

THE LIVING WORD COMMENTARY

πάσα γραφή  
θεόπνευστος







**THE LIVING WORD COMMENTARY**

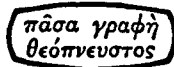
*Editor*  
**Everett Ferguson**

**The First Letter  
of Paul to  
The Corinthians**



**The First Letter  
of Paul to  
The Corinthians**

**Carl Holladay**



**SWEET PUBLISHING COMPANY**

**Austin, Texas**

©1979 by Sweet Publishing Company.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the publisher, except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles, or reviews.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 78-51708

ISBN 0-8344-0070-7

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

### *Acknowledgment*

This commentary is based on the text of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, 1971, and 1973 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches, and used by permission.

Writers in *The Living Word Commentary* series have been given freedom to develop their own understanding of the biblical text. As long as a fair statement is given to alternative interpretations, each writer has been permitted to state his own conclusions. Beyond the general editorial policies, the editors have sought no artificial uniformity, and differences are allowed free expression. A writer is responsible for his contribution alone, and the views expressed are not necessarily the views of the editors or publisher.



# Contents

<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
The Church	7
Situation and Occasion	17
The Letter	19
Outline	21
Selected Bibliography	22
<b>II. THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL     TO THE CORINTHIANS</b>	<b>23</b>
Salutation, 1:1-3	23
Prayer of Thanksgiving, 1:4-9	25
The Apostle and His Church, 1:10-4:21	27
The Church in a Pagan Society, 5:1-6:20	69
Response to Questions, 7:1-16:4	87
Concluding Matters, 16:5-24	213



# I

## Introduction

The epistle of 1 Corinthians was one of the most influential writings of Paul in the ancient church. Its universal appeal and unquestioned importance earned it first place in some early collections of Paul's letters, only later to be edged out by Romans. All this in spite of its being addressed quite specifically—and exclusively—to the church of God which is *at Corinth*. Although it has addressed the needs of churches in every age, it first addressed the needs of a church in another age—a fledgling church, incredibly diverse, predominantly Gentile, established by Paul in a major urban center during one of the most active and productive periods of his missionary work.

### THE CHURCH

The Corinthian church can best be understood by examining its general complexion (insofar as it can be ascertained) and its specific situation when Paul wrote the epistle. At least four factors helped shape the personality of the Corinthian church: (1) its founder, (2) its location, (3) its date of establishment, and (4) its membership.

#### *Paul*

In one sense the Corinthian church was begotten by God (1 Cor. 1:2), in another sense by Paul; he emphatically

## INTRODUCTION

insists that he was its father in a unique sense (1 Cor. 4:15; cf. 2:1ff.; Acts 18:1ff.). For a church to be the child of Paul inevitably meant that it would bear his distinctive imprint. This remained true even though co-workers assisted him in both preaching and teaching. While Paul insists that his preaching and teaching stood firmly within the apostolic tradition and derived ultimately from the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10; 11:23ff.; 15:1ff.), it is nevertheless true that both were transmitted through his personality. The gospel, after all, was entrusted to earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7).

Concretely, this means that the Corinthian church, in addition to being instructed in "traditions" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1ff.) which were pre-Pauline both chronologically and terminologically, also received their initial instruction in the faith couched in words and phrases often peculiarly Pauline. He explained Christ to them not only in widely used terms, such as Son of God, but also in ways and words uniquely Pauline. They are used nowhere else in the New Testament, at least in this way, except by Paul. These include "Christ our paschal lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7), "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), "the Rock" (1 Cor. 10:4), "the first fruits" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

### *Corinth*

The personality of the Corinthian church was also shaped by its location within a major urban center. In many ways the church reflected the personality of the city.

The Corinth which Paul entered was, by ancient standards at least, a new city, less than a hundred years old. Old Corinth had the misfortune of being leader of the Achaean League when it decided to resist Rome, and the city was destroyed in 146 B.C. It had thus lain in ruins for close to a century when Julius Caesar decreed in 44 B.C. that it be rebuilt on the same site, not as a Greek city but as a Roman colony. Its strategic location, controlling the isthmus which connected the lower half of Greece, the Peloponnesus, with the rest of mainland Greece, and which separated the Gulf of Corinth on the north from the Saronic Gulf on the east, had destined it for new life and insured that its ancient and well-founded reputation for wealth and power would be rapidly regained.

## *City of Corinth*

Commercial life was again revitalized, and the city became famous for mining, manufacturing, and craftsmanship. It would understandably attract the likes of artisans such as Aquila and Priscilla. Within fifty years after the city's refounding, the Isthmian games had moved back to Corinth—an indication of both its economic stability and growing influence—and they may well provide some of the imagery which Paul employs in writing to the Corinthian church (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24ff.). Thriving trade meant that the city had considerable cash flow, and by the early second century A.D. it was listed as one of the three banking centers of Greece, along with Athens and Patara. All of this may help to account for the presence of some affluent members in the Corinthian church, or may explain why the most extensive appeal for funds found in the New Testament (2 Cor. 8-9) is addressed to this church.

The city would, above all, have a mobile population. According to some ancient sources, Corinth was full of people on the move; according to others, it was full of people on the make. Dio Chysostom (*Oration* 37.8) mentions the constant flow of traders, pilgrims, diplomats, and those "just passing through," but this early second-century description only reinforces the picture we already know from the New Testament itself.

Politically, the new city was sufficiently flourishing within twenty years of its founding to be made the seat of provincial government in Achaia (27 B.C.), but it took almost seventy-five years for the Romans to judge the whole area stable enough to be made a senatorial province. A flourishing provincial capital inevitably brought the apparatus of government, and the future for aspiring civil servants possessing skill matched with energy would be promising; there were all the opportunities for upward social mobility, and with it influence. Erastus was one such civil servant (cf. Rom. 16:23); perhaps the secretarial skills of Tertius places him in the same category (cf. Rom. 16:22). The judicial system in such a city would also develop rapidly, and the wealthy would have their usual advantage in using it (cf. 1 Cor. 6:1ff.).

## INTRODUCTION

### *Early Fifties*

That the Corinthian church was established in the early fifties of the first century is one of the best attested chronological data in the history of early Christianity. The beginnings of the church are linked in Acts with the proconsulship of Gallio (Acts 18:12). The discovery of an inscription at Delphi which not only mentions Gallio but also provides evidence pertaining to the date of his proconsulship in Achaia has made it possible to establish, with relative precision, the outer limits of his proconsulship from A.D. 51–53. If the church was established prior to Gallio's accession as proconsul, as the Acts account seems to imply, this would conceivably place the beginning of the Corinthian church as early as the spring of A.D.50.

A few details of the establishment of the church are provided by the epistle itself (1 Cor. 1:14ff.; 2:1ff.; 3:2, 6; 15:1ff.), but the longest and most coherent account is provided by Acts (18:1ff.). Both accounts complement each other in providing important details, making it possible to set the founding of the Corinthian church within the overall chronological framework of Paul's life and ministry. (For a fuller treatment of the details and chronology of the establishment of the church, cf. introduction to 2 Corinthians.)

The period in which the Corinthian church was established was not only one of the most crisis-ridden periods, but (and probably for that reason) the most productive literary period of Paul's life. It was a period when, besides his work with the churches of Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 18–19), opposition to his preaching to the Gentiles intensified (cf. esp. 2 Cor., Gal.); it was also the period throughout which he seems to have been preoccupied with the collection for the Jerusalem poor (Rom. 15:14ff.). Yet these five or six years saw the appearance of the Thessalonian letters, the Corinthian correspondence, Galatians, Romans, and possibly Philippians and Philemon as well; in other words, the bulk of Paul's major writings.

### *Membership*

The data the New Testament provides about persons associated with the Corinthian church, either as resident or nonresident members, are remarkable in at least two

### *Church in Corinth*

respects: (1) the sheer number of individuals named, and (2) the diversity among them.

The following persons were associated with the Corinthian church, though not all at the same time or in the same way. Resident members include those who did not leave Corinth except for brief intervals; nonresident members include all of those whose stay in Corinth was in any sense temporary.

**Nonresident Members.** The first figure, of course, was *Paul*. Besides the obvious sources informing us about the relationship of Paul to the Corinthians (Acts 18:1ff.; 1 and 2 Corinthians), the letters written *from* Corinth can yield valuable information not only about Paul's circumstances while there but about his relationship to the church after leaving. The following passages provide information about Paul's relationship to the Corinthian church: Romans 1:13ff.; 14:1-15:6; 15:14ff., especially verses 17ff., 23-30; 16:1-2, 3-5, 16, 21-23; 1 Thessalonians 1:7f.; 2:18; 3:6-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 3:1-2.

After Paul, the one person who exercised the most influence upon the young Corinthian church was *Apollos*, the intellectually sophisticated teacher from Alexandria. This is confirmed not only by 1 Corinthians, where Apollos is mentioned by name more often than anyone else (except Paul)—and always conspicuously before Peter (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22)—and where he is clearly responsible for the second stage of the work at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6; 4:6), but also by the manner in which he is introduced in Acts. Acts tells the reader little about Corinth after Paul's departure except for Apollos' forceful ministry.

The presence of the "Apollos party" (1 Cor. 1:12) indicates that he was capable of engendering extreme personal loyalty although it is questionable whether that was his intention. The possible rivalry between Apollos the golden-tongued and Paul the silver-tongued is frequently exaggerated. Paul, it is true, in 1 Corinthians 1-4 does debunk wisdom and eloquence, which were Apollos' forte, and insists on the primacy of his own work (cf. 3:16; 4:15); and later (2 Cor. 3:1) he minimizes the value of letters of recommendation, the means by which Apollos had gained an entree into Corinth (cf. Acts 18:27). But what rivalry

## INTRODUCTION

there was, if any, was apparently negligible, for Paul willingly urges Apollos to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12).

*Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca)* were among the estimated two to four million Jews who lived in the Diaspora during the first century. As tentmakers they belonged to the artisan class and traveled extensively, which was not uncommon for Diaspora Jews, especially those who were well off financially. From the New Testament evidence alone, which provides glimpses of their whereabouts, we know that they lived in at least the following places: Pontus (Acts 18:2), Rome (Acts 18:2), Corinth (Acts 18:2), Ephesus (Acts 18:19; 1 Cor. 16:19), and Rome again (Rom. 16:3-5); it is difficult to know where 2 Timothy 4:19 places them. They were probably already Christians when they met Paul in Corinth, since the household of Stephanas had the honor of being the "first fruits of Achaia" (1 Cor. 16:15).

Aquila and Priscilla are perhaps best known for expounding "the way of God more accurately" to Apollos, a fellow Diaspora Jewish Christian, which probably means that they were the first to inform him about the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24ff.). They became intimate co-workers with Paul, and their work among the fledgling Gentile churches, their willingness to risk friendship with the mercer Paul, and their habitual hospitality to individuals such as Paul (Acts 18:3), and churches such as those at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and Rome (Rom. 16:5), brought them unusually high praise and placed all the Gentile churches in their debt (cf. 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5).

Before he became one of Paul's co-workers, *Silas* was an important leader in the early church, respected enough by both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to be selected as one of the two persons to accompany Paul and Barnabas in delivering the Jerusalem decree to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22ff.). A prophet capable of edifying speech (Acts 15:32), he was also distinguished by his literary ability (cf. 1 Peter 5:12). That he was a co-addressor with Paul in writing to the Thessalonians from Corinth may mean that he assisted in writing the epistle, if not in actual composition, at least in copying the letter (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; also cf. 1 Peter 5:12). All these qualifications would have made him especially useful as a companion of



## Church in Corinth

Paul and likely figured into Paul's decision to select him as a traveling companion in his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 15:40; cf. 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15). He may have been left behind in Corinth to strengthen the newly established church (cf. Acts 18:18), which seems to have been Paul's pattern (cf. Acts 17:15). He played an active role in the missionary preaching, second in importance only to Paul (cf. Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19). When he is mentioned with Paul, he is always mentioned second; but when mentioned with Timothy, he is always mentioned first.

As Paul's protege, *Timothy* was overshadowed by Silas in the early stages of the European mission (cf. Acts 16:1-18:21; esp. Acts 16:1; 17:14f.; 18:5; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:19), but he eventually became an important figure in his own right (Acts 19:22; 20:4; 1 Thess. 3:2ff.; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10f.; 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 16:21; Phil. 1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:1; Phile. 1; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:2; Heb. 13:23). He is most often found instructing Paul's newly established churches in Paul's "ways in Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17), a role for which he seems to have been especially suited, and in which he functioned as Paul's alter ego (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10f.; 1 Thess. 3:1ff.; 3:6ff.; especially Phil. 2:19ff.). Whereas Silas eventually faded out of the picture, the Pauline picture that is (cf. 1 Peter 5:12), Timothy's importance to Paul and his influence among the Pauline churches gradually increased (cf. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Phile. 1; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:2). Thus in the "Corinthian years" he was a relatively minor figure who could all too easily be ignored rather than taken seriously (1 Cor. 16:10ff.), who seems at first to have split his time between Thessalonica and Corinth, but who came to play a crucial role as the mediator of Paul's teaching to the Corinthian church as he did to the Thessalonian church earlier (1 Thess. 3:1ff.) and to the Philippian church later (Phil. 1:1; 2:19).

There is no evidence that *Titus* played any role in the early stages of the Corinthian work; he is mentioned neither in Acts nor 1 Corinthians. But in the troubled years that followed Paul's departure from Corinth, he was to play a leading role, chiefly as liaison between Paul and the Corinthian church. Unlike Timothy, teaching seems not to

## INTRODUCTION

have been his forte. In his relationship with the Corinthian church he is never singled out for his ability to instruct and strengthen the young church. This general portrait seems to be supported by the epistle addressed to him (cf. Titus 1:5).

Besides his role as liaison between Paul and the embattled Corinthian church, a role in which he functioned primarily as courier and general troubleshooter (cf. 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6ff.; 7:13; cf. Titus 1:5), he is mentioned primarily in connection with the collection for the Jerusalem poor (2 Cor. 8:6, 16ff., 23; 12:18). As a Gentile who had contacts with the Jerusalem church and as one who had not been required by the Jewish leaders to be circumcised (cf. Gal. 2:1ff.), he could effectively plead for the Gentile churches to participate in the collection, especially if they bore any resentment to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Later he is found working in other areas, specifically Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10) and Crete (Titus 1:5).

It is not known for sure how *Peter* was related to the Corinthian church in its early years. What is certain is the existence of one group within the church who was either especially loyal to the teaching of Peter or attracted to him personally, or both (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). There is no explicit evidence in the New Testament that he ever visited Corinth, although it is not impossible; the likelihood of his doing so depends, in part, upon whether one understands the agreement between Paul and Peter regarding their respective missions to be an agreement over geographical territory or ethnic territory (cf. Gal. 2:1ff., especially vss. 7ff.; 1:18), and whether Peter's visiting the Corinthian church would have violated that agreement. It is possible that the influence of Peter was mediated to the Corinthian church through Silas who is known to have had early contacts with Peter in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:22ff.) and whose later association with Peter is beyond question (cf. 1 Peter 5:12).

Nothing more is known of *Tertius* except that he was in Corinth with Paul during his last visit there (cf. Acts 20:2f.), and that he served as Paul's amanuensis in writing the epistle to the Romans from Corinth (cf. Rom. 16:22). He may have been a resident member of the Corinthian church, but that is uncertain.

## Church in Corinth

**Resident Members.** *Crispus* has the distinction of being the first full-fledged Jew converted by Paul whose name we know (Acts 18:8); in fact, he was personally baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:14), which was unusual in itself (1 Cor. 1:17). As "ruler of the synagogue" he was mainly responsible for organizing, supervising, and administering the public worship (Acts 13:15; Luke 13:14). In this position he could be, but was not necessarily, one of the leaders of the Jewish community; his responsibility was more narrowly defined and could include responsibility for the buildings and grounds. Evidence from inscriptions suggests that the leader of the synagogue was often financially well off, and would not only refill the till occasionally but even, on occasion, would substantially underwrite the building of the synagogue. It was an esteemed position, one in which he could exercise great influence, and the narrative of Acts clearly implies that the impressive response of the Corinthians to Paul's preaching was related to the conversion of Crispus and his household.

It was people such as Crispus in the Corinthian congregation who would most easily be able to grasp the subtleties of Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1ff.; 15:21ff., 45ff.), or who would most easily catch allusions to Old Testament words or phrases (cf. 1:9, 31; 2:9; 5:6-8; *passim*).

*Gaius* was among those personally baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:14). While staying as a guest in his house, Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans; in addition, Gaius hosted a house-church (cf. Rom. 16:23; cf. Acts 20:1ff.).

After Paul met resistance at the synagogue in Corinth, he moved next door to the private home of a Gentile "God-fearer," *Titius Justus* (Acts 18:7). The language may suggest that he not only moved from the synagogue but from the home of Aquila and Priscilla. The term "God-fearer" was a technical term for a Gentile who was attracted to Judaism strongly enough to attend the synagogue, perhaps even to observe some Jewish practices, but not enough to become a proselyte, i.e., a full-fledged "son of the covenant." Christianity especially appealed to such people, and we meet a number of them in the New Testament (cf. Acts 10:2; 13:16, 26; 16:14; 17:4, 17). Although it is

## INTRODUCTION

never said that Titius Justus became a believer, the way he is introduced in the Acts narrative makes it likely, and it has been suggested that he is to be identified with Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14). Whether he may be counted as a charter member of the Corinthian church remains uncertain.

If the *Sosthenes* mentioned in Acts is to be identified with “our brother Sosthenes” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1, then the Corinthian church could, at one point, boast two former synagogue presidents among its members. Interpreted one way, the Acts account (cf. Acts 18:17) presents a Sosthenes sympathetic to Paul; if so, he probably received his beating at the hands of the Jews. In any case, we can with confidence number him among Paul’s converts, even though at the time Paul writes 1 Corinthians, he is with Paul at Ephesus. In either case, Sosthenes represents another member of the Corinthian church with deep roots in Judaism, and would therefore view his new identity “in Christ” through darkly shaded Jewish glasses.

The identity of *Chloe’s people* is a mystery. They are mentioned only once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:11), and we do not know who Chloe was, whether she was a Christian, or even whether she resided in Corinth or Ephesus, or either. Generally, it is thought that Chloe and her household were Christians from Corinth who brought the bad news to Paul in Ephesus. That she had a retinue of “people,” probably slaves, may suggest that she was a well-to-do free woman. If so, she is yet another member of the Corinthian church belonging to the “haves,” and representing the relatively higher socioeconomic class.

The “city treasurer” *Erastus*, who is with Paul in Corinth when he writes Romans (cf. Rom. 16:23) must have been a Roman citizen. He is probably not to be identified with the Erastus mentioned elsewhere (Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20), since it would have been difficult to have retained his position as a civil servant while serving as a travel companion of Paul. In his position, he could have exercised considerable influence.

The *household of Stephanas* had the distinction of being the first converts of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15), personally baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:16). Their service in behalf of the church had placed them in a well-earned position of leader-

## Church in Corinth

ship which the rest of the church is urged to acknowledge. When Paul writes 1 Corinthians, Stephanas has traveled to Ephesus, possibly bearing a list of questions submitted by the Corinthian church (cf. 7:1ff.), and he may have delivered the epistle of 1 Corinthians back to the church.

Otherwise unknown, and undistinguished except for their Latin names, *Fortunatus* and *Achaicus* are members of the Corinthian church who accompanied Stephanas to Ephesus, probably bearing the Corinthians' questions (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17). Whether they were members of the household of Stephanas, perhaps slaves, we cannot say.

By referring to *Lucius*, *Jason*, and *Sosipater* as "my kinsmen" (Rom. 16:21), Paul probably means that they are Jewish Christians. Jason was often the Greek name adopted by Jews named Joshua.

The only other person singled out in 1 Corinthians is the man rebuked by Paul as a "man living with his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1ff.). As a result, he has deserved anonymity.

*Phoebe*, the "deaconess" of the church at Cenchreae, should also be listed among the members of the Corinthian church, since the church at Cenchreae (the port of Corinth) almost certainly belongs to the "church at Corinth." En route to Rome, she receives a high recommendation from Paul because of her leadership and service in the Cenchrean church (Rom. 16:1, 2).

## SITUATION AND OCCASION

### *Circumstances in the Church*

But what were the specific circumstances of the church when Paul wrote this epistle?

**Intramural Tensions.** Explicit references are made throughout the epistle to tensions of one sort or another (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10ff.; 3:3ff., esp. vs. 21; 4:6; 6:6; 8:7ff.; 10:24; 11:16 (?); 11:18ff.; 12-14, esp. 14:26ff.; 16:14, 16, 22). It is extraordinarily difficult to establish the source and nature of these tensions. For example, are the tensions seen throughout the epistle to be traced to the existence of four well-defined groups within the church (cf. 1:10ff.), or do tensions reflected elsewhere presuppose a different grouping, e.g., the "weak" and the "strong" (cf. chs. 8 and 10)?

## INTRODUCTION

**Emerging Arrogance.** There are also explicit references throughout the epistle to an emerging sense of arrogance within the church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:18ff.; 4:6ff., 8ff.; 4:18ff.; 5:2, 6ff.; 6:5ff.; 9:2; 10:6ff., esp. vs. 12; 13:4; 14:37; cf. 16:11). “Boasting” is a related term used to describe this attitude (1 Cor. 1:29, 31; 4:7; 5:6; 10:12; 13:4; cf. 3:18; 8:2; 10:12). Some within the church were placing great stock in wisdom (1 Cor. 2:5; 3:18ff.; 4:10), its corollary rhetorical eloquence (1:17; 2:1ff.), knowledge (8:1ff., 10), power (4:10, 19; cf. 1:17, 18ff., 26), and the signs of power, such as charismatic gifts (12–14).

But again, precisely who is arrogant, and why, is often difficult to determine. At times Paul seems to attribute arrogance to the entire congregation (3:18), at other times only to “some” (4:18ff.).

### *Contacts with the Church*

Paul was prompted to write 1 Corinthians by two reports which he had received from the church: one from Chloe’s people, the other from the Stephanas delegation; there were possibly other reports (cf. 5:1; 11:18). He had already written the church one letter (5:9), but the exact contents of this letter are unknown to us; we can only deduce the gist of the letter from Paul’s comments in chapter 5.

In addition to information which he had received about the church, there was information which the church (at least some of its members) wished to receive from Paul (7:1). Several things are worth noticing.

First, Paul does not intend for this letter to be an exhaustive treatment of these questions, only a response to the most urgent aspects of the questions (cf. 1 Cor. 11:34). He intends to visit them shortly, and for this reason, the letter should be seen as a provisional response intended to serve their needs in the absence of their two most influential teachers, Paul and Apollos, both of whom were in Ephesus, the one unable, the other unwilling to return (16:12).

Second, it has been suggested that the reports contained disparaging information about Paul which he now seeks to rebut, but this is far from certain. Such reports are said to have suggested that he did not intend to return (cf. 1 Cor. 4:16), and therefore was no longer concerned for

### *Correspondence with Corinth*

their welfare; and (2) that his leadership was openly being opposed by some of the members (cf. 4:13; 9:3). Opposition to his leadership and doubts about his travel plans had developed by the time 2 Corinthians was written, but they do not appear to have figured prominently in the circumstances prompting the writing of 1 Corinthians.

### THE LETTER

Some salient features of the epistle itself are worth noticing. First, because it is the most obvious and therefore least likely to be noticed, is the fact that it is, above all, a letter. While letters may, in some cases, be a poor substitute for a personal visit, Paul often appears to have been more effective on paper than he was in person (2 Cor. 10:10). This may have been true partially because he was so short-fused (cf. Acts 23:3ff.), but also because of the decided advantage of being able, in a letter, to compose deliberately and thoughtfully, and if necessary, slowly. We can assume that 1 Corinthians was dictated to a secretary, which seems to have been Paul's practice (cf. Rom. 16:22). This may account for the apparent lapse of memory in recalling those whom he baptized (1 Cor. 1:14ff.). The letter contains the standard features found in ancient letters, such as the greeting (1:1ff.) or thanksgiving (1:4ff.), but even these written features are peculiarly Pauline.

It was a custom, and probably the norm, for Paul's letters to be read aloud to his churches (Col. 4:16); whether to his churches or privately, they were read aloud in any case, since silent reading appears not to have been discovered until several centuries later. We thus find stylistic devices peculiarly suited to oral address, such as the diatribe (cf. Rom. 2:1ff.; 4:1ff.; 6:1ff., *passim*; James 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 10:23ff.; 15:29ff.) and irony (1 Cor. 4:8ff.). Because the letter, in effect, functioned as oral address, it often sounded very much like a sermon. It is not surprising, then, to find that the letter of 1 Corinthians contains material which Paul had employed in his missionary preaching and in his teaching, material known as "traditional," since it consisted of "traditions" of and about Jesus, much of which was common stock among the early churches. This

## INTRODUCTION

material would include words of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14), outline summaries of the preaching (15:1ff.; cf. 1 Thess. 1:9f.), summaries of the Christian confession (8:4ff.; cf. Rom. 1:3f.), narrative material preserving the institution of the Lord's supper (11:34ff.), prayers (1:4ff.; cf. 2 Cor. 1:3ff.), and hymns (cf. 1 Cor. 13; cf. Phil. 2:5ff.).

Second, the epistle is, in part at least (beginning with ch. 7), a written response to another letter (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1), and the only book in the New Testament of which this can be said with certainty. The structure of the second half of the epistle is determined accordingly, and may be regarded as the apostle's answers to these questions which he takes up one by one. This is seen by the repeated phrase "now concerning," which indicates, usually, that he is taking up a new question (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).

Third, the epistle is one part of a larger set of correspondence, and not the first part at that. One letter by Paul to the Corinthians had already preceded our 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9ff.), and two more were to follow: the "tearful letter" (2 Cor. 2:4) and our 2 Corinthians. Numerous theories, many of them extremely complex, suggest that the two "lost" letters are embedded within our 1 and 2 Corinthians. Although many of these theories are untenable, they nevertheless force the interpreter to allow for the possibility that the epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians *may* contain the fragments of other smaller letters. Specifically, this means that 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 may have been part of Paul's "previous letter" (1 Cor. 5:9), and may therefore have caused the Corinthians to raise the question addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:9ff., namely, "Shall we withdraw completely from the world (as implied by 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)?" It is unlikely that 1 Corinthians itself is a composite of several of Paul's shorter letters.

Fourth, the epistle was written at Ephesus during a ministry which, at the best of times, was turbulent. Just as Paul's letters written *from* Corinth can inform us about the Corinthian church, 1 and 2 Corinthians can yield the same type of information about Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32f.; 2 Cor. 1:8ff., 15ff.). This, along with the caution that the letter was not necessarily written at one time, much less one sitting, may help to account for the unevenness one detects



## *Contents*

occasionally in the overall tone of the letter. Or, it may help to explain certain interpretive problems, such as the apparent difference in Paul's plans concerning the sending of Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10f.). Thus, reading through the letter, one must remember that it was composed in less than ideal circumstances and may well represent the apostle's thought spread out over a period of months.

Fifth, as to the structure of the letter, it consists of two parts. Chapters 1-6 provide the substructure of the entire epistle, for in them we see unfold (1) his appeal for unity, (2) his devastating attack upon human presumption and the debilitating effects it has begun to have upon the Corinthian church, and (3) his description of the nature of his ministry and his relationship with them. These three themes are interwoven in chapters 1-4. Chapters 5-6 provide two concrete instances of how their arrogance had kept them from properly defining themselves within the society in which they lived. Chapters 7-16 constitute part two. They provide instructions on topics of pressing concern to the church. Here Paul takes up the questions on which they had requested, or needed, information. Basically there are six: (1) marriage (ch. 7), (2) eating sacrificial meats (chs. 8-10), (3) Christian worship (ch. 11), (4) spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14), (5) the resurrection of the dead (ch. 15), and (6) the collection (ch. 16).

## OUTLINE

- I. Greeting, 1:1-3
- II. Thanksgiving, 1:4-9
- III. Appeal for unity, attack upon human presumption, and call for imitation of Paul's apostolic behavior, 1:10-4:21
- IV. The church and pagan society, 5:1-6:20
- V. Response to topics on which the Corinthians have either written or about which they need instruction, 7:1-16:4
  - A. Marriage, 7:1-40
  - B. Food offered to idols, 8:1-11:1

## INTRODUCTION

- C. Christian worship, 11:2-34
  - D. Spiritual gifts, 12:1-14:40
  - E. The resurrection, 15:1-58
  - F. The collection, 16:1-4
- VI. Travel plans, personal greetings and exhortations, benediction, 16:5-24

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barrett, C. K. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 2d ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Conzelmann, H. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Translated by J.W. Leitch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Grosheide, F.W. *Commentary on First Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964.
- Héring, Jean. *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*. Translated by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock. London: Epworth Press, 1964.
- Hurd, J. C., Jr. *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*. London: S.P.C.K., 1965.
- Lietzmann, H. *An die Korinther III*. Ed. W. G. Kuemmel. 5th ed. Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1969.
- Orr, W. F. and Walther, J. A. *First Corinthians*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976.
- Robertson, A. & Plummer, A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*. 2d ed. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963.
- Ruef, J. *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Theissen, G. "Soziale Schichtung in der korinthischen Gemeinde. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums," *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 65 (1974) 232-72.
- Weiss, J. *Der erste Korintherbrief*. 9th ed. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970.

## II

# The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

### SALUTATION, 1:1-3

[1] Paul's opening remark of self-identification, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, underscores the divine authority with which he speaks. It also exposes a nerve which is pinched several times as his controversial ministry with the Corinthian church unfolds in the two epistles to the Corinthians. With the mention of his divine calling, he introduces a major biblical theme which is developed in at least two variations in 1 Corinthians. The apostle's calling (1:1) recalls the Old Testament theme of the prophet's call (cf. Gal. 1:15; Jer. 1:5), while the Christian's calling (1:2, 9, 24, 26; 7:15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24) echoes the Old Testament theme of election (cf. Deut. 7:6ff.).

If our brother Sosthenes is the ruler of the synagogue mentioned in Acts 18:17, he, like Crispus (Acts 18:8), must have come to believe in the Lord, and now was Paul's co-worker in Ephesus, along with others named in 1 Corinthians 16:17ff. Why Sosthenes qualifies as a co-addressor of 1 Corinthians can only be conjectured.

[2] As usual, Paul defines the addressees both geographically (at Corinth) and, more important, theologically (church of God) to emphasize especially the God-given

<sup>1</sup>Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

<sup>2</sup>To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

---

quality of their existence. The Corinthian church, by virtue of its having been called by God to share in "the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9), having God as the source of its life in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), and having received grace and peace as gifts from God (1 Cor. 1:3, 4), is thus the church which owes its existence to God as well as the church which belongs to God. The status of the Corinthian church is further defined in relation to Jesus: **to those sanctified in Christ Jesus. Their full response to the Lord (Acts 18:8) had placed them, individually and collectively, in Christ Jesus, and their new existence is thus appropriately styled "life in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:30). This "new life" was created and sustained by divine impulse (sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints) as well as by human response (calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ). Life in Christ is a constant interaction of being acted upon by God and acting in response to God. The distinctive quality of this relationship between believers and God sets them apart as "God's dedicated ones" whose faith in Christ enables them to conceive of themselves uniquely as God's people, the faithful remnant who, like their predecessors in the Old Testament, called on the name of the Lord in the midst of and in spite of distress (cf. Ps. 18:2ff.; 80:18; 91:15; 116:2ff.; 118:5; 145:18; Isa. 55:6; Jer. 11:14), and held fast to their divine calling. The Corinthian Christians share their calling with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours, i.e., with all faithful Christians everywhere.**

"To call upon the name of the Lord" (and its equivalent "to call upon the Lord"), a frequent Old Testament expression, especially in the Septuagint, is fundamentally, though not exclusively, language of worship, particularly prayer (cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 1 Kings 18:24ff.; Ps. 4:1; 18:3; *passim*).

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>I give thanks to God<sup>4</sup> always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge—<sup>6</sup>even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you—

<sup>4</sup> Other ancient authorities read *my God*

Whereas Jews with their implicit faith in the God of Israel had cried out to him in times of distress, those "set apart in Christ" now looked to Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, as their Lord who would sustain them to the end (1 Cor. 1:9). Accordingly, this seemingly prosaic expression which had appropriately already become a general designation of Christians, brims with significance inasmuch as it portrays the essential and inalterable stance of those called to be saints.

[3] In the prayer-greeting of **grace . . . and peace**, which introduces in almost unvarying form every Pauline epistle (contrast 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2), Paul combines the characteristic Jewish and Greek words of salutation. Its frequent use by Paul may be regarded as an indication of its intensity as a genuine prayer on behalf of its addressees.

#### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING, 1:4-9

[4-6] Paul repeatedly thanks God for his fully undeserved gift of grace bestowed upon himself, the unworthy sinner (Rom. 7:25; 1 Tim. 1:12), but is certainly no less thankful that others share this grace also (cf. Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; Phile. 4). Those who had received God's **grace . . . which was given . . . in Christ Jesus**, by allowing the gospel to take root within them and grow, were introduced to a new existence **in Christ**, which Paul frequently and appropriately describes by using the metaphor of wealth: **in every way you were enriched in him** (cf. Rom. 2:4; 9:23; 11:33; Eph. 1:7f., 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16; but contrast 1 Cor. 4:8). Although **speech** (*logos*) and **knowledge** (*gnōsis*) seem to foreshadow later discussions (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:1ff.), in the immediate context

<sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>8</sup>who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

---

where the Corinthians' original response to the gospel is in the foreground, one could paraphrase: "in every respect—in every word of proclamation and in all knowledge resulting from it—you were made wealthy by being in Christ, as the testimony of Christ (*to marturion tou Christou*, which frequently means the gospel generally, cf. 1 Cor. 2:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; also 2 Thess. 1:10) took concrete expression within you (by your lives of response and obedience)." Paul conceives of the preaching of the gospel not as a mere proclamation of words by a human agent, but as a fully dynamic activity in which God is at work within the believers who are opening themselves up to the word and work of God (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; also Phil. 2:13).

[7, 8] Because of their response to the gospel the Corinthians were not lacking in any spiritual gift. By underscoring that every Christian possesses spiritual gifts (*charismata*), Paul begins already to counter the condescending attitude of some of the Corinthians who boasted excessively of their extraordinary endowment of spiritual gifts. This is in keeping with his custom of alluding in his thanksgiving to certain issues which are later developed more fully in his epistles.

Paul consistently sets the Christian's life within an eschatological framework by orienting it to the final revelation of Christ at the end of history (cf. Phil. 1:6). Those who expected the return of Christ would be comforted to know that the God who is at work in calling the believer to faith is also at work throughout life, strengthening and confirming the believer in view of the day of Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23).

[9] The concluding remark of the thanksgiving, **God is faithful**, sounds a note of reassurance in view of the expected day of the Lord. The God who called them into the fellowship of his Son can be trusted unconditionally. His unerring fidelity in keeping steadfast covenant with his people is abundantly attested in the Old Testament

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

---

(cf. Ex. 34:6, 7; Deut. 4:31; 7:8, 9; Joshua 23:15; Ps. 136), where Israel's faith in God is always grounded in his activity within history. Who he is, is revealed in what he does; what he has done provides the clue to what he will do.

### THE APOSTLE AND HIS CHURCH, 1:10-4:21

This section of the letter stands as a self-contained structural unit. Having completed the thanksgiving (1:4-9), Paul begins a lengthy exhortation introduced and concluded by the same hortatory formula: "I appeal to you" (1:10) and "I urge you" (4:16) translate the same Greek phrase. There is a clear break between 4:21 and 5:1 where Paul begins to discuss the problems facing the Corinthian church. As an independent structural unit, 1:10-4:21 functions both as the preface and interpretive key to the rest of the letter. As a preface, it contains a statement of Paul's appeal in the most general terms. Here he lays the groundwork for addressing the specific problems in chapters 5-16. It serves as the interpretive key in that it tackles the underlying causes of the Corinthians' several problems and establishes the theological underpinnings of the solutions offered later in the epistle. In this respect the overall structure of the epistle reflects the typically Pauline approach of addressing the needs of churches: solutions are formulated theologically rather than pragmatically; or, to be more precise, practice is worked out in close conjunction with, rather than independent of, theological reflection.

#### *An Appeal for Unity, 1:10-17*

[10] Something of the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity is seen by his departure from his normal pattern of letter-composition. He usually reserves such formal appeals for the later sections of his epistles (cf. Rom. 12:1ff.; 1 Thess. 4:1ff.; Eph. 4:1ff.; also Rom. 15:30; 16:17;

<sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

---

2 Cor. 10:1ff.; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thess. 4:10; 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:12; Phile. 10), but here he immediately launches into a direct appeal to the Corinthians. Grounding the appeal in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ serves to underscore the authority behind his words, but any implied formality is offset when he addresses them as brethren (vs. 10) and "my brethren" (vs. 11).

The heart of the appeal, that all of you agree (literally, "speak the same thing"), is not a request for them to express their faith in identical terminology. Negatively, it excludes dissensions (*schismata*) which, as yet, appear to be only potential, not actual. *Schismata* implies fundamental and substantial differences (cf. John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; Acts 23:7) and should be distinguished from "quarreling" (*erides*) in verse 11, a term frequently used with "jealousy" (*zēlos*, cf. 1 Cor. 3:3; Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20) and "envy" (*phthonos*, Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4). The term appears to imply personal differences rather than serious differences of opinion. Positively, he urges them to cohere (*katartizō*) because they possess the same mind and the same judgment. They all (which vividly contrasts with "each one of you" in vs. 12) share the common experience of having had their inward nature (*mind, nous*) as well as their total orientation toward life (*judgment, gnōmē*) transformed by Christ (cf. Rom. 12:2); since unity exists at this more profound level, it is to be sought and realized at this level.

[11, 12] Since Chloe is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, it is impossible to determine whether she is a Christian (see Introduction). It is of far greater importance to determine the nature of the quarreling reported by Chloe's people, that is, either her slaves or members of her family. As restated by Paul, the report is, each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3f.). This report raises several per-



**<sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

---

sistent questions, most of which focus upon the so-called "Christ party." Is Paul describing an actual state of affairs in Corinth, or is this fourfold scheme merely a literary device used to call attention to the divided state of affairs but not to be taken literally? Are there four parties, all of which are indicted by Paul? How is one to explain "I belong to Christ"? How can it be an objectionable slogan in view of 1 Corinthians 3:23? Is it possibly a scribal error in which Crispus (*Krispou*) was misread as Christ (*Christou*)? Is it the comment of a well-meaning copyist whose marginal notation has later been transformed into the main body of the text? Is it Paul's own personal view, presented to counter the other three? Or is it the watchword of a group who rightly perceive that Christ is their only legitimate polestar, but who in some way misconceive their relationship to him? Nothing in the text permits an identification of different doctrinal positions held by the different parties.

[13] Since the parallel grammatical structure of the four slogans in verse 12 prevents separating the "Christ party" from the other three, and since the textual conjectures mentioned above are only conjectures, all four groups are to be understood as coming under Paul's censure. The form of the slogan, "I belong to Christ," Paul does not object to, as seen from 1 Corinthians 3:23; it is rather the nature of the relationship which its proponents intend by it, and its divisive implications to which he objects. All four parties are indicted, but they do not necessarily err in the same way. Certainly all of them are undercut by Paul's rhetorical question, **Is Christ divided?** (vs. 13). The first three groups, by conceiving of their faith in terms of a personality cult, simply have misplaced loyalties. The only legitimate loyalty, Paul insists, is to the one who **was crucified for you**, and who, in turn, makes it possible for the one who is **baptized in (his) name** to be a fellow participant in his crucifixion and resurrection (Rom. 6:3ff.; Gal. 2:20). All four groups mistakenly supposed that Christ is divisible, but the "Christ party" in particular assumed that it enjoyed a unique

<sup>14</sup>I am thankful<sup>a</sup> that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; <sup>15</sup>lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

<sup>a</sup>Other ancient authorities read *I thank God*

---

affiliation to Christ, exclusive of the others. The formal correctness of the slogan "I belong to Christ" notwithstanding, the "Christ party" has contributed to the inexcusable dismemberment of Christ which has begun to take place in Corinth.

Far more is known about the relationship of the Corinthian church to Paul and Apollos (cf. Acts 18:24-28; 19:1; 1 Cor. 3:1-9, 21-23; 4:6; 16:12) than to Cephas (cf. Introduction). Except for Galatians 2:7, 8, Paul always refers to Peter by his Aramaic name Cephas. Whether by his actual presence or by proxy, Peter had come to have influence among one segment of the Corinthian church.

[14-16] An understandably close attachment existed between baptizer and the one baptized (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2). Because such an attachment could easily result in a misplaced loyalty, Paul is thankful that he actually baptized only a few in Corinth (cf. John 4:2), notably Crispus (Acts 18:8), Gaius (Rom. 16:23; probably not the Gaius mentioned in Acts 19:29 nor the one of Acts 20:4), and the household of Stephanas (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15, 17). The lapse of memory in Paul's recollection of those whom he had baptized can be appreciated by anyone who has dictated a letter to a stenographer, as Paul is no doubt doing here, if Romans 16:22 is in any sense typical (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21).

[17] Since the commission of the risen Lord to Paul was to evangelize (cf. Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:16; 1 Tim. 2:7), Paul plays down his role as baptizer, while introducing the overarching theme of the first major section of the epistle: the superiority of the cross of Christ to all human wisdom. He frequently disparages rhetorical eloquence as the key to explaining the power of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 11:6; 1 Thess. 1:5), and in fact declares emphatically that the cross of Christ (can) be emptied of its power by eloquent wisdom.

<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.<sup>19</sup>For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

---

*God's Wisdom Versus Human Presumption, 1:18-25*

[18] The word (*logos*) of the cross here refers to the message which placards the crucified Christ before the world (cf. Gal. 3:1). The emphasis is upon the content of the message rather than the activity of preaching—“this doctrine of the cross” (NEB). Similar expressions occur elsewhere: cf. Matthew 13:19, “the word (*logos*) of the kingdom,” i.e., “the story about the kingdom”; Acts 15:7, “the word (*logos*) of the gospel,” i.e., “the story of the gospel.” The content is succinctly stated later—“we preach Christ crucified” (1:23).

The possibility of emptying the cross of Christ of its power (1:17) is an implication of the Corinthians' dependence on wisdom in preaching. The term “wisdom” (*sophia*) appears more times in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians than in all the rest of Paul's epistles combined; and, of the twenty times the term “wise” (*sophos*) occurs in the New Testament, sixteen occur in Pauline writings; of those sixteen, ten of them occur in 1 Corinthians 1-3. Wisdom, therefore, either claimed, monopolized, or misconstrued is a problem peculiarly Corinthian.

[19, 20] In a sense 1:18-25 is a form of theodicy. Paul defends the case of God against the charges of human wisdom, the cross serving as the grounds for the charge. The language of verse 19, taken from Isaiah 29:14 and Psalm 33:10, has the same defiant tone of Isaiah 40:12ff. where Yahweh taunts the created order, defying the nations of the earth to submit to being compared with him. The three succeeding questions in verse 20 also recall Old Testament passages (Isa. 19:12; 33:18; 44:25; Job 12:17) in which vaunted human wisdom proves no match for Yahweh; indeed it is utterly powerless before him. Attempts

**<sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,**

---

to “make sense” of the message of the cross, i.e., to measure it by the canons of human “wisdom,” are misguided because they are presumptuous. Who is man to judge God? Human wisdom and cleverness cannot judge God; they are instead judged by God who can easily thwart both.

[21] The cumulative effect of this mosaic of Old Testament quotations is that the wisdom of the world is incurably impotent. Since the world did not know God through (its) wisdom (cf. Rom. 1:21; Acts 17:26ff.), God accommodated himself to the world’s weakness through the “folly” of a crucified Messiah. The initiative was God’s: he passed the fatal judgment on human wisdom; it was he who confounded and obliterated human wisdom; and it is he who inaugurated the message of a crucified Messiah to save those who believe. Salvation is in no sense the result of human wisdom.

[22, 23] The gospel of the cross is defended over against both Jews and Greeks, Paul’s way of classifying the whole of humanity (cf. Rom. 1:16). The term Greeks does not single out one nationality but is rather used synonymously here with “Gentiles,” as seen in verse 23.

The notion of a crucified Messiah was equally repugnant to Jews and Gentiles, but for different reasons. It was offensive to Jews for at least two reasons. First, the notion of a suffering Messiah was a contradiction in terms (cf. Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33), although some Jews later conceded this point. Second, and of greater consequence, was the *manner* of Christ’s suffering: *crucifixion*. As the second-century Jew Trypho retorted to the Christian apologist Justin, “But whether Christ should be so shamefully crucified, this we are in doubt about. For whosoever is crucified is said in the law to be accursed [Deut. 21:23], so that I am exceedingly incredulous on this point. It is quite clear, indeed, that the Scriptures announce that Christ had

to suffer; but we wish to learn if you can prove it to us whether it was by the suffering cursed in the law" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 89).

Actually Deuteronomy 21:23 has to do with impaling a criminal on a tree *after* his execution, not execution by crucifixion (cf. Joshua 10:26f.). The impaling as such was not the grounds for the curse; the crucial point was that it was done only to an acknowledged criminal. Jews understandably countered the Christian claim that Jesus was Messiah by insisting that because he was hanged on a tree, he was a criminal. In claiming to be Messiah, he was guilty of blasphemy, and therefore under the curse of the law (Deut. 27:26). As the Jews saw it, the fact of Jesus' crucifixion verified their claim that he was guilty, and, of course, exonerated them. Whether they were right in instigating the execution of Jesus became one focus of their resistance to early Christian preaching (cf. Acts 5:27ff.; also 10:39).

Christians responded to Jewish objections by appealing to Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 53, which portrayed a suffering Messiah. They affirmed that his death by crucifixion was not *opposed to* but *in accordance with* scripture. This is the line of argument followed in Acts 13:29; also 1 Peter 2:21ff., where Isaiah 53 is more explicitly mentioned. A slightly different turn to the argument occurs in Galatians 3:13. The fourth Gospel reflects yet another form of Christian response where the cross is defended as a type of the brazen serpent (cf. John 3:14; also 8:28; 12:32; 18:32).

Gentiles also had scruples about "the word of the cross." Although martyrdom was not alien to the Greek mind—the death of Socrates being the most famous example—a crucified God ran counter to the prevailing notions of their ideal hero, most notably personified by Apollo. The image of a world-conquering Alexander the Great was still pervasive. For whatever reasons, Greeks stumbled over the notion of a crucified hero. The incredulity of pagans is noted by Justin: "They proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all" (*Apology* I, 13). To Gentiles a crucified hero would be a

**<sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

---

sign of weakness not power, and therefore an insult to God's intelligence. According to them, such a God needs defense, not worship. The burden of Paul's argument is to demonstrate and thus defend the **wisdom** of God in the face of such ostensible **folly**.

[24] The defense is unabashedly "subjective": it "makes sense" to those who are called, or to "us who are being saved" (1:18; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). The claims of God are fully comprehended only by those upon whom God has laid claim.

"Christ crucified" is further affirmed to be **the power of God and the wisdom of God**. Christ as the **wisdom of God** became an important way of expressing who Christ was to Greeks, particularly his pre-existence and his role in creation (cf. Prov. 8:23; Wisdom of Solomon 7:22; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3ff.). In the RSV, the phrase **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God** fails to do justice to the emphatic position of God (*theou*) in the Greek phrase, literally "*God's power . . . God's wisdom*." This unique word order (with "God's" in the first position) contrasts vividly with what seems to have been a stock Pauline phrase (*dynamis theou* cf. 1:18; 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:7; 13:4 twice; 2 Tim. 1:8; also cf. 1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Cor. 12:9; *sophia theou*: Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:7; Eph. 3:10). The crucified Christ as *God's power* and *God's wisdom* again underscores that the scheme is God's, and stands in irreconcilably sharp contrast to men's wisdom and men's power (vs. 25). Those who are offended by it must reckon with God, albeit to no avail, "for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (vs. 25).

[25] Paul's sarcasm in speaking of the cross as "folly" (vs. 18), "the folly of what we preach" (vs. 21), **the foolishness of God** (vs. 25), while on the surface conceding the opposing position, has precisely the opposite effect. For God, even at his worst, upstages man ("the wisdom of the world," vs. 18) even at his best. Really, there is no contest.

**<sup>26</sup>For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; <sup>27</sup>but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong,**

---

*The Corinthians as Proof of God's Power and Wisdom, 1:26-31*

Having vindicated God in 1:18-25 by asserting the paradox that his ways—as foolish and weak as they appear—far surpass the ways of men—as wise and powerful as they appear, Paul now illustrates the paradox in two ways: (1) the Corinthians themselves (vss. 26-31), and (2) his missionary preaching which led to their conversion (2:1-5). Both of these provide living, and therefore irrefutable, testimony of “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (vs. 24).

[26] The nature of their call vividly attests that “the word of the cross” is the “power of God” (vs. 18). They struck a most unimpressive pose when measured by the world's standards: **not many . . . were wise . . . powerful . . . of noble birth.** Not many, of course, suggests that some were. This in itself contradicts the notion held by some pagans in the second and third centuries that Christianity appealed exclusively to the lower classes of society. It also suggests considerable diversity within the socioeconomic makeup of the church (cf. Introduction).

[27] This threefold description of their unimpressive status provides the structure for three corresponding assertions underscoring God's role in their conversion, or calling (*klēsis*). Here, as elsewhere Paul sees the election of Christians as an act initiated by the call of God (cf. comments above on 1:2; also cf. 2 Thess. 2:13f.; Rom. 8:30). The peculiar quality of the call derives not only from the one who called—God—but from the unlikely character of those called (cf. Deut. 7:6ff.).

Each assertion calls attention to the radically paradoxical manner in which God confounds the world. The fact that he uses the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong illustrates that he is in no way answerable

**<sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.**

---

to the world. He performs his work not with the ingredients of the world's own making, but with those contemptible elements of society which the world utterly rejects—the foolish . . . the weak . . . “the low and despised.” These were precisely the elements God chose (note the threefold repetition) in order to deflate the wise . . . the strong. The Corinthians themselves are the living affirmative answer to the question put in 1:20, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

[28] This third affirmation is much stronger; instead of saying “God chose . . . to shame,” it reads **God chose . . . to bring to nothing**, literally “annihilate.” It is also more difficult to understand, particularly the phrases **even things that are not** (*ta mē onta*) and **things that are** (*ta onta*). The same expression (*ta mē onta*) is used in Romans 4:17, apparently to mean “things that do not exist,” and is contrasted with “things that do exist” (*onta*). It is doubtful whether Paul's use in verse 28 is to be understood in the same literal sense as “things nonexistent” and “things existing” (NEB, “the existing order”). The two phrases may be translated literally “things that are not” and “things that are” but are to be understood metaphorically: “God chose . . . things that are of no account according to the world's standards to render as utterly valueless things that to the world are of some account.”

[29] The result of God's action is that human presumption before God is by definition rendered impossible and therefore unthinkable—for two reasons. First, because of the *fact* that God called the Corinthian church into existence. God accomplished within the Corinthians that which, humanly speaking, was impossible; or, at least, unexplainable. Their call constitutes the living evidence of God's power and the world's impotence. They were the work of God, not the work of men. Second, because of the *way* in which God called them. Had he chosen to vanquish “things that are something” by using “things that are something,” the sides would have been equally matched. But the sides



**<sup>30</sup>He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; <sup>31</sup>therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."**

---

were unevenly matched, and God still manifested his power. It was not merely *that* God called the Corinthians, but that he did his work against such insuperable odds, humanly speaking. Not only was the work not accomplished by human wisdom and power, its accomplishment both defied and confounded human wisdom and power. All boasting whose basis rests in any way upon human wisdom or power is to be categorically rejected (cf. Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9).

[30] The application of this specifically to the Corinthians themselves results not only in an apt reminder of the God-given dimension of their own Christian existence, but also in a succinct description of every Christian's existence: **He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus.** Literally, "from him," or "because of him" (again in the emphatic first position) "you are what you are in Christ Jesus." The force of the sentence is, "He—the God who called you, no one or nothing else—is the source of your life in Christ."

By emphasizing the God-given dimension of their existence Paul is elaborating what it means to be the "church of God" (1:2) in Corinth. In fact, the Christological part of the formulation, . . . **Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption**, for all its richness in delineating who Christ is, may be regarded as subordinate to the overall emphasis being placed upon God and his role in their calling. Paul does not wish to emphasize so much that Christ is **our wisdom, our righteousness**, etc., but that his becoming **our wisdom**, etc., was *God's act*. Literally, "who became wisdom for us *from God*." (NEB, "You are in Christ Jesus by God's act, for God has made him our wisdom." Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18f.)

[31] The result of God's profoundly creative work in calling the Corinthian Christians into existence and in enabling those who had been called to speak of Christ with a possessive pronoun as "our wisdom," etc., is clear: "Let **him who boasts, boast of the Lord.**" The Old Testament

<sup>1</sup>When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony<sup>c</sup> of God in lofty words or wisdom.

<sup>c</sup>Other ancient authorities read *mystery* (or *secret*)

quotation is taken from Jeremiah 9:24, although it occurs here in a slightly different wording, which may be Paul's shorthand way of summarizing the passage and thereby making his particular point. Understood in this way the phrase "of the Lord" (*en kuriō*), which does not occur in the Old Testament quotation, would encompass the two distinct points made in Jeremiah 9:24. Paraphrased, the quotation would read: "If one wishes to glory, let him glory (1) in the relationship enjoyed by the one who is called the Lord, and (2) in the nature of the Lord who called him as One who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness."

With this final quotation Paul has reached the functional climax of the paragraph as he addresses the real malady which besets the Corinthian church. Division is more the symptom than the disease within the church. There is no fully satisfactory English word for the Greek word *kauchēsis*. "Boasting" conveys the notion of an over-inflated ego, but can all too easily be equated with "bragging," which is clearly inadequate to encompass the attitudinal dimension of the Corinthian problem. "Presumption" perhaps fills the bill better; however one translates it, it bedeviled the Corinthian church (cf. 3:21; 4:7; 2 Cor. *passim*), and here Paul already begins to launch his counterattack against the presumption which will be seen to be the root cause of many of their problems.

#### *Paul's Preaching Illustrates God's Power, 2:1-5*

[1] Paul's own preaching, like the Corinthians' call, further attests God's power and serves as the second piece of evidence adduced to support this. Note the repetition of *brethren* (1:26; 2:1). It is not uncommon for Paul, when writing to churches which he had established, to recall his original efforts of missionary preaching among them (Gal. 1:6ff.; 4:13ff.; Phil. 1:5; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5ff.; 2:1ff.), although it is interesting to note that he never does so purely to reminisce. Rather—and this is to be expected—the

<sup>2</sup>For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling;

---

circumstances which exist between him and the church at the time of writing, and the issues preoccupying them both, determine which features of their original relationship he singles out.

In the interval between Paul's original visit to Corinth (cf. Acts 18:1ff.) and the time of this writing, the importance of rhetorical eloquence had increased sharply in Corinth, abetted no doubt by the presence of the eloquent Alexandrian Apollos (Acts 18:24ff.; 19:1). This is perhaps what prompts Paul to disclaim **lofty words or wisdom** (cf. 1:17) as the key factors in his proclamation.

The **testimony of God** (some ancient manuscripts read "mystery of God"), in light of the emphasis Paul has placed so far upon the role of God as the active agent in their conversion, is probably to be understood here as "testimony borne by God" (subjective genitive) or perhaps "testimony initiated by God (genitive of the author) rather than "testimony about God" (objective genitive). Since Paul conceived of his preaching as an activity in which God was the primary agent (2 Cor. 5:20; cf. 2 Cor. 3:5; 4:5-6; also 2 Cor. 13:3; Rom. 15:18), he seems to be stressing yet again to the Corinthians that the message he preaches is not the testimony of man about God, but the testimony of God through and to man. **Lofty words or wisdom** would more befit testimony of man (understood as having originated with man and borne by man) about God, but would be of little consequence in testimony of God (understood as originating and thus deriving its force from God) borne by God through Christ to man.

[2] Paul rejects the necessity for rhetorical skills and devices normally used to enhance persuasive powers, deciding to allow **Jesus Christ and him crucified** to be the means by which God bears testimony through his preaching. This message was self-empowering and needed no human assistance to enhance its appeal.

[3] This confession recalls the description in Acts of Paul's activity in Corinth (Acts 18:1ff., esp. vss. 9ff.).

**‘and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

---

**Weakness** need not imply a physical ailment as it does in Galatians 4:13; rather it suggests an unimposing manner befitting the hearers (cf. 1:26ff.). **Fear and trembling** is a favorite Pauline couplet (cf. 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12; Eph. 6:5), influenced perhaps by Isaiah 19:16.

Such demeanor was in keeping with Paul's conviction that his overall manner of life befitted the gospel of a crucified Christ (2 Cor. 4:7-12; Phil. 1:20; Gal. 6:17). In fact, he did not conceive of preaching as an oral activity pure and simple, but as a "life-style" which encompassed his total behavior and through which the gospel of the crucified Christ reverberated (cf. Gal. 2:20ff.).

[4] As with his "life-style," so with his manner of preaching itself. **My speech** (*logos*) and **my message** (*kerygma*) are not two ways of describing the same thing. The former stresses the manner of presentation ("my manner of speech"), while the latter stresses what was said.

Paul does not deny having rhetorical ability, he only denies using it. That he had it, and used it, is clear from such passages as Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13. To be sure, he was accused by opponents of having inelegant speech (2 Cor. 10:10), and even admits, for the sake of argument, to being "unskilled in speaking" (2 Cor. 11:6). Wandering philosopher-preachers were a common phenomenon in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D. (cf. Acts 17:16ff., esp. vs. 18). Their presence was conspicuous and their methods notorious. Paul frequently distances himself from such preachers who, among other things, placed great stock in rhetorical eloquence and grossly misused their persuasive powers to bilk the people (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; 11:3; 1 Thess. 2:3ff.).

The point Paul wishes to emphasize here is that his preaching relied upon none of these things for its power. Rather, it was done **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power** (NEB, "it carried conviction by spiritual power"; cf. 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13).

For Paul, preaching was not a matter of words only (1 Thess. 2:13) but was an activity which received its force

<sup>5</sup>that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

<sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup>But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. <sup>8</sup>None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

---

from the Spirit of God. Yet his preaching did not exclude appeal to human reasoning faculties (2 Cor. 5:11); it was an act in which divine and human activity were fused, to which the believing hearer responded with both the mind and the spirit.

[5] Since neither the content of Paul's preaching—Jesus Christ and him crucified (vs. 2)—nor the manner of his proclamation (vss. 2 and 4), nor his personal demeanor (vs. 3) derived from human wisdom nor conformed to the canons of human wisdom, their faith could not be attributed to the **wisdom of men**. On the contrary, it was the testimony borne by God through the crucified Christ using a messenger of unimposing demeanor speaking with unimpressive speech—in short, God making foolish the wisdom of the world—that brought about their faith; and in the **power of God** their faith securely rested (cf. 1:18).

#### *Wisdom for the Mature, 2:6-16*

Paul had not attempted to explain all the mysteries of the faith to the Corinthians during his initial preaching. Yet after his departure some of them were claiming to have understood these mysteries fully, and as a result had become arrogant in their professed wisdom and knowledge. With cutting irony Paul counterattacks, showing that there is indeed a “wisdom of God” reserved for the “mature,” but that it had eluded the Corinthians owing to their immaturity. In the following section Paul elaborates upon this advanced wisdom, its nature, its method of appropriation, and its recipients (2:6-16).

[6-8] Advanced teaching in the faith is here referred to as **wisdom**. Identifying advanced religious teaching as wisdom

was common in antiquity, with a long history in both Jewish and non-Jewish thought. The "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament contained the popular wisdom of Israel and consisted of many types of material, including sayings, aphorisms, and parables. It was understood, and accepted, that this "wisdom" was not available to everybody but that certain persons were privy to it and held the key to its interpretation. The proverbs of Solomon, for example, unveil the secrets of life to those among Israel "wise" enough to receive this instruction (cf. Prov. 1:2ff.).

In addition to describing this wisdom of the sages, the term "wisdom" also developed in other important directions. Besides being regarded as an attribute of God, it came to be regarded as having an existence independent of God. Understood in this way, it could describe the body of knowledge containing all the mysteries about God—both who he is and what he wills. These mysteries were, by definition, as old as God, and therefore "from the beginning." To speak of God's revelation as the wisdom of God was a well-established concept by the first century A.D. In intertestamental Jewish thought it was common to refer to the law as the wisdom of God: it had always been in the mind of God from the beginning, but only later was revealed to Moses. That the law embodied the sum and substance of God's wisdom became a truism.

Wisdom also came to be personified as a figure created by God or as having existed from the beginning. Either way, wisdom was often portrayed as God's assistant in creating the world (Prov. 8:22; Wisdom of Solomon 7:22). In this connection the wisdom of God was often equated with the Spirit of God, functioning as God's alter ego, performing the same role as God himself. Accordingly, the wisdom of God was privy to the mind of God and served as the one who revealed and interpreted his will.

These various aspects of wisdom converged in the teaching of Jesus and were further developed in the early church. In the Gospels Jesus is often portrayed as a sage, "the teacher come from God" (John 3:2), unveiling the mysteries of God, specifically the mysteries of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 11:25ff.; Mark 4:11ff. and parallels). With parables and wisdom sayings he instructed his disciples, not

as the scribes and ordinary sages, but as *the* Teacher. He not only held the key, but was the key which unlocked the doors opening the secrets of God. The revelation of God was embodied in both his teaching and his person. He was the wisdom of God in both senses, and as the Son who is privy to the secret revelation of the Father, he invited his disciples to share both in the revelation which he had from the Father and the relationship which he shared with the Father (cf. Matt. 11:25-30; also John 10:14ff.; 17:25).

Both these concepts also occur in Paul's writings, especially in 1 Corinthians where the wisdom of God is both the revelation of God about Jesus and the person of Jesus himself (cf. Col. 1:15ff.; 2:3; Heb. 1:2f.).

The wisdom which was divinely revealed to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37) was hidden from the view of **this age** and the **rulers of this age**. It was common in Jewish thought to speak of "this age" and "the age to come" as a way of distinguishing the present from the future. The terms were not merely temporal, however, but also referred to the realms of existence typical of each age: earth and heaven. **This age**, therefore, is a general description of "earthly life," life bound up exclusively in a "this-world" outlook; it is synonymous with "earth" in its broadest sense.

The expression **rulers of this age** is capable of two meanings: (1) the political order of rulers, princes, kings, governors, and (2) the cosmic order of principalities, powers, rulers, and demons. The expression in this particular form is uniquely Pauline (cf. vs. 8); elsewhere in the New Testament "rulers" refers to human rather than cosmic figures. Although Paul does not use this precise expression in discussing the cosmic order, the tone of what is said here sounds very much like other descriptions of this order in Pauline literature (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15). Especially significant is the phrase **who are doomed to pass away** (2:6), an unusual way for him to refer to earthly sovereigns whom he elsewhere regards quite highly (cf. Rom. 13:1). He employs the same language (i.e., "passing away") later in the epistle to denote the ultimate destruction of the cosmic order (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24), and for this reason he is most likely doing the same here. **The rulers of this age**, therefore, is an expression referring to the cosmic order, elsewhere said to

**'But, as it is written,  
"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who  
love him,"**

---

consist of principalities and powers (cf. Eph. 6:12). It could be thought of as the demonic order over which Satan had control and from which he exercised his power. In the Gospels Jesus is often in direct and open conflict with this order of reality, an indication of the cosmic scope of his work. He always vanquishes every show of power which Satan attempts to make through this order (Matt. 12:28).

That Christ would emerge victorious in this cosmic struggle involving the forces of evil pitted against God belonged to the **secret and hidden wisdom of God**. Even **before the ages** the divine plan of wisdom had been worked out by God. The unfolding of the mystery, which had begun with Christ himself, now continued through divinely inspired teachers whose task it was to **impart** that which was hitherto unknown. The earthly order, as a whole, was oblivious to the unfolding of the divine drama of salvation, especially **the rulers of this age who crucified the Lord of glory**. Though Christ was crucified at the hands of political leaders, viewed in a cosmic perspective, their deeds could ultimately be viewed as the work of the demonic order.

The death of Christ thus seemed to signal his defeat at the hands of Satan but his resurrection reversed the tables, effectively sealing the doom of the cosmic order under Satan's control: they are (now) **doomed to pass away**. Their hold upon **this age** can only be regarded as temporary in view of the resurrection of Christ.

[9] The inscrutability of this hidden wisdom Paul underscores by quoting the Old Testament. Yet the words which follow are by no means a verbatim quotation from the Old Testament. He may be combining the language of several Old Testament passages (cf. Isa. 64:4; 52:15; also 65:16b), and the passage, as it stands, includes not only Old Testament language but Paul's own inspired reflections upon the passage. The phrases themselves are poetic and have as their subject "the wisdom of God," the divinely



**<sup>10</sup>God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.**

---

conceived scheme of salvation revealed through and by Christ.

Access to this mystery and to the salvation which it brings is for those **who love him**. The Corinthians will be reminded throughout the epistle, gently here, sternly later (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1ff.; 13:1ff.) that love is the beginning of wisdom.

[10] The content of the mystery of this wisdom **God has revealed to us through the Spirit**. Because the term **us** is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek text it most likely implies “us—not you.” It is unclear whether **us** should be understood as (1) an editorial “we,” and thus means “to me—Paul,” or (2) a reference to a small circle of inspired persons, including Paul and early Christian prophets, or (3) as a reference to all believers mature enough to digest this wisdom. The answer to this question will affect the way one reads the rest of the chapter, whether it is (1) strictly autobiographical and descriptive of Paul’s own apostolic experience, or (2) a description of what all Christian prophets experienced, or (3) a description of what every mature Christian experienced.

It is unlikely to be autobiographical, because in the paragraphs immediately preceding and following this section (cf. 2:1-5 and 3:1ff.) his use of “I” is as emphatic as his use of “we” and “us” within this section. This suggests that beginning with 2:6 he intentionally broadens the scope of his remarks and speaks of others besides himself.

Nor is the third possibility likely. Although he seems to imply that all the Corinthians (“brethren”) could have theoretically been “spiritual men” (*pneumatikoi*), i.e., recipients of this divine wisdom, elsewhere “spiritual men” is used synonymously with “prophet” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37). The ability to prophesy constitutes a separate gift not available to every one (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4ff.; esp. vs. 10).

The second possibility is most likely and what follows is a classic description of how early Christian prophets understood themselves. The earmark of any prophet was the possession of the Spirit of God (cf. Ezek. 2:2; 11:5; 37:1;

**<sup>11</sup>For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.<sup>d</sup>**

<sup>d</sup> Or interpreting spiritual truth in spiritual language; or comparing things with spiritual

---

Isa. 61:1; Luke 12:12). Especially active in Israel's history through the Old Testament prophets, the Spirit of God had been held from it for centuries. The Spirit was expected to return, signaling the inauguration of the messianic age. The age of the Messiah would be, above all, the age in which God's Spirit flourished (Matt. 12:28). The Gospels all attest that Jesus was the prophet *par excellence*, upon whom the Spirit of God dwelt, and who in turn promised it to his disciples (cf. Matt. 12:17ff.; Luke 4:1; 18ff.; John 14:16; 16:13; 20:22). Inspired prophets would be active in the age inaugurated by Messiah, and were to bear witness to Messiah and to God's revelation about Messiah (cf. Acts 2:17ff.).

[11] As noticed earlier (cf. discussion above on 2:6), the Spirit of God had special access to the wisdom of God, and was often said to unveil his wisdom. He alone knew the depths of God; he alone could comprehend the thoughts of God.

[12] The contrast between the Spirit which is from God and the spirit of the world serves to emphasize that the message received by Christian prophets was in no sense "of the world"; its origin was neither earthly nor human but from God (cf. John 14:17). Its recipients are uniquely qualified to understand the gifts bestowed . . . by God. Their capacity is one of comprehension: they understand the divine mysteries even as the Spirit understands the mind of God (cf. vs. 11).

[13] The prophet, in addition to comprehending, also spoke in a manner compatible with both the origin and content of the revelation. Because the origin of the revelation was divine, not "of the world," its force was not

**<sup>14</sup>The unspiritual<sup>1</sup> man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.**

<sup>1</sup> Or *natural*

---

derived from human wisdom; the prophet is not instructed by teachers of rhetoric but by the Spirit himself. The function of the prophet is further defined as interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. Understood this way, it would seem to mean that prophets communicate with prophets. Consequently, it is preferable to take the alternate meaning "interpreting spiritual things (i.e., divine revelations) in spiritual terms" (i.e., in language appropriate to the message, not with human wisdom).

[14, 15] Paul now contrasts two essentially different types of persons: the unspiritual man (*psychikos*, vs. 14) and the spiritual man (*pneumatikos*, vs. 15). The same two terms are employed in 15:44, 46 to contrast the resurrection body and the body which dies: "the spiritual body" and "the physical body." *Psychikos* in that context denotes that which is essentially of this earth: in every sense human and corruptible. The *psychikos* man in 2:14 would therefore be the one whose outlook is essentially earthly; his outlook in no sense reaches beyond the human dimension; he lives totally oblivious to God; no divine horizon ever opens up to him. Blind to the mysteries of life whose explanation is divine he is unable to receive the gifts of the Spirit of God; they are folly to him because of his unawareness of God's Spirit and his insensitivity to the world of the Spirit. He is a two-dimensional figure living in a three-dimensional world.

The spiritual man is assumed to have everything the unspiritual man lacks: it is unnecessary for Paul to state that he *has* received the gifts of God, that they are wisdom to him, and that he comprehends them because he is spiritually in tune. As such, he possesses powers of discrimination: he judges all things (literally, "examines all things"), and his only responsibility is to God. He is himself to be judged (examined) by no one, i.e., no one who does not possess the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24).

<sup>16</sup>“For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

<sup>1</sup>But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ.

[16] The rhetorical question **Who has known the mind of the Lord?** is drawn from Isaiah 40:13. The original context of the question indicates that God is throwing down the gauntlet before the created order, daring it to put him in the dock (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18ff.). The question functions to emphasize that the one who is not privy to God’s affairs is hardly qualified to call God to account about his affairs. Similarly, the one who is blind to the Spirit of God, “the unspiritual man,” is presumptuous to think that he can place “the spiritual man,” who has **the mind of Christ**, under cross-examination. This is the first and only aspect of the entire discussion which renders it in any sense a discussion of Christian prophecy. Without this final phrase, any contemporary Jewish prophet would have been perfectly happy with this as a description of his activity.

### *God’s Fellow Workers, 3:1-23*

[1] The change from “we” (2:16) back to I suggests that Paul is now resuming remarks begun in 2:1ff., where he had recalled his original missionary efforts among them. His remarks in verses 1 and 2 should be seen as referring to the same period and not to the letter which he has already written them (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9ff.).

The contrast in 2:14-16 is slightly altered: **spiritual men** (*pneumatikoi*) is set against **men of the flesh** (*sarkinoi*). The contrast between “spirit” and “flesh,” and what it means to have the “outlook of the Spirit” and “the outlook of the flesh” he most fully elaborates in Romans 8:1ff., especially verses 4ff., which may be regarded as Paul’s own commentary on this verse. Galatians 5:16ff. spells out the details of these respective “life-styles” if pursued to their limit. (Cf. comments above on 2:14.)

Castigating the Corinthians as **men of the flesh** is strong language, and is tempered by the phrase **babes in Christ**, which refers to their immaturity rather than to their moral outlook. Still the language smarts. Paul had used the father-

**<sup>2</sup>I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?**

---

child metaphor to describe his work within the young Thessalonian church, but tenderly and without sarcasm (1 Thess. 2:1ff., esp. vss. 7 and 11). His use of the metaphor here also serves another function: to reinforce his fatherly appeal (cf. 1:10ff.). A father addressing his children is able both to exhort and instruct with authority not lightly dismissed (cf. 4:14f.; also Phile. 10; 3 John 4). In fact, this father-child relationship with them not only provides the overall framework for the letter as a whole but makes possible and undergirds the appeals he makes throughout the letter. It should be read and interpreted as a father addressing his children.

[2] **Milk, not solid food** appropriately distinguishes elementary from advanced teaching, a distinction elsewhere found in the New Testament (cf. Heb. 5:12ff.; 6:1ff.; note how the image is reversed in 1 Peter 2:2). By the second century, as the distinction was more sharply made, catechetical teaching was developed for new converts; later, extended catechetical instruction preceded baptism.

As new converts, the Corinthians were not prepared for **solid food**, i.e., the wisdom of God elaborated in 2:6ff.; nor had their capacity for advanced teaching increased since, in spite of their claims to the contrary.

[3] Their conduct betrayed their actual condition. Claims to be spiritually sophisticated, i.e., "spiritual" and "mature" (cf. 2:6; 3:1) come to grief when accompanied by **jealousy and strife**. They still possessed an outlook essentially human, oblivious to the divine, and were **behaving like ordinary men**, i.e., instead of extraordinary men as some of them were claiming. They were still totally unaware of what it means to be a church of God (cf. 1:2). **Jealousy and strife** belong to the works of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:20), and can only exist among those whose outlook is still two-dimensional. These two vices cannot coexist with the Spirit of God. To speak of "spiritual men" filled with **jealousy and strife** is a contradiction in terms.

**‘For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely men?**

**<sup>5</sup>What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.**

---

[4] Singling out Paul and Apollos sets the stage for the discussion in the rest of the chapter. From here on, Paul will elucidate his relationship to Apollos, their relationship to God and to the Corinthian church. Whether this indicates that there were actually only two parties in the church is unclear. The important point is that for the Corinthians to define themselves with respect to any human figure, however prominent or however beloved, is tantamount to defining themselves as “the church of men at Corinth,” i.e., to define themselves in purely human terms; it is to deny their own birthright and to admit, in effect, that their faith rests not in the power of God but with the wisdom of men (cf. 2:5). In effect, it is to deny that the Spirit of God empowers them, the very heart of their own claim.

[5] The next paragraph, although clarifying the role of God’s workers Paul and Apollos, actually serves to emphasize the divine dimension of the church: that even if the Corinthian church was established by “ordinary men,” it still cannot be regarded as human either in origin or character.

**What then is Apollos? What is Paul?** These questions have the effect of further reducing their status. Servants (*diakonoi*) is used here with an emphasis upon the act of serving rather than upon subordination (*doulos*) (cf. 1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; Rom. 16:1). The term has a more narrow focus, and can be used of one who “serves” by preaching, for example, a minister of the Word (2 Cor. 11:15, 23). Paul will later refer to himself as a “servant of God” (*ho diakonos tou theou*, cf. 2 Cor. 6:4; cf. 3:6). By then, however, his work will have come under severe attack, and he will need to underscore even more strongly that which he only mentions here: that his ministry was not his own, but that which the Lord assigned (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1ff., esp. vs. 5; 6:4).

[6] The agricultural metaphor, introduced here to describe the respective roles of Paul and Apollos, is elsewhere

**<sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup>He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.**

---

used to describe missionary work (cf. John 4:35). Subdividing it into three stages allows Paul not only to differentiate between the work of himself and Apollos, but more importantly, to heighten the role of God. He thus sets his work within its proper dimension; it is work whose third—and crucial—dimension is provided by God.

[7] This verse states negatively what the previous verse states positively: neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is **anything**; their work, as important as it is, remains human without a **God who gives the growth**.

[8] Although Paul repeatedly mentions himself before Apollos, he does not conceive of his work as more important: it was only chronologically prior and thus understandably mentioned first. No hint of rivalry between himself and Apollos is found here as is sometimes claimed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:12). Literally, the text reads “the one who plants and the one who waters are one.” The unity which was lacking among the Corinthians had been present between their teachers. Still, each is responsible for his own work: **each shall receive his wages according to his labor**. Later Paul will explore in more detail the question of financial support of the minister (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3ff.); by the time he writes 2 Corinthians his refusal to accept funds from the Corinthians seems to have become an open question, seized upon by his opponents as one of the sure signs that he was *not* an apostle (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7ff.). The reference here, however, is more general and does not belong to that same discussion. Instead, **wages** is to be understood in the light of the next paragraph (cf. 3:13ff.), i.e., eschatologically: the minister's work will receive its final scrutiny by God on the last day (also cf. 1 Cor. 4:5).

[9] It is virtually impossible for any English translation to convey the full impact of this concluding verse in the paragraph. It not only pulls together all the strands of the paragraph into one compact sentence, but illustrates by its

<sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup>For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

---

structure where Paul wishes the accent to be placed. Literally, "*God's farmhands* (preserving the metaphor) are we; *God's farm* are you." The upshot of his discussion thus far is, we are God's, you are God's. All the more reason for them to see themselves as the church *of God* rather than as a church where human impulses are reigning unchecked.

**God's building** introduces an architectural metaphor which he proceeds to develop in the following paragraph.

[10] The architectural metaphor is developed in a different direction from the agricultural metaphor; it is also more fully elaborated. It actually functions to set up the image of the temple of God in verses 16 and 17, and not until then does Paul restate his fundamental point: that they are "of God." The effect of both metaphors is to reinforce the point begun in 2:1ff. and reiterated in 4:14ff., that *he* played the primary role in their birth, and his appeal cannot be ignored or even taken lightly.

Unfailingly, Paul attributes his apostolic ministry to an act of grace (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2); the Corinthians were earlier reminded that they owed their own existence as a church to an act of divine (not human) grace (1 Cor. 1:4). The structure around which he developed the agricultural metaphor is employed again. But the warning **Let each man take care how he builds upon it** is more pointed than verse 8b, and seems to be directed to the church itself. In the absence of its teachers (both Paul and Apollos are in Ephesus, 1 Cor. 16:12), the church must be willing to take responsibility for its work upon the superstructure. They are reminded that the results of their work will pass under the same scrutiny as that of their teachers. From here on the point of the metaphor functions not simply as a reminder but as a warning.

[11] The **foundation** itself, already laid by Paul and Apollos, is **Jesus Christ**. Paul's preaching of the "crucified



**<sup>12</sup>Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—<sup>13</sup>each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.**

---

Christ" had called them into existence (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2). Their foundation, therefore, was not provided by human wisdom but divine power (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5). The image of the church as a building is developed in other directions in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:4ff.; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 3:3-6).

[12, 13] To erect a superstructure incompatible with the substructure, besides being an act of consummate folly, ignores the overall perspective in which the Corinthians must work: **the Day will disclose the work.**

It is not clear whether the term **any one** refers to Paul himself, to some other Christian teacher who has visited Corinth, e.g., Peter, or to the Corinthians in general. Probably the last. Nor is it clear what is intended, if anything, by the two pairs of three: **gold, silver, precious stones** and **wood, hay, straw**. It is unlikely that this is his way of indicating the two stages of work, corresponding to "planting" and "watering," i.e., to his and Apollos' work respectively, for clearly he did not regard the work of Apollos as inferior. It may, however, suggest that their efforts, viewed jointly, were far superior to that of the Corinthians themselves. What is certain are the effects which refining fire would have on each.

**The Day will disclose** the inner fabric of the superstructure. **The Day** can be none other than the Day of Yahweh (cf. Amos 5:18), the Day signaling the end of history when the created order will be submitted to the critical examination of the Creator. Judgment is often, though not always, depicted as a refining fire. When Jesus' baptism is promised to be "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11f.), his role as prophetic judge is clearly in view: the One whose possession of the Spirit signals the breaking in of the final age in which he himself will exercise judgment as God's anointed One. Those who fail to recognize him suffer under his refining fire (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6ff.). Paul's emphasis upon the futurity of the event may

<sup>14</sup>If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

be intentional. There is some indication that those who were claiming to be "spiritual" were less than convinced that they would be subject to the scrutiny of a divine judgment in the future.

[14, 15] The work of ministers is contrasted: that which is enduring with that which is not. The framework is still eschatological: reward by God for an enduring ministry. Although one whose work does not survive the refining fire will suffer loss, he himself may survive.

[16, 17] To introduce a statement with the expression **do you not know**, or its opposite "you know that" is typical of this type of exhortation. Paul does not pretend to be introducing them to new instruction formerly unavailable to them. He recalls, instead, what is known and familiar to them, but what may have been forgotten. This is the first of several such reminders from the one who had originally taught them (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24; 12:2; 16:15).

Here begins the elaboration of the formula which introduced this section: "you are God's building" (3:9), only the building is specified as **God's temple**. Although **God** was mentioned only once in verses 10-15, he is now mentioned five times within the space of two verses. The warning is heightened, indeed becomes a threat. They are reminded that they are God's temple where his presence, the Spirit of God, dwells. In this respect they are "spiritual," at least ideally; but if they destroy God's temple by persistently giving way to human impulses which produce envy and strife, then they will forfeit their birthright, and suffer destruction at the hands of the God whom they have ignored. The presence of God's Spirit within the temple renders it **holy** (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2).

<sup>18</sup>Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

---

[18, 19] In 3:18-23 Paul returns to the themes introduced in 1:18ff.: divine wisdom versus human presumption, but now directs his remarks to the Corinthians. This section provides the first explicit indication in the epistle of the exact content of the claims made by the "spiritual ones."

Let no one deceive himself is one of three such prohibitions in the epistle (cf. 6:9; 15:33); the same form of prohibition but with a different content is also employed elsewhere (1 Cor. 3:21; 10:24; cf. Gal. 6:17; Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:18). The tone is one of paternal advice (cf. 1 John 3:7), and is typical of the type of advice found in the diatribe among Graeco-Roman authors. Later, Paul joins the prohibition with a well-known quotation, part of the common stock of popular wisdom (15:33). This provides another indication that the style, though written, is oral, and is probably reminiscent of the way Paul preached and taught while with them in person.

The word translated **thinks** (*dokeō*) may plausibly be rendered "pretends"; translated this way, it conveys more of the flavor of Paul's remarks. It has a similar connotation elsewhere in the epistle (8:2; 10:12; 14:37; perhaps 11:16). Their pretensions to wisdom are directly related to their arrogance (4:18f.; 5:2; 8:1), elsewhere called "being puffed up" (4:6). This attitude not only threatens to turn them into victims of a grand illusion, but actually dictates their conduct; specifically, it constitutes the barrier preventing them from properly relating to the society in which they live (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1ff., esp. vs. 2; 6:1ff., esp. vss. 5ff.).

Their "pretension," and the misunderstanding which it presupposes, is bound with their preoccupation with **this age**, another indication that they are exercising their claims to wisdom without an eye to the future (cf. 4:8ff.). Their pretension can only be remedied by abandoning the head-long pursuit for "human wisdom"; one must **become a fool** in order to **become wise**. Before they can receive the mysteries

<sup>20</sup>and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."<sup>21</sup> So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours,<sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours;<sup>23</sup> and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

---

of God's true wisdom (spelled out in 2:6ff.), they must recognize that the wisdom of this world, i.e., spiritual sophistication devoid of any signs that the Spirit of God is actually at work, is **folly with God**.

Again, Paul instinctively appeals to the thought-world best known to him: the Jewish Scriptures. The first quotation, from Job 5:13, is prompted doubtlessly by the key word **wise**; it possibly suggests the image of a hunt. Whether **craftiness** points to the methods employed by the self-styled "spiritual ones" is doubtful. In any case, Paul allows it no place in his own ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 4:2), the charges of his opponents notwithstanding (2 Cor. 12:16).

[20] The second quotation, from Psalm 94:11, is less tailor-made; the word "wise" is absent, at least from this part of the Psalm, but inserted by Paul nonetheless. This is another example of an inspired reflection upon an Old Testament text, interpreted to meet the present needs of the church. Actually, Paul may have in mind the earlier part of the Psalm (94:8); in any case, his remarks here are certainly in keeping with the entire mood of the Psalm.

[21, 22] The second prohibition **so let no one boast of men** (literally, "in men") paraphrases the quotation from Jeremiah 9:23 earlier cited (1:31; also cf. 1:29), but recalls the discussion of Paul and Apollos in 3:4ff. Since **men**, however highly revered, can only be "nothing" because all the work done among the Corinthians is God's work, they cannot be the focus of either praise or loyalty.

The basis for the prohibition is unfolded in verses 21b-23. **All things are yours** may recall a slogan especially popular among Cynic-Stoic authors. The ideal man, according to them, was the wise man who was said to possess all the virtues, such as freedom, true wealth, etc. Here, the slogan is reversed, especially if taken to apply to the entire congregation over against "some" who are claiming to be wise.

**'This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

---

The elaboration of the slogan is not clear, however. All things includes teachers: Paul, Apollos, Cephas; cosmic forces: the world, life, death (cf. Rom. 8:38); and time: things present and things future (cf. Rom. 8:38). The precise connotation of each component in the list is less important than the all-inclusiveness of the list, as seen by the repetition of the formula: **all are yours**. The point is, as God's church, God's farm, God's building, God's temple, they are in full possession of all his wealth (cf. 1 Cor. 1:5), lacking nothing.

[23] Because they had responded to the preaching of the crucified Christ and nothing else, and because he—and no one else—had become their foundation, they were **Christ's**. Because the preaching of Christ is "God's testimony" (the unveiling of his wisdom), they are **God's**. This provides a graphic restatement of 1:30, a theme absolutely dominating the entire section (1:18-3:23).

#### *Servants of Christ, 4:1-5*

Paul now turns from a discussion of *their* conduct to a discussion of *his* (and Apollos') conduct. (Note the change from "you" in 3:1-23, esp. vss. 16-23 to "us"/"we" in 4:1-5.) They are now instructed how to regard apostolic laborers. Misunderstanding on this fundamental point was at the heart of their problems (1 Cor. 1:12), and has already been addressed (3:5ff.). Their subordination to God was the focus of the earlier remarks, and is also in view here, especially at the beginning of his remarks.

[1] **Servants of Christ** (*hupēretas Christou*) is a term used nowhere else by Paul. Ordinarily, it refers to an underling of some sort, a junior official, performing either a specified service, for example, a religious official (Luke 4:20), a military official (Acts 5:22, 26; John 7:32, 45f.; 18:3, 12, 18, 22; 19:6), or an administrative official, especially "guard" (cf. Matt. 5:25; 26:58; Mark 14:54, 65), or some unspecified service (Acts 13:5). It can be used as a technical term for "minister of the word," as it is particularly in Luke-Acts (cf. Luke 1:2; Acts 26:16; cf. John 18:36). Subordination is

<sup>2</sup>Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup>But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

---

always a fundamental aspect of its meaning; the person so designated clearly derives whatever authority he has from a superior; the exact nature of the service is also defined by the superior. The expression here could therefore be paraphrased: "servants whose work is both authorized and defined by Christ."

**Stewards of the mysteries of God** recalls 2:6ff., where the content of the "mysteries" is spelled out (cf. 2:7). The gospel as a "mystery" in the sense of an esoteric body of revelation unveiled at the appropriate time to the appropriate person, is more fully developed in the Pauline letters than anywhere else in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; also Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; 3:3ff.; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:25ff.; 2:2; 4:3; et al.). **Stewards**, like "servants," implies subordination, but the additional sense of "trustee" (cf. Gal. 4:2) points to the high value of the trust placed in the person's charge (cf. Luke 12:42; 16:1ff.; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10). Accordingly, it may even mean "treasurer" (Rom. 16:23). The Corinthians are thus reminded that the "teachings" (of wisdom) to which they have failed to attain are in the hands of others besides themselves, most notably Paul and Apollos. The Corinthian community is hardly in a position, therefore, to sit in judgment upon them (cf. 4:5).

[2] One entrusted with anything valuable is obligated to be **trustworthy** (literally, "faithful"). A **trustworthy** God had called the Corinthian church into existence (1:9; cf. 10:13), and they have been, and still are, under **trustworthy** leadership (Paul: 1 Cor. 7:25; Timothy: 1 Cor. 4:17).

[3,4] The phrase **But with me it is a very small thing** may be paraphrased, "the least of my concerns is. . . ." The epistle of 1 Corinthians is filled with an astonishing number of references to language of "judgment." Although not always uniformly translated by the RSV, the terminology, representing one word family (*krinō*), occurs with remarkable frequency; interestingly, it tends to cluster in certain sec-

**Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.**

---

tions of the epistle (cf. 4:1ff.; 5:1ff.; 6:1ff.; 10:15ff.; 11:13ff.). These passages suggest that those who claimed to possess wisdom (the "spiritual ones," cf. 3:1) also claimed to have finely tuned powers of discrimination. These powers they seem to have employed freely, not so much by sitting in judgment upon those less well endowed (contrast Rom. 14:10ff.), as by simply elevating their own status with respect to others (hence, the frequency of "puffed up" language; cf. 4:6). The problem does not seem to be one of excessive concern for conducting the affairs of the less well endowed, but rather one of lack of concern, not excessive paternalism but lack of fraternalism. Rather than being preoccupied with scrutinizing the conduct of those less well endowed, they are oblivious to them. How this is being worked out concretely will be seen later in the discussion of eating sacrificial meats (chapters 8-11).

Consequently, there are few explicit references suggesting that they are "judging others." Even the prohibition to "pronounce judgment before the time" (4:5) does not specify who is being judged. Nor is it even certain in what sense, if any, they are judging Paul (cf. 9:3). By the time Paul writes 2 Corinthians, assaults upon his apostleship are openly being made (2 Cor. 10-13), but the evidence from 1 Corinthians of opposition to Paul by the Corinthian church is extremely tenuous.

These remarks are more likely prompted by Paul's repeated reference to his own behavior (2:1ff.; 3:1ff.), and should be read in the light of his concluding appeal for them to be his "imitators" (4:16). They serve to underscore both the authority and power of his personal example as a "servant of Christ." Whether he is a "trustworthy" steward is neither for them to decide, nor even for himself to decide—**It is the Lord who judges me.**

[5] The very fact that he places his own work within the perspective of the end of history is itself intended to be

instructive to the Corinthians. His caution to them not to judge prematurely is reinforced by his own refusal to judge even his own work prematurely. His personal example both constitutes the appeal and reinforces the appeal. His example, if taken seriously by them, will prevent them from developing such a high estimation of their own position (cf. 3:18ff.) or of others.

Reminding them not to judge **before the time, before the Lord comes** introduces a perspective which colors the advice which he gives elsewhere in the epistle (cf. 7:26, 29, 31; 11:26). The epistle is bracketed with references to the near expectation of the day of the Lord (1:7f.; 16:22). That there is some misunderstanding within the community about the events of the end is clear from chapter 15. Although not explicitly mentioned here, one form of misunderstanding involved the notion that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim. 2:18), and some of the Corinthians may have been developing a similar type of misunderstanding. It is not difficult to conceive how their arrogance could either have derived from or been fed by a misconception about the end. The assumption that one has already experienced spiritual perfection when coupled with the assumption that the Lord had *already* placed the world under judgment (through Jesus Christ) easily leads one who has been incorporated with Christ in baptism to assume that one actually shares in that judgment; in effect, is one of its agents. It is remarkable how often Paul reminds the Corinthians of the futurity of the final events.

It is not stated whether the Lord here is God or the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2), probably the former (cf. Rom. 2:16). His role as Judge is delineated in familiar terms. **The Lord . . . who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness** recalls other descriptions of the end as a time when light triumphs over darkness. Accordingly, these terms can serve as a way of defining poles of allegiance in the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan (2 Cor. 6:14f.; also cf. 1 Cor. 2:6ff.), between their followers "the sons of light" and "the sons of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:1ff., esp. vs. 5; cf. also Eph. 5:3ff.; Rom. 13:12; Col. 1:13). The Dead Sea Scrolls provide ample evidence that the Qumran community shared essentially this same outlook; there were of course



**‘I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.**

---

crucial differences, among them, the identity of the Messiah.

*Example of Paul and Apollos, 4:6-13*

[6] **I have applied all this** (i.e., the remarks in 3:5–4:5) **to myself and Apollos**. That Apollos has been included in the “we” and “us” is clear from 3:9; 3:10; 4:10; in fact, the same may be true from 1:18 on (cf. 1:21, 23; 2:6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16). Paul seems consistently to use “I” in referring to work done exclusively by him before the arrival of Apollos (2:1-5; 3:1-2).

The exact meaning of **applied** is difficult to determine. That the term (*metaschēmatiszō*) was a technical term among classical rhetoricians meaning “to employ a figure of speech” may suggest that the meaning is more than simply “I have made Apollos and myself the subject of these remarks.” Rather, the point seems to be, “I have applied these figures of speech (in chs. 1–4), especially the metaphors of farmworker and architect, to us for your benefit. I have done so hoping that you will take seriously our example among you: (1) our example in recognizing that *our* calling came not from ourselves but from God (3:5b, 6b, 7b); thus, our recognition that we are ‘*God’s* fellow workers’ (3:9), ‘servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God’ (4:1); (2) our example in recognizing that *your* calling came not from yourselves but from God; your foundation is Christ (3:11); you are God’s temple which houses his Spirit (3:16f.); thus, our example in refusing to conceive of our work among you in purely human terms as humanly conceived, humanly sustained, capable of loyalty based on human allegiance; in other words, our refusing to ‘boast of men’ (3:21); (3) our example of unity: ‘he who plants and he who waters are one’ (3:8); and (4) our example as ‘spiritual men’ (2:12) with the ‘mind of Christ’ (2:16) who refused to behave like ‘ordinary men’ (3:3).”

The purpose of presenting their behavior as models for the Corinthians to emulate was twofold: (1) to instruct: **that**

**<sup>7</sup>For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?**

**<sup>8</sup>Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!**

you may learn, and (2) to exhort: that none of you may be **puffed up**. Their behavior was instructive because it recognized the truth of the Old Testament quotations which Paul has cited showing the superiority of divine power to human wisdom (cf. 1:19f.; 3:19ff.), but most especially because it illustrated the truth of the scripture, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (Jer. 9:22), quoted in 1:31, and paraphrased in 3:21. They are urged likewise "to live according to Scripture," literally, **not to go beyond what is written**. Paul and Apollos' behavior exemplified unity among God's co-workers rather than being **puffed up in favor of one against another**. Being overinflated was endemic, especially among the "wise" and "those in the know"; the same term (*phusioō*) is also translated "to be arrogant" (cf. 4:18,19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; cf. 2 Cor. 12:20, "conceit"; also, Rom. 12:16).

[7] At this point Paul's remarks become bitingly sarcastic as he employs another figure of speech (irony): **For who sees anything different in you? More clearly rendered, "For who sets you apart?" or "Who gives you this importance?"** His repeated insistence since the beginning of the epistle that they owe their very being to a generous act of God (cf. 1:26-31) renders positive answers to the two following questions utterly impossible. They are recipients, and recipients who boast of anything besides the gift and the Giver boast to excess. Rather than the gift of material resources (cf. 1 Tim. 6:7), he has in mind the gift of salvation (1 Cor. 1:4ff.; cf. John 3:27; Heb. 5:4; James 1:17f.). He could also have reinforced the point by noting that Christ himself recognized that what he had, he had received from another (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; John 17:2).

[8] The irony intensifies, becoming outright sarcasm. Their arrogance is directly related to the conviction that they are **filled**, i.e., satiated with food (the same term is employed in Acts 27:38); he is doubtless recalling the

**For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.**

---

food metaphor in 3:2; actually, still nursing, they are claiming to be satiated with the "solid food" of the mysteries of God. **Already you have become rich!** They had, in one sense, already received wealth (1 Cor. 1:5), but they mistakenly assumed that all the riches were theirs (cf. Eph. 2:7); their illusion is similar to that of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:17). **Without us you have become kings!** Until now Paul has made no explicit use of royal imagery in describing the Corinthians (2:6, 8 fall into another category). He employs the expression "kingdom of God" relatively infrequently (at least as compared with the Gospels) but it does occur later (1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50). Unless "kings" is an oblique synonym for "powerful" (1 Cor. 1:26) or an oblique antonym for "servants" (4:1), it is his first such description of them. **Without us** is emphatic: "you have come to this wisdom apart from your teachers, Apollos and me." That he is speaking sarcastically is seen from his remark **And would that you did reign.**

The imagery may recall the notion familiar in Graeco-Roman popular philosophy that "the wise man alone is king." His wisdom and virtue enabled him to "reign" over his passions, and in an extended sense it was often suggested that he, not the likes of Alexander the Great, actually "reigned" over the world.

**So that we might share the rule with you:** " 'Tis a pity that your unenlightened teachers could not share with you in your wisdom and knowledge!" Their illusion is most probably to be explained as a case of overconversion. They have been "raised with Christ" and therefore **already**, by virtue of their baptism, shared in his resurrection. All the promises and benefits generally associated with the resurrection life: perfection, full knowledge, wisdom, control over the passions, etc. they **already** enjoyed. *Theirs is the kingdom, the power, the glory!*

[9] There now follows a striking contrast between their *fully achieved* status as "spiritual ones" and the hard

**<sup>10</sup>We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.**

---

realities of life as a "servant of Christ" and "minister of God's mysteries" (4:1). Paul is still appealing to his apostolic behavior as a paradigm for life, the only paradigm effective in countering the unmitigated arrogance which he has seen developing among the Corinthians. Apollos is, no doubt, still included in **us apostles**. Paul frequently uses the term "apostle" in a wider sense, perhaps best translated "missionary" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7; cf. 15:5; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). "Missionary" may even be the most appropriate translation when he uses the term of himself. He refers specifically to "the Twelve" only once in all his writings (1 Cor. 15:5).

Understood in this sense, "missionaries" becomes the subject of his following remarks as he sketches the unimpressive lot of apostolic workers. Their actual status as **last** contrasts vividly with their God-appointed status as first (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11); the imagery probably recalls the parades held at the Isthmian games where those appointed to fight in the arena, and thus **sentenced to death**, brought up the rear. The missionary's struggle takes place in the arena of the **world**, consisting of both **angels and men**, the world in which there are both earthly and heavenly spectators. The metaphor of "fighting" is a favorite Pauline image to describe his own missionary task (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 9:24ff.; Phil. 1:30; 1 Thess. 2:2; also Col. 1:29; 2:1; 1 Tim. 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7).

[10] The contrast between the self-understanding of Paul (and Apollos) and the self-understanding of the "spiritual" Corinthians is detailed further and likely supplies us with the terms which some of them were actually using of themselves. **Fools . . . wise** recalls an earlier discussion (3:18); his claim to be a skilled (i.e., wise, *sophos*) master-builder contrasts sharply (3:10). We may paraphrase, "we are fools on account of (our service to) Christ; you are wise merely by virtue of your status in Christ." The **weak . . . strong** language recalls 1:26ff., especially the reference to their absolute impotence: "weak" and "strong" language also becomes important in later discussions where the

**<sup>11</sup>To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup>and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.**

“strong” by virtue of being “wise” have tended to ignore the “weak” (cf. 1 Cor. 8:7ff.; cf. 9:22; 11:30). **Honor . . . disrepute:** “you are celebrities, we are nobodies” (JB).

It should be noticed that the threefold scheme employed here is exactly that of 1:26ff. There, speaking descriptively, Paul described them as neither wise, powerful, well-bred, i.e., honorable; here they are claiming exactly the reverse.

[11] The first of several descriptions of apostolic vicissitudes (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7ff.; 6:4ff.; 11:23ff.), these remarks are noteworthy primarily for their brevity. The more intense the opposition to his ministry, the longer the list—and the more polemic in cast. Interestingly, such lists have an uncanny way of being elicited by the Corinthian church (though, cf. Rom. 8:35; Phil. 4:12).

The mention of **hunger and thirst** poignantly contrasts with the Corinthians’ satiated state (4:8); Paul also mentions it elsewhere (2 Cor. 11:27; Rom. 8:35), but the note of Stoic resolve is absent (cf. Phil. 4:12). **Ill-clad** (cf. 2 Cor. 11:27) is literally “naked.” Conceivably **ill-clad** could be read with **buffeted**, thus understood as “stripped and beaten” (Acts 16:22; 2 Cor. 11:25; cf. Luke 10:30), except that the term here for buffeted (*kolaphidzomai*) is rare. Although it can mean “to be beaten with the fist,” it is not the ordinary term for “being flailed” (cf. Matt. 10:17ff.; Acts 22:24f.; also cf. Acts 5:40; 16:37; 22:19). It probably denotes an insulting blow (cf. Mark 14:65; 1 Peter 2:20). **Homeless** underlines Paul’s itinerant status, reminiscent of Jesus’ description of himself (Matt. 8:20). See comments on 2:4 about the itinerant preachers in the Graeco-Roman world.

[12,13] **We labor**, i.e., as missionaries; the term (*kopiaō*) is often used as a technical term for the “work” of preaching (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:10; cf. John 4:38). **While working with our hands** refers to his efforts to support himself by

**<sup>14</sup>I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.**

---

his own trade; his efforts in this respect are well known (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; Acts 18:3ff.; 20:34; 1 Cor. 9:1ff.). His refusal to accept financial support from churches with which he was working was unusual, especially in view of the clear mandate of the Lord himself to the contrary (cf. 1 Cor. 9:14); it later became a controversial point (2 Cor. 12:13).

**Reviled . . . bless** recalls the words of Jesus (Matt. 5:44; cf. Rom. 12:14, 20); **persecuted . . . endure** may point to his experiences undergone recently in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32), though he certainly already had a long string of such experiences to refer to (cf. 1 Thess. 2:1ff.). It is unlikely that **slandered . . . conciliate** speaks to the Corinthian situation, i.e., that it suggests that the Corinthians were actually slandering him; later they did, but not now (though, cf. 4:13; 9:3).

**The refuse of the world . . . the offscouring of all things** were common terms of abuse, used only here by Paul however. He may be drawing upon Old Testament imagery (Prov. 21:18; Jer. 22:28). He is, however, fond of using **refuse** terminology in discussing his work as an apostle (cf. Phil. 3:8). The term **offscouring** conceivably has the connotation "scapegoat," connoting a sacrifice offered in behalf of someone else's benefit (cf. Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6; 2 Cor. 12:15; Col. 1:24).

*Appeal to Imitation, 4:14-21*

[14] The tone changes abruptly as Paul brings his remarks to a close: **I do not write this to make you ashamed.** The blows have been hard, but not devastating, especially compared with 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Yet even after the fiercest invective, he can revert to the tenderest appeal (cf. Gal. 4:12; Phil. 4:1). Not that he is hesitant to bring them to shame (1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 2:8), but his remarks to this point, even at their bitterest, have been intended to **admonish his beloved children** (cf. Eph. 6:4). The appeal begun in 1:10 has been one of exhortation, urging them to unity as well as instructing them in how to make his

<sup>15</sup>For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup>I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup>Therefore I sent<sup>\*</sup> to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

<sup>\*</sup>Or *am sending*

---

appeal actual. Having sketched the nature of apostolic behavior as seen in the life of himself and Apollos, he can then urge them to take seriously this behavior. Admonish can have the sense of "instruct" (cf. Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 10:11; Col. 3:16).

[15] The fundamental basis of his appeal is now laid out, reserved conspicuously for the conclusion: he is their **father in Christ Jesus through the gospel**. Allusions have earlier been made to this father-child relationship, but not as forcefully as here. It was only natural for him to view his churches this way (Gal. 4:19; 1 Thess. 2:11; 2 Cor. 12:14; Phile. 10; cf. 3 John 4). **Countless** may be translated "ten thousand." The hyperbole reinforces the point: one father.

[16] **I urge you . . .** indicates that the appeal, begun in 1:10, is now concluding. Its aim: **Be imitators of me**. He now makes explicit what has been implicit throughout the entire first section. He has taken great pains to spell out the details of the behavior of both himself and Apollos for the purpose of presenting the Corinthians with a clear model of behavior appropriate to life in Christ, a "life-style" in keeping with the message of the crucified Christ. He has presented himself as a model for his churches to imitate, but always qualifies it with respect to Christ. His life is exemplary insofar as it re-enacts the preaching of the cross, and effectively works out its implications in life (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; Phil. 3:17; Gal. 4:12; Eph. 5:1; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). This call to imitation will become important later in the epistle when he again appeals to them to follow his example in solving their own problems: in his appeal for self-restraint (ch. 9) and in his appeal for love (ch. 13).

[17] Timothy, another of Paul's offspring, has already been sent to them, but apparently has not yet arrived (cf. 1 Cor. 16:10). His mission: **to remind you of my ways in**

**<sup>18</sup>Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup>For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. <sup>21</sup>What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?**

**Christ.** The epistle, as we have noticed, has consisted primarily of “reminders” rather than new instruction (cf. discussion on 3:16); instruction is to come later. **Ways** further suggests that his behavior is in view as much as his teachings (cf. 1 Cor. 12:31); actually, Paul would have been unhappy with this distinction. That these ways have been consistently applied everywhere in every church carries additional weight (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33).

[18] **Some are arrogant** suggests that the excessive claims to being “spiritual” were confined to a group within the church. How widespread and how deeply entrenched was the assumption that he would not return is difficult to say. It has been suggested that this assumption had led to the further conclusion that he was no longer concerned for them, and was being used to rally the church to chart its course independently of Paul’s leadership. But the evidence for this is fragile indeed.

[19, 20] This is the first indication that he is planning a trip. **If the Lord wills** may suggest instability in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32; though cf. Rom. 1:10; 15:32; James 4:15). The mention of the **arrogant** ones causes the language to heat up again. **Talk and power** were important concepts for the arrogant (cf. 1:18ff.). They are thus reminded that the **kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power**. This is the first mention of **kingdom of God** in the epistle, but is especially appropriate since some of them assume that they already reign in it (cf. 4:8). **Power** was at the heart of the message of the kingdom (cf. Mark 9:1; 1 Thess. 1:5; cf. Rom. 15:19).

[21] The mention of a **rod** sounds paternal, and should be seen as a continuation of the father metaphor. The father using a rod on his children had solid Old Testament warrant (Prov. 23:13f.; 29:15). If Paul has in mind the wisdom



writings of the Old Testament, the image is especially apropos considering the pervasiveness of the wisdom theme in this section, and the Corinthians' fundamental misunderstanding about it. Considered against this background they are, alas, the foolish son who brings grief to his father (cf. Prov. 19:13). Moreover, Israel was in constant need of chastening by her Father, an image developed thoroughly in Hebrews 12:5ff. His hope, of course, is to come to them in a spirit of love and gentleness, characteristic marks of the minister of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4ff.).

### THE CHURCH IN A PAGAN SOCIETY, 5:1–6:20

Having concluded the formal appeal for the Corinthians to cohere and to follow his example, Paul is still not ready to address the questions submitted to him by the Corinthian church (7:1). There still remains the need for him to give them fatherly instructions on how a church of God should behave within a pagan society. Specifically, they still need instructions about (1) the church's attitude and relationship to pagan mores (5:1-13; 6:12-20), and (2) the church's relationship to pagan institutions, notably pagan courts (6:1-8).

But how do chapters 5–6 relate to chapters 1–4? In a word, they underscore the pathetic immaturity of the Corinthian church (3:2b, 3). They reveal the astonishing discrepancy between their pretentious claims to wisdom and their inability to solve internal problems—which arrogance has caused them to ignore (5:2, 6) and which even a pinch of genuine wisdom would have enabled them to solve (6:2, 5). In spite of the highly developed powers of discrimination which “wisdom” is supposed to have brought them, they are still unable to “discern,” i.e., to judge properly (*krinō*). They still do not “discern” (1) how to deal with evil when it is present among them (5:1-8), and its related question (2) how to relate properly to pagan society (5:9-13), (3) how to settle internal disputes (6:1-11), and (4) how to deal with personal ethics, especially sexual ethics (6:12-20).

Accordingly, these two chapters consist primarily of reminders. Instructions which he had already given earlier, he either clarifies (5:9-13) or recalls; the expression “do you not know . . . ,” a stylized way of introducing traditional

<sup>1</sup>It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

---

teaching, occurs repeatedly (5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19). Chapters 5 and 6 could be appropriately entitled, "Things you do not yet know," or "Things your wisdom apparently still has not taught you."

#### *A Case of Immorality, 5:1-13*

[1] It is actually (perhaps, "widely") reported, but the source of the report is unnamed, probably owing to the nature of the report. The term immorality (*porneia*) in its more narrow sense meant "prostitution" (cf. 6:15, 16), but had a broader sense, ranging from "fornication" to "licentiousness"; it could simply mean "sexual intercourse." The term is more general than "adultery" (*moicheia*, cf. Matt. 5:32; 15:19), and is perhaps best rendered "sexual immorality" (NEB). In this instance, the ambiguity of the term is clarified somewhat by the more specific remark: **for a man is living with his father's wife**. But precisely what this relationship was is not stated. That it was his own mother, and thus a case of incest, is ruled out by his use of the term "father's wife," instead of "mother" (compare Lev. 18:7 and 8). More likely, he was living with his stepmother, but it is still not clear whether it was his widowed stepmother; probably so, since Paul does not call it "adultery." That they were married is indicated by the phrase **living with**, which suggests a continuous relationship. Even if we give the benefit of all the doubts, and assume that the case involved the marriage of a son to his widowed stepmother, it was still forbidden by Jewish law (cf. Lev. 18:8; 20:11) and Roman law, and therefore **of a kind that is not found even among pagans**; i.e., of a kind not condoned by pagans.

[2] The specific case of immorality interests Paul less than the Corinthians' unmitigated arrogance: **and you are arrogant!** The particulars he does not define, i.e., whether they explicitly and openly approved or whether they simply

<sup>3</sup>For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment 'in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup>you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Other ancient authorities omit *Jesus*

---

turned their heads. It was probably the latter since Paul does not feel compelled to discuss the relative merits of the case. The clear impression is left that both he and the Corinthians would agree that it was morally inexcusable. The question was, why had they not responded properly to an act so palpably immoral, inexcusable, and illegal? Their "arrogance had blinded them to a basic flaw in their corporate character. Their laissez-faire morality had doubtless been fed by their newly acquired sense of "freedom" (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).

Paul's reaction is as automatic as theirs was delayed: **Let him who has done this be removed from among you.** Banning persons from religious communities was a standard procedure in the synagogue, as Christians already well knew by this time (cf. John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2; Luke 6:22; Acts passim). Warrant and precedents for disciplining wayward members could be established from the Old Testament (cf. remarks on 5:13 below). The practice was known at Qumran. Similarly, the early Christian communities developed procedures for regulating both conduct and teaching unbecoming to the community (cf. Matt. 18:15ff.; Rom. 9:3; 16:17ff.; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 2:6f.; Gal. 1:8f.; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6ff.; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:19f.; Tit. 3:10; 2 John 9, 10).

[3-5] In light of the Corinthians' inaction Paul discharged his responsibility as their disciplining father, who, though **absent in body was present in spirit.** Though **spirit** is capable of meaning "Holy Spirit," its counterpart here is **body**, and undoubtedly refers to Paul's **spirit.** This is confirmed when he later says "my spirit is present" (vs. 4). Though absent, he has **already pronounced judgment** (*krinō*), i.e., he has properly exercised *his* powers of discrimination; his wisdom has enabled him to "judge" properly, theirs has not. He has

been able to see in his absence what they have failed to see in their presence. Yet he has rendered his verdict as if **present**. Moreover, he has done so with the utmost authority—in the name of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' instructions to his disciples concerning discipline included the promise that the actions of the community, if properly carried out, would have his divine sanction (Matt. 18:20).

The action is to be taken when the church is **assembled**; again, this accords with the procedure in Matthew 18:15ff. (cf. vs. 17). Interestingly, no reference is made in Paul's discussion to church leaders throughout the procedure, another indication of the relative lack of organization within the Corinthian church. Within the **assembled church Paul's spirit is present** (cf. 2 Cor. 13:10), along with the **power of our Lord Jesus**. The second mention of the Lord Jesus underscores both the solemnity of the action and the authority behind Paul's remarks as well as behind the procedure he is outlining.

He is now ready for his specific recommendation: **to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh** (cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). As noted earlier, the early Christian communities conceived of the world as being under competing powers: the demonic order in opposition to the divine order (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6; cf. also 10:14ff.). Satan was still operative through the demonic order, even though his power was "doomed to pass away" (1 Cor. 2:6). The practical effect of excluding one from the gathered community in which the power of the resurrected Lord was at work extinguishing the effects of Satan within their lives was to be thrust back into the sphere where the demonic order (Satan) exercised compelling force upon one's life (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20ff.). Still, as puzzling as it may seem to us, there was hope that **his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus**. The reference is to the final judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13). How the **destruction of the flesh** will result in the salvation of the man's spirit is not explained (cf. 1 Peter 4:6). Perhaps the unstated assumption was that once re-exposed to the power of Satan, he would return to the community, and thus his spirit be saved. The action prescribed was, at any rate, not simply punitive, but remedial.

**<sup>6</sup>Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.**

---

[6, 7] Turning from the individual offenders to the church itself, Paul now addresses what appears to have been his main concern: not so much the offense itself, but the congregation's improper response to the offense. A second time (cf. 5:2) he addresses the root of their failure: **your boasting is not good** (cf. 1:29ff.; 3:18ff.; 4:18f.). Their arrogance which had blinded them to the fatal flaw in their corporate life he now addresses by reminding them of what they should have already known: **do you not know that . . . ?**

The instruction which follows has a thoroughly Jewish complexion, consisting of terminology drawn exclusively from the Old Testament and from Israel's experiences. This may suggest that those at fault were among the Jewish Christian constituency within the church, since these phrases and terms they would understand without further explanation. Or, it may mean that Paul wrote these words while in preparation for Passover (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8).

The leaven imagery recalls the experiences of Israel in preparing for the Exodus, especially the instructions given concerning Passover (cf. Ex. 12:14ff.; 13:3ff.) when all leaven was forbidden—there would be no time for it to work. It was also regarded as ritually impure because of its fermenting or corrupting power (Ex. 23:18; Lev. 2:11). Unleavened bread became the appropriate symbol recalling the time when Israel hastily fled Egypt (Ex. 12:33ff.; 39), delivered by the mighty hand of Yahweh.

Given this background, the term **leaven** had a negative connotation, as it does, almost without exception, in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 16:5ff. and parallels); Jesus reverses the image, employing it positively to illustrate the irrepressible power of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 13:33ff.). Generally, the understood assumption was that, owing to its corrupting power, it was automatically to be removed; "cancer" would be a modern equivalent.

The application of the metaphor to the church appears to be new: whereas Israel in the Old Testament is nowhere

**Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

---

called “the unleavened,” here Paul applies the metaphor to the church itself: **as you really are unleavened**. Their status as God’s “holy ones,” “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16f.; 6:11), implied a certain character. They were expected to define themselves and their conduct in light of who they were, thus purge the **old leaven** and become a **new (unleavened) lump**.

Continuing the imagery, he characteristically grounds his appeal with reference to Christ: **For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed**. Again, the wording is distinctly Pauline, the concept is not (cf. John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:24; Rev. 5:6, 9, 12). An essential ingredient in the Passover Feast was the sacrifice of the **paschal lamb** (Ex. 12:1ff., 21ff.), signifying the deliverance by God and thus celebrating the covenant of Israel as the people of God. It was an absolutely fundamental element in shaping Israel’s self-understanding as the people of God. Similarly, Paul’s hope is that reminding the Corinthians of Christ, the **paschal lamb**, would remind them of the deliverance which it effected within them and of its shaping influence upon their own self-understanding as the true Israel, the church of God.

[8] His exhortation, **Let us celebrate the festival** (i.e., the Passover), is unique. It has been taken to suggest that the “gathering together” (5:4) is to be understood as the gathering for the Lord’s supper, the Christian passover, and for that reason, the “handing over” of the offender meant exclusion from participation in the Lord’s supper. If so, verse 8 is to be taken as instructions applying to their behavior at the Lord’s supper, i.e., “gather as a people reflecting your true identity, free of **malice and evil**, full of **sincerity and truth**.” But the imagery seems to have a wider application: as the “people of God in Christ,” the “true Israel” is being urged to recognize its character as literally “unleavened,” free from moral stains, and to conduct its ongoing life accordingly; thus, “to observe the feast” is to be taken as a general description of ongoing Christian life.

<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

---

[9] They should have been aware of their status as God's "holy temple" (3:16f.), and "God's unleavened ones," probably because Paul had employed this imagery earlier with them. But, *certainly* they had been instructed about how to behave towards **immoral men**, because he had earlier conveyed these instructions to them in writing—I wrote to you in my letter. As already noted, this letter is apparently lost. Presumably it was written earlier from Ephesus.

Two things are clear about the letter: (1) it dealt with how the church was to **associate with immoral men**, and (2) it was misunderstood by the Corinthian church. Because of explicit references such as this to letters Paul wrote to the church, yet no longer preserved (cf. 2 Cor. 2:4), it has often been suggested that these "lost letters" are actually embedded within our 1 and 2 Corinthians. The section most often suggested is 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, where the break in line of thought is as clear as the thematic connection between 2 Corinthians 6:13 and 7:2. Accordingly, it is often suggested that 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, which urges Christians to adopt a strict "hands off" policy towards "unbelievers," constitutes this "lost" letter mentioned in 5:9; and, that the misunderstanding of the Corinthians lies in their overliteral interpretation of that letter.

[10] The former is conjecture; that they had over-interpreted Paul's letter is not. They had incorrectly interpreted his letter as a mandate for complete withdrawal from the **immoral of this world**, which is further defined with a fairly standard list of its inhabitants: **greedy . . . robbers . . . idolaters**. The mention of **idolaters** indicates that this is chiefly a standard Jewish list of vices, since idolatry was regarded by them as the chief vice and distinguishing feature of a pagan, and therefore of an immoral society (cf. Acts 15:29). Their "wisdom" should have enabled them to see that this would have required them to **go out of the world**, a *reductio ad absurdum* which had escaped them.

<sup>11</sup>But rather I wrote<sup>1</sup> to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.

<sup>1</sup>Or now I write

---

[11] Clarification follows. The expression **But rather I wrote** is to be interpreted, “but now I write.” This is a frequently used stylistic device (epistolary aorist) in which the author uses the past tense to project himself into the position of the readers when they actually read the letter; i.e., by the time they read the letter, his writing will be an event of the past.

He returns to the case of the “immoral man” (5:1), here called **brother**. It is interesting to note that the “father’s wife” never comes in for discussion, i.e., is never called “sister,” probably because she was not a Christian, and hence not subject to the church’s actions nor Paul’s instructions. The portrait of the theoretical offending brother is now sketched in more detail: one who is **guilty of (sexual) immorality (*porneia*) . . . greed, or is an idolater, reviler** (i.e., “slanderer,” NEB), **drunkard, or robber**. The expression “guilty of” is literally rendered “(if a brother) is named as a . . . .” It may imply a formal procedure.

The list itself is representative rather than comprehensive, and is, in fact, conspicuously short, as vice lists go in the New Testament (cf. discussion below on 6:9ff.). It is primarily significant in that each item appears to be firmly anchored within the life situation of the Corinthian church. **Immorality** was often (cf. Gal. 5:19ff.), but not always (Rom. 1:28ff.) mentioned first, and probably is here because it is the item being discussed. **Greed** (NEB, “grasping”) and **robber** (NEB, “swindler”) appear to be singled out because of the discussion which follows, where it is clearly implied that some of the Corinthians were actually “defrauding” each other (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7f.). Gentile Christians were particularly pressed to define their conduct over against **idolaters** since many of them were formerly idolaters (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 12:2), and presumably many of their friends and family still were. **Reviler** may recall Paul’s remarks in 4:12, but as noted earlier, if “slanderers” were present within the



<sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."

---

Corinthian church, their slander is still veiled (cf. 1 Cor. 6:10; Acts 23:4). If the term has the connotation "contentious," as it occasionally did, especially in the Old Testament wisdom literature, it may point to 11:16. Drunkard foreshadows the discussion of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:21f.).

Anyone guilty of any of these vices is to be excluded from table fellowship: the Corinthians are not even to eat with such a one. The question again arises whether eat is to be understood in the ordinary sense or whether it refers to eating the Lord's supper. Undoubtedly the former, since this particular word, actually meaning "eat with" (*sunesthiō*) generally, perhaps always, implies an ordinary meal (cf. Luke 15:2; Acts 10:41; 11:3; Gal. 2:12).

A related question is whether his exclusion was total or partial. If total (i.e., permanent), it is difficult to see how his spirit could eventually be saved, since forfeiting one's status "in Christ" meant forfeiting the share in the resurrected life which being incorporated "in Christ" promised (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14). Is Paul allowing for the kind of distinction earlier made (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15)? Some commentators suggest that the exclusion may have been partial, and that the person could either have been removed temporarily or simply excluded from certain parts of the community's life, such as the Lord's supper. Such distinctions were made in the Qumran community; depending upon the seriousness of the infraction, one could either be excluded temporarily or permanently. A deliberate violation of the law of Moses meant permanent exclusion from the "council of the community" whereas an inadvertent violation meant exclusion for a two-year period. Or, it was possible to be excluded from certain aspects of the community's life, especially the "pure Meal of the congregation." But, the Corinthian church shows no signs of being as highly organized as the Qumran community.

[12, 13] The concluding remarks pick up the note sounded in verse 10: the relationship of the church to the

**<sup>1</sup>When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?**

---

world. The interpretive difficulty lies with Paul's remarks immediately following (cf. 6:2f.). Here his fundamental focus is upon their internal affairs; and upon their negligence in self-regulation. The two fairly heated questions in verse 12 must be read as an attack upon their blindness to their own surroundings. Their preoccupation with keeping their distance from the "immoral men" in the society around them was little excuse for their blindness to the "immoral man" within their own midst. **God judges those outside.** Their first responsibility was to purge the wickedness from among them: **Drive out the wicked person from among you.** This concluding remark is a direct Old Testament quotation, repeated in contexts where discipline of the members of the covenant is discussed (cf. Deut. 13:6ff.; 17:2ff.; 19:15ff.; 22:13ff., 23ff.; 24:7ff.).

#### *Lawsuits, 6:1-8*

[1] After dealing with the problem of failing to press the case of the offending brother, he now addresses the problem of overpressing the case against an offending brother. That some have, in fact, had a **grievance against a brother** is clear from the language employed; he is not discussing potential problems (cf. 6:7f.). **To go to law before the unrighteous** indicates that members of the congregation have utilized the pagan judicial system in settling interpersonal differences. The proximity of chapter 5 may suggest that divorce proceedings were the cause of conflict, but this is rendered unlikely by the language of verses 7 and 8. To speak of "suffering wrong" and "being defrauded" sounds more like contractual agreements. And it has been plausibly suggested that behind chapter 6 can be seen tensions arising between the "haves" and the "have nots" within the congregation (cf. 11:21ff.); after all, the more well off would have been able to take the cases to court.

The **unrighteous** (*adikoi*) are contrasted with the **saints** (*hagioi*), and clearly refers to pagans (note other language employed: "the world," 6:2; "those least esteemed by the church," 6:4; "unbelievers," 6:6).

**<sup>2</sup>Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!**

---

Among the privileges Jews enjoyed in the Graeco-Roman world at this time was the freedom to maintain their own judicial system, which enabled them to regulate the conduct of their communities throughout the cities of the empire. The synagogue provided the structural framework for making such a system viable, and its effectiveness is vividly attested within the New Testament (cf. e.g., Acts 18:15). Paul, on the other hand, appears to be urging that the matters be settled privately, i.e., among the members themselves, informally. Besides, the likelihood of the church employing the already established apparatus of the synagogue was virtually nil, considering the deterioration in relations between the church and the synagogue (cf. Acts 18).

[2, 3] The point of Paul's remarks dramatically shifts (cf. 5:12, 13). The obvious difficulty is, how can he say in one breath: "God, not you, judges the outsider" (5:13), and in another breath: **the saints will judge the world** (6:2). The solution is perhaps best sought in the tenses of the language employed. Whereas chapter 5 is dealing with judging in the present, chapter 6 is dealing with judging in the future: **the saints will judge the world . . . the world is to be judged by you**. We have already noticed the predilection among the Corinthians to judge prematurely (4:5), and here we meet another reminder that their role as judges is unrealized, still future. The one who judges present actions is God (4:4).

And yet verse 3b implies that their "judging" role is applicable to **matters pertaining to this life**, i.e., it has a present dimension. The simplest explanation may be that whereas earlier Paul was attempting to divert their attention *from* the world *to* the church, in order to underscore the inevitable connection between the church and the world, here he is attempting to direct their attention *from* the church *to* the world in order to underscore the superiority, inevitable yet still eventual, of the church to the world; especially, given their pretensions to arrogance. While the

**‘If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? <sup>5</sup>I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, <sup>6</sup>but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?**

---

church cannot exercise control over the world (at least, not yet), it can at least exercise control over itself. And both chapters 5 and 6 indicate that arrogance has been the main deterrent to the latter.

Both verses 2 and 3 employ an *a fortiori* argument, familiar in both Jewish and Christian traditions. If saints are to judge the world and angels, how much more should they be able to judge trivial cases . . . matters pertaining to this life? Early Christians shared the optimism of late Judaism that those saints who were tenaciously loyal to the covenant, especially in times of crisis, would share in the victory accomplished at the hands of God’s appointed Messiah, the Son of man (Dan. 7:13ff., 21f.; Rev. 3:21; cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28ff.). Even if full vindication was still future, it had already been effected through the resurrection (Matt. 22:44ff.).

[4-6] Given the indisputable force of Paul’s logic, the pagan courts could only be regarded as those who are least esteemed by the church, as having no promise of sharing in the victory effected by Christ’s resurrection. The Corinthians’ decision to do otherwise could only elicit shame (cf. 1 Cor. 15:34; cf. 4:14), especially considering their pretensions to wisdom: Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough . . . ? The phrase is reminiscent of the sarcasm of 4:7ff. It is the fourth reference to their arrogance since the beginning of the section (cf. 5:2, 6; 6:2b).

Verse 6 indicates the two-pronged nature of Paul’s complaint: not only the *fact* that brothers are at odds but also the method of settlement—before unbelievers. Especially the latter is true because of the inherent incapacity of unbelievers to serve as authorities in matters which their mindset renders either nonexistent or trivial (cf. 2 Cor. 6:15).

<sup>7</sup>To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup>But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.

<sup>9</sup>Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

---

[7, 8] He now elaborates the former point: the fact of the litigation. Their conduct is questionable for two reasons: (1) It points up all too vividly the inevitable result of their arrogance: a heightened individualism which threatens to undermine their collective identity as a church of God. This individualism, which is later defended with slogans such as "All things are lawful for me" (6:2; 10:23), has dulled what would normally be sensitive Christian instincts: **Why not rather suffer wrong . . . rather be defrauded?** An unrestrained compulsion to press one's rights has instead caused some of them actually to **wrong and defraud . . . even your own brethren**—a reversal of fundamental Christian ethics (cf. Matt. 5:38ff.; 1 Thess. 5:15; Rom. 12:14ff.). (2) What is more, it is an indication of their failure to perceive and follow the apostolic model provided by Paul himself (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12). The case for self-restraint he will treat later in the epistle (cf. ch. 9).

The use of "wrong" (*adikeō*) may be understood generally, but "defraud" (*apostereō*) can have the more specific and serious connotation "to steal" (cf. Mark 10:19), e.g., withholding wages (cf. James 5:4). It may, however, merely mean "deprive" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5).

*Sanctification of the Body, 6:9-20*

[9, 10] Again **do you not know** introduces material with which they should have been thoroughly conversant. We have already noticed that **unrighteous** (*adikoi*) and synonymous expressions used throughout the discussion referred to pagans in contrast to "saints" (cf. 6:1). But, does it have the same meaning here? That is, does Paul in verses 9-11 intend to buttress the point already made by insisting that

**<sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

---

pagans are patently unqualified to sit in judgment upon Christians? This is unlikely, in spite of his consistent use of the terminology to this point. Although verses 9 and 10 constitute a fairly standard vice list, the application in verse 11 is clearly to the Corinthians. It clearly functions to remind them that their own conduct in the matters discussed has threatened to return them to the state they should have jettisoned—unrighteousness. The term may have a double meaning: “your conduct in these matters has threatened to place you in the same category with those to whom you have been appealing for help—the unrighteous.”

Entry into the kingdom of God had required ethical demands ever since the preaching of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 3:7ff.); those who entered were promised a share in the world to come, even though that would have in a sense already begun to dawn. Still, its final consummation was unrealized. Similarly, the futurity of the inheritance is emphasized here: **will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**Do not be deceived** frequently precedes ethical instruction (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33; 6:7ff.). The vice list which follows is in many respects typical of those found elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 15:19ff.; Luke 18:11; Rom. 1:28ff.; 13:13; Gal. 5:19ff.; Eph. 5:3ff.; Col. 3:5, 8; 1 Tim. 1:9ff.; 6:4ff.; 2 Tim. 3:2ff.; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 4:3; Rev. 9:21; 21:8; 22:15). Generally, they are tailored to fit the context in which they are used, and this one is no exception. As noted earlier (cf. 5:9), sexual improprieties and vices related to avarice come in for special mention; both themes have been discussed either explicitly or implicitly in chapters 5 and 6. In addition to those mentioned above (5:9), the list mentions **adulterers**, the first such mention in the epistle. It is unlikely to be a comment upon 5:1, except in the same sense that the mention of **sexual perverts** is, namely as a sexual sin which the Corinthians are cautioned to avoid.

[11] The remarks now shift to the second person: **And such were some of you.** This descriptive reminder, with perhaps a slight touch of irony, serves, like earlier

<sup>12</sup>“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be enslaved by anything.

---

reminders (cf. 1:26ff.) to remind them of their roots. The statement is also helpful in providing some further indication of the makeup of the congregation; although it is often deduced from this that the Corinthian church was full of prostitutes and the like, the “such” is undefined. Elsewhere, reference is made to their former status as idolaters (12:2).

It is more important to notice the fundamental change which had taken place: **you were washed . . . sanctified . . . justified**. Reference has already been made to their being sanctified (cf. 1:2, 30; also 3:16f.) and indirectly to their justification (Christ is said to be “our righteousness” in 1:31); their being washed can only refer to their baptism (cf. 1:13ff.). All were done in and with the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God; it is possible to read “with” or even “by” the Spirit. The Spirit in connection with baptism is clearly referred to in 12:13.

[12] “All things are lawful for me.” The RSV rightly prints these words in quotation marks, since they are best understood as a slogan currently employed by some within the Corinthian church. It occurs in a later discussion (10:23ff.), but without “for me.” For this reason, the formulation here no doubt intends to respond to the attitude of individualism mentioned earlier (6:7f.); in fact, it probably arises out of that discussion. It is widely agreed that the slogan represents the attitude of those claiming to be “spiritual,” repeatedly censured for being “arrogant.” Expressive of the newfound freedom which they have experienced in Christ, it was apparently being used to justify several types of behavior, especially that which needed personal restraint. As we shall find him doing throughout the epistle when discussing such problems, Paul finds himself agreeing in principle (perhaps because the slogan was traceable in some sense to him), but disagreeing in practice. His qualifiers constitute clarification of what had apparently been unclear (cf. 5:9).

The first qualifier, **not all things are helpful**, addresses a fundamental need of the church. The claim to wisdom, as

**<sup>13</sup>“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.**

---

noted earlier, had failed to develop, in fact had actually hindered the development of any sense of fraternity; the impulse to be helpful was absent (cf. 1 Cor. 7:35; 10:23, 33; 12:7). The second qualifier, the refusal to be enslaved by anything, actually reinforces the claim, but perhaps implies “I will not be enslaved by wisdom.”

[13] A second slogan is introduced, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” This, of course, expresses Paul’s sentiments with respect to food laws. Food, per se, is neutral, and is neither intrinsically “clean” nor “unclean.” But, as the slogan is being used by the Corinthians, it is apparently being taken to mean that the body is to be employed for purely physical functions, such as eating. Paul’s qualifier is that both food and the body are properly defined only with respect to God who created both and who will destroy both one and the other. Once he reminds them that neither food nor the body is “purely physical” but “divine,” he then adds a qualification, clarifying the proper *function* of the body, which is his real concern: **the body is not meant for immorality.** It becomes clear how the slogans were being employed to justify sexual intercourse. Presumably the argument ran, “sexual intercourse, like eating, is a function of the body—nothing more. The body was designed for physical functions—e.g., eating or sexual relations.” They could even add, “Eating and sexual activities affect the body, but not the spirit.”

This attitude could also have been related to a misunderstanding about the last things. If, for example, one claims to be *already* resurrected, enjoying the benefits of “spiritual” life, in which the true concerns are with the spirit and not with the body, then the “body” can easily be relegated to a place of relative unimportance. Actually, such misconceptions could work in two directions: (1) a rigid asceticism, or (2) libertinism. A low view of the body and a high view of the spirit can mean either that one repulses anything material, mortifying the flesh, and therefore fasts, abstains from



**<sup>14</sup>And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. <sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!**

---

marriage, etc. Or, it can mean that one is oblivious to what happens with and to the body, and therefore sexual license is the result.

[14] Paul's response is to define the body and the existence in the body with respect to the act of Christ. The fundamental datum of the Christian faith was that **God raised the Lord** (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 1ff.); its corollary, and equally fundamental, was that **God will also raise us up by his power**. The connection, of course, is that the one in Christ will share in the resurrected life with the risen Lord, but this could only be done assuming some form of continuity between life "here" and life "there." This continuity was provided by the body; in chapter 15 Paul will explain that "body" does not imply this body of flesh and blood, but that which makes one an individual person. Because of God's act in Christ, and the promise held out for all those in Christ, the Christian could only view the body as "for the Lord" and the "Lord for the body," i.e., the resurrection of the Lord for the resurrection of the body.

[15] A second consequence of being raised with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:5ff.) was the Christian's incorporation into Christ. The imagery is almost shockingly vivid: the net result is that individual Christians actually become **members of Christ**. What is striking here, and especially in chapter 12, is that we do not meet the expression "body of Christians," but the much more crudely realistic expression "body of Christ." The scandal was not that Christians considered themselves as a group, a body, but that they actually conceived of themselves as united with a person whose death had taken place two decades earlier, and not only united, but sustained by the Spirit of that living person. The resurrection of Christ and the incorporation of Christians into this risen Christ, involved the person, the body. The implications were that what the Christian did with the body, in effect, involved Christ.

**<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." <sup>17</sup>But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup>Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup>Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup>you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.**

---

[16, 17] The implications for the individual are now developed further: Fornication is not to be regarded as an act of the body, detached from the spirit, but as an act of the whole person. In this respect, Paul's remarks reflect his Hebrew background, which conceived of the individual as a single entity; Greek thought, on the other hand, drew a much sharper distinction between the "body" and "soul." Fornication, therefore, involves the union of two persons. Instinctively, Paul cites the Old Testament: "The two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; cf. Matt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31).

Conversely, being united with the risen Lord through baptism involves the whole person: the person of the individual conjoined with the Lord himself, actually becoming one spirit with him.

[18] Having established the implications of fornication, he now gives the command—**Shun immorality**. Another reason is adduced. Fornication is a sin **against the body** in a way other sins are not. Paul does not elaborate, and it is not clear how this would be true in a way, say, that suicide is not. Even so, all other sins are regarded as being committed **outside the body**.

[19, 20] Paul now individualizes the temple imagery formerly employed in reference to the whole church (3:16f.). Now they are reminded (**Do you not know . . .**) that the individual **body** (i.e., person) is also a **temple of the Holy Spirit** (who dwells) **within you** (cf. 1 Thess. 4:8). The divine dimension which God has given to the church is also given to the individual. The presence of the Spirit is another reason why the body should not be defiled. Similarly, as the church has been reminded repeatedly that it is not self-generated, now individual Christians are reminded,

**<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman.**

---

**You are not your own.** It is not stated who bought them, whether God with the price of Christ's death, or Christ with his own death. In either case, the price is indisputable. They are urged to value the body as highly as God did (cf. 1 Cor. 7:23; 1 Peter 1:18ff.; Phil. 1:20).

## Response to Questions, 7:1–16:4

### *Marriage and Divorce, 7:1-16*

[1a] With chapter 7, Paul finally turns to the list of questions submitted to him by the Corinthian church. That he has been holding them at bay is reflected in the tone of the first sentence: **Now (then) concerning the matters about which you wrote.** These introductory words **now concerning** (*peri de*) function throughout the rest of the epistle as something of a formula signaling when a new or relatively new question is being addressed. This is the first of several times that it occurs (cf. 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). It, or a virtually identical construction, occurs only three other times in Paul's writings, each time introducing a topic about which one of his churches has lingering misgivings (2 Cor. 9:1), misunderstandings (1 Thess. 5:1), or needs for reassurance (1 Thess. 4:9). In itself, the formula does not necessarily imply a response to something written; in 7:1 that is indicated by a separate term (**wrote**).

This initial sentence in 7:1 partially accounts for the difficulty of interpreting chapter 7; in fact, how one interprets 7:1 determines one's overall approach to the chapter. The fact that the Corinthians had written him requesting information on several topics (note the plural, **matters**) and that he is responding to those same **matters** is incontestable. It is now widely accepted (and with excellent supporting evidence too detailed to rehearse here) that throughout the epistle Paul, in his response, actually quotes words, phrases, slogans currently in use within the Corinthian church. These have either been relayed to him via "Chloe's people" (1:11ff.) or the Stephanas delegation (16:15ff.), or

perhaps by other unknown sources (5:1); or they have been recorded or alluded to in *their* letter which he has before him. Examples of this have already been noticed (6:12; cf. 1:11ff.; 5:1); others will follow (cf. 8:1ff.; 10:23ff.; 12:3, 14ff.; 15:12, 32, 35).

The initial sentence in 7:1 forces the interpreter to allow for the possibility that any given sentence in the epistle, if the wording and context allow, may be the Corinthians speaking instead of Paul speaking. These considerations affect our understanding of both the structure of the chapter and the situation which it addresses.

**Marital Relations, 7:1b-7. [1b] It is well for a man not to touch a woman.** The interpretation of this sentence is notoriously difficult for three reasons: three of its five words (in Greek) are ambiguous; its function is not clear; nor is it clear who said it. Its meaning is crucial not only for interpreting the entire chapter, but also for deciding whether Paul's view of women—and marriage—was as low as it is often thought to be.

If it is a statement which Paul quotes from the Corinthians' letter, it belongs in quotation marks (as both the KJV and JB seem to imply, and the NEB footnote allows); if not, it expresses Paul's sentiments and serves as the introductory statement to his remarks which follow (as the absence of quotation marks in the RSV and NEB suggests).

The words are probably Paul's because this form of statement: "it is well . . ." typically expresses Paul's sentiments elsewhere in the epistle (cf. 7:8, 26; 9:15; cf. Rom. 14:21; also 1 Cor. 5:6). Also, the following sentence does not constitute the same type of qualifier which he generally employs when replying to a Corinthian slogan (cf. 6:12; 10:23); normally, though not always (cf. 8:1), he employs a strong adversative conjunction (*alla*: "but") to indicate his qualification or disapproval; he does not do so here. For these reasons, in the following discussion verse 1b will be assumed to be Paul's statement, expressing his sentiments. But what does it mean? The three problem words are **well**, **man**, and **touch**.

**Well** (*kalon*) is capable of four shades of meaning, ranging from "salutary" to "absolutely good." Here it either

means “advisable,” given its use in 1 Corinthians 7:8, 26 and 9:15, or “right” because of its use in Romans 14:21 and 1 Corinthians 5:6. In this verse the former makes good sense, but the latter makes better sense.

**Man** (*anthropos*) is the more general of the two Greek words most frequently used for “man”; it rarely means “husband” (Matt. 19:10). The other Greek word for man (*anēr*) is the term ordinarily used for “husband,” and is so translated each time it occurs in this chapter (7:2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 34, 39).

**Touch** is normally used in its ordinary sense, but can be a euphemism for “sexual intercourse” (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29); the two other times it occurs in the Pauline writings (2 Cor. 6:17; Col. 2:21) it probably means “touch (unclean things).” It does not ordinarily mean “marry” as does *gameō*, the term used throughout the rest of chapter 7 (7:9, 10, 28, 33, 34, 36, 39).

For these reasons, 7:1b would appear to be a statement about sexual relations between men and women generally, not about sexual responsibility within marriage.

If this is the meaning, then the Corinthians’ question must have been: “Is it right (advisable) for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman?” Or, stated in another way, “Should men and women abstain from sexual relations (completely)?” The rest of the chapter would then be read as Paul’s discussion of the circumstances in which sexual relationships are possible. His remarks would have to be read as the ascetic Paul answering with a qualified yes.

But, if the question had been formulated in this way, Paul’s answer in chapter 7 is, at most, unusual; at least, unexpected. The chapter neither in whole nor in part is a discussion of the permissibility and relative merits of sexual intercourse. It is rather a discussion of marriage: how married and unmarried persons should behave in different circumstances.

For this reason Paul’s initial statement in 7:1b must have a more specific frame of reference. Its function, therefore, is to be sought in its immediate relationship to verses 2-7, rather than as a topic sentence for the entire chapter. Verse 7 states Paul’s position, and it with verse 1b brackets the first paragraph.

**<sup>2</sup>But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.**

---

Its meaning must be sought by examining its connection with verse 2: "but because of the temptation to immorality . . . ." The RSV rendering represents a free paraphrase. Literally, it says, "but because of immoralities" (note plural), and should therefore be paraphrased, "but because there have been cases of immorality." Rendered this way, it is seen to be directly qualifying his general statement in 7:1b.

Paul is not attempting in this section to establish a rationale for marriage; he is rather stating both the reason for urging married persons to provide each other with full sexual fulfillment and his fear if they do not. The following verses indicate that the question being addressed is whether there are circumstances under which married persons should refrain from having sexual intercourse with each other, presumably for the purpose of pursuing spiritual activities, such as extended periods of prayer, and probably fasting. Paul's answer is a qualified yes: providing it is for good reason and of short duration. A second time he states his apprehension: "lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control." The overall gist of Paul's answer is: "Yes, there *are* some circumstances in which married persons should abstain from sexual intercourse (i.e., to 'rob' each other), but it should be done cautiously."

Since his answer takes this form, his initial sentence may be interpreted as follows: "It is right for a man not to touch a woman," or, more aptly, "It is right (not wrong) for a man and woman to refrain from having sexual relations." But the remarks immediately following indicate that the "man and woman" in view are the "husband and wife." Their specific question, therefore, would have been: "Is it right (or advisable) for a man and his wife to abstain from sexual intercourse, say, for spiritual reasons, such as prayer?" To which he responds, "Yes, it *is* right (advisable), but . . . ." Verse 2 provides his qualification.

[2] It is often suggested that Paul provides here a very narrow, indeed negative basis for marriage. It is true that he cites neither procreation (cf. Gen. 1:28) nor positive fulfill-

**<sup>3</sup>The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup>Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.**

---

ment as bases for marriage; his reason may, in one sense, be a strict interpretation of Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for man to be alone." But, as noted above, he is not attempting to establish a rationale for marriage here; he is instead giving advice to married persons in light of known cases where (married) persons have committed sexual immorality. Having been asked whether married persons should abstain from sexual intercourse, presumably for the purpose of devoting themselves to prayer, he realistically warns that to do so makes those involved unnecessarily vulnerable; and thus he urges those who are married to full marital fidelity: **each man should have sexual relations with his own wife only and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband only.**

[3,4] Because there have been cases of immorality, this leads Paul, in turn, to elaborate upon the responsibility which married persons have to each other. First, the advice is given, then the reason. The advice is that both the husband and the wife should give each other their **conjugal rights**, a paraphrase for "their due" (*opheilē*). The term is actually a commercial term and is elsewhere rendered "debt" (Matt. 18:32), or even (in the plural) "taxes" (Rom. 13:7). That it refers to sexual fulfillment is seen in the next verse, where the reason is elaborated: each spouse "rules over" the body of the other and thus neither spouse "has the authority" to withhold the body, i.e., sexual fulfillment, from the other.

[5] Accordingly, to refuse sexual fulfillment to one another (literally "to rob one another"), must be done by mutual agreement, and even then only temporarily: for a season. The reason for temporary abstinence is given as

**‘I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.**

**‘To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. ‘But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.**

---

prayer. This is often taken to mean that some who were married were so totally preoccupied with “spiritual matters” that they were seriously considering suspending their marriage relationship. But “devoting yourselves to prayer” need mean nothing more than a period of prayer, and perhaps fasting. The period should be temporary for the same reason that marital responsibility should be completely mutual: **lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.**

[6] What he says by way of concession can only be his advice in verse 5: his suggestion that “refusing one another” be for good reason and for short duration. It constituted a “concession” because of his genuine fear that married persons would be unable to resist sexual temptation even for a short period; and reports which he had heard from Corinth reinforced this fear. Much is said in this chapter by way of concession, e.g., “better” in verse 9.

[7] Obviously, devotion to prayer could occur unhindered if all were like Paul—unmarried and unencumbered. The force of **I wish** should not be diminished as does the NEB, “I should like you all to be as I am myself.” His firm opinion is that the unmarried state better promotes the life of prayer. Having said that, however, he introduces the principle which informs his own preference yet allows for others to do otherwise: **But each has his own special gift (charisma), i.e., capacity from God, one of one kind, and one of another.** He realizes that his capacity for the celibate life is not universal, and allows that God has endowed others differently.

**The Unmarried, 7:8, 9.** After addressing the question of whether husbands and wives should alter their pattern of living, he turns to address three groups: (1) the unmarried and widows (vss. 8, 9); (2) the married (vss. 10, 11); and



<sup>10</sup>To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup>(but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

---

(3) “the rest,” i.e., those with a non-Christian spouse (vss. 12-16). His primary question is whether persons in each of these groups should alter their pattern of living.

[8, 9] To the unmarried and the widows he advises: it is well for them to remain single as I do. Single does not occur in the Greek, but it is a permissible paraphrase. It should be noted that the advice is formulated in the same way as his statement in verse 1, “It is well . . .” Because it is clear that Paul is speaking here (I say), this makes it even more probable that he is the speaker in verse 1b. Also, the phrasing of the advice should be noted: to remain suggests that the question within the congregation was whether Paul’s general example should be normative: i.e., whether people “in these times” should remain as Paul: unmarried.

But, again, his advice allows for exceptions: if they cannot exercise self-control; if “immorality” will be a threat to them as it would be to married persons (cf. vss. 1-7), they should take necessary action to prevent it: they should marry. The reason cited is well known: For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion, i.e., to leave themselves vulnerable to sexual immorality.

Thus, as before, his preference is for them to remain as they are, unless sexual immorality will be a problem; in which case, they are to do whatever is necessary to avoid it.

The Married, 7:10, 11. [10, 11] To the married he is able to make one of his infrequent appeals to a word of the Lord (Jesus) himself. Since Jesus had specifically addressed the question of marriage (cf. Matt. 19:3ff.; 5:31ff.; Mark 10:11ff.), Paul’s advice here is tantamount to the Lord himself giving the charge. Elsewhere in the epistle he appeals to “traditions” which he had received from the Lord (1 Cor. 9:14; 11:23; 14:37; 15:3; cf. 1 Thess. 4:15), but he is not always able to appeal to such clearcut advice from the Lord (cf. 7:6, 9, 12, 25).

The form of the advice here reflects the teaching of Jesus as preserved in Mark, which contemplates the woman

<sup>12</sup>To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup>For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.

---

initiating divorce proceedings (cf. Mark 10:12; cf. Matt. 19:9; also Matt. 5:32; Luke 16:18). Roman law made it far easier for a woman to file for divorce than did Jewish law, although it was not impossible under Jewish law. Paul's statement here also agrees with Mark (and Luke) in another respect: "sexual immorality" is not mentioned as an exception (Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18; cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9; also 1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:1ff.). Realist that he is, however, Paul does acknowledge that divorces will occur, in which case the divorced parties are either to remain single or be reconciled. Jesus' refusal to allow divorced persons to remarry is mentioned by all the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9b; Mark 10:11f.; Luke 16:18).

The fact that *separate* is used in verse 10 and *divorce* is used in verse 11 is of little consequence, since they are used interchangeably later (cf. vss. 13 and 15).

**Non-Christian Mates, 7:12-16. [12-14]** The problem posed by "mixed marriages" appears not to have been directly addressed by Jesus, understandable when it is recalled that he confined his preaching activity to Palestine, and, with but rare exception, to Jews within Palestine. If he did address this problem, Paul was unaware of it, and his advice to the rest is Paul's own.

A church with a predominantly Gentile membership would no doubt have members whose spouses had not been baptized. This circumstance presented understandable tensions: conversion not only altered one's religious outlook, but affected one's behavior socially and was often bound to be upsetting domestically. But it also raised a more serious question: whether one's continued relationship with an unbelieving spouse constituted continued exposure to the

**<sup>15</sup>But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us<sup>1</sup> to peace.**

<sup>1</sup>Other ancient authorities read *you*

---

alien power of the demonic order; also of concern were the consequences which that had for their children. Would children already born at the time of conversion still be exposed to the power of Satan by exposure to the unbelieving spouse? And, would children born to the marriage share in the unbelieving spouse's impurity and vulnerability to Satan?

Obviously, terminating the marriage with an unbelieving spouse would solve all these problems—the Christian spouse would no longer be joined (bodily) to a person upon whom Satan still had power; nor would children already born to a marriage be exposed to such a person; nor would there be the danger of bearing children so exposed. There was every reason for them to separate.

Paul's advice, however, is that if the unbelieving spouse agrees to continue in the marriage, and does not wish to terminate the relationship, they should not divorce. His reason is that the marriage is not rendered unholy, and therefore vulnerable to the power of Satan, by the presence of an unbelieving spouse. Instead, the believing spouse has the effect of "consecrating," literally "making holy" the unbelieving spouse, and in turn, the children. It appears that "holiness" is being understood here as a "quality" which is actually transferred by the believing spouse to the rest of the family members, not in the sense of "sanctification" or "salvation" which is granted through baptism (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), for the unbelieving spouse is still "unbelieving." It is regarded as a "force" which cancels any adverse effects. "Unclean" is the term used for ritual impurity. The presence of a "sanctified" spouse prevents the rest of the family members from being "unclean," and therefore from being any real threat to the family. The presence of one spouse who has been baptized into Christ signals the defeat of the demonic world within that family unit.

[15] But, again, Paul realistically concedes that some unbelieving spouses will desire to terminate the marriage. In

**<sup>16</sup>Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?**

---

this case, the believing spouse is **not bound**. Although this is taken by some commentators to mean “is not bound to that husband anymore, and therefore free to remarry,” this is hardly possible. First, because the context demands that it be read “is not under obligation.” Second, because it is unlikely that he would concede here what he did not concede earlier (cf. 7:11). Here the meaning is that the believing spouse is not obligated to make what are obviously futile attempts to maintain the relationship. The reason: **God has called us to peace**. He did not intend for persons to live in perpetual turmoil, either in, out of, or because of the kingdom.

[16] The meaning of the final set of questions is not clear. Are they intended to serve as an encouragement to maintain or to terminate the relationship? If the former, they should be paraphrased: “How do you know that you will not save your spouse?” or “If you maintain the relationship, you might even save your spouse!” If the latter, they should be paraphrased, “How do you know that you (ever) will save your spouse?” or “If you maintain the relationship, it is still not certain that you will save your spouse.” Save is no doubt being used here in the sense normally used in the New Testament: “to effect the salvation through Christ” of the spouse (cf. 1 Peter 3:1).

The grammatical construction actually allows either paraphrase, but the sense demands the latter. Paul is clearly urging that believing spouses not attempt to perpetuate a relationship which the unbelieving spouse wishes to be terminated. The major motivation to maintain it would be to save the unbelieving spouse, but Paul prefers peace.

### *The Christian Calling, 7:17-24*

The principle introduced in verse 7 is now elaborated in more detail. Its location within the middle of the chapter suggests that a major section of the discussion has concluded. For this reason, it is possible that in the first half of

**<sup>17</sup>Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.**

---

the chapter he primarily addresses older persons whereas in the second half he addresses younger persons. If this is the division which he has in mind, then his remarks until now have been addressed to the married (vss. 1-7, 10-11), the married with unbelieving spouses (vss. 12-16), the formerly married (vs. 8), and the unmarried who are older (vs. 7). After this digression (vss. 17-24), he will address the younger unmarrieds, both men and women (vss. 25ff.).

The discussion of verses 17-24 focuses upon the principle which is repeated three times, once at the beginning (vs. 17), once in the middle (vs. 20), and once at the end (vs. 24), an indication of the highly stylized form of this section.

[17] The topic of Paul's remarks is how one should lead one's life, literally, "how one should walk" (*peripateō*). The word employed is commonly used to denote general human behavior, but when used in ethical discussions it can also denote specifically Christian behavior, i.e., how one should "walk" as a result of being "in Christ" (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1; cf. 2 Thess. 3:6, 11; Gal. 5:16; Rom. 6:4). The term called (*kaleō*) is to be understood as another way of describing this general Christian behavior. As noted earlier, "calling" can be employed in a broad sense, synonymous with "salvation," or by Paul to refer to his specific vocation to preach to the Gentiles (cf. comments on 1:1); the broader sense is in view here.

The particular mold in which one's Christian behavior is cast, in which one's calling is actually worked out, is indicated by the term assigned (*merizō*). It suggests the particular set of circumstances which define the shape of one's call, whether social ("slave") or ethnic ("circumcised"—"uncircumcised," i.e., Jew or Gentile) circumstances. **This is my rule in all the churches.** As already noted, the universality of his principles and teachings is of major consequence to him in instructing his churches (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 11:34, 14:33).

**<sup>18</sup>Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. <sup>19</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup>Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. <sup>21</sup>Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>*Or make use of your present condition instead*

[18] In verse 17 he uses “calling” as a term for “the call by God to salvation.” Thus, **was any one at the time of his call to salvation by God already a Jew, i.e., circumcised?** If so, he should not try to undo those circumstances by removing the marks of circumcision. Frequently, when Jews were exposed to the cultural life of Graeco-Roman society, they underwent a surgical operation to make their circumcision less noticeable. This especially became a problem when Jewish boys attended Greek schools and participated in Greek athletics, which were performed in the nude. Paul’s remarks, although an allusion to this practice, has a more specific reference. Some Jewish Christians insisted that one who was born uncircumcised, i.e., a Gentile, was obligated to be circumcised in order to be saved; in effect, become a Jew.

[19; 20] Paul’s position is capable of being pointedly summarized: **neither circumcision nor uncircumcision . . . counts; only obedience to God or keeping the commandments of God.** For a Jew to try to become a Gentile by removing the marks of his circumcision was of no consequence before God, and therefore immaterial; if immaterial, then unnecessary. One should neither cease being a Jew, nor cease being a Gentile; one should not seek to alter one’s cultural, or ethnic heritage, since God’s call to salvation can take place while one remains within and true to that cultural heritage.

[21] Similarly, social status provides no insurmountable barriers to the call of God, for one can be called to salvation by God **when (while) a slave.** But, should a slave seek to become a freedman? The meaning of Paul’s answer is one of

**<sup>22</sup>For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freeman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. <sup>23</sup>You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. <sup>24</sup>So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God.**

---

the most debated phrases in 1 Corinthians. The highly slippery phrase is capable of being rendered either (1) **avail yourself of the opportunity** (RSV), i.e., if you can achieve your freedom, do so; "take it" (NEB); "accept it" (JB); or (2) "make use of your present condition instead," i.e., remain a slave (alternative reading, RSV). As much as enlightened Western society hates to admit that Paul would urge a slave to remain a slave, the context here suggests that he does. In his instructions so far he has argued for the status quo: he has urged every category of persons addressed to remain in the circumstances in which the gospel has called (i.e., found) them, and in which they find themselves. Why should he do otherwise here, especially since there is no indication that he does so elsewhere (cf. Philemon)?

[22, 23] Verse 22 reinforces this interpretation. Assuming that he urged the slave to remain a slave, his assurance here that the one who is **called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord** has a point. He assures the slave that, even if a slave, he is nonetheless **free** in another and better sense: freed by God in Christ. And, for that matter, the freedman **when called is a slave of Christ**. The slave receives further assurance that even the **freedman** is in some sense "enslaved." Still, both the slave and the freedman are reminded that their "enslavement" is exclusively to Christ, not to men. They have been **bought** by Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20). Their loyalty is not to be humanly defined; this reminder we have already met (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3, 5ff., 18ff.).

[24] The final remark only reiterates the principle, and reinforces the above interpretation of 7:21b: each person, slave or free, Jew or Greek (interestingly, "male and female" are omitted) is to **remain** in the "lot," in the circumstances in which the call of God was received, and to remain there **with God**. The mention of **remain** again

<sup>25</sup>Now concerning the unmarried,<sup>7</sup> I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

<sup>7</sup>Greek *virgins*

---

reminds us of the general topic of the chapter that persons married and unmarried should remain as they are.

#### *Conduct of the Unmarried, 7:25-40*

The repetition of the phrase "now concerning" suggests that another Corinthian question is being addressed; if so, they had probably asked Paul to clarify his position with regard to both the married and the unmarried; verses 25ff. constitute his answer to the second part of their inquiry.

**The Present Distress, 7:25-31. [25]** His remarks here concern the unmarried, literally "virgins" (*parthenoi*). Since the term occurs in the plural, there is nothing to indicate the gender; *parthenos* can also mean a "male virgin" (cf. Rev. 14:4), but its use in verse 28 indicates that it is to be understood here in its ordinary sense. That his remarks here are also addressed to males, perhaps even primarily to males, is also seen from verse 28, and for that reason the RSV translates the term in verse 25 with the more general phrase the unmarried. Apart from this discussion (cf. 7:25, 28, 34, 36, 37, 38), Paul only uses the term once more (2 Cor. 11:2).

Since Paul did not have—and presumably could not get—a command of the Lord pertaining to the advisability of marriage for "the unmarried," he gives his opinion (*gnōmē*) on the matter. The distinction occurs earlier (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10, 12; also 2 Cor. 8:10; Phile. 8). Always aware that he owed his commission to an act of the Lord's mercy (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12ff.), he discharged it responsibly; this meant, among other things, "refusing to tamper with divine revelation" (2 Cor. 4:2). Because his remarks throughout the chapter have been both qualified and tentative in most respects, and have consisted largely of his opinion instead of divine commands, they are not, for that reason, to be taken lightly. In fact, his willingness and ability to make the distinction gave force to his advice. It was precisely because he refused to play fast and loose with the traditions and



**<sup>26</sup>I think that in view of the present<sup>27</sup> distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. <sup>27</sup>Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage.**

*"Or impending*

revelation which he had received that he demonstrated that he was trustworthy.

[26] The tentativeness of his advice is reflected in the phrasing: **I think** (*nomizō*), the same term occurs in verse 36 (cf. 1 Tim. 6:5). His uncertainty, however, applies to his advice, not to his conviction about the **present distress**. The meaning of the expression is uncertain. The Greek term *anagkē*, often translated "necessity" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:37; 9:16; 2 Cor. 9:7; Phile. 14), is here appropriately rendered **distress** (also KJV; cf. 1 Thess. 3:7; "hardships" in 2 Cor. 6:4; 12:10). It is the language of Jewish apocalyptic, typically used, not only in the New Testament (cf. Luke 21:23) but in intertestamental Jewish writings, in describing the period of intense turbulence which would precede the end. The phrase can justifiably be rendered "impending distress" (RSV footnote), or even "imminent distress" (Conzelmann), especially in view of the context (cf. vss. 29, 31).

The form of Paul's advice, **it is well . . .** recalls verse 1, and again raises the possibility that the Corinthians' question was: "Is it well, i.e., right or advisable, for the unmarried to remain unmarried?" Whether the phrase is Paul's advice, or his positive restatement of their question, its content is—for a person to remain as he is. The Greek would actually allow the translation, ". . . to remain as I am" (cf. 7:7). The following verse supports the RSV translation. It is the same advice he has given in the first half of the discussion (7:7).

[27] The scope of his remarks is now widened in this general statement of the principle which he has elaborated throughout the chapter. Actually the language employed suggests that the principle addresses the married and the divorced. This is implied in the KJV and brought out by the NEB: "Are you bound in marriage? Do not seek a dissolution. Has your marriage been dissolved? Do not seek a wife."

<sup>28</sup>But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl<sup>1</sup> marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. <sup>29</sup>I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, <sup>30</sup>and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, <sup>31</sup>and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

<sup>1</sup> Greek *virgin*

---

[28] In any case, he returns to the specific topic at hand: the unmarried. The structure indicates that he addresses first the unmarried men, then the unmarried women (girl, i.e., virgin). Both are assured that, if they marry, they do not sin. His assurances provide another instance of Paul's knack for retaining subtle distinctions. His ability to distinguish between what is foolish and what is sinful has not always been imitated, unfortunately.

His reluctance stems from his concern for them rather than any personal asceticism on his part: he wishes to spare them worldly troubles. The phrase literally reads: "but these will have tribulation (*thlipsis*) in the flesh." Although *thlipsis* can mean "tribulation" in the sense of persecution or suffering without any specific reference to the last days, the context here, in which the dimension of the last days is pervasive, requires the eschatological sense. Like "distress," it is a key term used in descriptions of the last days and the "signs" to precede the end (cf. Rom. 2:9; 2 Thess. 1:6; Matt. 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev. 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22; 7:14).

[29-31] If Paul's language to this point has been slightly ambiguous (which he himself seems to allow: I mean, i.e., "what I mean is . . ."), it is certainly less so with this verse. He clearly intends to define more precisely the basis for his advice: the appointed time has grown very short. Time (*kairos*) has already been used as a synonym for "the end" (1 Cor. 4:5); it has this use frequently, especially when used in this absolute sense (cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 21:8; 1 Peter 4:17; Rev. 1:3; 11:18; 12:12; 22:10); it is

**<sup>32</sup>I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; <sup>33</sup>but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, <sup>34</sup>and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl<sup>1</sup> is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband.**

<sup>1</sup> Greek *virgin*

---

also frequently employed in descriptions of the end (cf. Rom. 13:11; 2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 1:10; 1 Thess. 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:6; 1 Tim. 4:1; 6:15; 2 Tim. 3:1; 4:3). In the Gospels it has this same use and is frequently used with language of harvesting, another metaphor denoting the end (cf. Matt. 13:30; 21:34; 24:45; Mark 1:15; 12:2; Luke 12:42; 19:44; 20:10; 21:8; 21:24, 36). The translation **appointed time**, actually a paraphrase of the Greek phrase "the time" (*ho kairos*), intends to convey this eschatological sense. The phrase has grown very short may either mean that the "time" left until the end has been reduced (Mark 13:20), or that there is little of it left (Rom. 13:11f.). Either way, the nearness of the event is heightened.

During the interim (from now on) ordinary activities and relationships are altered in view of the end. The list is intended to be representative: the married are to live as though they were unmarried, the weeping as though they were joyful, the joyful as though they were sad, the merchants as though they were paupers, those engrossed in living as though they were hermits. The poetic language used here, if taken literally, runs counter to what Paul says earlier (cf. 7:1ff.; 5:9ff.) and elsewhere (Rom. 12:15). It intends rather to underscore the truly revolutionizing impact of the impending end upon domestic, personal, and commercial activities. Little does he mean that they are to be suspended; rather, that they can no longer have the absolute finality they once had. In Christ a third dimension had entered the picture, and soon everyone would realize it.

**Marital Anxieties, 7:32-35. [32-34]** Having laid out the reason underlying his advice, he now indicates his purpose

**<sup>35</sup>I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.**

---

in giving the advice: **I want you to be free from anxieties.** The form in which his advice is expressed is identical to that used in 7:7: it is not an idle wish but an earnest desire. The tone noticeably shifts here; the father's ultimate concern is for the welfare of his children.

"Anxiety" appears to be used in two senses here. The unmarried person is **anxious** about the affairs of the Lord in a good sense: **how to please the Lord.** The married person, on the other hand, is **anxious** about "the things of the world . . ." how to please his or her spouse. Although both the unmarried man and woman are addressed here, the underlying cause is the same: marriage inherently involved "divided interests" (vs. 34, literally, "of a divided [mind]"), whereas being unmarried allows, although does not necessarily insure, "undivided interests."

His remarks here echo the language of Jesus, both with respect to "divided loyalties" (Matt. 6:24), and "anxiety" (Matt. 6:25ff.). Both Jesus' teaching and Paul's teaching are set within the perspective of the kingdom of God, and both provide assurance in view of the nearness of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 6:10; 7:21ff.); the imminence of the final consummation of the kingdom is more highly emphasized in Paul, however.

[35] Aware that his advice will seem inordinately restricting, Paul again assures the Corinthians that what he has said (**this** probably refers to his remarks in general rather than to vss. 32-34), has been intended for their **benefit** (*sumphoron*). This becomes an important word in the epistle, primarily because some of the Corinthians are not conducting themselves with a view to benefiting, or upbuilding others (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:32, 33; 12:7). His aim is not unnecessary **restraint** (*brochon*): "not in order to put a halter around your necks," and so "to direct you like a domesticated animal" (Barrett). Instead, he wishes to **promote good order** and secure their **undivided devotion to the Lord** (cf. Luke 10:38ff.).

<sup>36</sup>If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed,<sup>1</sup> if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. <sup>37</sup>But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed,<sup>2</sup> he will do well. <sup>38</sup>So that he who marries his betrothed<sup>2</sup> does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

<sup>1</sup>Greek *virgin*

---

**The Betrothed, 7:36-38.** [36-38] Paul's remarks here are notoriously difficult to interpret, primarily for two reasons: (1) the ambiguity of the term *parthenos* (translated by the RSV, *betrothed*), in verse 36, and (2) the meaning of the word *gamizō* in verse 38 (translated by the RSV *married*). In a word, verse 36 seems to imply that he is discussing how a young man should behave towards his fiancée; verse 38, on the other hand, because he employs the word which usually means "give in marriage," seems to imply that he is discussing the father's behavior toward his engaged daughter. The grammar allows, in this latter case, "his passions" in verse 36 to be read "her passions."

The verses have given rise to three well-defined views. The remarks are addressed to (1) a father with an engaged daughter, (2) an engaged couple, "betrothed" but not yet married, or (3) to a couple "spiritually" married, living together but not having sexual relations. The third view is unlikely because clear evidence for such a practice dates only to the second century. The first view is less convincing since *gamizō* can mean (though not usually) simply "marry." The second view is most likely.

"His virgin" (*parthenon autou*) is an admittedly patronizing way of referring to one's fiancée although the modern colloquial expression "his girl" provides a near equivalent. In this case, the uncontrollable passions belong to the man, and Paul's advice is—**let him do as he wishes; this can only mean: let them marry.** As before, he assures them that marriage, which cannot be postponed except with disastrous consequences for those engaged, is **no sin.** Given the choice between folly and sin, Paul will recommend folly every time.

<sup>39</sup>A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup>But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.

---

Still, he who can control his sexual desires and continue to live as engaged, i.e., to keep her as his betrothed, will be wiser, because, unencumbered, he will fare better than the one who cannot, who will fare only well.

**Widows, 7:39, 40. [39, 40]** These final remarks must be regarded as a footnote to the entire discussion. Clearly the last half of the chapter has focused upon the “unmarried.” These remarks would fit more appropriately with the discussion in 7:10ff. They recall an earlier discussion (6:16) and foreshadow remarks he is later to make in writing to the Romans (7:2). Their function here may grow out of the remarks immediately preceding, if he is wishing to underscore that marriages contracted in the worst of times are indissoluble marriages all the same—indissoluble that is, except for death, of course. A widow is free to marry, as indicated earlier (7:9); the restriction only in the Lord has not been introduced earlier. Given his earlier discussion, relating to the problems inherent in “mixed marriages,” it is difficult to take the phrase in any other sense than “only a believer.” He is as keen to keep a marrying widow from anxiety as he is anyone else; and anxiety in marrying an unbeliever, as we have already seen, is highly probable.

His judgment, stated once more, is that she will be happier, literally “more blessed,” if she remains as he is—unmarried. It is his final plea for maintaining the status quo. His advice, he realizes, will be difficult to heed, and sounds unnecessarily narrow-minded (7:35). The discussion concludes on a tentative note, but it is reassuringly tentative. The grammar would allow the phrase to be translated: “but I believe that I too have the Spirit of God.” Perhaps this is an indication that some within the church were claiming the Spirit of God and were giving unsettling advice on these questions.

**<sup>1</sup>Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” “Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.**

---

*Idol Meats, 8:1-11:1*

Chapter 8 introduces the second major topic about which the Corinthians wrote Paul: “food offered to idols” (8:1). His response actually encompasses chapters 8-10, and possibly even chapter 11, for their next question does not surface until chapter 12:1, “now concerning spiritual gifts.”

There were at least two contexts in which a converted pagan would be confronted with “meat offered to idols,” one public, the other private. Although one could refuse to worship at a pagan temple, it would have been more difficult to stay away entirely. Social obligation, such as attending marriages or honoring the dead, often required one not only to attend a pagan temple or shrine but also to take part in a meal there. The food would almost certainly include “holy meat,” or from a Jewish perspective “meat offered to idols,” i.e., meat which had been used in a pagan sacrifice. Or, in more private settings one could be invited to dine with a host in a private home or perhaps at a meeting of a guild or small club. A sacrifice might be performed in connection with the meal, and the likelihood was great that one would be served meat which had, at some point, been used in pagan worship.

The public setting is in view in 8:7-13; the private setting is presupposed in 10:23-30.

**Love and Knowledge, 8:1-6.** [1] One of the most puzzling features of Paul’s response to the question of **food offered to idols** is the absence of any reference to the Apostolic Decree (cf. Acts 15:20ff., esp. vss. 20 and 29). Especially written for Gentile Christians (Acts 15:19), it expressly enjoined abstaining from what had been sacrificed to idols. But instead of simply enjoining the “weak” to abstain, Paul addresses the “strong.” It is reminiscent of chapter 5 where he is concerned less for the offender than he is for the “arrogant.” In any case, he does not mention the Decree. Perhaps it was inapplicable or unenforceable, especially outside Syria and Cilicia (cf. Acts 16:4, 5).

**<sup>2</sup>If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup>But if one loves God, one is known by him.**

---

It is now generally agreed that the words **all of us possess knowledge** constitute a slogan currently in use within the Corinthian church, which Paul here quotes (note it is set within quotations by both JB and RSV; NEB, "Of course we all 'have knowledge', as you say"). It aptly expresses the attitude of the "spiritually enlightened," who are no doubt to be identified with "the wise" addressed earlier in chapters 1-4 (cf. esp. 3:18ff.; 3:1ff.; 4:8ff.). As noted earlier (cf. discussion on 3:18, 19), human wisdom, when unaware of its origins or limitations, could easily become unrestrained arrogance; this could, in turn, breed an insensitivity to those "not in the know." Chapter 8 provides another concrete instance where this had begun to happen (cf. 6:7f.).

**Knowledge** (*gnōsis*) was the watchword of the "enlightened." It **puffs up**; **love** (*agapē*) is set in contrast to **knowledge** and has already been introduced as the prerequisite to receiving God's salvation (1 Cor. 2:9); it has the reverse effect: it **builds up**.

[2, 3] "Knowledge" per se is not inherently perverse, but it can be when it tends to breed pretention, or even worse, illusion: **If any one imagines** (literally, "pretends") **that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know** (cf. Gal. 6:3). Paul indicates here that "knowledge," far from being incompatible with "life in Christ," is, in fact, essential; but it must be properly defined. "Knowledge," properly understood, is both derivative and passive; before one "knows" (God), one is first "known" (by God), and before one is **known** by God, one first **loves** God. True knowledge thus emanates from love, and even then Paul can insist that one does not **know** God, but is **known** by God (cf. Gal. 4:9; 1 Cor. 13:12; cf. 2 Tim. 2:19; John 10:15; Matt. 11:27; Rom. 8:29). The formula is stated negatively in 1 Corinthians 14:38. It is not simply the difference between a human act and a divine gift; Paul insists that the claim "to know God" is the heart of human presumption; in fact, it borders on blasphemy (cf. 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:11, 14, 16; 3:20; cf. Rom. 1:21). And it is this which must have forced him to



<sup>4</sup>Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." <sup>5</sup>For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" — <sup>6</sup>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

---

retain the distinction, even to correct himself (cf. Gal. 4:9). He does speak, however, of "knowing" Christ, but in a context where such "knowledge" is extremely personal, if not experiential, but also partial (Phil. 3:10; also cf. 1 Cor. 15:34).

The grammar allows Paul's reminder to be paraphrased: "You who claim to be already in possession of complete *gnōsis*, you are not even at the beginning of true knowledge" (Héring).

[4, 5] The discussion is here more sharply focused: not simply sacrificial food, but **the eating of food offered to idols**. Again, to interpret verses 4-6 properly, one must decide who is speaking, whether Paul or the Corinthians; and, whether in whole or in part. It is theoretically possible, and logically conceivable, that all of verses 4-6 belong in quotation marks and represent the position of the enlightened; read this way, Paul's rebuttal would begin in verse 7. It is more widely agreed, however, that Paul quotes the Corinthian slogan in verse 4: "**an idol has no real existence**" and "**there is no God but one,**" and begins his response in verse 5 (so RSV and NEB).

Even if these phrases are Corinthian slogans, Paul does not disagree with their content. Polemic against idols (cf. 1 Cor. 10:19) and the proclamation of the one God (cf. Deut. 6:4) were fundamental elements in his missionary preaching to Gentiles (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9f.; Acts 17:22ff.). The designation **so-called** underscores his skepticism that there were actually "many gods" and "many lords."

[6] The Christian position (for us, cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 24) is elaborated in a highly stylized form, with all the characteristics of an early Christian confession. Prominent is the belief in **one God, the Father and Creator (from whom are all**

<sup>7</sup>However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

---

things); the one Lord Jesus Christ is distinguished by his role in creation (through whom are all things . . .; cf. Col. 1:15ff.; Heb. 1:2). The roles of the Father and Christ are obviously sketched in highly poetic language, typical of the language of worship, and their distinction should not be pressed too far (cf. Rom. 11:36). The implication of having a common God and Lord will be worked out later (cf. 1 Cor. 12:5ff.).

**Eating Idol Meat in Public, 8:7-13.** Paul has no disagreement with the content of their position; in fact, it was he who had taught them. Nor does he deplore the degree of their mastery; in fact, he urged them to eat "solid food" (1 Cor. 3:1ff.). Their failure is in assuming that the verities of the Christian faith are as clear to everyone else as they are to them. Not all have full mastery of the details nor understand the full implications of the faith which they confess in worship. His statement here provides further evidence that 8:1b represents the Corinthians speaking. Paul's agreement here is more formal than substantive. Their mistake was perhaps in saying "all."

[7] This is the first mention in the epistle of the weak as a distinct group. But who were they? It has been suggested that "the weak" were actually the Jewish Christians within the church; they (it is argued) would have had the greatest scruples about eating "sacrificial food" because of their almost instinctive revulsion to idols and anything associated with idols. Gentile Christians, on the other hand, once converted to the one Lord and one God, would not have been bothered by such food.

But this seems unlikely for two reasons: First, the summary statement of the Christian faith in verses 4-6 consists of items which would be self-evident to Christians with a Jewish background; they would hardly be as self-evident to converted pagans. They would be confessed by both Jewish and Gentile Christians, but the implications of one's confession are not always fully comprehended. Second, the language in verse 7 suggests otherwise. Some were

**8** Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. **9** Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. **10** For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

---

formerly accustomed to idols and ate food as really offered to an idol. This could hardly be anyone other than Gentiles. It is their conscience which is still weak and is defiled. Their belief in "one God" and "one Lord" would not have erased their former religious outlook overnight; for them to eat sacrificial meat could easily constitute an impermissible contact with the gods which they had rejected, even if they no longer believed, theoretically, in their existence.

[8] By insisting that food and "eating food" are matters of indifference, Paul presses upon the Jewish Christians the implications of the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 15:11ff.; cf. Rom. 14:17). The Jewish Christians within the Corinthian church had, no doubt, accepted Paul's teaching, especially his teaching of Christian freedom. Verse 8 has also been suggested as another part of the Corinthians' position; set within quotation marks, it would succinctly state the position of the enlightened Jewish Christians of Paul's time.

[9] It is thus the liberty (literally, "authority," *exousia*) of the Jewish Christians who no longer feel obliged to pre-occupy themselves with decisions about what is kosher and what is not, at least, who no longer feel that their salvation hinges upon it, which threatens to become a stumbling block to the weak. It is thus not the eating per se but its effects upon the weak (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22; 1 Thess. 5:14; Rom. 14:13ff.).

[10] The precise circumstances in which their "authority" (to do as they wished) was being exercised are now specified: a man of knowledge, i.e., a Jewish Christian, "enlightened" by Paul's teaching on Christian freedom, would no longer have had qualms about attending a social function in an idol's temple. A converted Gentile, however, who was invited to the same function, by seeing the man of knowledge eat the questionable food, may be encouraged (under social pressure) to do likewise.

<sup>11</sup>And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. <sup>12</sup>Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.

---

[11] The net effect was that the weak brother re-established contact with his pagan loyalties. It is unlikely that the danger Paul envisions is simply the unsettling of the conscience of the weak brother, but that such an act might result in reaffirming his old faith and therefore in re-establishing his loyalties to the world he had left behind. The stakes are high: the danger is that the weak man may be destroyed. He cannot be ignored because he is a brother for whom Christ died.

[12] The "strong brother" has ostensibly been acting in his own interest and in that interest alone; therein lies his fatal error—in failing to realize that his actions have implications beyond himself, that normally innocuous actions may actually be sinning against your brethren. Since they are members of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12), the sin has the effect of being against Christ.

[13] With the final remark Paul becomes autobiographical. He introduces his personal example as the model. If something as trivial as food can result in the loss of a brother, he easily can forego eating meat, because his brother, when potentially affected adversely by his actions, becomes foremost in his actions. As one who has been "known by God," his instincts are "to love," and seek that which builds up (vss. 1, 2).

**Apostolic Freedom, 9:1-27.** Some commentators strenuously argue that chapter 9 is an intrusion rather than a continuation of the discussion of eating sacrificial meat. But there is no compelling reason to treat it as an excursus, especially since it relates thematically to the discussion in chapter 8 (especially vss. 9 and 13). The structure of the chapter is as follows: After preliminary remarks (vss. 1-6), he establishes the case for apostolic rights by appealing to (a) practical examples (vs. 7), (b) the law (vss. 8-12a), (c) acknowledged precedent (vs. 13), and (d) a command of the

**<sup>1</sup>Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? <sup>2</sup>If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.**

---

Lord (vs. 14). Having established his rights, he then defends his renouncement of those rights (vss. 15-18). The principle of self-restraint which governs his actions is elaborated (vss. 19-23). The athletic metaphor (vss. 24-27) illustrates the principle, and forcefully concludes the case for self-restraint.

[1] The “strong” could easily counter Paul’s appeal: “Not only do Christians have certain rights, but apostles do as well. To relinquish those rights is a deadly compromise. If one’s conduct is regulated by the ‘weak’, one is no longer ‘free’; if an apostle, of all people, vows ‘never to eat meat’ in deference to a ‘weak brother’, he has relinquished his apostolic authority to the ‘weak’. Why not require the ‘weak’ to be strong? They should simply abstain from eating such meat until they outgrow their ‘hangups’. Let them become ‘strong’.”

The diatribe was a well-established literary form in which a writer (or speaker) could engage in dialogue with an imaginary opponent. Paul’s response in verse 1 exhibits characteristic features of this diatribe style. By employing it, he is able to demonstrate that such deference towards the “weak” as he has suggested in chapter 8 does not invalidate his position as an apostle. On the contrary, it exposes the inner fabric of a true apostle: responsible self-restraint.

Paul’s own freedom and position as an apostle can hardly be jeopardized. The rhetorical questions in verse 1 are all formulated so that “Yes” answers are self-evident and indisputable. In Graeco-Roman popular philosophy, the ideal wise man was touted as the only really “free” man. Paul’s opening question, **Am I not free?** is known to have been used in popular philosophy; understood against this background, its effect would be devastating to the position of the “strong” who regarded themselves as “wise”; one can be both wise and free.

[2] Paul’s claim to be an apostle rested upon two bases: (1) his claim to have seen the Lord (1 Cor. 15:8;

<sup>3</sup>This is my defense to those who would examine me. <sup>4</sup>Do we not have the right to our food and drink? <sup>5</sup>Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife,\* as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

\* Greek a sister as wife

---

cf. Acts 9:3ff.; 22:6ff.; 26:12ff.); and (2) the fruits of his labor: his churches (2 Cor. 3:1ff.). Obviously not everyone agreed with his claim or with his reasons supporting his claim. But if his own churches denied his claim, they automatically declared themselves to be illegitimate. They were in no position to assert that his concessions to the weak vitiated his apostolic claim. His work remained: they were the seal of his apostolic work which had been commissioned by the Lord. Actually, all the Gentile churches were the seal of his apostleship: their existence provided the concrete proof that the grace of God had been at work among the Gentiles through Paul. The legitimacy of his peculiar claim to be an apostle to the Gentiles stood or fell with his Gentile churches (Gal. 1:11ff.; 2:7ff.; cf. Rom. 15:28).

[3] Paul employs the language of **defense** (*apologia*) especially when his apostolic work was under criticism (Phil. 1:7, 16) or attack (2 Cor. 12:19). His language here suggests that some are, in fact, "examining" him; the RSV **those who would examine me** implies potential rather than actual examination, and may be a legitimate rendering, given the diatribe style. But, even if he was actually facing "examiners," they need not have been within the Corinthian church. He may very well have been defending himself to the church against outside critics (though, cf. 4:3).

[4, 5] His questions are forcefully put: "Surely, it is not true, is it, that we do not have authority to eat and drink? Surely, it is not true, is it, that we do not have authority to lead about a wife . . . ?" The right to **our food and drink** must be understood as the right to expect room and board from Christian hosts and hostesses (cf. Luke 10:8); this was Paul's well-established pattern (Acts 18:3, 7; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19).

The **right to be accompanied by a wife** is literally "to lead around a sister (i.e., a Christian, cf. 1 Cor. 7:15; Rom. 16:1;

**‘Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? <sup>7</sup>Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?’**

---

Phile. 2) as a wife.” It is to be understood as the right to accept financial aid in order to support a wife (cf. vs. 6). The three categories the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas are both interesting and puzzling. Presumably Cephas (Peter) would automatically be included in the first category. Paul, however, often uses “apostle” in a wider sense than “one of the Twelve” (cf. Phil. 2:25; 1 Cor. 15:7); the term for him may mean nothing more than “missionary.” Thus he would be saying, “Do I not have the right to support a wife (just) like other missionaries . . . ?” The brothers of the Lord, whose names we know (cf. Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), although initially skeptical of their elder brother (John 7:5), eventually came around and occupied a position of importance in the Jerusalem church. This is Paul’s only reference to them as a group. Peter’s married status is also documented in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 8:14ff.; Mark 1:29ff.; Luke 4:38ff.).

[6] The RSV rendering of verse 6 is awkward. Paul’s question is, “Do not Barnabas and I also have the right to refrain from working?” or “Are we not also entitled to financial support from the churches?” The term for working implies “to work for a living” (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12a). In his own writings, Paul mentions Barnabas infrequently (Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; Col. 4:10). This is not altogether surprising when one recalls that Paul’s letters stem from a period when Barnabas was no longer his close associate; his behavior at Antioch did not exactly endear him to Paul (Gal. 2:13).

[7] With verse 7 Paul begins a series of four arguments demonstrating a missionary’s right to expect and accept financial support from churches. The first is a common sense appeal to practical life. The questions are formulated as statements of the obvious: a soldier lives from his soldiering, a farmer from his farming, a shepherd from his shepherding. He does not need to state the obvious: “and a preacher from his preaching.” That a missionary can expect

**“Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? <sup>9</sup>For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup>Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop.**

---

to live off his produce—his churches—is obvious. The examples occur in altered form—and make a slightly different point in 2 Timothy 2:4ff.

[8] Aware that these examples may appear to be on human authority, and therefore trivial and unconvincing, Paul moves to an impeccable authority: the law. His sensitivity to citing “human” examples may derive from his earlier censure of the Corinthians for placing such stock in “human matters”; the language employed is the same (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3). All the same, he often spoke “in a human way” (cf. Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:32; Gal. 3:15; cf. Gal. 1:11). In spite of his trenchant criticism of the law (cf. Romans and Galatians), it still had an almost instinctive authority for him. It may have been powerless in effecting man’s righteousness before God, but its usefulness for Christian instruction Paul never questioned (1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4).

[9] It is usually unnecessary for Paul to define “the law” with the more specific phrase “of Moses”; he rarely does so in his own writings (cf. Rom. 9:15; 10:5, 19; though cf. Acts 13:39; also 15:5; 28:23). In fact, his favorite Old Testament character, at least the one he most often mentions, is not Moses but Abraham. The quotation is from Deuteronomy 25:4 (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18), an Israelite law extending humane treatment to domesticated animals.

[10] Paul proceeds with his own exposition of the text. The text was, after all, written for our sake (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 4:23; 15:4). Paul stands here in a well-established tradition of reinterpreting the Jewish Scriptures begun by Jesus himself (cf. Matt. 5:17ff.).

Paul’s application moves well beyond the Old Testament text. The connection between an unmuzzled ox and a farmer is analogical: both man and animal are entitled to benefits from their labor.



**<sup>11</sup>If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? <sup>12</sup>If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?**

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

---

[11] Having extended the example of the ox by analogy to the farmer, in good sermonic fashion, he now applies the text to his own circumstances. He employs a mode of argument well established in both Jewish and pagan authors —“the lesser to the greater”—“If one who sows ordinary seed can rightfully expect ordinary produce, should not one who sows extraordinary seed (spiritual good) at least be compensated with ordinary produce (material benefits)?” It is a variation of what one would normally expect: if material sowing implies material harvest, spiritual sowing implies spiritual harvest (Gal. 6:8). Yet his alteration of the expected pattern makes an irrefutable point. The same metaphor is used in this altered form elsewhere to convince Gentile churches to participate in the collection for Jerusalem: if you receive spiritual benefits, you at least should acknowledge your debt with material resources (Rom. 15:27; cf. Phil. 4:17; 2 Cor. 8:14; 9:6ff., esp. vss. 8ff.).

[12] It is difficult to determine the identity of the **others** who had **this rightful claim** upon them. Is it a reference to those mentioned in 9:2? And, does it suggest that **others**, perhaps Peter, had come to Corinth and, unlike Paul, were expecting the church to support them? These possibilities are intriguing, but the references are too allusive to say with certainty that they apply to the Corinthian church now. It should be noticed that the use of **we** (cf. vss. 11ff.) begins again.

His strong disclaimer in verse 12b (*alla, nevertheless*) has dramatic effect: “Both common sense and divine law entitled us to the *authority* to receive funds; *but*, we voluntarily refrained from using it; instead of seeking lighter burdens, we assumed burdens; and our motivation was not hindered by our apostleship, but was prompted by it: to remove every barricade which would hinder the progress of the **gospel of Christ** (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7, 9; Acts 20:34ff.).

<sup>13</sup>Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

<sup>14</sup>In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

<sup>15</sup>But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting.

The necessity of "enduring" was part and parcel of apostolic labor (1 Thess. 3:1, 5); the Corinthians will later be reminded of this feature of apostolic life (cf. 1 Cor. 13:7). The progress of the gospel is his all consuming passion. Whenever it is threatened, he willingly engages in its defense (cf. Phil. 1:7, 12ff., 25).

[13] He is still not finished constructing the case for apostolic rights. **Do you not know**, as usual, introduces what the Corinthians are already familiar with, providing common ground from which Paul can argue. It was a firmly established precedent within the Old Testament that priests received their food from the temple and shared in the sacrificial offerings (Num. 18:8, 31; Deut. 18:1ff.). This was also established procedure in pagan temples.

[14] This appeal to established practice is further buttressed by an appeal to the word of the Lord (Jesus). (Cf. earlier discussion of 7:10.) The apostolic teaching which Paul had received included the mandate (*diatassō*) that proclaiming the gospel entitled one to live by the gospel (cf. Luke 10:7; Gal. 6:6).

One could hardly ask for a more well-argued case, supported by both divine command (the law and a word of the Lord), established precedent (priests and apostles), and common sense.

[15] Yet Paul relinquishes what is an incontestably well-established right. He neither has exercised nor intends to exercise his authority in this respect. It is of little concern to him, apparently, that his refusal to accept financial support ignores an explicit command by the Lord himself (cf. vs. 14). Perhaps he felt that his commission to preach to the Gentiles was a higher command. Or, perhaps because it

**<sup>16</sup>For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup>For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. <sup>18</sup>What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.**

---

was a commission full of difficulties and opposition, he felt compelled to remove every conceivable barrier, one of which would have been accepting personal financial support from churches while he was working with them.

The intensity of his commitment is reflected in verse 15b. He would “boast” (perhaps to Jewish Christians) that his preaching to Gentiles was motivated exclusively by his divine commission to the Gentiles. This commission received enough criticism as it was; the last thing he needed was to be accused of “preaching for money.”

[16] We are now provided with a rare insight into his motivations and self-understanding of his apostolic mission. His commission to preach was hardly a matter of choice; consequently, it certainly offered no grounds for **boasting**. But neither was it a matter of chance: he had been compelled by a divine commission every bit as overwhelming as that of Israel’s prophets (Gal. 1:11ff.; Jer. 1:5; 20:9; Isa. 49:1ff.; cf. Luke 17:10). **Woe to me** is reminiscent of prophetic recognition of the awesomeness of a divine call (Isa. 6:5); this is the only time it is ever used by Paul. Its normal function is in condemnation, indicting manifest wrongs or evil (cf. Matt. 11:21; Jude 11).

[17] Had there been any element of volition, **reward** would be applicable; but it was involuntary: **not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission**, literally “stewardship” (cf. 4:1). He was compelled to do what he would not normally have done, and divine grace impelled him to do so.

[18] His only **reward** was that of responding to grace in an appropriate manner: **to make the gospel free of charge**. Thus, his **reward** was to refuse financial reward. To do this he had to refrain from **making full use of my right in the gospel**. In other words, he imposed self-restraint upon authority (*exousia*) which was inherently his.

<sup>19</sup>For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law.

---

It is apposite to note here that the word *exousia*, translated by the RSV **right(s)**, occurs seven times in chapter 9, and that Paul mentions it only to disclaim his full use of it. Typically, he only discusses his “authority,” apostolic or otherwise, when forced to do so (2 Cor. 10:8); he is embarrassed to bring it up, and when forced to, insists that it is for building up rather than for tearing down (cf. 2 Cor. 13:10). His behavior was an impressive illustration of Jesus’ teaching (cf. Matt. 20:25ff.).

[19] The notion of “freedom” introduces one of the most well-known paragraphs from all the writings of Paul. The paradox of an enslaved freedman intrigued many authors of this period, both Jewish and Greek. Philo of Alexandria, an older contemporary of Paul, devotes an entire tract to the topic: “Every good man is free.” He examines all the conceivable circumstances in which a virtuous man is ostensibly “enslaved,” jail for instance, but which are incapable of suppressing “true freedom,” the freedom of the soul. “Stone walls do not a prison make . . . .”

Paul’s treatment of the paradox is exactly the reverse. Although he is **free from all men** (or, “all things”), he has enslaved himself. The motif of enslavement thus serves to introduce this paragraph, and provides the interpretive framework in which it is to be understood.

Paul’s apostolic charge was, of course, “to win over as many as possible” (NEB); the term employed here (*kerdainō*), actually meaning “to gain” (KJV), is a commercial term, but can have missionary connotations (cf. 1 Peter 3:1f.). He now identifies **the more**: Jews (vs. 20), “those under the law” (vs. 20), Gentiles (vs. 21), and the “weak” (vs. 22). Conspicuously absent are “the strong,” unless they are addressed in verse 20.

[20] It is significant that in this verse Paul distinguishes between **Jews** and **those under the law**. He admits to becoming “as a Jew for Jews” without issuing any dis-

**<sup>21</sup>To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup>I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.**

---

claimer. But to become “as one under the law to those under the law” requires some qualification: “though I myself was not under the law.” The expression *under the law* means for Paul, “subject to the dominion of the law” (Rom. 6:14ff.) just as “under sin” means “subject to the dominion of sin” and implies complete bondage to the power of sin (Rom. 3:9; 7:14). Once released from the “law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2), for any one to return to that bondage was out of the question. Because of this distinction, “those under the law” likely refers to Jewish Christians who, according to Paul, were still living in bondage to the law and from whom he constantly distanced himself.

[21] **To those outside the law**, i.e., to Gentiles; literally, the phrase reads “to the lawless” (*anomoi*). The pattern of verse 20 is altered when Paul submits to what was an apparently irresistible temptation for him: the use of puns. The Old Testament, however, supplies abundant examples, and he is here no doubt reflecting his rabbinic training. It is virtually impossible to reproduce the pun in English in spite of many noble, but relatively unsuccessful attempts: “not God’s outlaw (*anomos theou*), but Christ’s in-law” (*en-nomos Christou*) (C. H. Dodd). However one paraphrases the sentence, Paul’s intention is fairly clear: **not being without law toward God**. He is unwilling to leave the impression that he lives apart from any law; his entire background made such a statement impossible; the consequences of such a statement were fearful for him. He still lived **under law**, but under law radically redefined through the work of Christ: “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). To render the phrase in this verse as **the law of Christ** (RSV) is perhaps as good as any.

[22, 23] **The weak** constitute the next category. Possibly Paul considered himself “weak” by virtue of his willingness

**<sup>24</sup>Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup>Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup>Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; <sup>27</sup>but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.**

---

to relinquish his rights, normally reserved for "the strong."

Finally, he insists that he had become **all things to all men** in order to save some. Also, all his efforts had been motivated by the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:12); he did so in order to **share in its blessings**, literally "to be a joint participant in it." This can hardly mean "in order that I can receive financial benefits"; instead, it means "that I may be a participant in its benefits, i.e., God's grace."

[24-27] The case for apostolic restraint is concluded with the introduction of a metaphor so familiar that scarcely anyone in the Graeco-Roman world at that time could be unaware of it. Hence it is introduced with **do you not know . . . ?** Actually, it consists of two images: the runner and the boxer, although the former is dominant. The former he uses elsewhere (cf. Gal. 2:2; 5:7; Phil. 2:16; cf. Phil. 3:13f.; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7; Acts 20:24; cf. Heb. 12:1; Jude 3). The **prize** and "seizing the prize" are more precisely defined in Philippians 3:14.

The unattainability of the prize (for everyone) is not the point of the metaphor. Rather, the metaphor is introduced to illustrate the need for self-control (*egkrateia*), a highly esteemed Graeco-Roman virtue found in virtue lists within the New Testament (cf. Gal. 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6; Titus 1:8); taken to its extreme, it easily became synonymous with "asceticism" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:9).

Paul's fondness for athletics is limited, however. They are useful for him primarily in supplying illustrations. The **perishable wreath**, literally "corruptible crown," can in no way compare with the **imperishable crown** which those in Christ seek. There is unlikely to be an allusion here to the crown of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2), although the image obviously can have royal connotations (cf. Rev. 4:4; 6:2; 12:1; 14:14; 19:12).

Having sketched the metaphors and isolated the point for doing so (self-restraint), he now applies it to himself. The course of his race is determined by the prize of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 3:14); it is therefore not "aimless," nor are his efforts shadowboxing. Instead, he stays in training; it should be noticed that he interprets the metaphor with "slave" terminology. **Subdue** it could actually be rendered "put it into slavery." The discussion ends on the note on which it began: "I have enslaved myself to all" (1 Cor. 9:19).

His fear, given the context, should be understood as the fear of losing "the crown." Apostolic behavior devoid of self-restraint can only come to grief.

**Israel's Experience, 10:1-13.** Some of the Corinthians had assumed that their status before God guaranteed certain inalienable rights; they had also assumed that in this status they were invulnerable. Their status "in Christ" was neither affected by circumstances nor subject to erosion. The attitude was endemic within ancient Israel at various times in her history, and within any group with a strong view of election, confident of its status before God. The experience of Israel in the Exodus is now recalled for the benefit of the Corinthian church. Paul introduces it as if it were new instruction. His remarks are in the form of a brief homily upon an Old Testament text; they are a summary and do not constitute a full sermon.

Verses 1-5 introduce and elaborate the theme: the Exodus as interpreted in the light of Christ and Christian experience. Verses 6-13 contain the "applications"; there appear to have been five such applications; or rather, one general application, with four subheadings: (1) "do not desire (literally, 'crave') evil" (vs. 6); (2) "do not be idolaters" (vs. 7); (3) "do not engage in immorality" (vs. 8); (4) "do not put the Lord to the test" (vs. 9); (5) "do not murmur" (vs. 10).

At that point the pre-Pauline homily, or at least the homily which Paul has adapted to his purposes, seems to have ended, and Paul's own remarks begin. That is, he now begins to "apply" the exposition to the specific situation of the Corinthians. Insisting that Israel's experience is instructive for Christians (vs. 11), he singles out the "point," actually a new point, which he wishes to make: the danger

<sup>1</sup>I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

---

of overweening arrogance (vs. 12) and the assurance that God, who is faithful, will enable them to avoid the pitfalls which Israel's experience vividly illustrated (vs. 13). In verses 14-22 he singles out another theme introduced in the homily: idolatry (vs. 7), and develops it specifically with reference to the Corinthians.

[1, 2] Paul considers the remarks which follow vital for their present situation. The introductory words **I want you to know, brethren** (literally, "I do not want you to be ignorant, i.e., uninformed . . ." and therefore, "I am informing you") are uniquely Pauline and typically introduce new information or instruction which they cannot reasonably be expected to have already acquired (cf. Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13).

First, he concisely summarizes the events of the Exodus (vss. 1-4a). Christians, even Gentile Christians, are expected to appropriate the history of Israel as *their* history and to see their own experience in the light of that history. Thus **our fathers** (cf. vss. 6 and 11). The repetition of **all** (five times) is intentional and significant; its use and position determine the structure of the summary: there are five declarative sentences, each introduced by the word "all"; its emphatic position within each clause is properly grasped when read as if written in solid capitals: ALL. The effect will be dramatic and forceful when he comes to verse five: ALL . . . ALL . . . ALL . . . ALL . . . ALL . . . , but with MOST God was not well pleased. The structure itself foreshadows his warning against arrogance (vs. 12).

It is easily seen that the form in which the summary is cast is already directed to the Corinthian church: they had all shared the same religious experience: deliverance by the hand of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11). Equally, though not as repeatedly, emphasized is the sameness of Israel's experience: "the same supernatural food . . . the same supernatural drink" (vss. 3b, 4). The solidarity of the Corinthian church is similarly emphasized later in the epistle (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 25; also 1:10).



**<sup>3</sup>and all ate the same supernatural<sup>o</sup> food <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same supernatural<sup>o</sup> drink. For they drank from the supernatural<sup>o</sup> Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.**

*<sup>o</sup>Greek spiritual*

---

The content of the summary is thoroughly Old Testament in its complexion (cf. Ex. 13:21; 14:22; Ps. 105:39), even if the language is not. To speak of the fathers as being baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea is most unusual. No convincing parallels from Jewish writings at that time have been adduced indicating that Israel was "baptized into Moses." In fact, the notion of Israel or an Israelite being "in" or "within" one of its patriarchs such as Abraham or Moses is foreign, a fact which all the more points up the astonishing claim of early Christians to be actually "in" a figure who had only recently died, but who was regarded as still alive, albeit in a radically new and unprecedented way. It appears therefore that the text before us clearly reflects Christian terminology being superimposed upon Israel's story. Whether this was Paul's sermon, or one which had already developed within Christian tradition, is not clear. The language of "being baptized into . . . (someone)" is Pauline, and for this reason it is probably his creation (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; though cf. Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:3, 5; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15).

[3, 4] The allusion to manna and water are familiar Old Testament themes (cf. Ex. 16:4ff.; Deut. 8:3; Ex. 17:1ff.; Num. 20:2ff.). Both themes are elsewhere elaborated in the New Testament (cf. John 6:25ff., esp. vss. 31ff., vss. 49ff.; 1 Peter 2:4). The terminology, however, is unusual; literally, "spiritual" (*pneumatikon*) food and drink. The same terminology is continued in the following phrase: **the supernatural Rock which followed . . . .** His language here may reflect his dependence upon Jewish wisdom literature (cf. discussion above on 2:6ff.), in which wisdom (personified) is presented as the one primarily responsible for directing the Exodus (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 11:1ff., esp. vs. 4; also Sirach 15:3). As noted earlier, the roles of wisdom and the Spirit often merged, and the Holy Spirit as God's agent in producing manna and water was not an inconceivable development in this direction: it may well

**<sup>5</sup>Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.**

**<sup>6</sup>Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did.**

---

explain Paul's language here. If so, the reinterpretation of Israel's history is even more firmly anchored in the Corinthians' experience, since many of them placed a high premium on the Holy Spirit. Paul's point could hardly be missed: Israel herself, suffused in God's Spirit, eating food and drinking water supplied by God's Spirit, under the guidance of God's Spirit, was nevertheless not insured against evil and destruction—and, nor were the Corinthian "spirituals"! This becomes especially clear in chapter 11 where Paul discusses how the Corinthians are partaking of their spiritual food, the Lord's supper.

With verse 4b the Christian motif becomes even more explicit: the **Rock was Christ**. Rabbinic interpretations of the Exodus know the theme of a brook which followed the Israelites in the wilderness. The implication here, however, is that Israel owed its survival, and therefore its salvation, to Christ. In Christian interpretation of the Old Testament Christ was regarded as the key to interpreting Israel's history. That history was to be reread assuming that Christ had been an active agent within it (cf. Heb. 11:26). The image of Christ as the **Rock** providing water for Israel would also have been possible because of the identification of Christ with the pre-existent wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24); since Christ was God's wisdom, active in creation (cf. Col. 1:15ff.), he was also seen as active within Israel's history as God's agent.

[5] The forceful impact of verse 5 derives from the contrast of **most of them** whose conduct displeased God with **all of them** who had shared in God's salvation: **they were overthrown in the wilderness**. This phrase is a direct quotation from the Old Testament (cf. Num. 14:16; also 14:23, 30; Jude 5). This is actually the point which the summary rehearsal of the Exodus is intended to make—God saved **all of them**, but was then displeased with **most of them**.

[6] With verse 6 Paul turns to the "application." **These things are warnings for us**, literally, "These things were

**<sup>7</sup>Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.**

---

done as types (*tupoi*), or examples, for us" (cf. Rom. 15:4; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; Heb. 8:5; 1 Peter 5:3). Israel's experience is to be an "example" for them, even as his own apostolic behavior was and is, although in a different sense (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; also ch. 9). The purpose of the example is now delineated, they are **not to desire evil** as Israel did. This is the first of the five "lessons," or actually the major "lesson," which is now further subdivided. Literally, the Corinthians are urged not to "crave" evil as Israel had "craved" evil (cf. Num. 11:4, 34). The idea of "craving" (*epithumeō*) is not picked up elsewhere in the epistle, although "evil" is (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6; 15:33). This is not the "point" he wishes to develop. That this is the general application with four subheadings is reflected in the structure of verses 7-10; each verse takes the form of a prohibition, introduced with the same word "not" (*mēde*). The four prohibitions are arranged in an a-b-b-a-pattern: "do not . . . Let us not . . . Let us not . . . do not . . ."

[7] The first prohibition is, **Do not be idolaters**. This is the feature of the homily which Paul will develop further (cf. vss. 14ff.). It is his nearest allusion to the Apostolic Decree (cf. Acts 15:20ff.; cf. 21:25), and is a prohibition well documented in the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 34:15ff.; Lev. 3:17; 5:2ff.; 17:10ff.). The consequences of idolatry are illustrated by the golden calf incident, with an appeal to Exodus 32:6. The key words of description are **eat and drink**. They have been provided with spiritual food and drink, and now lapse into idolatrous eating and drinking. This will be developed further in 10:16ff.

[8] The second prohibition is, **let us not indulge in immorality**. Idolatry and immorality are often mentioned together in the New Testament (cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5; Rev. 2:14, 20; 9:20f.), and not without good reason. Among the things that Israel's history had illustrated was the relationship between worshiping idols

**'We must not put the Lord' to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup>nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.**

<sup>9</sup>Other ancient authorities read *Christ*

and sexual immorality. Although it was often difficult to determine which came first, it was not difficult to see that the one produced the other (cf. Hos. 4:12ff.; 9:1; et al.).

A vivid example was provided by the incident of apostasy at Moab (Num. 25:1ff.), which resulted in the death (by plague) of twenty-four thousand persons. Exactly why the number has been reduced by a thousand in Paul's exposition of the text is not clear.

[9] The third prohibition is, let us not tempt the Lord. This recalls the incident in the wilderness when, in response to Israel's dissatisfaction with God's care of them, he sent fiery serpents (Num. 21:4ff.); the bronze serpent effected their deliverance, but Paul does not develop the image with reference to Christ as the New Testament does elsewhere (cf. John 3:14). Later, Christian writers from the second century onward would see the bronze serpent as a type of Christ. The notion of "tempting" and "being tempted" by God has different connotations in the New Testament (cf. James 1:13ff.; Matt. 4:1ff.), but here, the aspect being emphasized is "testing" God's patience with persistent recalcitrant behavior; presuming upon God's grace in this way belongs hand-in-glove with arrogance.

[10] The fourth prohibition is, do not murmur (*grumble*). Closely related to the third prohibition, this has a more specific reference to the Old Testament incidents recorded in Exodus 16:2ff.; Numbers 14:2ff.; 17:5ff. (cf. also Psalm 78:18f.). Paul's instructions elsewhere to churches beset with internal tensions employ the same imagery (cf. Phil. 2:14).

His mention that they were destroyed by the Destroyer should be noticed in particular, especially since it is the single motif which all four of the specific prohibitions have in common. Although "destruction" is not mentioned in connection with "craving evil" (cf. however, vs. 5; also Ex. 32:28), the idea permeates the homily. Their common point, therefore, is that death is the inevitable

<sup>11</sup>Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

---

consequence of incurring the displeasure of God (cf. vs. 5), and the clear implication is that behaving in any way comparable to that of Israel can scarcely have different consequences (cf. 11:30).

[11] This point Paul now makes for the benefit of the Corinthians. Already having noted that Israel's behavior was to be regarded as an example, even if a negative one, he now employs the same word, except as an adverb: literally, "These things happened to them typically," i.e., they were "symbolic" (NEB). Specifically, they were recorded for "the instruction (*nouthesia*) of those of us upon whom the end of the age has come." **Instruction** elsewhere has the connotation of "warning" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 5:12, 14; 2 Thess. 3:15; Titus 3:10). This is, of course, the function which it has had for Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 9:9ff.).

The Christian understanding of the Old Testament, however, is made possible because of the shift in the timetable of history caused by the resurrection of Jesus. Literally the phrase in verse 11b reads, "unto (*eis*) whom the end of the ages has come." Early Christians lived in the tension between "the already" and "the not yet." The death and resurrection of Christ had inaugurated the "last days" (Acts 2). The final age had begun, yet its consummation was "not yet." The expectation of final judgment informed their reading of the Old Testament; here Paul clearly intends for Israel's experience to be an inducement for the Corinthian Christians to live with a keen awareness that the Lord would soon judge their behavior (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4ff.; also 7:26, 29; cf. 1 Peter 4:7; Heb. 9:26; 1 John 2:18).

[12] With verses 12, 13 Paul concludes the homily, expressly applying it to the Corinthians. His "lesson" for them: do not be arrogant. The exhortation is formulated with terminology we have already met, **let anyone who thinks** (i.e., "pretends" *dokeō*) **that he stands take heed lest he fall** (cf. Rom. 11:20; Gal. 6:1). There can be little question that this recalls his description of them as children

<sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, shun the worship of idols. <sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say.

---

(cf. 1 Cor. 3:1ff.). In their arrogance, they claim to be “walking,” but their father reminds them that he still needs to hold them up by their hands (cf. Hos. 11:1ff.). Their salvation and blessings were not such that they could ignore the dangers of the idolatrous society in which they lived.

[13] But, having issued the warning, he provides the assurance. It is the same shift from stern warning to paternal reassurance we have seen earlier (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14). **Temptation** is now used in its other, more ordinary sense; Paul assures the Corinthians that the inclination to arrogance is human, a flaw within the human character. The faithful God, who had called them (cf. 1 Cor. 1:9), would also enable them to abandon their reckless pursuit of arrogance. The appeal to a faithful God, specifically recalling the Old Testament theme of a God who is faithful to his covenant with his children, is a consistent feature of early Christian exhortation (cf. 2 Cor. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23; 11:11; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11; also Heb. 13:8; 2 Peter 2:9).

**Flee Idolatry, 10:14-22.** [14] To this point Paul has not expressly forbidden the Corinthians to eat “food offered to idols.” Nor has he tackled the fundamental issue at stake: idolatry itself. The subject was introduced indirectly in the confessional summary in 8:4-6. The command **shun the worship of idols** appears to be addressed to Gentile Christians, since presumably it is they who would be tempted to return to worshipping idols.

[15] The reference to **sensible men** and “judging” recalls motifs introduced earlier; both are no doubt laden with irony: “I am speaking to persons claiming to be wise; you have boasted of your powers of discrimination; now exercise discrimination with regard to what I tell you.” The remarks are clearly addressed to “the strong,” perhaps Jewish Christians who were attending pagan temples with

**16The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation<sup>a</sup> in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation<sup>a</sup> in the body of Christ?**

<sup>a</sup> Or *communion*

---

impunity. His appeal here is reminiscent of Israel's prophets who had pled with Israel not to lapse into idolatry.

[16] Paul's reason for introducing the Lord's supper at this point is not immediately clear. Is the abuse and misunderstanding of the Lord's supper which he discusses in chapter 11 also in view here, and if so, does he introduce it in order to clarify the misunderstanding? Or, is it illustrative? Does he refer to the Lord's supper as common ground shared with the church from which to make his point about idolatry? It seems to be the latter.

The expression **cup of blessing** is uniquely Pauline; it is often associated with thanksgiving (cf. Matt. 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17; though, cf. 1 Cor. 11:25); according to some manuscripts, the text should read "cup of thanksgiving." "Breaking bread" is a typical expression (cf. Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).

The order of the elements—the cup, then the bread—is perhaps reversed because Paul wants to use the bread in order to develop a point about unity (vs. 17) and to lead into the discussion of eating sacrifices (vs. 18). The recital of the last supper in 11:23ff. follows the more traditional order—the bread, then the cup (cf. Matt. 26:26ff.; Mark 14:22ff.).

The most significant feature, however, is neither the order nor the terminology, but Paul's insistence that the cup and the bread involve **participation** in the body and blood of Christ. The Greek word is *koinōnia*, often translated "fellowship," but **participation** more adequately conveys the dynamic quality of the term; perhaps "sharing" does so even more, especially when it is recalled that the same term is used of the "collection" (2 Cor. 8:14; 9:13; Rom. 15:26; cf. Phil. 1:5). The act of drinking the cup and eating the bread is an act in which one not only acknowledges the reality and presence of Christ but actually ratifies one's union with Christ. The individual and Christ become one (again), their oneness sealed and solidified in the act of participating in the (effects of) the blood and body of Christ.

<sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel;<sup>\*</sup> are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? <sup>19</sup>What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

<sup>\*</sup>Greek *Israel according to the flesh*

---

[17] Each element is developed: first, the bread, then the cup in verse 21. Recalling the Exodus homily, in which he had emphasized that all Israel had eaten the “same spiritual food,” Paul now emphasizes the **one bread**: all Christians (the many) who **partake of the one bread**, by doing so, are solidified into one body of Christ. Partaking of the bread, thus, is not only an act uniting the believer with Christ, but an act uniting one believer with other believers in the body of Christ. It has both individual and corporate dimensions, and both involve actual participation with the person of Christ.

[18] As partaking of the bread and cup brought one to share in (the benefits of) the body and blood of Christ, so partaking of food and drink offered in sacrifice made one an actual participant in those sacrifices. Israel now provides the “example.” Paul urges the Corinthians to consider how the experience of Israel demonstrated that participating in a ritual meal entails an actual union between the participant and the figure being worshiped; **are not those who eat the sacrifices partners (*koinōneo*) with the (figure being worshiped at the) altar?** Applied to Israel, when they participated in pagan worship, by worshiping idols, they actually united themselves (“becoming partners”) with the pagan gods themselves. Eating of the sacrifices to a god implied becoming partners with the god—literally being united with the “person” of that god. This was so from the Christian perspective, whether the worshiper thought of it that way or not.

[19] Paul is aware that the Corinthians could counter: “But, you said that sacrificial food is neither here nor there” (cf. 1 Cor. 8:8). Thus he hastens to clarify any false impression which he might have left. His fear derives not from **food offered to idols being anything, or an idol being real.**



<sup>20</sup>No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. <sup>21</sup>You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup>Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

---

[20, 21] The only point which he wishes to nail down is that pagan worship, or any worship not directed to the one God and the one Lord, unavoidably involves the worship of demons (*daimonia*). It is Paul's first use of the term; in fact, the term only occurs once again in the Pauline writings, and there the "doctrine of demons" is forbidden (1 Tim. 4:1). It is well known that "demons" are far more frequently referred to in the Gospels. The terminology itself is derived from the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). It should be noticed, however, that the term can be used as a synonym for "gods" or "deities" (cf. Acts 17:18, "he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities," *daimonia*), and this seems to be Paul's use of the term here. Accordingly, they should be regarded as synonymous with the "gods many" and "lords many" mentioned earlier (8:5). He firmly believed in the existence of cosmic powers and forces in the demonic order, although he also believed as firmly that they were "doomed to pass away" (1 Cor. 2:6ff.). Until *then*, however, they were not to be ignored (cf. Eph. 6:12).

His real fear of eating sacrificial meats was its association with pagan worship; thus he did not wish the Corinthians to be partners with demons. Christ and Belial were utterly incompatible forces, and their worship was equally incompatible (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14ff., esp. vs. 16). Accordingly, those "in Christ," who had actually been united with Christ could not participate in both pagan worship and Christian worship. Split allegiance was excluded. For the table of the Lord see Malachi 1:7, 12 and Isaiah 65:11.

[22] This section ends with a threat: **Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy** (by our split loyalties, as Israel did to her own destruction; cf. 10:7ff.; also Deut. 32:21; Ex. 34:14)? **Are we stronger than he?** "Dare we incur the wrath of one who summarily destroys those who displease him?"

<sup>23</sup>“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. <sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

---

(Cf. 10:6, 8, 9, 10.) The mention of “strong” is probably intentional, since the arrogant were apparently taking their strength quite seriously, and flaunting it to dangerous limits (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10; also 1:25, 27).

**Eating Idol Meat in Private, 10:23-30.** [23] Continuing to address “the strong,” Paul returns to the theme introduced earlier (8:7ff.), but introduces it by quoting a Corinthian slogan also mentioned earlier: “All things are lawful” (cf. 6:12). As before, he rebuts the slogan, first by reminding the Corinthians that **not all things are helpful**, i.e., that not everything which they had the right (*exousia*) to do was necessarily for the common good (cf. 12:7; also 7:35); this is the note on which this larger section ends (cf. 10:33). The second time it is repeated, however, the qualifier is different. Rather than mentioning his personal refusal to be enslaved, as he did earlier (cf. 6:12b), he replies: **but not all things build up**, thus introducing the note which will later set the tone in his discussion of spiritual gifts (cf. 14:3ff.; also cf. Rom. 14:19; 15:2).

[24] The injunction to **seek the good of one’s neighbor**, besides being reminiscent of the teaching of Jesus (cf. Matt. 22:39, and parallels), recalls his earlier rebuke of “the strong” (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7f.; also Phil. 2:4). It is the natural impulse produced by love (8:2; cf. 1 Cor. 13:5), but seldom generated by arrogance and knowledge (8:1). It is applied concretely in verse 29.

[25] In this verse Paul enjoins them to **eat**, without qualifications; this is in contrast to his discussion earlier (also, this section should be read in close conjunction with Rom. 14:2ff., esp. 13ff.). But as already noted, the situation addressed here is private, whereas the former was public. The mention of **meat market** (*makellos*) suggests that he has in view one who is shopping for private use. There is clear evidence to suggest that such markets would have had meat *besides* that which had been sacrificed to idols; yet,

<sup>26</sup>For "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." <sup>27</sup>If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>28</sup>(But if some one says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience' sake—<sup>29</sup>I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it).

---

they would certainly have had *some* such meat. It has also been suggested that this description of the shopper as well as the fact that meat seems to have been prominent on the shopping list indicates that Paul has the well-to-do members in view.

The normal impulse, especially for Jews, would be to "ask questions" (*anakrinō*), i.e., "Is it kosher?" These were the questions which devout Jews had been taught to ask all their lives (cf. Acts 10:14). They also instinctively asked whether it had been polluted in pagan worship. Yet (and this is astonishing when one recalls Paul's own upbringing) Paul urges them to "ask no questions"; in view of his teaching about "foods" (1 Cor. 8:8), it was the proper advice to give. The principle is more fully elaborated in his letter to the Romans (cf. 14:14, 17, 20).

[26] His conviction, as usual, had been formed in the light of Scripture: "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (cf. Ps. 24:1; Rom. 14:14, 20; also 1 Tim. 4:4; Matt. 15:1ff. and parallels).

[27] The meat market forced the decision about the private use of such meat in one way; an invitation to dinner forced the private decision in another way, for there the believer had no choice in determining the menu. To be invited to dinner by an "unbeliever" (cf. 6:1ff.) as a social function was a perfectly ordinary custom, and would be a practical problem faced by members, especially those with social pretensions. Again, the advice is the same: eat whatever is served, "asking no questions." The same conviction calls for suspending questions here as it did earlier: food does not commend us to God (cf. Luke 10:8).

[28, 29a] That Paul has been addressing "the strong" to this point is clear, but his following remarks present

**For why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples? <sup>30</sup>If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?**

---

difficulties. The one who interjects, "This has been offered in sacrifice," at first glance appears to be the pagan host, who does so in deference to the religious scruples of the guest, because the term used is the typical term used by pagans to describe such food—*hierothuton*, i.e., "holy food"—whereas the Jewish term (reflecting their own viewpoint) was *eidōlothuton*, "idol food." The term used here, "holy food," is, however, the term that a converted pagan would still use. If so, the interjection is put by the Gentile Christian, the "weak brother." And the "strong" Christian is urged to refrain from eating the meat for the sake of the weak brother's conscience. The conscience of the weak brother is the crucial matter at stake (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10, 12). This interpretation, however, should not be pressed too energetically since, after all, the evidence is ambiguous.

Paul insists, however, that it is the conscience of the *weak brother*, not the strong brother, which should be foremost in view. This verse provides the concrete instance illustrating verse 24; this is reflected in the language: "I mean, not his own conscience, but that of his neighbor."

[29b, 30] The remarks in verses 29b, 30 are extraordinarily difficult to fit into any coherent interpretation of the passage because, if read as they are, they directly controvert Paul's advice in verses 28, 29a. On the one hand, he urges the invited guest to concede to the conscience of the "informer" (vs. 27), then puts a question which would have invalidated his advice, if it is taken seriously in any sense. Moreover, verse 30 is equally difficult to fit into this scheme.

There are only two plausible solutions: either verses 28, 29a do not fit; or they do fit, and must be read another way.

The RSV opts for the former, setting verses 28, 29a in parentheses, indicating the editorial judgment that this section intrudes into Paul's main train of thought, and thus that it was either an afterthought or a later insertion. Accordingly, after urging the "strong brother" to eat, asking no questions (vs. 27), Paul supports his advice with two

<sup>31</sup>So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup>Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup>just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. <sup>1</sup>Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

---

perfectly reasonable rhetorical questions, one of which implies, "There is no need for my liberty (in this private setting) to be determined by someone else's scruples"; and, "If I eat in gratitude, that is all that matters." But, why would Paul insert verses 28, 29a here, even as an afterthought? There is no textual evidence that these verses are absent in ancient manuscripts.

The difficulty is not easily resolved. The most convincing solution is that adopted by the NEB. According to this view, verses 29b, 30 represent the anticipated response of Paul's reader—"the strong": "What?" you say, 'is my freedom to be called in question by another man's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I blamed for eating food over which I have said grace?' On this showing, verses 31ff. would constitute Paul's response: "Well, . . . whatever you do . . . give no offense . . . because this is what I would do!"

This solution is strengthened both by Paul's practice of quoting Corinthian slogans and his use of the diatribe. These may well be the inquiry of his interlocutor.

The difficulty with the second solution is that verse 31 does not open with "but," Paul's typical way of countering objections.

**Paul's Example, 10:31–11:1. [10:31–11:1]** The final paragraph concludes his appeal begun in 8:1; it also introduces a new item: do all to the glory of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Cor. 9:13; Rom. 15:6, 7). The "eating" and "drinking" themes have pervaded the entire discussion, beginning with 10:3, properly regarded as a Pauline homily on "Christian eating and drinking." Yet it extends the scope of advice which to this point has been quite specific. Now he urges them "to be inoffensive" (i.e., to provide no stumbling block; cf. Phil. 1:10) to both Jews and Greeks (i.e., to non-Christians, cf. 1 Thess. 4:12), as well as to the church

of God (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:13; also Matt. 18:8ff., esp. vs. 10ff.). This was an intrinsic aspect of his own apostolic self-understanding (cf. 2 Cor. 6:3). These are the three all-encompassing categories mentioned earlier (cf. 9:19-24).

It is significant that he concludes his appeal by urging the Corinthians to follow the example of his personal behavior. Verse 33 may be regarded as a condensed summary of 9:19-24. His personal willingness not to press his individual rights (*exousia*), but to keep the common weal in mind becomes the basis of his final appeal: **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ** (cf. Eph. 5:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9; Heb. 6:12; 13:7). The way in which Christ illustrated the principle is elaborated more fully elsewhere (cf. Phil. 2:6ff.; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:4).

#### *Problems in the Assembly, 11:2-34*

To this point in the epistle, the meetings of the Corinthian church have not been addressed, at least not directly (cf. 1 Cor. 5:4; 10:14ff., esp. vs. 21). To be sure, their corporate behavior has been addressed, but the primary focus has been their responsibility to each other, most especially "the strong" to "the weak," as a church living within a pagan society. The problems addressed so far have not been troubles which have been exacerbated by their conduct or misconduct within the Christian assembly. With chapter 11, the focus shifts.

The exact function of chapter 11 within the overall epistle is unclear. It is often regarded as an excursus, unrelated either to what precedes or what follows, treating instead a topic not raised by the Corinthian church (but see on vs. 2), yet one on which they needed instruction. Some commentators relate it to the discussion in chapters 8-10: having discussed the relation of Christians to pagan worship, he now turns to address the question of Christian worship. Others, however, regard chapters 11-14 as a unit in which Paul addresses various aspects of the assembly at Corinth (women, Lord's supper, exercise of spiritual gifts).

At least, its internal structure is clear. The chapter is arranged according to the introductory clauses: "I praise you . . ." (vs. 2) and "I praise you not . . ." (vs. 17).

<sup>2</sup>I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

---

**Women's Head Covering, 11:2-16.** The meaning of these verses appears to be hopelessly unclear, in spite of many ingenious, but ill-fated attempts to explain them. The most one can hope for are a few shafts which might illuminate a few dark corners, but even then the room as a whole is still dimly lit. The commentator's task, in these circumstances, is to keep the obscure from becoming even more obscure.

[2] Paul's praise of the Corinthians, short-lived as it is, stems from two things: (1) their remembrance of him in everything; the report of the Stephanas delegation had apparently not been totally pessimistic (cf. 16:17f.); (2) their fidelity to the traditions which Paul had delivered to them. Perhaps the Corinthians in their letter or through their representatives had expressed their faithfulness to the customs delivered by Paul but had asked for some explanation or reason behind them.

**Traditions** (*paradoseis*) and related terminology refers to the "teachings" which they had received—his instruction; it is a typical way of referring to teachings, held as sacred and authoritative, which are transmitted from teacher to disciple (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). The negative overtones often attached to the term derive largely from Jesus' attacks upon the "traditions" of the Jews, i.e., the teachings of the Jewish scribes (cf. Matt. 15:2ff.; Mark 7:3ff.; also, Gal. 1:14); also, from its use in denoting teachings with no divine authority (cf. Col. 2:8). But its value to the early church in describing its sacred traditions, its teachings received from the Lord, is seen by its positive use by Paul (1 Cor. 11:23ff.; 15:1ff.).

[3] The instructions that follow appear to be new instructions, indicated by the introductory formula: **I want you to understand** (cf. remarks on 10:1). The order of the sequence which follows is surprising. It would have been more natural to have said, "the head of woman is man; the head of man is Christ; the head of Christ is God" (cf. 3:22). If the term **head**

**<sup>4</sup>Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, <sup>5</sup>but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven.**

---

(*kephalē*) is to be understood in the sense of “source” or “origin,” as some commentators suggest, the verse could be paraphrased, “the source of every man is Christ, because he was the agent of creation (Col. 1:15ff.; 1 Cor. 8:6b; cf. 1 Cor. 1:24); the source of woman is the man, since she was created from his rib (Gen. 2:18ff.); the source of Christ is God, since he was made wisdom by God (1 Cor. 1:30).”

If one takes head in the sense of “master,” obviously the point made is radically altered, and the sequence appears to be outlining the chain of command. The notion that man was the “master” of woman was a truism in Jewish thought, and had solid Old Testament support (Gen. 3:16). Jewish writers of the period, including Philo and Josephus, regarded it as axiomatic. More liberated opinions of the status of women are to be found within Graeco-Roman writers, but they are by no means unanimous.

[4] Paul does not specify the context in which the praying and prophesying occur; although it is not specified that it is done when the church “comes together” as he does below (cf. 11:17ff.), it is difficult to imagine why the problem addressed would exist if a private setting were assumed. “Prophesying,” by definition, presupposes an audience; it is not a private act (cf. 14:1ff.; 29ff.). It is well known that Jewish dress customs forbade women to appear in public unveiled. Graeco-Roman customs actually varied. In either case, the shame appears to have resulted when a woman appeared unveiled *in public*, rather than in the privacy of her own home. The description of the “praying” and “prophesying” man literally reads, “the man who prays or prophesies having (the veil) down upon (his) head, shames his head,” presumably Christ (vs. 2). Roman priests and magistrates performed sacrifices with heads veiled.

[5] The activity of the woman (within the assembled group) is apparently identical to that of the man. To pray with an unveiled head dishonors her head, presumably her



**‘For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>(For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup>Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) <sup>10</sup>That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels.**

<sup>7</sup> Greek authority (the veil being a symbol of this)

---

husband (cf. vs. 2). If one asks how this would occur, the explanation may be that converted and emancipated Greek women attended the meeting of the church with uncovered heads. It is conceivable that the “enlightened” members argued that it made no difference since there was neither “male nor female” in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:27). Obviously, this would tend to be precedent-setting, encouraging others, perhaps Jewish women, to do so, even in public. Such an act could easily be scandalous; also, it could arouse the curiosity of the surrounding society. The direction of Paul’s advice is for the church not to remove those distinctions which would make it difficult for it to relate to society.

[6] For a woman to appear without a veil was apparently tantamount to having one’s head shaved, which is taken to be the superlative state of reproach.

[7] The man, on the other hand, is obliged to wear no head covering, inasmuch as he is the **image and glory of God**. The language recalls Genesis 1:27. The **woman**, on the other hand, is the **glory of man**.

[8, 9] The basis for the schematized outline above is provided by the Genesis account of creation (cf. Gen. 2:18ff.). Thus, verse 8 means “for man was not created from the woman, but woman was created from the man” (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13). That creation is in view is supported by verse 9, where the term **created** (*ktizō*) is actually employed, but where the purpose of creation is more clearly specified, “Man was not created because of the woman, but woman was created because of the man.”

[10] “For this reason,” i.e., because of the primacy of man within creation, the woman is to be veiled. The verse is

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

---

difficult because the sentence literally reads "For this reason the woman ought to have authority (*exousia*) upon the (her) head . . . ." Some manuscripts replaced *exousia* with *kalumma*, the more common word for "veil," but it was obviously an attempt to explain the original difficult reading, and for this reason is to be rejected. Also problematic is the additional phrase "on account of angels." The angels may be malevolent figures (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4; 12:7; also 1 Cor. 4:9; 6:3), perhaps comparable to the principalities and powers, against whom women needed protection.

[11, 12] The difficulty presented by verses 11 and 12 is that at this point Paul appears to do an about-face. His remarks, if taken at face value, controvert his remarks immediately preceding. For here, he underscores the complete mutuality of man and woman. Man and woman are regarded as being "of each other."

On the other hand, if verses 11, 12 are the words of an interlocutor, an imaginary opponent, expressing the views of the "enlightened" within the church, they are more comprehensible. Their position would be as follows: "In the Lord there is neither male nor female; all sexual distinctions are nullified. It is impossible for woman to be without man, or man to be without woman. They owe their existence to each other, albeit in slightly different senses. Actually, all things derive from God. Thus, there should be no sexual distinctions within the church. This means that if a woman wishes to dispense with distinctions ordinarily made by society, such as wearing a veil, let her do so."

If this is the case, Paul's remarks will be seen to favor retention of society's distinctions. He may have felt that for the Corinthian church to adopt such a practice would be to flout its liberation before society, and in the process elicit society's disfavor. Sensitive to the impression the church makes upon society, he advises against it. Once more the "enlightened" have taken Paul's views and drawn from them conclusions about practice of which Paul disapproved.

<sup>13</sup>Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, <sup>15</sup>but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup>If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

---

Paul would have concurred about the mutuality of man and woman (cf. 7:3, 4).

[13-15] With verse 13 Paul resumes his remarks. Calling upon the "enlightened" to judge themselves, he insists that it cannot be appropriate for a woman to pray with her head unveiled. He buttresses his appeal with a reference to **nature** (*phusis*). Paul here is clearly using the term to refer to "the created order." Nature is illustrative of the point about covering the head in public.

[16] His final remarks show exasperation, and may recall earlier remarks (cf. 5:11). He insists that universal practice among his churches reinforces his appeal. The Corinthians are obviously expected to follow his "traditions" in this respect as well (cf. 11:2).

**Lord's Supper, 11:17-34.** The phrase "when you come together" is important for determining the specific circumstances which Paul now addresses. If there was any doubt that 11:2-16 dealt with their behavior within the Christian assembly, there can be no doubt that this is the case in verses 17-34. Their "coming together" is mentioned explicitly five times (verses 17, 18, 20, 33, 34), and is the situation assumed throughout this section. Since there is no evidence that Christians at this time had "church buildings," it can be safely assumed that they typically met as "house-churches" (cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12ff.; 16:15, 40; 18:3, 7; 20:7ff., 20; 21:4, 7, 8, 16, 18; 28:14, 30; 2 John 10; 3 John 10; Phile. 2; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; cf. however, James 2).

For this reason each of the five references to "coming together" must be understood to mean "coming together in a private home." In verse 20, the phrase "when you meet together" may be rendered "when you come together to the same place" (*epi to auto*). If there was more than one "house-church" in the vicinity of Corinth (and this depends

upon whether "churches of Christ" in Romans 16:16 means "all the churches of Christ here in [the vicinity of] Corinth," or "all the churches of Christ within the vicinity of the Aegean," i.e., western Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia, or "all the churches of Christ [in the East]"), this may mean that the several churches would meet periodically at one house-church, presumably at a house large enough to accommodate all of them. The most likely place would have been the house of Gaius, which was large enough to accommodate guests such as Paul, as well as the whole church (cf. Rom. 16:23).

Understanding these concrete circumstances in which the Corinthian church was meeting lends clarity to Paul's remarks in verses 17-34. This is particularly true in two respects. First, it may clarify the nature of the "divisions" (vs. 18) and "factions" (vs. 19) within the assembly. Second, it may clarify the exact relationship between "eating" the Lord's supper and "eating" the common meal within the assembly.

As to the former, recent research has convincingly suggested that the underlying social setting may partially explain the tensions within the church when it met together. It is significant that Paul does not analyze the problems in terms of "weak" and "strong" brethren as he does earlier (cf. 8:7ff.; 10:23ff.); nor does he tackle the "divisions" doctrinally. He does not proceed to analyze the "views" of the Lord's supper which seem to be precipitating the "divisions"; instead, he analyzes the problem in terms of economic differences.

This is seen most clearly in verse 22. His question, "Do you not have houses . . ." may mean nothing more than "Can you not take your meals at home?" But there is strong evidence to suggest that "to have a house" means here "to own a house." If so, his remarks are obviously addressed to the well-to-do. This is reinforced by the second question: ". . . do you humiliate those who have nothing?" The Greek literally reads "the have nots" (*tous mē echontas*), and there is strong linguistic evidence that this phrase had the same connotation then that it does now: "the poor."

On the basis of this evidence, the tensions may very well be those which arose when an extremely socially diverse

group of Corinthian Christians met within the home of one of its more well-to-do members, and when ordinary social distinctions between rich and poor, slave and master were not only being retained, but accentuated.

The specific implications of this relate to the second consideration mentioned above: the relationship between the so-called "common meal" and the Lord's supper. Commentators usually suggest that when Christians met together at this time, they would first eat the "love-feast" (*agapē*), after which they would have their "worship service," when they would eat the Lord's supper. Overindulgence at the former accounted for their scandalous conduct at the latter.

But the evidence for this picture, as convincing as it is, is not only late but unclear. The problem is compounded because the terms "eat" (*esthiō*) and "break bread" (*arton klaō*) are used in the New Testament for both ordinary meals and the Lord's supper, and it is not always easy to distinguish which is being referred to, if a distinction is implied at all (cf. Acts 2:46).

It is fully possible that the "ordinary meal" and the "Lord's supper" were fully intertwined, as was the Jewish Passover celebration, where *during the course* of the meal (although certainly not "ordinary") the cup and the bread were singled out as having special significance, and the participants partook of these accordingly. If this is the proper picture, it is fully explicable that some members would be "drunken" by the time the bread and wine were singled out and observed.

This is more especially the case if normal social distinctions were being retained throughout the eating. Domestic customs in the Graeco-Roman world at this time can be fairly well documented. It is known, for example, that a host could invite guests to his home, and rather than serving the same menu to all, serve the more distinguished guests delicacies and the less distinguished guests ordinary fare. Nor was it uncommon for the distinguished guests to come early, fare sumptuously, only to be joined later by the other guests. In both cases it was socially appropriate and fully accepted by the less distinguished guests.

Either, or both, of these customs may underlie the problems in the Corinthian assembly. On the one hand, it

<sup>17</sup>But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For, in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, <sup>19</sup>for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

---

looks as if the well-to-do members may have gathered earlier, taken their meals, even to excess, only to be joined later by the "have nots," the slaves, for example, who would probably have had to work late (Sundays were not holidays then). If so, Paul's remarks in verse 21 make perfectly good sense, as does his injunction for them "to wait for one another" (vs. 33). Or, if they are meeting together, it is fully possible that the well-to-do were having elaborate meals while the "have nots" were eating their bread and water, the former to excess, the latter to embarrassment. In this case, Paul's remarks in verses 18, 19 would refer to these social divisions. And his advice in verses 33, 34 would be encouraging the church either to erase these distinctions from their assembly or dispense with the "ordinary" meal together.

Actually, both are possible. The language of verses 17-34 certainly allows that some were "eating early" and that when all did eat, some ate well while others did not. In any case, their fundamental misunderstanding about what it means to be a "church of God" (vs. 22) is analyzed and addressed by Paul in two ways. First, he urges them to develop an awareness of themselves as a group, specifically as the body of Christ. His reminding them of the institution of the Lord's supper is intended to heighten their awareness that they gather to eat "the Lord's supper," not their own supper (vs. 20). Second, he urges them to dispense with all inequalities, social, economic, or otherwise which would result in the disintegration of themselves as the church of God.

[17-19] The phrase when you assemble as a church reads literally "when you come together in church (*en ekklēsia*). The divisions (*schismata*) and factions (*haireseis*) are only mentioned, not elaborated. The source of the report is

**<sup>20</sup>When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup>For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk.**

---

tactfully left unnamed, as earlier (cf. 5:1), hence it is idle to speculate about the identity of the informant(s). That it is hearsay is suggested by Paul's remarks: **and I partly believe it.** Although one of the terms (*schismata*) is used earlier (1:10; cf. 12:25), the general cloudiness of his remarks here makes it impossible to assume that the divisions spelled out in 1:10ff. are those which he has in mind here. It is a stronger term than "quarreling" (*erides*, 1:10); *hairesis* is actually the term used to denote a "sect," "party," or "school of thought" (cf. Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22) and is the only indication that doctrinal outlooks may have been the underlying issue.

His insistence that **factions** are necessary (*dei*) in order for the **genuine** to be **recognized** only makes sense if his remark is irony. As to the identity of the **genuine** (*dokimos*), it is worth noting that Paul uses the same term in contexts in which his opponents have been lambasted with invective, and in which **genuine** seems to have sarcastic overtones (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:7); it does not always convey this, however (cf. Rom. 14:18; 16:10; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:12). It belongs to the same word family as "examine" in verse 28; the two may be related; those who claim to be "self-examined" and "proved genuine" are still in dire need of self-examination, as their conduct in the assembly shows.

[20, 21] The structure of the language indicates that there is an intended contrast between the conduct of the whole group and the conduct of certain members of the group. More specifically, it is between what the group's conduct *should* be and what the conduct of certain members *actually* is. In Greek, the "you" (plural) is conspicuously set over against "each one"; and the **Lord's supper** is vividly contrasted with "each one's own supper." The clear implications are that the true significance of the **Lord's supper** has been disregarded. Hence the phrase could be translated "when you assemble together, it is not to eat a supper in honor of the Lord" (Barrett), but a meal in which the memory of the Lord, the authority of the Lord and the presence of the Lord

**22** What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

---

have all faded into oblivion. In their meal they were celebrating purely personal needs, in effect, themselves. They were "behaving like ordinary men" (3:3), unaware of that which distinguished them as a "church of God" (vs. 22).

The phrase **Lord's supper** is used only here. A similar expression, Lord's day (*kuriakē hēmera*), a day in honor of the Lord, occurs in Revelation 1:10.

Precisely what was taking place is indicated in verse 21. The phrase **goes ahead** translates the Greek word *prolambanō*, literally "takes before," thus, "takes one's own food without waiting for the rest." Consequently, **one is hungry and another is drunk**. Although the two phrases are intended to contrast the extremes, there is no reason not to take both of them literally, especially in view of earlier references (cf. 5:11; 6:10). Elsewhere Christians are urged to be drunk with the Spirit rather than wine, an admonition with little meaning if not grounded in fact (cf. Eph. 5:18).

[22] One of the most frequent meanings of the word **have** (*echō*) in Greek was "possess" or "own." It is, therefore, not at all unlikely that verse 22 should be translated "do you not *own* houses for the purpose of eating and drinking?" Paul's phrasing of the question is certainly different from "Can you not eat and drink *at home*?" (*en oikō*), cf. 11:34 14:35; also cf. 16:2). The mention of **those who have nothing**, literally "the have nots," in the following question confirms this interpretation since in Greek it could be used as a technical term for "the poor." The relation of the two may be seen if the second phrase is rendered "those who do not have ('own') houses."

The existence of tensions between rich and poor within the early church is well attested, seen among other things by the quantity and tone of the teaching addressed to the rich (cf. James 2:1ff.; the Gospel of Luke and its sequel Acts illustrate this perhaps more vividly than any other single document within the New Testament).



<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for' you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>4</sup>Other ancient authorities read *broken for*

---

But the point of the question should not be overlooked. **Despise** (*kataphronēo*) the church of God implies presumptuous contempt; it is a strong charge (cf. Matt. 6:24; 18:10; Luke 16:13; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; Heb. 12:2; 2 Peter 2:10). "Do you hold the church of God in contempt?" "Are you totally oblivious to the fact that when you come together as a church (vs. 18) you do so as the church of God?" The question in verse 22b seems to indicate that they thought their actions were praiseworthy. In this perhaps contrasts with his praise earlier given (cf. 11:2).

[23-26] The following remarks are introduced with language typically used to describe the transmission of "traditions," i.e., sacred teachings (cf. 15:3). This account of the Lord's supper thus belonged to the sacred teachings of the early church, traceable ultimately to the Lord; it had been carefully transmitted to the teachers and prophets responsible for perpetuating it. It was in this sense that Paul received it from the Lord. When he wishes to refer to inspirations received by divine revelation, he employs different language to do so (cf. Gal. 1:16; 2 Cor. 12:1; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10; 14:37; also 1 Peter 4:11). The terminology used here is that which he normally used to refer to teaching received from another Christian teacher (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9, 12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6). That which follows, therefore, has the full authority of the Lord Jesus himself. As he had earlier related the sacred teaching from the Jewish Scriptures (10:1ff.), Paul now relates sacred teachings from the Lord himself.

Only the most important features can be noticed: (1) In both Luke (22:19) and Paul, Jesus' words spoken after the

**<sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.**

---

blessing of the bread include the phrase **for you**. The importance of this for the Corinthian church will be seen in Paul's interpretation of the account of the last supper in verse 29. (2) The injunction **Do this in remembrance of me** occurs only in Luke (22:19) and Paul (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). The Corinthians obviously needed to be reminded that the supper was in honor of the Lord, and not of themselves; they are so reminded twice (vss. 24, 25). (3) The phrase **after supper** occurs only in Luke 22:20 and Paul (11:25); within the Corinthian church, it may have been necessary for them to be reminded that if the meal is to be taken in connection with the supper, it would have to retain its extraordinary quality rather than have an ordinary character. (4) The terminology of **new covenant** is identical in Luke (22:20) and Paul (1 Cor. 11:25); it recalls Jeremiah 31:31ff., in which Israel is said to receive its character and definition from God (cf. Zech. 9:11; Ex. 24:8); it emphatically stressed that the presence of God was within his people.

It is difficult to know whether verse 26 belongs to the tradition which Paul had received, or whether it is his own inspired reflection upon the tradition. It is reminiscent of the final words of the Lord (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; cf. Luke 22:16). In any case, it underscores that the observance of the Lord's supper must be done with an eye to the future—**until he comes**. Earlier the Corinthians had been reminded that their behavior in general must reflect this future dimension (cf. 1:8f.; 4:4f.; 6:2f.; 6:9f.; 7:26, 28, 31). Now they are reminded that their worship together is to reflect an awareness of this dimension as well. Indeed, the Lord's supper, properly enacted, becomes a proclamation of the ultimate victory of Christ.

[27] With verse 27 it is certain that Paul's own words resume. The application is clearly to the Corinthian church. He cautions them against participating "unworthily" (*anaxiōs*). The same word (in its adjective form) is earlier rendered "incompetent" (6:2); here, "indiscriminately" is perhaps the best rendering. It implies being oblivious to at

<sup>28</sup>Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. <sup>30</sup>That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.'

' Greek *have fallen asleep* (as in 15.6,20)

---

least two things: (1) that it is a supper in honor of the Lord and not an ordinary meal, shorn of any awareness of the Divine; (2) that it is a communal act; it involves the *church* in the fullest sense of the term, and it must not be allowed to accentuate distinctions and differences which have been obliterated by their baptism and by their resultant common participation in the body and blood of the Lord.

The one who is oblivious to both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the meal is guilty of profanation. The Corinthians have already been reminded of the dire consequences of turning spiritual food and drink into ordinary bread and water by ignoring one's divine deliverance (10:1ff.).

[28, 29] They are charged to "examine" themselves, or to prove themselves genuine (cf. vs. 19). How this is to be done is specified in verse 29: **discerning the body**. Although some ancient manuscripts read "discerning the body of the Lord," the entire context suggests that the phrase also, if not exclusively, implies "discerning the body, the church" (cf. 12:12ff.). Observance of the Lord's supper within the Corinthian church had pointed up the abysmal insensitivity of some of the members to the needs of other members. The Lord's supper had to be seen by them as an act which solidifies the group as a community called by God which meets in expectation of its Lord and to honor its Lord. One who fails to perceive this invites **judgment upon himself**. Israel's fate threatens to become their fate (10:5, 8ff.).

[30] The consequences of participating blind to this aspect of the meal are spelled out in verse 30. There is no compelling reason why the terms **weak**, **ill**, and **died** should be understood metaphorically. Of the three, **weak** would most likely be understood in this way in light of its use elsewhere in the epistle (cf. 8:7ff.). **Died** actually translates "sleep" (*koimomai*), a common euphemism for death in the

<sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened' so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

<sup>33</sup>So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—<sup>34</sup>if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning spiritual gifts,' brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed.

*\* Or when we are judged we are being chastened by the Lord*

*\* Or spiritual persons*

New Testament; in fact, it refers only to the death of Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13ff.; John 11:11f.).

[31, 32] In verses 31, 32 Paul employs "judging" language again, as he frequently does in the epistle. It is no doubt sarcastic: "If we only exercised the kind of discrimination which we should have, we would not come under judgment. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened like children, so that we will not suffer the same fate as the world, which has no protection from the Lord's judgment" (cf. 5:13; 6:2ff.).

[33, 34] The final appeal appears to be addressed to two aspects of their behavior. The first is addressed to their meetings when they do eat together: they are urged to wait for each other; they are not to eat in advance and leave some unfilled, therefore accentuating the differences between the rich and poor. The second is addressed to the meals in general: if the meals are going to have nutritional value only, they are advised to eat at home so that their meetings will not result in losing their divine dimension and inviting the judgment of God.

Verse 34b indicates that the instructions were obviously provisional. It is the second time Paul mentions his travel plans (cf. 4:14ff.; 16:5ff.).

### *Spiritual Gifts, 12:1-14:40*

**The Spirit and Idols, 12:1-3.** [1] Now concerning spiritual gifts. As we have noted earlier, this introductory formula indicates that Paul is answering another question submitted

<sup>2</sup>You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

by the Corinthians (cf. discussion on 7:1ff.). The wording also allows the translation "spiritual persons" (cf. RSV footnote); these could be the "spiritual ones" claiming special endowment by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1; also 2:6ff., esp. vss. 14-16; also 14:37). I do not want you to be uninformed suggests that the instructions to follow in chapters 12-14 are unfamiliar to them (cf. remarks on 10:1ff.).

[2] Before proceeding with his new instructions, however, he recalls the familiar: **You know that . . . .** Another glimpse into their past is provided by this recollection of their former life as heathen, or Gentiles (*ethnē*, cf. 1 Cor. 1:23; 5:1; 10:20). The mention of dumb idols recalls Jewish polemic against idol-worship which often focused upon the incredible folly of petitioning a piece of wood or stone which could neither hear nor speak (cf. Jer. 10:1ff., esp. vs. 5; Isa. 44:9ff., esp. vs. 17; Ps. 115:3ff., esp. vs. 5; Hab. 2:18ff.; Wisdom of Solomon 13-15, esp. 13:17f.). Enlightened pagans had leveled similar criticism against the superstitious practices of the masses. This polemic against idols became a prominent feature of Jewish missionary preaching to Gentiles, and was adopted—and adapted—by Christians in their preaching to Gentiles (cf. Acts 17:22ff.; 1 Thess. 1:9f.; cf. Gal. 4:8f.).

The polemic was not uniform in the degree of culpability assigned to pagans who were thus duped; whatever their motivations, the inescapable fact was that they had been led astray (cf. Acts 17:30; Rom. 1:20; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 13:1ff., esp. vss. 6f.).

[3] The reminder continues with verse 3. **Therefore I want you to understand**; the phrase could be rendered, "Therefore, I remind you" (cf. remarks on 15:1). The reminder consists of two parts: an anathema and a confessional formula. The former is enigmatic because it is difficult to be sure of the circumstances in which someone

would utter the anathema: “**Jesus be cursed!**” Several possibilities have been suggested: (1) it is an anathema stemming from the synagogue which could only “curse” a crucified Messiah (cf. Deut. 21:23; also Deut. 27:26; also Mark 9:39); (2) it is an anathema uttered by some Christians (at Corinth), “Gnostics” perhaps, while in ecstatic frenzy; they were assailing the “physical, earthly Jesus” (the Jesus who had come in the flesh), insisting that only the “spiritual” risen Lord was of benefit to “spiritual-minded” Christians (cf. 1 John 4:2f.); (3) it had not actually been uttered by anyone, but provides Paul a hypothetical position over against which he can make his real point, stated in verse 3b; (4) it represents an anathema uttered by members of pagan cults against Christians proclaiming Jesus as Lord; (5) it is an anathema uttered by Christians under pressure (from pagans) to recant.

While each of these positions has its supporters, and while none of them is inconceivable, some of them are more conceivable than others. They are listed above in the order of their likelihood.

Yet the gist of verse 3 is clear: Paul is insisting that the *claim* to divine inspiration per se is of no value. Rather, the content of that which is spoken while under the impulse of the Spirit is decisive in distinguishing inspired from un-inspired utterances. In this instance, the crucial determinant is whether the utterance properly expresses and acknowledges who Jesus really is; that is, the norm is exclusively Christological (cf. 1 John 4:1ff.; also 2 John 7ff.).

The content of the confessional formula “**Jesus is Lord**” in verse 3b actually translates the double name “Lord Jesus,” and serves as a reminder that the name “Lord Jesus (Christ),” because it encapsulated the chief and crucial distinguishing features of the early Christian preaching, served as a shorthand statement of early Christian belief. To confess that **Jesus is Lord** clearly demarcated one’s position; one was no longer merely a Jew, since a Jew regarded “Lord” as a synonym for “God” or “Yahweh”; nor was one a pagan, since pagans had many “lords” (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6ff.), including the emperor, as well as a host of greater and lesser deities. **Lord** implied that Jesus, now alive (cf. Rom. 10:9), occupied an exalted status from which he exercised domin-

<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of working, but is the same God who inspires them all in every one.

---

ion over the entire cosmos, which he would (eventually) subdue entirely. It, above all, meant his absolute supremacy over the demonic order, most especially over the "lord of this world" (cf. Phil. 2:6ff.; Eph. 2:1ff.).

**Gifts of the Spirit, 12:4-11.** [4-6] Paul's opening remarks are constructed carefully, precisely, and succinctly; as a result, the structure itself throws into bold relief the emphatic point which he wishes to drive home first: the Corinthian church, with its **varieties of gifts**, its **varieties of service**, its **varieties of working**, is incredibly, if not alarmingly diverse, yet it derives its diversity from the **same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God**. He does not say that in spite of the diversity, there is unity; he says rather that the diversity itself is divinely given, that the variety is divinely intended. Sameness lies not in the manifestations within the Corinthian church, but within their origin. Throughout the discussion that follows, Paul never attempts to eradicate the diversity. The diversity remains because it is divinely derived.

The point is even more emphatic because of the language which he employs. **Varieties** translates the Greek word *diarseis*; the verb form is used in verse 11, and is translated "apportions," which properly conveys the idea that the **gifts, service(s), working(s)** are all "distributions" (Barrett), "allotments" or "apportionments." They are derivative, as the term "gift" itself implies. For this reason, the second half of each parallel clause reinforces the point, especially in the third clause, which Paul himself develops.

**Gifts** (*charismata*), **service(s)** (*diakonai*), and **workings(s)** (*energēmata*) are not distinct, clearly defined categories. Paul can speak of **service** (*diakonia*) as a subdivision of **gifts** (*charismata*, cf. Rom. 12:6f.). **Workings** (*energēmata*) may simply be another way of saying "gifts" (*charismata*), since the same wording is used in verse 11, which literally reads "one and the same Spirit is at work activating (*energeō*)" all these (gifts).

Paul does not employ uniform terminology in discussing gifts; nor does he employ the same term uniformly. The term "gift" (*charisma*) has both a broad and a narrow sense. In its broadest sense it is used of the "gift" of salvation; used in this way, it appropriately underscores the free and gracious nature of what is given (cf. Rom. 5:15f.; 6:23; 11:29). It has a more narrow sense, especially when used of individuals, and in this sense can mean "capacity," "ability," or "capability" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:7). When used of Christians, it reflects the awareness that an individual's "ability," especially an "ability" used in the service of the gospel, was divinely given and has its proper use when employed in divine service. It is in this latter sense that the term is used in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. vss. 4, 9, 28, 30, 31; also 1 Cor. 1:7; Rom. 12:6; 1 Tim. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10).

In addition to gifts (*charismata*) Paul uses *pneumatika*, literally "spiritual things"; it is translated by the RSV as "spiritual gifts" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1). In the chapters 12-14 *charismata* and *pneumatika* appear to be used interchangeably. Technically, the term *charismata* does not in itself imply that the Spirit is the giver, nor does the term *pneumatika* imply that something is "given." Actually, the expression "spiritual gift" (*pneumatikon charisma*) occurs only once in the New Testament (Rom. 1:11: a different expression is used in Acts 2:38; 10:45).

Another expression used by Paul is "the manifestation of the Spirit" (*hē phanerōsis tou pneumatos*, in 12:7 cf. 14:12). This may be the most helpful term of all, because it indicates that gifts, whether described as *charismata*, *energēmata*, or *pneumatika*, are regarded as concrete manifestations that the Spirit is not only present but at work within the individual; this remains true whether the "gift" is highly visible, such as ecstatic utterances, or not.

It should be noticed that the Spirit is *not* in the foreground every time Paul discusses gifts. In Romans 12:4ff. (the closest parallel to his discussion in 1 Cor. 12), the Spirit is only mentioned once, and even then, not to describe the gifts. One detects the same difference in complexion in his two discussions of "eating sacrificial meats" (cf. 1 Cor. 8-10 and Romans 14). In each instance, the Corinthian passages



are much less general, much more particularized; their tone and overall complexion are "Corinthian," reflecting the particular concerns and needs of the Corinthian church. After all, the presence of those who styled themselves as "spiritual ones" seems to have been a problem peculiarly Corinthian. It is thus to a church which sees *itself* as singularly in tune with the Spirit that Paul frames the following remarks.

The structure of his remarks is itself striking. The **gifts** are transmitted by and from a threefold divine source: Spirit, Lord, and God. Allusions to the "Trinity" (to use a nonbiblical word) are extremely rare in the New Testament—too rare, in fact, to determine whether "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" was the standard order (cf. Matt. 28:19); two of the most unconscious references are by Paul (here and 2 Cor. 13:14), each with a different order. Here it is significant that the Spirit is placed conspicuously first. This arrangement probably reflects the Corinthians' *own* set of priorities; it is the **Spirit**, after all, on which some of them seem to be claiming a monopoly (cf. 3:1; 14:37). As a result, the Spirit becomes the focus of Paul's remarks, not necessarily because he regarded the Spirit as in any sense pre-eminent, but because they did.

For this reason, his decision to elaborate on the role of only one item, God (**who inspires them all**), may in itself be a reminder to them that the Spirit is not the sole reality of the Christian faith. We have already noticed throughout the epistle Paul's attempts to develop within the Corinthians a more mature understanding of God: who he is, what he does, and how they should define themselves and be defined with respect to him.

The concisely formulated remarks in verses 4-6 thus introduce the major item on the agenda: the Spirit. The following remarks in verses 7-11 consist of three parts: (1) a general statement in which he indicates the nature, origin, and purpose of the **gifts** (vs. 7); (2) an enumeration of the gifts, itemized roughly according to the same framework sketched in verses 4-6, namely, "to each . . . the same Spirit" (vss. 8-10); (3) a general statement, reiterating the same point: "all . . . one and the same Spirit," introducing the new point that the gifts are not given capriciously.

<sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

---

[7] The criterion for determining whether one was “in Christ” was whether one possessed the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9), and whether the Spirit was actively at work prompting and enabling the one “in Christ” to be an obedient child (cf. Rom. 8:15ff.; Gal. 4:6).

The tracks of the Spirit were seen in the overall pattern of life, whether in a pattern of obedience reflecting the imprint of “Abba, Father” or visible concretely, for to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit. To each Christian the Spirit had apportioned some “gift” or “capability.” The overall pattern of obedience took shape through the use and exercise of individual capabilities—the same Spirit effecting (theoretically, at least) the same degree and quality of filial obedience within individuals, but the obedience manifested itself through the distinct personalities and capabilities of the recipients. None was without the Spirit; none was without a “gift”; each had a concrete manifestation of the Spirit.

Yet both the Spirit and the manifestation of the Spirit, (the “gifts”) were given for the common good (*pros to sumpheron*), “for some useful purpose” (NEB). The Corinthians have already been issued a similar reminder: that their behavior must be “helpful” (cf. 6:12; 10:23); the same word is employed here; the phrase could be translated “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the purpose of helping (each other).” The Spirit, as a gift to each individual, manifests itself through the distinct personalities and capabilities of each individual, but is not intended for the sole benefit of each individual alone, but so that individuals might benefit one another (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12, 26).

[8-10] Verses 8-10 provide a detailed list of “gifts”

common among the Corinthians. Nine separate items are mentioned. The arrangement does not appear to be systematic, even if some of the gifts obviously belong together. When compared with similar lists (1 Cor. 12:28-30; 1 Cor. 13:1-3; Rom. 12:6-8), it becomes even more obvious that this list is not only random and unsystematic, but also far from comprehensive. One gets the distinct impression that Paul has never attempted to place the gifts in neatly defined categories; that in his mind they can and do overlap; and that he is less concerned with precise definition than with general impressions. Still, however, they are not wholly indistinguishable: "prophecy" and "tongues" are distinct and clearly defined enough for him to urge the pursuit of the one and the cautious use of the other.

The list is not developed uniformly. In connection with the first four items, Paul mentions the Spirit, each time in slightly altered form: **through the Spirit . . . according to the same Spirit . . . by the same Spirit . . . by the one Spirit.** There was little need for him to search for five additional prepositional phrases to fill out the list in this respect. With the fourth item his point has been sufficiently established: each person is allotted a gift, it derives from the Spirit, and it is by "one and the same Spirit" (cf. vs. 11).

1. **The utterance of wisdom** (vs. 8). Elsewhere in the epistle this phrase (*logos sophias*) appears to mean "rhetorical eloquence" (cf. 2:4, 13); understood in this sense, it would be rendered "the gift of speaking eloquently" (cf. NEB). An "utterance" given **through the Spirit**, however, renders it a prophetic utterance; if "wisdom" is understood in its more technical, and more usual sense in 1 Corinthians, meaning "divine mystery" (2:6), the phrase should be translated "the gift of preaching wisdom," or of providing advanced teaching in the divine mysteries (cf. 13:2).

2. **The utterance of knowledge** (vs. 8). For reasons just stated, this seems to imply more than the gift of putting "the deepest knowledge into words" (NEB). Understood as a prophetic utterance, it would be the gift of providing Christian instruction, perhaps to be distinguished as "elementary" in comparison with **wisdom** (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Cor. 8:7; Rom. 15:14); but this distinction should not be

pushed too far (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2; 14:6). Actually, these first two gifts appear to be utterances in which the content (wisdom and knowledge) is hardly distinguishable.

3. **Faith** (vs. 9). Faith is obviously being used here in a highly qualified sense, and is to be distinguished from Paul's customary use of the term to denote one's response to the gospel, or the content of the gospel itself (cf. 1 Cor. 15:14, 17; Rom. 1:16f.). In this broad sense, it is the possession of every believer; yet here, certain individuals are apportioned "a measure of faith" (cf. Rom. 12:3, 6), which may refer to the more refined capacity of certain believers both to have and to engender faith. But the fact that the gift immediately precedes two more specifically defined gifts, suggests that **faith** is to be understood here in its more qualified sense of **faith** sufficient "to remove mountains" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2). In the Gospels, faith so defined is the capacity to perform signs and wonders, specifically the ability to exorcize demons (cf. Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:22f.; cf. Mark 9:23).

4. **Gifts of healing** (vs. 9). The power to heal the sick is most frequently mentioned in connection with Jesus, although the disciples were also endowed with the same power (cf. Luke 10:9; 11:17ff.). Paul mentions the gift only rarely (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28, 30), never explicitly claims the gift for himself; yet that he possessed the gift is implied by his statements in 2 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 15:19 (cf. Gal. 3:5), and is corroborated by the account of Acts (16:18ff.; 19:11ff.; 28:8ff.; cf. Acts 20:9ff.). Apparently, those in the Corinthian church with this gift were not very skilled (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30).

5. **The workings of miracles** (vs. 10). Literally the phrase reads "workings of powers" (*energēmata dunameōn*); "powers" is a broad category, intentionally general, and is often used in the New Testament for "miracles" (cf. Gal. 3:5; Acts 19:11; Mark 6:2, 5, 14; Luke 19:37; Matt. 11:20ff.). This is one of Paul's rare references to "miracles"; this term "powers" occurs in the list of gifts later in the chapter (12:28, 29). Generally, the New Testament refers to this phenomenon as "signs and wonders," but even that expression is used rarely by Paul, especially with reference to himself (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19; cf. Gal. 3:5; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Cor. 1:22).

<sup>11</sup>All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Although he clearly had such powers, it is equally clear that he did not place much stock in them as a means of demonstrating his apostleship (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10ff.).

6. **Prophecy** (vs. 10). This gift is mentioned in all his lists (1 Cor. 12:28; 13:1-3, 8; Rom. 12:6). His understanding of this gift will be more fully elaborated in chapter 14.

7. **The ability to distinguish between the spirits** (vs. 10). This gift was closely related to "prophecy." Literally, the phrase reads "discerning(s) of spirits" (KJV), and refers to the gift of properly judging (*diakrinō*) what the prophet says, "weighing what is said" (cf. 14:29; cf. 1 John 4:1ff.; 1 Thess. 5:21; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2:2; also Matt. 24:24).

8. **Various kinds of tongues** (vs. 10). This is the first mention of the gift most troubling the Corinthians. Its nature and function will be discussed more fully in the remarks on chapter 14. It is included in the list at the end of the chapter (12:30). The plural is worth noting—**kinds** (*genē*) of tongues.

9. **The interpretation of tongues** (vs. 10). Obviously this belongs with the former gift, and is also mentioned later in the chapter (12:30) and in chapter 14 (cf. vss. 5, 26ff.).

[11] This final summary statement effectively pulls together the dominant motifs of the remarks which began with verse 4: **All these** (gifts)—without exception—are inspired by, i.e., have been activated by, **one and the same Spirit** (note: this phrase pulls together the four prepositional phrases in vss. 7-9). Recalling the language used in verses 4-6, Paul indicates that the Spirit **apportions**, or assigns to **each one individually** (no one is omitted) as **he wills** (not capriciously). The diversity is divinely intended. The last note is new to the discussion, and effectively sets up the metaphor of the body in verses 12ff.

**The Body of Christ, 12:12-27.** This passage constitutes the most extensive elaboration in the New Testament of the church as the body of Christ. It is the first time in Paul's writings that the image is developed in any detail. Elsewhere in the epistle "body" primarily refers to the individual body of a person (5:3; 6:13ff.; 7:4, 34; 9:27; 10:16; 11:24, 27; 13:3; 15:35ff.), although the metaphor as developed in

<sup>12</sup>For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

---

chapter 12 is foreshadowed earlier (cf. esp. 10:17; also 6:15; 11:29; perhaps 11:3). In his other letters Paul uses the term to refer to the “body” of an individual, both before (1 Thess. 5:23) and after 1 Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:10; 5:6, 8, 10; 10:10; 12:2f.; Rom. 1:24; 4:19; 6:6, 12; 7:4, 24; 8:10,11, 13,23; 12:1; Gal 6:17; Phil. 1:20; 3:21; Eph. 5:28; Col. 1:22; 2:11,23).

It is the Corinthian church, thus, which first prompts Paul to put the image into writing, and develop it, but it occurs in later Pauline epistles, mentioned briefly in Romans (12:4f.), developed more extensively in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30) and Colossians (1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15; the use in 2:17 is enigmatic). The striking feature of its use in Ephesians and Colossians is the universal, or rather cosmic dimension of the metaphor. The “body” is thus an image of the church developed most extensively, if not exclusively by Paul (Heb. 13:3 is a possible exception, but for grammatical considerations “body” is not to be understood as “the church”).

To speak of a group of persons as “the body of” another person, especially an historical person, was unusual indeed. It was not unknown for citizens in the empire to be thought of, or even described as “the body of the emperor,” and for the emperor to be regarded as the “head” of the body. Yet a group of disciples, say of a Rabbi, would not refer to itself as the “body of Gamaliel,” or even as the “body of Moses.” Nor would members of a philosophic school refer to themselves as the “body of Epicurus,” or “the body of Plato,” however much the influence of their founder or teacher still lingered among them. Certainly, there is no hint of evidence that followers of John the Baptist were ever called “the body of John the Baptist.” In rabbinic thought there is the notion that Adam was a gigantic figure from whose parts the cosmos was formed, but the idea is post-New Testament.

[12, 13] Paul’s use of the metaphor should be carefully

noticed. His point is not that the many members should be united, at least this is not his first point. Rather, his point is that there is **one body**, that it **has many members**, yet that it is still **one**. His first point is, therefore, an affirmation about **Christ**, and this affirmation serves as the basis of his appeal later. It should be kept in mind that not simply Christ, but the Christ resurrected *bodily*, is presupposed in the discussion. Verse 12 should be read as a statement about Christ. One would expect him to conclude by saying, "and so it is with the church"; instead he affirms, **so it is with Christ**. Once it is established that the resurrected body of Christ is one, he is then ready to proceed with the next point, the members.

All who were **baptized**, by dying and being raised with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:4ff.), were actually and literally "joined to Christ" (cf. Rom. 7:4). Baptism was not simply re-enactment; it was not that believers had died and were raised *like* Jesus had died and been raised; it was far more than "symbolic" re-enactment. In the act of baptism itself the believer actually appropriated the resurrected *life* which God had bestowed upon the risen Lord; the believer did not re-enact the resurrection, but God actually re-enacted the resurrection of Christ in the believer. United with the risen Lord, the believer now breathed the breath of new life which Jesus himself had breathed—the Spirit of God. The resurrected Christ and the baptized (resurrected) believer actually drank of the same Spirit. All believers who experienced this new life breathed the same Spirit; **all were made to drink of one Spirit**.

For by **one Spirit**, literally "in the one Spirit of the risen Christ," all were baptized into one body, i.e., the one (and only one) resurrected body of the risen Christ, regardless of ethnic or social status: Jew or Greek, slave or free; as a result, **all were made to drink of one** (and the same) **Spirit**. Baptism thus has a unifying effect (Gal. 3:27f.; Rom. 10:10ff.; Col. 3:9ff.). The passive voice should be noted: not that we drank, but that through union with Christ, believers were provided by God with the essential, life-sustaining ingredient: water, the one Spirit, the same Spirit which the risen Lord had been given to drink in the resurrection (cf. Rom. 8:11).

<sup>14</sup>For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single organ, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,

The imagery of the Exodus homily in chapter 10:1ff. lies just beneath the surface. Israel had been delivered by God, provided spiritual food and drink by God, had actually drunk of the spiritual rock—Christ, and all of them had done so.

[14] Still the explicit identification of the Corinthians with the body of Christ is not made yet (cf. vs. 27). The body analogy has been introduced, and Paul now proceeds to elaborate its details. **For the body does not consist of one member but many.** It should be noted that he does not say, "The many members of the body should behave like one body"; at least, not yet. Rather, he first states the reverse: that the body (of the risen Christ) has **many members**; this appears to be far from self-evident to the Corinthians.

The subject of his exposition here is the nature of the resurrected body of Christ. He is insisting that it is no longer still *simply* the body of the one person Jesus; rather, the resurrected Lord *now* encompassed more than just himself—indeed he encompassed every believer who had been given a drink of the same Spirit of which he now drinks. That is, he is no longer one member, but many members.

[15-26] Once this is established, the conversation between the parts of the body which follows advances the



<sup>24</sup>which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

---

argument. This part of Paul's remarks is not wholly new. In Graeco-Roman thought, the state had been *likened* to a body. Since sedition (*stasis*) was the perennial fear of citizens and leaders alike, especially leaders, the simile was developed as a plea for harmony (see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* III. ii. 5).

There is no need to rehearse the details of the analogy. The language is straightforward and clear. Instead, several features of Paul's use of the analogy may be remarked: (1) It serves to emphasize that there is one body. This is already established in verses 12, 13, but reiterated in verse 20. (2) The first point which the analogy effectively drives home is the plurality of the members, that the one body *can have* many members; it is ludicrous to think that the whole body should be an eye or an ear (vs. 17). As self-evident as this seems to us, it was not to them, apparently. (3) Both the plurality of the members and their placement within the body is divinely ordered, and it is not capricious (cf. vss. 18 and 24; also vs. 11). (4) The several members, regardless of their position and function within the body, are interdependent; most especially does he emphasize that the "lesser members," those parts of the body ostensibly inferior or shameful, e.g., the genitalia (vss. 23f.), are as essential to the body as the "greater members." As a result, the members are to be sympathetic, i.e., "feeling together"; suffering and rejoicing experienced by one member is to be experienced by all.

[27] The identification is now explicitly made: **Now you are the body of Christ and individually members.** Placed here, the statement is emphatic. Once it has been established that the one resurrected body of Christ is in fact capable of being many-membered, and that it retains its

<sup>28</sup>And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.

---

oneness and does not cease to be *one body* because of its many members, then he can urge the Corinthians to see that each of them, the greater and the lesser, by being given to drink of the same Spirit, severally and individually constitute the one resurrected body of Christ (at Corinth).

**Functions in the Church, 12:28-31. [28]** The complexion of the church as the body of Christ is now sketched in more detail. Until now the discussion has been in theoretical terms. The conversations between the ear and eye, though possibly reflecting attitudes among the Corinthians themselves, were purely hypothetical. Paul's remarks now move beyond the local church to the universal church.

Normally he uses "church" in its "local" sense, and in verse 28, although the "church" at Corinth is in the immediate view, the "church" in a broader sense is not far away.

Several questions are raised by the list. Are **first, second, and third** to be understood as descriptions of time or rank? Undoubtedly, the latter. Although Paul uses the term **apostles** in a broad sense, still the term meant for him those commissioned to preach by the Lord himself, and for this reason apostle was a position of primary importance for him (cf. 15:5; 4:9). Also, this is one of two such lists which set out the roles and functions of those comprising the church (cf. Eph. 4:11ff.; also 2:20; 3:5).

**Prophets**, for Paul, usually means Old Testament prophets (cf. Rom. 1:2; 3:21; 11:3; 1 Thess. 2:15), but in this epistle clearly refers to persons within the Corinthian church capable of receiving and delivering inspired utterances (cf. 11:4f.). Their role will be seen more clearly in chapter 14. They were obviously in a separate category from apostles (cf. Luke 11:49), and they were active within the life of the early church (cf. Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10).

**Teachers**, as a group, and therefore suggesting a separate role or function, are referred to rarely in the New Testament

**<sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup>Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>But earnestly desire the higher gifts.**

**And I will show you a still more excellent way.**

(cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28f.; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:3; Heb. 5:12; James 3:1). "Teacher" is a title frequently used of Jesus in the Gospels, where he is presented as the one who teaches his own disciples as well as preaches the good news of the kingdom; this is especially the case in Matthew (cf. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; *passim*). The disciples themselves were also commissioned to teach—*after the resurrection* (cf. Matt. 28:20). Paul himself was a teacher (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). Still, the exact function of teachers is not clear; it is possible that they especially provided instruction in the Old Testament, as interpreted in the light of Christ.

After the first three items, the list includes items already introduced earlier (cf. vss. 8ff.), although in a different order: **workers of miracles** (literally, "ones with powers"), **healers, helpers** ("those who lend support," cf. Acts 20:35; 1 Tim. 6:2), **administrators** (literally, "seapilots," or "helmsmen"; cf. Acts 27:11; Rev. 18:17; it later meant "governor," or any official in charge of administering affairs), **speakers in various kinds of tongues**. Mentioned earlier yet absent from this list are wisdom, knowledge, faith, ability to distinguish between spirits.

[29, 30] The set of questions which follows does not consistently take up each item. They are all rhetorical, implying "No" answers. Their effect is to affirm that only some are **apostles**, only some are **prophets**, etc. The one respect in which this list is similar to the one above is that **tongues** are mentioned last, without doubt intentionally by Paul, as chapter 14 will show.

[31] The final plea, **earnestly desire the higher gifts** may possibly be translated "desire the better gifts"; in either case, Paul never denies that the gifts can be ranked, that some are in fact better than others.

A **more excellent way** introduces chapter 13.

**Love, the Greatest Gift, 13:1-13.** Chapter 13 is regarded by many as an early Christian hymn quoted here by Paul as

**<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**

---

a rebuke to those Corinthian “spirituals” with charismatic gifts who are grossly insensitive to the “less endowed.” Others regard it as an excursus, virtually, if not totally unrelated to chapters 12 and 14. The passage is not generally thought to have been composed by Paul in response to *this* specific set of circumstances at Corinth.

But there is a strong likelihood that rather than being “an eternal hymn to love,” a general treatise or poetic statement about love as a Christian virtue, this chapter is one section of the epistle anchored within the historical circumstances of Paul and his relationship to the Corinthian church perhaps more so than any other. In fact, it is quite likely that the chapter should be read as autobiographical, in the strictest sense of the term. Understood in this way, it is Paul’s personal apologia, purely self-descriptive, and extremely useful in enlightening our understanding of Paul and his self-understanding of his apostolic ministry.

Paul’s description of the “more excellent way” has three parts: (1) a description of Paul’s own apostolic behavior, in which *agapē* is the underlying and recurrent motivation (vss. 1-3); (2) an elaboration of *agapē*, specifically as the distinguishing feature of Paul’s apostolic ministry (vss. 4-7); and (3) an argument for the superiority of *agapē* based upon its permanence (vss. 8-13).

[1] The first section is thoroughly autobiographical in the sense that each item can be firmly anchored within Paul’s own apostolic experience. He appears to be describing himself with categories, at first at least, in which the Corinthians placed considerable stock; they are certainly not the categories in which he placed the greatest value.

That Paul spoke in **tongues** is indisputable (cf. 14:6, 18); that he placed limited value upon this gift is equally indisputable—it is mentioned conspicuously last in each of the lists in chapter 12. There can be little doubt that **tongues** here means “ecstatic utterances”; **tongues . . . of angels** could imply little else (cf. 14:2). The nature of the “utterances” may be illuminated by a later remark which occurs in a description of an ecstatic vision, when he speaks

<sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned,<sup>4</sup> but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Other ancient authorities read *body that I may glory*

---

of “things that cannot be told, which no man can utter” (2 Cor. 12:1ff., esp. vs. 4). The later mention of “speaking as a child” means little unless it means “childish babbling” (cf. 13:11).

But if his ecstatic utterances are not motivated by love (*agapē*), i.e., if they are purely self-serving, of benefit to no one except himself (cf. 14:2, 4), he becomes a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. The image is supplied by the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 150:5).

[2] **Prophetic powers** were also Paul’s, as he insists in the epistle (cf. 2:16; 7:40; 14:37); these powers are further defined as the ability to **understand all mysteries and all knowledge**. Earlier, he had demonstrated that, as a prophet, with the mind of Christ (2:16), he was privy to the mystery of God’s wisdom (2:6ff., esp. vs. 10); in fact, he describes himself as a “steward of the mysteries of God” (4:1). One such mystery he later unveils in his instruction on the resurrection (15:51; cf. Rom. 11:25). **Inspired knowledge** was also his (cf. 14:6; 2:6ff., esp. vss. 12 and 16; 8:1; also 2 Cor. 6:6; 11:6; Col. 2:2).

**Faith sufficient to remove mountains** (cf. remarks on 12:9) implies “faith which gives one power to heal”; these powers Paul unquestionably had and used, although not for their advertising value (cf. 2 Cor. 12:11ff.; Rom. 15:19; Acts 16:18ff.; Acts 19:11ff.; 28:8ff.; also cf. 13:9ff.).

Yet, if his prophetic powers and his powers to work miracles are successful only in calling attention to himself, their value is nil. Paul sees no value in them if they are mere ostentation or if they are designed to bolster his own apostolic position *per se*; they are ultimately of benefit only if his churches benefit from them (cf. 2 Cor. 10:8, 15; 11:7ff.; 12:11ff., esp. vss. 15 and 19).

[3] He now introduces “gifts” not mentioned earlier (cf. 12:8ff., 28f.). The phrase **give away all I have** literally reads

“dispense with all my possessions,” especially financial resources (cf. Matt. 19:21). The term for “give away” (*psōmizō*) actually means “to parcel out” or “dispense,” and can be used for “feeding,” especially the hungry (cf. Rom. 12:20 = Prov. 25:21). Here, when the phrase is understood in the light of Paul’s own apostolic behavior, the phrase carries the meaning: “If I dispose of all my (rightful) possessions, not only my Jewish privileges (cf. Phil. 3:5ff.; esp. vss. 7, 14; 4:12), but my personal resources, which, incidentally are not reimbursed because of my waiving my apostolic privilege to receive financial support (cf. 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 11:7ff.), and yet am unmotivated by *agapē*, no one benefits, least of all me.” The reference here is thus to his personal circumstances: because of his apostolic work he had literally become “poor” (materially) in order for others to be “rich” (in Christ).

The second clause, **and if I deliver my body to be burned** is difficult, primarily because its specific referent is unclear; self-immolation is out of the question. It is too early for Neronian type of persecutions; there is no evidence that Christians were burned at the stake this early. He may, of course, be speaking hypothetically. But the alternative reading, “if I give my body that I may glory” (cf. RSV footnote) is preferred, especially because it employs terminology often employed by Paul in describing his own apostolic labors. He elsewhere speaks of his apostolic work as that in which he “hands over” his body, i.e., himself, on account of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7ff., esp. vs. 11; also 1 Cor. 9:27). “Boasting” is a frequent term employed by him when describing his apostolic behavior, even though he uses it ironically (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15f.; 2 Cor. 1:14).

Thus, even if he literally pauperizes himself and finds his “glory” in handing himself over to a life of “dying daily” in the service of his churches, and does so for any reason besides love, i.e., either failing to be constrained by the “love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:14) or impelled by love for him and his churches (2 Cor. 11:11; cf. Gal. 6:12ff.), nothing is gained: **I gain nothing**; literally, “nobody (really) profits, least of all me.”

The point is clear: love (*agapē*) is the single motivation for apostolic work. Far from being an “ideal virtue,” *agapē*

**‘Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;**

---

rather receives its concrete definition and expression through his own experiences as an apostle. If chapter 9 established self-restraint as the inner fabric of being an apostle, chapter 13 establishes *agapē* as the motivation for his self-restraint.

[4] The following description of *agapē* naturally employs terms frequently used in the New Testament either to describe God or Christ, or attitudes and traits in lists of virtues which Christians are taught to incorporate into their own lives. Yet one of the most striking features of the list is that each of the statements about *agapē* is formulated with terminology which Paul uses elsewhere to describe his own apostolic labor; even if the exact terminology in a couple of instances is not identical, still the attitude or trait described is easily documented within Paul’s own life.

**Patient and kind:** Both these traits characterize God (Rom. 2:4; Col. 1:11), and both are mentioned together in virtue lists (Col. 3:12) or as fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), yet they both appear in Paul’s description of his own apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 6:6; also cf. 1 Thess. 2:7).

**Not jealous or boastful:** “Jealousy” was, of course, at the root of the Corinthians’ problems (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3; also Rom. 13:13); the term employed can either mean “zealous,” or when overdone “jealous.” Paul claimed to be “jealous” for his churches, but with a “divine jealousy” (2 Cor. 11:2). The term translated “boastful” (*perpereuesthai*) is not the ordinary word for “boast” (*kauchēsthai*); it is to be understood in light of the following term. In any case, Paul’s discussion earlier (3:5ff.) demonstrated that he himself had no desire nor grounds for “boasting” before God (cf. 3:7, 21).

**[5] Is not arrogant or rude:** Arrogance also plagued the Corinthians (4:6, 18f.; 5:2; 8:1). Paul’s own apostolic behavior had shown his refusal to be presumptuous in the presence of God (cf. 1:17ff.). Improper or indecorous behavior, i.e., conduct unbecoming an apostle, he also deprecated (2 Cor. 2:17ff.; 4:1ff.; 10:13ff.).

<sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup>Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; <sup>10</sup>but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. <sup>13</sup>So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

**Does not insist on its own way:** This principle has already been elaborated in relation to the Corinthians' conduct (10:24ff.) and grounded in Paul's own exemplary behavior in this respect (10:33).

**Is not irritable or resentful:** Literally, the phrase reads "is not exercised" or "provoked" (cf. Acts 15:39; 17:16); also, "does not keep an account of evil," an Old Testament quotation (Zech. 8:17). In spite of his mercurial temperament, Paul's instructions so far have admirably demonstrated his refusal to be "provoked" with the Corinthians (cf. 4:14ff.).

**[6] Does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right:** He has so urged the Corinthians (12:26; cf. Rom. 12:14f.), but he consistently did so himself (cf. 2 Cor. 6:10; 11:29).

**[7] Bears . . . believes . . . hopes . . . endures:** He has readily and willingly borne anything in his apostolic work (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). Faith and hope are prominent in his preaching and ministry (1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Col. 1:4f.). His patient endurance for his churches is well documented (2 Cor. 6:3ff.). If his life was anything, it was a life of faith, hope, and patient endurance; no one knew this any better than the Corinthian church.

*Agapē* is seen, therefore, to be the quintessential sign of his apostleship; and his life at every turn placarded this fact before his churches.

**[8-13]** Love has already been singled out by Paul as that



which (some of) the Corinthians desperately needed (cf. 8:1f.). He now turns to discuss its enduring quality. His remarks are allusive; the language of poetry usually is. His language here is suggestive and emotive; it is impressionistic rather than realistic. His fondness for employing metaphors and figures of speech we have already noticed throughout the epistle, and it is especially evident here.

Yet, as in all effective use of language, Paul does not obscure the fundamental point: the absolute worth of the pursuit of love. This is, after all, the point he intends for his remarks to establish: "make love your aim" (14:1). Thus the general image of this impressionistic painting is clear; it is the individual hues and tones which are bothersome, and which, the more closely examined, appear to be less vividly clear. Once it is established that Paul's language here is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, attempts to lend precision and clarity to it are automatically rendered dubious, if not presumptuous. Any explanation will necessarily be provisional.

Most commentators suggest that his remarks are most likely conditioned by his expectation of the end. Throughout the epistle his advice and instructions are repeatedly framed within this forward-looking perspective (cf. 1:8f.; 2:6; 3:13, 15, 17, 22; 4:4f., 8f., 19; 5:5; 6:2f., 9f., 14; 7:17-24, 26, 29, 31, 32ff.; 9:24ff.; 10:11; 11:26, 29, 32; also 15:12ff.; 16:22). Also, it is striking that chapter 9, which we have suggested has a parallel function with chapter 13, ends on this same note ("prize" language, cf. Phil. 3:12). First Corinthians 1:7f. puts spiritual gifts in an eschatological perspective.

This initial observation is confirmed by examining Paul's language itself. *Pass away* (*katargeō*) is employed several times in the epistle; in most cases it refers to an action of "destruction," "disappearance," or "obliteration" brought on by the coming of the last day (cf. 2:6; 6:13; 15:24, 26; cf. 1:28); it by no means always has this connotation; and it may not have here; it does not in verse 11, for example. If it does, however, verse 10 can hardly be rendered in any way other than, "But when the final consummation comes, everything partial: prophecy, knowledge, tongues, will pass away into oblivion."

In addition, the **now . . . then** language of verse 12 reinforces this interpretation. Obviously **then** is often nothing more than an ordinary temporal adverb, and is so used quite frequently in the New Testament. Of the six times it is used in 1 Corinthians, however, thrice it means "then . . . at the final end" (4:5; 15:28, 54; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 2:8; Col. 3:4; also Matt. 24:14, 30; Mark 13:26f.; Luke 21:27). But this is by no means conclusive in establishing its meaning in 13:12 (the other use is in 16:2).

The language of "knowing" employed in verses 9 and 12 should also be observed. As noted earlier (cf. remarks on 8:2f.), Paul is extremely reluctant to admit that one "knows" God this side of "then," but that "full knowledge" comes at the final revelation of Christ (cf. Phil. 3:10f.; 2 Tim. 1:12; also 1 John 3:2).

Yet there are still persistent questions. The end is never referred to in the New Testament as "that which is perfect" (*to teleion*); the common word for "end" (*telos*) belongs to the same word-family, but it is not the term used here. Usually, *to teleion* denotes a "moral state," used to describe persons and personal conduct (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28; 4:12; cf. Matt. 5:48; 19:21; Heb. 5:14; James 1:4; 3:2; 1 John 4:18; cf. Heb. 6:1). The verb form, however, can be used to describe the Christian's "perfected state" at the coming of the Lord (cf. Phil. 3:12). Read in this way, verse 10 would describe the mature state to which Paul is urging the Corinthians, in which prophecies, knowledge, and tongues will no longer be the decisive criteria among them. And his reference to his own growth from immaturity to maturity will be seen as a model for them to follow; they will see that their speaking (in tongues), their knowledge, and their thinking have been childish, conduct unbecoming to genuinely mature Christians (cf. 3:1ff.).

**Edification in the Assembly, 14:1-40.** With chapter 14 there is a noticeable shift from "I" back to "you" (plural). The portrait of (his) apostolic life motivated by *agapē* now vividly before them, they can now be urged: "make love your aim."

Paul's discussion in chapter 14 does not submit to ready outline, but roughly the following outline may be suggested: (1) the personal appeal: tongues are good, prophecy is better

<sup>1</sup>Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup>For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

---

(vss. 1-5); (2) the appeal reinforced by personal example (vss. 6-19); (3) exhortation and specific instruction about worshiping as an assembled church (vss. 20-25); (4) directives pertaining to the assembled church (vss. 26-38); (5) final restatement of appeal (vss. 39, 40).

[1, 2] Paul gets to the point immediately: his preference is clear: **that you may prophesy**: it is repeated in verse 5. The basis for his preference is stated in verse 2, and arises from the fundamental nature of the gift itself. Consequently, his remarks here provide useful information for gaining a picture of the **one who speaks in a tongue**—what he does and why. The utterances were, above all, **in the Spirit**. The phrase is problematic, but literally reads “but in spirit (*pneumati*) he speaks mysteries.” Some manuscripts read “the spirit speaks mysteries.” Given the context of chapters 12–14, the term “spirit” can only mean “the Holy Spirit,” especially in view of his earlier remarks (12:11). These were “inspired” (NEB) utterances delivered under the impulse of the divine Spirit. The gift is a genuinely “spiritual” gift (12:1, 10f., 28, 30; 14:1, 12). This Paul never questions.

But precisely what it meant to speak **in a tongue** is unclear. Apparently, there is no difference between speaking **in a tongue** and speaking **in tongues**; the two expressions appear to be used interchangeably (14:2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 39). At times Paul implies that “to speak in a tongue” is the *mode* in which different types of “manifestations of the Spirit” can occur, i.e., one can “pray in a tongue” (vs. 14), or “instruct in a tongue” (vs. 19). If this is the case, the expression earlier used—“various *kinds* of tongues” (12:10) would mean, “the ability to utter knowledge, wisdom, etc. in a tongue, i.e., with ecstatic utterances.”

Yet there is no hint that one can “prophesy” in a tongue (unless vs. 6 is so understood); indeed, the two gifts appear to be not only distinguishable but incompatible. The same

person (e.g., Paul, cf. vs. 6) may be able to do both, but not at the same time. Done simultaneously, they are mutually exclusive.

Actually, "speaking in a tongue" is a form of praying; it need not have been the only form of praying, simply one mode. One who **speaks not to men but to God** (vs. 2) is essentially praying, even if the content of his utterances is **mysteries**. This is not unlike his description of praying elsewhere (cf. Rom. 8:26). Certainly, one who prays "edifies himself" (vs. 4), primarily if not exclusively. Later, corrective instructions are given in terms of how to pray (and sing) in the assembly (cf. vss. 13ff.). Certainly, the utterances described as "thanksgivings" to which others gathered are expected to say "Amen" can only be prayers (vs. 16). Prayers which could be understood would certainly be instructive to others (vs. 19). Finally, prayers offered "in tongues" would be signs to unbelievers that the new age had dawned, since they would be evidence of the Spirit at work (vs. 22). "To speak in a tongue," then, is essentially a communication between the individual and God.

The sounds themselves are actually unintelligible to everyone except God; it remains an open question whether they are also unintelligible to the individual; presumably not. At any rate, "no one (else) understands him" (cf. vs. 9). The utterance itself, or at least its meaning or significance, need not remain unintelligible, for it could be interpreted, either by someone else (vss. 5, 26, 27f.; cf. 12:30) or by the individual so gifted (vs. 13). The clear implication is that *interpreted* tongues are of equal value with prophecy (vs. 5), because *then* their significance is clear to someone besides God: the whole church is edified.

The term **mysteries** implies utterances whose meaning is "hidden." During utterances in tongues one's "mind" is disengaged while one's "spirit" is activated (vs. 14). The utterances are therefore nonrational, since one's rational faculties are suspended. Although the term is not used here, the experience may be called "ecstatic," for one literally "stands outside oneself" during the utterance (cf. Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; the term is used in its non-technical sense in Mark 5:42; 16:8; Luke 5:26; Acts 3:10).

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup>He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup>Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless some one interprets, so that the church may be edified.

---

[3-5] The one who prophesies, by contrast, speaks to men. The prophet also communicated under the impulse of the Spirit (12:11), but his communications were not directed to God; they were received from God and directed to men. Whereas "speaking in a tongue" was a communication from the individual to God for the sake of the individual, prophecy was essentially a communication from God to the individual for the sake of other individuals: **he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church**, i.e., "the assembled company" (Barrett) (vs. 4). The content of the prophecies is unspecified, except in general terms: "mysteries," "knowledge" (13:2), and "revelation" (14:30). Since "prophecy" is for believers (vs. 22), the content would presumably be advanced instruction in the faith: "mysteries," "knowledge," "revelations" pertaining to God's will and ways.

If there is some question about the exact content of prophecy, there can be no question about its aim: the prophet **speaks to men for their upbuilding** (*oikodomē*), and **encouragement** (*paraklēsis*) and **consolation** (*paramuthia*): "when a man prophesies . . . his words have power to build; they stimulate and they encourage" (NEB). These are all terms which Paul uses to describe his own apostolic work (2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; cf. Gal. 2:18; 1 Thess. 2:11). Elsewhere the work of Christian prophets is described with similar terminology (Acts 15:32). There is no mention in chapter 14 of the prophet's powers to predict future events, although this was one function of Christian prophets (Acts 11:27ff.). The prophetic role here is more nearly equivalent to "preaching," "forthtelling" rather than "foretelling," to use a well-known distinction. For this reason, when we think of "prophecy," we probably do well to think

**“Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?”**

---

of “preaching.” When prophetic words have their full impact, they result in “convicting,” even unbelievers (14:24), in spite of the fact that they are primarily aimed towards believers (vs. 22); properly delivered, they result in believers’ “learning and being encouraged” (14:31).

The words of a prophet are fully intelligible; nowhere does Paul state that a prophet requires an “interpreter.” Instead of being “interpreted,” a prophet’s words are “weighed” (14:29); this is done by one with a separate gift: the “ability to distinguish between spirits” (12:10; cf. 1 Thess. 5:19ff.). The prophetic enterprise is fully rational, employing both the spirit and the mind, the prophet remaining in full control of himself.

Thus, the two gifts of tongues and prophecy are seen to be different in several crucial respects: intelligibility, content, and aim. But the *beneficiary* is the most crucial respect in which they differ, for whereas the individual—and the individual alone—is the beneficiary in one instance, the whole assembled church is the beneficiary in the other. Quite forcefully, Paul insists that **he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues.** And although he allows that *interpreted* tongues would force him to qualify this valuation, still tongues are critically examined and found wanting primarily because of their utter failure (in Corinth) in translating “love” into “building up.” If the person who is speaking is alone the beneficiary, it is an egregious case of self-love.

[6] The following instructions are quite personal, as seen by the prominence of I. Although they may be hypothetical, they are nevertheless what *Paul* would do hypothetically. Paul’s words carry even greater weight because he himself could and did speak in tongues (cf. vs. 18). His critique consists neither of uninformed observations nor educated guesses by someone on the outside looking in; nor are they unsympathetic remarks from an unregenerate cynic who sees absolutely no value in the gift. Indeed, he not only recommends it, but strictly forbids trying to stop it (vs. 39).

**<sup>7</sup>If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will any one know what is played? <sup>8</sup>And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup>So with yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will any one know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup>There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning; <sup>11</sup>but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.**

---

Verse 6b literally reads “. . . unless I speak to you either in a revelation, or in knowledge or in prophecy or (in) teaching.” In could also be translated “with.” Here Paul appears to be saying “if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless *in addition* I also speak to you some divine revelations (2:10, 16), some divine word of knowledge, a word of prophetic encouragement and consolation, or a word of (moral) instruction.” Each of these differs from “tongues” by not only being intelligible, but also by being of value to someone besides Paul himself. His personal visits were typically motivated less by how he could personally benefit than by how he could benefit those visited (cf. Rom. 1:11).

[7-11] The absolute necessity of clarity is illustrated by the examples of musical instruments and foreign languages. For a **flute or harp** to have any aesthetic appeal, or for a **bugle** to have any value as a call to battle, the sounds must be **distinct**. Similarly, utterances **in a tongue** are little more than **speaking into the air**; the assumption, of course, is that the utterances are uninterpreted (cf. vs. 13).

Corinth, being a Roman colony, was certainly a **bi-lingual city**, and by being a major port was most probably a **multilingual city**. The mention of **different languages in the world**, besides being fairly self-evident, was particularly **appropriate** in Corinth. Bilingual himself (Acts 22:2), Paul knew firsthand that speaking in a foreign language to someone who did not know the meaning of the language was also like **speaking into the air** (cf. Acts 14:11). The term employed here for “language” (*phōnē*) is not the term used for “tongue” (*glōssa*) throughout the chapter. And the

<sup>12</sup>So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.

mention of "foreign languages" is purely illustrative; it is only remotely likely that "tongues" elsewhere in the chapter is to be understood as "foreign tongues." It is difficult to know, for example, how "foreign languages" would be of much assistance in communicating with angels (13:1). The use of foreign languages as an illustration indicates that the phenomenon in Corinth is distinct from the experience of Acts 2.

[12] With verse 12 Paul restates the appeal, except this time he widens it from an appeal for them to prophesy (vss. 1, 5), to an appeal for them to **strive to excel in building up the church**. Actually, he says, "since you are zealots of spirits." For this reason, some manuscripts read "since you are zealots of spiritual things" (i.e., gifts). The RSV rendering, "since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit," no doubt conveys the proper meaning, given the Corinthians' fondness for the Spirit and the manifestations of the Spirit. The nature and impact of his appeal should not be overlooked. **So with yourselves** literally reads "So also you." This should be read with his opening remarks (vs. 6): "If I do . . . so also (should) you."

[13] The examples of verses 7ff. have been hypothetical, and general. They did not relate specifically to Christian worship. They served to make the general point; the following remarks (vss. 13-19) serve to make the point specific; the movement of thought advances from the general need for clarity to the specific need for clarity in the assembly. The illustrations now cited are drawn from the very life and heart of early Christian worship itself. As a result these remarks provide one of the most vivid glimpses in the New Testament into what actually went on within an early Christian meeting. The chief features are prayer and singing.

If edification is of paramount concern, the **one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret**. Elsewhere Paul seems to imply that "tongues" and the "interpretation of tongues" are separate gifts, not usually



<sup>14</sup>For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup>What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. <sup>16</sup>Otherwise, if you bless<sup>v</sup> with the spirit, how can any one in the position of an outsider<sup>x</sup> say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup>For you may give thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

<sup>v</sup> That is, *give thanks to God*

<sup>x</sup> Or *him that is without gifts*

---

residing within the same individual (12:10; 14:5, 27f.). Yet here the individual who speaks in a tongue is urged to **pray for the power to interpret** his own utterances. Chapter 12 stressed that the Spirit or God gave the gifts as they willed (12:11, 18, 24, 28), but Christians could pray for them (12:31; 14:1, 13, 39). The emphasis in chapter 14 is on the individual's control.

[14-17] Praying now becomes the specific focus of his remarks. As noted earlier, his description seems to suggest that "in a tongue" is *one* mode in which various Christian utterances, such as prayer, can be carried out. But, if speaking in a tongue itself is a form of prayer, the terminology is understandable. The following discussion in verses 13-15 is replete with references to "praying." He uses the ordinary term (*proseuchesthai*), but other terms as well. Perhaps here it should be noted that oral, not silent prayer is in view; it is even doubtful whether silent prayer is ever in view in the New Testament discussion of praying; praying, even privately, is usually presented as praying aloud (cf. Matt. 6:5ff., esp. vss. 7ff.; Luke 18:11, 13); praying silently, or to oneself, is known in Jewish practice, but appears to have been exceptional (cf. 1 Sam. 1:13).

Bless is a term commonly used to mean "pray," especially in the Jewish tradition; actually it was a specific type of praying (cf. Matt. 14:19 and parallels; Mark 8:7; Luke 2:28). The response to the one who blesses **with the Spirit** is said to be Amen to his **thanksgiving** (*eucharistia*); both of these terms "bless" and "give thanks" are terms elsewhere used of the Lord's supper (cf. Matt. 26:26ff. and parallels; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24), yet it is unlikely that the

**1<sup>8</sup>I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; 1<sup>9</sup>nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.**

---

Lord's supper is in view here. Amen, a Hebrew word, was the proper response to a prayer (of thanksgiving). This is confirmed by Paul's use of the same term in verse 18, **I thank God**. This is his typical way of introducing a personal prayer (cf. Rom. 1:8; 7:25; 16:4; 1 Cor. 1:4, 14; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3ff.; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; Phile. 4).

It is not impossible, given the predominance of "praying" language within this passage, that **sing** is actually a synonym for **pray** since chanting prayers was typical in worship, especially Jewish worship. Yet since both praying and singing of (OT) psalms were two prominent features of synagogue worship, Paul probably has in mind here two separate acts (cf. Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18f.).

[18, 19] This is the most unequivocal assertion by Paul that he does, in fact, **speak with tongues** (cf. vs. 6); it is not a statement of what he can do, but of what he actually does. He excelled the "spiritual ones" even when judged by their own criteria, and for this reason his following remark cannot be gainsaid. His first three words are important: **Nevertheless, in church**. Speaking in tongues appears to have been especially suited for private worship, but **in church**, before the assembled church, a different set of criteria becomes operative, and one's conduct must be sensitive to the difference and be regulated accordingly. His statement is actually stronger than **I would rather**; perhaps a better rendering would be "BUT, when the church is assembled I want to speak five intelligible words so that others might receive the benefit of my instructions, instead of ten thousand unintelligible words." The point is clear: he prefers his words to be weighed rather than counted.

**Instruct** (*katēcheō*) must be understood generally as the overall purpose for which he would deliver revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or teaching (vs. 6). He could as easily have said "edify," but probably does not for stylistic variation (cf. vs. 17). It is not his normal word for "teach" (*didaskō*, cf. Rom. 2:18; Gal. 6:6).

<sup>20</sup>Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature. <sup>21</sup>In the law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." <sup>22</sup>Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. <sup>23</sup>If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? <sup>24</sup>But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, <sup>25</sup>the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

---

[20] By addressing them as brethren, Paul leaves behind his personal example and turns to direct exhortation; with verse 20 he reverts from "I" back to "you." **Do not be children in your thinking** can be rendered "Do not keep on being childish in your thinking." Both the grammar, context, and his remarks earlier support this translation. His description of them as children employs a metaphor introduced early in the epistle (cf. 3:1f.; 4:14f.) and alluded to since (10:12f., cf. 13:11; cf. also Eph. 4:14); his charge for them to be **mature** is actually a variation of the same metaphor (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6; 13:10 and see Phil. 3:12, 15). The entire exhortation appears to be a variation of a wisdom saying (cf. Rom. 16:19; Matt. 10:16); the warning against evil recalls his earlier warning (10:6; cf. 15:34); the call to be **mature** would especially smart (cf. 2:6).

[21] The quotation from the Old Testament (Isa. 28:11ff.; cf. Deut. 28:49) establishes that unintelligible language however impressive on the surface is of no particular value, even if used by the Lord himself. **This people** obviously refers to disobedient Israel whose conduct Paul has already cited as a warning to the Corinthian church (cf. 10:1ff.).

[22-25] The value of **tongues** and **prophecy** are contrasted in terms of those who potentially receive the most benefit. The remarks must be understood in the context of an assembly. The **unbelievers** who are envisioned as visiting the assembly may have been unbelieving spouses who attended voluntarily (cf. 7:12ff.). On the other hand, they

may have been interested friends or other visitors. **Unbelievers** is typically used of a non-Christian (cf. 1 Cor. 6:1ff.); here they are also called “outsiders” (vs. 23, *idiotēs*). This represents another part of Paul’s instruction in which the Corinthian church was called upon to be sensitive to how they would be viewed within a pagan society. The missionary intent of the assembly is clear. The church should realize that its worship is actually proclamation, and if effectively done, will result in the conversion of unbelievers: **falling on his face, he will worship God . . . .**

Tongues and prophecy are thus distinguished in terms of those most likely to benefit: **tongues are a sign . . . for unbelievers, while prophecy is . . . for believers.** Presumably he still has in mind uninterpreted tongues, since there is no indication to the contrary. Since he does not expect uninterpreted tongues to be understood (14:2), their only value for unbelievers is as a sign (*sēmeion*) that the Spirit is present. That, at the very least, the utterances in tongues demonstrated.

**Prophecy**, on the other hand, because it consisted of revelation, wisdom, and knowledge, and because its function was in providing instruction, consolation, and encouragement, all which resulted in building up, is of greatest value primarily to believers. Yet, effective prophecy reaches beyond the believers and can have a stunning impact upon unbelievers; it can result in their being convicted, called to account, having the inner secrets of their heart exposed, and in their becoming worshipers of God. Paul’s analysis points up the irrefutable paradox: tongues fail to do that for which they are best suited; prophecy succeeds in doing that for which it is least suited.

Paul’s hope is that the unbeliever will actually see that **God is really among you** (Isa. 45:14; Zech. 8:23). This phrase points up one of Paul’s lingering doubts about the Corinthian church, and indicates one of the recurrent themes of the epistle: his insistence that they are a “church of God,” and that their overall behavior should rise to that level of awareness. Properly carried out, their worship would become a proclamation of God’s presence within them; their worship would become a proper expression of their own identity.

**<sup>26</sup>What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.**

---

[26] The question, **What then, brethren?** introduces the final section. It is literally full of imperatives, and may rightly be regarded as a set of directives on how a church should behave when it is assembled. This specific focus is a feature in common with chapter 11, and may very well be the link between chapter 11 and chapters 12–14.

In a sense, these remarks are a “church order”—how they ought to behave in the (assembled) household of God (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). Here the instructions are still far from formalized, but by the end of the century “church order” would be an established literary form (cf. *Didache*).

The directives are given in the following manner: first, there is a statement of the fundamental principle which is to govern worship (vs. 26b); then follow directives for (1) speaking in tongues (vss. 27, 28); (2) prophetic speech (vss. 29-33); (3) the behavior of women (vss. 33b-36). A final reminder of his own prophetic authority is followed by a restatement of his appeal.

Paul’s opening remark does not suggest that each one brought to the assembly a **hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation**; rather, **when you come together** means “whenever you are assembled together.” The nature of his entire discussion implies that their meetings were completely spontaneous. As we have already noticed, Paul’s lists are not intended to be comprehensive (cf. 12:8ff., 28f.; 13:1-3; 14:6). This should be read as a random list of items—“prophecy” and “praying” are not even mentioned, unless they are implied by **revelation and tongue** respectively.

Since “one with a psalm” (**hymn**) is regarded as subject to the same set of directives, it appears to have been a spiritual gift as well (cf. 14:15). While it may have been an Old Testament psalm, it may as well have been an early Christian hymn, a few fragments of which appear to be embedded within the New Testament (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 5:14; possibly Phil. 2:6ff.; several appear to be found in Revelation).

**<sup>27</sup>If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup>But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup>Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.**

---

The fundamental principle guiding Christian worship is stated, **Let all things be done for edification.** "That which builds up" has already functioned as a crucial criterion for conduct outside the assembly (cf. 8:1; 10:23); with this chapter the frame of reference narrows. It could be paraphrased "Let all things done when assembled together be done for edification."

[27, 28] Since "speaking in a tongue" is the most pressing problem, it is treated first. There are three instructions: limit the number (**let there be only two or at most three**), presumably within one given service; one at a time, (**each in turn**), not all simultaneously; and **let one interpret**. Whether this one is one of the two or three, or someone else with the gift of interpretation is unclear. In any case, it points up the one condition on which Paul will not yield: no interpreter, no tongue speaking: **if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church, and speak to himself and to God.**

The mandate is interesting in one respect, unclear in another. It indicates that one who spoke in tongues retained some control, that it was not a question of being uncontrollably seized. The last part of the directive, **to speak to himself and to God** most likely means "at home."

[29] Even though prophecy was intelligible and was to be preferred, it too was apparently capable of abuse. Similarly, the number of those who deliver a prophetic exhortation in a single meeting is limited: **two or three**. Rather than calling for some to "interpret" the prophetic utterances, Paul urges, **let the others weigh what is said. The others** are no doubt those with the gift of "distinguishing between spirits" (12:10); since one with a tongue could be urged to pray for the power to interpret, presumably a prophet could pray for the power to "discern" the spirits. But there is no indication that this was done. Rather, the prophets seem not to have had the capacity to evaluate their own utterances, and given

<sup>30</sup>If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup>For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged; <sup>32</sup>and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup>For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

---

the problem which the early church had with false prophets, this was understandable enough (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19ff.).

But how did others weigh what was said? Paul does not elaborate, but some educated guesses are possible. "Weighing what is said" seems to imply discriminating evaluation of the content of the prophetic utterance; the prophetic revelation was therefore not self-authenticating, but subject to the scrutiny of others within the assembled church. Earlier Paul had emphasized that a prophetic utterance per se had no value, but had to be tested according to the confession "Jesus is Lord" (12:1ff.). Elsewhere, he instructs his churches not to "quench the Spirit (of prophecy)," but to "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21). Implicit in his discussions are at least two criteria: (1) conformity to the "traditions" and "confessional statements"; and (2) edification. Those who weigh what is said would be expected to weigh the prophetic utterance in light of the "traditions," i.e., the sacred teachings which the church had received from its inspired teachers (cf. remarks on 11:2ff.; 23ff.; 15:1ff.). But they would also be expected to determine whether the utterances constituted exhortation, consolation, edification (14:3).

Especially instructive is the clear implication throughout these remarks that the assembled members were not to be purely passive, that is to say, gullible recipients. His earlier remarks (vss. 14ff.) indicated that the mind was to be actively engaged in worship. Here it becomes clear that the assembled community itself was to be actively engaged in critical discernment of what was said and done.

[30-33a] The prophets are submitted to a third limitation. As with those who spoke in tongues, they were to prophesy one by one, i.e., sequentially. Obviously, this would increase the level of learning and encouragement. The reminder that spirits of prophets are subject to prophets should be understood with the injunction just mentioned; it is

As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup>the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. <sup>35</sup>If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

---

Paul's reminder that prophecy, like tongues, was controllable; the individual's spirit could be held under rein.

The appeal is grounded in the nature of God himself: **God is not a God of confusion but of peace.** This is typical of the way Paul instructs. His instructions are shaped by theological reflection rather than dictated by merely practical considerations; the latter are not unimportant, but they are not primary. It is also instructive to the Corinthians, for they are expected to learn to define themselves in relation to God.

[33b-35] The third set of directives are among the most controversial instructions given by Paul in the epistle. They are difficult to interpret primarily for the following reasons: (1) To this point, there has been no explicit reference to women in the entire section dealing with "spiritual gifts" (chs. 12-14); in fact, the entire epistle, for the most part, is directed to the men in the Corinthian church rather than the women (cf. however chapter 7). (2) The mention of "women" appears to intrude upon the discussion of prophecy because Paul resumes the theme of prophecy with verse 37. For this reason, these verses appear in some manuscripts at the end of verse 40, not only a tacit recognition of the literary problem posed by these verses but an obvious attempt to solve it by relocation. But even relocating them at the end of the chapter does not solve the third problem: (3) The directive which he issues here is difficult to square with his remarks made earlier (11:4ff.).

Since Paul is given to digressions, the third problem is the major one. Simply put, the problem is this: in 11:4ff. he clearly says that a woman "prays" and "prophesies"; in 14:33bff. he as clearly forbids a woman to do either, i.e., to speak in church.

Three explanations are usually offered:

(1) Paul's instructions in 11:5, 13 are given for private worship, while those in 14:33ff. are instructions given for



public assembly. (In a sense, all early Christian worship at this time was “private” in the sense that it occurred in private homes; but “public” will be used here to refer to the “assembled church.”) Paul allows the woman to **speak** at home, but not in the public assembly. Hence, no inconsistency. The difficulty with this is that although Paul never explicitly states in 11:2ff. that the “praying and prophesying” are done when the church is “assembled together” (as he does five times in the following section), his comments there appear to be meaningless unless public worship is envisioned. It is difficult to imagine why wearing or not wearing a head covering would even pose a problem “at home.” In addition, “prophesying” by definition presupposes “auditors” (cf. 14:3).

(2) An alternative position suggests that both 11:2ff. and 14:33ff. have in view public assembly; the references to “coming together” in 11:17ff. are taken to apply to the first part of the chapter as well. But, of the two, chapter 11:2ff. represents Paul’s real convictions, and 14:33ff. are regarded as a later interpolation and do not reflect Paul’s views at all.

The difficulty with this position is that there is no manuscript evidence that these verses were omitted *entirely* from the epistle. The manuscripts which relocate them at the end of the chapter, still relocate them within the epistle! But of even more consequence, all attempts to explain verses 33ff. as a later interpolation look suspiciously like attempts to domesticate Paul; perhaps liberate would be a better term.

(3) A third position suggests that both 11:2ff. and 14:33ff. address questions pertaining to public worship, and Paul is simply inconsistent. The difficulty with this is that he is unlikely to have been so blatantly inconsistent on a question as volatile as this.

Elsewhere Paul has appealed to the universal practice among his churches (7:17; 11:16). The women can also be translated “wives” (cf. vs. 35). Quite unequivocally, Paul enjoins them to silence **in the churches**, i.e., in the various assemblies of Christians. It is similar to advice given in 1 Timothy 2:11f. The basis for his injunction is **the law**, yet no quotation is given. It is usually assumed that he has in mind Genesis 3:16, but this is not certain. It is remotely

**<sup>36</sup>What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?**

**<sup>37</sup>If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.**

---

possible that he has in mind the incident of Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12); there are some intriguing parallels between that incident and Paul's discussion here. If this is the background informing his remarks, it may mean that Miriam was functioning as the prototypical insubordinate *prophetess* who is reprimanded for her questioning the authority of Moses, *the prophet*: (they) **should be subordinate** is precisely the point of the narrative in Numbers 12. One can therefore conjecture that Paul's remarks here are addressed to quite a specific problem: prophetesses within the Corinthian church whose utterances were either unsettling or even perhaps calling Paul's authority into question; it is significant that these remarks prompt him to a rather stern and pointed reminder of *his* prophetic authority (vs. 37).

Their **desire to know** suggests neither praying nor prophesying, however. Perhaps they were inquiring about the meaning of the ecstatic utterances, or the prophetic utterances, and in doing so, were contributing chaos to an already confused assembly. In any case, they are instructed to seek answers from their husbands at home (*en oikō*).

His second reason is, **it is shameful for a woman to speak in church** (but not at home). The term **speak** might imply "to speak in a tongue," were it not for the reference to her desire to learn. Thus, it probably means "to speak at all." Paul's instructions here are no doubt influenced by synagogue procedures, where women took no active role; the Jewish synagogue was a man's world; the home was the woman's world.

[36] This explosive question is difficult to interpret. Presumably, it can mean: "What? Did the word of God originate with you? Do you think you can overturn at will established precedent based upon the clear letter of the law (i.e., by allowing women to speak)? Or, does your special endowment of spiritual knowledge give you this right to alter well-established worship patterns at a whim?"

[37] The previous question triggers the final reminder of

<sup>38</sup>If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.  
<sup>39</sup>So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; <sup>40</sup>but all things should be done decently and in order.

<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand,

---

his prophetic authority. One who pretended to deliver "the word of God" (vs. 36) would obviously be assuming a prophetic role. *Spiritual* probably refers to the same person. This is Paul's strongest reminder that his written words (in the epistle) are the **command of the Lord**. Obviously, not everything he had written was, in the strictest sense, a **command of the Lord**, as he himself admitted (cf. 7:6, 12, 25). Yet in a broader sense it was, since after all he was a commissioned apostle charged with the responsibility of preaching and teaching the "sacred teachings" and the divine revelations which he had received. He always writes his letters with the implicit assumption that his apostolic position gives this authority to his words, especially to *his* churches.

What I am writing, although likely referring to what immediately precedes, obviously has a broader reference.

[38] Literally this verse reads "If one does not know, he is not known," and presumably applies to the one who presumes to question Paul's prophetic pronouncements.

[39, 40] The final appeal restates his opening remark. He urges them to pursue the more beneficial gift: prophecy; yet in the same breath forbids them to put out the flame of those who speak in tongues. In this Paul has been quite consistent. His critique stems, in part, from the abuse of "tongues" *in this situation*: the gift per se he does not disparage; he does not attempt to expunge it or eradicate it; nor does he instruct the Corinthians to do so. He instead deprecates the importance attached to it by *some* Corinthians; even more important, however, he perceives and attacks what that implied: that the individual mattered more than the group.

*The Resurrection 15:1-58*

**The Gospel, 15:1-11.** [1] The opening words **Now I would remind you** normally introduce familiar material

<sup>2</sup>by which you are saved, if you hold it fast — unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

---

(cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal. 1:11). The term remind (*gnōrizō*) is especially appropriate when used with the gospel, since it is often employed of God's making known the mystery of salvation (Rom. 9:22f.; 16:26; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 5, 10; 6:19; Col. 1:27; cf. 2 Peter 1:16). In this sense, it is a synonym for "reveal." The content of his reminder is familiar: the gospel (message) which he had originally preached to them (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1ff.; Acts 18:1ff.). In responding to the gospel they had received these sacred teachings (cf. Gal. 1:9; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6; 4:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6); the language implies not only that they had been obedient to the message, but that they had been entrusted with the message, even as Paul had been (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:12).

To stand in the faith of the gospel is an expression meaning "fidelity to those tenets of the faith which one has believed and experienced" (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:24; Rom. 11:20; 1 Thess. 3:8; Phil. 1:27). Elsewhere Paul indicates that such fidelity is divinely assisted (Rom. 14:4), though not divinely assured (1 Cor. 10:12; 15:2; cf. Gal. 1:6ff.).

[2] Through their response to the gospel they had experienced the saving power of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17f., 21), but their continued reappropriation of God's salvation depended upon their "holding fast" to the "word" (*logos*), a term interchangeable with "the gospel" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:1, 4). The specific respects in which Paul has reason to suspect that they are not holding fast to that faith are indicated below (15:14,17).

[3] The content of the gospel message is now given in a well-established summary. What he had received he had **delivered**, i.e., transmitted to them. As noted above (cf. discussion on 11:23ff.), the language employed is technical terminology for receiving and transmitting divine

teaching. Its use establishes continuity between Paul's teaching and the Lord himself, and in doing so underscores its authority; the transmitter serves as the conduit, not as the originator of the message. With this language Paul acknowledges that he is standing within the tradition as a faithful recipient and transmitter and that the message derives whatever authority it has from the message rather than from the messenger. It is thus of **first importance**.

[4] The summary of the preaching consists of four items which were obviously more fully elaborated in his preaching itself. These were: (1) Christ died; (2) he was buried; (3) he was raised; (4) he appeared. The summary itself highlights some of the crucial issues raised by early Christian preaching. This is seen first by its fourfold structure. Other summaries of the preaching within the New Testament suggest a twofold scheme in which the death (or suffering) and resurrection of Christ were the two foci of early Christian preaching (cf. Matt. 16:21; 17:22; 20:19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:32f.; 24:26, 46; Rom. 6:5ff.; 8:34; 14:9; 2 Cor. 13:4; esp. Rom. 1:1-6; Phil. 2:6-11; also 1 Peter 3:18).

If one **died**, it is presumably redundant to say that one is **buried**; yet this became an important ingredient within the early Christian proclamation. The Gospels themselves indicate that the empty tomb became a center of controversy (cf. Matt. 27:62ff.). Thus, the first item—**Christ died**—was reinforced by the second item—**he was buried**. The second item was likely formulated in response to Jewish countercharges that the "risen" Lord had never in fact risen, but had been stolen away; Christians responded: "he not only died, but he was buried, and we can show you the empty tomb!"

In similar fashion the fourth claim served to reinforce the third. As the elaboration of the summary will show, the appearances of the risen Lord and the role of witnesses were fundamental in establishing the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Thus, the four-part summary, as opposed to the (earlier) two-part summary, represents a more fully developed summary of the content of the early Christian preaching.

<sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

---

His resurrection was also defined in two respects: on the third day and in accordance with the scriptures. With the former assertion early Christians firmly anchored the resurrection of Christ within history—his death was not only a locatable event, his resurrection was a datable event. It too was firmly established by appealing to Old Testament passages (most notably Ps. 110:1ff.; 16:8ff.; cf. Hos. 6:2; Jonah 2:1; Isa. 54:7).

[5] The appearances of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection made them witnesses to God's divine act. Accordingly, the role of witnesses became crucial in the early Christian preaching (seen especially in Luke-Acts: Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16); this terminology is rare, however, in Paul's own writings (cf. 1 Cor. 15:15).

The list of witnesses given in verses 5ff. presents several interesting questions. First, it is difficult to decide where the traditional list ends and where Paul's remarks begin, whether with verse 6 or with verse 8. The list as it appears here has six components: (1) Cephas, i.e., Peter; (2) the twelve; (3) over 500 brethren; (4) James; (5) all the apostles; (6) Paul (finally).

Cephas, of course, figures prominently in the Gospel accounts of the postresurrection appearances (cf. Luke 24:34; John 20:3; 21:15ff.; Mark 16:7; he is not named in Matthew's account). The twelve is obviously being used in a generic sense here since, strictly speaking, there were only "eleven" apostles after his resurrection (cf. Matt. 28:16ff.; Mark 16:14ff.; Luke 24:9, 33; cf. John 20:19ff.; Acts 1:26). This is the only time the twelve occurs in Paul's writings.

[6, 7] The mention of more than five hundred brethren reminds us that this is the only mention in the New Testament where the number of disciples who saw the risen Lord is given as five hundred (cf. Luke 24:9b; Acts 1:15). The mention of James is also unusual; the Gospel accounts

<sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

---

do not refer to an appearance to James. Presumably, this is James the Lord's brother who became an early leader in the Jerusalem church (cf. Gal. 1:19; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; cf. Gal. 2:9, 12; Matt. 13:55 and parallels). Apostles appears to be used here in a wider sense than "the twelve"; had they referred to the same group, the second mention would have been redundant. Since this is typical of the way "apostle" is used by Paul (cf. discussion on 9:4ff.), this may be the beginning of his own remarks. In any event, here it seems to mean all those who were commissioned by the Lord to preach the gospel.

One of the most remarkable features of the list is the absence of any women, who are, of course, prominently mentioned in the Gospel accounts (cf. Matt. 28:9f.; Mark 16:9, 12f. (?); Luke 24:10f., 24; John 20:1ff., 11ff.; Acts 1:14).

[8] The appearance of the risen Lord to Paul was quite unusual, as indicated by Paul's words: **as to one untimely born**, literally a "miscarriage." It has been suggested that it was a term of contempt hurled at Paul by his opponents. Elsewhere he refers to the extraordinary nature of his call, but always insists that the Lord's appearance to him was as valid as those appearances which occurred immediately after his death (cf. Gal. 1:1ff.; Acts 9:1ff.; 22:6ff.; 26:12ff.).

[9, 10] Paul's sensitivity to having persecuted the church apparently never diminished (cf. Phil. 3:6; Gal. 1:13, 23; 1 Tim. 1:13), nor did his awareness that his divine commission had been an act of divine grace (Gal. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:1). In this respect he was **the least of the apostles**. It is possible that opponents later confronted in Corinth seized upon this in their attack upon his apostleship (cf. 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11f.).

He was, however, equally insistent that he had faithfully discharged his commission; the success of his work among

<sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

<sup>12</sup>Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

the Gentile churches attested that God's grace had been at work through him (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1ff.). His successful work among these churches was his only "boast," and that his work might fail or be sabotaged was one of his lingering fears (1 Cor. 3:10ff.; 9:15ff., 23; 2 Cor. 11:5, 23ff.; Phil. 2:16ff.; Gal. 2:2). I worked harder than any of them has primary reference to his work (*kopiaō*) of preaching.

[11] The proclamation itself and the proper response to it was of eminently more importance than the individual proclaimers; this was even true when the proclaimers preached from less than noble motives (cf. Phil. 1:15ff.).

**The Future Resurrection, 15:12-34.** [12] With verse 12 Paul turns to the pressing problem. There are several senses in which some of the Corinthians could have said **there is no resurrection of the dead**: (1) There is no resurrection *at all*, i.e., there is no life after death of any kind; (2) There is no resurrection for the *dead*, only for the living, i.e., only those who are alive at the second coming will be raised with Christ; (3) There is no resurrection of the *body*, i.e., the corpse will not be revived, but the immortal soul will live on; (4) There is no *future* resurrection, i.e., whatever resurrection is to occur has already occurred.

As to the first, such skepticism was known in both Jewish (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 4:1ff.; 23:8) and pagan thought (Acts 17:32; cf. Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 1:23).

As to the second, Paul had already met this type of misunderstanding in the church at Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13ff.).

As to the third, at both sophisticated and unsophisticated levels of pagan thought, the body was regarded as the "prison of the soul." Death was considered a welcome relief primarily because it sprang the release of the immortal soul, which would enjoy after-life existence free of the limitations imposed by a physical body. This notion had also pene-



trated Jewish thought, especially that which was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy (cf. 2 Macc. 7:9ff.).

A bodily resurrection was much more common in Jewish thought. Relatively absent from the Old Testament (cf. Job 14:7ff.; 19:25ff.; 20:7; Isa. 26:17ff.; Dan. 12:2ff.), the doctrine of a bodily resurrection blossomed especially during the intertestamental period. Its most ardent proponents were the Pharisees who came to prominence during this period. It was of course well-established by the beginning of the first century A.D.; it was taught by Jesus (Matt. 22:29ff.; Mark 12:18ff.; Luke 20:27ff.), and would have been the firm conviction of the staunch Pharisee Paul long before he became a Christian (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:5ff.).

As to the fourth, as strange as it may appear to us, some early Christians became convinced that the resurrection of Christians was a present reality rather than a future hope (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). A variation of this misunderstanding was encountered by Paul as early as the 50s (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2).

Quite obviously, such a doctrine of the resurrection would have to be "spiritualized." It could easily result by misinterpreting Paul's own teaching regarding baptism (cf. Rom. 6:1ff.; Col. 2:12ff.; 3:1ff.). By changing Paul's future tenses to present tenses (cf. Rom. 6:5ff.), one could claim to be already raised with him, and therefore "sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36).

It is not clear in which of these respects the Corinthians' misunderstanding was focused. Nor is it possible to analyze Paul's response in chapter 15 and reconstruct the nature of their misunderstanding with any degree of certitude. Actually, his response addresses all four questions although not in the same way nor to the same degree.

His response is twofold: He first demonstrates the devastating effects which their present claim would have upon their own faith, and upon his preaching. Their claim, he asserts, effectively obliterates their own basis for existence, and in this sense is suicidal. After he demonstrates that their life as a church of God depends upon their faith in an act of God, he then proceeds to expound that faith more fully.

No one appears to have denied that Christ had been raised from the dead. Instead, this functions as "the given":

<sup>13</sup>But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup>if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

---

**If Christ is preached as raised from the dead.** This Paul had preached and the Corinthians had believed (vs. 11).

[13-15] Paul's response is in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: he pushes the implications of their claim, which he shows to have consequences which even they themselves would regard as absurd, and therefore unacceptable. The movement of his train of thought is backward: "If, as you say, there is no resurrection of the dead, or, if, in principle, the dead are not and cannot be raised, then: (1) Christ has not been raised (vs. 13); (2) our preaching is in vain (vs. 14a); (3) your faith is in vain (vs. 14b); (4) we are false witnesses and have made God a liar (vs. 15); (5) the (already) dead have no hope (vs. 18).

Paul tips the first domino, and then invites the Corinthians to stand back and watch.

Actually, there are two sets of implications: (1) upon Paul's preaching (vss. 13-15), and (2) upon their faith (vss. 16-19). In a word, if they are right, Paul's preaching is pointless, and their faith is groundless.

The structure is the reverse of that employed earlier, where he had appealed to their call (1:26-31), his own preaching (2:1-5); even then, the inextricable connection between their faith and his preaching was affirmed (2:5).

**If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised.** "You cannot deny the resurrection of all men and accept the resurrection of one man" (J. A. T. Robinson). This fundamental dilemma faces the Corinthians, and is developed by Paul in two ways. The principle is stated twice (vss. 13 and 16), and each time introduces a different set of implications.

The first set of implications pertains to Paul's preaching. Since the resurrection of Christ was one of the central tenets of Paul's preaching, to deny that dead men are raised

<sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup>If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

---

renders Paul's preaching in vain, i.e., "empty." Since their faith depended upon his preaching, their faith would also be "emptied" of its content, and thus of its life. If his preaching is "emptied" of its content, he is found to be misrepresenting God, literally to be a "false witness of God." To be misrepresenting God or to be a "lying witness for God" (NEB) constituted for Paul an unthinkable abuse of his apostolic trust (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:17; 4:2; 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). The term "false witness" recalls the ninth commandment (cf. Ex. 20:16; 23:1; Deut. 19:15ff.; 1 Kings 21:8ff.).

But it also calls into question the veracity of God, a point which he touches upon, but does not develop. As he had done throughout the epistle, Paul pushes the Corinthians to see how grossly underdeveloped was their understanding of God—their "knowledge of God" (cf. 15:34). Perhaps the most far-reaching implication of their claim is its stunning audacity in calling into question the character of God. Such presumption he had already attacked (1:18ff.). "God is faithful" is a presupposition so utterly fundamental to early Christianity, especially Paul, that he considers it the last domino of all (cf. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13; Rom. 3:4; 9:6; 11:29; Heb. 6:18; 10:23; 11:11; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11).

[16-18] The second set of implications pertain to the Corinthians. The dilemma is restated (vs. 16); it affects the Corinthians, both living and dead. In the resurrection of Christ the power of sin was nullified; the effects of sin were cancelled for those who had been raised with Christ, who "in union with Him" were sharing in his victory over sin. If Christ had not been raised, sin still reigned. But denying the resurrection of Christ would also nullify the hopes of the "dead in Christ," those who have fallen asleep in Christ. In life, because they were "in Christ," they had shared in the presence of the risen Lord, but had enjoyed the hope that, in death, his life-giving Spirit would continue to give them life

<sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

---

“in Christ.” An unresurrected Christ made their life a farce and their death a finality.

[19] Paul’s final remark in this train of thought is capable of meaning either: “If this life is the only life in which Christ has given us hope, we are the most pitied of all men,” or “If in this life hope is all that Christ has given us, and a fragile hope at that, we are the most pitied of all men.” Grammatically, both are possible, but the first version fits the context more closely. Having just mentioned the hopelessness of the “dead in Christ,” the sentence would then be paraphrased, “If the dead in Christ do not have hope as well as the living, then we are of all men the most pitied.”

[20] His previous remarks have forcefully demonstrated that if “Christ has not been raised,” their faith was like a punctured balloon. He now proceeds to expound this constitutive element of their faith. First, it is boldly asserted, or rather reasserted, “But the truth is, Christ was raised to life” (NEB). The construction employed (*nuni de*) underscores the reality of the assertion in contrast to its implied unreality, given their claim (cf. vss. 13, 16).

They had not denied the facticity of Christ’s resurrection; indeed, they had believed and confessed the resurrection of Christ, as well as re-enacted it through their baptism, but its full implications they had not perceived. His exposition now seeks to trace those implications. The “text” of his exposition is **Christ has been raised from the dead.**

The impact of Christ’s resurrection virtually always sends Paul running for metaphors, and his favorite source was the Old Testament. The Old Testament image of **first fruits** (cf. Deut. 18:4; 26:2, 10; Num. 18:8ff.; Neh. 10:37ff.; Ezek. 45:13ff.) he employed in various ways (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15; Rom. 16:5), but here primarily for its temporal value (cf. vs. 23): “the vanguard is Christ” (Hering). The resurrection of Christ signaled the beginning of “the harvest.” The metaphor will be developed further in

<sup>21</sup>For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

verses 35ff., but in the light of that metaphor, one could say, "many have been sown, i.e., died, but Christ is the *first* to have been sown and shoot forth again into life" (cf. Col. 1:18; Acts 3:15; 26:23; Heb. 2:10). As a result, the harvest of "the dead" has not only been insured, but had already been triggered. The single most distinctive "sign" that the "harvest" had begun was the coming and presence of the Spirit, whom Paul also designates "the first fruits" (cf. Rom. 8:23; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22).

If there are those within the Corinthian church who have serious doubts that "the dead in Christ" will have a share in the resurrection, they are here reassured; those "of Christ," even if they have been "sown a physical body," i.e., even if they have died, because they are "of Christ" their destiny is to be the same as his: they too will "shoot forth," raised in a "spiritual" body, as imperishable and as glorious as his. This is their destiny, but it has not yet been realized.

[21, 22] The Old Testament supplies a second image: **Adam**. The effects of Christ's resurrection are as far reaching for the human race as were the effects of Adam's sin. Yet what each bequeathed was radically different: through Adam came **death**, through Christ came the **resurrection of the dead**. Adam and Christ each stand at the beginning of a new order: Adam as the head of "humanity," Christ as the head of HUMANITY. Humanity as typified by Adam has **death** as its single common denominator: **as in Adam all die**; death is the containing force upon all human life; this it shares with its father. But HUMANITY as typified by Christ has resurrected life as its distinguishing feature: **in Christ shall all be made alive**. It is thus written in larger, bolder type, because its extra dimension literally encompasses, swallows up that which typified "humanity": **death**. Christ was the first to experience humanity written in large letters. The Adam typology Paul later develops more fully when he writes to the Romans (cf. ch. 5).

One of the most troublesome exegetical questions is how one is to understand **all**—all humanity or all Christians.

<sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

---

Consistency might seem to require the same in both phrases: "as in Adam all humans die, so in Christ will all humans be made alive." Yet the thought seems to be: all who are in Adam die, and all who are in Christ will be raised (cf. vss. 45-49). Paul is silent about non-Christians (contrast John 5:28f.).

[23, 24a] Because the promise for those in Christ is unquestionably future, the timetable of events needs to be clarified, especially if some Corinthians assumed that the resurrected life had no future dimension. Paul thus asserts: **each in his own order. Order** (*tagma*), a military term, probably has not only a temporal sense, i.e., "each in his own sequence," but also implies "rank."

It is a threefold sequence: **Christ the first fruits . . . then those who belong to Christ . . . then comes the end.** It now becomes clear that **the first fruits** has a temporal connotation: the resurrection of Christ triggered the chain of events. The next major event: **his coming** (*parousia*), at which time those "of Christ" will shoot forth into resurrected life. Paul is not concerned here to establish the chronological sequence between the raising of the "dead in Christ" and "those who are alive at his coming" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13ff.). **Then comes the end.** No interim is envisioned between the *parousia* and **the end**. The term *end* (*telos*) can scarcely be taken in any other sense than "the end of history" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; 10:11; also Matt. 24:13f.). It has been suggested that the phrase should be understood: "then comes the 'rest' "— the unbelievers. But the evidence for taking "end" in this sense is highly dubious.

[24b] **The end** is accompanied by two other events: (1) **delivering the kingdom to God** by Christ, and (2) **destroying all cosmic forces: rule, authority, and power.** Although the two clauses in Greek are identical, and seem to imply that these events are simultaneous, the sense demands that the destruction of cosmic forces precedes the presentation of the kingdom by the Messiah to God. The RSV thus

<sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

---

rightly translates the second phrase: **after destroying**. . . .

The **destroying** (*katargeō*) is unquestionably future, to be accomplished by the end (also vs. 26); the term is frequently employed by Paul in describing the final conquest of the Messiah over cosmic forces (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6; 6:13; 13:8, 10; cf. 2 Thess. 2:8); or, it can be employed without specific reference to its *final* stages of consummation to denote that which is destroyed, or fades away, with the onset of the new age of salvation inaugurated by Christ the Messiah (2 Cor. 3:7, 11, 13; Eph. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14).

**Rule, authority, and power** all denote cosmic forces, which reside "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Rom. 8:38; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; 1 Peter 3:22). The work of Christ throughout the New Testament is seen to have implications at this cosmic level, although the emphasis upon his superiority is sometimes absolute, at other times (as here) not fully consummated until the last day. The **kingdom** is seen here in both its present and future dimension. Christ "reigns" during the interim (vs. 25), but after all enemies are vanquished, the **kingdom** will be transferred to the Father (vs. 24). Emphasis within Paul and the New Testament oscillates between these two aspects of the kingdom: the "already" and the "not yet." At times Paul highlights its present dimension (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13; 4:11), while at other times the future dimension is in view (1 Cor. 6:9f.; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18).

[25] The interim reign of Christ at the right hand of the Father between his resurrection and his second coming is supported by Psalm 110:1, the most frequently quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42f.; 22:69; Acts 2:34ff.; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1, 10, 12f.; 12:2; Rev. 3:21). **For Christ must reign until God has put all his (Christ's) enemies under his (Christ's) feet.**

[26] **Death** is here personified as an enemy. This serves to remind us that **death** is understood as far more than "every man's fate," but actually as a force endemic to the cosmic

<sup>27</sup>“For God<sup>1</sup> has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection under him,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. <sup>28</sup>When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

<sup>29</sup>Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized in their behalf?

<sup>1</sup> Greek *he*

---

order; it is usually mentioned by Paul in the same breath with “sin,” similarly conceived by him to be far more than a generic description of what a person does; it is rather a force which transcends individuals; all are enslaved under its dominion, except for the act of God in Christ (cf. Rom. 5:12ff.; 6:16; 7:5ff.; 8:2ff.). With the defeat of death, the work of Christ may be said to be completed.

[27, 28] Again the Old Testament provides the proof that God had entrusted to the Son the victory over all forces (Ps. 8:6; cf. Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:6ff.). Verse 27b is a parenthetical statement in which Paul hastens to protect his flank by insisting upon the absolute inviolability of God’s sovereignty. As a result, the portrait of Christ which emerges is what Christians in later centuries would regard as “subordinationist.” The Son himself is ultimately to be **subjected** to the Father, so that **God may be everything to every one**, or so that “God will be all in all” (NEB). Similar language is used of Christ in Colossians 3:11.

[29] The following paragraph opens abruptly, possibly suggesting that it is one of Paul’s characteristic digressions. It would make excellent sense had it followed directly upon verses 12-19, which ended with a mention of the hopelessness of the “dead in Christ,” that is, assuming the Corinthians’ position. If they were actually saying, “There is no resurrection for those who have already died, only for the living,” the following remarks would be a plausible, indeed convincing response.

The practice of vicarious baptism is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament, although a related practice is known among certain Christian groups from the second



<sup>30</sup>Why am I in peril every hour? <sup>31</sup>I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup>What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

---

century on. This passage has occasioned well over two dozen interpretations. This in itself should cause the interpreter to be cautious rather than imaginative. Actually all that Paul's remarks tell us is how *he* understood their practice. For this reason, the implications which can be drawn from the act are more important, for our purposes, than the act itself. Assuming that he was correctly informed or that he correctly understood what they were doing, his remarks mean little unless their practice presupposed that those who had already died were either alive in some sense or were expected to live again in some sense. It is an *ad hominem* argument: what they said and what they did were inconsistent. Their own practice, therefore, controverted their position. It is also striking that Paul does not disapprove the practice.

[30-32a] Next Paul appeals to his personal behavior, as he was wont to do. If only the living have a share in the resurrection hope, why should he constantly flirt with death? Why not rather play it safe, and insure his chances for being alive at the coming of Christ? Instead, he finds himself constantly staring at death, because of his **pride** (literally, "boasting") in them. The language here is that which he often uses when speaking of his apostolic labors among his churches (1 Cor. 9:15ff.; 2 Cor. 4:10ff.). Thus, he not only willingly faces death, but does so in behalf of his churches.

His willingness to pursue his apostolic work with almost reckless abandon is attested by his own experience at Ephesus, of which he now writes. "Fighting with beasts" by his own admission is a way of speaking metaphorically (cf. Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 3:3; 9:8; Gal. 1:11; 3:15). Instead of referring to his experiences in the arena, it more probably refers to opponents encountered at Ephesus. "Fighting beasts" is a well-documented metaphor at this time for struggling with opponents. The intense opposition which he

<sup>33</sup>Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

<sup>34</sup>Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

<sup>35</sup>But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

met at Ephesus is also well documented (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8ff.; Acts 19:1ff., esp. 21ff.; 20:17ff.).

[32b] Yet a third tack is taken in verses 32ff. Returning to the approach used earlier where he assumes their position for the sake of argument, and then presses its consequences (cf. verses 12ff.), he now insists that **if the dead are not raised**, all moral restraints should be lifted, and all should satiate themselves. The quotation "**Let us eat . . .**" is from Isaiah 22:13 (cf. Luke 12:19).

[33] This may provide more insight into the Corinthians' position. If they were assuming that only the living *will* share the resurrection hope, it was only a short step to claiming that the living *are* sharing the resurrection hope. Verse 33 indicates clearly that their misconception of the resurrection was directly related to their immoral conduct. We have already noted (cf. remarks above on 15:12) how one could claim to be raised already, and that "already being raised" could stress matters of the "mind and spirit" while relegating matters of the "body" to relative unimportance. The quotation is from the Hellenistic playwright Menander.

[34] To the Corinthian attitude Paul retorts, **Come to your right mind, and sin no more**. Apparently those whom he addresses were claiming "knowledge of God," otherwise his statement **some have no knowledge** would have no point. A "spiritual" understanding of resurrection is fully compatible with a claim to full knowledge (*gnōsis*); for one thing, both involve only the mind and the spirit; neither is "bodily." As "enlightened" as their outlook appears to be, Paul can only rebuke them, and this is to their **shame**.

**The Resurrection Body, 15:35-58.** [35] One possible deterrent to believing that the dead would be raised was the question: How? Everyone knew that the corpse decayed, eventually leaving a skeleton as the only vestige of human

**<sup>36</sup>You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup>For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup>There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.**

---

life. Experience had also taught that bodies could be mutilated in battle, dismembered in the arena, consumed in fires, or lost at sea. It was by no means unusual to ask, "If the dead are raised, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

[36, 37] Paul's response is an appeal to nature, which often provides him analogies for explaining the mysteries of life, and in this instance, the mysteries of death. His response once again assumes the form of a diatribe: the imaginary interlocutor puts the objector's question, which was in no sense imaginary, but urgently real. **You foolish man!** This is a typical way for a wise philosopher to counter opponents, but singularly appropriate in this instance, because his addressees apparently claim to be in their "right mind," and full of divine "knowledge." They, of all people, should have been able to perceive the simple lessons of nature!

[38] Paul scarcely had to demonstrate that the life cycle of plants was the work of God; both pagans and Jews would easily concede that seedtime and harvest were the result of divine power and under divine control. Nothing was more self-evident to the ancients. God was thus responsible for the "form" (body) of both seeds and sprouts.

[39-41] Nature also taught a further lesson: there are different forms in which life occurs: one form for men, another form for animals, birds, and fish. These are not intended as "scientific" subdivisions, but categories observable in everyday experience. These are examples

<sup>42</sup>So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

---

drawn from earthly life; they are **terrestrial bodies**. The heavens exhibit the same variety of forms: **celestial bodies**. Their essential difference from terrestrial forms is indicated by the word **glory**, which here could also be rendered "form of radiance." Hence there are different forms in which the radiance of the heavens is manifested: one **glory of the sun**, another of the **moon and stars**.

Nature thus teaches both a difference in form, or glory, between **terrestrial bodies** and **celestial bodies**, but also between modes of life within each order. The effect of all these observations is cumulative, and the point is the same: there are different forms of existence and they are attributable to God himself.

[42-44] These analogies from nature, firmly established by their self-evident quality, enable Paul to explain the mystery of the resurrection of the dead. Two things are fundamental to his remarks that follow. One is the distinction earlier established between two forms of existence, whether they are described as "that which is sown" and "that which is to die" (vss. 36, 37), or "terrestrial" and "celestial" (vs. 40). His descriptive terms appear in pairs: there are two modes of existence, variously denoted, **perishable** and **imperishable** (vs. 42), **sown in dishonor** and **raised in glory** (vs. 43), etc. The other is the metaphor of sowing, introduced in verse 36: "what is sown must first be buried, i.e., die, before it comes to life." It provides the image vividly illustrating dying and rising. His analysis of the resurrection employs both points: there are two modes of existence, and "sowing" (death) is the essential point at which the transformation from one to the other occurs, **sown perishable . . . raised imperishable; sown in dishonor . . . raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a physical body, raised a spiritual body**. The metaphor reaches

<sup>45</sup>Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall<sup>c</sup> also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities read *let us*

---

its literary climax at verse 44. It allows Paul to move from the known: the existence of the physical body, to the unknown: the existence of a spiritual body.

[45, 46] At this point, his explanation is reinforced by appealing to the Old Testament (Gen. 2:7). The figure **Adam** is introduced as the representative man (with a little "m"); beside him is placed Christ, the representative Man (with a capital "M"). To the first Adam, God gave the first physical body: **Adam became a living being** (Gen. 2:7). To the second Adam, or the last Adam, Christ, God gave the first spiritual body. Their essential difference—and the Greek makes this clear — is that the former was essentially *life-receiving*, whereas the latter was *life-giving*. It is this which renders one physical and the other spiritual. It was the last Adam upon whom and within whom the Spirit of God dwelt; by raising him from the dead, God breathed into history a second breath of life, and vividly confirmed another mode of existence which wholly transcended physical life: **spiritual life**. But it succeeds the physical instead of replacing the physical: **it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual**. Spiritual life is the hope which the resurrection of the last Adam confirmed and will eventually provide; it is inaccessible to those who are still in the physical body.

[47-49] All are indebted to the first Adam for physical life—but since he was a **man of dust**, physical life is essentially earthbound. All are indebted to the second Adam for spiritual life, whose origin is from heaven. Physical life bears the indelible stamp of the **man of dust**; it is earthbound and perishable; it shows signs of dishonor

<sup>50</sup>I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

<sup>51</sup>Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

---

and weakness. Spiritual life, on the other hand, bears the indelible stamp (image) of the man of heaven: it is imperishable, radiating glory and power. But it is future: we shall bear the image of the man of heaven.

[50] Until now, Paul has only been concerned to stress that there are two modes of existence, and that the transformation from one to the other requires death. This is the first explicit reference where he insists that the change is inevitably in the future. The basis for this is provided by verse 50: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because perishable life which bears the stamp of the "man of dust," does not inherit the imperishable, i.e., that life which bears the stamp of the "man of heaven."

The obvious question would now be—When?

[51] The spiritual man who has the mind of Christ, to whom is revealed the secrets of the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:14ff.) now unfolds the answer: Lo! I tell you a mystery. He is now providing them instruction in the true wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6ff.).

Because participation in spiritual life is out of the question for those who still bear the image of Adam, and have a "dust-like" existence, a change is required. But, is this also true for the dead? Do they still bear the image of Adam or do they, at death, assume the image of the last Adam?

[52-54a] Paul's following remarks do not give a clear answer. At the end of history, graphically depicted here in the language of Jewish apocalyptic, the dead will be raised

**"Death is swallowed up in victory."**

<sup>55</sup>**"O death, where is thy victory?"**

**O death, where is thy sting?"**

<sup>56</sup>**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.**

<sup>57</sup>**But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

<sup>58</sup>**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

---

imperishable, and the living shall be changed. Whether they are raised already imperishable, or whether their resurrection provides them an imperishable body, is not clear. But Paul's remarks appear to encompass both the dead and the living. Both appear to be in view through verse 54. The perishable must put on the imperishable; the mortal must put on immortality. Whether living or dead, at the resurrection they are "clothed with" a new nature; the image is literally that of one putting on a garment; it is implied that one has first disrobed, putting off the old garment; one nature replaces the other.

[54b-55] The Old Testament quotation in verses 54b-55, drawn (probably) from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, still appears to have both the dead and the living in view. First, death is destroyed: the dead are raised and the living are transformed. Death is seen to be powerless over the dead: **"O death, where is thy victory?"** Death's victory over those who had already died was only apparent, not real. But, death is also powerless over the living: **"O death, where is thy sting?"** Because those who are living are changed, and escape death because of the resurrection, they escape the sting of death.

[56-58] The following remarks pick up the imagery introduced by the Old Testament quotation. Its meaning is unclear. Presumably, Paul means: The sting which death brings is the result of sin; prior to the first resurrection, the world still lived under the force and power of sin (Satan), and the continuance of death documents its continued power. But sin exhibits its power through the law. As long as persons try to justify themselves before God by rigidly adhering to the law, the power of sin is still at work.

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. <sup>2</sup>On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. <sup>3</sup>And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

---

These three things—sin, law, and death—represented to Paul the three essential ingredients of the world order whose doom was sealed when God raised Christ from the dead. They still reigned under the auspices of principalities and powers, but their reign was doomed to pass away. At the final resurrection, they would be destroyed, and the risen Lord would then hand over the reign to the God who had entrusted him with it.

#### *The Contribution, 16:1-4*

[1] The last question of the Corinthians addressed by Paul is **the contribution for the saints** (note the introductory formula, **now concerning**). This is the first mention of the collection in his epistles, but it was by no means a freshly conceived project. Paul had already begun the collection for the Jerusalem poor even before his meeting with the Jewish Christian “pillars” at Jerusalem; the language used indicates that there he agreed to *continue* to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10). When he had so directed Galatia about the collection is not known.

[2-4] His instructions are procedural for the most part. The Corinthians are urged to set aside funds: **put something aside and store it up**, and to do so regularly: **on the first day of every week**. Properly done, this would alleviate last-minute attempts when Paul arrived.

Apparently, the Corinthians took this part of Paul’s instructions less seriously than other parts of his letter, because his extensive appeal in 2 Corinthians 8-9 seems to suggest that they were dragging their feet. The reasons are not known, but they may have simply been unsympathetic to the proposal in general.



<sup>5</sup>I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, <sup>6</sup>and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may speed me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not want to see you now just in passing; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. <sup>8</sup>But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup>for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

---

Paul viewed the collection itself as far more than a charitable gesture, although it certainly was that. It had immense theological significance for him, not only in confirming the legitimacy of his mission to the Gentiles but also in fitting in with his overall mission strategy (cf. commentary on 2 Cor. 8-9; also Rom. 15:22ff.; Gal. 2:10).

One persistent question about the collection is why it is not more prominently discussed in Acts (though cf. Acts 11:29f.; 12:25; 24:17).

Also interesting to note is that at this time Paul is not planning definitely to go to Jerusalem himself. But, if necessary, he will go and the delegates will accompany him.

## CONCLUDING MATTERS, 16:5-24

### *Travel Plans, 16:5-12*

[5-9] Paul's intention to visit has already been mentioned twice (4:19ff.; 11:34); he now elaborates on those plans in more detail. Writing from Ephesus (vs. 8), probably in the early spring, he intends to visit the Corinthians after passing through Macedonia. His travel plans are no doubt being made around his final efforts in completing the collection; this will be his last trip through Macedonia and Achaia, trying to complete this project which has preoccupied him through his 5-7 years in this part of his mission to the Gentiles.

A brief glimpse into his situation in Ephesus is provided. The mention of many adversaries simply confirms the picture of his turbulent ministry in Ephesus known from other references (1 Cor. 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:8ff.; Acts 19:1ff.). Still, a wide door suggests that productive work still lay ahead.

<sup>10</sup>When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am.

<sup>11</sup>So let no one despise him. Speed him on his way in peace, that he may return to me; for I am expecting him with the brethren.

<sup>12</sup>As for our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brethren, but it was not at all his will<sup>a</sup> to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

<sup>13</sup>Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. <sup>14</sup>Let all that you do be done in love.

<sup>a</sup> Or *God's will for him*

[10, 11] On Timothy, see Introduction. Earlier (4:14ff.), Paul indicated that he had sent Timothy, whereas here it appears that Timothy had not yet arrived in Corinth. Perhaps he was still en route, having gone through Macedonia.

His remarks about Timothy are complimentary, as usual (cf. 4:14ff.), but not as complimentary as they will later be (cf. Phil. 2:19ff.). This is the time in which Timothy is emerging into greater prominence by **doing the work of the Lord** as Paul does. His relatively young age no doubt explains why some would not take him seriously: **let no one despise him.**

**Speed him on his way** implies "provide him with resources." The identity of the **brethren** who will accompany him is not known.

[12] On Apollos, see Introduction. Apollos is obviously in Ephesus with Paul, still warmly regarded by Paul: **our brother.** There is no hint of friction here, even if Apollos' presence in Corinth might have engendered strong feelings of personal loyalty. His reluctance to return is unexplained, but not unexplainable. Aware of the situation (cf. 1:10ff.), he may be understandably reluctant to return, fearing that his presence may exacerbate an already unsettled situation.

### *Exhortations, 16:13-18*

[13, 14] Frequently at the end of Paul's epistles he includes what appear to be random words of exhortation (cf. 1 Thess. 5:15ff.). Reminders of this sort had already been mentioned in the epistle (cf. e.g., 1 Cor. 15:58). It is

<sup>15</sup>Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; <sup>16</sup>I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer. <sup>17</sup>I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; <sup>18</sup>for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men.

<sup>19</sup>The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. <sup>20</sup>All the brethren send greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

---

one of his several exhortations for the Corinthians to pursue love: Let all things you do be done in love (cf. vs. 22).

[15-18] On the household of Stephanas, see Introduction. To be first converts was not yet an official position of honor as it was later to become in the second century, but it is already worth honorable mention (cf. Rom. 16:5). They distinguished themselves primarily for their service of the saints, which may not only mean their work within the Corinthian church generally, but also that they had already taken the initiative in contributing to the collection for the saints. If the latter, their example is intended to be even more instructive for the Corinthians.

Such service deserved not only respect but submission. The church is urged to be subject (*hypotassō*) to such men. It is the same language elsewhere used of churches being asked to be subordinate to their elders and leaders (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 5:5).

The coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had probably brought to Paul the Corinthians' list of questions, as well as a report about their general welfare and problems. This delegation probably delivered the epistle of 1 Corinthians to the church, and were possibly instructed by Paul how to read it aloud before the church.

#### *Greetings, 16:19-22*

[19, 20] Asia means western Asia Minor, especially the churches in the vicinity of Ephesus, e.g., Miletus. It indicates the degree of Paul's success in this area. Churches means, of course, "house-churches."

**<sup>21</sup>I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. <sup>22</sup>If any one has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!<sup>c</sup> <sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>24</sup>My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

<sup>c</sup> Greek *Maranatha*

With Paul at Ephesus are Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca) (cf. Introduction). The church in their house reveals that their house typically became a place where the saints met, and also probably says something about their economic position.

The holy kiss seems to have been a typical form of Christian greeting (cf. Rom. 16:16); it is to be understood as the greeting used by Christians when assembling to worship.

[21] Paul's final reminder that he is personally signing the greeting indicates that the rest of the letter had been written, i.e., copied, by an amanuensis, perhaps Sosthenes (cf. 1:1). This appears to have been Paul's typical practice (Rom. 16:22).

[22] The letter concludes on a pointed note, in which love is a prominent feature. But here, it is love for the Lord instead of love for each other. Probably it is to be read as a final word addressed to the "spirituals" who had earlier been reminded that "love for God" is the beginning of "knowledge"; without the former, one is accursed.

Our Lord, come! is a striking expression primarily because it appears as an Aramaic word (*Marana tha*) in the middle of a Greek text. It has been the subject of much debate, and is capable of meaning either "Our Lord has come!" or "May our Lord come!" Given the prominence throughout the epistle of references to the end, it probably means the latter here (cf. Rev. 22:20).

#### *Benediction, 16:23, 24*

[23, 24] Paul typically concludes his epistles with a benediction, although the form in each of his epistles is worth close examination. The benedictions are not uniform either in length (cf. Rom. 16:25-27) or in content (2 Cor. 13:13). Grace is commonly mentioned and was of great theological significance.







