1 CORINTHIANS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The word of the cross, one body in Christ,
the greatest of these is love, and the hope of the resurrection

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 1 Corinthians. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

1 Corinthians may be the most practical letter in the New Testament. Paul writes to a young church in a hard city, a church with every gift it could want and a long list of problems. In sixteen chapters he deals with division, pride, sexual sin, lawsuits, marriage, food offered to idols, worship, spiritual gifts, love, and the resurrection of the dead. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 1 Corinthians. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 1 Corinthians. It is one half of a conversation. Paul had heard reports about the church (1:11), and the church had written him a letter with questions (7:1). Much of the letter answers those reports and those questions one at a time, and Paul often signals a new question with the words "Now concerning" (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). Sometimes he even quotes the Corinthians' own sayings back to them before he corrects them (6:12-13; 8:1). If we pull a verse out of that setting, we can easily make Paul say the opposite of what he meant. If we read it in its place, we see a pastor working through real problems with real people, and pointing them back to Christ crucified every time.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. 1 Corinthians is a real letter that answers real questions, and this study takes Paul at his word: Christ really did die for our sins and rise again on the third day

(15:3-4), the Holy Spirit really does live in each believer and in the church, and God really does care how His people live with their bodies, their marriages, their money, and one another.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: sixteen weeks. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- One Scripture part a week: most chapters are printed in two or three Scripture parts, and the start of each part is a natural place to stop. This pace takes most of a year and gives the longer chapters, such as 7, 14 and 15, the time they need. Short chapters such as 2, 5, 8 and 13 can be taken in one meeting.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 1 Corinthians touch painful or hard subjects: sexual sin in the church and church discipline (5:1-13), lawsuits between believers (6:1-8), the list of sins in 6:9-11, including sexual sin

and sexual relations between men, and the call to sexual purity (6:12-20), marriage, singleness, divorce, and marriage to an unbelieving spouse, and slavery (chapter 7), the roles of men and women in worship (11:2-16; 14:34-35), God's discipline of those who took the Lord's Supper carelessly, including sickness and death (11:27-32), spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues (chapters 12 to 14), and death and grief (chapter 15). On some of these, good Bible teachers disagree, and where they do, the study gives the main views fairly. Some in your group may have been through divorce, sexual sin, or abuse, or may love someone who has. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 1 Corinthians. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians is the seventh book of the New Testament. It sits between Romans and 2 Corinthians. It is one of Paul's letters to churches, and it is the first of two letters in our Bibles that he wrote to the believers in the city of Corinth. As we will see below, Paul and the Corinthians wrote to each other more than these two times.

The church in Corinth was gifted. Paul says they were "not lacking in any gift" (1:7). But it was also proud, divided, and confused about how a believer should live. Some of its members were following the habits of the city instead of the ways of Christ. Paul does not answer them with a list of rules. Again and again he brings them back to the cross. The message of a crucified Savior looks foolish to the world, but it is God's power to save, and it turns every proud human idea upside down. Paul gives us the heart of the letter early:

1 Corinthians 1:18 (SLB)

"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

From there Paul works through one problem after another: division over leaders, a case of open sexual sin, believers suing each other, questions about marriage and singleness, food offered to idols, disorder at the Lord's Supper, the use and misuse of spiritual gifts, and doubts about the resurrection of the dead. In the middle of it all stands chapter 13, where Paul shows that love is the more excellent way. And near the end stands chapter 15, the fullest teaching in the Bible on the resurrection. Christ "has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (15:4), and because He rose, His people will rise too.

1 Corinthians has 16 chapters and 437 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Divisions and the Wisdom of the Cross (chapters 1 to 4)

- Chapter 1: Christ Crucified, the Wisdom of God
- Chapter 2: The Spirit Reveals God's Wisdom
- Chapter 3: God's Field and God's Building
- Chapter 4: Faithful Servants of Christ

Part Two: Sin in the Church and the Body for the Lord (chapters 5 and 6)

- Chapter 5: Sin in the Church
- Chapter 6: Lawsuits and the Body as God's Temple

Part Three: Answers to the Church's Questions (chapters 7 to 10)

- Chapter 7: Marriage and Singleness
- Chapter 8: Love Builds Up
- Chapter 9: Paul's Rights and the Race to Win

- Chapter 10: Lessons From Israel and the Lord's Table

Part Four: Order and Love in Worship (chapters 11 to 14)

- Chapter 11: Order in Worship and the Lord's Supper
- Chapter 12: One Body, Many Gifts
- Chapter 13: The Love Chapter
- Chapter 14: Prophecy, Tongues, and Order

Part Five: The Resurrection and Final Words (chapters 15 and 16)

- Chapter 15: The Resurrection
- Chapter 16: The Collection and Final Words

Background of the Book

Author: The letter opens with "Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother" (1:1), and it closes with Paul's own greeting in his own hand (16:21). Sosthenes may be the same man who was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth and was beaten in front of the Roman governor's judgment seat (Acts 18:17). If so, he had come to faith in Christ since then and was now with Paul. Scripture does not say for sure. Paul is the one speaking all through the letter, and Sosthenes joins him in the greeting. Some modern scholars doubt that Paul wrote a few of the letters that carry his name, but almost no one, old or new, doubts that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. A church leader in Rome named Clement wrote to the same church near the end of the first century and told them to take up again the letter Paul had written to them. I take the letter at its word, as the church always has.

Who it was written to: Paul writes "to the church of God which is in Corinth" (1:2). Most of its members were Gentiles, people who were not Jewish by birth. Paul reminds them that they used to be led away to idols (12:2). There were also Jewish believers, such as Crispus, the former ruler of the synagogue (1:14; Acts 18:8). A few members were well off, but most were ordinary people: "not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many of noble birth" (1:26). Some were slaves (7:21). The church most likely met in homes, as churches did in those days (16:19).

The city of Corinth: Corinth sat on the narrow strip of land, called an isthmus, that joins the southern part of Greece to the mainland. It had a port on each side, Lechaeum to the west and Cenchrea to the east (Romans 16:1; Acts 18:18). Ships and goods moved across the isthmus rather than sail the dangerous seas around the southern tip of Greece, and that made Corinth rich. The old Greek city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. About a hundred years later, in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman colony. By Paul's day it was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, a busy city of traders, sailors, soldiers, freed slaves, and people from all over the empire. It hosted the Isthmian Games, a great athletic festival held every two years, and Paul's pictures of runners and boxers in 9:24-27 would have made sense to every reader. Above the city stood a high rock hill called the Acrocorinth, with a temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, on top. Temples and idols were everywhere in the city. Corinth had a name for wealth, pride, and sexual looseness. Long before Paul, the Greeks had even used the city's name as a word for living an immoral life. The problems in this letter did not come out of nowhere. The church lived in Corinth, and too much of Corinth lived in the church.

How the church began: Paul first came to Corinth on his second missionary journey, about A.D. 50, after preaching in Athens (Acts 18:1). There he met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had been forced to leave Rome when the emperor Claudius ordered all the Jews out of the city. They were tentmakers, as Paul was, and he stayed and worked with them (Acts 18:2-3). Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue. When Silas and Timothy came, Paul gave himself fully to preaching that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:5). Most of the synagogue turned against him, so he moved next door to the house of a man named Justus. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed with his whole household, and many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized (Acts 18:7-8). The Lord told Paul in a vision, "Do not fear, but keep speaking, and do not be silent" (Acts 18:9), because He had many people in that city. Paul stayed a year and six months (Acts 18:11). Near the

end of that time, the Jewish leaders brought him before Gallio, the Roman proconsul, or governor, of Achaia, who threw the case out (Acts 18:12-17). An inscription found at Delphi in Greece dates Gallio's time in office to about A.D. 51 to 52, and it is one of the best fixed dates we have for Paul's life. After Paul left, a gifted Jewish teacher from Alexandria named Apollos came to Corinth and helped the believers greatly (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1).

Letters between Paul and Corinth: Paul wrote to Corinth more than twice. Before 1 Corinthians he had written them an earlier letter telling them not to associate with sexually immoral people (5:9). That letter has not been kept for us. Then news came. People from Chloe's household told Paul about quarrels in the church (1:11). Three men from Corinth, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, came to see him (16:17), and the church sent a letter with questions (7:1). 1 Corinthians is Paul's answer to the reports and to the letter. After it, things got harder. 2 Corinthians tells us of a painful visit (2 Corinthians 2:1) and a letter Paul wrote "through many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4), before Titus brought good news that most of the church had turned back. Then Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

When and where it was written: Paul wrote from Ephesus. He says, "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost" (16:8), and he sends greetings from "the churches of Asia" and from Aquila and Priscilla (16:19). He was near the end of his long stay of about three years in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10; 20:31). Most scholars date the letter about A.D. 55, a few years after the church began.

Purpose: Paul writes to bring a divided, proud church back to Christ crucified. He corrects their divisions and their pride, deals with sin they had let go, answers their questions about marriage, freedom, worship and spiritual gifts, and sets out the truth of the resurrection that some of them had begun to deny (15:12). Through it all he wants them to see that the cross changes everything: how we think, how we treat one another, what we do with our bodies, and how we worship. And he wants them to do it all in love (16:14).

Chapter 1: Christ Crucified, the Wisdom of God

Scripture

1:1-9 Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through ***the*** will of God, and Sosthenes the brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth, to ***those*** sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, together with all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, just as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to ***the*** end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God ***is*** faithful, through whom you were called into ***the*** fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

1:10-17 Now I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each of you says, "I indeed am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that I baptized into my name. Now I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not in wisdom of speech, so that the cross of Christ may not be made empty.

1:18-31 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is ***the*** power of God. For it has been written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will set aside." Where ***is the*** wise ***man***? Where ***is the*** scribe? Where ***is the*** debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through the wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who believe. Since both Jews ask for a sign and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews indeed a stumbling block, but to Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ ***the*** power of God and ***the*** wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers, that ***there are*** not many wise according to ***the*** flesh, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world, so that He might put the wise to shame; and God chose the weak things of the world, so that He might put the strong things to shame; and God chose the lowborn things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, so that He might bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before Him. But from Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, just as it has been written, "The one who boasts, let him boast in ***the*** Lord."

Chapter 1 Preview

Paul opens his letter to the church in Corinth with a greeting and a word of thanks. Before he says one word about their problems, he reminds them who they are. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called saints. God has given them grace, enriched them with every gift, and He will keep them to the end. God is faithful. That is where Paul starts, and it is where every correction in this letter is rooted.

Then he goes straight to the first problem: division. The believers were lining up behind their favorite leaders, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or even Christ, as if the church were a set of teams. Paul asks whether Christ has been divided. He answers the problem with the cross. The message of a crucified Savior looks foolish to the world, weak to the Jews who wanted signs and silly to the Greeks who prized wisdom. But to those who are called, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. God chose the weak and the lowly so that no one can boast before Him. If we boast, we boast in the Lord.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through **the** will of God, and Sosthenes the brother,*

"Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God," An apostle is one who is sent. In the New Testament, the apostles were men chosen and sent by the risen Lord Himself to lay the foundation of the church. Paul did not appoint himself. He was called, and that happened "through the will of God." Some in Corinth would question his authority (4:3; 9:1-3), so he makes it plain from the first line.

With him is "Sosthenes the brother." A synagogue ruler in Corinth named Sosthenes was beaten before the Roman governor when the Jews brought Paul to court (Acts 18:17). Many believe this is the same man, now a believer and working with Paul. Scripture doesn't say for sure, but if it is, what a picture of God's grace.

1:2 *to the church of God which is in Corinth, to **those** sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, together with all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours:*

Paul writes "to the church of God which is in Corinth." Notice whose church it is. It is not Paul's church or Apollos' church. It is the church of God. That alone answers much of chapter 1.

The believers are "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." To be sanctified means to be set apart for God. The word saint comes from the same root and means a holy one. In the Bible every believer is a saint, not only a few special Christians. This is true of us because we are "in Christ Jesus," not because we have earned it. Later in this letter Paul will rebuke the Corinthians for many sins, yet he still calls them saints. Our standing comes first, and it is the reason we are called to live holy lives.

Paul also reminds them that they belong to a bigger family: "all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place." Corinth was not the whole church.

1:3 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and **the** Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This is Paul's usual greeting, but it is not an empty one. Grace is God's undeserved favor. Peace is the wholeness and rest that come when we are right with God. Grace always comes first, and peace flows from it.

Grace and peace come from two Persons, "God our Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul puts Jesus right beside the Father as the source of these blessings. No mere man could stand in that place. From the first verses, Paul treats Jesus as Lord and God.

1:4 *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus,*

"I thank my God always concerning you." This is remarkable when we think of what is coming. This church was divided, proud, and tolerating open sin. Yet Paul thanks God for them, and he means it.

What does he thank God for? Not for their behavior, but "for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus." Paul looked past their failures to what God had done in them. That is a good lesson for us when we deal with a hard church or a hard believer. Start by thanking God for His work in them. It is easier to correct someone when you can honestly see God's grace in his life.

1:5-6 *that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, just as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,*

"In everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge." The Corinthians had plenty of gifted speakers and plenty of knowledge. Those were exactly the things they were proud of, and Paul will deal with that pride later (8:1; 13:1-2). But first he says plainly that these gifts came from God. They were enriched "in Him."

This happened "just as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." The testimony of Christ is the gospel about Him, which Paul preached in Corinth. When they believed it, God confirmed it in their lives. Their changed lives and their spiritual gifts were proof that the message was true.

1:7 *so that you are not lacking in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"So that you are not lacking in any gift." The Corinthian church had no shortage of spiritual gifts. Their problem was not a lack of gifts. It was a lack of love and maturity. Gifts are not a sign of spiritual maturity. A church can be rich in gifts and still be immature, as chapters 12 to 14 will show.

And they were "eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." The revelation of Christ is His coming, when He will be seen as He is. The early church lived looking for Jesus to come. That hope is meant to shape how we live today (1 John 3:2-3). Paul will say more about what happens when He comes for His people in 15:51-52.

1:8 *who will also confirm you to **the** end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Who will confirm them? The word may point back to the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of verse 7, or ahead to God, whom Paul names in the next verse. Either way, the One who began His work in them would finish it (Philippians 1:6).

"Blameless" does not mean they were sinless now. It means no charge will stand against them on that day, because they are in Christ. "The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" points to the day He comes and His people stand before Him. Paul is about to correct these believers sharply, but he wants them to know the correction does not mean God has given up on them.

1:9 *God **is** faithful, through whom you were called into **the** fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

"God is faithful." This short sentence carries the weight of the whole opening. Our security does not rest on our faithfulness. It rests on His.

God called them "into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Fellowship means sharing life together. Believers share in Christ, and in Him they share with one another. The word appears again in 10:16 for the Lord's Supper. Keep this verse in mind as you read the next one. If we are all called into fellowship with the same Son, how can we be divided against each other?

1:10 *Now I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Now Paul turns to the first problem. "I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." He has named Christ nine times in the first nine verses, and now he appeals to them in that same name.

He asks for three things. First, "that you all speak the same thing." Second, "there be no divisions among you." The word for divisions is schismata, from which we get the word schism. It was used of a tear in cloth. Third, that they "be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." The word for made complete was used of mending nets. Paul wants the torn church mended.

This does not mean believers will agree on every small matter. Paul himself will allow room for differences of conscience in chapter 8. But they must not split into camps.

1:11 *For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are quarrels among you.*

"For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are quarrels among you." Chloe was most likely a woman known to the church, and "those of Chloe" were probably members of her household, perhaps family or servants, who had traveled to Ephesus and told Paul what was going on.

Paul names his source. He does not pass along anonymous gossip. He also calls them "my brothers" even as he brings up the problem. The word for quarrels means arguments and rivalry. The church was fighting.

1:12 *Now I mean this, that each of you says, "I indeed am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

Each of them was saying, "I indeed am of Paul," or "I of Apollos," or "I of Cephas," or "I of Christ." Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter. Some in Corinth were proud to follow Paul, who founded the church. Others liked Apollos, the gifted speaker from Alexandria (Acts 18:24-28). Others claimed Peter, perhaps Jewish believers who liked the leading apostle to the Jews.

And then there were those who said, "I of Christ." That sounds like the right answer, but it seems they used even Christ's name as a badge to look down on everyone else. Have you ever met someone like that? You can say all the right words and still have a proud and divisive spirit.

None of these leaders asked for a fan club. Paul and Apollos worked together (3:6; 16:12). The problem was not the leaders. It was the people's pride.

1:13 *Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?*

Paul answers with three sharp questions. "Has Christ been divided?" Christ has one body, and it cannot be cut into pieces and handed out to different groups. "Paul was not crucified for you, was he?" Of course not. Only Christ died for them. "Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" No. They were baptized in the name of Jesus, because they belonged to Him.

Each question points to Christ. He is the One who was crucified for us, and He is the One we belong to. No pastor, teacher, or writer, however gifted, can take His place. When we start building our identity around a human leader, we have lost sight of the cross.

1:14-16 *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that I baptized into my name. Now I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.*

"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius." Crispus was the synagogue ruler who believed with his household (Acts 18:8). Gaius may be the man who hosted Paul and the church when Paul later wrote Romans from Corinth (Romans 16:23).

Why is Paul thankful? "So that no one may say that I baptized into my name." If he had baptized many, some might have formed a party around that. Then he remembers one more: "I also baptized the household of Stephanas." Stephanas was one of the first believers in that region (16:15). Paul is honest: "I do not know whether I baptized any other." The Holy Spirit inspired what Paul wrote, but that did not mean Paul was given a list of every person he had baptized years before. He writes like a real man, remembering as he goes.

1:17 *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not in wisdom of speech, so that the cross of Christ may not be made empty.*

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul is not saying baptism doesn't matter. Jesus commanded it (Matthew 28:19), and Paul baptized people. But baptism is the believer's obedient public step after faith. It does not save. What brings a person to faith is the gospel. Paul's main calling was to preach it.

And he preached it "not in wisdom of speech, so that the cross of Christ may not be made empty." The Greeks loved polished speakers who could win a crowd with clever words. Paul refused to win people that way. If people came to Christ because of a speaker's skill, their faith would rest on the speaker. The power is in the message of the cross, not in the messenger.

1:18 *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the** power of God.*

This is the key verse of the chapter. "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

"The word of the cross" is the message that Jesus died on a Roman cross to pay for our sins. To the ancient world, crucifixion was the most shameful death there was. It was used for slaves and rebels. To say that God's Son died that way, and that this death saves, sounded like nonsense.

There are only two groups in this verse: "those who are perishing" and "us who are being saved." How a person responds to the cross shows which group he is in. To one group the message is foolish. To the other it is "the power of God." The gospel does not just tell us about God's power. It is His power at work, saving those who believe (Romans 1:16).

1:19 *For it has been written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will set aside."*

Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will set aside." In Isaiah's day, the leaders of Judah trusted their own clever plans and political deals instead of trusting God. God said He would bring their wisdom to nothing.

Paul says the cross does the same thing. God's way of saving people does not depend on human brilliance. The smartest people in the world cannot reason their way to God, and the cross shows how far off their wisdom was. God sets it aside.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 29:14 (quoted)

1:20 *Where **is the** wise **man**? Where **is the** scribe? Where **is the** debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

Paul asks four questions. "Where is the wise man?" This may be the Greek philosopher. "Where is the scribe?" A scribe was a Jewish expert in the Law of Moses. "Where is the debater of this age?" This was the skilled arguer who could win any debate. Paul lines up the best minds of his world, Jewish and Greek, and asks where they are now.

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" The answer is yes. With all their learning, the wise men of that age did not recognize God's Son. They crucified Him (2:8). The cross exposed their wisdom as foolishness.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 19:12 (alluded to); Isaiah 33:18 (alluded to); Isaiah 44:25 (alluded to)

1:21 *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through the wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who believe.*

"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through the wisdom did not know God." God in His wisdom set things up so that people could not find Him by human wisdom alone. The great thinkers of Greece wrote about many things, but they did not come to know the true God.

So "God was pleased through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who believe." Notice the words. It is not foolish preaching that saves. It is the message preached, which the world calls foolish. And it saves "those who believe." Salvation is not for the clever or the well-educated. It is for anyone who believes. A child and a professor come to God the same way.

1:22 *Since both Jews ask for a sign and Greeks seek wisdom,*

"Both Jews ask for a sign and Greeks seek wisdom." The Jews wanted proof by power. Again and again they asked Jesus for a sign from heaven (Matthew 12:38; John 6:30). They expected a Messiah who would show His power and drive out Rome.

The Greeks wanted proof by reason. They loved philosophy and debate (Acts 17:21). They wanted a message that would satisfy their minds.

People are not so different today. Some say they will believe if God shows them a miracle. Others say they will believe if someone can prove it to them with an argument. Both want God to come to them on their terms.

1:23 *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews indeed a stumbling block, but to Greeks foolishness,*

"But we preach Christ crucified." Paul did not change the message to fit what people wanted. He did not give the Jews a show of power, or the Greeks a new philosophy. He gave both the same thing: a crucified Messiah.

To the Jews this was "a stumbling block." The word is skandalon, from which we get scandal. A Messiah who was hanged on a tree seemed impossible to them, since the Law said a man hanged on a tree was under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). To the Greeks it was "foolishness." Why would anyone worship a man who died like a criminal? The cross offended both.

1:24 *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the** power of God and **the** wisdom of God.*

"But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Here is the turn. To those whom God has called, the very thing that looked weak and foolish turns out to be exactly what they were looking for.

The Jews wanted power. In Christ crucified they find "the power of God," power to forgive sin and give new life. The Greeks wanted wisdom. In Christ crucified they find "the wisdom of God," the plan God made before the ages to save sinners and still be just (Romans 3:26). The called here are the same people as "those who believe" in verse 21. God's call and our faith go together.

1:25 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Paul is not saying God is really foolish or weak. He is speaking from the world's point of view. Even what the world calls God's foolishness is wiser than all human wisdom put together. Even what looks like God's weakness, His Son dying on a cross, is stronger than all the power of men.

The cross looked like defeat. Rome and the Jewish leaders thought they had won. Three days later the tomb was empty. God's "weakness" broke the power of sin and death.

1:26 *For consider your calling, brothers, that **there are** not many wise according to **the** flesh, not many powerful, not many of noble birth.*

"For consider your calling, brothers." Paul asks them to look around the room. Who did God save in Corinth? "Not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many of noble birth." Most of the church were ordinary people. Some were slaves (7:21).

Paul says "not many," not "not any." Some in the church had money and position, such as Crispus and Erastus, the city treasurer (Romans 16:23). God saves the rich and the educated too. But He did not build His church on them. If you have ever felt that you were nobody special, take heart. God loves to use nobodies.

1:27-28 *But God chose the foolish things of the world, so that He might put the wise to shame; and God chose the weak things of the world, so that He might put the strong things to shame; and God chose the lowborn things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, so that He might bring to nothing the things that are,*

"But God chose." These words are repeated three times. God chose "the foolish things of the world," "the weak things of the world," and "the lowborn things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not." The world looked at the church in Corinth and saw nothing worth noticing. God looked at them and saw His chosen people.

Why did God do it this way? "So that He might put the wise to shame," "put the strong things to shame," and "bring to nothing the things that are." God's choice turns the world's ranking upside down. Those the world counts as somebody are brought low, and those the world counts as nothing are lifted up. God has done this all through Scripture, choosing a shepherd boy like David, fishermen like Peter, and a persecutor like Paul.

1:29 *so that no flesh may boast before Him.*

"So that no flesh may boast before Him." This is the reason behind everything in verses 26 to 28. "Flesh" here means human beings in their weakness. God saves in a way that leaves no room for human pride.

If God saved the smartest, we could boast in our minds. If He saved the strongest, we could boast in our strength. If He saved the best, we could boast in our goodness. But He saves by grace, through a cross the world calls foolish, and He often chooses the people the world overlooks. No one will stand before God and claim he earned it. The Corinthians were boasting in their leaders and their gifts. Paul tells them that boasting has no place before God.

1:30 *But from Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,*

"But from Him you are in Christ Jesus." Their new life came from God. They did not put themselves into Christ. God did.

And Christ "became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Everything we need, we find in Him. He is our wisdom: we don't need the wisdom of this world. He is our righteousness: God declares us right with Him because of Christ. This is called justification. He is our sanctification: He sets us apart for God and makes us holy. And He is our redemption: He bought us out of slavery to sin with His own blood, and one day He will redeem our bodies too (Romans 8:23). We don't have Christ plus something else. We have it all in Christ.

1:31 *so that, just as it has been written, "The one who boasts, let him boast in **the** Lord."*

"The one who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." Paul sums up Jeremiah 9:23-24. In that passage God says the wise man should not boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the rich man in his riches. If anyone boasts, let him boast that he knows the Lord.

The Corinthians were boasting in men: "I indeed am of Paul," "I of Apollos" (1:12). Paul says the only right boast is in the Lord. Is there any boasting in your life that needs to change? The safest boast for a believer is to point away from ourselves to Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 9:24 (quoted)

Chapter 1 Summary

Paul greets the church of God in Corinth as saints, sanctified in Christ Jesus. He thanks God for the grace given them, the gifts they have, and God's promise to confirm them blameless to the day of Christ, because God is faithful. Then he turns to their quarrels. The church had split into groups around Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even Christ. Paul reminds them that Christ is not divided, that Paul was not crucified for them, and that they were not baptized in his name. His calling was to preach the gospel, not with clever speech that would empty the cross of its power. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but the power of God to those being saved. Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but Paul preaches Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, yet to the called the power and wisdom of God. God chose the foolish, the weak, and the despised, so that no one may boast before Him. Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and whoever boasts must boast in the Lord.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. How does Paul describe the believers in Corinth in 1:2, even though they had serious problems?

2. What does Paul thank God for in 1:4-7, and why is it significant that he starts there?

3. What does 1:8-9 tell us about God's faithfulness to His people?

4. What was the problem Chloe's household reported to Paul? (1:11-12)

5. What three questions does Paul ask in 1:13, and what do they have in common?

6. Why did Paul refuse to preach "in wisdom of speech"? (1:17)

7. What are the two groups of people in 1:18, and how does each see the cross?

8. Why was Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks? (1:22-23)

9. Who does God choose in 1:26-29, and why? How does that encourage you?

10. Is there something other than the Lord that you are tempted to boast in? What would it look like to boast in the Lord instead? (1:31)

Chapter 2: The Spirit Reveals God's Wisdom

Scripture

2:1-16 And I, having come to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my word and my preaching ***were*** not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of ***the*** Spirit and of power, so that your faith may not be in ***the*** wisdom of men, but in ***the*** power of God. But we speak wisdom among the mature, but wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nothing. But we speak ***the*** wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden ***wisdom***, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age has known; for if they had known ***it***, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But just as it has been written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up into ***the*** heart of man, things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God revealed ***them*** to us through His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of the man except the spirit of the man which ***is*** in him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who ***is*** from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in ***words*** taught by ***the*** Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual ***things*** with spiritual ***things***. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know ***them***, because they are spiritually examined. But he who ***is*** spiritual indeed examines all things, but he himself is examined by no one. For who has known ***the*** mind of ***the*** Lord, who will instruct Him? But we have ***the*** mind of Christ.

Chapter 2 Preview

In chapter 1 Paul showed that the message of the cross looks foolish to the world. Now he reminds the Corinthians how he first brought that message to them. He did not come with polished speeches or clever arguments. He came in weakness and fear, determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Their faith did not rest on a speaker's skill. It rested on the power of God, shown by the Spirit.

Then Paul makes it clear that the gospel is not empty of wisdom. There is a true wisdom, God's wisdom, hidden from the rulers of this age but now revealed. No eye could see it and no human mind could think it up. God has revealed it to us by His Spirit, who knows the depths of God. Believers have received that Spirit, and so they can understand what God has freely given them. The natural man cannot accept these things, because they are spiritually examined. But we have the mind of Christ.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And I, having come to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.*

"And I, having come to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom." Paul looks back to the day he first arrived in Corinth, about A.D. 50 (Acts 18:1). Corinth loved speakers. Traveling teachers called sophists went from city to city giving dazzling speeches, and people paid to hear them. Paul could have tried to compete. He chose not to.

He came "proclaiming to you the testimony of God." Paul saw himself as a witness, not a performer. A witness doesn't make up his message. He tells what he has seen and heard. The gospel is God's testimony about His Son, and Paul simply passed it on.

2:2 *For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*

"For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." This was a choice Paul made before he came. He had just come from Athens, where he had reasoned with philosophers (Acts 17:16-34). In Corinth he made up his mind to keep the cross at the center.

This does not mean Paul taught nothing else. He taught the Corinthians for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). It means everything he taught flowed from the cross and led back to it. That is still the test of good preaching. A sermon can be clever, moving, and practical, but if it leaves out Christ crucified, it is missing the heart.

2:3 *And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.*

"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." This is the great apostle Paul. Why was he afraid? He had just been run out of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, and laughed at in Athens (Acts 16 to 17). Corinth was a big, proud, wicked city. It is no wonder he felt weak.

God knew how he felt. In Corinth the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Do not fear, but keep speaking, and do not be silent" (Acts 18:9). Being afraid is not a sin. Paul felt fear and kept going anyway. If you feel weak when you share your faith, you are in good company. God's power works best through people who know they are weak (2 Corinthians 12:9).

2:4 *And my word and my preaching **were** not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of **the** Spirit and of power,*

"And my word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Paul did not use the tricks of the speakers of his day to move a crowd. He did not try to win people with skill.

Instead his preaching came with "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The word for demonstration was used in a court of law for clear proof. The proof that Paul's message was true was what the Holy Spirit did. People's lives were changed. Sinners were made new (6:11). Some

take this also to include the miracles God did through Paul (2 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 15:19). Either way, the power was God's, not Paul's.

2:5 *so that your faith may not be in **the** wisdom of men, but in **the** power of God.*

"So that your faith may not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Here is why Paul preached the way he did. If the Corinthians had come to faith because of a brilliant speech, their faith would rest on a man. The next brilliant speaker might talk them out of it.

But faith that rests on God's power stands firm. This verse speaks to the Corinthian problem from chapter 1. They were boasting in human leaders. Paul says their faith was never meant to rest on any human leader, himself included. What is your faith resting on? A favorite preacher or a strong argument may help us, but our faith must rest on God Himself.

2:6 *But we speak wisdom among the mature, but wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nothing.*

"But we speak wisdom among the mature." Paul does not want them to think the gospel is for simple minds only. There is real wisdom in it, deep and rich. But it is understood by "the mature," those who have grown in the faith and have the Spirit's help. In 3:1-2 Paul will tell the Corinthians they were not yet mature.

This wisdom is "not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nothing." The rulers of this age are the powerful people of the world, the kings, governors, and religious leaders. Some also see the spiritual powers of darkness behind them (Ephesians 6:12). Their power is passing away. God's wisdom lasts forever.

2:7 *But we speak **the** wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden **wisdom**, which God predestined before the ages for our glory,*

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom." In the Bible a mystery is not a puzzle to solve. It is a truth God kept hidden in the past and has now made known. This wisdom is God's plan to save the world through His crucified Son.

God "predestined" this wisdom "before the ages for our glory." To predestine means to decide ahead of time. Before the world was made, God planned the cross and the salvation that comes from it. Nothing about the cross caught God by surprise. And the goal of His plan was "our glory," that His people would one day share in the glory of Christ (Romans 8:30).

2:8 *which none of the rulers of this age has known; for if they had known **it**, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

"Which none of the rulers of this age has known; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Pilate, Herod, and the high priests thought they were in control. They did not understand who Jesus was or what God was doing. If they had understood, they would never have crucified Him, because the cross was the very thing that defeated sin, death, and Satan (Colossians 2:15).

Notice the title Paul gives to the One who was crucified: "the Lord of glory." In the Old Testament, glory belongs to God alone (Isaiah 42:8). The Man who died on the cross was God the Son. That is the wonder of the gospel.

2:9 *But just as it has been written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up into **the** heart of man, things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Paul draws on Isaiah 64:4, and perhaps Isaiah 65:17 as well: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up into the heart of man, things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

This verse is often used to describe heaven, and the things God has prepared for us there are certainly beyond imagining. But in context Paul is talking about something more. No human eye, ear, or mind could ever have discovered God's plan of salvation on its own. People did not figure out the cross. And the next verse says God has now revealed it.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 64:4 (quoted); Isaiah 65:17 (alluded to)

2:10 *But God revealed **them** to us through His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.*

"But God revealed them to us through His Spirit." What no eye could see, God has shown us. He did it "through His Spirit." Paul is speaking first of all of the apostles and prophets, to whom God gave His truth so they could write it down (Ephesians 3:5). But every believer shares in the Spirit's work of helping us understand what God has given.

"For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." The Holy Spirit is not a force. He searches, He knows, He teaches. And He knows God fully, because He is God. Only God can know "the depths of God." This verse is one of many in Scripture that show the Holy Spirit is a divine Person.

2:11 *For who among men knows the things of the man except the spirit of the man which **is** in him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*

Paul gives a simple example. "Who among men knows the things of the man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" You can watch a person, talk with him, and guess what he is thinking, but only he knows his own heart. No one else can get inside his thoughts.

"So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." If we cannot even know another person's thoughts, how could we ever know God's? We cannot, unless He shows us. And the Spirit of God, who knows God's own mind, is the One who reveals Him to us. That is why we need the Spirit to understand the Bible.

2:12 *Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who **is** from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,*

"Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." "The spirit of the world" is the way the world thinks, its values and its so-called wisdom. Believers have received something different. Every believer has received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9).

Why? "So that we may know the things freely given to us by God." What things? Forgiveness, adoption as His children, eternal life, the hope of glory, and all that is ours in Christ (1:30). These are gifts, "freely given." We could never earn them. The Spirit helps us know and enjoy them.

2:13 *which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in **words** taught by **the** Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual **things** with spiritual **things**.*

"Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Holy Spirit." The apostles did not only receive God's truth from the Spirit. They also spoke and wrote it in words the Spirit taught them. This is a strong statement about the inspiration of Scripture. The Spirit guided not just the ideas but the words (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

"Comparing spiritual things with spiritual things." The Greek phrase can be read a few ways. It may mean explaining spiritual truths in spiritual words, or explaining spiritual truths to spiritual people. Either way, God's truth is passed on by the Spirit's help, not by human cleverness.

2:14 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know **them**, because they are spiritually examined.*

"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." The natural man is the person without the Holy Spirit, a person who has not been born again (Jude 19). He may be smart and educated. But spiritual truth makes no sense to him: "they are foolishness to him."

"And he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually examined." This is not just that he won't. Paul says he can't, not on his own. Spiritual truth must be judged with spiritual eyes. That is why arguing someone into the kingdom doesn't work by itself. We share the gospel and we pray, because only the Spirit can open blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). This should make us patient and prayerful with unbelieving friends and family.

2:15 *But he who **is** spiritual indeed examines all things, but he himself is examined by no one.*

"But he who is spiritual indeed examines all things." The spiritual man is the believer who has the Holy Spirit and is led by Him. He can judge rightly about the things of God and about life, because he sees them in God's light.

"But he himself is examined by no one." This does not mean believers are above correction. Paul is about to correct the Corinthians sharply. It means the natural man is not able to judge the spiritual man rightly, because he doesn't understand where the believer's life is coming from. The world may call a believer foolish, but the world is not the final judge. God is (4:3-4).

2:16 *For who has known **the** mind of **the** Lord, who will instruct Him? But we have **the** mind of Christ.*

"For who has known the mind of the Lord, who will instruct Him?" Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13. No one can teach God anything or give Him advice. His mind is far above ours.

"But we have the mind of Christ." This is an amazing claim. We could never know God's mind on our own. But in Christ, through the Spirit, God has shared His thoughts with us. We have the mind of Christ in the Scriptures the Spirit gave and in the Spirit who lives in us. That doesn't mean we know everything. It means we can think about life the way Christ does. Paul will soon show that the Corinthians were not living that way. Having the mind of Christ is a gift. Thinking with it takes growth.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 40:13 (quoted)

Chapter 2 Summary

Paul reminds the Corinthians how he first preached to them. He did not come with fine speeches or human wisdom. He decided to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and he came in weakness, fear, and trembling. His message came with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith would rest on God's power and not on human wisdom. Yet the gospel does contain true wisdom, God's wisdom, hidden in a mystery and planned before the ages for our glory. The rulers of this age did not understand it, or they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. No eye, ear, or human heart could discover what God prepared, but God has revealed it by His Spirit, who searches even the depths of God. Believers have received the Spirit from God, so they can know what God has freely given, and the apostles spoke it in words taught by the Spirit. The natural man cannot accept these things, because they are spiritually examined, but believers have the mind of Christ.

I have felt weak in serving God when I doubted my abilities and my faith. Paul came to Corinth in weakness, fear and much trembling. God still used him. That gives me courage when I feel I am not enough.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. How did Paul come to Corinth, and how did he not come? (2:1-3)

2. What did Paul decide to know among the Corinthians, and what does that mean? (2:2)

3. Why did Paul want their faith to rest on the power of God and not on the wisdom of men? (2:4-5)

4. What does Paul mean by "mystery" in 2:7?

5. Why did the rulers of this age crucify "the Lord of glory"? (2:8)

6. In context, what is Paul talking about in 2:9-10?

7. What does 2:10-11 teach us about the Holy Spirit?

8. Why can't the natural man accept the things of the Spirit of God? (2:14) How should that shape the way you pray for unbelievers?

9. Paul was weak and afraid in Corinth, yet God used him. When have you felt weak in serving God?

10. What would it look like this week to think with "the mind of Christ" about a decision or a problem you face? (2:16)

Chapter 3: God's Field and God's Building

Scripture

3:1-9 And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual ***men***, but as to fleshly ***men***, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, and not solid food; for you were not yet able, but even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For where ***there is*** jealousy and strife and dissensions among you, are you not fleshly, and walking according to man? For whenever someone says, "I indeed am of Paul," and another, "I ***am*** of Apollos," are you not fleshly? Who then is Paul, and who ***is*** Apollos, but servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each? I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing ***it*** to grow. So neither is the one who plants anything, nor the one who waters, but God who causes ***it*** to grow. Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one; and each will receive ***his*** own reward according to ***his*** own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

3:10-23 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds on ***it***. But let each one take heed how he builds on ***it***. For no one is able to lay another foundation besides the ***one*** being laid, which is Jesus the Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will make ***it*** clear, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test the work of each, of what sort it is. If the work of anyone which he built on ***it*** remains, he will receive a reward. If the work of anyone is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and ***that*** the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks ***that he*** is wise in this age, let him become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it has been written, "***He is*** the ***One*** catching the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "***The*** Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are futile." So then let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or ***the*** world or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours, and you ***are*** Christ's, and Christ ***is*** God's.

Chapter 3 Preview

Paul has just said that believers have the mind of Christ. Now he tells the Corinthians that he could not speak to them as spiritual people. They were still infants in Christ, still living like the world. The proof was their jealousy and quarreling over leaders. Paul and Apollos were only servants. One planted, the other watered, but God made it grow. The church is God's field and God's building.

Then Paul warns every builder in the church. The only foundation is Jesus Christ. But each one must be careful how he builds on it. One day each believer's work will be tested by fire. Work that lasts will be rewarded. Work that burns up will be lost, though the believer himself will be saved. The church is God's temple, and God takes it seriously when anyone harms it. So no one should

boast in men. All things belong to believers, and believers belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual **men**, but as to fleshly **men**, as to infants in Christ.*

"And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly men, as to infants in Christ." In chapter 2 Paul described two kinds of people, the natural man without the Spirit and the spiritual man. Now he speaks of a third: believers who have the Spirit but are living like people who don't.

He calls them "fleshly." The flesh here means our fallen human nature, the part of us that still pulls toward sin. They were truly "in Christ," and Paul still calls them "brothers." But they were "infants." There is nothing wrong with being a baby when you are newly born. The problem comes when years go by and you are still a baby.

3:2 *I gave you milk to drink, and not solid food; for you were not yet able, but even now you are not yet able,*

"I gave you milk to drink, and not solid food; for you were not yet able." When Paul first came to Corinth, the believers were brand new in the faith, so he fed them the basic truths of the gospel, the way a mother feeds a newborn. That was right for that time.

"But even now you are not yet able." Several years had passed, and they had not grown. They prided themselves on their wisdom and knowledge, but Paul says they were still on milk. The writer of Hebrews says the same thing to his readers (Hebrews 5:12-14). Spiritual age is not measured by how long we have been saved. It is measured by how much we have grown.

3:3 *for you are still fleshly. For where **there is** jealousy and strife and dissensions among you, are you not fleshly, and walking according to man?*

"For you are still fleshly." How did Paul know? "For where there is jealousy and strife and dissensions among you, are you not fleshly, and walking according to man?"

The Corinthians probably thought their gifts and their knowledge proved they were mature. Paul points to something else: how they treated one another. Jealousy and quarreling are works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). "Walking according to man" means living the way any unbeliever lives. A church can have great preaching and great gifts and still be fleshly. The test of maturity is not how much we know, but whether we love.

3:4 *For whenever someone says, "I indeed am of Paul," and another, "I **am** of Apollos," are you not fleshly?*

When one says, "I indeed am of Paul," and another says he is of Apollos, Paul asks, "are you not fleshly?" He comes back to the problem of chapter 1. Their party spirit is a sign of immaturity.

Paul does not defend his own group. He could have said that at least the ones who followed him had it right. He doesn't. He rebukes those who were loyal to him just as much as the others. A godly leader does not want people following him. He wants them following Christ (11:1). Taking sides over leaders is what immature people do. It treats the church like the world, where people line up behind their heroes.

3:5 *Who then is Paul, and who **is** Apollos, but servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each?*

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but servants through whom you believed." The word for servants is diakonoi, the word from which we get deacon. It means someone who waits on others, like a table servant. Paul is not putting himself down. He is putting himself in the right place.

They were the ones "through whom you believed." They were the means, not the source. "Even as the Lord gave to each." The Lord gave Paul his work and Apollos his. Each did what the Lord assigned. No servant should be made into a celebrity, and no servant should be despised. Every one of them belongs to the Lord.

3:6 *I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing **it** to grow.*

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing it to grow." Paul uses a farming picture. Paul planted the church in Corinth when he first preached the gospel there. Apollos came later and watered, teaching and strengthening the believers (Acts 18:27-28).

But neither of them made anything grow. Only "God was causing it to grow." The verb shows God was doing it all along. No farmer can make a seed sprout. He can plant it and water it, but the life comes from God. The same is true in the church. Preachers and teachers can sow and water, but only God gives spiritual life and growth.

3:7 *So neither is the one who plants anything, nor the one who waters, but God who causes **it** to grow.*

"So neither is the one who plants anything, nor the one who waters, but God who causes it to grow." Compared to God, the planter and the waterer are nothing. All the credit goes to God.

This should humble every pastor and teacher. It should also free them. If God is the One who causes the growth, then we don't have to carry the weight of results on our shoulders. We plant faithfully, we water faithfully, and we leave the growth to Him. And it should change how church members see their leaders. Thank God for them, but don't give them the glory that belongs to God.

3:8 *Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one; and each will receive **his** own reward according to **his** own labor.*

"Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one." Paul and Apollos were not rivals. They were on the same team, working toward the same harvest. The Corinthians were trying to set them against each other, but they had one purpose.

"And each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." Here Paul introduces the idea of reward, which he will develop in verses 10 to 15. God sees each servant's work. He does not reward according to fame or results, but "according to his own labor," the faithful work each one did. The quiet servant no one notices will not be forgotten by God.

3:9 *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

"For we are God's fellow workers." This most likely means we work together under God, as fellow workers belonging to Him. What a privilege that God lets us share in His work.

"You are God's field, God's building." Paul now shifts the picture. The church is God's field, where He grows a crop. It is also God's building, and from here to verse 17 Paul talks about building. Notice the word "God's" three times in this verse. The workers belong to God. The field belongs to God. The building belongs to God. Nothing here belongs to Paul, Apollos, or the Corinthians. It is all His.

3:10 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds on **it**. But let each one take heed how he builds on **it**.*

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation." A master builder was the man in charge of a building project, who planned it and laid the foundation. Paul laid the foundation of the church in Corinth when he preached Christ there first. He gives the credit to "the grace of God."

"And another builds on it." Others came after Paul, including Apollos and the local leaders, and they built on what he had laid. "But let each one take heed how he builds on it." This is a warning. Paul is speaking first to those who teach and lead in the church. But in a wider sense every believer builds something with his life. All of us should be careful how we build.

3:11 *For no one is able to lay another foundation besides the **one** being laid, which is Jesus the Christ.*

"For no one is able to lay another foundation besides the one being laid, which is Jesus the Christ." There is only one foundation for the church and for the Christian life: Jesus Christ Himself. Paul did not invent the foundation. He laid down what was already there.

Any church built on anything else, a personality, a program, a tradition, or a political cause, is not built on the true foundation. Any life built on anything else will not stand (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus is the Rock. Is your life built on Him? The question in verses 12 to 15 is not about the foundation. It is about what we build on it.

3:12 *Now if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw." Paul lists two kinds of building materials. Gold, silver, and precious stones are costly and lasting. They survive fire. Wood, hay, and straw are cheap and easy to find. They burn.

What do the materials stand for? In context Paul is speaking of the work done in building the church, especially teaching and ministry. Teaching that is true to Christ and done for His glory is like gold. Teaching that is shallow, worldly, or done for self is like straw. In a wider sense, the materials are the works, motives, and service of every believer's life.

3:13 *the work of each will become manifest; for the day will make **it** clear, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test the work of each, of what sort it is.*

"The work of each will become manifest; for the day will make it clear." What day is Paul talking about? It is the day of the Lord's coming, when each believer stands before Him. Paul calls this "the judgment seat of Christ" in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

"Because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test the work of each, of what sort it is." The fire here is a picture of God's searching judgment. Notice it tests "of what sort" the work is, not how much there is. God is not impressed by size. He looks at quality and motive (4:5). A small work done for His glory may outlast a big work done for show.

3:14 *If the work of anyone which he built on **it** remains, he will receive a reward.*

"If the work of anyone which he built on it remains, he will receive a reward." Work that passes the test of fire will be rewarded. Scripture speaks of crowns and other rewards given to faithful believers (9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 22:12).

This is important to get right. The judgment seat of Christ is not about whether a believer is saved. Salvation is a gift of grace, received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The judgment seat is about rewards for how we served Christ after we were saved. Rewards are not a ticket into heaven. They are the Lord's "well done" to His faithful servants (Matthew 25:21).

3:15 *If the work of anyone is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

"If the work of anyone is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." This verse is very clear on two points. First, a believer can lose rewards. Work done with wrong motives or false materials will burn, and he will suffer loss.

Second, he himself "will be saved." The man's salvation is not in question. He is like a man who escapes a burning house with his life but loses everything inside. His life's work goes up in smoke, but he is saved.

Some have used this verse to teach purgatory, a place where believers are purified after death before entering heaven. But the fire tests the work, not the person, and it happens on "the day," not in a long process after death. Paul is speaking of rewards gained or lost, not of punishment to pay for sin. Christ paid for our sins in full.

3:16 *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and **that** the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Paul asks "do you not know" ten times in this letter. These are things they should have known.

In this verse "you" is plural. Paul is speaking of the church as a whole. The Corinthians lived in a city full of temples to false gods. Paul tells them that the church itself is God's temple, the place where He lives by His Spirit. The word for temple here means the inner holy place where God's presence dwelt. When believers gather, God is truly present among them. In 6:19 Paul will apply the same picture to each believer's body.

3:17 *If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are.*

"If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him." This is a strong warning. The word for destroy can also mean ruin or corrupt. Anyone who tears down God's church by false teaching, division, or sin will answer to God Himself.

"For the temple of God is holy, which you are." The church belongs to God, and He guards it. Bible teachers differ on who is in view. Many believe Paul is warning false teachers and others who were never truly saved. Others believe he speaks of God's severe discipline on believers who harm His church, as in 11:30. Either way, it is a fearful thing to damage God's people. Gossip and division are not small things to God.

3:18 *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks **that he** is wise in this age, let him become foolish, so that he may become wise.*

"Let no one deceive himself." The danger is self-deception. "If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish, so that he may become wise."

Some in Corinth thought they were very wise by the world's standards. Paul says that kind of wisdom must be given up. To become truly wise, a person must be willing to look foolish in the world's eyes by accepting the message of the cross. That means admitting we do not have the answers, we cannot save ourselves, and we need a crucified Savior. Pride says it already knows. Humility asks the Lord to teach it.

3:19 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it has been written, "**He is** the **One** catching the wise in their craftiness";*

"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." What the world calls brilliant, God calls foolish, because it leaves Him out.

Paul quotes Job 5:13: "He is the One catching the wise in their craftiness." This is one of the few places in the New Testament where Job is quoted (Romans 11:35 also draws on Job). The picture is of God catching clever people in their own traps. They think they are outsmarting everyone, even God, but their schemes end up snaring them. Haman built gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on them himself (Esther 7:10). Human cleverness can never outwit God.

Old Testament links: Job 5:13 (quoted)

3:20 *and again, "**The** Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are futile."*

Paul adds Psalm 94:11: "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are futile." God sees every thought and every plan of the wise people of the world. He knows they are "futile," meaning empty and useless.

That doesn't mean all learning is bad. Paul was a highly educated man. It means that human reasoning, when it shuts God out, ends in emptiness. The Corinthians were treating human wisdom as the highest thing. Paul shows them from Scripture that God has already passed judgment on it. Why would we build our lives on what God calls futile?

Old Testament links: Psalm 94:11 (quoted)

3:21 *So then let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,*

"So then let no one boast in men." This is where Paul has been heading all through chapters 1 to 3. The Corinthians were boasting in their favorite leaders. Paul says stop.

"For all things are yours." Here is the surprise. The Corinthians were saying they belonged to Paul or to Apollos. Paul turns it around. You don't belong to them. They belong to you. God gave them to you as servants. Why would you shrink yourself down to one leader's fan club when God has given you everything?

3:22 *whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or **the** world or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours,*

"Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas." All three leaders belong to the whole church. Each one is God's gift to every believer. We can learn from many teachers without making any of them our badge.

Then Paul widens the list: "or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours." Everything serves the believer. The world is ours, because one day we will reign with Christ (6:2). Life is ours, because we live it for Him. Even death is ours, because for the believer death is not the end but the doorway to being with Christ (Philippians 1:21). Present things and future things are ours. Nothing in all creation is outside God's care for His people (Romans 8:38-39).

3:23 *and you **are** Christ's, and Christ **is** God's.*

"And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Everything belongs to the believer, but the believer belongs to Christ. That is the right order. We are not our own (6:19-20).

"And Christ is God's." This does not mean Christ is less than God. Paul has already called Him "the Lord of glory" (2:8). It speaks of the Son's willing place in the plan of salvation, as He came to do the Father's will (John 6:38; 1 Corinthians 15:28). The chain ends in God. The church does not belong to Paul or Apollos. It belongs to Christ, and through Christ to God. There is no place for boasting in men in that chain.

Chapter 3 Summary

Paul could not speak to the Corinthians as spiritual people, because they were still fleshly, infants in Christ. He had fed them milk, and they were still not ready for solid food. Their jealousy and quarrels over Paul and Apollos proved it. Paul and Apollos were only servants. One planted and the other watered, but God gave the growth. The church is God's field and God's building. Paul laid the only foundation, Jesus Christ, and each one must be careful how he builds on it. On the day of Christ, each believer's work will be tested by fire. Work that remains will be rewarded. Work that burns up will be lost, but the believer himself will be saved, as through fire. The church is God's holy temple where His Spirit dwells, and God will destroy anyone who destroys it. No one should trust in the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. So no one should boast in men, because all things belong to believers, believers belong to Christ, and Christ is God's.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul call the Corinthians "fleshly" and "infants in Christ"? (3:1-3)

2. What evidence of immaturity does Paul point to in 3:3-4?

3. What roles did Paul and Apollos play, and who gave the growth? (3:5-7)

4. What is the only foundation for the church? (3:11)

5. What do the two kinds of building materials in 3:12 stand for?

6. What will happen to each believer's work on "the day"? (3:13-15)

7. Does 3:15 teach that a believer can lose his salvation? Why or why not?

8. What does it mean that the church is "a temple of God"? How should that affect the way we treat our church? (3:16-17)

9. Are you building with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and straw? What would change if you lived with the judgment seat of Christ in mind?

10. Is there a leader or teacher you have been tempted to boast in? How does 3:21-23 help you see that person rightly?

Chapter 4: Faithful Servants of Christ

Scripture

4:1-13 So let a man regard us as attendants of Christ and stewards of ***the*** mysteries of God. Now moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by a human day; indeed, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but the ***One*** who examines me is ***the*** Lord. So then do not judge anything before ***the*** time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of the darkness and make manifest the purposes of the hearts; and then the praise will come to each from God. Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos on account of you, so that in us you may learn not to think beyond what has been written, so that you may not be puffed up, one on behalf of the one against the other. For who makes you different? And what do you have which you did not receive? And if you did indeed receive ***it***, why do you boast as if not having received ***it***? Already you are satiated; already you became rich; apart from us you reigned; and I wish indeed that you did reign, so that we also might reign with you. For I think that God has exhibited us the apostles last, as condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We ***are*** fools on account of Christ, but you ***are*** wise in Christ; we ***are*** weak, but you ***are*** strong; you ***are*** honored, but we ***are*** without honor. Up to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are poorly clothed, and are struck with fists, and wander homeless, and we toil, working with ***our*** own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being slandered, we entreat. We have become as ***the*** scum of the world, ***the*** refuse of all things, until now.

4:14-21 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I admonish ***you***. For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet ***you do*** not ***have*** many fathers; for in Christ Jesus through the gospel I begot you. Therefore I exhort you, become imitators of me. Because of this I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in ***the*** Lord, who will remind you of my ways which ***are*** in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some were puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you quickly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God ***is*** not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

Chapter 4 Preview

Paul finishes his answer to the divisions in Corinth by telling the church how to see its leaders. They are attendants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, and the one thing required of a steward is that he be found faithful. Paul did not care much about being judged by the Corinthians, or even by himself. The Lord is his judge, and when He comes He will bring hidden things to light and give each one his praise. So the Corinthians should stop judging and stop puffing themselves up over one teacher against another. Everything they have, they received.

Then Paul uses some sharp irony. The Corinthians acted as if they were already rich and reigning, while the apostles were treated like the scum of the world: hungry, beaten, homeless, and cursed.

Paul is not trying to shame them. He writes as a father to his beloved children. He has sent Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ, and he will come himself soon. The choice is theirs. Shall he come with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *So let a man regard us as attendants of Christ and stewards of **the** mysteries of God.*

"So let a man regard us as attendants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul tells the church how to think of him and Apollos. They are not party leaders. They are "attendants of Christ." Some say the word first meant an under-rower on a ship. In Paul's day it was used of any servant who carried out his master's orders. A servant takes his orders from his master, not from the crowd.

They are also "stewards." A steward was a household manager, often a slave, put in charge of his master's goods. The steward didn't own what he managed. The "mysteries of God" are the truths God has revealed in the gospel (2:7). Paul was trusted with God's truth to hand out faithfully, not to change.

4:2 *Now moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*

"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful." What does God look for in a steward? Not that he be popular, gifted, or successful by the world's measure. He must be faithful.

This is freeing for anyone who serves God. You may not be the best speaker or have the largest ministry. That isn't the question God asks. He asks whether you were faithful with what He gave you. The Corinthians were comparing leaders by their gifts and style. Paul says the only measure that matters is faithfulness, and only the Master can judge it. Jesus said the same in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:21).

4:3 *But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by a human day; indeed, I do not even examine myself.*

"But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by a human day." The word for examined is the same word used in 2:14-15. It means to look into something and judge it. Some in Corinth were judging Paul and finding him lacking.

Paul says their verdict doesn't carry much weight with him. "A human day" means a human court, in contrast to the day of the Lord. He goes further: "I do not even examine myself." He does not trust even his own judgment of himself. This is not pride. It is humility. Paul knows that only God sees the heart truly.

4:4 *For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but the **One** who examines me is **the** Lord.*

"For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this." Paul's conscience was clear. He was not aware of any unfaithfulness in his ministry. But that did not prove he was

innocent. A clear conscience is good, but our consciences are not perfect. We can be blind to our own faults.

"But the One who examines me is the Lord." In the end, only the Lord's verdict counts. This guards us from two errors. We should not live for the praise or blame of people. And we should not rest on our own opinion of ourselves. We live before the Lord, and His judgment is the one that matters.

4:5 *So then do not judge anything before **the** time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of the darkness and make manifest the purposes of the hearts; and then the praise will come to each from God.*

"So then do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes." Paul is not saying believers can never judge anything. In the next chapter he tells the church to judge a sinning member (5:12). Here he means judging the hidden motives and the final worth of someone's service. That is the Lord's job, and it waits for His coming.

When He comes, He "will both bring to light the hidden things of the darkness and make manifest the purposes of the hearts." Nothing will be hidden then. "And then the praise will come to each from God." This is the judgment seat of Christ again (3:13-15). Notice the word "praise." The Lord will find something to praise in each faithful servant. Live for that praise.

4:6 *Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos on account of you, so that in us you may learn not to think beyond what has been written, so that you may not be puffed up, one on behalf of the one against the other.*

"Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos on account of you." Paul has been using himself and Apollos as examples, so that the Corinthians could see the problem without him naming the people who were really causing it.

He wants them to learn "not to think beyond what has been written." This most likely means not going beyond Scripture, especially the Old Testament verses he has quoted about pride and wisdom (1:19, 31; 3:19-20). Don't add your own ideas to God's Word. The goal: "so that you may not be puffed up, one on behalf of the one against the other." "Puffed up" means swelled with pride, like a bellows full of air. Paul uses this word six times in this letter, more than any other book of the New Testament. Pride was a Corinthian problem.

4:7 *For who makes you different? And what do you have which you did not receive? And if you did indeed receive **it**, why do you boast as if not having received **it**?*

Paul asks three questions that cut through pride. "For who makes you different?" Who made you better than anyone else? The answer is no one. If you differ from others, God made the difference.

"And what do you have which you did not receive?" Nothing. Every gift, every ability, every bit of knowledge, even our salvation, was given to us.

"And if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if not having received it?" If it was a gift, there is no room to boast. Imagine a man bragging about a present someone else bought him. This one verse can cure a great deal of pride. Whenever you are tempted to look down on someone, ask yourself these three questions.

4:8 *Already you are satiated; already you became rich; apart from us you reigned; and I wish indeed that you did reign, so that we also might reign with you.*

Now Paul uses irony, saying the opposite of what he means to make a point. "Already you are satiated; already you became rich; apart from us you reigned." The Corinthians acted as though they had already arrived. They had all they wanted. They lived as if the kingdom had already come and they were already reigning as kings.

But that day has not come yet. Believers will reign with Christ when He returns and sets up His kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:4-6). Paul adds, "I wish indeed that you did reign, so that we also might reign with you." If the kingdom had truly come, the apostles would be reigning too, not suffering. The Corinthians were living as if the age to come were already here.

4:9 *For I think that God has exhibited us the apostles last, as condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.*

"For I think that God has exhibited us the apostles last, as condemned to death." Paul draws a picture from the Roman world. When a Roman general celebrated a victory, he led a parade through the city. At the very end came the captives who were condemned to die in the arena. That is how Paul saw the apostles. They were at the back of the line, men on their way to death.

"Because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." The word for spectacle is the root of our word theater. The apostles were like men in an arena, watched by the whole world and even by angels. The Corinthians thought they were kings. The apostles were treated like condemned men.

4:10 *We **are** fools on account of Christ, but you **are** wise in Christ; we **are** weak, but you **are** strong; you **are** honored, but we **are** without honor.*

Paul gives three contrasts, still using irony. "We are fools on account of Christ, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honored, but we are without honor."

The Corinthians wanted to be thought wise, strong, and honored. They wanted a faith that made them look good in the eyes of their city. The apostles had given all that up for Christ. They were laughed at, weak, and looked down on. Paul is asking the Corinthians to think about which path looks more like Jesus. The world mocked Him, He was crucified in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4), and He was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3). Following Him does not usually make us popular.

4:11-12 *Up to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are poorly clothed, and are struck with fists, and wander homeless, and we toil, working with* ***our*** *own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;*

"Up to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are poorly clothed, and are struck with fists, and wander homeless." This was not ancient history for Paul. It was his life as he wrote. He was hungry, thirsty, dressed in worn clothes, beaten, and had no home of his own.

"And we toil, working with our own hands." In Corinth Paul made tents to support himself (Acts 18:3). Greeks often looked down on manual labor, but Paul worked so he would not be a burden to anyone (9:12).

"Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure." This is how Jesus taught us to respond (Luke 6:28). When people cursed the apostles, they blessed them back. When people persecuted them, they kept going. That is the opposite of the way the world responds.

4:13 *being slandered, we entreat. We have become as* ***the*** *scum of the world,* ***the*** *refuse of all things, until now.*

"Being slandered, we entreat." When people spread lies about them, they answered gently. Then Paul uses two of the strongest words he could find: "We have become as the scum of the world, the refuse of all things, until now."

The two words both mean the filth scraped off a dirty pot or swept off a floor, the stuff thrown out with the trash. Some writers also used them for the lowest people in society. That is how the world saw the apostles. Yet these were the men God used to turn the world upside down. When you are mistreated for following Christ, remember that you walk where the apostles walked, and where Jesus walked before them.

4:14 *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I admonish* ***you****.*

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I admonish you." Paul's tone changes. His irony was sharp, but his heart is soft. He is not trying to humiliate them. He loves them.

To admonish means to warn and correct, to put sense into someone. A good father does this with his children. He doesn't ignore their wrong, and he doesn't crush them either. He corrects them because he loves them. This verse shows us how to correct others. Speak the truth plainly, but make sure your motive is love and your goal is their good, not your own satisfaction.

4:15 *For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet* ***you do*** *not* ***have*** *many fathers; for in Christ Jesus through the gospel I begot you.*

"For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers." A guardian was a trusted slave in a Roman household who watched over the children, walked them to school, and kept them in line. He could be strict, and he was not their father.

The Corinthians had many teachers and guides. But they had only one spiritual father. "For in Christ Jesus through the gospel I begot you." Paul was the one who first brought them the gospel, and through it they were born again. That gave him a special place in their lives. Others could teach them, but only Paul had brought them to new birth. That is why he could speak to them so plainly.

4:16 *Therefore I exhort you, become imitators of me.*

"Therefore I exhort you, become imitators of me." This might sound proud, but it isn't. Paul has just described his life in verses 9 to 13: humble, poor, suffering, blessing those who curse him. That is the life he asks them to copy. He is not telling them to copy his gifts or his success. He is telling them to follow his way of the cross.

Later he adds the key: "Become imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (11:1). Every believer, and every parent, pastor, and teacher, should be able to say something like this. Not because we are perfect, but because we are following Jesus and want others to follow Him with us.

4:17 *Because of this I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in **the** Lord, who will remind you of my ways which **are** in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*

"Because of this I sent Timothy to you." Timothy was Paul's young coworker, who had helped plant the church in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Paul calls him "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord." Paul had led Timothy to faith or at least raised him up in it, as a father raises a son.

Timothy would "remind you of my ways which are in Christ." Paul did not teach one thing in Corinth and something else somewhere else. What he taught was "just as I teach everywhere in every church." The Corinthians were not special. The same gospel, and the same way of life, applied to every church. Timothy may have arrived after this letter did (16:10).

4:18 *Now some were puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.*

"Now some were puffed up, as though I were not coming to you." There it is again: puffed up. Some in Corinth thought Paul was afraid to face them. Since he sent Timothy instead of coming himself, they said he would never show up. And with Paul gone, they made themselves big.

Isn't this just like human nature? When the teacher leaves the room, some students take over. When the parents are away, some children push the rules. But God sees, and Paul would come. This is a warning to anyone who acts one way when they think no one is watching.

4:19 *But I will come to you quickly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.*

"But I will come to you quickly, if the Lord wills." Paul planned to come. But he put his plans under the Lord's will (James 4:13-15). That is a good habit for every believer. We make plans, but we hold them loosely, knowing God may change them. Paul's plans did change later, as 2 Corinthians 1:15-2:1 shows.

When he comes, "I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power." Anyone can talk big. Paul would find out whether these proud people had any real spiritual power behind their talk. Talk is cheap. God's power is not.

4:20 *For the kingdom of God **is** not in word but in power.*

"For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." The kingdom of God is God's rule. It is not a matter of clever speech or big claims. It shows itself in power, God's power changing lives.

This verse does not mean words don't matter. Paul preached the gospel with words. It means that empty talk, without God's power, is not the kingdom. A life truly under God's rule will show it. The Corinthians had plenty of words. Paul wanted to see whether they had the power of God that turns proud people into humble servants. That is the real proof of the kingdom in a person's life.

4:21 *What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*

"What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" Paul gives them a choice. The rod was used by a father, or by a guardian, to discipline a child. Paul is saying that if the problems are not fixed, he will come and deal with them firmly.

But that is not what he wants. He would much rather come "in love and a spirit of gentleness." The choice is up to them. If they correct what is wrong before he comes, he can come gently. This verse leads right into chapter 5, where Paul deals with a sin the church had not dealt with. Like a good father, he would rather they fix it themselves.

Chapter 4 Summary

Paul tells the Corinthians to see him and Apollos as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries, and the one thing required of a steward is faithfulness. Paul does not rest on the church's judgment or even on his own. The Lord is his judge, and when He comes He will reveal the hidden things and the purposes of hearts, and each will receive praise from God. So the Corinthians should not judge before the time, and should not be puffed up over one teacher against another, because everything they have was received. With sharp irony, Paul contrasts their self-satisfied pride, as if they were already reigning, with the apostles' life as men condemned to death, a spectacle to the world, hungry, beaten, and homeless, blessing when cursed and treated as the scum of the world. Yet he writes not to shame them but to warn them as his beloved children, for he is their father in the gospel. He urges them to imitate him and is sending Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ. Some proud people thought Paul would not come, but he will come soon, if the Lord wills, and test their power, for the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. He asks whether they want him to come with a rod or in love and gentleness.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. How does Paul want the church to regard him and Apollos? (4:1)

2. What one thing is required of a steward? (4:2)

3. Why does Paul not even trust his own judgment of himself? (4:3-4)

4. What will happen when the Lord comes, according to 4:5?

5. What three questions does Paul ask in 4:7, and how do they answer pride?

6. How does Paul describe the life of the apostles in 4:9-13?

7. How does Paul show a father's heart in 4:14-15?

8. What does it mean that "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power"? (4:20)

9. Do you tend to judge yourself by what people think of you? How does 4:3-5 change that?

10. Could you say to someone younger in the faith, "become imitators of me"? What would need to change in your life for that to be true? (4:16)

Chapter 5: Sin in the Church

Scripture

5:1-13 Sexual immorality is actually reported among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, so that someone has the wife of ***his*** father. And you are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, so that the one who did this deed might be removed out of your midst. For I indeed, as being absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as being present, the one who has so committed this, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you and my spirit are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one to Satan for ***the*** destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting ***is*** not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore cleanse out the old leaven, so that you may be a new lump, just as you are unleavened. For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ. So then let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with ***the*** leaven of malice and wickedness, but with ***the*** unleavened ***bread*** of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in the letter not to associate with sexually immoral ***persons***; and not at all ***meaning*** the sexually immoral of this world, or the covetous, or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you ought to go out of the world. But now I wrote to you not to associate ***with him***, if anyone named a brother is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler; with such a one not even to eat. For what ***is it*** to me to judge those outside also? Do you not judge those inside? But those outside God will judge. And you will remove the evil ***man*** from among yourselves.

Chapter 5 Preview

Paul now turns to a problem the church should have dealt with long before. A man in the church was living in sexual sin with his father's wife, a sin even the pagans of Corinth would not accept. Worse, the church was proud of itself instead of grieving. Paul tells them to gather in the name of the Lord Jesus and remove the man from their fellowship, handing him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Paul explains why with a picture from the Passover. A little leaven works through the whole lump of dough. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, so the church must clean out the old leaven of sin. Then Paul clears up a misunderstanding from an earlier letter. He never meant that believers should cut themselves off from sinners in the world. He meant they should not keep close company with someone who calls himself a brother and goes on living in open sin. God judges those outside. The church is responsible for those inside. Church discipline is hard, but it is an act of love, meant to bring a sinner back.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *Sexual immorality is actually reported among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, so that someone has the wife of **his** father.*

"Sexual immorality is actually reported among you." The word for sexual immorality is porneia, a broad word for any sexual sin outside of marriage between a man and a woman. The news had reached Paul in Ephesus, and it was not a rumor.

"Such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles." Corinth was known for loose living. Yet even there, this was shameful. "Someone has the wife of his father." This was most likely the man's stepmother. The word "has" suggests an ongoing relationship, not a single act. The Law of Moses forbade it plainly (Leviticus 18:8; Deuteronomy 22:30), and Roman law did too. Paul does not mention the woman being disciplined, which suggests she was not a believer.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:8 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 22:30 (alluded to)

5:2 *And you are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, so that the one who did this deed might be removed out of your midst.*

"And you are puffed up." Here is the shocking part. The church knew about this sin, and instead of grieving, they were proud. Maybe they were proud of how open-minded and free they were. Maybe they were so proud of their gifts that they ignored it. Either way, their pride blinded them.

"And did not rather mourn." The right response to sin in the church is grief, the kind of mourning you show at a funeral. Sin among God's people should break our hearts. And grief should lead to action: "so that the one who did this deed might be removed out of your midst." The church should have already dealt with this man. Paul now tells them what to do.

5:3 *For I indeed, as being absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as being present, the one who has so committed this,*

"For I indeed, as being absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged." Paul was far away in Ephesus, but he was with them in spirit, and he had already made a decision about this case.

Wait, didn't Paul just say in 4:5 not to judge before the time? Yes, but that was about judging the hidden motives of a servant's heart, which only God can see. This was different. This was open sin, known to everyone, with no repentance. The church is not to judge hearts, but it is responsible to deal with open, ongoing sin among its members. Jesus Himself gave the church this responsibility (Matthew 18:15-17).

5:4 *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you and my spirit are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you and my spirit are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." This was not to be one man's private decision. The whole church

was to gather. It was to be done "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," meaning by His authority and as He would want. And it was to be done "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This tells us church discipline is serious. It is not a pastor settling a grudge, or a group of members pushing someone out. It is the church acting together, under Christ's authority, with Christ present among them (Matthew 18:20). It should always be done prayerfully and carefully, never in anger or in a hurry.

5:5 *to deliver such a one to Satan for **the** destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

"To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is one of the hardest verses in the letter. What does it mean?

To "deliver such a one to Satan" most likely means to put the man out of the church's fellowship, back into the world, which is Satan's domain (1 John 5:19). Inside the church he had the protection and care of God's people. Outside, he would face the full weight of sin's results. Paul used the same language in 1 Timothy 1:20.

"The destruction of the flesh" is read in two main ways. Some believe it means the destruction of his sinful nature, as he hits bottom and turns back to God. Others believe it means physical suffering, even sickness or death, as God's discipline (compare 11:30).

But the goal is clear: "so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Church discipline is not about getting rid of someone. It is about rescuing him. It aims at repentance and restoration.

5:6 *Your boasting **is** not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

"Your boasting is not good." Whatever the Corinthians were boasting about, Paul says it was not good, not with this sin in their midst.

"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" Leaven is yeast, or more often in those days a piece of old fermented dough kept back from an earlier batch. Put a little into new dough, and it spreads through the whole lump. In Scripture leaven is often a picture of sin or false teaching spreading (Matthew 16:6; Galatians 5:9).

The point is plain. Sin tolerated in a church does not stay small. It spreads. When open sin is ignored, it tells everyone else that sin doesn't matter. Others will follow. A church that will not deal with sin will soon be full of it.

5:7 *Therefore cleanse out the old leaven, so that you may be a new lump, just as you are unleavened. For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ.*

"Therefore cleanse out the old leaven, so that you may be a new lump, just as you are unleavened." Paul draws on the Passover. Before Passover, a Jewish family searched the whole

house and removed every bit of leaven (Exodus 12:15-20). Then they ate unleavened bread for seven days.

"Just as you are unleavened." In Christ believers are already clean and new. Now they must live like it. Become what you are.

"For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ." In Egypt, the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts kept God's judgment from falling on the house (Exodus 12:13). Jesus is our Passover Lamb. He died at Passover time, and His blood saves us from judgment (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). Because the Lamb has been sacrificed, the old leaven has to go.

Old Testament links: Exodus 12:27 (pictured); Exodus 12:21 (pictured); Exodus 12:15 (alluded to)

5:8 *So then let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with **the** leaven of malice and wickedness, but with **the** unleavened **bread** of sincerity and truth.*

"So then let us celebrate the feast." The Christian life is like a never-ending Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Lamb has been sacrificed, and now we live in a constant celebration of what He has done.

But we celebrate it "not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness." Malice is ill will toward others. Wickedness is evil in action. These belong to the old life. Instead, we celebrate "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Sincerity means pure, with no hidden mixture. The word was used of something that could be held up to the sunlight and found clean. Truth means living honestly before God. The new life has no place for the old leaven.

Old Testament links: Exodus 12:15 (alluded to)

5:9 *I wrote to you in the letter not to associate with sexually immoral **persons**;*

"I wrote to you in the letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons." Paul had written an earlier letter to Corinth, before 1 Corinthians. We don't have it. In it he had told them not to mix with sexually immoral people.

"Associate" means to mix closely, to keep company with someone as a friend. It seems the Corinthians had misunderstood that earlier letter, or perhaps had twisted it. Perhaps they said that obeying it would mean leaving the world entirely, so it could not be done. Paul now explains what he meant. This verse also reminds us that not every letter an apostle wrote was meant to become part of Scripture. God kept the ones He wanted us to have.

5:10 *and not at all **meaning** the sexually immoral of this world, or the covetous, or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you ought to go out of the world.*

"And not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the covetous, or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you ought to go out of the world." Paul did not mean that believers should avoid all unbelievers who sin. If they did that, they would have to leave the planet.

The covetous are the greedy, who always want more. Swindlers are those who cheat and steal. Idolaters worship false gods. Corinth was full of all of them. Believers have to work, shop, and live next to them. And more than that, we are sent to them with the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus ate with sinners (Luke 15:1-2). We cannot reach people we refuse to be near.

5:11 *But now I wrote to you not to associate **with him**, if anyone named a brother is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler; with such a one not even to eat.*

"But now I wrote to you not to associate with him, if anyone named a brother is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler; with such a one not even to eat."

Here is the real point. The danger is not the sinner outside the church. It is the person who calls himself a believer, "named a brother," and goes on in open, unrepentant sin. A reviler is someone who abuses others with his words. Greed and harsh words are on the list right beside sexual sin.

"With such a one not even to eat." Eating together was a sign of close friendship and acceptance. Some think the Lord's Supper is in view too. The church was not to act as if everything was fine. This is not hatred. It is a loving refusal to pretend, meant to show the person how serious his sin is. Paul's later words show that this kind of discipline was meant to lead to forgiveness and comfort when the person repents (2 Corinthians 2:6-8; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

5:12 *For what **is it** to me to judge those outside also? Do you not judge those inside?*

"For what is it to me to judge those outside also?" Paul's job as an apostle was not to judge the unbelieving world. The church has no authority to discipline people who are not part of it.

"Do you not judge those inside?" The church is responsible for its own members. This is where many churches get it backward. They are quick to condemn the sins of the world around them and slow to deal with sin among themselves. Paul says the opposite. Be patient and loving with the lost, who don't know any better. But hold those who claim the name of Christ to His standard. Judgment begins with the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

5:13 *But those outside God will judge. And you will remove the evil **man** from among yourselves.*

"But those outside God will judge." God will judge the world in His time. That is His job, not ours. Our job toward the world is to show them Christ.

"And you will remove the evil man from among yourselves." Paul quotes a phrase that appears again and again in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 17:7; 22:21-24). Israel was told to purge evil from among them. Now Paul applies it to the church. The man must be put out.

A word as a pastor. Church discipline is rare today, and when it is done badly it can do real harm. It must be done humbly, carefully, and with love, after private steps have been taken (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1). It is never a weapon for leaders to control people or silence those who raise concerns. And it is no substitute for reporting a crime. If abuse is involved, the authorities must be told. The goal is always restoration. Many believe the man disciplined here is the one Paul later asked the church to forgive and welcome back (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). If so, the discipline worked. That is what we should pray for every time.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 17:7 (quoted)

Chapter 5 Summary

A man in the church in Corinth was living in sexual sin with his father's wife, a sin even the pagans would not accept, and the church was proud instead of grieving. Paul, absent in body but present in spirit, had already judged the case. He tells the church to gather in the name and power of the Lord Jesus and deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Their boasting was not good, because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Since Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, they must clean out the old leaven of malice and wickedness and live with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Paul explains that his earlier letter did not mean they should avoid sinners in the world, or they would have to leave the world. He meant they should not keep close company with anyone who calls himself a brother and lives in open sexual sin, greed, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, or swindling. God judges those outside. The church must judge those inside and remove the evil man from among them, always with the goal of his repentance and restoration.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What sin was being tolerated in the church in Corinth? (5:1)

2. How did the church respond, and how should it have responded? (5:2)

3. What did Paul tell the church to do with the man, and what was the goal? (5:4-5)

4. What does the picture of leaven teach about sin in a church? (5:6-7)

5. How is Christ our Passover? (5:7)

6. What had the Corinthians misunderstood about Paul's earlier letter? (5:9-11)

7. Why does Paul say believers should not cut themselves off from the sinners of this world? (5:10)

8. According to 5:12-13, who is the church responsible to judge, and who does God judge?

9. Why do you think churches find it so hard to deal with sin among their members? What would loving discipline look like?

10. Is there any "old leaven" in your own life that needs to be cleaned out? (5:7-8)

Chapter 6: Lawsuits and the Body as God's Temple

Scripture

6:1-11 Does anyone of you, having a matter against the other, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy of the smallest cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more then the things of this life? So if you indeed have cases ***concerning*** things of this life, those who are despised in the church, these do you seat ***as judges***? I say ***this*** to your shame. Thus is ***there*** not a wise ***man*** among you, not even one, who will be able to decide between his brother ***and brother***? But brother goes to law with brother, and this before unbelievers! Already indeed then it is altogether a defeat in you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why do you not rather suffer wrong? Why are you not rather defrauded? But you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and these ***things to*** brothers! Or do you not know that unrighteous ***ones*** will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither sexually immoral ***persons***, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate ***men***, nor men who lie with males, nor thieves, nor greedy ***persons***, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some ***of you***; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

6:12-20 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Foods ***are*** for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will bring to nothing both it and them. And the body ***is*** not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Then having taken the members of the Christ, shall I make ***them*** members of a prostitute? May it not be! Or do you not know that the one who is joined to the prostitute is one body ***with her***? For "the two," He says, "will become one flesh." But the one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit ***with Him***. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man may do is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against ***his*** own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ***who is*** in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Chapter 6 Preview

Paul keeps dealing with problems the church had let slide. Some believers were taking each other to court before unbelieving judges over ordinary disputes. Paul is amazed. One day the saints will judge the world and even angels. Couldn't they find one wise person in the church to settle a matter between brothers? Better to be wronged than to drag a brother into court before unbelievers. Then Paul warns that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, and he names sins plainly. But he also gives the hope of the gospel: "such were some of you." They had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.

In the second half of the chapter, Paul answers some Corinthian slogans that were being used to excuse sexual sin. Yes, all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable, and a believer must

not be mastered by anything. The body is not for sexual immorality. It is for the Lord. Our bodies are members of Christ, and we must not join them to a prostitute. Flee sexual immorality. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own. You were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *Does anyone of you, having a matter against the other, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*

"Does anyone of you, having a matter against the other, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" The word "dare" shows how shocked Paul is. Believers in Corinth were suing one another in the city's courts.

The Greeks loved to go to court. Lawsuits were almost a public sport. And courts in the Roman world often favored people with money and status. "The unrighteous" here does not mean every judge was corrupt. It means they were not believers, not made right with God. Paul's concern is that God's family was taking its private quarrels and airing them before the unbelieving world.

6:2 *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy of the smallest cases?*

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" Scripture teaches that believers will share in Christ's rule when He comes. Daniel saw the saints receive the kingdom (Daniel 7:22, 27). Jesus told the Twelve they would sit on thrones (Matthew 19:28). Revelation 20:4-6 shows believers reigning with Christ for a thousand years. One day the saints will help govern the world under Christ.

"And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy of the smallest cases?" If God will trust believers to share in judging the whole world, surely they can handle a small dispute between two church members. Paul is calling them to see themselves rightly. You were made for far bigger things than this.

Old Testament links: Daniel 7:22 (alluded to)

6:3 *Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more then the things of this life?*

"Do you not know that we will judge angels?" This is even more surprising. Believers will have a part in God's judgment of angels, most likely the fallen angels who rebelled with Satan (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Scripture does not tell us exactly what this will look like, and we should not go beyond what it says.

"How much more then the things of this life?" If we will one day judge angels, then a quarrel over money or property is a small thing. The phrase "the things of this life" means everyday matters, the stuff of daily living. Paul wants them to see how small their disputes are next to their future. When we keep eternity in view, a lot of our quarrels shrink to their real size.

6:4 *So if you indeed have cases **concerning** things of this life, those who are despised in the church, these do you seat **as judges**?*

"So if you indeed have cases concerning things of this life, those who are despised in the church, these do you seat as judges?" This verse can be read two ways. It may be a question: are you setting up as judges men the church has no reason to respect, that is, unbelieving judges? Or it may be a command, said with irony: even the least respected members of the church could handle these cases, so let them do it.

Either way the point is the same. Taking these cases to unbelievers made no sense. Anyone in the church who knows the Lord would be a better judge of a dispute between brothers than a court that does not know God.

6:5 *I say **this** to your shame. Thus is **there** not a wise **man** among you, not even one, who will be able to decide between his brother **and brother**?*

"I say this to your shame." Paul said in 4:14 that he did not write to shame them. Now he does, because this was shameful. The Corinthians were proud of their wisdom.

So Paul asks, "Is there not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to decide between his brother and brother?" With all their boasting about wisdom, couldn't they find one wise person to settle a dispute? This is the kind of wisdom the church really needs: not clever speeches, but practical, godly wisdom that can help two believers make peace. Churches today still need people like that, mature believers who can sit down with two people and help them work things out.

6:6 *But brother goes to law with brother, and this before unbelievers!*

"But brother goes to law with brother, and this before unbelievers!" Paul can hardly believe it. It is bad enough that brothers were fighting. Worse, they were doing it in front of unbelievers.

Think about what this told the city. The church preached love, forgiveness, and peace. Then its members fought each other in public court over money. What would an unbeliever think? Jesus said the world will know we are His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35). When believers fight in public, the world sees the opposite, and the name of Christ is shamed.

6:7 *Already indeed then it is altogether a defeat in you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why do you not rather suffer wrong? Why are you not rather defrauded?*

"Already indeed then it is altogether a defeat in you, that you have lawsuits with one another." Before the case was even decided, they had already lost. Whoever won in court, the church lost.

"Why do you not rather suffer wrong? Why are you not rather defrauded?" This is hard teaching. Paul says it would be better to be wronged, even cheated, than to take a brother to court. That is what Jesus taught: turn the other cheek, and if someone takes your shirt, let him have your coat too (Matthew 5:39-40). Being right is not always the most important thing. Sometimes the most Christlike thing we can do is let it go and trust God to make it right.

6:8 *But you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and these **things to** brothers!*

"But you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and these things to brothers!" The ones going to court were not just victims. Some were doing the cheating, and they were doing it to their own brothers in Christ.

A word of care here. Paul is speaking about civil disputes between believers, things like money, property, and business. He is not speaking about crimes. God has given governments the job of punishing evil (Romans 13:1-4). If a crime has been committed, such as abuse, assault, or theft, it should be reported to the authorities. This passage must never be used to keep victims quiet or to protect someone who has harmed another person.

6:9-10 *Or do you not know that unrighteous **ones** will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither sexually immoral **persons**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate **men**, nor men who lie with males, nor thieves, nor greedy **persons**, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

"Or do you not know that unrighteous ones will not inherit the kingdom of God?" The unrighteous here are those whose lives are marked by sin and who have not been made right with God. Paul has just called the Corinthians' own behavior wrong (6:8). He warns them not to think lightly of sin.

"Do not be deceived." Some in Corinth were saying that what you do with your body doesn't matter. Paul says they are fooling themselves. Then he names ten kinds of sin. "Sexually immoral persons" covers all sexual sin outside marriage. "Idolaters" worship false gods. "Adulterers" break their marriage vows.

"Effeminate men" and "men who lie with males" translate two Greek words, malakoi and arsenokoitai. The first means soft ones, and in this setting it was used of men who took the passive role in sexual relations with other men. The second word is formed from the two Greek words used in the Greek Old Testament in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 for a man lying with a male. Together they name sexual relations between men as sin.

Then come "thieves," "greedy persons," "drunkards," "revilers," who abuse others with their words, and "swindlers," who cheat. Greed and drunkenness and a cruel tongue are on the same list. None of us can read this list and feel superior to anyone else.

What does Paul mean when he says people like this will not inherit the kingdom? He is not saying a believer who once fell into one of these sins is lost. He is describing people whose lives are marked by these sins, who keep on in them without repentance. A life that goes on in sin with no sorrow and no change shows that a person does not belong to Christ (1 John 3:9-10). But that is not the end of the story.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:22 (alluded to)

6:11 *And such were some **of you**; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

"And such were some of you." These may be the most hopeful words in the chapter. Some in the Corinthian church had been sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who had slept with men, thieves, drunkards, and swindlers. That is who they were. It is not who they are now.

Three things happened to them. "But you were washed." God cleansed them from the filth of their sin (Titus 3:5). "But you were sanctified." God set them apart as His own. "But you were justified." God declared them righteous, not guilty, because of Christ. Justification is God's legal verdict that a sinner who believes is right with Him. All of this happened "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." The Father, the Son, and the Spirit were all at work in saving them.

Hear this if you see yourself in that list. No sin is beyond the reach of God's grace. Whatever you have done, and whatever pulls at you still, you can be washed, set apart, and made right with God through Jesus Christ. Some believers still struggle with old desires, including same-sex attraction, for years after they come to Christ. Temptation is not the same as sin, and a struggle does not mean you were never saved. The church should be a place where people who are fighting old sins are loved, helped, and pointed to Christ, not shamed or pushed away.

6:12 *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*

"All things are lawful for me." This was most likely a saying the Corinthians used, perhaps taking something Paul himself had taught about freedom from the Law and twisting it. Many Bibles put it in quotation marks. The Corinthians used it to excuse whatever they wanted to do.

Paul doesn't throw it out completely, but he puts two limits on it. First, "not all things are profitable." Just because you can do something doesn't mean it is good for you or for others. Second, "I will not be mastered by anything." Freedom that leads you into slavery is not freedom at all. Many things start as a choice and become a chain: drink, drugs, pornography, gambling, even food or a phone. A believer must ask not only whether something is allowed, but whether it is helping him and whether it is taking control of him.

6:13 *Foods **are** for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will bring to nothing both it and them. And the body **is** not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

"Foods are for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will bring to nothing both it and them." This was likely another Corinthian slogan, and Paul may be quoting all of the first half. The idea seems to have been this: the body is just physical and will pass away, so eat what you want and do what you want with your body. Food satisfies the stomach, and sex satisfies another appetite. What's the difference?

Paul says there is a big difference. "And the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Our bodies are not just meat to be used for pleasure. They belong to the Lord. And amazingly, "the Lord for the body." He cares about our bodies, gave His own body for them, and will one day raise them.

6:14 *And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up through His power.*

"And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up through His power." This is why the body matters. Some Corinthians thought the body was unimportant, because it will die. Paul says it will not stay dead. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead will raise our bodies too.

Paul will spend all of chapter 15 on this truth. The resurrection is not only about our souls going to heaven. It is about our bodies being raised and made new (Philippians 3:21). God is not going to throw our bodies away. He is going to raise them. So what we do with them now matters to Him.

6:15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Then having taken the members of the Christ, shall I make* ***them*** *members of a prostitute? May it not be!*

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Believers are joined to Christ, not only in spirit but body and soul. Our bodies are His members, His limbs, the parts He uses to do His work.

"Then having taken the members of the Christ, shall I make them members of a prostitute? May it not be!" Prostitution was common in Corinth, as in most port cities of that day. Some believers apparently thought it didn't matter. Paul says the thought is unthinkable. Taking a body that belongs to Christ and joining it to a prostitute is like dragging Christ Himself into that sin. "May it not be" is the strongest way Paul can say no.

6:16 *Or do you not know that the one who is joined to the prostitute is one body* ***with her****? For "the two," He says, "will become one flesh."*

"Or do you not know that the one who is joined to the prostitute is one body with her?" Sex is never just physical. It joins two people together in a deep way, whether they intend it or not.

Paul proves it with Genesis 2:24: "the two," He says, "will become one flesh." Paul says "He says." God is the One speaking in Genesis. God designed sex to be part of the lifelong union of a husband and wife, a joining of two lives into one. When people join themselves outside of marriage, they misuse something God made holy. They are joining themselves in a way God meant only for marriage.

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:24 (quoted)

6:17 *But the one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit* ***with Him****.*

"But the one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Here is the contrast. A believer is joined to the Lord in a union even deeper than the union of husband and wife. The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ so closely that Paul can say we are "one spirit with Him."

That is why sexual sin is such a serious matter for a believer. It is not only a sin against another person or against our own bodies. It brings into a shameful union a body that belongs to Christ and is one with Him by the Spirit. We cannot be joined to the Lord and to sin at the same time without great harm.

6:18 *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man may do is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

"Flee sexual immorality." Paul does not say to fight it or to reason with it. He says run. Joseph is the great example. When Potiphar's wife grabbed him, he left his coat in her hand and ran out of the house (Genesis 39:12). Some temptations are best handled by getting away from them as fast as you can. That might mean not going certain places, not being alone with certain people, or putting filters on a phone or computer.

"Every sin that a man may do is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." Other sins affect the body, of course. But sexual sin is different. It uses the body itself to break the union it was made for, and it often leaves deep scars in body, heart, and memory.

6:19 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit* ***who is*** *in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?" In 3:16 the church as a whole was God's temple. Here it is each believer's body. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer (Romans 8:9). Your body is His dwelling place, His holy temple.

"And you are not your own." This truth changes everything. Our culture says your body belongs to you alone. Scripture says your body belongs to God. We don't own ourselves. We are stewards of the bodies God gave us. That covers sexual purity, but it also covers how we care for our bodies, what we put into them, and how we use them. Would you do in a temple what you are tempted to do with your body?

6:20 *For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

"For you were bought with a price." Here is why we are not our own. Christ bought us. In Corinth people saw slaves bought and sold in the market every day. We were slaves to sin, and Jesus paid for our freedom with His own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). We now belong to the One who bought us.

"Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." To glorify God means to show how great and good He is. We do it not only with our worship on Sunday but with our bodies every day of the week. Most older Greek copies end this verse at "in your body," and many modern Bibles leave out the words "and in your spirit, which are God's." The SLB includes them because it follows the Received Greek Text. Either way, the meaning stands: the whole person belongs to God.

Chapter 6 Summary

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking each other to court before unbelieving judges. The saints will judge the world and even angels, so they should be able to settle everyday disputes among themselves. It would be better to suffer wrong or be cheated than to bring shame on Christ by suing a brother before unbelievers, and some of them were the ones doing the wrong. The

unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, and Paul names the sins plainly: sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, sexual relations between men, theft, greed, drunkenness, abusive speech, and swindling. Yet some of the Corinthians had lived that way, and they had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. Paul then answers the slogans used to excuse sexual sin. All things may be lawful, but not all are profitable, and a believer must not be mastered by anything. The body is for the Lord, and God will raise it. A believer's body is a member of Christ and must not be joined to a prostitute, because the one joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Believers must flee sexual immorality. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, they are not their own, and they were bought with a price, so they must glorify God in their bodies.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Why was Paul shocked that believers were taking each other to court? (6:1, 6)

2. What reasons does Paul give in 6:2-3 for settling disputes inside the church?

3. What does Paul say would be better than going to court with a brother? (6:7)

4. Who will not inherit the kingdom of God, according to 6:9-10?

5. What hope does 6:11 give, and what three things had God done for the Corinthians?

6. What two limits does Paul put on the slogan "All things are lawful for me"? (6:12)

7. Why does what we do with our bodies matter to God? (6:13-15, 19-20)

8. What does it mean to "Flee sexual immorality"? What would that look like in your life? (6:18)

9. Is there anything in your life that is starting to master you? What step could you take this week? (6:12)

10. You "were bought with a price." How should that truth change the way you think about your body and how you use it? (6:20)

Chapter 7: Marriage and Singleness

Scripture

7:1-16 Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me: ***it is*** good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to the wife the goodwill due ***her***, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband ***does***; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife ***does***. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by mutual agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this by way of concession, not by way of command. For I wish all men to be even as I myself ***am***. But each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that way. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I ***am***. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn. And to those who have married I give charge, not I, but the Lord: a wife is not to be separated from ***her*** husband (but if she is indeed separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to ***her*** husband), and a husband is not to send away ***his*** wife. But to the rest I say, not the Lord: if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to dwell with him, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to dwell with her, let her not send him away. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in the husband; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself; the brother or the sister has not been enslaved in such ***cases***; but God has called us in peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save ***your*** husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save ***your*** wife?

7:17-24 Only, as God has assigned to each, as the Lord has called each, so let him walk. And so I prescribe in all the churches. Was anyone called having been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but ***what matters is*** keeping the commandments of God. Let each remain in this, in the calling in which he was called. Were you called ***as*** a slave? Let it not concern you; but if you are indeed able to become free, rather make use ***of it***. For the one who was called in ***the*** Lord ***as*** a slave is a freedman of ***the*** Lord; likewise also the one who was called ***as*** free is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers, let each remain with God in that in which he was called.

7:25-40 Now concerning the virgins, I do not have a command of ***the*** Lord; but I give judgment as one who has received mercy from ***the*** Lord to be trustworthy. I think then that this is good because of the present necessity, that ***it is*** good for a man to be thus. Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek release. Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned. But such will have tribulation in the flesh, and I am sparing you. But this I say, brothers: the time has been shortened, so that from now on even those who have wives may be as ***though*** not having ***them***, and those who weep as ***though*** not weeping, and those who rejoice as ***though*** not rejoicing, and

those who buy as ***though*** not possessing, and those who use this world as ***though*** not using ***it*** to the full; for the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be without anxiety. The unmarried ***man*** is anxious for the things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord; but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how he will please ***his*** wife. The wife and the virgin have been divided. The unmarried woman is anxious for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how she will please ***her*** husband. And this I say for your own benefit, not that I may cast a noose on you, but for what ***is*** seemly and devoted to the Lord without distraction. But if anyone thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past ***her*** prime, and so it ought to be, let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will, and has judged this in his heart, to keep his own virgin, does well. So then also the one who gives ***her*** in marriage does well, but the one who does not give ***her*** in marriage does better. A wife has been bound by law for as long a time as her husband lives; but if her husband falls asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in ***the*** Lord. But she is more blessed if she remains thus, according to my judgment; and I think that I also have ***the*** Spirit of God.

Chapter 7 Preview

With chapter 7 Paul begins to answer the letter the Corinthians had sent him. Their first question was about marriage. Some in Corinth seem to have thought that married believers should stop having sexual relations, or that it was more spiritual not to marry at all. Paul answers with balance. Marriage is good, and husband and wife should not deprive each other. Singleness is also good, and it is a gift from God. Married believers should not divorce. If an unbelieving spouse is willing to stay, the believer should not leave, because God can use the believer in that home. But if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is not bound in such a case.

Then Paul gives a principle that runs through the whole chapter: remain in the calling in which God called you. Becoming a Christian does not mean you must change your marriage status, your background, or your place in society. Serve God where you are. In the last part, Paul speaks to those who have never married. Because of the present distress and the shortness of the time, he advises them to think hard about staying single, so they can serve the Lord without distraction. But those who marry do not sin. A widow is free to remarry, only in the Lord.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me: **it is** good for a man not to touch a woman.*

"Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me." Here Paul begins answering the Corinthians' letter. The words "now concerning" will mark new topics through the rest of the book (7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

"It is good for a man not to touch a woman." To "touch a woman" was a polite way of speaking about sexual relations. Many Bible teachers believe this line was a saying from the Corinthians'

own letter, which Paul quotes before answering it, as he did in 6:12-13. Some in Corinth had swung from one extreme to the other. While some were saying sex outside of marriage didn't matter, others were saying even married couples should give it up. Paul agrees that singleness can be good, but he will not let anyone call marriage second-class.

7:2 *But because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

"But because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." Corinth was full of sexual temptation. Paul's answer is marriage. God made marriage as the right place for sexual desire.

Notice the words "his own" and "her own." This is one man and one woman, each belonging to the other. That is God's plan from creation (Genesis 2:24).

This is not Paul's whole view of marriage. He is answering a specific question. Elsewhere he speaks of marriage as a picture of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Marriage is far more than a guard against sin. But it is not less than that either.

7:3 *Let the husband render to the wife the goodwill due **her**, and likewise also the wife to the husband.*

"Let the husband render to the wife the goodwill due her, and likewise also the wife to the husband." The "goodwill due her" refers to the marriage relationship, including sexual relations. Paul says it is something each spouse owes the other.

Notice how Paul treats husband and wife equally here. In the ancient world, men often had rights and women had duties. Paul says both have duties and both have rights. The husband owes his wife, and the wife owes her husband. In a world where many men treated their wives as property, this was a big step. In Christ, marriage is a partnership of mutual giving.

7:4 *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband **does**; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife **does**.*

"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." In marriage, our bodies are no longer only our own. We have given ourselves to each other.

Again, notice the balance. It works both ways. This verse is about mutual self-giving, not about demands. It never gives either spouse the right to force himself or herself on the other. Love does not seek its own (13:5), and Paul is speaking of willing gifts. Any use of this verse to excuse abuse or force twists it into the opposite of what Paul meant. A husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church will not demand. He will give.

7:5 *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by mutual agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

"Do not deprive one another." Some Corinthians were holding back from their spouses, perhaps thinking it was more spiritual. Paul says stop.

He allows one exception, with three conditions: "except perhaps by mutual agreement," both must agree; "for a time," it must be temporary; and "that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer," it must have a spiritual purpose. Then "come together again."

Why? "So that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." Paul is realistic. Married people who stay apart too long open the door to temptation. Satan looks for weak spots, and a cold marriage is one of them. Guard your marriage by caring for each other.

7:6 *But I say this by way of concession, not by way of command.*

"But I say this by way of concession, not by way of command." What is "this"? It most likely refers to what he just said in verse 5 about a time apart for prayer. Paul allows it, but he does not command it. No one has to do it to be more spiritual.

Some take "this" to mean the whole instruction to marry in verse 2. In that case, Paul is saying marriage is allowed, not commanded. Either way, Paul is careful not to make rules where God has given freedom. That is a good lesson for us. We should not bind people's consciences with rules God has not given.

7:7 *For I wish all men to be even as I myself **am**. But each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that way.*

"For I wish all men to be even as I myself am." Paul was single when he wrote, either never married or widowed. Scripture doesn't say which. He found that being single gave him freedom to serve God fully, and he wished others could share that freedom.

"But each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that way." Singleness is a gift. So is marriage. God does not give the same gift to everyone. Jesus said the same thing (Matthew 19:11-12). If you are single, your life is not on hold, waiting for marriage to begin. If you are married, you have not settled for less. Both are gifts, and both can be used for God.

7:8 *But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I **am**.*

"But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I am." The "unmarried" here may mean those who were once married but are no longer, since Paul pairs them with widows. It may also include anyone single.

Paul says it is "good" to remain single. He does not say it is better in every case, or that it is commanded. He says it is good. In a church where some looked down on marriage and others

looked down on singleness, Paul affirms both. A single believer is not a half-person waiting to be completed. Jesus Himself was never married, and He was the most complete man who ever lived.

7:9 *But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.*

"But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." "To burn" here means to burn with desire, to be consumed by sexual longing. Paul is not saying people should marry just to have an outlet. He is saying that if someone struggles deeply with desire, marriage is God's good answer, and there is no shame in it.

This verse is honest and practical. Some people can live single and content. Others cannot without constant temptation. Paul does not make the second group feel guilty. He says marry. God made us with these desires, and He made marriage as the right place for them. There is nothing second-rate about that.

7:10 *And to those who have married I give charge, not I, but the Lord: a wife is not to be separated from* ***her*** *husband*

"And to those who have married I give charge, not I, but the Lord." Here Paul is passing on something Jesus Himself taught while He was on earth (Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12). Paul wants them to know this is not just his advice. It comes from the Lord.

"A wife is not to be separated from her husband." The word for separated was used of divorce in the Greek world. In those days, a husband or a wife could simply walk away and the marriage was considered ended. Paul says a believing wife must not do that. God's plan is for marriage to last for life. "What God joined together, let man not separate," as Jesus said (Matthew 19:6).

7:11 *(but if she is indeed separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to* ***her*** *husband), and a husband is not to send away* ***his*** *wife.*

"But if she is indeed separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." Paul knows that even believers sometimes separate. If that happens, there are two choices: stay unmarried, or be reconciled. The door to reconciliation should be kept open. "And a husband is not to send away his wife." The same rule applies to the husband.

A word as a pastor. This verse speaks to believers who separate for reasons that do not change the marriage. It does not tell anyone to stay where they or their children are in danger. If you are being abused, getting to safety is not a sin. Please reach out to your pastor, to trusted believers, and to the authorities. God cares about your safety.

7:12 *But to the rest I say, not the Lord: if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to dwell with him, let him not send her away.*

"But to the rest I say, not the Lord." Paul now speaks to a case Jesus did not address during His time on earth: marriages where one spouse came to faith and the other did not. In Corinth, many people had been married before they believed. Paul is not saying his words here are less inspired.

He is saying Jesus left no direct teaching on this case, so Paul, as an apostle guided by the Spirit, gives it (7:40; 14:37).

"If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to dwell with him, let him not send her away." Some believers might have thought they should divorce an unbelieving spouse to stay pure. Paul says no. If the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay, the believer must not leave.

7:13 *And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to dwell with her, let her not send him away.*

"And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to dwell with her, let her not send him away." Paul gives the same word to the wife. He treats both sides the same way.

This took courage. In the Roman world, a wife was usually expected to follow her husband's religion. A woman who became a Christian while her husband worshiped other gods was in a hard spot. Paul tells her not to leave if her husband is willing to stay. Peter gives similar counsel to wives with unbelieving husbands, that they may be won by their wives' behavior (1 Peter 3:1-2).

This does not mean believers should go into such a marriage on purpose. Paul will say a widow may remarry "only in the Lord" (7:39). He is speaking here to people who were already married when one of them came to faith.

7:14 *For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in the husband; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.*

"For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in the husband." Some believers may have worried that being married to an unbeliever made them unclean. Paul says it is the other way around.

What does "sanctified" mean here? It cannot mean the unbelieving spouse is saved, because verse 16 says the believer may yet save him. It means set apart in a special way. The unbeliever is in a home where God is at work and where he sees the gospel lived every day. The believer's presence brings God's blessing into the home.

"Otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." The children, too, are set apart by having a believing parent. That does not make them automatically saved. Each child must come to faith for himself. But they are raised under God's care and in the light of the gospel.

7:15 *But if the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself; the brother or the sister has not been enslaved in such **cases**; but God has called us in peace.*

"But if the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself." What if the unbelieving spouse leaves? Paul says let him go. The believer does not have to chase him or force him to stay.

"The brother or the sister has not been enslaved in such cases." What does "not enslaved" mean? Good Bible teachers read this in two main ways. Many believe it means the believer is free from the marriage bond and may remarry. They connect it with verse 39, where a wife is bound while

her husband lives and is free to marry when he dies. In this view, desertion by an unbeliever is a second ground for divorce and remarriage, alongside the exception for sexual immorality Jesus gave (Matthew 19:9). Others believe it means only that the believer is not bound to fight to keep the marriage together or to follow the unbeliever, but he is still not free to remarry, as verse 11 said. Both views agree that the believer is not to blame when the unbeliever chooses to leave.

"But God has called us in peace." Whatever happens, God wants peace in our homes and in our hearts. The believer should not start a war to keep or end a marriage. If you have been left, hear this: God has not left you. If you are wrestling with whether you are free to remarry, talk with a godly pastor who knows your situation and the Scriptures.

7:16 *For how do you know, wife, whether you will save **your** husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save **your** wife?*

"For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" This verse is read in two ways. Some read it as hopeful: stay in the marriage, because you may lead your spouse to Christ. That fits verses 12 to 14. Others read it as a reason to let the deserting spouse go: you can't be sure that holding on will save him, so don't fight to keep him. That fits verse 15.

Either way, the believer cannot save anyone. God saves, and we can only point to Christ. We should never stay in a marriage thinking it is our job to save our spouse by sheer effort, and we should never give up praying for them either. Many unbelieving spouses have come to Christ through the quiet faith of their husband or wife.

7:17 *Only, as God has assigned to each, as the Lord has called each, so let him walk. And so I prescribe in all the churches.*

"Only, as God has assigned to each, as the Lord has called each, so let him walk." Here is the principle that runs through the rest of the chapter. When God calls you to Himself, He calls you where you are. Your first job is not to change your situation. It is to walk with Him in it.

"And so I prescribe in all the churches." This was not a special rule for Corinth. Paul taught this everywhere. New believers are often eager to change everything about their lives. Some changes are needed, like leaving sin behind. But your marriage, your job, and your background are usually not things you must throw away to follow Christ. God can use you right where He found you.

7:18 *Was anyone called having been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised.*

Paul gives a first example. "Was anyone called having been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised." A Jewish man who became a Christian did not need to hide his Jewish background. In the Greek world, some Jewish men even tried to undo their circumcision by surgery so they would not be mocked at the public baths and games.

"Was anyone called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised." A Gentile man who believed did not need to become a Jew. Some were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved,

and Paul fought that error hard (Galatians 5:2-6; Acts 15:1-11). Salvation does not depend on your background.

7:19 *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but **what matters is** keeping the commandments of God.*

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." This was a startling thing for a Jewish man to write. Circumcision had been the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). But in Christ, it does not make a person right with God, and neither does the lack of it.

"But what matters is keeping the commandments of God." What counts is obeying God. Paul says something similar in Galatians 5:6, where what matters is "faith working through love." This doesn't mean we are saved by keeping commandments. It means that what God cares about is a heart that loves and obeys Him, not outward marks.

7:20 *Let each remain in this, in the calling in which he was called.*

"Let each remain in this, in the calling in which he was called." Paul repeats the principle. The "calling" here is the life situation a person was in when God called him to salvation.

This doesn't mean a person can never change jobs, move, or marry. Paul himself will allow change in the next verse. It means you don't have to change your outward situation to be a good Christian. A believing plumber does not have to become a pastor to serve God. A believing mother does not have to leave home to be in ministry. Your everyday life is where God has placed you to live for Him. Paul says this three times in this short section (7:17, 20, 24), so it must be important.

7:21 *Were you called **as** a slave? Let it not concern you; but if you are indeed able to become free, rather make use **of it**.*

"Were you called as a slave? Let it not concern you." Many believers in Corinth were slaves. In the Roman Empire, slavery was common, perhaps a large part of the population in big cities. It was not based on race. People became slaves through war, debt, birth, or crime. Some slaves were educated and held responsible jobs, and many were freed after some years. But it was still a hard life, and a slave belonged to another person.

"But if you are indeed able to become free, rather make use of it." Most read this as: if you can gain your freedom, take it. Some read it as: even if you could be free, make use of your present condition to serve God. The first reading fits the next verses better. Paul is not saying slavery is good. He is saying a slave's standing before God is not lower than anyone else's.

7:22 *For the one who was called in **the** Lord **as** a slave is a freedman of **the** Lord; likewise also the one who was called **as** free is a slave of Christ.*

"For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord." A freedman was a former slave who had been set free. A slave who belongs to Christ is already free in the deepest way. He is free from sin, guilt, and death.

"Likewise also the one who was called as free is a slave of Christ." And a free man who belongs to Christ is now Christ's slave, owing Him everything. In Christ, the world's categories are turned around. The slave is free, and the free man is a slave. Both stand equal before God (Galatians 3:28).

These verses have sometimes been misused to keep people in chains and to say slaves should never seek freedom. That twists Paul's words. Paul just said to take freedom if you can, and in 1 Timothy 1:10 he names "enslavers" among the lawless. Roman slavery was not the same as the race-based slavery of the American South, but neither system is God's ideal. For us today, these verses speak to our work. Whether we are the boss or the newest employee, we serve Christ in it.

7:23 *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*

"You were bought with a price." Paul said this in 6:20. Christ bought every believer with His own blood. That is true of the slave and the free man alike.

"Do not become slaves of men." Since Christ owns you, don't sell yourself to anyone else. In context this may mean, don't sell yourself into slavery if you are free. Some in the ancient world did that to escape debt. But it also has a wider meaning. Don't become a slave to what people think, to human opinions, or to anyone who wants to control you in a way that takes Christ's place. You belong to Him.

7:24 *Brothers, let each remain with God in that in which he was called.*

"Brothers, let each remain with God in that in which he was called." Paul repeats the principle a third time, but he adds two words: "with God." That is the key. We don't remain in our situation alone. We remain in it "with God."

That changes everything about where you are right now. Whether you are married or single, rich or poor, an employee or a boss, God is with you there. Your situation may be hard, and it may change in time. But today it is the place where you walk with God. Contentment does not come from changing our circumstances. It comes from knowing God is with us in them.

7:25 *Now concerning the virgins, I do not have a command of **the** Lord; but I give judgment as one who has received mercy from **the** Lord to be trustworthy.*

"Now concerning the virgins." Here is another topic from the Corinthians' letter. "Virgins" here means young people who had never been married, especially young women who were engaged or old enough to marry.

"I do not have a command of the Lord." Jesus had not given direct teaching on this. "But I give judgment as one who has received mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy." Paul gives his advice, and he gives it as one whom the Lord has made faithful by His mercy. This is wise counsel from an apostle, and the Holy Spirit included it in Scripture. But Paul is careful to say it is advice, not a command.

7:26 *I think then that this is good because of the present necessity, that **it is** good for a man to be thus.*

"I think then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be thus." "To be thus" means to stay as he is, that is, unmarried.

Why? "Because of the present necessity." The word means distress or hardship. Paul may be thinking of a particular crisis in Corinth, such as a famine or persecution that made life hard. Or he may mean the distress of living in this fallen age as believers wait for the Lord. Either way, it was a hard time to start a family. Paul is giving practical advice for that situation, not a rule that every believer should always stay single.

7:27 *Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek release. Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*

"Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek release." If you are married, stay married. Some may have thought that in hard times they should get out of their marriage to serve God better. Paul says no.

"Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife." "Released" here may mean never married, or it may mean someone whose marriage has ended. Paul's advice is not to rush into marriage. Again, this is advice for the present distress. He says in the very next verse that marrying is not sin. Paul is not making rules. He is helping believers think wisely about the times they lived in.

7:28 *But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned. But such will have tribulation in the flesh, and I am sparing you.*

"But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned." Paul makes it plain. Marriage is not sin. Anyone who wants to marry is free to do so. Some in Corinth may have taught otherwise, but Paul shuts that down. Later he warns against false teachers who forbid marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

"But such will have tribulation in the flesh, and I am sparing you." Married life brings its own troubles. A married person has more to worry about, especially in hard times: a spouse to care for, children to feed, and more to lose. Paul is not trying to scare them. He wants to spare them extra pain. Anyone who has been married knows marriage is a great joy and also hard work.

7:29 *But this I say, brothers: the time has been shortened, so that from now on even those who have wives may be as **though** not having **them**,*

"But this I say, brothers: the time has been shortened." The word for shortened was used of a sail being taken in, or of something compressed. The time until the Lord comes is short. The early church lived expecting Jesus to come at any moment, and so should we (Titus 2:13).

"So that from now on even those who have wives may be as though not having them." This does not mean husbands should ignore their wives. Paul has just told them to care for each other

(7:3-5). It means marriage, as precious as it is, must not become the most important thing in life. Marriage belongs to this age. Jesus said in the resurrection people do not marry (Matthew 22:30). Live with eternity in view.

7:30-31 *and those who weep as **though** not weeping, and those who rejoice as **though** not rejoicing, and those who buy as **though** not possessing, and those who use this world as **though** not using **it** to the full; for the form of this world is passing away.*

Paul applies the same principle to all of life. "Those who weep as though not weeping, and those who rejoice as though not rejoicing." Our sorrows are real, but they are not the end. Our joys are real, but they are not forever. "Those who buy as though not possessing." We can own things, but we should hold them loosely.

"And those who use this world as though not using it to the full." We live in this world and use what it offers. But we must not be swallowed up by it.

Why? "For the form of this world is passing away." The word for form was used of the scenery in a play, the outward shape of things. The scene is changing. Everything we see now is temporary. Only what is done for Christ will last. That is a good question to ask ourselves: am I living for what is passing, or for what will last?

7:32 *But I want you to be without anxiety. The unmarried **man** is anxious for the things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord;*

"But I want you to be without anxiety." Paul's goal is not to load them down. He wants them to be free from needless worry.

"The unmarried man is anxious for the things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord." The word for anxious here is used in a good sense. It means caring about something. A single man can give his whole attention to the Lord's work. He can go where God sends him, serve when he is needed, and give his time freely. Paul himself was an example of this. He traveled the world for the gospel, often in danger, with no family to worry about.

7:33-34 *but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how he will please **his** wife. The wife and the virgin have been divided. The unmarried woman is anxious for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how she will please **her** husband.*

"But the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how he will please his wife." A married man has a right and good concern for his wife. He must provide for her, care for her, and please her. That is his duty (Ephesians 5:25). But it means his attention is divided.

"The wife and the virgin have been divided." The same is true for women. "The unmarried woman is anxious for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit." She can give herself fully to God. "But the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how she will please her husband."

Paul is not saying married people are less spiritual. Pleasing your spouse is part of serving God. He is saying marriage brings more responsibilities, and those take time and attention. Married or single, our goal is to please the Lord.

7:35 *And this I say for your own benefit, not that I may cast a noose on you, but for what **is** seemly and devoted to the Lord without distraction.*

"And this I say for your own benefit, not that I may cast a noose on you." The noose was used to catch animals or to tie someone up. Paul is not trying to trap them with rules. He is not forcing anyone to stay single.

His goal is "for what is seemly and devoted to the Lord without distraction." Seemly means fitting and right. Paul wants believers to be wholly devoted to the Lord. For some that means staying single. For others it means marriage. Whatever our state, the goal is the same: to serve the Lord with an undivided heart. Ask yourself, what distracts you from devotion to the Lord?

7:36 *But if anyone thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past **her** prime, and so it ought to be, let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry.*

"But if anyone thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past her prime, and so it ought to be, let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry." Verses 36 to 38 are hard to interpret, and Bible teachers read them in two main ways.

One view is that Paul is speaking of a father and his unmarried daughter. In those days, fathers usually arranged their daughters' marriages. If a father thinks he is being unfair to his daughter by keeping her single when she is past the usual age, he may give her in marriage. The other view is that Paul is speaking of an engaged man and the woman he is engaged to. If he finds that his desire is strong, or she is getting older, they should marry. "He does not sin; let them marry." Either way, marriage is not sin.

7:37 *But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will, and has judged this in his heart, to keep his own virgin, does well.*

"But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will, and has judged this in his heart, to keep his own virgin, does well."

This speaks to the other side. If a man has decided, with a settled mind and no pressure forcing him, to keep his virgin unmarried, he "does well." Under the father view, it means he keeps his daughter single. Under the engaged couple view, it means he decides with her not to marry, so they can serve the Lord. Notice the conditions. The decision must be firm, freely made, and under control. Paul does not want anyone pressured into singleness, and he does not want anyone pressured into marriage.

7:38 *So then also the one who gives **her** in marriage does well, but the one who does not give **her** in marriage does better.*

"So then also the one who gives her in marriage does well, but the one who does not give her in marriage does better." Both choices are good. Marriage is good. Singleness, in the present distress, is "better" in Paul's judgment, because it allows undivided service to the Lord.

We must be careful not to turn this into a rule that says single people are more spiritual. Paul has already said marriage is a gift from God (7:7) and that marrying is not sin (7:28, 36). "Better" here means better suited to the times and to undistracted service, not more holy. The right choice is the one God leads you to, made with wisdom and a desire to please Him.

7:39 *A wife has been bound by law for as long a time as her husband lives; but if her husband falls asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in **the** Lord.*

"A wife has been bound by law for as long a time as her husband lives." Marriage is for life. That is God's design.

"But if her husband falls asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes." For the believer, death is called sleep, because it is not the end (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). When a husband dies, the marriage bond ends, and the widow is free to remarry.

"Only in the Lord." That is the one limit. A believing widow should marry a believer. Paul states the same principle in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers." This applies to anyone thinking about marriage. Marrying someone who does not share your faith in Christ invites a lifetime of division at the deepest level of your life.

7:40 *But she is more blessed if she remains thus, according to my judgment; and I think that I also have **the** Spirit of God.*

"But she is more blessed if she remains thus, according to my judgment." Paul thinks a widow will be happier if she stays single, for the reasons he has given: freedom from worry and freedom to serve the Lord. But it is his judgment, not a command. Elsewhere he advises younger widows to remarry (1 Timothy 5:14).

"And I think that I also have the Spirit of God." This is not doubt. It is a gentle jab at those in Corinth who claimed to be spiritual and questioned Paul. He is saying, in effect, that he has the Spirit at least as much as those who claim to be so spiritual. Paul's counsel in this chapter is not just a man's opinion. It is given by an apostle with the Spirit of God, and it is part of God's Word to us.

Chapter 7 Summary

Paul begins answering the Corinthians' letter with the question of marriage. Against those who said it is good for a man not to touch a woman, he teaches that each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband, and that husbands and wives owe each other the marriage relationship, apart from a brief time of prayer by mutual agreement. Singleness is a good gift from

God, and so is marriage. For those who struggle with desire, it is better to marry than to burn. Passing on the Lord's command, Paul says married believers should not divorce, and a wife who separates should remain unmarried or be reconciled. A believer married to an unbeliever who is willing to stay should not leave, because the unbelieving spouse and the children are set apart by the believer's presence. But if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is not enslaved in such cases, for God has called us in peace. Paul then teaches that each believer should remain with God in the calling in which he was called, whether circumcised or not, slave or free, since what matters is obeying God and all believers were bought with a price. To the unmarried he advises staying single because of the present distress and the shortness of the time, so they can serve the Lord without distraction, though those who marry do not sin. A widow is free to remarry, only in the Lord.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What Corinthian saying does Paul seem to answer in 7:1, and how does he answer it?

2. What does Paul teach about the duties husbands and wives owe each other? (7:3-5)

3. What does Paul say about singleness and marriage as gifts from God? (7:7)

4. What does the Lord command married believers, and what should a separated believer do? (7:10-11)

5. What should a believer do if married to an unbeliever who is willing to stay? Why? (7:12-14)

6. What does Paul say in 7:15 if the unbeliever leaves?

7. What principle does Paul repeat three times in 7:17-24, and what does it mean?

8. Why does Paul advise the unmarried to consider staying single? Does he say marriage is wrong? (7:26-28, 32-35)

9. "The form of this world is passing away" (7:31). What things in your life are you holding too tightly?

10. Whether you are married or single, what would it look like for you to serve the Lord "without distraction"? (7:35)

Chapter 8: Love Builds Up

Scripture

8:1-13 Now concerning the idol sacrifices, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known anything as it is necessary to know; but if anyone loves God, this one has been known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of the idol sacrifices, we know that an idol ***is*** nothing in ***the*** world, and that ***there is*** no other God except one. For even if indeed there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us ***there is*** one God, the Father, from whom ***are*** all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom ***are*** all things, and we through Him. But this knowledge ***is*** not in all ***men***; and some, with conscience of the idol until now, eat ***food*** as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat do we have more, nor if we do not eat do we lack. But watch, lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you, the one having knowledge, reclining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, since he is weak, be built up to eat the idol sacrifices? And the brother who is weak will perish by your knowledge, for whom Christ died. And thus sinning against the brothers and striking their conscience while it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat to the age, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble.

Chapter 8 Preview

The next question in the Corinthians' letter was about food offered to idols. In Corinth, much of the meat sold in the market had first been sacrificed in a pagan temple. Feasts and social events were often held in temple dining rooms. Could a believer eat that meat? Some in the church said yes, and they were proud of their knowledge. An idol is nothing, and there is only one God, so the food is just food. Paul agrees with their facts. But he points out that knowledge alone puffs up. Love builds up.

Not every believer had that knowledge. Some had worshiped idols for years, and eating such food troubled their conscience. If a believer with knowledge used his freedom carelessly, he could lead a weaker brother to act against his conscience and fall. That brother is one for whom Christ died. Sinning against him is sinning against Christ. So Paul says that if food would make his brother stumble, he will never eat meat again. Freedom is good, but love limits it for the sake of others. Paul will continue this subject through chapters 9 and 10.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *Now concerning the idol sacrifices, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*

"Now concerning the idol sacrifices." This is a new question from the Corinthians' letter. "Idol sacrifices" means food, mostly meat, that had been offered to a pagan god. In Corinth, animals

were sacrificed in the temples, part was burned, part went to the priests, and part was eaten at temple meals or sold in the market. It was hard to buy meat or go to a dinner party without facing the question.

"We know that we all have knowledge." This was probably another Corinthian saying. The strong believers were proud of what they knew. Paul answers, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Knowledge on its own makes people proud, like a balloon full of air. Love builds others up, like a house going up brick by brick. Paul is not against knowledge. He is against knowledge without love.

8:2 *And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known anything as it is necessary to know;*

"And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known anything as it is necessary to know." This is a warning to anyone who is proud of what he knows. The person who thinks he has it all figured out shows he doesn't.

Real knowledge of God makes a person humble. The more we truly learn about God, the more we see how much we don't know. That is the mark of someone who knows "as it is necessary to know." The Corinthians knew facts, but they did not yet know how to use them in love. Have you ever met someone who knew the Bible well but was harsh with everyone? Knowledge without love has missed the point.

8:3 *but if anyone loves God, this one has been known by Him.*

"But if anyone loves God, this one has been known by Him." Paul turns it around. The most important thing is not what we know about God. It is that God knows us. To be "known by Him" means to be loved and chosen by Him, to belong to Him as His own (Galatians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:19).

And the one who loves God shows that he is known by God. The Corinthians were proud of their knowledge. Paul reminds them that the whole Christian life begins with God's love for us, not our knowledge of Him. That should humble us. And love for God will always show itself in love for others (1 John 4:20-21).

8:4 *Therefore concerning the eating of the idol sacrifices, we know that an idol **is** nothing in **the** world, and that **there is** no other God except one.*

"Therefore concerning the eating of the idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God except one." Now Paul comes back to the question. He agrees with the strong believers' facts.

An idol is "nothing." It is just wood, stone, or metal shaped by human hands (Isaiah 44:9-20; Psalm 115:4-8). There is no real god behind it. And there is only one true God, as the Shema, Israel's great confession, says: "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). So food offered to an idol has not been changed. It is still just food. The strong believers were right about that.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 6:4 (alluded to)

8:5 *For even if indeed there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords,*

"For even if indeed there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords." Corinth was full of gods. The Greeks and Romans worshiped gods of the sky, the sea, love, war, and harvest. Emperors were called lords and even gods. Temples were everywhere.

Paul calls them "so-called gods." They are not true gods. But he also says "there are many gods and many lords" in the sense that people worship them and serve them. In 10:20 Paul will add that behind the idols are demons. The idol itself is nothing, but idol worship is not harmless. That is why Paul will warn believers in chapter 10 not to take part in pagan worship.

8:6 *yet to us **there is** one God, the Father, from whom **are** all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom **are** all things, and we through Him.*

"Yet to us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him."

This is one of the great statements of the faith in the New Testament. Paul takes Israel's confession that God is one and shows that Jesus is included in it. The Father is the source "from whom are all things," and we live "for Him." Jesus Christ is the "one Lord," the One "through whom are all things," the agent of creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). And we live "through Him," as He gives us new life.

"Lord" was the word the Greek Old Testament used for God's holy name. Paul calls Jesus by that name. There is one God, and Jesus is not a second god. He is the one Lord, sharing fully in the one God's identity and work.

8:7 *But this knowledge **is** not in all **men**; and some, with conscience of the idol until now, eat **food** as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*

"But this knowledge is not in all men." Not every believer had come to that settled understanding. Some knew in their heads that idols were nothing, but they did not feel it in their hearts.

"And some, with conscience of the idol until now, eat food as an idol sacrifice." These believers had worshiped idols for years before coming to Christ. Even now, when they ate that food, it felt like idol worship to them. "And their conscience, being weak, is defiled." The conscience is the inner sense of right and wrong God has given us. A "weak" conscience here is not a sinful one. It is

one that is not yet fully taught. If a person goes against his conscience, even when the thing itself is not wrong, he feels guilty and is harmed (Romans 14:23).

8:8 *But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat do we have more, nor if we do not eat do we lack.*

"But food does not commend us to God." Food doesn't bring us closer to God or push us away from Him. "For neither if we eat do we have more, nor if we do not eat do we lack."

This cuts both ways. The strong believer should not think he is more spiritual because he eats freely. The weak believer should not think he is more spiritual because he refuses. Food is not the issue. Jesus taught the same: it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart (Mark 7:18-23). Since food doesn't matter to God, the strong believer should be willing to give it up for the sake of a brother.

8:9 *But watch, lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*

"But watch, lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." Paul admits the strong believers have a "right." They are free to eat. But a right is not the same as a duty to use it.

A "stumbling block" is something that trips a person and makes him fall. Here it means something that leads another believer into sin. The strong believer's freedom could become a trap for someone else. Love asks not only whether I am free to do something, but also how it will affect my brother. Freedom used without love can do real harm.

8:10 *For if anyone sees you, the one having knowledge, reclining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, since he is weak, be built up to eat the idol sacrifices?*

"For if anyone sees you, the one having knowledge, reclining in an idol's temple." People in that day reclined on couches to eat. Temples had dining rooms where people held banquets, weddings, and birthday parties. A believer with knowledge might think nothing of eating there.

"Will not his conscience, since he is weak, be built up to eat the idol sacrifices?" Notice the word "built up." Paul uses it with a touch of irony. The strong believers said their knowledge would build up the weak. Paul says, yes, it will build him up, but in the wrong direction. It will encourage him to do what his conscience says is wrong. In chapter 10 Paul will go further and say that taking part in meals tied to idol worship is itself wrong (10:14-22).

8:11 *And the brother who is weak will perish by your knowledge, for whom Christ died.*

"And the brother who is weak will perish by your knowledge, for whom Christ died." This is a strong word. "Perish" here means to be ruined or destroyed. Paul is showing how serious it is to lead a brother into sin. He is no longer weighing a menu. He is weighing a soul.

Bible teachers differ on how far the word perish goes here. Some believe it means spiritual ruin, the destruction of his faith and walk with God. Others believe it means falling back into idolatry

and losing the fruit of a life in Christ. Either way, Paul's main point is clear: this weak believer is a brother "for whom Christ died." If Christ loved him enough to die for him, can't we love him enough to give up a meal?

8:12 *And thus sinning against the brothers and striking their conscience while it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

"And thus sinning against the brothers and striking their conscience while it is weak, you sin against Christ." The word for "striking" means hitting or wounding. To lead a weak believer to go against his conscience is to wound him.

And it is not only a sin against him. "You sin against Christ." Christ is so closely joined to His people that whatever we do to them, we do to Him. Jesus said this to Saul on the road to Damascus: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul had been persecuting believers, but Jesus said Saul was persecuting Him. When we hurt a brother or sister, we hurt the Lord who loves them.

8:13 *Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat to the age, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble.*

"Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat to the age, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble." "To the age" means forever. Paul puts himself on the line. He would rather never eat meat again than cause a brother to fall.

This is love in action. Paul had the right to eat. He knew idols were nothing. But he cared more about his brother than about his rights. In chapter 9 he will show how he gave up many rights for the sake of the gospel. This does not mean we must give in to every opinion someone has, or that weaker believers can control everyone else. Paul is talking about leading someone into sin, not just annoying him. But it does mean that love sets limits on our freedom. The question is not only, what am I free to do? It is also, what will build up my brother?

Chapter 8 Summary

Paul answers the Corinthians' question about food offered to idols. The strong believers were proud of their knowledge, but knowledge puffs up while love builds up. The one who thinks he knows has not yet known as he should, and what matters most is that God knows the one who loves Him. Paul agrees that an idol is nothing and that there is only one God. Though there are so-called gods and lords, for believers there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things. But not every believer has that knowledge. Some, used to idols, eat with a weak conscience and are defiled. Food does not bring us closer to God, so the strong must watch that their right does not become a stumbling block to the weak. If a weak brother sees a strong believer eating in an idol's temple, he may be led to act against his conscience and be ruined, though he is a brother for whom Christ died. To sin against a brother this way is to sin against Christ. So Paul says he will never eat meat if it causes his brother to stumble.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What question did the Corinthians ask in 8:1, and why was it a real issue in their city?

2. What is the difference between knowledge that "puffs up" and love that "builds up"? (8:1)

3. Why is it more important to be known by God than to know a great deal? (8:2-3)

4. What does Paul agree with in 8:4-6, and what does 8:6 teach about Jesus?

5. Who are the "weak" in this chapter, and what happens when they act against their conscience? (8:7)

6. According to 8:8, does food bring us closer to God?

7. How could a strong believer's freedom become a "stumbling block"? (8:9-10)

8. Why does Paul say sinning against a brother is sinning against Christ? (8:11-12)

9. Is there a freedom you enjoy that might cause another believer to stumble? What would love do?

10. Paul was willing to give up meat for the sake of his brother (8:13). What right are you holding onto that love might ask you to give up?

Chapter 9: Paul's Rights and the Race to Win

Scripture

9:1-14 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in ***the*** Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least to you I am; for you are the seal of my apostleship in ***the*** Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and to drink? Do we not have a right to take along a sister ***as*** a wife, as also the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or ***is it*** only I and Barnabas ***who*** do not have a right to not work? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not eat of the milk of the flock? Do I speak these things according to man? Or does not the law also say these things? For in the law of Moses it has been written, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it threshes." Is it for the oxen ***that*** God cares? Or does He say ***it*** entirely because of us? For it was written because of us, that the one who plows ought to plow in hope, and the one who threshes in hope ***ought*** to partake of his hope. If we sowed spiritual things among you, ***is it*** a great thing if we will reap your fleshly things? If others partake of ***this*** right over you, ***do*** we not more? But we did not use this right, but we bear all things, so that we may not give any hindrance to the gospel of the Christ. Do you not know that those who work ***at*** the holy things eat of the temple, ***and*** those who attend at the altar share with the altar? So also the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel.

9:15-27 But I have used none of these things; and I have not written these things that it may be done thus to me; for ***it is*** better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting empty. For if I preach the gospel, there is no boasting for me; for necessity is laid on me; and woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That, preaching the gospel, I may offer the gospel of the Christ without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For being free from all ***men***, I made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I may gain Jews; to those under law as under law, so that I may gain those under law; to those without law as without law (not being without law to God, but within law to Christ), so that I may gain those without law. To the weak I became as weak, so that I may gain the weak. I have become all things to all ***men***, so that by all means I may save some. And this I do because of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run in a stadium all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain ***it***. And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. They then ***do it*** that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run thus, not as uncertainly; thus I box, not as beating ***the*** air; but I strike my body and bring ***it*** into slavery, lest somehow, having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Chapter 9 Preview

In chapter 8 Paul told the Corinthians that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. A believer may know that an idol is nothing, but if eating meat offered to idols causes a weaker brother to stumble, love sets that right aside. Chapter 9 can look like a change of subject, but it is not. Paul now uses himself as the example. As an apostle he had real rights: the right to food and drink, the

right to bring a believing wife along on his travels, and the right to be paid by the churches he served. He proves these rights from common sense, from the Law of Moses, from the temple, and from the words of the Lord Jesus.

Then he tells them he gave up every one of those rights for the sake of the gospel. He preached free of charge. He made himself a slave to all so that he might win more people to Christ. To the Jews he became as a Jew, to those without the Law as without the Law, and to the weak as weak. He ends the chapter with the picture of an athlete. Runners and boxers train hard and give up many things to win a wreath that soon withers. Paul disciplines himself for a crown that will never fade.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1 *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in* ***the*** *Lord?*

Paul opens with four quick questions, and each one expects the answer "yes." "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free?" An apostle was a man sent out directly by the risen Christ with His authority. Some in Corinth were questioning whether Paul really was one, so he gives his proof.

"Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" To be an apostle, a man had to be a witness of the risen Lord (Acts 1:21-22). Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), and he will mention it again in 15:8.

"Are you not my work in the Lord?" The church in Corinth itself was the proof. Paul had come to their city and preached Christ, and they had believed (Acts 18:1-11). Notice he says "in the Lord." The work was the Lord's, done through Paul.

9:2 *If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least to you I am; for you are the seal of my apostleship in* ***the*** *Lord.*

"If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least to you I am." Other churches might wonder about Paul, but the Corinthians had no excuse. They owed their spiritual life to his ministry.

"You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." A seal was a mark pressed into wax to show that a document was real and to show who owned it. The changed lives of the believers in Corinth were like God's stamp on Paul's ministry. The best proof of a ministry is not a title or a diploma. It is the fruit God brings through it.

9:3 *My defense to those who examine me is this:*

"My defense to those who examine me is this." The word for defense is apologia, the word for a legal answer given in court. We get our word apologetics from it. The word for examine was also used of a court hearing. Some in Corinth were putting Paul on trial in their minds.

Paul is not being defensive for his own sake. He is about to show them what giving up rights for the good of others looks like. His defense also becomes his lesson for them.

9:4 *Do we not have a right to eat and to drink?*

"Do we not have a right to eat and to drink?" The word for right here is the same word Paul used in 8:9, where he warned the strong, "lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." Now he is saying, in effect, that they talk about their rights, so let him tell them about his.

He most likely means the right to have his food and drink supplied by the church while he served them. A worker in God's kingdom has the right to be cared for by the people he serves. Paul is not asking for anything here. He is simply establishing that the right was real.

9:5 *Do we not have a right to take along a sister* ***as*** *a wife, as also the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*

"Do we not have a right to take along a sister as a wife?" A "sister" here means a fellow believer. Paul had the right to marry a believing woman and bring her with him on his travels, with the church supporting them both.

He points to "the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas." Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter. The Gospels tell us Peter had a wife, since Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15). "The brothers of the Lord" were James, Joses, Simon, and Jude, the sons of Joseph and Mary (Matthew 13:55), who did not believe in Jesus at first (John 7:5) but came to faith after His resurrection. They traveled in ministry, and their wives traveled with them. Paul had the same right, though he chose not to use it (7:7-8).

9:6 *Or* ***is it*** *only I and Barnabas* ***who*** *do not have a right to not work?*

"Or is it only I and Barnabas who do not have a right to not work?" Barnabas was Paul's partner on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). It seems both men had a habit of working with their hands to pay their own way. Paul was a tentmaker, and in Corinth he worked alongside Aquila and Priscilla in that trade (Acts 18:3).

Paul's question is pointed. Were the other apostles allowed to be supported while Paul and Barnabas had to earn their living? Of course not. They had the same right as everyone else. They simply chose not to use it.

9:7 *Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not eat of the milk of the flock?*

Now Paul gives three pictures from everyday life. "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?" No army asks its soldiers to buy their own food and weapons. "Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?" The farmer who works the vines expects to taste the grapes. "Or who shepherds a flock and does not eat of the milk of the flock?" The shepherd lives from the flock he cares for.

These are all pictures of ministry. The Christian life is a battle, the church is God's field (3:9), and the believers are His flock (Acts 20:28). The one who serves them has a right to live from that work.

9:8-9 *Do I speak these things according to man? Or does not the law also say these things? For in the law of Moses it has been written, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it threshes." Is it for the oxen **that** God cares?*

"Do I speak these things according to man?" In other words, is this just human reasoning? No. "Does not the law also say these things?"

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it threshes." Threshing was the work of separating grain from the stalks. An ox would walk in circles over the grain on the threshing floor, often pulling a heavy sled. God told Israel not to tie the ox's mouth shut while it worked. Let it eat as it labors.

"Is it for the oxen that God cares?" Paul is not saying God does not care about animals. Jesus said not one sparrow falls without the Father (Matthew 10:29). Paul is saying the command was not given only for oxen. It teaches a wider principle about every worker.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 25:4 (quoted)

9:10 *Or does He say **it** entirely because of us? For it was written because of us, that the one who plows ought to plow in hope, and the one who threshes in hope **ought** to partake of his hope.*

"Or does He say it entirely because of us? For it was written because of us." The law about the ox shows God's heart for anyone who works. If God cares that an ox is fed while it works, how much more does He care for the people who labor in His kingdom?

"The one who plows ought to plow in hope, and the one who threshes in hope ought to partake of his hope." The farmer plows in spring hoping for a harvest. The man threshing in the fall hopes to share in that harvest. Hard work is done with an expected return. Paul uses Scripture here the way the Lord intends: the Old Testament still teaches us today (10:11; Romans 15:4).

9:11 *If we sowed spiritual things among you, **is it** a great thing if we will reap your fleshly things?*

"If we sowed spiritual things among you, is it a great thing if we will reap your fleshly things?" Paul planted the gospel in Corinth. He brought them the message of eternal life. By "fleshly things" he means material things like food, money, and a place to stay. He is not using "fleshly" in a bad sense here.

Which is worth more, eternal life or a meal? The question answers itself. If someone gave you the gospel, supporting him with a meal or some money is a small return. Paul says the same in Galatians 6:6: the one taught the Word should share all good things with the one who teaches.

9:12 *If others partake of **this** right over you, **do** we not more? But we did not use this right, but we bear all things, so that we may not give any hindrance to the gospel of the Christ.*

"If others partake of this right over you, do we not more?" Other teachers had come to Corinth and been supported by the church. If they had that right, Paul, who founded the church, had it even more.

"But we did not use this right." Here is the heart of the chapter. Paul had the right and laid it down. Why? "So that we may not give any hindrance to the gospel of the Christ." The word for hindrance was used of something that cuts in and blocks the way. Paul did not want anything to block the road to the gospel. In a city full of traveling teachers who charged for their wisdom, he did not want anyone to say he preached for money.

"We bear all things." It cost him. He worked late, he went hungry at times (4:11-12). But the gospel was worth it. What rights might God be asking you to lay down so that others can hear about Jesus?

9:13 *Do you not know that those who work **at** the holy things eat of the temple, **and** those who attend at the altar share with the altar?*

"Do you not know that those who work at the holy things eat of the temple?" Paul now points to the priests and Levites of Israel. Under the Law of Moses, the priests who served at the altar received part of the sacrifices for their food (Numbers 18:8-20; Deuteronomy 18:1-5). The Levites received the tithes of the people.

"Those who attend at the altar share with the altar." God built this into the worship of Israel. Those who gave their lives to serving Him were provided for through the offerings of the people. It was not a shameful thing. It was God's own plan.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 18:1 (alluded to)

9:14 *So also the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel.*

"So also the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel." This is Paul's strongest argument. The Lord Jesus Himself gave this command. When He sent out His disciples, He told them that the worker is worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7; Matthew 10:10). Paul quotes that saying again in 1 Timothy 5:18.

So the case is closed. Common sense, the Law, the temple, and the words of Jesus all agree. Those who preach the gospel have a right to be supported by it. Churches today should take this seriously and care well for those who teach them. But Paul is about to show why he set the right aside.

9:15 *But I have used none of these things; and I have not written these things that it may be done thus to me; for **it is** better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting empty.*

"But I have used none of these things." Paul has spent fourteen verses proving his right, and now he tells them he never used it. "And I have not written these things that it may be done thus to me." He wants them to know he is not hinting for money.

"For it is better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting empty." Paul feels this strongly. His "boasting" was not pride. It was the joy of being able to say that he gave them the gospel and it cost them nothing. He would rather die than lose that. Paul did accept gifts from other churches at times, such as the Philippians (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9), but in Corinth he would not take support from the church he was serving.

9:16 *For if I preach the gospel, there is no boasting for me; for necessity is laid on me; and woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*

"For if I preach the gospel, there is no boasting for me." Why not? "For necessity is laid on me." Paul did not volunteer to be an apostle. Jesus met him on the road and sent him (Acts 26:16-18). Preaching was not an option for him. It was an order from his Lord.

"And woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" Woe is a word of grief and coming judgment. Paul felt the weight of his calling. Like Jeremiah, who said God's word was a fire shut up in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9), Paul could not keep quiet. Every believer has been given a part in making Christ known (Matthew 28:19-20). Do we feel any of that weight?

9:17 *For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.*

"For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a stewardship." A steward was a household manager, often a slave, who was trusted with his master's goods. He was not paid extra for doing his duty. It was simply his job.

Paul is saying that preaching itself was his duty as a steward. He would not get a special reward just for doing what he was told. But there was something he could do willingly, above his duty, and that is what he explains next.

9:18 *What then is my reward? That, preaching the gospel, I may offer the gospel of the Christ without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

"What then is my reward? That, preaching the gospel, I may offer the gospel of the Christ without charge." Paul's reward was the joy of giving the gospel away for free. He did more than his duty by refusing pay.

"So as not to make full use of my right in the gospel." That is the key phrase. A right is something you may use, not something you must use. Paul's reward was in not using it. There is a deep joy in giving freely, the same way God gave His gospel freely to us. As Jesus said to His disciples, freely they had received, so freely they should give (Matthew 10:8).

9:19 *For being free from all **men**, I made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain the more.*

"For being free from all men, I made myself a slave to all." Paul was not under anyone's control. He did not owe anyone anything, since he did not take their money. And yet he chose to become a slave to everyone, putting their needs ahead of his own.

Why? "So that I may gain the more." The word "gain" is used five times in verses 19-22. It is a word for winning or earning, and Paul uses it of winning people to Christ. His freedom was not for himself. He used it to win as many people as possible. That is the same lesson he gave the strong believers in chapter 8.

9:20 *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I may gain Jews; to those under law as under law, so that I may gain those under law;*

"And to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I may gain Jews." Paul was Jewish by birth, but in Christ he was no longer under the Law of Moses as a way to be right with God. Still, among Jews he would keep Jewish customs so that he would not offend them needlessly. He had Timothy circumcised before taking him among the Jews (Acts 16:3), and he took part in a temple vow in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20-26).

"To those under law as under law." This was not compromise of the gospel. Paul never said a person had to keep the Law to be saved (Galatians 2:16). He simply laid aside his freedom in matters that did not touch the truth of the gospel so that the Jews would listen.

9:21 *to those without law as without law (not being without law to God, but within law to Christ), so that I may gain those without law.*

"To those without law as without law." This means the Gentiles, who were not under the Law of Moses. Among them, Paul did not keep Jewish food laws or customs. He ate with them and lived among them as one of them.

Then Paul adds an important clarification: "not being without law to God, but within law to Christ." Paul was not lawless. Being free from the Law of Moses did not mean he could live any way he wanted. He was under Christ's authority, and the law of Christ is the law of love (Galatians 6:2). Grace is never a license to sin (Romans 6:1-2).

9:22 *To the weak I became as weak, so that I may gain the weak. I have become all things to all **men**, so that by all means I may save some.*

"To the weak I became as weak, so that I may gain the weak." The weak are the believers with tender consciences from chapter 8. Paul would give up his liberty with them, even refusing meat, rather than cause them to fall (8:13).

"I have become all things to all men, so that by all means I may save some." This verse is sometimes twisted to mean that a believer may do anything to fit in. That is not what Paul means. He never sinned to reach sinners. He changed his customs, his diet, and his comforts, but never the message or his obedience to Christ. Notice also that Paul says he may "save some." Only God

saves, but He uses people. Paul is honest that not everyone will believe. But some will, and that makes it worth it.

9:23 *And this I do because of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*

"And this I do because of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it." Everything Paul did, he did for the sake of the gospel. Giving up his rights, working with his hands, becoming all things to all people, all of it was for the gospel.

"A fellow partaker" means one who shares in something with others. Paul wanted to share in the gospel's blessings along with those he won. There is a joy in seeing someone come to Christ that cannot be had any other way. Paul did not want to stand back from the work. He wanted to be in the middle of it.

9:24 *Do you not know that those who run in a stadium all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain* ***it****.*

Now Paul turns to a picture the Corinthians knew well. Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, one of the great athletic festivals of the Greek world, held every two years near the city. Everyone in Corinth would have seen runners and boxers training and competing.

"Do you not know that those who run in a stadium all run, but one receives the prize?" A stadium was a race track, and it was also a measure of distance for a footrace. In a race, everyone runs, but only one wins. Paul is not saying only one believer will be saved. He is saying that we should run with the same effort as an athlete who wants to win. "So run, that you may obtain it." Don't just jog along in the Christian life. Run to win.

9:25 *And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. They then* ***do it*** *that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable.*

"And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things." Athletes in the Greek games went through months of strict training. They watched their diet, their sleep, and their habits. They said no to many good things in order to win.

"They then do it that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable." The prize at the games was a wreath of leaves placed on the winner's head. Within days it would dry up and crumble. Yet men gave up everything for it. Paul says believers are running for a crown that will never fade. The New Testament speaks of crowns given to believers as rewards (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4). If an athlete will discipline himself for a wreath, how much more should we for that?

9:26 *Therefore I run thus, not as uncertainly; thus I box, not as beating* ***the*** *air;*

"Therefore I run thus, not as uncertainly." Paul knew where the finish line was. He was not running in circles or wandering off the track. His life had one aim: to serve Christ and make Him known.

"Thus I box, not as beating the air." A boxer who swings wildly and misses is wasting his strength. Paul's blows landed. He did not waste his life on things that did not matter. Many believers stay busy but never really fight the right battle. What are you aiming at? Is your effort going into things that count for eternity?

9:27 *but I strike my body and bring* ***it*** *into slavery, lest somehow, having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

"But I strike my body and bring it into slavery." The word "strike" is a boxing word for hitting someone under the eye, giving them a black eye. Paul is speaking in a figure. He does not mean he beat himself. He means he took firm control of his body's desires. His body would be his servant, not his master.

"Lest somehow, having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." The word for "disqualified" was used of an athlete who was rejected from the contest or failed to win the prize because he broke the rules. Bible teachers read this in two main ways. Many believe Paul means losing his reward or his usefulness in ministry, not his salvation, since the whole context is about prizes and crowns. Others believe Paul is warning that a person who preaches but does not live by the gospel shows he was never truly saved. Either way the warning is serious. Knowing the truth and teaching it to others is not enough. We must live it ourselves.

Chapter 9 Summary

Paul defends his apostleship by pointing to his sight of the risen Lord and to the church in Corinth as the seal of his work. He then shows that as an apostle he had real rights: to food and drink, to bring a believing wife on his travels, and to be supported by the churches he served. He proves this from common sense (the soldier, the farmer, the shepherd), from the Law of Moses (the ox not muzzled), from the priests who ate from the altar, and from the command of the Lord Jesus that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. Yet Paul used none of these rights. He preached without charge so that nothing would hinder the gospel. Free from all, he made himself a slave to all, becoming as a Jew to the Jews, as without law to those without the Law, and as weak to the weak, so that by all means he might save some. Like an athlete in the games, he ran with purpose and disciplined his body, so that after preaching to others he would not himself be disqualified, and he calls believers to run in the same way for an imperishable crown.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. What four questions does Paul ask in 9:1, and how do they prove he is an apostle?

2. What three pictures from everyday life does Paul use to show that a worker has a right to be supported? (9:7)

3. How does Paul use the law about the ox to teach a principle for ministry? (9:9-10)

4. What did the Lord command about those who proclaim the gospel? (9:14)

5. Why did Paul refuse to use his right to be paid in Corinth? (9:12, 9:15-18)

6. What does Paul mean when he says he became "all things to all men"? What does that verse not mean? (9:22)

7. How did athletes in the games train, and what prize did they win? How does that compare to the crown believers run for? (9:24-25)

8. What right or freedom do you have that you could lay down to help someone else hear the gospel?

9. Paul did not want to run "uncertainly" or box "as beating the air." What in your life is taking effort but not counting for eternity? (9:26)

10. What area of your life needs more self-control so that your body serves you and not the other way around? (9:27)

Chapter 10: Lessons From Israel and the Lord's Table

Scripture

10:1-13 Now I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they were drinking from a spiritual rock that followed ***them***, and the rock was the Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things became examples for us, so that we would not be desirers of evil things, as they also desired. And do not become idolaters, as some of them ***were***; as it has been written, "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed sexual immorality, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell. Nor let us put the Christ to the test, as some of them also tested ***Him***, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them also grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them ***as*** examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages came. Therefore let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall. No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God ***is*** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure ***it***.

10:14-22 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible ***men***; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of the Christ? Because ***there is*** one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at Israel according to ***the*** flesh: are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What then do I say? That an idol is anything, or that an idol sacrifice is anything? But ***I say*** that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers with the demons. You are not able to drink ***the*** cup of ***the*** Lord and ***the*** cup of demons; you are not able to partake of ***the*** table of ***the*** Lord and of ***the*** table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

10:23-33 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own ***good***, but each that of the other. Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, asking no questions because of conscience; for "the earth ***is*** the Lord's, and its fullness." And if any of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, asking no questions because of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This is an idol sacrifice," do not eat, because of that one who informed ***you***, and because of conscience; for "the earth ***is*** the Lord's, and its fullness." Now I say conscience, not your own, but that of the other; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? And if I partake with thanks, why am I slandered for that for which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God. Become without offense both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God, even as I also please all ***men*** in all things, not seeking my own benefit, but that of the many, that they may be saved.

Chapter 10 Preview

Paul closed chapter 9 with a warning: even a preacher must discipline himself, so that he does not end up disqualified. Chapter 10 shows why that warning matters. Paul looks back at Israel in the wilderness. Every one of them was rescued from Egypt, passed through the sea, and was fed by God. Yet most of them fell in the wilderness because of idolatry, sexual sin, testing the Lord, and grumbling. Those events were written down as examples for us. Then comes one of the most loved promises in the Bible: no temptation has taken us except what is common to people, and God is faithful to make a way out.

In the second half Paul brings the long discussion about food offered to idols (chapters 8 to 10) to a close. A believer cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons, because behind the idols are demons. Then Paul gives practical rules. Meat sold in the market may be eaten without asking questions, since the earth is the Lord's. But if someone points out that it was offered to an idol, set your freedom aside for that person's conscience. Whatever we do, eat, or drink, we do it all to the glory of God, seeking the good of others so that they may be saved.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *Now I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,*

"Now I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers." Paul uses this phrase when he is about to teach something important that they may have missed. "Brothers" includes all the believers, men and women.

"Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea." Paul calls the Israelites "our fathers," even when writing to a mostly Gentile church. In Christ, the Gentile believers had become part of the same family of faith (Galatians 3:7). The cloud was the pillar of cloud that led Israel by day and became fire by night (Exodus 13:21). The sea was the Red Sea, which God parted so they could cross on dry ground (Exodus 14:21-22). Notice the word "all." It appears five times in verses 1-4. Every Israelite received these blessings.

Old Testament links: Exodus 13:21 (alluded to); Exodus 14:22 (alluded to)

10:2 *and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,*

"And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The word baptize means to dip or immerse, and it also carries the idea of being joined to someone. When Israel passed under the cloud and through the sea, they were joined to Moses as their leader. They were identified with him and followed him out of Egypt.

Paul draws a picture here. In a way, Israel had its own kind of baptism. The Corinthians had been baptized into Christ. Paul's point is that an outward sign of belonging does not keep a person safe if their heart turns away. Israel had the sign, but many did not have faith (Hebrews 3:19).

10:3-4 *and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they were drinking from a spiritual rock that followed* ***them****, and the rock was the Christ.*

"And all ate the same spiritual food." This is the manna, the bread God sent from heaven every morning (Exodus 16:4, 14-15). "And all drank the same spiritual drink." God gave them water from the rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Paul calls it "spiritual" because it came from God in a supernatural way.

"For they were drinking from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ." What does Paul mean? The Old Testament calls God the Rock of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:4, 15). Paul says the One who cared for Israel in the wilderness was the Christ, the Son of God, before He came in the flesh. It was Christ who went with them and supplied their needs. Some Jewish teachers had a legend that the rock itself rolled along behind Israel. Paul does not teach that. He points to the Person behind the water.

Old Testament links: Exodus 17:6 (pictured); Numbers 20:11 (pictured); Exodus 16:4 (alluded to)

10:5 *But with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.*

"But with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness." This verse is sobering. Of the adult generation that left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land (Numbers 14:29-30). Hundreds of thousands died in the desert over forty years.

"Laid low" pictures bodies scattered across the sand. They all had the same blessings, but most of them never reached the goal. Paul has just spoken of running the race to win (9:24-27). Israel started well and did not finish. Blessings are not the same as faithfulness. We should not take God's goodness for granted.

Old Testament links: Numbers 14:29 (alluded to)

10:6 *Now these things became examples for us, so that we would not be desirers of evil things, as they also desired.*

"Now these things became examples for us." The word for examples is typos, which gives us our word "type." It means a pattern, a model, or a mark left by a blow. Israel's story was written down so that we would learn from it.

"So that we would not be desirers of evil things, as they also desired." Paul starts with desire, because sin begins in the heart. In Numbers 11:4-6 the people craved the meat of Egypt and despised the manna God gave them. God sent quail, but a plague came with it, and the place was named Kibroth-hattaavah, which means graves of craving (Numbers 11:33-34). Wanting what God has not given us is where many falls begin.

Old Testament links: Numbers 11:4 (alluded to); Numbers 11:34 (alluded to)

10:7 *And do not become idolaters, as some of them **were**; as it has been written, "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."*

"And do not become idolaters, as some of them were." Paul quotes Exodus 32:6: "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." This was the golden calf. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Law, the people made an idol, held a feast in its honor, and gave themselves to wild celebration.

This hits close to home for Corinth. The whole question in chapters 8 to 10 was about meals at idol temples. Paul is saying, 'Israel ate and drank at an idol feast, and it led to judgment. Be careful.' The word "play" here points to dancing and revelry that often went along with idol worship and could lead to immorality.

Old Testament links: Exodus 32:6 (quoted)

10:8 *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed sexual immorality, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell.*

"Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed sexual immorality." This was at Baal-peor, when Israelite men joined in the sexual sin and idol worship of Moab (Numbers 25:1-9). In Corinth, idol feasts and sexual sin often went together, so this warning was very real.

"And in one day twenty-three thousand fell." Numbers 25:9 gives the total who died in the plague as twenty-four thousand. Bible teachers have explained this in a few ways. Many believe Paul gives the number who died "in one day," while Numbers gives the total, including the leaders who were executed (Numbers 25:4-5). Others note that both are round numbers. Either way there is no real contradiction, and the point is clear: sexual sin brings terrible consequences.

Old Testament links: Numbers 25:1 (alluded to); Numbers 25:9 (alluded to)

10:9 *Nor let us put the Christ to the test, as some of them also tested **Him**, and were destroyed by the serpents.*

"Nor let us put the Christ to the test, as some of them also tested Him, and were destroyed by the serpents." This happened in Numbers 21:4-9. The people grew impatient, spoke against God and Moses, and complained about the manna. God sent fiery serpents, and many died. Then God told Moses to make a bronze serpent on a pole, and whoever looked at it lived. Jesus later said that event pictured His own death on the cross (John 3:14-15).

To test God means to push Him, to see how far we can go before He acts. Paul says they tested "the Christ." Once again the One leading Israel was Christ Himself. Most Greek copies, including the Received Text the SLB follows, read "the Christ" here; a few read "the Lord." Either way, it is the Lord who was tested.

Old Testament links: Numbers 21:5 (alluded to); Numbers 21:6 (alluded to)

10:10 *Nor grumble, as some of them also grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*

"Nor grumble, as some of them also grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer." Israel grumbled again and again in the wilderness. Paul may be thinking of the rebellion of Korah and the grumbling that followed, when a plague killed thousands (Numbers 16:41-49), or of the grumbling after the spies' report (Numbers 14:1-37). "The destroyer" is likely the angel God sent in judgment, as with the death of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:23).

We may think grumbling is a small sin. God does not. Complaining is a way of saying God is not good and is not doing right by us. Paul puts it right alongside idolatry and immorality. Philippians 2:14 tells us to do all things without grumbling.

Old Testament links: Numbers 16:41 (alluded to); Numbers 14:29 (alluded to)

10:11 *Now all these things happened to them **as** examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages came.*

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition." These events really happened. They are history, not legends. But God also had them written down so that we would learn. "Admonition" means a warning given to set someone on the right path.

"On whom the ends of the ages came." Believers in the church age live after the cross and resurrection. Everything the Old Testament pointed toward has come in Christ. We have more light than Israel had in the wilderness. That means we have more reason to obey, and less excuse when we don't. The Old Testament is not out of date. It was written for us (Romans 15:4).

10:12 *Therefore let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall.*

"Therefore let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall." This is aimed at the strong in Corinth who were proud of their knowledge (8:1-2). They thought they could go to idol feasts with no danger. Paul says, 'Watch out.' The person most likely to fall is the one who thinks he can't.

Pride comes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Many believers who fell into serious sin did not think it could happen to them. They let their guard down. None of us is above temptation. The safest believer is the humble one who knows his own weakness and leans on the Lord.

10:13 *No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God **is** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure **it**.*

After warning them, Paul gives them a promise. "No temptation has taken you except what is human." The temptations you face are not unique. Others have faced the same things and come through by God's grace. Satan wants you to think you are the only one, and that no one could understand. That is a lie.

"And God is faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able." God sets the limits. He knows how much you can bear. "But with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure it." With every temptation, God provides an exit. Sometimes the

way out is to run, as Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:12). Sometimes it is to pray, to call a believing friend, to turn off the screen, or to leave the room.

This verse does not promise that life will be easy. It promises that we never have to sin. When we fall, it is because we did not take the way out God gave. And when we do fall, there is forgiveness for those who confess (1 John 1:9). What temptation are you facing today? Ask God to show you the door, and then walk through it.

10:14 *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." "Therefore" ties this to the promise of verse 13. One of the ways out of temptation is simply to run. Paul does not say to argue with idolatry or to see how close you can get to it. He says flee. He gives the same command about sexual immorality in 6:18.

He calls them "my beloved." Paul is not scolding from a distance. He loves them, and he wants them safe. Idolatry is not only bowing to statues. It is anything we put in God's place: money, pleasure, success, even people. John ends his first letter the same way, telling believers to guard themselves from idols (1 John 5:21).

10:15 *I speak as to sensible **men**; judge for yourselves what I say.*

"I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say." The Corinthians were proud of their wisdom. Paul says, 'All right, use it. Think this through with me.' He is not asking them to accept his word blindly. He is going to reason with them and let them see that the conclusion is plain.

Good Bible teaching invites people to think and to check what they are taught against Scripture, as the believers in Berea did (Acts 17:11). God gave us minds, and He wants us to use them in the light of His Word.

10:16 *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of the Christ?*

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of the Christ?" The "cup of blessing" was the name for a cup at the Passover meal over which a prayer of thanks was said. Jesus used a cup at the Last Supper and gave it new meaning (11:25). "We bless" means we give thanks to God for it.

The word for sharing is koinonia, which means fellowship, participation, or having something in common. "The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of the Christ?" When believers take the Lord's Supper, they share together in Christ, in what His body and blood accomplished for them on the cross. It is a fellowship with Him and with each other.

Christians understand the Lord's Supper in different ways. What Scripture shows plainly is that the Lord's Supper is a remembrance Jesus commanded and a proclamation of His death (11:24-26). The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches teach that the bread and cup become His body and blood, Lutherans that Christ is truly present in, with, and under them, many Reformed believers that He is present spiritually, and many Baptist and Bible churches that the bread and

cup are pictures. Paul's point here is simple: the meal joins us to the Lord, and so we cannot also join ourselves to idols.

10:17 *Because **there is** one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.*

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread." In the early church, a single loaf was broken and shared. Paul draws the lesson: many believers sharing one loaf shows that we are one body in Christ.

This prepares for chapter 12, where Paul will teach that the church is one body with many members. It also speaks to the divisions in Corinth (1:10-13). How can people who share one loaf at the Lord's table split into parties and look down on each other? The Lord's Supper is a picture of unity, and taking it should make us want to live in unity.

10:18 *Look at Israel according to **the** flesh: are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?*

"Look at Israel according to the flesh: are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?" "Israel according to the flesh" means the nation of Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob. In many of Israel's sacrifices, part of the offering was burned on the altar, part went to the priest, and part was eaten by the worshiper (Leviticus 7:15; Deuteronomy 12:17-18).

When an Israelite ate that meal, he was taking part in the worship of the God of that altar. Eating was not a neutral act. It was fellowship with the One to whom the sacrifice was offered. Paul is building his case step by step.

10:19-20 *What then do I say? That an idol is anything, or that an idol sacrifice is anything? But **I say** that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers with the demons.*

"What then do I say? That an idol is anything, or that an idol sacrifice is anything?" Paul does not want them to think he is going back on what he said in 8:4. An idol is just wood or stone. It is not a real god.

"But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God." Here is the danger. The idol is nothing, but there is something behind it. Demons, fallen angels who serve Satan, use false religion to draw people away from the true God. Moses said the same thing about Israel (Deuteronomy 32:17).

"And I do not want you to become sharers with the demons." Going to an idol feast was not harmless. It meant sitting down in fellowship with the forces of darkness. The strong in Corinth thought their knowledge protected them. Paul says it does not.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:17 (quoted)

10:21 *You are not able to drink **the** cup of **the** Lord and **the** cup of demons; you are not able to partake of **the** table of **the** Lord and of **the** table of demons.*

"You are not able to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you are not able to partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons." "The table of the Lord" is the Lord's Supper. "The table of demons" is the idol feast.

Paul says it is impossible to do both. Not that a person cannot physically walk from one to the other, but that the two cannot go together. You cannot be loyal to Christ and share in worship that belongs to His enemies. Jesus said no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We cannot have one foot in the world and one foot with the Lord.

Old Testament links: Malachi 1:7 (alluded to)

10:22 *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?*

"Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" God's jealousy is not petty like human jealousy. It is the right love of a husband for his wife, who will not share her with another. God told Israel He is a jealous God who will not give His glory to idols (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 32:21; Isaiah 42:8).

"Are we stronger than He?" This is a sharp question. The strong in Corinth were proud of their strength. But no one is stronger than God. If we play with idolatry, we are not testing our own strength. We are testing His patience, as Israel did, and we saw what happened to them.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:21 (alluded to)

10:23 *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but not all things build up.*

Now Paul turns to practical advice. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable." He quoted a version of this saying in 6:12. It may have been a slogan in Corinth. Paul agrees with part of it: in Christ, we are free from the Law's food rules. But freedom is not the only question.

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things build up." The question is not only, 'Am I allowed to do this?' It is also, 'Will this help others? Will it build up the church?' Mature believers ask not only what is permitted, but what is best.

10:24 *Let no one seek his own **good**, but each that of the other.*

"Let no one seek his own good, but each that of the other." This is the rule of love that runs through chapters 8 to 10. The question is not, 'What do I want?' but, 'What will help my brother or sister?'

Jesus lived this way. He did not please Himself (Romans 15:3). He came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). This verse goes against everything our culture tells us. The world says look out for number one. Christ says look out for others. Paul says the same in Philippians 2:4.

10:25-26 *Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, asking no questions because of conscience; for "the earth **is** the Lord's, and its fullness."*

"Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, asking no questions because of conscience." Much of the meat sold in Corinth's market had come from animals sacrificed at temples. Paul says a believer can buy it and eat it freely. There is no need to check where it came from.

Why? Because "the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness." Paul quotes Psalm 24:1. Everything belongs to God. Meat is meat. Once it is in the market, it is just food, and God made all food to be received with thanks (1 Timothy 4:4-5). A believer does not need to live in fear that he will accidentally touch something unclean.

Old Testament links: Psalm 24:1 (quoted)

10:27 *And if any of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, asking no questions because of conscience.*

"And if any of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat everything that is set before you, asking no questions because of conscience." Paul assumes believers will have friendships with unbelievers and share meals with them. He does not tell them to cut themselves off from the world. He did not say they must go, but if they want to, they can.

At a meal in someone's home, the believer should eat what is served and not make a scene about where the meat came from. Jesus Himself ate with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Sharing a table with unbelievers can open the door to sharing Christ.

10:28 *But if anyone says to you, "This is an idol sacrifice," do not eat, because of that one who informed **you**, and because of conscience; for "the earth **is** the Lord's, and its fullness."*

"But if anyone says to you" that the meat is an idol sacrifice, Paul says, "do not eat." Now things change. If someone at the meal points out that the meat was offered to an idol, the believer should decline. Why? "Because of that one who informed you, and because of conscience."

The person who spoke up may be a weaker believer who is troubled, or an unbeliever who wants to see whether the Christian will take part in honoring the gods. Either way, eating now would send the wrong message. It would look like approval of idol worship. So the believer sets aside his freedom for the sake of the other person.

Paul repeats here the words of Psalm 24:1 that he quoted in verse 26: "the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness." The SLB follows the Received Text here, which has this repeat; many older Greek copies do not.

Old Testament links: Psalm 24:1 (quoted)

10:29-30 *Now I say conscience, not your own, but that of the other; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? And if I partake with thanks, why am I slandered for that for which I give thanks?*

"Now I say conscience, not your own, but that of the other." Paul clarifies. The believer's own conscience is clear. He knows the meat is just meat. But he gives up eating it for the sake of the other person's conscience.

"For why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? And if I partake with thanks, why am I slandered for that for which I give thanks?" These questions may be Paul speaking for the strong believer, who might ask why his freedom should be limited by someone else's weak conscience. Paul's answer is that we should not give anyone a reason to speak evil about something we thank God for. Our liberty is real, but it is not worth damaging someone's faith or our witness. Romans 14:16 says the same.

10:31 *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God.*

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God." This is the great principle that settles the whole question. God's glory is the goal of everything a believer does.

Notice how ordinary eating and drinking are. Paul is saying no part of life is too small to honor God. Your meals, your work, your free time, your conversations: all of it can bring Him glory. Before you decide whether to do something, ask yourself, 'Can I do this for the glory of God? Will it make Him look good to others?' That one question settles a lot of gray areas.

10:32 *Become without offense both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God,*

"Become without offense both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God." "Without offense" means not giving anyone a reason to stumble. Paul names three groups of people. Jews are the people of Israel. Greeks here means all Gentiles who are not believers. "The church of God" is the body of believers, Jew and Gentile together in Christ.

This verse is one of the reasons many Bible teachers keep Israel and the church distinct in God's plan. Paul names them as separate groups. The church does not replace Israel. God still has a future for the nation of Israel (Romans 11:25-29). In every group, believers should live in a way that does not push people away from Christ.

10:33 *even as I also please all* ***men*** *in all things, not seeking my own benefit, but that of the many, that they may be saved.*

"Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own benefit, but that of the many, that they may be saved." Paul does not mean he was a people pleaser who changed his message to keep everyone happy. He said plainly in Galatians 1:10 that he did not seek to please men in that way. He means he gave up his own comfort and rights so that nothing in his behavior would stand between people and the gospel.

"That they may be saved." This is the goal behind everything in chapters 8 to 10. Our freedom, our food, our rights: all of it is less important than people coming to Christ. The next verse finishes the thought (11:1): "Become imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Chapter 10 Summary

Paul warns the Corinthians from the history of Israel. All the Israelites were under the cloud, passed through the sea, were baptized into Moses, ate the manna, and drank from the rock, and the rock was Christ. Yet most of them fell in the wilderness because they craved evil things, worshiped idols, committed sexual immorality, tested Christ, and grumbled. These things were written as examples for us, so the one who thinks he stands must watch lest he fall. No temptation is beyond what is common to people, and God is faithful to make a way out. Believers must flee from idolatry. The cup and the bread are a sharing in the blood and body of Christ, and the one loaf shows that believers are one body. An idol is nothing, but the sacrifices of the Gentiles are offered to demons, so no one can share in the Lord's table and the table of demons. Food sold in the market may be eaten freely, since the earth is the Lord's, but believers should give up their freedom when someone's conscience is at stake. Whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God and give no offense to Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, seeking the good of others so that they may be saved.

Temptation pulls step by step. After my hiking accident in 2014 and four surgeries, I used alcohol for the pain, a little at first and a lot by the end, until it became an addiction. God always gave a way out. I was not always willing to take it. Recognizing the pull early is the difference between stepping back and getting caught.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What blessings did all the Israelites share in the wilderness, according to 10:1-4?

2. Who does Paul say the rock was that followed Israel, and what does that teach us about Christ? (10:4)

3. What five sins of Israel does Paul list in 10:6-10, and what happened because of them?

4. Why were the stories of Israel written down, according to 10:11?

5. Why is the person who thinks he stands in danger? (10:12)

6. What three promises does God give in 10:13 about temptation?

7. Why can a believer not share in the table of the Lord and the table of demons? (10:20-21)

8. How does Paul tell believers to handle meat in the market and at a meal in an unbeliever's home? When should they decline? (10:25-28)

9. Think of a temptation you face often. What way out has God given you, and how will you take it next time? (10:13)

10. What is one ordinary part of your daily life you could do more intentionally for the glory of God? (10:31)

Chapter 11: Order in Worship and the Lord's Supper

Scripture

11:1-16 Become imitators of me, even as I also ***am*** of Christ. Now I praise you, brothers, that you have remembered me in all things, and you hold firmly the traditions, even as I delivered ***them*** to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ, and ***the*** head of a woman ***is*** the man, and ***the*** head of Christ ***is*** God. Every man praying or prophesying, having ***something*** down over ***his*** head, dishonors his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with the head uncovered dishonors her own head; for it is one and the same ***as*** the ***woman*** having been shaved. For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn; but if ***it is*** shameful for a woman to be shorn or to be shaved, let her cover herself. For a man indeed ought not to cover the head, being ***the*** image and glory of God; but the woman is ***the*** glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man. Because of this the woman ought to have authority on the head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither ***is*** woman without man, nor man without woman, in ***the*** Lord. For just as the woman ***is*** from the man, so also the man ***is*** through the woman; but all things ***are*** from God. Judge among yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered? Or does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her long hair has been given to her instead of a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor ***do*** the churches of God.

11:17-34 But in instructing ***you in*** this, I do not praise ***you***, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first indeed, when you come together in the church, I hear ***that*** divisions exist among you, and in part I believe ***it***. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore, when you come together in the same place, it is not to eat ***the*** Lord's supper; for in the eating each one takes his own supper beforehand, and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and to drink? Or do you despise the church of God and put to shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise ***you***. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread; and having given thanks, He broke ***it*** and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My remembrance." Likewise also ***He took*** the cup after having supped, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink ***it***, in My remembrance." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. Because of this many among you ***are*** weak and sick, and many sleep. For if we were judging ourselves, we would not be judged. But being judged by ***the*** Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. And if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order whenever I come.

Chapter 11 Preview

Chapter 11 opens with a short verse that closes the last section: "Become imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." Then Paul begins a new part of the letter about what happens when the church gathers for worship. That part runs through chapter 14. First he takes up a question about men and women praying and prophesying, and whether a woman should have her head covered. Paul grounds his answer in headship (Christ the head of every man, the man the head of the woman, God the head of Christ), in creation, and in what was fitting in the churches. This is one of the most debated passages in the letter, and good Bible teachers apply it in different ways.

Then Paul turns to a problem that made him angry. When the Corinthians came together for the Lord's Supper, it had become anything but the Lord's. The rich ate their own meals early, some got drunk, and the poor went home hungry. Paul reminds them of what the Lord Jesus did on the night He was betrayed, when He took bread and the cup and said, "do this in My remembrance." Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. So each believer should examine himself before he eats, because God takes this meal seriously.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *Become imitators of me, even as I also **am** of Christ.*

"Become imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." This verse belongs with the end of chapter 10. Paul has just said he gives up his own benefit so that others may be saved (10:33). Now he says, in effect, 'Follow my example.' That sounds bold, but notice the limit. Follow me as I follow Christ.

Paul is not asking anyone to follow him blindly. He points beyond himself to Jesus. Every believer should be able to say something like this to a newer believer. Not that we are perfect, but that we are following Christ and they can follow us as we do. Who is watching your walk with Christ, and where would they end up if they followed you?

11:2 *Now I praise you, brothers, that you have remembered me in all things, and you hold firmly the traditions, even as I delivered **them** to you.*

"Now I praise you, brothers, that you have remembered me in all things, and you hold firmly the traditions, even as I delivered them to you." Paul starts this section with praise. The Corinthians had problems, but they had also kept much of what Paul taught them.

"Traditions" here means the teaching handed down by the apostles (2 Thessalonians 2:15). It is not human traditions added to God's Word, which Jesus condemned (Mark 7:8). It is the truth Paul received from the Lord and passed on, such as the gospel (15:3) and the Lord's Supper (11:23). Today we have that apostolic teaching written down for us in the New Testament.

11:3 *But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ, and **the** head of a woman **is** the man, and **the** head of Christ **is** God.*

"But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ, and the head of a woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." Paul lays down the principle that the rest of the passage is built on. He describes three relationships, each with a head.

What does "head" mean here? Most Bible teachers believe it speaks of authority and leadership, as it does in Ephesians 1:22 and 5:23. Others believe it means source or origin, the way the head of a river is where it starts, pointing to verse 8, where woman came from man. Many see both ideas.

Christ has a head too. God the Father is the head of Christ. Yet Jesus is fully God, equal with the Father (John 1:1; 10:30). So headship in this verse does not mean one is worth less than another. The Son willingly submits to the Father's will (John 6:38) while being fully equal in nature. That pattern helps us read what Paul says about men and women. The man and the woman are equal in worth before God (Galatians 3:28), and Paul still speaks of an order between them.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having **something** down over **his** head, dishonors his head.*

"Every man praying or prophesying, having something down over his head, dishonors his head." Praying means speaking to God. Prophesying means speaking a message from God to the people (14:3). Paul assumes both were happening when the church gathered.

A man who covered his head while doing this brought shame on his head. That could mean his own physical head, or Christ, his spiritual head (verse 3), or both. Paul seems to play on both meanings. In that setting, a man covering his head in worship sent a message that did not fit his place under Christ.

11:5 *But every woman praying or prophesying with the head uncovered dishonors her own head; for it is one and the same **as** the **woman** having been shaved.*

"But every woman praying or prophesying with the head uncovered dishonors her own head." Here Paul assumes that women were praying and prophesying in the church meetings. He does not forbid it here. He tells them how they should do it, with the head covered.

"For it is one and the same as the woman having been shaved." In that culture, a shaved head on a woman was a sign of deep shame. It could mark a woman punished for adultery, or one who had rejected her role as a woman. Paul says that a woman praying with her head uncovered is like that. Her own head, and her husband or the man as her head (verse 3), are shamed.

Notice the tension between this verse and 14:34-35, where Paul tells women to be silent in the churches. Bible teachers explain it in different ways, and we will look at that when we get to chapter 14.

11:6 *For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn; but if **it is** shameful for a woman to be shorn or to be shaved, let her cover herself.*

"For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn." Paul presses the point. If a woman refuses to cover her head, she might as well go all the way and cut off her hair. "But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or to be shaved, let her cover herself."

Paul is reasoning from what they all agreed was shameful. Since everyone in Corinth knew a shaved head was a disgrace for a woman, they should see that an uncovered head in worship sent a similar message. To be shorn means to have the hair cut very short, and to be shaved means to have it cut off completely.

11:7 *For a man indeed ought not to cover the head, being **the** image and glory of God; but the woman is **the** glory of man.*

"For a man indeed ought not to cover the head, being the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man." Paul now goes back to creation. The man was made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), and Paul calls him "the image and glory of God."

Does this mean women are not made in God's image? No. Genesis 1:27 says plainly that God created mankind in His image, male and female. Paul is not denying that. He is speaking of glory, of who brings honor to whom. The man reflects God's glory as the one God first formed. The woman was made to be "the glory of man." A good wife brings honor to her husband (Proverbs 12:4; 31:23). In worship, Paul's point is that God's glory should be on display, not human glory.

Old Testament links: Genesis 1:27 (alluded to)

11:8-9 *For man is not from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man.*

"For man is not from woman, but woman from man." Paul points to the order of creation in Genesis 2. God formed Adam first from the dust, and then made Eve from Adam's side (Genesis 2:21-22).

"For indeed man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man." God said it was not good for the man to be alone, and He made a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18). The word "helper" in Genesis does not mean less important. The same Hebrew word is used of God Himself, who is Israel's help (Psalm 33:20). Paul is showing that the order between man and woman goes back before the fall, to the way God made the world. That is why many teachers say the principle in this passage is not only a matter of Corinthian culture.

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:18 (alluded to); Genesis 2:21-22 (alluded to)

11:10 *Because of this the woman ought to have authority on the head, because of the angels.*

"Because of this the woman ought to have authority on the head, because of the angels." This is one of the hardest verses in the New Testament. "Authority on the head" most likely means a sign

of authority, the head covering. Some see it as a sign that she is under her husband's authority. Others see it as a sign of her own authority to pray and prophesy in the church.

"Because of the angels." What do the angels have to do with it? The most common view is that angels watch the worship of the church and learn from it (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12), and they should see God's order honored. Others think of angels as an example of creatures who gladly serve in their place. A few connect it to the fallen angels of Genesis 6, but most teachers do not hold that view. Scripture does not explain it more fully, so we should hold our views with humility.

11:11-12 *Nevertheless, neither **is** woman without man, nor man without woman, in **the** Lord. For just as the woman **is** from the man, so also the man **is** through the woman; but all things **are** from God.*

"Nevertheless, neither is woman without man, nor man without woman, in the Lord." Paul does not want anyone to take verses 7-10 too far. Men and women need each other. "In the Lord," they are partners, not rivals.

"For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman." The first woman came from the first man. But every man since then has been born of a woman. Neither can boast over the other. "But all things are from God." In the end, both man and woman owe their existence to God. These verses guard against pride on the man's side. Headship is never a license to look down on women or treat them harshly.

11:13 *Judge among yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered?*

"Judge among yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered?" Paul again asks the Corinthians to use their own judgment. He expects them to see that in their setting, it was not fitting.

The word "fitting" means proper or suitable. It points to what was proper in that culture and setting. This is one reason many Bible teachers believe the covering itself was a custom tied to that time and place, while the principle behind it (honoring God's order and not bringing shame on one's head) holds for every age.

11:14-15 *Or does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her long hair has been given to her instead of a covering.*

"Or does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?" "Nature" here probably means the natural sense of things that people have, or the way things normally are. In general, across many cultures, long hair has been seen as a woman's glory.

"For her long hair has been given to her instead of a covering." This phrase is important. Some Bible teachers believe Paul is saying a woman's long hair is the covering he means, so no other covering is needed. Others believe the hair is a natural picture that points to the need for a cloth

covering in worship, the way nature and custom agree. The words "instead of" can also mean "as" or "for." Either way, Paul is pointing out that God has built a difference between men and women into creation, and worship should honor it.

11:16 *But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor **do** the churches of God.*

"But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God." Paul ends the argument. If someone wants to keep arguing, he says the apostles and the churches do not have "such custom." Some think this means the churches had no custom of women praying uncovered. Others think it means the churches had no custom of being contentious over it.

So how should we apply this passage today? Here are the main readings. Some churches believe women should wear a head covering in worship today, since Paul grounds it in creation and the angels. Many Bible teachers believe the covering was a custom of that culture that showed modesty and a wife's honor for her husband, and that the lasting principle is to honor God's order and the difference between men and women, without requiring a covering today. Others believe a woman's long hair is the covering. And some read headship as mutual partnership rather than authority, which affects the whole application. Godly believers hold each of these views. What every view agrees on is this: worship should bring glory to God, and men and women are equal in worth and made to need each other.

11:17 *But in instructing **you in** this, I do not praise **you**, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.*

"But in instructing you in this, I do not praise you." In verse 2 Paul praised them. Now he cannot. "Because you come together not for the better but for the worse." Their church meetings were doing more harm than good.

That is a hard thing to hear about a church. The gathering of God's people is meant to build them up (14:26). But in Corinth, the way they were meeting was tearing them down. It is possible to attend church every week and leave worse than we came, if our hearts are wrong toward God and each other.

11:18-19 *For first indeed, when you come together in the church, I hear **that** divisions exist among you, and in part I believe **it**. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.*

"For first indeed, when you come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you, and in part I believe it." Paul has already dealt with divisions in chapters 1-4, where they split into groups around leaders. Here the division is different. It is between the rich and the poor, as the next verses show. "In part I believe it" shows Paul being fair. He does not assume every report is true.

"For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you." Paul is not saying divisions are good. He is saying that when they happen, they show

who is truly faithful. Trouble in a church reveals people's hearts. The "approved" are those who have been tested and proven genuine.

11:20-21 *Therefore, when you come together in the same place, it is not to eat **the** Lord's supper; for in the eating each one takes his own supper beforehand, and one is hungry, and another is drunk.*

"Therefore, when you come together in the same place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper." In the early church, the Lord's Supper was often part of a larger shared meal, sometimes called a love feast (Jude 12). Believers brought food and ate together, and then shared the bread and cup.

But in Corinth it had turned ugly. "For in the eating each one takes his own supper beforehand, and one is hungry, and another is drunk." Many Bible teachers believe the wealthy, who did not have to work late, arrived early with plenty of food and wine and ate it themselves, while the poor and the slaves came later, after work, and found nothing left. Some went hungry while others were drunk. Paul says that is not the Lord's Supper at all. It had become their own supper.

11:22 *What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and to drink? Or do you despise the church of God and put to shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise **you**.*

"What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and to drink?" If they just wanted a meal, they could eat at home. "Or do you despise the church of God and put to shame those who have nothing?" By feasting in front of the hungry, they were showing contempt for the church. They were humiliating their poorer brothers and sisters.

"What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you." Paul's anger shows. This was not a small matter of manners. It struck at the heart of the gospel. Christ died for rich and poor alike, and at His table we are all equal. A church that makes some people feel like second-class members at the Lord's table has missed the point of the cross (James 2:1-4).

11:23 *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread;*

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you." Paul did not invent what he taught about the Lord's Supper. He received it from the Lord. This may mean Jesus showed it to him directly, or that it came from the Lord through the other apostles. Either way, its authority is the Lord's.

"That the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread." Paul takes them back to that night. Jesus was eating the Passover with His disciples (Matthew 26:17-30; Luke 22:7-20). Judas had already agreed to betray Him. Knowing what was coming, Jesus gave His followers this meal to remember Him by. This is the earliest written account of the Lord's Supper we have, since most scholars date 1 Corinthians before the Gospels.

11:24 *and having given thanks, He broke **it** and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My remembrance."*

"And having given thanks, He broke it and said," "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My remembrance." Jesus first gave thanks to the Father. The Greek word for giving thanks is eucharisteo, which is why some churches call this meal the Eucharist.

"This is My body." The bread stands for His body, given for us on the cross. "Which is being broken for you." The SLB follows the Received Text here, which includes the word broken. Many older Greek copies do not have that word and simply say His body is for you. Either way, His body was given in our place. John 19:36 tells us not one of His bones was broken, so the breaking here points to His body being given up in death for us.

"Do this in My remembrance." Jesus commanded this meal. It is not optional for His church. The meal helps us remember what He did. We do not remember a dead hero. We remember a living Savior who died for us and rose again.

11:25 *Likewise also **He took** the cup after having supped, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink **it**, in My remembrance."*

"Likewise also He took the cup after having supped, saying," "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in My remembrance." "After having supped" means after the meal. At the Passover there were several cups of wine, and this was likely the cup after the main meal.

"The new covenant in My blood." A covenant is a binding agreement. Jeremiah promised a new covenant in which God would write His law on His people's hearts and remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The old covenant at Sinai was sealed with the blood of animals (Exodus 24:8). The new covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus. His death made the forgiveness of sins possible for all who believe (Hebrews 9:15).

Christians understand this meal in different ways. What Scripture shows plainly is that the Lord's Supper is a remembrance and a proclamation that Jesus commanded, as verses 24-26 say. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches teach that the bread and cup become His body and blood, Lutherans that Christ is truly present in, with, and under them, many Reformed believers that He is present spiritually, and many Baptist and Bible churches that the bread and cup are pictures, the way Jesus also called Himself the door and the vine (John 10:9; 15:5). Believers in each tradition honor the meal as holy.

Jeremiah 31:31 says God will make this new covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Some teachers say the church has taken Israel's place in this covenant. I believe the church shares now in its forgiveness through Jesus' blood, and God will still keep every promise of it to the nation of Israel when Christ returns (Romans 11:26-27).

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 31:31 (alluded to); Exodus 24:8 (alluded to)

11:26 *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.*

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes." The Lord's Supper is a sermon without words. Every time we take it, we announce to each other and to the world that Jesus died for sinners.

The meal looks in three directions. It looks back to the cross. It looks around at the body of believers sharing the one loaf (10:17). And it looks forward: "until He comes." Every time we take the Supper, we remind ourselves that Jesus is coming back for His church (John 14:3). One day we will not need a reminder, because we will see Him face to face. Jesus said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until He drinks it new with us in His Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

11:27 *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." This verse has troubled many believers. Some have stayed away from the Lord's Supper because they felt unworthy. But Paul is not talking about being worthy in ourselves. None of us is worthy. That is why Jesus died.

"Unworthily" describes the way we take it, not the person taking it. In Corinth, it meant treating the meal like a party, getting drunk, and shaming the poor. To take the Lord's Supper in a careless, selfish way is to treat lightly the body and blood of Jesus. It is like insulting the sacrifice He made.

11:28 *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." The word "examine" means to test, the way metal was tested to see if it was genuine. Before we take the Lord's Supper, we should stop and look honestly at our hearts.

What should we look for? Is there sin I have not confessed? Am I holding a grudge against a brother or sister? Am I coming with a careless attitude? The point is not to stay away. Notice the verse says, "and so let him eat." Examine yourself, confess what needs confessing, make right what needs to be made right, and then come to the table. Jesus said if we remember that our brother has something against us, we should go and be reconciled first (Matthew 5:23-24).

11:29 *For the one who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.*

"For the one who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." To discern means to recognize or to judge rightly. Bible teachers read "the body" here in two main ways.

Some believe it means recognizing that the bread stands for the Lord's body given on the cross, and so treating it with reverence. Others believe it means recognizing the church, the body of

Christ (10:17; 12:27), and so treating fellow believers rightly. In Corinth both were happening: they treated the meal lightly and they shamed the poor. Both readings fit the context. The judgment here is God's discipline, as the next verses show.

11:30 *Because of this many among you **are** weak and sick, and many sleep.*

"Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and many sleep." This is a serious statement. God was disciplining the Corinthian church. Some were weak, some were sick, and some had died. "Sleep" is a gentle word the New Testament uses for the death of believers (15:6, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Their bodies were asleep until the resurrection.

We should be careful here. Not every sickness is God's discipline for sin. Jesus said so plainly about the man born blind (John 9:2-3). But this verse shows that it can be. God loves His children too much to let them keep sinning without correction. When we are sick, it is good to ask God if there is anything He wants to show us, without assuming the worst.

11:31 *For if we were judging ourselves, we would not be judged.*

"For if we were judging ourselves, we would not be judged." Here is the way to avoid God's discipline. Judge yourself first. If we honestly examine our own lives, confess our sins, and turn from them, God does not need to step in with discipline.

This is God's mercy. He gives us the chance to deal with our sin ourselves. When we refuse, He deals with it Himself. It is far better to humble ourselves before Him than to wait for Him to humble us (James 4:10).

11:32 *But being judged by **the** Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world.*

"But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world." This verse brings great comfort. When God judges His children, it is discipline, not condemnation. The word for "disciplined" is the word for training a child.

God disciplines us because we belong to Him, the way a good father corrects his son (Hebrews 12:5-11). The goal is "so that we may not be condemned with the world." The world faces God's final judgment. His children do not, because Christ took that judgment for us (Romans 8:1). Even when God's discipline is hard, it is a sign of His love. Even those in Corinth who had died under His discipline were believers, asleep in Christ.

11:33-34 *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. And if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order whenever I come.*

"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Paul gives a simple, practical fix. Don't rush ahead. Wait until everyone has arrived, and share what you have.

"And if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment." If someone is so hungry that he cannot wait, he should eat before he comes. The church meal is not about filling stomachs. It is about fellowship with the Lord and with each other.

"And the rest I will set in order whenever I come." There were other matters Paul would deal with in person. Scripture does not tell us what they were. Paul trusted that what he had written was enough for now, and he planned to visit them (4:19; 16:5).

Chapter 11 Summary

Paul calls the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ. He praises them for holding to the traditions he delivered, then teaches about head coverings in worship. Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ. A man praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonors his head, and a woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors hers. Paul grounds this in creation, since woman came from man and was made for him, and in the angels. Yet in the Lord, man and woman need each other, and all things are from God. Bible teachers apply the passage in different ways today. Paul then rebukes the church for the way they took the Lord's Supper, where the rich ate and got drunk while the poor went hungry. He reminds them that the Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread and the cup and said to do this in His remembrance, and that every time they eat and drink they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Anyone who eats unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, so each person should examine himself and then eat. God was disciplining the church with sickness and death, but His discipline is so that His children will not be condemned with the world. They are to wait for one another when they gather.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What does Paul ask the Corinthians to imitate, and what is the limit he puts on it? (11:1)

2. What three relationships does Paul describe in 11:3, and what does it teach us that even Christ has a head?

3. What did Paul assume women were doing in the church meetings, according to 11:5?

4. How do 11:11-12 balance what Paul says in 11:7-10?

5. What were the Corinthians doing wrong at the Lord's Supper? (11:20-22)

6. What did Jesus say about the bread and the cup on the night He was betrayed? (11:23-25)

7. What do we proclaim every time we take the Lord's Supper, and until when? (11:26)

8. What does it mean to eat or drink "unworthily"? Does it mean we must be worthy in ourselves? (11:27)

9. Before you take the Lord's Supper next time, what questions will you ask yourself as you examine your heart? (11:28)

10. How does knowing that God's discipline is for our good, so that we will not be condemned, change how you respond to hard times? (11:32)

Chapter 12: One Body, Many Gifts

Scripture

12:1-11 Now concerning spiritual ***gifts***, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by ***the*** Spirit of God says, "Jesus ***is*** accursed," and no one is able to say, "Jesus ***is*** Lord," except by ***the*** Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, and the same Lord; and there are varieties of workings, but it is the same God who works all things in all. But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; and to a different one faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit; and to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another distinguishing of spirits, and to a different one kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each individually as He wills.

12:12-31 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also ***is*** the Christ. For indeed by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and we were all made to drink into one Spirit. For indeed the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," it is not for this ***reason*** not of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," it is not for this ***reason*** not of the body. If the whole body ***were*** an eye, where ***would*** the hearing ***be***? If the whole ***were*** hearing, where ***would*** the smelling ***be***? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He willed. And if they all were one member, where ***would*** the body ***be***? But now ***there are*** indeed many members, but one body. And the eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." But much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those ***members*** of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we put more abundant honor; and our unpresentable ***members*** have more abundant presentability, but our presentable ***members*** have no need. But God has blended the body together, having given more abundant honor to the ***member*** that lacks, so that there may be no division in the body, but ***that*** the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with ***it***; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with ***it***. Now you are ***the*** body of Christ, and members individually. And God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues. ***Are*** all apostles? ***Are*** all prophets? ***Are*** all teachers? ***Are*** all ***workers of*** miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the better gifts. And yet I show you a way beyond comparison.

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapters 12, 13 and 14 belong together. The Corinthians had written to Paul with questions about spiritual gifts, and Paul answers them at length. The church in Corinth was rich in gifts (1:7), but they were using them to show off. Some prized the more dramatic gifts, especially speaking in

tongues, and looked down on believers who did not have them. Others felt they did not belong at all. Paul starts by saying that the true test of the Spirit's work is whether Jesus is honored as Lord. Then he shows that there are many kinds of gifts, services, and workings, but one Spirit, one Lord, and one God behind them all. Every believer is given a gift, and every gift is for the common good.

In the second half of the chapter, Paul uses the picture of a human body. A body has many parts, and each one is needed. The foot cannot say it does not belong because it is not a hand. The eye cannot tell the hand it does not need it. God has put each member in the body just as He wanted, and He gives special honor to the parts that seem weaker. When one member suffers, all suffer, and when one is honored, all rejoice. Paul ends by asking whether everyone has the same gift. The answer is no. Then he points them to something greater than any gift: the way of love, which is the subject of chapter 13.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *Now concerning spiritual **gifts**, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." "Now concerning" is the phrase Paul uses for each topic the Corinthians asked about in their letter (7:1; 8:1; 16:1). This is a new question from them.

The Greek word here is pneumatikon, which means spiritual things or things of the Spirit. The SLB adds the word gifts in bold italics, since the context is about gifts. Paul does not want them to stay ignorant about how the Holy Spirit works in the church. The Corinthians were excited about spiritual things, but excitement is not the same as understanding. Zeal without knowledge can lead us in the wrong direction (Romans 10:2).

12:2 *You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to the mute idols, however you were led.*

"You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to the mute idols, however you were led." Paul reminds them where they came from. Before they knew Christ, they worshiped idols that could not speak. Yet they were "carried away" and "led" by them. The words picture a prisoner being dragged off.

In the pagan temples of Corinth, worshipers sometimes fell into wild, ecstatic states and spoke strange words. They thought this was the power of the gods. Paul's point is that being swept up in a powerful spiritual experience does not prove it comes from God. The idols were mute, but there were demons behind them (10:20). Experiences must be tested.

12:3 *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by **the** Spirit of God says, "Jesus **is** accursed," and no one is able to say, "Jesus **is** Lord," except by **the** Holy Spirit.*

Paul writes that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God says" the words "Jesus is accursed," and that no one is able to say "Jesus is Lord," "except by the Holy Spirit." Here is the test. The Holy Spirit always leads people to honor Jesus. He never leads anyone to curse Him.

Saying the words "Jesus is Lord" is easy for anyone. Paul means saying it from the heart, as a true confession of faith (Romans 10:9). No one can truly bow to Jesus as Lord unless the Spirit has opened their eyes. This means every true believer has the Spirit. There is no first-class and second-class Christian. And it gives us a simple test for any spiritual gift or experience: does it point people to Jesus as Lord? Jesus said the Spirit would glorify Him (John 16:14).

12:4-6 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, and the same Lord; and there are varieties of workings, but it is the same God who works all things in all.*

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, and the same Lord; and there are varieties of workings, but it is the same God who works all things in all." Paul repeats the word "varieties" three times and the word "same" three times. There is variety in what is given, but unity in who gives it.

Notice the Trinity here. "The same Spirit" gives the gifts. "The same Lord," Jesus, is served through the services. "The same God," the Father, works all things. The three Persons of the Godhead work together in the church. The word for gifts is charismata, gifts of grace. We get the word "charismatic" from it. These gifts are not earned. They are given freely by God's grace.

12:7 *But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

"But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Two truths stand out in this verse. First, "to each." Every believer has been given at least one gift. No one is left out. If you belong to Christ, the Spirit has given you a way to serve His body.

Second, "for the common good." The gifts are not given for our own glory or enjoyment. They are given to help others. The Corinthians were using their gifts to show off. Paul says that misses the point. A gift is like a tool God puts in our hands to build up His church. What gift has God given you, and how are you using it for others?

12:8 *For to one is given through the Spirit a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;*

Now Paul lists some of the gifts. "For to one is given through the Spirit a word of wisdom." This is likely the ability to apply God's truth wisely to real situations, speaking the right word at the right time. "And to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit." This is likely the ability to understand and explain the truths of God.

Bible teachers do not agree on exactly what each of these gifts was. Scripture names them without defining them in detail. Some believe the word of knowledge was a special revelation from God of facts a person could not otherwise know. Others believe it was a gift of understanding and teaching the truth God had revealed. We should be humble where the Bible does not give us details.

12:9 *and to a different one faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit;*

"And to a different one faith by the same Spirit." Every believer has saving faith. This must be a special gift of faith, a strong confidence that God will do great things in a particular situation. Paul mentions faith that can move mountains in 13:2.

"And to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit." Notice the plural, "gifts of healings." This may suggest different kinds of healing for different needs. In the book of Acts, the apostles healed the sick as a sign that their message came from God (Acts 3:6-8; 5:15-16; 19:11-12). God still heals today in answer to prayer (James 5:14-15). Whether the gift of healing given to a person continues today is a question we will look at below.

12:10 *and to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another distinguishing of spirits, and to a different one kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues.*

"And to another workings of miracles." These are acts of divine power beyond healing, like Paul striking Elymas blind (Acts 13:11) or raising Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). "And to another prophecy." Prophecy is speaking a message from God. In chapter 14, Paul says it builds up, encourages and comforts the church (14:3).

"And to another distinguishing of spirits." This is the ability to tell whether a message or spiritual experience comes from God, from the human spirit, or from a demon. John tells all believers to test the spirits (1 John 4:1). "And to a different one kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues." Tongues means speaking in a language the speaker has not learned. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke in real human languages that visitors from many nations understood (Acts 2:4-11). Some believe the tongues in Corinth were the same kind of human languages. Others believe they could also include a heavenly or prayer language (13:1; 14:2). Interpretation was the gift of explaining what was said in a tongue so that the church could understand.

12:11 *But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each individually as He wills.*

"But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each individually as He wills." The Spirit decides who gets which gift. It is "as He wills," not as we want. Notice again that the Holy Spirit is a Person. He has a will. A force or a power does not make decisions.

This verse frees us from envy and pride. If God chose your gift, there is no reason to be jealous of someone else's or to look down on someone with a different one. The Corinthians who boasted about tongues had nothing to boast about. They did not choose their gift, and they did not earn it.

Here is a good place to address a question that divides good Bible teachers. Do all of these gifts continue today? Some, often called cessationists, believe the sign gifts (such as tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles) were given to confirm the message of the apostles and the founding of the church, and ended when the apostles died and the New Testament was complete (Ephesians 2:20;

Hebrews 2:3-4). Others, often called continuationists, believe all the gifts continue until Christ returns, since Paul says the partial things will be done away "when the perfect comes" (13:10), and nothing in the New Testament says the gifts would end before then. Many believers hold a view in between, open to God working in these ways today but cautious about claims. Every side agrees that no gift adds to Scripture, that every gift must be tested by God's Word, and that love matters more than any gift.

12:12 *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also **is** the Christ.*

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." Now Paul uses a picture everyone can understand: the human body. A body has hands, feet, eyes, ears, and many inner parts. Yet it is one body.

Notice how Paul ends the verse. He does not say 'so also is the church,' though that is what he means. He says "so also is the Christ." The church is so closely joined to Jesus that Paul can call it by His name. Jesus told Saul on the Damascus road that persecuting the church was persecuting Him (Acts 9:4). The church is His body, and He is its head (Colossians 1:18).

12:13 *For indeed by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and we were all made to drink into one Spirit.*

"For indeed by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This is the baptism of the Spirit. At the moment a person believes, the Holy Spirit places him into the body of Christ. Notice the word "all." Every believer has been baptized by the Spirit into the body. Many Bible teachers take this to mean it happens to every believer at salvation, not as a second experience for a few. Some Pentecostal and charismatic teachers agree that every believer is placed into the body when he believes, but they also speak of a later filling or baptism in the Spirit for power to serve (Acts 1:8). Either way, this verse says no believer is left outside the body.

"Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free." The body of Christ breaks down every wall between people. In the ancient world, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people did not mix. In the church they belong to the same body. "And we were all made to drink into one Spirit." The Spirit is pictured as water we have all drunk, living in every believer (John 7:37-39).

12:14 *For indeed the body is not one member, but many.*

"For indeed the body is not one member, but many." This is a simple point, but the Corinthians needed it. A body is not one big eye or one big tongue. It needs many parts working together.

A church where everyone has the same gift would not be a healthy church. It would be like a body that is all mouth. God made the church with variety on purpose. Our differences are not a problem to be fixed. They are part of God's design. The person who serves differently than you do is not a threat to the body. They are a gift to it.

12:15-16 *If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," it is not for this* ***reason*** *not of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," it is not for this* ***reason*** *not of the body.*

The foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," but "it is not for this reason not of the body." Paul gives the body parts a voice. The foot feels left out because it is not a hand. The ear feels left out because it is not an eye.

This speaks to believers who feel their gift is not important. Maybe you can't preach or sing, so you think you don't really matter. Paul says that is not true. The foot is still part of the body. So are you. Feeling unimportant does not make you unimportant. Comparing yourself to others will only make you miserable. God has given you a place, and the body needs you there.

12:17 *If the whole body* ***were*** *an eye, where* ***would*** *the hearing* ***be****? If the whole* ***were*** *hearing, where* ***would*** *the smelling* ***be****?*

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be?" Paul paints a strange picture: a giant eyeball with no ears or nose. It could see, but it could not hear or smell anything.

The point is clear. If everyone had the same gift, the body could not function. The Corinthians who wanted everyone to speak in tongues were asking for a body that is all tongue. Every gift is needed, and every member has a job no one else can do in quite the same way.

12:18 *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He willed.*

"But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He willed." This is the answer to both the proud and the discouraged. God put you where you are. He designed your place in the body on purpose.

"Just as He willed." God is not careless. He did not make a mistake when He gave you your gifts and placed you in your church. You can trust Him with your place. Instead of wishing for someone else's gift, ask Him how He wants you to use the one He gave you.

12:19-20 *And if they all were one member, where* ***would*** *the body* ***be****? But now* ***there are*** *indeed many members, but one body.*

"And if they all were one member, where would the body be?" If every part were the same, there would be no body at all, only a single part. "But now there are indeed many members, but one body."

Paul brings us back to the balance. Many members, one body. We need both truths. If we stress only the unity, we may try to make everyone the same. If we stress only the variety, we may split apart. God's design holds both together. A healthy church celebrates its differences and guards its unity.

12:21 *And the eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

"And the eye is not able to say to the hand," "I have no need of you." Nor can the head say it to the feet. Now Paul turns to the proud. In verses 15-16 the lesser parts felt left out. Here the more visible parts look down on the others.

The eye might think it is more important than the hand. The head might think it is above the feet. But the eye cannot pick anything up without the hand, and the head cannot go anywhere without the feet. No believer can say to another, 'I don't need you.' The gifted preacher needs the faithful person who prays. The leader needs the one who sets up chairs. We are all dependent on each other.

12:22 *But much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;*

"But much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary." Think of the parts of your body that seem weak or small. Your heart, your lungs, your liver are hidden away, but you cannot live without them.

The same is true in the church. Some of the most important work is done quietly. The believer who prays every day for the church, the one who visits the sick, the one who teaches children: these may seem less important than the person on the platform, but the church could not survive without them. God sees what others do not see.

12:23-24 *and those **members** of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we put more abundant honor; and our unpresentable **members** have more abundant presentability, but our presentable **members** have no need. But God has blended the body together, having given more abundant honor to the **member** that lacks,*

"And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we put more abundant honor." Paul is speaking of the way we treat our bodies. The parts we consider less presentable we cover with clothing, giving them more care. "Our presentable members have no need." Our faces do not need to be covered.

"But God has blended the body together, having given more abundant honor to the member that lacks." "Blended" means mixed together, like ingredients. God has put the body together in a way that honors the parts that seem lowly. In the church, God's way is to lift up the humble. Jesus said the last will be first (Matthew 20:16). We should honor those the world overlooks.

12:25 *so that there may be no division in the body, but **that** the members may have the same care for one another.*

"So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." Here is God's purpose in the way He designed the body. He wants no division. The Corinthians were full of divisions (1:10; 11:18). God wants His people to care for each other equally.

"The same care" means each member cares about the others as much as about itself. There are no favorites in a healthy body. The rich are not cared for more than the poor, nor the gifted more than the plain. This kind of care does not happen by accident. It happens when we remember we are one body.

12:26 *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with **it**; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with **it**.*

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it." When you stub your toe, your whole body feels it. You bend over, your face winces, your hands reach down. That is how the church should be.

When a believer is going through grief, sickness, or hardship, the rest of the church should feel it and come alongside. Romans 12:15 tells us to weep with those who weep. And when a believer is honored or blessed, we should rejoice with them, not envy them. That second part is often harder. Can you celebrate when God blesses someone else?

12:27 *Now you are **the** body of Christ, and members individually.*

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Paul applies the picture directly. The church in Corinth was the body of Christ in that city. Every believer in it was a member, a part of that body.

This is true of every local church. You are not just someone who attends church. You are a member of Christ's body. You belong, and you have a part to play. Membership in Christ's body is not like joining a club. It is like being a part of a living thing. Christ lives His life in the world through His body.

12:28 *And God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues.*

"And God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." Paul now lists some of the gifts and roles God has given. The first three are ranked. Apostles were those sent directly by Christ. Prophets spoke messages from God. Teachers explained God's Word. These three are listed first because they lay the foundation and build up the church with the Word (Ephesians 2:20).

"Then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues." Helps means giving aid to those in need. Administrations comes from the word for the person who steers a ship. It speaks of leading and guiding. Tongues, which the Corinthians prized most, is listed last. Paul is not saying tongues are worthless. He is gently correcting their sense of what matters most.

12:29-30 ***Are*** *all apostles?* ***Are*** *all prophets?* ***Are*** *all teachers?* ***Are*** *all* ***workers of*** *miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?*

"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" In Greek, each of these questions is worded to expect the answer no.

This is important. Paul is saying plainly that not every believer will have every gift. Not all are apostles, not all teach, and not all speak in tongues. Some teach that every believer should speak in tongues as a sign of the Spirit's filling. These verses show that the gift is given to some and not to others, as the Spirit wills (12:11). No believer should be made to feel less spiritual because he does not have a particular gift.

12:31 *But earnestly desire the better gifts. And yet I show you a way beyond comparison.*

"But earnestly desire the better gifts." Paul tells them to want the gifts that do the most good for the church. In chapter 14 he will say that prophecy is greater than tongues because it builds up the church (14:1-5). The better gifts are the ones that serve others most.

"And yet I show you a way beyond comparison." Then Paul turns. There is something more important than any gift. It is a way of life, the way of love. The Corinthians had plenty of gifts but very little love. Without love, the gifts lose their value. Chapter 13, the love chapter, is not a break from the subject of gifts. It is the heart of it.

Chapter 12 Summary

Paul begins his teaching on spiritual gifts by reminding the Corinthians that they once followed mute idols. The test of the Spirit's work is that no one speaking by the Spirit curses Jesus, and no one can truly say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. There are varieties of gifts, services and workings, but the same Spirit, Lord and God. Each believer is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues and interpretation, all given by the one Spirit as He wills. The church is like a human body. By one Spirit all believers were baptized into one body, Jew and Greek, slave and free. The foot and the ear belong though they are not the hand or the eye, and the eye and the head cannot say they have no need of the hand and feet. God has placed each member as He willed and given more honor to the parts that seem weaker, so that there may be no division and all may care for one another, suffering and rejoicing together. Not all are apostles, prophets, or teachers, and not all speak in tongues. Believers should desire the better gifts, but Paul points them to a way that is better still, the way of love.

Sometimes I have felt that my part in the church did not matter. 1 Corinthians 12 says every part of the body is needed, even the ones that seem weaker. God put me where I am for a reason.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What test does Paul give in 12:3 to know whether someone is speaking by the Spirit of God?

2. How do 12:4-6 show the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the church?

3. Who receives a gift of the Spirit, and what is the purpose of every gift? (12:7)

4. Who decides which gift each believer receives? (12:11)

5. What does it mean that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"? (12:13)

6. What is the problem with the foot and the ear in 12:15-16, and what is the problem with the eye and the head in 12:21?

7. What answer does Paul expect to the questions in 12:29-30, and what does that teach about tongues and other gifts?

8. Have you ever felt that your part in the church did not matter? How does this chapter answer that feeling?

9. Who in your church serves quietly and might be overlooked? How can you honor them this week? (12:22-24)

10. What gift has God given you, and how can you use it more for the common good? (12:7)

Chapter 13: The Love Chapter

Scripture

13:1-13 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to feed ***others***, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing. Love is patient, is kind; love is not envious; love does not boast, is not puffed up, does not behave improperly, does not seek its own things, is not provoked, does not count the evil, does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but whether ***there are*** prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, then that which ***is*** in part will be done away. When I was a child, I was speaking as a child, I was thinking as a child, I was reasoning as a child; but when I became a man, I did away with the things of the child. For now we see through a mirror in an enigma, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will fully know, even as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these ***is*** love.

Chapter 13 Preview

Chapter 13 is one of the best known chapters in the Bible. It is read at weddings all over the world. But Paul did not write it for a wedding. He wrote it to a church that was proud, divided, and using its spiritual gifts to show off. Chapter 12 ended with Paul promising to show them "a way beyond comparison" (12:31). That way is love. The Greek word is agape, the kind of love that gives itself for the good of another, the love God showed us at the cross.

Paul makes three moves in this chapter. First, without love, even the greatest gifts and the greatest sacrifices are worth nothing. Second, he describes what love looks like in action: patient, kind, not envious or boastful, not selfish or easily angered, keeping no record of wrongs, and bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things. Third, he shows that love lasts forever. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are partial and will one day be done away, but love never fails. Faith, hope, and love remain, and the greatest of these is love.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." Paul starts with tongues, the gift the Corinthians prized most. He imagines the greatest gift of speech possible: every human language and even the speech of angels.

Without love, it is just noise. Sounding brass may refer to a gong or to the bronze vessels some Greek theaters used to make sound carry. A clanging cymbal was used in pagan worship to make a loud racket. Corinth knew both sounds well. Paul is saying that the most impressive speech, without love, is like banging pots. It makes noise, but it has no meaning and does no good. Paul says "I." He applies this to himself first.

13:2 *And if I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

"And if I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Paul goes up the list. Prophecy was a gift Paul valued highly (14:1). "All the mysteries" means understanding all the hidden truths of God. "All the knowledge" means knowing everything there is to know about God's Word. "All the faith so as to remove mountains" echoes the words of Jesus (Matthew 17:20).

Imagine having all of those at once. Imagine being the greatest Bible teacher who ever lived. Paul says without love, "I am nothing." Not 'I have nothing' but 'I am nothing.' A person can know a great deal about God and still be empty if he does not love. The strong in Corinth were proud of their knowledge (8:1). Paul says knowledge without love counts for nothing.

13:3 *And if I give away all my possessions to feed **others**, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing.*

"And if I give away all my possessions to feed others, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing." Now Paul turns from gifts to sacrifices. Giving everything to the poor sounds like the highest love. Dying as a martyr sounds like the greatest devotion.

But it is possible to do both without love. A person can give to be seen by others (Matthew 6:1-4). A person can even die for a cause out of pride or stubbornness. God looks at the heart. The act alone does not impress Him. Without love, "I am profited nothing." There is no reward in heaven for sacrifice made without love. This is a sobering verse for anyone who serves in the church. Why do you serve? For applause, for duty, or out of love?

13:4 *Love is patient, is kind; love is not envious; love does not boast, is not puffed up,*

Now Paul describes love. He does not give a definition. He shows us what love does. Most of these words are verbs in Greek. Love is something you do.

"Love is patient." The word means long-tempered. Love puts up with people for a long time without striking back. God is patient with us (2 Peter 3:9). "Is kind." Love looks for ways to do good to others. Patience puts up with people. Kindness reaches out to them.

"Love is not envious." Love does not resent someone else's gifts or blessings. The Corinthians were jealous of each other's gifts. "Love does not boast, is not puffed up." Love does not brag about itself. "Puffed up" means swollen with pride, like a balloon full of air. Paul has used that word of the Corinthians several times (4:6, 18; 5:2; 8:1). Love does not need to be the center of attention.

13:5 *does not behave improperly, does not seek its own things, is not provoked, does not count the evil,*

"Does not behave improperly." Love has good manners. It does not act in a rude or shameful way. The Corinthians were behaving shamefully at the Lord's Supper (11:21-22). "Does not seek its own things." This is the heart of love. It puts others first. Paul has been saying this all through the letter (10:24, 33).

"Is not provoked." Love is not touchy or easily angered. Some people are like a match waiting to be struck. Love has a long fuse. "Does not count the evil." This is a bookkeeping word. Love does not keep a record of wrongs, writing down every hurt to bring it up later. When God forgives us, He does not keep a list (Psalm 103:12). Many marriages and friendships would be healed if we stopped keeping score.

13:6 *does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;*

"Does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." Love does not take pleasure in sin, whether in our own lives or in the failures of others. It does not enjoy gossip about someone's fall. It is not glad when an enemy stumbles (Proverbs 24:17).

Instead love "rejoices with the truth." Real love and truth go together. Love is not just being nice. It does not pretend sin is fine. The Corinthians were tolerating a man living in open sin and were proud of it (5:1-2). That was not love. Love wants what is right and true, even when it is hard. It speaks the truth, but it speaks it in love (Ephesians 4:15).

13:7 *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

"Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." "Bears all things" can mean to cover or to protect. Love does not broadcast the faults of others but covers them, as Peter says (1 Peter 4:8). "Believes all things" does not mean love is gullible. It means love gives others the benefit of the doubt. It looks for the best in people, not the worst.

"Hopes all things." Even when people fail, love does not give up hope that God can change them. "Endures all things." Love keeps going under pressure. It does not quit. Read verses 4-7 again and put your own name in place of the word love. That is a humbling test. Then put the name of Jesus there. He is the only one who has ever loved perfectly like this. The more we walk with Him, the more His love grows in us (Galatians 5:22).

13:8 *Love never fails; but whether* ***there are*** *prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away.*

"Love never fails." The word means love never falls down, never collapses, never comes to an end. Everything else will pass away, but love will last forever. God is love (1 John 4:8), and love will be the air of heaven.

"But whether there are prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away." Here Paul compares love to the gifts. The gifts the Corinthians were so proud of are temporary. They will end. Love never will.

Bible teachers disagree about when these gifts end. Some believe certain gifts, like tongues and prophecy, ended in the first century, once the apostles were gone and the New Testament was complete. Others believe they continue until the return of Christ. The verbs differ. Prophecy and knowledge "will be done away," while tongues "will cease." Some see meaning in that difference, and others do not. Both sides agree that the gifts are temporary and love is eternal.

13:9 *For we know in part and we prophesy in part;*

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part." Our knowledge of God in this life is real but partial. Even the prophets in the early church saw only part of the picture. The gifts are like pieces of a puzzle. They are true and helpful, but none of them shows the whole.

This verse should keep us humble. No one knows everything about God. Not the best pastor, not the wisest scholar, not the most gifted believer. We know enough to trust Him and obey Him, but there is much we do not yet understand. That is why love and humility matter so much in the church. We should hold firmly to what God has made plain and be gracious where good believers disagree.

13:10 *but when the perfect comes, then that which **is** in part will be done away.*

"But when the perfect comes, then that which is in part will be done away." The word perfect means complete or mature, the end goal. When that comes, the partial gifts will no longer be needed. What is "the perfect"? Bible teachers give three main answers.

Many believe it is the return of Christ and the eternal state, when we will see Him face to face (13:12). On this view, the gifts continue until then. Others believe it is the completed New Testament, the full revelation of God's Word. On this view, gifts like prophecy and tongues ended when the last book was written. Still others believe it is the maturity of the church, which some link to the end of the apostolic age. Each view has thoughtful supporters. Verse 12 will help us think it through.

13:11 *When I was a child, I was speaking as a child, I was thinking as a child, I was reasoning as a child; but when I became a man, I did away with the things of the child.*

"When I was a child, I was speaking as a child, I was thinking as a child, I was reasoning as a child; but when I became a man, I did away with the things of the child." Paul uses the picture of growing up. A child talks, thinks, and reasons in a childlike way. That is normal for a child. But when he becomes an adult, he puts those ways behind him.

Paul's point is that our present state, with its partial gifts, is like childhood compared to what is coming. There is also a gentle rebuke here. The Corinthians were acting like children, arguing about who had the best gift (3:1; 14:20). Love is the mark of maturity. A mature believer cares less about his gifts and more about loving others.

13:12 *For now we see through a mirror in an enigma, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will fully know, even as I also have been fully known.*

"For now we see through a mirror in an enigma, but then face to face." Corinth was known for its bronze work, and mirrors in that day were made of polished metal. Even the best of them gave a dim, blurry image. "In an enigma" means in a riddle, not fully clear.

That is how we see God now. We see Him truly in His Word, but not fully. "But then face to face." One day we will see Him clearly, with nothing in the way. John says when He appears we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

"Now I know in part, but then I will fully know, even as I also have been fully known." God knows us completely right now. One day we will know Him as fully as a creature can. Many Bible teachers see the words "face to face" as pointing to the return of Christ, though those who read "the perfect" as the completed Scripture see it as a picture of clearer understanding. Either way, our best day of knowing God is still ahead.

13:13 *But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these* ***is*** *love.*

"But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." The gifts will pass away, but these three remain. Faith trusts God. Hope looks forward to His promises. Love gives itself for others.

Why is love the greatest? One day faith will become sight, and hope will be fulfilled when we see Jesus. But love will go on forever. Love is the very nature of God (1 John 4:16). It is the first and greatest command (Matthew 22:37-40). The Corinthians wanted to be known for their gifts. Paul says what matters most is love. How would people describe you? Would they say you are gifted, or would they say you love? Ask God to grow His love in you.

Chapter 13 Summary

Paul shows the Corinthians the way that is beyond comparison, the way of love. Without love, speaking in the tongues of men and angels is only noise, and having prophecy, all knowledge, and mountain-moving faith counts for nothing. Even giving away all possessions and giving up the body to be burned profits nothing without love. Love is patient and kind. It is not envious, boastful, proud, or rude. It does not seek its own things, is not provoked, and does not keep a record of wrongs. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. It bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. Love never fails. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are partial and will be done away when the perfect comes. Like a child growing into a man, we now see dimly as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face and know fully as we are fully known. Faith, hope, and love remain, and the greatest of these is love.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What three gifts and two sacrifices does Paul say are worth nothing without love? (13:1-3)

2. Why do you think Paul began with tongues in 13:1?

3. List the things love does and does not do in 13:4-7. Which ones stand out to you most?

4. What does it mean that love "does not count the evil"? (13:5)

5. What does Paul say will be done away, and what never fails? (13:8)

6. What are the main views of "the perfect" in 13:10, and what do all of them agree on?

7. What picture does Paul use in 13:12 to describe how we know God now and how we will know Him later?

8. Read 13:4-7 again with your own name in place of the word love. Where do you fall short?

9. Is there someone you are keeping a record of wrongs against? What would it look like to let it go? (13:5)

10. Why is love greater than faith and hope, and how can you grow in love this week? (13:13)

Chapter 14: Prophecy, Tongues, and Order

Scripture

14:1-12 Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual ***gifts***, but especially that you may prophesy. For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one hears ***him***, but in ***the*** spirit he speaks mysteries. But the one who prophesies speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies ***the*** church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but rather that you may prophesy; for greater ***is*** the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification. But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you, unless I speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching? Yet ***even*** lifeless things giving a sound, whether flute or harp, if they do not give a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is piped or what is harped? For indeed, if a trumpet gives an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you give speech that is clear through the tongue, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into ***the*** air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of sounds in ***the*** world, and none ***of them is*** without sound. If then I do not know the power of the sound, I will be a foreigner to the one who speaks, and the one who speaks ***will be*** a foreigner to me. So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual ***gifts***, seek that you may abound for the edification of the church.

14:13-25 Therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What then is it? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will the one who fills the place of the uninstructed say the "Amen" at your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than you all; but in ***the*** church I want to speak five words through my mind, so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brothers, do not be children in ***your*** thinking; but in evil be infants, and in ***your*** thinking be mature. In the law it has been written, "By other tongues and by other lips I will speak to this people, and not even so will they listen to Me, says ***the*** Lord." So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelievers; but prophecy ***is*** not to the unbelievers, but to those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in the same place and all speak in tongues, and uninstructed ***men*** or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or uninstructed ***man*** comes in, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; and thus the secrets of his heart become manifest; and thus, having fallen on ***his*** face, he will worship God, declaring that God is truly among you.

14:26-40 What then is it, brothers? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, ***let it be*** by two, or at the most three, and in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in ***the*** church; and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern. But if

something is revealed to another who is sitting ***by***, let the first be silent. For you are all able to prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted. And ***the*** spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not ***a God*** of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women be silent in the churches; for it has not been permitted to them to speak, but ***they are*** to be subject, as the law also says. And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in ***the*** church. Or did the word of God go out from you? Or did it come to you only? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. So, brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. Let all things be done properly and in order.

Chapter 14 Preview

In chapter 12 Paul taught that every believer has a gift for the common good. In chapter 13 he showed that love is greater than any gift. Now in chapter 14 he puts love to work in the church meeting. The Corinthians loved the gift of tongues, and their meetings had become noisy and confusing. Paul compares tongues and prophecy. Tongues spoken without interpretation build up only the speaker, because no one else understands. Prophecy builds up the whole church, because everyone can understand it. So Paul tells them to seek the gifts that build up others, and to pray with the mind as well as with the spirit.

In the second half Paul gives rules for order in worship. If anyone speaks in a tongue, only two or three may do so, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, they should keep silent. Prophets should also speak one at a time while the others weigh what is said, because God is not a God of disorder but of peace. Paul then gives a much debated command about women keeping silent in the churches. He ends by saying his words are the Lord's commandments, and that all things should be done properly and in order.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1 *Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual **gifts**, but especially that you may prophesy.*

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." This verse ties chapters 12 to 14 together. "Pursue love" picks up chapter 13. The word pursue means to chase or run after. Love is the goal we chase.

"And earnestly desire spiritual gifts" picks up 12:31. Paul does not tell them to give up the gifts. He tells them to want them, but for the right reason. "But especially that you may prophesy." Of all the gifts, Paul singles out prophecy because it builds up the whole church, as he will explain. Love wants the gifts that help others most.

14:2 *For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one hears **him**, but in **the** spirit he speaks mysteries.*

"For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God." When someone speaks in a tongue and no one understands, he is speaking only to God. "For no one hears him." The word

"hears" here means understands. People can hear the sounds, but they cannot follow the meaning.

"But in the spirit he speaks mysteries." The word mysteries here means things hidden from those listening. Without interpretation, what he says stays hidden. Paul does not say this is evil. He says it is limited. Speaking to God is good, but in a church meeting, the goal is to build up others too.

14:3 *But the one who prophesies speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation.*

"But the one who prophesies speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation." Prophecy is different. It is spoken to people in words they understand. Paul gives three things it does.

"Edification" means building up, like a house. It strengthens believers in their faith. "Exhortation" means urging and encouraging, calling people to act. "Consolation" means comforting those who are hurting. That is a good test for any message spoken in church. Does it build up? Does it encourage people to follow Christ? Does it comfort the hurting? Good preaching and teaching today should do the same things.

14:4 *The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies **the** church.*

"The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church." Paul does not condemn building yourself up. It is good for a believer to grow. But in a church meeting, the goal is to build up the whole body.

The Corinthians were treating their gathering as a place for personal spiritual experiences. Paul turns their eyes to others. The question is not, 'What will I get out of church?' It is, 'How can I help someone else?' This is love at work (13:5). Love does not seek its own things.

14:5 *Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but rather that you may prophesy; for greater **is** the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification.*

"Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but rather that you may prophesy." Paul is not against tongues. He would be glad if they all had the gift. But he would rather they prophesy. Some read the first part as a real wish, while others see it as a way of speaking, like Paul wishing all were single like him (7:7), knowing they would not be (12:30).

"For greater is the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification." Here is the key. Tongues with interpretation can build up the church as prophecy does. The problem is not tongues themselves but tongues that no one understands. Everything in the meeting should serve the church's edification.

14:6 *But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you, unless I speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching?*

"But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you?" Paul uses himself as an example. Suppose he came to Corinth and spoke only in tongues. What good would it do them?

"Unless I speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching." To help them, Paul must speak in a way they can understand. He must give them truth from God, knowledge of His ways, a prophetic word, or clear teaching. Paul was the most gifted man in the church, and yet he knew that only clear words build up the hearers. Before you share something in church, ask whether others can understand it and be helped by it.

14:7 *Yet **even** lifeless things giving a sound, whether flute or harp, if they do not give a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is piped or what is harped?*

"Yet even lifeless things giving a sound, whether flute or harp, if they do not give a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is piped or what is harped?" Paul uses musical instruments as a picture. A flute or harp makes sounds. But if the notes are not distinct, you cannot tell what song is being played.

Music needs clear notes to have meaning. Random sounds are not a song. The same is true of speech in church. Words that cannot be understood are like a musician playing random notes. They may sound spiritual, but they do not carry a message.

14:8 *For indeed, if a trumpet gives an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?*

"For indeed, if a trumpet gives an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" In an ancient army, the trumpet gave signals. One call meant to attack, another to retreat. If the trumpeter just made noise, the soldiers would not know what to do.

The church is in a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12). God's people need clear signals from His Word. Preachers and teachers today should take this to heart. A sermon that is confusing or vague is like a trumpet with an uncertain sound. People need to know plainly what God says so they can obey.

14:9 *So also you, unless you give speech that is clear through the tongue, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into **the** air.*

"So also you, unless you give speech that is clear through the tongue, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air." The word tongue here is the same word as in the gift of tongues, but here it means the physical tongue in your mouth. If what you say cannot be understood, you are just talking into the wind.

Paul used a similar picture in 9:26, of a boxer beating the air. Words that do not reach anyone accomplish nothing. God gave us the gift of speech so that we could communicate His truth to one another.

14:10-11 *There are, it may be, so many kinds of sounds in **the** world, and none **of them is** without sound. If then I do not know the power of the sound, I will be a foreigner to the one who speaks, and the one who speaks **will be** a foreigner to me.*

"There are, it may be, so many kinds of sounds in the world, and none of them is without sound." The word sounds here also means languages. There are many languages in the world, and each one has meaning to those who speak it.

"If then I do not know the power of the sound, I will be a foreigner to the one who speaks, and the one who speaks will be a foreigner to me." The word for foreigner is barbaros, the word Greeks used for anyone who did not speak Greek. To Greek ears, other languages sounded like bar bar bar. If you have ever been in a country where you did not know the language, you know the feeling. You hear people talking, but you are shut out. Uninterpreted tongues in church did the same thing. They made fellow believers feel like strangers.

14:12 *So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual **gifts**, seek that you may abound for the edification of the church.*

"So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound for the edification of the church." Paul does not crush their zeal. He redirects it. They were eager for spiritual gifts, and that was good. Now he tells them to aim that eagerness at building up the church.

"Seek that you may abound." Paul wants them to overflow with gifts, but gifts that edify. The test of spiritual maturity is not how many gifts you have or how dramatic they are. It is how much you build up others with what God has given you.

14:13 *Therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.*

"Therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." Here is Paul's practical answer. If you have the gift of tongues, ask God for the ability to interpret, so that your gift can help others.

This shows that gifts are not fixed forever. A believer can pray for God to give him a gift that would serve the church better. It also shows Paul's heart. He does not shut down the gift of tongues. He asks that it be used in a way that builds up the body.

14:14 *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.*

"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful." When a person prays in a tongue, his spirit is engaged with God, but his mind does not understand what he is saying. His understanding produces no fruit.

Bible teachers read this in different ways. Some take "my spirit" to mean the person's own inner spirit. Others take it to mean the Holy Spirit's gift working through him. Either way, Paul's point is that the mind is left out. And God wants us to worship Him with our minds as well as our hearts (Matthew 22:37).

14:15 *What then is it? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind.*

"What then is it? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind." Paul's answer is both, not one or the other. Prayer and worship should come from the heart and from the understanding.

This is a balanced verse for every church. Some churches lean toward feeling and emotion with little thought. Others lean toward thinking with little warmth. Paul wants both. Worship that engages the spirit but bypasses the mind is not enough. Worship that fills the mind but leaves the heart cold is not enough either. God wants all of us.

14:16-17 *Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will the one who fills the place of the uninstructed say the "Amen" at your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

"Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will the one who fills the place of the uninstructed say the Amen at your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you say?" The "uninstructed" are likely visitors, or believers who did not have the gift and did not understand. Amen is a Hebrew word that means so be it, or truly. In the early church, people said Amen out loud to agree with a prayer.

"For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified." Paul is fair. The person praying in a tongue may be giving thanks to God beautifully. But no one else can join in. A prayer in church is meant to be a shared prayer, one that others can agree with and be built up by.

14:18 *I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than you all;*

"I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than you all." This must have surprised the Corinthians. Paul was not against tongues because he lacked the gift. He had it more than any of them.

That gives his words great weight. Paul was not criticizing something he did not understand. He knew the gift from the inside. And because he knew it, he could tell them how to use it rightly. Paul thanks God for the gift. He does not despise it. But he puts it in its proper place, as the next verse shows.

14:19 *but in **the** church I want to speak five words through my mind, so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

"But in the church I want to speak five words through my mind, so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue." Five words compared to ten thousand. Paul says five clear words that teach someone are worth more in church than a huge amount of speech no one understands.

Ten thousand was the largest number the Greeks had a single word for. Paul is saying a few words of clear teaching outweigh an endless amount of uninterpreted tongues. The church meeting is for instruction and building up. Clarity serves love.

14:20 *Brothers, do not be children in **your** thinking; but in evil be infants, and in **your** thinking be mature.*

"Brothers, do not be children in your thinking; but in evil be infants, and in your thinking be mature." Paul gently corrects them. The Corinthians were acting like children who love noise and show. They were fascinated by the dramatic gifts.

Paul wants them to be like infants when it comes to evil, knowing as little about it as possible. But in their thinking, they should be grown up. Jesus told us to be like children in trust and humility (Matthew 18:3), but He never told us to be childish in our understanding. Mature believers think carefully about how God wants His church to worship.

14:21 *In the law it has been written, "By other tongues and by other lips I will speak to this people, and not even so will they listen to Me, says **the** Lord."*

"In the law it has been written," "By other tongues and by other lips I will speak to this people, and not even so will they listen to Me, says the Lord." Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12. By "the law" he means the Old Testament as a whole.

In Isaiah's day, Israel refused to listen to God's prophets. So God warned that He would speak to them through foreign invaders, the Assyrians, whose language they could not understand. Hearing a foreign language would be a sign of God's judgment on their unbelief. Even then, they would not listen.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 28:11-12 (quoted)

14:22 *So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelievers; but prophecy **is** not to the unbelievers, but to those who believe.*

"So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelievers; but prophecy is not to the unbelievers, but to those who believe." Paul draws the lesson from Isaiah. Tongues served as a sign to unbelievers. In Isaiah, the sign was one of judgment on those who refused to hear. On the day of Pentecost, tongues were a sign to the unbelieving Jews gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5-12).

Prophecy, on the other hand, is for believers. It builds them up. Bible teachers see verses 22-25 as hard to put together, since verse 24 shows prophecy helping an unbeliever. Most understand Paul to mean that tongues without interpretation confirm unbelievers in their unbelief, while prophecy builds up believers and can convict unbelievers too.

14:23 *Therefore if the whole church comes together in the same place and all speak in tongues, and uninstructed **men** or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are mad?*

"Therefore if the whole church comes together in the same place and all speak in tongues, and uninstructed men or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are mad?" Picture it. A visitor walks into the church meeting and everyone is speaking in languages he cannot understand. What will he think? He will think they have lost their minds.

"Mad" means insane or out of control. The Corinthians may have thought their meetings showed how spiritual they were. But to outsiders, it looked like chaos. Our worship should not drive people away from Christ. It should help them see Him.

14:24-25 *But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or uninstructed **man** comes in, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; and thus the secrets of his heart become manifest; and thus, having fallen on **his** face, he will worship God, declaring that God is truly among you.*

"But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or uninstructed man comes in, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all." Now picture a different meeting. Believers are speaking God's truth in words everyone can understand. The visitor hears it, and his conscience is pricked. He is "convicted," meaning shown his sin.

"And thus the secrets of his heart become manifest." God's Word exposes what is hidden in a person's heart (Hebrews 4:12). "And thus, having fallen on his face, he will worship God, declaring that God is truly among you." The result is that he falls down and worships. He sees that God is really there. That is what our church gatherings should do. When God's Word is spoken clearly, the Spirit uses it to draw people to Christ.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 45:14 (alluded to)

14:26 *What then is it, brothers? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

"What then is it, brothers? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." Paul describes what a church meeting in Corinth was like. Many people took part. One brought a psalm or song. Another brought a teaching. Others had a tongue, a revelation, or an interpretation.

"Let all things be done for edification." Here is the rule for everything. Every song, every teaching, every gift should build up the church. Paul expects many members to take part. Worship is not a show put on by a few while everyone else watches. Each member has something to give (12:7).

14:27 *If anyone speaks in a tongue,* ***let it be*** *by two, or at the most three, and in turn; and let one interpret.*

"If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and in turn; and let one interpret." Paul gives clear rules. Only two or three people may speak in tongues in a meeting. They must speak one at a time, not all at once. And someone must interpret.

These rules show that speaking in tongues is under the speaker's control. He can wait his turn. He is not swept away by something he cannot stop. The Spirit of God does not produce chaos. He produces order.

14:28 *But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in* ***the*** *church; and let him speak to himself and to God.*

"But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God." If no one can interpret, the person with the gift should not speak out loud in the meeting. He can pray quietly to God, but not address the church.

Again we see that a person speaking in tongues can choose to stay silent. This guards the church against confusion. It also shows that love governs the use of gifts. If using a gift in a certain way would not help others, love holds it back.

14:29 *And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern.*

"And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern." Prophecy also has limits. Only two or three should speak in a meeting. "And let the others discern" means the rest of the church, or the other prophets, should weigh what is said.

This is very important. Prophecy in the New Testament church was not accepted blindly. It had to be tested against the apostles' teaching (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1). Today we test every message by the written Word of God. No one who claims to speak for God is above being checked by Scripture.

14:30-31 *But if* ***something*** *is revealed to another who is sitting* ***by****, let the first be silent. For you are all able to prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted.*

"But if something is revealed to another who is sitting by, let the first be silent." If God gives a message to someone else while one prophet is speaking, the first should stop and let the other speak. No one should hog the floor.

"For you are all able to prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted." There is time for everyone, one at a time. The goal is that "all may learn" and "all may be exhorted." Taking turns lets the whole church benefit. Paul's rules are not meant to stifle the Spirit. They make room for Him to speak through many members in an orderly way.

14:32 *And **the** spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;*

"And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." This is a key principle. A true prophet is never out of control. He can choose when to speak and when to stay silent.

In the pagan religions of Corinth, people believed that a god would take over a person and make him say things against his will. Paul says the Holy Spirit does not work that way. When God speaks through someone, the person remains in control of himself. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Anyone who says, 'I couldn't help it, the Spirit made me do it,' does not understand how the Spirit works.

14:33 *for God is not **a God** of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." This is the reason behind all of Paul's rules. Worship should reflect the character of God. He is a God of order and peace, not confusion.

Creation itself shows God's order, from the stars to the seasons. The church should show it too. Paul adds, "as in all the churches of the saints." The Corinthians were not free to make up their own way of doing things. They were part of a larger family of churches that followed the same teaching. Some Bibles connect this last phrase with verse 34 instead of verse 33. The Greek can be read either way.

14:34 *Let your women be silent in the churches; for it has not been permitted to them to speak, but **they are** to be subject, as the law also says.*

"Let your women be silent in the churches; for it has not been permitted to them to speak, but they are to be subject, as the law also says." Here is what the text says plainly. Paul tells the women to be silent in the church meetings. He says it is not permitted for them to speak there, and that they are to be in submission, as the Law says. By "the law," he likely means the order of creation in Genesis 2, which he pointed to in 11:8-9, though Paul does not quote a specific verse.

This verse must be read alongside 11:5, where Paul assumes women were praying and prophesying in the church, with their heads covered. How can both be true? Bible teachers give several main readings. Some believe women should not speak at all in the church meeting, and that 11:5 refers to other settings or describes something Paul then corrects. Many believe Paul is forbidding a certain kind of speaking, namely the weighing or judging of prophecies just mentioned in verse 29, which would place a woman in authority over the men's teaching. Others believe Paul is stopping disruptive questions and chatter during the meeting, which verse 35 seems to point to. Still others believe it addressed a local problem in Corinth and its culture.

14:35 *And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in **the** church.*

"And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in the church." Paul assumes the women want to learn, and he encourages it.

Women learning God's Word was not common in that world, and Paul does not forbid it. He tells them where to ask their questions: at home, with their husbands.

"For it is shameful for women to speak in the church." This is strong language. Those who see this as a call for complete silence take it at face value. Those who see it as limited to questions or to judging prophecy point out that the verse speaks of asking questions to learn, and that the context is the orderly weighing of messages.

A few scholars note that some ancient Greek copies place verses 34-35 after verse 40, and they suggest the verses were added later. But these verses appear in every known Greek copy of this letter, and the SLB, like most Bibles, prints them here. We should take them as Paul's words.

Godly believers hold each of these readings. What all agree on is that women and men are equal in worth before God (Galatians 3:28), that women did pray and prophesy in the early church (11:5; Acts 21:9), and that the church meeting should be orderly. Each church must study the passage carefully alongside 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and decide how to apply it with a clear conscience.

14:36 *Or did the word of God go out from you? Or did it come to you only?*

"Or did the word of God go out from you? Or did it come to you only?" Paul has a sharp question for the Corinthians. Did God's Word start with them? Were they the only ones who had it?

Of course not. The gospel came to them from Jerusalem through the apostles. The Corinthians were acting as if they could set their own rules, ignoring what the other churches did. Paul reminds them that they are under God's Word, not over it. No church today has the right to set aside what Scripture says just because its culture thinks differently.

14:37 *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord.*

"If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord." This is a strong claim. Paul says what he has written is not just his opinion. It is the Lord's command.

Here is a test for anyone who claims to be spiritual. A truly spiritual person will recognize the authority of the apostles' writings. Someone who claims a word from God that contradicts Scripture shows that he is not truly led by the Spirit. The Spirit who inspired Scripture will never contradict it.

14:38 *But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

"But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant." If someone refuses to recognize Paul's words as the Lord's command, Paul will not argue with him any further. Some ancient copies read this as he is not recognized, meaning God will not recognize him. The SLB follows the Received Text here.

Either way, the point is serious. Rejecting God's Word is a choice, and it has consequences. Paul has given his teaching clearly. Those who refuse it are responsible for their own ignorance.

14:39 *So, brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*

"So, brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues." Paul sums up the chapter. Prophecy is the gift to seek most, because it builds up the church. Tongues should not be forbidden, but should be used in order with interpretation.

How should this verse be applied today? It depends on the views we looked at in chapters 12 and 13. Those who believe the sign gifts continue see this as a direct command for today. Those who believe the sign gifts ended with the apostles see it as a command for the church when the gifts were active. Both sides agree that this verse rules out treating the gifts as worthless in Paul's day, and that whatever is done in church must be done in love and in order.

14:40 *Let all things be done properly and in order.*

"Let all things be done properly and in order." This is the final word on worship. "Properly" means in a fitting, decent way. "In order" is a military word for soldiers lined up in their ranks.

God cares about how His church worships. He is not honored by confusion or showing off. He is honored when His people gather in love, speak clearly, take turns, test what is said, and build each other up. Order is not the opposite of the Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit, because He is the Spirit of a God of peace. Does your part in your church's worship help bring order and build others up?

Chapter 14 Summary

Paul tells the Corinthians to pursue love and to desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. A person speaking in a tongue speaks to God and builds up himself, but no one else understands. The one who prophesies speaks to people for their building up, encouragement and comfort, and so builds up the church. Like a flute, a harp, or a trumpet without a clear sound, uninterpreted tongues carry no message and make hearers feel like foreigners. The one who speaks in a tongue should pray to interpret, and believers should pray and sing with the spirit and with the mind. Paul spoke in tongues more than all of them, yet in church he would rather speak five words that teach than ten thousand in a tongue. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers, as in Isaiah, while prophecy serves believers and can convict an unbeliever so that he worships God. Paul gives rules for order: two or three speak in tongues, in turn, with an interpreter, or else keep silent; two or three prophets speak, one at a time, while others weigh what is said, for the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets and God is a God of peace. Women are told to be silent in the churches and to ask their husbands at home, a command good Bible teachers apply in different ways. Paul's words are the Lord's commandments. Believers should desire to prophesy, not forbid tongues, and do all things properly and in order.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul tell the church to desire prophecy more than tongues? (14:1-5)

2. What three things does prophecy do for the church, according to 14:3?

3. What pictures does Paul use in 14:7-11 to show the problem with speech no one understands?

4. What does Paul mean when he says he will pray and sing "with the spirit" and "with the mind"? (14:15)

5. Why would Paul rather speak five words with his mind than ten thousand in a tongue? (14:19)

6. What rules does Paul give for tongues and for prophecy in 14:27-31?

7. What does "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" teach us about how the Holy Spirit works? (14:32)

8. How do the main readings of 14:34-35 try to fit it together with 11:5? What do all of them agree on?

9. Does what you bring to your church's gatherings build up others? What is one way you could do that better? (14:26)

10. God is "not a God of disorder but of peace." Where do you need His peace and order in your own life? (14:33)

Chapter 15: The Resurrection

Scripture

15:1-11 Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also have stood, through which you also are being saved, in what word I preached ***it*** to you, if you hold ***it*** fast, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you among ***the*** first ***things*** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also have fallen asleep. After that He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all, as to the untimely birth, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by ***the*** grace of God I am what I am, and His grace which ***was*** toward me did not become empty, but I toiled more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God which ***was*** with me. Whether then I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.

15:12-19 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from ***the*** dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of ***the*** dead? But if there is no resurrection of ***the*** dead, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching ***is*** empty, and your faith also ***is*** empty. And we are also found ***to be*** false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised the Christ, whom He did not raise if indeed then ***the*** dead are not raised. For if ***the*** dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith ***is*** futile; you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life we have hoped in Christ only, we are more pitiable than all men.

15:20-34 But now Christ has been raised from ***the*** dead; He became ***the*** firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since through a man ***came*** death, through a man also ***came the*** resurrection of ***the*** dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ ***the*** firstfruits, after that those of Christ at His coming, then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He brings to nothing all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet. ***The*** last enemy is brought to nothing: death. For He put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says that all things have been put in subjection, ***it is*** evident that the ***One*** who put all things in subjection to Him ***is*** excepted. And when all things have been put in subjection to Him, then the Son Himself also will be put in subjection to the ***One*** who put all things in subjection to Him, so that God may be all things in all. Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead, if ***the*** dead are not raised at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? Why are we also in danger every hour? I die every day, by your boasting which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. If according to man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what ***is*** the profit to me? If ***the*** dead are not raised, let us eat and let us drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be misled: bad associations corrupt good morals. Sober up righteously, and do not sin; for some have ignorance of God. I say to your shame.

15:35-49 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow the body that will be, but bare grain, if it should happen ***to be*** of wheat or of some one of the rest. But God gives it a body just as He willed, and to each of the seeds its own body. Not all flesh the same flesh, but ***there is*** one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fish, and another of birds. And ***there are*** heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly ***is*** one, and the ***glory*** of the earthly ***is*** another. ***There is*** one glory of ***the*** sun, and another glory of ***the*** moon, and another glory of ***the*** stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also ***is*** the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. So also it has been written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam ***became*** a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual ***is*** not first, but the natural, after that the spiritual. The first man ***is*** from ***the*** earth, made of dust; the second man ***is*** the Lord from heaven. As ***is*** the ***one*** made of dust, such also ***are*** those made of dust; and as ***is*** the heavenly ***One***, such also ***are*** the heavenly ***ones***. And just as we have borne the image of the ***one*** made of dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly ***One***.

15:50-58 Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit ***the*** kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Look, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in ***the*** blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for ***the*** trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this corruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the word that has been written will come to pass: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, ***is*** your sting? Where, O Hades, ***is*** your victory?" Now the sting of death ***is*** sin, and the power of sin ***is*** the law. But thanks ***be*** to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not empty in ***the*** Lord.

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapter 15 is the longest chapter in the letter and the fullest teaching on the resurrection in the Bible. Some in Corinth were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. They may have accepted that Jesus rose, but they could not believe that their own bodies would be raised. Many Greeks thought the body was a prison and that only the soul mattered. Paul answers by going back to the gospel itself. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day, just as the Scriptures said, and He was seen by Peter, by the Twelve, by more than five hundred believers at once, by James, by all the apostles, and last of all by Paul.

Then Paul shows what is lost if there is no resurrection: our preaching is empty, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, and those who have died in Christ are gone. But Christ has been raised, the firstfruits of a great harvest. Paul lays out the order of the resurrection and the coming kingdom, when every enemy, even death, is brought to nothing. He answers the question of what kind of body we will have by pointing to a seed and the plant that grows from it. Our bodies will be raised

imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. And he reveals a mystery: not all believers will die, but all will be changed in the blink of an eye when the trumpet sounds and Christ comes for His church. Death will be swallowed up in victory. So we stand firm, knowing our work in the Lord is never wasted.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also have stood,*

"Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you." Paul is not bringing them anything new. He is reminding them of what they already heard. The word gospel means good news. Paul is going back to the foundation, because their doubts about the resurrection struck at the heart of it.

He describes the gospel in three ways. It is the message he "preached" to them. It is the message they "received," which means they welcomed and believed it. And it is the message "in which you also have stood." The gospel is not only how we begin the Christian life. It is the ground we stand on every day.

15:2 *through which you also are being saved, in what word I preached* ***it*** *to you, if you hold* ***it*** *fast, unless you believed in vain.*

"Through which you also are being saved." The gospel saves. Salvation has a past, present, and future. We were saved when we believed (Ephesians 2:8), we are being saved as God works in us, and we will be saved fully when Christ comes (Romans 13:11).

"If you hold it fast, unless you believed in vain." This is not saying that salvation depends on our hanging on by our own strength. True faith keeps holding to the gospel. Paul's concern is that some in Corinth were denying the resurrection. If the resurrection is not true, then believing was in vain, as he will show in verses 14-17. Bible teachers differ on how warnings like this fit with the security of believers, but all agree that real faith continues to hold to the truth of the gospel.

15:3 *For I delivered to you among* ***the*** *first* ***things*** *what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*

"For I delivered to you among the first things what I also received." Paul passed on the message he himself received, from the Lord and from those who were believers before him. "Among the first things" means of first importance. This is the center of the faith.

"That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Here is the gospel. Christ died. It was a real death. He died "for our sins," in our place, taking the punishment we deserved. This is called substitution. And He died "according to the Scriptures." The Old Testament foretold it. Isaiah 53 says the Servant of the Lord would be pierced for our transgressions and that the Lord laid on Him the sin of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6). The death of Jesus was not an accident. It was God's plan from the beginning.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:5-6 (alluded to)

15:4 *and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*

"And that He was buried." His burial proves He really died. He was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60). He did not faint or swoon on the cross. He was dead and buried.

"And that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." The verb is in a tense that means He was raised and remains raised. Jesus is alive right now. "On the third day" was foretold in picture by Jonah in the fish (Matthew 12:40), and Psalm 16:10 promised that God's Holy One would not see decay (Acts 2:27-31). This is the gospel: Christ died, was buried, and rose again. Every person must decide what they will do with that good news.

Some Bible teachers hear an echo here of Hosea 6:2, "on the third day He will raise us up." Others point out that in Hosea these are the words of Israel turning back to the Lord (Hosea 6:1), and that they speak of the nation being revived. I believe Hosea's words still belong to Israel and will come true when the nation returns to the Lord, so I list them here only as an echo.

Old Testament links: Psalm 16:10 (alluded to); Hosea 6:2 (alluded to)

15:5 *and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

"And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve." Now Paul gives the witnesses. Cephas is Peter. Jesus appeared to him alone on the day He rose (Luke 24:34). That must have been a tender meeting, since Peter had denied Him three times.

"Then to the Twelve." This was the name for the group of apostles, even though Judas was gone and Thomas was missing the first time (John 20:19-24). Jesus appeared to them in the upper room. These were real people who could be questioned. The resurrection was not a story made up long after. It was reported by eyewitnesses who were still living.

15:6 *After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also have fallen asleep.*

"After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time." This is a remarkable statement. Five hundred people saw the risen Jesus together. This may have been in Galilee, where Jesus had told His followers to meet Him (Matthew 28:10, 16), though Scripture does not say.

"Of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also have fallen asleep." Paul is saying, in effect, 'Most of them are still alive. Go ask them.' When Paul wrote this, about A.D. 55, most of those witnesses were still living. A man does not invite people to check his story unless he is sure it is true. Notice also how Paul describes the death of believers: "fallen asleep." For those in Christ, death is like sleep, because they will wake up.

15:7 *After that He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

"After that He appeared to James." This is James the brother of Jesus. During Jesus' ministry, His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). But after the resurrection, James became a believer and later a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19). He wrote the letter of James.

What changed James? He saw his brother alive from the dead. It is hard to imagine anything else that would convince a man that his own brother was the Son of God. "Then to all the apostles." This may refer to Jesus' appearances over the forty days before He ascended (Acts 1:3-9).

15:8 *And last of all, as to the untimely birth, He appeared also to me.*

"And last of all, as to the untimely birth, He appeared also to me." Paul was the last person to see the risen Lord in this way. Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), after He had already ascended.

"The untimely birth" is a strong phrase. It can mean a baby born too early or a miscarriage. Paul may mean that he was born into the family of apostles at the wrong time, abruptly, after the others. Or he may be using a word his enemies called him. Either way, Paul is humble about it. He did not deserve to see Jesus. But Jesus chose to show Himself to him.

15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Paul never forgot what he had been. Before he met Jesus, he hunted down believers, put them in prison, and agreed to their deaths (Acts 8:3; 22:4; 26:10).

Paul did not live in guilt, because he knew he was forgiven. But he never lost the wonder of grace. In 1 Timothy 1:15 he calls himself the foremost of sinners. The more we understand how much we have been forgiven, the more humble and grateful we become.

15:10 *But by **the** grace of God I am what I am, and His grace which **was** toward me did not become empty, but I toiled more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God which **was** with me.*

"But by the grace of God I am what I am." Here is the answer to Paul's past. Everything he became was by God's grace. Grace is God's undeserved favor, His kindness to those who deserve the opposite.

"And His grace which was toward me did not become empty, but I toiled more abundantly than all of them." God's grace did not make Paul lazy. It made him work harder than anyone. Grace and effort are not enemies. "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Even his hard work was God's grace working in him. That is the balance we need. We work hard, but we give God the credit (Philippians 2:12-13).

15:11 *Whether then I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.*

"Whether then I or they, so we preach, and so you believed." Paul and the other apostles all preached the same gospel. There was no disagreement among them about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This matters because the Corinthians had split into groups around Paul, Apollos, and Peter (1:12). Paul says all of them preached the same message. And the Corinthians had believed it. Now some were drifting from it. Paul calls them back to what they first believed. Truth does not change. The gospel we believe today is the same gospel the apostles preached.

15:12 *Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from **the** dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of **the** dead?*

"Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Paul now addresses the problem directly. Some in the church were denying the resurrection of the body.

We don't know exactly what they believed. Many Greeks thought the body was worthless and that the soul alone lived on. Others thought nothing survived death at all. Some may have thought the resurrection was only spiritual and had already happened (2 Timothy 2:18). Paul's argument is simple. If Christ rose from the dead, then resurrection is possible. You cannot believe Christ rose and say the dead cannot rise.

15:13-14 *But if there is no resurrection of **the** dead, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching **is** empty, and your faith also **is** empty.*

"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised." If dead people cannot be raised, then Jesus was not raised either. The two stand or fall together.

"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is empty, and your faith also is empty." Paul now walks through what follows if Jesus stayed in the grave. First, the preaching is empty. The word means hollow, with nothing inside. The whole message of the apostles would be a lie. Second, faith is empty. Believing in a dead Savior is believing in nothing. Christianity is not just a good set of morals. It stands or falls on a historical event: the resurrection of Jesus.

15:15 *And we are also found **to be** false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised the Christ, whom He did not raise if indeed then **the** dead are not raised.*

"And we are also found to be false witnesses of God." Third, the apostles would be liars. They were not just mistaken. They would be giving false testimony about God Himself.

"Because we testified against God that He raised the Christ, whom He did not raise if indeed then the dead are not raised." The apostles said God raised Jesus. If that were false, they would be speaking against God by claiming He did something He did not do. But these men suffered and died for what they preached. People may die for a lie they believe is true. But the apostles were in a position to know whether Jesus rose. Men do not die for what they know is a lie.

15:16-17 *For if **the** dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith **is** futile; you are still in your sins.*

"For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised." Paul repeats the point to drive it home. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Fourth, faith would be futile, meaning useless. It would not get us anywhere.

Fifth, "you are still in your sins." This is the most serious point. The resurrection proves that God accepted Christ's death as payment for sin. Romans 4:25 says He was raised because of our justification. Justification means being declared righteous before God. If Jesus is still dead, His death did not defeat sin, and we are still guilty before God. Everything depends on the empty tomb.

15:18 *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

"Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." Sixth, believers who have died are lost forever. The Corinthians had loved ones who had died trusting in Jesus. If there is no resurrection, those loved ones did not fall asleep. They perished.

This would mean there is no reunion, no hope beyond the grave. Every Christian funeral would be a hopeless goodbye. But that is not what Christians believe. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The resurrection gives us hope for our loved ones who have died in Christ.

15:19 *If in this life we have hoped in Christ only, we are more pitiable than all men.*

"If in this life we have hoped in Christ only, we are more pitiable than all men." Seventh, Christians would be the most pitiful people on earth. If Christ only helps us in this life and there is nothing after, then we have given up much for nothing.

The apostles had given up their homes, their safety, and in many cases their lives. If there is no resurrection, they were fools. But the Christian hope is not just for this life. It reaches beyond the grave. That is why believers can suffer, sacrifice, and even die with joy. We know this life is not all there is.

15:20 *But now Christ has been raised from **the** dead; He became **the** firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead." After seven terrible ifs, Paul turns with two great words: but now. This is the fact. Christ has been raised. Everything Paul just described is not true, because Jesus is alive.

"He became the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest, brought to God as an offering (Leviticus 23:10-11). They were a promise that the rest of the harvest was coming. Many Bible teachers point out that Jesus rose on the day after the Sabbath following Passover, the day the firstfruits were waved before the Lord (Leviticus 23:11). His resurrection is God's promise that all who belong to Him will be raised too.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 23:10 (alluded to)

15:21-22 *For since through a man **came** death, through a man also **came the** resurrection of **the** dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*

"For since through a man came death, through a man also came the resurrection of the dead." Death came into the world through one man, Adam (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). Resurrection comes through one man, Jesus. Paul compares Adam and Christ again in Romans 5:12-21.

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." Everyone who is "in Adam," which is every human being, dies. Everyone who is "in Christ" will be made alive. Paul is not saying every person will be saved. He is saying all who belong to Christ will be raised to life with Him, just as all who belong to Adam die. Jesus also taught that unbelievers will be raised, but to judgment (John 5:28-29).

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:17 (alluded to)

15:23 *But each in his own order: Christ **the** firstfruits, after that those of Christ at His coming,*

"But each in his own order." The resurrection happens in stages. The word order was used for ranks of soldiers, each group marching in its turn.

"Christ the firstfruits." Jesus rose first. "After that those of Christ at His coming." The next group is those who belong to Christ, raised when He comes. I believe the Scriptures teach that this coming has two stages. First, Christ comes for His church before the seven-year Tribulation, raising the dead in Christ and changing living believers (15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Then, at the end of the Tribulation, He returns visibly to the earth, and the believers who died during that time are raised to reign with Him (Revelation 20:4-6). Those who see the coming as one event read this verse as one resurrection at the end.

15:24 *then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He brings to nothing all rule and all authority and power.*

"Then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He brings to nothing all rule and all authority and power." After the resurrection of believers comes "the end." Paul does not say how long it is between His coming and the end. Revelation 20 tells us that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. At the close of that kingdom, every enemy will be put down.

"When He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father." Christ will hand over the completed kingdom to the Father. Every rebel power, human and demonic, will be "brought to nothing."

This does not mean Christ stops ruling. Scripture says His kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:33). It means His work of conquering every enemy is finished, and the kingdom passes into the eternal state.

15:25 *For He must reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet.*

"For He must reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet." Paul is thinking of Psalm 110:1, where God says to the Messiah, "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." Christ must reign. Nothing can stop it.

As I read Scripture, this reign reaches its full form in the thousand-year kingdom, when Christ rules on the earth from Jerusalem after He returns (Revelation 20:1-6; Zechariah 14:9). Others see this verse as His present reign from heaven over the church. Either way, His victory is certain. Every enemy will one day be under His feet.

Old Testament links: Psalm 110:1 (alluded to)

15:26 ***The*** *last enemy is brought to nothing: death.*

"The last enemy is brought to nothing: death." Death is called an enemy. It was not part of God's good creation. It came because of sin (Romans 5:12). Death has taken every generation since Adam. But it will not have the last word.

Death is the "last enemy" to be destroyed. Revelation 20:14 says that death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire. In the new heaven and new earth, there will be no more death (Revelation 21:4). Jesus already defeated death when He rose. One day it will be gone forever. For those in Christ, that is the most hopeful promise in the world.

15:27 *For He put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says that all things have been put in subjection,* ***it is*** *evident that the* ***One*** *who put all things in subjection to Him* ***is*** *excepted.*

"For He put all things in subjection under His feet." Paul quotes Psalm 8:6. That psalm speaks of God giving man rule over creation. Man lost much of that rule through sin, but Jesus, the perfect Man, fulfills it (Hebrews 2:6-9).

"But when He says that all things have been put in subjection, it is evident that the One who put all things in subjection to Him is excepted." Paul makes a careful point. When God puts all things under Christ, that does not include God the Father Himself. The Father is the One doing the subjecting. He is not under the Son.

Old Testament links: Psalm 8:6 (quoted)

15:28 *And when all things have been put in subjection to Him, then the Son Himself also will be put in subjection to the* ***One*** *who put all things in subjection to Him, so that God may be all things in all.*

"And when all things have been put in subjection to Him, then the Son Himself also will be put in subjection to the One who put all things in subjection to Him." This verse does not mean the Son is less than the Father. The Son is fully God (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9). It speaks of the Son's role. As

the Son willingly obeyed the Father on earth (John 6:38), He will willingly honor the Father when His work is complete, just as 11:3 said the head of Christ is God.

"So that God may be all things in all." The goal of all history is that God will be everything, fully honored by all creation. There will be no rival, no rebellion, no sin. God will be all in all. That is where history is going.

15:29 *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead, if **the** dead are not raised at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?*

"Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead are not raised at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?" This is one of the hardest verses in the Bible. Bible teachers have counted many explanations. Here are the main ones.

Some believe a few people in Corinth were being baptized on behalf of believers who had died without being baptized. Paul mentions the practice to show that even it assumed a resurrection, but he does not approve it. Paul asks "what will those do," speaking of others, not of himself or the church as a whole. Others believe it means people were baptized because of the dead, that is, they came to faith through the testimony of believers who had died and wanted to join them in the resurrection. Others believe it means new believers stepping in to take the place of those who had died, like soldiers filling the ranks. Still others read the dead as the believer's own body, baptized with a view to its resurrection.

What is clear is this: no other Scripture teaches baptism for the dead, and salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, which each person must receive for himself (Ephesians 2:8-9). No one can believe for someone else. Whatever this verse means, Paul's point is that the practice made no sense if the dead are not raised.

15:30-31 *Why are we also in danger every hour? I die every day, by your boasting which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

"Why are we also in danger every hour?" Paul turns to his own life. He faced danger constantly for the gospel. Why would he risk his life if there is no resurrection?

"I die every day, by your boasting which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul does not mean he died spiritually. He means he faced death every day. He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and hunted (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). "By your boasting" is a strong oath. Paul is saying, 'As surely as I boast in you, I face death daily.' The Corinthians were his joy, and he swears by them. A man does not live like that for a lie.

15:32 *If according to man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what **is** the profit to me? If **the** dead are not raised, let us eat and let us drink, for tomorrow we die.*

"If according to man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what is the profit to me?" Paul was writing from Ephesus (16:8). Bible teachers read this in two ways. Some believe Paul was actually thrown to wild animals in the arena. But Paul was a Roman citizen, and Acts does not mention it, so most

believe he is speaking in a figure about violent enemies who opposed him there (Acts 19:23-41). "According to man" may point to that human way of speaking.

"If the dead are not raised, let us eat and let us drink, for tomorrow we die." Paul quotes Isaiah 22:13, where the people of Jerusalem partied instead of repenting. If there is no resurrection, why not live for pleasure? That is how many people live today. What we believe about the future shapes how we live now.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 22:13 (quoted)

15:33 *Do not be misled: bad associations corrupt good morals.*

"Do not be misled: bad associations corrupt good morals." Paul quotes a line well known in the Greek world, from the Greek poet Menander. Even the pagans knew this was true.

The Corinthians were being influenced by people who denied the resurrection. Paul warns that the company we keep shapes us. Wrong ideas lead to wrong living. If you spend your time with people who mock God and His Word, it will rub off on you. This does not mean we avoid unbelievers (5:10). It means we must be careful who we let shape our beliefs and habits.

15:34 *Sober up righteously, and do not sin; for some have ignorance of God. I say to your shame.*

"Sober up righteously, and do not sin." Paul says it is time to wake up. The Corinthians were like people who were drunk, confused by false ideas. They needed to come to their senses and stop sinning.

"For some have ignorance of God. I say to your shame." Some in the church did not truly know God. Some think Paul means people in the church who were not truly believers. Others think he means unbelievers around them whom the church had failed to reach. Either way, it was shameful. A church that is busy arguing and living carelessly is not shining the light of the gospel to those who need it.

15:35 *But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"*

"But someone will say," "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" Now Paul answers the questions of the doubters. They were asking how a body that has rotted in the grave or been burned can be raised. What will that body be like?

These are honest questions, and many people still ask them. Paul answers them in verses 36-49. The answer comes from the world around us. God already does something like this every spring.

15:36 *Fool! What you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies.*

"Fool! What you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies." The word fool means someone who does not think clearly. Paul is not being cruel. He is saying the answer is right in front of them.

Every farmer knows that a seed must be buried in the ground and die before it grows into a plant. Jesus used the same picture of His own death (John 12:24). Death is not the end of the seed. It is the way to new life. In the same way, the death of a believer's body is not the end. It is planting.

15:37-38 *And what you sow, you do not sow the body that will be, but bare grain, if it should happen **to be** of wheat or of some one of the rest. But God gives it a body just as He willed, and to each of the seeds its own body.*

"And what you sow, you do not sow the body that will be, but bare grain." When you plant a seed of wheat, you do not plant a full stalk of wheat. You plant a small, bare seed. What grows looks very different from what was planted.

"But God gives it a body just as He willed, and to each of the seeds its own body." God gives each seed the body that is right for it. There is a link between the seed and the plant. A wheat seed becomes wheat, not an oak tree. So it will be with our resurrection bodies. They will be connected to the bodies we have now, but far greater. Our bodies will be ours, yet changed.

15:39-41 *Not all flesh **is** the same flesh, but **there is** one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fish, and another of birds. And **there are** heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly **is** one, and the **glory** of the earthly **is** another. **There is** one glory of **the** sun, and another glory of **the** moon, and another glory of **the** stars; for star differs from star in glory.*

"Not all flesh is the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fish, and another of birds." God has made many kinds of bodies, each suited for its place. A fish is made for water, a bird for the sky.

"And there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies." The sun, moon, and stars each have their own glory, different from one another. "For star differs from star in glory." Paul's point is that God is not limited to one kind of body. If He can make such variety in creation, He can surely give us a new kind of body suited for eternity. The God who made the stars can raise the dead.

15:42 *So also **is** the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.*

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." Now Paul draws four contrasts between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies. The first is corruption and incorruption.

Our bodies now are perishable. They age, get sick, and decay. When a believer is buried, the body is "sown" like a seed. But it will be raised imperishable. It will never grow old, get sick, or die again. Think of the pain and weakness of aging. One day it will be gone forever for those in Christ.

15:43 *It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.*

"It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory." Death is not beautiful. A body in the grave is a humbling sight. But the resurrection body will shine with glory, like the glorified body of Jesus (Philippians 3:21).

"It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." Our bodies now grow tired. They have limits. In death they are completely powerless. But the resurrection body will have strength and abilities we cannot imagine. The disabled will walk. The weak will be strong.

15:44 *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*

"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." The natural body is the body suited to life on this earth. The spiritual body is the body suited to the life of the Spirit in eternity.

"Spiritual body" does not mean a body made of spirit, like a ghost. Jesus' resurrection body could be touched, and He ate food (Luke 24:39-43). It was a real, physical body. But it was ruled and filled by the Holy Spirit, and it was fit for heaven. That is what our bodies will be like. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." Both are real.

15:45 *So also it has been written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam* ***became*** *a life-giving spirit.*

"So also it has been written," "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." Paul quotes Genesis 2:7. When God breathed into Adam, he became a living being.

Jesus is called "the last Adam." Adam was the head of the old human race, and through him came death. Jesus is the head of a new humanity, and through Him comes life. Adam received life. Jesus gives life. "A life-giving spirit" means that the risen Christ gives resurrection life to all who belong to Him (John 5:21).

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:7 (quoted)

15:46 *However, the spiritual* ***is*** *not first, but the natural, after that the spiritual.*

"However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, after that the spiritual." God's order is natural first, then spiritual. We are born with natural bodies like Adam's. Later, at the resurrection, we will receive spiritual bodies like Christ's.

Some in Corinth may have thought they were already fully spiritual and did not need a future resurrection. Paul says no. The spiritual body comes later. We live now in bodies that will die, but we wait for something better. Our salvation is not complete until our bodies are raised (Romans 8:23).

15:47 *The first man* ***is*** *from* ***the*** *earth, made of dust; the second man* ***is*** *the Lord from heaven.*

"The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is the Lord from heaven." Adam was made from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). His body was earthly. And when he sinned, he was told that to dust he would return (Genesis 3:19).

Jesus is "the second man," and He is "the Lord from heaven." He came from heaven, and He is the beginning of a new kind of humanity. Adam's family is made of dust and returns to dust. Christ's family will share His heavenly life.

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:7 (alluded to)

15:48-49 *As **is** the **one** made of dust, such also **are** those made of dust; and as **is** the heavenly **One**, such also **are** the heavenly **ones**. And just as we have borne the image of the **one** made of dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly **One**.*

"As is the one made of dust, such also are those made of dust; and as is the heavenly One, such also are the heavenly ones." Everyone born into Adam's family is like Adam, earthly and mortal. Everyone born again into Christ's family will be like Him.

"And just as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly One." Right now we look like Adam. We get tired, we get sick, we die. But one day we will look like Jesus. We will have bodies like His glorious body. That is God's promise to every believer (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

15:50 *Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit **the** kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption.*

"Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption." "Flesh and blood" means our present human nature, mortal and weak. Our bodies as they are now cannot enter God's eternal kingdom.

This is why change is necessary. It is not that the body is bad. God made it. But our present bodies are corrupted by sin and death. Something perishable cannot inherit what is imperishable. Before we can enter the fullness of God's kingdom, we must be changed. And Paul now tells us how.

15:51 *Look, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,*

"Look, I tell you a mystery." In the New Testament, a mystery is a truth God kept hidden in the past and has now revealed (Romans 16:25). This is something new that the Old Testament did not make clear.

"We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." Not every believer will die. Some will be alive when Christ comes for His church. But all believers, living and dead, will be changed. This is the rapture of the church. The word rapture comes from the Latin word for being caught up in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. I believe Scripture teaches that this event takes place before the seven-year Tribulation. Jesus promised to come and take His own to be with Him (John 14:1-3), and God has not appointed us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The Tribulation follows, and then Christ returns visibly to the earth at its end.

15:52 *in an instant, in **the** blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for **the** trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.*

"In an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet." The change will happen in an instant. The word for instant is atomos, from which we get atom. It means something that cannot be cut any smaller. It will happen faster than a blink.

"At the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed." This trumpet is the same one Paul mentions in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the trumpet of God. It calls the church home. It is not the same as the seventh trumpet of judgment in Revelation 11:15, which belongs to the Tribulation. In Paul's day, a trumpet called soldiers to gather and break camp. "Last" can mean the final call for the church in this age. Some teachers link this trumpet to Matthew 24:31 or to Revelation 11 and place the rapture later. But this passage speaks of a sudden change of believers, with no signs given. The dead in Christ rise first, and then we who are alive are changed. In a moment, every believer will have a new body.

15:53 *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Paul uses the picture of putting on clothes. Our mortal bodies will be clothed with immortality, as a person puts on a new garment.

Notice the word "this." It is "this corruptible" and "this mortal." The same body that dies is the one that is changed and raised. God does not throw away our bodies and give us new ones from nothing. He transforms them. There is a real connection between who you are now and who you will be forever.

15:54 *And when this corruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the word that has been written will come to pass: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

"And when this corruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the word that has been written will come to pass:" "Death has been swallowed up in victory." Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8, a promise that God would swallow up death forever.

Death has swallowed up every human being since Adam. But at the resurrection, death itself will be swallowed up. Victory will take its place. This is what Jesus won when He rose. On that day, His victory will be complete for all who belong to Him.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 25:8 (quoted)

15:55 *"Where, O death, **is** your sting? Where, O Hades, **is** your victory?"*

"Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory?" Paul quotes Hosea 13:14, taunting death like a defeated enemy. A sting is like the stinger of a bee or scorpion. Death's sting has been pulled.

Hades is the place of the dead. The SLB follows the Received Text here, which reads Hades in the second line. Many older Greek copies repeat death. Either way, the point is the same. Death and the grave have lost their power over the believer. A bee that has lost its stinger may still buzz around, but it cannot hurt you. Believers still die, but death cannot hold us.

Old Testament links: Hosea 13:14 (quoted)

15:56 *Now the sting of death **is** sin, and the power of sin **is** the law.*

"Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." What makes death so terrible is sin. Death is the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23). Without sin, death would have no sting.

"And the power of sin is the law." The Law of God shows us our sin and condemns us for it (Romans 7:7-11). The Law is good, but it gives sin its power to condemn, because it shows how far we have fallen short. The Law cannot save us. It can only show us we need a Savior.

15:57 *But thanks **be** to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Here is the answer. Jesus took the sting of death for us. He paid for our sin on the cross and met the full demands of the Law. Then He rose, defeating death.

God gives us the victory. We do not earn it. It is a gift, received by faith. And it comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no other way. Have you received that victory? If you have trusted Christ, death has lost its power over you. If you have not, you can trust Him today.

15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not empty in **the** Lord.*

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Paul ends this great chapter with a practical call. Because of the resurrection, we can stand firm. "Steadfast" means settled and firm. "Immovable" means not shaken by false teaching or hard times.

"Always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not empty in the Lord." Because the resurrection is true, nothing done for Christ is wasted. Every prayer, every kindness, every hour of service, every word of witness counts for eternity. You may feel your work goes unnoticed. But God sees it, and one day He will reward it (Hebrews 6:10). Keep going. Your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Chapter 15 Summary

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached, the message in which they stand and by which they are saved: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. The risen Christ appeared to Peter, to the Twelve, to more than five hundred at once, to James, to all the apostles, and last of all to Paul, who by God's grace became what he was. Some in Corinth denied the resurrection of the dead, but if

the dead are not raised, Christ is not raised, preaching and faith are empty, the apostles are false witnesses, believers are still in their sins, the dead in Christ have perished, and Christians are the most pitiable of all people. But Christ has been raised, the firstfruits. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive, each in order: Christ, then those of Christ at His coming, then the end, when He hands the kingdom to the Father after putting every enemy, last of all death, under His feet. Baptism for the dead and Paul's daily danger make no sense without the resurrection. Like a seed sown and raised as a plant, the body is sown perishable, dishonored, weak and natural, and raised imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual, bearing the image of the heavenly Man. Not all believers will sleep, but all will be changed in an instant at the last trumpet, when Christ comes for His church. Death will be swallowed up in victory, given to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, so believers stand firm, knowing their toil in the Lord is not empty.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What are the main parts of the gospel Paul gives in 15:3-4?

2. List the people the risen Jesus appeared to, according to 15:5-8. Why do these witnesses matter?

3. What would be true if Christ has not been raised? List the results Paul gives in 15:13-19.

4. What does it mean that Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"? (15:20)

5. What order of resurrection does Paul give in 15:23-24?

6. How does Paul use the picture of a seed to explain the resurrection body? (15:36-38)

7. What four contrasts does Paul draw between our present body and our resurrection body? (15:42-44)

8. What will happen to believers who are alive when Christ comes for His church? (15:51-52)

9. How does knowing that "death has been swallowed up in victory" change the way you face death, your own or a loved one's? (15:54-57)

10. What work in the Lord are you tempted to give up on? How does 15:58 encourage you to keep going?

Chapter 16: The Collection and Final Words

Scripture

16:1-12 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also do. On every first ***day*** of ***the*** week let each of you put aside by himself, storing up whatever he may be prospered, so that when I come there may not be collections then. And when I arrive, whomever you approve through letters, these I will send to carry your gift to Jerusalem. And if it is fitting for me also to go, they will go with me. Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia, for I am passing through Macedonia; and with you perhaps I will stay, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me forward wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now in passing; but I hope to remain some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a great and effective door has opened to me, and many ***are*** opposing. Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he works the work of ***the*** Lord, as I also ***do***. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him forward in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers. Now concerning Apollos the brother, I exhorted him much that he come to you with the brothers, and ***there*** was not at all a will that he come now; but he will come when he has opportunity.

16:13-24 Watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strengthened. Let everything of yours be done in love. Now I exhort you, brothers (you know the household of Stephanas, that it is ***the*** firstfruits of Achaia, and they have appointed themselves for service to the saints), that you also be subject to such ***ones***, and to everyone who works together and toils. And I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these filled up your lack; for they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such ***ones***. The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in ***the*** Lord, with the church at their house. All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The greeting of Paul ***is*** with my hand. If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. Maran atha. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you. My love ***be*** with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Chapter 16 Preview

After the heights of chapter 15, Paul comes back down to earth. The resurrection is true, so our work in the Lord is not empty, and part of that work is giving. Paul gives instructions for a collection he was gathering from the Gentile churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Each person is to set something aside on the first day of every week, in keeping with how God has prospered him, so that the gift is ready when Paul arrives. Trusted men chosen by the church will carry it to Jerusalem. Paul then shares his travel plans. He will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door for the gospel has opened there, even with many opponents. He asks the church to welcome Timothy and explains why Apollos is not coming yet.

The letter closes with a short burst of commands: watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, and do everything in love. Paul commends the household of Stephanas and others who served the saints, and asks the church to honor such people. He sends greetings from the churches of Asia and from Aquila and Priscilla, and writes the final greeting in his own hand. His

last words hold a solemn warning, an Aramaic prayer for the Lord to come, and a blessing of grace and love for them all.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also do.*

"Now concerning the collection for the saints." "Now concerning" marks another question from the Corinthians' letter (7:1; 12:1). The saints here are the believers in Jerusalem. Many of them were poor. Some may have lost jobs or family support when they came to Christ, and there had been a famine in Judea (Acts 11:27-30).

"As I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also do." Paul gave the same instructions to every church that took part. This collection mattered greatly to Paul. He mentions it in Romans 15:25-27 and gives two whole chapters to it in 2 Corinthians 8-9. It was a way for Gentile believers to show love to the Jewish believers who first brought them the gospel. It showed that Jew and Gentile were one body in Christ.

16:2 *On every first **day** of **the** week let each of you put aside by himself, storing up whatever he may be prospered, so that when I come there may not be collections then.*

"On every first day of the week let each of you put aside by himself." This verse gives a pattern for giving that still helps us today. Notice when. "On every first day of the week," which is Sunday. The early church gathered on the first day, the day Jesus rose (Acts 20:7). Giving was regular, tied to worship.

Notice who. "Each of you." Every believer took part, not just the wealthy. Notice how. "Put aside by himself," meaning each person set it aside on purpose. And notice how much. "Storing up whatever he may be prospered." Paul does not name an amount here. Each person gave in keeping with what God had given him. Those who have more can give more. Bible teachers differ on whether the tithe, a tenth, is the pattern for believers today, but all agree that giving should be regular, planned, and in proportion to what God has given.

"So that when I come there may not be collections then." Paul did not want a last-minute push for money when he arrived. Planned giving is better than pressured giving.

16:3 *And when I arrive, whomever you approve through letters, these I will send to carry your gift to Jerusalem.*

"And when I arrive, whomever you approve through letters, these I will send to carry your gift to Jerusalem." Paul did not handle the money himself. The church chose trusted men to carry it. Paul would send them with letters of introduction.

This shows great wisdom. Paul was careful to avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing with money (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). Churches today should follow the same pattern. Money given to God's work should be handled by more than one trusted person, with openness and

accountability. Notice also that Paul calls it "your gift." The word here is charis, the word for grace. Giving is an act of grace.

16:4 *And if it is fitting for me also to go, they will go with me.*

"And if it is fitting for me also to go, they will go with me." Paul was willing to go to Jerusalem with the gift if it seemed right. He did go in the end, as Acts 20-21 and Romans 15:25 tell us. The trip led to his arrest in Jerusalem.

Paul was open about his plans, but he did not insist on being in charge of the money. The men chosen by the church would carry it, with Paul or without him. He put the church's trust and the gospel's good name ahead of his own role.

16:5 *Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia, for I am passing through Macedonia;*

"Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia, for I am passing through Macedonia." Paul shares his travel plans. Macedonia was the northern part of Greece, where the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were. Corinth was in Achaia, the southern part.

Paul planned to travel from Ephesus north through Macedonia and then south to Corinth. Acts 20:1-3 tells us he did make that trip, though his plans changed along the way. 2 Corinthians 1:15-17 shows that some in Corinth criticized him when his plans shifted.

16:6 *and with you perhaps I will stay, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me forward wherever I go.*

"And with you perhaps I will stay, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me forward wherever I go." In the ancient world, travel by sea stopped during the winter months because storms made it too dangerous. Paul hoped to spend that time in Corinth.

"So that you may send me forward" means to help him on his way, with supplies, money for the journey, and perhaps people to travel with him. Even though Paul did not take support from Corinth for his preaching there (9:15), he was willing to let them help him travel on to the next place. Supporting missionaries as they go is part of the church's work (3 John 6-8).

16:7 *For I do not want to see you now in passing; but I hope to remain some time with you, if the Lord permits.*

"For I do not want to see you now in passing; but I hope to remain some time with you, if the Lord permits." Paul did not want a quick visit. The church had many problems, and he wanted time to deal with them in person (11:34).

"If the Lord permits." Paul made plans, but he held them loosely. He knew the Lord was in charge of his schedule. James 4:13-15 warns against making plans as if we control tomorrow. We should plan wisely, as Paul did, but always say, 'If the Lord wills.' That is not a religious phrase to tack on. It is a real attitude of trust.

16:8-9 *But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a great and effective door has opened to me, and many **are** opposing.*

"But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost." This tells us Paul was writing from Ephesus, probably in the spring. Pentecost was the Jewish feast fifty days after Passover. Paul spent about three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31).

"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and many are opposing." Paul had a great opportunity to preach, and God was using it. Acts 19:10 says all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord. But there was also great opposition. Both went together. An open door for the gospel often brings enemies with it. Opposition is not always a sign that we are in the wrong place. Sometimes it is a sign that God is at work. Paul did not leave because of opposition. He stayed because of the open door.

16:10 *Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he works the work of **the** Lord, as I also **do**.*

"Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear." Timothy was Paul's young helper and spiritual son (4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2). Paul had sent him to Corinth to remind them of his teaching (4:17).

"Without fear" suggests that Timothy may have been timid (2 Timothy 1:7), and the Corinthians could be a hard group. Paul asks them to make him feel welcome. "For he works the work of the Lord, as I also do." Timothy was young, but his work was the same as Paul's. He deserved the same respect. Churches should encourage young leaders, not make them afraid.

16:11 *Therefore let no one despise him. But send him forward in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers.*

"Therefore let no one despise him." Timothy was young, and some might look down on him for it. Paul later told Timothy himself not to let anyone despise his youth (1 Timothy 4:12).

"But send him forward in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers." Paul wanted Timothy to come back to him safely and on good terms with the church. How we treat God's servants matters. Do you encourage the younger believers and leaders in your church, or do you dismiss them?

16:12 *Now concerning Apollos the brother, I exhorted him much that he come to you with the brothers, and **there** was not at all a will that he come now; but he will come when he has opportunity.*

"Now concerning Apollos the brother." Apollos was a gifted teacher from Alexandria who had ministered in Corinth after Paul (Acts 18:24-28). Some in Corinth had made him the head of their party (1:12).

"I exhorted him much that he come to you with the brothers, and there was not at all a will that he come now; but he will come when he has opportunity." Paul urged Apollos to go to Corinth, but

Apollos did not want to go at that time. He may not have wanted to stir up the party spirit around his name. There was no rivalry between Paul and Apollos. Paul calls him "the brother." They were partners in the gospel (3:5-9). The divisions in Corinth were the church's doing, not theirs.

16:13 *Watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strengthened.*

"Watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strengthened." Paul gives four short commands, like a commander giving orders to his troops.

Watch means stay alert, like a guard on duty. Be on the lookout for false teaching and temptation. To "stand firm in the faith" means hold your ground on the truth of the gospel, especially the resurrection (15:1, 58). To "act like men" means be brave and mature, not childish. This command is for the whole church, men and women, and calls for courage. To be strengthened means to grow strong, by the Lord's power (Ephesians 6:10). The Corinthians had been acting like spiritual children. Paul calls them to grow up and stand strong.

16:14 *Let everything of yours be done in love.*

"Let everything of yours be done in love." After four strong commands comes a gentle one, and it balances the rest. Standing firm and acting bravely can become harsh without love. Love keeps strength from turning into pride.

This one verse sums up the whole letter. The Corinthians' problems, their divisions, their lawsuits, their pride about knowledge and gifts, their behavior at the Lord's Supper, all came down to a lack of love. Paul gave a whole chapter to it (chapter 13). Now he gives one more reminder. Not some things, but "everything" should be done in love. Is there an area of your life where you are strong but not loving?

16:15-16 *Now I exhort you, brothers (you know the household of Stephanas, that it is **the** firstfruits of Achaia, and they have appointed themselves for service to the saints), that you also be subject to such **ones**, and to everyone who works together and toils.*

"Now I exhort you, brothers (you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and they have appointed themselves for service to the saints)." Stephanas and his family were among the first people in Achaia to believe in Christ. Paul baptized them himself (1:16).

"They have appointed themselves for service to the saints." No one forced them to serve. They gave themselves to it. That is the heart of real ministry. "That you also be subject to such ones, and to everyone who works together and toils." Paul tells the church to follow and respect people like Stephanas. Leadership in the church is earned by service, not by talent or social position. The people who quietly serve deserve our honor and support.

16:17-18 *And I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these filled up your lack; for they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such **ones**.*

"And I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these filled up your lack." These three men had traveled from Corinth to Ephesus to visit Paul. They may have

brought the Corinthians' letter with them (7:1). "Filled up your lack" means they made up for the church's absence. Paul could not be with the whole church, but these men brought the church to him.

"For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such ones." Their visit encouraged Paul. Some people in a church are refreshers. They lift the spirits of others. Paul says to recognize and appreciate them. Who has refreshed you lately? Have you told them? And whose spirit could you refresh this week?

16:19 *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in **the** Lord, with the church at their house.*

"The churches of Asia greet you." Asia here means the Roman province in the western part of what is now Turkey, with Ephesus as its main city. The gospel had spread to many towns there (Acts 19:10). Believers far away cared about the church in Corinth.

"Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church at their house." This husband and wife were tentmakers who had worked with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). They then moved to Ephesus, where they helped teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). The Corinthians knew them well. Notice "the church at their house." The early church had no church buildings. Believers met in homes. A church is not a building. It is the people of God.

16:20 *All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

"All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." In that culture, a kiss on the cheek was a common greeting among family and close friends. It showed warmth and welcome.

"Holy" means it was set apart, a sign of Christian love, not romance. Paul gives this command in several letters (Romans 16:16; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). In our culture, a handshake, a hug, or a warm word may do the same thing. The point is not the form of the greeting. The point is that believers who had been divided should welcome one another as family.

16:21 *The greeting of Paul **is** with my hand.*

"The greeting of Paul is with my hand." Paul usually dictated his letters to a helper who wrote them down (Romans 16:22). At the end, he would take the pen and write a few lines himself.

This was a personal touch, and it was also a mark that the letter was truly from Paul (2 Thessalonians 3:17). False letters claiming to be from him were going around (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul's own handwriting showed this one was real. Imagine the Corinthians seeing the apostle's handwriting at the end of this long letter. It was his personal word to them.

16:22 *If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. Maran atha.*

"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." This sounds harsh after a letter so full of love. But it is a solemn warning. The word for "accursed" is anathema, which means set apart for God's judgment. Paul used the same word in 12:3.

To not love the Lord Jesus is the worst thing a person can do. It means rejecting the One who gave His life for us. All the problems in Corinth came back to this. Love for Christ is the heart of the Christian life. Do you love Him?

"Maran atha." This is Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. It can mean 'Our Lord, come!' or 'Our Lord has come.' Many Bible teachers take it as a prayer, the same cry as Revelation 22:20, where John prays for the Lord Jesus to come. Early believers longed for the return of Christ. This little prayer reminds us that He is coming for His church, and that we should live ready for Him.

16:23 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you.*

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Paul began the letter with grace (1:3), and he ends it with grace. Everything in between, every correction and every command, is wrapped in God's grace.

This is how God deals with His children. He corrects us, but He does so in grace. The Corinthians had many sins and problems. But they were still God's people, and His grace was still with them. No matter how badly we have failed, God's grace is greater (Romans 5:20).

16:24 *My love **be** with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

"My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen." Paul's last word is love. He had written strong words to the Corinthians. He had rebuked them, warned them, and corrected them. But he wanted them to know that it all came from love.

Notice the word all. Paul did not love only those who followed him. He loved the whole church, even those who criticized him. And his love was in Christ Jesus. It flowed from Christ's love for him. That is the kind of love that can hold a divided church together. Amen means so be it. May that love be true of us as well.

Chapter 16 Summary

Paul gives instructions for the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem: on the first day of every week, each one should set aside an amount in keeping with how God has prospered him, so that the gift is ready when Paul comes, and men approved by the church will carry it. Paul plans to come through Macedonia and perhaps spend the winter in Corinth, but he will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door has opened there, with many opponents. He asks the church to receive Timothy without fear and not to despise him, and says that Apollos will come when he has opportunity. Paul calls the church to watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, and do everything in love. He commends the household of Stephanas and the men who refreshed his spirit, and asks the church to honor such servants. He sends greetings from the churches of

Asia and from Aquila and Priscilla and the church in their house, and writes his own greeting by hand. He warns that anyone who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ is accursed, prays "Maran atha," and closes with the grace of the Lord Jesus and his own love for them all in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Who was the collection for, and why do you think it mattered so much to Paul? (16:1-3)

2. What pattern for giving do you see in 16:2: when, who, how, and how much?

3. Why did Paul have the church choose men to carry the gift instead of carrying it himself? (16:3-4)

4. What did Paul see in Ephesus that made him stay, even with many opponents? (16:8-9)

5. How did Paul want the church to treat Timothy, and why? (16:10-11)

6. What four commands does Paul give in 16:13, and what command balances them in 16:14?

7. What did the household of Stephanas do, and how did Paul want the church to respond? (16:15-16)

8. Is your giving to the Lord regular, planned, and in proportion to what He has given you? What step could you take? (16:2)

9. Who has refreshed your spirit lately, and how can you thank them or refresh someone else this week? (16:17-18)

10. Paul ends with "Maran atha." How would your life change if you lived each day ready for the Lord to come? (16:22)

Conclusion

1 Corinthians is a letter to a church with problems. The believers in Corinth were gifted, but they were proud and divided. They lined up behind their favorite leaders, put up with open sin, took each other to court, argued over marriage and food, shamed the poor at the Lord's Supper, used their spiritual gifts to show off, and some even doubted the resurrection. Paul answered every one of those problems the same way. He took them back to Christ crucified and risen. The cross humbles our pride, the Spirit makes us one body, and the resurrection gives us a sure hope.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with 1 Corinthians, we see that God cares about how His people live together. He cares about our unity, our purity, our marriages, our consciences, our worship, and how we treat each other. Where good Bible teachers have disagreed, such as on head coverings, women speaking in the church, the sign gifts, and baptism for the dead, I have tried to set out the main views fairly and let the text speak. What no one can miss is the way Paul pointed: "Pursue love" (14:1). "But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (13:13).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to love His church. The church in Corinth was far from perfect, and so is every church today. But it is still the body of Christ and the temple of God, where His Spirit lives. Find your place in it and use the gift He has given you for the common good (12:7).

Paul's message is the same for us today as it was for the believers in Corinth. "For I delivered to you among the first things what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," "and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (15:3-4). Because He lives, death has lost its sting, and one day we who belong to Him will be changed in the blink of an eye. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:57). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve as part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Old and New Testament Links in 1 Corinthians

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1:19	Isaiah 29:14	quoted
1:20	Isaiah 19:12	alluded to
1:20	Isaiah 33:18	alluded to
1:20	Isaiah 44:25	alluded to
1:31	Jeremiah 9:24	quoted
2:9	Isaiah 64:4	quoted
2:9	Isaiah 65:17	alluded to
2:16	Isaiah 40:13	quoted
3:19	Job 5:13	quoted
3:20	Psalm 94:11	quoted
5:1	Leviticus 18:8	alluded to
5:1	Deuteronomy 22:30	alluded to
5:7	Exodus 12:27	pictured
5:7	Exodus 12:21	pictured
5:7	Exodus 12:15	alluded to
5:8	Exodus 12:15	alluded to
5:13	Deuteronomy 17:7	quoted
6:2	Daniel 7:22	alluded to
6:9-10	Leviticus 18:22	alluded to
6:16	Genesis 2:24	quoted
8:4	Deuteronomy 6:4	alluded to
9:8-9	Deuteronomy 25:4	quoted
9:13	Deuteronomy 18:1	alluded to
10:1	Exodus 13:21	alluded to
10:1	Exodus 14:22	alluded to
10:3-4	Exodus 17:6	pictured
10:3-4	Numbers 20:11	pictured
10:3-4	Exodus 16:4	alluded to
10:5	Numbers 14:29	alluded to
10:6	Numbers 11:4	alluded to
10:6	Numbers 11:34	alluded to
10:7	Exodus 32:6	quoted
10:8	Numbers 25:1	alluded to
10:8	Numbers 25:9	alluded to
10:9	Numbers 21:5	alluded to
10:9	Numbers 21:6	alluded to
10:10	Numbers 16:41	alluded to
10:10	Numbers 14:29	alluded to
10:19-20	Deuteronomy 32:17	quoted
10:21	Malachi 1:7	alluded to

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
10:22	Deuteronomy 32:21	alluded to
10:25-26	Psalm 24:1	quoted
10:28	Psalm 24:1	quoted
11:7	Genesis 1:27	alluded to
11:8-9	Genesis 2:18	alluded to
11:8-9	Genesis 2:21-22	alluded to
11:25	Jeremiah 31:31	alluded to
11:25	Exodus 24:8	alluded to
14:21	Isaiah 28:11-12	quoted
14:24-25	Isaiah 45:14	alluded to
15:3	Isaiah 53:5-6	alluded to
15:4	Psalm 16:10	alluded to
15:4	Hosea 6:2	alluded to
15:20	Leviticus 23:10	alluded to
15:21-22	Genesis 2:17	alluded to
15:25	Psalm 110:1	alluded to
15:27	Psalm 8:6	quoted
15:32	Isaiah 22:13	quoted
15:45	Genesis 2:7	quoted
15:47	Genesis 2:7	alluded to
15:54	Isaiah 25:8	quoted
15:55	Hosea 13:14	quoted

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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