherding, law, precedent, priesthood, and the Lord Himself - yet at the end of it all he didn't claim his right, why? Because the Christian worker is not to be seen as a wage-earner, but he's to be thought of in terms of love rather than law, gratitude rather than duty and compulsion. Now give me a couple of minutes here as I draw this all together, because there's principles and applications that we can apply to our lives. Paul had authority that none of us have, or no modern worker preacher or missionary has, yet we ought to submit to this apostolic authority we find here. Here's about four or five ways we can do it. One: we should support our workers - and I thank you for supporting me, but there's more than me you know. There's missionaries, there's evangelists, there's organisations, and it's up to us to support them. There's the work here, and we'll be building soon, and it's our duty to support it! Second: we need to realise that expressing our freedom in Christ, although it is our right, it may hinder the gospel at times. Thirdly: lost souls, what a principle this is, are more important than our rights! Fourthly: we need to cultivate our love for others that motivates us to place their need for the gospel above our desire for freedom and rights.

I love Philippians 2, as we've been meditating in it, and what does verse 6 say: 'He was in the form of God', the morphae (sp?) of God, 'yet He thought it not something to be grasped at, but made Himself of no reputation. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself' - He, the Christ, didn't grasp at His own deity! He had it, but He didn't revel in its privileges. I love those old Moravian missionaries, and there's a story told of one of them who was in the West Indies, and no matter how much he tried he could get no access to the natives because they were kept working all day as slaves, and then when they got home at night they were too tired to be receptive to the gospel. After he had tried every plan he could think of and failed in every one of them, the verse Romans 12 verse 1 came to him, about offering your body as a living sacrifice. He took drastic action, and do you know what he did? He sold himself into slavery! By one of the plantation owners he was driven every day with those coloured men into the field to work, but it was there he could speak to them - he forwent his right of freedom for the cause of the gospel and for the cause of Christ.

How much do we do that? Come on, we're not talking about pastors and missionaries here, and evangelists, this is for us all - and we'll see this next week. Are we obsessed with our rights? Can we say in the spirit of Christ, like the Moravian man, like Paul the apostle and like the imitable C.T. Studd: 'If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him'. Next week we're going to see the worker's responsibility to the church and to the gospel.

Oh, our Father, let our lives be given and every moment spent for God, for souls, for heaven, and all earth's ties be rent. Lord Jesus, Thou gavest Thyself for me, but what have I given for Thee? Lord, let our lives not be a hindrance to Thy gospel, but may our deaths be a testimony to it, for Christ's sake, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 22*

## ***"The Wisdom Of A Master Soul-Winner"***

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

- 1. *The Soul-Winner's Motivation (verses 15-18)***
  - a. *A high motive (verse 15)*
  - b. *A passionate motive (verse 16)*
  - c. *A rewarded motive (verses 17-18)*
- 2. *The Soul-Winner's Adaptation (verses 19-23)***
  - a. *To the Jew under the law (verses 19-20)*
  - b. *To the Gentile outside the law (verse 21)*
  - c. *To the weak without understanding (verses 22-23)*

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 9, 1 Corinthians chapter 9, beginning to read at verse 15 - and we're looking at these verses under the title tonight 'The Wisdom of a Master Soul-Winner'. Verse 15, trying to remember, at least, if you were with us the last couple of weeks, what we have studied hitherto: "But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation", or a stewardship, "of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" - and we finish our reading at verse 23.

If we have anything in these verses that we have read together this evening, one thing that we do receive is a picture, a portrait, even a self-portrait of the apostle Paul as a soul-winner - and I would go as far as to say, as a master soul-winner. We're going to see this evening, as we go down these verses, that Paul knew what Solomon said in Proverbs 11 and verse 30, that 'He that winneth souls is wise'. That doesn't just mean that it's a wise thing to go after souls or the lost and seek to win them, but I think the inference is in that verse also that you need wisdom, a certain amount of wisdom, in order to win the lost for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not just all about the sovereignty of God, and we need to be very careful that we don't make this mistake - and although we stand very firm and square on the sovereignty of God, in all things we must remember that God has left with His church and with His disciples the responsibility to go and win the lost. It is significant that Paul himself said that he longed to save some.

Of course, we know that salvation is of the Lord, and the Lord alone can save men and women, but yet Paul uses this phrase because there is a human responsibility in all of us as believers to go after our kith and kin, our brethren in humanity, and seek and save the lost. We will see tonight the wisdom Paul had in this regard, but what we also need to see is that this wisdom of soul-winning is found in the context of the weaker brother, and forgoing what is your right and liberty in Christ for the weaker brother, who may stumble seeing your liberty. We're going to see this evening, as we did last week, that Paul forfeited the right to be paid for

his Gospel ministry in order that the gospel that he was preaching might have greater success. Remember that, he had foregone any wage, even a meal on the table of Corinthian homes, in order that no one could point the finger and say: 'Paul's in it for the money'. So he had foregone these things in order that the gospel might be spread without any hindrance whatsoever.

But the point that Paul was making, as he made these Corinthians aware of his own sacrifice, was that they too ought to forfeit their right to eat this meat sacrificed to idols that they talked about in the first few verses of this chapter, they should avoid it in case they injure the weaker brother, in case they offend the brother for whom Christ has died. What he's really getting at is this: the testimony of the believer, the testimony of the church, and the testimony of the witness of the gospel is much more important than the liberty that we have in Christ. Although the Corinthian's theological viewpoints were 'A1', they were absolutely correct, Paul had to point out to them that love was to regulate their liberty even when their liberty was theologically accurate.

Now we're going to see tonight that Paul cites two reasons why it's important to forgo your right, and in his case personally to forgo his right of payment for his ministry. The two reasons really, if we were to summarise it, can be given like this: one, you're to forgo your right in the gospel, for the gospel's sake, because of the reward that you will have one day in eternity. The second thing is this: if you are to win souls, it will be called upon you at times to forgo your rights and your liberty for the gospel's sake in the very medium of winning the lost for the Lord Jesus. So, one: because of your reward; and two: because of the necessity of soul-winning, and soul-winning with wisdom.

Let's look at this tonight, because it's particularly informative to all of us who are believers, those involved in so-called - I don't like this phrase, but at times it's hard to get round it - 'full-time service', and those who are involved in all sorts of service - every individual Christian will get some kind of an application from this study tonight. The first thing that Paul talks about is the soul-winner's motivation, the soul-winner's motivation, verses 15 to 18. Really the summary of what he's saying in this is: 'Your serving is not all that matters'. Now if I could get everybody in the Iron Hall to serve the Lord, I would be really chuffed - but once you get to that point of doing something for the Lord, Paul is saying that that's not the be all and end all of everything, but what really matters is how you serve the Lord - specifically the motivation with which you serve Him.

There are three things I've outlined for you in your notes with regards to the soul-winner's motivation that Paul teaches us here from his own personal example. One: there is a high motive, verse 15; two: a passionate motive, verse 16; and three: a rewarded motive, verses 17 and 18. Let's look at verse 15 first of all: 'But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void'. Of course he's talking about what has already come, he was talking about how he had a right to be paid for his Gospel ministry, and we looked at the various evidences, and he made a watertight legal case in this regard, appealing to law, appealing to custom, and appealing even to our Lord Jesus Christ to show that he was worthy - the labourer - of his hire. You're not to muzzle the ox as it treads out the corn. But Paul is pointing out to them again that he waived that right of wages in reward, financially, for his labour - the reason being, and let us not miss this, that he didn't want to give any of his enemies, or the enemies of the gospel, an occasion to charge him with using the gospel in a mercenary way for his own personal gain.

Now we hadn't time to do this last week, but we want to take the time just to show you that this is right, this is a consistent pattern in the life of the apostle throughout the epistles. Look at 1 Thessalonians for a moment, chapter 2 verse 9, Paul says: 'For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God'. In order to be answerable only to God he didn't want the people of God in Thessalonica to have any ties financially upon him. Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 8 to see the similar sentiment: 'Neither did we eat any

man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you'. Do you see this? That Paul would even go to the extent of refusing a meal in order that none could point the finger at him and say: 'Look, he's only here in Thessalonica to be fed, to be watered at our expense, to be looked after by the church of God - he's a sponger!'. But because Paul wanted the gospel to stand out above everything else in his life, he made sure that there was never once an occasion of finger-pointing of blame toward him that he was in it for the money.

Now the interesting thing is that Paul receives support from the church of Thessalonica after he left them, but he never received any support when he was labouring among them. I think, without doubt, that the church of Thessalonica was among those Macedonian churches that helped support the apostle, ironically, when he was in Corinth labouring among the Corinthians. Let me show you this, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and it's narrowing it down to see that it was when he was among the people ministering the gospel that he didn't take this money, but when he was in Corinth the Thessalonians, being of Macedonia, helped him - chapter 11 verses 8 and 9: 'I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man', no man among you that is, 'for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself'.

Why? Why was he so particular and picky? I imagine that some of the brethren in the churches today would have sat down with Paul and said: 'Now Paul, you're going against your own teaching: the labourer is worthy of his hire' - Paul would say: 'No, you're missing the point, that is my right, and if I want it I can have it; but what is more important for me is the gospel! I want only the gospel to be seen'. That's why he says in verse 15: 'For it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void' - I would rather die! Now I'm led to believe that this is not a single sentence as it appears to us in the English verse here in our Authorised Version. In the original the phrase could be read like this: 'I would rather die than', and then it stops - 'I would rather die than', it's an incomplete exclamation. 'I would rather die than', and then it's interrupted by this statement, 'no one will deprive me of this boast' - do you see it? 'I would rather die than', and then he pauses, 'no one will deprive me of this boast'. Now we haven't got time to look at this, but you can go through the Greek New Testament and you can find that on occasions Paul didn't complete his sentences - he was a bit like me at times! He didn't complete them, he got so worked up in an exclamation of emotions that he was overcome, and he stopped dead in the middle of sentences. He couldn't finish this particular sentence because he was overwhelmed by how important the preaching of the gospel was above everything else, even above the very bread that he was eating and the water that he was drinking, and it didn't matter that he suffered and had to work in the backstreets of Corinth with his hands making tents - it didn't matter, as long as the gospel was not hindered!

This is tremendous stuff, and we need to really note this: he never... 'I will never let anyone deprive me of the boast that I preached the gospel voluntarily, not for what I could get out of it'. Now friends this evening, Paul, when he's boasting, isn't sinning - because we'll see later that his call to preach the gospel was nothing to do with him in one sense, it was of God entirely, but what he's trying to point out to them is: 'I'm not a prophet for hire, like the prophet Balaam in the Old Testament that was in it for the money. I am in it for the gospel, and the glory of the gospel'. This is what we need in our hearts today, although if a church like this church is able to keep a man like me that's tremendous and commendable, and I'm very thankful for it, but if there ever came a day when you couldn't support me, or when I wasn't here for whatever reason - I would have to preach the gospel, no matter what was on the table, or no matter what I could drink, or where I could live!

We'll see this, because Paul says it's a necessity, but let's look at one more passage to show you how this was ingrained within Paul - Acts 20 - when he's talking to the Ephesian elders. This was the commitment that he declared to these Ephesian men of God, verse 35: 'I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye

ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive' – it's more blessed! Verse 33: 'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me' - do you see it? It is more blessed, this is his thesis of ministry if you like, his motto: 'It's more blessed to give than to receive, and if I'm called upon to give the gospel and get nothing back in return but suffering and anguish from the people of God and the enemies of Christ, so be it!'

I'll tell you, this is what we need today, and if we could sum it up we could sum it up in this statement: Paul's purpose and motive in ministry was men, not money. What a refreshing statement that is in the light of all the television evangelism that goes on and goes over the satellite - isn't it amazing? It's remarkable that the elect of God are deceived, sure the world can even see through it all! My friends, as one man said: 'If Paul was more concerned about money than he was, his stature would have shrivelled and we would not have heard of him except for a passing mention' - and I believe he's right. Paul stands out because he was different in this regard, he had a high motive - not for money, not for his welfare, but for the gospel!

Secondly he had a passionate motive, a passionate motive which was his soul-winning motivation. Verse 16: 'For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!'. Now that seems quite complicated, but what he's really saying is: 'The driving force of my ministry is a compelling conviction'. In other words: 'I have been sent of God', now we know that he was an apostle - and we looked at this last week, that there was a uniqueness in how an apostle was sent of God, but in one sense we can understand it generally: all of us who go to preach the gospel are sent to preach the gospel on the great commission of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 28. So we are all sent, and 'It's not as if I'm just going of my own free will', Paul is saying, 'but there's a compelling conviction in me'. He actually uses this statement: 'For me it is a necessity - and it's not a necessity that's my doing', look at the wording, 'for necessity is laid upon me'. 'I didn't ask for this!' - now he's not complaining, but what he's doing is retorting back to his Damascus Road experience when the Lord led His hand upon him and He saved him, and Paul said: 'What wouldst Thou have me to do?'. There the Lord Jesus ordained him, he was ordained in his mother's womb, but there the Lord put His hand upon him and called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles and do the work he's actually doing here. For him it is a necessity to do this, it's a necessity to go, and then we read on: 'But woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!'. So it's a necessity to go, and it's a woe if he didn't!

That's why Paul says: 'Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory in. I'm running all round the Mediterranean world', but do you know what he's saying in colloquial terms? 'I have no choice, I have no choice. This wasn't something that I sat down by the fire one day and thought, 'Well, I better make a new religion, or I better go around preaching this gospel of Jesus because I think it's right" - necessity was laid upon him! He had a compelling conviction, a compulsion on him, so much so that he was cursing himself if he didn't fulfil it: 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!'. Now don't misunderstand me, we know that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, and there was a choice that he had to make - I'm not saying that he could have refused to obey God, but what Paul wants you to see is that he was compelled. If he had not fulfilled his ministry that God was calling him to, there would be the woe of chastisement - I believe that word 'woe' means the severest of judgments promised on unfaithful ministers. In James 3 verse 1, James says seek not to be many masters, for you bring yourself under greater condemnation - that really means: teachers, don't seek to be a preacher unless you're prepared to go and preach the gospel, unless you're prepared for necessity to be laid upon you, unless you're prepared to be judged if you do not do it!

For Paul preaching was not a profession, there is no such a thing as the preaching profession! For Paul preaching was not a pastime that he did on nights and got a brown envelope for it, but preaching was a passion, it drove his whole being and existence. He's saying: 'You can't just choose to be a preacher the way people choose an everyday profession, for it's not really a matter of your choosing, it's a matter of God's

choosing!'. I think we would do well, perhaps, if there were fewer men in pulpits who were not called of God; men trying to fill the place - and I do not stand on a high horse when I say this, I've a lot to learn and a lot of ground to cover in my life yet - but surely we have to acknowledge in this day of apostasy that men ought to stand up and open their mouths when they're called of God, and when they've got a message from God! An old preacher said to a young man contemplating service: 'Don't enter the ministry if you can help it son'. That's what it's like! Don't enter the ministry if you can help it! I can testify in my own life that I was compelled, there was nothing else open for me, men told me: 'Why not do a degree in teaching?' - if you'll excuse the personal illustration for one moment, but I know that this is true. 'Do a degree in teaching, and if it doesn't work out you can fall back upon it' - that's not a call from God!

Paul had this compelling issue of necessity upon him! One writer put it: 'If the modern ministry is to be adequate to the tremendous days ahead, it needs to be the ministry of a master passion'. Do you know what's wrong a lot of the time? There's too little passion in our pulpits! Do you know what that communicates? 'That man doesn't believe what he's saying!'. I hope I can remember this illustration right, but it was a very famous actor who was asked the question: 'What is the difference between you and a preacher?'. He answered something like this: 'A preacher is a man who preaches truth as if it was fiction; I am a man who acts fiction as if it was truth'. God forgive us if this is the case with us - sometimes I know I get excited, and I know I go overboard at times, but I can't help it! Because necessity is laid upon me - woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel! I can't talk about the blood of Christ, and the cross of Christ, and the nails of Golgotha like an icicle! This is what Paul was saying, the great preacher C. H. Spurgeon said: 'The man who says, 'God has chosen me', can afford to let others think and speak after their own nature. It is in his business to take his stand separately and deliberately and distinctly, to do what he believes to be right and let the many or the few do as they will - but he is to preach the gospel, even if he doesn't get fed for it!'

It's a passionate motive. Speaking about modern ministers, a Christian editor said: 'A man who is forced to preach in order to save himself always makes a fervent preacher' - do you see it? To save yourself from judgment: 'Woe is unto me!' - the philosophy of the watchman, that when he cries and puts the trumpet to his mouth and blows the warning in the city, and the people don't heed it, the blood is off his hands - but if he falls asleep and doesn't put the trumpet to his mouth, the blood is on his hands, and Paul could say in Acts: 'I am not guilty of the blood of any of you', because he preached unto them the gospel. He was driven to preach, and he preached with passion - God give us more passionate preachers, passionate evangelists, and passionate Christians as they seek to win the lost.

Thirdly, a rewarded motive, verses 17 and 18: 'For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward', this is remarkable, 'if I do this willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation', or a stewardship, 'of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel'. Paul is saying: 'I can't get reward for something I'm compelled to do' - do you see what he's saying here? 'Necessity is laid upon me, I've been called to be a preacher of the gospel, and I can't get rewarded for something I have to do'. Now don't think Paul's saying that he'll not be rewarded in any way for his preaching of the gospel, but the main point that he's making here is that 'It's not the actual preaching of the gospel I will be rewarded for, that's a dispensation, it's a stewardship, and if I don't do it I'll not be rewarded, I'll be punished! Not in the sense of wrath, or hell, or judgment, but in less reward when I get to the Judgment Seat. So I'm not being rewarded for doing something, this is my responsibility, but what I will be rewarded for is preaching the gospel without charge, preaching it when there was nothing in it for me but suffering and hell, and anguish and torment, and tears and fastings day after day, days and nights in the deep'. When you're getting nothing out of it only glorifying Christ, Paul says when it's that motivation you'll be rewarded - it will be a rewarded motive to do it not for your own gain, but for the gain of the glory of Christ.

Paul's reward was not just preaching the message, but for taking no payment and continuing to preach it anyway. Oh, we can learn so many lessons from the soul-winner's motivation: a high motive, a passionate motive, a rewarded motive. But let's move on, because we need to get to this: the soul-winner's adaptation - not just his motivation, but his adaptation, verses 19 to 23. Really this is, Paul is saying, the primary reason for not taking money - what is it? 'To win the more!'. I love that, to win the more! Sometimes people take pity on me because we don't see so many people getting saved in these days, and it's a real burden upon my heart, and I hope it's on yours too. Some people mean well, and I know where they're coming from, because I have to remind myself of this too: that you've to be faithful - we learnt this in this book - you've to be faithful, and you've to sow the seed. To a certain extent you have to leave the results with God, but please do not miss the point that it wasn't just this issue with Paul - that you just preach and leave the rest with God - no! He had a greater hand in it than that, he desired that he might win more, win the more!

I don't think it's wrong to want many people saved, do you? We're not in the numbers game - bums on pews, if you'll excuse the expression - that's not what we're into, or how many's on the role, but I'll tell you this: I would rather go to the Judgment Seat with more souls, under my preaching, saved than less - would you not rather lead more than less to the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul, this was his desire, this was the reason why he adapted his whole lifestyle to see more won for Him. So he speaks of the need for this worker's willingness to adapt himself - adapt himself to what? Adapt himself to the conditions of the men, the needs of the men and women who need the gospel, in order to come into this flexibility towards them that he may save some. This isn't universalism now, all are not going to be saved - and there's people preach this, that because Jesus died and shed His blood that the world will be saved - that's not what that means 'the world will be saved'. Although He's the Saviour of the world that is not talking about the whole world, that every single sinner that's in it is saved without repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ - it can be seen clearly here, because Paul wanted to save some, because only some would be saved.

How did he do it? Well, he definitely believed that he that winneth souls is wise, and he shows this. He illustrates it in three types of people who he witnessed to and worked among. There's two of them, the first is the Jew and the second is the Gentile, look at this verse, verse 20: 'And unto the Jews I became as a Jew', then in verse 21 'To them that are without law', that's a Gentile, 'as without law'. Now you, I would say, couldn't get two more diverse groups of people in the ancient world than these two groups - Jews and Gentiles - they detested one another. Yet Paul was able, as a soul-winner, to adapt himself to both of them, and offend neither of them, but reach, and win, and save them - both of them! They're different in all sorts of ways: in clothing, in their holy day, holidays, in their eating habits, in their family practices and their religious rites and ceremonies and all the rest, in sacrifices - it must have required tremendous flexibility, but Paul was able to drive himself to that. Incidentally, remember how we applied the area of eating meat that's sacrificed to idols a couple of weeks ago, and we applied it to grey areas that are in believer's lives even today, things that the Bible doesn't speak about, there's no revelation on - we don't know whether to do them or not to do them, whether it's sinful or not sinful. Well, we can apply this here: that if there's anything that is doubtful - as someone said to me after that evening: 'If in doubt, cast it out' - but certainly in this regard, if in doubt that it will affect the gospel in detrimental ways, cast it out! That Paul's point.

Paul, even when he had a right to be practising as a Jew, forwent it in order that he might witness to the Gentiles; when he had a right to be let go of all the ritualistic ceremony of Judaism, he had forgone that right in order to win those among the Jews. Isn't that tremendous to see this? He didn't want to offend one who he was witnessing to, and the reason why was that his love for the lost regulated his liberty in Christ - do you see that? 'I have made myself a slave', that's what verse 19 really means, 'For though I be free from all men - I'm liberated like the rest of you - yet have I made myself servant', the word is 'slave', 'unto all, that I might gain the more'. Now there's only two words in the Greek used for that statement 'I have made myself a slave', and it's the Greek word 'agulosá' (sp?), 'I enslave'; and 'emoton' (sp?), 'myself' - I enslave myself. The word 'enslavement' is an extremely strong Greek word, it's actually used to describe, in Acts 7, the 400 years of



enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt! Do you see that? Paul says: 'In that way I enslave myself'. In chapter 7 verse 15 of this book he talks about the bond of marriage, 'But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases' - it's talking about they're not required in such cases to try and keep a marriage relationship, not a marriage, but a marriage relationship going in such circumstances, they're to let them go. They're not bound - it's the same word used, 'But I do bind myself to these lost people, to the way they are'. It's used in Titus 2:3 of addiction to wine, a binding like that, an addiction to wine - to be enslaved. It's also used in Romans 6:18 of the relationship that Christians have now through Christ of righteousness, of righteousness to God - and it's so binding that we'll never be lost, once we're saved we're always saved. It's the same word 'to be enslaved' to that relationship where he talks 'I have made myself a slave that I might win some' - isn't that remarkable?

You can talk all you like about 'just sow the seed and let God do the rest', but that's not what Paul did. Paul did more than sow the seed, and in Mark 10 verse 44 we find the reason from the Saviour's lips: 'Whosoever wishes to be first shall be the slave of all'. You might want to call it, in the modern term, pre-evangelism - in other words, things that we can do that are apart, nothing to do with the gospel, but help unbelievers to listen to the gospel - a sort of methodology in how we present it, that we adapt ourselves to their needs and even their way of life up to a point of sinning. Let's show you how this bears out in the moments that remain, let's look at the first example he makes, verses 19 and 20 - the Jew: 'For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law'.

Now this is real adaptability, he's flexible to the Jewish conscience within - and this is important to know - within scriptural limits. Paul would be as Jewish as was necessary to win the Jew. Do you see that? Was he not a Jew? Of course he was a Jew, but when he got saved he let go of all the ritualistic ceremonial rites and so on and all the rest of it. As far as is scripturally possible in the gospel, within the limits of the Bible, he worked as a Jew among the Jews; and if they had a feast day, a fast day, if they had a religious ceremony or rite, if they insisted on him being cleansed - whatever it was, even to the extent of traditions of Judaism - he followed them in order that it would create an open door for the gospel, witnessing to Jews. He gladly accommodated these things, and was flexible to them to win them. What had once been - and this is the point I want you to see - legal restraints in his life when he was a Jew, now had become love restraints - do you see the difference? He didn't have to do it, he would have been right not doing it, but because he loved them so much and there was nothing wrong in doing it, in fact it opened the gospel to them and give an opportunity to win them, he did it! He did it because if he had brazenly blasted the Jews and the way of the Jews, both their custom and conscience, he would lose all hope of winning them, wouldn't he?

There's some wisdom here about soul-winning. Soul-winning, you're trying to win people, win people. You see it in the Gentiles, to the Gentile outside the law he did the same, verse 21: 'To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God)', he doesn't want you to make the mistake of thinking that he's talking about sinning here, he's not talking about sin, he's under the law to Christ - incidentally that means the moral law, he's under the law to Christ. He has to obey the Decalogue and so on, apart from the Sabbath which is reciprocated in the New Testament, 'that I might gain them that are without law'. What does that mean? Well, he doesn't want to be misunderstood, saying that you go and you sin with the sinners to get them saved - he's not violating God's law, but he becomes conventionally correct to those around him in their ways and in their ideas, perhaps even in their practices that are neutral. He did not expect these Gentiles to be regulated by Jewish customs and ceremonies and rules; he sought to understand their background, where they were coming from, even respect their opinions to an extent and be sympathetic with their convictions. As Warren Weirsbach put it well: 'It took tact to have contact'. That's his point.

To the Jew he became a Jew, to the Gentile he became a Gentile, because these things aren't important any more. 'To the weak', he says, verse 22 and 23, 'he became weak', to those who are weak without

understanding. I think he's talking about those within the church, verse 22: 'To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'. It doesn't mean 'When in Rome do as the Romans', so many people - even Christians today - have taken this verse and made it so flexible, that believers are actually sinning trying to win those who are lost, which is absolutely ridiculous. What he's saying is: Paul, where things were without moral significance, was flexible; he was rigid when there was a moral conscience about a thing, when it would have violated Christian morality and truth, but when a thing was cultural Paul was flexible. He let his love overrule his liberty in order that he might win some. As one scholar put it: 'It was not looseness of life that Paul advocates, it was rather liberty of action with a lofty object' - the object was that he would by all means save some.

Now don't misunderstand me please, because there's a lot of dilution of the gospel going on today - and what we need, if anything, as we have said, 'Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel' - we're not talking about making the gospel acceptable to those around us, or changing it, or diluting it to satisfy them, because Paul said already that he was an ambassador, not a politician! He had to give what God had give to him, but what he's talking about here is not the message but the method, and in his method he was able to condescend in any way it took to see people brought to Jesus Christ. He never ever set the truth of the gospel aside, but he was willing to set aside his own personal liberty in the gospel that he would win some. I think John MacArthur puts it very well, he says this: 'If a person is offended by God's word, that is his problem. If he is offended by Biblical doctrine, Biblical standards, or church discipline, that is his problem. That person is offended by God. But if he is offended by our unnecessary behaviour or practices, no matter how good and acceptable those may be in themselves, his problem becomes our problem - and it is not a problem of law, but the problem of love'. That's it in a nutshell, because for Paul nothing meant anything apart from the gospel. What a statement! 'I do all things', verse 23, 'for the gospel's sake. I'm willing to set aside everything but the gospel, for the gospel, in order that the gospel's influence cannot be hindered in my life'.

How refreshing this is, how challenging it is. I've been referring lately in my preaching to Hudson Taylor because I've been reading, on and off, his biography. You may not know this, but Hudson Taylor went to China at the same time as Britain had declared war upon China. It was like going to the enemy, and if that wasn't stigma enough Taylor also decided, when he was out of China for a while, that he would take upon himself the dress and the look of the Chinese - and this was something unique and monumental, it had only been done a few times before by gospel missionaries, but he did it. If you like, he became a Chinaman to Chinamen, that he might win Chinamen. What did he do? Remember now that this is the 1800s. He shaved off all his hair - now some of you don't need to do that! - but he shaved off all his hair, apart from one ponytail that went down his back. He grew it because that was Chinese custom, to have this ponytail from your head - I can't remember the technical name for it, but he did this. Then he dyed that ponytail black, because the Chinese all have - as far as I know - black hair. He nearly blinded himself with ammonia, and he was a doctor, as he tried to dye his hair; and he got scars over his face as he tried to do it. Then he took upon himself Chinese traditional dress, the long silk gown and robe. He bound himself, he loosed himself of liberty to dress whatever way he liked, and coming from the West they dress in a three-piece suit or whatever it was, he had forgone this - why? Because in the Chinese mind they believed that a white man's dignity rested in strict adherence to British dress and British western habits. When Taylor decided to don this Chinese look, and look in all intents and purposes just like a Chinese man, it was deeply shocking, first of all to the Chinese, and then to the British, some of the missionaries.

We're not in the 1800s, but what would you do if on a missionary Sunday we had a missionary from China, and he got up into the pulpit in a dress with a long ponytail down his back? Come on now, what would you do? Hundreds of years ago this man of God, and I hope you would agree with me that he was a man of God, he had gone native - and as far as the British were concerned, it's on record, that he had lost his credibility as a missionary for doing it. He even lost support, and they even labelled him a traitor because he was going to those whom they were at war with, and he was denying his Britishness in order to win the lost - but he set

aside his liberty and he became enslaved to these Chinese customs, why? To win them! Because his love for them was greater than his desire for liberty in Christ! Why was that? Because he had a passion for the lost.

Now come on friends, what are we doing that we by all means - not sinful means now, don't misunderstand me - but by all means save some? Do you know that we need to? Do you even know that we need to? What are we doing? Can we even bring somebody to the gospel meeting? It seems not!

Hudson Taylor was preaching on one occasion, and a man called Nee Yung Fa, who was a Ningbo (sp?) cotton dealer, was converted. He had also been a leader in a reformed Buddhist sect. This Buddhist sect believed that you shouldn't worship idols, they were reformed in that sense - they opposed idolatry, and they were really trying to search for the truth. At the end of Hudson Taylor's sermon, Nee stood up and he addressed the audience and said this: 'I have long searched for the truth as my father did before me, and I have travelled far but I haven't found it. I found no rest in Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, but I do find rest in what I heard tonight. From now on I believe in Jesus'. Nee took Hudson Taylor to a meeting of the sect he had formerly led, and was allowed for a moment to explain the reason for his change of faith. Taylor was so impressed with the clarity and power with which he spoke that he addressed him afterwards, and spoke to him personally. Another member of the group was converted that same evening, and both Nee and the new convert were baptised that moment. Then Nee asked Hudson Taylor: 'How long has the gospel been known in England?'. Embarrassed, he said: 'For several hundred years'. 'What!', exclaimed Nee, 'And you have only now come to preach it to us? My father sought after the truth for more than 20 years and died without finding it! Why didn't you come sooner!'. The author says: 'For Hudson Taylor, it was a difficult question to answer'.

May we be, as Paul says in verse 23, partakers together in winning the lost by all means, and saving some. Friends in the assembly, elders, deacons, members, is there not more we can be doing to win the lost? I'm not talking about dressing up like a clown and swallowing a goldfish, I'm talking about in the realms of liberty that we have in Christ, can we not be doing more? May we do more, may the Lord give us a passion after the lost.

Father, help us to save with fear, to have compassion making a difference, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garments spotted by the flesh. Give us a heart that the Saviour had as He stood over Jerusalem and wept for their souls. Give us the compulsion that He had to set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem, to say: 'I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how I am straitened until it be accomplished'. Let us be like Paul who said: 'Oh, that I would be accursed for my brethren, accursed from Christ that I might win them. My heart's desire', he said, 'and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved'. Oh Lord, would You save our friends, our loved ones, this neighbourhood, those around that have no hope. Lord, let us by all means biblical and necessary, seek to win them for the time is short, and there's no time to be playing around with the eternal souls of men and women. So hear us Lord, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 23*

## ***"Discovering Discipline"***

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### I Corinthians 9:24-27

1. ***The Essential Requirements Of Discipline***
  - a. *Discipline needs incentive (verse 24)*
  - b. *Discipline needs restriction (verse 25)*
  - c. *Discipline needs direction (verse 26)*
  - d. *Discipline needs possession (verse 27a)*
2. ***The Fatal Result Of Indiscipline (verse 27b)***
  - a. *Hypocritical preaching*
  - b. *Disqualification for the prize*

**B**eginning to read at verse 24, taking up the subject 'Discovering Discipline'. Chapter 9 verse 24, trying to keep in mind everything that we have already read and studied thus far in this chapter: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway".

We often hear it said, particularly in a sporting capacity, that it's not the winning that matters but the taking part. That may be so in a sporting capacity, but it's not so here, where Paul is using sporting illustrations to speak to us of the battle, or the game if you like, or the race of the Christian life that we are in. It's not good enough for the Christian to say: 'It's not the winning that matters, it's only the taking part'. Paul says the opposite, that there are to be no spectators in Christ's games. There are to be no hangers-on, just coming along for the ride. There are to be no stragglers behind, lagging at the back of the race. God wants winners, and only winners will do in God's race - nothing less God will be satisfied with, God must have winners!

It seems, however, that we have succeeded in demoting our faith into a kind of Christian amateur athletics. We've made Christianity exist in our lives as a sort of pastime that we are devoted to in some shape or form, to a large extent it doesn't take up all our energies, rather our primary employment is in another sphere - whatever that may be. Paul is wanting us to know categorically and absolutely this evening that Christianity is not a hobby, to the Christian Christianity ought to be the primary reason for his existence, it must be his whole life and destiny. In the context of where Paul says this there is greater light brought to this truth when we consider that these Corinthians had been, up to this verse, asserting their rights to eat meat that had been offered to idols. They were saying: 'It's theologically correct, we know that the idol doesn't mean anything, it's not a real god, there is only one living God, and meat that's offered to it doesn't matter because meat doesn't commend us to God, neither drink'. They were asserting their own right to do this thing, but Paul, as we have found, was teaching them that their love for their brethren, and of course their love for the Lord ultimately, must regulate their liberty. It's not enough to say: 'I'm a Christian because I've been forgiven I'm cleansed by the grace of God and the blood of Christ, that I can do whatever I like'. You are free in Christ, but we've got a collective responsibility to one another, and love in all things must regulate our Christian liberty now in Christ.

But now Paul is coming to them and he's showing, by using these athletic illustrations, that there's another reason why they should forgo their rights, and it's this: to win the prize. We should forgo our rights first because of the weaker brother, and the love for our brother for whom Christ died and shed His blood; but now Paul is saying in a personal reason - that's more foregoing our rights for the benefit of others - but now he's turning to foregoing our rights for our own personal benefits, and primarily it is this: to win the prize. Let me illustrate it to you this way, in the context of what these Corinthians were bickering about with regards to this meat offered to idols: the Olympic runner is perfectly entitled to have a diet of Big Macs and fries every day of the week. He's perfectly entitled to it, nobody's going to lock him up and put him in prison, or charge him with an offence if he does it - but he need be under no illusion that he can win the gold medal at the Olympics if that is the diet that he's feeding on. Imagine David Beckham deciding to have an Ulster Fry every morning in life! He's perfectly free to do it, but eventually it's going to show on him - the weight - and Fergie will see that he's not up to form, and he'll be dropped from the team. He needn't think that he can rise to that standard of competition without being disqualified off the squad.

So what Paul is saying here is that there are many things that are your right and are lawful for you to do in Christ, you're perfectly within reason and legitimacy to do them, but don't think for one moment that when you get to the Judgment Seat that you will get a prize if these things have been your goal right throughout your whole life. He's telling us tonight, very soberly in this meeting: don't think that every life, every type of life and lifestyle, will receive a prize - for it'll not. Every Christian life will not receive as great eternal rewards, certainly, as the apostle Paul - but what he wants us to realise this evening is that there is only one life that will receive the prize, and that is the life that is lived to win the race, and to gain the prize, that is the life that lives for Christ, that lives for eternity, that lives for that prize - everything else is second to it.

Ultimately if we were to sum it up in a few words, Paul is saying that the life that will win the prize is a disciplined life. So, he's wanting these Corinthians, who were so indisciplined, to discover discipline - and maybe we need to discover it this evening in the 21st century church, for I think discipline has become a sort of dirty word for Christians today. Both negative discipline and positive discipline, I mean by that foregoing certain things, and doing certain things in a disciplinary nature: abstaining from things and practising things in a disciplined format. I think, to a large extent, the church has adopted a casual format in many spheres - in its worship, in its service, in its preaching, and so much else, we could go on. Now I do not want to be misunderstood tonight, I am not a traditionalist and I am not a ritualist, and I don't think that the golden age of the church was in the 1940s and 50s. I don't think either that a man or a woman has to come into the church to worship God as if they're going to Royal Ascot, I don't believe that. But one thing that disturbs me is the casual approach that many have today to the things of God, and that worries me at times the way people come to worship God with His people. Again I'm not saying you have to...of course, it would be foolish, it would be legalism to say that you have to wear this and you have to wear that - but it does concern me when somebody can't wash their face and get out of their pyjamas before they come and worship God, that worries me.

Don't think that I'm on some hobbyhorse, I'm pointing this out because I believe that these things are only symptomatic of a general relaxation in Christian disciplines in many areas. I have a theory that if you were to go and look in the private lives of some casual Christians, you will find that there is also a casual communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and a casual approach to the disciplines of godliness. Now do not go backwards in that reasoning, do not take the antithesis of it as true: ie, if you come and are dressed well, and you do everything right and say everything right, and seem to be to the naked eye dotting all the 'i's' and crossing all the 't's', that means you are spiritual - that is incorrect! That's not the deduction I want you to make, but what I am saying is that this general trend of casualness displays to me that there is a lack of discipline within the church at large, and that discipline is most needed in the personal arena.

V. Raymond Edmund said in his book 'The Disciplines of Life': 'Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down, above all the divine grace is derided as legalism, or is entirely unknown to a generation that is largely illiterate in the Scriptures. We need the rugged strength of Christian character that can only come from discipline'. Listen to what 1 Timothy 4 verse 7 says, Paul writing to Timothy, another translation: 'Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness'.

Now, what am I talking about when I say 'disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness'? Well, there are many disciplines, and we haven't got time to go into them all this evening - but the discipline of reading the word of God in a disciplined fashion, systematically reading from cover to cover of the Bible, reading the word of God every day, feeding yourself on the Living Bread. Praying to God every day throughout the day, that's a discipline. Fasting is a discipline; worshipping God in private and public, not coming to church, but when you're in the meeting with God's people that your heart is actually worshipping God. How many of us really do that in the hymns that we sing, when we hear the word of God that there arises from our heart a worship, an adoration, a praise to the Lord? Witnessing is a discipline. Few people, and I have experience of this, I find that many young people today less and less - and I'm not just hitting the young people tonight - but many of them have not learned, and probably the reason they haven't learned to witness is because they haven't seen it in others above them. The discipline of being able to witness, being able to turn to the verses, to be able to point a person to Christ to answer the difficult questions - they seem to be going away, disappearing in this undisciplined age.

Giving, stewardship, I wonder is that disappearing too? We could ask the question: why has discipline suffered in this modern age? I would reckon the answer probably is, because we live in such a materialistic society it encourages us to pamper ourselves rather than to deny ourselves, to be at ease rather than to stand at attention - discipline has become the green-eyed monster, or the Cinderella of the church. To many Christians, when you talk about discipline, it's like eating sawdust. What Paul seeks to do in this chapter is to redress the imbalance, he wants them to discover discipline once again. Tom Landry, who was the coach of the Dallas Cowboys American football team for 30 years, he wrote these words: 'The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they have always wanted to be'. Will I give you that again? The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they have always wanted to be. Paul wants these Corinthians to know that champions in the faith are not born, they are made, and they are made to a large extent, from our capacity, through discipline.

So let's discover this discipline together this evening. The first thing he tells us, I believe, is the essential requirements of discipline. The first essential requirement is found in verse 24: 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain'. This is the first thing: discipline needs incentive. Now Paul is using, and he's using these illustrations right throughout these verses, but the first illustration he uses is: in a race everyone runs, but only one man wins the prize - that's obvious, isn't it? So he turns to the Christians in Corinth and makes the application: so you run your race in such a way that you will win the prize. Now there's one difference, one way that his illustration collapses, and that's this: that in a human race all the runners cannot win the prize, only one can win the prize, but in the divine Christian race we all can win the prize if we run it in a disciplined fashion keeping the rules along the way. That's what's glorious tonight, we're not looking for spiritual superstars or heroes, we're not looking to set men on pedestals, it is available to all of us - and we've got to banish the thought from our minds that there is some kind of tier of Christian standard, somehow that you can't get to the top tier and be a spiritual giant, that's a lie from the pit, and if the devil can keep you thinking that, he can keep you the spiritual pygmy that you maybe are. It's possible for us all, but nevertheless we all need an incentive.

This could be the reason why so many believers are so afraid of discipline. I think there's two reasons - well, there's probably more, but I'll give you just the two now. The first is because they feel that discipline restricts them, it restricts them, it robs them of freedom. The second reason is because they don't see the prize that

discipline gives. Now let's deal with the first and foremost: because they feel it restricts them. That again is a lie from the devil that he wants believers to believe in order that this discipline should be robbed of them, and ultimately freedom should be robbed from them, because freedom comes from discipline the word of God says. You see the devil's a liar, and as I said last night in the Gospel meeting we as believers, as well as the unbelievers, need to know the truth that the truth sets us free from the devil's lies and restrictions. It's his lies that restrict us.

I love people who are able to sit down and just play anything on the piano, because I can't do it - just sit down and put a piece of music in front of them. But there are certain people in our world and they can sit down and play a piece of music without fault, absolutely accurately, that they have never seen before in their life, perhaps an unknown piece of music that has only been written, and the reason they can do that is because they have disciplined themselves and they have been training from a child right up through their adulthood for that moment of performance - now, that is freedom, isn't it? That's freedom, that's the reason why we should never believe that discipline restricts us.

I think perhaps the biggest problem is not being able to focus on the eternal prize that is before us. Let me illustrate it this way: Kevin is a six-year-old little boy, and he's in his living room strumming away on his guitar 'Home, Home on the Range', and he's fed up with it. He looks out the window on a sunny April afternoon and he sees his friends across the park playing football, and 'Home, Home on the Range' gets even worse and worse and worse, and it's drudgery. Now that is drudgery, and discipline is drudgery if you do not have an incentive. Let me tell you Kevin's story once again: an angel comes and appears before Kevin in the living room, and takes him in a vision to the Royal Albert Hall, and there he sees up on the stage a virtuoso with a classical guitar, and his fingers are going two to the dozen, and what he is producing from that guitar is absolutely tremendous - to such an extent that the angel says to Kevin: 'What do you think?'. And he says: 'Wow!' - he thinks to himself of the noises that his clumsy fingers and thumbs bring out of the guitar. He thinks to himself: 'It's tremendous that someone could bring such noise out of a guitar that's nearly the same as my guitar, with all the same strings and notes'. The angel takes him back to his living room, and standing before him again the angel says to Kevin: 'Kevin, that virtuoso was you'. He points to the guitar in the corner, '...but you need to practise'.

Do you see the difference? Incentive! He now has an incentive, and in Christ's race it is no different - and perhaps the reason why you have tried and tried and tried again in your own strength to discipline your life, and it's become a drudgery and you've let it go and give it up as a bad job, is because you haven't seen that the result of it will be freedom in your life, but also that there is an eternal incentive and reward, a prize up ahead! Let us not miss this, that the one essential requirement, perhaps the most essential, is that discipline needs incentive.

The second thing is verse 25: 'Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible'. Discipline needs restriction. Now the illustration, look at it, that Paul is giving us here, from athletics, is that all athletes that compete in games practise self-control - that's what that word 'temperate' means in the Authorised Version. They go into strict training, that's the way it could be translated, restricting themselves in all things, temperate in all things - why? For the sake of it? No! For a purpose, an incentive, in order to win the prize - a wreath. They do it for a wreath that will fade away, a laurel wreath that they will put on their head. Now let's come to its application to the believer: you, in the same way, must practise self-control to win a prize - not to win a laurel wreath of leaves, but to win a crown that is indestructible, that is eternal, reserved for you in the heavens, that fadeth not away.

Now this word 'temperate', or 'self-controlled', is the crucial word in this passage - it means literally 'a strength within', it's the idea of mastering oneself instead of giving up yourself to impulses, to overindulgences, to emotions, to your appetites, to the senses that are within you. Now we learnt in the very

first study of this book that there was in Corinth what was called the Ithsmian Games, it was a bit like the Olympics that we have today, and it happened every two years and was held just ten miles outside Corinth. Many of the athletes came into Corinth to train for the games a few months before them. This was a fierce competition, each athlete was striving for this coveted Ithsmian crown that they would wear on their heads, and it was a literal laurel wreath. The winners not only received a crown, but history tells us they also received lifetime exemptions from paying taxes, from serving in the military, tuition fees for education were paid for them, there were statues of themselves that would be erected along the road that led to the site of the games - and they would be seen as heroes, in fact it is said they would be immortalised! But the real prize was the wreath that they could put on their head that they were awarded at the end of the games.

Now this is Paul's point: in order that they would win that prize, these Ithsmian athletes submitted themselves to a gruelling training programme that called for a long hours, a strict diet, abstinence from alcohol and almost a masochistic exercise session day after day after day after day - because there was only one thing on their mind: the prize! Paul says: 'And they did that for a perishable crown that fades away?'. C.S. Lewis said these words with regard to our armchair attitude to the prize that is before us in our imperishable crown: 'If we consider the unblushing promises of reward, and the staggering nature of reward promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea'. Wouldn't it be terrible if we, as believers, were easily pleased with an earthly crown that will perish when we die or before it, when there is a heavenly crown reserved for us if we would only strive for it! I'll tell you what a greater tragedy is: some of us wouldn't even have the discipline to win the earthly crown, how can we ever hope to win a heavenly one? The poet said:

'The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night'.

I'll tell you what we need today, and I've been cut to shreds with this word in the study before God in prayer today, what we need is less sloth-Christians and more disciplined men and women of God who can shake this world because they're not worried about pampering themselves, but they're prepared to make sacrifices for Christ and for the crown! Discipline needs restrictions - can I ask you today: have you got a problem restricting your Christian life? If you've got a problem with that, you'll never get that crown. I hope you can see how this applies to these Corinthians with regards to the matter of eating meat offered to idols.

The third thing he says that is an essential requirement of discipline, a prerequisite, is that discipline needs direction. Verse 26: 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air'. Discipline needs direction - now, he's saying: 'I do not run as a man running aimlessly, not like a man whose running without a definite aim, who's not knowing why he's running, or not knowing where he's running to - I run straight to the goal that God has put before me, and as I am running I am running purposefully, and there is purpose in every step that I run'. Now it would seem ridiculous when we consider Paul's illustration, of thinking of a man who's running a race and his mind isn't on winning - an athlete whose mind isn't on the prize, who isn't in the game to win. But you know, isn't it ironic that in the greatest race of all, the Christian race, that it is possible to be in it and just be running aimlessly, purposelessly, step-by-step not knowing where you're going, not knowing why you're running?

John Hausen (sp?) said these words: 'We go and take our place in the course as though the prize could be won without any running at all', aren't some like that? 'Or as if there was no prize worth running for. Perhaps we dream and loiter and fold our arms, we turn aside to look at every object of passing interest. Or if we



begin with some vigour, all the zest and warmth of the struggle grows feebler and fainter when it ought to become more animated. We care little what hindrances occur to stop our course and to risk a dishonourable fall'. Paul says: 'That's not the way I run. For a start, I run' - and some of us, perhaps, haven't even started to run at all - 'but secondly, I run for a purpose. I'm not running not knowing why I'm running, not knowing where I'm running to, I run to obtain this prize and I am determined not to stop for breath, not to loiter, not to fold my arms, not to turn around to any distractions, not to stumble over something that the devil or someone else has left before me to make me fall dishonourably'.

Then he gives another illustration, this time boxing, which was part of the Ithsmian Games as well. He says: 'I don't fight like a boxer that misses his punches, I don't beat the air' - it could be translated 'I don't shadow box'. I think the inference that Paul is giving here is that it's like a man in the ring fighting and there's no enemy to fight, it's as if he's fighting and there's no adversary! We learnt last week of Paul's personal soul-winning exploits, and what he was like in his wisdom for winning souls - and what a portrait of Paul we got last evening, but what a greater portrait we get tonight when we look at how he strove toward the goal - because when Paul was in the boxing ring with sin and with the devil, he rarely threw a wild punch. He never missed! When he cocked his wrist back and swung his fist, he always landed squarely and firmly on the chain of the evil one. I wonder do we do that? Come on now, we're in a race, we're in a battle, we're in a fight - we've been singing: 'Fight the good fight with all thy might' - do we do it? For sin and Satan constantly are trying to distract us, to get us off our guard in the ring and to put us on our back on the canvas! How do we fight sin? How do we fight the world? How do we fight Satan? Paul says the only way is to dodge his swings and land a firm punch on his jaw - no other way!

I'm a sinner too, and I know that many a time when we think we're fighting with sin, we box sin as if there wasn't an adversary there. We pretend we're fighting it, we even maybe convince ourselves that we're fighting it, but we're not ruthless with it - isn't that right? We court our sin, we tempt with sin, we play with sin, we flirt with sin rather than hit sin and down sin and floor our sin! Dodds, the puritan, said: 'We fight sin as we would fight our own son. We first try to disarm him'. But Paul is saying here: 'When I came to fight sin, when I came to fight the devil that would rob me of my prize, I didn't fight him as my son, but I fought him like David with Goliath - I cut his head off!'. Is that not what the Lord Jesus said? 'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out' - is that not what we've been finding in this chapter? That the principal right throughout this thing is: if there is a grey area, if there's a questionable practice, whatever it may be, if in doubt cast it out. That is, of course, if you want to win the prize.

Discipline needs direction, you've got to know where you're running to and what you're running for, and that will give you the incentive to reach the goal. Fourthly, verse 27, discipline needs possession: 'But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway'. Discipline needs possession, now what do I mean by that? Well, Paul is saying - let's look at what he's saying first - 'I discipline', he literally says, 'I keep under my body', a better translation is, 'I buffet my body'. He's still here in the boxing illustration: 'I beat my body, I bruise my body it and make it my slave, I bring it into subjection', literally, 'make it my slave, like an athlete makes his body his slave, like a boxer. I allow my body to be buffeted and to be battered, I handle it roughly, I discipline it by hardship, I subdue it'.

That phrase 'I keep it under', which could be translated 'buffet', literally means 'to hit under the eye'. It means 'I give my own body a black eye, I beat my face black and blue'. Now it's not literal beating here, don't be coming back next Monday night with two black eyes! It doesn't warrant asceticism, and what the Catholics do and the monks, beating themselves and depriving themselves - that is not what we're talking about here, he's talking spiritually. He's saying: 'Just as the athlete trains his body and starts to possess his body, I so beat my body into subjection so that it will serve my purposes and my ultimate goals, rather than me serve its senses, appetites, desires and lusts'.

Now it's very interesting to me that he didn't say: 'I destroy my body'. You remember there were those in Corinth who thought that the body was totally and utterly evil, and therefore you could do what you like in the body because the body is not going to be resurrected, it's just going to perish in the ground, and so they delved into the most depraved sins - and we've seen it all. Then there were others, the opposite side, and they were the ascetics, and they thought that they needed to cut off sex and any type of appetites - they stopped eating and all the rest - because they felt that these things, material things were evil. Now Paul doesn't say either of those things, all Paul is saying is that there is a nature within you, and it's still in you after you get saved - it's the old man, the old nature. If you feed the old nature, that old nature will overcome you, that old nature will possess you, but you must desire to possess your body - don't let the old nature do it, you possess your body for the purposes of godliness.

That can only be done through discipline. He's saying: 'Don't destroy the body'. You know what it's like, some of you men, you've been there, you give a fellow a black eye just to let him know - I'm not advocating this! - just to let him know who's boss, isn't that right? 'You do what you're told!' - that's what he's doing with his body, 'I'm letting you know who's boss. You'll do what I say, I'll not do what you say. I'm not at your beck and call, to your senses, to your lusts, to your desires. You will serve me in godliness, not in sin!'. Believer, do you possess your body or does your body possess you? Do you control your appetites, or do your appetites control you? I think, for most, the body tells our minds what to do, isn't that right? When you feel tired, what do you do? You go and have a sleep. When you feel hungry, you go and eat something - our body tells our minds what to do.

But Paul is saying the opposite, he's saying: 'Don't let your body tell your mind what to do, let your mind tell your body what to do'. Rather than your body deciding when you eat, when you sleep, there may come a time that you will need to stay awake, that you will need to forgo eating, that you will need to cease from some of the sexual relations in your marriage - and it may be necessary to do it, but when it comes the time to do it you can't possess your body! I think you see what I'm saying, don't you? The mantra that goes about in health establishments today is 'Listen to your body', isn't it? Listen to your body - when you're tired, sleep; when you're hungry, eat; when you have an urge, go and fulfil it - that's not Christian, Bible philosophy, that is the philosophy of the evil one. Now don't misunderstand me, don't say that I'm saying that we have all to stay up all night and not sleep any longer, and we've to stop eating - it's nothing like that. Remember Paul is walking this narrow road throughout the balanced, biblical processes that have been revealed through Old, and especially New Testaments - but what Paul is saying here, and this is what I think is the distinction he's making, when you run it's something exceptional, isn't it? Isn't it? Do you run everywhere? I'm sure you don't. An athlete doesn't run everywhere, the running is the exceptional, occasional thing; it is the temporary thing that he's called to do at the point that he's just about to win the prize - but his whole training up to that point has been leading him up to that exceptional thing. So he's training, and that is the daily thing, but the running is the exceptional thing.

Now here's Paul's point: if you are not training on a daily basis, if you are not disciplining yourself with incentive, with restrictions, with directions, possessing your body in a daily capacity, when it comes to the race your body won't obey your demands! Have you got it? An athlete can't operate by just eating everything and doing everything, he has to follow his training rules. When he feels like lying-in in the morning at six o'clock or whatever, he doesn't do it - he feels like it, but he doesn't do it. He gets up and he goes to run, no matter whether it's hail, rain, or snow. I come to the early morning prayer meeting here every Wednesday morning, and I said to brother Billy the other morning, it's amazing to me the amount of people I see out walking their dogs and out for a jog - I'm sure they feel like lying in, but they want the prize, and all their prize is health! Maybe their prize is a few pound at the racing track, but that's their prize and it gets them out of their bed! Do our bodies respond to us? Paul says: 'I can make my body respond for the goal whenever I need it. My body listens to me, I don't listen to my body'.

What do I mean here? If you have no discipline in your life, right, and you just do everything - you've quite a legitimate right to do everything, it's your freedom in Christ - you don't have any restrictions, you don't have any disciplines, you don't have any fixed practices, you just indulge yourself in food and sleep and everything - and I'm speaking to my own heart here, don't think I'm condemning you, this is God's word to us all. One day there might be a massive need, and maybe you've to stay up the whole night and pray before God, maybe you've to fast before God, maybe you've to do something else for God, and you can't do it, because your body needs the sleep and your body can't operate without the food! Paul is saying: 'The norm is you always eat, you always sleep, but there is a race that you've got to run, and when you have to run that race your body ought to respond to your demands, rather than you responding to its'.

'Whatever', can we say, 'the Lord demands for a temporary space of time, I can respond', can you say that? Remember the Lord took the disciples, three of them, into the Garden. Remember He said: 'Would you pray?'. There He was in deep agony, praying Himself, exceeding sorrowful even unto death - and He turned round and they were asleep! Three times when He turned round they were asleep, and what did He say? 'The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak' - now this is the power of the body, that even when your spirit's willing, if your body doesn't respond it's no use! Can you say: 'Whatever the Lord asks of me, I can respond in body, soul, and spirit'?

Well, let's move on because the time is going quickly and there's one very important thing to say. Not just does he give us the essential requirements of discipline, but the fatal results of indiscipline. He says: 'Lest', the second part of verse 27, 'that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway'. 'Lest I fear that after I preach to you and all the other churches, I myself should become unfit to stand the final test myself. I fear' - and this word here 'castaway' could be better translated 'disqualified for the prize'. 'I fear that I'm the one standing here telling you want to do, and if I'm not doing it I'll lose the prize too'. Some translate it: 'I'll be found to be a counterfeit'.

These Ithsmian Games that we've been talking about had to engage ten months preparatory training, and they had to be able at the end of those ten months to certify that they were faithful to every day and every moment and every training of that period. Then afterwards it had to be certified that they had kept morally clean throughout the whole of that period. The reason why that had to be so was, that before the contest, preceding it, the contestants were led about the arena by the Herald or the master of ceremonies, while he asked and shouted in a loud voice whether any of the spectators in the arena could accuse the athlete of any crime, any misdemeanour, any wickedness, if they were slaves, if they had been depraved in any way in life or in manners. If any of them had anything accused of them they were disqualified right away.

Now this is spiritual realism if ever we've seen it. In Philippians 3 on Sunday mornings we've seen Paul say: 'Not as though I have already attained', and here he is fearing that before he finishes and gets over the finishing line and grabs the prize, that in some way he should become a counterfeit, be disqualified and become unfit to run the race himself - because even Paul had an old nature that needed to be hammered into submission! And he hammered it! As Arthur Sway says in his translation: 'Nay, I browbeat my own animal nature, but you Corinthians are inclined to be champions of your animal nature, feeding it - and you treat it. But I treat it not as my master, but as my slave, lest by any chance after acting as the Herald of the ceremonies who bids others enter, I might find my own self disqualified from competing'.

There are two reasons I'm going to draw out of this: the first is that if he was found as a counterfeit his preaching would have been hypocritical. Now I'm not talking here just to preachers or pastors, or teachers or evangelists, or missionaries or whatever you want to call them, because we're all meant to be preaching, we're all meant to be gossiping the Gospel. But what Paul is saying, and remember what he's coming from in the last few verses that we studied last week, he said that he suffered the loss of all things that by any means he might save some. He's talking essentially in an evangelistic capacity, and we must be careful as those who

share the gospel that we are not seen to be those who pamper the body rather than those who buffet the body, who feed the flesh rather than fight it. We need to beware in these days as preachers, and of preachers, who pamper.

The second fatal result of indiscipline is this disqualification from the prize. Now let me correct a misunderstanding of many of the cults and those who believe that you can be saved and lost. Paul, when he says 'disqualified', is not talking about salvation, he's talking about the prize, he's speaking about the race. For the Ithsmian Games you had to be a Greek citizen, you couldn't be a slave either to be in those games, you had to be born and bred in Greece. Paul is talking here about people who are born and bred of the Spirit of God, yet still you can be disqualified - you'll not lose your salvation, but he's talking about losing reward, service and the reward that it brings. At the end of the Ithsmian Games the winners were read out, but do you know something? Those who were disqualified were read out as well.

I wonder how many disqualified Christians we have today? For one reason or another they're useless to either God or man. Friends, this is serious stuff. There should be a terrible fear that is in us, the same way it was in the apostle Paul, of being put on the shelf by God! Not hear His voice any more, not feel His impulsion, His impress - you're not saved, you're not going to hell, but you're just useless! Why? Because you love yourself too much! Let's not dilute the message of the Bible, I'll never dilute it, God help me I hope I'll never dilute it: 'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it'.

When the medallist wins the gold in the Olympics, all the celebration is ecstatic - yet there is very little attention paid to the years of hard training and blood and sweat that produces a winner. Paul is saying that champions are not born, they are made, and the tools that forge them are discipline, motivation and looking to the goal. Now there's none of us here tonight that have run a race like the apostle Paul, but don't you forget that in this portion he hasn't finished the race yet - but he's afraid of being disqualified, he's afraid of it! My friend, I don't know how long you're on the road, I don't know what you've done for Christ, what glory you've seen for Him, I don't know anything about it and I don't want to know - but I want to ask you: how will you finish? Some of you are near finishing, aren't you? All men who were greatly used of God were not only people in God's control, but people of self-control. May all of us tonight, and every night, discover discipline, that we might win the prize.

Whatever it is that's preventing you, weighing you down, the sin that's besetting you - come on, are you going to let go? For if you don't let go you'll forfeit the prize. You know, you've to give all of yourself over to the Lord, this isn't a half-salvation. Maybe there's somebody in here tonight, and this will be your night of surrender, full and complete - all to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give, I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. I surrender all, all to Jesus I surrender, I surrender all - can you say that? I tell you, if you can say that and mean it, that will be the greatest discovery next to salvation that you have made.

Lord, help us, this old man is so strong at times - and we love ourselves, we want to save ourselves so much, but yet in eternity we will be glad if we lose ourselves for Thee now. For except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. Lord, we don't want to go to Thee empty-handed, but we want to receive a crown, we want to hear: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant', we want that prize that fadeth not away, we want it to be reserved in heaven for us. Lord, give us the strength, give us the grace to throw away whatever's hindering us; and give us the incentive, the direction, the restriction, the possession of our bodies that will mean that we're not disqualified, but that we'll get there in the end - and may we all finish well, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 24*

## ***"A History Lesson In Holiness"***

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### **I Corinthians 10:1-13**

- 1. The Privileges Of Liberty (verses 1-4)**
  - a. Emancipation from Egypt
  - b. Immersion into Moses
  - c. Nutrition from the Rock
- 2. The Pitfalls Of Liberty (verses 5-10)**
  - a. Idolatry
  - b. Sexual immorality
  - c. Testing God
  - d. Grumbling
- 3. The Practicalities Of Liberty (verses 11-13)**
  - a. Humble realism
  - b. Divine optimism

**F**irst Corinthians chapter 10 - it's hard to believe that we've reached chapter 10, maybe you say it's not hard to believe at all, we've taken that long over it! But this is our 24th study that we have been in in this epistle, and we're right in the middle of a section that has been dealing with meat that has been sacrificed to idols, and will hopefully remind you of some of the things that we've learnt over the past number of weeks if you've forgotten them.

We're going to take our reading up at verse 1: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt", or test, "Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it". We end our reading at verse 13.

I believe that what Paul has given to us here in the first 13 verses of chapter 10 of his epistle is a history lesson in holiness, and we're going to take time to look down this history lesson very carefully this evening. I don't know whether some of you can cast your mind back far enough to remember what school was like, but you either loved or loathed history. I think most people, if they were honest, loathed history - they wondered what the relevance was of those dog-eared pages of the past. Why learn all these dates? 1066, and whatever other dates you learnt - who cares about all this old stuff? What has it that got do with today? What relevancy is there to my life in these things that are learned in history? It was George Santayana, a famous Harvard philosophy professor, who said these words: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat

it'. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it - and he's right! If there is any good reason why we should learn history and look into our past, one reason is this: that we should not make the mistakes that our forefathers made.

Whether that be in a political sense or military sense, but especially as we come into this chapter we will see it with regards to a spiritual sense. We need to look at the great cloud of witnesses that have gone not just before us on to glory, but those who have been behind us in the Old Testament Scriptures that we will see tonight, for an example not just of how to do things but of how not to do things. I wonder today does a lack of the study of history in a general sense in our society account for the fact that we're repeating many of the mistakes that generations in our past made. Perhaps if we paid more attention to history and to how things were done or not done, we would have more success as a nation and indeed as a planet.

Here in this chapter we have an Old Testament history of the Israelites, and particularly their failures with regards to obeying the will and the word of God. Now let me just pause for a moment because I believe this will be helpful in your understanding of the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and especially as we come to later chapters with regards to spiritual gifts and so on. Paul says in verse 1: 'Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea'. Of course you will know that Corinth, we found out in our first week of study, geographically was found in Greece, in the Greek Empire. So these people, many of them would be Gentiles, and you would be forgiven for thinking that the church at Corinth would be made up mostly of Gentiles, but I want to put forward to you tonight the suggestion - and I believe it can be borne out, and we'll see it in later studies in this book - that there was a large contingent of Jewish people in the church at Corinth. Now of course, when Paul says: 'all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea', he was including himself in the 'our', for he was a Jew of the Jews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and you know his credentials well in the New Testament. But there were many others in the church at Corinth who had a Jewish background, and we can see that clearly in this chapter, because only they could really understand the import of the historical Old Testament data that he's giving to these new Christians.

I'll not stride into that area too much tonight, but we do need to ask the question: what is the purpose of giving such a history lesson to these new believers in Corinth? This, if you like, is the foundation stone to all that we're going to hear and find out tonight from this portion, and it's really verse 11. 'Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come'. Verse 6 as well bears this out: 'Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted'. These historical occurrences have happened as ensamples - the word could possibly be translated as 'types', as representations to us of spiritual truths, and the Holy Spirit has caused them to be written down that we in the 21st century and also these Corinthian believers would be able to see the mistakes that they made and avoid them ourselves.

Verse 11 says specifically: 'they are written down to warn us, we who' - talking about the Corinthians, but more especially us today - 'we upon whom the ends of the world are come', or better translated 'those who live at the time when this age is drawing to a close'. That word 'world' there could be better translated 'age', and surely we know today as Christians that we live in the closing of this age, this age of grace. We really feel that from prophetic Scriptures and so on, that we're coming to the consummation, the climax of all time - and if ever there was a time when we are living as a people upon whom the ends of the age is coming, it is our time! If ever there was a time that these pictures, and indeed Old Testament history was relevant, it is relevant today. We will see tonight, that the very temptations that the Israelites fell in are the temptations that many believers are facing day by day in this 21st century age.

It has great relevance to our day and generation, but before we go any further let me just make a couple of applications and glean a few lessons right away from the very fact that Paul plucks out of the Old Testament these illustrations and uses them as types to New Testament believers. The first lesson to glean is this: that as

a believer a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures is necessary. It's not optional, it is necessary! It's not just a knowledge of the book of Psalms - you know the old saying, that if you look at someone's Bible you usually find that the New Testament is all dog-eared and thumb-ended, and the book of Psalms is as well - people tend to jump from the New Testament to the Psalms, the New Testament to the Psalms. If we're honest with ourselves, if you've ever tried to read through systematically the word of God, some of the most difficult portions and books and passages that we have found have been in the Old Testament Scriptures - particularly the first five books of the Bible that Paul himself is homing in on in this very passage. But we're seeing right away that Paul uses the Old Testament, and you must remember as well that all the early church had until they had the finished canon of the New Testament was the Old Testament Scriptures. It is needed, and by inference, because it is needed - an ignorance of the Old Testament, Paul is insinuating, if you're ignorant of these things, unaware of these things, it will be to your spiritual detriment, it will be fatal to your spiritual life.

That's the first lesson, you need a knowledge of the Old Testament. Really an offshoot of that is that you need to read your Bible. Now that might seem obvious to people in the Iron Hall, I don't know whether it is or not, but you'd think it was obvious to these Corinthians, wouldn't you? Many of whom were Jews. But it seems that they had become ignorant or unaware of many of these Old Testament stories that they had been brought up with. I just wonder, as we go through them tonight with a fine-toothed comb, and you hear some of the stories, maybe they don't prick your memory and ring a bell, and could that be because you don't know that either? You are unaware and ignorant of them primarily because you skipped over them, or you haven't read them! We need to systematically read our Bibles.

The third application, and this is very important especially for some of our young people in the age in which we live, is found in verse 11 where it says: 'Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples', but you could nearly stop just after that word 'happened' - 'Now all these things happened'. They happened! The Old Testament Scriptures are not simple Sunday School stories that are only fairytales to hang spiritual applications on. No matter what theologians tell us from our university halls, these things, Paul says under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they all happened! They can be taken literally.

I said the word 'ensample' is 'tupos' (sp?), which can be translated legitimately 'type'. Harry Ironside, in his chapter on this particular verse in his commentary, entitled it: 'Old Testament Types of New Testament Truths'. That's what this passage is, Old Testament types of New Testament truths, a history lesson in holiness from the Old Testament for a New Testament people. Let us not forget, as we apply these truths to ourselves tonight, that the primary application was given to these Corinthians. I've already said that we find chapter 10 in the midst of this debate over meat that was offered to idols. You remember that those with an intellectual and theological knowledge in the church of Corinth knew that meat that was offered to idols meant nothing, because the idols meant nothing - they're false gods and there's only one true and living God. Then they went on to reason that meat and drink cannot commend us to God, therefore it can't mean anything detrimental to your spirituality to eat of meat sacrificed to idols. But you remember the danger that Paul was pointing out to them, that with this correct scriptural theological knowledge they were in danger of causing a stumbling block for the weaker brother. But not only causing a stumbling block for the weaker brother, they were in danger of this knowledge puffing themselves up to such an extent that they burst - their arrogance would lead to them falling, and them stumbling.

In chapters 8 and 9 he's been telling them that liberty is not licence: yes, you're free in Christ, you're perfectly entitled to eat meat that is sacrificed to idols, but you've got to remember that liberty is not licence, and you've got to take into consideration your weaker brother. Then we found later on in those chapters that there is something that has to regulate our liberty in Christ, and that is love - love for our weaker brother, what it will do to him, but primarily love for the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to see tonight an illustration, all these illustrations, of how arrogance leads to sin. He uses these Old Testament types to show them the

danger if they do not exercise discipline over their liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ. To those who think they need to learn nothing more, what a verse, verse 12: 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man' - beware, if you think you stand firm, if you think you're strong - he's quoting from Proverbs 16:18: 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall'. Paul is saying that one of the surest ways to fall into sin as a Christian is to become overconfident, or even better put, self-confident.

Wasn't this a problem for the Corinthians? Self-confidence. You remember how many times we found this little phrase as we've gone through each chapter: 'puffed up, puffed up', they were blown up in their pride and all their knowledge. Wasn't that the reason in chapter 4, if you turn back to it, for Paul's sarcastic remarks with regards to them? He says in verse 8: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us', without us apostles, 'and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ' - you're so puffed up! You can hear the sarcastic tone in Paul's voice as he castigates.

Now what we will find out tonight is, in these illustrations, that Paul is telling us that these believers in Corinth who are saved by the grace of God - we've no doubt about that, we saw that in the opening lessons of this book in chapter 1 where they are sanctified in God in Christ, set apart by grace, they're saved just like you and me. But we're going to see tonight that they're also baptised, they were well-taught believers - you could even say in their knowledge, theological aptitude, that they were mature. Paul says on one occasion that they came behind in no gift, they weren't lacking in spiritual gift and prowess - but their problem was that they were overconfident! Paul was warning them that their over-self-confidence was going to lead to a massive fall.

Let me explain it like this, in context: these believers who new theologically that there was nothing wrong with eating this meat offered to idols, even sitting down in the temple eating them, felt that they were so strong in their knowledge that they were strong enough to freely associate with pagans in every realm and purpose of life - whether it even be the ceremonies of paganism, or the social activities that they were engaged in. They felt that because they were so strong in their theological knowledge that they wouldn't be morally or spiritually affected. Paul is saying to them tonight, listen: 'You are self-deceived! You may have all the theological knowledge correct, but you're ignoring how first of all you're harming the weaker Christian' - but now he's coming in to look personally at themselves, that they're endangering themselves, their own spiritual lives, for a cataclysmic fall.

One author put it: 'They could not live long on the far edge of freedom without falling into temptation and then into sin'. What we're going to find out tonight, and I want to nail it right at the very beginning, is that the loving Christian - and I don't just mean the Christian who loves other Christians, but primarily the Christian who loves his Lord - doesn't try and stretch Christian liberty to an extreme, to see how close to evil and sin he can get without being harmed or without offending God! That is not the attitude of a spiritual man or woman! Paul says that if that is your attitude, that's the way you operate, seeing how far you can go before it's too far, you're on the precipice of disaster and you're in danger of falling headlong spiritually! Now don't misunderstand me, he's not talking about falling from salvation, because we know that that is impossible if you are truly saved, but he's talking here about falling from holiness - and in the last couple of verses of chapter 9 we saw that he's also talking about falling from usefulness - being disqualified, being set on the shelf for God as useless! What a danger this is.

We're going to see this evening that the Lord doesn't take lightly these matters of believers sinning in His sight. I think if the modern church needs a dose of anything, it's a dose of the realism that is found in this portion of Scripture, and the honesty of not only the apostle with himself, but the honesty he longed to see in



every believer with regards to the danger that we are all in of falling into sin. If many of us feared sin more, I think we would fall into sin a lot less.

So let's look at it this evening from our outline. The first thing that Paul brings to them in his argument is the privileges of liberty that the children of Israel had in the Old Testament in verses 1 to 4: 'Moreover, brethren', or as some translations say, 'For brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant', that just refers back to the disqualification he talks about in verse 27. Because there is a danger of being disqualified from serving the Lord, becoming a castaway, moreover I don't want you to be ignorant of mistakes that your forefathers made in the wilderness. Paul begins to outline the privileges that these men and women of God had in the Old Testament in order to encourage them on to godliness, for the privileges that they had should have done this, but we find that it was the opposite that happened in the wilderness - because no matter how many privileges they had, they went round and round for 40 years in a circle of sinfulness because they wouldn't be obedient to God, they wouldn't allow God's goodness to lead them towards repentance.

Five times within these four verses you have the word 'all, all', expressing the oneness they experienced, they all experienced the same thing. There wasn't any particular spiritual giants among them who experienced these privileges of spirituality, they all experienced them but yet most of them, we will see, failed. Let's look at the privileges under three headings, the first is this: they all experienced emancipation from Egypt. Paul says that you shouldn't be ignorant: 'how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea' - Exodus 13 tells us that the children of Israel, as they were led out of Egypt, were guided by day by a pillar of cloud and by night by a pillar of fire. Those two pillars guided them on their way through the wilderness, it led them everywhere and they didn't have to wonder for one moment where to go and how to get there. If you were going to summarise that particular spiritual privilege, we could say that they had supernatural guidance all their lives. Imagine that for a moment, supernatural guidance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - all they had to do was look up and see a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, and they knew God was there. Just look out of their tent, and if it moved a few feet to the left they moved a few feet to the left, or to the right. They pitched their tents when it stopped, when it started to move they pulled up the pegs and journeyed. One man put it well when he said that all they needed was an open eye for God to guide them, there was no guessing game, following God's guidance was as simple as opening their eyes and looking to God - supernatural guidance!

We have guidance today, but not this kind of guidance! Imagine the privilege of 24 hours a day having a kind of hotline to heaven like these Israelites! Spiritual guidance, supernatural guidance! Then also it says that they all passed through the sea, we could define that as supernatural deliverance. Turn with me to Exodus 14 till we just remind ourselves of these portions of Scripture, and maybe you don't know them at all, and this will be a good way of making you aware of them. Exodus 14 verse 21: 'And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left'.

Four hundred years in slavery in Egypt, with all the maltreatment that they received in bondage, and then God sends ten plagues, He leads them out of Egypt, He leads them through the Red Sea, opens up the waves, causes them to walk through, and their feet don't even get wet! A supernatural deliverance was theirs, and we could say tonight that every physical law would say that they should have drowned, yet because God was a reality in their experience, and He intervened for them right on time, they were delivered in a supernatural way. And even to this day in Jewish homes they celebrate this month the Passover season, it's still the touchstone of Jewish faith today because it was such a supernatural deliverance. Think of this! A nation like this chosen of God, not because they were great or strong or beautiful, but because God chose them! A nation that He brought out of bondage in Egypt, a nation that He delivered through the sea, a nation that He guided for 40 years of backsliding through the wilderness, with all these privileges of emancipation from the

slavery and sin of Egypt - yet here they are, disqualified by God! It's a sobering thought, isn't it? What Paul is saying to us and to the Corinthians is: 'Beware that this doesn't happen to you!'

One of their privileges was emancipation from Egypt, and then secondly immersion into Moses. Some people get confused at verse 2: 'And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea'. Some people even try to explain it that that cloud pillar that guided them by day used to sprinkle them with wee drops of rain, and was just like baptism - what a lot of nonsense! Nothing of the sort, all you've to do is look at the definition of baptism in the Greek it is 'baptidso' which doesn't just mean 'immerse', but it has the idea of identification with him - we see that particularly in Romans chapter 6 where we're identified in believer's baptism by immersion, identifying with Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and that's what it means here. They were identified with God and with Moses as they went through the Red Sea. In fact, in Paul's day if you went to get a garment of clothing dyed, you would take it to the merchant and the word was used 'baptise it, dip it' - and by dipping it in the different coloured dye it would change its identity. They were coming out of Egypt and they were becoming a nation unto Moses and unto God, and they were baptised in that sense through the Red Sea - the Israelites were spiritually dipped into a union with God and with Moses, and particularly Moses' leadership over them.

You see that in Exodus if you turn back to Exodus 14 for a moment quickly, that at the beginning of this journey they respected Moses' leadership over them. They were baptised into it, verse 31 of chapter 14: 'And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses'. So we could summarise it all like this: they had supernatural guidance, the cloud, the fire; they had supernatural deliverance through the Red Sea; and they had also supernatural leadership, this meek man of God, Moses, immersed unto him.

Then thirdly they had nutrition from the rock - verse 3: 'And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ'. The spiritual food is a reference to the manna, that angel's food, that bread from God that came down from heaven, that God supplied faithfully for them for 40 years, six days a week, every day except the Sabbath. They never went hungry, read about it in Exodus 16 and Psalm 78. That is the spiritual food, now it doesn't mean that it wasn't literal food, but it means when it says 'spiritual food' that there was more significance in it than just feeding the stomach, there was spiritual nutrition in this food for the children of God. It says here that they drank of this Rock that followed them. The ancient Jews had a legend that was known to the Jews in Paul's day, and probably known by him and believed by many, that an actual rock followed Israel throughout the wilderness journey providing water on tap wherever they went. That's not what this means, originally it was an original rock that gave them water, but it doesn't mean it followed them everywhere - because what Paul is really saying is answering this: for they drank, yes there was a rock that followed them, but they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

'Petrodes' (sp?) is the word that is used in the Greek for a large stone or boulder, and it's the word that was used of the rock that Moses struck to get the water. That's not the word that's used here, the word used here is 'Petra', which is the word of a great massive cliff, a massive rock, a precipice - this is not Moses' rock, the boulder that brought forth the water - but what Paul is saying, and it's remarkable when we consider the Old Testament context, that the Rock that give them spiritual sustenance and nourishment in the Old Testament was the Lord Jesus Christ, it was their Messiah! Isn't that wonderful? They had supernatural guidance, supernatural deliverance, supernatural leadership, and supernatural food and drink from none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ - His presence was with them. Even before He took upon Himself human flesh, He had His hands on the affairs of His people, and He provided them with all the water that they needed - isn't that beautiful? If you ever need any proof that He is God, the Bible is full of it, but here's one: the Rock right throughout the Old Testament is spoken of Jehovah, but Paul says that Rock was Christ! 'I and my Father are one', He said, and we better believe it because it's right throughout the whole Scriptures.

Isn't it wonderful? I don't know whether there's anybody here tonight and you're not saved, or maybe there's someone here and you're a believer and you're sort of backslidden, and you're trying still to find sustenance and nourishment in the things of this world. I don't know what your circumstances are, but if this passage tells you anything it tells you this: there was only one way that these children of Israel through the wilderness could be delivered from their corruption, and that was through the Rock that followed them and finding satisfaction in the Saviour alone! What do we sing?

'None but Christ can satisfy,  
None other name for me!  
There's love and life and lasting joy,  
Lord Jesus, found in Thee'.

Oh if the dear Jewish people could see this today! Well, you would think, wouldn't you, with supernatural guidance, supernatural deliverance, supernatural leadership, supernatural food and drink, being emancipated from Egypt, immersed into Moses, and nourished from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that they would be a very thankful and devoted people, and that they would follow in obedience any command that the Lord would give to them - what a surprise when we read verse 5! 'But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness'. That 'many of them' should be translated 'most of them'! And even when it's translated 'most of them', it's the greatest understatement in the world, because if you think about it and calculate it out of the hundreds of thousands in that first generation that came out of Egypt and went forty years through the wilderness, two survived! Two! Joshua and Caleb got into the Promised Land, only two out of such a company, and even Moses and Aaron, if you read your Old Testament, they became disqualified - Moses because he struck the rock at Miribah instead of speaking to it to get the waters from it. Paul says that many of them, most of them, all but two of them, God was not pleased with. And he says, this is the terrible statement: 'for they were overthrown in the wilderness'. That's misleading, it sounds as if the wilderness got the better of them, but what it really means is that they were laid low in the wilderness, literally their bodies were strewn across the ground of the whole desert! They were disqualified, and only two of them over the age of 20 when they left the land of Egypt were left alive and went into the Promised Land.

Imagine the graphic scene that Paul is painting here for these Corinthian believers: bodies scattered about the whole desert floor like broken potsherds, vessels not meet for the Master's use, vessels that Paul would speak of later as vessels of dishonour. One author put it like this: 'What a spectacle is that which is called up by the apostle before the eyes of the self-satisfied Corinthians, all those bodies filled with miraculous food and drink strewn across the soil of the desert'. With all their privileges, what a shock! You might say: 'Well, why does he have to be so shocking, and use so shocking an illustration?'. I think he'd maybe be pulled up for being undispensational today if it wasn't in the New Testament - how can you apply such harsh judgment from God to the church of Jesus Christ? Here's why, verse 11, because it's an example, it's a type - the word 'tupos' that could be translated 'type', could also be translated in this sense 'to strike with a blow for the purpose of leaving an impression'. It was used of the stamp that was put on the emperor's coin, a strike that made a mark. In fact, in John's gospel it's used of the very nailprints of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself - what an impression it makes! That's what Paul wants this illustration to do to these believers, to make a lasting impression, to leave a blow with them that they will never forget!

It does that alright, doesn't it? He wants it to be an admonition, verse 11, the word could be translated 'instruction' - 'nuthasia' (sp?), or to put or set into the thinking a change of one's behaviour. If you like, it's like shock treatment to make them change their ways and their thoughts and their lives, because they're under the chastisement of God if they do not! So really what Paul is saying to us, and we need to all take note here tonight, that there are dangers in Christian maturity as well as Christian immaturity. Overconfidence was their undoing, self-confidence. If you just would consider this for a moment in the context, that surely I think

- I'll ask it as a question at least - could this possibly mean that other Christians who maybe don't know as much as you know, who maybe don't have as much light, if I could put it that way, as you have with regards to the Scriptures and what to do and what not to do, even though your knowledge may be correct; could it be that these other believers are holier than you, and are rewarded for more than you because the little light that they have, they're obedient to it? I think you will find that that's borne out in this passage. We're not excusing error, we're talking about people in ignorance, people who haven't been given the revelation, perhaps, that you have. But it is possible, I believe that this can explain the reason why many men in history have been blessed of God, and they have been blatantly ignorantly in error. God's ways are not always our ways, but we must move on.

Those are the privileges of liberty, secondly he leads them on in this argument and speaks to them of the pitfalls of liberty. These believers are exposed to supernatural benefits that we have outlined already, yet they lacked the correct proper response. Imagine it, as we read Numbers and Exodus, they became dissatisfied and ungrateful towards God, and they kept longing to get back to Egypt. Numbers 11:4-6, they yearned after the leek and the garlic. They cursed Moses that he had led them out and left them to die in the wilderness, and they even came to the stage of saying to Moses: 'We're sick of this food from heaven!'. Isn't that amazing? I think it must be one of the most horrible sights in the universe to see a child of heaven reject heavenly food, and crave the filth of the earth instead.

Let's go through these pitfalls quickly. The first was idolatry: 'these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things', it could be translated 'craven after evil things'. I wonder is there somebody here tonight, and you're a believer, and you're craving after evil things - Proverbs puts it: 'Don't be envious of evildoers!'. The way that they envy them first was their idolatry: 'Neither be ye idolaters', verse 7, 'as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play'. They're hardly out of Egypt, if you read the book of Exodus, and they start while Moses is up the Mount meeting with God, to build a golden calf, and they begin to worship it. Now don't think and misunderstand, as many do, that they were worshipping a false god, they were not! They were worshipping a calf in the name of Jehovah! They were worshipping the calf, Aaron said, as the One who brought them out of Egypt, and he built an altar to that calf, and he even declared that there would be feasts unto the LORD - capital L-O-R-D in the Old Testament which is the name of Jehovah!

Paul here quotes what Moses said of them: 'They sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play'. They had, as Paul would say, an orgy of paganism under the Mount of God when God was speaking and feeding His people, and they did it in the name of God! Let me just make a digression and application here, because many Roman Catholic folk are deluded by their teachers and their false priests. We say to them: 'Why is it that you bow down to idols and worship them?'. They say: 'Well, we don't worship false gods, we worship the true and the living God, these images help us worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit' - apart from the fact that they worship the Virgin Mary too. But that is in direct contradiction when we see what Paul says here and what happened in Moses' day, because these were worshipping the true and the living God, but they were using an image to do it, and God told them in His second commandment that they should not make a graven image even if they were worshipping the true and the living God.

John said at the very end of his little epistle: 'My little children keep yourselves from idols'. I urge you, if you're a person converted out of Roman Catholicism or any other system that worships idols, get out of that system as soon as you can, because it will contaminate you! Do not support it, do not encourage it! I know that many stay within the system because they're sincerely want to win those around them for Christ, but they do not realise that by default they dishonour God in doing that; and they even could confirm others, the weaker souls, in doing the sins that they previously did, or even endanger their eternal souls to damnation in a false way of salvation. We will see later on 'what fellowship hath God with Belial', the temples of paganism with the temple of God.

That was their idolatry, but friends you don't have to bow down to a piece of wood to commit idolatry, there is spiritual idolatry that seizes the adoration that is due alone to God. It can be your wife or husband or your child, or your friend, or your reputation, or your job, or success, or love, or self-image - it is anything that takes God's place on the throne of your heart! It's as bad as making a golden calf!

Their second pitfall was sexual immorality, it speaks of an account in Numbers 25. We haven't got time to go into the difference in the account in Numbers 25 that says that there were 24,000 who fell, and here in Corinthians it says that there were 23,000 that fell in one day - people say, 'Well there you have it, the Bible contradicts itself'. But if you look at it carefully you will see that Paul says 23,000 fell in one day, but Numbers does not say that, and Numbers includes within it, I believe, the subsequent deaths after that - those that fell in the plague. Apart from that, can you see the relevance to sexual immorality here with idolatry in the city of Corinth. You remember I told you right at the beginning of our studies of the temple of Aphrodite there on the Acrocorinth, that great hill, and the thousand ritualistic pagan prostitutes that were there serving their false gods. As we go through pagan ancient religions we see that idolatry is almost always inseparably linked with sexual immorality.

Some of these Corinthians were going back to their old ways. Well, I want to say tonight, I know we may not indulge in those things, but Paul says to us that anything that is inconsistent with purity is to be done away with. These self-confident, over-confident Corinthians flirted with their sinful environment, and there are so many young people and older people and middle-aged people today through the media and all sorts of ways, through entertainment and leisure, flirt with the world. They might say: 'I haven't partaken of the sin', but they flirt with the sin! But in chapter 6 and verse 18 Paul told them not to flirt with it but to flee from fornication!

'When you flee from temptation', one man said, 'make sure you don't leave a forwarding address behind you'. That is where many fall down. They're overconfident, they think: 'I can handle this situation, I can handle this relationship I'm in, it'll not go too far' - and then when the temptations get stronger, they can't handle it, and before they know it it's too late and they've fallen into the pitfall of the devil! Let's be honest for a moment, even in the Christian environment in which we live today, where many Christians think it's alright to go to the clubs and the pubs and all the rest, you cannot tell me - you cannot convince me - that you can go to those places, and gaze upon what you see, and have pure thoughts every moment! You're a liar! It's impossible, that's why he tells us to flee from it!

The third pitfall, testing God, questioning God's faithfulness. Verse 9: 'Let us not tempt Christ', there's the Trinity again if you want it - if Christ wasn't God how could they be testing Christ in the wilderness? Psalm 78 says that they tempted God in the wilderness. What did they say to God and to Moses? 'Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?', and do you know what God's response to His children was? It wasn't pleasant, Numbers says in verse 6 of chapter 21 that He sent the serpents, Paul agrees with him in verse 9: 'as some of them also tempted God, and were destroyed of serpents'. The children were hearing about it yesterday, Psalm 78 says it was because they limited the Holy One of Israel, and they said: 'Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?'

Let me clear up a bit of misunderstanding, this testing God isn't trusting God's promises and claiming them, that's not what he's talking about here. We encourage that, and the word of God does. Neither is it holy argumentation with God from the standpoint of faith, asking Him to do what He has said He will do - but what we're talking about here with these Israelites was daring God to move, daring Him to move, with an attitude within you of doubt and craving for something else which is sinful. How is this done today? It's done in exactly the same way - isn't it wonderful, the relevance of the word of God? Just as the Corinthians were doing, pushing their liberty to the limits, seeing how much of the flesh they could indulge in and the world they could enjoy without categorically and intrinsically sinning. That's what Christians say today: 'This is the age of grace. We're governed by grace, not law. We're free and God is a forgiving God, we can't lose our

salvation no matter what we do, so why not get everything out of our life that we can' - as the Israelites found out, that's not pleasing to God! The Corinthians found out around the Lord's table, when they were getting drunk, chapter 11 verse 30, we'll see it in later weeks - they found out in the age of grace that it is not pleasing to God, and many were weak and sickly among them and many slept - dead!

Fourthly they were grumbling. You've heard the song: 'Grumble on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday' - they murmured: 'some of them also murmured', verse 10, 'and were destroyed of the destroyer'. This is powerful stuff, these are the children of God, the destroyer is the angel that killed the firstborn in Egypt. God sent a plague in this occurrence and killed 14,700 people. This is the same angel not only that slew the firstborn in Egypt, but later killed 70,000 men because of David's census in 2 Samuel chapter 24. In response to the prayer of Isaiah and Hezekiah this angel destroyed an entire Assyrian army that was besieging Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 32, but God turns him on His own people! Why? Because they were grumbling, and their grumbling was a sign that they were dissatisfied with God's sovereignty in their lives. They were challenging God's wisdom.

I'm going to have to finish tonight, but let me finish on this note: do we ever do this? Challenge God's wisdom and grumble, question His sovereignty, test God, doubt God - are we involved in some way, whether mentally or physically, in sexual immorality or idolatry? A pastor on one occasion give a series of sermons entitled 'The Sins of the Saints', and one of these grumblers, apparently under conviction, a woman disapprovingly said to him at the door: 'After all, sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of an unsaved person'. 'Yes it is', the pastor said, 'it's worse'.

To sin against law is one thing, but surely to sin against grace is another? I wonder as we close our meeting tonight, is there a dry desert patch on your heart? Is there a piece of your soul that is lying parched, that hasn't been nourished by Christ for years or months or even days? Or perhaps there are prickly attitudes that have sprouted against others, or even against the Lord Himself? Perhaps there are the thorns of lust, idolatry, or the gravel and grit of grumbling, and it has calloused your feet towards God and your sensitivity to Him in your soul? I would urge you tonight, and this is applied to believers: God's chastisement is severe! But don't let His chastisement keep you away, let it drive you to Jesus for He is the oasis where you can find the water of forgiveness and rest. If you come to Him and let the goodness of God lead you to repentance, He is the one who says: 'I will give you the water of life freely, and you will never thirst again; come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' - and He'll do it!

I warn you, as Paul warns us tonight, whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. God willing, not next week but the following week, we'll begin with the practicalities of liberty as we continue in this passage.

Oh, our Father, what can we say but that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Lord, we read in Thy word, if Thou didst spare not Thine only Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? But Lord, we know all too well that they are there for the taking, but yet the cost is what stops us. Father, we pray that we, before it is too late, will enter the promised land of the blessing of God, individually and as an assembly, that we will never limit the Holy One of Israel, that we will never fail to learn from the mistakes of our forefathers spiritually, but Lord that we will discipline ourselves to win the prize - whatever the cost - and to live to God before it be too late. Amen.

## *1 Corinthians - Chapter 25*

# *"The Saint, The System And Sin"*

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### I Corinthians 10:12-23

1. ***Temptation Is Unavoidable***
2. ***Sin Is Escapable***
3. ***Compromise Is Inexcusable***
4. ***Danger Is Inevitable***

**W**e didn't finish our study last Monday night, but we're going to finish that one off this evening - but it all flows into really one theme which is throughout the whole of this chapter, and I'm sure that it'll flow over into next week's study as well. We're going to take up our reading at verse 12, and I've entitled our study this evening 'The Saint, The System and Sin', the saint, the system and sin.

Verse 12: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not".

Now if you're with us this evening and it's your first night, or you haven't been here in a while, you may not know that in the last few chapters - from about chapter 8 or so right through to the end of chapter 10 - we are contextually in a portion of this book that is dealing with the question of whether it's right or not for the Christian in Corinth to eat of meat that was sacrificed to idols. Now Paul has already gone into a very detailed theological discourse as to the fact that there is no particular sin in the eating of meat that is sacrificed to idols because: one, there is no such thing as another god apart from Jehovah, there is only one true and living God; therefore to eat meat sacrificed to false gods means that that god is a nonentity and it doesn't figure at all, so it cannot be a sin in that sense. His second main argument why it is not a sin particularly was that meat and drink does not commend us to God - you can't get to God by eating and drinking certain things or, for that matter, not eating or drinking certain things - but we come to God by grace through faith in our Jesus Christ alone.

So you see the basic, naked, black and white theological discourse and argument that Paul has already given. But Paul is answering some believers in Corinth who believe that because they are free and they don't live by law and rules and regulations, they have taken their liberty in Christ and their freedom to an extreme, so much so that it has become what we could call licence. Their liberty has strayed into the realms of licence, and they have failed to regulate their liberty, and that's why Paul had to come in in these few chapters and

tell them that there are certain principles as Christians that must regulate their liberty. One principal was the principle of the weaker brother, that is that although you may be able to handle eating meat sacrificed to idols, some people who have come out of that sinful background mightn't be able to handle it, so you've to take them into your consideration. Really what Paul was saying was: your liberty ought to be regulated by love, and I hope that every time I've reminded you of that it's starting to sink in. Although we are free in Christ, we're not free to do as we like, there are certain regulations, and one of the regulations is the love that we must have for the weaker brethren.

Of course we saw last week as well, not last week but the week before, we were off last week, but we saw that it's also love to God that must regulate our liberty. We ought not to do something that will take us further away from God, even if in itself it's perfectly legitimate, if it doesn't bring us nearer to God or [brings us] further away we must ignore that thing. If we're in doubt about something with regards to our conscience we should, if in doubt, cast it out. That's really what he says in the last verse that we read, and he's repeating it from another portion we've already studied: 'All things', verse 23, 'are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient', that could be translated 'helpful'. In other words: 'All things, I can do them, theoretically, in Christ and through grace, but all those things are not helpful for me in my faith, they don't bring me nearer to Christ and make me more spiritual and holy' - 'all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not'.

That's important to see that. Now I love, when we're going through this epistle, to see Paul's pastoral balance as he answers these very difficult questions - I couldn't have answered the questions that he had posed to him. So he's told them theologically: 'Ah, you're correct, you've dotted your i's and crossed your t's', but now he's coming into this passage and he's telling them that there are dangers in following your freedom and liberty to the excess that you have done. Remember, please, that this wasn't just the case of people going to the marketplace where this meat that had been sacrificed to idols was being sold cheaply, it wasn't just a case of that; but what Paul is addressing is people who have been invited actually to dinners and banquets and festivals in the temple of the false god. So they're not just buying this meat and eating it with a clear conscience, they're actually going to the temple on the Acrocorinth and they're sitting down with pagans who worshipped these other false gods, and maybe even in a pagan festival they're eating and celebrating - maybe their heart isn't in it - but yet they are there and identifying with this false pagan system.

Now Paul is coming in, and he says: 'Listen, although you might be able to do this in good conscience, and you're not theoretically in your heart worshipping this false god, you've got to see first of all the dangers there are in this thing for you spiritually, and also you've got to see the idolatrous nature of association - guilt by association'. Now we're going to see the tremendous relevance to this today for us as believers in our contemporary age, because many people - especially younger people today - are asking the question: 'What ought the Christian's attitude to be towards the world system about us? How do we react towards things, grey areas in scripture that the Bible doesn't speak categorically about, that maybe weren't even invented in Bible times?'. Well let me say that the word of God, although it doesn't mention certain things specifically by name, the word of God is always relevant, because in the iniquitous realm there is nothing new under the sun, and also in the realm of righteousness God has given to us within His holy word all the answers that we need for any problem that perplexes us in our 21st-century age. Everything is there: the problems of paganism in Corinth's day are exactly the same as the problems in the world today - and, praise God, the answers that Paul gave them then are the answers that we need and the answers that work still today!

For us in the 21st century world it's no different, and if we were to go down this passage and substitute some of our modern words into the text for some of the ancient words that we find in the portion, we would find that it doesn't change it one iota - the problems are still the same, and the answer is also the same that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Now the reason that this is so applicable and contemporary and relevant to us today is because, I believe more than ever, the church of Jesus Christ in the West is mimicking the church of Corinth. The problems that you find with regards to sin in this church are the problems that we find in the



Western church today - because it seems in modernity that Christians in the 21st-century have gone to the extreme of valuing their liberty more than their holiness.

I think a casual reading of many of the Christian paperbacks on our Christian bookshop shelves will be able to tell you that right away - that there is this attitude that, because we're saved by grace, that we can flaunt our liberty and even go to the extent of flirting with the world. So much so that I would say to you that in many quarters within Christendom the demarcation line between the world and the church seems to be almost invisible. We are meant to be in the world but not of the world, and as one wise man said on one occasion: 'The problem is not when the boat is in the water, but when the water starts getting into the boat'. Compromise with the world is the danger that the church has always faced and is still facing today, yet many Christians - and I would have to say many young Christians - betray in the questions that they ask that they do not see the real danger that there is in the world, and I would have to say that many of those young Christians have grown up in Christian homes. They have never felt the bite and the venom of the serpent of sin in the world system. Compromise with the world affects not only the witness of the church worldwide and panoramically, but it affects you individually as a spiritual entity. You've got to know this: that if you flirt and flaunt your liberty in the world, you will be affected spiritually.

Let me read to you what C. S. Lewis said in his book 'The Joyful Christian' - let me say that there's somethings that C.S. Lewis said that you couldn't quote, and many things we would disagree with him on, but he said many profound things. In this book he speaks of the shocking similarity between sins of actions and sins of thought. Remember the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, He likened the sin of lusting after a woman in your mind with your eyes to the actual sin of adultery; He likened the sin of hatred in your heart and mind to the sin of murder - they weren't a million miles apart. So C. S. Lewis tells us how sin, comparing these two different things, how sin can affect the Christian internally. Now follow with me in this, he says: 'Christian writers seem to be so very strict at one moment, and so very free and easy at another. They talk about mere sins of thought as if they were immensely important, and then they talk about the most frightful murders and treacheries as if you had only got to repent and all would be forgiven'. Have you ever found that? He goes on: 'But I have come to see that they are right, what they're always thinking of is the mark which the action leaves on that tiny central self which no one sees in this life, but which each of us will have to endure or enjoy forever, that little mark is there. One man may be so placed that his anger sheds the blood of thousands, and another so placed that however angry he gets he will only be laughed at - but the little mark on the soul may be much the same in both! Each has done something to himself which, unless he repents, will make it harder for him to keep out of the rage the next time he is tempted, and will make the rage worse when he does fall into it. Each of them, if he seriously turns to God, can have that twist in the central man straightened out again. Each is, in the long run, doomed if he will not! The bigness or smallness of the thing seen from the outside is not what really matters, what matters is the imprint that it leaves on the soul'.

So why can a tiny sin of thought that seems so harmless and innocent be just as dangerous as a blatantly malicious sin? The reason is because there is progressiveness in sin, and if something on your heart and mind is left unerased, that little mark on the soul, it will eventually smear from your mind in your heart to your character and your very personal being will be permanently stained. What did James say in chapter 1 and verse 15? 'Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death' - so what is Paul saying in the light of what we have just said, and what James has testified in his book? It is simply this: you're better to stay away from something that could potentially lead you into trouble, you're better to stay clear of it than court spiritual disaster - even if it's only an association.

These Christians in Corinth could be saying: 'Oh, what's wrong? I'm just sitting in the temple, I'm not worshipping the god, I'm eating a meal; they aren't worshipping the god' - but it is the association, Paul is saying, that may not be sinning in and of itself, but could lead you and lure you into an awful spiritual

catastrophe. We might say to ourselves sometimes: 'Well, thoughts are harmless', but harmless thoughts can lead to heinous sins. In the same way what we think of as harmless associations can also lead to spiritual disaster - and if there's anything that Paul is saying to us tonight, it is exactly that. He comes to them as he's come to them so often, and in verse 14 we see the heart of a compassionate pastor, and he says to them appealingly: 'Dearly beloved, flee from idolatry'. It as if he sits down beside this young Christian and puts his arm around them by pen and paper, and they're struggling with sin and temptation and backsliding, and the attraction and magnetism of the world; and he puts his arm around them and he says: 'Dearly beloved, flee this idolatry'.

He gives them good godly counsel, and I'll tell you that is what we need in this day and age. Young people, this is what you need to hear, what God's word is saying here - I've got nothing to impart to you, only what is in the scripture - what is it? What is it that Paul said to them? Well, here it is, fourfold - the first thing is that in this world temptation is unavoidable, temptation is unavoidable. Verse 13: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it'. What Paul is saying is that Christians experience all temptations - now mark that! 'There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man', and across the body of Jesus Christ, the church of the living God, there's not one temptation that is in existence that a child of God has not experienced - even the sin of idolatry!

Now there's two aspects to that to my heart, the first is that it brings an overwhelming sense of liberty - it's liberating to me to think of this! I'm not on my own! I'm not the only one facing this hurdle and this mountain of sin! I'm not the only one with this problem! Although at times I feel I could be, and although no one puts their arm around me and says: 'I have that problem too', nevertheless God's word stands forever - I can't be the only one! Does that not liberate you tonight if you're struggling with this particular problem, whatever it may be? To know that you're not odd, you're not some kind of freak! But what is liberating is also frightening, because it warns us, doesn't it? The negative aspect of it is that there is no temptation that is beyond us - and that's why Paul came and said in verse 12: 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall'. Every Christian is in as much danger of falling into sin, even the awful sin that he's talking about in this passage of idolatry. You might say: 'No! That's not possible! I would never stoop to bow down to a god of stone or an idol of wood or jewels!' - listen, these Corinthians were heading for exactly that, the disaster of idolatry, and it was tragically in the name of celebrating their own liberty! Isn't that remarkable? The sinfulness and wickedness of sin, how we could actually be pontificating a spiritual idea and principle, but that very thing is idolatry in some kind of Christian clothes. They participated in this idolatry and Paul explains to them that it was just one more step further down the staircase into the very pit of demonism!

You might ask the question, and you would be right in doing so: 'What leads to such a massive fall?'. There are two things that will lead - a Christian now - to such a fall as this, into the very demonism that Paul talks about later on in these verses. The first is this: over-self-confidence, and the second is lack of God-confidence. He speaks to two types of Christians in Corinth, the first are the self-confident - these proud Corinthians who proudly and pompously had their nose upturned, stuck in the air, felt that they could never fall down the manhole of sin into the sewer of iniquity. They felt that they were above the rest, they were mature, they could handle the Acrocorinth and the temple, and meat sacrificed to the idol - they could stare the devil himself in the face and come away pure, unaffected.

Paul says to them: 'Take heed' - the word 'heed' means you need to look at something, and what he's implying is that if you're so sure that you'll stay standing after temptation, you need to take a closer look, you need to realise that you - yes! Even you - might be heading for a fall! There's no temptation that is not common, and you're not so big that you can't fall, and you need to guard, he says, against this haughty spirit. You need to see ourselves not in over-confidence and pride, but you need to be realistic. I think one first early step on the road to holiness and a deeper life of God, in one sense, is a step backwards. It's a step

backward from yourself, not from God, but it's a real deep-dyed dose of realism, where you realise that you are vulnerable, that you are dependent - even as a child of God - totally and utterly upon God, and that you are able to fall! Is that not what he told us in verses 1 to 11 when he went through the history lesson on the lack of holiness in the life of the Israelites, to show them that they had all the blessings and privileges of God, but what happened? They took their supernatural heritage for granted and they fell into the most diabolical sins imaginable. We saw in that last study that the reason, one of them at least, was because they took supernatural things as ordinary things - they became familiar with the things of God. You know, that can happen in our lives too, as Christians we struggle with overexposure to things that God has told us through the Word, through church and all the rest, and we can get so comfortable in this type of Christian atmosphere that we let our defences down - and when we go out into the world, we're so over-confident that the first dart the devil sends to us, it gets us right in the heart!

Is it not true with, I would say, most of us that like Peter our strongest points can often be our weakest? You know what happened to him: he was so strong in testifying Christ, he was the one to come to the fore and say: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God', and God had revealed it - but it was he too that kept sinning with his mouth and his boldness. What about Abraham, the great man and father of all the faithful, the father of faith - yet he failed in what? The very opposite of faith, unbelief. Moses was said to be the meekest man that ever lived, apart from Christ of course, yet his sin was in presumption, in striking the rock in anger. Samson, the man of great strength, and what did he fail in? Great weakness at the feet of a woman. And this is not immune from the church, you go into the book of Revelation, the first few chapters: the church at Sardis, they had a great reputation, they had a name, Jesus said, that they lived - yet they were dead! Jesus told them to repent or He would come and judge them. Thyatira was the self-confident, in chapter 3 verse 17 they thought they were rich and increased in goods, had need of nothing, but Jesus came and told them they were blind, they were poor, they were wretched, they were naked!

Can I just fire a warning shot across your bow tonight? If you ever get to a certain spiritual peak and mountaintop where you feel satisfied, where you feel 'I've got there, I've arrived' - you are in big trouble! This verse that we've been looking at, verse 12, tells you that you are the prime target for a fall! If the devil's looking for any bait, you're the one! You might say: 'Well, how can you be secure?' - here's the lesson, oh, that we would all take it tonight: the only way to be secure is not to stay where we are, but go on to higher heights. Keep on moving! During a military campaign a young captain was recommended to Napoleon the Emperor for promotion to a higher rank. Napoleon asked: 'Why do you suggest this man?'. They answered to say that through unusual circumstances he had courage, and his cleverness had won a great victory several days ago. Napoleon said: 'Good, that's tremendous, but what did he do the next day?'. That was the end of the matter - what do you do the next day? Where do you go from your spiritual victories, your spiritual mountaintops?

Don't misunderstand us: from a divine standpoint our security rests in our position in Christ, there's no doubt about that - we cannot be moved! 'Time the bond shall never sever', but from a human standpoint our personal security rests in our condition! The Corinthian position was excellent in chapter 1, they were sanctified, they were called into Christ, they were washed, they were cleansed; but their condition here now is another thing, isn't it?

Temptation is unavoidable, but this is the good news: sin is escapable. In this world, yes, this world that you're living in, sin is escapable. He not only came and spoke to the over-self-confident, and indeed any self-confident person is over-self-confident, but he came and spoke to those who have a lack of God-confidence. If you like, they were discouraged. To this person this verse 13 comes: 'There's no temptation that has taken you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful'. Some of them were overwhelmed and overcome by temptation, and to them Paul didn't bring a word of caution he brought a word of comfort. James 1 tells us, I hope you know, that God doesn't tempt anyone with evil - it's not God that tempts you. God never solicits a person to sin, but God allows the devil and his forces to tempt us as an effort to strengthen us when we

overcome our temptations. There's no doubt about that, that there are two sides to the coin of temptation - and this is what we're getting here with Paul: God's sovereignty and plan and providence in our temptation. What a comfort it is to us: that whenever you feel completely alone in your temptation that you're wrestling with - you're not alone, there are others wrestling with it, but there is that God and He is the Almighty God, and He is faithful!

Did you ever think: 'If I face that temptation one more time I'm going to crash and burn'? My friend, we're all in the same fire, we all have similar temptations - but praise God, if you're one of His children, He is faithful and He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. This is what this Christian church needs to hear in this day and age, bombarded with such an effulgence of filth: He provides a way of escape, that you may be able to bear your temptation. He gives the strength to the child of God to endure the searing licks of temptation's white-hot flame. In chapter 1 verse 9 we saw that God is faithful, in chapter 2 verse 9 it says: 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation' - and this is what we didn't get to last week, the practicalities of our Christian liberty. What are they? Don't be overconfident and don't lack God-confidence.

So what do you need then? One: you need a humble realism. You need to know your own weaknesses, and you need to know your strengths, and know at times that even your strengths are your weaknesses, and your problems aren't greater than anybody else's. We live in a world of common experiences, and you need to realise that you're humble - you mightn't feel it, but you are! The other side is that you need divine optimism, knowing that nothing is taken and come across your path that is not human, and that you can never be tempted that millions of others have not been tempted with that same thing - and praise God, you can never be tempted by anything that a child of God has not overcome! No believer can never claim when overwhelmed by temptation: 'The devil made me do it, God didn't give the strength, He didn't come in when I needed Him', for He says He will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able - and is that not, I wonder, the response to the prayer: 'Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. He's saying that He'll never lead you into a temptation that you can't handle. 'A way of escape' here should be translated: 'the way of escape', and you know what the way of escape is - it's not out of the situation, it's through the situation! 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; they shall not overflow thee. When thou passest through the fire, it shall not kindle upon thee'.

Oh, I tell you, there's a warning here for us all, is there not? These Corinthians chose to live dangerously near to the edges of this pagan word of idolatry and sin, and even surrounded themselves with many of the temptations, they flirted with it; and Paul is coming across their path and sticking a stop sign in the road in front of them and warning them that this very celebration of their liberty was going to lead into lamentation of disaster! The command he brings to them is categorical, you cannot misunderstand it, verse 14: 'flee from idolatry'.

In this world, thirdly, compromise is inexcusable - you must flee from idolatry. I hope we've defined an idol for you in previous weeks, but really you know that it's not just some form of a god, but it's anything that constantly pulls your heart away from the Lord, that constantly wants to be enthroned in His place on your heart. There's something here to think about for us: Israel's false gods and idols were made out of gold and wood and stone, I wonder what your idol is made out of? Is it the flesh of another person, is it the paper of banknotes and checks, is it the warm woolly security blanket of a happy home and environment, and luxuries and materials? Don't misquote me, I'm not saying these things are sin in and of themselves, because they may even be legitimate things that there's nothing evil in, but yet they can come into our hearts and take the place of exaltation above our Lord Himself! They can become idolatrous, and he had already told these believers in chapter 6 verse 18: 'flee from fornication', and now he's coming and telling them to flee from idolatry. Although he says later on, and has done already, the idol's nothing, the idol isn't a real god, yet his whole

point here is that although you're theologically correct in saying there's not a god there, that idol can be used of the devil to lead you into sin and to take a hold upon your life. Oh, that was something they hadn't thought of.

Paul is telling them: 'You know, idolatry is demonic'. It's not something to fiddle with, it's not something to play with, it's not a toy that you can flaunt your Christian liberty in front of and think that you'll come away unaffected and untainted - it is demonic, it is a plan thought up from the very caverns of the evil. For that reason, fourthly, he tells us that in this world danger is inevitable - especially if you go down that road of idolatry. He tells us in verse 16: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion', now mark that word, 'the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion', there it is again, 'of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers', there's another word, 'of that one bread'.

You go down this chapter and you find that after reading all these verses, reading about communion and partakers, and one this and one that and one the other, and unity and all the rest, that the theme of it is fellowship - fellowship. That the reason why the order of the usual order of the Lord's Table, the bread and the wine, is reversed here. The cup is mentioned first because it primarily speaks of supping with each other, of communion. What Paul is saying here is that if you go up to the temple and sit down at the idol's table and eat of the meat sacrificed to the idol, you're fellowshiping with the idol the way that we fellowship with one another when we sit at the Lord's Table to remember Him in His death. Communion, you're partaking of that thing. The awful thing is, he says in verse 20: 'But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils' - and he is implying - 'I would not that ye should have' - what? - 'fellowship with devils'!

What he's doing is laying down the doctrine of separation that we have, of course, in 2 Corinthians and chapter 6 verse 14: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion', there's the word again, 'hath light with darkness? what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?'. He uses, surprisingly, the Lord's Supper as an illustration. Now let's think about the illustration that he's bringing, and the import of it: he's saying that when a believer takes of the Lord's Table, in a spiritual way he's having fellowship with the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word 'fellowship' is in the Greek literally 'sharing in', he's sharing in the body and blood of the Lord. Now what this is not is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches of transubstantiation, they teach that the very body and blood of Christ are in the bread and in the wine; that when the priest with his priestcraft prays over these emblems that they change into the literal flesh and blood of Christ, and you consume it in your own body! That's not what Paul says, or what the word of God is teaching, neither is it what's called consubstantiation, which many of the Lutherans believe and Martin Luther himself believed; that although the bread and wine didn't turn into the literal body and blood of Christ, that the body and blood of Christ literally were alongside of them when they were taken, just beside them. Others believe that when you take the emblems they change into the literal body and blood of Christ. But that's not what Paul is saying, in fact the illustration testifies that that's not the case, but rather these emblems are like sensitive things that motivate us after the body and the blood of Christ. They sensitise to us His sacrifice at Calvary 2000 or so years ago.

Let me illustrate it to you like this: you maybe go away for a few weeks, away from your wife or husband or children, and you take away with you in your wallet or in a frame a little photograph. Now and again, especially as the time gets longer that you're apart, you lift the photograph and you look - now the photograph is not the real article, sure it's not? But what happens when you look at the photograph? The real love that you have for the real article is stimulated and stirred - you don't grab and kiss and hug the photograph, but you go into another realm whereby you actually, in your heart, love and embrace that person that is absent. When we break bread, don't just say it is nothing - I hate when people treat the bread and the wine with disdain - they're holy things! In and of themselves they are bread and wine, but when they are

taken there is something spiritual happens in the heart of a believer, when we are to come out in communion fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

By remembering Christ's death the believer enters into communion with his risen Lord, and Paul is saying - listen, here's the illustration: when you eat meat offered to idols in an associated place with idols, you actually enter into a spiritual communion with demons. In verse 18 he mentions Israel after the flesh, the nation who ate the sacrifices and were partakers of the altar - it's the same illustration, the application is clear, that a believer - whether in the Old or New Testament - cannot partake of the Lord's food, whether it's Old Testament sacrifices or the New Testament supper of the Lord, and devil's food - you can't do it, because you cannot serve God and mammon! You cannot serve two masters! He is implying, and this is the tremendous thing that we need to grab hold of today in our world, that fellowship with evil in some way, with these supernatural beings, is implied, that it effected some mysterious spiritual union with them in their heart. And if you don't believe that, read a few chapters back when he's talking about fornication with a harlot, and he says that the body of Christ is united to it.

Spiritual union - is not the Breaking of Bread the Christian's identity? It's what marks him, and the same results in participation at the Lord's Table happens in participation at an idol's table where you're identifying with it in fellowship. The one who has been made one with Christ, think of the awful thought, is being made one with the demonic spirit. The sacred relationship with Jesus Christ is now being transformed and swapped and substituted for a relationship with the deepest dyed damnable evil! Now that is idolatry! It was one thing to eat meat brought to a temple market, it's another thing to eat such meat in an idol temple with temple idolaters. Our problem today is not paganism in a sense, it's not idols as Paul knew them, or idolatry and practices of his day, but it's the world. It's the same thing, the same demonic spirits in a different form, it's found in personal habits, personal pleasures, personal practices that relate to this old world, the system in which we live - and essentially they're wrong, but this is the import of what Paul is saying: they can actually open us up to spiritual demonic forces!

I'm not saying that believers can be possessed, I don't believe they can - but I know that with Ananias and Sapphira the evil one had entered into their heart. They became wrong when the practices that they were involved in lost their identity of Jesus Christ. Have you got it? Is it right to do this, is it right to do that? Is it right to go here? Is it right to drink that? The Bible has very little to say about any of those specifics, but I'll tell you this: if any of it causes you to lose your identity as one of Christ's ones in the eyes of the world, you can be sure that it is wrong. When on one day we sit at the Table of the Lord, and the next day we join ourselves with those who are godless in places associated with sin, we are fellowshiping with demons. In verse 22 he asks the question: 'Are we stronger than God?'. It's directed to the strong Christian who thought he was sure to enjoy his liberty without falling into sin and never being harmed, he's saying you may be stronger than your weaker brother, but you are not stronger than God and it's dangerous to play with sin and tempt God! Remember, this is the history that he's already gone through that Israel tempted God to jealousy, and God judged them!

What's the progression that we have seen? It's this in three things: one, association with idolatry leads to participation in idolatry - the two cannot be separated, association is participation. Two: participation in idolatry leads to involvement with the devil. There's nothing behind the stone or the wood, he says, there's no real god there, there's nothing in the meat offered to the idol - but what is dangerous to the Christian is the force of darkness, the demonic world that hides behind the visible stuff of idols. How do we apply that? Now listen, please listen, especially the young people among us: when you get too deeply entrenched into a certain sin, an idol is created in your soul, and once an idol is carved out in your heart Satan has gained a foothold in you! Do I need to tell you that Satan is alive and well? Some people are atheistic with regards to God, but more Christians perhaps are atheistic with regards to the existence of the evil one - but he is brilliant in his scheming attacks on believers, and perhaps that's the greatest lie that he has sown: that he is not real. He is a

roaring lion, Peter says, going round seeking whom he may devour. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, 'Do not be ignorant of his devices, do not give him a foothold'.

I read of an African missionary saying once that there are three beasts in the jungle that lay wait on their prey: one is the lion, one is the leopard, and one is the hyena. The hyena doesn't devour its prey, it attacks only the vital organs and it only takes a few mouthfuls and leaves. The leopard doesn't eat its prey, all it's interested in is the desire for the blood of the victim. But the lion completely devours the victim and doesn't leave one portion. Do you realise, Christian, that that's what the devil wants to do with you? Just as the forces of heaven are active in your life, so are the forces of hell, and he will stop short of nothing but the destruction of your spiritual testimony until it lies in ruins and shipwrecks - and whatever association you are involved in, that little mark within your heart, if he can put his foot into your soul he will exploit that thing to bring you down!

Satan delights in Christians who love to live on the 'no trespassing' borders of carnality, those who value their liberty to push into such extremes that it compromises their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. They camp so near the enemy territory that they make themselves vulnerable to the lion. Can I ask you tonight: what sins, what associations have given Satan a foothold in your life? What idols are crowding out the Lord from the throne of your heart? My friend, if God is speaking to you this evening, if you renounce that sin, that association, and you turn and repent from it and turn to God, He will give you the strength to overcome it, for - praise God - this is a victorious passage. God is faithful. John could say in 1 John 4:4: 'greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'!

The greatest lie, I think, that the devil sells believers, one of them at least is: 'You can't overcome that, you'll never have victory, you'll never be what you ought to be'. Can I tell you this story as I close, I was reading it today. Carl Armading (sp?) wrote of a recent experience he had some years ago when he was standing before a cage in a zoo in one of the biggest cities of the United States. As he was standing before the cage of the Wildcat, whatever it was, I'm not sure exactly what species, but he watched and out of a door at the back of the cage came the attendant, the zookeeper, with a brush. He had nothing in his hands but this broom, and carefully closing the door behind him quietly, he proceeded to sweep up all the dirt on the floor of the cage. Carl says that as he watched this scene shivers went up and down his spine, because he realised that this old man was alone with this Wildcat in the cage. So far as he could tell he didn't have a weapon, he didn't have a radio to call for help if he got into difficulty. He had nothing to protect himself in the case of an attack. As Carl looked on his countenance he didn't seem to be afraid at all, in fact he was just going about his work. He spoke of the keeper's composure, Carl said: 'I supposed that when he got to where the cat lay he would treat him with the utmost respect, but nothing of the kind! When he got near to the beast he give him a shove with the broom to make him get out of the way. The Wildcat made no response except a disapproving hiss, after which he lay down another corner of the cage'. 'You certainly are a brave man', he said, when the keeper got out of the cage. 'No, I ain't brave', he said, continuing to sweep away. 'Well', I said, 'that cat must be tame'. 'No', he answered, 'the cat ain't tame'. 'Well', I said, 'if you aren't brave and the cat ain't tame, then I can't understand why he doesn't attack you'. The man chuckled, 'Mr', he said, 'he's old and he ain't got no teeth!'.

James said: 'Submit yourselves unto God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you'. And just before that he said: 'God resists the proud, and exalts the humble'. If you're tempted, there is an Almighty God who can cause you to overcome. If you're overconfident take heed, for you're in for a fall.

Father, we say to Thee tonight thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we bless Thee that the great Physician, bleeding on Calvary's cross, took every cybertooth of Satan from his jaws for us, so that if we submit ourselves to Thee and resist him who is the enemy of our souls, he has no power over us - Hallelujah! Christ has defeated sin, this world system, death and hell, and He is alive. He is our companion, and by His Spirit He is our helper, and He is in us, our hope and our glory. May each

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saint of God who lives in the system of the world tempted by sin, know that there is a Saviour who does not only save from the consequences of sin but the very power of it down here on earth. We thank Thee for Him, for we love Him, and we worship at His feet, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 26*

## ***"How To Use Your Liberty For The Lord"***

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### **I Corinthians 10:23-11:1**

- 1. Two Preliminary Questions To Ask**
  - i. Is it helpful? (verse 23)*
  - ii. Is it brotherly (verse 24)*
- 2. Three Practical Scenarios To Consider**
  - i. The marketplace – don't ask – conscience clear (verse 25)*
  - ii. The pagan home – don't ask – conscience clear (verse 27)*
  - iii. Anywhere – told – don't eat – for other's conscience (verse 28)*
- 3. Two Principles The Christian Should Live By**
  - i. Do all to God's glory (verse 31)*
  - ii. Do nothing to offend (verse 32-11:1)*

If you have been with us, you'll know that over the last number of weeks, quite a few weeks, from chapter 8 of our study we have been in the section of this first epistle that deals with meat that is offered to idols in the pagan temple in Corinth, and whether it is right - both theologically and practically - for the believers in Corinth to eat of that meat offered to idols. We've been looking at the responsibility that we have with regards to our Christian liberty - not only before God and to ourselves and our own spiritual development, but to our brethren and sisters in Christ, particularly, we've seen, our weaker brothers in the Lord. So, we're coming to the very end of that section and the conclusion of his thoughts on all these themes - and let me say that the reason why we've taken so much time going through this section (we could almost have summarised it all in one or two evenings), but the reason why we've been taking so much time over it is because there are so many principles that are related to the meat offered to idols that bear and have significance to many issues that Christians are facing today. The principles behind Paul's teaching contemporary to these Corinthians with regards to the meat offered to idols, is applicable to many many grey areas and controversial issues that Christians have to deal with in our 21st century age.

So we're coming to Paul's summary, and we're starting to read at verse 23. Paul says, and he has reiterated this phrase before in chapter 6 verse 12: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved".

Now we're coming tonight to the question of how to use your liberty for the Lord - how can you use this liberty for the Lord? Really it's a summary of everything that we've been taught in these few chapters from chapter 8 so far. We find that Paul gives us the crux of the matter - if you're wanting to fulfil all of his teaching that he has taught us from chapter 8, it could be encapsulated in verse 31: "Whether therefore ye eat,

or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God'. That is Paul's central message in this chapter, and even this section, but we could also say in the biblical sense, taking a panoramic view of the whole of the Scriptures, that this is the central message of the Bible to the believer - no matter what age that believer lives in. You remember that the Lord Jesus in Matthew's gospel chapter 22 verse 36, there was a lawyer came to test Him, and he said: 'Which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

Whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all - whatever it is that you do - do it to the glory of God, for the benefit of God's glory and for the benefit of your brothers. Many of you will be familiar from your Sunday School days with the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the first question and its answer are these: 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever'. The catechism is correct, that the pinnacle of man's existence is to glorify God and to enjoy God with all that is in him, to bless His holy name. Anything and everything that a Christian does ought to be done for the glory of God. This is Paul's chief point, he's summing up the whole of these matters - is it right to eat the meat, is it right not to eat the meat, is it right to go to the temple to eat it, is it right to go to your neighbour's house to eat it, is it right to go down to the marketplace and buy meat that's probably been sacrificed to idols? Is it right or is it not? As we come into our own 21st century, and with all the issues that Christians have to face with regards to whether this grey area is sin or not, whether this matter that the Bible doesn't speak about is sin or not, here is the rule that will help us, and indeed - I believe - will guide us, categorically and finally, in the right direction: whatever you do, whether you eat or drink or whatsoever it is, do it to the glory of God - and if you can't do it to the glory of God, don't do it at all!

So liberty, in the final analysis, the freedom that we have in Christ, has to be regulated by how it glorifies God. The reason, if you like, that that liberty has been given to us in the first place, the reason why we have been set free in Jesus Christ, is for that chief purpose: to glorify God. Now we don't have time, and we hadn't in these weeks, to go through all the difficult questionable issues that face Christians in our modern age. But it would be easy, and I think many are doing it today, to conclude: 'Look, I'm free in Christ, I've been saved by grace, I've been forgiven, I'm not regulated by laws. I'm not an Old Testament Christian, I'm New Testament Christian regulated by the principles of grace! Therefore I'm free, and I can do what I like!'. But Paul is clearly coming in at the end of this great thesis, and we'll see tonight that he is laying down again the rights that we have in the liberty of Christ, but he's also warning us: be careful how you use your liberty, and don't ignore the fact that the liberty has been given to you in the first instance to chiefly glorify God in freedom.

God has set us free to glorify His holy name. He's set us free to enjoy Him - not chiefly to enjoy ourselves, but to glorify God - and as one modern writer, John Piper, has put it - he has changed the catechism to say: 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever'. Friends, this is a real challenge to us this evening because we live our lives at times for our own enjoyment. We seek our own pleasure, and we are free - praise God - we are free from the law, oh happy condition, and we're free from the law of sin in our lives as well. If we're truly born-again those habitual sins should be broken from us, but do we realise that it's not just an emancipation to be a free spirit floating around this universe enjoying oneself, but we have been set free from slavery in Egypt to serve the true and the living God! Our freedom has been given to us to enjoy God, but oh if we knew that the greatest enjoyment that we could ever seek and have in life is to enjoy God Himself, and to glorify Him in enjoying Him!

We'll see later on as well that one of the reasons why this freedom has been given to us is because we no longer have those restrictions on us to win the lost. God is glorified not only when we enjoy Him, but He is glorified when we win souls for Him! So, we're saying this evening that the purpose of Christian freedom is

to glorify God, and we're also going to see the pattern and the principles for knowing what glorifies Him - how do you know what glorifies Him and what doesn't glorify Him? How do you know when to let certain things into your life, and practices and so on, and partake of them? Well, all these principles are laid down tonight, and I want you, if you have a pen - and I know some of you don't - but these principles will be invaluable for you if you write them down, or if you imbibe them. Young people especially, and I know what you're facing, I faced the same things, the same issues - and you need to know these principles.

The first thing Paul does in the question of how to use your liberty for the Lord, he asks two preliminary questions. The first is: is it helpful? Verse 23: 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient' - that word could be 'beneficial', or just simply 'helpful'. Paul, probably, when he was preaching in Corinth, used this phrase 'all things are lawful to me'. He was speaking of the grace of God that he had in Christ, but many of these Corinthians who wanted to delve into their old sin took this phrase up - 'all things are lawful to me' - and used it as a kind of a slogan to legitimise their sin and their backsliding. So whenever Paul says 'all things are lawful for me', and whenever he says that we're now free from Christ, free from the law, free from any regulations and hindrances of our old life or old religion, what Paul does not mean is the old sin of our previous unconverted existence.

That is clear, we've already seen that, but it's important that we take a moment just to refresh our memories - chapter 6, if you turn back to it, this is where we find this same statement again in verse 12. But we don't want to look at that, just verses 9 and 10: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?'. So when Paul says 'all things are lawful for me', it does not bring into that umbrella term anything that is sinful, or unrighteous, or breaks the moral law of God - and he gives us a lineation of these things: 'Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed...', and so on. So 'all things are lawful for me' always refers to things that are not sinful, matters that are questionable maybe, matters that are grey areas, matters that the Bible doesn't explicitly teach on or give chapter and verse on, but it never refers to anything that is sinful before a holy God.

Now there, before we realise it, is a principle of how we can use our liberty. We must never let our liberty in Christ stray into the areas of sin, because sin never glorifies God. I hope you've got that. Sin doesn't glorify God because sin does not edify. 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not'. Now that Greek word 'edify' simply means 'to build a house' literally - bricks and mortar. Many times in the New Testament it's used to describe in a Christian life the spiritual growth, the development, the maturity, if you like the 'up-building' that they experience as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what Paul is saying here is: you really, in Christ, officially and forensically, are allowed to do anything within measure, but those things that you do - not those sinful things, they're prohibited - but those matters in the grey areas that you're not prohibited, those things have to come under the category of things that will build you up in Christ.

So there is another qualification: these things have to edify, they have to constitute spiritual growth in your life, they have to be profitable for only things that are profitable are able to edify. What he is saying is that you've to desire spiritual benefits, spiritual edification for yourselves and for other people - and if you desire those good things to build you up, you'll not be seeking after sinful things or even questionable things, but you'll be only seeking those things that bring into spiritual maturity, into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ; those things that will benefit you and build you up. So, I wonder if there's maybe a question in your mind about a certain thing tonight, I wonder are you asking now yourself: 'Well it might not be intrinsically sinful, but does it bring me nearer the Lord Jesus? Does it edify me? Does it deepen my spiritual experience?'. Paul said to the Ephesian elders that he had withheld nothing from them that was profitable - Acts 20 verse 20. He called Timothy to be faithful to the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:16, because they are

profitable for edification. In 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 26 he says: 'Let all things be done for edification' - edifying the church of Jesus Christ. His advice in Ephesians 4:29 to the church there was: 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers'.

Now here's the principle borne out: whenever you come to a decision or a practice, and you wonder whether you should do it or not, the Bible has no clear distinction whether it's a sin or not a sin, there's no guidance or prohibition, you need to ask the question first of all: is it right to do this thing? In other words, is it wrong? Is it a sin, and does God prohibit it within His word? If it's not forbidden in scripture, the answer is 'Yes', you can go ahead and do it. But then the next question is: is it profitable? Is it edifying? Is it up-building for me? Will it bring me nearer to Christ? And if it brings you nearer to Christ, well then you can say 'Yes' for a moment, but then you've to go on to the next question which is this: not only is it helpful, but is it brotherly? You see the matter of the Christian life is not just what helps you, what gets you on further in your spiritual maturity, but you've got to take your other brethren and sisters into consideration as well. Does it up-build other people around you? Well it help them, or will it hinder them?

Now if the answer to all those three questions is 'Yes', you can go on and do it, and you can do that thing - whatever it is - to the glory of God. But if the answer to those questions is 'No', even the last question just on its own, you cannot do that thing - not by law, you can do it by law, all things are lawful for you; but you cannot do it to the glory of God. The principle is this, really if I could summarise it in just one quip: edification over gratification. Not what you want, but what edifies your spirit and edifies those around you, and that will rule out anything that is questionable, is on the verge of sinful, or even falls into that category completely.

So, 'Is it helpful?', is the first preliminary question to ask. The second is, 'Is it brotherly?' - is it brotherly? 'Let no man', verse 24, 'seek his own, but every man another's wealth'. Now this is even more demanding! It would be alright if we only had to look after ourselves, but Paul is saying that even if something will build you up spiritually you shouldn't do it if it will not add to the good of others. Now I don't know how you would define that or even illustrate that, but there's bound to be an application to it in some shape or form - and maybe it's specific to your own individual experience. But what he's really saying, if I could paraphrase it like this: you're to put the other person before you! Our concern in the Christian life, and I think so often we forget this, but it's so much of import in the New Testament, is that we're to put other people before ourselves - we're to put the good of our neighbour before ourselves! It's the absolute opposite and contrary to our wicked human nature, but the fact remains that that is what we have to do as Christians, and we've been learning it in Philippians chapter 2 - that we've to seek our brother's benefit, we're to edify them, we're to build them up, we're to esteem one another better than ourselves! Imagine that!

The question when we're considering doing something that maybe the Bible doesn't speak about at all is: 'Well, is it sin?' - if it's sin you can't do it. 'Is it helpful to me?' - if it's not helpful you can't do it; if it is, well, you might be able to do it - if, if, and only if it is helpful to your brother as well! These aren't rules, they're principles. John MacArthur, in his commentary, gave an illustration about a pastor friend of his who, after preaching on this particular passage, had an open time of testimony in the meeting. He asked the congregation to share experiences that they had of giving up something for the sake of someone else. Now apart from one man who stood up and said that he didn't drink or smoke around any other Christians, no one responded - he didn't understand his liberty obviously! But after the service a number of people told the pastor: 'For the first time in my life I have realised that I don't really give up anything for the sake of others'. I wonder if we were to have an open time here now - and I know you don't want your right hand knowing what your left hand's doing - but would you have an instance of giving up something that was dear to you, maybe even was your right in liberty, but you gave it up for the benefit and the sake of someone else?

Now the first principle with regards to ourselves and our brethren is edification rather than gratification, but now here is another principle: others before yourself. If you're wanting to know how you can use your liberty for the Lord, do something that edifies not gratifies, and do something for someone else rather than yourself! That is why Christ has set us free, not to help ourselves, not to feed ourselves, not to gratify ourselves, but to glorify Him and to help others!

So those are the two preliminary questions to ask, and then he leads us on further down this road of principle to three practical scenarios to consider, and they are so practical. Three illustrations - now let me just say that the rabbis, whenever a Jew was living in a city, a pagan city like Corinth, would have put real strong strict prohibitions on the Jews. They wouldn't have been able to go to the pagan market and buy the meat offered to idols even if they didn't know for sure that it was offered to idols, but they had to go only to the shops that sold kosher meat - that is, meat that was acceptable according to the Old Testament law. But as we come here to Corinth where there were many Jews, that was not Paul's policy. Paul didn't go down the rabbinical line, nor ought we! He gives three examples to show us: the first is the marketplace. He says quite simply in verse 25: 'Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake'. So we're not talking about going to the temple and sitting down in idol worship as some of them were doing several weeks ago in our study, but we're talking about going to the shambles, the marketplace, where the meat is sold - and in all likelihood that meat has come from the idol's table, but you're in ignorance of it - and Paul is saying: when you go to the marketplace, don't ask any questions, don't say: 'Now, which is the steak that was offered to the idol, and which is clean of the idol?' - just go, and for conscience sake ask nothing.

Now to some degree that principle counterbalances the previous one. What he's really saying is that the true welfare of others has to be our first concern. We've seen that. If a thing will not edify another we ought not to do it, but now he's coming and counterbalancing this by saying: though that's the case, their standards are not necessarily having to become our standards with regards to the weak conscience. What I mean is: if something offends another person you ought not to do it, but that doesn't mean that you have to start getting offended by the same thing. You should not rule your life by the offences of other people, and you shouldn't go into the legalistic extreme of making great issues out of everything you do. Paul is just trying to put a balance in this, so that these people don't run around obeying every foible that other weak Christians have. When they're in their presence they had to regard and respect their weaker conscience, but that doesn't mean that because they are weak, every time they go down to the market they've to ask what the meat is that's offered to idols.

Paul says in the first scenario: 'Go down to the market, buy your meat, don't ask any questions, and you'll be able to live with a clear and a clean conscience'. The reasoning for that is a quotation from Psalm 24 and verse 1: 'For the earth is the Lord's', verse 26, 'and the fullness thereof'. This meat means nothing to God, meat doesn't commend us to God, an idol doesn't exist as a false God - yes, as we saw last week, if you go up and partake of the actual sacrifice and the ritual you're having communion and are sharing with demons in verse 20 of this chapter - but if you're only going to the market and you don't know it's the meat of an idol, don't make great issues out of everything you do! For, as 1 Timothy 4 says, 'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer'.

Go to the market, and as long as you're not participating in the pagan idolatrous ceremony, go to the market, buy the meat, go home and cook the meat, put the sauce on it and enjoy it! That's what he's saying, and with this liberty he's saying don't get tied up with legalism, don't become unduly introspective about it. When you take the meat home and put it on the pan, don't be thinking: 'Oh, I wonder is this for an idol or is it not? I wonder is this jinxed in some way with some superstitious spirit?'. He's saying there's no problem with it, don't be laden down by the weak conscience of other believers, go home - and if you're going to do it, do it, and do it without an issue in it, and just enjoy it, and by doing that you'll be doing it to the glory of God!

Now what principle is this? Here's the principle, the first one: edification over gratification. The second: others over self - and now it is this: liberty over legalism, liberty over legalism! Don't let other people entangle you in their legalism, even if you give into it at times because of their weaker conscience, because you don't want to offend a brother for whom Christ has died - fair enough! But don't adopt their legalistic conscience as your own, that's what Paul's saying! Really it's a word to the intense, if you like. He's saying it's possible in these things, even these little religious matters, to become over scrupulous, to be so self-analytical that you get so gazing upon your own navel, so intense, so on a spiritual edge that you can't enjoy anything within the framework of your Christian liberty, and all your freedom in Christ has been robbed from you because of what someone else thinks or what someone else will say!

Oh, here we're getting close to home now, aren't we? The word of God says that the fear of man bringeth a snare. I wonder does this sound like you, that you're so worried about what someone will think or what someone will say, you're looking over your shoulder so much in your Christian life that you can't enjoy your own liberty. What Paul is saying here is: relax, relax! If this thing is not a sin, if it edifies you, if you can do this thing to the glory of God with a clear conscience and you're not harming a weaker brother: relax, enjoy it, and do what God's will is rather than what men's will is! In Ephesians 5 verse 1 he told them to be followers of God, and God help us if we become followers of men rather than followers of God; followers of men's consciences and men's scruples and men's foibles and men's dotted i's and crossed t's rather than God's!

Let me sound a word of warning too, that one of the first steps toward emotional or mental illness is creating problems out of nothing, when there's nothing to make an issue over yet you make an issue over it! And there are some, even in this Hall, that will make an issue over everything and anything just to have an issue and to stand on it! You're on dangerous ground, because when you get like this - I have a friend, and on one occasion he got so intense about seeking after a particular thing that he felt God had promised him that it was destroying his whole Christian experience, it was robbing him of his peace and his joy. An older brother came to him and said to him: 'Remember, whatever you do don't stop, even in seeking after this thing that God has promised you, don't stop enjoying the Saviour!'. There is a danger there, isn't there? Don't stop enjoying the Saviour. There's a woman, Marion H. Nelson, in America who has written a book called: 'Why Christians Crack up' - the causes and remedies of nervous trouble in Christians. Why Christians crack up!

Well, there's the marketplace - what the principle? Don't ask any questions, and eat your meat in a clear conscience. You'll not know whether it's sacrificed to idols, and no one else will know. The second practical scenario to consider is the pagan home. The principle is the same, don't ask any questions and your conscience will be clear. Verse 27: 'If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake'. What he is saying here is that you don't have to go if you don't want to, but if you want to go, if you're disposed to go, whatever is put on a plate on the table in front of you - and I know it would be hard in some instances! - but don't ask any questions - no matter how many questions you might have! - don't ask them, just eat it, and eat it with a clear conscience not needing to know where that particular thing has come from. Don't ask any embarrassing questions. Now incidentally, as we're moving on here let's not miss some things: some people would tell us that we're not to associate or even eat with those who are unsaved. We can clearly see that that is contrary to the word of God, that we are to eat with them, and certainly if you follow the example of our Lord Jesus - and he tells us to do that in chapter 11 verse 1 that we will finish on tonight, to be followers of Christ as Paul was - we will be rubbing shoulders very closely with the ungodly.

Paul is saying that if we go to their house, don't let it bother you that you might be eating food that has been offered as an idol sacrifice, but sit down, enjoy the meal, and do it to the glory of God. Eat anything that is set before you, didn't the Lord say that Himself? Freedom in Christ is the privilege that you have, and it's only to be forfeited when you're offending your other brother - have you got it? It's only to be let go and

sacrificed when you're offending the brethren. In Galatians 5 verse 1 he said to them: 'It was for freedom that Christ has set us free, therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery'. They were getting all bogged down in Old Testament law and rituals and regulations. Paul's saying: 'Christ has set you free from all that, don't get bogged down in it again!'. Certainly he teaches us that we're to refrain from anything that could be detrimental to our brothers and sisters, but we should never get into a state within our own hearts where we have any legalistic compulsion - believing that we should or should not do certain things just because another brother's conscience is weak. If we do refrain from our liberty, that is to be for love of them, not from adherence to legalism.

Now let's think about this for a minute, because I really want these principles to sink into our minds and hearts. When we restrict our liberty for the sake of the weaker brother, is that all we do? Do we just stop there? Do we all live for the rest of our days at the beck and call and the mercy of the weaker brother? That's not right at all - but surely when we sacrifice our liberty for the weaker brother we should try in tenderness and in grace to broaden their capacity, their understanding of the Christian freedom that they have, the right that they have, and we should try and help their conscience to grow stronger in order that they may become a Christian that is able to enjoy the freedom and the liberty that they have in Christ, and not restrict their own enjoyment and privileges that they have in Him. but yet the principle is the same here - in the marketplace don't ask questions, you'll be able to eat with a clear conscience; in the pagan home don't ask any questions, and you'll be able to eat with a clear conscience.

Now here's the different one, verse 28: 'But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof'. It's not just, I believe, at the pagan man's table, I think it's at the marketplace, I think indeed that it's anywhere. If you were in a position, and all of a sudden someone said: 'Oh, don't eat that one, don't buy that steak, that was offered to an idol!' - you're to stop in your tracks if you've been told that, you're not to eat; not for your conscience, you shouldn't have a conscience about it, but for that person's conscience you're not to eat. You're not to argue, you're not to condemn them, you're not to insist upon your own freedom...'This is my right, I'm a Christian. I have been set free' - no! For conscience sake you're to let go of your liberty lest that person - whether he's a weaker brother, or even indeed an unbeliever - lest they be offended in seeing you do that thing.

Let me illustrate it, Charles Swindoll illustrates it like this, and I'm using his illustration - think of the first century, imagine this: you're an active member of the church in Corinth, you're very involved and very respected. You've been invited to a patio party by Rufus and Julia, a non-Christian couple who own the chariot shop on Colosseum Way. They have also invited a young man named Erastus who, unknown to them, has recently come to know the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and become a member of the church that you attend. You all sit down and the meal is served - enjoying your Caesar salad, you look across the table and see a familiar face - it's Erastus, the new believer who has begun attending your church services. You smile and chat a little, and then your attention is diverted by a delicious smelling entree, sirloin steak delicately seasoned and cooked to perfection - and just as you're reaching for your fork, Erastus leans over to you and whispers: 'I just heard the cooks talking about how they were glad so much meat was left over from the sacrifices. You know, that bothers me, because I was involved in idol worship for a long time and I just don't feel right about eating this meat'. What do you do? Mustering all the resistance you have, you leave the meat on your plate and politely say: 'Please pass the grapes, rolls and broccoli', and you skip the meat because an issue was made of it.

Let me bring that into the 21st century for an illustration. Picture yourself going for a meal with another young believer, and you decide to book a table in a licensed restaurant. When your friend enters, all of a sudden you can see that he's not happy about it, and he turns to you and he says: 'Listen, I used to be an alcoholic before I was born-again, and this is a real struggle for me' - what do you do? Do you say: 'Don't

worry, the Spirit of God has set you free. Don't worry, I'm free, I can do whatever I like - you're coming with me' - you cancel the booking and you go to McDonald's or wherever you like! The weaker brother has made it an issue - it doesn't mean that for the rest of your life you haven't to go into a licensed place, it would be hard not to these days, because of the weaker brother. No, you don't take his conscience, you don't be bound - even if it is his legalism - you respect his weakness, because it has been made an issue and you cannot offend one for whom Christ has died.

Verse 29 is a bit hard to understand, the second part, he says: 'For why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?'. Some people think he's hypothetically using a question of the liberals, the strong Christian: 'Why should I give into a weaker conscience? Why should I be dictated to by a weak Christian over what I can and cannot do?', but I don't think that's really what he means here. I believe what he is saying is making clear that it's for conscience sake that you give into the weaker brother, not your conscience but their conscience, the other man's conscience! Look at the verse: 'Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?' - your liberty isn't judged by what someone else thinks is right or wrong. If we ever give into a weaker conscience, it is not because they are right and we are wrong, it is because we love them and we do not want to offend them. It's a subtle distinction, but it's a very important one. We're to modify our actions for the sake of others, but we are not to modify our conscience! We're not to adopt the weaker brother's legalism.

So there's three scenarios: the marketplace, don't ask, eat with a clear conscience; the pagan home, don't ask, eat with a clear conscience; anywhere where you're told, don't eat for the other's conscience sake. Now here we're coming to the conclusion of the whole matter: the two principles the Christian should live by. We've seen the two preliminary questions to ask, the three practical scenarios to consider, and now the two principles the Christian should live by. Verse 31: 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God' - do all to God's glory. The purpose of using your liberty is not to live it up, not to enjoy your life, but use it carefully, use it selflessly to the glory and the honour and the magnification of Almighty God! I know eating and drinking is within the context of offerings to idols and so on, but it's not just limited to that. Is he not talking about whatever you do in life, even the basic things, every day, the little things like eating and drinking, God is to be glorified in the mundane, in the routine things of life - He can be glorified, and He will be glorified if we do them for Him in the freedom that we have in Christ. Our whole life is to be a life committed to the glory of God in everything we do!

Sometimes people come: 'Should I do this? Is it wrong to this?', now if you just ask the question: 'Can I glorify God in this? Can I edify my brother in this? Can I become more like Christ in this? Is there a doxology of praise and worship and adoration that rises from my spirit to God as I partake and engage in this?' - and if there is not, you cannot and you ought not. It might not be sin in itself - it might be, but even if it's not it may lead to sin as you do it in a bad conscience, or as you cause another brother to fall. Do all things to the glory of God - we could spend a whole series on that, couldn't we? Do we do everything to the glory of God?

The second principle the Christian should live by is: do nothing to offend. Verse 32: 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'. Nothing to offend others! Our living before men should be righteous, loving, selfless, to such an extent - think about this now - that we give no offence to anybody. To either a Jew or a Gentile, we should not put a stumbling block in their way to coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, we should not cause a weaker brother to stumble, in no way should we be causing them to fall - people will be, always, offended at the gospel of Christ, and as we saw in previous weeks if they are offended with the gospel that's their problem - but if they are offended by our lives needlessly, the things that we do, the things that we say, that



is our problem! If we do that we dishonour God. Let me say this categorically, without apology: the only offence that should be in us to this world is Christ and the gospel.

Now here's the crescendo: Paul says in verse 33, 'I don't offend anyone, and I do all to the glory of God' - why? What's his reasoning? 'That they might be saved' - the Jews, the Greeks, the people in the church - of course they are saved, but the Jews and the Greeks and the people in the church, what does it do? It covers the whole scope of all humanity. He's saying there's no action of ours that should prevent an unbeliever coming to Christ, nothing that we do! They should never be offended in us, and in fact our liberty allows us not to offend them, our liberty actually allows us to bring the gospel to them without the restrictions of the law - to the Jew I became a Jew, remember that passage? To the Greek I became a Greek, I became all things to all men that I by any means might save some! Boy-o-boy, do we use our liberty to seek the lost?

Now listen brethren, we must never ever make it difficult for a Jew, a Gentile, a person from East Belfast or West Belfast to trust the Lord Jesus Christ - never! The only offence and the only stumbling block should be Christ and His cross! This is when we are in trouble - he says: 'I please all men in all things', that doesn't mean he's a men-pleaser, he's already said in Galatians 1 that he obeys God rather than men. What he's saying is, he's affirming that the fact of his life and liberty and ministry is centred around helping other people rather than promoting himself and his own desires - he's saying: 'Christ has made me free not to live it up, not to just enjoy my Christian life, but He has set me free to use my liberty to win the lost!'. Do we do that? You know, I reckon that Paul at times was misunderstood. I think people point the finger at him and say, I know it, that he was inconsistent - but those were people who didn't understand his principles. You know, I think a large extent of the conservative evangelical church in Ulster doesn't understand his principles either. At times he would eat with the Gentiles, whatever they were eating, the way they were eating. At other times he would eat with the Jews, and he would only eat the kosher food that they were eating, and he would keep the rituals and the laws and everything - not because they were saving him, not because he was communicating that to them, but because he wanted to win them, and he didn't want to offend them with anything but the cross of Jesus Christ. His inconsistency, if I could say this, actually showed his consistency - not consistency with regards to keeping little laws and commands that inevitably would have contradicted one another depending on what community and race he was trying to reach, but he was living consistently with the divine principles that God had revealed to him and he's laying down for us in this chapter.

Let me illustrate it to you like this: a weather vane, you look at it and it looks inconsistent, going up and down. First it points one direction, then to another - but a weather vane is always consistent, it is always consistent when it points to the direction the wind is blowing. It's consistent with the wind, and that is what makes it useful! Liberty, and I have been challenged to the depths of my being today, liberty is to be used to win the lost! But do we not restrict ourselves from winning them by legalism!? Do we not? Oh, don't misunderstand me, I got an e-mail from Andrew who does the website the other day, he says:

*'Hi David,*

*I was browsing a few church sites today and visited one in Australia. I read their statement of belief and it seems similar to ours, they don't appear to be Charismatic, and their church is over 100 years old. Sometimes we may find it hard to believe that these things are happening, but their Sunday Morning service was announced as follows:*

*"Sunday Morning 10:30am*

*GO BZirk - Entertainment through pop music and circus - Invite your friends and family"*

That's not what I mean when I say using your liberty. Don't misunderstand me, but what I am saying is: are we doing all in our power according to the Scriptures, the remit that we're given, the principles of liberty that are laid down for us, to reach the lost - or are we restricting ourselves with man-made rules?

Let me give you, in closing, a list of these principles - if you want to write them down - to know when and how to do certain things. All things are lawful but:

- 1) the question you need to ask is: will they lead to freedom or slavery? Will they lead to freedom or slavery? Sin will lead to slavery, *1 Corinthians 6 verse 12*
- 2) will they make me a stumbling block or a stepping stone? *1 Corinthians 8:13*
- 3) will they build me up or will they tear me down? *1 Corinthians 10:23*
- 4) will they only please me or will they glorify Christ? *1 Corinthians 10:31*
- 5) will they help to win the lost to Christ, or will they turn them away? *1 Corinthians 10:33*

Let me quote one author as I finish tonight, he says in conclusion to this section: 'The summary of their statement leads to this conclusion: the ideal of Christian behaviour is for the glory of God and helping of man. This imposes a very high principle upon Christians, far higher than 'do this and don't do that', it takes the common pleasures and makes them sacred privileges. It takes eating and drinking, social contacts, companionship, and makes them noble activities. It tells us that the greatest pleasure in life is not the indulgence of self, but the helping of others! Yes, it tells us that our every movement in everyday life can be to the glory of God. The dinner table, the kitchen sink, the school desk, the craftsman's bench can glow with the glory like Moses' bush in the wilderness to the glory of God'.

Can you say tonight: 'All I do is for the glory of God and for the helping of our fellow man'? If you can say that, and if you can do that, you will be the nearest representation of the Lord Jesus Christ in your neighbourhood - because Paul said: 'Be followers of me in this, even as I also am of Christ'.

We're not going to sing our final hymn, we're just going to bow our heads where we're sitting. We've had a long study over these last weeks, I hope it's been worth it just to get these deep principles - but I hope that they've cut further than just your ear and your mind, I hope they've gone into your very heart. Fellowship here in the Iron Hall, I hope this has challenged you tonight over how we're reaching the lost - we're not to compromise our message and we're not to use methods that do that, or demean the message - but I'll tell you, we could be doing an awful lot more than what we are! We're certainly not using your liberty, you'd think we had more rules than the New Testament that's for sure! How are we going to reach them? How are we going to win them? Are we just going to do nothing? I was challenged today about our nation, our nation of Ulster, and one of the main things that has prevented people in the nationalist community receiving the gospel is that the Gospel has been wrapped in some kind of political emblem in their perception. That is unforgivable. I don't care who's looking over my shoulder, I don't care, we are to follow God and follow Christ - and if there's anything in my life that is an offence to someone else, preventing them coming to Christ, other than His cross, it is a sin. Let's not underestimate it. If we take that illustration, surely there is a smaller application of it in our own lives - let's root it out now, let's nail it to His cross, and let us have the freedom of that message of reconciliation pulling down the middle wall of partition - whatever that may be - to us presenting the gospel to those that need it. I tell you, if the woman at the well came to some of us, she wouldn't get in the front door - it's just as well she went to the Master, isn't it? We are to be like Him.

Lord we say: 'Fill Thou our lives, O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways. Praise in the common things of life, it's goings out and in, praise in each duty and each deed however small and mean'. Lord, help us to live holy lives - not legalistic lives, but lives that are ruled by the principles of love for Thee and love for our brethren and love for the lost. Lord, if we have bound ourselves in shackles of man-made religion and tradition, we pray that You would break us free again, that we may break through with Thee and break out to those that are lost. Let us never compromise the gospel as so many are doing today, but Lord, let us not sit in the armchair of Christian comfort and let the world go to hell for fear of what another older brother will say. We thank Thee that Thou art the God who opens the arms to the prodigal. Lord, may we run into Your arms if we have offended Thee, if like the

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churches in the Revelation our candlestick is gone or it's going out. Lord Jesus, we repent, and we pray that You will restore the Shekinah to us in our day. Behold You stand at the door, Saviour, and knock - may this church open the door and invite You in, to Your glory we pray. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 28*

## ***"Celebrating The Supper Of The Lord"***

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### I Corinthians 11:17-34

1. ***Their Perversion Of The Supper (verses 17-22)***
2. ***The Lord's Institution Of The Supper (verses 23-26)***
  - a. *Looking backward (verses 23-26a)*
  - b. *Looking forward (verse 26b)*
3. ***Our Preparation For The Supper (verses 27-34)***
  - a. *Looking inward (verses 27-28; 31-32)*
  - b. *Looking outward (verses 29; 33-34)*

Our reading is beginning at verse 17. We were looking at the subject of headship and headcovering last week, and of course Paul has now entered into a new section of this epistle, beginning at verse 2 of chapter 11, with the church's worship and the orders and ordinances of that worship. We begin our reading at verse 17, and the title of our study tonight is 'Celebrating The Supper Of The Lord'.

"Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not", you remember in verse 2 he said 'Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances', the traditions, the teachings, 'as I delivered them to you'. So with regards to headship and headcovering he was able to praise them because they were following his instruction, his apostolic authority and teaching - but now as he comes to this issue of the Lord's Supper, he cannot praise them. "I praise you not that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse". The insinuation is there that they were better not coming together at all, because when they come together they do not adhere to the teaching that he gave them when he was with them.

"For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you". So the two reasons why he was not pleased as they came together to break bread was that there were divisions and heresies among them. "When ye come together", verse 20, "therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper" - you think you're coming together to eat the Lord's Supper, but that's not why you're coming together at all, it's really to fulfil your own fleshly lusts and sensualities. Verse 21: "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation", or judgement, "to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation", or unto judgement. "And the rest will I set in order when I come".

Both by instruction and by example, the Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry laid down two ordinances that His disciples who were faithful were to obey and follow Him in. Both by teaching and instruction He taught us to be baptised, He taught us to break bread and drink from the cup - but He also practised these things Himself, and by example we see Him exhorting us to do the same. He was baptised Himself, not because He had any sin but in identification with us for whom He would die He was baptised, and we ought to obey His teaching and obey His example. But also tonight we're looking specifically at the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. As we come to Paul's teaching we also find echoed throughout the New Testament other apostles teaching with regards to the Lord's Table. Luke tells us that four marks of the life in the early Christian church were in Acts chapter 2, if you turn with me to it you will see this very clearly in verse 42, the practices that they had - Acts 2:42: 'And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine', that's the teaching, 'and fellowship', being together one with the other in love, 'and in breaking of bread', that's the Lord's Supper, 'and in prayers'.

So right from the very institution and beginning of the church of Jesus Christ after Pentecost, it was their practice to break bread. Many scholars and historians believe that the early church broke bread in their households and celebrated it perhaps after every meal that they ate as a family and as the church of Jesus Christ, because we know that they all lived together and had all things together, sharing of one accord. But of course as we go through the Acts of the apostles and come to chapter 20 we find that it's indicated to us that what was a regular occurrence of breaking bread and drinking of the cup became less regular in the sense that it began to be on the first day of each week. If you turn to Acts chapter 20, you find there that Paul is travelling to Jerusalem, and as he travels to Jerusalem we find in verse 6 that he stops in a town called Troas: 'And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days'. They came to Troas in five days time, but they stayed there a whole week - seven days. Paul marks in verse 7 that 'upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight'. So we see that Paul obviously didn't break bread every day that he was in Troas, but when he arrived in Troas he waited for seven days until the first day of the week which was the instigated day that the believers met in this fashion to break bread, and we see that that is continued right through the church history, and that's why we meet around the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day.

What we often do not see in the Scriptures, and of course in the way that we have interpreted the Lord's Table today as the contemporary Western church is that this breaking of bread and drinking of the cup incorporated more than just an ordinance. We find that the early church developed the Breaking of Bread into what we might call a special fellowship meal that they began to call 'The Love Feast'. Now let me show you why this is the case, if you turn to Jude - only one chapter in Jude of course - before the book of Revelation, Jude and verse 12. We see that Jude is warning against apostates and false teachers, and in verse 12 he speaks of how they infiltrate the church of Jesus Christ, and there is a danger: 'These are spots in your feasts of charity', or feasts of love, 'when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water', and so on, all the descriptions that Peter also echoes. But he mentions this title 'Your feast of charity, your love feast' - and this was a meal, if you like, like a modern day family buffet that we might have even in the church, where the believers came together on a pseudo-social, spiritual basis - to meet together, to eat together, to fellowship together - members of the church family gathering. They would bring whatever food they could, whatever drink they could afford, and they encouraged each other by sharing this food amongst them all - and regardless of how rich you were, or how poor you were, you all got the same helping and you all could partake of the same food and the same drink.

Now this was a regular occurrence in the church of Jesus Christ, probably on the Lord's Day - but such congregational meals were stressing, very clearly, fellowship, affection, mutual caring among the believers; the emphasis of their unity together lead towards the unity that they had in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and before the end of those love feasts and fellowship meals they would silence themselves quietly and come together and remember the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread and the drinking from the cup. They would celebrate the unifying accomplishment of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Now, it is likely, in fact almost definite, that the Corinthians followed this same custom - but what they had done was, they had laid into the Lord's Supper with a sentiment not of love, not of fellowship, not of worship and remembrance unto the Lord, but in the spirit of a gluttonous orgy of pride and of selfishness.

Now this was common, a common happening in the early church among those churches where false teachers had infiltrated. If you turn with me to 2 Peter, I want to show you this, 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 13, speaking of brute beasts, apostate teachers that will utterly perish in their own corruption, he says: 'They shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children'. Now this is exactly what was happening in the church at Corinth: they were beginning from their love feasts, leading into the Lord's Supper, to revel in a drunken gluttonous orgy in the very sight of God - and it's small wonder that the apostle Paul refused to praise them in what they were doing around the Lord's Table.

Now let's look first of all at their perversion of the supper, verses 17 to 22, as we see in these verses the disorder that was causing chaos within the church. Let me give you an example - verse 21: 'For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken'. The rich would come, and they were supposed, in a feast of love and a feast of fellowship, to share their food with those who were poor in the church - but they didn't regard them at all! In fact, they sat up to their big three course slap-up dinner, with all the drink that they could get, and they ignored those who were poor within the assembly - and because of that some went hungry. Then there were the sensual in the assembly, they weren't too preoccupied with the food, but rather with the drink - they had no regard to sobriety at all, and they made themselves drunk! So, what began as a love family feast of the church of Jesus Christ, which initially would lead into the Lord's Table to break the bread and drink from the cup, became a debauched disgraceful orgy of sensuality and of sin.

For that reason Paul could not praise them, in fact this was a far cry from any fitting prelude or preparation for the Lord's Supper at all. It was totally foreign and opposite, the antithesis of everything that is of love, whether to man or to God. Paul gives us two specific reasons why he was not pleased with the goings-on here in these love feasts - verse 18: 'For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it'. Now he didn't know this first-hand, he obviously had heard it, but he could believe it because he knew - and we have found out in these past weeks what the Corinthians were like, puffed up with pride and they had the party spirit: 'I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, I am of Apollos, and I am of Christ'. Paul says: 'I partly believe these divisions', and the word is 'schismata' in Greek, it's the word we get 'schism' from in our English language - a division, it literally means a tearing apart or a cutting in half, and metaphorically it speaks of division and dissension within the church.

Now this was a far cry from what the embryo of the church was in the Acts of the apostles - this is what I want you to see: how far away in so short a time they had removed from the Holy Spirit's ideal. From the Acts of the Apostles we know that as the church lived and worshipped together, it says they had all things in common, sharing with all as anyone might have need. But the Corinthian upper-class disdained not only sharing their food, but even sharing the same room, as it were, the same meal, with those who were less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ. It caused the division within the church, schismata. What I want you

to see first of all is that this is a mark of wrong living - now remember that: this is a mark of wrong living. They did not behave in brotherly and sisterly love toward their fellow Christians.

But here's the second thing that Paul cites against them in verse 19: 'For there must be also heresies among you', there were heresies among them, 'that they which are approved may be made manifest among you'. Now that word 'heresy' in the Authorised Version isn't the same meaning as we would have today about heresy, a false doctrine. What it means literally in the Greek is 'false thinking', the false thinking that had led them to their divisions: to think that the upper-crust were a cut above the rest, those who were poor and didn't have the same food and drink as the rest of them. It was the idea, the psychological thinking process, that led them to their divisions. Now the remarkable thing about these heresies, this wrong thinking, was that Paul says: 'they which are approved, these must be like this' - verse 19: 'there must be heresies, that they which are approved may be manifest among you'.

This is very strange, because when you read the corrective epistles of Paul you find that he is so hard on wrong thinking and especially false doctrine, our definition of heresy today, so it seems strange that Paul would say on the other hand: 'there must be false thinking among you'. Now that phrase 'there must be' in English is only one word in Greek 'dei', it's found throughout the New Testament and it simply means: 'it is necessary'. So you could translate this: 'It is necessary that there be these heresies and false thinkings among you, it must be'. It denotes, in the sense of the Greek word, 'necessity, compulsion, it has to be like this'. When Peter and the apostles, if you remember in the Acts of the Apostles, were told by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ or they would suffer persecution for it, they replied, Peter and the apostles to the powers that be: 'We must obey God rather than men'. Now the 'we must' is the same word - 'dei' in the Greek - 'we must', it's not an option, this must be for us, it's a compulsion, it's a necessity. We find the Lord Jesus used the same word in relation to many prophetic events including His crucifixion, His resurrection, things that must happen - Matthew 24, Matthew 26, John 3. He even went as far as to say: 'For it is inevitable that stumbling-blocks must come, but woe unto that man through whom the stumbling-block comes' - 'it is inevitable' is that word in Greek 'dei', it must be, it's a necessity. Paul is now using the same Greek word for these heresies, it is a necessity, it is inevitable, it must be that these false thinkers are among you - why must that be? He tells us: 'It's inevitable, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you'.

Let's really try and understand this - what does the word 'approved' mean? Well, it means passing a test, literally that's the picture language that's given here. It used to be used of precious metals that had been tried in the fire and proved to be pure, and what Paul is saying here is that there has to be certain amounts of church division, there has to be! It is inevitable that there will be where the ungodly and the sinful will separate from those who are following Christ and His teaching and trying to live holy lives and spiritual existence - and because of that, by doing this Christ proves His faithful saints, His remnant of those who believe in Him, and who trust in Him and follow His word. Now this puts the myth to what we hear in ecumenism today, that in some way Christ's prayer in John chapter 17 has never been fulfilled, that His children should be one as He and the Father are one. We often hear this: 'We've got to fulfil this prayer' - well, I believe that if Christ prayed a prayer like that, that the Father would answer Christ's prayer, and has answered Christ's prayer, and His church is one in spirit. It is the same spirit right throughout the whole church, but is this a contradiction of what the Lord said in John chapter 17? Of course it is not: the Lord is speaking in a spiritual sense, and praying that they will be united in truth, 'For Thy word is truth', He said in John 17 - but what is being said by the inspiration of the Spirit here is that these schisms will be inevitable because false teachers will infiltrate the church and it will prove those who are My approved, those who have been tried in the fire and come forth as gold.

Heresy is a mark of wrong thinking that leads to wrong living. The wrong thinking and the wrong living, the divisions, the heresies, are the natural allies here - one is the effect, the divisions; the other is the cause, the

false thinking that leads to the divisions. So let none of us here tonight, wherever you're from, whatever place you hang your hat, let no one say that teaching does not matter, that heresy does not matter, that being inaccurate in the scripture and doctrine and theology does not matter - it does matter! What you believe determines how you behave! As one put it well: 'The soil of our deeds is our creeds, because we do what we believe is right'. It affects our practice.

Now we see here that unity, before Paul gets into the theology of the Lord's Table, unity is what was at stake at the church of Corinth. He's already addressed, if you remember in chapter 10, the Lord's Table - and again it was the theme of unity in the assembly. Look at chapter 10 verses 16 and 17: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread'. How many times do we find the word 'one', and the phrase or the idea of 'unity' in those two verses? It's right throughout it all, and as Paul comes to chapter 11 the exact same theme is there: are we unified as we come around the Lord's Table, do we see ourselves just as that loaf, one piece of loaf? And as each piece of bread is broken off and we assimilate it into our body, we ourselves - as Paul says in chapter 10 here - become that one loaf, united together as the body of Christ.

I wonder are we united as an assembly? Do we consider everybody in the assembly when we come around the Lord's Table? Is it really a feast of love, and even in a practical sense do we consider the less fortunate in the body, do we try and meet their needs? One verse that you very seldom hear expounded is 1 John 3:17: 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'. 'By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, because ye love one another' - do we consider the weaker? Do we consider the poor? Do we consider the less fortunate?

Warren Wiersbe in his commentary tells the story of when he was at a Sunday School picnic, he was only into his teenage years, and they began to play a relay game - some of you young people have played it yourselves - you throw eggs to one another, and each time you catch an egg you step back another step, until the further you get away the harder you have to throw the egg, and then inevitably it becomes hilarious as the eggs crack over people. However, as they were playing this in all the hilarity and fun, some of the folk noticed two Sunday School pupils who were standing at the sidelines with their mouths agape and their eyes popping out of their sockets, absolutely fascinated. When they thought about it for a moment they realised that they came from a poor family, and they probably rarely ever ate an egg, let alone threw them at one another. The little girl went over to the lady who was leading the games and asked: 'If there are any eggs left over, can my brother and I take them home?'. Wisely, the lady stopped the game before it was really over, and awarded the prizes, and gave all the eggs to the two children, because she knew - this is what we need to know, and the Corinthians needed to know - that it is wrong for some of the saints to have a good time at the expense of others! Before we go into the theology of the Lord's Supper, we've got to ask the question: are we one body, do we take into consideration the needs of each other? Are we united? Or are we divided? Do we have false ideas, is false teaching infiltrating the assembly? I don't know, but these things are what will divide the church of Jesus Christ, and the one place that we ought to be united and at one identification of unification in the church is the Lord's Table - and that is often the very factor that we forget about when we come to meet the Lord, that it speaks of communion with each other and with God.

I was hearing today about a meeting in Scotland, and one half of the meeting wasn't speaking to the other half of the meeting, and they all came as usual to the Lord's Table that morning and they sat down. Then one brother noticed that there was no bread on the table, and inquiries were made. An older elder brother in the assembly stood up, and he castigated them because they were out of love, out of fellowship with one another, and he said that the loaf wouldn't be on the table until it was all sorted out! That brother was right, do you know why? Because Paul says: 'It were better that you wouldn't even do this, as do it wrong and do it without



unity'. Seemingly frustrated, trying to find a rational explanation for their behaviour he says, exasperated in verse 22: 'What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God? Can you not eat like this at home if you want to? If you want to get drunk, do it at home, don't do it at the Lord's Table! Or do you despise the church of God, the weaker brother in the church, those who aren't as well off as you? Do you shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not'. What he's saying is, if you're at your love feast, if you can't show love why have a love feast at all?

Friends, let's not fall into their perversion of the Supper, because these are types of sins that we seem not to take too seriously: division, false thinking about one another, a lack of love, a lack of compassion, a lack of caring for each other and laying our lives down for each other - and God forbid that we should ever come to the Lord's Table with a grudge with one another!

Then he comes, and it's almost trying to soften their hearts by reminding them of the Lord Himself. He comes to the Lord's institution of the Supper, verses 23 to 26, the purpose of the Lord's Table. One author says it's like a diamond, these verses, on a muddy road. One of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture, and it's given in the middle of a castigating rebuke from the apostle of such debauchery and drunkenness and idolatry. So he comes, and he says in verse 23: 'For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread'. Let me note a couple of things with you before we go on any further. Most conservative scholars believe that 1 Corinthians was probably written before the Gospels, and that means that Paul's account here of the institution of the Lord's Supper is the very first one, and it includes some literal quotations direct from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, and they're absolutely consistent with what the gospel writers brought to us at a later date. We know that the Lord Jesus never spoke to Paul on the earth in His habitation as He was here, He was revealed to him on the Damascus Road of course, but we have to believe that what we have here is given to Paul directly by revelation from God probably in Arabia, where we read of him in Galatians 1 - it wasn't from the apostles, but it was direct from the Lord because he didn't commune with any man.

Now what does he remind them of in the institution of this Supper? He tells them two things: look backward and look forward. The Lord's institution of this Supper was intended to make them look backward, and very poignantly he reminds them that this was instituted on the night, look at it in verse 23, the same night in which He was betrayed. What he is insinuating here is that when the Lord instituted this supper He did it in an environment of wickedness, in an evil world - there was God establishing good; and what men meant for evil, God intended for good. I wonder is he making application to these believers in Corinth, that as they meet together for their fleshly lusts in their little political factions, there they are - but God, nevertheless, is doing a good thing because those among them who are Christ's and who are walking with Him, are being approved even in the midst of that wickedness and worldliness.

Another factor that we often miss when we look at the institution of the Lord's Supper is that the Lord Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Passover. I think I reminded you of that last week as we looked at the headcovering, but it's strange that none of the gospel writers or even Paul here in Corinthians 11 indicate any details of that Passover meal, but rather their concentration is to show us that there's something new happening here: it's the end of Judaism, and now it's the beginning of God coming in to the Gentiles and the whole world in fact, and bringing His new covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ. But nevertheless it was still the Passover meal that the Lord took and adapted and changed into the new thing of the Lord's Supper.

Let me give you a resume of what happened at the Passover meal, and hopefully the jigsaw pieces will fall into place. The Passover meal began with the host pronouncing the blessing of the first cup. He lifted the first cup, one of four cups that were on the table at the Passover meal. That cup was full of red wine, and he would pass it from hand to hand after he had partaken of it himself, and after the first cup had been drunk they would take a bitter herb, and they would dip that bitter herb in some fruit sauce and then it would be

eaten. After the first cup was taken the bitter herb was dipped in the fruit sauce and eaten, some one of them would stand and give a message giving the meaning of what the Passover was all about - the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt toward the Promised Land. Then the first part of a hymn was sung, and that hymn was called the 'Hallel' (sp?) - 'Hallel' actually is like 'Hallelujah', 'Hallel, Hallelujah, praise ye the Lord', 'Hallel' simply means 'praise' - they would sing a hymn which was comprised of Psalm 113 through to 118, the first part was sung now. Then after that they would take the second cup, and it was passed to the host and he would pass it around, drinking of it. Then they would take unleavened bread, and they would break the unleavened bread and pass it round. Then after the unleavened bread they would eat the roasted sacrificial lamb, and then the third cup was passed around and drunk of after it was prayed over. When it was passed from hand to hand and drunk from the rest of the 'Hallel' was sung, and then the fourth cup was taken which celebrated the coming kingdom in a day that was yet to be, and it was drunk before immediately leaving.

Now what I want you to see is: in the gospel writings, and here in 1 Corinthians 11, it was the third cup that the Lord Jesus took and passed around his disciples - we saw last week in chapter 10 it was none other than what was called 'the cup of blessing'. Luke tells us in Luke 22:20, that in the same way He took the cup, that third cup, and after they had eaten, after they had eaten the sacrificial lamb, He said: 'This is my blood, poured out for you, of the new covenant' - and the record of Luke is that after they took that some brief words of warning were given by the Lord Jesus Christ, a rebuke and instruction, the meal was concluded by the singing of the 'Hallel', and they went out. Let me tie all that together for a moment: here's the first point, as far as I can see, and I would value your instruction, He did not take of the fourth cup of the kingdom - because He said, in fact, on that occasion: 'I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom'. When He had given thanks, and in the Greek it is the participle of 'eucharistio' (sp?), from which we get 'eucharist' - it just simply means 'thanksgiving' - when He had given thanks for the bread He passed it from hand to hand. Now what does that unleavened bread represent in the Passover? It represents the deliverance, the representation of their exodus - but now He takes it and He gives it a new meaning, to represent His body, the body of Messiah.

To the Jewish mind the body didn't just mean this flesh, it represented the whole person - not just the physical being - but Jesus' body would have meant the mystery of who He was, the incarnation, His whole life, His whole teaching, His ministry and His work, all that He was and all that He did. It says that He give it to His disciples. Most modern translations and scholars believe that that word 'broken' is not there, because of course the prophecy was that none of His bones would be broken. Nevertheless, it was passed from hand to hand, and Paul gives us the record of the Lord, and it says: 'This is for you'. I think those must be some of the most beautiful words in the whole of Scripture: 'This unleavened bread being broken, just as the children of Israel came from Egypt, bondage, into the Promised Land, this is my body being broken for you, and here you are, eat of it!'

The cup He gives them, that third cup of blessing, do you know what it represented? It represented the lamb's blood, Exodus 12, that was smeared upon the two doorposts and the lintel, that was protecting them as God came by and the angel came by. He takes that cup representing the blood of the lamb and He declares: 'This is the New Testament in my blood, shed not just for the Jews, but for the salvation of the world'. He turns to His disciples after taking this Passover, this Jewish feast, and totally making something new out of it that no man had ever seen before, and He says to His disciples: 'This is for you, now do this in remembrance of me'.

My friends, as we consider the typology of all this and the significance of it, let me just pause for a moment: do you realise that this isn't an option, this isn't an added extra for the Christian church? In fact, it is disobedience of the highest order not to break bread and drink from the cup, because it is the command of the Lord Jesus - it is sin not to remember Him! For the Hebrew, to remember meant much more than simply a memory or to bring something to mind, to merely recall something that had happened in the past, it actually

means to go back psychologically in one's mind, to actually recapture as much of the reality and the significance of an event that you've already experienced, to almost feel that you were there - and that's what we've to do every first day of the week, do you do it my friend? I know that some of you don't, for I never see you, never see you! More than that: Christ never sees you!

What did He mean when He said: 'This is my body'? This has been debated down through all the centuries, when He give thanks on this did the molecules of the bread turn into the molecules of His body as the Roman Catholic Church teaches - transubstantiation? Of course it didn't, that is perhaps the most Satanic and blasphemous interpretation of the Lord's Supper that has ever been seen on the face of God's earth. This was metaphoric language, and a casual reading of the Scriptures would show you that this is the case - did the Lord Jesus not say in this same Upper Room: 'I am the vine and ye are the branches'? Did He literally mean that He was a vine and they were the branches? Of course He didn't. He said: 'I am the door, by me if any man enter in He shall be saved' - He didn't point to a door and say: 'That door is me, I am that door'. In fact in 1 Corinthians 10 that we studied a few weeks ago, Paul says that the rock that followed the children of Israel in the wilderness was Christ - does that mean that Christ literally is a piece of granite, flinty, and hard and cold? Of course it doesn't. You maybe walk into a friend's or a neighbour's house and you see a photograph on the wall of somebody you don't recognise, and you point at it and you say: 'Who's that?', and the person says: 'Oh, that's my son', or, 'that's my daughter', or, 'that's my mother or father'. Would you ever say to them: 'I thought that was a piece of paper with a frame around it hanging on the wall'? You would never say that, because you know what they mean, they're talking in representatory, imaginary in the sense of imagery, language. They're saying: 'this represents', but they just say, 'that is my son', 'that is my daughter'.

The whole of the Lord's Supper, the breaking of the loaf, the drinking of the cup, is a representation to our physical senses for something that is spiritual. As we show forth the Lord's death till He come, what we are not doing is we are not sacrificing Christ all over again - that is the blasphemy of the mass! The sacrifice is complete, and that's why we're looking backward to something that has been done and is finished, it is a commemoration. It doesn't indicate either that the physical person of Christ is in the bread or in the cup, neither does it insinuate that Christ is beside the bread or beside the cup as the Lutherans believe - consubstantiation. What it means is that Christ is not in the bread or in the cup, but Christ is there in the people! Christ is there in the meeting by His Spirit, it's the spiritual presence of Christ that it signifies - and as we partake of that bread and of that wine it has been designated as the flesh and the blood of Christ not literally, but as we take it by faith in our minds and in our hearts we are trusting in the sacrificial death that He accomplished for us. As one man put it: 'Eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood are done with the mind and the heart, not with the teeth and the throat'. Didn't the Lord say in John 6: 'Whosoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life' - did He mean literally eat His flesh and drink His blood? He could not have meant it literally: one, because He was sitting there as He gave the bread and wine, did He have two bodies? Was one body already dead when He was signifying the sacrifice? If it's a spiritual body, had He been dead and resurrected before He'd even gone to the cross or the tomb? It is absolutely impossible - and apart from all that, we know that it was a year before this institution was instigated after Jesus said: 'except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye shall have eternal life' - does that mean the disciples could not have eternal life for a whole year until they had the Lord's Supper instituted and given to them? Of course not! These words are spiritual, that's what He said Himself - the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was not instituted so that we could have a physical presence in our body or beside us of Christ, but so that we could know that we are His, and He is mine, and He is with us, and He is in us - not by bread and wine, but by His Spirit. Now as well as that He didn't say that 'the cup is my blood', He says the cup is the New Testament - the cup is not His blood, it is the New Testament in His blood.

Look backward, then he says 'look forward' - verse 26, the second half: 'ye do shew the Lord's death till he come'. It helps us look forward to a day when we will be with Him - why did he say that if we're already with Him in the presence of the bread and wine? It's looking to the day when we shall see Him as He is, and -

Hallelujah - we shall be like Him. You know, it does show forth His death till He come, and it's only for believers - I think that's absolutely clear in the passage and every other verse of Scripture concerning the Lord's Table - but could I just say that I believe it's a great shame that there aren't more unbelievers at the Lord's Table, not partaking of the emblems, but witnessing the Lord's death till He comes. I've heard of children who have been born-again by seeing and witnessing the ordinance of the Lord's Table and realising the significance - do you remember the children around the Passover table? God told them that their children would say: 'What meaneth this?', and their father would tell them!

Looking backward, looking forward, and then thirdly and finally: our preparation for the Supper - our preparation. Twofold: look inward, and look outward. He says in verse 27: 'Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily', or unthoughtfully, 'shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ'. Now Paul isn't primarily talking about if you are unworthy person, of course if you're not saved this is not for you, it's for those who are saved and on their way to glory. But Paul is primarily talking about partaking in an unworthy manner, the way that you partake, not who you are. He said that if you partake of this feast without thought - now get the import of this please - you are guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord! If there's any fresh crucifixions that is the only sense that there could be one, that the sacrifice of Christ has already been made and you sin at His table - and it's almost, in a sense, as if you're putting the nails and the thorns in even more. That is not literal, of course.

How else can you eat of it unworthily? If you eat of it ritualistically without participating with your mind and your heart, you go through the motions and your emotions are not touched, you treat it lightly rather than seriously. You eat of it unworthily if you believe that it imparts some kind of grace or merit to you, that you're saved by eating it or it makes you cleaner, or it keeps you going on your way to heaven. Some other people come, as we've already said, with bitterness, with hatred toward another believer in the same assembly, or come with blatant sin in their life that they refuse to repent of - and all of that is eating and drinking unworthily, and it says you're guilty of the blood and body of Christ!

My friend, this is serious stuff. You dishonour His body, it's like trampling the flag of your country on the ground, only it's worse than that. Paul says every time you come to the Lord's Supper, therefore, a person ought to examine himself. Can I ask you, before I go any further: if you are at the Lord's Table how much time do you spend before you come? Do you rush out, wash your face, put your clothes on, out the door, bomb it down the road, sit down and then expect to have a time of worship and fellowship and meditation with the Lord Jesus? That is to drink and to eat unworthily, if you're not examining yourself, looking inwards. A person who eats and drinks without the right spirit, eat and drinks, Paul says, look at it, judgement to himself! The word in the Authorised is translated 'damnation', which is an incorrect translation because there is no condemnation, as Romans 8:1 tells us, for them which are in Christ Jesus. The word is the sense of a judgment, 'crema' (sp?) is the Greek word, he uses 'condemnation' later in verse 32 with regards to those who are in the world - they are condemned, 'catacrema' (sp?) - but the believer is only judged, it literally means 'chastened', out of love, to be disciplined. Now listen to this: this means that if you don't come to the Lord's Table and remember the Lord, or if you come and eat and drink unworthily, the Lord will discipline you out of love so that you'll not go into the condemnation of the world, so that you'll not be labelled with them - and even if it means, like some of these in Corinth who slept, that means they died, or they came under serious diseases, even if God has to do that to you, He will do it in love rather than see you condemned with those that are in the world. It mightn't seem like love, but it is.

The thought is powerful, and then he says don't just look inward to whether you're right, confess your sins, and if you confess your sins 1 John 1 tells us He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness - and you can come to that Table if you confess your sins to Christ, but confess them, and if you need to confess it to another brother and face him or her you have to do it! Then look outward, verse 29, you eat and drink unworthily if you eat and drink not discerning the Lord's body. Now of course that

means the literal body of the Lord, and how He sacrificed that for you and for me, but I believe it has a dual meaning - it can also mean to discern the Lord's body as in the church, look outward to your brethren and sisters, for as he said in chapter 10: 'We being many are one bread and one body' - and that supper, let us not forget this, this is Paul's main point, has to be a demonstration of the unity of the church together in love. But there was no unity in Corinth and there was very little love, in fact the celebration of the feast of love, the Lord's Supper, was only a demonstration of their schismata.

Beloved, if God loves us we ought also to love one another. Let me sum it all up in the words of one man of God who put it so well: 'This sacrament indicates' - I don't like that word 'sacrament', but nevertheless - 'indicates the whole scope of Christ's relationship to us. It indicates Christ for us in the atonement; it indicates Christ in us by appropriation; it indicates Christ among us by communion; it indicates Christ to us in the second advent. It is a feast in commemoration of Christ's death; it is a feast in recognition of Christ's life; it is a feast in proclamation of Christ is coming - therefore, in all these elements, the Lord's Supper binds the past, the future, to the present moment. It is our present communion with Christ, which links us to the past commemoration of His death, and the future anticipation of His return'.

'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup' - is it often? 'This do in remembrance of me', verse 24 is in the present continuous tense, which means 'remember continually' - remember continually! In the days of the Covenanters in Scotland a young girl was going to attend the Lord's Supper held by the Covenanters on a Sunday afternoon. It was a service that had been prohibited by the law, and the soldiers of the King of England were looking everywhere for people who were going to meet together and partake of the Table. As the girl turned one corner on her way she came face-to-face with a band of soldiers and she knew she was trapped. For a moment she wondered what she was going to do or what she was going to say, and she was unwilling to lie about what she was doing but she knew it would be deadly to tell the truth. Immediately on being asked the question where she was going, she found herself answering - listen to this, this is marvellous: 'My elder brother has died, and they are going to read his will is afternoon, and he has done something for me and has left something for me, and I want to hear them read the will' - and they allowed her to go.

Do you go? When you're there do you remember? Do you worship? Jesus says: 'Do you remember me?'

Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, we worship at Thy feet for Thy great sacrifice for us, Thy people, that we may be one with Thee, even as Thou art one with Thy Father. Our Father, we thank Thee that Thou didst send Thy Son to bleed and die, and gave Him to this fallen world. Oh, our Father, we give Thee thanks; we praise Thee for the love of Jesus. Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for going to the cross, for bleeding and shedding Thy blood, and offering Thy body prepared for death in holiness and spotlessness, the Lamb, and laying it down for me. Lord, let us never forget, let us always remember, and let us be united in Thee as Thou art one. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 37*

## ***"The Evidence For The Resurrection"***

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### **I Corinthians 15:1-11**

**I. Their Experience Of Salvation Through The Gospel (verses 1-2)**

**II. The Testimony Of The Old Testament Scriptures (verses 3-4)**

**III. The Eyewitnesses (verses 5-10)**

1. *Peter*
2. *The Twelve*
3. *The Five Hundred*
4. *James*
5. *Paul*

**IV. The Conclusiveness Of The Common Message (verse 11)**

**F**irst Corinthians 15, if you turn with me to it now, beginning to read at verse 1 and finishing at verse 11 tonight. Looking at the evidence for The Resurrection, and we will be looking specifically at some of the people who, like those women on that early Sunday morning, witnessed the events concerning the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Verse 1: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed".

In Paul the apostle's day there used to be a motto that hung in the city of Athens that read like this: 'Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection'. That was the belief of the Greek philosophers of Paul's day. Indeed there was a Jewish sect called the Sadducees who did not believe in the bodily resurrection, either of the Lord Jesus or of human beings of any kind - as the little quip goes: 'That's why they were sad, you see'...because they didn't believe in the resurrection. If you remember, when the apostle Paul was in the Greek city of Athens, he preached on the resurrection. In that famous chapter 17 and verse 32, we read that some mocked him and others said: 'We will hear thee again of this matter', because most of the Greeks of that day believed what their philosophers taught: that the body was a prison to the human being, that the human spirit was like a bird caught up in a cage, and therefore death could only be seen as the release of that bird into a paradise. They weren't sure what that was, but one thing we do know is that when we look into the Corinthian church the influence of those Greek philosophies was beginning to be seen. There was evolving a sceptical attitude towards the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. As we read this passage we have to read between lines a little to think that probably there were false teachers

coming into the church and teaching this; that we would not rise again from the dead bodily in a day yet to be.

Now what I do want to say before we go on any further is that I believe that the Corinthian believers in Corinth believed that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. I do not believe that they had imbibed this false doctrine to such an extent that they thought that the Lord Jesus had never been resurrected. They were not doubting the Lord's resurrection, they were doubting their own resurrection in a day that was yet to be. That is the reason why Paul starts his argument by using the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as an example as to how and why we one day will be resurrected too. One famous Bible teacher and scholar has put the importance of the resurrection down to this fact: 'Just as the heart pumps life-giving blood to every part of the body, so the truth of the resurrection gives life to every other area of the gospel truth. The resurrection is the pivot on which all of Christianity turns, and without which none of the other truths would much matter'.

The resurrection is central to the Christian gospel, the resurrection is central to all the facets of Christian doctrine, and of course we need go no further than the words we have already heard tonight, and the words we read in the gospel of our Lord Jesus, to see that His bodily resurrection was central to His own claims. It was He that claimed that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He was the one, was He not, that said at the grave of His friend: 'I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die'. We go into the Acts of the Apostles and we find out that the first two sermons after Pentecost focus solely on that subject of the resurrection of Jesus, you can read them in Acts 2 and Acts 3. It was, was it not, the truth of the resurrection that turned those dejected disciples into the courageous witnesses and martyrs of the Acts of the Apostles and of Christian history that many of us know so well?

You see, it was this intrinsic truth and doctrine, that Jesus rose again from the grave, that fired these men and women of God to spread the gospel in only a few years across almost the whole of the Roman Empire and the known world and beyond. The truth of the resurrection is intrinsic, vital and fundamental, to everything that we believe as Christians. We would have to say that our faith stands or falls upon this truth. The implications of this, because it is the cornerstone of the gospel, is that it has been Satan's target down through all the eras of Christian history. Right from Paul's day, right from the very moments after Christ rose bodily from the grave, the accusations that were floating about; right up to this very day among some of the cults, even among some of those who call themselves Christians and ministers - in the liberal sense of course. Satan attacks this doctrine, because Satan knows that this doctrine is the foundation stone of everything that Christ claimed and everything that Christians believe. If there was no resurrection there is no life-giving power; if there is no resurrection there is no power in the gospel to change a man's life; if Christ was not raised from the dead there is no divinity in His nature; if Christ did not come back to life there is no salvation from sin, there is no eternal life for any of us to look forward to.

In fact the apostle says it himself in this chapter in verse 19: 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable', or as another translation puts it, 'we are of all men most pitiable, most to be pitied'. Without the resurrection salvation cannot be provided, and for us practically speaking today in the age of grace, without belief in the resurrection salvation cannot either be received! Does not Paul say in Romans 10 and verse 9 that if we confess the Lord Jesus Christ with our mouth, and believe in our heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved? And the implication of that is, practically, that we cannot receive the salvation that was procured by the death and resurrection of Christ if we do not believe in His resurrection as well as His death - you cannot be a Christian and not believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord!

So what Paul does for these Corinthians to convince them of the evidence of Christ's resurrection, in order to

cause them to believe in their own subsequent resurrection one day, is to lay down the evidence for Jesus' resurrection and they are these: one, their experience of salvation through the gospel; two, the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures; three, the eyewitnesses, Peter, the twelve, the 500, James, and the apostle himself who is writing; and then fourthly, the conclusiveness of the common message. Jesus said, did He not, 'Because I live, ye shall live also'. Oh, they believed the first half, that Jesus lived, but they had faltered at the second half, that they would live also.

So let us look at the first piece of evidence which Paul tells us in verses 1 and 2 was their experience of salvation through the gospel. Let's read it again: 'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain'. Paul is telling them: 'Look, when I first came and preached the gospel to you in Corinth the faith that transformed your lives, that conversion, regenerating experience that entered your heart by the new birth, that turned your lives upside down, was the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus - that was the message I preached to you'. His point in verses 1 and 2 is: 'You Corinthian believers are living evidence that this doctrine of the resurrection is true. It is the power of the resurrection in your life, procured by your individual personal faith in that message, that has caused such a transforming change in all of your experiences'.

Is that not true in our lives? I hope it's true in your life. I fear that it's getting less true in this modern age of easy-believism, that we don't see as much change in peoples lives, converts lives. In fact, we don't even seem to look for it today as we used to - that there is a transforming power, the resurrection dynamite of God that is in the gospel of God that causes the change whereby old things pass away and behold all things are made new. Now some people get perplexed by this verse 2, where he says: 'By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain'. They think to themselves: 'Well, is Paul saying here that salvation is conditional? That you're in danger of losing your salvation depending on how you go down the road?' - that is not what the apostle Paul is saying. Now this is a qualifying statement, but what he is saying is: 'If you hold fast to the word which I first preached to you, the word of the gospel about the death, the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus - if you hold fast to that your faith will not have been in vain'. He's not talking about losing your salvation, a clearer rendering of that phrase could be like this: 'Unless you believe without effect', you would have believed without effect if you have now lost faith in the resurrection.

Now you might say: 'David, you're coming perilously close to being 'saved and lost" - that's not what Paul's saying or what I'm saying at all, what he is saying here - and this is a lesson we ought to learn in our modern wishy-washy age - he's telling us that the proof of conversion is to hold fast to the fundamental truths and tenets of the gospel, that's what he's saying. In other words, if we can put it the opposite way, we ought to question those who change the gospel that they have first claimed to believe. We look around the churches today and we see that people are dulling down the gospel, people are diluting the gospel to suit the people, people are rationalising the gospel, in theological halls they're liberalising the gospel to suit minds that feel that they cannot grasp the supernatural - the fact of the matter is that when men begin to do this they apostasize, but by their apostasy they show that they were never the children of God in the first place! They had believed without effect.

Surely if we look at this piece of evidence, the experience of salvation through the gospel that they believed, we see it in the evidence of church history, don't we? That we tonight are in the church of Jesus Christ over 2000 years after He died and rose again, and I know it's subjective evidence in a sense, but does that not even point to the fact that His resurrection can be evidenced in our lives, in our existence - and the lack of extinction of those who are the church of Jesus Christ. The church historian, Kenneth Scott-Latourette, wrote in his book 'The History of the Expansion of Christianity', these words: 'But for their profound belief', the early Christians, 'that the Crucified had risen from the dead, and that they had seen Him and talked with Him,



the death of Jesus, and even Jesus Himself, would probably have been all but forgotten'. Do you see what he's saying? If it wasn't for the fact that their lives have been totally and utterly transformed because they believed that they had seen the risen Christ, Jesus would have been another forgotten Messiah of history!

A very learned man once said to a little child who believed in our Lord Jesus Christ: 'My poor little girl, you don't know who you really believe in, do you? There have been many Christs, in which of them do you believe?'. The little girl replied in her simple childlike faith: 'I know which one I believe in, I believe in the Christ who rose from the dead' - there's only one of them! A follower of Buddha writes of his leader: 'When Buddha died it was with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains' - that is how Buddha died. Asoka, one of the emperors of India, distributed after Buddha's death his ashes in minute proportions to 84,000 shrines all over the continent of India, and Buddhism as a religion still tonight centres all its worship on the ashes of its dead founder.

Mohammed, who we hear so much about today, died in Medina on June 8th 632AD at the age of 61, and his tomb every year is visited by tens upon tens of thousands of Moslems, but what are they coming to his tomb for? They are coming to mourn the death of their leader, not to celebrate his resurrection! Yet the church of Jesus Christ, to this very year, not just every Easter Sunday, but every Lord's day morning celebrates the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over sin, death, and the grave and hell! As one man has put it well: 'Christianity begins where all the religions of the world end, at death, and it starts with resurrection' - Hallelujah! Aren't you glad that you have tonight the evidence? I hope you have it! If you haven't, you need to know that born-again experience by the Holy Ghost in your heart that proves within you that Jesus lives!

Here's the second piece of evidence that Paul gives the church in verses 3 to 4, the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures. Look at verse 3: 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures'. Now before we look at the Scriptures that Paul is talking about, look at this statement: 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received'. Now 'first of all' there in the original language means 'of first importance', 'Of first importance I delivered to you this gospel that Jesus died and rose again'. Now here's a lesson if there ever was one, and it is simply that the gospel has to be the first important message that the church of Jesus Christ gives to this world today. The gospel is the first thing that we ought to proclaim, the gospel is the thing that the world ought to know us by! A paraphrase of this verse goes like this: 'I passed on to you what was most important, the gospel of the Lord Jesus'.

Now can I pause for a moment to address some of you parents and grandparents in our meeting: do we pass on to our children what is most important? We may pass on to them a trade; we may pass on to them an education; we may pass on to them a financial legacy - but do we pass on to them the gospel? I know we do do it, but do we do it first of all? Is that our priority? As a church social action is very good, charity and helping the poor, and we ought to do a little bit more of it I feel in evangelicalism today, but the fact of the matter is that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be what is central to everything that we do - and indeed the inference of the statement 'first of all' would be that the gospel must be the first thing that we do towards the unsaved. Can I ask those who preach among us, and I'm asking myself this question, in all the gospel messages that you have preached lately, how many times has the resurrection of the Lord Jesus featured? It is the central aspect of the gospel, and when I read the New Testament I find that the cross is not singled out on its own whenever the apostles preach the gospel, but whenever you find the cross you find the resurrection very close behind.

A lad once was gazing intently at a picture in an art store window, and that picture was displaying a notable portrait of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. The gentleman approached and stopped to stand beside the little boy and look in as well, and the boy saw the man's interest and said: 'That's Jesus'. There was no answer from the man, and the lad continued: 'Them's the Roman soldiers'. After a moment more of silence he then

said: 'They killed Him'. The man could hold his peace no longer, and he said: 'Where did you learn that, lad?'. He said: 'I learnt it in the Mission Sunday School'. The man began to turn and walk away thoughtfully, and he hadn't gone far before he was hearing the voice of that young boy saying again: 'Say, mister', and quickly the little boy ran after him, 'Say, mister', he repeated, 'I wanted to tell you as well that He rose again!'.

Now here's the question: do we forget to tell them that He rose again? For without that there is no gospel! You can have all the cross and all the blood that you like, but if Jesus rots in the grave tonight we are damned and of all men to be pitied! But praise God, according to the Scriptures - in other words, in fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures our Lord Jesus was not only led like a lamb to the slaughter, but He rose again glorious, victorious over death and hell.

So the apostle appeals to the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures - now we would not have remotely time to go through them all tonight, we couldn't go through them there are too many, but if we could give you a survey of them. You will know the book of Leviticus, I'm sure - probably from not reading it because it's so complicated at times - but you'll probably have picked up this much about it: that it's about lambs that are slain, isn't it? And when we find John the Baptist, what is he doing? He's saying these words above my head: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'. The whole of the Old Testament sacrificial system points to the Lord Jesus Christ who would be the substitute for sinners and the Saviour of all men.

Now we could stop there, couldn't we? How, according to the Scriptures, our Lord Jesus should die. Leviticus chapter 16 specifically tells us about the Jewish Day of Atonement, we read in Isaiah 53 about the Lord Jesus Christ being the servant of Jehovah and the Lord laying on Him the iniquity of us all - all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to our own way, it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He made His soul an offering for sin. Now there's a lot in the Old Testament about the death of the Lord Jesus, what Paul says: that He died according to the Scriptures, even for our sins - but you might say: 'But where in the Old Testament are the prophecies concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day?'. I know of some Old Testament theological Bible scholars who say that there is no evidence in the Old Testament with regards to His resurrection. Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, you could turn to them in Matthew 12 - remember the Pharisees were questioning Him about this issue of what He was going to do in His claims as Messiah, and he pointed them to the prophet Jonah, and he says that as Jonah went into the belly of the fish, and was in the depths and bowels of that fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be.

Paul the apostle compared the resurrection of our Lord Jesus in the New Testament to the firstfruits, which is an Old Testament type of the Lord's resurrection. The firstfruits of the crop, the best, the first fruit that was yielded in the fields was taken by the farmers and the people and was presented to God on the day following the Sabbath after the Passover. Let me go over that again: the Passover lamb was killed, and the day following that Sabbath the firstfruits were offered. Now since the Sabbath, as you would know, is the seventh day, our Saturday, the day after the Sabbath is Sunday, that is our Lord's Day - in other words, that is the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came from the grave as the firstfruits - do you see it?

You've got it in the Old Testament alright, you've got it in the prophet Jonah that our Lord Jesus would be risen from the dead, you've got it in the type of the firstfruits. You've got it right throughout the Scriptures, I wouldn't have time to look at it, but we see the apostle in his pentecostal sermon in Acts 2 referring to Psalm 16, that God would not leave His holy One in hell, He would not leave His body to see corruption. In Hebrews chapter 2 verse 12 you get Psalm 22 quoted; in the New Testament in Acts 13 verses 32-33 Psalm 2 is quoted and verse 7, that the Lord would give unto His Son the heathen for His inheritance at His resurrection. And if you needed any more proof, and we could go over a lot of texts but we don't have time

tonight, what more do you need than those two dejected disciples on the road to Emmaus that day, thinking that all their dreams had been shattered and their Lord and promised Messiah was dead, and the Saviour Himself draws near and goes with them and says to them in His tender compassions and grace: 'Oh fools, and slow of heart to believe' - what? - 'all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning' - where? - 'at Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself'.

Paul is telling them: 'Your experience of salvation through the gospel is proof that Jesus has risen again from the dead'. Now he's telling them that the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures, according to the Scriptures He died, according to the Scriptures He was buried, according to the Scriptures He rose again the third day - why is he telling them that? To show them that this is not some new thing, this is something that Moses and all the prophets have foretold, this is something that was in complete and utter fulfilment to God's will. He's laying down some case now, isn't he?

Here's the third piece of evidence: the eyewitnesses in verses 5 through to 10. Now before we look at them individually, you remember the words of Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 1 and verse 3 he said that the Lord Jesus: 'shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God'. 'By many infallible proofs' - water-tight evidence is what Dr Luke is talking about. Now throughout human history in court cases, legal disputes, throughout every country and nation you could name, the testimony of honest eyewitnesses has been considered one of the most reliable forms of evidence in a court of law. The fact of the matter is, Paul now comes to use this form of evidence - personal testimony - to show that Jesus indeed has risen from the grave.

Here it is, but before I go on let me cite two experienced and qualified men on this regard of how important testimony is, and how they have found the testimony of the eyewitnesses to the resurrection as being trustworthy. The first is a lawyer, Sir Edward Clarke, he says this: 'As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. For me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect' - he doesn't put on a show, he doesn't need to - 'and the gospel evidence for the resurrection is of that class. As a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate'.

The historian Thomas Arnold, of Oxford University, writes like this from his historic profession: 'I have been used for many years to study the history of other times and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is better proved by fuller evidence than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead'. We don't need their verification, but does it not tell us something? Paul tells us the first eyewitness that he cites and brings to the dock is the apostle Peter - who? The apostle Peter, yes, that one who faithlessly denied the Lord Jesus Christ three times - yet Peter is the one who now, post-resurrection, is privileged to have a private, personal experience, audience, and visual appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I tell you, isn't it lovely that even in the coldness of a courtroom, with all the legal evidence and theological intricacies of proving the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that the lovely compassion of the grace of the Son of God can be seen even in that? Isn't it? Peter, tell Peter! How great is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! Peter saw Him, and then he cites the twelve - now this has confused some because, if you know the gospel history you will know that there wasn't twelve, because Judas has gone to his own place. We know that the Acts of the Apostles hasn't transpired, where Matthias has been made that apostle to take Judas' place - so why are they call the twelve? Well, when you read through scripture you find that that is an expression for all the disciples - no matter whether there were twelve of them present or not - but the fact of the matter is

Paul is saying that not only did Peter the apostle see the risen Lord Jesus, but all the disciples saw Him risen. Then he moves further, he speaks of the 500 who all saw him at one time, verse 6, 'After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep'.

He's telling them that on one occasion, and we have to say that we don't know exactly where that may be, in some field it might have been in Matthew 28 that we saw on the screen tonight, when the Lord Jesus was about to ascend to glory - we just don't know for sure, it may have been around Galilee. But the fact of the matter is: how could 500 individual personalities and intellectual brains hallucinate and be deceived about seeing the Lord Jesus Christ? This is what some sceptics say: 'The disciples were hallucinating, they were seeing the dream and the fantasy that they had' - 500 of them? I do not think so. Paul wrote that most of these men were still alive in his day - yes, some of them had fallen asleep and gone home to be with the Lord - but the point that he's making is this, 'Look: the one that's writing to you, I'm going to tell you in a minute, I've seen Him; the apostle Peter that you know and trust, he has seen Him; all of the disciples - do you believe them? - they have seen Him; and there are above 500 men who have seen Him too, and the majority of them are still alive - and if you want to substantiate what I'm saying', this is the crux, 'go and ask them!'. They're still alive, they can be cross-questioned if you doubt the trustworthiness and truthfulness of what I'm saying now.

I don't know much about legal matters, but I know this: that the value of evidence concerning witnesses is evaluated by two qualifications: one, the quantity of the evidence; and two, the quality of the evidence. Even in a witness, a defence or a prosecution will be looking for quality witnesses - someone who has a history of truthfulness - but they'll also be looking, if they can get it, for more than one man or woman who have seen this event. Now here you have it in this passage, the quality of these specific witnesses is represented by the apostles, the ones who heard the teaching of the Lord Jesus about not bearing false witness, about not lying, about not cheating, about not stealing and all the rest of the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ. All the apostles are known by name, they're quality witnesses who can be named and who can be found, and who could be easily questioned.

What about the quantity of them? Well, there's only about a dozen apostles, but there's over 500 brethren who can be found and they all can be asked. Fourthly he cites James as another eyewitness, now most people believe that James here is the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. We haven't got time to look, but we're told within the Scriptures that he was one of the brothers of the Lord, half-brothers, who were sceptical about the Lord Jesus' claims, and they thought He was mad, they thought He'd lost His head thinking He was the Messiah, having all these dreams of great things about Himself - but we read that this same James, his whole life is transformed and turned upside down by what? The resurrection! If the resurrection was so hard to be believed, do you not think it would make a sceptic even more sceptical? Why is he suddenly changed? Because he saw the Lord! It would change you too, if you saw Him.

Then fifthly and finally Paul leaves himself to the last, characteristically, even though he is one of the greatest witnesses here. He says in verse 8: 'And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time' - that literally means that he was born out of season, because the apostles had already been called, the Lord Jesus had died and rose again, and most of these people that are cited as eyewitnesses saw the Lord Jesus during those 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension, but Paul is one born out of due season. The word is often used of an abortion in Greek, or of a birth that is too early, a premature birth, or of a miscarriage - but I think Paul is perhaps using it here to say that he was born again out of due time concerning the other apostles. As we read on we see this: 'For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church'. He puts himself last, he was a man who breathed out threatenings and murders towards the saints of God, he was going to round them up on the road to Damascus, maybe to feed them to the lions or the gladiators! But the fact of the matter was he had an

experience with the risen, resurrected Christ. The man who was absolutely convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was dead experienced a radical change in his heart, a change that drove him to persecution and suffering that I would say is second to none to any Christian who has ever lived after him - and all because of the change that the power of the resurrection made in his life!

You can see even the change in these verses - verse 9: 'I am the least of the apostles'. I imagine Paul, before he was converted, he wasn't a very humble man - but there is a complete and utter absence of pride here, isn't there? The resurrected Christ had cast out his sin, and had entered in and was born in him, in the very depths of his personality. We read on: 'By the grace of God I am what I am', he had an appreciation of the grace of God - he wasn't labouring any more in the laws of Judaism, or any other rituals and regalia and regulations, but he knew that if he was anything it was because of the grace of God in his life through the resurrected Christ. We read on: 'His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me'.

Now if you stopped at 'more than they all', you would think maybe Paul has retrieved some of his old pride again - but the fact of the matter is what he is saying is: 'I have a humble admission of the accomplishments that I have in my life', it wasn't some kind of false humility, you know when you say to people: 'That went well tonight...' 'Ach, no it didn't really'; or 'You're doing well...' 'No, no, I'm not really' - false humility! That wasn't in Paul, but he was able to admit humbly that his accomplishments were not through his own strength, but were through the grace of God which was working in him. Do you know what that gave him? An honest appreciation of others in verse 11: 'Therefore whether it were I or they', whether it's me or the rest of the apostles preaching this message to you, we preach the same message that we believe. The bottom line is, it doesn't matter who's preaching it to you among the apostles - this is the truth of God's word, and it can stand up to the closest scrutiny!

Their experience of salvation through the Gospel proved it; the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures proved it; the eyewitnesses, Peter, the twelve, the 500, James, the apostle Paul proved it; and then finally in verse 11 the conclusiveness of the common message. We've already mentioned it: Paul joins himself with all the other apostles and all the other believers that believe in this glorious truth, and he states that no matter who it was who preaches it they will all be united in their testimony as to the Gospel, and particularly, peculiarly, the truth of the tenet that Jesus lives!

Now I just imagine that at this point Paul's readers would be saying to them in their minds: 'Yes, why are you trying to prove all this to us? We believe that Jesus was raised from the dead' - and then Paul would reply: 'If you believe that, then you must believe that we all will be in the resurrection of the dead, for the resurrection is not just important, it is the first importance! Because all that we believe hinges upon it!'. You may have heard of Thomas Jefferson, the great American statesman, what you may not know is that he was a religious rationalist - that means a man who explains away the supernatural because he cannot conceive of it and reason it in his mind, a bit like the Unitarians of our day, the non-subscribing Presbyterian Church who are not Christian, they're rationalists who do not believe in the blood, do not believe in the resurrection, do not believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ or the afterlife. Thomas Jefferson, he wasn't a Unitarian but he was a rationalist, and he edited a Bible of his own - he decided to write his own Bible because God's Bible didn't suit his views and his reasoning. This is what he entitled his Bible: 'The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth'. He had no belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and thus he ends his Bible with these words, listen carefully: 'There laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed'.

The end of the story, praise God, is not sealed with a tomb, but up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph o'er His foes, He arose victorious o'er the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to reign! If you were to enter life from a sealed tomb with a dying Saviour you would enter a hopeless world. When the great Christian scientist - I don't mean Christian Scientist in the cult sense, but a scientist who was a

Christian - Sir Michael Faraday was dying, he was lying there on his deathbed and some journalists questioned him as to his speculations about life and death. 'Speculations?', he said, 'I know nothing about speculations, I am resting on certainties, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and because He lives I shall live also'.

Now we can criticise the Corinthians for believing that Jesus has risen again and that we will not rise again. We believe He rose again, don't we? But do we really believe that we will rise again? I'll tell you, if we did it would transform us, just like it transformed these early saints.

Our Father, we thank Thee that Thy Son was declared to be Thy Son by the resurrection from the dead. If He had laid in the grave, we would have known He was not Thy Son, but we thank Thee, our Father, that You put Your 'Well done' on Calvary by raising Him from the dead. He is at Thy right-hand tonight, and we bow and adore and praise His glorious name, and we say 'Hallelujah, Christ arose!', but we also say 'Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!'. Oh Lord, we look for that day when we will rise as He is risen, and we will be given perfect bodies, and we shall see the Lord, and we - wonder of wonders - shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Lord, we will be perfect one day, because of Christ's death and resurrection, and Lord we thank Thee, we praise and worship Thee for all that Thou hast done for us in the Lord Jesus. We praise His name, and we pray that we will go with His blessing, and any that have not had the Christ of God entering into their heart by His Spirit in salvation, we pray that the resurrection power even tonight would be unleashed in their being to know that Jesus is Lord and He is risen from the dead. To His glory we pray, Amen.

## *1 Corinthians - Chapter 38*

# ***"Repercussions Of No Resurrection"***

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**F**irst Corinthians 15, and you will remember hopefully, if you were here last week, that we looked at verses 1 through to 11 - which primarily dealt with the subject of the evidence for the resurrection. Paul gave us very very convincing evidence of why we can know that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Now we know that he was doing that, not because the Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but rather they had failed to put their faith in the fact that one day, because Jesus had risen from the grave, that they would rise again. Therefore he's building up a case, and he does this by citing the fact that it is historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead. We take up our reading, maybe we'll read from verse 1 just to get the context, but our main portion for consideration tonight is verses 12 through to verse 19 - our subject: 'The Repercussions Of No Resurrection'.

Verse 1: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas", that is Peter, "then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed". Here are our verses for this evening: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable".

There is a story, I'm not sure whether it's true or whether it is legend, of a German princess who, when she was on her deathbed, ordered that her grave be covered with a great granite slab, and that around that great granite slab be placed solid blocks of stone. She requested that the whole thing be fastened together with clamps of iron. On her tombstone should be cut these words, she said: "This burial place, purchased to all eternity, must never be opened". It just so happened that a little acorn was buried in the process of the covering up of the grave, and during the months that followed the seed sprouted, and the tender shoot found its way up through the crevice of the iron binding on the stones, and actually - eventually in its strength - pushed aside the rocks that were never to be moved.

I'm sure I'm true in saying that most of us, if not all of us, have stood by a burial place of someone very near and dear to us - a loved one. I'm also sure that perhaps we could say that we have felt the finality of the moment, that maybe we've even wondered if there is any hope left at all for us or for our loved one that

seems to have gone into eternity. Maybe we have even questioned if the awful clutch of death would ever be released from their hearts. The fact of the matter is that death is a very human experience, literally, for us all. The grave threatens to sever us from our loved ones for all eternity. The tomb seems to be sealed forever to some people, never to be opened again. But the fact of the matter is, if we are Christians, we believe that the Christian hope is that those who have died in Jesus - in other words, those who have died having saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation - in their heart there has been planted a seed, if you like an acorn of hope, and when they are buried one day we believe that that acorn will blossom into the tree of a resurrection body.

If God does not leave even a little acorn or any insignificant seed in the ground, do you think He will desert a man or woman that is made in His image and, in fact, is twice His because they are redeemed by sovereign grace and precious blood? The fact of the matter is: there is for the Christian, for the child of God, even while staring into the deep and devilish eyes of death, there is a balm of comfort. That is why Paul could say that we sorrow, yes, but we sorrow not as others who are without hope - and the hope that we have as Christians is the hope of the resurrection. In fact, I would say that all we have to cling to, when death has stripped us of a loved one from our arms, is the truth of the resurrection.

One writer has said: 'It is the solace of a soon-coming spring in the bitter breeze of death's darkest winter'. As Christians, without a hope in the resurrection we are without hope at all in our lives, and at all in eternity. We have no hope if there is no resurrection of the dead! If you take away the resurrection hope from the Christian, you take away everything that he possesses. That is why Paul takes so seriously the Corinthian doubts that they, one day, would be raised from the grave. As every true preacher, what Paul does is he not only declares the truth of the gospel, that the resurrection is fact in verses 1 to 11 that we looked at last week, but he shows us the devastating results that would inevitably flow out of serious error with regards to this resurrection truth. If you like, what I have put as your title tonight: the repercussions of no resurrection.

We must realise tonight, as believers in Christ who are very privileged to have the word of God before us and meet in this fashion in a Bible study, that error with regard to fundamental truth is serious: because what we believe - and I've said it so many times, but it bears repeating constantly - what we believe affects, ultimately, the way we behave. That is what was happening in Corinth, there were serious ramifications and repercussions of their starting to believe that they would not be raised from the dead bodily one day. So Paul, in verses 12 to 19, lists the consequences, the repercussions of their denial of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

So let's look at them tonight under two headings: first of all we see there are theological repercussions if there is no resurrection. Somewhat as an offshoot of that we find Paul personalises these thoughts, and actually starts to speak to these people and says: 'Your faith is useless, you're still in your sins, your Christian dead have perished', and so on, 'Ye are of all men most miserable if there is no resurrection'. He comes right down to their individual level, and he tells them of the ramifications of personally believing that there is no resurrection for you.

So let's look first of all the theological ramifications if Christ be not raised, and if there is no future resurrection for us all. Verse 13: 'But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen' - now you might think that is self-explanatory, but his first line of argument is: if there is no resurrection for you, and I've just spent 11 verses proving it to you, but if that is true and there's no resurrection for you, you must conclude that what I have just said to you in fact is not true. Christ is not raised if you are not going to be raised one day. Now, his logic in arguing this is unanswerable. He's saying: 'Look, if there's no bodily resurrection for men and women like you and me, then Christ cannot be risen'. He almost looks them eyeball to eyeball, and says: 'Look, do you believe that? Do you really believe that Christ is not risen?' - and I can almost hear them replying: 'Of course we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is risen, we're not disputing that!



But we are disputing that we will be raised one day!'

Now let me just pause for a moment because we found ourselves in a courtroom scene last week, and it's almost reminiscent of that in this sense, that often when you're going to prove in a court of law, or just in everyday life, the possibility of any fact or the possibility of any occurrence taking place, all you have to do is demonstrate that it has already taken place at least once. Have you got that? To prove that something is possible, all that you need to do is prove that it happened once. You might have heard it as being described as a 'precedent' created - you've heard that, haven't you? A precedent has been created, a precedent for a conviction, and what we have here is Paul in verses 1 to 11, and now specifically verses 12 and 13, is saying: 'Look, you have got to believe in your own resurrection - why? Because a precedent has been created! If Christ has risen, you will rise; but if you're saying now that you're not going to rise, it means that Christ has not risen!'

It seems strange, perhaps, to you that they could accept one part of the truth - that Jesus has risen from the grave - without the other, that they would rise from the grave one day. It is a bit confusing because the two truths are inextricably linked - we're very fond of that phrase in the province, but here is where it applies: the two come together, Christ's resurrection, and our resurrection - so how could they be confused? How could they believe that God could do it for Jesus, but He cannot do it for us? Now I think to understand this we have to look a little bit at the cause of their confusion, and you have to look to the historicity in the context of the Corinthian church. Now you remember many many weeks ago I spoke to you about the fact that the Corinthians had imbibed some Greek philosophy. Many of them in this church, whether it be because they were converted out of this philosophical background, or whether it was there were false Christian, so-called, teachers going around the church starting to espouse this false doctrine - they were looking to a doctrine of dualism within the universe. Now let me explain what that is: they were becoming spiritists in the sense that they believed that everything around them physically was evil, your body is evil, this pulpit is evil, anything around you that you can touch and feel and sense is evil; but the spiritual realm is all good. Many believers, perhaps, in this church had imbibed this philosophy - and therefore you can see what the ramification of that was: they were absolutely appalled at any suggestion that after you died that your body would be raised from the grave, because the body to them was worthless, in fact it was sinful, it was the seat of the sinful nature.

They believed that the body was like a prison for your spirit or your soul. They believed that the day that you died, that your soul, like a bird from a cage, would fly into paradise and you would realise your true self and utopia. That is why Paul, as we saw last week in Acts 17, was mocked when he preached of resurrection in the Greek city of Athens - it was foolishness to them, foolishness to the Greek! Now perhaps - it's only a suggestion, but I think it carries a great deal of weight - there were those coming into the Corinthian church and saying: 'Look, we believe that Christ rose from the dead, but He didn't rise bodily'. These type of 'forefathers of Gnostics' we could call them, were saying that Christ rose from the dead but He rose spiritually, not physically, spiritually. Therefore when you live on - they were saying that you become extinct in eternity, or you don't live on - but when you live on, you live on spiritually and you will never live on physically again, because Christ's resurrection was only spiritual therefore your resurrection was only be spiritual. It was this dualism.

Now to believe that, they had to believe that Christ was not a man - have you got it? Because if Christ was a man, He was flesh and blood like you and me, and if He was a man and inhabited a body that meant that that body was evil, and they couldn't equate in their mind that the body of Christ could be evil, therefore they decided that Christ came but he was not really a man or at least He wasn't fully man, He only appeared to be human. Consequently, when He died on the cross - I hope you're putting all this together now - when He died on the cross He only appeared to die on the cross - have you got it? Therefore, when He only appeared to die on the cross His resurrection did not need to be a bodily resurrection because He didn't have a body!

Now maybe you think that this is all intricate detail that I don't need to go into tonight, but the fact of the matter is this: this is what the Christian Science movement teaches to this very day. This is what spiritualism, the spiritist church, teaches in our city. This is what Jehovah's Witnesses believe: that the Lord Jesus did not bodily rise from the grave, but had some kind of spiritual resurrection. This is what modern theologians, Christians so-called, are teaching in our theological halls: that Christ did not bodily rise from the dead, that it doesn't really have to be the case that He needs to rise bodily from the grave, as long as He's with us in spirit and our spirits will go to Him one day.

Now let me show you how important this is - Romans chapter 1, turn to it with me - we read in verse 1 of Romans chapter 1: 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)' - what is the gospel of God? 'Concerning', verse 3, 'his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh' - He was a man. John says in 1 John 1: 'We saw Him', our eyes saw Him, our ears heard Him, our hands handled the Word of life - He was a real human being. Now here's verse 4: 'He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'. Now here's the truth of God that castigates and exposes all error, whether it was in Paul's day or our day, the resurrection of Jesus Christ evidences the humanity and the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you got it? That's why it's so important, that's why men want to deny it, if they're wanting to deny the deity of Christ they deny the resurrection - even those wanting to deny the humanity of Christ deny the resurrection and make it some kind of spiritual thing. But God rose Jesus from the dead in the flesh, of the seed of David, and while doing so He declared Him to be His Son by the resurrection of the dead.

Let us never imbibe the lies of the cults! Jesus said to John on the isle of Patmos in that wonderful vision in the book of the Revelation: 'I am the Alpha and Omega, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and hades'. This is our Saviour, and I'll tell you this: this is the great issue, the great issue in religious debate today is not only ecumenism, or the charismatic movement, it is not about what is mortal sin, what is morality and what is not; the real issue today and what always has been the issue is this - and never forget it - what think ye of Christ?

I was talking to someone recently, and they were getting engaged in debate with a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon, and they were starting to discuss about who Jesus was. This friend of mine said - I hope it's nobody here, it doesn't really matter - said: 'Well, I tried detour him away from the person of the Godhead, because I felt there was more important matters'. I said: 'Don't make that mistake, that is the important matter! That is the only matter!'. That is the matter upon which truth and error is divided - Jesus said to Simon Peter: 'Whom do men say that I am?'. 'Some say that you are Elijah, Lord; some say that you're John the Baptist come back from the dead; some say you're Jeremiah the prophet'. 'Who do you say that I am, Simon Peter?'. 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' - and the Lord Jesus said: 'Upon this rock I will build my church'. Now the Saviour is a Rock of course, but I believe in that passage specifically that the rock was not just the Christ, but the statement of truth of who the Christ was! The resurrection is evidencing for us that He was man, but He is and always shall be God.

Now let me show you the importance of this, turn with me to 2 John, that little epistle at the end of your New Testament. Second John - John was a man who wrote often against the Gnostics, I quoted to you from 1 John chapter 1, and now we're coming to 2 John. You do remember in the gospel of John, how did he start off his gospel? 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' - and later on, I think it's verse 14, what does he say? 'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory'. Now here in the second epistle of John, of course there's only one chapter, and in verse 7 we read these words: 'Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist'. You can't get much clearer than that! Anyone who says today, no matter if they call themselves Christian missionaries or not, that Jesus did not come in the flesh, that the Son

of God was not made flesh by the seed of David, and took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh apart from sin, is antichrist and we ought to have nothing to do with them!

Now we must move on - but is that not a fundamental fact: if there is no resurrection, that means Christ is not raised Himself. Now we're going to see, like dominoes, Paul begins to pile the arguments to topple this Corinthian pagan philosophical reasoning. The second point of argument is this: if Christ is not raised, and if you do not rise again, verse 14, then is our preaching vain. The word in Greek for 'vain' there is the word 'kenos', which means 'empty' - not having substance. Now why is that such? If you're not going to be raised again from the dead, why has our preaching no substance, why is it empty, why is it vain? Well here's the first reason, we looked at this in a bit more detail last week, we don't have time tonight, but here's the fundamental factor: Jesus Himself, the Lord, promised that the third day after He was taken by wicked hands and slain He would rise again, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again'. Now that's a fundamental reasoning - if He didn't rise again, or if there is no resurrection for us, our preaching, our gospel preaching is nonsense! Jesus must have been deluded, He must have been fooled by someone or fooled Himself into thinking He was Messiah and the Son of God. He must have been deceived, or else He was a deceiver! He was a wicked man who was getting people to follow Him, and ultimately follow Him to perdition and to hell because He knew that He wasn't going to heaven, He knew He wasn't going to Calvary to die for sins, He knew He wasn't going to rise from the grave! Listen, those are the only options that you have if you have come into this meeting tonight and you think that Jesus was a good man, or a prophet, or a mighty preacher, but you don't think He's the Son of God; that is not a logical option that you can take - you must believe He's a liar, He's a lunatic, or He is Lord!

There is no other logical conclusion, and if He was deceived or a deceiver, the second point why our preaching would be in vain is because He could not be worthy of our trust. How could you ask people, whether you're an apostle or not, to trust in a Saviour who cannot be trusted, to trust in one who has lied? I'll tell you this: if He did not rise from the grave we have no way of knowing, even though we can preach it till we're blue in the face, that His death has any greater value than your death or mine! Have you got that? All the preaching in Christian history from the apostles through the reformers, to the revivalists, to our modern age - all of the missionaries - is a fabrication of historical inaccuracies and blatant lies! For if He did not rise from the dead: one, He is not God; and two, He did not work a work on Calvary to be qualified to be our Saviour.

One Christian author has said this and said it well: 'Christianity is Christ, and if He is not who He said He was, and if He did not do what He said He had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity and you disembowel it, there is nothing left!'. What a folly it would be to preach about a man who lied and is dead rotting in a grave. Do you see it? If we're not going to rise again, that means Christ didn't rise again, and that means that our preaching is futile. The offshoot of this is the response of people to the message would also be in vain - your third sub-point: faith in Christ is empty. Look at verse 14: 'our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also vain'. What value is there in trusting in an empty message, a message that doesn't mean anything? Prince Charles says that when he takes the throne, that he will become the 'defender of faith' - do you know that although we believe that we are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ, it is not so much individual segregated faith that saves us, it is who our faith is in. That is so important: you could have faith in Buddha, and in Mohammed, and in every religious leader and organisation in existence - but the fact of the matter is that the quality of faith takes its character from the message that it believes in. Your faith is not worth anything unless your message is authentic, and if your message is vain, and your message is empty, and you're teaching that Jesus died and rose again and to trust in Him, and He didn't die for sin and He didn't rise again from the grave - your faith means nothing, it is empty!

Let's face it, as you go through the Acts of the Apostles and the rest of the New Testament the

overemphasised preaching of the apostles was this: that because Jesus died and rose again He has now power to save men and women - is that not what Hebrews says? 'He has the power to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him seeing', what?, 'He ever liveth'. Faith in Christ is empty and there is no power to change lives, no point in having faith in Him, if He is dead in the grave.

Fourthly, he goes further in verse 15: 'Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not'. The apostles - 'we' he says - and the witnesses, all of them, of the resurrection were liars. Now this is the point at which Paul now knocks, I believe, the Corinthian position into the grave itself. He is hammering the final nail in the coffin of this belief, that somehow you can have an airy-fairy faith that Jesus rose again, whether bodily or spiritually, but believe that you will never rise again - it just is impossible. Here's his reason: we are the apostles that are preaching this bodily resurrection! Is our message to you empty? In fact, worse than this, we not only would be liars by preaching this to you, but watch this phrase in verse 15: 'we would have testified of God wrongly'. Now please ponder that statement for a moment, because that is terrific. The apostle here is saying that all of the apostles and the witnesses to the resurrection that we named in the evidence last week in verses 1 to 11 - Paul, Peter, the apostles, the twelve, James, the 500, and others - all of them were standing in the dock giving evidence against God! If God didn't raise Christ from the dead as they publicly state that God did raise Christ from the dead - what are they doing? They're misrepresenting God in their preaching! They make themselves to be liars, that's the apostles now, indeed they make every Christian throughout the whole of Christian history to be liars - Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John and Charles Wesley, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, D. L. Moody - you can go on and on and on, they're all made to be liars and false witnesses, and of course the one that crowns them all is the Lord Jesus Christ for He led them all astray.

God would have been misrepresented in their preaching, do you not think they had to be sure that what they were saying was certain and was accurate? May I just say in a remark of footnote, that it is very important whenever we preach from any pulpit with an open Bible that we never misrepresent God. It can be done you know, the divine character was being falsified, it was being publicly stated that God did something that He did not do. The fundamental factor is this: if the apostles could not be trusted in this so intrinsic matter to their message, how could they be trusted in other matters? How could they be trusted when Paul says: 'we preach Christ crucified'? How could He be trusted? The contemporary application of this, by the way, is this: anyone who denies the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a witness against God - isn't that ironic? Those who come to your door and call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses, are in effect witnesses against Jehovah? For He has risen His Son from the grave!

Well, these are the theological repercussions if no resurrection: Christ is not raised, the gospel preaching is futile, faith in Christ is empty, the apostles and witnesses were liars. Now let's look at how Paul makes this personal to them in verses 17 to 19. Personally speaking he says: 'And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain' - now in verse 14, you might think: 'Well, he's already said that...our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain' - but in verse 17 this is a different word that he uses for 'vain', it means 'lacking in result', not 'empty' but 'lacking in result'. It's talking about how their faith practically and personally is futile, it is fruitless; in other words it's without effect, it doesn't figure.

Now we don't want to be too selfish as we view salvation, but the fact of the matter is surely faith is to benefit the sinner, isn't it? It's to benefit us in our sin, and in subsequent Christian life it's to benefit us day by day as we walk by faith and not by sight, as we live by faith and take the promises of God by faith - but it is impossible to have a fruitful faith, an effectual faith, if the object of our faith is dead! Do you see it? Your practical faith, personally, is useless!

Now the next statement shows us where that type of faith leaves us, in fact it leaves us where it finds us: in

our sin. You are still in your sin, that's the case - in verse 17 he says: 'ye are yet in your sins'. Now let me explain this to you, because I think sometimes we misunderstand these facts about the significance of the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The Christian's salvation, your salvation, involves not only a cancellation of your sin - it's not just about having your sins cleansed away, and the penalty of your sins being taken away from over your head - but salvation is a contribution to you from God, not just a cancellation but a contribution, there is a gift to you. Now if we could simplify that like this, and it is making it a little bit too simple, but for our understanding if we could say that cancellation was done at Calvary. The cancellation of our sins was through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that contribution of new life, the gift of the eternal life, was and is through the resurrection of Jesus.

Now let me show you this, because so often in our gospel preaching we leave out the resurrection of Christ. Turn with me to Romans 4, Romans 4, and mark this verse because it's very important, Romans 4 verse 25 - we'll read verse 24: 'But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences', that's Calvary, that is the cancellation of our offences through His blood - now here's the contribution in salvation: 'and was raised again for our justification'. Now listen: you see this being delivered for our offences, the cancellation of our sins - it means absolutely nothing, unless Jesus rose from the grave and contributed to us eternal life! Now get this tonight: a negative salvation that claims to do away with your sins means nothing, unless it can be justified and proved. What good is a salvation that does away with the sins of our past, but doesn't deal with our present or our future? That is the kind of salvation you and I would have if the Lord Jesus was not raised from the dead. Now mark this: the cross' significance is in the Lord Jesus' resurrection - a dead Saviour is no use to anybody!

Some of us love to sing on a Sunday evening:

'My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord O my soul'.

Rubbish, if He did not rise from the dead! Do you know why? How would we know that my sin was nailed to His cross? How was God going to tell me that He was a satisfying sacrifice for my sin? The resurrection justified us, and was God's 'Amen' to Christ who He was, the Son of God, vindicated at His resurrection, and what He did, the work that He finished and cried and said He did on Calvary - but there at His glorious coming forth from the tomb, He was vindicated - not in crucifixion, but in resurrection! God did raise Him from the grave, and that is why the Corinthians needed to believe that they would be raised themselves - because Jesus told the disciples: 'Because I live, ye shall live also'. In Acts chapter 5 the apostle preached to the Jews and said: 'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins'.

Can you grasp this? How would we know that our sins were washed away at Calvary if Jesus had not come from the grave? Do you know the tragedy of this, and it might be hard for you to imagine - I think the longer we're saved, maybe, it is - but you would still be in your sins just where you sit. Here's a further implication of that: if you were still in your sins, that means your Christian dead would have perished - verse 18 - and you one day will perish too. 'Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished'. Now let me say first of all in qualification that this word 'perish' never ever means 'annihilation' - there are some evangelical scholars, so-called, who tell us that once you die you're done for, and that God wipes out the soul, sort of extinguishes the soul, and you're unconscious of anything - in fact you're totally and utterly destroyed, a sort of cessation of being. Vine, that great Greek scholar, says that this word 'perish': 'It is not loss of being, but

rather loss of well-being'. Do you see the difference? The loss of well-being - it speaks of ruin as far as the purpose for which a person or a thing was created. But put simply and bluntly in this context to us tonight, of all the terrible implications of what would happen if Christ had never rose from the grave, what Paul is now saying is: 'Those who died that we loved in the church and in our families, who died trusting in Christ, they're in hell tonight!'

It's almost unthinkable, but Paul says that is the repercussion of not believing in your own resurrection. They're in hell - do you know why? Because Christ has not been raised for their justification as Romans 4:25 testifies, and therefore they have no advocate before the bar of God's justice. They have been condemned standing in their own unrighteousness, rather than robed in the righteousness of Christ. Do you know what that means? All our funerals are a farce, all our committals where we talk about leaving a loved one into the ground in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection, it's all hot air if Jesus has not risen from the dead! But praise God, He has! And we one day will! That's why Paul could say in 1 Thessalonians 4 that those who died in Christ, albeit described as falling asleep, they are assured of a resurrection - do you know why? For the dead in Christ shall rise first - have you got that? Is it clear enough? Here it is, this is why we believe it, but praise God we're living in the good of it - that our loved ones have gone to glory! They are absent from the body, yes, awaiting the resurrection, but they're present with the Lord and one day they'll go body, soul, and spirit to be with Him and be like Him for they shall see Him as He is.

Here's the fourth personal repercussion if there's no resurrection: we are the most pitiable people, verse 19, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable', or most pitiable. Do you know what this says? Living believers are as wretched as those who have died without Christ if there's no resurrection - most pitiable. I believe what Paul is thinking of here are the sorrows, and if I had time I could turn you to the sufferings of the great apostle, to the trials that he experienced, the persecution from his enemies, all that he had to undergo as afflictions for the gospel. He's saying: 'Look, if this is all a farce and a fairytale, all of this suffering and sorrow and trial and persecution and affliction - it would be for a false cause! And I would have wasted my life for it all, and that is pitiable - I think it is pathetic!', he says.

It certainly is a tragedy, but you would be wasting your life for Christ now, right now, if there is no resurrection for you and there was no resurrection for Jesus. Sometimes I hear people say, even from the pulpit: 'If I found out there was no God', imagine that, 'or that the Lord Jesus Christ was not Saviour and Lord, I would live my life all over again as a Christian' - do you think like that? I don't. I wouldn't live life as a Christian, not a bit of it! Not the suffering, not the persecution, not the trial, not the temptation - let me tell you why: Jesus says, 'Him that follows me, let him take up his cross and follow me daily. Him that loses his life for my sake will find it' - did you hear that? 'Lose your life for my sake' - what would be the point of losing the present world, and losing the world to come, because there isn't one - at least you could gain this world! But as a Christian we have given up this world, because we believe that there is hanging over our heads a greater world - what would be the point of it all if that was only pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die? I'll tell you, Hebrews chapter 11, that hall of faith, should be called the hall of the foolish - yes, Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Sarah, and Moses, Rahab, David, the prophets and all the rest - what were they faithful for? Faithful for nothing! We read in that chapter that they were mocked and scourged, and imprisoned, and stoned, and afflicted, and ill-treated, and put to death in vain!

We have given up the pleasures of this world - I hope you have - and follies of it. We have become strangers and pilgrims in this land and in this world, but if it's all a mistake we'll lose both worlds! But we are glad to give it all up, why? Because we gain life with Christ! Maybe the reason why you're not giving up this old world is because you don't really believe there's life with Christ farther on - if you really believed it, you'd be living for that world now. We then could say, with the prophet in Psalm 73: 'Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure', or with the servant of the Lord in Isaiah's prophecy: 'I have toiled in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing in vanity' - but the fact of the matter is, Peter says 'We have not followed cunningly

devised fables, but with infallible proofs we have had it evidenced to us that Jesus lives!'. No longer thy portals are cheerless, Jesus lives the mighty and strong to save - Hallelujah!

Now Paul has fully demonstrated the folly of such teaching, that you can just believe that Jesus rose again but you don't have to believe that we are going to rise again as believers - such a message, I think he has laid down very clearly for us, would not be glad tidings, that would be sad tidings because the result of it would be...let's recap it: faith would be empty, preachers would be liars, practical faith would be useless - you would be unsaved, still in your sins! Your departed saints, friends and relatives, would be lost and in hell; and you would be living today in this world deceived and duped, and ultimately going into eternity lost yourself! But hallelujah, the resurrection is true, and He is alive, and because He lives we shall live also! Come on now: do we believe it? Do we really believe it? That's why the Reformers, many of whom became martyrs, because they believed it. The Covenanters, and the missionaries, that's why they didn't prize this world - because they were living for a world to come, because the resurrection is true and their resurrection is true!

If Easter be not true,  
Then all the lilies low must lie;  
The Flanders poppies fade and die;  
The spring must lose her fairest bloom  
For Christ were still within the tomb--  
If Easter be not true.

If Easter be not true,  
Then faith must mount on broken wing;  
Then hope no more immortal spring;  
Then love must lose her mighty urge;  
Life prove a phantom, death a dirge--  
If Easter be not true.

If Easter be not true,  
'Twere foolishness the cross to bear;  
He died in vain who suffered there;  
What matter though we laugh or cry,  
Be good or evil, live or die,  
If Easter be not true.

If Easter be not true--  
But it is true, and Christ is risen!  
And mortal spirit from its prison  
Of sin and death with Him may rise!  
Worthwhile the struggle, sure the prize,  
Since Easter, aye, is true!

Praise God, it's true! If it wasn't true, we should well take the advice of Solomon and eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die. But it is true - tomorrow we go home, and soon we will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and be rewarded. A wounded soldier, knowing he was going to die, took his little Bible out of his pocket, and he placed his finger on John chapter 11 verse 25 where Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'. As the blood ran down his finger it caused his finger to stick to the page of the Bible at that verse when he died - it was stuck! And for us, I'll tell you, it is sure, and it is a certain hope because we stake our whole eternity on it! The declaration of not only

the apostles and prophets, but the angelic messenger is true: 'Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen!'. He is risen, can you say 'He is risen indeed'? He is risen, He is risen indeed, praise His name.

Our Father, we thank Thee that we can say 'Lo He sets in blood no more, for He is risen, exalted and at Thy right-hand, the Prince and a Saviour'. Father, we thank Thee tonight that Christ is risen, and we shall rise also, and our faith is not in vain, neither is our preaching in vain. We thank Thee that we are not in our sins tonight, and we will never perish - and as Christ has told us, neither shall any man pluck you out of my hand, or my Father's hand. We thank Thee, our Father, that we are not of all men to be pitied, but of all men to be envied; for we have Christ in life and in eternity, and nothing shall the bond sever. I am His, and He is mine, and neither death nor life will separate us from His love. Glory be to His name, and may His life, His resurrection power be uplifted in our lives now and evermore. Amen.



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 39*

## **"God's Resurrection Programme"**

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### I Corinthians 15:20-28

- I. The First Fruits (verses 20-22)**
- II. The Harvest (verses 23)**
- III. The End (verses 24-28)**

**W**e're looking primarily this evening at verses 20 through to 28, under the title 'God's Resurrection Programme', but we'll begin our reading from verse 1 so that we can follow the same thought that we have been studying in previous weeks - and even if you haven't been here this will just refresh your memory to the passage that we are dealing with tonight just before the verses that are for our particular concentration. So let us read from verse 1, but remembering that we are focusing particularly on verses 20 through to 28.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all".

It was Eric Sawyer (sp?), the great theologian, who in one of his writings spoke these words, he said: 'The present age is Easter time, it begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer, and it ends with the resurrection

of the redeemed. Between those two lies the spiritual resurrection of those called into life through Christ'. He goes on: 'So we live today between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter we go to meet the last Easter'. Let me read that again for you: 'The present age', for us as Christians, 'is Easter time, it begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer, and ends with the resurrection of the redeemed. Between those two Easters there is the spiritual resurrection of all those who are called into life through Christ. So therefore today we live between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter we go soon to meet the last Easter'.

Of course the last Easter that Eric Sawyer is talking about is the bodily, literal resurrection of those who are saved - the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, those whom the Bible calls saints. The resurrection of the saints within the word of God is also called the resurrection of the righteous, and on occasion it is called the first resurrection. Now that is very important as we begin our study tonight, whenever you find the first resurrection mentioned it always refers to the resurrection of the children of God. It is, when we read in the Gospels, the resurrection unto righteousness, or the resurrection of the righteous. The second resurrection that we read of within the Scriptures is what Jesus the Lord called the resurrection to unrighteousness, or the resurrection of the unrighteous unto damnation. That's important to make that distinction first of all: that there is the resurrection of the righteous, that is the first resurrection; and there is the resurrection of those who are unrighteous unto damnation, and the Bible calls that the second resurrection.

Now what Paul is chiefly concerned with in chapter 15 of his first epistle to the Corinthians is the first resurrection. Of course we have learned right throughout this whole epistle, particularly in chapter 1, that even though these Corinthians are extremely carnal in their spirituality, they are babes in Christ and Paul can't speak to them about deep spiritual matters, nevertheless they are Christians. They've been called in chapter 1 'saints' that are sanctified unto God, and therefore in this chapter he is speaking to them specifically concerning the resurrection of the saints, the resurrection of the righteous, the first resurrection. Of course we would know that as we have studied this chapter in verses 1 to 11, he has told them already of how they do believe that Jesus has risen from the grave, how they believe in Christ's resurrection. He took them one further after evidencing Christ's resurrection to them in the first 11 verses, to then show them logically that they must believe therefore in their own resurrection. We saw this last week too, that both the resurrection of our Lord and our own subsequent resurrection one day in the future are inextricably linked, you cannot divide the two. We'll see that again further this evening - but he does this for them by proving to them that there are some terrible repercussions if we do not believe in our own resurrection. We saw that in verses 12 to 19 last week - that if we do not rise again one day, it means that Christ has not risen from the dead; because if the two are linked together and you don't believe we're going to rise, it must mean logically that He did not rise from the dead. Then our preaching is in vain, and the apostle's preaching is in vain, and the evangelists, and the prophets of the Old Testament who prophesied that Christ, after His death, would rise again - it's all vain, because Christ is still in the grave and so we will remain in the grave one day. Our faith is in vain, because the message believed in is empty, it's not worth believing in!

We went on and saw how personally, not just theologically, but personal repercussions follow, that our own personal faith is fruitless - it doesn't make any difference how much faith you have if your faith is in a dead Saviour. It also means that you're still in your sins, the faith that you exercised to have your sins washed away it doesn't mean anything because Jesus is still in the grave and we don't know whether His sacrifice was enough to satisfy a holy God. I'm not going to give you last week's sermon, but we saw that there are terrible and ridiculous repercussions if we do not believe in our own resurrection, and if Christ is not risen from the grave.

Now what we are looking at specifically tonight is found in verses 20 to 28, and it is God's programme of resurrection. Perhaps some in their minds were asking: 'Well, when do all these resurrections take place, or when does our resurrection take place? Paul, you're trying to prove to us, well: when will it happen? A bodily resurrection, you say - when will it happen, and how can we know the time of it?'. Well, let's look at

this explanation of Paul's under these three headings - he talks first of all of a figure of speech, an illustration of the firstfruits; and then he talks to them about harvest, and then he talks to them about the end. Now this will seem a bit obscure to you at first, but hopefully - God willing - as we go down these verses this will be explained to you: God's resurrection programme.

Let's look at verse 20 first of all - now look at the change of emphasis here. Paul has been talking through all the negative implications and consequences that would result if Christ was not risen and we do not rise again, but now he changes his tone completely in verse 20: 'But now is Christ risen from the dead' - but now! If you look at verse 13, his language has been somewhat different: 'But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen', verse 14, 'And if Christ be not risen', verse 15, 'Yea, we are found false witnesses because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up if so be that the dead rise not', verse 16, 'For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not raised', verse 17, 'And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins'. All of these suppositions of the implication is the resurrection has not happened - 'But now', he says! This is his conclusion: 'Now Christ is risen from the dead' - Hallelujah is right! Because if Christ is not risen from the dead we are of all men to be pitied.

Now your Authorised Version says: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead', and some may think that that might be a question, but it could literally be translated: 'Now Christ is', it is emphatic, it is declaring a truth, in fact it is a certainty. Christ is risen from the grave! And the apostle is saying: 'I am persuaded of that fact, and so ought you to be', and therefore what follows through from that is that you must also be certain that one day you will rise from the grave. You see, to be certain about Christ's resurrection is to be certain about your own future resurrection - that's Paul's whole point in this passage. You can't believe that Christ rose from the dead and you'll not; you can't believe that you'll rise from the dead and Christ hasn't - the two must come together! Now my question to you, especially if you're not a believer in this meeting, is: are you sure of your future resurrection in Christ? If you died this evening, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and the trumpet blows would you be sure that you rose in Christ unto the resurrection of righteousness, which is the first resurrection, unto eternal life. Would you be among that great throng?

That is the question, is it not? But even if you're a believer, are you persuaded of this future that you have that rests upon the fact that Jesus is alive - 'Now Christ is risen from the dead'! He goes on and says: 'and become the firstfruits of them that slept'. One day during the French Revolution a man, a sceptical man, probably a socialist, said to one of the bishops of Christianity: 'The Christian religion, what is it? It would be easy to start a religion like that, would it not?'. 'Oh yes', said the Bishop, 'One would only have to rise again from the dead'. Now please let the import of all this sink in: this is the uniqueness of Christ, for Christ is Christianity, and that is what makes our faith unique. That man whose hands worked daily at the carpenter's bench in the little despised village of Nazareth, those hands are in glory tonight. Those blessed feet that trod the hills of Judaea, that went to those who were in need: the hungry, the sick, the blind, the lame, and even went to those who were dead in their tomb and cried to them to rise again. Those feet, nail-pierced feet that they may be, are in glory! That blessed One on the blue lake of Galilee, who spoke those mighty omnipotent words and even the winds and the waves obeyed Him when he said, 'Peace, be still!', and the whole squall lay down - that Man is in glory! The One who wept and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the One who set His face as a flint to Calvary, the One who was nailed and bled and died there in your place, in your room, and in your stead and with your sin upon Him - He is in glory tonight!

Has it sunk in? This same Jesus is alive for evermore! I wonder do we ever really stop to think about this? Do we ever stand in the middle of the street and look up past the clouds that come over our head, dark that they may be, through the blue canopy of space, and see that there He is! Lord Jesus, You are there and You're alive! You're more alive than I'm alive, for You're living in the power of an endless life! Do you know that? This is not a fairytale, He's more alive than you are! You're dying where you sit tonight - He lives for evermore! He is Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is There.

Now this is what Paul does not want them to miss before he goes on to talk about God's resurrection programme, he wants to assure them that one day they will be there too, because He is there. To do this he uses this figure, this illustration and type of the firstfruits: 'Christ has become', some would say that word 'become' shouldn't be there, 'He is the firstfruits of them that slept'. When He rose from the grave, He became the firstfruits. Now to understand this representatory language that Paul uses here, you've got to know the type of the firstfruits that is found in Leviticus chapter 23. Now we don't have time to read through that chapter, but it would do you good to read it at home, but what you have there is that the Israelites - before they harvested their crops - they were told to bring a sample of those crops and offer them to the Lord. So what they would do would be, the harvester or the farmer would go into the big golden field of corn or wheat, and perhaps probably at the corner of that great field there was maybe a little part of the acre that was getting the sun more than others, and it was riper than the rest of the crop and it came to ripeness first. The farmer would go over and put it under his arm, and take his implement and cut it away, and carry it to the priest. We read in Leviticus that the priest would make an offering to the Lord.

Now mark the sequence of all these events in the Old Testament. First of all the lamb would be slain at Passover, the lamb slain for the sins of the people, representing atonement. Then the Sabbath after the lamb was slain at Passover, the day after that Sabbath - that therefore means the Sunday, because Sabbath is Saturday - that Sunday the priest would take that firstfruits, and wave the sheaf of the firstfruits before the Lord. That was a sign to signify that the entire harvest belonged to the Lord. Now let me tease that type out for you if you haven't already got it. The Lord Jesus, as John the Baptist said, is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, the Passover Lamb delivering His people from bondage in sinful Egypt. Three days later, not on the Sabbath but on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, that resurrection Easter morning, God raised Him from the grave, declared Him to be the Son of God with power unto our justification, and waved Him before the world - a living Saviour to show that His work was finished, and harvest was coming.

It's wonderful, isn't it? What this type signifies, firstfruits, is just what it signified - that this was the first part of the harvest in Israel, but there was more of the harvest to come. There was more of the same to come - and what Paul is saying here is, even as Christ is the firstfruits in the resurrection, that type, the very fact that Christ rose again, is signifying that there is more of the same to come! Have you got it? Therefore His resurrection requires our resurrection - if I could put it like this: the firstfruits was a sample of the saints who would be resurrected one day. Isn't this wonderful? Isn't it? He was raised bodily - none of this spiritual nonsense - He was raised bodily, and we shall be raised bodily. Do you remember as He stood before the disciples - and sometimes we demean the body as Bible-believing Christians - but He looked to them and He asked them to handle Him, touch Him and see: 'A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have' - flesh and bones, there was no blood because He shed His blood. The animating power of that resurrection body was no more blood flowing through His veins, but was the spiritual element that was powered by the Spirit of the living God - and as He was such, He is the firstfruits, and one day we will be like that. When our blood disappears at the moment of death, and when Jesus Christ from the excellent glory, and the trumpet is blown, and He comes for His saints, and the dead in Christ rise first, and we that are alive and remain caught up together with the Lord in the air; we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption - there we will be, like who? Like the firstfruits, like our Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall see Him as He is, and we shall be like Him, and we shall be forever with the Lord.

We read in this passage not so long ago that according to the Scriptures, verse 3: 'Paul delivered unto them what he received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures'. He died for sin once, once - the papish, popish, pagan mass is a lie! He does not die every time they break bread and drink from the cup, He has died once,

He has been buried once, He has risen finally forever! Praise God, because He lives in the power of an endless life we will live just like that one day too. Let me tell you this is different - some people say: 'How can this be the firstfruits of resurrection when there were some resurrected in the Old Testament, some miracles were done' - you remember the miracle of Elisha and so on with the little boy, you come into the New Testament and the Lord Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son, raised Jairus' daughter, raised Lazarus - they were resurrected. It's not the same because Lazarus died again, he visited the grave a second time - so did the widow of Nain's son, so did Jairus' daughter, so did the one who Elisha healed - and all in the Old Testament and New, they all died again, but Jesus lives forever! Lo He sets in blood no more.

Do you see the difference? Then he uses another figure to get this home in verses 21 and 22, let's look at this, he goes right back to the beginning of time. He says in verse 21: 'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead'. The man, of course, that death came by was Adam, the man who first sinned, disobeyed God, was tempted and gave in to the temptation and sin entered upon all men, and we know that death was the wages of that sin. Then we read on that in a similar sense, by a man came also the resurrection of the dead. Just as a man brought in death, a man, another man, a second man, the last man, the last Adam, has brought in the resurrection of the dead - our Lord Jesus. Then in verse 22: 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive'.

Now listen very carefully, because this verse causes a lot of difficulties for folk. You see, they read this verse this way - look at it with me: 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive' - do you hear the emphasis I'm making as I read that verse? I'm emphasising that little word 'all', now that is the incorrect reading of that verse - it is the wrong emphasis. There are some who study the word of God and come away with the conclusion of salvation called universalism, that is that every single person born on the face of the earth will be saved, that God could never ever send a person to hell, and often they appeal to this verse. 'Here it is', they say, 'all men died in Adam - all are sinners, we'll admit that to you - but in Christ all have been made alive', and they emphasise this word 'all'. Now that cannot be what this verse is saying - why? Because the whole of the New Testament teaches us that there are those who are raised unto damnation, and there are those who are raised unto eternal life; that there is a heaven, that there is a hell; that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. The Lord Jesus had the rich man in Luke chapter 16 in hell! In fact, if you want to prove it from this epistle, turn back with me to chapter 6, and here you have it in the words of Paul - unless he's contradicting himself - chapter 6 and verse 9: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God'. Then if you were to go to Revelation 21 and verse 8, you will see that what they do inherit is the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

So there is a difference here - do not be confused with those who say all will be saved in the end, that is not the teaching of the word of God. 'All' is not the governing word of this verse, but rather the governing word is the word 'in' - please note that. Let's read it again emphasising the word 'in': 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive' - is it becoming clearer? Now even though that, I believe, is the emphasis, there are others who say: 'Not everybody is going to be saved, of course, the word of God is very clear on that, but this just means that because all died in Adam all shall rise in Christ - that means all men. Whether they're believers doesn't really matter, because I have said that there is a resurrection unto damnation, and there's a resurrection unto life, so therefore even those who are going to damnation are still being resurrected. So you could say that it's because of Christ that that is happening. So all men who have died in Adam are being raised altogether in Christ, whether it be to go to hell or to reside in heaven'. Of course the Lord Jesus said in John 5 and verse 29 that that is the case, that all will be resurrected, some to life, some to damnation. My question is: if that is what Paul is meaning here, why didn't he just keep using the word 'by' in verse 21 - that's the phrase he uses in verse 21. Look: 'For since by man', the sense is 'through a man', 'came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead'. Look at the change: 'For as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive'.

Now these two different words are not just different in the English language, they're different in the original Greek that the New Testament was written in. Verse 21, that word 'by' is the word 'via', and that word denotes 'agency', agency - that is that through the man death came upon men, and through Christ life can come upon men as well. It is the agency whereby this was accomplished. When you go into verse 22 this word 'in' doesn't speak of agency, the Greek word is 'en', but it expresses rather 'association' - association. What you have in verse 22 is what the Bible calls headship, federal headship, and it's further seen in the fact that in the Greek language it reads like this - there is an article before the two names here, 'for as in the Adam all die, even so in the Christ shall all be made alive'. It is federal headship that you have here.

Now you say: 'What are you talking about? I don't even know what that means!'. This is what it means: when you were born the first time a sinner, you were born into Adam - Adam was your federal head. Maybe you're wondering at times: 'Why do I get lumbered with all the sin and the guilt because of something Adam did back there in the Garden of Eden?' - well, here's the reason why: because he is your forefather, and therefore he becomes your federal head. 'In the Adam' - so if you are 'in the Adam', that means you are still dead in your trespasses and in your sin, it relates to the old creation under sin, under judgment. But when you come here to where it says in this verse: 'even so in the Christ shall all be made alive', what you have here is the new creation, those in Christ - all things have passed away and all things have become new. You have federal headship under the Lord Jesus Christ, being in Christ.

Now although it could be argued that the damned are raised because of what Christ has done, this is not what Paul is meaning in this passage. He is saying: 'In Adam you are lost, but if you are in Christ you are saved' - and please, if you don't believe me on this one, take into account the fact that we have said that he is writing here to Christians. The Lord Jesus Christ could not be described as the firstfruits of those who are still in Adam, whether they come back from the grave or not. The unsaved dead could not be described as those who are asleep, which is the description of those who he's talking about in this passage - and further to this, more importantly, every time you find this statement 'in Christ' within the New Testament it only applies to believers. You cannot put unbelievers in it. You are lost because of your federal headship, and because your federal head, Adam, failed - but praise God, if you're in Christ through grace by faith, your federal head has succeeded, and if you're in Christ you will live!

Now, why is he telling them all this, well simply because in verse 23 he wants them to see that because of the success of their federal head, because of the firstfruits of the harvest, the harvest is coming soon - and 'every man', verse 23, 'in his own order will be resurrected: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming'. You can know that you're going to be resurrected again, your loved ones are going to come from the grave, because Christ has risen as the firstfruits there will be of necessity a harvest one day. He says 'every man in his own order' - that's interesting, and it's a very difficult statement. Originally in the Greek language it is a term that is used of military rank, every man in his own rank. What he's describing here, I believe, is that God has an order, He has a sequence in His resurrection programme. Of course, as we believe, the Bible teaches that the coming of our Lord Jesus will be in two parts; we also have to believe, as we study the Scriptures, that the harvest will be in many parts as well. We would have to say, and say categorically, that as far as we understand the study of the word of God there is no such phenomenon as a general resurrection - that means a resurrection where everybody at the same time, whether they're a Christian or whether they're not, is raised from the dead at one specific split moment of time.

Now turn with me for a moment to John 5, this is where the confusion sometimes enters - John 5, we quoted it, verse 28: 'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation'. You could think: 'Well, there it is, they're all going to come forth

together, one to life, one to hell'. The fact of the matter is, as we go through the revelation of the New Testament, we come to such passages like 1 Thessalonians 4, if you would turn with me to that. First Thessalonians chapter 4, and we'll take our reading from verse 13: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep', Christians, 'that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words'. No reference to the resurrection of the damned, it's specific to believers.

Then when we turn further to Revelation 20 - if that was the resurrection unto life, which of course it clearly is - we turn to Revelation 20, and we find that in the chronological calendar of God's prophetic will that the resurrection of the dead who are unsaved comes way later than anything that we have just read in 1 Thessalonians 4, which is clear from verse 11: 'And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'.

Now, as you read the Scriptures, the New Testament, wherever you're reading of comforting words to the believer concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ there is one thing that is very plain, and it is this: that there is no-one lost, no-one lost! Have you got it? First Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, you don't read about anybody being lost. When you come to Revelation chapter 20 they're all lost, they're all lost! It's a different period of time. The Great Tribulation has come upon the whole earth, the millennial reign of Christ is over, it's not talking about the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus that we find in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. What we find here is that there are at least these two resurrections - the first unto life, and the second unto death - and they are different, and nobody in the first resurrection will be lost, and nobody in the second resurrection will be saved.

We don't have time to look into this, but there are also the resurrection of the Old Testament saints, and I'm not going to get into when that is, but you can read about that in Daniel 12 and Isaiah 26, Ezekiel 37. There is the resurrection of tribulation saints that you read of here in Revelation 20, those who in the seven years of tribulation and judgment that's poured upon the earth will die, and at the end of those years will be resurrected - you read about it in verses 4 to 6 of 20. But all of them, all the saints, whether it's Old Testament saints, whether it's tribulation saints, whether it's saints in the rapture of Jesus Christ, all of them - mark this please - comprise of the first resurrection. Have you got that? All of them comprise, no matter when it happens, the time is not what Paul has in sight here, it is the type of resurrection.

Now look at this verse here in 1 Corinthians, and look at verse 23: 'Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming'. They that are Christ's, that means if you're one of Christ's you will be there with the Lord in the first resurrection. Now mark what I'm saying, go back to Revelation 20 for a moment, Revelation 20 verse 1: 'And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years', that is the millennial reign of Christ, 'And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years

should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus', the tribulation saints, 'and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years' - now mark that. They were resurrected after the tribulation and lived and reigned 1000 years with Christ. So this was their resurrection... 'But the rest of the dead', have you got that? 'The rest of the dead', so somebody was left in the grave, the unrighteous dead 'lived not again until the thousand years were finished'. Now how can there be one general resurrection if some of the dead were still left in the grave? John says this resurrection of these tribulation saints he's talking about is the first resurrection: 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years'. Is that not clear? There cannot be one general resurrection. Here is the happy thing: they that are Christ's shall follow the firstfruits - are you Christ's tonight? You will follow!

Now here's the third point: the end. Verse 24, here's a programme he's setting out - he has already said a broad outline of prophetic study, not everything is in it, but the first thing he's told us is that the resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits. The second thing he's told us in verse 23 is that the 'parousia', which is just Greek for meaning 'presence', the coming of the Lord, the embracing of the Lord of His saints, is they that are Christ's at His coming. All the saints at some time are comprised in this first resurrection. Then thirdly in his programme is verse 24: 'Then cometh the end'. Now here's another difficult one! I'm not claiming to know everything about all that is before us, but in honesty before you I'll bring what I feel, out of the studies, God is saying in this passage. 'Then cometh the end', well first of all this word 'cometh' should be in italics in your Authorised Version - that means it's not there, it was added by the translators, so you could read it like this: 'Then the end'.

Now some think this means: 'Then the end of the resurrection' - Christ has come, the dead in Christ have been raised, those that are alive have gone to be with the Lord, and the tribulation saints after the tribulation will have risen again, the Old Testament saints - whenever that happens - then; and then at the very end after the dead who are outside of Christ have risen again, then that will be the end - the end of the resurrections. Well, I reject that view, because Paul tells us what the end is here: 'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power'. Now here's the question: what is this kingdom? This is how we'll know when the end is: what is this kingdom that the Lord Jesus is described as delivering up to the Father? Well, in chapter 15 and verse 50 we read, if you look at it, of a spiritual kingdom: 'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption'. Nicodemus was told: 'Ye must be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born again' - so there's a spiritual kingdom which is in all of our hearts, the Lord Jesus is saying. It's described in chapter 6 that we read to you, that those fearful and unbelieving, those whoremongers, idolaters, and adulterers, they cannot inherit the kingdom of God in that sense. The angel said to Mary in Luke chapter 1 that the Lord Jesus would be the one who would sit on the throne of David during the millennial kingdom that we read of in Revelation 20, that thousand years when Christ will rule with a rod of iron. Mary was told: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'.

But what you need to see is, Paul is viewing here the end in this sense: that when Jesus comes to the earth to judge, He will banish sin for 1000 years as we read in Revelation 20, He will establish His kingdom, believers will reign with Him and share His glory and authority, and this kingdom that was prophesied in the Old Testament is called the millennial - 'mille', Latin for 1000, 'annum', Latin for year - and even after that millennium, if we were to read on in chapter 20 of Revelation, if you look at it with me, even after that reign of righteousness on the earth everything is not put under the subjection of our Lord Jesus Christ just yet.



Look at Revelation 20 verse 7: 'And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth', verse 9, 'And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire'. So even after the tribulation, when the Lord comes and His feet touch the Mount of Olives, and He comes in judgment, He rules for 1000 years with a rod of iron, peace around all the earth, the lion lays down with the lamb and so on - but after that thousand years there's still trouble because of sin. At that point the Lord Jesus puts down the devil for the final time, He casts him into the lake of fire and all his angels, and all the lost who will follow him, and then the Lord Jesus Christ - after He delivers death and Hades to the lake of fire - delivers the kingdom to God, and Jesus will have put all things under His feet. That, I believe, is the end spoke of here - when the Lord Jesus shall deliver everything in a perfect state to His Father, God, upon the throne; and shall usher in Revelation 21 and 22 - the eternal state.

The word for 'end' here in the Greek is the word 'telos', which not only can refer to that which is final, but completed - that's the idea, consummated, the final scene when things are finally fulfilled - the final culmination of all the ages! The kingdom here is not the millennial kingdom chiefly, because even after this millennial kingdom there is chaotic abuse of the evil one, but what this is is the Lord Jesus who was standing there before He left earth, resurrected in His state, saying: 'All is given unto me in heaven and earth', and He went up to the right hand of God, the Majesty on high, and He sat down and God said: 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. Sit Thou at my right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool' - it hadn't happened! But there He is, one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, working through the age of grace to bring God and man together - and in the end He does it, and what is being offered up to God here as a kingdom is His mediatorial kingdom when everything will be in harmony with the sovereign will of God, then Christ will offer it to Him! Why? That God may be all in all!

Can I illustrate it to you like this: Christ is like the receiver, the receiver of this world. Suppose, say a business in the city of Glasgow is owned by a firm in London and run by three directors; and they send a manager out to Glasgow to take charge of the business, but this manager proves to be dishonest, to be incompetent, and the business faces insurmountable difficulties - we could say fatalities. One of the directors says back in London: 'You allow me to go up there, and I'll act as a receiver. I will straighten everything out, I'll put the business on its feet' - and he goes and he takes charge of everything, he goes over all the books, he finds out where the crookedness has been. It may take him months, perhaps years before he straightens everything out - but after everything is clear, every bill is paid, and there are no longer any liabilities, he goes back to London, presents his account, and hands it all back over to the firm - completed, perfect! That is what you have here: the Lord Jesus Christ is the receiver, He's still got an interest in it, it's still His. He's still a member, if I can say it, of the firm running the universe. He is still in complete charge, but He is no longer exercising sole administration mediatorially - but God and man have been brought together! Adam, in the Garden of Eden, gave the evil one the authority over the world; and the Lord Jesus back in heaven said: 'I will go. I will be the receiver. I will go and bleed and die. I will take the sin of the world upon my shoulders. I will be buried. I will come to life again. I will go to Thy right hand and intercede for those people right throughout their whole existence and pilgrimage on earth'. There's a day coming after the tribulation, after the rapture, after the millennial reign, and just at the very borders of the eternal state when Christ will have put everything underneath His feet and given all back to God in shipshape.

'Man of sorrows, what a name  
For the Son of God who came,  
Ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'

The purpose is that God may be all in all. Can I take time to finish this verse 25 and 26? This is why this has

to happen: 'For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death'. Over the magnificent mausoleum that holds the mortal remains of Queen Victoria, and those of her Royal husband, are inscribed these words: 'Here at last I will rest with thee, and with thee in Christ I shall also rise'. That is the Christian hope! I'm led to believe that there is a wonderful picture called the game of death, and in this picture is portrayed a young man represented playing the game of chess with the devil. The devil apparently, by the position of his chess pieces, has won the game - he's got the young man in checkmate. But one day a noted chess player was walking by this portrait, and he noted as he studied in great detail the picture that there was a loophole - and he suddenly cried out from the depths of his soul: 'I can save this fellow' - and he explained how the chess pieces could be moved to win the game! That is what the Lord Jesus has done! We were in Adam and damned and judged, but He has moved the devil who had checkmated us, and He has snatched the prey from his mighty jaws, the jaws of the grave!

Isn't it wonderful? He had to reign till that day, till He put under His feet the last enemy that shall be destroyed: death!

'Before the tomb Christ stood one day,  
And dried the people's tears away,  
As He spoke forth in mighty voice  
That made Judea's hills rejoice:  
'Come forth!'.

Inside the tomb Christ lay one morn,  
Defeated seemed salvation's horn:  
But God the Father spoke the word,  
And this He said though no man heard:  
'Come forth!'.

Inside the tomb of sin I lay,  
The price of sin I had to pay,  
But Christ the raiser of the dead  
Spoke to my poor bound soul and said:  
'Come forth!'.

And when the great and final sound  
Shall raise our loved ones from the ground,  
T'will be the last time we shall hear  
That glorious sound upon our ear:  
'Come forth!'.

'When He comes our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring, then anew this song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'

Lord, we thank Thee that Jesus one day will reign, and we thank Thee that sin will be gone - but even after that final rebellion of the evil one, He will put all things under His feet, and the last enemy will be death, defeated, delivered to the lake of fire, gone forever. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! All we can say tonight is, in the light of His coming, may we be more worthy of Him, and even so come Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 40*

## ***"Our Resurrection Incentives"***

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### **I Corinthians 15:29-34**

**I. Soul Winning (verse 29)**

**II. Suffering Service (verses 30-32)**

**III. Sanctified Separation (verses 33-34)**

**F**irst Corinthians 15, and we're going to read from verse 29 tonight. I hope that you remember all that we have already read, there's quite a lot in this chapter that we've studied in great detail - it's a long chapter on the subject of the resurrection of our Lord, and our subsequent resurrection one day in a day that is yet to be. We're coming now to a very controversial verse in particular, and portion of this chapter, and we want to take a good deal of time understanding what God's word is saying to us this evening.

Verse 29 - we'll read from verse 17 just to get the train of thought: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all".

Here's our portion this evening, through to verse 34: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame".

Charles Swindoll, the author, broadcaster and preacher writes in one of his books that Edgar Allan Poe was one of the most brilliant writers in all of American history and literature. He was one who, he claims, was very misunderstood. His short stories and poems have taken millions of readers deep into the haunting mists of his imagination. Yet because his peers couldn't see the tragedy in his life, they tagged him 'insane', they named him a hopeless drunk, a drug addict, and they failed to honour the truth in his works. Charles Swindoll goes on to say that in a masked autobiography Edgar Allan Poe, under the title 'The Pit and the Pendulum', draws on his own personal experience of despair in his life. In that book he pictures himself strapped into a pit of fate, and above him is the razor-sharp blade of death's pendulum swinging above, moving closer and closer with each swing - it is a picture of no hope, nothing beyond the grave.

Now centuries before Edgar Allan Poe, Swindoll points out very accurately that there was another man by the name of Job, Job the patriarch of the Old Testament suffered tragedies far greater than Edgar Allan Poe.

As you read his book in the Old Testament, and I encourage you to do so in great detail, Job was a man who felt the sting of sores that covered his physical body from head to toe. We read relationally that he lost every member of his family apart from his wife, but even lost her affection. He lost all of his servants, he lost all of his possessions, and eventually he lost all of his friends because his comforters fostered the idea that the God that Job had trusted in and served so faithfully, had turned on him and effectually stabbed him in the back, betrayed him. Like Poe, Job expressed his pain in his writings in the book that we can read in the Old Testament, and he asks many difficult questions that usually go hand-in-hand with suffering. In chapter 14 of the book of Job and verse 2, he says this about human beings: 'He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not'. 'Man is born unto trouble', we read within the book, 'as the sparks fly upward' - and we surely see that in the autobiography of this man Job. But the difference between Job and Edgar Allan Poe was that Job believed in the resurrection of the body, and in the midst of all his anguish and all his pain we also read in this book that Job said: 'And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh and I shall see God'.

Many men and women curse God and deny God's goodness in the midst of their pain, but because Job had hope in a resurrected Saviour he survived all his trial and tribulation, and he certainly did not deny God. Now if the story of Job contrasted with this secular pagan man Edgar Allan Poe tells us anything, it is simply this: what we believe affects the way we behave. I say that so many times from this pulpit, but the fact of the matter is plain in scripture: our doctrine always affects our practice. You see it in the Sadducees in the Gospels - you remember I told you that the Sadducees were sad-you-see because they didn't believe in the resurrection. But because they didn't believe in a bodily resurrection, they could not think straight, and effectively therefore they could not live right. That is why we find them rejecting the words, the work, and the finished salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - because they did not believe in the bodily resurrection, they did not see Christ in His true light.

What does it tell us? It tells us that right doctrine is inseparable, it is intrinsically connected with right moral behaviour. If you do not believe that which is right, you will not live right, because right principles lead to right conduct. This is what Paul is chiefly dealing with tonight in our portion from verse 29 to 34. In verses 1 to 11 we saw that he dealt with the historical facts and evidences of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then in verses 12 to 19 he dealt with the theological implications of Christ's resurrection, and what the implications would be if Christ had not risen from the grave. Last week we looked at verses 22 to 28, how he set out the resurrection, building up his case of proof that we will be raised one day from a prophetic standpoint, showing that one day all of us will rise again from the grave - and he gives us God's programme for resurrection. But now he turns to talk about the subject of our resurrection in a practical sense in verses 29 to 34.

His main point now this evening is: 'Listen Corinthians, if you stop believing in the resurrection, what you effectively do is you remove the greatest motivational factor for the Christian life'. Have you got that? The fundamental incentive for all that we are and all that we do, practically as Christians, is the fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ and our resurrection one day. He cites three areas of Christian experience that have as their powerhouse of motivation and incentive the fact of the resurrection. The first begins in verse 29, so let's read it together: 'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?'. Now let me just say before we go on any further that this verse, I think must be one of the most, if not the most difficult verse in the whole of holy Scripture. There are several legitimate interpretations of verse 29, but let me also say that although some people may debate what this verse actually means, in the light of the rest of the context of holy Scripture we know for surety and with absolute certainty what this verse cannot be teaching.

This is very important and I want to take time over this. I want to bring before you in a general sense four basic interpretations of verse 29 so that we can get to the bottom of what God's word is saying, and in the

context of our message tonight looking at our resurrection incentives. The first interpretation that you will often hear from men that go two by two around your doors is that Paul is teaching here that we can be baptised in our living state for those who are already dead and entered into eternity - it is called vicarious baptism for the dead, or proxy baptism. In other words, you could be baptised for someone else who has already died in order to get them out of hell and get them into heaven quicker. Now let me inform you that a study of Christian history will show you that this was a heresy that was claimed by the ancient Gnostic movement - they were heretics. We see some of their heresies coming to fruition and beginning in embryo in Corinth, and in Galatia, and in Ephesus and throughout many of the epistles of the apostle Paul and the apostle John. We find it taught, chiefly, through one of the gnostic heretics by the name of Marcian - this is all documented fact that you can study in church history. But in our modern age, as we've said many times going through Corinthians, there's nothing new under the sun - and this heresy is embraced today by the false Mormon Church. It is the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, not for the living, but for the dead.

Baptismal regeneration is simply this: that baptism is a salvatory ordinance, a saving ordinance - in other words, that the water at baptism saves your soul. But what the false cult of Mormonism teaches is that your baptism not only can save your soul, but can save the soul of others who already have entered into eternity! Now let me deal with the first point first all: it is completely unscriptural to appoint, to teach, baptismal regeneration. The word of God from start to finish teaches us that salvation is a personal matter of individual faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone - and there are hundreds of proof texts that I could quote from this pulpit tonight to prove that to you, but one that I quoted even last night in the Gospel meeting is in Ephesians 2 verse 8: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast'. Categorically clear that you cannot achieve salvation through works, it is not achieved through a church or through a movement, but it is by the grace of God exercised by a personal faith in Christ and the acceptance of the gift of God which is salvation. The whole of Scripture teaches us from start to finish that it must be the faith of the individual for salvation - 'believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'. It's very clear that one person's faith cannot save another.

You might have very much faith, but your faith will not save me, and my faith will not save you - it is a personal matter before God. Just as your faith will not save me, and vice versa, then certainly we have to conclude that one person's baptism cannot save another person! If a person cannot save himself by being baptised - and there is not one verse in Scripture that teaches us that if you are not baptised you are damned, not one verse - I challenge you to show me that verse! And if a person themselves cannot be saved by being baptised, can you answer me the question: how can their baptism save somebody else? It is an utterly unscriptural impossibility, and added to that fact it is against the teaching of God's word in relation to eternity, for Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 says: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' - not a second chance if your aunt or uncle gets baptised for you! This is a lie of the devil, giving men and women hope beyond eternity where there is no hope - the Bible says, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Luke 16, that: 'The rich man lifted up his eyes in hell' - he couldn't even get a drop of water, let alone be baptised by proxy from somebody outside of the grave!

Death ends all opportunity for salvation. Now what the Mormons have done is they have taken this awkward phrase, this awkward text out of Scripture, there is none like it in the whole of the word of God - and this is what the cults do, I would warn you that: they take obscure verses that are hard to interpret, we must admit, but that no other Scripture seems to be in concurrence with, and they build a foundation of salvation upon it!

When in Salt Lake City, which is the capital of Mormonism, some years ago the great evangelical preacher and commentator Harry Ironside met a young Mormon elder who told him of a very wealthy lady who had been baptised in Salt Lake City - wait for it - over 30,000 times. I don't know where you find that in Scripture, I only find 'believe and be baptised' - and that's it, no more baptisms after that. But this lady who was baptised 30,000 times plus, every time - incidentally - she was baptised, she paid a sum of money into

the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, that is the Mormons. So you can say that if this doesn't do anything for you in a salvatory nature, it certainly does something for you in a financial nature. Imagine if we were getting paid every time we baptised someone - the building fund would go skyhigh! She was using her entire fortune to redeem people from destruction - that's what she thought, she was paying to be baptised to get them out of hell! She had been baptised for all her friends, for all her relatives, and then - bless her soul - do you know what she did? She went through all the history books, and went through all literature, and she sought out thousands upon thousands of names, and she got baptised for as many people as she possibly could to try and save them!

She was baptised for Alexander the Great, for King Nebuchadnezzar, for Julius Caesar, for Napoleon Bonaparte, for Cleopatra and thousands of other historical characters, in order that she might - by that means - save them! This young Mormon elder said to Mr Ironside, and it is documented, concerning this lady that he felt, I quote: 'I believe in the day of judgment it will be proven that this lady, through being baptised for the dead' - wait for it - 'has saved more souls than Jesus Christ'. He believed, and some Mormon literature teaches, that the members of the Mormon Church are saving more through baptism for the dead than was saved through the shedding of the precious blood of Christ on Calvary's cross. Now if that's not from the very damned pit of hell, I don't know what is.

Let me show you how this error is not even accordance with what we find in 1 Corinthians. Turn to chapter 1 for a moment, 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul the apostle wasn't a Mormon, that's for sure! 'For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel' - now can you get it any clearer than that? It doesn't mean he didn't preach baptism, and we believe in baptism in this church tonight, and we believe it's important, and it's obedience to God's word - but it doesn't save your soul! That's why Paul said: 'I don't want you to get caught up with baptism, but we preach the gospel' - which is what? It's not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect... 'For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God'. Baptism is not the power of God, the cross of Christ is that.

Now I hope that that's clear, and we could spend a lot of time on that, but I'm not going to waste it on it - it's not even worth it. It cannot mean vicarious or proxy baptism for the dead. But then there are others who say: "Well, you read it 'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead' - it means the dead there is Christ, 'What shall they do which are baptized for Christ?'" . You might say: 'Well, what does that mean?' - well, you could read it this way, as they do: 'What shall they do which are baptised in honour of Christ?'. In other words, because Christ has died, the New Testament teaches us that when we are baptised we are identifying with the death of Christ. You can read Romans 6 to find that out. So these people interpret this by saying: 'We are, in baptism, honouring the one who has died, Christ' - now that is true, that is what happens when you're baptised - but I do not believe that that's what this means here, chiefly because this word for 'dead' is in the plural. Look at verse 29: 'What shall they do which are baptized for the dead', or, 'the dead ones' - it's in the plural in the Greek language. Not talking about one person, but about the 'dead ones'. Now although that interpretation sits well and does not offend our Christian conscience - we would have to say it's a correct thought - it is not, I believe, Paul's thought here. It's not the sense that we are identifying with Christ here.

Then thirdly some other people say: 'Well, we're dead to the world as Christians, and isn't that what baptism means - that when Christ died, we died with Him to this evil world, and He has delivered us from it. We rise up from baptism into the resurrection life of new faith in Christ. Therefore that's what this means, that we are dead to the world when we confess Christ'. Well, that's true, but the fact of the matter is this word 'dead', and the theme of death throughout this passage has got nothing to do with spiritual death, but everything to do with physical death. He's talking here about physical resurrection, not spiritual death, so we must reject that interpretation although it's not opposed to Christian doctrine as such - it's not what Paul is saying here.

Now here is, I believe, what this verse is saying to us tonight: 'What shall they do which are baptised for',

that word 'for', 'the dead'. That word 'for' is the Greek preposition 'huper', and placed in front of a word it can have almost a dozen meanings, but the senses are this: 'in place of', in place of. You find it where the Lord Jesus said in John chapter 10 that the good Shepherd would give his life 'for' the sheep - 'for'. The sense is not 'for the good of the sheep', the sense is 'in the place', huper, 'in the place as a substitute for the sheep'. You find it in other places and it's used in meaning a substitutionary placement - so we could read it like this: 'Else what shall they do which are baptized in place of', not for the benefit of the dead, but 'in place of the dead'. Now that's what the word means, now let's look at the context which is so important. Verse 17: 'And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are still in your sins', and he goes down all of the consequences of what would happen if Christ was not raised. He's arguing now: what would be the point of our faith? What would be the point of our preaching? What would be the point, we're going to see in a few moments, of our martyrs who have died for Christ if we do not rise again from the grave? That is the context, have you got it?

So 'huper' means 'in place of', the context is talking about people who are suffering for their faith and what's the point of it all if there is no resurrection - so what Paul is obviously saying, as far as I can see, is: what is the point of people getting converted, and being baptised to replace those who have died for their faith, if the dead rise not? Now can you see that? It doesn't look like it! Can you see it? Contextually, grammatically, and reasonably it's the explanation that I feel is the only one we can possibly have according to the line of thought that Paul is directing here. Many have illustrated it like this: if you can imagine in one of the world wars, a battalion of the British army going into a battle, and the front line has about 100 men. Straightaway they're wiped out, they're all slain, and the commanding officer replaces that hundred dead men with another hundred. They go into the battle and they're all wiped out as well, just like the first - and he does it again, and he does it over and over so many times that he begins to realise that he's losing the battle. The only option is to retreat - why? Because there's no point in replacing hundreds of hundreds of men, when all that's going to happen is that they'll die and there's no victory!

Paul is saying: what is the point of preaching the Gospel, of there being converts - and remember baptism is very closely linked in the New Testament with conversion, you hardly ever see them divided, because once you were saved you were baptised there and then as a confession. What the point of them - and remember in the New Testament it could have cost them their very lives to be publicly baptised - what's the point of replacing those who have been killed for their confession, if the dead rise not again? Now you know in the Great Commission that our Lord Jesus gave in Matthew 28 that He told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, baptising men and women and every creature in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It was intrinsic to Christ's command, and Paul is saying: what's the point of that command, or following that command, if there is no resurrection of the dead? It could be translated like this: 'Else what shall they do which are baptised to take place of those who have died?'

Now here's Paul's first incentive: the resurrection of Christ, and our future resurrection one day, is the incentive for soul-winning evangelism. I hope that you can see that. He's saying: 'What's the point in winning souls and baptising them in confession towards the Lord Jesus' lordship, if there's no resurrection, if it's all a farce, what's the point of winning souls?'. But praise God there is a point, because there is a resurrection, Christ has risen, and we will rise one day, and their souls will either rise to the resurrection of the just unto eternal life or the resurrection of damnation for those who will go to hell.

So the question begs to us tonight: how is the resurrection an incentive towards us to winning souls? Are you motivated to win the lost because you know that there's a resurrection day coming? Now listen, I have to say this tonight: if we were living in the light of the resurrection that we will have, and in the light of the resurrection that all men will have whether to life or whether to damnation, we would be making a greater effort to getting people under the sound of the Gospel. Now can I speak personally just for a moment to the people in the Iron Hall? We are facing a problem in the Gospel meeting, for there are fewer and fewer unsaved people coming. If one day I stood up and on behalf of the oversight announced that we were going

to stop the Gospel meeting, some of you would be the first to blatter on my door to object to it - but here's the question: are we bringing folk under the sound of the Gospel? I know it's hard today, I know the TV is the best on a Sunday night, I know all the arguments - but surely if we were living in the light of their resurrection, I mean if it's real, if the reality of it really gripped our hearts, would we not be at least making an effort?

I believe the thought that Paul may have here is that people were being converted because they were impressed by the martyr's death that many Christians were dying, and they were effectively taking their place - being saved and being baptised, and maybe even themselves going to death. When we look at the book of Acts we find out possibly that the first seeds of faith that were planted in Paul's own heart as the young man Saul, was by the testimony of the great Christian Stephen, as he saw him being stoned. Paul witnessed his death as a martyr, he heard his last dying words of testimony and love for Christ - and could it have been at that moment that the seeds of faith had started to ignite in his heart? It wasn't long before he was joining the ranks, sure it wasn't?

Soul-winning should be given a massive boost of incentive by our belief in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Here's his second point in verse 30 to 32: the resurrection that we will have one day should be our incentive for suffering service. Look at verse 30: 'And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?' - now please note that verse 30 is connected by that conjunction 'and' with verse 29, which means that what he's talking about in the baptism for the dead has some connection with verse 30. Now he's talking about sufferings, so it seems to continue to support what I've been saying in verse 29 - does it not? 'Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily' - not a spiritual death, a physical death. He is in danger of death every day. 'If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die'.

Now that word 'jeopardy' in verse 30 means 'endanger'. He's saying: 'Why do we endanger ourselves every day as Christians preaching the Gospel if there is no resurrection? Every hour I'm in danger!'. It would be some kind of masochistic mind, suffering for suffering's sake, if suffering was an end in itself and if there was no resurrection. Paul would be right, we of all men would be most pitiable. But the only thing that makes a Christian willing to face abuse, to face the violence, to face the persecution mentally, verbally, physically, and every way, politically, socially, religiously - the thing that made the first believers face the lions, and the gladiators, and the Roman crosses was the fact that they knew that one day, because Christ had risen, they would rise! It's the only incentive to suffer, as far as I can see, and Scripture supports it. In Romans 8:18 Paul says in another place: 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us'.

What would be the purpose - answer me - of suffering for Christ, if we would never ever see Him face-to-face? If we would never have rest? If we would never have reward? That's why Paul says in verse 31, look at his words: 'I protest' - he was the first Protestant! - 'I protest'. He's saying: 'You who deny the resurrection, do you know what you do? You make a shambles of Christian service and Christian suffering!'. Now let me tell you: I've no right to protest from this pulpit tonight, I have suffered very little for Christ - but if anybody had the right to protest to what these Corinthians were teaching, it was the apostle Paul.

Turn with me to his second epistle to the Corinthians chapter 1 verses 8 and 9, look what he's saying here: 'For we would not, brethren', chapter 1 verse 8, 'have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure', crushed, 'above strength', had enough, nothing more in me, 'insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead'. The sentence of death in him! Chapter 4, look at it, of the same epistle verses 8 to 12: 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of



the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you'.

Turn to chapter 11 verse 23: 'Are they ministers of Christ?', this is the false teachers, '(I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches' - and he could go on and on and on of his sufferings, is it any wonder he protests that these false teachers who don't believe in the bodily resurrection are wanting to snatch from him his reward which he has gained by suffering for Jesus? In fact in the book of Acts, when they were trying - Agabus and the Christians - were trying to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, he said to them: 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus'.

What's the point of it all, suffering service, if there is no resurrection? In fact, he says in verse 32: 'If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?'. In other words, 'All this that I've been doing, these great exploits of suffering, have all been done in the manner of men, they've been done in the flesh, it's only my own ego trip, it's got nothing to do with God if there's no resurrection! It's only to propound my own doctrine!'. Here talking about these beasts at Ephesus, he's probably talking about the riot in a metaphorical sense, the riot that erupted because of how he preached against the god Diana of the Ephesians. Demetrius, who made little gods of Diana, the silversmith, for people to worship, he started whispering a campaign against Paul - before he knew it there was a riot on his hands, and he was almost killed. He's saying: 'That would all have been just of my own personal ego, I'm trying to build my own empire and kingdom for the apostle Paul - if there's no resurrection what was the point of all this?'.

Whatever was the occasion he's talking about here, one thing is for certain: he's citing life-threatening, dangerous experiences that he'd gone through many times to show that if there's no resurrection, what's the point of all that? Because there is a resurrection - that's the point! Now here's the question, my responsibility as a preacher of God's word is to bring this down to you and apply it to you, here's the question: what life-threatening circumstances have I ever been through, have you ever been through, for the Lord Jesus Christ? You might say, 'Well, I don't live in the jungle, I don't live in Vietnam, I don't live in Saudi Arabia where I could get my head chopped off, in parts of South America, parts of the continent of Africa'. You know there are situations, I believe, coming up - and even now - when if we were as out and out for Christ as Paul was, our lives would be threatened, and we would have some martyrs maybe here in the Iron Hall! Are we suffering for Christ? If we were asked to suffer for Christ the way Paul suffered for Christ, would many of us not run a mile from it? But Paul's point is this: if you believe in the bodily resurrection, what have you got to lose? In fact you've got everything to win!

Do you believe that? Come on now: do we really believe that? Well, Paul says if you don't believe it, do you know what you might as well do? Go home and eat, drink, and just be merry - live it up, for you'll die tomorrow and your life will be all over, there's nothing more for it - so just live for the flesh. He's quoting Isaiah 22 which reflects in ancient Israel the hopelessness and hedonistic spirit, love of pleasure, that was in their backslidden hearts when they had left God and denied Him and followed other gods. Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes continually repeats the same dismal sentiment over and over again, that life is utter futility, he says: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity' - eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!

I'm led to believe that the Greek historian, Heroditus, tells us of an interesting custom that the Egyptians had - and I quote, he says: 'In social meetings among the rich, when the banquet was ended a servant would often carry around among the guests a coffin in which was a wooden image of a corpse carved and hand-painted to resemble a dead person as nearly as possible. The servant would show it to each of the guests and would say 'Gaze here, and drink and be merry, for when you die such you shall be'. Now that is what Paul is saying: that's it, that is the end - if that is the end then just go out and live it up, sensuality is the only reasonable conclusion and rule of life, so why not grab all you can, do all you can, live it up all you can - for that's all there is! But the Christian gospel and the fact evidenced here is that Christ has risen, and what is intrinsically linked with Christ's resurrection is that we will rise, therefore it's not all - the material world and universe is not all there is, our senses and our pleasures is not all!

Here's the big question for us today: are modern Christians committing the Corinthian sin? What is that? Believing in theory and theology, and dogma and doctrine and all that highbrow stuff in the bodily resurrection of Christ, but living as if they're never going to rise again! Living for down here! Am I doing it? Are you doing it? Rather than living for up there? It makes sense to just live for down here if that's all there is, but what happens if there is an up there? I'm telling you from God's word there is! There is a resurrection!

Look with me to Hebrews 11 for a minute, Hebrews 11 the great hall of faith chapter, verse 33. These great saints of God, prophets and patriarchs, and apostles: 'Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire in the flames of martyrdom, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance', oh, that's a statement and a half, 'that they might obtain a better resurrection' - a better resurrection! Why did they suffer it all? Because they had a hope of a resurrection! Why did the Lord Jesus suffer what He did? In chapter 12 verse 2: 'The author and finisher of our faith', the Lord Jesus Christ, we're to look to Him, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'. He saw His resurrection, He saw His ascension, He saw His glorification, and that is what motivated Him - His incentive was the resurrection incentive!

Now thirdly and finally Paul is concerned that they are deceived, he says in verse 33 of chapter 15: 'Be not deceived' - be not deceived, and the reason why he says that is that Satan would love to deceive believers into living as if down here is all that really matters. In fact, remember in Matthew 24 the Lord said of the end times that if it were possible Satan would have a desire to deceive the very elect. So Paul says: 'Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners'. Now that phrase 'evil communications' is the Greek word 'homelia' (sp?) which could be translated 'company'. You could read that: 'Evil company corrupts good manners'. Now I'm not talking about how you slurp your soup or anything like that, or which knife and fork you use - he's talking about morality here. He's talking about, now mark this young people especially, how your friends, your closest friends, can affect your morality.

Now I'm not one of these people that says when you get saved you're to forget about all your unsaved friends, because how are you going to win them to Christ if you do that? But you should not make the influence of those people the chief influence upon your life, because they will corrupt your morality. Goth once remarked: 'Tell me with whom thou art found, and I will tell thee who thou art'. Solomon said in Proverbs 13: 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed'. I have found, and I'm sure you have found too, that men are more obedient to example than they are to teaching. Who you take as your example may be the one that's closest to you - Paul is saying that that company can affect your good morals. That word 'homelia' is the word we get 'homily' from, and it can also mean a spoken, as the Authorised says, communication - a lecture or a sermon. What Paul was getting at here is not just the company these Corinthians were keeping, but what they were listening to - the wrong

teaching as well as the wrong association with evil people, and he's saying: 'Look, don't be deceived, it will corrupt your good manners'.

Now that 'good manners' could be translated 'good morals', and if you were hanging around people who said 'Let's eat, drink, for tomorrow we die' – do you not think eventually that's going to rub off on you? One Greek historian reported that when a deadly plague came to the Greek city of Athens, I quote: 'People committed every shameful crime, and eagerly snatched at every lustful pleasure because life was so short, they did not believe in a resurrection, so they believed that they would never pay the price for their vice'. Is that not our world today? 'Live it up, you'll never have to answer, there's no judgment toward God, there's no wages for sin' - and without the prospect of a resurrection for the unsaved person, it has them deceived and duped into thinking that they will never meet their Maker. But more than this: for these Corinthian believers starting to doubt their own resurrection, they didn't believe that they would ever be accountable before the judgment seat of Christ - remember, that's what our resurrection will be! The rapture, the resurrection, and the judgment seat!

I'll tell you, if we were living in the light of our resurrection there would be more accountability, that's for sure. So he tells them, and he tells us now, this is God's word for us - verse 34: 'Awake to righteousness, and sin not'. That verb in the Greek 'awake' means 'become sober' - become sober, return to your senses from the intoxicating influences of the false teaching that you've been listening to, and the bad company that you've been keeping, and the false example that you've been following! 'These people have not the knowledge of God' - I believe he's talking about these false teachers here, verse 34: 'some have not the knowledge of God'. It's interesting, isn't that, that the ones that later call themselves Gnostics, which is from the Greek word 'gnosis', 'to have knowledge', the word for 'knowledge' here is the word 'gnosis' - they don't have any gnosis at all! No knowledge, no knowledge of God that they claim. So Paul says in these first couple of phrases in verse 34 - look at them, they're marvellous - he says two things: wake up and clean up! Wake up and clean up!

I wish we had time, we don't, to read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 - do it when you get home - but what Paul tells them in 1 Thessalonians 5 is to separate themselves from sin. Now listen to me: very seldom today do you hear anything spoken about with regards to sanctified separation from the world. Often what you hear about is how we have to assimilate, and be like the world, in order to win people to Christ. Look at this word 'awake' please - awake! It is in the Greek aorist tense - do you know what that means? It is something to be done immediately and done once for all completely, never to be repeated again! Wake up and stay awake! The tense of the verb 'and sin not' is in the present continuous tense, which means this: to be no continuing in your course of sin. Put the two together: wake up once and for all, and continually never sin again! Why? Because some day very soon you're going to be resurrected.

Now let's recap and conclude as we finish: what are our resurrection incentives? Here's the first thing: a belief in the resurrection tightens our ties to believers who have died and gone before. Isn't it wonderful that we believe in the communion of the saints, not just the living saints but those who have gone to glory - we still have fellowship with them! But not just that, this baptism for the dead implies that because there is a resurrection we ought to follow the apostle Paul, the apostle Peter, and James, and all of the patriarchs and prophets in their suffering. We're going to sing in just a few moments a verse of the hymn that says that we must 'bear the torch that flaming fell from the hands of those, who gave their lives proclaiming that Jesus died and rose'.

What is the incentive to win the lost for Christ as our forefathers won those of their day? It is because one day we will rise, and they will rise - the incentive of soul winning. The second is the belief that the resurrection is our incentive to bear today's trials. He asks the question: what does it advantage us? 'Oh, I'm going through hell', you might think, 'Persecution, the demons of the deep seem to be let loose upon my soul

- what's the point of it all? Is it worth it?' - yes, it's worth it, for our faith one day will give way to sight, and we will be rewarded in the future no matter what wild beasts we have had to face! The incentive of suffering service.

Then thirdly, the belief that the resurrection acts as a moral safeguard in our lives, the incentive to sanctified separation and holiness. I'll tell you: we will wish that we would have finished many of our little moral squabbles when we get a sight, not a shortsighted view but a longsighted view, of the judgment seat of Christ in our good resurrection. Now here's the question friends, please don't leave it unanswered: do we cling, cling, to the hope of our resurrection in theory - like the Corinthians - or in practice? And if we did, would our lives not be changed? Are we living as if our behaviour today will affect our future tomorrow?

Remember that man, Edgar Allan Poe, that we began with? His logic wasn't too far wrong if there is no resurrection. Without the truth of Scripture we're all strapped into a pit under a swinging pendulum, but the fact of the matter is God's word, and the Son of God resurrected from the grave, testifies - and we can echo what Job said: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter-day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God'.

What do we need to do? We need to wake up, we need to stop sinning, we need to crawl out of the pit and start living for tomorrow today, because there is a resurrection!

Oh, our Father, we have to ask ourselves tonight in the light of our resurrection and the resurrection of all men - are we winning the lost? Are we replacing those who have gone before us in the hope of that glorious resurrection at the appearing of our Lord Jesus? Are we suffering in our service for Thee? Are we being sanctified in our separation from this world? Oh God, help us tonight, help us to examine ourselves in the light of our resurrection, for we ask these things in the Saviour's name, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 41*

## ***"Our Resurrection Bodies"***

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### **I Corinthians 15:35-49**

#### **I. Creation Illustrations (verses 36-42a)**

1. *Seeds*
  - (i) *Decomposition Of Seed*
  - (ii) *Difference Of Plant*
  - (iii) *Continuity Of Both*
2. *Flesh*
  - (i) *Difference In Kind*
3. *Stars*
  - (i) *Difference In Glory*

#### **II. Contrasts (verses 42b-44)**

1. *Corruption and Incorruption*
2. *Dishonour and Glory*
3. *Weakness and Power*
4. *Natural and Spiritual*

#### **III. Characteristics (verses 45-49)**

**T**his is our 41st study in 1 Corinthians, I'm just not 100% sure how many studies we have been in chapter 15, this may be number 4 or even 5, looking at the subject of resurrection. Tonight's topic is 'Our Resurrection Bodies', which is particularly interesting to most people, but especially to us who are believers. We're going to take up our reading from verse 35, and not read any of the rest of the chapter because we've already read it and studied it in depth, and we've quite a large chunk to deal with tonight and I want to get through it all.

Verse 35, and remember the subject chiefly is 'Our Resurrection Bodies': "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial", heavenly bodies and earthy bodies, "but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they

also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly".

The portion of verses that we have read together tonight begin with a twofold question in verse 35, look at it: 'But some man will say', a rhetorical question that the apostle Paul is anticipating, or perhaps that he has even read in this lost epistle that we assume was written to Paul asking many questions of the spiritual realm. Some man, whether in writing or whether just in Paul's mind, will say: 'How are the dead raised up?'. They will question the actual reality of the resurrection of the body of the believer, and of course we realise as we've gone through this series so far that the Corinthian believers were not doubting the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but were saying: 'Although we believe that He has risen from the dead, we don't believe that we're going to rise from the dead one day'. Some man will say: 'How are the dead raised up?', but here is the intrinsic crux of the question that Paul has in mind in the second half of verse 35 - they will ask this second question: 'With what body do they come?'. Now that's the real sense of this question: how are the dead raised? - in other words what are the mechanics, what are the logistics of the physical resurrection of the believer.

Now you have to understand, and hopefully you have picked this up over the last few weeks - but maybe you're a newcomer tonight and you haven't been with us in previous studies - you've got to understand that these Corinthian believers were living in Greek society. Many people in Greek society who had been converted from pagan backgrounds had been influenced by the pagan philosophies. One philosophy that was starting even in this day to infiltrate the church of Jesus Christ, we see it in Corinthians and we see it in further epistles like Ephesians and even 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, was the theory of the Gnostics. 'Gnosis', men who believed that they had superior knowledge of God and God's way, and the Gnostics were teaching the doctrine that the body is evil. In fact they said that all matter was evil, anything physical in the universe was evil and of no intrinsic value to God or to the spiritual realm. Therefore they didn't see any value in the bodily resurrection - what's the point of it all? 'This body is evil, and the sooner my spirit or soul can get out of it the better! If the rots in the grave it doesn't matter, I can leave it there and I'm as free as a bird, and I'll fly to God in some kind of utopia or nirvana'.

Therefore these Greeks, many of them, even beginning in the church of Corinth, Christians were starting to doubt the possibility of a physical resurrection one day - in fact, many of them were saying that it's an absolute impossibility according to our reasoning. If you think, it's not too hard to come to that conclusion. In the so-called advanced scientific age in which we live, we realise what a reasonable impossibility it seems to be that the physical body that dies and rots in the grave should ever come to life again. After all, when the body is turned to dust we know, scientifically, that turns to soil, and from that soil other bodies derive nutrition - nourishment comes, actually, from the dead bodies of beasts and plants and animals, and human beings all around us! If we could define it like this, in short, the food we eat is a part of the elements of dead things, dead vegetation, dead animal life, dead human life of generations long ago. In fact, I read an article today that said when the body of the founder of Rhode Island, some of you may know was Roger Williams, when he was exhumed from the grave it was discovered that the roots of a nearby apple tree had actually grown through the coffin, and were nourishing that tree from the nourishment that was from the dead body of that man.

The fact of the matter is: there is in nature the cycle of life, where death feeds life. Life dies, and death feeds life again over and over again. To the modern mind, to the rational mind, people think to themselves: 'How therefore can the dead rise again, when all of the particles of humanity and animal life all around the world are scattered abroad, who knows where? At the resurrection, who will claim the various elements of the body? Where will they be? Who has them?'. Maybe some of the questions you are asking are these: 'What about people who have been cremated? What happens to their body that has been burnt? What about people down through the years, even in our own land during the troubles, who were killed in great explosions and

their bodies were blown to smithereens? What about people who are still living, who one day will die and their bodies have been dismembered - where will be that dismembered part on the day of the resurrection? What about folk who have been lost at sea? What about people's ashes who have been carried away in the wind?'. Now don't laugh too hard, but a few weeks or months ago I think, I watched a television programme that showed a man whose last wishes were that his ashes were taken - I think this was maybe at Halloween time - and were strapped into a firework, shot up into heaven, and the big blue and green and red flash went off, and presumably so did he everywhere around the sky. What happens to a body that has been disposed of like that?

These are valid questions to be asking, even some folk who have lost little infant children may be asking the question, in the light of the fact of the resurrection: 'How will my child be raised again? Will they be raised as a child or will they be raised as an adult?'. Now let me say tonight that there are not answers to every single question that we have on the subject of eternity or the subject of the resurrection, and I don't claim to have many of them here tonight - but the question that the Corinthians were asking: 'Paul, if as you say this fact of Christ's resurrection and our subsequent resurrection is true, how could it possibly happen?'. Now, I don't know whether the Corinthians were asking this question, but I feel that some in our modern age - even Christians - can ask it: why is resurrection necessary? Why is a bodily resurrection necessary? Why can't we be like those who are already in heaven, we're assuming they are happy as departed saints - Paul said that they're absent from the body and present with the Lord, which is far better. They are content, they're satisfied, they are fulfilled in the presence of Christ, why do we need to have a bodily resurrection, why can't we just go as a spirit to heaven and dwell there for all eternity as our brethren and sisters that have gone on before us are tonight?

Here's the reason why, if you haven't realised this yet in our studies in chapter 15 you've got to realise it tonight, and it's right throughout the whole body of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation: embodiment is the end of all of God's ways - have you got that? Embodiment is the end of all God's ways - what do I mean? It's this, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5:23, Paul prays that our whole body, soul and spirit, might be presentable on the last day. We are a tripartite being, we are made up of our body, our physical part; we are made up of our soul, our personality if you like, our intellect, our will and our emotion; and our spirit, which is the part that, if we're not saved, is dead, but if we are it relates to God in worship. God's purpose and goal for redemption is that our body, soul, and spirit - i.e. the whole man - is redeemed in the end, and seen to be redeemed. That is why the resurrection of the body is important, because the resurrection of the body more correctly is the resurrection of body, soul, and spirit put together. The fact of the matter is this: if Christ never rose from the dead, His soul in His body might have gone free back to God, or wherever you think it went, but His body still lies rotting in the grave - it is still held by death! His victory on Calvary's cross is only a partial victory, and it's only a two-thirds victory because although His soul and spirit are free, His body is still in the clutches of death - death still holds sway over Him and over us as His disciples. That is why it is necessary that the body rises from the dead!

Now maybe the question is the one that perhaps, I think, at the back of their minds the Corinthians were asking: why would you want your body back from the grave? I mean, why would you want the old body with all its aches and pains and limitations back? I just wonder, as one commentator asks, could the Corinthians have heard some of the modern day teaching of their age of the Jewish rabbis - which was a misinterpretation of such Scriptures as Job 19:26, where Job says: 'Yet from my flesh I shall see God', and they taught that the resurrection body that we would have would be identical in every way to the body that we are living in now, there wouldn't be anything different. You can understand the Greeks, that if they were hearing this they'd be saying: 'What would be the point or the attraction in all of that? I want rid of this old body!'.

Therefore, to the Greeks, not only was it not possible in their minds to think or conceive of the body being raised again, but it was undesirable if it was going to be a body just like the body that we inhabit tonight.

Now let me say this categorically right at the very beginning of this study so that you don't misunderstand anything that I'm saying, and so that you hear very clearly what the Bible teaches and what we as Christian believers hold to - it is this: resurrection is not reconstruction - have you got that? The doctrine of resurrection from the word of God is not reconstruction. I mean this: that there is nowhere in the Bible that teaches that at the resurrection God will put together all the old pieces and return our former bodies to us - that is not in the word of God! Resurrection not only is not reconstruction, it is not resuscitation. It is not simply the old body brought back to life again, it is something far surpassing that. Therefore it refutes both of these questions that the Corinthians may have been asking: is it necessary? It is necessary! Why would you want your old body back? It's not going to be your old body back!

So what will it be like? Well here we enter our study, and Paul begins to tell us - here's what it's going to be like. Like every good preacher he uses much illustration, and first of all he says in verse 36 - I want you to note this - 'Thou fool'. Speaking to this man, or men, he calls these people who are contemplating the idea that there is no resurrection, he calls them fools - literally in the Greek it could be translated 'you unthinking ones'. These Greek philosophers were the very ones that thought they were the great thinking ones. He calls them fools, and the reason why he seems to be so harsh is because he knows that their questioning and their doubts about the resurrection are not coming from honest hearts grappling with truth of God, but rather they are the reflection and echo of the mocking taunts of sceptical pagan philosophical minds of their day. They were starting to imbibe the doctrine of the world - 'Fools!', he said, 'Unthinking ones'.

Then he asks them, and I want you to see his expertise and his forensic mind, and how like the Lord Jesus Christ he shows them how foolish they are by simply lifting their eyes heavenward to the nature of the skies, lifting their eyes downward to the wonder of God's creation, and seeing how natural the resurrection of the body really is. He does it by using three illustrations from God's creation. Here are the creation illustrations, the first one is found in verse 36: 'that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die'. He uses the illustration of a seed. He says: 'Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die'. Now what Paul is talking about here in his illustration is the decomposition of a little seed. Maybe you have green fingers, and you have planted your little seed, well I hope that you know what happens to it. If that seed is going to become a plant, that seed must cease being a seed, it must die, it must discard its old body, and be transformed - metamorphosised - into a new body. It decomposes, it dissolves in the ground, and it turns into something that it was not.

Of course you remember the Lord Jesus Christ in John 12 verse 24 said: 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit'. Looking forward to Calvary the Lord Jesus was pointing to His earthly body as a seed, He was saying that that particular body that He inhabited on the earth, it was going to die, and it was going to give way after death, through His resurrection, to another body - a resurrection body. Now that's the first principle that you've got to learn looking at this illustration of seeds, Paul is saying that this resurrection body only comes to pass through the decomposition of the seed.

Now here's the second principle: there's a difference between the seed and the plant that comes from the seed. Look at verse 37, verse 36: 'That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain'. In other words the seed that you sow is not the final result, it's not the plant and it's not the fruit that's borne on the plant, but the original and the final forms are both different. The seed that you plant and the plant that grows, the end result, are different in their form. Now I hope you're following me, have you got it? The seed that goes into the ground has to die, that body dies; and the plant, the little shoot that begins to start in the depths of the ground, and work its way out of that dead corpse, and push through to seek the light and eventually resurrect into new life, is a totally different thing than what was planted. I hope you understand that.



When you look at the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels, you find that the Lord's glorified body after His resurrection was radically different than the body that died. In other words, what came out of the grave was different than what went into the grave - it was His own body, but it was different. As you read the Gospels, I don't have time to cite all the passages, I hope you do it in your own private studies, but you can see that the Lord Jesus' glorified body was not limited by time. His body was not limited by space. His body was not limited by material substance. Jesus went from one place to another without travelling in the normal physical way that you or I do after His resurrection. When we see His appearances, at times He appeared and disappeared at His own will. On one occasion He entered into a room without even opening the door - things that He had never done before in the body in which He died. So we have to therefore discern that the resurrection body of Jesus changed dramatically, it changed in a marvellous and a radical way, and here's the inference to us from Paul tonight: in this same way our bodies will change!

The seed will go into the ground, our old body, and as it goes into the ground and it decomposes there is coming a day when the fruit will come forth - and what will rise to God as a plant to His glory, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be us, but it will be a different, radically marvellous body. Now then, here's the final conclusion of this illustration in verse 38: 'But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body'. Well let's follow this through again: one, the old body has to die, and it ceases to exist in all its intrinsic value as was - what comes forth in resurrection is different. You're the same person, it's your body but it is radically different - but here is what links both of these together: there is a continuity in both these bodies. In spite of their great differences there continues the same life, the same personality in the form that was in it down here on earth.

Now please watch how Paul illustrates this, verse 37 he tells us: 'Look, if you sow wheat seeds, you don't get barley growing at harvest time; and if you sow flax you don't get corn coming back; if you put a corn seed in you'll get fruit that is corn'. In other words, the identity of the seed will determine the identity of the fruit - have you got it? If it's you that dies - Hallelujah! - it's going to be you rising again, it's going to be your body. What I want you to see is: yes, the old dies; the new rises; but there is a continuity of identity - in other words it's you, and it's still your body although drastically different.

Now this might be a bit of a shock to some of you, but the fact of the matter is that the body that you're in tonight is not the body that you were in 20 years ago - is it? It might be a bigger one, it might have a few more stretchmarks here and there on it, it might feel a bit more worn. I tell you, we're told by scientists that every three and a half years our body dramatically changes. The particles that we have making us up are changed - and we know all too well that an adult's body is drastically different than a child's, but our identity is the same, isn't it? Our identity: we're still who we always have been. There may not be the sameness of particles physically, but there is the same relation to the person that we are. Let me tell you, if you were to dig up in your garden, maybe some of the shoots are already coming up as they are in my garden - not that I know too much about them! - but if you dug down to the bottom of that little root you would find microscopic shells of the old seed that has been discarded. It's left there to rot, finished with, and something that is coming out is new!

Do you know what that tells me? God will not have to use every part of this old body in His new body. I don't believe for one minute that it's just going to be some kind of patch-up job on what we are wearing on our spirit and souls this very evening. Jesus, as He came forth in His resurrection body, He was recognisable, wasn't He? But He was different - and I would vouch to say that many times, if not all, within the Gospels whenever the Lord Jesus was revealed to His disciples in His resurrection form, they did not recognise Him right away - He had to reveal Himself to them. But apart from that, when He did reveal His personality to them they recognised Him; the disciples knew His face. The Transfiguration up on the Mount was a foretelling prophecy of what it would be like on that day when the Lord Jesus comes, and the resurrection takes place - His whole being was transfigured, they knew who He was. There were the saints that had been

resurrected, like Moses there, who had died, he would be there. The saints that had been raptured, like Elijah, he would be there. My friends, the point I want you to see is this: the Lord Jesus was recognisable, but He was different. When He was in the upper room and doubting Thomas saw the nail-prints in His hands and in His feet, and the gash in His side, he recognised Him - but the fact of the matter is: He was dramatically changed in a new body.

So you see this: the seed is buried, it dies; what comes forth is something different, the plant - but there is a continuity between them both. The illustration that Paul is giving us here is, as the farmer goes forth to sow His grain, as we often - and I have said it many times standing at an open grave - we do it in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection...that's how the farmer sows his grain, in the sure and certain hope that harvest is coming one day! How many times recently have we heard: 'In life we are in the midst of death', but for the believer - because the seed that dies comes to life again in a glorious life, we can say: 'In death we are in the midst of life!' The light of the gospel has changed for the Christian the act of burial into an act of sowing, and an act of hope. The question Paul is asking them with regards to this illustration is: if, for thousands upon thousands of years the God of heaven who has created all things, has been doing this in the plant world - is it impossible for Him to do it with the resurrected body? As Paul said to Agrippa: 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?'. He raises the little seeds that die in the ground, do you not think He'll raise His blood-bought saints one day?

The illustration of seeds; then he gives the illustration of flesh, and the illustration is that the new resurrected body is in a different kind, it's a different kind. Verse 39: 'All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds'. He's telling us to look at the variety of bodies that God has already created in the wildlife around us. Look at the variety - the fish is different, and lives in a different environment than the bird; we live in a different environment than the beast of the field; and so on ad infinitum. But even when you look at individual species and compare them to each other, for instance I'm different than you, and one bull is different from another bull, and one sparrow different from another sparrow - we're all made up differently. God's creation is a plethora of variety, and a spectrum of wonderful colours.

Listen to what John MacArthur found in his own studies. He said, I quote: 'I have read that there are some 600 octazillion different combinations of amino acids'. Now let me repeat that for you again '600 octazillion' - now you know what a million is, don't you? Well, an octazillion is a little bit different, it is 10 to the 108th power - do you know what that means? That's 1 with 108 zeros after it - a million is 1 with 6 zeros after it, isn't it? Isn't it? This is 108 zeros after it! Now what's an amino acid? It is the building block of all life, and not only does each type of plant have amino acids, animal life has it. They all have distinct patterns of amino acids; but each individual plant, animal and human being are not exactly alike. They're each unique, not only in their grouping but as individuals - no two flowers are alike, no two snowflakes, two seeds, no two blades of grass, no two human beings - even identical twins are not exactly alike.

Isn't that remarkable? What Paul is saying is that the human body, the nature of one kind like humans is different than animals, and birds are different than fish; they have their own particular flesh - and that shows you the difference in God's creation, but even among their own kind there's a great difference. Everybody is unique. What Paul is saying is if God is able to make different kinds of bodies for men, animals, birds and fish, and different identities among them, why is it so hard for Him to make a resurrection body? What an argument he's laying down here for us tonight! He's saying some bodies, human bodies are fitted for society; the body of the beast is fitted for the field; the body of the fish for the sea; the body of the bird for the sky; and one day, believers in Corinth, whether you think it or are able to reason or rationalise it in your mind, God will give us a body fitted for heaven!

One German writer once asked the question: 'If fish are philosophers, and if they're capable of thinking, I am

absolutely certain that every philosophical fish is quite sure that it is impossible for any creature to live out of water'. Every fish thinks: 'If I jump out of the water, I'll gasp for breath and I'll die' - he doesn't know in his philosophy of the world down in the depths of the deep that is all that he knows, that there are birds flying high, that there are human beings talking and walking...and even fishing! Our philosophical men are walking around thinking that there is no other life. There is resurrection life, and we're going to partake of it one day, praise God!

The illustration of seeds, and then flesh, and then stars in verse 40 and 41: 'There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory'. The celestial beings, the planets and stars in the solar system differ from our earthly bodies. In fact the stars even differ from the planets and the moons. I don't know whether you know this or not, but planets and moons only reflect light produced by stars - they're like mirrors that bounce the light of stars off them, but stars produce their own light. So in space even these planets and stars differ - and in fact, every single star is different, the spectrum of colours that comes from it. In fact, some expositors believe that while Paul is talking here about the different glory of stars that he's saying to us that when we are in our resurrected bodies we will have different glories manifested because of our faithfulness down here on earth. But what Paul is saying is that God has a creative capacity for infinite variety in His creation, in the seeds and the plants and the flesh of every kind; and the stars and the planets and everything that is out there in the universe - why is it so difficult for God to make a resurrection body?

Therefore, verse 42: 'So also is the resurrection of the dead' - in the resurrection of the dead we will differ from our old body as the spark differs from the sun! That is the creation illustration that he gives for our resurrection bodies. Now he comes to the contrasts, and now he's going to be more specific in what our resurrection bodies are like. There are four ways here that he says our resurrection bodies will differ from our present bodies, and I've listed them for you on your sheet. Here's the first: corruption and incorruption, look at the second part of verse 42: 'It is sown', our old body, 'in corruption', and the same body note, the same person, 'it', the identity, 'is raised in incorruption'. Corruption contrasted with incorruption. Now the point that Paul is trying to make here is the sense of durability, durability. This body will last! Even a little child that is born, right at that moment of infancy it begins the process of deterioration, and that theoretically is dying. The Bible says, but you see it yourself, that we have come from the dust of the earth and to the dust of the earth we will go. Psalm 103 says that 'God knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust'.

Let me just say for a moment that every now and again a false prophet comes up in Christendom and preaches to us a new gospel that there is the redemption of the body now - in other words, that we can claim as our right never to be sick as Christians! But no matter how fervently these men believe that false doctrine, and how faithfully they preach it, all of them take a cold when they sit in a draught, all of them get a sore tummy when they eat too much, and all the faith healers that have ever existed are all dead - because they all suffered corruption! The fact of the matter is, if you want to read your future - it's not very heartening, but it's found in Ecclesiastes 12 and verses 1 to 7, all the things that will start to go. Your teeth will start to go, your eyesight will start to go, I'll not to any further it will only depress you! But the point of this message is: thank God there is redemption for the body! It's not the end of it all, and you remember that as Martha stood at the grave of her brother Lazarus, and the Lord Jesus Christ said: 'Roll ye away the stone' - she said: 'Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days' - decomposition had set in because his body had been buried in corruption, but the words that the Lord Jesus Christ was about to speak brought him back! He didn't have the body that we'll have, but one day we're going to get it, and this corruption will put on incorruption. As Peter said: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible' - incorruptible! - 'and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you'.

Bodies without any sickness - do you hear that, you that are crippled with pains and aches and weakness? Bodies with no more decay, no more deterioration, no more death - for the corruptible will put on incorruption. Here's the second contrast: the dishonour of this old body will put on glory. Look at verse 43: 'It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory'. This is now talking about the valueless old body, in other words from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden we lost our capacity to please God - it was diminished, we couldn't please God as we should with our body, with our soul, or with our spirit. Paul is saying that that dishonour that has been brought upon us, because we are all the sons and daughters of Adam, will be discarded and changed into the glorious glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our resurrection bodies we will be enabled to praise God and please God through all eternity!

I can't please God for a minute, but one day I'll please Him forever. Paul says that's why we are not citizens of this realm, but we have our conversation, our way of life, in heaven from which we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body of humiliation that it may be fashioned unto the likeness of His body of glory. Dishonour to glory - I hope this is whetting your appetite. Thirdly in contrast: weakness with power. Verse 43, the second half: 'It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power'. What Paul is getting at now is ability, the ability of this new body in contrast to the ability of the bodies that we have now. You've lost the ability, haven't you? You maybe don't walk as quickly as you used to walk, maybe you can't retain the figures in your mind or even the verses that you could one day. My friend, listen: physically, mentally, spiritually this body will be new in its powerful ability to do. The body that we have now, as one writer put it, a draught of air or a drop of water can kill him. We are limited in this life so often simply because of the necessary limitations of the body. Time and time again our physical constitution says to our visions and our plans: 'thus far and no further', and we are often frustrated because we are what we are.

What about the realm of the weakness that we have in our bodies regarding sin? Is that not a weakness in itself? Trying to stay awake this morning as I'm praying and as I'm reading? But one day there'll be no more struggle, no more temptation - as the Lord Jesus said to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they couldn't wait with Him and watch one hour in prayer, He said: 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'. But on that day when I get my resurrection body anything that my heavenly spirit determines to do, my heavenly body will be able and willing to accomplish! What about that? You will be what you have wanted to be!

Weakness will put on power, and then finally verse 44: 'It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body' - natural will give way to spiritual. Now we're talking about the sphere of this body, the realm that it inhabits. The natural body that we have is made only for this sphere in which we function physically, but we're going to get a spiritual body. You remember, we don't have time to read it, but in Luke chapter 20 the Sadducees and Pharisees were debating over the question of resurrection - you remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in it - and one very clever clogs said to the Lord Jesus: 'What about this law in Moses where the brother has to marry the widow of his brother?'. Therefore there was this woman, they gave an example, who had been married to seven different husbands through that means of death and remarriage in the Levitical law - whose wife will she be on the day of resurrection? The Lord Jesus' reply was: 'You don't know what you're talking about, you're ignorant not knowing the Scriptures, for we shall be like angels' - i.e. bodies fitted for eternity, not for time; spiritual bodies rather than physical bodies. You'll not be giving and taking in marriage in heaven! 'Praise the Lord for that', some of you're saying - aren't you!

The fact of the matter is, friends, the natural will put on the spiritual - in this very book in chapter 6 and verse 13 we read about the issue of meats. Not only won't there be physical relationships like the relationships sexually between a man and a woman, we will be like the angels - the digestive system will probably be very different, verse 13: 'Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them'. God will destroy the belly, yet we'll still be able to eat because there's the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the

Lord Jesus - remember - made breakfast for the disciples on the beach and He ate with them, and He broke bread - but this is not a natural body, it's a spiritual body that won't have the physical relationships that we used to have. Not that we'll not know husbands or wives or anything like that, that's not what I'm talking about, but we'll not live in this natural realm any more. We mightn't be the same as the angels, but we will be perfectly fitted for the eternal realm.

Now don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here, this is very important. When Paul says a spiritual body he does not mean a non-material body, he doesn't mean that we're going to be disembodied spirits floating around the place. It is a physical body that is spiritual - you might say that's a contradiction. Well, the Lord Jesus, when He rose again in Luke 24 said: 'A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have'. The word for 'natural' here is the Greek word 'psukikos' (sp?) which is derivative from the word that we get 'soul' from, 'psuchae' (sp?). We could translate this that our natural body is a 'soulish' body, that means a sensual body - I told you at the start that the soul is made up of the mind, the emotion and the will - what we relate in our personality to this realm, and our body is controlled by our mind, by our emotions, and by our will. But this new body, this resurrection body, is not a 'psukikos' body, it is not soul-governed, but the Greek word for 'spiritual' here is 'neumatikos' (sp?) which is 'spiritual body'. This is a body, literally, that will be controlled not by our mind or emotions and decisions, but will be controlled by the spirit, the animating force of our new body will be the spirit, the human spirit motivated by the Spirit of God.

I know all this is hard to take in, but can I put it in the words of Dr A. J. Gordon who said: 'Now, here and now, the body bears the spirit. We carry about in our body the spirit, a slow chariot whose wheels are often disabled, and whose swiftest motion is but laboured and tardy - but then the spirit will bear the body, carrying it on wings of thought whithersoever it will'. The body bears the spirit, and our cry often is: 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death? The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, I can't get to prayer as often as I ought, I can't read as often as I ought and keep the attention as I would like, I can't witness as often' - we all get these gripes, and some of us are worthy of them, all of us are I'm sure - but the fact of the matter is: there's a day coming when our spirit will bear those bodies to the errands of the Son of God for all eternity, for His glory forever and ever, Amen.

The natural will put on spiritual - here's the final crescendo, I'm going to take off on this one. Verses 45 to 49, the characteristics of this new body - here is the fourth way that he answers this question: 'How will the dead be raised?', and it's to show simply that the prototype for the resurrection body already exists. Verse 45: 'So it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul' - God breathed into him, he's quoting Genesis now, 2:7 - 'the last Adam was made a quickening spirit'. The life that God gave Adam in the Garden of Eden was natural life, but the life that Christ gives us through His death and resurrection, and even when He breathed on His disciples in the upper room, what did He say? 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit'.

'Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural', here's a good principle here in verse 46. What is he saying? He's saying that life starts in the natural realm, that which is born of blood and of water - but then the second birth is the spiritual birth. The natural comes first, the spiritual comes second, and you have to keep the order that God gives. But it also refers to the Lord Jesus coming after Adam, and the Lord Jesus being the progenitor of a race that had not yet been that would last for all eternity, a race after His own image. Look at verse 47: 'The first man is of the earth, earthy' - by the way, the Hebrew word for 'Adam' literally means 'red dust' - Adam was made of the red dust, earthy. This doesn't just mean that he was made from the dust, or he came from earth, this is talking primarily about his characteristics, it's talking about who he was like - he was grounded in the earth, he came from the earth, but the second man is the Lord from heaven! His characteristics and His nature was heavenly.

Now here's a blessing if ever there was one: 'As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also

bear the image of the heavenly'. What are you bearing tonight? Scars that this old natural body has left? Scars of death, scars of disease, scars of disappointment, scars of sin - one day, if you are in Christ, if you're related to Him who is the heavenly One, if you're in His race, as sure as you've borne the scars of the earthly you will bear the glory of the heavenly! I can't imagine it, can you?

'Beloved, now are we the sons of God', John says, 'and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'. It doesn't mean we'll all look like the Lord Jesus, we will be like Him in nature, and in image, and in characteristic - the characteristic of our new body will be the Lord Jesus Christ, just imagine it! He Himself said in Matthew 13, one day: 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father'. One day heaven will radiate like the sun in blazing and magnificent glory, which - wonder of wonders - the Lord will share with us.

That glory will be ours - Romans 8, here it is, let me read this as I finish: 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'. Look at verse 28 for a moment: 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified'. Verse 35: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

Are you looking forward to it? To get out of these old bodies and into a new one that will glorify God, and enjoy Him forever?

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 42*

## ***"The Death Of Death"***

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### **I Corinthians 15:50-58**

- I. The Change (verses 50-53)**
- II. The Conquest (verses 54-56)**
- III. The Credit (verse 57)**
- IV. The Challenge (verse 58)**

**F**irst Corinthians 15 again, don't forget all the recordings are available from the tape room upstairs of all the studies in Corinthians, and also the studies in this particular chapter on the subject of resurrection. We're looking tonight at verses 50 to 58, the final verses of the chapter, under the title: 'The Death of Death', or you could entitle it also 'Victory over Death'.

We'll read from verse 50: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".

Sigmund Freud, who was lauded to be the founder of psychology, once wrote these words after considering all the ailments of the mind that men and women suffer from in our age, he said: 'And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be'. He is symptomatic in telling us that the world that we live in has no answer to the painful open wound of death. They do not know how to answer the enigma of our own fatality and mortality. But the fact of the matter is, as Christians tonight, isn't it wonderful to know that as the world around us looks to one another and looks to philosophers, looks to intellectuals, looks to scientists to theorise why we must live and why we die as we do, that we have the answer to it all in the person of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this longest chapter that Paul has penned for us so far in the first epistle to the Corinthians, he has dealt in great detail with the subject of how we have the answer to death in the fact - and mark that - in the fact, indisputable watertight evidential fact, that Jesus has risen from the grave, and because He lives we shall live also. We saw in verses 1 to 11 that Paul gives us in great forensic detail the evidence for the resurrection of Christ - why we must believe and can believe that Jesus truly rose from the grave, literally, in a bodily resurrection. Then we moved on in verses 12 through to 19, and we looked at the repercussions if there be no resurrection of Christ, and also if there be no resurrection of ourselves in likeness of Christ. Then we looked at verses 20 to 28, and we looked at God's resurrection programme, the order in which God intends to resurrect people. Then in verses 29 to 34 we looked at our resurrection incentives, why it is so important as Christians to allow the resurrection to be our motivation in what we do for the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week

we spent some time looking at verses 35 to 49, at the description and explanation that Paul gives us of our resurrection bodies, what our bodies will be like. The Corinthians, you remember, said to Paul: 'How shall we be resurrected? How is it possible that dead men and women, even in Christ, shall be bodily resurrected?'

Now tonight we come in verses 50 to 58 to Paul's conclusion. He brings to us in a great crescendo, a great climax of this massive subject of the resurrection, how the resurrection of Jesus Christ brings to us, Christians in Christ who one day will be resurrected again: we have victory over death! The resurrection brings us victory over death, and in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ what we effectively have is the death of death! What a hope that is! I love that Christian word 'hope', and it is a Christian word. So much of the time today it's misunderstood, it's thought to be an airy-fairy wish: 'I hope this is going to happen' - a lack of certainty, just some kind of desire within your heart but no real assurance to back it up. But that is not the Christian hope, the Christian hope is a certainty that because Christ lives we shall live also!

That Christian certainty was captured in the epitaph of Benjamin Franklin, he wrote it himself before he died, and it is etched on his tombstone in Christchurch Cemetery in Philadelphia in the United States, and it goes like this - listen very carefully: 'The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms - but the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant addition, revised and corrected by the Author'. Isn't that lovely? That is our hope - that though worms, as Job says, eat my flesh; one day I will stand in my flesh, and I will see God for I know that my Redeemer liveth!

So Paul tells us at this wonderful climax conclusion that he brings to us at the end of his great treatise on resurrection, he tells us four things that we're going to look at tonight. He talks first of all about the change, and how that change will be wrought - how the change will be wrought. We looked at the mechanics, if you like, the logistics of the resurrection body last week, but what we're going to look at this evening is who will be changed, who will be changed, how will they be changed, how will it happen, and when will they be changed. Those three questions: who, how, and when. Then we'll look in verses 54 to 56 at the conquest, what victory do we actually have through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus? Then we'll look at the credit: who do we thank for such a great prospect that we have in view? Then finally, as many times we find in Paul's epistles and writings, there's always a challenge - he comes at the end of this great chapter, at the end of this message, with an appeal as to what manner of men and women ought we to be because of these truths that we have learnt?

So let's look first of all at the change that is wrought here, let's look at verse 50: 'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption'. Now you remember the Corinthians were starting to think, through the vain philosophy of the Corinthian Greek philosophers, that it was an utter impossibility that people should rise physically from the grave. But what Paul is saying here is that it's not an impossibility, neither is it undesirable, but it is of absolute necessity that we rise again from the grave and that our bodies are changed - why? Because flesh and blood, ordinary flesh and blood, cannot inherit the kingdom of God - and when the kingdom of God is mentioned here it means the heavenly aspect of the kingdom of God, i.e. the eternal state and heaven that we read of in the last chapter of the book of Revelation.

Like the reason why a caterpillar does not fly until it goes through that transforming metamorphosis to make it into a butterfly, you and I in our present state are fitted for this physical world, we are not fitted for the eternal. We die, and we must needs die, and that little seed dies in the ground, and then there comes a great change where the force of resurrection works within us, and what comes forth is a different body - the same identity but a different form, because we cannot inherit the kingdom of God in the flesh and blood which we are in just now this evening.



Now there are some inferences that we must take from that statement of Paul. The first is this: that the resurrection body does not consist of purely flesh and blood. Now bear with me on this one, because it's important that we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. Look what he says in verse 15, he does not say 'neither flesh nor blood inherit the kingdom of God'. He does not say 'neither flesh nor blood', but rather he says 'flesh and blood' - the emphasis is these two together. This point that he is making is: our bodies physically, in which we inhabit this physical realm with, is animated by blood going through our veins - 'the life of the flesh is in the blood'. But this resurrection body, as we saw last week, is not a natural body that is animated by blood, but it is a spiritual body that is not controlled by our souls - i.e. our intellect, our emotions and our will - but these resurrection bodies that we will have will be animated and activated by the spirit with the Holy Ghost upon it. Do you understand that? Yes, we'll have flesh, it will not be the same flesh as we have tonight - as we saw last week there are different types of flesh, flesh of beasts and all the rest as we read - it will be a different type of flesh, but it will be flesh nevertheless. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ said to the doubting disciples: 'Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh as ye see me have'. The fact of the matter is: the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood, and He was transformed, even He was transformed before He returned into the presence of His Father. The reason why we cannot enter into the kingdom of God with the flesh and blood that we have is because these bodies that we live in are corruptible, and anything corruptible cannot inherit that which is incorruptible - do you understand? These bodies that we live in, they decay. The human body that we possess is affected by disease, it is smote eventually by death, and therefore cannot inherit incorruption - and that is why we have to be made different. We have to be totally changed and transformed to enter into the kingdom of God, the eternal state, and our identity continues - I'll still be David Legge - but the body will change.

Now, because Paul says this, all that he has said thus far, I think - and I'm reading between the lines here - but I think Paul is anticipating this in the Corinthian's minds, that they're perhaps thinking that he's talking so much about those that have died in Christ, that he's perhaps ignoring the prospect of those who are living, those who he's writing to and maybe those who are asking questions of him. I imagine that in their minds, certainly in the mind of Paul anticipating this in their minds, they're asking the question: 'What would happen to our bodies when the Lord comes? What will happen to us? You're talking, and you've used the illustration Paul, that the seed has to die to bring forth much fruit' - so if you have to die, and the old body has to die before the new body can come forth, these Corinthians are probably saying 'What about we who are alive when the Lord Jesus comes back again? If you have to die to get this new body, what's going to happen to us?'. What about the living?

So, in answer to that question, Paul says in verse 51: 'Behold, I shew you a mystery' - he gives them the answer in what he calls a mystery. Now let's make a definition here that we've done throughout this book, but maybe you haven't been here - a mystery in the New Testament is not something mysterious, it's not some kind of spooky enigma or puzzle that nobody can work out, but in the New Testament a Biblical mystery is a truth that had never ever been revealed before to anyone. It was hidden through the past ages, it was unknown, but now it is revealed in the New Testament to the apostles and to the saints who received the apostle's teaching. Now please let this sink into your mind and heart for just a moment: what a privileged people we are tonight to be post-Calvary, to be post-resurrection and ascension, to be post-the finishing of the canon of Scripture, and to be sitting here tonight and be party to a mystery that the great prophets and patriarchs and priests of the past in the Old Testament never ever knew! They never got a look into this fact!

Now you might say to me: 'But David, did you not prove to us in previous weeks that the resurrection is to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures?' - yes, that is the truth. That is the truth, but the mystery that Paul is talking about here is not the truth of resurrection, but rather he is talking here about the fact that you'll not even need to die to have this new body - in fact, if you're alive when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, you will be changed as the dead in Christ will be. That is the mystery, never before had it been revealed to men. So he tells them in verse 51: 'We shall not all sleep' - that had never been heard of before! - 'but we shall all

be changed'. I think a better rendering would be: 'We shall not all fall asleep'; we shall not all, as believers, die; not every believer will pass through death. Now that's very hard for us to conceive of and really reason and rationalise in our mind, because we continually live in the midst of death; but Paul is saying: 'Look, this is a fact that has been hidden through all the ages, this is a mystery that I'm revealing to you now, that Christians may not die! You may not die! In fact there will be a generation of Christians who will not die, therefore you don't have to die to be changed, all you have to do is be in Christ when He comes, whether in the grave or out of the grave' - and his point is this: whatever you are, wherever you are, as long as you're in Christ, we shall all be changed! Isn't that wonderful? The equality that is in Christ here!

Now remember he's talking to the Corinthians, in all their sin and backsliding, and he's telling them whether your brethren and sisters are dead in the grave, or whether you're living, when Christ comes we shall all be changed. Now I think I'd be right in saying that most of us here, most of the time, expect to die some day - is that not true? From the youngest to the oldest, we expect to die, we maybe even think about death - but the fact of the matter is: do we ever have a consciousness of this in our mind, that we might never die? We may never have a funeral, there may never be a wake for you or for me, there may never be a tombstone, there may never be a need to pick a coffin, they may never sing my favourite hymns around my grave - because Jesus may come, and I may not die! Wouldn't that be wonderful if you didn't even need to die to be changed? Wouldn't that be the icing on the cake if you didn't even have to go through death, the dying of the seed, until the new life came forth? But the Lord Jesus Christ, as it says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, the Lord Jesus will come and 'the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we that are alive and remain will be caught up together to be with the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord'.

Death or life doesn't disenfranchise the child of God from this new body - all believers, all believers will be changed, all believers will be equally equipped for heaven. So there is the answer to the question 'Who will be changed?' - all of us! Dead or alive! Now here's the next question he answers: how? What is the process? If you look at it he says in verse 52: 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'. Now please note this, verse 52, this is not a process, it's not a process of supernatural metamorphosis. There is an instantaneous re-creation, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Now you see that word 'moment', in the Greek language it is the word 'atomos' which we get 'atom' from - you've heard of the atom bomb. 'Atomos' denotes that which cannot be cut, or that which cannot be divided - so what Paul is saying here is that this is the smallest conceivable quantity of time that cannot be divided into quarters or sixths or eighths or hundredths. It's such a small split-second that it cannot be divided one more time, like an atom. In that space of time you will be changed.

Oh, I hope this is sinking into your heart - in a moment! Here he says, further to illustrate it to us, 'in the twinkling of an eye' - the sense is a scintillation. He's not talking now about a wink, or a blink, he's talking about something quicker, something like light from the sun just flashing and hitting your eye - that quick! In the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, we will be changed, totally transformed - we'll not be waiting around a split-second for it, something that can't even be split. Now have you ever sat down and meditated upon that fact for just a few seconds - have you? Have you ever contemplated what this means, and the implications for many believers in Christ at this very hour? For some dear children that we are regularly praying for, this very night they're lying in hospital beds, and they are weak and they're suffering, and some of them are dying. They're enduring days of pain and nights of agony, and some of them are crying and soul-distressed: 'O Lord, how long, how long must this go on?' - and there's going to come a day when one moment they're in excruciating pain, and the next moment, before they can even think, they're up in the air with Christ and they're in a body without pain, without suffering, without trial! I doubt we don't think of this enough...

What about poor souls, and Christians are not immune from this, who have mental illnesses, or whose minds fail them - whether it be from diseases like Alzheimer's, or just the stresses of life? Some poor folk even that

name the name of Christ are shut away in what we could call asylums for want of a more understandable name. There they are, cut off from the rest of humanity, depressed, anxious, discouraged, distressed, despairing, maybe even thinking that the God of heaven has forsaken them and left them alone - but in a moment, in a split-second, less than that, they will be caught up to be with Christ, and they will have the intelligence perhaps greater even than an angel, and they will look into the very face of the Lord Jesus Christ and know that He leaves or for forsakes no one.

It's no wonder Paul in another place calls this 'the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ' - is it not a blessed hope? Is it not? We've just been talking about physical things and mental things, what about spiritual things? Can I ask you tonight how long you've been saved? You can remember the night or the day that you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ - I can remember - the night that you ventured all upon the claims of Christ, and you repented of your sin, and you gave Him completely your life in repentance and faith. Can I ask you: what progress have you made since that day? How have you come on? How many years are you saved? Who's 50 years saved? Put your hand up if you're 50 years saved - you're giving your age away now! Forty years saved? Twenty years saved? Where are you tonight in comparison to where you were then, and where did you think you would be 50 years on? Come on, be honest! Did you think you would be the way you are tonight? We would have to all of us, no matter how long saved we are, go down memory lane and retrace many a failure in the eyes of God, many a crises when we didn't turn to God as we should, many temptations which we've fallen into, many heartaches and pains that were brought upon us not of our own doing, disasters that surrounded us day by day. It's even more mind-blowing when we think of this fact: that even with the Spirit's help it's taken us as long as it has to get to where we are tonight in our present state of spiritual maturity, whatever that may be - but imagine, in less than a split-second, the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, we will be changed! What we couldn't do even with the Spirit's help on this earth, the Lord Jesus Christ will do without even a moment's notice to even contemplate it or think about it for ourselves. In a moment - oh, the speed of it!

Isn't it wonderful? I'll tell you, when God does a job He does it right. There's no Purgatory here where the flesh is burned out of you for hundreds or thousands of years before you're fit for the kingdom of God, that's not what we have here - in the twinkling of an eye, in a moment we are changed because we are in Christ. Why is it a thing so wonderful to some when you imagine that in Genesis 1, 2 and 3 God spoke - and here is it evidenced that He didn't in some way use evolution in His own providential purposes to bring creation into being - He spoke then and the whole world sprang into obedience according to His creative power. Omnipotent God! And on that day He will speak and re-creation will come into being. Oh it was a wonderful blessing to me today to think about this: it'll not take millions of years for Almighty God to make me a new creation. I couldn't do it in a million years on my own, and I vouch to say I couldn't even do it down here in these worldly circumstances with the flesh that I'm in even with the help of the Holy Ghost - but then He will do what no one has been able to do, in the fraction of a second, isn't it wonderful?

Then he says, being more specific about when - we've looked at who and how, but when this will happen. He says 'At the last trump' - I don't have time to deal with this, but it's not the last heavenly trumpet to be sounded in the book of Revelation. The reason why that is, in 1 Thessalonians 4, this trumpet is called 'the trumpet of God', it's not the trumpet of an angel that you read about in Revelation, it's called 'the trump of God'. It's called 'the last trump' - why is it called 'the last trump'? Well, 'the last trump' was an expression that was used in Paul's day by the common Roman army. What used to happen was, when the Roman army was in camp, and the camp was about to be broken up and they were going to move on - whether it was in the middle of the night or the middle of the day - the trumpet sounded, and it usually sounded three times. The first trumpet that was blown, the first blast signified that they were to strike the tents, pull out the tent pegs and prepare to depart - they were to get ready. The second trumpet that was blown meant that they were to fall into line, into their segregations, into their troops and their regiments just before going. Then the third trump was called 'the last trump', and when it sounded that was the sign - no further order was needed - to

march away.

I don't know how long it was since you heard the first trump, when the Lord Jesus called you in the Gospel and told you to take the old tent pegs from this earth, and you took up your cross and you followed Him in repentance and faith and were saved. I hope tonight that you've heard the second trump, and you've gathered together with the people of God in the ranks of the blessed and the redeemed, awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there's going to come a day, very soon I believe, when the last trump will sound and we will march away! Won't it be wonderful at the end of the age of grace, the church age?

During the United States Civil War there was a group of soldiers who spent a winter's night without their tents in the open field. During the night there was a great snowfall of several inches, and at dawn one of the chaplains - up very early, probably for prayer - reported a strange sight. He said that all the snow-covered soldiers lying on their beds, they looked like the mounds of new graves. At dawn when the bugle of the revelry sounded one man immediately stood up and rose from that mound of snow, one by one by one, and that Chaplain's mind immediately went to 1 Corinthians 15, and he thought of the last trump and the dead being raised! But isn't it wonderful that we can say tonight, whether dead or alive, we all shall be changed and this corruption shall put on incorruption!

That Greek word 'put on' was commonly used for putting on your clothes, and what Paul is saying here is that our redeemed spirits will one day very soon put on redeemed bodies, and we will be complete. Doesn't he talk about it in another place, in 2 Corinthians 5, turn to it for a moment - 2 Corinthians 5 verse 1: 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this body', this present one, 'we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed', we don't want our spirits to be released from any body, 'but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life' - to have an immortal body, an incorruptible one - 'Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit'. What a change, eh?

I hope we meditate on it much, we have to move on because he then talks in verses 54 to 56 about the conquest. Look at verse 54: 'So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory'. Now I want you to notice, before we go on any further in verse 54, that there are two groups mentioned here. There is the corruptible who will put on incorruption, and there is the mortal who shall put on immortality. Now there is a distinction here: the corruptible refers to those who have died, whose flesh has corrupted; but there's a different sense speaking about those who are mortal because someone who is mortal has not died. Those who are mortal are described here as putting on immortality, so there's a sense here, I think, that what is being described is those who are dead in Christ and those who are alive when Christ comes again who are in Him. Those who are dead in Christ, their corruption in the grave will put on incorruption; those who are alive in their mortality will put on immortality. Whatever it is, we shall all be changed.

Romans 8 and verse 10 tells us: 'If Christ be in you, the body is dead', do you hear that? 'If Christ be in you, the body is dead' - that's a difficult verse for a lot of people to understand, and sometimes it's more clear when you add one little word, the word 'still': 'the body is still dead'. If you are in Christ the body is still dead - what am I talking about? If you're a believer in Christ the Spirit of God dwells in you, but your body's still dying. Because you're saved it doesn't make any difference to your body - no matter what other people may tell us in the charismatic realms - the body is still dying, because it is the Adamic sentence of our fallen nature, even for the believer, that our bodies waste away. That's why Paul said: 'Dying thou shalt die'. But your spirit, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 that we've just read and verse 5, is the earnest - it's like the

guarantee, or the deposit of what will be paid later, there's a pledge that we will be given a new body because the Spirit of God lives in us. Listen to Romans 8:11: 'But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you'. That is the conquest - yes, we're dying tonight, even though we're saved; God doesn't give us a new body right away as soon as we trust Christ, but this is what we have to look forward to, this is the hope of the Lord Jesus as Romans 6:9 says: 'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him'.

In other words, death is not the master over our Lord Jesus Christ because He died, and in dying He put sin to death, and in rising again from the grave He put death to death, and because His Spirit is in us we know that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead will raise us from the dead one day. My dear friends, we would be liars tonight if we said that death was not still an enemy to us all. Although, as we have been singing, we no longer fear death, it still violates our lives, it breaks up our nearest and dearest relationships, it destroys our families and friends are torn apart day by day across our land, and even in the homes that belong to Christ - but there is a day coming, Paul says, when death will be swallowed up in victory. He quotes Isaiah 25 and verse 8, 'Death shall be swallowed up in victory', and the wonderful change that will happen to our bodies when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, whether we're dead or alive, not only will signify a wonderful change but a wonderful conquest that death, our enemy, has finally been defeated - the death of death!

Please note this that the coming of the Lord Jesus and the changing of our vile bodies of humiliation into the likeness of His glorious resurrection body, it doesn't just halt the death process, it doesn't just stop its effect in our lives, but it effectually goes back and robs from death all of its previous victories, all the knots that it has tied in our lives and the lives of our families, Jesus will go back through it all and restore everything to His wonderful redemption glory!

That's why he says in verse 55: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' - Hosea 13:14 he's quoting. This, I believe, is a taunt at death - isn't it? 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' - and it's only my imagination, but I just wonder will this be a song that we'll be singing as we're going up to glory? We'll have been changed, and we'll be singing: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'. Let's look at that wee word 'sting' just for a moment. Most of you are familiar with bee-stings, and if you know anything about bees you will know this: the stinger of a bee is a sharp organ that's connected with a poison gland, and when a bee stings you it leaves the organ, that stinger, in the victim. I'm led to believe that a bee only stings once because of that reason, because it leaves its stinger in the victim, and because it has lost its ability to sting it therefore loses all future effectiveness because its sting has gone! Do you see what Paul is saying here? 'O death, where is thy sting?', can we answer that question, 'Where is your sting, death?' - do you know what death would have to say? 'My sting was put into Christ at Calvary, and because it's in Him it will never be in you'.

Death left its sting in our Lord Jesus Christ, and now when death hits us even in our own mortality, it is a stingless process and the grave has been robbed of its victory. Because the sting of death is sin, it's the wages of sin that is death, the harm in death has been caused by sin, and the power of sin is the law - because you don't even know you're a sinner in a sense until the law is given. Paul said in Romans 4: 'for where no law is, there is no transgression', but the fact of the matter is tonight that death for the believer has been swallowed up in victory, but there's a day coming in the full consummation of when we will be given our resurrection bodies, when death will be totally defeated completely and finally!

Does this not encourage your hearts tonight? Does it not? How many of our loved ones have been cruelly devoured by death? How many folk, since the beginning of time, Genesis 1, 2 and 3, have been swallowed up in death? Listen to me now, I was thinking as I was studying this today of a wee couple of verses in

Proverbs 30:15 and 16 - listen to these verses: 'There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough' - here they are - 'The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough' - but the first of those is the grave. When has the grave stopped swallowing up victims? It has an insatiable appetite, but praise God we can say tonight in the good of it that not only is a greater than Solomon here, and a greater than Moses and Aaron is here, and a greater than Jonah is here, and a greater than the angels is here, but a greater than death is here! He has swallowed up death in His glorious victory, He has satisfied the insatiable in His own death.

"He hell in hell laid low,  
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew,  
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,  
And death, by dying, slew".

Hallelujah, what a Saviour! What a change! What a conquest! Thirdly: what credit is due to His name - verse 57: 'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Who here tonight can live sinlessly? Put your hand up if you can live sinlessly - even after your conversion you can't do it, and you're a liar if you say you can do it, for John says that if we say we have no sin we not only make ourselves liars, but we make God a liar. None of us can do it, none of us can fulfil God's holy law, and then when we do sin there's not one of us here tonight, by anything that we can do, that can remove one of those sins committed - and none of us, surely, can remove the consequences of our sins. None of us can cheat death, none of us can avoid or escape the grave, and if we're without Christ none of us can escape hell and eternal damnation and judgment upon our sin - but thanks be unto God that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, why? Because on our behalf Jesus Christ, the sinless spotless Son of God, lived a sinless life for us. Oh sometimes we run all too quick to the cross, that's the most important thing - the life of Christ is not vicarious in the sense that Calvary is, but never you forget that He lived a perfect life that fulfilled completely the law of God. For that reason He was a perfect sacrifice, and He went to Calvary and He removed the sin that we have, He satisfied a holy God with a vicarious effectual sacrifice - and then He buried, rose again from the grave, victorious over death in his resurrection! All the victory accomplished for us He has given to us!

Is that why Paul says in Galatians: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree'. You never lose the sight of this, believer: He took your condemnation, He took your curse, and as He took all your sin and your guilt and your judgment, He gives you His victory in its place - how can we not thank God for Him? How can we not praise Him? Why do our hearts not overflow and burst with joy because of our salvation? The writer to the Hebrews put it well when he said: 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'.

Death's sting is gone, the grave's victory is robbed; death is declawed, it's defanged, it's disarmed, it's destroyed - and one day very soon it will be finally completed, as we read in Revelation 20 where death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire, 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away'. Glory to God! What a change! What a conquest! What credit is due to the Lord Jesus Christ who gives us the victory!

Here finally Paul brings us, verse 58, to the challenge - let's not miss this, whatever we do: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'. The challenge! What is Paul saying? He's saying this: if you folk here in the Iron Hall tonight really believe all this about the resurrection that you've been studying down

through all these weeks of this chapter, you need to be steadfast, unmoveable - that's negative, it means simply you've got to stay right where you are being seated and settled. Now it's not talking about inertia, or lethargy, or laziness, it's talking about doctrinally in the truth that you've received around the cross, the resurrection and the glory of a risen Redeemer, you've got to stand unmoveable and steadfast in all of the wealth of that truth imparted to you. Here's the positive - don't move, negative - positive: always abounding in the work of the Lord. Abounding! Abounding! The sense is 'continually doing over and above the requirements that's asked of you', it's the idea of exceeding, overflowing, overdoing in what God gives you.

How easy are some of us moved away from God's will, eh? Sure half of us don't even know if we're in it or not! Paul says 'Get in it, and don't get out of it, and do all you can for God in the midst of it. Don't move a hair's breadth'. Remember he said to the Ephesians: 'be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine', but understand what the Bible teaches and what you believe, and get on with the work and don't move an inch in your doctrine...but move as much as you can in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, what Paul is saying here is: if you abandon the truth of the resurrection, you will abandon your ways and your standards to the standards of this world. If there's no resurrection there'll be no consequences for the way that you're living here now down here, there'll be no motivation for reward of selfless service and a sanctified life - it's all gone if there's no resurrection! So hold onto this truth, live every day in the light of the glorious appearing of our Lord and your changed body, and your life will be transformed now. How many of us are doing that? How many of us are abounding in the work of the Lord? How many of us say: 'Well, I've served my time, I've done my part, let others do the work now, there are plenty of other people that can fall in line'? Let me say that rest in the work of God is important, and it's very necessary, but what Paul is saying here I believe is that if we're ever going to err, we should err on the side of doing too much rather than doing too little! God has preserved many a man into old age working for the Lord, and blessed men like that, but there's many men's lives that have been shortened because they were abounding in the work of the Lord. Read about Henry Martyn, the missionary to India and Persia, who said: 'I am determined to burn myself out for God', and he did just that by the age of 35. David Brainerd, the first missionary to the American Indians, died before he reached the age of 30; as did Robert Murray M'Cheyne the great Scottish preacher. Because they over-abounded, they gave much more than their due, exceeding requirements, overflowing, overdoing for God - why? Because they didn't live for here, they lived for there!

What about Jim Elliot? He said he wanted to be a flame that burned out for God, and he was the one who said: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose' - and that's why God said: 'Well, I'll take your life, and give you the glory of a martyr in heaven'. What about Epaphroditus? We don't know much about him, but we know this: Paul says in Philippians he was a brother, a companion and labourer, and a fellow soldier - and Paul says of him that he was nigh unto death for the work of Christ. He was working to death for the Lord Jesus! How many are like that? Who invest all their time, all their money, all their energies, all their effort, all their blood, sweat and tears in the work of Christ - why? Because it's worth it in eternity, and it will last for all eternity. Let us never forget, with all our doctrines and all our meditations on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the Lord Jesus says: 'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give to every man according to his work'.

Oh, we sing: 'When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more; and the dawning breaks eternal, bright and fair' - what about the last verse:

'Let us labour for the Master,  
From the dawn 'til setting sun;  
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care.  
Then when all our life is over, when it's spent,

And our work on earth is done,  
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there'.

Let me tell you this: at the end of this chapter, that the truth of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fact of a resurrection should never ever make us theoretical, never make us idle Christians who sit looking for His coming and doing nothing! But if any truth has affected me of late - I'll tell you this - and wanted to spur me on to do something for Christ, and gripped my soul to work for God, it has been my resurrection! Whatever your work is tonight it's not a waste, it's not in vain in the Lord, it's an investment - why? Because the best is yet to be! Can I leave you with of poem of challenge as to what you're do with the talents that God has given to you? Listen, it's only a few lines:

If I have strength I owe the service of the strong  
If melody I have I owe the world a song  
If I can stand when all about my post are falling  
If I can run with speed when needy hearts are calling  
And if my torch can light the dark of any night  
Then I must pay the debt I owe with living light!

If heaven's grace has showered me with some rare gifts;  
If I can lift some load no other strength can lift.  
If I can heal some wound no other hand can heal.  
If some great truth the speaking skies reveal;  
Then I must go a broken wounded thing,  
If to a wounded world my gifts no healing bring'.

Jesus is coming soon, you will be changed soon - will you be unmoveable, will you be found abounding in the work of the Lord?

Oh, our Father, what can we say? Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift, thanks be unto God for the victory that He has given us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, there's no words that can describe the gratitude that's in our hearts tonight, for all that the Saviour has done for us in His death and through the agonies of Calvary, and through the glorious victories and triumph of the empty tomb. But we want to say tonight: Lord, may we be different from the knowledge of it, and may it penetrate our hearts tonight, and may the very power of the resurrection - as Paul could say, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed unto His death. Praise the Saviour, ye who know Him, who can tell how much we owe Him? Come and let us render to Him all we are, and all we have. Amen.



# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 43*

## ***"Concerning Collections"***

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### **I Corinthians 16:1-4**

- I. Purposefully (verse 1)**
- II. Periodically (verse 2a)**
- III. Personally (verse 2b)**
- IV. Systematically (verse 2c)**
- V. Providentially (verse 2d)**
- VI. Proportionately (verse 2e)**
- VII. Preventatively (verse 2f)**
- VIII. Intelligently (verses 3, 4)**

**A**t last, some of you are saying, we've reached the last chapter of this epistle - 43 studies up to this evening, and I don't know how many it will take to get chapter 16 finished, but probably it will take us up to Easter or thereabouts. I would value your prayers too, as I consider the short series, or whatever it may be, that will take us up to the end of the season - so please do remember that in prayer as I consider that from now through to the Easter period. Tonight we're looking at this passage 'Concerning Collections', and the title is right out of our reading as you will see in verse one of chapter 16:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me".

Now let me just say that I couldn't possibly this evening take up everything with regards to the great subject of giving in this study just in one night. I commend to you four messages that I gave not so long ago on the subject 'The Grace of Giving'. We preached it on Sunday mornings, and not only did we preach it but we offered it at great bargain because the two tapes are free, two tapes with two messages on each - four messages free of charge, and the tape recording ministry offers those with no obligation at all, but you can consider a donation to the building fund! So I want to refer you to those two tapes because I will leave certain things out tonight with regards to giving, and we'll only be looking at the contextual theme of giving in this portion. So I'm not going to exhaust the subject by any stretch of the imagination tonight, but do get those tapes if you can.

Some people think it mercenary to preach on the subject of money, and I can understand that because many who have called themselves Christians have abused the subject often to their own gain. Because some churches or organisations and movements have gone into overkill financially, emphasising giving, many folk don't mention it at all. So there's a pendulum swing from the charismatic prosperity gospel that says God will bless you if you give as much as you can, God will give it all back to you and much much more, and really they're only making themselves richer and fatter financially - that has caused others to swing to the opposite end of a pendulum, and totally ignore the subject of money. We find that that is something that the apostle Paul, and none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, never ever does.

But here in this epistle in chapter 16, I can almost see the faces of the Corinthian believers grimacing as Paul

the apostle mentions to them this delicate subject of financial giving. Although some of them must have referred to it in their writing of an epistle to Paul, because we know that in this first epistle to the Corinthians he is answering the questions that the Corinthian had. We don't have their epistle, but we know that often when he touches on some of these subjects he is answering their questions. I think we can be in no doubt, when we read in verse 1, these words: 'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye'. He is answering their question on the subject of this collection that Paul was making for the saints in the city of Jerusalem.

We often grimace too when giving is mentioned, simply because the subject - maybe perhaps above any other subject - really hits us where it hurts: right in our pockets! The Lord Jesus Christ, didn't He say: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'? I think that tells a great tale as to why some people find this subject so difficult. Then in another place the Holy Spirit exhorts us, again through the apostle Paul, that God loves a cheerful giver - and the word in Greek is the one which we derive the word 'hilarious' from, you could almost translate it: 'God loves a hilarious giver'. He loves His people to be willing, not just financially, but in every respect of their giving to God, He wants them to give joyfully, He wants them to give liberally and hilariously.

Now is that the way Christians give? Christians often don't give their time like that, and we laboured yesterday morning talking about that special time with God, and so often it's like seeing how long we can stay under the water with one breath in our lungs. We see how long we can pray, or how long we can read our Bible, without getting so tired of it that we almost die! Sometimes giving is like that: we do it out of duty because we feel we have to do it as Christians, if we even do it at all it's not done joyfully. Vance Havner, that prolific writer and quip inventor, said that most Christians today give with the sentiment of the hymn: 'When we asunder part it gives us inward pain, but we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again'. But remarkably the apostle Paul moves - and I want you to see this - he moves from chapter 15, from talking to us about the great mystery of the resurrection, where we who are also alive, but also those who are dead in Christ, will be changed at the rapture of the church at the coming of the Lord Jesus - he moves from such a dignified and sacred subject to this subject concerning collections.

Now let me reinforce this by saying to you, as I have said before, that your New Testament doesn't have chapter divisions or verse divisions as you have here - and many of them are very intricately done, but the fact of the matter is that they're not in the original scriptures. There are no chapter 15 or 16 or verses 1 through to 58 of chapter 15, it's just not there. So in the Greek language chapter 15 runs fluently right into chapter 16, there's no division there - and what Paul is doing for us is, after us meditating upon the subject of Christ's resurrection and our own resurrection, he brings us back down to earth with a bump. He brings us from the future into the present, and he now starts to tell us how the life that is to come when Jesus comes again is chiefly related to the life that is now.

There's something very important in that fact that I do not want you to miss. It's this: when God gives us ever a glimpse of the end times in prophetic Scripture, or He gives us a vision of heaven through His holy word, always but always He gives us that privilege for the purpose of helping us down here on earth. He doesn't just give it to us for our fascination that we may know the times and the seasons, and we may be able to impress others who are unbelievers, or other Christians who don't believe what we believe, because of our great knowledge. That is the Corinthian spirit, remember - knowledge above others! But God gives us these visions that we, as the Lord Jesus said, may build up treasures in heaven while we are on earth.

So don't lose the import before we go into these verses 1 to 4, of why these verses come after chapter 15, and also why they come straight after his exhortation in verse 58. Let's remind ourselves of it in chapter 15, he has given them this great discourse on the resurrection that we've spent so much time looking at, and here's the real crescendo and climax of why he tells them about it: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast,

unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection for the saints...'. Is it not that the apostle Paul comes from the great subject of resurrection, exhorts them to always be over-abounding in the work of the Lord, and here's the chief example of a way that they can be doing that: over-abounding in their giving to the saints.

Please don't miss that, because what the apostle Paul is doing here is what he does right throughout all his epistles as far as I can see: he marries doctrine with duty, he marries worship and works - as the apostle James said: 'Faith without works is dead'. What Paul is telling us here tonight is, in chapter 15 married with chapter 16, the resurrection of Christ and your subsequent future resurrection one day ought to motivate you to give to God's people and to serve the Lord with all your might. In fact, what he is literally saying is: your resurrection glory can be enhanced by your giving to the saints, and if you give to the saints throughout your whole Christian pilgrimage, Paul says that that labour will never ever be in vain because the Lord is no man's debtor. Isn't that wonderful?

Now why does he specifically come to talk to the Corinthians about the subject of giving? Will we have known, if we have been taught nothing else over these weeks, that the church at Corinth was a church in disorder - wasn't it? If ever there was a church in disorder it was this one! In fact, right at the very beginning of chapter 1 we find that the body was in division, bodily there was division, there were factions. Some were saying: 'I am of Paul', 'I am of Apollos', 'I am of Cephas', others who were super-spiritual were saying: 'Well, I'm not of any of those mere men, I am of Christ'. Paul reprimands them, he says that's a carnal party spirit, it's not to be in the church of Jesus Christ. So they were in disorder bodily, they were in disorder intellectually because they were esteeming human wisdom over the wisdom of God that's revealed in the Scriptures and by the Spirit. They were following these men, the one they thought was most clever; or the one that they thought was more eloquent in his preaching like Apollos. Ethically we find that they were in disorder, they were suing one another, they were taking each other to court - brother against brother. Rather than burying the hatchet in the church of Jesus Christ and allowing spiritual men in the assembly to judge over matters, even social and financial matters, they were running to the courts, the law courts of the land. What a bad testimony that was! Morally there was disorder, there was sexual immorality, there was incest, there was fornication of every conceivable kind - such which was not even mentioned among the pagans, the heathen Gentiles, Paul says! There was disorder regarding their charity, they were offending the weaker brother. Men who were confident of their spirituality were eating the meat that was sacrificed to idols, and they thought that they had the theological knowledge - which in some sense they did - but they didn't account for how it might offend weaker brethren, how it may pull them down and make them backslide into the pagan worship that they had been delivered from in their conversion. They had little charity for one another, and that's why Paul had to come in chapter 13 and give them that great discourse on charity - that you can be the greatest prophet and understand all mysteries, and even give your body to be burned, but if you don't have love you've nothing!

Practically, when it came to church order, they were in disorder. Headship was nonexistent, the headcovering was starting to fall way, order around the Lord's Table - they were getting drunk there. There was disorder among the gifts spiritually exercised, such as tongues and prophecy, that he legislates on. There was disorder among the women, the women were taking a place of priority that God had not ordained. In chapter 15 that we've just finished we find doctrinally there was disorder in the subject of the resurrection, they were beginning to doubt their own bodily resurrection one day. Now Paul, at the last chapter, tells us or at least insinuates that there was also disorder with regards to collections - their liberality, there was disorder there too in their giving.

Now my question to you tonight, before we go on any further, is this: is there disorder with your giving? How do you know? Well, first of all: are you giving at all? But then the second question, assuming as a Christian that you are giving, and maybe that's a very big assumption for some of us tonight - but how we are

giving is the next question. Therefore Paul, answering their question, now sets down in order principles concerning collections. Let's begin to look at them tonight: the first thing he tells them in verse 1, 'Concerning collections for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye'. He tells them that they have to be giving in this collection purposefully, purposefully. Now reading verse 1 tells us, reading between the lines, that these Corinthians knew about the collection for the saints of Jerusalem. They would have to have known about it, first and foremost, to have asked him about it - but they must have known what Paul had told the churches at Galatia, because he just says: 'even so do ye'. He doesn't really go into much detail about what he told them.

Before we actually look at how they were to give purposefully, let me just show you some of the emphases of the life of the apostle Paul and his ministry. Paul really had three concerns in his ministry, and maybe that's generalising it a little, but if we can do it and summarise three concerns that the apostle had. We read in the book of Romans in chapter 9 and chapter 10, that he had a real concern for his kinsmen according to the flesh - the nation of Israel, his brothers and sisters in Judaism. He said that he would almost consider being accursed, anathema for God, if he could save his brethren in Christ, undergoing the wrath of God for them and giving them his salvation. In chapter 10 and verse 1 he says: 'My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved', he had a concern for his kinsmen.

But then we see that he had also a concern for the Gentiles. You remember God had chosen him, a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name to the Gentile people, and we know Paul chiefly as the apostle to the Gentiles. He had a concern for the Jew, he had a concern for the Gentiles, but of course you would be ignorant or blind in reading the epistles not to see that Paul had a great concern for the saints of God, for the children of God. If we could summarise that concern for the saints of God, we could summarise it in three headings - first: he was concerned for their spiritual strength. He wanted men and women in Christ in these New Testament days to be over-abounding in their faith, to be victorious, to build themselves up in their most holy faith and be encouraged in days of darkness. The second thing we find he was concerned about for the saints was their social standing. He wanted them not only to be spiritually strong, but he wanted their witness for Christ in the civilisation in which they lived to be God-glorifying and honouring. He wanted them to be sanctified and holy and peculiar people.

Here's the third thing with regards to the well-being of the saints, that Paul was concerned with. He was not just concerned with their spiritual strength or their social standing, but he was also concerned about their financial statement. You see it right throughout his epistles, he was concerned with the financial state of those in the church of Jesus Christ. Now, verse 1, this collection that he had given orders to the church of Galatia and also to the Corinthians was something that he had done for one solid year - soliciting contributions from the churches (notice the plural, by the way, there wasn't just one church in Galatia, there was the churches of Galatia) and also, as we go into the book of Romans chapter 15, he went to the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, and he requested the collection of money for - as we read in Romans 15 - the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, the poor among the saints of Jerusalem.

Now it might surprise you that this great city of glory and gold, that we read about in the Old Testament and the days of Solomon, had become a poor city. The fact of the matter is, although it was the religious capital of Judaism, and arguably the world, many many people because of that flocked to it. They thought they would find utopia in Jerusalem, and by doing so they drained the resources of the city financially. Added to that is the fact that the people who Paul is talking about here, the saints in Jerusalem, were born-again believers. The Jews had shunned them, the synagogue had stopped supporting the poor among them, they were persecuted as believers in the Lord Jesus, many of them were put out of their homes, their possessions were confiscated, they found it hard getting decent jobs. That's the reason why most Christians in New Testament days were probably slaves. Many of them were in prison, some even faced death, and in Acts chapter 11 we read that there was a famine in the city of Jerusalem. So we can see very clearly that there was

an economic plight among the believers of Jesus Christ in the city of Jerusalem.

Now, I know and you know that Acts chapter 2 tells us that the believers in Jerusalem, just after Pentecost, sold their property, sold their possessions, and distributed the finances among the poor - but we also know that that wouldn't last forever. It wouldn't provide for their needs for the foreseeable future. Paul now comes to the churches, Galatia, the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and he requests a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem that really need their help at this time. Now please note that Paul's chief concern was not just to meet the need of the saints, but Paul saw the bigger picture - he wanted the need of the saints to be met through the body, met through the body!

Now often when there's a great need, maybe some of us are on our knees praying for a multimillionaire to come along and just write us one check that will wipe the whole slate clean - but do you know something? That would be a wonderful answer to prayer, perhaps maybe even a miracle, but the fact of the matter is it would rob the blessing from the body. Paul saw the benefit of the need of the saints being met by the whole body, and he saw this collection as being a way whereby the body could be unified - specifically the Jews and the Gentiles. You know that there was that problem in the early church between these two nations, even though they were one in Christ.

Let me show you this please, turn with me to Romans 15 for a moment - don't miss Paul's method in this matter. Romans 15:27, talking about the Jews he says: 'If the Gentiles have been made partakers of [the Jews] spiritual things', isn't that what happens us? Spiritually speaking we have been engrafted into many of the blessings that Israel has, isn't that wonderful? Israel's God is our God, we who were once strangers to the commonwealth of Israel are now under many of the blessings from the God of Israel. We don't replace Israel, of course, but we come under many of the blessings. So we have been made partakers of their spiritual things, therefore 'our duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things'. Now that word 'carnal' simply means material things. Paul is talking to them specifically about the need of the believers in Jerusalem, and he says: 'Look, you believers, Gentile believers, you have benefited from the spiritual blessings of the Jews' - remember the Lord Jesus said: 'Salvation is of the Jews', the Lord Jesus was a Jew - 'Well, if you have benefited from their spiritual things, ought you not to benefit them by material things at this moment of their need?'

Now here's a lesson: you can't share gifts in the church of Jesus Christ without also sharing in fellowship. It is one of the greatest blessings of fellowship to meet the needs of believers around us, and in fact three times within the New Testament Paul uses the word 'koinia' - usually translated into our English word 'fellowship' - for offerings of giving, Romans 15, 2 Corinthians 8, 2 Corinthians 9. He's telling us that we receive a mighty blessing of fellowship and solidarity with the sufferings and shortcomings of the people of God when we meet their needs financially. 'Saints', that's the word he uses, he's telling the church that the primary goal for our giving ought not to be just edifices, but ought to be the well-being of the saints of Jesus Christ.

Now that, in our exposition tonight, is where we have to stop - but if we were to go right through the New Testament, we would find that the church is not only to give to the needy saints, but to those who are needy no matter who they are. The parable of a good Samaritan, does it not tell us that? No matter what a man's religion is, whether he's Protestant, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, or anything - whatever sort it may be - we are to give to those, even those who don't have a belief at all, who are needy, and show our Christian love in that way. In Galatians 6:14, listen to what Paul says on another occasion: 'Let us do good unto all men' - oh, I could stop there and spend a whole night on that one. We're very good, at times, at looking after ourselves - but do we do good unto all men, saved and unsaved alike? But Paul goes on of course in Galatians: 'especially unto them who are of the household of faith'. So not only are we to support saints, but we're to look after the poor and the needy of the world.

But please don't miss this: it's not just the saints of our own assembly, in fact here it is saints of other assemblies! He's exhorting the Corinthian Christians to help the Jerusalem Christians, and the Galatian and the Macedonia and the Achaian Christians, to help Christians of another assembly. Did he promote it as the apostle? Giving between churches? Now I know that we have an independence here in the Iron Hall, and we guard it, and I believe rightly so in these days - but the fact of the matter is, let us not lose sight of this: we are not the only work for God in the land, and there are works that need our support at times. We as believers ought not to be parochial in our vision concerning collections, but let us not be parochial in the sense that we will give to many other things, but we will not give to the work of the Lord. We'll look after our family, we'll look after our home, our domestic situations, our business, but the work of God suffers - and that's what's happening today. There are pastors who cannot be held by a church because giving is not a priority, there are missionaries who have to be brought home from the field because the finances aren't there.

One writer has said that there is money on hand for the exploitation of every kind of material enterprise on earth, yet the greatest work in the world languishes. It does its work on the pitiful religious dole when it may be supported by a bursting treasury. It is not overstating the case to say that the enterprise of the world's evangelisation depends as much on our paying as our praying! Now maybe you think that's unspiritual, well that's a pity of you because the Bible holds it out - if the Gospel is to go to the four corners of the world it will need not just your prayer, it will need something of your pocket. Give purposefully! It's not giving into the air, it's giving to see the gospel of Christ maintained and furthered, it's giving to the needy saints who really have a dire need.

Let's move on: it's giving periodically, Paul says. 'Upon the first day of the week', verse 2 - now we haven't got all week to study this, so we can't look too much at this statement 'the first day', and take it through the whole Bible - but save to say this not only tells us that the believers met on a Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection; but it is trying, I think, here to show us that the day of resurrection, the Lord's Day, Sunday, was the day that believers gave - and the chief reason Paul is bringing this to our attention is to show us that giving is an intrinsic part of our worship. He's saying it's not to be spasmodic, our worship isn't to be spasmodic, it's to be regular. Our giving isn't to be just 'as the Spirit leads you' - that's an interesting phrase, isn't that? 'As the Spirit leads you' - now I know that the Spirit does lead us at times, in a special concern, to give to a particular work maybe that we've never heard of, or we've never thought of, or we've maybe not considered ever. But the fact of the matter is Paul is saying that that is not to be the chief motivation of your giving, your giving is not to be just as the Spirit leads in some kind of subjective way, because the Spirit here is leading you to give regularly on the first day of the week.

Sometimes - and I know that we need to be, as believers, open to the Spirit's leading and guidance, and I believe most of the time we're not open enough - but there's an awful lot of subjectivity and airy-fairy nonsense taught and said about the leading of God's Spirit. Do you ever hear it? 'God led me to do this, God led me to do that', and sometimes this statement 'the Spirit leads' covers a multitude of sins and iniquities. Everything is put down to the spiritual world because you can't see it, and therefore you can't judge it. It's like people who say: 'I can't come Sunday night, can't come Monday night, can't come Thursday night, but I'll be with you in spirit' - with you in spirit. Vance Havner once said: 'I'm fed up preaching to congregation of disembodied spirits'. 'Spirit', it's like using the injunction of anonymity with regards to giving that we find in the Sermon on the Mount, don't let the right hand know what your left hand is doing, to camouflage your poverty in giving! You're not concerned to feel that people know what you're giving, you're more concerned about people knowing what you're not giving!

We can work these things for our own good at times and for our own benefit and favour - the point that Paul is giving here is that we're not to just be parcelling up a wee amount of money at the beginning of the month when we get our pay, giving is more than that! He's not legislating that you have to give so much every so often, he's telling us: 'Look, because this is linked with the first day of the week, this is worship!'. You're to

give worshipfully, as well as regularly! Now, Peter tells us that we are New Testament priests, doesn't he? He says as New Testament priests we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices; Paul said in Philippians 4:18 of an offering that it was as a sweet smelling savour unto God. Now here's my question to you in the light of this word: do you see your giving as worship? I'll tell you, it would be hard for some of you, because you leave the Lord's Table before you even get a chance to give! Those that are there, some of you don't give - it's not because I'm looking, it's only because the amount is counted afterwards, I don't count it but I know how much it is. It's impossible that everybody could give what they ought to give, but the fact of the matter is that we're missing out - do you see it like that? We're missing out in our worship!

Now let's take this on a wee bit further: what else did they do on the first day of the week? In Acts chapter 20 verse 7, on the first day of the week Paul broke bread with the believers, didn't he? Now there's nothing more sacred, I would vouch to say, for the believer than the Breaking of Bread, remembering the Lord around the broken bread and the cup. You know, we would guard that against anything - wouldn't we? - infiltrating it or spoiling it. If money was mentioned at the Lord's Table there would be a hue and cry, but what does the apostle do? He says: 'When you're meeting at the Lord's Table to remember the sacrifice that He give for you, don't you forget to dig your hand deep into your pocket!'. I'm not making this up now, it's here in the book - it's resurrection day that we remember the Lord, isn't it? We've just finished this resurrection chapter, and the greatest pinnacle of spiritual worship on the first day of the week, when the believers were met together, they were to give to God their spiritual worship and worship from their material wealth.

How can you give a couple of coppers to the Lord Jesus Christ if you're gazing at Calvary? Can you do it? Do you know what God said to His Old Testament people: 'Will a man rob God?'. You can't rob God of money in a sense, because He owns everything, but what they were robbing God of was worship, the worship that is His due when we give Him offerings of our financial wealth. 'Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings' - there you have it.

Periodically, purposefully, thirdly personally: 'let every one of you', verse 2, there's nobody exempt, it's all-inclusive no matter how little you can give. Do you remember the wee woman who give the mite in the temple? The Lord was watching one day - you're allowed to watch you know! He was watching, there He was, and the wee woman came in and gave her mite, and the Lord Jesus commended her for it - do you know why? Because it was all that she had, but she give it! Now mark this please: she give personally, and she give sacrificially, and the Lord Jesus didn't run over to her and say: 'Love, you don't need to give that for you have nothing else'. He didn't reprimand the officials of the temple for receiving the gift, He commended her because she gave all she had. Giving, this is what the New Testament teaches, giving when we have little says more about you than giving when you have much - because what is left when we give, after we give, tells more about our spiritual state than what we give! What we keep for ourselves, no matter how much the amount is that we give away...

You see, you could be a liberal giver by giving one pound on a Sunday morning, and you could be an old shrivelled up miser by giving a thousand! It's what it costs you, you see. It's what you have to start off with, and what's left over. Turn with me for a moment to 2 Corinthians 8 - 8 and 9 give real exposition of the Macedonians liberality in their giving, but look at verse 1 of chapter 8: 'Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality'. They gave out of the deep depths, the deep sea depths of their poverty. They didn't have anything to give, but they gave anyway! The Lord Jesus is saying this: no matter how little you have to give, you've to give personally. You can't say: 'Look, I've no money to give, so I'm not going to give anything' - Jesus said: 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful in that which is much'.

Personally, fourthly systematically. The third part of verse 2: 'Lay by him in store', let every one of you lay

by him in store. Literally, 'Let each one of you by himself lay up, or store up'. Now many people believe that this means 'put away in your home'. You get your pay for the week - the sense is a week here - and you look at what you're going to give to God, and you set it aside and put it in a private treasury. J.M. Darby in his translation translates this verse 'put by at home', but there are other Bible scholars who believe that because this is linked with the first day of the week, and the church met on the first day of the week, that it's talking about laying by in store into the church treasury. I favour that view, there's no principle at stake, it doesn't really matter, but the fact of the matter is that the word 'store' here is a Greek noun from which we get our English word 'thesaurus'. You know that a thesaurus is a collection, a treasury of words that you can look up to get a synonymous word, for a word that you're looking for a different one for.

The fact of the matter is, this word has been used for a treasury, and it was used in Paul's day for a storehouse, a chest where valuables were stored. In pagan and Jewish cultures of the New Testament, treasuries were often associated with temples, whether it was the Jewish temple or whether it was the pagan temple. So for that reason I think what's being talked about here is that, even if they were collecting at home during the week, they were to bring on the Lord's Day these collections, and store them in the church treasury on the first day of the week - so that, as Paul says later on, there will be no collections when he comes. There would have to be collections when he came if you were storing it up in your own house, wouldn't there? If there was a need for the saints right away, you'd have to get all together, and discuss who was going to give and all the rest - I think it is in the church here that Paul's talking about.

Systematically - there's a method in it! It's not 'the Spirit moves me', the Spirit says you've got to do this! This is God's word to you! Here's my question to us this evening: if Christians were as systematic in giving to the Lord as they are in handling other financial matters, the work of the Lord would never ever suffer - isn't that a fact? I know people, and if they buy a can of Coke, they put it down in a ledger! It's not me by the way! But the fact of the matter is that there are people who are that detailed in their pennies, yet they may be robbing the church of the Living God of what it needs to further the Gospel!

Are we giving systematically? Fifthly, we are to give providentially. Not many people deal with this one, but I want to deal with it shortly - it just says 'as God', just those two words 'as God'...yes, 'has prospered you', we'll look at that in a minute - but 'as God hath prospered you'. In other words, don't forget where your prosperity comes from! It comes from the hand of God, James says: 'Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no shadow of turning, no variableness' - it's from the Lord. The fact of the matter is in relation to giving, He prospers you providentially in His will, and the higher prospering and proportion of giving He gives you is so that you might have a higher proportion to give back to Him for the work. Do you get it?

God never gave me a million pounds, maybe that surprises you! He hasn't given me that, so He doesn't expect me to give that to His work if I don't have it. In a smaller regard, we can apply that in the sense that we have to be sensible too - yes, we have to be sacrificial, but this next point will show us that our giving providentially is to be proportionate. We're to give proportionately 'as God has prospered him'. What Paul is doing here is, in one sense, leaving it to individual discretion - and I think this is terribly important. Paul doesn't lay down a percentage that we're to give, you'll never find in the New Testament a percentage, and you'll never find a tithe. This is one great misunderstanding with regards to giving in the church today, and it's not only a misunderstanding of New Testament teaching on tithing, it's a misunderstanding of Old Testament teaching on tithing - and I commend those tapes to you, I don't have time to go into the detail of it all. But let me just mention this: there were many tithes in the Old Testament - not just 10%, there were many of them. There was the Lord's tithe that was taken of the people, of the produce, to feed the Levite priests, for the service of the temple and tabernacle. There was the festival tithe, an annual celebration to celebrate the conquest of the promised land once a year. Both those tithes were 10%, of course, which gave a mandatory 20% for everybody - 20%!



Then there was the poor tithe, the social tax of 10%, and that was every three years, 3.3% per annum - which gave a total of 23% when added to the first two tithes. Twenty-three per year! Then there was the tithes of the corners of the fields, and of the fruit of the vine for the poor - there were other taxes from time to time, and it all adds up to a requirement per annum of a minimum of 25 percent per year. Then there is grace giving in the Old Testament, it's not all about law, you could offer the firstfruits if you wanted to God, there were also freewill offerings. There were many other things, but the bottom line is this: in the Old Testament Scriptures there could be anything up to 30+% of your wealth that was given to God. Then when we come into the New Testament Scriptures the only time that tithe is mentioned, only once, is when the Lord Jesus castigates the Pharisees and says: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone'. And if there was anybody to introduce the doctrine of the tithe, it was Paul, who was a Jew, a real Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was talking to Gentiles here, many of whom in Corinth didn't know the first thing about a tithe - do you not think if they needed to know it, he would have been the man to teach them?

Paul is telling us that it's not about percentages, what our giving depends on is our individual circumstances, that we may give proportionately as God has prospered us. Now don't think, in one sense, that a Christian should be giving less than a Jew in law - but in the other sense, I know this, that for some folk during some times of the year it's very difficult even to get the tithe, to get the 10%. Maybe you find that hard to believe, but the fact of the matter is that there are some people in that situation - and for that reason Paul doesn't legislate. He says: 'Look, you give as God has prospered you, proportionately to your circumstances' - and let's face it, our circumstances can change from week to week, can't they? That's why we need to assess them week to week, not only because it's a weekly worship, but we may have needs this week that we never accounted for, and we're to be no man's debtor - is that not the truth? We can give to God and then rob our neighbour!

What did Paul say practically in 1 Timothy 5: 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel'. This is the question: when we get more, when we get more do we spend more, or do we give more? Oh I know, when we get less we give less and we spend less, there's no choice - but when we get more do we proportionately give more? There's a passage in 2 Corinthians 8 which has been very helpful to me, a paraphrase of it simply reads: 'God doesn't expect you to give what you don't have'. Don't misunderstand me: sacrificial giving is in the word of God, and this little widow's mite was commended - but the fact of the matter is that Paul says our contribution can be flexible. We're not to neglect sacrifice in the matter, but here's Paul's point I believe - he's talking about the Jewish poor Christians, and he's talking to some in Corinth that were probably quite wealthy and well-heeled, and he's saying this: the burden of giving in the collection should not rest upon the poor. There should never be a Christian - it happens out of necessity - but there should never be a Christian that has to pass a meal by because a rich Christian will not give what their prosperity says they should give.

We're all to bear the burden, Paul says - proportionately, right? Moving on - six is it? Seven maybe? Preventatively - that's a hard one to say - preventatively, verse 2, give as God has prospered you, proportionately: 'that there be no gatherings when I come'. Now what's Paul's point? I think this is it: there should be a continual flow of resources in the church of Jesus Christ, and a continual store of resources put away on a regular basis for when the need arises, that it might be met! That mean that when there is a need and it arises, we shouldn't be scraping the bottom of the barrel, and running around needing people to give! Now of course there are exercises and projects like the one we're in the middle of, that we could never have that amount of money set aside, in one sense, on a weekly basis - but the point of Paul is this, this is his point through my eyes: why do you need a building project to get some of you to give? Are there not needs all the time? Are there not poor Christians? Are there not missionaries that are seeking to win the lost? Is there not a

'Wonder Book', and they need another £200,000 to finance what they've already started doing let alone what they're going to do? Is there not a need?

Is giving, for you, something that is preventative? I mean, is it something that is regular, that means when a need arises in the Assembly among the people that that need can be met, because you're giving preventatively? That's what Paul is saying: 'When I come for this collection for the believers who are poor in Jerusalem, I don't want you all running around starting to dig into your pockets - that's not the way to give'. I wonder, for us, is giving a last-minute rush on a Sunday morning before we dart out the door, is it? 'I'll get a few things together here so that nobody sees I'm not putting anything in'? Give preventatively for the day that there is a need.

Then finally, eighthly, Paul commands us to give intelligently. I think this is terribly important and applicable today, verses 3 and 4: 'And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters', please note the authority that the great apostle gave to the assembly in Corinth to appoint whoever they wished, 'them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem'. I'll send whoever you appoint, men who are approved - verse 4: 'And if it be meet', if I feel it's right, 'that I go also, they shall go with me'. I like the way he puts it there in verse 4, he's asserting his apostolic authority now, he says: 'I'm not going with them, they'll go with me' - but he's telling us to give intelligently. Now Paul was guarding his own reputation here in verses 3 and 4 because, rather than being accused of money grabbing - which might have been what people thought when he was going around collecting this money, that he had some kind of vested interest in it - he refused to handle the finances personally. There is wisdom in that.

You might say: 'Well, sure Paul was an honest man if ever there was one' - of course he was, but the fact of the matter is he was also a wise man. He knew that other people wouldn't see him as honest, and if they had anything against him that would be an accusation that they would give. So he's abstaining from all appearance of evil, the wisdom that he give others. But is it not true that this area of money is often a bigger temptation to the workers for the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel than deviating spiritually, doctrinally, or even morally? Is that not the case? The love of money can fuel and motivate their service for Christ, and drive them to higher things!

Therefore, Paul tells you, here's some principles that need to be heralded in this day and age: the worker's duty is to be accountable financially, the worker's duty is to be able to say: 'This is where the money went, this is what I did with it' - but your duty in your giving is not just to scatter the money all around you, or when your tears start tripping you because you see a wee starving African, that you put your hand in your pocket! You need to know that the money that you're giving is used legitimately and wisely, and therefore he says: 'Appoint respected men among you, and I will send them to Jerusalem with letters of approval'. In Acts chapter 6 we see that the apostles had to do this because they wanted to labour in prayer and in the ministry of the word of God, and they told the believers there to set out from among them spiritual men full of the Holy Ghost, and the qualification for handling the money was not financial or commercial, but moral and spiritual! I believe it was the deacons that did it.

John MacArthur says, and I think this is a tremendous illustration as we conclude this and draw it altogether: 'God made all of His creation to give', isn't that right? 'He made everything around us to give, He made the sun and the moon and the stars to give forth light. He made the clouds to give forth rain. He made the earth to give forth, yielding seed and plants and vegetables. He also designed his supreme creation, man, to give'. 'But', MacArthur goes on, 'fallen man is the most reluctant giver of all God's creation, but one of the surest signs that you have been recreated, that you're redeemed, that you are regenerated, that you are a saved person, is your willingness to give'. So how is it? He goes on to quote the Athenian statesman Aristides, and I'm going to quote him now - listen to this. Aristides wrote of Christian people in the second century AD, listen to how he describes them: 'They walk in humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among

them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and they grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributes liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger they bring him under their roof, and they rejoice over him as if he were their brother. They call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God - but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability. If they hear that any of their number is in prison or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs - and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. If there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessity' - wait till you hear this - 'they will fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with his necessary food'!

Oh, we're all advanced, aren't we today? Oh, we know so much more than those Christians in those days - but John said: 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'. Warren Weirsbe said: 'Christian giving is a grace, the outflow of the grace of God in our lives, and not the result of emotion or pressure. An open heart cannot maintain a closed hand'. Is that not true? Is your hand closed tonight to the giving of God's work? Is it closed? Do you have this spirit: 'I'll not give!?' I'll tell you, do you know why you'll not give? Because your heart is closed! If we appreciate the grace of God extended to us, we will want to express the grace of sharing with others - and the fact of the matter is this, and this is what a lot of people can't stand but this is the fact of the matter, in 2 Corinthians 8:9 not only does Paul here in 1 Corinthians inextricably link this grace of giving with the Lord's Table upon the first day of the week, and the resurrection on the day of the Lord, but he also in 2 Corinthians 8:9 links it with the very coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world and taking upon Himself of our sin. He says, as you know: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' - and if you esteem the Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice for you, you will sacrifice for Him.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were an offering far too small".

Do you know why the Corinthians were exhorted by the Macedonians' giving? Those Macedonians who gave out of their poverty? Here's what Paul says: because first they gave themselves! Is that not the key?

"Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were an offering far too small.  
Love so amazing, so divine  
Demands" ...my ten pound note? No!  
Demands my life, my heart, my all".

Does He have your all? For if He has your all, He'll have your wallet.

Lord Jesus, we hear Thee say: 'I gave my life for thee. My precious blood I shared, that thou might ransomed be, and quickened from the dead. I gave my life for thee, what hast thou given for me?'. Lord, we pray that all of us may give all of ourselves this night and always, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 44*

## *'Men At Work'*

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### **I Corinthians 16:5-12**

- I. Paul's Plans (verses 5-9)**
- II. Timothy's Testimony (verses 10-11)**
- III. Apollos' Independence (verse 12)**

**W**e're turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 16, and we'll be here again next Monday evening as usual at eight o'clock, continuing in our studies in chapter 16. Don't forget that all of the tape recordings of the messages thus far in this series are available, as are this evening's messages on tape after the meeting if you want to purchase them. We're looking tonight at chapter 16 verses 5 through to 12, and the title I have given you on your sheet is 'Men at Work'.

Verse 5: "Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia". Now just in case you weren't here last week, let's just read verses 1 to 4 where Paul took up the subject 'concerning collections', and we'll see how he got on to this subject we're on tonight. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me. Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries. Now if Timotheus", that is Timothy, "come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time".

Now we saw last week in verses 1 to 4 that Paul spoke to us concerning collections, concerning our stewardship financially toward God, our responsibility as a people of God financially in God's eyes. But you know this chapter is not just about money, as we will see tonight, but it's about stewardship in general in many senses. The first stewardship that we looked at last week was our stewardship of income, how many of us have an income in our own domestic lives out in the workplace, and we were encouraged last week to set by some of that income in store as God has prospered us, and bring together with a people of God on the first day of the week, and bring an offering to God out of what God has prospered us in the sense of wealth through our income. We have a stewardship before God, we have a responsibility before God to give to God financially.

Tonight we're going to see that not only do we have a stewardship of our finances and our money, but we have a stewardship before God of our opportunities. We are responsible to God, as we see in verses 5 to 9, for the opportunities - or, as Paul puts it very metaphorically, the open doors that God sets before us in our

lives. We have a responsibility and a stewardship to step through the doors that God opens up for us. Then we'll see also, not all of it tonight but certainly verses 10 to 12, and then later on right through to verse 24, that the church of Jesus Christ also has a stewardship of individuals. Not just of income, not just of opportunity, but we have a stewardship of individuals - i.e. people in the church of Jesus Christ. These three stewardships for the greatest resources that we have, apart from the spiritual blessings of course, in the church of Jesus Christ: the resources of income, the resources of opportunity, and the resources of individuals who are gifted and who are called by God to serve Him in the church.

What Paul is teaching us here, even tonight through example, is that these resources of the church must not be wasted. Financial resources; the opportunities that God gives us in His sovereign will as He opens doors before us as a collective people of God or as individual Christians in our personal lives; and also as individuals, those gifted individuals among us - and we know from previous weeks that we're all gifted in one way or another - but we must not waste our resources. We are responsible before God regarding what God has given to us. Now, tonight we're looking at men that Paul mentions, men who are at work in the church at Corinth. We could say 'men of God who are at work within the church of Jesus Christ'. We want never to see men of God wasted within the church of Jesus Christ, but we would have to say that in the day and hour in which we live, we are seeing a great wastage or perhaps famine of men of God. Many of them are passing on to glory, they're dying and going to be with the Lord which is far better - but for us here on earth it's not far better for us, because we're losing great godly men who could teach us many things. There's not too many folk around to teach us those spiritual truths today, and sometimes I feel so much like the Psalmist in Psalm 12 and verse 1, where he lamented the fact even in his day - maybe it's just something that every generation goes through - he said: 'Help Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men'. Individuals whom God is working through seem to be wasting in our day and age.

We're going to see tonight, first-hand, men of God at work. Let me shoot a warning shot across your bows just at the very beginning here: I don't want you now to switch off and say, he's going to be talking now to people like himself - pastors, and preachers, and missionaries, and evangelists, and full-time Christian workers from whatever shade of the spectrum they may be - you couldn't be further from the truth! Because we've seen in these recent weeks, studying the body of Christ, that we've all been gifted of God in one way or maybe many, but we've all something to do for God - and let me say this very categorically: potentially all of us can be men or women of God, all of us!

We will see from this passage tonight that Paul had no conception of spiritual giants, that there are these nephilim in the spiritual kingdom of God who tower above the rest of us, and we can never reach their pinnacle. Paul did not have that ideology in mind, he believed that all of us, because we're all in Christ, and we all have the same potential spiritual blessings, we all can reach that pinnacle of being men and women of God. Now before we even look at these men of God, there are many lessons in discipleship that we see here in the example of the apostles. Of course, the great apostle was a teacher, and a teacher after the school of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the great teacher of men. Any teacher is diligently committed to his students, and Paul was of course, as our Lord Jesus Christ was - but we know, as we've been studying this book in recent weeks, that the classroom at Corinth was struggling. They were failing the pass mark of the spiritual life, so much so that Paul said: 'Ye are carnal, I have to talk to you like nursery children, you are babes in Christ. You should be eating meat, but you're still feeding on milk'. So they needed someone to come, literally, to where they were and to show them first-hand how to follow God.

They needed an example, so Paul volunteers himself to tutor them and bring Timothy along to help them. So we find in verse 6 he says this: 'And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go'. 'I'm going to winter with you, I'm going to spend some quality time with you and give you an example in my life and my teaching, in Timothy's teaching and his example, of

what godliness really is'. That word 'with' that we have in verse 6 and elsewhere in this passage, it carries the idea of intimate involvement. Paul wasn't just from an arm's length discipling these Christians, he's literally saying: 'I'm going to winter with you, and going to come face-to-face in contact with you, in dialogue, so that I can bring you along as you watch me living for Christ'.

Now can I just say this: what people need today, and especially could I say young people in our assemblies, is not just your exposition of Scripture; but more than that, people today in our world need the example of Scripture lived out in the life - the exposition of the life testifying to the belief. Now let me show you exactly what I'm saying, chapter 15 and verse 58 that he ended this great section on resurrection with: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'. Paul, in chapter 16 I believe, is now giving Paul's personified examples of verse 58. He's giving us an example of someone who is steadfast, that is Timothy. Timothy is steadfast. What about unmoveable? We'll find that Apollos is exactly that, he's a prime personification of a man of God who is unmoveable. And the last qualification is 'always abounding in the work of the Lord', and who else could be an example of that other than the great apostle Paul himself? Always abounding in the work of the Lord! Timothy: steadfast; Apollos: unmoveable; the apostle Paul: always abounding in the work of the Lord - and do you know what Paul is doing for us? He's giving us expository lives, examples: 'Corinthians, this is the way that you're to live!'.

You will know that in 2 Corinthians and chapter 3 and verse 2 he says to the same group of Christians: 'Ye are our epistles' - you are our epistles! You people, you Christians, your testimonies are our letters written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Men in Corinth of Greek pagan backgrounds, and even the Jews who rejected their Messiah, they're not going to read your New Testament - but you are the Bible that they are going to read, so you have to exposit the Bible in your very life, in your actions, in your word, in your deeds. You've heard the little verse, I'm sure: 'You're writing a gospel, a chapter each day, in the deeds that you do, in the words that you say'. This is Paul's great point in our passage this evening: you, as he says to Timothy on another occasion, you need to study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Now a lot of men quote that verse, and they quote it in the King James: 'study to show thyself approved unto God' - there's nothing wrong with that translation, other than that the word 'study' is an old English word that just means 'be diligent'. It doesn't mean getting the books down and the Greek Lexicon, and spending a couple of hours in the study - that's not what it means. It means be diligent, do all in your power, study to present yourself approved unto God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed. In other words, you need to do God's work, the Lord's work in the Lord's way, and only by doing that - as we found out in chapter 3 of this book - will we build to ourselves something lasting for eternity, something of gold and silver and precious stones.

Now, we're going to see tonight some master builders at work in the work of God. Come with me as we look at the first one - verses 5 to 9. We see first of all Paul's plans, and we can learn a great deal from Paul's plans. It's twofold in this sense, and I didn't put this in your notes because I want to keep you awake, and you should be doing a wee bit of writing filling in those big gaps in between the three points - there are two sub-points under Paul's plans that I want to give you. Here's the first one: Paul's plans were scheduled by God's will, Paul's plans were scheduled by God's will. Look at verse 4, I want you to see one word: 'And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me'. The word 'meet' is a very interesting word, it's the same word that we have in Timothy where he exhorts him to be 'a vessel meet for the Master's use', in other words a vessel fit, a vessel right to be used by God. It's the same sense here, Paul is saying that if it's right for me that I go also, then you shall go with me.

But the point that I want you to see this evening is that Paul's plans were scheduled by God's will and God's

will alone. He wasn't bound by or obligated to certain people to do certain things at certain times at their will and every whim. Not the great apostle, he's saying: 'My schedule is planned by the will of God, and if the will of God allows me to come with you, I will come with you - but I'm not giving you any guarantees'. Look at verse 5: 'Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia', verse 6, 'And it may be that I will abide', it may be! He's not selling himself to the Corinthian's programme, he's not allowing himself to be bound by any contract of an organisation or group of people that claim the name of Christ. He is saying: 'My schedule is determined by God's will, led by God's Spirit'.

Look on in verse 6: 'Yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey', look at this word, 'whithersoever I go' - whithersoever I go, there's an uncertainty about it. In other words, he's not going to be bullied into where he's going, and be told or signed up into some kind of programme that he can't get out of. The only condition that the apostle Paul gives as to whether or not he will be with these Corinthian people is in verse 7: 'For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit' - what about that? Oh, this plays havoc with a lot of the ways we do things today in our age, even in our churches. The apostle Paul wasn't planning too far ahead in many senses, but nevertheless his planning that he did make was according to the will of God. He wasn't making any promises to anybody because he didn't know, he might have to break a promise if he made it, because God could say: 'No, you're not going, you have to go over here, this is where I need you'.

I hope you can see this - in fact the apostle James said, didn't he, in his epistle in chapter 4 and verses 13 to 15: 'Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that'. Now I wonder are our plans made by the will of the Lord? Now please don't think that I'm going off the scale tonight in some kind of subjective spiritual realm, where we have to be in some way hearing God's voice to us all the time in what we do, and we can never plan ahead - I want you to see this first point very clearly: he scheduled his plans by God's will. He did schedule them, and although he might have to change a plan now and again, he had a plan to change. He did plan, so we're seeing the balance of the apostle Paul here. I know, and I've read men who said that you shouldn't even plan in the next week or the next month or next year what meetings to take and all the rest, because you should be led by God's Spirit - but you can't live like that in the real world! The balance is: yes, make plans, like the apostle Paul did, but make no guarantees to those plans; and realise that those plans will only go ahead if God permits.

Some people quote you Proverbs 3:5 and 6: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding' - and they interpret 'lean not unto thine own understanding' to mean put your brain in neutral and don't think about the matter. That's not what God's word means, is it? God is legislating planning here, but it is legislating planning according to God's will, and being surrendered and submitted to the possibility of God entering in and wrecking your plans, turning them all upside down. Let me show you Paul's plan specifically tonight, we'll go backwards from verse 8. He's writing from Ephesus, he says: 'But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost' - I'm just going to stay where I am until Pentecost. Now 'Pentecost' is not talking here about the experience that the believers had in the Upper Room in Acts chapter 2, it's not talking about some religious festival in the church, the New Testament church. It's talking about the time of year when the Jews celebrated the religious feast of Pentecost, and it just meant a date on the calendar like we have dates, and it's very akin to Easter, our own springtime.

So Paul is saying here: 'But I will tarry at Ephesus until springtime', and then if you move back a couple of verses to verse 6 he says: 'And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go'. So he's going to stay until springtime with these people in Ephesus where he's writing from, and then he's going to move and pass through Macedonia, hoping to be all summer with

them, and eventually reach Corinth in winter. Do you see that? Verse 8, he's going to stay with them until springtime, he's going to travel through Macedonia as we see in verse 5: 'I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia' - and then he'll come in winter time to the Corinthians and spend all winter with them.

Men of God plan, they have to plan, because men of God - and I wish we had time to look at this in the apostle Paul's life - men of God have a vision! People with a vision plan according to God's will, not apart from God will, and not making their plans and then asking God bless them - that's not what I'm talking about, but I'm talking about in accordance and communion with God making plans. Proverbs says the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; a man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord leads his steps.

Now Paul gives in verse 9 the reason why he's going to stay in Ephesus until spring is out, and this is so important because this shows us the second principle of Paul's plans. They were scheduled by God's will, according to how God led, he didn't give any guarantees but nevertheless he made plans - but here's the second point in verse 9, the reason he stayed in Ephesus: 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries'. Paul's plans, secondly, were regulated by gospel opportunity - have you got that? Not just scheduled by the will of God, but regulated by gospel opportunity. In other words, Paul was saying: God has opened a door here, a mighty door in Ephesus, an effectual door, and He has allowed us a place of blessing, and we just can't get up and leave now - God wants us to do something here!

Now there is a principle if ever there was one - do you get it clearly? The Lord is saying to you tonight, wherever you are, whatever sphere you work for Him, that: 'If I open a door for you, by all means you step through that door if there are great things to be done for God' - you go through that door! Don't let the door close! Don't pass by the door! Don't ignore the door! When God presents you with opportunities, there is a stewardship before you to take those opportunities - but don't miss the other side of the coin. It's a two-edged sword, and the second edge is the sharpest of all, because Paul links these two things together. He says: 'a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries'. In other words, Paul is saying: 'Whenever there's an open door, there's always the old devil' - have you got it? When God gives you an opportunity to do something for Him, you will find that with that opportunity, the adversary - the two go together, they're never separated. If you're going to do the Lord's work, you need to realise that you're going to encounter the Lord's enemy.

So Paul is saying: yes, there's an open door, and if you get an open door like me to do a work, you step through that open door - but step through the open door with open eyes, and realise that there's an old adversary there, that roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Now I could spend all night going through Bible characters to prove this to you, that anyone in the Bible who has ever tried to do anything for God, and to whom God has opened a great door effectual for them to do a work for Him, they have met the devil himself at the door, they have met every obstacle and every persecution and every suffering possible. Nehemiah, who we're studying these Sunday mornings, was it not he that found in his very preparation of the work there were three men: Tobiah, Sanballat, Geshem, who were all going to oppose his work for God - and what a proof that that was a work for God for Him, that he stirred up opposition.

Do you see this tonight? Even the Lord Jesus Christ in His temptations - don't you believe that His temptation finished in the first couple of chapters of Matthew's gospel, I believe that the testing and the jibing of the devil went right throughout His whole life, right to Calvary. The fact of the matter is: God had opened a door to Christ to redeem the world from sin, do you not think the powers of evil and the adversary were going to oppose that with every power in his being? Paul is telling us: if you want to go through a door for God, you want to do something great for God - who of us don't want to do that? I mean if we're honest with ourselves, who wouldn't put your hand up and say: 'Look, I'd love to be something great for God, I would love to accomplish a great work for my Master' - but here's the question Paul is asking tonight in



inference, he's asking first: are you prepared to meet a great enemy? It's not all about walking through great effectual doors, are you prepared if you're going to do a great work for God to meet a great enemy, because there's no opportunity without the adversary!

G. Campbell Morgan, the great Bible expositor, said these powerful words: 'If you have no opposition in the place where you serve, you're serving in the wrong place'. Did you hear that? That's a very exclusive statement: 'If you have no opposition in the place where you serve, you're serving in the wrong place'. In your King James Bible those words 'there are' in the verse, 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries' - it's not there, so that the verse reads like this: 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and many adversaries'. The adversaries are equal to the open door that is there, they're as real as the opportunities - do you realise this? People go to serve the Lord, and they think it's all a picnic, and it's just a great time in the limelight, and all the great opportunities - listen: if you realise that the fields are white unto harvest, and the labourers are few, you need to realise also that you'll have company in the harvest field - not from more labourers, but from the enemy of souls!

I wish I had time to show you in Acts chapter 19 Paul in the city of Ephesus where he's writing from, this same city where he has that great effectual door of opening and where the adversary is. You will read in chapter 19 alone about a group of blaspheming Jews, about a group of exorcist Jews trying to cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus when they didn't even believe in the Lord Jesus, you will read about the occult, black magic, in a deep-dyed form so that when people were converted they brought all their curious arts together and burned them all in a great bonfire. You will read that this was the cultural and pagan religious centre of Diana worship; and when Demetrius, the silversmith who made little gods of Diana, was converted there was a great riot in the whole town and they were going to kill Paul and his followers.

Let me turn you for a moment to 2 Corinthians, this time chapter 1, till we see this. Verses 8 and 9, Paul talking now about his time in Asia and Ephesus, verse 8: 'For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead' - we thought that we were going to die! Now listen, don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here: he wasn't afraid of the adversary, but he wasn't ignorant of the adversary either - he knew that he was there, and he knew the danger that he posed. His approach was to acknowledge adversaries, not to accept them but to acknowledge them and realise that they were there. With Paul the opportunities were more significant than the adversaries, but the fact of the matter is: you need to realise that if God is setting an open door before you tonight in His sovereign permissive will, you need to know that there will be an adversary standing at that door.

John Paton, who was a university student in Scotland, felt the call of God to go to the New Hebrides. He graduated from the University and he married his bride and sailed to the Southwest Pacific and began a work among the savage cannibals. His wife and his infant son died a few months later, and Paton faced the ordeal of sleeping several nights on the graves of his wife and son lest the cannibals dug them up and ate their bodies. He left after four years faithful service without one convert to his name - 'What a waste', we might say. There was a door, effectual, that was open to him, and he stepped through it and there was an adversary there to meet him - but when you read the rest of the story you find out that many years later his son by another marriage returned to those islands, and eventually he saw the entire island come to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith! When the elder John Paton revisited the chief of the former cannibal tribe, the cannibal chief asked the missionary: 'Who was that great army that surrounded your hut every night when first you came among us?'. 'What great army?'. A great army of angels - believe it or not, but they were around him, protecting him! He had stepped through that door, it wasn't painless or costless, but God was with him, and through his faithful work his son saw the whole people brought to Christ. At the end of his trip old John

Paton said, after ministering on another island, through tearful eyes: 'I don't know of one native of these islands who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ'.

Oh there are great effectual doors for us to step through, but let us not be unaware of the adversary and of the cross that we must bear! Oh, we're all prepared to step through the doors, aren't we? But are we prepared to meet the great adversary and enemy? Here's the second question - we could be all night on these! Are we prepared to go through small doors first? Paul says in verse 9: 'a great door and effectual' - a big door is there for me to step through. We all want the big doors to step through, don't we? But the only reason why Paul got the opportunity to step through the big door, was because he had entered through many small doors before that. In Acts chapter 14 and verse 17 we read about the door to preach to the Gentiles, and the Lord set before him a door to take the gospel to the Gentile people, and he stepped through it. In 2 Corinthians 2 we read about the door that he stepped through to take the gospel to the people at Troas, and we read of other doors that he faithfully stepped through - and therefore Paul, when he came to the Colossians, had the right to ask them to pray that God would set before him a great door to make the gospel known to more people. He had the right to do that because he'd stepped through every door that God had set before him.

Sometimes we miss these lessons. There are open opportunities all around us here in this city and in our churches, and the fact of the matter is the Lord Jesus said that those who will be faithful in the least will be committed the big things to be faithful in. If you're not faithful in the wee things, the small doors, how do you think God's going to give you a big door to step through? Can I ask you tonight: are you faithful in the small doors that God sets before you? What am I talking about? Here's a verse, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Enter into thy closet' - that door is always open, you know! The closet door for prayer, have you entered into it? Do you think God's going to give you a great work to do, an effectual door of opening, revival, blessing, if you can't even go through the door of your own closet? What about this one - Revelation 3:20 to the church: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me'. Are we involved in the open door of communion in the congregation, not just in the closet but in the congregation of God's people - are we here to meet Christ?

How can you go to the other side of the world to serve Him, if you can't go across the road and worship Him? Are you prepared to go through the small doors? Here's the third question that Paul is asking us by inference: are you prepared to wait for God to open doors, rather than you push them open? Eh? What about that one? Are you prepared to wait until God opens the door, before you push that door open? Harry Ironside said: 'No servant of God who is in the current of divine will, will ever have to hunt for open doors for testimony - just be obedient'. Did you get that? If God's opening a door for you, you don't have to hunt for it, and you don't have to push it open, and you don't have to bombard it and knock it down!

Proverbs says: a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men - that means you don't need to advertise your availability to the church of Jesus Christ for preaching and taking meetings. You don't need to invite yourself! The amount of preachers that invite themselves even to this pulpit, it's remarkable! 'Can I come and preach? Have you got a Sunday free for me?'. When I was younger - and I emphasise that - I was misled, I believe I was misled and I've learnt my lesson, for I was coming out of college and there was an assistantship in a church that was becoming available. A man said to me, a respectable man, in many ways a man of God, he said to me: 'Why don't you ring up the pastor there and ask him would he consider you?'. What a rebuke I got, when I rang that pastor and he said to me very humbly and meekly: 'David, don't push God's doors open, wait till He opens them for you'.

I wonder do we learn these very basic lessons - but the trouble is we're not willing to let God guide us. He says to one of the churches in Revelation: 'I am he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth'. The business of the servant of Christ is to be in God's will and say: 'Here am I, send me

whithersoever you want, and I'll go!'. Are you prepared to wait for God's doors to open, rather than you push them? And here's the final question: are you prepared to have the doors you want to open shut in your face? Are you prepared to have the doors that you want to open shut in your face? That happened to the apostle Paul, and he was providing here for the possibility of it in all these suppositions that he makes about where he's going to be and what he's going to do, because he knows God could just turn it all upside down. He's had experience, in Acts 16 and in verse 7 we read that: 'After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not'.

If I can say it without being too flippant: Paul got up one day, and he said, 'I think we'll go into Bithynia. Come on boys, we're going to go there and preach the gospel', and he went and the Holy Spirit said: 'No, you're not going in there yet'. What about that? Are you prepared to have God shut doors that you want to open? I was astounded to realise that the great man of God and pioneer missionary David Livingstone, who left his heart literally in Africa, he saw many African people come to the Lord Jesus Christ, from a very early age his vision was not for Africa, it was for China right up to the day that he died! But God never sent him to China! God closed China's door for Livingstone, but He opened up Africa and it was the great and effectual one.

Oh, we must move on - look at verses 10 to 11 at another master builder. We've seen Paul, I hope you've learnt that he scheduled his plans by God's will, and secondly he regulated those plans by gospel opportunities. Then secondly Timothy's testimony, the second example - verses 10 to 11. Verse 10, look at it: 'Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do'. He is saying that Timothy's testimony commands respect, there is the first sub-point: Timothy testimony commands respect - why does it? Paul says, listen: 'In this regard he's no different than me, because he works the work of the Lord that I'm doing'. Oh, what a lesson there is for us all there: he's doing the same work regardless of his youth, regardless of his inexperience, regardless of his physical health or his disposition whatever that may have been. Timothy is working the work of the Lord, and that's all the qualification that he needs - and therefore the great apostle commends him!

Timothy was much younger than Paul, and in fact even eight years after he wrote this part of the epistle Paul still speaks of Timothy's youth. Age didn't matter to Paul as much as testimony - have you got that? Age didn't matter to Paul as much as testimony - that's why in the qualifications for oversight in the New Testament it says: 'not a novice', not 'not someone of young years in someone's estimation', but 'not a novice' because testimony is the sense there - 'not one who is immature spiritually speaking'. He said in verse 11: 'Let no man therefore despise him', and he expands that in 1 Timothy 4:12 of course, you know where he says to Timothy: 'Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example to all the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity' - do you see that? He's saying: 'Timothy, it doesn't matter what age you are; Corinthians, it doesn't matter what age this man is I'm sending to you - what matters is this: his testimony! Timothy I want you to be an example to all believers, young and old, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity'.

So he tells these Corinthians: 'Now, you be easy on him, let him be among you without fear' - because you would know by now that the Corinthians could be a very critical lot, in fact downright rude at times. In 2 Corinthians they say of the apostle himself that his letters, his epistles are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible - what are they going to make of Timothy? But the fact of the matter is Paul says Timothy commands respect, and can I say this to you tonight: any servant of the Lord, any servant of the Lord who God has called and commended, no matter who they are, what disposition, what denomination - if God has put His hand on them you've no reason to despise them, they command respect. If they're approved of God, why should they worry if they be approved of you? Who are you?

Timothy commanded respect, but here's the second thing: he is commended by Paul. I want you to see this specifically, in effect Paul is saying: 'Look, don't despise him', verse 11, 'but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren'. In effect: treat him the way you would treat me, let him be among you without fear, I want you to protect him. 'I look for him', he says, in other words 'I prize him'. He pleads for him that they'll send him back in a good state with their blessing in peace, because he esteems him, he commends him. I'll tell you, it would be a great thing to have the apostle Paul commend you! I think there's a whole lot of dodgy stuff that's written about Timothy in some commentaries - you'd think he was a weakling, pale-faced weakling that couldn't stand up to anything, or do anything for God. The fact of the matter is, yes, he had often infirmities and all the rest, but he would have to be a mighty man to follow the apostle Paul in anybody's estimation.

Listen to what one commentator says about these two facts - how Timothy commands respect, and how he is commended by Paul, and the standard that the church is to show towards the servant of Christ. He says: 'There is much to learn in these little niceties of Christian conduct. Christianity consists as much of the way we act as in what we say. If one says that he is impressed', and he means there simply astounded, 'with the heresies of modernists, then we say that we are astounded with the hypocrisies of the fundamentalists. It's about time we began to inspect the conduct of our creed as much as we insist upon the correctness of our creed!'. How do we hold our beliefs? Do we hold them in grace? How do we treat other believers, no matter what we think about them? Paul said to this church: 'Timothy commands respect, and he is commended by me, and I want you to respect him no matter what age he is, or no matter what experience he has'.

What a master builder, and Timothy went into the midst of all that and built for God! Paul's plans, Timothy's testimony, and thirdly and finally Apollos' independence. Another man of God at work, let's see what we can learn from him, verse 12: 'As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time'. This is a remarkable verse - Apollos' independence. Let me show you something about this man, turn with me to the book of the Acts chapter 18, and verse 24, we read of this man: 'And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man', Apollos was an eloquent man, have you got that? 'And mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus', Apollos was an eloquent man who was mighty in the Scriptures - in other words the Old Testament Scriptures, because they didn't have the New Testament yet, but he was a mighty man who could preach the word almost like no one else in his day. A mighty man who was eloquent...verse 25: 'This man was instructed in the way of the Lord', now that's simply another way, I think, of saying that he was a saved man, he was a converted man, he knew God in a personal way. 'And being fervent in the spirit', what does that mean? He wasn't a wet fish in the pulpit, he was a zealous man. He, as we would say here in Ulster, had fire in his belly, he could preach the word with power, 'and he spake and taught diligently'. He was a diligent man, he was consistent in everything he did, whatever he taught he backed it up with his life, he lived what he said. 'Knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue' - he spoke boldly, an eloquent man, a mighty man, a saved man, a zealous man, a consistent man, and a fearless man! A Jew converted to Christ, going into the middle of the synagogue and boldly preaching Christ unto them.

Verse 26: 'Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly'. He was all those things, but he was also a humble man! He was able to have a man and - watch this! - a woman...men, you know what one of those is! Have you ever had a woman teach you? Here it is: he was humble enough, eloquent, mighty, zealous, consistent, to allow a man and a woman to teach him the things of God more perfectly. But let me show you this from Corinthians: he was a man who had a mind of his own - have you got that? He was a man who had a mind of his own, look at verse 12: 'Apollos, I greatly desired him', Paul says, 'to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time'.

Now just put yourself in the position for one moment: you're living in the day of the apostle Paul, and you've got a bit of ability with the word of God and you can preach a wee bit - and the great apostle comes along and has a word in your ear and he says: 'David, you've been doing pretty well you know, and I think you are the man - you see that church in Corinth that's in pieces, I think you're the man to go and sort it all out'. What would you think? What would most of us do? 'The great apostle thinks I'm the man? The great apostle thinks I've got the ability?' - would you not be flattered just a little bit? The fact of the matter is, this man having a request from his friend the apostle Paul, wasn't swayed by friendship - it didn't affect him! We have found out from the very first chapter of this book that there were divisions in Corinth, there were factions - some said 'I am of Paul', some said 'I am of Cephas', Peter, some said 'I am of Christ' - but what was the other group? 'I am of Apollos'. He had a friendship in Paul, but he also had a fan club in Corinth! But neither his friend Paul, nor his fans in Corinth could sway this man to go there if it was not God's will.

What a mighty man he was, eh? Someone has said this is pure unjealous love and respect on both Paul's account and Apollos' account. Paul wasn't jealous of the following that Apollos had in Corinth, in fact he invites him to come along and preach to them, because he'll be listened to. Neither was Paul miffed at Apollos' refusal for not coming - most of us would have got our backs up, and said: 'He mustn't realise who I am, the great apostle'. That tells me about Paul that he allowed other people the liberties that he enjoyed himself. But I want you to see too not only the greatness of Paul, but the greatness of Apollos: he didn't promote himself, and he didn't pander to the party spirit in the Corinthians. Surely he could have said: 'These people really love me, I'll get well paid there, I'll get a great listening, I'll be sitting up to a great table of a feast every night - sure they just love me in that wee meeting in Corinth', and we would go - but he didn't go! I wonder is that the reason why he didn't go, he didn't want to serve God and mammon,

Oh, what truths there are here. Paul did not envy Apollos, and there was no competition between Apollos and Paul. What we see here in verse 12 is the type of liberty that prevailed for a servant of God in the early church - all that mattered was: were they guided of God? They weren't dictated to buy any source, in fact even the great apostle himself wasn't authorised to tell Apollos what to do - do you see it? Some people believe that the apostles were the first bishops, and had authority, and Paul was the first Archbishop of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. Well, if he was, he could have told Timothy, like bishops today, 'Just you go there whether you like it or not, and Apollos, you go over there' - but there was no great hierarchy lording it over the rest in the church of Jesus Christ. There were just various assemblies among the saints, the servants of Christ placed of God among them, gifted by the Lord and acting only in subjection to Him.

Harry Ironside has well said: 'I would not like to tear this chapter out of my Bible, it helps me to understand God's way of guiding His servants in their ministry for Him' - is that true? We have seen God at work in men at work! Paul's plans, how he was scheduled by God's will alone, how he was regulated by gospel opportunity; how Timothy commanded respect, he was commended by Paul; and here Apollos' independence, how he didn't have any man, even the apostle, tell him what to do! God was his judge! Have we not seen tonight a man who is steadfast, Timothy's testimony. Have we not seen just now a man who is unmoveable, Apollos' independence according to the Spirit of God in his life. And have we not seen a man always abounding in the work of the Lord, and I can almost hear Paul the apostle saying collectively: 'Be ye followers of us, even as we are followers of Christ'. As he finished verse 58 of chapter 15, and if you're like that, if that's your work like these men at work, your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.

Father, we say with another hymnwriter tonight: 'Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land'. Lord, we realise that the Saviour, whom we love and believe in, has called us to take up a cross and to follow Him. Lord, we pray that we will do that, and every door of opportunity that You open before us, Lord, that we'll take it, that we'll not be ignorant of Satan's devices but nevertheless we'll be confident of Thy promises; and we will go forth following the testimony of men like the apostle Paul, Timothy, Apollos - men who were moved and motivated by God's will and the gospel of

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Christ. Lord, we pray that we will have those two facets of the Scriptures as our motivating factors in our lives. The Lord Jesus told us in that great commission: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' - the evangelism, the soul-winning, and the teaching - teaching them all things. Lord, let us be building up ourselves in our most holy faith, but let us be winning the lost and doing it all, Lord, not from our own motivation and plans, but according to Thy will, walking in Thy Spirit, for Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

# *1 Corinthians - Chapter 45*

## *"Learn From Your Mistakes"*

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### **I Corinthians 16:13-14**

- I. LOOK OUT! - Watchfulness**
- II. STAND FAST! – Firmness**
- III. GROW UP! – Maturity**
- IV. WORK OUT! – Strength**
- V. GIVE ALL! - Love**

**F**irst Corinthians 16, and we're only taking two verses tonight - and that's not to drag it out to fit into a calendar, to get up to Easter without having to do anything else - there are so many truths in the two verses that we're going to look at tonight, that it's going to take the whole night really to tease them out if we even can do that in the time that we have. I have put our study in these two verses tonight under the title: 'Learn from Your Mistakes' - learn from your mistakes, and we'll just read these two verses, verses 13 and 14 of chapter 16.

Paul says: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity". Let's read these verses again: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity".

What we come to this evening in these two verses is a positive exhortation from the apostle at the end of this great epistle, with the backdrop of all the negative behaviour that the Corinthians have been engaged in hitherto and up to this point. If you have been following us in these past number of weeks - 44 or so - or if you're familiar with the first epistle to the Corinthians, you will know that there's much negative correction within this epistle. Paul is continually, right from the very beginning in chapter 1, trying to bring them into line with the order of the Spirit of God according to the word of God. So right at the end of the epistle, it's almost as if in these almost last two verses, 13 and 14, he's reviewing everything he's dealt with negatively in a positive light. Do you understand what I'm saying? He's been telling them up to now what not to do, what not to believe, and now he's turning it all on its head - not correction, but exhortation to tell them: 'Now that's what you're not meant to be doing, here's what you ought to be doing'. Watch, stand fast, quit you like men, be strong, and everything that you do, do it in love.

In other words, the apostle is coming and saying: 'Now look, you Corinthians, I want you to learn from your mistakes. There's no point in me going through' - and of course it wasn't divided into chapters, but for the sake of us tonight - '15 or 16 chapters telling you Corinthian people want to do, if you're not going to do it! If you're not going to learn from your mistakes!'. How guilty we are as believers in the 21st century of this, aren't we? We read the word of God, I hope we read it every day. We read books about the word of God, we hear sermons about it perhaps every Sunday, Monday, or Wednesday or Thursday or Friday. Maybe we have radio stations on every hour of the day, Christian ones, or maybe we listen to tape recordings of sermons - but the great question is: do we learn from them, and do we learn from the mistakes that are in our past; the things that we know are wrong that need to be put right, do we put them right?

There is a military tone in these two verses which I like. Paul is telling them: 'Watch ye, stand fast in the

faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with love' - because there's a war on! There is a war on, Corinthians! This isn't a Sunday School picnic, this is a war. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; there is a spiritual realm that the people, the natural men of the world, are ignorant to and many carnal believers are ignorant to, but the spiritual man is aware of, that is going on behind the scenes - God and good against Satan and evil. There's a war on, and that's why you need to learn from your mistakes!

But the question I want to ask you tonight, as I ask it of myself and indeed all of so-called Christendom or the Christian church at large today: is there really a war on? I mean, are we really behaving as if we are fighting the world? Or is the majority of Christianity today not fighting the world but flirting with the world? Are we doing what our forefathers did in days gone by, the patriarchs and the prophets, and the priests and the apostles, and the evangelists - are we swimming against the tide, or are we going with the flow of the tide, the way of the world and the fashion thereof? Do we even perceive within our hearts and our minds that there is a threat in the world, that there is a danger in those things that are round about us, that there is a fight to be fought, that there is a battle to be in the winning of?

As I was preparing this this morning, I thought of that occurrence in 1 Samuel chapter 17 and verse 29, where that boy David came down to his brothers facing the Philistines. You remember Goliath, the Philistine, came into the camp and he challenged the children of Israel, he threw down the gauntlet: if anyone was man enough and brave enough, courageous enough to face this great giant. David, of course, came down with a packed lunch for his brothers; and he turned to his brothers who were soldiers in the army, and he said: 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine to talk this way and to blaspheme the people of the living God, Jehovah?'. Of course his brothers, older, castigated him - more or less saying: 'Who do you think you are? Do you think you're going to take on Goliath?'. Here's the words that David said, listen very carefully, he turned to his brothers - and I can see him looking them eyeball to eyeball, and with the courage of a lion even in the heart of almost a child, he said: 'Is there not a cause?'

Is there not a cause? Is there not a fight to be fought? You wouldn't think there was a cause if you looked at many Christians in our world today, because a lot of them are courting the world, trying to get the world on the side of Christianity - or maybe they're just cruising along with the world - rather than what the Bible has taught us to do as Christians: conquer the world in our lives, in the church of Jesus Christ, and try through the Gospel and through the power of God to save some from the flames of the world. Fighting continually, inside and outside, externally and internally, against our three great enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Someone has rightly said in a secular sense that the world can be divided into three categories: the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen, and the vast majority who have no idea what in the world is happening. The fact of the matter is, many Christians are ignorant to what is going on not in our temporal seen world of the material and the physical, but in the unseen world of the spiritual where there is a great battle occurring at this very moment in time. What Paul is saying in these two verses is: don't be characterised by ignorance, believers - be alert! Realise that you are in a battle. He's asking them by inference: are you alert, are you awake, or are you asleep at your post in this great warfare?

What Paul really wants us to realise is that the enemy is at hand, as he is always at hand. He wants us to know that in this world we are never ever safe, we are always in danger from the forces of evil. As we saw last week, we are especially - and this is where it becomes very ironic to our mentality - we are especially in danger from the old devil when there is an open door of opportunity before us for the Gospel. You remember verse 9 that we looked at in great detail, Paul said that he couldn't go to Corinth just at that moment because he was in Ephesus until Pentecost - why? 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries'. We saw that the Authorised Version adds 'there are' there, so you could read it: 'For a



great door and effectual is opened unto me and many adversaries' - the adversaries were as real as the opportunities. But wherever there are opportunities, there are adversaries - there is always danger.

The Lord Jesus told us: 'In the world' - in other words, as long as you're in the world - 'ye shall have tribulation', of course He said: 'But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' - but let us not be ignorant. This is what Paul is saying: we have an enemy, and a great enemy at that. The hymnwriter said:

'Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend of grace  
To help me unto God?'

His last verse goes:

'Since I must fight if I would reign  
Increase my courage Lord.  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pains,  
Supported by Thy Word'.

There is a fight, and we're in the fight whether we like it or not! Our reward will be determined according to how we fight. The first principle of any warfare and any soldier is to look out for the enemy. That is exactly what Paul is telling the Corinthians to do: 'Be on sharp lookout and, Corinthian believers, these mistakes that you have made in the past, make sure that you do not give the devil a foothold in your life by making these mistakes again. If you have run into the enemy's trap once, make sure that you don't twice - make sure you learn from your mistakes!'. I wonder do we learn from our mistakes? If we're honest with ourselves and with God, we'd have to say that there's many times that the same sin that we've always fallen into, we continually fall into over and over again, and we seem never to get the victory over certain things in our lives.

Paul is saying, listen: if you are not asleep, you will be alert, but if you are not alert you are asleep - and what you need is to be revived! Revival is what many a Christian needs today in our generation! I wonder do you need it in your heart tonight? Do you have it in your heart? Do you even want it in your heart? Could you handle it in your heart? If God came this very night to cast all the idols down from the throne of your heart, and set His footstool upon your life in control and Lordship and authority, could you deal with it?

Well, let's take these words of exhortation to the Corinthians and see if we can learn from them, and if - please God - our hearts, by His Spirit, would be revived tonight in them. The first thing he says to them is: watch, watch ye. We could spend all night on these two words alone: watch ye. He's telling them: look out, look out! He's now exhorting them to watchfulness. You could translate this statement: 'be on alert', in fact there is only one Greek word that is used here for 'watch ye', or 'be on alert', and it can mean 'to watch', it's sometimes translated 'to be awake, to be vigilant', and figuratively speaking it actually means 'to be alive' - to be revived, if you like! There are some 22 times that the New Testament refers to this statement as 'to be spiritually awake, to be alert', as opposed to the opposite, being asleep. Paul is telling us: be alert, be awake, don't be asleep, don't be apathetic, don't be lethargic. Of course, we know that the Corinthian believers had the characteristic of being spiritually and indeed morally asleep, and at times they were even physically asleep in a stupor.

What am I talking about? Well, we haven't time to go through this in detail, but in chapter 11 you'll remember that there were folk getting drunk at the Lord's Table - just imagine it! That physical state of intoxication around the Table of the Lord was just symptomatic of how, spiritually before God, they were in a stupor. You remember that we dealt with meats offered to idols, and we saw over several weeks that many

of the pagan ideas, philosophies and habits that they had enjoyed or endured in their old unconverted lives, they were carrying through into the church after conversion. Paul had to deal with them on that one. We saw also how in chapters 1 and 2 they began to substitute the wisdom of God found in His revealed will with the wisdom of man, those who they looked up to. They were also factious - they split into parties, they had party spirit: one was of Apollos, one was of Cephas, one said 'I am of Christ'. They were also immoral, we saw in chapter 5 that there was fornication among them that is not even named among the Gentile pagans. There was litigation in chapter 6, one brother was taking another brother to court. Then in chapter 7 they had a perverted idea about marriage and divorce, and remarriage, and even celibacy, singlehood. Paul had to set them straight on that one. Then when it came to offending there are other believers who were bought by the same blood of Christ, they were self-indulgent, they were indifferent to the needs and the cares of their brethren and sisters in Christ, the welfare of others didn't matter. We saw in great detail from chapters 12 to 14 that on occasions they misunderstood and certainly they misused spiritual gifts that were given to them by God. In that great chapter, chapter 13, we saw that they were negligent in the greatest thing of all, the real thing that mattered, the issue of love. It didn't matter, Paul was inferring, if you've got everything else right that I've criticised in your Christian church and life, if you don't have love encircling it all as its environment.

That's why he says: 'You need to look out, you Corinthian believers, look: what if I've told you all these things, and you don't learn from your mistakes?'. I can sympathise a wee bit with the apostle Paul in the sense that in the preaching ministry that I'm privileged to enjoy, there are times when you're giving out this teaching truth from God's word time after time after time again, and you feel like Paul, and you wonder: 'Am I labouring in vain? Are you listening? Are you doing what the word of God is saying? Are you learning from your mistakes? Are you putting God's word into effect?'. This statement 'watch ye' is found at least six times within the Scriptures. Let me give the occurrences to you, and I think we can learn a great deal from them tonight - six things that the word of God tells us to watch for.

Here's the first, Hebrews 13 if you want to turn to it, verse 17, Hebrews 13:17 says: 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief'. Obey them that have the rule over you, shepherds are to watch for the sheep's safety, shepherds are to watch for the sheep's safety. Now this is not a very popular verse in our day and age, even in the church of Jesus Christ, for many believers think they don't have to obey anybody - they just obey their own lusts, and their own desires, and their own human wisdom like the Corinthians. The fact of the matter is that God has ordained that there should be men in assemblies who are gifted as overseers, elders, 'bishops' it's translated at times in the New Testament, even 'presbyters' - but it all means the one thing, the same word as 'pastor', it's no different - elders within the assembly that God has put there to rule over the saints, and He tells the saints: 'Submit yourselves to them, for they watch for your souls'.

There are some of you here tonight and you've never submitted yourselves to the elders. Some people come to me with the argument: 'I don't find anywhere in scripture where you have to sign a dotted line' - I don't find that anywhere either, and we don't do that here, but what we do is we encourage people to submit themselves under the rule of those whom they ought to obey. You see there is a submission here, and if you have never done this you ought to do it because it's a command of God. But here's the other side of the coin that I really want to concentrate on, overseers, and to those who are overseers tonight, take heed to this: you need to watch the flock! Are you watching the flock? Are you watching for the sheep's safety? The flock on the one hand need to be prepared to be watched, but the shepherds need to be prepared to do the watching! Now what does that mean in a practical sense? Well, it means this: leaders need to be prepared to go to people and say: 'Now, how are you doing spiritually? How are things spiritually?', or 'Why haven't you been out at the meetings lately? Are you OK in your communion with God?'...even to this extent: 'How are your quiet times before God? How's your time alone with God? How's your prayer time with God?'. Now I vouch to say that most people today, if we started doing this regularly and continually, would think we were prying and we ought to mind our own business - that is our business! We have to answer to God one day! Let us not

be afraid of doing it, because I have found on the occasions that I have done it, that people have appreciated it - because perhaps no one else asks.

Friends tonight who are not overseers, can I ask you in your heart of hearts: are you prepared to be asked those questions? 'Where were you? How are you? How's your times with God? Are you falling into temptation?'. Those are questions that the men of God who rule assemblies ought to be asking - but you ought to be willing to be asked! Here's a second thing that we ought to watch for, and it's in a general sense too: assemblies ought to watch for subtle sensual heresies. Second Peter - you may not want to turn to all these texts, but just take them down if you're not going to turn to them - in 2 Peter 2 verse 1 we read these words: 'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction'.

Now the inference there in that passage is that there were believers in the church of Jesus Christ who were actually inviting false teachers into the assembly who were teaching falsehood, heresy. The reason why they were bringing them in was that they were telling the people what they wanted to hear, they were confirming them in their own carnal and sinful lustful desires - and that's why, as believers in Christ and as assemblies of God, we should not go by popular opinion! We go by the word of God, because the fashion of this world passes away, it changes - one week it's this, the next week it's that. But Paul told Timothy: 'For the time will come', and I believe it's here, 'when they shall not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts', their sensual subtle lusts, 'they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou', Timothy, 'watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry'. 'Don't you be deviated, Timothy, no matter what people want, no matter what teachers they want to listen to, in season and out of season, you preach the word!'.

Shepherds need to watch for the sheep's safety. Assemblies need to watch for subtle sensual heresies. Thirdly the saints need to watch for Satan's schemes, the saints need to watch for Satan's schemes. First Peter 5:8 and 9: 'Be sober', Peter says, 'be vigilant' - that word 'vigilant' is the same word 'watch ye' in Corinthians here - 'because your adversary the Devil is a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith'. You need to watch for Satan's schemes - can I ask you: do you even know Satan's schemes? I know that you can go into sin, and delve where you ought not to be delving, and find out things that you would be better never knowing - that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about this: do not be ignorant of his devices! Do you know the three main gates that Satan works through? The word of God tells us it is the lust of the eye, it is the lust of the flesh, and it is the pride of life. That which satisfies the senses of our eyes, that we want to look upon; and then that our fleshly lusts crave after and want to bring to ourselves; and then the pride that is engendered within, when we want to do things our way rather than God's way. This is the fighting battleground of the evil one, are we ignorant of that?

I suppose the question is: do you walk into his traps? He lays traps everywhere, and he's more interested about you as a believer than he's interested about people out there in that world that he's already got hold of. Are you ignorant of his devices? Do you give him a foothold in your life? Many a time, and I've said it before, we get down on our knees and we pray: 'Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil' - and we lead ourselves into temptation by where our feet take us, and what our eyes look at, and what our ears are open to, and what our hearts conceive and what our minds think about! Saints need to watch for Satan's schemes.

Fourthly, saints need to watch for the solicitation to sin - this is quite similar to the one that has just gone before. The solicitation to sin is simply temptation. You remember the Lord Jesus came to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane with Him before He was taken away to be tried, and He spoke to them in their

stupor and in their sleep, and He said to them: 'Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is oh so weak!'. Now does it not stand to reason that if you're seeking God, if you are watching, if you're praying, if you are digesting inwardly and assimilating the obedience to God's word, you will know temptation when you see it right away? But if you're sleeping, if your spiritual eyes are shut, if they're stuck together with the glue of the night, you will fall more easily into sin - and you'll know exactly what I'm talking about, because you and I have both experienced it.

We need as believers, as the saints of God, to watch for the solicitation to sin. Temptation is not sin, but when we ponder it, when we put it over our tongue like a titbit in our mouth that we enjoy the taste of, and we flirt with it, it so easily becomes sin - and before we know it we have fallen. We're tempted to unfaithfulness towards the Lord Jesus Christ - we should open our mouths and speak for Him, or we should shut our mouths and not say something that would take away a testimony from Him. We're tempted to prayerlessness, tempted to another half-hour, or hour, or two hours in bed rather than getting up out of our stupor, and getting on our knees and crying unto God for our loved ones who are on their way to hell! We're tempted to lukewarmness - not to get fired up about those around us who are on their way to a lost, damned eternity; not to get annoyed about the reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the church of His love being dragged into the sin and mire of the world. You see, it's very easy to choose the easy way out, and the easy way out is the way where we're so asleep and so under a stupor, under an anaesthetic of the evil one, that we can't even see when the devil is dangling his old carrot in front of our noses.

We must move on: fifthly, we need to watch for sleepy sluggishness. This is the same thing really, but in another sense, in that if we are asleep, if we're in a stupor, we will not be alert and we will be overtaken - but one of the ways we can be overtaken, primarily, and one of the ways the Corinthians were overtaken, was in pride! We don't have time to turn to it, but Revelation 3 tells us in verses 1 to 5 of the church at Sardis. The Lord Jesus now, not any old run-of-the-mill preacher, the Lord Jesus said to them: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead!' The Iron Hall could have a name that it lives, it could be living on a reputation of bygone days, it could be going on its own steam of pride, but it could be as dead as someone six-foot under in the grave.

Is that a reality that we are awake to? That is the reality the Corinthians had to waken up to. It doesn't matter what your name is, or what your reputation is, what matters is this: are you awake? Are you watching? Are you ready for temptation, to fight it? Are you looking out for the evil one on every hand?

Sixthly, saints need to watch, and finally, for the second coming of the Saviour. Shepherds need to watch for the sheep's safety, assemblies need to watch for subtle sensual heresies, saints need to watch for Satan's schemes, saints need to watch for the solicitation of sin, saints need to watch for sleepy sluggishness and pride, but saints need to watch for the second coming of our Saviour! Are you watching? The Lord Jesus said: 'Watch therefore, for ye know not in what hour that your Lord doth come'. He said of the Lord Jesus in 2 Peter that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God' - looking for! Who is looking for the Saviour?

Well, we must move on - look out, an exhortation to watchfulness. Secondly: stand fast, an exhortation to firmness. 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith'. Now we don't have time to go down all the pieces of armour that you find in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 11 to 17, but in order from head to toe - because it's easier for me to remember that way - Paul exhorts us to take up the armour of God, that we might stand in the evil day, that we may resist the ways of the devil - and having done all, to stand. In other words, when we're in the battle, and when the smoke and the smell and the stench and the sounds of war are all around us, and perhaps we're terrified, that we don't turn on our heels and retreat, but we stand our ground, our victory ground in Jesus, and we fight!

So he says to take the helmet of salvation, that your thoughts may be directed by the word of God and your salvation blessings. Take the breastplate of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, not of our own good but of His imputed righteousness that He gave to us at Calvary and we have by faith. Take the girdle, the belt of truth around us, that everything in our lives would be held up by the truth of God's word. Have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, standing firm, not moving but standing firm in the gospel that can be offered to men and women, and being ready to take it to those who need it! Taking unto us the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the evil one, the shield of faith that is God Himself. Taking unto us the sword of the Spirit, that two-edged sword animated by the Spirit, not by law which brings death, but by the living Spirit of God, that many will be slain of the Lord. And don't forget this one: all-prayer, all-prayer! How many of us take that one?

The fact of the matter is, you and I both know that the temptation in the battle is to run away, to turn on our heels when things get hot and to forsake the cause of God. Elijah did it when he heard that this woman Jezebel was against him, he took to his heels. John Mark did it when things got too difficult on the mission field, and he left the great apostle Paul. Peter did it from the cross, when he was counted as one of the disciples of the Lord Jesus and he forsook the Lord and he denied Him with oaths and curses. The fact of the matter is, you can go through all of Ephesians 6 and you will not find one piece of armour that covers your back, because God does not intend His servant to run away! He intends him to stand and to fight.

This firmness to stand fast also means mature stability, mature stability - I'm asking you now: are you a stable Christian? Are you a stable Christian? There are many Christians who are like rollercoasters, or the Grand Old Duke of York - one minute they're up, and the next minute they're down, and they're neither up nor down half the time. You're a Christian who is going well for a week or two, and then you find yourself in the valley, and then on the mountaintop again - and over and over again you just go through this vicious circle of experience, but you just can't get on the straight and narrow. Many are like that, because they are imbibing every new thing that comes along their way. In Acts 17 we read of the Athenians, and strangers that were there also, who spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. If you're into Christianity to see new things all around you, it might be new spiritual things going on, or it might be new mediums within the church of Jesus Christ, or new methods, and all that you're interested in is something that is modern rather than something that is true - you're in grave danger of being deceived by the devil!

Turn with me to Ephesians 4 for a moment, Ephesians 4 verses 13 to 15 - in 11 he talks about the gifts that were given to the church: '[The Lord] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive'. We need to stand fast in our doctrine, in our truth, in the apostle's doctrine and tradition handed down from the very early disciples.

Charles Hodge, that great theologian and reformed doctor of theology, who wrote a worthy systematic theology, said these words: 'We as Christians should not consider every point of doctrine an open question' - did you get that? We as Christians should not consider every point of doctrine an open question, anything that is within the word of God is not open for discussion. Now I know there are interpretations and so on, but the fact of the matter is that the Corinthians would not take a firm stand on those things that were perfectly clear, but they were perverted by their own human wisdom which they were now mingling with the revealed truth of God. As far as they were concerned there wasn't that much in the Bible that was certain, there wasn't that much that Paul had passed down in his apostolic teaching that was absolute truth, but they were

imbibing a relative spirit that we see in our world today: 'Well, it's whatever you feel happy with, whatever you think is right'. Paul says: 'No, stand fast, firmness is what is required, firmness in the faith, stand fast in the faith' - and that 'in the faith' is not the faith that you exercise in Jesus, or the faith that you live by in your Christian pilgrimage, this is the faith that Jude says was 'once and for all delivered to the saints', the gamut of truth in the gospel of our salvation.

It's what Paul talked about in chapter 15 and verse 1: 'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand'. It is the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Philippians 1:27 Paul prayed for the saints, this was part of his prayer: 'that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel' - one spirit, one mind, striving for the one thing, the one gospel. He's talking about doctrine, and doctrine is in ill-repute in the day and age in which we live. In fact, we saw in the first couple of chapters of this book, that the Corinthians saw the revealed truth and will of God as foolishness! Paul had to tell them that God's foolishness is wiser than their wisdom, and it was about time that they started to put their old selfish pride and man-made wisdom aside and all their intellectual haughtiness, and accept God's word as what it is and what it says - rather than adding to it, rather than doing what many do today and interpreting it through the filter of their own human wisdom, or the present fashions of our day and age.

What was the result of their human wisdom interpreting the word of God? What was it? We find that when they're exercising their spiritual gifts they are claiming that by the Spirit of the living God that Jesus is anathema, Jesus is accursed! Paul tells them no man can say that of the Spirit, that's where your human wisdom leads you to - and then in chapter 15 that we've just read from, what did their human wisdom lead them to? Not to believe in the resurrection of the body! Paul told the Thessalonians: 'Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught whether by word or by our epistle'. Who is standing fast today? Who is exhibiting firmness on the word of God? Because that is what is needed in the battle, not men who will run!

Look out, an exhortation to watchfulness; stand fast, an exhortation to firmness; grow up, an exhortation to maturity. 'Quit you like men', he says. That word 'quit' doesn't mean 'quit, stop', the way some of you would like to interpret it - but rather it says 'act', that's what it means 'act like men, not like children'. 'Quit' is used for the short of 'acquit', 'to act, to execute something' - 'act like men', Paul says, 'not like children!' Remember the Ephesians who were going after every wind of doctrine, they were just like little children, whatever was the new fad or the new fashion they were following it. Paul says: 'There is a need for you to grow up, there is a need for maturity, there is a need for courageous manliness, and a mature leadership in the church. Play the man, Corinthians! Be men'. He's telling us that we need to push into spiritual maturity, it doesn't come by the waving of a wand, it has to be worked at, it has to be pushed to - and we need, today more than ever, the courage of our forefathers in the fight and in the battle for God. We need to grow up, we need to cease to be children, we need to be courageous men and women, and the greatest example of all that I can give tonight is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who had the courageous manliness to come from the realms of heaven - leave all the splendours and all the blessings that He knew, and we could never know - and step off the throne and step onto the face of this sinful godforsaken world, and then come and walk among men in obscurity for 30 years - to have courage like that, and not see His godliness as a thing to be grasped after, and His attributes as a thing to be used for His own pride and renown. He came as a servant, and He humbled Himself and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

We saw last night what that meant, not what Gibson shows us in all the blood and gore - yes, that was Calvary, but there was more than all of that - His soul was made an offering for sin, and He endured the wrath of God there on that centre tree - He had the courage to do it! In the Garden, He looked into the cup, and He said: 'Lord, not my will, but Thine be done' - and He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, to the track, He turned not back. What courage! That's what we need today - there was never a man as

courageous as our Lord Jesus Christ. But we could give you more examples: the soldiers of God, what about David and Joshua and the exploits of Gideon; what about Old Testament servants of God, like the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, or like Daniel in the den of lions who prayed no matter what men did to him; what about the New Testament saints like Paul, Peter, Stephen who was stoned, John the Baptist whose head was cut off, John on the Isle of Patmos there suffering for Christ - all men who were controlled, who were confident, who were courageous, they weren't children!

Paul had to say to these Corinthians: 'I couldn't feed you with meat, like an adult, I had to feed you with milk like a babe - you have never matured, you have never disciplined yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ'. Like a parent, Paul said in chapter 3 and verses 1 and 2: 'Must I come to you with a rod, like a parent reprimanding its child because you're so childish, so immature?'. Can I ask you tonight: are you growing in the Lord Jesus? Growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Saviour? 'How do I grow?', you might say - well, there's only one way. 'As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby' - the holy Scriptures of God, that's the only way. 'All Scripture', Timothy was told, 'is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'.

Grow up - can I say to some of you men, there was a problem in Corinth, one of which was that the women were doing the speaking, the women were doing the leading, and the men were sitting back and allowing it all to happen - and that is what is happening in the church of Jesus Christ today, and it's about time that some of you men opened your mouths in the prayer meeting and ministered around the table when I know that some of you can do it, but you never do. It's time that you grew up and put away whatever petty differences that you have with others, or whatever problems that you have with this church or that church or the other church, and you start to grow up and become mature in Christ and be a man for God!

Grow up, and then he tells us you need to work out. Be strong, that's all it is, be strong - the Greek term is frequently given in the Bible to denote an inner spiritual growth. The verb is in the passive voice which literally means 'be strengthened, be strengthened'. In other words, you're standing by, coming to God, and He is doing the strengthening - and of course you would have to admit, wouldn't you really, theologically, that we cannot strengthen ourselves. We can do things like praying, and reading God's word, and coming with God's people to strengthen ourselves - but at the end of the day God must do this work in our own hearts. Our part is to come to God, and to submit to Him to be strengthened.

He strengthens us by the grace of God, 2 Timothy 2:1: 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus'. Do we come to the Lord for His grace? He says there is grace and mercy there for us to help us in our time of need. He told Paul when he had that thorn in the flesh, thrice he came for its removal to God, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness, Paul, I'll give you the grace'. We get that strength from the grace of God, we get it through the Spirit of God. He prayed in Ephesians for the Ephesian Christians many things, but one was that they would be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. The Holy Ghost of God is needed for this, you need to wait before God for His grace, and I believe you need to wait before God for the infusion and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in your life. I know that when you're saved, and we dealt with this in previous weeks, you're given the Holy Spirit, you're baptised into the church by the Holy Spirit - but there is the filling of the Spirit, and how many of us have it? How many of us are controlled by the Spirit of the living God that we might work out this strength? The word is literally 'power'! Who knows the power of God upon their lives today? Do you?

You get this strength through the grace of God and the Spirit of God, but also through the word of God - need I repeat it again? That's the way we get strength. Paul had to say to these Corinthians: 'Ye are carnal, you are strong in the flesh, you're fleshly, you're not spiritual, and only the spiritual man can overcome the world and the flesh and the devil!'. You need to discipline yourself, we saw that in 1 Corinthians 9 and 25 -

that if you're going to run in a race, you need to practice, you need to discipline yourself, you need to train. We grow in strength when we use the strength that we have, as Philippians says 'it is God that worketh in you to do according to His good purpose, therefore work out your own salvation in fear and trembling' - in other words, what God has worked into you, you need to work out, and that's how you get more strength! Then when we are before God seeking His grace, seeking the fullness of His Spirit, and seeking what He says in His word, we can be brought to the place that Paul was when he says: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'.

Work out, an exhortation to strength; and finally, give all, and this is in exhortation to love in verse...I've lost my passage now... in verse 14: 'Let all your things be done with charity'. 'Your things' could be left out, 'Let all be done with love'. You know, if we had all these things, and we were able to look out in watchfulness, and stand fast in firmness, and grow up in maturity, and work out in strength, and didn't have love - do you know what we would be? We would be hard people, and would be extremely hurtful at times. But all of these great characteristics of a man of God that these Corinthians needed to have, learning from their mistakes, had to be tempered at all times by the very love of Christ - and all you have to do is go home and read 1 Corinthians 13, that tells us that if you have everything and have not love, you're nothing.

True manliness needs to be balanced with love, lest a leadership becomes a dictatorship. John MacArthur put it well, and I'll just quote you what he says, I think this is tremendous: 'Love compliments and balances everything else. It is the beautiful softening principle, it keeps our firmness from becoming hardness, our strength from becoming domineering. It keeps our maturity gentle and considerate, it keeps our right doctrine from becoming obstinate and dogmatism, and our right living from becoming smug self-righteousness'. Carl Sandberg was addressing the United States Congress, and he was speaking about the late Abraham Lincoln, and he described him as a man of velvet steel, a man of velvet steel. Isn't that a lovely image? That manliness does not exclude tenderness, and Paul is saying here that it's not 'do everything with the accompaniment of love', but in love, in the very element of love, in the atmosphere and environment of love you should do everything that you do. When you're watching, when you're firm, when you're mature, when you're strong, make sure it's all in the cocoon of love.

Peter told the church: 'And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover a multitude of sins'. John said: 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God', and in verse 19 of that chapter do you know what he says? He says: 'We love him', well that 'him' really doesn't need to be there in a sense in the translation, it literally is saying 'we love!' - not just the Lord, but love everyone, because He first loved us!

Can I finish by telling you a story that I only heard today on this issue of love, and let us take the exhortations that Paul gives us here and learn from our own mistakes. Let us look out, and stand fast, and grow up, and work out, and give all - but it all must be tempered in love.

Her name was Sally, she was a young lady who went to the Bible Seminary, and she went one day to her classroom, the classroom of Dr Smith who all the students loved because many-a-time he would illustrate his truths with great illustrations. This day when they came into the classroom they knew that they were in for another good one because just on the blackboard there was a target. Alongside the target there was a little table with a lot of darts on it, and they thought: 'What are we in for today?'. Dr Smith got them all to sit down, and he said to them: 'Now I want to think of a person in all the world who you've got the greatest grudge with, someone you really detest - I'll not use the word 'hate', for that's too strong and too un-Christian, but some of us think we're allowed to detest some people, so you think of someone you detest, someone you're just annoyed with and angry with. What I'll do is, I'll get you a piece of paper and a pen, and you can draw a picture of them, and I'll let you have your turn to pin them on that target and throw darts, as many darts as you can get on them for the time that is left'. So they all set to work, and Sally began her picture.



Sally's friend drew a picture of the girl that had stole her boyfriend off her a couple of weeks ago. Another one of Sally's friends drew a picture of her little brother, and Sally began to draw a picture of someone who used to be her best friend - she did it in great detail and took a lot of time over it, every freckle was detailed, the shape of her nose - maybe it wasn't the true shape, but the ears and eyes and everything were there.

Each person got their turn, and you want to have seen them - the picture went up, and they belted that board with all the might that they could until the paper was shredded, there was hardly any of it left! One by one they went up, until Dr Smith said: 'Sorry, the time is up, I can't let any of you have any more chances now' - and Sally hadn't had her turn. Boy, was she angry! 'I went to all the trouble of this, and I wanted to vent my anger and my revenge', and just as Sally was getting hot under the collar Dr Smith went up to the dartboard, and took off all the pictures that had been pinned by the students - and behind them was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. His eyes were torn, His nose was broken, His whole face was marred, and the whole class was silent as Dr Smith just said these words: 'As ye have done it unto the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me'. That brings it home, doesn't it? Let all things be done with love.

*1 Corinthians - Chapter 46*  
***"Some Last Lessons In Love  
 For The Lord's People"***

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**I Corinthians 16:15-24**

- I. Be addicted to serving the saints (verse 15)**
- II. Be submitted to servants of God (verse 16)**
- III. Be supportive to saints in need (verses 17-18)**
- IV. Be hospitable to the rest of the body (verse 19)**
- V. Be affectionate in dealing with each other (verse 20)**

**The Salutation (verse 21)**

**The Condemnation (verse 22)**

**The Benediction (verses 23-24)**

**F**irst Corinthians 16, and you can see from your study sheet that the title is 'Some Last Lessons In Love For The Lord's People', and the reading, the portion of consideration, is verse 15 to verse 24 - but we'll take it up from verse 14 because, as we'll see, everything from verse 15 on is really linked to what Paul has just said in verse 14 where we ended last Monday evening.

Verse 14: "Let all your things be done with charity. I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit and your's: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such. The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen".

'Some Last Lessons In Love For The Lord's People', that is how the apostle concludes this first epistle to the Corinthians. What you have, I believe, in verse 15 to the end of the chapter, 24, is an illustration of the verse 14 where we ended last Monday night. Let's just read it together, he said: 'Let all your things', or as we saw that 'your' is added, 'Let all things' - all - 'be done with charity'. Right at the end of this letter Paul is striking the note of love, he's wanting these believers in Corinth to realise the intrinsic fundamental place that love ought to have in the life of individual believers, but collectively in the life of the local assembly. So please don't make the mistake, as many do when they read the last salutations of the apostle Paul at the end of his epistles, of just thinking that they're a bundle of expressions of common courtesy wherewith he is ending his letter. It's far greater than that! There's far deeper truth for us to learn from it. We must always remember that these verses, though they may seem mundane at a very casual glance, they are Scripture - Holy Scripture.

Just like the great genealogies of the Old Testament that sometimes we get bleary-eyed reading at times in our devotions, they are Scripture. As I prayed in my prayer, and as 2 Timothy 3:16 says: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' - all godliness.

These verses, these closing verses of 1 Corinthians, are Scripture - and therefore it's important to see what the Holy Spirit has to say to us from them. You will remember as we've gone through 46 or 45 or thereabouts weeks of this study, that we found out that these Corinthian Christians were clever - they prided themselves in their human wisdom. They were charismatic, many of them came behind in no gift. They were very gifted in not only wisdom, but in spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the church. But we also saw that they were carnal Christians, they were fleshly Christians, they were looking out for number one rather than each other. But one of the major features that we have seen lacking in these Corinthian, carnal, charismatic, clever Christians is charity with one another.

Let me remind you - as if I needed to remind you - of that wonderful purple passage in 1 Corinthians 13. Turn with me to it just till we remind ourselves of how Paul laid this down forcibly: 'You could be clever, Corinthians, you could be charismatic - but it doesn't matter what you are or what you have, if you lack charity you're nothing'. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away'.

They needed to realise that without love their Christianity meant absolutely nothing! So love, Paul is saying at the end of this epistle, as he has laid down right throughout it all, is a characteristic that should chiefly mark not only the child of God but the church of God. So, under consideration this evening, are some last lessons in love for the Lord's people. Let me remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus to the disciples, turn with me to John 13:34 that will lay a foundation for everything that we're going to say tonight. John 13:34 and 35, the Saviour said: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another'.

Love is to mark us as the people of God! In this portion, in verse 14, he starts with love: 'Let all your things be done with charity', and he ends this portion in verse 24, 'My love be with you all in Christ Jesus'. He commands them to love, and then he ends with the assurance that they're loved by him. So we're going to see tonight that these final remarks of the apostle Paul are not some bunch of loose ends without a coherent theme. What he is telling us, and more importantly what the Holy Spirit of God is inspiring us to know through the Scriptures, is that these sentiments expressed to us should mark all of God's people as symptomatic of their love to one another.

So let's look at them - the first he gives us in verse 15: 'I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves' - what a phrase! - 'to the ministry of the saints,')'. Here's the first mark of love among believers: being addicted to serving the saints. So by inference the exhortation of the apostle by the Spirit to us tonight in the 21st century is: being addicted

to the service of the saints. Now if you look at verse 15, he talks about the house of Stephanas as being the firstfruits of Achaia - that means they were the first ones of the Lord Jesus Christ in Achaia. Now if you look back to chapter 1 and verse 16, you remember when the apostle Paul said: 'I came not to baptise, but to preach the gospel' - he said that he had baptised no one except the house of Stephanas. Chapter 1 and verse 16: 'And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other'. The household of Stephanas were the first saved, the first baptised, and now we see at the end of chapter 16 that they're leading lights in this meeting in the church at Corinth.

Now let me just say, by way of passing, that that verse in chapter 1 verse 16 does not prove infant baptism. A lot of paedo-baptists, who baptise children, tell us that because the household of Stephanas was baptised that there were wee babies - I don't know how they know that - but there were wee babies in the household and they were baptised as well. Well, the question I ask them at the end of Corinthians - that they maybe haven't read to the end of - is: how are these people, these little babies, leading lights in the meeting? And how are they addicted to the service of the saints? It's an impossibility! But those who believed and were baptised, eventually became leading labourers in the church at Corinth - important workers in the church. Here's the description that Paul gives to them: they were addicted to the ministry of the saints, to serving the saints - what a strong phrase! Addicted! It says they addicted themselves - it wasn't something they caught, like some kind of disease - they addicted themselves of their own volition, voluntarily in their own mind and heart. They put their hand to the plough, and they turned not back as they sought to love others by serving.

Now the Greek word is 'tasso', and it can be translated - as some translations do - 'devoted'. 'They devoted themselves to the service of the saints', or it could also be translated 'They appointed themselves to the service of the saints'. Now what does that mean, 'They appointed themselves'? Well, I'll tell you what it doesn't mean: it doesn't mean that they pushed their way into leadership. We must not misunderstand this, because there are men, Christian men, who push themselves into positions of leadership, who seek to push themselves into the limelight to be seen as leaders. That is not what Paul is talking about when he says that they appointed themselves in this matter, rather what it means is this: whenever they saw the need, whenever they saw something that needed to be done, they didn't wait to be asked to do it! If they saw the need, and they had the means to meet the need, they got up and met it, because they were addicted to doing such things. Almost, we could say, they just couldn't help themselves helping others!

I think that's beautiful, don't you? In fact they toiled to exhaustion in their labouring on the apostle Paul. This is a whole family now we're talking about - in our age sometimes you get one in a family who's really on fire for God. Maybe the husband, he's always out and the wife's never at the meetings, or vice versa. Maybe it's a young teenager in the family, and the family doesn't set a very good example - they're not at the Breaking of Bread, they're not at the Bible Study or the prayer meeting - but yet their young person in the family, the son or daughter, they're there all the time, and they're soaking up and seeking God's face. But here we have an entire family unit following hard after God, and every one of them has addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints!

Can you imagine if we had families like this? The work of God would take off, wouldn't it? If our families were so faithful to the work of God and the local church - and here's the thing that really impresses me about this addiction to the ministry of the saints: it was voluntarily in nature! They didn't have to go to Bible College for so many years, and then get ordained by some denomination or church body. They didn't have to get hand-picked to do it, they weren't appointed by men, they weren't just given a position or a recognition, but they devoted themselves completely because of the great need there was - and as a family they rose up voluntarily and devoted themselves to the work of God! I'll tell you, this is what we need - I hope there's nobody in our meeting tonight sitting there waiting to be asked! Do you not see the need? The Lord Jesus said the fields are white unto harvest, and the labourers are few - the Lord Jesus is asking you, why do I need to ask you?

My friends, I know that there's times that people want to do something and it's important that leadership within the church need to facilitate folk, but there's an aspect here that we ought to already be motivated to do something for the Lord Jesus. I'll tell you, there's not a lot of people knocking my door down, asking: 'What can I do for you, David?', or 'What can I do for the church?', or 'What can I do for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in this corner of God's kingdom?'. Oh, I could spend one whole night on this phrase because it's so tremendous: addicted to serving the saints - wherever the need was, this family was found, and they wouldn't see a need there and not meet it. Tremendous, isn't it?

Now a lot of translations don't translate it 'addicted to the saints', but I like that translation. John MacArthur, the commentator and preacher says: 'If we use it like it's used today in our own society, even for drug addiction, we can see many parallels'. I quote him directly, so that I don't make any mistakes, he says: 'Drug addiction has three primary characteristics. First it involves a strong habit, overpowering desire, and a compulsion to take the drug. The second feature of drug addiction is that it involves a growing tolerance of the drug, your body gets used to it, so that in order to maintain the desired effect - the buzz - you need to take larger and larger doses. The third characteristic is dependence upon the drug, you must have the drug in order to function'. Now addiction is a negative illustration in a sense, and many would think it wasn't appropriate to talk about the service of the Lord's people as an addiction, but the fact of the matter is that the thought that Paul is bringing to us is: just as any addiction is a habit, the house of Stephanas had a good habit of ministry to the saints of God. In fact, it was like a drug - it was out of a powerful, all-consuming, driven compulsion to minister - they felt compelled to meet the needs of others!

Their tolerance, as they kept addicting themselves to the ministry of the saints, their tolerance - just like a drug - got greater, so that they never became satisfied with what they could do for the Lord, but the more they did for the Lord the more they wanted to do, and they were never ever content with their service for the Lord. Enough was never enough. Then we see that they were dependent - that third feature of even drug addiction - they couldn't do without it. MacArthur said he tries to imagine the apostle Paul taking a day off somewhere along the way - not that it's wrong to take a day off, I remember reading Nicholson and someone said to him after he said he was going on his holidays: 'You know the devil doesn't take a holiday!', and he said 'Well, I'd be like the devil if I didn't take a holiday'. You need your rest! The Lord Jesus took His disciples apart to rest a while, but the apostle was so addicted to the work of the Lord that when he stopped I can imagine him having withdrawal symptoms! Can't you? Addicted to the work of the service of the saints - now he was a workaholic, he wasn't compelled to work for work's sake, but he was addicted to the ministry of the saints for love's sake! That's the difference.

The apostle John, who we probably could call the apostle of love, because love is right throughout his gospel and his three epistles, he says: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren'. How many of us lay down our lives for each other? I mean, really put ourselves out? Oh, we may have done it once or twice, but how many of us are addicted - addicted, that this is a habit of life? What an exhortation! Be addicted to serving the saints, and then that will be a characteristic that will mark you as the people of God on earth.

Let's see the second characteristic in verse 16, he says: 'That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth'. Now who is he talking about? Well, obviously it's the house of Stephanas in verse 15: you must submit yourselves unto such - not them specifically, but anybody that's involved in the type of work that they are involved in that's helping us with the gospel and labours with us - be submitted to those servants of God. Now as we have gone through this book we've seen the importance of being submitted, as the people of God and as members of the local assembly, to the leaders in the assembly, the oversight, the elders, the bishops, the presbyters as the Bible calls them. But what Paul is talking about here is not just those people who have a sort of position of authority in the assembly, he's talking here now

about everybody who faithfully does a work for the Lord - all godly people ought to be respected for what they do for Christ! But more than that: not only ought they not to be taken for granted and respected, they must be submitted to in the work that they do for the Lord.

Now one primary and fundamental application that we should take from this exhortation 'be submitted to the servants of the Lord', is what comes from a pulpit - whatever pulpit you listen to - if the word of God is preached from it, you ought to submit to that authority. When the servant of God preaches the word of God, you ought to bow to the Spirit of God. I'll tell you, sometimes I preach the Scriptures, and there's a murmur - and just to warn you: most things that are said normally come back to me! So don't say anything, because somebody always runs and comes and tells you - I don't always tell you, but I usually hear about it! The fact of the matter is: if I'm preaching, and I'm preaching from the word of God, as soon as I divert from it you come and tell me! But if I'm preaching, and the two-edged double sword of the Spirit starts to pierce into the depths of your being, and you go 'Ouch!' - you feel the pain of it - don't shoot the messenger! I'm just delivering God's word, but if God's word speaks to your conscience and your heart, you must bow to it! Do you? Do you bow to God's word?

But you know there's more than that, and I think - we talked about surrender not so long ago in one of our studies - but I think surrender and submission, specifically here, is a vital aspect to the Spirit-filled life. If you want to be filled with the Holy Ghost of God, you've got to learn to submit to the word of God - not argue with it, submit! There are other things in the Scriptures that we're told to submit to. In Ephesians 5, if you turn with me to it for a moment, Galatians, Ephesians 5 verse 21. Not only are the servants of the Lord to be submitted to, but Paul says: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God'. We, as Christians, are to submit ourselves to each other - that means when somebody gets one over you, and you don't like it, you don't always fight your corner. You give in and concede at times for the good of the other brother, and the good of the peace of the meeting. That's something that we don't see too much today, but I'll tell you it's a mark of the Spirit-filled man where he does not defend himself. It's one thing defending a biblical principle, but when we start to defend ourselves that's a different matter.

We read on and we find in verse 22: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord'. The Bible tells us that wives are to submit to their husband in the Lord, not when he's asking you to do something that is not scriptural or holy, but 'in the Lord'. Verse 1 of chapter 6: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right'. That's not just wee children running round your feet, I think that's children right up to adulthood, they should obey their parents and respect their parents in the sense that the commandment tells us to 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. Are we honouring our parents? Then in verse 5: 'Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters' - employees are to submit to their employers, and employers are not to provoke their employees to wrath, or parents their children - but nevertheless there's a submission here. There is an order of God, and if we were to go to Romans 13 we would find that the Christian citizen is to submit to the law of the land and the government, and the ordinances thereof.

We find in 1 Peter 5 that the younger men are to submit themselves to the older men. I remember first going into the work of the Lord, and Vinnie Commons (sp?) who preached here not so long ago, who is a man of God I believe - Vinnie said to me: 'David, as you go into Bible College remember this: always climb down the ladder, not up it'. There's something in that, isn't there? The Lord Jesus said: 'And whosoever will be chief among you', to His disciples, 'let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many'. The apostle said in chapter 11 verse 1, look at it: 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'.

Be submitted to the servants of God - now here's one way you can be submitted to a man of God: put yourself under his example, or her example. Follow their example as far as they follow Christ! We're not talking about clones walking about, talking the same way, dressing the same way, carrying the same size of

Bible and all the rest - as many people do - we're talking about in the life of godliness. Get a figure that you can look up to, and I'll tell you, as a young man, as a Christian, there are very few people to look up to today! But if you get one, you put your eye on them, you follow them as far as they follow Christ's example.

Thirdly, the mark of love and the lesson of love that they needed to learn as the Lord's people was to be supportive to saints in need. Verse 17: 'I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit and your's: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such'. Be supportive to the saints in need - do you see that word 'coming'? I'm just looking for it... 'I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus' - that word 'coming' is the word in Greek 'yarousia'. Now that may mean nothing to you, but it just means 'the arrival' - 'I am glad at the arrival', but it's a stronger meaning, it means 'the arrival, and the subsequent presence of you after you have arrived'. So it's not just the coming, when you ring the doorbell and walk through the threshold, it's the fact that you're staying for a week or a month, or whatever it may be. They're glad that you've come and that you're there, that's the sense: that you're there with them, that your presence is enjoyed.

Now that word 'yarousia' is similar to the word that is used of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is 'parousia', which simply means 'the presence of the Lord Jesus'. So you could render this statement like this: 'I'm glad of the coming of Stephanas, I am rejoicing in the presence of Stephanas'. Isn't that a wonderful thing to say about a Christian brother? 'I'm rejoicing in his presence', he's so glad that he's here. He tells us the reason why, look at verse 17: 'that which was lacking on your part they have supplied'. Now some think that may mean 'what you lack as Corinthian carnal believers, they're the epitome of everything that you need to know and be' - but that's not what I think it means. What he's saying is: 'I love you Corinthians, and I'm lacking your presence here where I am, but they have come and visited me; and what I'm lacking in enjoying your presence, I'm enjoying in their presence - they're being such a blessing to me. I miss your faces, but I'm glad to have them with me, and what I miss in you I have in them'. Isn't that beautiful?

Now here's the question: do people rejoice in your presence? Or when you ring the doorbell, do they dive behind the settee, and say 'Sshh, turn the lights off quick! Look who's coming!?' Or do they rejoice in your presence, that you're there? Trevor Knight, who preaches with us, I remember him saying to me on one occasion of the old Welsh evangelist who has also preached here and has now gone to be in glory, David Sheperd - some of you may remember him preaching at Easter Conventions in the past. Whenever David Sheperd came into a room there was a presence - I'm not saying he was some kind of saint, but there was a presence with him, it was as if he carried the presence of God wherever he went. He was a joy to be with, and when you were with him you wanted to stay with him! Do you know anybody like that? I know one, maybe two - people who are a joy to be with.

Listen to what he goes on to say, here's a further reason why they're a joy, verse 18: 'they have refreshed my spirit and yours'. 'When I'm with them I feel when I walk away that I've had a spiritual bath, I feel refreshed, I feel cleansed, I feel that I've been blessed as they have sharpened my blade with their blade'. Do you refresh people? Remember David was running away from the hand of Saul who wanted to kill him, and he went into the woods - and it says that Jonathan, the prince, the son of the King, left the palace and went into the wood, and we read in the word of God that Jonathan strengthened the hand of David. Isn't that lovely? The apostle Paul on one occasion was downcast, by inference of a text in Acts 28, and it says: 'And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage'. He met a group of saints who, when he saw them, it encouraged him, it refreshed his soul.

Are you refreshing to be around? You know, there are some people, and I can't say it any other way, and all they do is gurn - that's all they do! Whenever they open their mouth it's always complaint, it's always

negative, it's always destruction, dereliction - let us be a group of Barnabas' who in a day of small things encourage the people of God! Let us be refreshing to be around - if anybody should be refreshing, it should be the man or the woman from whose spirit flows rivers of living water! Should it not be us? Sometimes we can be the most miserable people to be around. The Lord Jesus said, and incidentally He uses the same word as Paul uses here for 'refresh', in Matthew 11 verse 28: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' - it's the same word as 'refresh', 'rest'.

Now what does that mean? Well, He goes on to talk about the yoke, and how He would bear the yoke with you, and His yoke is easy and His burden is light, and He would help you, He would lighten the burdens just by being with you. Isn't that right? He said He was going away, and He would send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to come and strengthen you - the 'paraclete' in Greek, 'come alongside and bear the burden with you'. What the apostle Paul is saying is that there are some believers that are just like Christ in this way - they're Christlike, they come alongside and they bear your burden, and they refresh you: they lighten your load, and they're a pleasure to be with.

Be supportive of the saints, and he goes on even to say that everyone is blessed by this type of ministry. He says 'not just my spirit, but yours' - you were blessed too! At the end of Paul's life, we read in 2 Timothy chapter 4, if you want to turn to it - he's now in prison, facing death, 2 Timothy 4 and in verse 9 we read that he says to Timothy: 'Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me', I need your encouragement Timothy, I need your presence, 'For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry' - I want Mark to be with me! Isn't that lovely? 'He refreshes my spirit'.

Let's move on: be addicted to serving the saints, be submitted to servants of God, be supportive to saints in need; and fourthly, be hospitable to the rest of the body. Verse 19: 'The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house' - be hospitable to the rest of the body. Aquila and Priscilla, husband and wife, were dedicated to the service of the Lord - they were a husband and wife team. Now you don't often get this, but we read in the Scriptures that Paul met them when he was in Corinth, and like Paul they were tentmakers - you can read that in Acts 18. Six times we read of them in the New Testament, and when Paul moved from Corinth to Ephesus they packed up their bags, they moved their business, and they went with him - and we read in Acts 18 that they assisted him in the founding of the church there at Ephesus.

Paul felt that Aquila and Priscilla were so capable and so spiritual, that when he left them in Ephesus to return to Antioch, he left them to oversee the work of God! What a couple! Then in Ephesus, you'll remember, in the synagogue when Apollos got up to preach he was instructed in the way of the Lord, but he didn't know the full counsel of God as the Holy Spirit had revealed it to some of the church - it was Priscilla and Aquila that took him aside, and we read that they expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. What a couple, eh? In Romans 16, we don't have time to read it, and verse 4 we read that Paul says that 'They stuck out their neck for me, and risked their lives for me!'. What a husband and wife team, and Paul probably lived in their house for over a year and a half - what a couple they are!

C. T. Studd was a great missionary - you'll remember, if you know his story, that he left a potentially successful career in cricket, and also he left a legacy of wealth from his ancestors, and he went out into the mission-field. Then he got married, and when he got married there might have been a concern in his mind and the minds of his peers and those who had brought him up in the ways of the Lord, that perhaps his service would be hindered in this marriage bond. But we read in his biography that on the day he was married both of them wore a sash - now it wasn't an orange one! - but there was written on it 'United in Christ'. How many services for the Lord are divided 50 percent when they get married? Do you drag your partner down? Or do you drag them up? Do you encourage them in the things of the Lord or do you keep



them back?

Isn't this a marvellous refreshment even in itself, to see a couple that were so hospitable that we read that they didn't even stay in Ephesus, but they moved when Paul moved to Rome - and then when Paul was in prison they went back to Ephesus and they helped Timothy as they had helped Paul! They weren't following a personality, they were following the Lord! They served the Lord from the depths of their hearts. They moved house - would you move house for the Lord? They moved their business - would you move your business for the Lord? They followed God's servant, and we read here that they even had the church, the assembly in Ephesus - which incidentally, probably was one of several assemblies in Ephesus - they had it in their home. It couldn't have been a building, by the way, the church is not a building - you do know that? It would be hard to get a building into their house, wouldn't it? It was the people, the church of the living God, the lively stones.

Here's a question that we must ask: do you view your house as an instrument for God's work and for God's service? Or is it maybe even an idol in itself? What a lesson: to be hospitable to the rest of the body - and if any of you want me round for dinner, well I'll be glad to accept the invitation!

Fifthly: be affectionate in dealing with each other. Verse 20, here's a mark of New Testament Christians that we need to pay attention to tonight: 'All the brethren greet you' - and there you have it again, there's a group of brethren in Ephesus meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's house, but here he says in verse 20: 'All the brethren greet you'. There wasn't a 'Church of Ephesus' the way there's a 'Church of Ireland', there were various assemblies like this in Ephesus - but he's saying collectively: 'All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss'. Be affectionate in dealing with each other.

Now you may not know this, but if you read Christian history you will know that the early Christians - here even in the Corinthian days - were ill-spoken of, people said they were evildoers. When they broke bread, they said they were having orgies; when they were breaking bread and drinking the wine that symbolised the blood of Christ, they said that they were in some way cannibals eating flesh and drinking blood. There were all these false rumours going around about the church of Jesus Christ in the early days, and what Paul is saying here is: make sure you don't put any weight to those accusations, and when believers are dealing with one another in public and private make sure you do it with affection one toward another.

So he says: 'Greet one another, when you greet one another, greet one another with a holy kiss'. Now I don't want you smothering me when we go out after the meeting when I'm at the door, because what Paul is saying here - the sentiment is the custom of his day, like a handshake or an embrace even with us today, was to show that you were on good terms with the person, there was affection between one another. It was in order that we would never be misunderstood as being fallen out, or being enemies, or having some issue between one another with our fellowship broken. Now the danger today is that the opposite would be conceived - if all you women threw your arms around me on the way out of the meeting tonight, people would start to ask questions, because our custom has changed - they'd be asking the very questions that they were doing this not to attract in Paul's day. The reason why he was giving this exhortation, was that you might be upright in the eyes of the world. So I think what we do today, like shaking hands and all the rest, is the way to concede - but also the rest of our dealings that we have with one another. Sometimes I feel, as believers, we think that because we're brethren and sisters in Christ that we can assume upon some privileges that we would never assume upon with people in the world, or even with our friends or family. Do you not think that's the case?

Sometimes good manners go out the window, and we say things to one another that we wouldn't dream of saying to anybody else. In our dealings, Paul says, this is a witness, this is how people will know that you're the people of God - be affectionate to each other in your dealings. The point is: we ought to be known, if anybody ought to be known, as an affectionate people. Should we not be? I'm not talking about all lovey-

dovey romantic nonsense, I'm talking about real love that lays the life down for each other.

Now let's conclude with these three headings from verse 21 to 24 - for Paul now, in verse 21 we read, takes up his pen - you say: 'Well, he's a bit late taking it up, it's the last chapter'. Well, you do know that Paul dictated his letters? Now he's taking the pen off the man he has dictated it to up to now, and he's putting his own handwriting to it to say: 'This is the personal touch with my own hand, these are now my characteristic salutations to you, the salutation of me Paul with mine own hand' - a salutation. Isn't it lovely? He comes to this soft part of the epistle where he's expressing his characteristic of love toward them, and the love that they ought to have toward one another, and almost as a personification and illustration of that he takes his own pen to exhort them in it. Isn't that nice?

But after the salutation there's a condemnation. In verse 22 we read: 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha'. If any man love not the Lord Jesus - the Greek word for 'love' there is 'philio', it is not the highest form of love 'agape', the love that we have from God and the love that we ought to have for each other and for God, but it's a tender affection. It's almost corresponding to the affection that we ought to have for one another, and Paul is saying that if you don't have an affection towards the Lord Jesus Christ you ought to be anathema! And the word 'anathema' means 'to be accursed'! This is very serious stuff, because what the apostle is saying here is that one of the marks of being a child of God is an affection for the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean you're out and out for God, you ought to be out and out for God, but if you don't even have an affection for the Lord Jesus, if His name doesn't charm your fear; if the thoughts of Christ and all that He has done for you, all that He means for you, all that He will do in a day that's yet to come - if it doesn't stir up the embers of your soul, you mightn't be saved at all!

That's the question - it's not about profession now. It doesn't say 'If you've prayed the sinner's prayer, or stuck your hand up in some mass meeting during the playing of 'Just As I Am, Without One Plea' - that's not in Paul's thought here at all. The question he's asking is: do you have a love for the Saviour? Do you have an affection for the Lord Jesus Christ? He then follows this word 'anathema' with the word 'Maranatha', which is an Aramaic word which means 'our Lord comes'. It's almost as if he's putting these two words together, he's saying 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed when the Lord comes!'. That's what's going to happen, isn't it? Let me tell you what Paul said to Timothy: if you want the crown of righteousness you will love the appearing of the Lord, and if you love the Lord it follows that you're going to love His appearing and you're going to look for His appearing.

Can I fill you in on a couple of other things that you will do if you love the Lord and have an affection for Him? Here's one: you will keep His commandments. The Lord Jesus says: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' - 1 John 3, not only will you keep His commandments, you will love the brethren: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren'. Do we love the brethren? Do we keep His commandments? Are we looking for His coming? 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, let him be accursed' - I don't care what you've done, or what you've said, or where you've been; on that day when the Lord comes, you'll knock on the door and say 'Lord, Lord, have I not prophesied in Thy name, have I not cast out many demons in Thy name, have I not done many mighty works in Thy name?'. He will say 'Depart from me, ye cursed!'.

Are you saved tonight? Do you love the Lord Jesus? I'm not asking you have you professed faith: do you have a love for Christ in your heart that is the mark of one who saved?

Then he ends with the benediction, grace and love: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen'. Do you know what he's saying at the end of this epistle to a problematic carnal group of Christians? He's saying: 'You know, grace and love can overcome and conquer anything'. Isn't that wonderful? He started in grace - you remember he saw them in Christ, as sanctified saints

of God; and he's ending with the same grace, and the same love that can conquer conflict. But isn't it wonderful that he ends with this note that we're going to begin two Monday nights from here with, that even if things don't get better, and things increasingly seem futile in our lives and in our world, remember the watchword: Maranatha! Our Lord is coming! And when He comes He will put to right every wrong, He will heal every wound, He will wipe away every tear; and He will make all things new. Can you say Maranatha? Maranatha! Are you all asleep? Maranatha! Our Lord comes!

Our Father, we thank Thee that we have a prospect - in a church even like Corinth with all their problems and all their carnality, the apostle could still direct them to a hope that was theirs, even in all their problems. Lord, we thank Thee that though we're not what we ought to be, one day we will be like Jesus - we will see Him as He is, and we will be like Him. Lord, it's just amazing, and we want to thank Thee for that amazing grace, that marvellous boundless love that You showed to us in the person of Thy Son. We pray that we, as we leave these salutations of Paul tonight, these last lessons in love to the Lord's people, that we will be a people marked by grace and love also - and that people will look at us and say: 'Behold, how they love one another'. Amen.



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