

Pastoral Guidance for a Congregation [Part 1]
A Study Guide on 1 Corinthians

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Scripture references and quotations are from the following:

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- *The Greek New Testament* (27th edition); Nestle, E., Nestle, E., Aland, B., Aland, K., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

Salutation (1 Corinthians 1.1-9)

Greeting (1 Cor 1.1-3)

1. Who wrote this letter?

1.1. There is almost universal agreement among interpreters that this letter was composed by Paul.

1.1.1. There are some who suggest that Sosthenes may have been a co-author of the letter.

However, he was more likely a recording secretary of Paul. We will consider Sosthenes' role below.

1.2. Who was Paul? He was a:

1.2.1. Jew who:

1.2.1.1. Was the child of orthodox Jewish parents, from the tribe of Benjamin (Acts 23.6; Rom 11.1; Phil 3.5).

1.2.1.2. Had both Jewish and Roman names—Saul and Paul (Acts 13.9). Many Jews at that time had two names (Jewish and Gentile). The name 'Paul' means 'little'.

1.2.1.3. Initially he hated Christ and Christians and persecuted the Church (1 Cor 15.9; Acts 9.1, 2; Acts 22.4, 5; Phil 3.6).

1.2.1.4. Was brought to faith in Christ through a personal appearance of Jesus to him on his journey to Damascus to imprison believers in Jesus Christ (Acts 9.3-19).

1.2.2. Roman citizen, born in Tarsus in Asia Minor, a centre of Hellenistic culture (Acts 21.39; Acts 22.25).

1.2.3. Tent maker, who:

1.2.3.1. Had been trained in a trade. He followed a wise practice of the Jews, which encouraged men to engage in a trade and to be educated.

1.2.3.2. Was not ashamed to be thought of as an artisan or labourer by the socially ambitious Corinthians.

1.2.3.3. Worked with Aquila, a Jew of Asia Minor, who had been banished by the decree of Claudius Caesar (c 49 AD¹), which drove all the Jews from Rome (Acts 18.1-3).

1.2.3.4. Supported himself in Corinth by practicing his trade (Acts 18.2-3; Acts 9.18). Paul was cautious about accepting financial aid from congregations so that they could not claim patronage over him (2 Cor 11.9; Phil 4.15).

1.2.4. Scholar, among the most educated of his generation, who was:

1.2.4.1. Educated in Judaism by Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22.3) according to the strictest sect of the Pharisees (Acts 26.5)

1.2.4.2. Well-read in Greek and Roman philosophy—as evidenced by his quotations, and use of phrases and allusions (sometimes with a substitution of Christ) from them—for example:²

1.2.4.2.1. Aratus, *Phaenomena* (Acts 17.28b)

1.2.4.2.2. Epimenides (Titus 1.12)

1.2.4.2.3. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a Roman Stoic (Acts 17.24-28a)

1.2.4.2.4. Menander, *Thais* (1 Cor 15.33)

1.2.4.2.5. Plato, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Theaetetus* (Rom 7.22, 23; Rom 8.5 with Gal 6.8; allusion 1 Cor 9.16, 24a; 1 Cor 13.12; 2 Cor 4.4; Phil 1.21; Phil 3.19; 1 Thess 5.15; 2 Tim 4.6)

1.2.4.2.6. Socrates (1 Cor 12.14-17, 25).

1.2.5. Missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9.15; Gal 2.7-8; Eph 3.8), who:

1.2.5.1. Made three (recorded) missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world.

1.2.5.2. Founded more than ten (and probably more than 15) congregations, including: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colossae,

¹ Jack Finegan. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) p. 394.

² *Paul and his use of Greek Philosophy*; biblethingsinbibleways.wordpress.com/2013/07/14/paul-and-his-use-of-greek-philosophy/

- Hieropolis, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (1 Cor 3.6).
- 1.2.5.3. Was in Ephesus, at the time he wrote this letter. He had come to Ephesus, indirectly, following his mission work in Corinth.
- 1.2.6. Teacher and preacher (Acts 15.35). He spent more than two years carrying out this form of ministry in Corinth.
- 1.2.7. Letter writer, skilled in the Greco-Roman form of rhetoric.
- 1.2.8. Humble man, who knew that he had been saved by grace and that his intellectual gifts had been given to him by the Lord (1 Cor 2.3; 2 Cor 4.7; 2 Cor 11.29-30; 2 Cor 12.5, 9-10).
- 1.2.9. Apostle (as he states in 1 Cor 1.1, and in eight other Epistles).
- 1.3. What office did Paul claim for himself, which would be understood as giving him authority to write this letter?
- 1.3.1. He claimed to be an apostle.
- 1.3.1.1. The literal Greek is: “Paul called apostle of Christ Jesus ...” as in ‘called *an* apostle’.
- 1.3.1.2. The word ‘apostle’ is related to the Greek verb meaning ‘send’, and means ‘someone sent as a messenger’.
- 1.3.1.3. Its usage is similar to our word ‘ambassador’. The Gospels use the term ‘sent’ when speaking of Jesus who was sent by the Father (Mt 10.40; Mt 15.24).
- 1.3.2. Jesus called his chosen core of twelve disciples, apostles (Lk 6.13). Paul is using the term in the strict sense of his being an addition to the original twelve apostles, and as having the same authority in the fledgling Church as Peter or John (see, 1 Cor 9.1-3).
- 1.3.3. The term may be used in a general sense to refer to other evangelists:
- 1.3.3.1. Barnabas (Acts 14.14)
- 1.3.3.2. Andronicus and Junian (Rom 16.7)
- 1.3.3.3. Apollos (1 Cor 4.6-9)
- 1.3.3.4. James, the Lord’s brother (Gal 1.19)
- 1.3.3.5. Possibly Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 2.6)
- 1.3.3.6. Possibly Titus; the word ‘messengers’ is ‘apostles’ in the Greek (2 Cor 8.23)
- 1.3.3.7. Possibly Epaphroditus; the word ‘messenger’ is ‘apostle’ in the Greek (Phil 2.25).
- 1.4. Of whom was Paul an apostle?
- 1.4.1. Of Christ Jesus. Or, as it would have been understood in Greek, ‘the anointed Jesus’. ‘Christ Jesus’ (used exclusively by Paul, >80X) and ‘Jesus Christ’ (used almost 70X) along with ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ (used about 60X) are common titles for Jesus.
- 1.4.2. ‘Christ’ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah* (‘Anointed One’).
- 1.4.3. ‘Jesus’ is the name given to the incarnate second person of the divine Trinity (Mt 1.21), the son of Mary who lived in Nazareth for around 33 years.
- 1.4.3.1. It is composed of two Hebrew nouns: a contraction of ‘YHWH’, the covenant name for God, and ‘salvation’ (‘hosea’).
- 1.4.4. ‘Lord’ (used in 1 Cor 1.2, 3) is the translation of the Greek word *kurios*, which was used to translate the Hebrew term *adoni*, which referred to a ‘master’ or ‘lord’. By applying the title ‘lord’ to Jesus, the NT writers assert that Jesus is God.
- 1.5. How did Paul receive his authority as an apostle from Jesus?
- 1.5.1. He tells us that he was called to the office/role by the will of God; and, in particular, by Jesus the second person of the divine Trinity.
- 1.5.2. Jesus chose Paul to be an apostle, through a special calling which began with his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.1-19; Acts 22.6-16; Acts 26.12-18; Gal 1.15).
- 1.5.2.1. Paul had not taken this office/title to himself.
- 1.5.2.2. In fact, until his calling he was an enemy of Christ.
- 1.5.2.3. He asserts that the office was bestowed upon him by divine commission.
- 1.5.2.4. As Jesus asserts elsewhere, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go ...” (Jn 15.16).
- 1.5.3. The only other place where Paul explicitly says that he was called to be an apostle is in

Romans 1.1.

- 1.6. Why does Paul draw attention to his position as an apostle?
 - 1.6.1. Paul was not boasting or speaking proudly.
 - 1.6.2. He wished to ensure that what he wrote, in answer to what he had heard about the situation in the Corinthian church and in response to their questions, was understood to be delivered with divine authority—he knew that the contents of this letter was prophetic with Scriptural authority (1 Cor 7.25). Paul’s authority to write Scripture, and 1 Corinthians, was accepted by the post-apostolic church. For example, the *Muratorian Fragment*³ (c 180-200 AD), which listed canonical books included 1 Corinthians as the first of Paul’s writings.
 - 1.6.3. False teachers were undermining his teaching and stirring up trouble in the Corinthian church (2 Cor 11.1-15).
- 1.7. What does Paul’s salutation indicate about the nature of a formal call to ministry (fulltime or part time) in Christ’s Church?
 - 1.7.1. It consists of three parts:
 - 1.7.1.1. Evidence of God’s call,
 - 1.7.1.2. A call to a specific role (1 Cor 12.28-29), with the goal of serving Jesus (‘of Christ Jesus’), and
 - 1.7.1.3. Evidence of gifts for the role.
 - 1.7.2. It is clear from 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians that Paul did not agree with individuals claiming, on their own authority, that they were called to serve in an official capacity in the Church. To assume arbitrarily a leadership or teaching position within the Church is an unwarranted action on the part of any person.
 - 1.7.3. Paul, elsewhere, includes evidence of spiritual gifts (1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9) as being prerequisite in those called into ministry.
 - 1.7.4. The Church has historically stated that the calling is two-fold: of God and of the Church.
2. Who was with Paul when he wrote this letter?
 - 2.1. Sosthenes. Who was Sosthenes?
 - 2.1.1. Since Paul refers to him as a brother, we can infer that he was a fellow believer in Christ.
 - 2.1.2. It is likely that Sosthenes had been the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, mentioned in Acts 18.17, who was converted and was with Paul during some of his later missionary journeys. Calvin states that it is the same person.
 - 2.1.3. The fact that the Jews beat him may indicate that he had displayed sympathies toward Paul or had already been converted at the time the Jews prosecuted their case against Paul before Gallio.
 - 2.1.4. The fact that Paul mentions Sosthenes in his opening salutation to the Corinthian church supports the inference that he was from Corinth and known to the Corinthians; otherwise, mention of an unknown Sosthenes in the salutation would make little sense.
 - 2.2. What was his role?
 - 2.2.1. Many interpreters suggest that Sosthenes was either a partner in Paul’s continuing missionary journeys and/or a scribe who wrote down the contents of Paul’s Epistles as he dictated (Rom 16.22)—thus Paul’s later reference to his finishing the letter with his own hand (1 Cor 16.21; with Gal 6.11 and 2 Thess 3.17). He may have also been the person through whom Paul received some of his information about the current state of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1).
 - 2.2.2. Even though Paul was the leader of Christ’s missionary work to the Gentiles (Acts 18.6) and knew that he had a leadership role as an apostle, he often mentioned those who were travelling with him as partners in his work.
 - 2.2.3. Paul may have included Sosthenes’ name as an endorsement of what he wrote to the

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian_fragment

Corinthians. A former ruler (elder) of the synagogue who had converted to Christ, would have been respected in the new congregation, which included both Jews and Gentiles.

3. To whom was the letter written?

3.1. To the church of God in Corinth.

3.2. Church of God.

3.2.1. The Greek word (ἐκκλησία) translated as ‘church’ was a relatively common word in Hellenistic society meaning a group of people called together in ‘an assembly’ of the body politic (e.g., the citizens of a city-state; Acts 19.32, 39, 41). The term was adopted by the translators of the OT (LXX; occurring about 100X) to refer to the OT assembly of Israel.

3.2.2. Matthew uses the term twice when he reports Jesus’ teaching (Mt 16.18; Mt 18.17), and Paul uses it extensively (>70X). James and John use the term a few times. It is interesting that Peter does not use the term, even though it is the term used by Matthew when he reports Jesus’ words to Peter (Mt 16.18).

3.2.3. Paul uses the fuller expression ‘church of God’ a few times, in his letters to the churches in Corinth (1 Cor 1.2; 1 Cor 10.32; 1 Cor 11.22; 1 Cor 15.9; 2 Cor 1.1) and Galatia (Gal 1.13), to Timothy (1 Tim 3.5), and when speaking with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20.28). It is possible that Paul uses the additional words ‘of God’ when writing to his Gentile audiences to reinforce the distinction between citizenship in a Greek city-state and citizenship in God’s kingdom. In the past, people rarely needed to modify the word ‘church’ in English as the term had generally been assumed to refer to a Christian assembly or building. However, some cults (e.g., The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; i.e., Mormons) have also taken the term. Our word ‘church’ comes from the Dutch word ‘kerk’ or German word ‘Kirche’ which are derived from the Greek word κύριον (lord); as a short form for the concept of the ‘Lord’s house or assembly’.

3.2.4. The word ‘church’ as used in the NT never refers to a physical building, but always to an assembly of God’s people. It is used to refer to:

3.2.4.1. Local assemblies (1 Cor 16.19; Rom 16.5),

3.2.4.2. A regional collection of believers in different congregations (Acts 5.11; Acts 8.3; Acts 19.31), and

3.2.4.3. The worldwide collection of believers (Mt 16.18).

Paul views the local Corinthian church as a full representation of *the Church*, not merely a part of it. We should try to use the term ‘church building’ when speaking of our building rather than ‘church’—for example, we can say, “Our church meets (assembles) at 10 Thomas Clark Way.” but should avoid saying, “Our church is at 10 Thomas Clark Way.” if we mean the physical facility, since a building is not a *church*.

3.2.5. The earliest Reformation-period translation of the NT into English, by Tyndale (c 1530), did not use the word ‘church’ but rather used ‘congregation’ to translate the Greek word.

3.2.6. Some people become distressed over the use of the word ‘church’ in English translations and claim that the use of the word reinforces the idea of a hierarchical organization in contrast to local independent assemblies. Some even go as far as to say that any assembly of Christians which calls itself a ‘church’ is an abomination. They argue for what they call the ‘ecclesia system’. In so doing, they do not see the irony in their argument. Paul (and other NT writers) used a Greek term from the political realm to refer to the assembly of God’s people. The word ‘church’ is also derived from a secular Greek word—one that means ‘master’ or ‘lord’. Applying one secular word to translate the Greek word is essentially no different from using another—as long as the use of the word is explained within a Christian context. Juliet’s words are probably a good corrective to this extremism, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”⁴

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II.

- 3.2.7. What is the significance of Paul's using the term 'church of God' to refer to the assembly of believers in Corinth?
- 3.2.7.1. The Church (every local congregation and the worldwide body) belongs to God, not to the congregants or to its leaders. This is a relevant consideration in the Corinthian context where Paul needs to deal with a party spirit which emphasizes allegiance to human leaders (1 Cor 3.4).
- 3.2.7.2. The Greek word which is translated 'church' has the idea of coming together in concord, not splintering into autonomous factions or as isolated individuals.
- 3.3. In Corinth. What do we know about Corinth in Paul's era?
- 3.3.1. *Location* – Corinth was situated on the narrow (~5km) isthmus connecting the southern portion of Greece to the northern portion. It had two harbours—one facing east into the Saronic Gulf /Aegean Sea and the other facing west into the Ionian /Adriatic Sea. Goods being transported from east to west or vice versa would be unloaded at one port and transported across the isthmus and loaded into ships—saving an often dangerous (particularly in winter) six-day journey south around Achaëa. As early as the 7th century BC, attempts were made to dig a canal across the isthmus. The Corinth Canal was completed in 1893. Corinth was the gateway to Europe from the East, more so than Athens. Paul spent about a year and a half in the city, which indicates how important he believed it to be to establish a church in that city. From Corinth the Gospel would be carried to the ends of the world.
- 3.3.2. *Brief History* – The original Greek city (dating back to at least the 8th century BC) was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC when it defeated the Achaean League. Its citizens were sold into slavery. It lay in ruins for almost 100 years. Around 44 BC Julius Caesar ordered that it be rebuilt as a Roman colony (*Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*⁵; “The colony of Corinth, to the Praise of Julius”) in the style of a city in southern Italy. In 27 BC, Augustus made it the capital of the province of Achaëa, ruled by its own proconsular governor. Achaëa was made an Imperial Province in 15 AD. At the time of Paul's missionary work in the city, Junius Gallio, a younger brother of the philosopher Seneca, held the proconsular post (Acts 18.12). The city was partially destroyed by earthquakes in 77 AD and 365 AD, and finally in 375 AD, and has lain in ruins since then. A small town exists today near the ruins of ancient Corinth.
- 3.3.3. *Cultural Setting* –
- 3.3.3.1. *Mixed polity*. The city at the time of Paul is estimated to have had anywhere from 70,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. The majority of its settlers were Latins—many of who were discharged soldiers. However, people from many parts of world lived in the city. Jews also had settled in the city and erected a synagogue (Acts 18.4)—an inscription (... ΑΓΩΓΗ ΕΒΡ ...) from a lintel (possibly from a building constructed after the time of Paul) has been found in the ruins indicating the presence of a '[Syn]agogue of the Hebr[ews]'.
- 3.3.3.2. *Material prosperity*. It was a centre of international commerce where east met west, providing services catering to travellers (e.g., sailors, merchants, soldiers, slave traders) and tourists. It also had local manufacturing (pottery and bronze) and artisans (marble sculptures). At the time of Paul's visit, it was a wealthy city still being rebuilt and increasing in fame. “Corinth was a city where public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form.”⁶ In his second letter to them, Paul refers to their prosperity (2 Cor 8.14).
- 3.3.3.3. *Morose paganism*. Corinth contained shrines for many of the cults of the

⁵ www.ascsa.edu.gr/pdf/uploads/hesperia/146671.pdf

⁶ B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 8.

Mediterranean (e.g., Poseidon, Isis, Asclepius, Artemis, Athena, Jupiter, Helios, and Aphrodite). It was a focal point for the sensual Greek cult of Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of beauty, love, and fertility; served by hundreds of cult prostitutes. Pilgrims travelled to the city for the purpose of visiting the temple of Aphrodite on the acropolis. Coins from Paul's era, minted in Corinth, display images of Aphrodite and her temple.⁷ In addition, Corinth had a temple-resort for Asclepius, the god of emotional and mental health, which included places for sleeping, bathing, working out, studying and contemplating, sacrifices, and dining—Paul may refer to this 'health resort' (1 Cor 10.27-30). Many clay representations of body parts have been found in the ruins of Corinth which were left behind as thanks to the god of healing.⁸

- 3.3.3.4. *Moral perversity.* The old Corinth was infamous for its licentiousness. 'To Corinthianise' (κορινθιάνιζεν) was a euphemism for sexual immorality. It appears to have continued its wicked ways after it was rebuilt, with female 'companions' (*hetaerae*) being available for dinner parties. It was the Las Vegas of the old world. Paul refers to the practices that were a regular part of meals associated with the pagan temples (1 Cor 10.1-22). Paul wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth (Rom 16.23), probably during his third visit to the city (probably in late 56 AD or possibly 55 AD⁹) and included his indictment of Roman culture (Rom 1.18-23) based on what he saw displayed at its worst in Corinth.
- 3.3.3.5. *Martial competition.* The city hosted the bi-annual Isthmian Games which began in 581 BC and were revived in 3 AD. Only the Olympic Games in Athens rivaled them in importance. The games were probably held while Paul was in the city, giving Paul illustrations for his letters (1 Cor 9.24-27; Gal 2.2; Gal 5.7; Phil 2.16; 2 Tim 2.5; 2 Tim 4.7; Heb 12.1). In addition, Corinth introduced Roman gladiatorial contests.¹⁰
- 3.3.3.6. *Marked pride.* The Corinthians were a rich, independent, proud, and competitive people.
- 3.4. Church in Corinth (Acts 18.1-17).
 - 3.4.1. During his second missionary journey, Paul left Athens, after addressing the Areopagus, and sailed to Corinth (about a half day's journey by boat). He arrived in the city sometime in 49-50 AD¹¹.
 - 3.4.2. Paul began his work in the Jewish synagogue. Some of the Jews were converted (1 Cor 7.18; 1 Cor 16.15-17), including the synagogue leader (1 Cor 1.14). After other Jews opposed him, he moved his preaching base next door to the home of Titius Justus and declared that he would focus his evangelism work on the Gentiles. The congregation in Corinth had a number of Gentile converts, including a Roman official (Erastus; Acts 19.22; Rom 16.23; 2 Tim 4.20), a few wealthy men such as Gaius (1 Cor 1.26; 2 Cor 8.1, 2, 14), and folks from the lower classes, including slaves (1 Cor 1.26-29; 1 Cor 7.21-23; 1 Cor 12.13) and the poor (1 Cor 11.22), and from rough backgrounds (1 Cor 6.9-11). Based on the number (14) of males mentioned in the two letters, assuming that each had a family and that some had slaves, we can estimate that the congregation had at least fifty people.

⁷ Corinth, Coins and the Cult of Aphrodite; www.forumancientcoins.com/Articles/aphrodite.pdf

⁸ Steven M. Oberhelman, *Anatomical Votive Reliefs as Evidence for Specialization at Healing Sanctuaries in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, www.atiner.gr/journals/health/2014-1-1-4-OBERHELMAN.pdf; and Jessica Hughes, *Fragmentation as Metaphor in the Classical Healing Sanctuary*, [www.academia.edu/1758118/Fragmentation as Metaphor in the Classical Healing Sanctuary](http://www.academia.edu/1758118/Fragmentation_as_Metaphor_in_the_Classical_Healing_Sanctuary)

⁹ Jack Finegan. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) p. 397.

¹⁰ Apuleius (124-170 AD), *Metamorphosis*, book 10, 17-22; [Apuleius \(c.124–170\) - The Golden Ass: Book X \(poetryintranslation.com\)](http://poetryintranslation.com); Dio Chrysostom (c 40-112 AD), *Discourses*, 31.121; penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/31*.html

¹¹ Jack Finegan. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) p. 394.

- 3.4.3. The Corinthian games were held in 51 AD while Paul was in the city.
- 3.4.4. Paul was called before Gallio, who was proconsul of Achaia, from July 51 AD to July 52 AD (based on information found in an inscription of the emperor Claudius found at Delphi, about 200 kms from Corinth), by his Jewish opponents. However, Gallio would not hear the case and told the Jews that the complaint was a matter related to their own religious customs.
- 3.4.5. After his year-and-a-half stay in Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus in 52 AD, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. There he met Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, who had been a disciple of John, whom he instructed in the Gospel and sent to Corinth with letters of introduction (1 Cor 3.6).
- 3.4.6. While Paul was in Ephesus, the congregation in Corinth encountered a number of challenges, which he heard about from Chloe (1 Cor 1.11), possibly Sosthenes (1 Cor 1.1), or from a number of folks from the Corinthian church (1 Cor 16.17). He responded to their challenges with this letter—1 Corinthians 16.8—in late 53 AD or early 54 AD (some, e.g., William Hendriksen, Louis Berkhof, and Gary Habermas place it 2-3 years later). He commissioned Timothy to carry the letter and to assist in addressing the problems in Corinth (1 Cor 4.17; 1 Cor 16.10).
- 3.4.7. Paul heard that Timothy was not able to solve the problems in the Corinthian church, so it appears that he made an emergency visit to the city (2 Cor 2.1). That visit did not fully address the problems.
- 3.4.8. Some commentators believe that Paul then wrote a severe letter (2 Cor 2.3), delivered by Titus (2 Cor 2.13; 2 Cor 7.13-15) that is now lost. [We will address the question of how many letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians when we study 2 Corinthians.] Regardless of the theories about the number of letters Paul wrote, we receive 1 and 2 Corinthians as part of the canonical NT with apostolic authorship and the validation of the Holy Spirit.
- 3.4.9. Paul met Titus in Macedonia (2 Cor 2.13; 2 Cor 7.5) and was encouraged to hear that the Corinthians had responded to his rebuke and to Titus' leadership (2 Cor 7.13). On hearing the report, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians with great thanksgiving (2 Cor 7.11-16).
- 3.4.10. Paul may have made a final visit to Corinth (Acts 20.2-3), around 55 AD.
- 3.5. To those sanctified. How does he use the term 'sanctified'?
 - 3.5.1. The congregation in Corinth was composed of persons whom Paul declared had been sanctified. The congregation collectively and the individuals within it were set apart to God.
 - 3.5.2. Clearly Paul does not mean that they were sinless or even well advanced in their quest to be more Christ-like—based on what we know of the situation in the Corinthian church.
 - 3.5.3. Also, Paul is not speaking of progressive sanctification in this instance—i.e., becoming more Christ like—which all Christians are called to pursue with the aid of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4.3; 1 Thess 5.23; 2 Tim 2.21; 1 Pt 1.15-16).
 - 3.5.4. Rather, he means that they had been set aside from the world (from the mass of sinful humanity) as belonging to Christ. In the case of the Corinthians, their sanctification was more than being part of a collective theocratic community—as the nation of Israel was set aside to God, yet many of the OT covenant community were not saved. The Corinthians' sanctification was based on the work of the Holy Spirit who had converted them and declared them holy. When sinners receive Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are declared justified and sanctified (1 Cor 1.30; 1 Cor 6.11; Acts 20.32; Acts 26.18; 2 Thess 2.13; Heb 2.11; Heb 10.10, 14, 29; 1 Pt 1.2). Christ's meritorious righteousness is imputed to them. Paul viewed them as sanctified based on their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is God's act that sanctifies, not any act of our own works, and makes us part of Christ's Church and family.
- 3.6. To be saints.
 - 3.6.1. Depending on how we translate this, Paul may be using it as a synonym for sanctified; or he could be understood to be speaking of progressive sanctification. The ESV, following the

KJV, translates it as ‘called to be saints’ which could be understood as giving the direction that they are to be heading. The NASB translates it more literally, ‘saints by calling’ from the Greek, ‘called holy ones’.

- 3.6.2. As with the word ‘sanctified’, ‘saints’ is plural. In the NT (the exception is Phil 4.21), Christians are collectively referred to as saints. A saint is not a holy miracle worker, as in the Roman Catholic tradition, but a believer in Christ Jesus living out his faith as part of a church community placed in the midst of a corrupt and vile culture.
- 3.6.3. Paul viewed the Corinthian church as a community of professing Christians—with all their sin-stains—who, by the grace of God, were new creatures in Christ, set apart from their former commitments to the world (1 Cor 6.9-11). Nevertheless, this appellation is also a subtle rebuke and a hint of what they should have been, compared with what they were—based on the report he had heard.
- 3.6.4. By calling them *saints* he reminds them that there are spiritual, moral, and ritual (i.e., religious practices) boundaries which separate them from the world. They had formerly been dead in their sins, now they were alive in Christ; slaves of Satan, now servants of righteousness; dedicated to pagan deities such as Aphrodite, now consecrated to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

3.7. In Christ Jesus. What does Paul mean?

- 3.7.1. Paul uses the expression ‘in Christ Jesus’ 50 times, once speaking to Felix (Acts 24.24) and 49 times in his Epistles (he also uses ‘in Jesus Christ’ three times). We are to understand him as saying the Christian’s salvation (justification and sanctification) is founded upon Christ Jesus and he lives as Christ dwells in him (through the Holy Spirit). Jesus is the source of their new life and the lifeblood of their on-going life (Acts 17.28). Paul also uses the more generic term ‘in Christ’ more than 80 times in his Epistles—making union with Christ one of his central theological themes.

3.8. Called.

- 3.8.1. What does Paul mean when he says that the Corinthians were called?
- 3.8.2. He likely has in mind different dimensions of salvation, as initiated by God:
 - 3.8.2.1. Eternal election, whereby God has eternally chosen some to salvation (Jn 15.16; Rom 8.28-30). Paul does not use the term *election* (or *elect*) in 1 Corinthians or 2 Corinthians (as he does, for example, in Romans [Rom 8.33; Rom 9.11; Rom 11.7, 28]).
 - 3.8.2.2. The personal invitation to each individual as the Holy Spirit converts the elect.
 - 3.8.2.3. An exhortation to a holy life (2 Tim 1.9).
- 3.8.3. God always takes the initiative in calling people to himself (Jn 6.44, 65; Jn 15.16; Eph 1.4; 1 Pt 5.10). The Bible does not reconcile the apparent contradiction between God’s sovereignly calling and man’s responsibly responding.
- 3.8.4. Paul refers to the calling of the Corinthians elsewhere in this letter, speaking of election (1 Cor 1.9, 24, 26), conversion (1 Cor 1.18; 1 Cor 10.33), and sanctification (1 Cor 6.11).
- 3.8.5. The Greek word used for ‘church’ (ἐκκλησία) is composed of two parts—the first part means ‘out of’ and the second part comes from the same root as the word that is translated called. The Church is therefore the ‘called-out ones’.

4. Whom does Paul include with the members of the Corinthian church?

- 4.1. All those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, all believers in Jesus Christ in every congregation in every city.
- 4.2. Why does he include this broader audience?
 - 4.2.1. To include nearby congregations (home-based or synagogue-based) in Achaia (2 Cor 1.1), as an audience who should read and apply the instructions in his letter.
 - 4.2.2. To remind the Corinthian church that they were part of a larger global Christian community who call upon the same Lord and are thus separated (sanctified) and called out from the

- colony founded by Julius Caesar in 44 BC to the colony of Christ's Kingdom on the earth. Both the words "all those" and "their Lord and ours" indicate the ultimate unity of all true congregations and believers in Christ.
- 4.2.3. To indicate that his exhortations apply to Christians, wherever they may be and whenever they may live—i.e., to us living in the 21st century.
- 4.3. As mentioned above, the letter was written to be read in a public setting. In contrast, most letters in Paul's day were written for private use by the recipient. Paul intended that this letter to the congregation be read aloud—for the ear (e.g., with alliteration, assonance, and rhythm)—in the congregational assembly as an extension of his face-to-face oral communication with them.
5. What is the qualification for Christian congregational identification which Paul mentions?
- 5.1. Calling on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord.
- 5.2. What is entailed in the 'calling'?
- 5.2.1. From the beginning of time and history it has been understood to be an act of worship (Gen 4.26).
- 5.2.2. It includes the acts of prayer (1 Ki 18.24) and praise (Ps 105.1; Ps 116.13, 17).
- 5.2.3. In the NT context, it also means to believe in faith in Jesus as revealed in Scripture and trusting in him for salvation to everlasting life.
- 5.3. Paul's use of 'Lord' as a title for Jesus indicates that he equated Jesus with God (1 Cor 1.3), with 'Lord' (κυρίου) being equivalent to the Hebrew יהוה. Calling on Jesus (as an act of worship) implies that Jesus is God and worthy to receive worship (Rev 4.11).
- 5.4. Calling on the *name* is used as a synecdoche¹² to refer to Jesus.
6. What did Paul bestow upon the readers of this letter?
- 6.1. A benediction (a blessing).
- 6.1.1. Paul, along with Peter (1 Pt 1.2) and John (2 Jn 3; Rev 1.4), used the combination of 'grace and peace' in greetings in their Epistles.
- 6.1.2. It has been suggested that these greetings combine the common Greek (χάρις) and Hebrew (עֲלֵינוּ שְׁלוֹמְךָ) cultural greetings used in NT times.
- 6.1.3. It could be thought that Paul and the other writers used this form of greeting in a perfunctory manner, much as we use 'good day'. However, that would be suggesting that Paul did not really mean what he was saying in his letter. Paul intended his blessing to be taken seriously and not just as a formula.
- 6.1.4. What is intended by the use of this benediction?
- 6.1.4.1. It summarizes all the blessings provided by salvation in Christ.
- 6.1.4.2. It is a desire that God would grant an expansion of the grace and peace that he has already bestowed on a believer and which the believer enjoys.
- 6.1.4.3. The expression 'peace and grace' is not used in the NT. It is probably significant that 'grace' proceeds 'peace' in the greetings, since the grace of God is a required precondition for peace with and from God.
- 6.2. What is grace, as referred to here by Paul?
- 6.2.1. Grace is a display of freely offered kindness shown by one person toward another, who is unworthy to receive the favour.
- 6.2.2. Grace in the Bible includes two aspects: 1) God's favour toward unworthy sinners, as manifested in salvation (Rom 3.24; Rom 5.15; Eph 2.5, 8), and 2) unconditional kindness shown to anyone (believer or not) who doesn't deserve it (2 Cor 8.6-7, 19; 2 Cor 9.8; Eph 4.7, 29; James 4.6). Grace in its totality is a provision of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, which justifies (Rom 3.24; Eph 2.8), sanctifies (Acts 20.32; 2 Thess 2.13; 1 Pt 1.2), strengthens (2 Tim 2.1), and glorifies (1 Pt 5.10) a believer in Christ.

¹² A figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole.

- 6.2.3. Since Paul assumes that his readers are saved (1 Cor 1.1), he isn't speaking of God's offering pardon for sin (salvation), but the grace to persevere until the end, when they will receive their reward in heaven.
- 6.3. What is peace, as referred to here by Paul?
 - 6.3.1. Peace as used in the Biblical context includes:
 - 6.3.1.1. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God—peace *with* God (Rom 5.1).
 - 6.3.1.2. A rest and confidence in the assurance of forgiveness, knowledge of reconciliation, and hope of everlasting life—peace *from* God (Rom 15.13; Phil 4.6-7).
 - 6.3.1.3. A harmony among believers—peace *by* God (Lk 2.14; Col 3.14)
- 6.4. Where does Paul say that grace and peace come from?
 - 6.4.1. From God our Father (i.e., God the Father) and the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., God the Son). He uses the same expression elsewhere (Gal 1.3).
 - 6.4.2. He associates Jesus with the Father and indicates that grace and peace come from the two coordinated members of the Trinity. The equality was also inferred in 1 Cor 1.2.
- 6.5. What makes this benediction more than just a formality?
 - 6.5.1. Paul did more than use a formulaic greeting. He sincerely wished that God would confer blessing on the Corinthian church.
 - 6.5.2. Paul understood the importance and significance of invoking blessings (Gen 27.33; Num 6.22-27) and used them often (Rom 16.25-27; 2 Cor 13.14; Eph 3.20, 21; 1 Thess 5.23, 24; 2 Thess 2.16, 17; Heb 13.20, 21).
 - 6.5.3. His words are a prayer which he believed God would answer by providing grace and peace to the Corinthians.
7. How is this greeting structured?
 - 7.1. In formal correspondence today, we structure the opening of our letters with a date and a named recipient; with the name of the sender at the end of the letter. In contrast, letters in Paul's day were structured with the name of the writer mentioned first, followed by the name of the recipient. Paul uses this structure in all of his letters except in Hebrews.
 - 7.2. E-mail correspondence is closer to the structure of Epistles of Paul's day: date, from, to, subject, content.
 - 7.3. He follows the introduction of the parties (from and to) with a fuller description of the attributes of the recipients (1 Cor 1.2) followed by a blessing (1 Cor 1.3).
 - 7.4. We could outline the structure as:
 - 7.4.1. *Confirmation* (1) – of his name, office, and authority
 - 7.4.2. *Congregation* (2) – the primary recipients, a congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ in Corinth
 - 7.4.3. *Consecration* (2) – the holy nature of the recipients
 - 7.4.4. *Collective* (2) – the broader audience of the letter, which is the worldwide Church
 - 7.4.5. *Commendation* (3) – the conferring of a blessing on the recipients, commending them to God.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 1.1-3)?
 - 8.1. *Church* – The opening to the letter, even though it is brief, provides key insights into the nature of what the Church of Jesus Christ should be like in the 21st century.
 - 8.1.1. The Church belongs to God ("the church *of* God") and not to any human.
 - 8.1.1.1. It is therefore wrong for there to be divisions in the Church around allegiance to a man.
 - 8.1.1.2. It also seems to be inappropriate to name a church after a person (e.g., Lutherans, Knox or Calvin Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodists, or Timothy Eaton Memorial Church).
 - 8.1.2. The Church is a single organic whole, "*the* Church of God" (Jn 11.52; Rom 12.5), made

- up of geographically local congregations of assembled believers (“that is *in* Corinth” and “in every place”; 1 Cor 16.19).
- 8.1.2.1. Christians do not (should not) exist in isolation, they are to be part of organized and recognized local congregations (1 Cor 1.2; 1 Cor 4.17; 1 Cor 11.18; Rom 16.1, 5) and larger groupings of congregations such as ‘fellowships’ or denominations (Acts 8.1, 3; Acts 9.31 [singular in Greek]), as part of the broader Church.
 - 8.1.3. The Church of God should be marked by catholicity and spiritual unity with Jesus Christ; not by provincialism, sectarianism, and individualism.
 - 8.1.3.1. It is wrong for divisions to exist in the Church around phenotype, ethnic, social, nationalistic, economic, or linguistic factors. The Corinthian church was composed of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slave and free, and Greek and Latin speakers.
 - 8.1.3.1.1. I believe that it was wrong for the Scottish immigrants who founded our congregation to continue to provide services in Gaelic, when everyone in the congregation could speak English—that is linguistic sectarianism! Likewise, I consistently objected to our being identified as a Scottish congregation, long after our congregational mix was ethnically varied.
 - 8.1.3.1.2. I believe that it is wrong for congregations to be formed around linguistic, former nationalistic, or ethnic backgrounds today in a country like Canada—for example, the Bayview Glen Farsi Speaking Church, North Toronto Chinese Baptist Church, or Mount of Olives Hispanic Church in Etobicoke. While congregations like this appear to be founded with good intentions—e.g., to provide for those who have immigrated to Canada and feel somewhat isolated, they perpetuate a non-Christian sectarianism. When we lived in Ottawa, a Korean-speaking congregation was starting to lose its young people and they asked me to provide services to them in English. Likewise, I presented for CMI at a Chinese church in north Scarborough that had had to start-up a separate English-speaking congregation to support its young people, because their youth did not want to attend the services being offered in Mandarin or Cantonese.
 - 8.1.3.1.3. Congregations in Canada should reflect the ethnic diversity of our country, just as the Corinthian congregation reflected the new Christian citizenship of former Jews and pagan Gentiles and native local Greeks and retired Latin-speaking Roman soldiers who would have attended services conducted in Greek (since Paul wrote to the Corinthians in Greek).
 - 8.1.3.2. Elders in a congregation are to work together with like-minded elders in nearby congregations through synodical meetings (presbyteries, synods, general assemblies, councils) for the purposes of ordination, evangelism, establishing doctrinal positions, discipline, and appeals (Mt 18.15-20; Acts 15.1-41; 1 Tim 4.14).
 - 8.1.3.2.1. Denominations are the result of schism in the Church caused by pride and irreconcilable doctrinal differences. The existence of denominations is the result of sin.
 - 8.1.3.2.2. However, denominations are not sinful in themselves since they are a manifestation of the striving for visible organizational unity which Christ desires in his Church (Jn 17.11, 21-22).
 - 8.1.3.2.3. Since geographical divisions exist naturally and do not destroy the Church’s unity, so denominational differences cannot destroy the Church’s ultimate unity in Christ. All believers (and congregations) are branches of the same vine (Jn 15.5), members of the one body (1 Cor 12.12-26).
 - 8.1.4. The Church can be viewed from two perspectives:
 - 8.1.4.1. It is an invisible organization (invisible to us, but visible to God) that acts visibly in

time and space which is the body of Christ (Col 1.24) that includes all believers through all time in heaven and on earth, (Mt 16.18; Heb 12.23) and whose head is Christ (Eph 5.23ff; Col 1.18).

8.1.4.2. It is a visible organization that is:

8.1.4.2.1. Made up of a definable number of individuals (Acts 2.41, 47; Acts 4.4; Acts 5.14);

8.1.4.2.2. Inclusive of both believers and unbelievers (Mt 7.21-23; Mt 13.24-30; Acts 20.29; Rev 2.20); and

8.1.4.2.3. Governed with a Biblically-derived form of Church government (Heb 13.17), ruled by elders (Acts 20.17, 28) with a responsibility to teach (1 Tim 3.2), govern (1 Tim 5.17; 1 Pt 5.1-3; Heb 13.17), and discipline (1 Tim 6.12) those under their care.

In this regard, Calvin said: “Accordingly, wherever the worship of God is preserved unfringed, and that fundamental doctrine, of which I have spoken, remains, we must without hesitation conclude that in that case a Church exists.”¹³ No congregation (as we will see in our study of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians) or denomination is perfect. We can always find something we disagree with in a constitution or practice. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on us not to separate or cause disunity unless our action can be unequivocally supported by appeal to the clear teaching of Scripture.

8.1.5. Those in the Church have been called by God, set-apart (consecrated) from the world, and declared to be holy.

8.1.5.1. Thus, they should live according to their calling in holy obedience.

8.1.5.2. Even though there may be sin (even overtly gross sin, such as incest) in the midst of a local congregation, this does not disqualify it from being part of the broader true Church of Jesus Christ, if the congregation is willing to deal with the sin when brought to its attention.

8.1.5.3. In this regard, Calvin said: “We may not require that the Church, while in this world, should be free from every wrinkle and stain, or forthwith pronounce unworthy of such a title every society in which everything is not as we would wish it. For it is a dangerous temptation to think that there is no Church at all where perfect purity is not to be seen. For the man that is prepossessed with this notion, must necessarily in the end withdraw from all others, and look upon himself as the only saint in the world, or set up a peculiar sect in company with a few hypocrites.”¹⁴

8.1.6. The Church (including each local congregations) is to assemble (Heb 10.25) to worship God (“call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”), using a defined form of worship (1 Cor 11.17-34; 1 Cor 14.1-40), the correct observance of the sacraments (1 Cor 11.23; Mt 28.19), and a defined confession of faith (Acts 2.42; Col 2.7; Heb 4.14).

8.2. *Calling* – The opening greeting uses the word ‘called’ twice—first to refer to Paul’s calling as an apostle and then to refer to the calling of the Corinthians into the Church. This indicates that both conferring of membership and designation of leadership in the Church is ultimately God’s action. The Church is not a human institution such as a club, charitable organization, or association in which membership is voluntary and the vision and constitution are written by men. Membership in the Church is determined by God—administered through men—and its constitution—the Bible—was written by the Holy Spirit. Both callings within the Church involve two components: 1) the inner calling of the Holy Spirit and 2) the recognition and administration of the calling delegated to the leaders of the Church.

8.2.1. *Calling to Church membership* – Once a person is converted by the Holy Spirit, he or she

¹³ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.viii.i.html

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.viii.i.html

is to seek membership in the Church through baptism and affiliation with a local congregation whose elders recognize and administer his or her admission into the visible organized Church.

- 8.2.1.1. That the recipients of this letter were “the church of God that is in Corinth” indicates that they were not isolated individuals, but part of the collective—the church in Corinth.
- 8.2.1.2. It is common to reject the concept of church membership today. What are some reasons people give? And, how can we respond to these ‘reasons’?
- 8.2.1.2.1. Membership does not make you a Christian, only profession of faith does, therefore membership isn’t needed.
Response: The logic of this argument fails when you consider the example of the following: “Baptism does not make you a Christian, only profession of faith does, therefore baptism isn’t needed.”
- 8.2.1.2.2. Membership in God’s invisible/everlasting church does not necessarily require membership in a local congregation or denomination. A person can belong to the Church without making a specific commitment to an organization.
Response: It is true that a person can be a Christian without being a member of a congregation. However, there are many things that one can do (or not do), while being a Christian, but nevertheless be an inconsistent Christian. If membership can be demonstrated to be a Scriptural requirement, then full obedience will require it. In addition, the two are not mutually exclusive. A person can be a member of both the visible and the invisible Church through two different relationships. Just as a person can be a member of a family through two different relationships (e.g., as a daughter and as a sister).
- 8.2.1.2.3. “The sin, hypocrisy, and inconsistency visible in every congregation and denomination turns me off. There is no perfect organization, so I won’t join any.”
Response: If consistently applied, the logic of this position would require Christians to cease being committed to the institution of marriage because some marriages have failed. Or, to give up citizenship in a country because particular politicians are corrupt.
- 8.2.1.2.4. Abuse by elders makes people leery of the organized church and they feel it is ‘safer’ not to be subject to others.
Response: This argument cannot be applied consistently. If it were, we would have to be against parenthood because some parents abuse their children. Or, we could not work for a boss because some bosses are unfair. At times, all human authority is abused. However, this does not mean that human authority is never to be respected.
- 8.2.1.2.5. Membership is not an important matter. Rather the Church should be focused on evangelism.
Response: This same kind of argument is used by those who say what we do in worship is not an important matter or is to be determined by individual taste. It is also the argument used by people who want to dismiss such matters as Paul’s instruction about women teaching (1 Tim 2.11-12), and in other areas where people do not want to listen to the Bible’s teachings, or the logical conclusions of arguments derived from those teachings.¹⁵ This argument can be used only if membership is truly a matter of indifference. If membership can be demonstrated to have Scriptural warrant, then it is required.

¹⁵ Philip B. Payne, “Does 1 Timothy 2:12-15 prohibit women from teaching or having authority over men?” *The Christian Post*, 2023-04-24; www.christianpost.com/voices/does-1-timothy-212-15-prohibit-women-having-authority-over-men.html

- 8.2.1.3. What are some of the underlying causes which influence people to give these ‘reasons’ for rejecting church membership?
 - 8.2.1.3.1. A spirit of individualism and independency, that is rampant throughout Western culture.
 - 8.2.1.3.2. Fear of the unknown, indicating a lack of trust in God.
 - 8.2.1.3.3. An unforgiving spirit and holding grudges—a hinderance to prayer (Mt 6.12) and demonstrative of a lack of love (1 Cor 13.1-13).
 - 8.2.1.3.4. A lack of understanding of the covenantal and federal model that God used when he established the institutions of marriage, the State, and the Church.
 - 8.2.1.3.5. A lack of commitment to corporate responsibility. Which can be partially attributed to the Church’s lack of emphasis and teaching on corporate responsibility and individual accountability.
 - 8.2.1.3.6. Rebellion against the explicit oversight by elders (or authority in general).
 - 8.2.1.3.7. Ignorance of doctrine that pervades the Church—in particular ignorance about the doctrine of the Church.
 - 8.2.1.3.8. No commitment to the historic and Reformed confessional position on the Church—e.g., a rejection of the Westminster Standards, including *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government*.
- 8.2.1.4. What Biblical evidence shows that those who profess faith in Christ are to become members of local congregations?
 - 8.2.1.4.1. Many believed through the preaching of the apostles were added to the number who were already part of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 2.41, 47; Acts 4.4; Acts 5.14).
 - 8.2.1.4.2. Jesus appointed men to act as his ‘under shepherds’ (elders) in each church or congregation (Titus 1.5). They were to lead, rule, guide, admonish, teach, protect, care for, and discipline the flock of God, over which God had made them overseers (Acts 20.13-35; 1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-16; 1 Pt 5.1-4). Caring for the flock would be impossible if there were no recognizable membership. An elder couldn’t watch over a flock that he couldn’t define in terms of some form of membership or association (whatever we want to call it).
 - 8.2.1.4.3. By Christ’s own authorization (Mt 16.15-19), the Church is provided with the power of the “keys” so as to have the authorized responsibility of “binding and loosing,” which at the very least includes the authority to determine terms of communion and membership in the authorized covenant community. Notice also, that this takes place on earth while being authorized in heaven. Since the time of the apostles, it is the elders’ job to draw the line where the Lord Jesus would draw it—no tighter and no looser!
 - 8.2.1.4.4. Since elders are directly responsible for particular assemblies of God’s people, then obviously it is necessary for both them and the people to know who actually makes up the assembly. It is therefore necessary to demarcate in some way (e.g., count or enumerate, list, ask for a commitment, etc.) those who are within the assembly and those who are outside the assembly (1 Cor 5.12).
 - 8.2.1.4.5. A congregation could not keep the commands to obey church leaders (Heb 13.17; 1 Tim 5.17) if there is not a definable and visible group of leaders. Thus, by necessary inference, a person who is a Christian must be committed to a congregation with a definable group of leaders.
 - 8.2.1.4.6. Jesus provides an order to be followed when calling an erring brother or sister to repentance and restoring fellowship between individual members of the Church (Mt 18.15ff). If the guilty person refuses to listen, Jesus instructs us to bring the matter to the Church. That clearly points to believers being recognized as members of some body in which to put into effect Church

censure.

- 8.2.1.4.7. Excommunication is expelling someone from the Church, which includes, at least, barring someone from the Lord's Supper. A church cannot have power to expel, if it does not have power to admit. If we admit ourselves to the Church (e.g., come to the Lord's Supper solely by our own volition), then we cannot be removed by any other means. Admission to, and exclusion from, the Church's sacraments is by the same means—either our own individual volition or through the authority of the elders. Paul does not say a man is to remove himself, but that the Church is to expel him (1 Cor 5.13). The Church cannot expel someone if there is no concept of membership and if it does not have the duty of admission into membership.
- 8.2.2. *Calling to Church office* – Once a man receives a call, from the Holy Spirit, to pursue an office within the Church, he is to seek recognition and administration of this call by the body of elders overseeing the congregation. He is not to appoint himself to the office (Jer 14.14; Heb 5.4).
 - 8.2.2.1. What forms may the call to pursue a Church office take? A man may sense an inner compulsion (1 Tim 3.1), friends or associates within the congregation may encourage him to consider taking on a ruling / teaching role, or the current elders may identify and recommend him for office.
 - 8.2.2.2. How does the body of elders recognize and administer a man's call to a Church office?
 - 8.2.2.2.1. The man displays the character and gifts required of a person in a position of spiritual leadership (Acts 6.3; 1 Tim 3.2-7; 1 Tim 4.14; Titus 1.6-9).
 - 8.2.2.2.2. The man has been trained, tested and proven (1 Tim 5.22).
 - 8.2.2.2.3. The will of God has been discerned through prayer (Acts 13.4; Acts 14.23).
 - 8.2.2.2.4. The will of a congregation has been determined (Dt 1.13; Acts 6.3).
 - 8.2.2.2.5. The man has been ordained by elders (1 Tim 4.14; Titus 1.5).

Gratefulness (1 Cor 1.4-9)

- 1. For what is Paul thankful?
 - 1.1. For them and for the grace that they had been given by God.
 - 1.2. To whom does Paul give his thanks? To God.
 - 1.3. What does it mean to be thankful to God?
 - 1.3.1. It is to praise God for his unmerited goodness towards us.
 - 1.3.2. It is to acknowledge that he gives us all good things, including food and the other necessities of life, peace with him, safety in society, and the promise and prospect of everlasting life in heaven.
 - 1.3.3. The two primary instruments of human thanksgiving to God are praise and prayer, followed by works of obedience.
 - 1.4. Where do we learn how to thank God?
 - 1.4.1. Jesus gave us an example of thanking God (Lk 22.17, 19; Jn 6.11, 23).
 - 1.4.2. The Psalms are a source of thanksgiving material.
 - 1.5. What does Paul's statement about thanksgiving tell us about his character?
 - 1.5.1. Thanksgiving toward God is a common theme in Paul's Epistles. His expression of thanksgiving is out of the overflow of a heart full of praise and not a mere compliment for others or a rhetorical construct in his Epistles.
 - 1.6. How does Paul refer to God?
 - 1.6.1. As 'my God'.
 - 1.6.2. What does he *not* mean by this expression?
 - 1.6.2.1. He is not speaking of a personal 'household deity' or a god of his own invention.
 - 1.6.2.2. He is not suggesting that God is his exclusively.

- 1.6.2.3. He is not using the expression as a means of expressing surprise, as many do today.
- 1.6.3. What *does* he mean? He is speaking of:
 - 1.6.3.1. The one to whom he exclusively renders praise.
 - 1.6.3.2. The one to whom he has dedicated his life.
 - 1.6.3.3. The one who answers prayer.
 - 1.6.3.4. His personal relationship with the God who created the universe and who sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 4.10).
- 1.7. Why is Paul thankful for the congregation in Corinth?
 - 1.7.1. They are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have been set aside (1 Cor 1.2) for the glory of God.
 - 1.7.2. Despite their shortcomings as a congregation, the challenges he knows they face to reform, and the concern they have caused him, he is truly thankful for the displays of God's grace in their midst.
 - 1.7.3. He knows that God is at work in the congregation, even though they have presented him with a number of challenges.
- 1.8. What is the grace Paul is referring to here?
 - 1.8.1. We noted (1 Cor 1.3) that grace is the freely offered kindness of God toward mankind, who is unworthy to receive the favour; including pardon for sin, salvation and everlasting rewards.
 - 1.8.2. Here, however, he is extending the idea, through a metonymy, to include the power and gifts (compare, 1 Cor 3.10; Rom 12.3, 6; Rom 15.15-16; Gal 2.9) which God gives to his people to render service to the Church and to the society in which the Church now operates.
 - 1.8.3. The result of the bestowal of God's grace is that in Christ, Christians are made rich in spiritual gifts—he mentions specific ones in 1 Cor 1.5. Thus, when believers display spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12.1; 1 Cor 14.1), it is a sign that grace has been given to them.
- 1.9. How did they receive this grace?
 - 1.9.1. It was given to them *in* Christ Jesus.
 - 1.9.2. Notice that he uses 'in' and not 'by'. He is not speaking of the instrument of the dispensation of the gifts (i.e., the Holy Spirit; Heb 2.4), but rather the ground of their worthiness to receive the spiritual gifts—being established in Christ.
- 1.10. How earnestly did Paul pray for the Corinthians?
 - 1.10.1. He gave thanks always.
 - 1.10.2. This doesn't mean that he audibly expressed thanks for the Corinthian church every minute of every day. Rather, it means that he often thought about them and their needs and brought them before the Father on a regular basis in his prayers.
2. What was Paul specifically thankful for in the Corinthian church?
 - 2.1. That they were enriched in all speech and in all knowledge.
 - 2.2. *Enriched in all speech* – What does Paul mean?
 - 2.2.1. The Corinthians (at least some) appear to have had the gift of eloquence in public speaking and debate—likely in the model of Greek and Roman oratory. Some interpreters suggest that he is speaking of the gift of tongues. However, the word used here is 'λόγος', not 'γλῶσσα', and later references (1 Cor 2.2, 4; 1 Cor 4.20) indicate that Paul compared his 'imperfect' oratory to theirs.
 - 2.3. *Enriched in all knowledge* – What does Paul mean?
 - 2.3.1. Here he is likely speaking of doctrinal or theological knowledge (γνώσις), not new revelation. He was commending them for their intellectual apprehension of the basic Christian truth which builds up (1 Cor 12.8)—not human knowledge which puffs up (1 Cor 8.1-2).
 - 2.4. The order of the words may suggest that truth preached leads to truth apprehended. However, both need to exist in a congregation. Knowledge without speaking is only of private value.

- Whereas, eloquent speaking not based on true knowledge can harm the hearers by leading them astray.
- 2.5. What Christian graces (gifts of the Spirit) are missing from his commendation and from the Corinthians, as indicated by his instruction to them later in the letter?
 - 2.5.1. They were rich in preaching doctrine but not as rich in their faith, hope, or love (1 Cor 13.13). They could ‘talk the talk’, but not ‘walk the talk’.
 3. What does Paul note as having been confirmed among the Corinthians?
 - 3.1. The “testimony about Christ”.
 - 3.2. The Greek has ‘the witness *of* Christ’. So, it could be the witness *from* Christ given to the Corinthians by the apostle, or the witness *to* Christ delivered by the apostle (1 Cor 2.2). In either case the witness is *about* Christ.
 - 3.3. Paul says that the witness about Christ had been confirmed (made evident, substantiated) among them, indicating that their faith in Jesus was visibly displayed—in particular (‘even as’) in their speaking and display of knowledge about Jesus.
 4. What does Paul say that the Corinthian church did *not* lack?
 - 4.1. They were “not lacking in any gift”.
 - 4.2. The Greek word used here is *χαρίσματος* which is related to the word ‘grace’ (*χάρις*).
 - 4.3. By stating that they were not lacking in *any* gift, Paul is not referring to specific gifts but to the general suite of gifts God dispenses by his special, converting, grace. So, we are to understand him to mean that the Corinthians had *all* the gifts associated with salvation: knowledge repentance, conversion, faith, and hope—all that are necessary for salvation and to be a member of Christ’s family and kingdom—and the ability to proclaim the Gospel.
 - 4.4. These same gifts are the possession of all believers and are found in all congregations of God’s people.
 - 4.5. However, as Paul will indicate later, the Corinthians as a body were not displaying love for one another (e.g., there were disputes among them) as they should have been. It is a sad truth that in many congregations of God’s people, a visible display of love for God’s people is lacking.
 5. What were the Corinthian’s waiting for?
 - 5.1. The day of the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does this mean?
 - 5.1.1. Most (possibly all) commentators believe that he is speaking of the Corinthian’s belief that Jesus would return from heaven, and that his return was imminent.
 - 5.1.2. Many in the early Church, including the Corinthians, may have thought that Jesus would return within the lifetime of the generation which was alive at the time of his crucifixion—based on their interpretation of his statements recorded in Matthew (Mt 24.29, 30, 34).
 - 5.1.3. Some commentators suggest that Paul (at least initially) had a similar belief—i.e., of the near return of Jesus (1 Cor 15.51; Phil 3.20; Col 3.4; 1 Thess 1.9-10; Titus 2.13)—and that he taught the Corinthians to believe that Jesus would return within a generation. Thus, they say, he commends them for their believing in the near return of Jesus.
 - 5.1.4. It is suggested by many that other NT writers had a similar belief (1 Pt 4.7; James 5.8, 9; 1 Jn 2.18; Rev 22.20).
 - 5.1.5. We should be cautious about accepting a view that Paul changed his views. If Paul communicated one thing in his early writings and a different (contradictory) thing later, then there is a mistake in Scripture. The Holy Spirit breathed into Paul the truth so that all that Paul communicated in his writings included in the NT are without error.
 - 5.2. What may be the significance of Paul’s use of the expression ‘day of our Lord Jesus Christ’?
 - 5.2.1. He is probably equating the expression with the ‘day of the LORD’ used over 20X in the OT.

- 5.2.2. His use of this expression equates Jesus with Jehovah and confirms the deity of Jesus, and that Jesus is the one who judge the world. Thus, he is commending the Corinthians for their belief that Jesus was coming (soon) to judge the world (Acts 17.31).
- 5.2.3. Also, the name ‘Christ’ appears more often in this letter than in any other book of the NT—and nine times in the opening eight verses of this letter (the name Jesus appears eight times in these eight verses; always with ‘Christ’). Paul wanted to focus his readers’ attention on Jesus as God’s Anointed, and away from their divisive interest in human eloquence and prominence.
- 5.3. However, Paul’s commendation of the Corinthians goes beyond a *belief* in the return of Jesus to judge the world, to the fact that the Corinthians were *waiting* for his return.
 - 5.3.1. The word used here (ἀπεκδεχομένων) can be translated more forcefully as ‘eagerly waiting’. The word is used to speak of the expectation of the return of Jesus, in six other places in the NT (Rom 8.19, 23, 25; Gal 5.5; Phil 3.20; Heb 9.28 [a hint that Paul wrote Hebrews]) and only one other time (1 Pt 3.20).
 - 5.3.2. The Corinthians had an *eager expectation*, watching for the return of Jesus as the vigilant maidens were waiting for the bridegroom to come, in Jesus’ parable (Mt 25.1-13).
 - 5.3.3. True Christians eagerly expect, and look forward to, Jesus’ second coming. They are not so attached to this world that they care about staying here (Phil 1.23) or about its pending destruction.
- 5.4. Assuming that the NT writers believed that Jesus would return within the lifetime of their generation, how can we reconcile this with the fact that almost 2,000 years have now passed since his departure?
 - 5.4.1. First, we need to interpret Matthew (Mt 24.29-34) correctly. Jesus was not speaking in this instance of the end of history, but of the end of the Jewish age with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which occurred within the lifetime of the generation alive at the time of Jesus.
 - 5.4.2. The OT saints were dead centuries before the Messiah arrived (~4,000 years for Adam and Eve, ~3,000 years for Seth, ~2,300 years for Eber, ~2,000 years for Abraham, ~1,500 years for Moses, ~700 years for Isaiah, and ~550 years for Daniel). Our wait for the return of Jesus has not been as long as that endured by some in the OT era, who all had to wait for his first coming.
 - 5.4.3. Peter reminds us that scoffers will appear in the last days and claim that the ‘delay’ of Jesus’ return is evidence of God’s non-existence or of his non-involvement in the affairs of mankind (2 Pt 3.3-4). God has placed mankind under judgement by permitting it to compound its guilt as it tries every conceivable means of declaring its autonomy from him while flouting his moral requirements (Rom 1.24-25). At the same time, he is graciously granting mankind respite from final judgement and an opportunity to repent.
 - 5.4.4. God’s timing is not our timing (2 Pt 3.8). Jesus’ return is not *delayed*. God’s time is always the right time (Rom 5.6). He engenders faith in his Church by requiring us to learn patience as we wait for him to work out his providences and to reveal his glorious appearance in his appointed time.
 - 5.4.5. The first generation of the NT Church was not wrong to expect the imminent appearance of Jesus. This is to be the expectation of every believer in every generation. Christ can, and will, appear at any point, when he is least expected by the majority of mankind. (Mt 24.36-44; Mt 25.1-13; Rom 13.11-12; 1 Thess 5.1-3; Heb 10.37; 2 Pt 3.8-10).
 - 5.4.6. However, we are not to set dates for his return. For example, as Anne Graham Lotz, a preacher, author, and the daughter of Billy Graham, has done, “the day of the Lord is near

... I believe, with deep conviction, that it's my generation."¹⁶

5.5. Why does Paul mention the Corinthians eager expectation of Jesus' return as part of his commendation of their gifts of speech and knowledge?

5.5.1. He may have wanted to remind them that their hope was to be in Christ and not in the men whom they esteemed (1 Cor 3.4, 5, 22-23). It was a hint of the matter which was causing division among them—the resurrection—that he would deal with later in his letter.

6. What was Paul's hope for the Corinthians (1 Cor 1.8)?

6.1. His desire for them was that God would sustain them to the end—that the divine grace which had led them to profess faith in Christ would preserve them or cause them to persevere.

6.2. To whom does the relative pronoun 'who' refer?

6.2.1. The logical antecedent is the Lord Jesus Christ who is mentioned at the end of verse 7.

However, since he doesn't say, in 'his' day (at the end of verse 8), but again includes two titles with Jesus' name, the 'who' may refer to God more generically, or to God the Father specifically—i.e., God, referenced previously (1 Cor 1.4), who provided gracious gifts (1 Cor 1.4, 5), and who would be referenced immediately following (1 Cor 1.9). Regardless, since Jesus is God, it is God whom Paul desires will sustain them.

6.3. To what 'end' does Paul refer?

6.3.1. Many interpreters suggest that he is speaking of the end of the age (the 'last days') and the Day of Judgement, which was expected to occur within the lifetime of the readers—particularly since he refers to the 'day of our Lord Jesus Christ', which may be a formal reference to the day that Jesus will return.

6.3.2. However, 'the end' could be a reference to the end of their lives—i.e., that they would be sustained until their death and declared righteous (1 Cor 3.13) as they passed from this life into the next.

6.4. In what state did Paul pray that they would be sustained?

6.4.1. As guiltless (blameless or righteous). That is, that they would reach the end and be both forensically and actually without sin—an actual and perfect holiness in the presence of God (Eph 1.4; Col 1.22).

6.4.2. How are Christians made guiltless?

6.4.2.1. Forensically, through Christ's imputed righteousness.

6.4.2.2. Progressively, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

6.4.2.3. Entirely or finally, through the transformative process of glorification.

6.5. Why would God sustain them?

6.5.1. Because he is faithful to those whom he has called.

6.5.2. Paul's expectation is based on the reality that God will not discontinue the saving work that he initiates—he will carry it to completion (Rom 8.28-30; Rom 11.29; Phil 1.6; 1 Thess 5.24; Heb 7.25). It is impossible that God will not save those whom he converts—otherwise it would make a mockery of the work of Jesus on the cross, indicating that his death was not sufficient to pay the debt of sin for those for whom he died and that he is unable to preserve them from falling away or to keep them from committing a sin which could never be forgiven.

6.5.3. To whom is God faithful?

6.5.3.1. To himself, to fulfill his eternal purposes.

6.5.3.2. To Christ (from the Father to the Son), to fulfill the obligations of the eternal covenant.

6.5.3.3. To believers, to complete the work he has graciously and lovingly initiated on their

¹⁶ Michael W. Chapman, "Billy Graham's Daughter: 'The Day of the Lord is Near,' God is 'Warning America,' We're in the 'Last' Generation", *CNSNews*, 2015-05-20; cnsnews.com/blog/michael-w-chapman/billy-grahams-daughter-day-lord-near-god-warning-america-were-last-generation

behalf.

6.5.4. We trust in God's faithfulness not in our own abilities to be trustworthy.

7. Into what are believers called (1 Cor 1.9)?

7.1. "Into the fellowship (κοινωνία) of his Son".

7.2. What is fellowship?

7.2.1. A dictionary definition of 'fellowship' is: 'a friendly association with people who share one's interests'. Certainly, this is true of the Christian's relationship with Jesus—it is a friendly association, and the Christian's interest is in seeing the advancement of his kingdom. However, the dictionary definition is too weak to adequately encompass fellowship with Jesus. Fellowship with Jesus is more than a friendly association and sharing of common interests.

7.2.2. What does fellowship with Jesus include? It includes:

7.2.2.1. Union with Jesus, as a branch of a vine depends on the life-giving stalk (Jn 15.4; Gal 2.20).

7.2.2.2. Partnership, by being a co-worker with Christ (1 Cor 3.9). The same Greek word for 'fellowship' is used to describe the partnership between the sons of Zebedee and Simon Peter (Lk 5.10).

7.2.2.3. A familial relationship, in which we are adopted into God's household as sons and become brothers of Jesus (Eph 1.5).

7.2.2.4. Communion with Jesus as evidenced by sharing a meal with him (1 Cor 11.23-26).

7.2.2.5. Having a passion to see the advancement of his cause (Lk 6.10).

7.2.2.6. Sharing in his sacrificial death (Gal 2.20), and ultimately sharing in his exaltation and glory as joint heirs of his kingdom (Rom 8.17).

7.2.2.7. Fellowship with the Father through the Son (1 Jn 1.3).

7.2.2.8. Becoming more like Christ (Rom 8.29; Gal 4.19; Eph 1.4; Eph 2.10).

7.3. What does Paul (and other writers of the NT; Mt 4.3; Mk 1.1; Lk 1.35; Jn 1.34) mean when he says that Jesus is God's Son?

7.3.1. Paul states often, elsewhere, that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom 1.3, 4, 9; Rom 5.10; Rom 8.3, 29, 32; 2 Cor 1.19; Gal 1.16; Gal 2.20; Gal 4.4, 6; Eph 4.13; Col 1.13; 1 Thess 1.10; Heb 1.2; Heb 3.6; Heb 4.14; Heb 5.8; Heb 6.6; Heb 7.3, 28; Heb 10.29).

7.3.2. The concept of sonship for the second person of the Trinity is hinted at in the OT (Ps 110.1; Is 7.14; Is 9.6-7) but is not fully developed until his incarnation and the revelation of God in the Son.

7.3.3. The concept of the divine sonship of Jesus includes the incarnation—materially, Jesus is the son of God (Mt 1.18, 20; Lk 1.35).

7.3.4. However, Jesus has been the Son from all eternity (Heb 1.2; Heb 3.6; Heb 5.8; Heb 7.28). The Trinity did not change the nature of the relationships at the time of the incarnation.

7.3.5. Theologians speak of the 'eternal generation' of the Son.

7.3.5.1. However, this relationship does not generate the essence of existence but of affiliation. The Son never came into existence, he has always existed as uncreated God.

7.3.5.2. God chose to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son using an anthropomorphic analogy—although nothing in the human realm can adequately define the nature of God.

7.3.5.3. In the historical development of the understanding of this relationship within the Trinity, the term 'eternally begotten' (as used in the *Nicene Creed*) has become synonymous with 'eternal generation'.

7.3.5.4. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the

Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”¹⁷

7.3.5.5. Some scholars have objected to the use of the terms “generated” and “begotten” because they believe that this implies ontological subordinationism or that Christ had a beginning. Prefixing the terms with ‘eternally’ changes the meaning of the words. While we might prefer to use different words, because of the limitations of human language we cannot fully understand and define the mystery of the relationship in the Trinity. We have a similar challenge when we attempt to speak about eternity and have to use time-based concepts (2 Tim 1.9 [NIV]; Titus 1.2 [NIV]).

8. How does Paul allude to, or summarize, what he will cover in the rest of his letter, in this part of his introduction (1 Cor 1.4-9)?
 - 8.1. “All speech and all knowledge” (5) identifies the primary gifts they had, but implies that they are missing the graces which he will later refer to in chapter 13. Their primary focus on speech and knowledge led to pride and a divisive sectarianism which Paul will address in 1 Cor 1.10-4.21.
 - 8.2. Being sustained “to the end, guiltless” (8) speaks to his desire that they be holy and expel particular sins from their midst. He will deal with these sins in chapters 5-11.
 - 8.3. They were “not lacking any gift” (7), but they were misusing their gifts. So, Paul will speak to the proper use of gifts within the Christian church in chapters 12-14.
 - 8.4. They were waiting “for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (7) but had misunderstood how this would come about. So, Paul deals with the resurrection in chapter 15.
 - 8.5. They “were called into the fellowship of his Son” (9), which has familial obligations which he addresses in chapter 16.

Thus, Paul weaves into his introduction all the main topics he plans to cover in detail in the remainder of the letter. This is a masterful composition which displayed Paul’s classical education in the art of rhetoric.

9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 1.4-9)?
 - 9.1. *Personal Apprehension* – Paul’s use of ‘my God’ teaches us that God must be *our* God. We should not just know truths about God, or even just acknowledge him to be the only God (James 2.19). We must believe his words fully, trust him completely, and serve him absolutely—thus making him *our* God.
 - 9.2. *Prevalent Admixture* – In every church we will find a mixture of beliefs and practices which are right and praiseworthy and ones which are wrong and damnable. No congregation of true believers can have problems worse than what Paul had to deal with in the Corinthian church. Yet he called them saints and treated them as fellow believers who could be appealed to and corrected through rational discourse.
 - 9.2.1. We need to look for and commend the good we find in all congregations of Christ’s worldwide Church and sincerely believe that they are our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In general, we should be willing to fellowship with other Christians and congregations which display the *marks* of the true Church. For example,
 - 9.2.1.1. The *Belgic Confession*, states: “The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.”¹⁸

¹⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 2, *Of God, and of the Holy Trinity*, section 4.

¹⁸ www.prc.org/about/official-standards/creeds/three-forms-of-unity/belgic-confession/27-35/article-29

- 9.2.1.2. Acts 2.42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This passage could suggest four marks of the true church: sound doctrine is preached, fellowship is maintained (which implies discipline, otherwise there cannot be fellowship), the sacraments (as signified by breaking of bread) are administered correctly, and worship (as signified by corporate prayer) is properly observed.
- 9.2.1.3. Where churches (denominations or congregations) hold to the Reformed standards for doctrine and worship they should be united into a single visible organization (at a national level). There should not be sectarian divisions over matters such as versions, liturgical order, ethnic background, home schooling, ownership of buildings, calling of a particular pastor, two-office or three-office views, abstinence from alcohol, head coverings, or any of the other myriad of peripheral matters which cause divisions.
- 9.2.2. We are to be thankful for all believers, and congregations, and not to use our ‘Reformed’ distinctive as the standard of acceptability to God. We are all sinners who have been saved by grace.
- 9.2.3. We are to use irenic persuasion, as Paul generally does, in his letters to the Corinthians to persuade folks to come to a right position on doctrine and practice. We are not to use a ‘sledge hammer’ approach to bring about change, when what is required is a jeweller’s raising hammer.
- 9.3. *Parousia Anticipation* – As was exhibited among the Corinthians, we should have an anticipation of the return of Christ at any time and cherish that expectation as we wait patiently for his appearance. Our affections should not be so focused on this world that we would regret leaving it when the trumpet sounds to signal our removal.
- 9.4. *Prayerful Appeal* – Paul sets an example by his constant prayers for other believers and congregations. He gives thanks to God for them and makes appeals on their behalf. We need to move away from our self-focus and parochial concerns and pray for the Church, for example by:
 - 9.4.1. Expressing greater concern for the afflicted and persecuted.
 - 9.4.2. Rejoicing, without envy, when we see others exercising the gifts they have been given for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom (Num 11.28-29; Phil 1.15-18).
 - 9.4.3. Making the advancement of the Gospel, and the salvation of the lost, a primary concern (Rom 9.2-3; Rom 10.1).
- 9.5. *Praiseworthy Approach* – Paul provides an example of what Christian salutations should be like:
 - 9.5.1. *Cordial*: There is a friendly warmth, as a gentle father to a son, in his communication
 - 9.5.2. *Charitable*: He speaks/writes from his heart. He demonstrates real joy when reflecting on the good that is displayed among them and with hope for their advancement (1 Cor 1.7-8).
 - 9.5.3. *Commending*: He looks for what is good among them that he can praise (1 Cor 1.5) before dealing with that which is problematic. By acknowledging their successes and hope for their future he inspires confidence in them and disposes them to be open to his instruction and correction.
 - 9.5.4. *Candid*: What he states is pre-eminently the truth. There is no prevarication in his communication. He doesn’t stoop to using rhetorical flattery designed to win his readers.
 - 9.5.5. *Comprehensive*: He has the welfare of the broader Church in focus, even while dealing with the local situation of the Corinthians (1 Cor 1.2).His approach is Spirit-filled, displaying the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13.13).
- 9.6. *Perseverance Applied* – Paul’s desire that God would sustain the Corinthians to the end (1 Cor 1.8) implies the perseverance (or, everlasting security) of the saints—a person who has been predestined by God the Father in election will be saved (given faith by the Holy Spirit and redeemed by the Son; Rom 8.28-30), and nothing can undo his salvation, because God’s calling is irrevocable (Rom 11.29), and he will be preserved (sustained) to the end (Jn 5.24; Jn 10.27-29;

Rom 8.38-39; Phil 1.6).

- 9.6.1. A person who has been saved cannot commit a sin (e.g., blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) which would undo his salvation. This idea is abhorrent since it:
 - 9.6.1.1. Suggests that God is impotent in the face of human will and action.
 - 9.6.1.2. Ignores the fact that God ordains both the means and the end and keeps his elect from falling away permanently, and that justification is accompanied by sanctification.
 - 9.6.1.3. Forgets that a person is purely saved by an act of divine grace which does not depend at all on human will or actions (Eph 2.4-10).
 - 9.6.1.4. Rejects the idea that true believers can fall into grievous sin and yet be true believers; but they will not make a practice of sinning (1 Jn 3.9).
 - 9.6.1.5. Denies the reality that a true falling away can occur only after a *false* profession of faith has been made (Mt 13.20-21; 1 Jn 2:19).
- 9.6.2. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, “They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”¹⁹.
- 9.6.3. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is of great value to the believer, for it:
 - 9.6.3.1. Helps him not to despair over his inability to keep his life free of sin.
 - 9.6.3.2. Provides him with an assurance of salvation which is dependent on God and not on his own efforts, or lack thereof.
 - 9.6.3.3. Gives him an unwavering hope of being sustained to the end as he passes through the valley of the shadow of death.

Sins (1 Corinthians 1.10-6.20)

Divisive Schisms (1 Cor 1.10-4.21)

Personal Contentions (1 Cor 1.10-17)

1. Why did Paul write this letter?

- 1.1. Paul was responding to information brought to him by representatives of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 1:11; 1 Cor 5:1; 1 Cor 16:17).
- 1.2. Based on previous knowledge you may have of the contents of this letter, what are some of the challenges Paul deals with? In summary, the challenges which Paul encountered were:
 - 1.2.1. Sins (1 Cor 1.10-6.20), in particular:
 - 1.2.1.1. *Divisive Schisms* (1 Cor 1.10-4.21) – Factions had developed around spiritual leaders and had led to personal contentions. Paul deals with this matter extensively by drawing their attention to the importance of focusing on Christ and the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles.
 - 1.2.1.2. *Deviance that Shocks* (1 Cor 5.1-13) – A man in the congregation was living openly in an incestuous relationship. This was being tolerated by the body, and not being dealt with through church discipline procedures.
 - 1.2.1.3. *Destructive Suits* (1 Cor 6.1-8) – Paul is appalled that Christians were suing one another, and this before the Roman courts, to deal with grievances. They were not dealing with their issues as Christian brothers, for example, by asking their church leaders or fellow members of the congregation to judge the disputes and provide a resolution.
 - 1.2.1.4. *Disinherited Sanctification* (1 Cor 6.9-11) – Paul reminds the congregation of the pagan practices of their past, which are unacceptable for those professing to be Christians.
 - 1.2.1.5. *Disallowed Sex* (1 Cor 6.12-20) – He then returns to another sexual sin—consorting with prostitutes.

¹⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 17, *Of the Perseverance of the Saints*, section 1.

- 1.2.2. Solutions (1 Cor 7.1-16.4). The Corinthians had written to Paul about a number of questions which they wished him to address (1 Cor 7.1):
 - 1.2.2.1. *Regulations for Marriage* (1 Cor 7.1-40) – There were some in the congregation who claimed that Christians should not marry and that those who were married should practice celibacy (1 Cor 7.1-5). They held that marital sexual intercourse was inconsistent with Christian holiness and some even insisted on the dissolution of the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7.17-24). Paul deals with the place of marriage and remarriage after the death of a spouse.
 - 1.2.2.2. *Regulations for Meat* (1 Cor 8.1-11.1) – Some wanted to know if they could eat meat from animals which had been sacrificed to pagan gods' idols and whether or not they could eat food served at dinners hosted by their pagan neighbours.
 - 1.2.2.3. *Regulations for Meetings* (1 Cor 11.2-14.40) – Women were violating the apostolic practice in the churches and creation-based principle of male headship. Some people were misusing the Lord's Supper, and others were causing chaos during corporate worship by the exercise of their spiritual gifts. Paul clarifies how churches should operate at their worship services.
 - 1.2.2.4. *Resurrection Mystery* (1 Cor 15.1-58) – Some were denying the possibility of the resurrection of the body and asking questions about how it could be possible. With masterful logic, Paul demonstrates the reality of the resurrection of Christ and of believers.
 - 1.2.2.5. *Regulations for Money* (1 Cor 16.1-4) – Paul offered guidelines regarding the collection of the congregation's tithes.
- 1.2.3. The challenges faced by the Corinthian church were moral (e.g., sexual immorality), religious (i.e., idolatrous practices), social (e.g., marriage and legal suits), and doctrinal (e.g., their question required Paul to provide the clearest statements in Scripture about the nature of the final resurrection).
- 1.3. Paul had been in Corinth for about 18 months and had laid a foundation for the new congregation (1 Cor 3.6). But more was needed to give the congregation a sustainable infrastructure. On hearing of the issues in Corinth, Paul believed that it was necessary for him to document how a congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ should function properly. So, this letter (and 2 Corinthians) deals with how a congregation should operate, rather than directly with the message of salvation that is to be received. It deals with how to live out the new spiritual life, rather than how to be reborn; proper behaviour (orthopraxis), more than proper belief (orthodoxy).
- 1.4. What were Paul's objective in writing this letter? They were to:
 - 1.4.1. Encourage and build up the Corinthian church so that it would not only survive but prosper in the context of the materialistic, social, cultural, and ethical challenges presented by living in a leading city of the Roman Empire.
 - 1.4.2. Demonstrate how theology (from the cross [1 Cor 1.23] to the resurrection [1 Cor 15.1-58]) is not to be addressed as an abstract intellectual exercise but is to form the foundation for building a new society—the Church.
 - 1.4.3. Provide principles for dealing with a spectrum of detailed issues which will be faced by any congregation over its lifetime. This practical guidance made the letter the most referenced source document for the Church in the immediate post-apostolic generations. For example, the *Epistle of Clement* (~95 AD) refers to it.²⁰
- 1.5. This letter (along with 2 Corinthians) provides valuable information about the early NT church—how it was to be structured and operate. How does this prove useful for us in the 21st century?
 - 1.5.1. It helps us to understand the challenges associated with starting and sustaining a

²⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_of_Clement

- congregation in the midst of a pagan society.
- 1.5.2. It encourages us by setting before us an example which wasn't perfect so that we can learn how to deal with congregational challenges with firmness tempered by love.
 - 1.5.3. It manages our expectations. If a congregation founded by the apostle, Paul, had challenges after being taught by him, then it isn't surprising that congregations founded and overseen by pastors/elders today, who do not have Paul's insights, will have challenges.
 - 1.5.4. It teaches us how to deal with the issues that continue to plague the Church. We need to heed its lessons so that we can properly order our congregation. The solution is not, as was proposed by two female professors from Geneva University,²¹ for example, to rewrite the long-standing understanding of the Bible's teachings by replacing 'patriarchal' translations with feminist interpretations.
2. How did Paul structure this letter?
 - 2.1. Scholars have suggested that Paul structured the letter using approaches generally used within the literate communities of the Greco-Roman world of his day.
 - 2.2. One suggestion is that he used the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity²² which were: wisdom or prudence (chapters 1–4), justice (chapters 5–6), courage (chapters 7 and 15), and temperance (chapters 8–14). However, the proposed mapping of the chapters and challenges the Corinthian church was facing to these virtues seems forced. For example, it isn't clear how sexual sins (1 Cor 5.1-13; 1 Cor 6.12-20) fall into the justice category while marriage (1 Cor 7.1-40) falls into the courage category, and the resurrection mystery (1 Cor 15.1-58) seems to deal with matters unrelated to courage.
 - 2.3. Others have suggested that Paul used a rhetorical form of public oral speech (this letter to the Corinthians was intended for public reading). Classical rhetorical forms (i.e., forensic, used in courts; ceremonial, used at funerals and other settings to praise or condemn; and philosophical, polemical or deliberative, used for pedagogical purposes) were intended to raise emotions and persuade the hearers. Again, it seems that attempts have been made to force-fit Paul's writings into the rhetorical methods of communication of his day.
 - 2.3.1. The entire letter does not fit into a single form of rhetoric. But Paul does use rhetorical techniques to structure his arguments in various parts. Paul wanted his message to be heard and heeded by his audience, so he used the persuasion techniques familiar in his day.
 - 2.3.2. Paul assumes that his converts will hear him, be persuaded, and heed his message. His use of persuasion indicates that he viewed his role in the midst of the Christian community of recent converts; not as a tyrant who could command but as a leader who had to convince and encourage. His single-focused goal was to win Jews and Gentiles for Christ (1 Cor 9.19-22) without the use of the florid Sophistic (from which we get the term 'sophistry') approach to rhetoric (1 Cor 2.1). However, a time would come where he would have to be firmer with the Corinthians and appeal to his apostolic authority, as shown by his change of tone in 2 Corinthians.
 3. What does Paul *not* want to see in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1.10, 11)?
 - 3.1. *Divisions* – The word Paul uses is *σχίσματα*, from which we get the word *schism* in English.
 - 3.1.1. What is the nature of the division that he does not want to see (looking ahead to verse 12)?
 - 3.1.1.1. A division associated with allegiance to personalities—a party spirit (we will address this in more detail below).
 - 3.1.2. Based on our understanding of Corinth (and Greco-Roman culture) at the time of the early

²¹ In *The #MeToo Era, Feminist Theologians Publish "Women's Bible"*; www.ndtv.com/world-news/in-the-metoo-era-feminist-theologians-publish-womens-bible-1953820 and New 'Women's Bible' replaces 'patriarchal' Biblical translations with feminist interpretations; womenintheworld.com/2018/11/27/new-womens-bible-replaces-patriarchal-biblical-translations-that-are-compatible-with-feminist-values/

²² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardinal_virtues

NT Church, we can infer that divisions often arose between the followers of different teachers (e.g., schools of philosophy or religious cults). So, it is not surprising that this cultural artifact continued after the folks in the congregation had been converted.

3.2. *Disagreements* – Quarrelling.

3.2.1. What is to be an expected outcome if people align themselves around individuals—their personalities, teaching, and style of leadership?

3.2.2. The result is contentions, strife, discord (ἐριδες, a word used only by Paul in the NT).

3.3. *Disputes* – Party spirit has been a significant contributor to divisions in Christendom—probably as significantly as divisions over doctrinal issues.

3.3.1. What are examples of disputes which do not have doctrinal import, and do not warrant division? [Discuss.]

3.3.2. What are examples of disputes which have significant doctrinal import, and may warrant division (e.g., into different congregations or denominations)? [Discuss.]

3.4. What are common root causes of divisions in the Church?

3.4.1. Pride and self-assertion are paraded among faction leaders—even a pride which attempts to elevate a man above Christ.

3.4.2. Stubbornness (a child of pride) which results in a spirit that is not willing to listen to or receive instruction, and the belief that only my opinion has merit, often displayed as propagation of false teaching.

3.4.3. A lack of love being evident among the members of the congregation.

3.4.4. Scandals that are not dealt with when they arise and are not dealt with in a wise manner (e.g., ignored or suppressed with a heavy hand).

3.5. What principles should we apply to determine when/if it is appropriate to divide from a church denomination or congregation?

3.5.1. Disagreement, *per se*, is not wrong (1 Cor 11.18-19; Gal 2.5, 11). Disagreements over doctrines, worship practices, and the administration of discipline are necessary when the differences are substantial. Unity is not to be achieved at the expense of truth. The challenge facing congregations and denominations (their leaders and members) is to determine which disagreements are substantial *enough* to warrant separation.

3.5.2. Disagreements should be handled with love and compassion for fellow believers. A divisive spirit should not be manifested among the leaders and members of a congregation. Nor should persons in a congregation take divisive action. Rather, if they have changed their views which they professed to hold, have followed proper channels for dealing with different views (e.g., through the graded court system of the denomination), and are unwilling to be convinced by the arguments of the leaders and their peers, then they should leave the congregation or denomination rather than attempt to drag others into their views.

3.5.3. If church leaders teach doctrines which are clearly contrary to the Bible, endorse overt sins, or cause people to commit overt sins, and refuse to repent of their actions, then this may (and probably does) justify leaving a congregation or denomination. Examples of justified division include when denominational/congregational leaders:

3.5.3.1. Deny, and are not disciplined for their denial, the truth of the virgin conception of Jesus, the deity of Jesus, or the reality of his resurrection from the dead.

3.5.3.2. Indicate (under a vow) that they will abide by a current practice in worship (e.g., not using instrumental music) and then decide to act contrary to their statements and press for the introduction of unbiblical practices of worship.

3.5.3.3. Ordain women or practicing homosexuals to the preaching/teaching office.

3.6. What are common results of divisions in the Church?

3.6.1. Hurt feelings.

3.6.2. Ruptured families and friendships.

3.6.3. A bad reputation for believers with those outside of the Church.

3.6.4. Public dishonour for the name of Jesus—as an example, consider the scorn the world casts

on the United Church of Canada over their handling of Gretta Vosper's denial of cardinal Christian truths.

- 3.6.5. An expenditure of time and energy to heal wounds and make amends—time and energy which could better be expended in more profitable pursuits, including advancing the work of the Church.
4. Instead of divisions and disagreements, what does Paul desire to see in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1.10)?
 - 4.1. Agreement and unity in mind and judgement. The ideal is that a congregation will be of one mind in essentials: the doctrine that is taught and preached, the form of worship that is practiced, and the church discipline that is administered. This leaves latitude for members of a congregation to lovingly tolerate differences and to cooperate with one another.
 - 4.2. Had the Corinthian church already fragmented?
 - 4.2.1. It appears that Paul anticipated that the party spirit and ensuing divisions (1 Cor 11.18-19) which had been reported to him would result in irreparable fragmentation. Through his letter, he wished to forestall what might have appeared to be inevitable, by appealing to them to work together to avoid destroying the Church of God in Corinth.
 - 4.2.2. Thus, where existing divisions existed, the leaders and members of a congregation were to be attuned to destructive forces at play and repair the breaches, patch the schisms, heal the wounds, and work toward agreement and unity in mind and judgement.
5. How did Paul appeal to the Corinthians to agree and be united (1 Cor 1.10)?
 - 5.1. He appealed to them in the name of Jesus.
 - 5.1.1. He wanted them to agree and to be united for the sake of Jesus—i.e., out of love and loyalty to Jesus.
 - 5.1.2. He wanted them to live out the agreement and unity which Jesus desires to see in his Church (Jn 17.11).
 - 5.1.3. He wanted them to emulate the agreement and unity that is evident in the Trinity (Jn 17.11).
 - 5.1.4. By appealing in the name of Jesus, he condemns the use of another's name (i.e., as evidenced by the party spirit in Corinth). This is similar to our belief that swearing an oath should be only in the name of God. In so doing, we exclude all other names as legitimate for the basis of oath taking.
 - 5.2. He appealed to them as brothers.
 - 5.2.1. He reminded them of their familial affiliation (through salvation) in one Father.
 - 5.2.2. Family members who love one another should be able to overcome difficulties which strangers cannot overcome easily.
 - 5.3. He used an appeal and not a heavy hand. There is a danger in churches that those who are gifted with powers of persuasion or are in positions of authority will use a heavy hand of power. Paul did not use a 'command-and-control' approach (Philemon 8) for dealing with issues of beliefs and practice among the congregations he addressed. He used appeal, argued reason, and suasion. The Church has only one Lord who has given the Church its constitution and laws (the Bible), through the prophets and apostles. While temporal church leaders are to be respected and obeyed (Ex 20.12; Ex 16.16; Philip 2.29; Titus 3.1; Heb 13.7, 17), they are to be obeyed only when their teaching and commands are demonstrably consistent with, and applications of, the word of God. Also, they are to be careful in what they demand of their congregations, either through direct edict or through implied expectations.
6. How had Paul heard about the discord in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1.11)?
 - 6.1. It had been reported to him by Chloe's people.
 - 6.2. We do not know who Chloe was, since there is no other mention of her in Paul's writings.
 - 6.3. However, what can we *infer* from the mention of Chloe?

- 6.3.1. She was a member of the Corinthian church, since Paul names her in this letter.
 - 6.3.2. She was likely loyal to Paul and may have been one of his early converts in Corinth, since she sent the report to him.
 - 6.3.3. She probably had material wealth, since she could afford to send some from her household to Ephesus, rather than just sending a letter.
 - 6.3.4. She had a concern for the state of the congregation and therefore sent some of her family members, or household slaves, to Paul in Ephesus to inform him of what was happening in Corinth.
 - 6.3.5. She was likely well respected within the congregation, since Paul names her as the source of his information and doesn't believe that this will cause her any problems within the party factions.
7. What was the nature of the discord in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1.11-12)?
- 7.1. The congregation was divided over allegiance to individual Christian teachers.
 - 7.2. What was the root cause of this division?
 - 7.2.1. The congregation idolized individual teachers, and the members boasted of their affiliation with particular teachers.
 - 7.2.2. They allowed their former pagan cultural biases to affect how they behaved in the Church. Three dimensions of the Greco-Roman culture influenced their behaviour:
 - 7.2.2.1. *Honor-shame*. Public recognition and the plaudits of men were viewed highly, and people would align themselves with those whom they believed were the most recognized, to thereby increase their own sense of importance. Today, Christians do the same thing when they drop the name of a well-known personage in the Christian community—e.g., “When I met with John MacArthur ...”, or “In my correspondence with Vern Poythress ...”
 - 7.2.2.2. *Oratory and rhetoric*. The ability to speak eloquently in public, using the best oratorical and rhetorical skills was considered to be important in their cultural context. They were living in the Hellenistic culture which had produced Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and the later schools of the Sophists, Epicureans, and Stoics. The Greek tendency to idolize philosopher-teachers influenced their views about Christian teachers. Sadly, many today in the Reformed tradition (and also in the broader Evangelical community) do the same thing when they become sermon-sippers and flit from one speaking conference to another or assign loyalty to a congregation only as long as the preaching meets their ‘standards’.
 - 7.2.2.3. *Personal loyalty*. The pupils or disciples of philosopher-teachers assigned their loyalty to them and considered the pupils of other philosopher-teachers to be inferior. The Corinthians followed the same practice, as Paul indicates by the words, “I follow”. The Greek is more explicit. When translated literally it states, “I on the one hand, I am of Paul, I of Apollos ...” (ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ). The use of the possessive genitive indicates a strong sense of loyalty and dependence between the follower and the teacher. Christians today do the same thing when they say, “I on the one hand, I am of Luther, I of Calvin, I of Knox, I of Wesley ...”
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 - 7.3. With what were the divisions *not* associated?
 - 7.3.1. Paul is not hesitant to call out false teachers in his letters (Rom 16.17-18; Gal 2.11, 14; Gal 5.10-12; Eph 4.14; 1 Tim 1.18-20; 1 Tim 4.1-6; 2 Tim 2.16-18). However, in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, there is no hint that Apollos or Cephas had taught anything to the Corinthians different from what he had taught them.
 - 7.3.2. Although there were some doctrinal questions raised by the Corinthians, which Paul would address, the division that Paul is concerned about is not over questions of doctrine but how beliefs were expressed by the teachers—i.e., their oratorical style and skill.
 - 7.4. What would be the likely result of the divisions if they were not dealt with?

- 7.4.1. The members of the Corinthian church were still worshipping together, if in a dysfunctional manner (1 Cor 11.18-21) and had not yet splintered into separate congregations. Nevertheless, they were in danger of experiencing a great rupture if they did not overcome their culturally engrained attitudes toward human teachers.
- 7.4.2. Thus, Paul will attempt in his letters to the Corinthians to change their views—to no longer think as Greco-Roman pagans, but as disciples of Christ and citizens of heaven. They needed to be de-programmed from their ‘cultish’ adherence to men and to realize that they did not belong to their teachers, but that their teachers belonged to Christ and to them (1 Cor 3.21).
8. Who were the teachers around whom the divided parties affiliated?
- 8.1. Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and Christ.
- 8.1.1. Paul likely lists the names of the teachers in the order in which the parties arose in the Corinthian church. Paul was first because it was through his evangelistic efforts that the church was founded.
- 8.1.2. *Paul* – The existence of a Paul faction implies that opposition had arisen to him since he had left Corinth to continue his evangelistic work elsewhere.
- 8.1.3. *Apollos* – Apollos was from Alexandria and a powerful apologist for Christ. He had been sent to Corinth by the church in Ephesus to build them up with his teaching (Acts 18.24-19.1). Luke informs us that he was: eloquent, competent in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in spirit, and that he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. With Luke’s mention of Apollos’ eloquence and Paul’s statements about his own ineloquence (1 Cor 1.17; 1 Cor 2.1, 4, 13; 2 Cor 10.10), we can infer that the Apollos-faction felt that Apollos was the better teacher—possibly more powerful or polished in the Greco-Roman rhetoric style. Paul did not indicate that there were any problems with Apollos’ teaching and represents him as a co-worker in the Gospel (1 Cor 3.6-9; 1 Cor 4.6; 1 Cor 16.12).
- 8.1.4. *Cephas (Peter)* – We do not read of a visit by Peter to Corinth. However, given that a faction arose around him, it is likely that he did visit the city. Some suggest that those of a Jewish background in the Corinthian congregation aligned themselves with Peter. However, Paul also was of a Jewish background—he was a strict Pharisee—but had not been one of the original disciples. The faction which claimed Cephas as their teacher, probably appealed to his being one of the few living apostles who had walked with Jesus for three years, rather than to his being a supporter of Rabbinic teachings.
- 8.2. There was even a ‘Christ’ party.
- 8.2.1. Some object to the idea that there was a fourth party, based on Clement of Alexandria’s (c 95 AD) noting the presence of only three parties, “Take up the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you.”²³ They suggest that the text should be read differently—for example as if Paul replies to the adherents of the other parties by saying that he himself is of Christ. Others suggest that if there had been a ‘Christ’ party, Paul would have commended them for aligning with Jesus.
- 8.2.2. What might have been the problem with the ‘Christ’ party’s claim?
- 8.2.2.1. Not that they claimed to be Christians, since all in the Corinthian church would have made this claim.
- 8.2.2.2. Rather, they were claiming to be above the quarrel—“We do not align ourselves with mere human teachers, but with Christ himself!” It is similar to anti-creedal

²³ Clement of Rome. *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*; Vol. 1, p. 18 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885).

- proponents who say, “We have no creed but Christ”.
- 8.2.2.3. They may have also rejected human authority and were not willing to be subject to the early teachers or to the appointed elders.
- 8.2.2.4. The problem was likely exacerbated by a schismatic spirit by which they viewed themselves to be superior to other believers and held others in disdain and claimed that they did not need mere human teachers to gain insight into Christian truths.
- 8.3. Paul is appalled by the presence of *any* party spirit in the Church which leads its adherents to claim that they have a special place, more insight into spiritual truths, or greater gifts.
9. How does Paul present his argument that there should be no divisions in the church (1 Cor 1.13)?
- 9.1. He asks three rhetorical questions, to which the expected answer is ‘no’. Rephrasing his questions as statements, he says that:
- 9.2. *Christ is not divided!* There is only one Christ, and thus only one associated Gospel message—that Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1.15)—and only one head of the Church (Eph 1.22; Col 1.18). Therefore, in principle, there cannot be multiple teachers. Christ is the ultimate teacher. His teachings are found in the Bible. The apostles (and since then, preaching or teaching elders/pastors) are not teachers of their own doctrines, but re-transmitters of what Christ has taught.
- 9.3. *Paul was not crucified!* Only Jesus was crucified to save sinners; and his crucifixion was a once-for-all event (1 Cor 1.23; Heb 7.27; Heb 9.28). No one, and certainly not a mere sinful human being, can usurp his unique position, not even the great apostle Paul. Paul uses his own name (rather than those of Apollos or Cephas) to emphasize that there is nothing special about his position, to indicate that he is merely an instrument of Christ, and to reinforce his argument against creating divisions in the Church over allegiances to persons.
- 9.4. *You were not baptized into Paul!* Likewise, there is only one, visible, means of signifying admission into, and membership in, Christ’s church—baptism into, or in, the name of Christ (Acts 2.38; Acts 8.16; Rom 6.3) or in the name of the Trinity (Mt 28.19). No Christian is baptized, or pledged to serve, in the name of a sinful creature within the Church. A person baptized in the name of Christ belongs to Christ (1 Cor 3.23) and to his Church.
- 9.5. *There is only one undivided Church!* The logical consequence of the flow of the three rhetorical questions is that since there is one Christ and one crucifixion, there can be only one saviour. And, since there is only one saviour, it logically follows that there is only one baptism—which is the outward sign of belief in Christ’s work on the cross and of alignment with him in his Church. Thus, if a person belongs to Christ and his Church, he cannot belong to a human teacher. In consequence, a person with a partisan spirit, who aligns with an individual teacher in the Church, indicates that he does not understand the significance of Christ, his crucifixion, his baptism, or his Church.
10. Why does Paul emphasize the fact that he performed only a few baptisms among the Corinthians (1 Cor 1.14-16)?
- 10.1. Since the Corinthians demonstrated that they were more concerned about who had baptized them, than into whom they had been baptized, he wanted to inform them that he did not consider the instrument (the person) administering the baptism to be important. He is glad that he did not baptize a large number of converts, which would have given the impression that he was binding his converts to himself and contributed to the factionalism.
- 10.2. Since he mentions the names of some of the folks he baptized, we can infer that he believed that it was important that a person receive the outward seal of the covenant of grace (Mt 28.19; Mk 16.15; Rom 6.4). However, he emphasizes that it does not matter who conducts the baptism, as long as he has a warrant to do so.
- 10.3. Paul baptized some of the early converts in Corinth. Others travelling with him may have baptized others. And, once elders were appointed, they would have baptized the rest of the

- growing congregation. Thus, he emphasizes his role as an evangelist-preacher of the Gospel who founded and organized congregations but left the ongoing operation to others (1 Cor 3.6-8).
- 10.4. Whom does he mention as his having baptized?
- 10.4.1. *Crispus* – The ruler of the synagogue, converted through Paul’s preaching (Acts 18.8).
- 10.4.2. *Gaius* – Likely the same person mentioned in Romans 16.23 (Paul wrote the letter to the Romans during his stay in Corinth). Gaius was probably wealthy since he was able to host Paul and had enough space in his house to accommodate the congregation in Corinth as it met for worship.
- 10.4.3. *The household of Stephanas* – While he is dictating the letter, he remembers that he also baptized the household of Stephanas. It is possible that Stephanas, being present at the time Paul wrote this letter (1 Cor 16.17), reminded Paul that he had baptized himself. The ‘household’ of Stephanas would have included any children and servants/slaves. Under the covenant model instituted at creation (Gen 2.9, 16-17) and perpetuated throughout the OT (Gen 17.9-14), a covenant head’s family members were included in baptism when he received Christ.
11. What does Paul’s correcting his account indicate (1 Cor 1.16)?
- 11.1. It indicates how Paul dictated his letters to a scribe, who recorded his words as he spoke. He apparently did not then produce a revised version. Although corrections may have been made to the original with marginal notes—which were added to the original text when it was copied or perpetuated as marginal notes during the copying process.
- 11.2. Paul, as the human author of this letter, was guided by the Holy Spirit so that what he wrote was without error. However, Paul’s personality and his finite memory are illustrated. What we call the ‘inspiration of Scripture’ does not undermine the human engagement with the manuscripts which compose the Bible or remove an author’s personality from his composition.
12. What does Paul indicate is his primary role, as an apostle (1 Cor 1.17)?
- 12.1. To preach the Gospel. What is entailed in preaching the Gospel?
- 12.1.1. To declare the message of the good-news of salvation to each person. This message is more than: “God loves you. Be happy, Christ has saved you.” The preaching of the Gospel must include the following components:
- 12.1.1.1. “You are by nature a sinful creature and have personally broken God’s holy law in many ways. [Without an understanding of God’s law and sin against God, a person cannot know of his need of salvation.]
- 12.1.1.2. You deserve to suffer everlasting punishment for your sins.
- 12.1.1.3. However, the God-man Jesus Christ came into the world (born of a virgin) to obey the law perfectly so that he could die as a perfect sacrifice in your place.
- 12.1.1.4. If you believe in Jesus as the God-man and that he died and rose again on the third day, and repent of your sins, God will reckon Christ’s sacrifice as payment for your sins and credit his righteousness to your account and you will be forgiven of your sins and receive an everlasting inheritance in heaven.”
- 12.1.2. To display a conviction that there is nothing more important for men to hear and heed than this message.
- 12.1.3. To appeal to the hearers’ intellect with reasons and their emotions with compassion, so as to awaken faith in Jesus.
- 12.1.4. To declare these truths even if men do not want to hear them and refuse to listen.
- 12.2. Jesus commissioned the apostles (the original core disciples, and then Paul) to preach the Gospel and to teach (Mt 28.19-20; Mk 16.15; Lk 24.47); and to baptize (Mt 28.19). Paul understood preaching and teaching (through evangelism) to be his primary role (Acts 9.15) as an apostle (1 Cor 9.1, 2; 1 Cor 15.9; Rom 11.13; 1 Tim 2.7). Although preaching (κηρύσσω or

εὐαγγελίζω) and teaching (διδάσκω) can be defined as different actions,²⁴ they often overlap and can occur together (Mt 4.23; Mt 11.1; Lk 20.1; Acts 5.42; Acts 15.35; Acts 28.31; 1 Tim 6:2 [NASB]. Paul's use of the word 'preach' includes teaching (2 Tim 1.11).

12.2.1. Preaching, in the NT sense, is the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Teaching, in the NT sense, is to build up the saints in their faith. Thus,

12.2.1.1. Preaching has an outward focus, breadth, starting, and planting.

12.2.1.2. Teaching has an inward focus, depth, developing, and growing.

12.2.2. 'Preaching' in our Reformed and Presbyterian context it is often the systematic instruction in doctrine and apostolic tradition and is 'teaching' in the NT sense. Thus, we often make a distinction between 'evangelistic preaching' and 'exegetical or expository preaching'. We use the word 'preaching' today to mean NT 'teaching' and therefore need to qualify it in order to get closer to the meaning that is intended in the NT.

12.2.3. How can we maintain a proper balance between the two, in a public worship setting?

12.2.3.1. Preach through books (or sections) of the Bible, with a focus on each passage's relationship to Christ.

12.2.3.2. Conduct pastoral visitation and work so that the pastors/elders know the people and understand the needs of the congregation.

12.2.3.3. Use multiple preachers/teachers who can provide different emphases. "Where there are more ministers in a congregation than one, and they of different gifts, each may more especially apply himself to doctrine or exhortation, according to the gift wherein he most excels, and as they shall agree between themselves."²⁵

12.2.3.4. Use multiple teaching/preaching ministries (e.g., pulpit, Sunday School classes).

13. Why does Paul emphasize the importance of preaching?

13.1. God has established *preaching* as the fundamental means of presenting the Gospel to the world (1 Cor 1.21; Rom 10.14-15). "Preaching of the word, *being the power of God unto salvation* ..." ²⁶

13.2. Preaching is God's chosen means of revival—the Holy Spirit's instrument for changing the human heart. Along with prayer, preaching has played a central role in the history of every revival and significant evangelistic movement.²⁷ There has never been a revival that was initiated by anything other than God's designated dynamic duo: prayer and preaching. Spurgeon said, "I do not look for any other means of converting men beyond the simple preaching of the Gospel and the opening of men's ears to hear it. The moment the church of God shall despise the pulpit, God will despise her. It has been through the ministry that the Lord has always been pleased to revive and bless His churches."²⁸

13.3. The Bible uses visible signs and symbols (e.g., in the tabernacle or temple and the sacraments), but the overwhelming emphasis is on the spoken word to communicate God's purposes to man. Idolatry focuses on physical representations of deities with statues and images. God, the universal deity, cannot be represented in concrete images. Neil Postman says, "The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking."²⁹

13.4. Why has there been a dramatic down-grading of the practice of preaching in our age?

13.4.1. Many people in the church, and most outside of it, find preaching dull and claim that it is

²⁴ See: "Appendix L – Preaching and Teaching" in: James R. Hughes, *Nehemiah the Church Builder: Instructor's Guide*, 2006; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

²⁵ "Of the Preaching of the Word," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

²⁶ "Of the Preaching of the Word," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

²⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Primacy of Preaching*, (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1971), p. 24.

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Early Years*, Vol 1, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), p. v.

²⁹ Quoted in: Charles Colson, Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale, 1999), p. 468.

- ineffective. Where does the fault lie? It lies with:
- 13.4.1.1. Seminaries which do not teach candidates how to preach effectively,
 - 13.4.1.2. Presbyteries permitting non-preachers (i.e., those not truly skilled and called) to become pastors,
 - 13.4.1.3. Preachers not working to improve their preaching,
 - 13.4.1.4. A lack of prayer for the pulpit ministry,
 - 13.4.1.5. A lack of emphasis and desire on the part of people in the Church for good preaching, and
 - 13.4.1.6. People in the Church seeking to be entertained.
- 13.4.2. Preaching is authoritative monologue. Autonomous men do not want the unambiguous communication of authoritative truth. There is no opportunity for argument and contradiction during the preaching of the word. Conversion, revival, and reformation are marked by proclamation of God's word, not by sharing opinions about what a passage means to each person in a home study group, discussing optional interpretations, debating about doctrines or beliefs, or holding inter-faith dialogue.
- 13.4.3. A popular suggestion is that the use of other means such as music concerts, puppetry, videos, drama productions, or the visual arts, are more effective in our day for reaching the lost and 'seekers'. God predestined the invention of modern media; yet he ordained live-audience preaching as his medium for communicating his word. There are a number of things that may have a place in the work of the Church, in a pre-evangelism setting (e.g., sports nights, movie nights, community BBQs, soup kitchens, ESL programs, etc.), rather than in evangelism itself—some people have been saved through these means—but as a consideration of the history of the church shows, their impact has been very limited in bringing people to salvation, when compared with preaching.
- 13.5. The challenge for the Church today is how to get preaching before the world by knowing what and where is the modern equivalent of the agora of Paul's day (Acts 17.17). Many today suggest that it is in cyberspace. However, using media diminishes the opportunity for live-audience preaching.
- 13.6. The *Directory for Public Worship* gives directions for how preaching should be undertaken.³⁰
- 13.6.1. Pick a text on doctrine or work through a book or chapter.
 - 13.6.2. Introduce the topic, followed by a summary or paraphrase of the text if lengthy.
 - 13.6.3. Divide the text into doctrines; not too many divisions so as to "trouble their minds with obscure terms of art."
 - 13.6.4. Make sure the doctrines are truths derived from the text to show what God teaches.
 - 13.6.5. Clarify in plain terms anything that is obscure. Use Scripture parallels.
 - 13.6.6. Use solid arguments that convince.
 - 13.6.7. Use illustrations that are full of light to convey truth to the heart.
 - 13.6.8. Remove any causes for doubt by reconciling the apparent differences.
 - 13.6.9. Apply the doctrine to the hearers so the hearers personally may feel the word to be cutting and powerful at disclosing thoughts.
 - 13.6.10. Add weight to the argument from other places in Scripture.
 - 13.6.11. Challenge errors; with care, so as not to raise heresy from the grave.
 - 13.6.12. Exhort action, as drawn from the passage.
 - 13.6.13. Declare the sin of disobedience and means of avoiding it.
 - 13.6.14. Apply comfort against temptations, terrors, and troubles.
 - 13.6.15. Do not exhaust the doctrines in the text. Choose wisely what is useful at the time to draw men to Christ "the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort."
- "This method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every text; but only recommended, as being found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpful for the

³⁰ "Of the Preaching of the Word," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, abbreviated and paraphrased.

people's understandings and memories." But the servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole ministry:

13.6.16. "Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently."

13.6.17. "Plainly, that the meanest [simplest] may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant."

13.6.18. "Faithfully, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory ..."

13.6.19. "Wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; showing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness."

13.6.20. "Gravely, as becometh the word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his ministry."

13.6.21. With loving affection ... from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good.

13.6.22. Taught of God, persuaded in his own heart, that what he teaches is the truth of Christ.

13.6.23. Walking before his flock, as an example to them.

13.7. What are attributes of anointed (Is 61.1) preaching?

13.7.1. From the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2.1-5; Eph 3.8).

13.7.2. Saturated with Scripture (2 Tim 4.2).

13.7.3. Christ Centered (1 Cor 1.23).

13.7.4. Powerful (Mt 12.41; Acts 2.41).

13.7.5. Enlightens the mind (Rom 10.14).

13.7.6. Stirs the affections, probes the heart (Acts 2.37).

13.7.7. Uses analogies and imagery (Mt 5.13-16; Mt 7.1-6, 13-14, 15-19, 24-27).

13.7.8. Helps the hearers (Acts 20.20).

13.7.9. Delivers threats and warnings (Acts 17.30-31).

13.7.10. Full of good news (Acts 17.18).

13.7.11. Pleads for a response (Acts 2.40).

13.7.12. Directed to the people with simple and understandable words and concepts (1 Cor 1.17; Mk 16.15).

13.7.13. Adapted to the audience (Acts 17.22-23)

13.7.14. Provides a mouthpiece of God—not a freelance thinker (Num 22.38; 2 Chron 18.13; 2 Cor 2.17; Gal 1.11, 12).

13.7.15. Commissioned (1 Cor 1.17; Rom 10.15).

13.7.16. Urgent (Mt 10.7).

13.7.17. Compulsive (not an intellectual exercise) (1 Cor 9.16).

14. What does Paul mean when he says, "not with words of eloquent wisdom" (1 Cor 1.17)?

14.1. Paul uses the term 'wisdom' here to refer to human philosophy and teaching, not Biblical wisdom (e.g., as taught in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes).

14.2. The Gospel message is to be preached in simplicity, not paraded with sophistication—so that it can be understood by anyone, not just by a university professor (1 Cor 1.20-25); not in clever words in a polished form (as in the Greco-Roman oratorical style) but having no content—like meat and potatoes not a cream éclair. Consider this example from George Orwell's essay, *Politics and the English Language*,³¹ in which he illustrated the problem of using 'human wisdom' to present a truth, by the following reworking of a classic text, "Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in

³¹George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 1946; wikilivres.ca/wiki/Politics_and_the_English_Language

competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.” We know the original, “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.” (Ecc 9.11) One writer on the Puritans notes that the late-sixteenth century Puritan preachers favoured “what Chaderton called ‘a plain but effectual way of preaching’”. Whereas their Anglican rivals, “indulged in a more elaborate style in their written sermons, which the Puritans labelled ‘witty’ as opposed to ‘spiritual’”. These priests studded their addresses with elaborate word play and Greek or Latin quotations designed to impress upon the hearers the learning and wit of the preacher. Richard Greenham, a celebrated Puritan divine, dismissed such offerings as ‘the swelling words and painted eloquence of human wisdom’. Like all his colleagues he attacked them vigorously as being merely ‘glassy, bright and brittle. so cold and so human, that the simple preaching of Christ does greatly decay’.”³²

- 14.3. The message of truth is not to be hidden behind the speaker’s desire for recognition as an eloquent or entertaining speaker. Using fancy words and fine sounding arguments leads one to think that he is intelligent and causes him to be puffed up.³³ Preaching that is simple and easy to understand allows the truth to shine on its own. One does not wrap a beautiful gemstone in glittery costume jewellery; rather he presents it in a simple setting.
- 14.4. This does not mean that a preacher is to be unprepared, uncouth, or boring and dry. It also does not mean that he is not to use stories and compelling figures of speech—Jesus did, and we should follow his example. And, it does not mean that he is to be unable to respond to critics of the Gospel with reasoned responses and powerful logic. Rather the preacher of the Gospel, is to be educated in theology (2 Tim 3.15-17), knowledgeable of contrary worldviews (1 Chron 12.32) and able to respond to them (1 Pt 3.15), and a gifted communicator (1 Tim 3.2; 2 Tim 2.2), who is able to present a clear and concise message.

15. What does Paul say can empty the cross of Christ of its power?

- 15.1. Paul isn’t contrasting preaching with baptism; suggesting that observance of the rite of baptism empties the cross of its power. Nor is he suggesting that if he were to have baptized more persons that would have emptied the cross of its power. The Church, during the Middle Ages went off base by emphasizing the external rites (with the definition of seven sacraments) and major portions of the modern Evangelical Church is following suit—with its emphasis on external forms (e.g., ‘praise’ bands, ‘worship’ teams, and external manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit). However, that isn’t the kind of thing Paul is dealing with in this section.
- 15.2. He is speaking about preaching which is sullied with words of ‘eloquent wisdom’—i.e., preaching which emphasizes, or is focused on, human wisdom. In the Corinthian context he is speaking of preaching which emphasized the use of the showy rhetorical devices practiced by the Greco-Roman politicians, lawyers, and the teachers of his day, and was based on Greek philosophy.
- 15.3. What are examples of preaching today which include ‘eloquent wisdom’ or ‘human wisdom’?
 - 15.3.1. The ‘health-and-wealth gospel’ or the ‘prosperity gospel’—which claims that if you come to Christ your problems (health, financial, relationship, etc.) will be solved, and conversely if you have a problem it is a symptom of your lack of faith.
 - 15.3.2. Using the pulpit as a forum for advancing human psychology and psychiatry—e.g., techniques for accepting guilt or addictions rather than personal confession of sin or advocating the undermining of the responsibility of men to act like men (1 Cor 16.13).

³² John Adair, *Founding Fathers — The Puritans in England and America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), p. 92.

³³ Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 20:139-156 (2006); web.princeton.edu/sites/opplab/papers/Opp%20Consequences%20of%20Erudite%20Vernacular.pdf

- 15.3.3. Replacing preaching with ‘worship’—as if preaching is not a component of worship—which is built around times of singing choruses and watching performers play music.
- 15.3.4. Using a ‘drama ministry’³⁴ to replace or augment preaching. This is a return to the Middle Ages, where preaching was unintelligible to most (because it was often presented in Latin or by unskilled preachers) and morality plays filled the void.
- 15.3.5. Diminishing the importance of the preaching of the cross and Christ’s shed blood.
- 15.3.6. Claiming that a person can be saved by faith plus works of obedience and displays of love—implying that Christ only made it possible for a person to be saved, not that Christ saves his elect.
- 15.3.7. Introducing other teachings which are inconsistent with the clear teachings of Scripture, such as: ‘open theology’, ‘old earth’ models, ‘easy-believism’, rejection of miracles, Dispensationalism, universalism, emergent-church (truth is subjective, no absolutes or authority structures), syncretism (e.g., Islam or Hinduism are ‘ways’ to God).
- 15.4. Words of human wisdom cannot take the place of God’s Gospel—that Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1.15). What does this imply?
 - 15.4.1. The systematization of truth (i.e., ‘doctrine’, ‘theology’) should not be elevated *above* teaching about and knowing the person of Christ. It is necessary to know Jesus, not just to know something about him.
 - 15.4.2. Likewise, the messenger should not be elevated above the message (1 Cor 1.29).
- 16. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 1.10-17)?
 - 16.1. *Rituals vs Reality* – Baptism, though important, is a sign and symbol of alignment with Christ and membership in God’s covenant community, not the reality of faith. Baptism does not save or wash away original or personal sin; faith in Jesus Christ does. Paul cautions against an exalted view of baptism and, by extension, of any ritual—whether authorized by God or not.
 - 16.2. *Restriction vs Realization* – Paul baptized the *household* of Stephanas. Other instances of household baptisms are recorded in Acts (Acts 16.15, 33-34) and of household conversions with an implied baptism (Acts 10.47-48; Acts 11.14). Opponents of infant baptism claim that these passages cannot be used to support the practice of infant baptism because there is no explicit mention of infants (or young children). In addition, the opponents of infant baptism say that infants could not have participated in speaking in tongues (Acts 10.46), service to the saints (1 Cor 16.15), rejoicing over conversion (Acts 16.34), or in expressions of belief (Acts 16.31); therefore, there must not have been infants present in these households. However, the idea that in all four of these households there were no young children is unsupportable. When the head of the household professed adherence to a religion, the entire household was expected to follow suit. The opponents of infant baptism cannot demonstrate that every single (adult) person in each of these households, including the slaves, made a credible profession of faith. Yet the *households* were baptized. In addition, their arguments about infants not participating in outward exhibitions of faith are illogical. For example, if we say, “The entire city came out to welcome the Blue Jays after they won the World Series.” we do not mean that every single person lined the sidewalks on Yonge St. So, when the Bible records that a household believed, it does not mean that every single person was truly converted. Household baptisms follow the model of household circumcisions (Gen 17.9-14), which included infants and slaves, as realization of the promise made to Abraham (Gen 17.1-14; Gal 3.29). Also, if Paul had suggested to Jewish converts that women (e.g., Lydia) could be included under the sign of the new covenant but not their children, he would have been considered a lunatic. People in the Church who separate from other believers because they claim that only adult baptism is valid, may think that they are being Biblical, but they are practicing the form of sectarianism which

³⁴ See, for example: www.religiousproductnews.com/articles/2005-July/In-Every-Issue/Drama-Ministry-.htm.

Paul speaks against in this section of 1 Corinthians.³⁵

- 16.3. *Rivalry vs Rapport* – Paul condemns any form of sectarianism resulting from allegiance to a favourite teacher or from adherence to any teaching which is not essential to faith in Jesus Christ and clearly taught in Scripture. There is only one Christ, one crucifixion, one Church, and one Confession (one Faith). Principles which follow from this include:
- 16.3.1. Denominations and congregations should not be named after Church teachers. For example, to refer to or include names such as Lutheran or Wesleyan in denominational names or for congregations to use names such as Knox, Calvin, or Chalmers, is inconsistent with the teachings of this section of 1 Corinthians.
 - 16.3.2. Christians are to strive for organizational unity through the bond of love (Jn 13.34; Col 3.14), and apostolic example (Acts 4.32) and exhortation (Eph 4.1-6; Phil 2.1-6; 1 Pt 3.8)
 - 16.3.3. The Church, the spiritual body of Christ, cannot properly be divided any more than Christ can be divided. Thus, the existence of denominations and many congregations in a single locale is inconsistent with the desire of Christ (Jn 17.11, 21-22). Anyone who splits the body of Christ, or removes himself therefrom, for sectarian reasons commits a grievous sin akin to divorce in marriage.
 - 16.3.4. Agreement in the essentials of the Faith should override all possibility of division over matters which are not essential. Therefore, every professing Christian should align with (i.e., be a member of) a local congregation of believers and every congregation should align with a regional denomination of believers. Someone who argues that joining a congregation or denomination perpetuates sectarianism is in fact himself being sectarian.
 - 16.3.5. Denominationalism, while not ideal, is the result of God's providence. Paul indicates that divisions are necessary so that "those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (1 Cor 11.18-19). We considered, above, principles which should govern church divisions, and concluded that we should leave a congregation or denomination when the leaders teach doctrines which are clearly contrary to the Bible; or endorse overt sins, or cause people to commit overt sins, and refuse to repent of their actions.
- 16.4. *Resistance vs Recitation* – Anti-creedalism is prevalent among many today who claim to be Christians—with the apparently tolerant statement 'no creed but Christ'. However, agreement with a creed is a means of *avoiding* sectarianism:³⁶
- 16.4.1. It serves as a basis for ecclesiastical unity—one can know the essence of what others believe about God, Christ, sin, and salvation before uniting with them.
 - 16.4.2. It helps to prevent false doctrines and practices from entering a congregation or denomination
 - 16.4.3. It provides an objective basis for exercising church discipline.
- In reality there isn't any church or denomination which does not have some form of a creed—even if unwritten. For example, even an anti-creedalist Christian would object to the introduction of the *Qur'an* into his congregation. The more precise and consistent with the clear and explicit teachings of Scripture a creed is, the easier it is to have organizational unity. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is an example of such a creed.
- 16.5. *Reflection vs Reformation* – The Corinthians reflected their culture, bringing into the church aspects of their culture such as honor-shame, rhetoric-loving, and pride-in-persons which led to divisions. In contrast, their adherence to Christ should have had a reformational impact on their lives and, through them, on the culture around them. The North American church is also often a reflection of its cultural milieu rather than a force for reforming culture. For example:
- 16.5.1. Christian contemporary music expresses the world's values—it is often a decadent sundae with a sprinkling of 'Jesus-sprinkles'.

³⁵ For a consideration of the argument in favour of infant baptism, refer to: James A. Hughes, *The Case for Infant Baptism*; available at, www.EPCToronto.org; and James W. Scott, *The Biblical Basis for Infant Baptism*; www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH00/0007c.html

³⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. *In Defense of Creedalism*; www.cmfnw.com/articles/pt566.htm

- 16.5.2. Materialism has rushed into all sectors of the Church—a spirit of thankfulness and sharing has been swallowed up by acquisitiveness and one-upmanship (e.g., bigger congregations and bigger assembly halls).
- 16.5.3. The urgency which Paul displayed for preaching of the cross of Christ has been replaced with degradation of worship into an entertainment spectacle.
- 16.5.4. ‘Political correctness’ (e.g., acceptance of homosexual practices, females ordained to eldership positions, and theistic evolution) has trumped adherence to the clear teachings of Scripture.
- 16.5.5. Covenant allegiance to a body (congregation or denomination) demonstrated through loving service, has been replaced with a spirit of independence which states, “If I am not getting anything out of the church, I will go elsewhere.”

Power of the Cross (1 Cor 1.18-25)

1. What irony do we find if we compare this section with Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 1.17, “not with words of eloquent wisdom”?
 - 1.1. Paul indicates that he was not called to preach with the eloquent forms of Greek rhetoric. Yet, he demonstrates that he has mastered these forms, and uses them to drive home his points. This section is a brilliant example of the use of the rhetorical forms and style. For example, he uses:
 - 1.1.1. Antithetical and synonymous parallels (numerous).
 - 1.1.2. Chiasm (1 Cor 1.19, 24b [with 1 Cor 1.25]).
 - 1.1.3. Word repetition (1 Cor 1.20).
 - 1.1.4. Rhetorical questions (1 Cor 1.20).
 - 1.1.5. Sound repetition (e.g., both clauses in 1 Cor 1.22 end with *συν*; similar in 1 Cor 1.24).
 - 1.1.6. Parallelism (1 Cor 1.18 with 1 Cor 1.24).
 - 1.1.7. Double entendre (*wisdom* and *folly*) used throughout the section.
 - 1.2. Paul provides a powerful polemical description of the state of the world into which the word of the cross is directed. Similar powerful polemics occur in Romans 1.18-32 and 2 Tim 3.1-5.
2. What is folly to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1.18-23)?
 - 2.1. The word of the cross.
 - 2.1.1. Not only the teaching about the nature of the cross (i.e., as an instrument of torture for the vilest of offenders) but the applied aspect of Christ’s death on the cross (i.e., his vicarious and substitutionary atonement)—a crucified Messiah.
 - 2.1.2. The Greek word translated ‘folly’ (*μωρία*) is the origin of our English word ‘moron’.
 - 2.2. Who are the perishing?
 - 2.2.1. All mankind, represented by the two categories of Gentiles and Jews, who reject the message of the cross.
 - 2.2.2. What two categories of mankind were represented?
 - 2.2.2.1. Those who had only *natural* revelation about God (Rom 1.19-20) but knew nothing of his providential purposes or his redemptive plan.
 - 2.2.2.2. Those who, in addition, had been given *special* revelation through the prophets—i.e., the OT (Rom 3.2).
 - 2.2.3. What are equivalent categories today?
 - 2.2.3.1. Those who have only natural revelation about God and have not heard anything explicit and correct about Jesus and the Gospel including, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and hedonistic materialists.
 - 2.2.3.2. Those who have had a degree of access to the special revelation provided in the Bible but who have rejected the revealed truth about Jesus and his life and crucifixion—for example, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, theological liberals, and young adults who were brought up in a church and attended Sunday School and worship services but

- have rejected their heritage.
- 2.2.4. We could paraphrase the first part of verse 18 as: ‘The concept of a crucified Messiah is moronic to those who appear to be on their way to hell.’
- 2.3. Why is the cross a stumbling block to Jews?
- 2.3.1. Translating the Greek word as ‘stumbling block’ may not be forceful enough. It may be better to translate it as ‘offensive’ or ‘scandalous’ (σκάνδαλον).
- 2.3.2. The concept of an executed Messiah (Jn 12.34) was beyond belief for the Jews. The Messiah, in their view, was to be a victorious champion who would lead his subjugated people to victory, destroy his enemies, and establish a millennial kingdom on earth.
- 2.3.3. In addition, the idea that the Messiah would die a cursed death by crucifixion on a wooden stake (cross) was offensive (Dt 21.23; Gal 3.13).
- 2.3.4. Other aspects of the life of Jesus contributed to their rejection of him as the Messiah:
- 2.3.4.1. He was born in a lowly state in a stable (Lk 2.7), not as a king in a palace.
- 2.3.4.2. He was believed to have come from an obscure part of Israel (Jn 1.46), not a royal city.
- 2.3.4.3. He displayed an authority greater than their teachers of the law (Mk 1.22; Mt 5.21).
- 2.3.4.4. He appeared to disrespect the Law (Mt 12.2).
- 2.3.4.5. He claimed equality with God (Jn 5.18; Jn 10.30).
- 2.3.4.6. He broke social taboos (Mt 8.2-3; Lk 7.36-39; Jn 4.27).
- 2.3.4.7. He rejected the use of the sword to advance his kingdom (Mt 26.52-53; Jn 18.36).
- 2.3.4.8. He claimed that his kingdom was not of this world (Jn 18.36).
- 2.3.4.9. He opened the way of life to all mankind, including despised Samaritans and Gentiles (Jn 12.32).
- 2.3.5. Without the converting work of the Spirit, the Jews could do no other than reject Jesus and his cross.
- 2.4. Why is the cross folly to Greeks/Gentiles?
- 2.4.1. In 1 Cor 1.22-24 Paul uses two words to refer to non-Jews—translated as Greeks (“Ἕλληνα) and Gentiles (ἔθνη). Given their use in immediate association, it is likely that he uses them as synonyms to refer to pagans in general. If there is a difference in his use of the words, it may be that he uses the term ‘Greeks’ to refer to those among the Gentiles who emphasized humanistic, rationalistic, and philosophical thinking which arose out of Greek culture in contrast to the irrational eastern religions. Of course, the Greeks also had a parallel and derivative irrational mythology and pantheon to that of the eastern religions, and also mystic cults (e.g., Cult of Cybele and Eleusinian Mysteries).
- 2.4.2. From a Greek perspective, there were three strikes against the cross and a crucified saviour:
- 2.4.2.1. Greek rationalistic philosophy (from Plato’s idealism and Aristotle’s materialism) struggled with the concept of a nonmaterial god interacting directly with the physical order. The gods were said to inhabit a separate plane; so, the idea that a God-man could act as a penal substitute for a man would be viewed as irrational. Of course, Greek mythology did include interaction between the gods and the created order—e.g., Chaos and Gaia gave birth to components of the physical universe and produced the Titans, the Titan Prometheus created man out of mud; and Hercules was a son of Zeus and a mortal woman, Alcmena.
- 2.4.2.2. Greco-Roman thinking about the manly virtues would have viewed a crucified religious leader as being humiliated, since crucifixion was the death reserved for murderers and traitors. The idea would have been absurd and treated with scorn and contempt.
- 2.4.2.3. The thought that God’s plan of salvation would be exercised through the life and death of a non-Greek (and at that, a Jew) was unfathomable to Greek ethnic pride.
- 2.4.3. Beyond the Greco-Roman world, Gentile religions would have viewed the idea of salvation through a God-man dying on a cross as a substitute for sinners as ridiculous. A God who

- they believed could not defeat his enemies and who died at their hands like a criminal was not one to be trusted for obtaining admission to the realms of the afterlife. Their means of obtaining ‘salvation’ are very different from God’s means; for example:³⁷
- 2.4.3.1. Sin in Hinduism: Actions that violate moral and ethical codes, have negative consequences and create negative *karma*.
 - 2.4.3.2. Sin in Buddhism: No concept of sin and ethics are not based upon duty towards any deity.
 - 2.4.3.3. Good works in Hinduism and in Buddhism: Impersonal *karma* law ensures that all good or bad deeds eventually return as rewards or punishment.
 - 2.4.3.4. Salvation in Hinduism: Men are freed from a cycle of death and reincarnation, come to a state of completeness, and become one with god.
 - 2.4.3.5. Salvation in Buddhism: Discipline of giving up on desires; this quest relies on oneself, not on gods or priests; a person can work himself upward by making use of acquired merit.
- 2.5. What did the Jews of Paul’s day demand?
- 2.5.1. Signs—miraculous illustrations of Jesus’ claim to be divine and the Messiah (Mk 8.11-12; Jn 2:18; Jn 4.48).
 - 2.5.2. Jesus provided many signs demonstrating that he was God incarnate (Jn 20.30; Jn 21.25), but the Jews refused to believe the evidence (Jn 12.37). His resurrection was evidenced by many eyewitnesses (1 Cor 15.4-8). Another miraculous sign would not have convinced them (Lk 16.29-31).
 - 2.5.3. The Jews had access to revealed truth (Rom 3.2). They did not need to be told facts about the Messiah and the cross. They needed to believe the evidence presented to them.
 - 2.5.4. Why did Jesus appear at the time in history when he did (i.e., from 4 BC to 33 AD)?
 - 2.5.4.1. Many providential reasons can be given, such as the relative peace of the Roman Empire, ease of travel and communication, and the universal use of the Greek language.
 - 2.5.4.2. To fulfill explicit prophecies (e.g., Dan 9.24-27; Dan 11.40-45).
 - 2.5.4.3. Ultimately at the right time—i.e., the time established by God in his eternal plan (Mk 1.15; Rom 5.6; Gal 4.4).
 - 2.5.4.4. Another reason is because of the Jewish demand for signs. The miracles which Jesus performed could not have been attributed to mere human capabilities in the 1st century. His miracles were understood to be supernatural, even if it was claimed by some that they were not from a divine source (Mt 12.24). Sceptical scholars today attempt to explain his miracles as slight-of-hand or natural phenomena. However, their scepticism shows through clearly. If Jesus were to have appeared in the 21st century—assuming all of our technological advances were in place—his miracles would be dismissed as special effects and camera tricks. Jesus appeared when sign miracles could be legitimately interpreted as nothing other than from a divine source.
- 2.6. What did the Greeks of Paul’s day seek?
- 2.6.1. The Greeks were enamoured with ideas (Acts 17.19, 21) and showmanship associated with elegantly communicated ideas. What they wanted was an idea that appealed to their rational faculties and would be supported by logical proofs.
 - 2.6.2. Greeks were perpetual seekers—the journey, not the destination, was important to them (Acts 17.21). They were not sure what they were seeking (Acts 17.23), so they could never be sure if they had found truth.
- 2.7. How might we summarize the two approaches to the word of the cross?
- 2.7.1. The ‘Jewish’ approach judges the *truthfulness* of God’s claim about the work of salvation

³⁷ James R. Hughes, *Comparison of Biblical Christianity with Selected Other Belief Systems*, 2013-12; available at, www.epcutoronto.org.

- and places sceptical doubt above faith. It says, “I will not believe unless I see the evidence for myself.” (Jn 20.25)
- 2.7.2. The ‘Greek’ approach judges the *rationality* of God’s work of salvation and places man’s rational faculties above God’s. It says, “I will evaluate God’s claims for myself.”
- 2.7.3. In the Church today there are representatives of both approaches: sign seekers *vs* sermon sippers; adherents of the sensational *vs* the syllogistic; superstitious *vs* ‘scientific’.
- 2.7.4. Although they may appear to be positioned as opposites, like emotion *vs* logic, every person who objects to the word of the cross applies an element of both approaches, to varying degrees.
- 2.8. Why is the word of the cross folly to mankind?
- 2.8.1. The message of the necessity of crucifixion for salvation is repugnant to both Jews and Greeks because:
- 2.8.1.1. It indicates the heinousness of sin—that crucifixion (death) is the deserved punishment for human sin (Ezk 18.4).
- 2.8.1.2. It speaks of capital punishment, which is considered to be barbaric by our ‘enlightened’ age.
- 2.8.1.3. It leaves no room for human effort or pride in procuring salvation—salvation was procured entirely by the death of Christ and is not dependent on the works of the recipients (Eph 2.9).
- 2.8.1.4. It speaks to everlasting happiness which is obtained through an act of humility and self-denial (Phil 2.6-8), not through wealth or power.
- 2.8.1.5. It involves vicarious substitution and does not require that a sinner pay the debt of his own sin, if he is willing to repent of his sin and believe in Christ’s completed work on the cross (Rom 5.8).
- 2.8.1.6. It is undiscernible to the darkened hearts of men who are perishing (Rom 1.21)—it cannot, naturally, be heard and heeded.
- 2.8.1.7. It isn’t how men would have designed salvation, if they had been assigned the job of coming up with a solution for sin.
- 2.8.2. The common hatred of the message of the cross unites mankind from radically different religious and cultural backgrounds in their antipathy. For example, people who endorse the acceptance of homosexual practices or the murder of the unborn in the womb (or even outside of the womb) wish to have the Bible banned from every public forum. Likewise, Muslims, who deny the crucifixion of Jesus,³⁸ want to eradicate the message about the Messiah from the world and would support banning the Bible.
3. What is the word of the cross to those being saved (1 Cor 1.18, 24)?
- 3.1. The power and the wisdom of God.
- 3.1.1. In the context of this section, the cross (1 Cor 1.18) and Christ (1 Cor 1.24) refer to Christ’s crucifixion.
- 3.1.2. Paul sets forth the ‘power’ and ‘wisdom’ of God as the antitheses to a ‘stumbling block’ and ‘folly’ to men.
- 3.1.3. This contrast demonstrates that there are only two classes of mankind—those who reject *vs* those who accept the cross of Christ as the only means of redemption. There is, and can be, no middle ground. There are *not* multiple paths and multiple religions which lead to God. There is one, and one only—the word of the cross of Christ.
- 3.2. What does ‘being saved’ mean? Or, what is ‘salvation’?
- 3.2.1. Salvation in the NT is a complex of concepts. It includes:
- 3.2.1.1. A one-time volitional act of the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of individuals to convert them by making them spiritually alive, declaring them righteous, and

³⁸ *Qur’an*, “Surat Al-Nisa”, 4:157; quran.com/4

- sanctifying or setting them apart to God (Acts 15.11; Eph 2.5, 8; Titus 3.5).
- 3.2.1.2. A one-time volitional act of individuals who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as the God-man who died on the cross to pay their debt of sin (Acts 16.31; Rom 10.9)
 - 3.2.1.3. An ongoing, life-long process, which includes sanctification (1 Cor 1.18; 1 Cor 15.2; 2 Cor 2.15).
 - 3.2.1.4. A future, final act of God to deliver us from hell into the everlasting presence of God's glory (1 Cor 3.15; Rom 5.9-10; Rom 13.11; 1 Thess 5.8-9; Heb 1.14; Heb 9.28).
- 3.2.2. Why must we understand salvation to be a complex of ideas, and to be careful not to focus on one aspect of salvation?
- 3.2.2.1. An overemphasis on one aspect can result in our formulating a faulty theology.
 - 3.2.2.2. For example, a focus on the human volitional act tends to cause people to believe that their act of repentance is a meritorious work. In contrast, a focus on God's grace in the act of saving can lead one to an antinomian or fatalistic spirit.
- 3.2.3. What is salvation *not*, in the NT? It is not:
- 3.2.3.1. Liberation from tyrannical governments or oppressive economic systems.
 - 3.2.3.2. Deliverance from all temporal-physical peril.
 - 3.2.3.3. A promise of personal health-and-wealth wellbeing in this realm.
 - 3.2.3.4. A universalism, which claims that eventually everyone will reach a status of peaceful equilibrium—a state of 'nirvana' that "represents its ultimate state of soteriological release and liberation from rebirths".³⁹
 - 3.2.3.5. Liberation of a person's spirit from his physical body. It is instead a restoration of body and spirit (a person's entire being) from the ravages of sin and death to a true and full, everlasting life.
 - 3.2.3.6. Annihilation—the cessation of all existence.
- 3.2.4. In verse 24 Paul uses 'called' as a synonym, or intimately related parallel, for 'saved' in verse 18 (2 Tim 1.9). When we studied verse 2 of chapter 1, we considered the nature of the call which God directs to those whom he is saving. We noted that being called by God, includes: eternal election, a personal invitation from the Holy Spirit which converts the person, and an exhortation to a holy life.
- 3.3. How is the word of the cross (i.e., reading of the Bible about life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and the preaching and declaration of the crucifixion) the power of God?
- 3.3.1. It is the means God has chosen for bringing the Gospel to the world of men who are dying in their sins. It is *the* means, not just a primary means. Regardless of what inducements are used to bring people into contact with Christ, they can only be saved if they hear and heed the words (written or preached) that declare Jesus to be the crucified and risen saviour, in whom they must believe.
- 3.4. What effect does the word of the cross have on mankind? It:
- 3.4.1. Convicts a person of sin, producing faith which leads to repentance (Mk 1.4).
 - 3.4.2. Is the instrument used to make a person into a new creation (2 Cor 5.17).
 - 3.4.3. Changes pride and selfishness into humility and love (Col 3.5-17).
 - 3.4.4. Dispels spiritual and intellectual darkness from the hearts of men (Rom 1.21; Eph 4.18) by shining spiritual and intellectual light into their hearts (2 Cor 4.4; 2 Tim 1.10).
 - 3.4.5. Exposes, embarrasses, and defeats our enemies (Eph 6.12).
 - 3.4.6. Empowers believers (2 Cor 11.23-33; Phil 1.27-30).
 - 3.4.7. Produces true wisdom (2 Tim 3.15; James 3.13), not the false wisdom of the world (Rom 1.22).
- 3.5. How is the word of the cross, in the form of preaching, the wisdom of God?
- 3.5.1. Preaching of the cross speaks of Christ and the work he accomplished on the cross.

³⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana

Ultimately, the wisdom of God rests upon Christ (1 Cor 1.24) who is God.

3.5.2. Preaching of the cross demonstrates God's wisdom in planning and orchestrating salvation. It demonstrates the fulfillment of the OT ceremonial ordinances, prophecies, and promises in Christ.

3.5.3. Preaching of the cross shames the wisdom of the world by demonstrating that all the works-based efforts of men to make themselves right with God are utter failures—they leave men under an everlasting cloud of guilt.

4. Why does the world consider the (preaching of the) cross to be superstitious nonsense and folly?
 - 4.1. Because God has handed mankind over to believe a lie “because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess 2.10-11).
 - 4.2. Their sin has blinded them because God has blinded them. Their pride and conceit in claiming to be wise has caused them to become fools (Rom 1.22).
 - 4.3. What are other examples of mankind's believing lies and rejecting truth, because they have rejected the truth of the crucifixion and resurrection?
 - 4.3.1. *Evolutionism*. Believing that all that we see around us is the result of time and chance acting on matter and energy. Unbelieving men cannot explain how life originates from non-life.
 - 4.3.2. *Socialism*. Believing that collective ownership and regulation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange will benefit mankind. Unbelieving men cannot explain how a centrally planned economy which distorts price signals, rewards mediocrity and selfishness, encourages political corruption, and treats individuals as slaves can allocate resources more efficiently than a system which supports individual initiative and effort.
 - 4.3.3. *Paternalism*. Believing that bureaucrats can and should restrict fundamental freedoms for the best interest of the population. Unbelieving men cannot explain how removing accountability for actions makes people more responsible.
 - 4.3.4. *Pluralism*. Believing that there are other ways to be reconciled with God other than through belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Unbelieving men cannot explain how religions which teach two exactly opposite tenets (e.g., that Jesus is or is not God, or did or did not rise from the dead) can both be correct.
 - 4.3.5. *Hedonism*. The unbeliever has no prospect or hope beyond this life and lives to maximize the pleasure he can get out of this life (Is 22.13; Lk 12.19; 1 Cor 15.32).
 - 4.3.6. *Transgenderism*. Believing that a person's gender is not defined by his/her sex. Unbelieving men cannot explain how a male who thinks/feels that he is a female can give birth or a self-declared ‘male’ could supply a Y chromosome.
 - 4.3.7. *Environmentalism*. Believing that environmental concerns—particularly those related to the non-human elements of the created order—are of greater importance than the human right to life. Unbelieving men cannot explain why protecting the life of pre-born eagles (i.e., eagle eggs) is of greater importance—resulting in stiff financial penalties and imprisonment—than protecting the life of unborn humans.⁴⁰
 - 4.3.8. *Welfarism*. Believing that price controls and income redistribution will improve the wellbeing of individuals within a society. Unbelieving men cannot explain how raising the minimum wage will improve the job prospects and income of lower skilled individuals, increase the number of employment opportunities which businesses create, and not increase operating costs. Nor can they explain how providing a guaranteed monthly income will provide incentives for a person to take responsibility for his own well being.
 - 4.4. Although it may not appear to be the case, all of these examples of man's foolishness are the (direct or indirect) result of his rejecting the revealed truth of God in Scripture—and in particular, the truth about the death and resurrection of Jesus. God gives mankind over to believe delusions in other domains of life because they reject the word of God.

⁴⁰ *Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act*; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bald_and_Golden_Eagle_Protection_Act

5. What is the purpose of Paul's rhetorical questions (1 Cor 1.20)?
 - 5.1. To reinforce the truth that even though men think they are smart, they are morons ('fools', from μωρία; 18, 21, 23) if they reject Christ and the message of the cross.
 - 5.1.1. He uses a three-fold repetition of his question, in different forms. This is a rhetorical strategy, and it uses the Hebraic concept of repetition for emphasis and completeness.
 - 5.2. What are the three dimensions of worldly wisdom which Paul dismisses?
 - 5.2.1. The 'wise' – a pagan sage = a university professor, philosopher, or scientist.
 - 5.2.2. The 'scribe' – a religious or legal 'expert' = a Supreme Court judge or liberal theologian.
 - 5.2.3. The 'debater' – an eloquent speaker = a talk show host or politician.
 - 5.3. What is 'this age' of which Paul speaks?
 - 5.3.1. It is the period from man's fall until the renovation of the universe at the return of Christ—the time of the reign of Satan and sin (Jn 12.31; 2 Cor 4.4), until it is replaced with the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3.7-13).
 - 5.3.2. In Ephesians 2.2 Paul uses the two words ('age' and 'world') used here, in one phrase (τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) which is translated as 'the course of this world'.
 - 5.4. What is the expected answer to the first three rhetorical questions?
 - 5.4.1. It is, 'they are not to be found' or 'they never really existed'?
 - 5.4.2. The boasted Greek knowledge (natural science, philosophy, religion, economics, political science) of Paul's age as expressed in various schools of thought (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism) could not explain man's primary purpose for existence or provide a means of reconciling men to God. The wisdom of the world could not bring true light to the prisoners living in shadows in a cave, but only increase their darkness. ~500 years of Athenian and Greek democratic thinking and the rule of law could not change the human heart. ~2,500 years (post flood) of empire building could not provide hope for the paltry lives of men and women. God allowed men to conduct their experiments to answer the 'big' questions, and they failed. Instead, their pride and hubris increased their alienation from God. Thus, Paul says that the times of ignorance have ended, and men must turn to God in repentance (Acts 17.30) and receive and accept the word of the cross (Acts 17.31-32).
 - 5.4.3. The expected answer is that the wisdom of the world is not what it claims to be. Rather, it is foolishness, irrationality, and stupidity.
 - 5.4.4. What does Paul do with his fourth rhetorical question?
 - 5.4.4.1. He supplies the answer to his three rhetorical questions. He indicates that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. (Is 19.11; Is 44.25; Job 12.17).
 - 5.4.5. Horace (65-27 BC), a leading Roman lyric poet during the time of Augustus Caesar, understood that the pagan philosophy was no better than *insaniens sapientia*,⁴¹ 'senseless philosophy',⁴² 'witless wisdom',⁴³ or 'crazy wisdom'.⁴⁴ He was, in this instance, an honest commentator, like Richard Lewontin, an American evolutionary biologist, mathematician, geneticist, and social commentator, who wrote, "Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite* of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation

⁴¹ Horace, *Odes*, Book 1.34

⁴² www.gutenberg.org/files/14020/14020-h/14020-h.htm#THE_FIRST_BOOK_OF_THE_ODES_OF_HORACE

⁴³ www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0025%3Abook%3D1%3Apoem%3D34

⁴⁴ www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceOdesBkI.htm#anchor_Toc39402040

of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”⁴⁵

6. How does God destroy (make foolish) man’s supposed wisdom (1 Cor 1.19, 20d)?
 - 6.1. Paul quotes (verse 19) from Isaiah 29.14. In its context in Isaiah, Judah was warned of the coming siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. However, they did not want to listen to the warning, and God confounded their false hopes and lip service. Nevertheless, he continued to be faithful to his covenant with Abraham and provided salvation—“And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction.” (Is 29.24)
 - 6.2. James described the kind of human wisdom Paul is referring to, as “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (James 3.15).
 - 6.3. God will destroy every form of man-centred wisdom that ignores his plans and providences, in various ways. What are examples of how he will do this? He will:
 - 6.3.1. *Frustrate*: God exposes the logical inconsistencies of mankind’s wisdom so that it becomes clear that he believes falsehoods without any evidence, and in spite of contrary evidence. For example,
 - 6.3.1.1. Many pro-abortionists now admit that a fetus is a pre-born human being from conception, not a lump of protoplasm, and that abortion is the killing of a human being. Their attempts to defend murder and the selling of baby parts have become strident and have lost any semblance of logic.
 - 6.3.1.2. Many scientists, politicians, and university academics claim that we are essentially nothing more than a bag of pond scum. If that is the case, then they are hypocrites if they make a pronouncement on human moral accountability—one does not expect moral behaviour from a bacteria or virus—such as, it being our responsibility to stop the supposed anthropogenic global warming. Why should global warming be an issue if men are just pawns in evolution’s master game of survival?
 - 6.3.2. *Punish*: God sends chaos on society, for example:
 - 6.3.2.1. Political correctness will collapse in absurdity. When schools vote to permit ‘transgender’ males into women’s washrooms, women become concerned for their privacy and safety.
 - 6.3.2.2. Many countries will soon be crushed under a mountain of debt. Governments will no longer be able to give out food stamps and ‘free’ phones and subsidize health care and housing. As a result, we can expect to see riots, destruction of the property of the productive, and imposition of martial law—Venezuela provides a prime current example.
 - 6.4. Paul teaches the Corinthians that the foolish wisdom of his day (e.g., Gnosticism, mystery religions, pantheism, cultural hubris, and moral relativism) had to be expunged from their thinking and their minds transformed (Rom 12.2). It is not possible to live a consistent and relevant Christian life based on the world’s wisdom.
7. Why does God choose to use preaching as his (primary) means of saving sinners (1 Cor 1.21)?
 - 7.1. It is his selected (primary) approach for disseminating the Gospel:
 - 7.1.1. It displays his wisdom in a way which confounds the world.

⁴⁵ Richard C. Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons”, *The New York Review of Books*, 1997-01-09, p. 31; a review of *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, by Carl Sagan; www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1997/jan/09/billions-and-billions-of-demons/

- 7.1.2. It pleases him to save men through what is preached.⁴⁶
- 7.2. What is included in the statement ‘what we preach’?
- 7.2.1. Both the form of communication (preaching) and what is communicated (the word of the cross) are under consideration in Paul’s thinking.
- 7.2.2. Salvation does not come just from knowing facts about God and his redemptive purposes. If knowledge alone could save, then Satan and his demons would be saved (James 2.19). Although God has revealed truth in written form (the Bible)—to preserve his message to mankind accurately—his primary method of reaching the lost with the Gospel is not through literature dissemination (e.g., handing out Bibles or Scripture extracts), it is through preaching.
- 7.2.3. What are other possible means of introducing people to the Gospel?
- 7.2.3.1. Writing articles or books or blogging. However, these reach primarily an already-saved audience.
- 7.2.3.2. Engaging in on-line discussion forums. These rarely convince, since people use them for spouting their, often ill-considered, opinions and ‘pontificating’.
- 7.2.3.3. Engaging in debates, for example on a university campus.
- 7.2.3.4. Offering concerts and music performances or dramatic productions. These primarily entertain, rather than convict people of sin and the need for repentance. Although sometimes a Gospel message is added during or at the end of the production.
- 7.2.3.5. Hosting sports/games nights.
- 7.2.3.6. Movies and novels that relate stories of redemption and faith
- 7.2.3.7. Social ministries (feeding, clothing and housing the poor; counselling the abortion minded: teaching ESL programs). These demonstrate the love of Christ, but on their own do not proclaim the Gospel.
- 7.2.3.8. Personal friendship and interaction. Neighbours and associates can learn that Christians are not whackos or bigots.
- 7.2.4. So, how might these alternatives be applied?
- 7.2.4.1. They may prove to be useful for pre-evangelism and making people more open to listening to preaching (proclamation of the word).
- 7.2.5. What is necessary to turn pre-evangelism into the means of leading someone to salvation through faith in Jesus?
- 7.2.5.1. At some point, the Gospel must be proclaimed in its fullness.
- 7.2.5.2. This does not necessarily mean that it must be proclaimed in a public worship setting. Nor does it necessarily mean that it must be proclaimed by an ordained minister. But the Gospel must be communicated completely, concisely, and clearly.
- 7.2.5.3. In other words, κηρύσσω (verbal announcing, telling, proclaiming, preaching) must take place to bring the Gospel to the minds of the hearers.
- 7.3. What makes preaching pleasing to God?
- 7.3.1. The perceived weakness of the form:
- 7.3.1.1. The world views spoken words as less convincing than other means for achieving ends—for example the ‘sword’. Men say things like, ‘that is just talk’ and view ‘talk’ as a foolish way to accomplish something if there is an alternative such as spending money or through legislative means. Islam, for example, is usually not disseminated by preaching but by force—a person is compelled to say a formula or forfeit his life.
- 7.3.1.2. Preaching relies on the power of the spoken word, rather than in things such as pageantry, ceremony, ritual, visions, miracles, technical demonstrations, or music. Preaching of the cross declares God’s redeeming love and grace without human accoutrements.
- 7.3.1.3. However, spoken words can appeal to the rational faculties of the mind along with

⁴⁶ Refer to previous notes about preaching in the consideration of 1 Cor 1.17.

- the emotional faculties of the heart.
- 7.3.1.4. Hearing spoken words preached, followed by heeding them, is taking God at his word.
- 7.3.2. The perceived weakness of the content:
- 7.3.2.1. The content of the message is focused on Christ and the cross (1 Cor 1.18), which men despise and consider to be folly—a crucified God-man taking sin upon himself is beneath their consideration. Therefore, this pleases God since it deprives men of an opportunity to boast (e.g., in their good works) and makes them dependent on his love and mercy through faith.
- 7.3.2.2. Preaching about a crucified saviour is not a plan that men would have ever conceived—rather they view it as babbling (Acts 17.18). This approach confounds the wisdom of men, who think that they can devise a better approach for leading the lost to salvation. Thus, even the Church attempts to use alternative means in every generation and ends up emulating the world.
- 7.3.3. The perceived weakness of the agents: Preaching also relies on human intermediaries. God could have chosen to directly reveal himself to each person he elected to save (as he did with Paul, who was on his way to Damascus; Acts 9.1-9). However, he chooses to give weak (1 Cor 1.26-27; 2 Cor 12.9-10; 2 Cor 13.4) human creatures a responsible role in bringing the Gospel to the lost and dying.
- 7.4. Who are the ones who are saved through preaching?
- 7.4.1. Those who believe—i.e., they place their trust in, rely on, and embrace Jesus. God does not believe for them but gives them the gift of faith so that they can exercise belief.
- 7.5. How might we explain the apparent contradiction between 1 Cor 1.21 and Romans 1.21?
- 7.5.1. Is there a contradiction between, “the world *did not know* God through wisdom” (1 Cor 1.21) and “although they *knew* God” (Rom 1.21)?
- 7.5.2. Men innately know God—about his existence and demands of obedience, and of their guilt. However, this knowledge is not obtained through their efforts; it is knowledge given directly to them as beings created in the image of God. But their own efforts to find God (Acts 17.27) are not sufficient to reveal the truth of the Gospel and lead them to receive Christ as saviour. Men cannot discover God’s plans for the salvation of mankind by starting with false presuppositions, beliefs, and faulty interpretation of facts (i.e., through worldly wisdom)—but only thorough reception of the preaching of revealed truth. Their innate knowledge is passive and suppressed (Rom 1.18) because their foolish hearts are darkened (Rom 1.21). Reception of the Gospel is activated through the converting power and effectual call of the Holy Spirit and the outer call of the preached word.
8. Why is God’s ‘foolishness’ wiser, and his ‘weakness’ stronger, than man’s (1 Cor 1.25)?
- 8.1. How are we to understand Paul’s statement about God’s capabilities?
- 8.1.1. Paul is not suggesting that God is really foolish or weak. Rather, he is using mild sarcasm or satire and is speaking from a human perspective—men think that God is foolish and weak, and even accuse him of being this way.
- 8.2. What are current examples where men think that God is foolish?
- 8.2.1. They think that limiting salvation to those who believe in the crucified and risen Jesus is too narrow. If they were to create a plan of salvation, it would not be through a substitutionary death on a cross.
- 8.2.2. They reject capital punishment, and thus the necessity for Christ to die to pay the debt of our sins and accuse God of barbaric brutality.
- 8.2.3. They think that God’s restriction on marriage to one man with one woman is intolerant.
- 8.3. What are examples of how men think that God is weak?
- 8.3.1. They think that the God-man exposing himself to the humiliation of crucifixion shows that God couldn’t come up with a better plan for procuring redemption.

- 8.3.2. They claim that God is weak since he seems to be unable to stop evil such as the genocide perpetrated by Islamic terrorists. They ask, “If there is a God, why does he permit evil?” or “If he is good and powerful, why doesn’t he stop evil things from happening?”
- 8.4. Why do men think that God is foolish and weak?
- 8.4.1. Because sinful human nature wants to do ‘great things’ and contribute to its own salvation and destiny: “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”⁴⁷
- 8.5. Why are man’s ways really the foolish and weak ways?
- 8.5.1. All of the ‘great’ reasonings of the ancient (and modern) philosophers could not provide redemption for mankind. Rather they are like spiderwebs swept away before the broom of Gospel truth.
- 8.5.2. Science, polluted by the faulty presuppositions of evolution and of humanistic psychology, cannot provide man with a purpose and meaning or deal with his guilt.
- 8.5.3. Likewise, political programs, laws and harsh enforcement, are useless for changing the stone-cold heart of man.
- 8.5.4. Technological innovations and education do not produce upright citizens.
- 8.5.5. Human wisdom, starting from materialistic naturalism, fails to produce anything of spiritual worth.
- 8.6. In contrast, how does God demonstrate his wisdom and strength through his plan of redemption?
- 8.6.1. Sin was atoned for through the death of Christ (Heb 9.14).
- 8.6.2. The death of death was accomplished through the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15.54; 2 Tim 1.10).
- 8.6.3. People who are dead in their trespasses and sins are made alive and redeemed, and their lives transformed (Eph 2.12-16).
- 8.6.4. Everlasting life is actually made available to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ (2 Tim 4.8).
- 8.7. God’s ways may appear to be foolish and weak, but the results will, in the end, prove otherwise. Man’s way is the path of defeat; God’s way is the path of victory.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 1.18-25)?
- 9.1. *Cultural Presuppositions* – We need to consider the cultural presuppositions of our own day in the light of Paul’s indictment of Greco-Roman culture. The presuppositions of the culture of his day were similar to those of today in the West—cultural hubris, an amalgam of materialistic rationalism and mystical spiritualism, a rejection of supernaturally revealed truth, a claim that there is no need for a saviour, and a disgust with the concept of capital execution (through crucifixion) and the offense of the cross. The heart of man is no different today from what it was in Paul’s day and the same message of the Gospel is needed.
- 9.2. *Confronting Pride* – The supposed wisdom of this world may at times appear intimidating. But God has made it foolish. We do not need to be afraid of the pundits who proclaim political correctness, the scientists who claim that men are merely the product of chance collisions of molecules, or the neo-atheists who declare that there is no need for God and his righteous standards. God has declared their schemes to be vain foolishness. Therefore, we can confront the pride of man’s independent, and anti-God, thinking with the message of the cross, knowing that it will be scoffed at, but that it is the power and wisdom of God for those who are being saved.
- 9.3. *Cross’ Power* – Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Heb 9.22). The reality of the cross—the God-man crucified on behalf of sinners—is the central fact of true religion. The teachings of Jesus are excellent, his life was without fault, his service and miracles were unequalled, and his death was undeserved. But without the cross—his substitutionary atonement and resurrection—Christianity is nothing more than a soap bubble—it appears to be pretty but has no enduring substance—and there is no hope for mankind. The crucifixion is the

⁴⁷ William Ernest Henley, *Invictus*; www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182194

most powerful concept ever conceived and act ever performed. It surpasses every work of man as it provides justification for men and reconciliation between God and man. We must not be ashamed of the cross. Rather we must hold to its truth firmly.

- 9.4. *Crucifixion Preached* – The message (word) of the cross must be preached. There can be no Gospel unless the cross is preached. Preaching of the cross challenges, confounds, and cancels human wisdom. The preaching of the cross has a multifold effect: it exposes sin, it shames sinners, it awakens the conscience, it gives life to the spiritually dead, it enlightens minds, and it provides power to persevere. Therefore, the message of the cross must be preached plainly, publicly, powerfully, and perpetually.
- 9.5. *Correct Practice* – The Church must not conform to the world. Paul dismisses the intellectual approach of the world as folly. Therefore:
 - 9.5.1. The Church must not absorb the humanistic teachings of worldly philosophy, psychology, science, history, or ethics. Rather it must stand apart on the foundation of the Bible (the whole Bible!; 2 Tim 3.16-17) as the standard for all truth and knowledge. In whatever areas the Bible speaks (statements about creation, historical events, human psychology, moral requirements, etc.) it is *the* standard against which all else is to be judged and interpreted.
 - 9.5.2. The message of the cross must not be diluted to accommodate the prejudices of the world—for example, through syncretistic accommodation of false religions, since there are not multiple ways to God (Gal 1.8).
 - 9.5.3. Similarly, the doctrine of the Church must not be diluted to accommodate the ‘politically correct’ thinking of the world—for example, the acceptance of same-sex ‘marriage’ or the ordination of practicing homosexuals.
 - 9.5.4. The Church must not adopt the methods of the world not explicitly endorsed by direct Scriptural warrant or example—such as, from the communication, entertainment, or marketing industries.

Prideless Calling (1 Cor 1.26-31)

1. What are the standards by which the world judges value?
 - 1.1. In the Greco-Roman world, in Paul’s day, the value or merit of a person was judged by: worldly standards (Gk: σάρκα, ‘flesh’) of wisdom and morality, political power, and being ‘well-born’ (from a good family).
 - 1.1.1. Social standing and influence were considered to be more important than ‘raw’ wealth.
 - 1.1.2. Paul uses ‘flesh’ to refer to a human being (1 Cor 1.28), a clan or ethnic group of people (1 Cor 10.18), a genealogical line (Rom 1.3; Rom 4.1), a human body (1 Cor 5.5; Rom 2.28), and the sinful nature (Rom 6.19; Rom 7.18).
 - 1.2. What would be equivalent measures of worldly value or merit today?
 - 1.2.1. Philosophers, scientists, and university professors are not venerated as they once were. So, in the knowledge domain, North Americans consider a silver-tongued pundit (one who is clever with words and has a sharp wit) as a person of intrinsic worth. Examples include TV and radio talk show hosts, and some newscasters and actors. Smooth talk is equated with wisdom.
 - 1.2.2. Political power is still important in our society. It is often assumed that a person who can become a president or prime minister must be smart or be endowed with special gifts. The fact that many politicians are dishonest schemers is generally ignored by the populace at election time.
 - 1.2.3. Nobel birth is not venerated by North Americans as it was in the rest of the world for thousands of years. Since the age of revolution (English, American, French, Russian), we have this notion that inherited titles generally do not endow a person with merit. Although people today are impressed if someone receives an ‘earned’ knighthood—e.g., Sir Elton John. In our culture, a ‘self-made’ billionaire (e.g., Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, Donald Trump, Elon Musk) is generally considered to be more important than a princeling of some

- legacy monarchy. Wealth, and particularly inherited wealth, is a surrogate for nobility.
- 1.2.4. Other measures of worldly value today include: champions for ‘social justice’ such as those who defend liberal-defined ‘rights’ such as same-sex ‘marriage’, gender equality, and access to abortion; environmentalists who protect animal habitats with religious zeal; and purveyors of ‘tolerance’ who claim that all religions (except, of course, Biblical Christianity) are to be given respect.
2. According to Paul, what was the socio-economic background of many in the Corinthian church?
- 2.1. Most of them did not come from backgrounds of worldly status. They did not have value or merit in the world’s eyes.
- 2.2. It has been noted by historians that most of the converts to Christianity were from the lower classes of Roman society (including slaves; 1 Cor 7.21), during the first couple of centuries after the death and resurrection of Christ. There were some who may have been viewed by the world as being wise, powerful, or of noble birth (e.g., Crispus, Sosthenes, Gaius and Erastus among the Corinthians; and Theophilus [Lk 1.3] and those of Caesar’s household [Phil 4:22]) but they were the exception. Jesus’ teaching appealed to the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ (Mt 11.19), not to the ‘intelligentsia’ (Jn 7.48) who looked down on the first apostles as ‘uneducated, common men’ (Acts 4.13). Likewise, leading Romans appear to have despised Christians. For example, Celsus (c 180 AD) is reported by Origen to have asserted, “We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character, not venturing to utter a word in the presence of their elders and wiser masters; but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey them; that the former are foolish and stupid, and neither know nor can perform anything that is really good, being preoccupied with empty trifles; that *they* alone know how men ought to live, and that, if the children obey them, they will both be happy themselves, and will make their home happy also.”⁴⁸
- 2.3. And, the worldly wise continue to consider Christians (specifically, or as members of the ‘religious’ class) as ignorant buffoons. A few examples include the following:
- 2.3.1. “In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point.” - Friedrich Nietzsche⁴⁹
- 2.3.2. “All thinking men are atheists.” - Ernest Hemingway⁵⁰
- 2.3.3. “Religion is the most malevolent of all mind viruses.” - Arthur C. Clarke⁵¹
- 2.3.4. “If you believe that the earth is 6,000 years old, then it’s pretty clear that you are incapable of understanding facts and arguing anything with you would be like arguing with someone who still believes in Santa Claus.” Jawillie⁵²
- 2.3.5. “God is a concept by which we measure our pain.” - John Lennon⁵³
- 2.3.6. “Religions vary in their degree of idiocy, but I reject them all. For most people, religion is nothing more than a substitute for a malfunctioning brain.” - Gene Roddenberry⁵⁴
- 2.3.7. “History does not record anywhere at any time a religion that has any rational basis. Religion is a crutch for people not strong enough to stand up to the unknown without help.

⁴⁸ Origen, “Origen against Celsus”, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), F. Crombie (Trans.), *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Vol. 4, p. 486), (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885).

⁴⁹ www.quotationspage.com/quote/33959.html

⁵⁰ hollowverse.com/ernest-hemingway

⁵¹ www.avclub.com/article/arthur-c-clarke-13855

⁵² www.dailykos.com/story/2014/05/09/1297780/-The-Earth-IS-NOT-6-000-Years-Old-and-I-really-shouldn-t-have-to-tell-you-this#

⁵³ www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=1108

⁵⁴ en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Gene_Roddenberry

But like dandruff, most people do have a religion and spend time and money on it and seem to derive considerable pleasure from fiddling with it.” - Robert Heinlein⁵⁵

- 2.4. After the first wave of Mediterranean evangelism, Christians who applied diligence in business and avoided sloth, debauchery, and licentiousness would have increased their status and standing in society. Likewise, reliable Christians would have been asked to fill responsible positions of authority in government offices. Thus, as the numbers of Christians began to increase in the Roman Empire, and as churches included second-generation and third-generation Christians, a larger percentage of the Christians would have been from backgrounds which the world views as meritorious. So, Paul’s comment is more directly applicable to the situation of early congregations, than to congregations in the 4th century through the mid-20th century in the West. However, today, it is still the case that many new converts are not from backgrounds that are considered of value by the world.
- 2.5. Why does Paul point out the worldly inferiority of the Corinthians’ background?
 - 2.5.1. To reinforce the truth that all believers are one in Christ (Gal 3.28).
 - 2.5.2. To remind them that no believer is to elevate himself over another (Rom 12.10; Phil 2.3).
 - 2.5.3. To have them acknowledge that all that they have, has been given to them as a gift from God (James 1.17).
 - 2.5.4. To teach them that there is no room for boasting over worldly assets or attainments (1 Cor 1.29).
3. Why does God not call many of those who have assets or attainments which the world values?
 - 3.1. God doesn’t call many, or the majority, of *any* class of people; so, his discrimination is not related to what the world considers of value. Few are called inwardly (effectually chosen), although many more are called outwardly (Mt 22.14).
 - 3.2. How many people does God call to saving faith?
 - 3.2.1. Prior to the flood, very few believed, and mankind was wiped out. Millions and possibly as many as a billion people could have been destroyed, with only the few in the line of Seth saved.
 - 3.2.2. From the time of the flood until the time of Christ, only a portion of the Jews were true believers and a very small number of Gentiles. During that ~2,300-year period another ~10 billion were lost to hell.
 - 3.2.3. From the time of Christ to the start of the 21st century, the total number of people who had lived, or are alive, is around 60 billion.⁵⁶ Likely, at most, 10% of these would have been, or are, truly saved (today about 30% of the world’s population identifies itself as being Christian).
 - 3.2.4. We can estimate that roughly 70 billion people have lived since the time of Adam’s sin and about 6 billion of those have been saved.
 - 3.3. Why doesn’t God save most of mankind and only condemn the really evil to hell?
 - 3.3.1. Our concept of ‘really evil’ is of one who commits serial murders, runs a drug cartel, or leads a grossly debauched life.
 - 3.3.2. God’s definition of ‘really evil’ includes those who proudly reject his righteous demands and the Gospel message (Prov 16.5; Prov 18.12). Sin is ultimately a matter of the heart and not just of the outer actions (Mt 5.21-48).
 - 3.3.3. The reason God doesn’t save the majority of mankind is because they are guilty of pride, suppressing truth, and worshiping the creature (Rom 1.18-21). Man’s pride drives him to reject God and his message of salvation through Christ.
4. Why does God choose to call people into his Church from different kinds of backgrounds; including

⁵⁵ en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Robert_A._Heinlein again

⁵⁶ www.reddit.com/r/theydidthemath/comments/284g28/how_many_human_beings_have_lived_since_0_ad_and/

people from categories despised by others (1 Cor 1.27-29)?

4.1. To shame the wise and strong. How does God shame them?

4.1.1. By saving the ‘foolish; and ‘weak’ he shows the ‘wise’ and the ‘strong’ that their worldly brilliance and attainments cannot solve the problem of sin or provide reconciliation with God. Education and social programs (e.g., housing, welfare, medical) cannot make mankind whole, but conversion can turn a drug addict (e.g., My Pillow founder Mike Lindell⁵⁷) into a dedicated and productive citizen, a prostitute into an evangelist (e.g., Annie Lobert who runs Hookers for Christ⁵⁸), a lesbian into a joyful wife of a pastor and mother (e.g., Rosaria Butterfield), a serial murderer into a preacher (e.g., David Berkowitz⁵⁹), and an abortionist into a speaker for Christ and defender of life (e.g., Dr. Haywood Robinson⁶⁰).

4.1.2. He overthrows mankind’s established systems of social stratification (e.g., around ethnic group, caste, ancestry, language [a division introduced because of men built the idolatrous tower of Babel], income, or accomplishments) and creates a new and diverse community made up of all mankind—the Church. A powerful counter-culture statement that the Christian Church can make to the world is through its inclusiveness—a phenotypical, culturally, linguistically, or socially divided Church is not what God intended for the Church. Prejudices aren’t solved by movements and protests such as ‘Black Lives Matter’ (which only emphasizes differences) but by Christians living the truth that *all* lives matter—all people are all children of Adam/Noah (Acts 17.26), all need the same saviour, and all believers are brothers and sisters of Jesus.

4.2. To bring things that the world thinks as special (‘things that are’), to nothing.

4.2.1. This means to make or declare them worthless. The Greek word (καταργήση) translated ‘nothing’ is a compound word which means to completely inactivate or abolish.

4.2.2. Paul is restating his point that God puts to shame the world’s systems, which are hostile to God and to mankind’s everlasting welfare. He may also be including the abrogation of the forms of the old covenant ceremonial system such as animal sacrifices (Heb 9.9; Heb 10.4),

4.3. To magnify his own glory. God’s power and gifts are magnified by his choice of weak instruments (clay vessels) for proclaiming the Gospel and filling heaven. The increase of the Church through the centuries declares to the world that:

4.3.1. Christ’s mediation on the cross was a success.

4.3.2. Salvation is not due to human skill and attainments but to the loving grace of God.

4.3.3. Nothing, not even the gates of hell, will ever be able to conquer Christ’s Church (Mt 16.18).

4.4. To nullify human boasting.

4.4.1. Since God’s election of an individual to salvation is not conditional on any worldly value or merit, wisdom or strength, or action or accomplishment of that person, there can be no room for boasting (Eph 2.8-9). And, since God saves individuals from every strata of mankind, and does not differentiate between people based on worldly standards, there can be no grounds for boasting.

4.4.2. The word for *boast* in verse 1 Cor 1.29 must be interpreted within its context. Paul uses it here in a bad sense (i.e., based on human pride). However, in 1 Cor 1.31, where he quotes from an OT passage, he uses it in a good sense (i.e., praising God).

4.5. What are Biblical examples of God saving the ‘foolish’ or ‘weak’, or using them as his instruments for saving others?

4.5.1. Joseph was sold into slavery but saved his family from starvation (Gen 37.23-23; Gen

⁵⁷ salvationarmynorth.org/2015/12/my-pillow-founder-opens-up-about-addiction/

⁵⁸ Lauren Leigh Noske, “Former Prostitute Annie Lobert Reveals the Truth about ‘Fifty Shades of Grey,’ How Christ Redeemed Her Past”, *Gospel Herald*, 2015-03-05; www.gospelherald.com/articles/54619/20150305/former-prostitute-reveals-the-truth-about-fifty-shades-of-grey-how-christ-redeemed-her-past.htm

⁵⁹ Mark Ellis, ‘Son of Sam’ satanic serial killer became ‘Son of Hope’, 2015-09-10; blog.godreports.com/2015/09/satanic-son-of-sam-serial-killer-became-son-of-hope

⁶⁰ www.ambassadorspeakers.com/speakers/unique/dr.-haywood-robinson

- 41.41-43).
- 4.5.2. A band of 300 men defeated a much larger army (Judges 7.7, 19, 23).
- 4.5.3. The youngest in a family was anointed king (1 Sam 16.12, 13).
- 4.5.4. A small stone was used to kill a giant and encourage a nation (1 Sam 17.40, 45-51).
- 4.5.5. A dip in the Jordan river cleansed an enemy of God of his leprosy and led him to faith (2 Ki 5.8-19).
- 4.5.6. A boy's lunch of five loaves and two fishes was used to feed a hungry multitude so that they could hear great preaching (Mt 14.15-21).
- 4.5.7. The cross, a symbol of disgrace and an instrument of torture, became a symbol of grace and an instrument of salvation (1 Cor 1.17-18; Gal 5.11).
5. What is the position or status of Christians (1 Cor 1.30)?
- 5.1. They are 'in Christ Jesus'. What does being in Christ encompass? It means being:
- 5.1.1. Raised from spiritual death to spiritual life (1 Pt 1.3).
- 5.1.2. Restored to fellowship with God (1 Cor 1.9; 2 Cor 13.14).
- 5.1.3. Provided with hope (Rom 15.13) and a new purpose in life (1 Thess 1.9; Heb 9.14).
- 5.1.4. Renewed in mind and thinking (Rom 12.2; Eph 4.23).
- 5.1.5. Part of a new family—the Church (Eph 2.19; Heb 12.22).
- 5.1.6. Made heirs to everlasting blessings (Rom 8.17).
- 5.2. How does Paul enumerate the blessings which flow from being in Christ?
- 5.2.1. The result of being in Christ is that Christ becomes for us (his people) the provider of the blessings of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.
- 5.2.2. Paul uses terms which demonstrate how being in Christ reverses man's four-fold condition in sin so that he becomes truly:
- 5.2.2.1. *Rational*. Once steeped in foolishness unable to think rationally (Ps 14.1; Rom 1.18, 21, 22); but now renewed in wisdom of the mind (Eph 4.23).
- 5.2.2.2. *Righteous*. Once judicially guilty and condemned to death (Gen 2.17); but now declared righteous (sinless) in Christ (Rom 3.24; Rom 5.1).
- 5.2.2.3. *Religious*. Once delivered over to worshiping idols (Acts 17.22-23; Rom 1.23); but now able to honour the Creator through acts of worship and holy lives (Rom 12.1; 1 Thess 1.9).
- 5.2.2.4. *Redeemed*. Once bound in slavery to sin and Satan (Jn 8.34; Rom 6.16, 19); but now set free through the redemption purchased by Christ (Jn 8.36; Rom 6.17-19).
- 5.3. *Wisdom*. What is the wisdom which Christ provides?
- 5.3.1. It is the highest form of the applied knowledge of God, which is comprised of knowing:
- 5.3.1.1. About the existence of God (through innate revelation; Rom 1.19)
- 5.3.1.2. About God's particular attributes (through special revelation), as illustrated in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism's* answer to Question 4 ("What is God?"): "God is a Spirit,⁶¹ infinite,⁶² eternal,⁶³ and unchangeable,⁶⁴ in his being,⁶⁵ wisdom,⁶⁶ power,⁶⁷

⁶¹ Dt 4.15-19; Lk 24.39. Jn 1.18; Jn 4.24; Acts 17.29.

⁶² 1 Ki 8.27; Ps 139.7-10; Ps 145.3; Jer 23.24; Rom 11.33-36.

⁶³ Dt 33.27; Ps 90.2; Ps 102.12, 24-27; Rev 1.4, 8.

⁶⁴ Ps 33.11; Mal 3.6; Heb 1.12; Heb 6.17-18; Heb 13.8; James 1.17.

⁶⁵ Ex 3.14; Ps 115.2-3; 1 Tim 1.17; 1 Tim 6.15-16.

⁶⁶ Ps 104.24; Rom 11.33-34; Heb 4.13; 1 Jn 3.20.

⁶⁷ Gen 17.1; Ps 62.11; Jer 32.17; Mt 19.26; Rev 1.8.

- holiness,⁶⁸ justice,⁶⁹ goodness,⁷⁰ and truth.⁷¹
- 5.3.1.3. About God's plan for redeeming mankind (through special revelation; 2 Tim 3.15),
 - 5.3.1.4. Him as a personal friend (James 2.23).
 - 5.3.2. It recognizes Jesus as the embodiment of God's truth (Jn 14.6; Col 1.9; Col 2.3) and the fulfillment of the OT wisdom writings (Prov 8.1-36).
 - 5.3.3. It includes a renewal of the mind so that a person is able to think rationally about subjects beyond theology. The world would contend that a Christian who accepts the Bible as the word of God is ignorant and deluded by superstition. In fact, the reality is quite different.
 - 5.3.3.1. An unbeliever who rejects the Bible as the word of God is irrational—he lives as if there are standards for truth but rejects the very standard which makes rational thought possible. It is the height of irrationality to claim that truth is relative (even a statement such as 'all truth is relative' is self-refuting).
 - 5.3.3.2. Accepting the revelation of God in the Bible as absolutely true enlarges our knowledge about history (e.g., man's origin), anthropology, psychology, ethics, child rearing, economics, political science, and even subjects such as geology and paleontology (e.g., the flood explains the formation of fossils and fossil fuels and Neanderthals were post-flood humans descended from Noah).
 - 5.3.3.3. God isn't the God of *some* truth (e.g., how to be saved but not how the solar system works), he is the God of *all* truth.
 - 5.4. *Righteousness*. What is the righteousness which Christ provides?
 - 5.4.1. Being assigned Christ's righteousness through faith (2 Cor 5.21).
 - 5.4.2. Being declared sinless—positionally, but not practically in this life; but both positionally and practically in the next life (Rom 4.3).
 - 5.4.3. Cancellation of all outstanding debts of sin owed to God (Col 2.14).
 - 5.4.4. Removal of the guilt and record of sin (Ps 103.12). There is no sin registry (like a sex-offenders' registry or violent crimes registry) for those who are in Christ.
 - 5.4.5. Reinstatement of forfeited rights (e.g., dominion and inheritance rights) (Gal 3.29).
 - 5.4.6. The basis against which we will be judged (Acts 17.31).
 - 5.4.7. Our everlasting reward (2 Tim 4.8).
 - 5.5. *Sanctification*. What is the sanctification which Christ provides?
 - 5.5.1. In the NT 'sanctification' is used in two primary senses: 1) the instantaneous declaration of person's being holy (set apart) to God (1 Cor 6.11), and 2) the progressive, life-long, purification of a believer as he mortifies sin by daily repentance and living to glorify God.
 - 5.5.2. In this instance, Paul appears to be using the word to refer to the one-time act of being set apart to God, rather than the ongoing cleansing of a believer's life.
 - 5.6. *Redemption*. What is the redemption which Christ provides?
 - 5.6.1. What is redemption?
 - 5.6.1.1. It is to make a payment, particularly of a debt. For example, if someone borrowed money from a pawn shop, using his diving watch as collateral, and then repaid the money he would redeem his watch.
 - 5.6.1.2. In the Bible, the concept of redemption is applied to property (Lev 25.23-34) and animals (Lev 27.9-13). It is also used to refer to a person being purchased and set free out of slavery by payment of a price (Lev 25.47-55).
 - 5.6.1.3. Associated with the term 'redemption' is the person doing the redemption by paying the price—the redeemer, for example a kinsman redeemer (Ruth 4.1-6).
 - 5.6.1.4. God is referred to as the person redeeming his people (Ex 6.6; Ex 15.13; Job 19.25; Ps

⁶⁸ Heb 1.13; 1 Pt 1.15-16; 1 Jn 3.3, 5; Rev 15.4.

⁶⁹ Gen 18.25; Ex 34.6-7; Dt 32.4; Ps 96.13; Rom 3.5, 26.

⁷⁰ Ps 103.5; Ps 107.8; Mt 19.7; Rom 2.4.

⁷¹ Ex 34.6; Dt 32.4; Ps 86.15; Ps 117.2; Heb 6.18.

19.14; Ps 74.2; Jer 31.11).

5.6.1.5. Biblical redemption can have both physical (i.e., redeeming out of slavery) and spiritual (i.e., redeeming out of sin; Ps 49.7, 8, 15; Ps 130.7-8) aspects.

5.6.2. What is meant by the redemption Paul mentions here? It is the payment of the debt of sin owed to God by Jesus (our kinsman redeemer) through his death on the cross, which has set us free from slavery to sin (Jn 8.34) and everlasting death (1 Cor 6.20; 1 Cor 7.23; Mt 20.28; Gal 3.13; Gal 4.5; 1 Tim 2.6; Titus 2.14; 1 Pt 1.18-19).

5.6.3. There is also a future aspect associated with redemption (Eph 4.30). It includes the restoration of the physical universe, including our bodies (Rom 8.22-23; 2 Pt 3.13; 1 Jn 3.2). Thus, man, in respect to his entire being, is delivered from slavery and decay into the “freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8.21).

5.7. These four blessings associated with being in Christ should be considered as a set which cannot be separated. For example, one cannot be declared righteous without being endowed with spiritual wisdom and being made holy (sanctified). Each believer in Christ, has all four blessings in abundance; not fewer, and not by a limited measure. Christ himself does not barely have each attribute of wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification/holiness. So, when a believer is redeemed by Christ and is situationally in Christ, he is heir to each blessing to the fullest extent possible—although not fully realized until his redemption is completed on the last day. Our being in Christ, and the blessings which flow from it, begins with our redemption and is completed when our redemption is fully accomplished with the renovation of the created order.

6. Why is the Christian’s position, “in Christ”?

6.1. What is the most common verb found in 1 Cor 1.27-28? The most common verb, other than ‘is’/‘are’, is ‘chose’, which occurs three times.

6.2. The calling (1 Cor 1.26) which they were directed to consider, was based on their *being in Christ*, which was founded upon God’s choosing them. Their being called into salvation in Christ was based entirely on God’s sovereign will and choice—“because of him” (1 Cor 1.30)—independent of any human desire, will, or action. God’s free choice is emphasized by Paul, since a dead person—dead in sin—cannot chose to do anything, let alone save himself. There are three aspects of this call:

6.2.1. *Electing* call from God—based on the foreknowledge and predestinating love of God.

6.2.2. *Expansive* call from God—the call of the Gospel through the preached and written word that many hear (Mt 22.14).

6.2.3. *Effectual* call from God—the personal call of the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the unbeliever to lead him to faith and repentance.

6.3. God’s method of salvation is wonderful. It is not based on works which cannot be performed by (spiritually) dead people, on a ritual of burning parts of dead animals, or on a system of dead doctrine. Rather it is based on a living person who has conquered death by his resurrection.

7. In whom are we to boast? Why?

7.1. Boasting in one’s own abilities or accomplishments is sinful (1 Cor 1.29) as it is based on pride and ignores the reality that all that we have which is good is a gift from God (1 Cor 4.7; James 1.17). However, boasting in God is a good thing (1 Cor 1.31).

7.2. What does it mean to “boast in the Lord”?

7.2.1. Acknowledging that there is nothing good in anything or anyone, except what God has placed in it/him.

7.2.2. Thanking God for the goodness he has bestowed upon us—temporal blessings, redemption, and everlasting blessings in a restored paradise.

7.2.3. Praising God’s person and works through acts of worship (e.g., singing Psalms or praying).

7.3. What does the fact that we are to boast in the Lord indicate about Jesus?

7.3.1. Worship is to be rendered to God alone (Mt 4.10; Rev 22.8-9). Therefore, we are not to

worship creatures (Rom 1.25). Since Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12.3; Rom 10.9; Phil 2.11) and is to be worshiped (Phil 2.9-11), he must be God.

7.4. What does Paul's statement "as it is written" tell us?

7.4.1. The OT is the authoritative word of God. The expression 'as it is written' as it appears in the English Bible (ESV) always refers to a scriptural passage—the law, book of the covenant, or a prophetic, didactic, or praise writings.

7.4.2. Paul relies on the OT (derived from Jer 9.23-24) as his source of authority for directing the NT Church congregation in Corinth. As he states elsewhere, the OT is relevant for directing the life on the NT Church (2 Tim 3.15-17).

8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 1.26-31)?

8.1. *God's Goodness Defined* – God informs us through the prophet Isaiah that his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55.8). What impresses and pleases men, is not what God honours. In fact, what men call 'good', is often called 'evil' by God (Is 5.20). Evil men establish the merit or worth of a person by his power, possessions, or paternity. God dismisses these measures as foolish—a rich man still has to put on his pants one leg at a time and his wealth does not make him a better person. We need to avoid the temptation to fall under the spell of the world's standards and instead live by God's standards. What is good in God's eyes is to "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6.8).

8.2. *God's Grace Displayed* – Since men are destitute of any innate goodness—we are by nature ignorant, polluted, guilty, and enslaved—our calling is not determined by our personal 'merits' or our own 'power'. God does not save us because of our works but because of his grace (Eph 2.8-9). His grace is dispensed on the basis of his free and sovereign election—we are saved because of his will and choice. Therefore, there is no room for personal boasting about our attainments or accomplishments.

8.3. *God's Glory Declared* – However, as Paul states, we are to boast in the Lord. Jesus is the author of life (temporal [Col 1.16] and everlasting [Jn 3.16]) and the provider of all blessings. Therefore, we are to glorify God through our lives and praise; "for from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11.36).

8.4. *God's Gifts Delivered* – Since all good comes through God (James 1.17), he is the source of all blessings. We are made full in him (Col 2.10) and receive from him true wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. There is no other way that these can be delivered to mankind because "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4.12).

Proclaiming Christ (1 Cor 2.1-5)

1. What does Paul call the recipients of this letter?

1.1. Brothers—a collective term of endearment. He uses this term over 25 times in this letter. It first occurs in 1 Corinthians 1.10.

1.2. Why does Paul use this term when he writes to the churches, and in particular to the Corinthians?
1.2.1. He views them as Christians—he had previously called them saints (1 Cor 1.2)—and thus part of God's family who have been saved by grace.

1.2.2. He wishes to remind them of their familial affiliation (through salvation) in one Father and that they should display love for the other members of their spiritual family.

1.2.3. He displays true humility—even though he is an apostle and has to argue this later (1 Cor 9.1, 2)—and treats them as peers, not in a master-slave or teacher-student relationship. Paul understood clearly that he had been saved by grace and that there was nothing in him that was worthy of salvation. Thus, before God, he viewed all believers as equals.

1.3. Why does Paul say, 'and I'?

1.3.1. He extends his previous thought to include himself as a humble recipient of God's grace. The wisdom and righteousness that he has is because he is in Christ, so he cannot boast.

- 1.3.2. He informs them that as a spiritual brother to them, he is in the same situation as they are—entirely dependent on God’s grace for salvation.
 - 1.3.3. He will go on to emphasize his humble position through his preaching (1 Cor 2.1-3).
 - 1.4. Why does he say, ‘when I came to you’?
 - 1.4.1. He emphasizes their dependence on God’s grace. Before he went to Corinth the people, who would become believers and members of the Church, had had no thought about approaching God and seeking salvation. The Gospel was not found in the wisdom or fine speeches of the Greco-Roman philosophers.
 - 1.4.2. He also reminds them that the Gospel had to be carried to them by him, under God’s direction, otherwise they would never have heard the truth and believed.
2. What does Paul say that he did *not* do?
 - 2.1. He did not use “lofty speech or wisdom” (1 Cor 2.1) or “plausible words of wisdom” (1 Cor 2.4). It was neither as a rhetorician nor as a philosopher that he came to them to proclaim the Gospel, but as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.
 - 2.2. What does he mean by “lofty speech or wisdom”?
 - 2.2.1. He did use finely structured oratorical presentations or subtle or complex arguments.
 - 2.2.2. He did not seek praise or prestige for himself for his oratorical skills but sought to direct his hearers to Jesus.
 - 2.2.3. His approach was to present the Gospel simply, in plain words, boldly, with an unaffected style, so that even the least educated among them would hear, understand, and believe.
 - 2.3. What does he mean by “plausible words of wisdom”?
 - 2.3.1. The KJV, following Tyndale, used ‘enticing’ instead of plausible. The NKJV, NASB, and NIV all have ‘persuasive’.
 - 2.3.2. ‘Plausible’ means an argument or statement that seems reasonable. However, there is a subtlety to ‘plausibility’. For example, we speak of ‘a plausible liar’ and ‘plausible deniability’. Thus, a plausible person is one who is skilled at producing persuasive arguments with the intent to deceive.
 - 2.3.3. The ESV has, correctly, extended the idea of ‘persuasive’ in the other modern translations and included a negative connotation. Persuasive arguments and ‘words of wisdom’ could be good, but ‘plausible words of wisdom’ are to be understood as being deceptive arguments covered by eloquence.
 - 2.4. Does this mean that Paul implies that he was sloppy in his use of language?
 - 2.4.1. Far from it! Paul was a master at constructing positively persuasive arguments. He also was an eloquent speaker (despite what some of his hearers might have said (2 Cor 10.10)) as evidenced by the fact that the people of Lystra referred to him as Hermes, the Greek god—spokesman of the gods and patron of orators and composers of literature and poetry (Acts 14.12).
 - 2.4.2. We can note some of his elegant writing: the structure of 1 Corinthians, Romans (in particular Romans 8.1-39), Galatians, and Hebrews. Within 1 Corinthians chapters 13 and 15 stand out as masterful works of persuasive argument. Even in this section (1 Cor 2.1-5) he uses strong stylistic forms such as antithesis—verses 2, 4, and 5 have ‘except’ and ‘but’—and contrast—verse 1 begins with ‘I’ (‘and I’) and ends with ‘God’.
 - 2.4.3. We also see his mastery of rhetoric in the sermon he preached to the Athenian Areopagus (Acts 17.22-31).
 - 2.5. Why does he emphasize this point after previously stating it (1 Cor 1.17)?
 - 2.5.1. To reinforce what he said previously so that his readers cannot miss the point—the message of the Gospel does not come from, or with, the wisdom of men; but from God and with God’s words.
3. What is the testimony of God?

- 3.1. Paul uses ‘testimony’ (1 Cor 2.1), as he did earlier (1 Cor 1.6). He is speaking of the witness about Christ—i.e., the Gospel.
 - 3.2. The Greek words for ‘testimony’ (μαρτυρίον) and ‘mystery’ (μυστήριον) sound quite similar. One way in which manuscripts were copied in the ancient world was that one person would read from the original (or the copy at hand) and the copyists would transcribe what was being read. It appears that sometime in the copying process during the early centuries of the Christian era (sometime before 400 AD) a variation arose in the manuscripts. So, there are a number of old manuscripts supporting each reading. The standard NT Greek text⁷² used for Bible translation provides ‘mystery’ as the reading in the text and ‘testimony’ in the footnote and indicates that the proposed primary reading is ‘almost certain’. However, the ESV (and NIV, NASB, and NKJV) follows the reading of the KJV and Tyndale’s 1536 translation and includes ‘testimony’ in the body of the text and puts ‘mystery’ in the footnote.
 - 3.3. Paul speaks of the mystery (‘hidden’) in 1 Corinthians 2.7 and in other places (Rom 11.25; Eph 1.9; Eph 3.1-13; Eph 5.32; Eph 6.19; Col 1.26-27; Col 2.2; Col 4.3; 1 Tim 3.9, 16) much more frequently than ‘testimony’. When he speaks of the mystery of God, it is in reference to what God has done in saving mankind through the God-man Jesus Christ and uniting Jews and Gentiles in salvation. He uses ‘mystery’ as a synonym for ‘gospel’.
 - 3.4. One argument in favour of ‘testimony’ as the preferred reading, is that it would seem to be less likely that a scribe would mistakenly substitute the less common word in the Pauline corpus for the more commonly used word. It would probably require the work of a doctoral thesis to determine the correct reading, if it would even be possible at this time to make a definitive decision.
 - 3.5. Regardless, if Paul was thinking of his statement in 1 Cor 1.6 (‘testimony’), which refers to the Gospel, or of his more common concept of ‘mystery’, which he also uses to refer to the Gospel, then in either case Paul is speaking in this verse of the Gospel of God—i.e., the good news that God has graciously provided a means of salvation for all mankind (Jew and Gentile) through Jesus Christ.
4. What was Paul determined only to know?
 - 4.1. Jesus Christ and him crucified
 - 4.1.1. Paul’s theology is focused on the deity of Jesus Christ and his death as a sacrifice for sin, and on his resurrection which defeated death. Although Paul would have known the details of Jesus’ life (e.g., from the apostles—especially Matthew, Peter/Mark and John—in Jerusalem and from Luke, who travelled with him), he rarely mentions any aspect of the life of Jesus before his death and resurrection. His reference to the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11.23-25) is one of the rare exceptions. Paul took it as a given that Jesus is God and that he had demonstrated his claim to divinity during his life on earth, through his teaching and miracles. He thus focuses his teaching on the implications of Jesus’ historical crucifixion and resurrection, which demonstrates:
 - 4.1.1.1. God’s righteousness and hatred of sin, and for the need to provide substitutionary atonement.
 - 4.1.1.2. Man’s condemnation as a sinner in need of Divine intervention.
 - 4.1.1.3. The highest revelation of Divine love and mercy—through the death of the Son of God.
 - 4.1.1.4. The fulfillment of God’s promises in the OT—through the prophetic voice of the final prophet, Jesus, and his once-for-all definitive sacrifice.
 - 4.1.1.5. The provision of pardon, justification, sanctification, and redemption for lost mankind through repentance and faith.

⁷² E. Nestle, E. Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, & B. M. Metzger. *The Greek New Testament* (27th ed.), (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

- 4.1.1.6. The only means of providing true hope through resurrection to everlasting life.
- 4.1.2. This is the substance of the Gospel and is to be the primary focus of preaching. Thus, preaching should not be focused on Jesus as a moral teacher or life exemplar, or on appeals for personal or societal improvement.
- 4.2. Does that mean that Paul taught nothing other than about the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus?
 - 4.2.1. Clearly not—otherwise we would not have much of the contents of 1 Corinthians. We must not isolate his words from the broader context of his preaching and teaching.
 - 4.2.2. His teaching about Christ includes the implications of Christ's death and resurrection, such as:
 - 4.2.2.1. The obedience required of a redeemed life.
 - 4.2.2.2. The community and fellowship of the redeemed people—i.e., the Church.
 - 4.2.2.3. The true worship of thankful response that follows from reconciliation with God.
 - 4.2.3. Paul also does not dispense with all human knowledge. Clearly, he was familiar with contemporary intellectual thinking (e.g., the teachings of the Epicureans) of his culture and with current events (e.g., the Hellenic games); and he used this knowledge to engage with his audience (e.g., with the Areopagus in Athens; Acts 17.16-34). His example informs us that it is inappropriate for believers to isolate themselves in Christian ghettos and attempt to ignore, and disengage from, the rest of society—as do the strict-order Mennonites and Amish.
- 4.3. What are the fundamental inferences we can draw from Paul's statement?
 - 4.3.1. No human knowledge is of equal importance with the truth of the Gospel as revealed from Genesis 1.1 through Revelation 22.21.
 - 4.3.2. Nothing is more important than the message of the Gospel. Nothing is more important than knowing Jesus Christ personally as Lord and saviour.
 - 4.3.3. A focus on aspects of the life of Christ (e.g., his compassion for the sick or his moral teaching) without considering his death and resurrection are a distortion of the message of the Gospel.
- 5. What does Paul say was characteristic of his approach among them?
 - 5.1. Weakness
 - 5.1.1. Many suggest that the weakness Paul is referring to is physical infirmities (e.g., a problem with his vision or a 'cerebral disturbance') which he heroically overcame to proclaim the Gospel. While he may have had such a problem (2 Cor 12.7) it is mere supposition to conclude that he is speaking of such in this instance. Others suggest that Paul was conscious of being an inadequate speaker and debater in public rhetoric (2 Cor 10.10; 2 Cor 11.6). However, as we noted previously in this section, Paul was a master at constructing persuasive arguments and an eloquent speaker—as evidenced by the fact that the people of Lystra referred to him as Hermes, and by his magnificent speech before the Athenian Areopagus (Acts 17.16-34).
 - 5.1.2. Rather, it is more likely that he is conscious of a personal spiritual, moral, and intellectual insufficiency when facing his work as the apostle to the Gentiles. He knew that he should have been condemned to death for his complicity in the murder of Stephen (Acts 7.58; Acts 8.1; Acts 22.20) but had been saved by grace (Acts 22.21; 1 Tim 1.15-16).
 - 5.2. Fear and trembling
 - 5.2.1. He admitted to the Corinthians that although he may have appeared to be bold when facing anti-Christian foes, he was inwardly facing fears. He had been mistreated in various places (e.g., Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) and was anticipating similar negative treatment when he ministered in Corinth.
 - 5.2.2. Since he was dealing with everlasting life-and-death matters, he felt a heavy burden of responsibility and was apprehensive about what would be the outcome if he failed to

discharge his duty faithfully.

- 5.3. Jesus had to encourage Paul while he was in Corinth (Acts 18.9-10) and before he faced other challenges (Acts 23.11; Acts 27.23). The *great* apostle Paul admitted that he was a sinner (Rom 7.7-24) who could be intimidated by the worldly wise and powerful. This made him conscious of the truth that he could only operate in his role as an evangelist through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 5.4. It was because of, not in spite of, Paul's true humility and dependence on the converting power of the Holy Spirit that he was successful in bringing the Gospel to European Gentiles. He did not come across as the arrogant sophists or as the slick 'health-and-wealth' preachers of televangelism. He presented the Gospel sincerely with a passion for the salvation of those condemned to everlasting death. When we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in Christ (2 Cor 12.10).
6. What typified Paul's speech and message (1 Cor 2.4)?
 - 6.1. It was a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power". What does this mean?
 - 6.2. Paul was determined not to manipulate his hearers with rhetorical finery and elaborate arguments, but to present the plain truth on the understanding that the Holy Spirit would work in the hearts of his audience—converting those who were elected to salvation.
 - 6.3. Paul understood and wholeheartedly believed that if anyone heeded his message and was converted this was not a demonstration of his own powers of persuasion but a demonstration (clear proof) of the Spirit's powerful work within the person's heart (Acts 16.14). Therefore, he deliberately avoided using the rhetorical skills of the sophists so that no one could accuse him of manipulating the Corinthians into receiving Christ.
 - 6.4. Conversion depends on the Holy Spirit and not on the finest of human arguments. This does not excuse the preacher, evangelist, or apologist. Each is to provide a thorough defense of the Gospel and shroud it in prayer. Unless, the Holy Spirit works, preaching will be ineffective, and no one will be brought into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
7. What was Paul's reason for avoiding the techniques of the world (1 Cor 2.5)?
 - 7.1. Paul wanted all the glory and praise to redound to God—he had the same spirit of humility as displayed by John the Baptist (Jn 3.30). His method was God's method.
 - 7.2. He sincerely believed that mankind's only hope was the electing grace of the Father, the completed work of the Son on the cross, and the converting power of the Holy Spirit—the Father plans, the Son procures, and the Holy Spirit applies, salvation. Salvation is 100% God's work.
 - 7.3. A faith that rests on human wisdom is doomed to disappoint. A faith resting on Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is guaranteed to grant everlasting life.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 2.1-5)?
 - 8.1. *Purpose of Preaching* – The purpose of preaching is to proclaim:
 - 8.1.1. The glory of God—his wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
 - 8.1.2. The sin of men and redemption which has been purchased by Christ on the cross for believers.
 - 8.1.3. The peace of conscience, the death of sin, and everlasting life which are the blessings of conversion.
 - 8.2. *Power of Preaching* – The source of the power in preaching is the Holy Spirit, not the skill or gifts of the messenger. The messenger is to display true humility (weakness, fear, and trembling), place Christ at the centre, and watch the Lord work through human weakness to disarm pagan principalities.
 - 8.3. *Plainness of Preaching* – We should present the Gospel in a simple and straightforward manner, believing that God will convert those whom he will save (Rom 1.16; Acts 17.31-32). We do not need to crowd preaching with gimmicks of entertainment, fine rhetoric, complex arguments, or

cultural adaptation, to see it succeed. God will use the simple solid presentation of truth to accomplish his purposes.

Perception Comparison (1 Cor 2.6-16)

1. What is the wisdom of God which the rulers of this age do not understand (1 Cor 2.6-7, 9)?
 - 1.1. “A secret and hidden wisdom of God.” What is this?
 - 1.1.1. It is the plan of God to provide everlasting life to mankind (not Jews alone) through the death of his son, who would take upon himself the sins of his people.
 - 1.1.2. It is the confluence of truth, justice, love, and mercy in one event and one man:
 - 1.1.2.1. The truth that the person who sins against God must die,
 - 1.1.2.2. Justice in punishing sin with death,
 - 1.1.2.3. The display of unmerited love for sinners through the provision of a means of escape from everlasting death, and
 - 1.1.2.4. Mercy in the application of Christ’s vicarious atonement to sinful men.
 - 1.1.3. It is the same as the mystery of Godliness (1 Tim 3.16).
 - 1.1.4. It is the counterpoint to the counterfeit wisdom of man (1 Cor 1.20; 1 Cor 2.6).
 - 1.2. What is “this age” of which Paul speaks (1 Cor 2.6, 8)?
 - 1.2.1. In 1.20 we noted that it is the period from man’s fall through Adam’s sin, until the renovation of the universe at the return of Christ—the time of the reign of Satan and sin, until it is replaced with the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - 1.3. Who are the “rulers of this age”?
 - 1.3.1. There are two possible categories: human authorities or spiritual powers (Eph 6.12).
 - 1.3.2. Some think that Paul is writing from within a superstitious worldview, and that he believed that the present age is under the control of supernatural beings. This is a false view. Paul believed that God, in the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, rules over all the created order—natural and supernatural (Phil 2.9-11; 1 Tim 6.15-16).
 - 1.3.3. Paul is referring specifically to the class of rulers in church and state (Jews and Romans) who crucified Jesus, and generally to any person who sets the popular or political and cultural agenda for this present world—such as, politicians, academics, pundits, scientists, or entertainers.
 - 1.4. What is to become of the rulers of this age and their ‘wisdom’?
 - 1.4.1. Their ‘wisdom’ is doomed to pass away, as they are.
 - 1.4.2. The false psychological, anthropological, political, economic, legal, and scientific theories and beliefs of the ‘rulers’ of this age will pass away, as God shows the foolishness of them. What are some examples of the foolish ‘wisdom’ of this age?
 - 1.4.2.1. The universe is 13.8B years old and the earth 4.5B years old.
 - 1.4.2.2. Evolution of species occurs through a random increase of complex specified information in DNA.
 - 1.4.2.3. The extinction of dinosaurs was caused by a meteor impact or similar cataclysm ~65M years ago.
 - 1.4.2.4. Social programs (welfare, education, health) can be funded through ever-increasing debt.
 - 1.4.2.5. Governments can contribute to economic growth through income redistribution, works programs, or wage and price controls.
 - 1.4.2.6. Religious plurality can exist without suppressing true religion, and Islam is a religion of peace which should be accommodated.
 - 1.4.2.7. Man is innately good, societal pressures cause dysfunctional behaviours, and state-sponsored and controlled education programs can eradicate the problem.
 - 1.4.2.8. Endorsement of homosexual practices, same-sex ‘marriage’, sexual freedoms, and easy divorce will lead to a more moral society.
 - 1.4.2.9. There are multiple genders and people may pick their own; and biological males

- should be allowed to access female change rooms and participate in female sports.
- 1.4.2.10. Legislatures need to increase the number of laws and regulations to protect the population from itself and make individuals more responsible.
- 1.4.2.11. Population growth must be limited, since mankind places a burden on the world's ecosystems and causes species extinction.
- 1.4.2.12. Global warming or the euphemistic 'climate change' (if it is occurring) can be attributed primarily (or even partially) to human activity (i.e., burning fossil fuels).
- 1.4.2.13. Individuals, with government sponsorship, should determine who among the unborn, elderly, terminally ill, and disabled has a right to live.
- 1.4.2.14. Cutting police budgets will reduce the incidence of crime.
- 1.4.2.15. There is no accountability before God for sin and no hell and if there is a god, *she* will overlook mankind's wickedness.
- 1.4.2.16. The Bible is a myth, and of no more value than other religious writings, such as the *Qur'an*.
- 1.4.3. God will continue to show men in this age that their theories and beliefs are futile and will display the ultimate futility of mankind's beliefs as he metes out everlasting punishment and rewards.
- 1.4.4. When we compare the knowledge of reality which we receive from knowing Christ and his word, with the philosophies, theories, and beliefs of wicked men, we see that God's plan for redeeming mankind is as different as day is from night or white is from black.
- 1.5. What did God decree for those who love him?
 - 1.5.1. Salvation of his elect from all nations (not just from the covenant community of the Jews) through his crucified Son. Salvation by crucifixion was unimaginable to those living then and also by those living in our age.
 - 1.5.2. When were these things decreed?
 - 1.5.2.1. "Before the ages"—i.e., in eternity.
 - 1.5.2.2. Paul uses a time-based concept to describe timelessness. He uses this concept a few times elsewhere (1 Cor 2.7; 2 Tim 1.9; Titus 1.2) as an accommodation to our limited ability to understand time and eternity, while knowing that time came into existence with the creation of the material universe (Gen 1.1).
 - 1.5.2.3. Before God created mankind, he had planned their redemption through Christ (Mt 25.34; Jn 17.24; Eph 1.4; 1 Pt 1.20; Rev 13.8). This means that Adam's rebellion was not a surprise to God and that God had planned for the garden of Eden to be a *temporary* abode for mankind. God's plans for mankind are more glorious than anything which we can imagine.
- 1.6. What is it that God has prepared that is unimaginable?
 - 1.6.1. Paradise, a new heavens and earth, in which righteousness will dwell forever (2 Pt 3.13). Paul tells us elsewhere that this paradise is unimaginably magnificent (2 Cor 12.2-4). John describes it (as seen in his vision) as a glorious place of beauty and wonder (Rev 21.1-27).
 - 1.6.2. Resurrected physical spiritual bodies fit for heaven and everlasting life (1 Cor 15.42-49).
- 1.7. What are proximate reasons for why God initially kept this wisdom secret and hidden?
 - 1.7.1. God permitted men, for a time, to attempt to draw near to him through their philosophies, religions, education, and rituals (Acts 17.29-30). But as the dismal failure of man's attempts became clear and each generation continued its headlong plunge into hell, God revealed a redemptive plan that no human person could ever have conceived—an incarnation of the God-man, a humiliation of him through death on the cross, the conquering of death through resurrection, and the vicarious application of his meritorious work to those who believe in him in faith and repent of their sins.
 - 1.7.2. God chose to wait to reveal his plan until he could demonstrate unequivocally that men could not devise a means of reconciliation with him on their own. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgements and how

- inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11.33).
- 1.7.3. God determined that the fullness of the revelation about salvation could not be achieved without the incarnation of the God-man (Heb 1.2). The reason is not that men in the ancient world were too stupid to understand the secret and hidden wisdom of God but that the revelation of it needed to occur within the context of the living Word who dwelt among men and showed them the nature and character of God (Jn 1.14-18; Heb 1.3).
- 1.7.4. Nevertheless, God progressively revealed—from Genesis 3.15 onwards—the message that he would save mankind from every nation by the death of his Son and bring the saved through a death-and-resurrection experience into a new paradise—a restored physical universe.
- 1.7.5. In the fullness of time, after the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, God made known the full extent of the mystery of his plan for the salvation of his people (Rom 16.25; Col 1.26) through the completion of his written word in the NT.
- 1.8. Who are the recipients of the wisdom of God?
- 1.8.1. Those who love God (1 Cor 2.9).
- 1.9. Why did God reveal his secret and hidden wisdom of the plan of salvation?
- 1.9.1. If the secret and hidden wisdom of the plan of salvation is not made known, then no one can benefit from it, and salvation cannot be offered and received by sinners.
- 1.9.2. The message of the Gospel cannot be found in natural revelation or in the special revelation of the law of God. These forms of revelation teach that there is a God and that man is a sinner, and leave him only with a sense that something important is missing in his life. In order for men to be saved God must reveal his plan for reconciling sinners to himself through means of the vicarious atonement offered by the mediator between God and man, the God-man Christ Jesus (Col 1.20). This requires special revelation through the Gospel declaration, the living presence of the Son, and the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit.
- 1.9.3. To restore the image of God in those being saved—“for our glory”—through reconciliation.
- 1.9.4. To bring his elect to glory—these things were revealed “for our glory”—by redeeming them from sin and hell through calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.
2. Who are the mature to whom this wisdom is imparted (1 Cor 2.6)?
- 2.1. What does the use of ‘yet’ (ESV, NASB) or ‘however’ (NIV, NKJV) indicate? Paul is identifying a contrast. In chapter 1 he established a contrast between the ‘wisdom’ of men and the wisdom of God. He now extends the contrast to include the ‘wise’ (the rulers) of this age and believers in Christ to whom the mystery of the Gospel has been revealed—‘us’ in verse 10 includes his Corinthian audience.
- 2.2. So, the ‘mature’ are probably not those who have, necessarily, a well-developed understanding of the Gospel mysteries or have a highly advanced faith, but rather those who have received with simple faith the truth that Jesus is Lord and saviour. They are the same ones who Paul refers to as ‘saved’ (1 Cor 1.18), ‘the called’ (1 Cor 1.2, 9, 24), and ‘saints’ (1 Cor 1.2) in the previous chapter.
- 2.3. Thus, maturity is not advanced knowledge but true knowledge. Calvin’s interpretation may help us understand Paul’s meaning, “By those that were *perfect*, he means not those that had attained a wisdom that was full and complete, but those who possess a sound and unbiassed judgement.”⁷³
- 2.4. The KJV translated the Greek word (τελείους) as ‘perfect’. Modern translators have probably chosen to use ‘mature’ so as to avoid the idea of sinless perfectionism. However, the absolute nature of the contrast given with the word ‘perfect’ may reinforce the contrast more effectively—unbelievers are fools, believers are wise; unbelievers are unholy, believers are holy.

⁷³ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.ix.iii.html

Therefore, any person who has believed the Gospel, has shown sound and unbiased judgement and is declared to be perfect ('whole', 'complete'), in Christ.

3. If the rulers of this age had understood the wisdom of God what would they not have done (1 Cor 2.8)?
 - 3.1. They would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
 - 3.2. Why would they not have done this?
 - 3.2.1. The majority of interpreters suggest that what Paul means is that if they had understood who Jesus was, they would not have treated him so cruelly and unjustly but instead would have honoured him.
 - 3.2.2. However, this seems to contradict God's wisdom (his wise plan). God deemed it necessary for the salvation of the lost that his son be subjected to humiliation and death. Yet, according to the majority of interpreters, if the Jewish and Roman leaders had believed that Jesus was the Messiah, they would not have crucified him. By extension we can conclude, based on this logic (*reductio ad absurdum*), that if every person were to have believed that Jesus was the Messiah no one would have crucified him. The irony is that this interpretation means that if everyone believed the message about the saviour and salvation, no one would be saved since no one would have crucified the saviour.
 - 3.2.3. Rather, it is more likely that what Paul is indicating is that if they had understood God's plan, they would not have crucified the saviour because by so doing they advanced his plan to provide vicarious atonement. If they had understood God's plan, they would have rebelled by not doing what God wanted to be done. Because they were ignorant of God's plan, they fulfilled it. In so doing, they thought they served their own ends but advanced God's purposes and plan and destroyed themselves.
 - 3.2.4. Satan continually misunderstands God's purposes and plans. What are examples of how he has attempted to derail God's redemptive plans?
 - 3.2.4.1. He thought he could destroy mankind by tempting him to sin and God would kill him immediately.
 - 3.2.4.2. Wiping out the covenant line leading to the Messiah through Pharaoh's enslaving the Hebrews and killing their baby boys.
 - 3.2.4.3. Killing off the royal line through Athaliah (2 Ki 11.1-3).
 - 3.2.4.4. Killing off the babies in Bethlehem, through Herod.
 - 3.2.4.5. Tempting the God-man Jesus to sin.
 - 3.2.4.6. Tempting Judas into betraying Jesus and the Jewish and Roman leaders into crucifying him.
 - 3.2.4.7. Tempting Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross to avoid dying the death of the accursed.

In each case, his vicious attacks advanced God's plan, and Satan had to curse and say, "Foiled again!" His attempts to destroy God's people continue after the resurrection:
 - 3.2.4.8. Persecution of the Church by Muslims does not eliminate Christianity, it only advances the cause and encourages other Muslims to consider the reality of the true religion which does not retaliate.
 - 3.2.4.9. Promulgating belief in evolution, same-sex 'marriage', and man-defined worship among those who claim to be Christians will not destroy the Church, it will only demarcate true believers, purify the Church of falsehood, and strengthen the Church.
 - 3.2.5. Paul's statement reinforces the necessity of the crucifixion. It was not a mistake, accident, or surprise to God. It was precisely what God had planned and it was brought about by foolish rebels against him who thought that they could thwart his eternal plans by killing off Jesus (Acts 2.23).
 - 3.3. Who does Paul indicate are the foolish ones who attempt to thwart God's plans?
 - 3.3.1. The rulers of this age, whom he mentions (1 Cor 2.6, 8).

- 3.3.2. Paul is referring to the class of rulers (Jews and Romans) who crucified Jesus, and generally to any person who sets the political or cultural agenda for this present world.
- 3.3.3. Thus, Paul shows that for all of their pretensions, the rulers of this age are fools who suppress the truth that has been revealed to them through nature and are ignorant of the special revelation provided in Scripture. While claiming to be wise, declaring themselves to be wise, and fooling others into thinking that they are wise, they are actually the ultimate fools (Ps 14.1; Rom 1.18-22).
- 3.3.4. The salvation of mankind does not come from the worldly wise—philosophers, politicians, scientists, commentators, or military commanders. It comes only from the Lord of glory—Jesus Christ—in fulfillment of God’s eternal plan.
- 3.4. Why does Paul use the term ‘Lord of glory’?
 - 3.4.1. This title for Jesus (τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης) occurs nowhere else in the Greek NT. [The ESV, following the KJV, has the full title also in James 2:1, but the word ‘Lord’ does not appear in the Greek in that verse (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης). The NIV and NASB translate James 2:1 as “glorious Lord Jesus Christ”.]
 - 3.4.2. Jesus is the Lord of glory because he is the ultimate glorious one—i.e., God (Jn 1.14). Jesus is also the Lord of glory because he is the one who gives glory to his people whom he is saving (1 Pt 5.4).
- 4. How do we receive the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2.10-12)?
 - 4.1. It is revealed to us through the Spirit.
 - 4.2. What are some forms of revelation of truth?
 - 4.2.1. Nature – displayed in the order of creation (Ps 19.1; Rom 1.20).
 - 4.2.2. Innate – the inborn sense which all men have about the existence of God and his righteous demands (Rom 1.18-21).
 - 4.2.3. Voice – direct communication via a verbal message to individuals or groups or people (Mt 3.17; Acts 9.4; Acts 11.7-9).
 - 4.2.4. Visions and dreams – direct communication from God to individuals (Mt 1.20).
 - 4.2.5. Angelic – messages sent through angels to individuals (Acts 27.23-24).
 - 4.2.6. Prophecy – God’s message directed to his people or to pagan nations through prophets (2 Pt 1.21).
 - 4.2.7. Miracles – exhibitions of God’s power and control over the universe (1 Ki 18.36-39).
 - 4.2.8. Jesus – Jesus is the revelation of God, who communicated truth (Mt 5.38-39; Jn 1:9; Jn 14.6).
 - 4.2.9. Scripture – God’s breathed-out word, communicated through prophets and apostles (2 Tim 3.16-17), and recorded faithfully to be transmitted through all ages.
 - 4.2.10. Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit communicates directly to the mind of those being saved to convict and convert them (Jn 3.3-5; Jn 16.8-11; Titus 3.5).Some of these forms of revelation are no longer used by God or are extremely rare today, because revelation in these forms are no longer needed since the arrival of the Son of God (Heb 1.1-2) in the flesh and the completion of the NT.
 - 4.3. How is the Spirit able to reveal these things to us?
 - 4.3.1. He knows the depths of God.
 - 4.3.2. What are the ‘depths of God’?
 - 4.3.2.1. The will, thoughts, plans, and discourses of God.
 - 4.3.2.2. In this context, the mystery that has now been revealed about how God planned to redeem a people through the death of his son—i.e., the Gospel message.
 - 4.3.3. Why are they deep?
 - 4.3.3.1. They cannot be discovered by human reason or experiment but may be revealed only by God to men.
 - 4.4. What analogy does Paul use to illustrate the Spirit’s knowledge of God?

- 4.4.1. He indicates that since only a man can know his own inner thoughts, not another man, only God can know his own inner thoughts, and no one else.
- 4.5. Thus, what do these verses tell us about the Holy Spirit?
 - 4.5.1. He is a person, not a force. A force cannot search, know, or reveal anything.
 - 4.5.2. He is God. A person who knows everything about God, who is infinite and eternal, must also be infinite and eternal, and therefore God.
- 4.6. What about God is hidden from the Spirit?
 - 4.6.1. Nothing, since the ‘depths of God’ go to the very essence of God’s being, of which the Spirit shares.
- 4.7. In consequence then, who is the one who reveals God’s truth to us and teaches us?
 - 4.7.1. God, since God can be known only through God alone—i.e., through what God reveals of himself to mankind.
 - 4.7.2. Our teacher is God himself. Jesus was the greatest teacher to ever live in this world. He sent the Holy Spirit to continue his teaching once he left the world (Jn 14.26).
 - 4.7.3. The Holy Spirit is now the greatest teacher because he not only teaches the minds of unbelievers but changes their hearts so that they believe what he teaches.
- 4.8. How are we able to understand the revelation of God?
 - 4.8.1. The Spirit of/from God opens our minds and changes our wills so that we are able to understand the revelation from God (Acts 16.14). Until the Holy Spirit enables men to receive it and believe it, the revelation from God is considered to be utter foolishness.
 - 4.8.2. We receive the Holy Spirit. He indwells us. Just as God (Jesus) sustains our existence (Col 1.16), God the Holy Spirit lives within us (1 Cor 3.16; Rom 8.9; 2 Tim 1.14) and makes us spiritually alive and open to spiritual truths.
- 4.9. What is required of us to receive this revelation?
 - 4.9.1. To *receive* it. God can be known only through receiving the “things freely given us by God” (1 Cor 2.12).
 - 4.9.2. What are the implications of this?
 - 4.9.2.1. Gospel truth cannot be obtained through empirical analysis or logical deductions. It can only be obtained through receiving, by faith, what is freely offered by God (Eph 2.8-9).
 - 4.9.2.2. The religious, philosophical, or scientific ‘wisdom’ of men cannot return men to the surface of the earth from the deep hole of moral, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual depravity into which sin plunged us; let alone elevate them to heaven.
- 4.10. What do you notice about the persons mentioned (1 Cor 2.8-10)?
 - 4.10.1. Three persons are mentioned: the crucified Lord of glory (Jesus), God (the Father), and the Spirit (the Holy Spirit)—the Trinity, three eternal persons in the one God.
 - 4.10.2. There is an ultimate mystery in the Trinity, but it is affirmed here for our acceptance in faith.
 - 4.10.3. These three persons are intimately involved in the salvation of the elect. The Father planned salvation (the ‘depths of God’), the son procured it (the crucified ‘Lord of glory’) and the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the hearts of believers (‘revealed to us through the Spirit’).
- 5. What did Paul do with the wisdom he had been taught by the Spirit (1 Cor 2.13)?
 - 5.1. He imparted it, or transmitted, it to others. How did he do this?
 - 5.1.1. Through words. He preached to unbelievers and believers and he taught in the churches. He also wrote Epistles (of which we have a number, including this one) to the churches (ones he had founded and to ones he had not yet visited) and to individuals.
 - 5.1.2. He lived his life as an example to others (1 Cor 4.16; Phil 3.17; Phil 4.9) but did not consider the example of holy living to be enough for bringing life to the spiritually dead. He understood the necessity of word-based instruction (Rom 10.14). Some Christians excuse

their hesitancy to communicate the Gospel through words by saying that their lives exhibit Christ's love. We can assume that they are sincere, and that people are attracted to Christ through them. However, salvation requires revelation through words to the intellect. This is the reason that God communicated the word of life through the Bible, and communicates it through preaching, teaching, and evangelism.

5.2. How did he impart the wisdom of the Spirit?

5.2.1. He interpreted and imparted “spiritual truths to those who are spiritual”—i.e., he interpreted the wisdom of the Spirit spiritually so that he could effectively communicate it. Elsewhere he tells Timothy to *rightly handle* the word of truth (2 Tim 2.15). What might Paul mean by saying he interpreted God's revelation spiritually?

5.2.2. He applied a valid set of hermeneutic principles, which those who follow him as pastors, preachers, and teachers are also to apply. What are some of these principles?⁷⁴

5.2.2.1. *Understand the meaning of Scripture as the Holy Spirit, intended it to be understood*—there are not multiple meanings to Scripture, but one; what its ultimate author intended; and the meaning of Scripture is not changed by the reader's perspective or by current cultural beliefs (for example, homosexual practices condemned in Scripture are not acceptable today because the culture claims that they are).

5.2.2.2. *Accept the straightforward plain sense of Scripture*—accepting historical accounts as history (e.g., Genesis 1-11) and figurative and symbolic (e.g., much of Revelation) as illustrative. Understand the use of different styles of literature (e.g., narrative, poetic, didactic, apologetic or rhetorical argument, etc.) as they are intended to be understood, and do not read into texts allegorical or mystical meanings which are not intended. Also, do not attempt to make the symbolic literal (for example, claiming that the locusts of Revelation 9.3, 7 are Apache helicopters).

5.2.2.3. *Compare Scripture with Scripture*—the unity of the Bible (ultimately coming from the Holy Spirit) means that there cannot be any mistakes or inconsistencies in Scripture. Apparent contradictions are the result of our misunderstanding, not because there are real contradictions. Therefore, it is necessary strive to understand the meaning of a pericope in its immediate context and in the broader context of the rest of Scripture.

5.2.2.4. *Situate a text within the progressive revelation of the key organizing themes of the Bible*—such as:

5.2.2.4.1. The pervasiveness of sin since the fall of Adam and the ongoing battle between good and evil.

5.2.2.4.2. God's requirement that all men obey his laws

5.2.2.4.3. The everlasting hopelessness of mankind without salvation in Christ and belief in the truth revealed in the Bible

5.2.2.4.4. God's use of covenants in his dealings with mankind.

5.2.2.4.5. Salvation of the elect through belief in the redeemer—Jesus—and his vicarious atonement.

5.2.2.4.6. God's sovereign control over all nations.

5.2.2.4.7. The continuity of a single Church (all OT and NT believers) throughout redemptive history.

5.2.2.5. *Apply a correct interpretation*—interpretation must be distinguished from application; but interpreted texts must be applied to the reader and hearer. The one meaning of a particular passage may be applied in different ways in different historical and cultural contexts. For example, instructions to Israel to destroy the Canaanites or to observe physical ceremonial forms have different spiritual

⁷⁴ For a more in-depth consideration, refer to: *Bible Interpretation – Best-practice Principles*; available at, www.EPCToronto.org.

applications for us in the NT age (Eph 6.12; Rev 8.3-4).

6. Why does a natural person not accept the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2.14, 16)?
 - 6.1. It is folly to him, and he is unable to understand it. By nature, men consider the teachings of the Bible to be foolishness and nonsense because they require illumination of the mind by the Holy Spirit in order to be accepted as truth.
 - 6.2. What is a “natural person”?
 - 6.2.1. The ‘natural person’ is everyone who is born into this world, prior to his conversion, because he is born with indwelling—original—sin and has no natural tendency to seek and receive spiritual truth.
 - 6.2.2. Paul does not include only the most depraved and base of individuals, but everyone who has not believed in Jesus as Lord and saviour.
 - 6.3. What are the things the natural person does not accept?
 - 6.3.1. “The things of the Spirit of God”. That is, the great mysteries which God has revealed to mankind in the Bible—the message of the Gospel.
 - 6.3.2. What are examples of the things of the Spirit of God which a natural person cannot understand and accept?
 - 6.3.2.1. The existence of God—men substitute the veneration of idols for their suppressed innate knowledge of the existence of the one true God.
 - 6.3.2.2. God as a tri-unity (the Trinity)—men deny that the concept of one God in three persons can be rational.
 - 6.3.2.3. God as creator—men relegate the creation account to the realm of myth and claim that the universe is either eternal or self-created—both of which are irrational and impossible.
 - 6.3.2.4. God as lawgiver and judge—men reject God’s law and the idea that he holds nations and individuals accountable against that law.
 - 6.3.2.5. The existence of sin—men dismiss the reality of sin and believe that they are innately good; they call sin by euphemisms such as a ‘dysfunction’ or call evil good (Is 5.20).
 - 6.3.2.6. God as saviour—men believe that they can figure out ways to correct societal dysfunctions; and ultimately, if there is an afterlife, they will be able to save themselves.
 - 6.3.2.7. Jesus as the God-man—men oppose the idea that Jesus is God-incarnate who offered a perfect sacrifice of atonement and is the only mediator between God and man.
 - 6.4. What are the reasons a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit?
 - 6.4.1. They are considered to be foolishness or absurdities. Their position, however, is foolish. They are like a person who says, “I do not believe in gravity, because I do not understand what it really is; so, I can jump off a twenty-storey building and fly like a bird.” Because we do not understand how something works does not necessarily mean that it isn’t real or true.
 - 6.4.2. They are from the mind of God and cannot be known or understood unless the Spirit reveals them to a person and instructs the person in them (1 Cor 2.10).
 - 6.5. If a natural person cannot accept the things of the Spirit, how can he be saved? Isn’t the message of the Gospel part of the ‘things of the Spirit of God’?
 - 6.5.1. In order for them to be understood a person must be born again—no longer being a ‘natural person’ but becoming a ‘spiritual person’ (Jn 3.1-15).
7. How are Christians able to receive the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2.15-16)?
 - 7.1. They have been endowed with the mind of Christ.
 - 7.1.1. Paul includes his readers with the ‘we’.
 - 7.2. What is the mind of Christ?
 - 7.2.1. Christians have a mind that has been taught by the Spirit and illuminated by spiritual truths.
 - 7.2.2. However, it means more than just intellectual knowledge about spiritual things. It includes

- having a change of intellect, will, desires, and commitment.
- 7.2.2.1. Just as Jesus displayed love for mankind through his sacrificial death, the mind of Christ in us, is a mind that loves God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and spiritual things and displays that love for God through a love for man (1 Jn 4.20).
 - 7.2.2.2. Just as Jesus desired to do the will of the Father (Jn 6.38), the mind of Christ in us includes a desire to see God glorified by our lives of obedience (Rev 15.3-4).
 - 7.2.2.3. Other aspects of the mind of Christ include the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23), obedience (Phil 2.8; Rom 5.19), and humility (Phil 2.4-8).
 - 7.2.3. If we have the mind of Christ, we know the truth, love the good, desire and choose to do right, and serve others out of love.
 - 7.3. How do Christians receive the mind of Christ?
 - 7.3.1. Through hearing the word proclaimed and preached.
 - 7.3.2. Through the indwelling conversion of the Holy Spirit and the provision of faith to believe.
 - 7.3.3. Through study of his word and faithful interpretations thereof (1 Cor 2.13).
 - 7.3.4. Through prayer (James 1.5).
 - 7.3.5. Through exercise of the intellectual and knowledge gifts which God gives us—i.e., by thinking God's thoughts after him.
 - 7.4. What is the result of having the mind of Christ?
 - 7.4.1. No one can judge us, but we can judge all things.
 - 7.4.2. A way to restate the idea expressed in verses 15 and 16 is: No one can instruct or judge Jesus (compare, Is 40.13), but he instructs others and judges all things.
 - 7.4.3. Since we have the mind of Jesus, we likewise cannot be instructed or judged by those who are still natural persons, but in turn can instruct and judge them.
 - 7.4.4. Paul is *not* suggesting that we should be haughty or proud. We need to understand his point in its context. He is saying that Christians cannot be taught by the *false* wisdom of the world or be judged by it. Rather Christians, who are taught by the Holy Spirit, can judge/discern the things of this world and instruct the world in spiritual truths. Spiritual discernment is not provided by the world's philosophies, religions, or science. The world has no answers to man's deepest needs. Rather, Christians have the answers, through the Gospel, and can discern the foolishness of men and present the truths of the Gospel to them.
 8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 2.6-16)?
 - 8.1. *Wisdom of God.* In this section Paul contrasts the wisdom of God with the 'wisdom' of man. This contrast teaches us how we should view the 'wisdom' of men, so that we can appreciate the wisdom of God with which we have been endowed when we were converted. We can contrast God's wisdom with man's wisdom, with the following attributes:

Attribute	God's Wisdom	Man's 'Wisdom'
Duration	Eternal	Of this age
Ultimate Source	Holy Spirit	Satan
Recipients	Those with the mind of Christ	Those with the mind of man (Mt 16.23)
Visibility	Not seen or imaginable by natural man	Pushed by academia, media, pop culture
Truthfulness	Profound truth	Lies, deception, and foolishness (Ps 14.1)
Effect on Judgement	Provides clear insights in all areas of reality	Clouds the mind in all areas of reality
Cost	Freely given by God (Is 55.1)	Always comes with a price (Mk 8.36)
Understandability	Folly to the natural man	Folly to the spiritual man

Process	Revealed and received	Invented and elevated (to idol status)
Scope	Mind and heart (the whole man)	All thoughts and emotions
Dependability	Answers the important questions	Fails to answer the important questions
Sufficiency	Saves from hell	Destroys in hell

8.2. *Ways of God.* Satan and sinful mankind (represented here by the ‘rulers of this age’) try to thwart the work of God with their schemes. They think that by suppressing Christianity and demeaning Christ and his Church they can justify their lawless actions and soothe their guilty consciences. However, their schemes have the opposite results—they fulfill God’s plans, they redound to his glory through his providential governance, and they advance his cause for the Church—often more people come to faith in times of paucity and persecution than in times of prosperity.

Partitioned Church (1 Cor 3.1-17)

God’s Servants (1 Cor 3.1-9)

People of the Flesh (1 Cor 3.1-4)

1. What does Paul indicate was the level of the spiritual *immaturity* of the Corinthians?

1.1. He called them “people of the flesh” and not spiritual. What might he mean?

1.1.1. He is not using the term ‘flesh’ in the sense of a person who is habitually indulging in sin—i.e., the natural person (1 Cor 2.14)—since he has addressed his readers as believers (1 Cor 1.2). Rather, they were not exhibiting, as dominant, the traits of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23). They claimed that they loved Jesus but were not showing this love significantly in all aspects of their Christian walk.

1.2. He called them “infants in Christ”. What might he mean?

1.2.1. They had received and believed Christianity but had not grown in the application of Christian principles to all aspects of daily life.

1.2.2. They were proud of their worldly wisdom and knowledge but were not wise in how to apply spiritual truth.

1.3. The issues that he deals with in this letter (e.g., sexual immorality, idolatry, and faulty views of the resurrection) indicate that the Corinthians had not grown in *applied* spiritual wisdom.

1.4. In what ways is a similar immaturity exhibited in the Church today?

1.4.1. ‘*Easy believism*’ – A focus on the conversion event as enough to save one from hell but not displaying an interest in progressive sanctification.

1.4.2. *Antinomianism* – a belief and claim that Christians are not required to obey particular laws (e.g., some of the Ten Commandments or applied examples in the Mosaic Law) and can behave like unbelievers (e.g., not respecting the Sabbath, engaging in premarital sex, committing adultery, or practicing divorce for reasons such as ‘incompatibility’).

1.4.3. *Materialism* – Exhibiting an idolatrous desire to acquire perishable objects.

1.4.4. *Ritualism* – An infatuation with rituals (e.g., days, diets, dance, drama, decorations, dulcets and ditties) which perpetuate aspects of the OT ceremonial system, and ignoring the proper observance of the spiritual forms which replaced the types of the OT order which were fulfilled in Christ.

1.5. Why is this a problem?

1.5.1. All Christians, at times, struggle with immaturity, but no professed Christian can remain immature (a person of the flesh) indefinitely and be considered a true Christian—by their fruit they will be known (Mt 12.33). Lack of growth is probably evidence of a lack of conversion.

1.5.2. It is expected that Christians will grow and mature—just as those born of flesh are expected to grow, so those born of the Spirit are expected to grow to become more like Jesus. Lack of growth is a tragedy and indicates that there is a physical or spiritual health problem.

- 1.5.3. Immaturity among Christians leads to the charge of hypocrisy and brings Christ and his Church into disrepute.
2. What reason does Paul give for this assessment?
 - 2.1. They had shown that they were immature as Christians by their attitudes and actions. They were behaving like natural men (“in a human way”), not as born-again men.
 - 2.2. They were still letting the world’s priorities and patterns influence their thinking and did not have fully transformed minds (Rom 12.2). In particular, they were exhibiting jealousy and causing strife because of their party spirit (around human factions). Their immature behaviour was self-centred and divisive. They wanted to be recognized and honoured; when what they needed was to be humble (Phil 2.1-8). They had understood the message of “Christ crucified” for their salvation but not for their sanctification.
 - 2.3. What chain of sin was evident among the Corinthians?
 - 2.3.1. Pride → jealousy/envy → strife/contention → sectarianism.
 - 2.4. How does Paul show that they had a problem with sectarianism?
 - 2.4.1. It was displayed in their party spirit; some claimed to follow Paul or Apollos; and thus being ‘merely human’—i.e., showing that they were not spiritual, like they should be.
 - 2.5. What do we, as Christians, need to avoid if we are to keep our congregation from becoming like that in Corinth?
 - 2.5.1. Pride – the antidote is to be humble (1 Pt 5.5).
 - 2.5.2. Envy – the antidote is to consider others more significant than ourselves (Phil 2.3).
 - 2.5.3. Fault-finding – the antidote is to see our own sins (Mt 7.3).
 - 2.5.4. Being ill tempered – the antidote is to live joyfully (Phil 4.4)
 - 2.5.5. Complaining – the antidote is to encourage (1 Thess 5.11).A life of a selfless, humble, joyful, encouragement is contagious
3. What does Paul indicate is unsuitable for “infants in Christ”?
 - 3.1. Solid food instead of milk.
 - 3.2. What are the ‘milk’ and ‘solid food’ of which he speaks?
 - 3.2.1. The distinction is probably not, as some might suppose, between ‘elementary’ doctrines such as the tri-unity of God, deity of Jesus, or resurrection of Jesus versus subtle doctrinal distinctions such as the nature of man (bipartite vs tripartite) or the sequence of events relating to the end of the age. The reality is that much of the basics of Christianity are ‘mind-blowing’ from the natural man’s perspective and difficult even for the most theologically advanced Christian to understand. For example, the following concepts and teachings of Scripture are *basic* (elementary) to Christianity and yet are very difficult for human minds to grasp:
 - 3.2.1.1. God’s aseity, essential non-materiality, eternity and infinitude.
 - 3.2.1.2. God’s simplicity (oneness), yet with three persons.
 - 3.2.1.3. God’s creation of everything from nothing pre-existing, except for Adam who we are told was made from dust from the ground (Gen 2.7).
 - 3.2.1.4. God’s goodness and the initial goodness of the universe contrasted with the introduction and presence of sin in human hearts.
 - 3.2.1.5. God’s predestination of all things, yet the existence of full human responsibility.
 - 3.2.1.6. The incarnation of Jesus as the God-man.
 - 3.2.1.7. The vicarious, substitutionary atonement.No other philosophical or religious system has concepts like these or can explain these. Not even the brightest of human minds is able to understand them fully. Yet, an infant in Christ receives them, understands them, and believes them.
 - 3.2.2. In the context of 1 Corinthians and in Hebrews 5.11-14, ‘milk’ is the “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1.18)—i.e., salvation through Christ’s work (the act of justification); whereas

- ‘solid food’ is instruction in how to live a righteous life (the process of sanctification).
- 3.3. What irony is presented by Paul’s statement about food?
 - 3.3.1. The Corinthians needed solid food to grow, but they were unable to eat solid food because they were not grown.
 - 3.3.2. Paul is thus going to introduce them to solid food (in small bites) as he addresses their problems and questions throughout the remainder of this letter.
 4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 3.1-4)?
 - 4.1. *Conceit* – Pride continues to infect the hearts of members of the Church—it is not confined to the heart of a natural man. Infants in Christ, those who have saving faith but are not yet fully living out a mature faith, often have a great measure of conceit. For example, infants in Christ may contrast their new life with their former life and believe that they are good, without much sin. However, as they grow as Christians, they become humbler and realize that the struggle with indwelling sin will be a constant challenge for them for the rest of their earthly lives.
 - 4.2. *Contention* – Contentions and strife in the Church are the sad evidence of Christian immaturity—that Christians are living as “people the flesh” rather than as “spiritual people”. Those who are advancing as Christians are peaceable, not contentious. They work at living in harmony with other believers, put aside their petty jealousies and selfishness, and strive to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ.
 - 4.3. *Cultivation* – Christians must grow from an infant state to a mature state.
 - 4.3.1. Almost every commentary or sermon which provides an application of these verses appears to suggest that a lesson we should derive from them is that it is a duty of Christian teachers and preachers to adapt their message to the maturity level (e.g., age, intelligence, or doctrinal acumen) of his hearers and provide only teaching which they have the capacity to comprehend. They often expand this idea by suggesting that there is an inexhaustible depth to the doctrinal teachings which can be brought to those who are more mature in their faith.
 - 4.3.2. However, this does not appear to be a valid lesson to derive from this section. Rather, the lesson is that living a mature Christian life is more than knowing deep and complex facts about God and spiritual realities—it is *applying* the truth that we have learned. Cultivation of the Christian life is living in accordance with the facts; it is applying the knowledge in our lives as we interact with other Christians and with the world around us. Teachers and preachers must continue to present the ‘milk’ of the Gospel—salvation in Christ alone, through faith alone. However, they also have to call their students and hearers to live out their faith. This means that there needs to be more, rather than less, emphasis on obedience to the law of God. As an illustration, Paul would say that a Christian who plays professional baseball on the Lord’s Day is an infant in Christ. He believes in Christ and his completed work on the cross but is satisfied with being justified and is not living out his faith. It is only when Christians renounce the world’s moral subjectivism and live by the standards of Scripture that they grow to Christian adulthood and the world begins to take serious notice of Christianity.
 - 4.3.3. In our physical lives we expect to grow from babies to adults. So, it should be expected that infants in Christ will grow up to be men of faith, living lives which display their walk with God (Gen 5.22, 24; Gen 6.9).

Plants of the Father (1 Cor 3.5-9)

1. What does Paul indicate was his and Apollos’ station in the Church?
 - 1.1. Servants and specifically servants (Gk: δᾱκονοι, not δοῦλοι) involved in planting and watering the ‘plants’ in God’s garden—the Church. From the perspective of Roman society and particularly from the proud Corinthian perspective, Paul assigned to himself and Apollos demeaning tasks reserved for labourers in a garden.
 - 1.2. Why does he identify their common station as servants?

- 1.2.1. To remind the Corinthians that he and Apollos were mortal men, not angels, and certainly not God.
 - 1.2.2. To emphasize the point that he and Apollos are merely messengers of God and not rulers over the people of God. They were the *means*, not the *cause*, of bringing the Corinthians to salvation—through whom they had believed—and to the knowledge of “the secret and hidden wisdom of God.” (1 Cor 2.7) They were ministers who served the Church by serving God. They were responsible *for* the Corinthians because they were responsible *to* God.
 - 1.2.3. To send a subtle rebuke to anyone who would elevate men in the Church of Christ—including anyone who would advance a party spirit around his own name.
 - 1.2.4. To demonstrate that he and Apollos were not competing with one another, but were complementing each other, as they worked to bring the Church to maturity—they were equals in station and role with regard to their role in the Corinthian Church.
 - 1.2.5. To demonstrate to the Corinthians that their salvation and growth in grace were not the result of human effort but the working of the Holy Spirit, since “God gave the growth”.
 - 1.2.6. To encourage the Corinthians to esteem Christ because of the message delivered by his messengers. We are not to esteem the message because of the messenger; nor are we to esteem the messenger because of his message. As we would say, “Do not shoot the messenger”, Paul would say “Do not honour or elevate the messenger!”
2. How does God build his Church?
- 2.1. The Church is “God’s field, God’s building”.
 - 2.1.1. Paul mixes his metaphors; switching from a garden to a building. He uses the concept of the Church as a building often in his writing (1 Cor 3.16-17; 2 Cor 6.16; Eph 2.20-22; Rom 15.20; 2 Tim 2.19; Heb 11.10). Peter (1 Pt 2.5) and John (Rev 21.9-21) also use a similar metaphor.
 - 2.1.2. God is the Church’s architect and builder (Mt 16.18; Heb 11.10). The workmen are his labourers who report to him, follow his plan, take their assignments from him, have their work inspected by him, and receive their wages from him.
 - 2.2. God uses human instruments in the work of building his Church. He assigns different roles and gifts to his workers, including:
 - 2.2.1. Church planters who can awaken the spiritually dead among the unchurched and irreligious (e.g., through evangelism).
 - 2.2.2. Apologists who can challenge false philosophies, religions, and science (e.g., through lectures and debates).
 - 2.2.3. Preachers who challenge the congregation to believe, repent, and walk in obedience to the Faith, once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).
 - 2.2.4. Systematic teachers in congregations who foster spiritual growth in faith and knowledge in children and adults (e.g., in directed Bible studies).
 - 2.2.5. Brotherly encouragers to the spiritually wounded and discouraged, who challenge them to persevere in faithfulness.
 - 2.2.6. Comforters of the sick and dying.
 - 2.2.7. Ministers of mercy in congregationally sponsored (parachurch) organizations who care for temporal needs, by serving in Christian hospitals or missionary medicine, organizing soup kitchens, or counselling those who have physical, psychological, or spiritual needs.
 - 2.2.8. Teachers in Christian congregationally sponsored schools who present the Christian worldview to their students.
 - 2.2.9. Administrators who care for the physical fabric of a congregation.
 - 2.2.10. Prayer warriors who place the needs of the congregation before our gracious God.All classes of human instruments co-operate in one mission—the building of God’s Church. Together, collectively, they become one instrument in the hand of God. As such their various roles become threads in the tapestry of

- 2.3. Every true worker (evangelist, preacher, teacher, minister, counselor) in the Church does not usurp God's role but takes on the assignments he is given, with joy and praise (Ps 115.1).
3. How are the labourers in the Church God's fellow workers?
 - 3.1. God does not need to use intermediate means to accomplish any of his purposes. In the same way that he created the universe out of nothing that was preexisting, he could directly convert the elect and bypass human intermediaries altogether.
 - 3.2. However, he chooses to use his people as his "fellow workers". The world is to be evangelized, not through the extraordinary but by faithful labourers carrying out ordinary duties (Mt 28.18-20).
 - 3.3. Why does God use human instruments?
 - 3.3.1. He created us to have responsibilities (Gen 1.26).
 - 3.3.2. He designed us with a need to feel and fulfill a purpose (Gen 2.15).
 - 3.3.3. He chooses to share his work with his people (Rom 10.14-15).
 - 3.3.4. He expects us to act responsibly (2 Thess 3.10).
 - 3.3.5. To honour us, by entrusting us with work in his kingdom (Mt 24.45-51; Lk 12.42-46).
 - 3.3.6. He wishes to challenge and test our faith as we work for him (Ps 66.10; 1 Pt 1.6-7).
4. What does Paul mean when he says that the labourers in the Church receive their wages according to their labour?
 - 4.1. Some in the church serve in paid capacities. However, this is probably not what he is speaking of. Rather, he probably is speaking about other classes of a reward for labour: 1) the commendation we receive from doing a job well (Mt 25.21), and 2) everlasting rewards (2 Tim 4.8).
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 3.5-9)?
 - 5.1. *Human Roles* – Every believer has a God-ordained role in his Church. One role is not better than another; all are important for the advancement of Christ's kingdom (1 Cor 12.14-31).
 - 5.2. *Humility Realization* – In whatever role we serve, we need to be *truly* humble, realizing that we are fellow servants with all other believers in the congregation. If Paul can ask the rhetorical question, "What is Paul?" with the implied answer "Nothing!" then so must every other preacher, teacher, pastor, elder, Sunday School teacher etc. Also, leaders in a congregation must not lord it over others in the congregation (Titus 1.6-9; Phil 2.3-8).
 - 5.3. *Heavy Responsibility* – Preachers, evangelists, and teachers should not be proud of the gifts and skills which they have been given. Rather they should recognize that the gifts they have are from God, and that the more gifts they have been given the heavier their responsibility; and the more their 'success' the more they should be on their knees confessing the sin of pride and giving thanks for God advancing his kingdom.
 - 5.4. *Heavenly Rewards* – Workers in the church should not cultivate the praise of men or seek rewards from men. For example, preachers must not seek recognition from their congregation—sometimes they do this in subtle ways such as asking "Do you agree with how I handled this point?" or by feigning a false humility, "I do not think I explained this point very clearly." hoping that a hearer will provide an accolade. Rather, they should work to please the Lord. He will justly dispense rewards to recognize the work that all his faithful servants have performed.

God's Substructure (1 Cor 3.10-15)

1. What did Paul do while in Corinth?
 - 1.1. He laid the foundation (through his preaching and teaching) for the new congregation. He refers to himself as a 'master builder' (Gk: ἀρχιτέκτων; from which we derive our word 'architect').
 - 1.2. He says elsewhere that it was his ambition not to build on the foundation laid by another (Rom 15.20).

- 1.2.1. This does not mean that he displayed a ‘not-invented-here’ attitude.
 - 1.2.2. Rather, it means that he viewed his role as an itinerant evangelist to the Gentiles (Acts 9.15; Acts 13.46; Rom 11.13; Gal 1.16; 1 Tim 2.7) and church planter, not a permanent pastor/elder in an established congregation (Acts 18.1-11).
 - 1.2.3. He would hand over new congregations to other more permanent teachers (e.g., Apollos in Corinth; 1 Cor 3.10) or local elders whom he or others with him would ordain (Acts 14.23; 2 Tim 2.2; Titus 1.5).
 - 1.3. Paul is indirectly asserting his authority over the Corinthians as the founding pastor of their congregation (1 Cor 4.15; 1 Cor 9.1; 1 Cor 15.1)
2. How was Paul enabled to found congregations?
 - 2.1. By the grace of God given to him. Paul uses this expression “grace of God” over 10X in his Epistles. He was diligent never to usurp God’s glory, and always to render praise to God as the master builder of the Church (Heb 11.10).
 - 2.2. He was ‘skilled’ or ‘an expert’ in laying the foundation. God had endowed Paul with a mix of skills and attributes which made him ideally suited for the role of itinerant evangelist:
 - 2.2.1. A Jew, the son of orthodox parents, and Pharisee (Acts 23.6)
 - 2.2.2. Well educated in the OT and taught by a prominent Rabbi (Acts 22.3)
 - 2.2.3. A personal encounter with Jesus (Acts 9.1-19)
 - 2.2.4. Taught directly by Jesus (1 Cor 11.23; Gal 1.11-12, 17)
 - 2.2.5. A Roman citizen (Acts 21.39; Acts 22.25)
 - 2.2.6. Well-versed in the pagan writers, as evidenced by the number of times he quotes from them⁷⁵
 - 2.2.7. A bachelor without the concerns of a family (1 Cor 7.8)
 - 2.2.8. Able to support himself with a manual skill (tent making; 1 Cor 9.18; Acts 18.2-3)
 - 2.2.9. Skilled in rhetoric and oratory (e.g., Acts 17.22-31)
 - 2.2.10. Skilled in the primary languages of the Roman world.
3. What must be the only foundation of a congregation within God’s Church?
 - 3.1. Jesus Christ. He personally is the foundation.
 - 3.2. What are the implications of Christ being the only foundation for salvation and the Church?
 - 3.2.1. Without Christ there can be no salvation. It is an exclusive foundation. No other can be laid. Thus, all other religions which deny the Biblical truths about Jesus are demonic. It is a great dishonour to the Father, and the sufficiency of Jesus, to suggest that he can be replaced by any other.
 - 3.2.2. Without Christ there can be no Christianity and no Church.
 - 3.2.3. The Church is laid on an eternal foundation which is strong enough to support the entire edifice built upon it, and to endure forever. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Mt 16.18).
 - 3.2.4. Paul and Apollos were only builders upon the foundation and could not therefore be the foundation itself.
 - 3.2.5. We must confess him to be the only way of salvation (Acts 4.12). Confessing him can be through belief in the words of the *Apostle’s Creed*, or believing what the *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches about Jesus: “It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and

⁷⁵ Refer to the section entitled, *Greeting*, 1 Cor 1.1-3 for a list.

equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. ... This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.”⁷⁶

4. How are we to understand Paul's analogy, in which he uses different building materials?
 - 4.1. Paul presents two classes of building materials to contrast two classes of human efforts applied to building the Church's edifice, on the foundation of Christ. He identifies three types of building material in each class as an *hendiatriis*, to indicate that there are other items in the class (today authors would say, “such as”, or add an “etc.”). We are not to attempt to distinguish between the items in each class.
 - 4.2. The two classes can be contrasted with a number of attributes:

Class	Gold, silver, precious stones	Wood, hay, straw
Value	Rare and valuable	Inexpensive and common
Durability	Lasting	Fleeting
Doctrine	True and complete	False or imperfect
Source	Holy Spirit and Bible	Human will and myths
Motives	Worthy—for the glory of God	Unworthy—for self-glorification

- 4.3. Are the two classes distinctly exhibited?
 - 4.3.1. In principle, there are only two classes. However, in practice all human efforts applied to building the Church are a mixture of good and evil. Every good work is tinged to a degree by selfish sin. It is only through the grace of God that there is any goodness in our works.
 - 4.3.2. We barely know the remnants of evil that reside in our own hearts so we cannot be judges of the value of our work. A preacher may have preached an outstanding (by popular opinion) sermon and prayed hard to suppress any self-glorification, but God may not have used that particular sermon to stir the faith of anyone in the congregation. In other instances, a preacher may have preached a mediocre (by our standards) sermon and have felt discouraged, or congratulated himself for having preached a ‘great’ sermon; yet, in spite of the taint of sin associated with these sermons, God may have used them for the conversion of many. A woman may have grudgingly agreed to babysit another's children while she did a volunteer shift at a Pregnancy Care Centre; however, God used that act of grudging kindness indirectly to save three unborn babies.
 - 4.3.3. We cannot know which class our works (or those of anyone else) fall into, any more than

⁷⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith; chapter 8, Of Christ the Mediator.

we can know the true state of those in the Church (Mt 13.30). God alone knows, and he alone supplies the growth (1 Cor 3.7).

- 4.4. What causes a particular action, applied to building the Church, to fall into one class or the other?
 - 4.4.1. This is partly determined by the attitude of the person (e.g., humility, selfless love for Christ, cooperativeness with other Christians). However, the quality of a particular action is also intrinsic. There are actions which in themselves are “wood, hay, straw” regardless of the attitude of the worker.
 - 4.4.2. Anything which is offered in the work of the Church which is not according to Scripture is an inferior building material. This includes:
 - 4.4.2.1. Forms of invented worship such as offering compositions of mere human origin rather than the Psalms composed under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
 - 4.4.2.2. Using worldly techniques and methods (during worship services) in an attempt to engage audiences, such as drama productions and rock bands.
 - 4.4.2.3. Applying secular psychology to influence inquirers or to assure converts of their standing with God.
 - 4.4.2.4. Compromising with man’s theories (e.g., cosmological or biological evolution) and ‘science’ in order to appear more plausible in the eyes of the world.
5. When will the quality of the builders’ work become manifest?
 - 5.1. On “the Day”.
 - 5.2. The ESV (NIV, NKJV) capitalizes ‘day’ indicating that it is a particular day.
 - 5.3. Most interpreters agree that Paul is referring to the last day, the day of the Lord (1 Cor 1.8), the Day of Judgement (1 Cor 4.5; Rom 2.16), when Christ will judge the works of all mankind (2 Cor 5.10), including the work of those engaged in building the Church.
 - 5.4. We will only know at the Day of Judgement whether or not our work for the Kingdom, and the work of others, were made of precious materials. We are all in for a great surprise when we survey God’s handiwork of saving a people for himself and building his Church. But we will not be disappointed. We will marvel at how he has woven together the threads of each person’s life into a great tapestry—the black and crimson threads of forgiven sin and the gold and white threads of worship and kindness will be woven with the greens, yellows and browns of people’s lives in their families, neighbourhoods, work environments, and schools; along with the blues and reds of their emotional reactions to events around them. The resulting tapestry won’t be .5m high by 70m long and depict the Norman Conquest, led by William (the Bayeux tapestry). It will be 510 million square kilometers and be unrolled from Adam to the last person saved.
6. How will the quality of the builders’ work be determined?
 - 6.1. Through a test of fire. What kind of fire?
 - 6.2. Paul is not speaking of the physical fire which will consume everything on the last day (2 Pt 3.7, 10) because nothing material will survive that fire.
 - 6.3. Nor is he speaking of the fire of hell (Mal 4.1; Mt 3.10; Mt 5.22; 2 Thess 1.8), since some of the works that will be tested by the fire Paul is speaking of will be precious and survive forever.
 - 6.4. He is speaking figuratively about the fire of God’s wrath (Ps 78.21; Nah 1.6; Zeph 1.18; Zeph 3.8) which will test the genuineness of the works performed by each leader (person) in the Church. This fire is not retributive but validating.
 - 6.5. The word (δοκιμάσει) ‘test’ which Paul uses is applied in metallurgy. With metals the testing fire burns off impurities and leaves the pure, genuine metal. In the NT, the word is only used in a positive sense of testing with a view towards acceptance. It is used in the NT of testing faith, behaviour, teaching, and doctrine to ensure that they are genuine or worthwhile (Rom 12.2; 2 Cor 8.8, 22; 2 Cor 13.5; Gal 6.4; Eph 5.10; Phil 1.10; 1 Thess 2.4; 1 Thess 5.21; 1 Tim 3.10; 1 Pt 1.7; 1 Jn 4.1).

7. What will be the reward of a faithful builder of God's Church?
 - 7.1. It is not salvation; salvation is a gift (Eph 2.8), not a reward. Even if a person's works prove not to be of value, if he is a Christian he will still be saved for ever (1 Cor 3.15). The people to whom Paul addressed this letter are assumed to be believers. Salvation is by grace, and is definitively final, not based on the performance or value of anyone's particular works.
 - 7.2. This passage refers to post-Judgement Day rewards, not salvation—i.e., rewards in heaven.
 - 7.3. That there are differences in the rewards which believers will receive is taught by Jesus (Mt 16.27; Mt 25.14-30; Lk 19.16-19).
 - 7.4. What the rewards are, is not defined here. What *might* be examples of the rewards?
 - 7.4.1. Commendation for doing a job well (1 Cor 4.5; Mt 25.21).
 - 7.4.2. An "unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt 5.4), a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4.8).
 - 7.4.3. Enlarged responsibilities (Lk 19.16-19).
 - 7.4.4. Enhanced various spiritual, mental, and physical capacities.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 3.10-15)?
 - 8.1. *Roles* – Building a congregation of God's people is dependent on the work of many people who must cooperate and respect one another's gifts and roles. It is a tragedy when co-workers with Christ cannot cooperate among themselves.
 - 8.2. *Rock* – All the work of building the Church must be on the foundation of Jesus—his person, life and work, and teachings; which are the bedrock of all reality. To build on any other foundation is to deny the need for God's work in salvation through his Son.
 - 8.3. *Responsibility* – Every Christian has a role in building the Church and it is his responsibility to work with faith, diligence, faithfulness, skill, humility, joy, and thanksgiving to produce works that are precious and lasting.
 - 8.4. *Rightness* – There are differences in the quality of the building materials which can be used. A portion of this quality is determined by the attitude of the person (e.g., humility, selfless love for Christ, cooperativeness with other Christians). However, the quality is also intrinsic. There are works which in themselves are "wood, hay, straw" regardless of the attitude of the worker.
 - 8.5. *Repose* – Anyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ and is truly converted cannot lose his salvation. Even if his works on behalf of the Church may have no lasting value, he can rest in the confidence that he will be saved.
 - 8.6. *Rewards* – Even though all Christians will be saved (the free gift of God dispensed in love) we must not be satisfied with being barely saved. Rewards will be dispensed in heaven which will vary, depending on the works performed in this life. We are to strive to win a full reward (2 Jn 8).

God's Sanctuary (1 Cor 3.16-17)

1. To what are believers in Christ likened?
 - 1.1. Paul uses a metaphor and calls the people in the Church in Corinth God's temple (ναός).
 - 1.2. He uses the expression "Do you not know" ten times in 1 Corinthians—this is the first occurrence (the others are in 1 Cor 5.6; 1 Cor 6.2-3, 9, 15-16, 19; 1 Cor 9.13, 24). Why? In each instance he uses the expression to introduce an idea which is an important truth beyond dispute.
2. In what way are Christians God's temple?
 - 2.1. It is where the Holy Spirit dwells.
 - 2.2. In this case, the "you" is plural. Thus, he appears to be saying that the collective congregation is God's temple, as he indicates in Ephesians (Eph 2.21), and as Peter states (1 Pt 2.5). Elsewhere in this letter (1 Cor 6.19) he speaks of the body of each individual Christian as a temple.
 - 2.3. Why is a congregation of Christ's Church the temple of God? Because it is where God:
 - 2.3.1. Dwells on earth (Mt 23.21)

- 2.3.2.Reveals his will (Rev 16.1)
- 2.3.3.Makes his presence known (2 Chron 7.1; 2 Cor 6.16; Rev 7.15)
- 2.3.4.Meets with his people (2 Sam 22.7; Ps 18.6)
- 2.3.5.Hears the pleas of his people (Ps 18.6)
- 2.3.6.Judges the world (Is 66.6; Mic 1.2)
- 2.3.7.Is worshiped by his people (Ps 5.7; Lk 2.37; Rev 11.1).
- 2.4. With the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem—which will likely never be rebuilt—God has moved his activity into the living body of his redeemed and holy people—the Church.
- 3. How does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Church?
 - 3.1. The Trinity, as individual persons and the shared Godhead, dwells in believers.
 - 3.1.1.Father (Jn 14.23)
 - 3.1.2.Son (Jn 14.20, 23; Jn 15.4-5; Rom 8.10; 2 Cor 13.5; Gal 2.20; Eph 3.17; Col 1.27)
 - 3.1.3.Holy Spirit (Jn 14.16-17; Rom 8.9, 11; 2 Tim 1.14).
 - 3.2. Since God is omnipresent, his dwelling in individual believers refers to his work in the hearts of believers not to his locality—i.e., where he makes himself known through his actions—through:
 - 3.2.1.Converting and regenerating their hearts
 - 3.2.2.Causing them to repent of their sins and believe in the redeeming work of Christ
 - 3.2.3.Providing them assurance of the salvation
 - 3.2.4.Enlightening their minds so that they receive and understand his revelation in the Bible
 - 3.2.5.Sanctifying their thoughts, words, and actions
 - 3.2.6.Facilitating their prayers (Rom 8.26)
 - 3.2.7.Encouraging them to joyfully praise their Creator and Lord
 - 3.2.8.Instilling in them an anticipation of the glory that awaits them at death
 - 3.2.9.Enabling them to persevere in faith to the end of their life.
 - 3.3. The Holy Spirit dwells in individual members of congregations and therefore indirectly in congregations. He also dwells in true congregations directly and displays his presence and work when congregations:
 - 3.3.1.Present the truth of the Gospel clearly—preach and teach sound doctrine.
 - 3.3.2.Carefully and lovingly discipline those under their care.
 - 3.3.3.Administer the sacraments correctly.
 - 3.3.4.Practice true worship.These are the marks of the true Church (which we noted when we studied 1 Cor 1.4-9)
 - 3.4. The Holy Spirit may remove his influence from individual believers for a time (Ps 51.11), but not permanently to entirely since no true believer can lose his salvation. However, the Holy Spirit will permanently remove his presence from congregations (and denominations) where they become unfaithful in upholding the marks of the true Church—as we can observe by a study of the history of the Church, beginning with the congregations in Revelation 2-3.
- 4. How might individuals in a congregation destroy God’s temple?
 - 4.1. The Church cannot be destroyed (Mt 16.18), but local congregations (and denominations) can be destroyed by the attitudes, actions, and advocacy (teachings) of their leaders (pastors and elders) and members.
 - 4.2. What are the primary destructive forces within a congregation as God’s temple? They are the sins of:
 - 4.2.1.*Pride* – Expecting to be honoured, praised, and rewarded in a congregation.
 - 4.2.2.*Self-centredness* – Creating factions around the teachings or personalities of individuals and expecting the Church to cater your needs rather than living to serve the needs of others in the congregation.
 - 4.2.3.*Idolatry* – Introducing any form of false worship, which is not agreeable to the teaching of Scripture.

- 4.2.4. *Heresy* – Introducing non-Biblical teachings. A list would be almost endless, but would include teaching works-based righteousness, speculating about how Christ will rule the earth from a throne in Jerusalem, making compromises with secular theories of origins, and syncretistic practices such as ‘prayer’ with Muslims.
5. Does Paul teach that a person may lose his salvation?
- 5.1. In this section, Paul is not speaking about salvation, which cannot be earned or lost by works. As we noted when dealing with 3.14, salvation is a gift (Rom 6.23; Eph 2.8), not a reward for works (Eph 2.9).
- 5.2. However, if a person actively and systematically works to destroy the Church, the reality of his salvation may be questioned—“a tree is known by its own fruit” (Lk 6.44). In that case, he would not *lose* his salvation, but would demonstrate that he had never been saved.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 3.16-17)?
- Martin Marty structured his book, *A Short History of Christianity*, around four themes, which we can also use to structure the lessons associated with this section of Paul’s letter:
- 6.1. *One* – Paul speaks to the members of the congregation in Corinth and informs them that as a collective entity they are God’s temple, in which God (the Holy Spirit) dwells. God does not have multiple dwelling locations (temples) on earth among mankind—he has only one. Only Christians make up his temple—the Church. Assemblies of adherents of other religions are not part of God’s temple. There are not multiple paths to God and multiple ‘houses’, such as the *dar al-Islam*, ‘house/abode of Islam’.
- 6.2. *Holy* – The Spirit possesses and dwells in the Church. Therefore, it is holy, sanctified (1 Cor 1.2; 1 Cor 6.11), and set-apart for the glory of God. Since we can destroy the Church (a local congregation or a denomination) with our bad attitudes, actions and advocacy, it is imperative that we strive to keep our lives holy so that the visible Church remains holy.
- 6.3. *Catholic* – Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth, but his letter is part of Scripture and applies to us also. He knew that he was writing Scripture and expected his letters to be read in other congregations (Col 4.16). So, the instruction given in these two verses, and in the entire letter, is a communication to the Church, universal, in all generations and around the globe. Therefore, we must heed its teaching and apply it in our lives.
- 6.4. *Apostolic* – As we noted when we studied 1 Corinthians 2.6-16, there is only one correct meaning or interpretation of any Scripture passage—the meaning which the Holy Spirit intended and the Prophets, Jesus, and the apostles taught. However, there can be multiple applications in different cultural contexts. Thus, another way that we can destroy a local congregation or denomination is with false teaching. Therefore, we must strive to derive and understand the correct interpretation of any Scripture passage we are considering. What are some guidelines (rules) which we should follow when interpreting Scripture? We noted a few basic hermeneutic principles, such as: accept the straightforward plain sense of Scripture, compare Scripture with Scripture, and situate a text within the progressive revelation of the key organizing themes of the Bible. In addition, to ensure that our interpretation or teaching is apostolic we need to:
- 6.4.1. Make our interpretation (and application) of a passage consistent with the collective wisdom of our venerable forefathers in the faith, such as:
- 6.4.1.1. The first four ecumenical councils (Nicaea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451).
- 6.4.1.2. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* and associated documents.
- 6.4.1.3. The writings of men such as Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, Edwards, Owen, Hodge, Berkhof ...
- 6.4.2. Resist the temptation to introduce a novel interpretation.
- 6.4.3. Humbly heed the wisdom and guidance of the elders (presbyters) if they indicate that our interpretation is anomalous or heretical.

- 6.4.4. Correct our interpretation when it results in our being in a class with only one member—our own self. When we find no one else, among widely respected theologians, who hold the same interpretation that we do, we can probably conclude that our interpretation is mistaken.

Perplexed Crafty (1 Cor 3.18-23)

1. What is a key problem Paul identified, that was underlying the various challenges facing the Corinthian congregation?
 - 1.1. They were deceiving themselves.
 - 1.1.1. “Let no one deceive himself” is a present, negative imperative; which usually means to stop doing something already in progress.
 - 1.1.2. The term ‘deceive’ is an intensified (with the prefix ἐκ) form of ἀπατάω, which means to mislead or deceive someone egregiously.
 - 1.2. Pride and self-deception are twin sisters which give birth to mankind’s plague-ridden offspring (Rom 1.29-31; Gal 5.19-20).
 - 1.2.1. Pride is pagan mankind’s fundamental *spiritual* problem—men worship the creature rather than the creator (Rom 1.25). Every false religion is based ultimately on self worship—a physical image created by a man’s hands or a vain imagination created by a man’s own mind.
 - 1.2.2. Self-deception is pagan mankind’s fundamental *intellectual* problem (Rom 1.18; 2 Tim 3.13). It is the root of all the false thinking of men without Christ in every area of life—anthropology and psychology, morality, religious belief and practice, philosophy, political and economic theory, and scientific theory.
 - 1.3. How might a Christian deceive himself?
 - 1.3.1. Thinking he is wiser than he is (Rom 12.16). The Corinthians thought they were wise and mature, but they had much to learn and were infants in faith and sanctification (1 Cor 3.1).
 - 1.3.2. Thinking too highly of himself (Gal 6.3). Because the Corinthians thought they were wise they also thought they were above others—as if they were God’s gift to mankind.
 - 1.3.3. Thinking he is without sin (1 Jn 1.8). The Corinthians thought that they were above sin and sanctification and they dismissed evils such as incest and drunkenness (even at the Lord’s Supper).
 - 1.3.4. Allowing others to deceive him through their teachings or actions (2 Tim 3.13; Eph 5.6). The Corinthians had become confused by false practices (e.g., eating meat sacrificed to idols) and teachings (e.g., about the reality of the resurrection).
 - 1.4. What are some means of avoiding self-deception?
 - 1.4.1. *Fear of the Lord* – Which is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Ps 111.10; Prov 1.7; Prov 9.10).
 - 1.4.2. *Humility* – Thinking more highly of others than ourselves (Rom 12.3)—particularly in our intellectual or spiritual attainments. We are nothing without the power of God.
 - 1.4.3. *Thankfulness* – Giving constant thanks to God, reminds us that we are not the source of our own life or blessing.
 - 1.4.4. *Focusing on fundamentals* – Continually focusing on the simple truth of the Gospel message with a simple faith—we are sinners saved by grace, to do good works—helps us remember who we are and where we are going.
 - 1.4.5. *Renouncing falsehood* – Falsehood is always the same, but Satan constantly puts it in new clothes to deceive even the elect, if he could (Mt 24.24). We need to evaluate every teaching of men by the standards of Scripture.
 - 1.4.6. *Ignoring the world’s scorn* – Being willing to be considered a fool for Christ (1 Cor 4.10). For example, believing that the universe/world is about 6,000 years old, rather than billions of years old claimed by proponents of materialism.
 - 1.4.7. *Being on guard* – The warning against being deceived is repeated more than five times in

the NT. Thus, indicating that deception of self or deception by others is a serious problem in the Church. Pretenders to truth lead the simple astray with their style, eloquence, degrees, and fancy vocabulary.

2. What does Paul mean when he says to “become a fool”?
 - 2.1. He does not mean that we are to dispense with rationality and reason. He knows that God calls us to use our reason (Is 1.18) and he displays the use of tightly reasoned arguments (e.g., in Acts 17.16-34, Romans, and Hebrews).
 - 2.2. Rather, he means that we are:
 - 2.2.1. To accept the truth that God’s revelation trumps human reason (Rom 11.33-35). Reason is useful, but it cannot discern truths that can only be revealed by God (such as his tri-unity or the deity of Christ).
 - 2.2.2. To be willing to submit our reason to revelation (the Bible), in every area: ontology (metaphysics; the study of existence), epistemology (the study of how we know anything), axiology (the study of values), and morality (the study of right vs wrong) to the explicit teachings of God found in Scripture (2 Cor 10.5; Heb 4.12). Nothing exists independent of God. All of existence (Gen 1.1; Acts 17.28; Rom 11.36), meaning (1 Cor 6.20; 1 Cor 10.31; Ps 86.9), knowledge (Ps 147.5; Rom 11.33; James 1.5), truth (Rom 1.25; 1 Jn 5:20), and moral standards (Ex 20.1-17; Ps 19.7) ultimately come from God.
 - 2.2.3. Not to use the faulty presuppositions and arguments of natural man (Prov 26.4), but demonstrate the logical absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*) of following human reason to its logical conclusion (Prov 26.5)
 - 2.2.4. Not to be afraid to appear foolish to the natural man (1 Cor 4.10)—for example, by standing for the truth that God created man male and female and there only two genders based on biological sex.
 - 2.2.5. To be humble and conscious of the limitations of reasoning abilities (Is 55.8-9).
3. What is Paul’s opinion of the wisdom of the world?
 - 3.1. It is folly—folly with, or before, God; and therefore, ultimate folly.
 - 3.2. What makes it folly?
 - 3.2.1. *Finite* – Men have limited knowledge and insight—far less than they think, compared with the omniscience of God (Is 55.8-9).
 - 3.2.2. *Fallen* – Man’s mind is polluted by sin, and thus every theory, concept, or idea is tainted. It is only through the general grace and special grace (e.g., indwelling of the Holy Spirit and direct revelation) of God that men can think clearly about anything (Rom 1.21; Eph 4.18).
 - 3.2.3. *Futile* – It produces nothing of everlasting importance or enduring value because it is dead in sin (1 Cor 3.20; Rom 1.21; Eph 4.17).
 - 3.3. What areas of human endeavours are affected by folly?
 - 3.3.1. When we studied 1 Corinthians 2.6-16 we noted that human ‘wisdom’ is doomed to pass away, and we identified examples, in a number of areas of human endeavour—including psychology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, economics, law and science—of the foolishness of man’s thinking; for example, evolution, religious plurality, endorsement of homosexual practices as morally neutral or even beneficial, and the idea that man is innately good.
4. What is the ‘craftiness’ of which Paul speaks?
 - 4.1. Satan’s intention when he tempted Eve was to encourage her to question God’s veracity along with breaking God’s command. His intentions have never changed—he desires that all mankind would call God a liar and break God’s law. Natural man follows in the footsteps of his spiritual father, the Devil, who is the father of lies (Jn 8.44). A goal of all sinful men is to deceive others and get them to disavow God’s truth and break his commands.

- 4.2. Thus, the craftiness of which Paul speaks appears to be the deceptive practices which all men pursue with a desire to lead others into sin. They are not content with committing sin themselves but want others to join them on the ‘ride’ (Rom 1.32; 2 Tim 3.13).
- 4.3. A mistake which Christians make is to believe that their pagan neighbours are rational, reasonable, and righteous (not overly wicked). However, the truth is otherwise. Their sin-polluted hearts desire to indulge in gross sins and to drag us with them. The only reason that they are somewhat restrained is because God’s general grace instills in them a fear of being caught and shamed.
- 4.4. What are some ways that men display craftiness in leading others into sin? They:
 - 4.4.1. Take vows that they do not really believe or intend to keep (e.g., marriage vows).
Professing Christians at times do the same when they agree to maintain particular standards (e.g., codes of ethics, statements of faith, or ordination vows) and later demonstrate by their behaviour that their vows were worthless.
 - 4.4.2. Teach subject matter to deceive their students, which they know in their deepest minds is not true. For example, teaching about evolution or a genetic basis for homosexuality. Professing Christians do the same thing when they spout falsehood (e.g., about predestination, election, and free-will; end-time prophecies; God’s desire to be worshiped with human inventions, or syncretistic practices).
 - 4.4.3. Dismiss the concepts of objective truth and absolute moral standards (2 Thess 2.9-12); claiming that both truth and morality are subjective and culturally derived. Professing Christians do the same when they claim that God’s laws (e.g., regarding the Sabbath) do not need to be kept by those living under grace in the NT era.
 - 4.4.4. Rationalize wicked behaviour and set a bad example for others. For example, they justify avoiding paying sales tax with under-the-table transactions by saying that the government overtaxes; justify committing adultery by claiming that their spouse is difficult to live with; or dismiss drunkenness as a minor foible. Professing Christians make the same rationalizations for the same sins and add others, such as harbouring hate and being unforgiving, or for gossiping.
5. What does God do with a ‘wise’ person?
 - 5.1. He catches the (worldly) wise in their craftiness.
 - 5.1.1. Paul quotes from Job 5.13; which is the only direct quotation from the book of Job in the NT.
 - 5.1.2. The words were part of a speech given by Eliphaz. Even though God condemns, in general, the speeches of Job’s friends (Job 42.7), many of their statements are true but not applied correctly to Job.
 - 5.2. Why does God catch the ‘wise’ in their craftiness?
 - 5.2.1. He knows and declares that their thoughts are futile (1 Cor 3.20).
 - 5.2.2. Thus, their wisdom is foolishness that must be restrained and rebuked.
At this point, Paul quotes from Psalm 94.11.
 - 5.3. What are ways that God catches the worldly fools in their craftiness?
 - 5.3.1. He (eventually) shows them the absurdity and logical inconsistency of their schemes, for example:
 - 5.3.1.1. If they define marriage as a union based on feelings rather than as a conjugal relationship between the opposite sexes, there is no reason to deny polygamous ‘marriages’ or ‘marriages’ with animals, or ‘marriages’ with dolls, or incestuous ‘marriages’⁷⁷—and soon ‘marriage’ will become an entirely meaningless construct.
 - 5.3.1.2. They use self-refuting arguments, such as: ‘absolute truth does not exist’ (but this

⁷⁷ Michael Brown, “Why Can’t Two Gay Brothers Marry?” Townhall, 2015-10-23; townhall.com/columnists/michaelbrown/2015/10/23/why-cant-two-gay-brothers-marry-n2070299/page/full

statement claims to be absolute truth), ‘empirical scientific evidence is the only way to prove anything’ (they cannot prove that with empirical science), ‘only what can be perceived by the physical senses can exist’ (they cannot prove even the existence/non-existence of this statement with their five senses). These speak nonsense, like the classic quip, “Nobody goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.” (Yogi Berra).

- 5.3.1.3. They define meaningless causal relationships; for example, they claim that every physical attribute and behaviour of organisms can be attributed to evolution—so in effect it is a god, or it doesn’t explain anything other than what is, is. And, they claim that everything can be attributed to genetics and therefore homosexual practices are natural but become squeamish about defending rape and prejudices (racism) as natural and the result of a person’s genetic makeup.
- 5.3.1.4. They claim that morality is culturally derived and subjective, except when they want to defend one of their cherished ‘absolutes’ such as demanding indoctrination of children with sex-ed programs that normalize deviant behaviours.
- 5.3.2. He confounds their schemes with unintended consequences, for example:
 - 5.3.2.1. Governments raise the mandatory minimum wage to reduce unemployment and companies respond by automating entry level positions and increase unemployment for the inexperienced.
 - 5.3.2.2. Governments impose rent control to provide cheaper housing for the poor. Developers stop building rental units and the supply of rental housing shrinks and housing costs increase.
 - 5.3.2.3. Governments place a tax on plastic grocery bags (or ban them) to decrease the amount of plastic going into landfills, but instead the amount of plastic increases because people substitute heavier purchased plastic bags to use with their garbage.⁷⁸
 - 5.3.2.4. Michelle Obama championed a supposedly healthier school lunch program and children refused to eat the food, which went to waste, and purchased ‘junk’ food.⁷⁹
- 6. What are we not to boast in?
 - 6.1. “In men”. What does this mean?
 - 6.2. We are not to boast about anything which comes from the mind or hand of any man; including: philosophies, religions, scientific discoveries, technological inventions, institutions, constructed edifices, or accomplishments.
 - 6.3. Why not?
 - 6.3.1. Because all that we have or are able to do is a gift from God (1 Cor 4.7).
 - 6.4. In the context of 1 Corinthians what, specifically, did Paul probably have in mind?
 - 6.4.1. Not to boast about belonging to a particular party (Paul, Apollos, Cephas) in the Church—but to Christ (1 Cor 1.12; 1 Cor 4.6).
 - 6.4.2. Modern denominational pride (“I am as Calvinist”; “I am Reformed”, “I am a Spirit-filled Pentecostal”) falls under the same condemnation.
- 7. What things does Paul say belong to Christians?
 - 7.1. “All things.”
 - 7.2. What is included in ‘all things’?
 - 7.2.1. His list includes human leaders, the world, and all of life and death—he could be speaking of the death of Christ, or of what follows this life in heaven—in the present or future.
 - 7.2.2. In his list he includes created things (including time). The list is intended to provide the

⁷⁸ Steve Toloken, “Consumers buy heavier bags; plastics use rises after Hong Kong taxes bags,” *Plastics News*, 2011-08-05; www.plasticsnews.com/headlines2.html?id=22775&channel=110

⁷⁹ Evan Bleier, “Hundreds of students return to the cafeteria after Montana high school relinquishes \$120,000 in federal funding and drops Michelle Obama’s lunch program”; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3275942/Bozeman-High-School-Montana-drops-Michelle-Obama-s-lunch-program-attracts-students-cafeteria.html

scope of what is included, not to be exhaustive. Therefore, we can conclude that everything in the universe belongs to Christians—Christ’s Church. The universe was created for man (1 Tim 6.17) and will be recreated for God’s redeemed (Mt 5.5; Mt 25.34).

7.2.3. Even the wealth of the nations and all the accomplishments of pagans belong to the Church. God advances his purposes for his Church through them (Rom 8.28).

7.3. What is excluded from ‘all things’?

7.3.1. The only uncreated thing—i.e., God.

7.4. Why does Paul make this declaration?

7.4.1. Christians have a tendency to underrate the privileges and gifts they have been given, particularly when they look at the accomplishments of many in the world. Paul wants us to stop looking at men and their supposed glory and focus on the glorious realities that we have in Christ.

8. In what way do believers belong to Christ and Christ to God?

8.1. Every unconverted person belongs to Satan and is a slave to sin and material pleasures. In contrast, believers in Christ were purchased by him (Acts 20.28); belong to him (Rom 6.16-18; Titus 2.14); and live their lives for God’s glory, through their praise and service.

8.2. Christ belongs to God in two senses:

8.2.1. As a member of the Trinity, and fully God (Jn 1.1-3), the Son belongs to the Father and Holy Spirit in an eternal bond of unity and love.

8.2.2. As the God-man, and mediator, Christ voluntarily submitted himself to the Father’s will (1 Cor 11.3; 1 Cor 15.28; Ps 40.8; Mt 26.42). Paul’s use of the title ‘Christ’ indicates that this is the sense he primarily had in mind.

8.3. Why does Paul include this statement about relationships between the Church and Christ and between Christ and the Father?

8.3.1. To remind Christians that the entire created realm, and even the eternal Son through the economy of the Trinity, is subject to the will of God the Father. Ultimately, we have nothing (life, intellectual abilities, skills, material possessions, responsibilities, and everlasting salvation) which has not been given to us by God as a gift; and we derive any authority which we have from God (Gen 1.26). Therefore, it is inappropriate for any believer to boast about anything he has, has done, or can do.

9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 3.18-23)?

9.1. *Foolishness* – Paul speaks of three classes of sinful human foolishness which infect all pagans and, to an extent, Christians.

9.1.1. Self-deception – Thinking that we are wise; wiser than other Christians and even wiser than God.

9.1.2. Pride – Thinking that we have anything to boast about; when everything we have is a gift from God.

9.1.3. Worldly wisdom – Believing the false claim that the world’s ‘wisdom’ has more merit than God’s revealed truth.

We must constantly be aware of our tendency to become seduced by these classes of sinful human foolishness and avoid them. When Christians do not avoid this seductive folly, lives are wrecked, and congregations destroyed.

9.2. *Faithfulness* – Paul directs us to the antidote for intellectual and moral folly. It is to be faithful in our commitment to God’s sovereignty in every area of life:

9.2.1. Realizing that the Church belongs to Christ and that he is building it, not through our fanciful schemes or fantasized status, but through our faithful service. We must be on guard against the slightest tendency to usurp any part of his honour or authority.

9.2.2. Reckoning our present and future possessions and gifts from and in Christ (“you are Christ’s”), so that the things of this world become pale shadows of the ultimate reality.

Prophet's Commission (1 Cor 4.1-21)

Ministry and Stewardship (1 Cor 4.1-5)

1. Every member of a congregation forms an opinion about the elders/pastor in the congregation.
 - 1.1. What are *positive* examples?
 - 1.1.1. He exhibits the characteristics of good elder which Paul identifies (in Titus and 1 Timothy).
 - 1.1.2. He is a good ... practical ... exegetical preacher.
 - 1.1.3. He has a skill in comforting the sick and elderly.
 - 1.1.4. He is a sensitive counsellor
 - 1.1.5. He is a superb evangelist.
 - 1.1.6. He has good organizational skills.
 - 1.1.7. He is a motivating leader.
 - 1.2. Sadly, for every positive opinion, there seems also to be a contrasting negative opinion. People seem unable to avoid making comparative assessments about elders, pastors, and preachers.
2. How does Paul want the Corinthians to regard his ministry?
 - 2.1. Paul tells the Corinthians how they should regard him and his ministry, and how they should regard the ministries of other leaders (e.g., Apollos and Peter). He provides two terms by which he wants his position and role to be assessed. What are they?
 - 2.1.1. Servants (ὕπηρέτας) – A specialized term for a servant, which implied low-level, menial work.
 - 2.1.2. Stewards (οἰκονόμοις) – A mature slave (or servant) assigned responsibility to oversee a household economy and to supervise the other slaves/servants (Lk 16.1-8).
 - 2.1.3. Both terms indicate that Paul viewed himself as subject to Christ as the master and owner.
 - 2.1.4. This is Paul's third analogy to describe the apostles' ministry—agriculture (1 Cor 3.5-8), building (1 Cor 3.9-12), and household management (1 Cor 4.1).
 - 2.2. Thus, elders/pastors cannot hold a view of their service in the Church that is too *low*. This means that they are to be humble. In the past, until recently, pastors were often among the most educated persons in their parish or community and it was easy for them to allow the respect of their positions to inflate their egos and to expect their congregations to defer to their opinions on all matters. Today, pastors (except possibly in rural or poor inner-city congregations, or in mission settings) are often in congregations which have a number of highly educated individuals (e.g., doctors, engineers, professors, lawyers).
 - 2.3. While elders/pastors are to consider their positions with humility, and their congregations are to view them as servants of Christ, this does not mean that members of the congregation are to demean or boss around elders/pastors. They are Christ's servants, not the congregation's servants, except for Christ's sake (2 Cor 4.5).
3. How is a pastor/preacher a steward of the mysteries of God?
 - 3.1. We noted (1 Cor 2.1-5) that Paul used the term 'mystery' as a synonym for the truth which had been veiled in the past but in Christ was more fully revealed— i.e., the Gospel, the good news that God has graciously provided a means of salvation for all mankind (Jew and Gentile) through Jesus Christ.
 - 3.2. Therefore, a steward of the mysteries of God is one who advances the Gospel message, through the Church—preaching, teaching, edification and counsel, and works of compassion and mercy.
4. What does Paul say is required of stewards?
 - 4.1. Faithfulness.
 - 4.1.1. A faithful servant and steward does not steal from his master's possessions, honour, or glory; he protects his master's interests.

- 4.2. Faithfulness to whom?
 - 4.2.1. To Christ—as servants of Christ—and to God the Father—as stewards of his redemptive plan.
- 4.3. Faithfulness in what?
 - 4.3.1. Doctrine and teaching (1 Tim 6.2-5; 2 Tim 1.13; 2 Tim 2.2).
 - 4.3.2. Holiness (1 Cor 4.16-17; 1 Thess 4.7; Heb 12.14; 2 Pt 3.11).
- 4.4. What is not required to be faithful?
 - 4.4.1. Intellectual brilliance, eloquence, originality, popularity, or demonstrated success.
5. Why was Paul unconcerned about having his ministry judged by the Corinthians?
 - 5.1. He wasn't aware of any particular problem in his own ministry with which the Corinthians could charge him with unfaithfulness—he had been scrupulously faithful to Christ and had done the best he could do from a human perspective.
 - 5.1.1. He is speaking of his work as an apostle and as the evangelist to the Corinthians, not of his entire life—he knew that he had many personal failings and sins (Rom 7.7-25; 1 Tim 1.15).
 - 5.1.2. However, his conscience is clear, with regard to his ministry among them.
 - 5.2. He dismissed their shallow standards (outward appearance, displays of human virtues and worldly eloquence, and evidence of material success) for comparing and assessing his ministry. This does not mean that he was not hurt by their criticisms, but that he chose to overlook them.
 - 5.3. He understood that the Corinthians were making judgements based on a limited assessment of events—i.e., they did not see the 'big picture'. Paul had a long-term and broad perspective on God's work of redemption and taught that it will only be on the Day of Judgement, when the Lord returns, that we will be able to see how the individual efforts of Christians have been instrumental in the advance of the Gospel. What may appear small and inconsequential to us, God may have used to build his kingdom in ways that we could never imagine. For example, the prayers of a poor mother over a wayward son may have been used by God to lead that young man to repentance and faith, after the mother died. That young man may have opened the door of the Gospel to a country, and through his faithfulness millions were brought into the Kingdom.
 - 5.4. He was not caught up in morbid self-introspection—always wondering if he had done enough or done his work well enough. He was saved by grace and empowered by grace and believed that God would ultimately reward him based on Christ's merits not based on his own work.
6. Since he had a clear conscience with regard to his ministry in Corinth, why does he then say that he is not thereby acquitted?
 - 6.1. He knew that his best efforts were not good enough, therefore he was not acquitted. Our 'good' works are always tainted with sin. We do work for the Kingdom with mixed motives—of self-glorification and advancement. Some think that their good works will earn them salvation or a more prestigious position in heaven.
 - 6.2. He knew that it is God who would judge the quality of his work (1 Cor 3.13-15; Rom 2.16; 2 Cor 5.10; Heb 4.13), not a human 'court' (Gk: 'day') or 'proceeding'.
7. Why should congregations not stand in judgement over their elders/pastors?
 - 7.1. Kingdom success cannot be assessed or judged by human standards or tribunals. God alone is the judge of the value of a person's efforts, and the one who condemns or commends.
 - 7.2. The time for judgement is at the end of time, on the final day—the Day of Judgement. Any other time of judgement or assessment is premature. The outcome of a long chain of events will only be seen at the end of time, and the fruit of an elder's/pastor's work will only be known then.
 - 7.3. It is not the business of Christians to judge their brothers and leaders (Mt 7.1-6; Rom 14.4; Heb 13.17).
 - 7.4. Much (most) of the judgement of an elder's/pastor's ministry in a congregation arises from a spirit of jealousy or self-will; from people who want to have their own way or to receive honour.

- 7.5. Does this mean that elders/pastors are free to do as they think and wish in a congregation?
 - 7.5.1. Elders/pastors are not overlords, they are under-shepherds of Christ, and are to do only that which can be supported Biblically and is for the edification and building up of the Church.
 - 7.5.2. Elders/pastors are to live transparent lives (as good examples) in which the faithfulness of their doctrine and life is evident to all.
 - 7.5.3. Elders/pastors are subject to the collective witness and wisdom of other elders in the session and presbytery.
 - 7.5.4. Elders/pastors are subject to proper procedure for assessing the faithfulness of their doctrine, teaching, and way of life (1 Tim 5.19).
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 4.1-5)?
 - 8.1. *Appointment* – Elders/pastors are servants of Christ, for the Church; appointed by him, responsible to him, and dependent on him; to rule and preach/teach his Gospel, in his name.
 - 8.2. *Authority* – Elders/pastors are gifts to the Church (Eph 4.11), but are still servants, not bosses! They do not have arbitrary or discretionary authority to rule in Christ's Church. Their authority is ministerial. Which means they are:
 - 8.2.1. To ascertain the mind of Christ, through study of the Bible.
 - 8.2.2. Teach/preach the 'whole counsel' of God from the Bible.
 - 8.2.3. Not teach the doctrines of men.
 - 8.2.4. Not to originate or innovate doctrine.
 - 8.2.5. Treat their congregations with loving respect.
 - 8.3. *Approach* – Elders/pastors are to be humble and diligent; not pompous, idle or lazy. They are planters who are to leave the responsibility for the harvest to God, who gives the increase (1 Cor 3.7).
 - 8.4. *Assessment* – Congregations are to love their elders/pastors and not be judgemental of their ministries and not to make comparisons with the ministries of others or the 'standards' of the world (virtues, intellectual achievements, speaking skills, management skills, etc.), as the Corinthians did. Neither a man himself nor his contemporaries can assess the success of his ministry. The right of assessment belongs to Christ alone, and will only be accomplished on the Day of Judgement.
 - 8.5. *Advent* – And, this passage reminds us that the Lord will come again to wrap up this age and usher in the everlasting age.

Ministry and Status (1 Cor 4.6-13)

1. What things did Paul apply to himself (and Apollos)? Why?
 - 1.1. The things he applied to himself (and Apollos) were, at least, what he had exhorted the Corinthians to consider in the preceding section (1 Cor 4.1-5)—i.e.,
 - 1.1.1. *Appointment* – Elders/pastors are servants who are appointed by Christ, for the Church.
 - 1.1.2. *Authority* – Elders/pastors have oversight duties as stewards; but are still servants in Christ's Church, not bosses!
 - 1.1.3. *Approach* – Elders/pastors are to be humble and diligent; not pompous, idle or lazy.
 - 1.1.4. *Assessment* – The right of assessment of a ministry belongs to Christ, at the end of time. He may have been thinking also of some of the other things he had said previously such as not being influenced by, or judging by, the world's standards of 'success' (1 Cor 1.26-31), God's nullifying the boasting of the worldly 'wise' (1 Cor 2.6-16; 1 Cor 3.18-23); and his focus on proclaiming Christ (1 Cor 2.1-5).
 - 1.2. He had applied these considerations to himself for their benefit—i.e., so that they could become mature Christians, and a mature congregation.
 - 1.3. His objective was that they might learn from his example and thus become more disciplined in their Christian walk.

2. What does Paul want the Corinthians to learn from his example?
 - 2.1. Not to go beyond what is written.
 - 2.1.1. What is he referring to as ‘what is written’?
 - 2.1.1.1. Some suggest that it may be what he has written in the preceding section or this whole letter. However, it is more likely that he is speaking of the entire corpus of canonical writings (Mt 2.5; 2 Cor 4.13)—the Scriptures.
 - 2.1.1.2. At this point (late 53 AD or early 54 AD) the Scriptures would have included mostly the OT books. The Gospel of Mark and the Epistle of James were probably available at this time. And, Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians and Thessalonians were also in circulation. So, Paul is speaking primarily about the OT writings; which provide standards for the NT Church (2 Tim 3.15-17).
 - 2.1.2. What does he mean by ‘not to go beyond what is written’?
 - 2.1.2.1. The word of God, as found in the Bible, is our final authority and ultimate standard.
 - 2.1.2.2. He expresses the principle, upheld by the 16th century reformers and the 17th century Puritans and Covenanters, that the Scriptures “principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”⁸⁰
 - 2.1.2.3. In addition, he teaches that no new Scriptures can be defined—unless authorized by the apostles, who were directly appointed by Christ to complete the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 14.37; Jn 14.26; Rom 2.16; 2 Cor 13.3; Gal 1.8-9; 1 Thess 2.13; 2 Pt 3.2, 16)—and nothing is to be set down as a rule for behaviour unless it can be demonstrated unequivocally that it is derived from, and consistent with, Scripture.
 - 2.1.2.4. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, provides useful thoughts on the application of these principles”
 - 2.1.2.4.1. “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”⁸¹
 - 2.1.2.4.2. “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”⁸²
 - 2.1.2.4.3. “All synods or councils, since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice; but to be used as a help in both.”⁸³
 - 2.1.2.5. It is as if he says, “To be binding, it must be written down.”
 - 2.1.2.6. He wants the Corinthians to guide their attitudes, allegiances, and actions regarding their leaders and others in the congregation by Scripture and not by prevailing secular opinions and practices.
 - 2.2. Not to be puffed up.

⁸⁰ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*’s answer to Question 3 (“What do the Scriptures principally teach?”):

⁸¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 4.

⁸² *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 10.

⁸³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 31, *Of Synods and Councils*, section 4.

- 2.2.1. Paul identified the Corinthians fundamental problem—pride. Their pride was based on a belief that the Greek culture was superior to any other and that they were gifted exemplars of their culture. In addition, the Greek culture frowned on humility as a trait—in their view humility was certainly not a virtue of ‘noble’ men.
 - 2.3. Not to foster a party spirit (“one against another”).
 - 2.3.1. He dealt with this issue explicitly earlier in his letter (1 Cor 1.10-17). Here, he is dealing with the underlying issues which contributed to their party spirit: evaluating ministerial success with criteria which went beyond the Scriptural standards and a pride associated with being part of the ‘in-crowd’.
3. What reason does Paul give for why Christians should not boast about anything?
 - 3.1. There is nothing different about us. In what ways are we all the same?
 - 3.1.1. We are creatures.
 - 3.1.2. We are sinful creatures by nature.
 - 3.1.3. We are saved by grace, not by works of merit.
 - 3.1.4. We are gifted by grace.
 - 3.2. We have nothing (material benefits, personality attributes, or intellectual skills) which we have not received.
 - 3.2.1. Anything that we have received is a gift from God and is not based on our personal merit or our worth. Therefore, we have no right to boast about anything, but particularly not about a gift that has been given to us out of God’s love, and in spite of our sin-blemished responses to his love. We should be humbly thankful, not haughtily boastful.
 - 3.2.2. Anything that we have received, has been given to us for the glory of God and the advancement of his purposes, not for our personal advancement or aggrandizement.
 - 3.3. How does he structure his challenge to the Corinthians to abstain from un-Christ-like behaviour?
 - 3.3.1. With three rhetorical questions, which as a set:
 - 3.3.1.1. Identifies their similarity—having a new nature in Christ (1 Cor 1.30).
 - 3.3.1.2. Encourages thanksgiving for the gifts that they have received (1 Cor 1.4-9)
 - 3.3.1.3. Emphasizes that all persons in the Church are nothing in God’s eyes, but are gifted by his grace, so there can be no room for boasting (1 Cor 1.26-29).
 - 3.4. What should be the result of meditating on Paul’s rhetorical questions?
 - 3.4.1. These questions remind the Corinthians (and us) that Christians are to:
 - 3.4.1.1. Respect others as peers, with none greater than another, under the headship of Christ.
 - 3.4.1.2. Acknowledge our indebtedness to God, leading to increased faith.
 - 3.4.1.3. Be thankful and grateful, leading to an enhanced love of God.
 - 3.4.1.4. Subdue pride, leading to humility.
4. What form of speech does Paul use in verse 1 Cor 4.8, 10?
 - 4.1. Sarcasm or irony. [Sarcasm is the use of irony to deliver ridicule or a scathing response to intellectual foolishness.]
 - 4.1.1. It is an effective means of responding to human pride and vain conceit.
 - 4.1.2. God uses it directly (Job 38.1-41; Mk 7.9) as do his prophets (1 Ki 18.27).
 - 4.1.3. By responding according to a person’s self-estimate, sarcasm cuts to the heart.
 - 4.2. How does Paul temper his use of sarcasm?
 - 4.2.1. By treating them as brothers (1 Cor 4.6) and his beloved children (1 Cor 4.14).
 - 4.2.2. By not naming the individuals who have been causing trouble in the congregation but referring to the problems and solutions abstractly.
 - 4.2.3. By expressing a sincere desire that they would be blessed in the way they thought they already were.
 - 4.2.4. By limiting his use of sarcasm to a brief outburst and then returning immediately to his didactic and conciliatory approach.

- 4.2.5. By contrasting his own condition with theirs (1 Cor 4.9-13).
5. What did the Corinthians think that they had (1 Cor 4.8, 10)?
- 5.1. All that they wanted (or needed), including riches, royal standing, honour, wisdom and strength.
- 5.2. What are the riches he speaks of?
- 5.2.1. He could be referring to their belief that they had:
- 5.2.1.1. Material riches; improvements in their assets since they became believers.
- 5.2.1.2. Intellectual wisdom; an ability to apply philosophical concepts and rhetorical techniques.
- 5.2.1.3. Spiritual insights into the mysteries of God (1 Cor 13.9-12) or gifts such as speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14.1-25).
- 5.2.1.4. Freedom; not being constrained by moral exactitude (1 Cor 5.1-13).
- 5.2.1.5. Eschatological; to be received when Christ returns.
- Since he does not define what he means by 'rich', it is difficult to determine what he means. However, the next sentence provides context. Since they thought of themselves as having royal standing, he may be referring to their belief that they were already receiving the blessings of the everlasting kingdom.
- 5.3. What is the royal standing (and honour) he speaks of?
- 5.3.1. They viewed themselves as having noble standing and positions of honour within Christ's kingdom.
6. Instead, what should the Corinthians have thought about themselves and their condition?
- 6.1. They should have seen their spiritual poverty and nakedness (Rev 3.17-18).
- 6.2. They should have been hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Mt 5.6).
- 6.3. They should have been fearful of their potential risk of not being participants in the kingdom of Christ (Mt 19.24; Heb 3.12).
- 6.4. They should have understood that they were not yet recipients of the realized kingdom of Christ. Their eschatology was faulty—the kingdom of Christ will not be realized in this sin-polluted, temporal realm, contrary to the belief of Premillennialists and Dispensationalists; but only when Jesus returns to renovate the universe.
- 6.4.1. When Christ returns, the dead will be raised from the graves (1 Cor 15.20-23; 1 Thess 4.15-17), and then there will be a general judgement (1 Cor 4.5; Mt 13.49-50; Mt 16.27; Mt 25.14-46; Lk 19.15-27; Jn 5.28-29; 2 Thess 1.6-10; Jude 14; Jude 15; Rev 20.11-15).
- 6.4.2. At the time of the general judgement the heavens and the earth will be cleansed with fire (2 Pt 3.10-12), all creation will be restored (Rom 8.19-22), the new heavens and new earth will be established (Is 65.17-25; 2 Pt 3.13; Rev 21.1), and heaven will be extended to the earth (Rev 21.2-4).
7. What had Paul endured for the sake of the Gospel (1 Cor 4.9-13)?
- 7.1. *Exhibited as a condemned prisoner* – He uses an illustration from a Roman triumphal march (Col 2.15) in which condemned prisoners were paraded in naked shame as they were sent to the arena to be slaughtered by gladiators or animals for the amusement of the citizenry.
- 7.1.1. He is led before the watching world (of men and angels) to fight for the Gospel. We must not take his analogy to an extreme. He would not have considered the watching holy angels to be like the Roman rabble. Rather, he considers himself to be engaged in a cosmic battle (Eph 6.12) between God's army and Satan's hordes, with the whole rational creation watching to see who the ultimate victor will be. He views his own role as little more than a foot soldier in this battle.
- 7.1.2. How does he use this analogy to shame the Corinthians?
- 7.1.2.1. The implication is that they are sitting in the stands and are not engaged in the battle, as they should be.

- 7.2. *Being considered a fool for Christ* – The world may think that Paul is a babblers (Acts 17.18) and a fool for believing in the reality of the supernatural and miracles.
- 7.2.1. The world (and much of ‘Christian’ academia) similarly views anyone as a fool who accepts the Bible at face value (e.g., six-day creation, young earth; miracles such as Jonah swallowed by a large fish, and Jesus feeding thousands from a boy’s lunch; the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, on the third day; and that Christ will return to renovate the universe).
- 7.2.2. Paul says, in contrast, that he is not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1.16). He was not ashamed to preach about Adam as the first man, sin and the need for repentance, and Christ-crucified, even among the ‘wise’ philosophers of Athens (Acts 17.16-34).
- 7.3. *Weaknesses* – His weaknesses (2 Cor 11.29; 2 Cor 12.9-10) were both physical (2 Cor 12.7) and psychological (2 Cor 11.28). He *did* consider himself to be bold and courageous but realized that his boldness was entirely dependent on the Lord’s support (Acts 18.9).
- 7.4. *Hunger and thirst* – He doesn’t provide specific circumstances of his hunger and thirst in his Epistles (see: 2 Cor 11.27). However, as an itinerant traveller, not expecting financial support from the fledgling Church (1 Cor 9.6; Acts 20.34; 2 Cor 12.13-15; 1 Thess 2.9; 2 Thess 3.8), and with limited opportunities to earn a living wage, there would have been times when he needed money and food to survive.
- 7.5. *Manual labour* – Greek culture deprecated manual labour, but Paul engaged in it (Acts 18.3) to support himself and the other evangelists travelling with him (Acts 20.34)—working with woven squares of smelly and coarse black goat-hair. The reborn Corinthians were probably of a similar mind to their pagan neighbours. Portions of the North American (Church) culture are similar, despising jobs which require manual labour and encouraging young people to strive to be doctors, lawyers, or professors; rather than plumbers or electricians. When academic streaming was in vogue, a person considered not bright enough was sent to a ‘technical’ school while others were sent to an ‘academic’ school.
- 7.6. *Disrepute, reviling and slander* – Paul experienced verbal abuse from the Jewish leaders and false teachers (Rom 3.8). However, it must have pained him greatly to have a congregation which he had founded, and people who owed their salvation to his efforts, criticizing and demeaning him.
- 7.7. *Persecution* – Paul ought to have been exempt from violence, both as a law-abiding freeman and a Roman citizen (Acts 16.37) but was treated as if he were a criminal by both Jews and Romans (Acts 9.29; Acts 13.50; Acts 14.5; Acts 16.22; Acts 18.12; Acts 21.36; Acts 22.22; Acts 23.10).
- 7.8. *Treated like scum and refuse* – Paul uses two words (with very similar meanings) to describe the garbage which one might scrape off of a plate at the end of dinner, clean up from a slaughter house, or remove from a barn. He is saying that he has been despised as nothing more than garbage.

Paul reminds the Corinthians a number of other times of his sufferings and afflictions for the sake of the Kingdom and Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15.30-32; 2 Cor 1.8-10; 2 Cor 11.23-28).

8. Why does Paul make a contrast between the Corinthians and himself?
- 8.1. Paul includes other apostles in his comparison, such as Peter and John (Acts 4.1-22; Acts 5.17-42; Acts 12.3-5), and James (Acts 12.2). However, his examples in these verses are drawn from his own experience.
- 8.1.1. Paul was not a despondent pessimist (a theological Eeyore), seeking sympathy as he slumped his shoulders in misery. He was an optimist, filled with hope and joy (Phil 1.18; Phil 2.17; Col 1.23-24; 1 Thess 4.13-18). He knew that God was working out his great and loving purposes for the good of his people, through him as a secondary instrument.
- 8.1.2. Nor was Paul seeking suffering. He did not have a ‘martyr complex’—desiring the feeling of being a martyr for its own sake or seeking suffering or persecution because he felt a perverse psychological need. He did not like suffering, but he knew that it is often the

- portion of those who take a stand for Christ and truth in a hostile world (2 Tim 3.12).
- 8.2. He wants to show the Corinthians that their worldly self-esteem and boasting are out of place in God's Church.
- 8.2.1. The person who is greatest in the Kingdom of God will often be considered least in the eyes of the world (Mt 5.3, 5, 7, 10; Mt 18.1-4), suffering for the Kingdom (Acts 5.41; 1 Pt 4.12-19; James 1.2). The things they valued, Paul dismissed; the things they despised in Paul, Paul vaunted.
- 8.2.2. Whom did the Corinthians follow? Christ? He was persecuted. Peter? He was persecuted. Paul? He was persecuted. They should not claim to follow one of these men and also boast of their own situation and gifts.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 4.6-13)?
- 9.1. *Bible Esteemed* – We must accept the Scriptures of the OT and NT as our standard of truth, righteousness, behavioural example, and correction (2 Tim 3.15-17). The Bible must be our standard in all areas of life, including:
- 9.1.1. *History*: The Bible gives the final word on the historical events of which it speaks (e.g., creation, flood, Joseph in Egypt, exodus of Jews from Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Esther in Persia, time and place of the birth of Jesus, etc.). Where extra-Biblical history or scientific theories contradict the plain statements of the Bible, the Bible is to be accepted as absolute.
- 9.1.2. *Theology*: Everything we are to believe concerning God and his providential governance is to be derived from the Bible alone. This includes the truths about his aseity, eternality and tri-unity; the divinity of Jesus; and the justice and love of God revealed through the work of redemption on the cross.
- 9.1.3. *Miracles*: The Bible is to be our standard for defining what we will believe about how God rules in providence. The 'laws' of nature describe how God usually operates through secondary causes; they do not prescribe how he must operate. True science must not rule out the reality of the supernatural or the miraculous.
- 9.1.4. *Worship*: The Bible tells us how God defines worship and what he deems to be acceptable forms of worship
- 9.1.5. *Government and law*: Since all legislated behaviour deals with morality and there is ultimately no such thing as a non-religious morality, all human-defined laws are to be demonstrably derived from, and consistent with, the Ten Commandments; and to follow the example of the case laws in the Bible, which apply the Ten Commandments.
- 9.1.6. *Anthropology and psychology*: The Bible explains the origin of sin and guilt and how to deal with them through repentance and confession. Humanistic theories and methods, at best, provided remedies for the symptoms of guilt and, at worst, lead men into hell.
- 9.2. *Boasting Exposed* – Boasting in human skills, accomplishments, or possessions is a denial of God's goodness and sovereign dispositions. We are nothing, except what God has made us and given to us. "Pride is not mere folly; it is wickedness also, because it robs God of His glory."⁸⁴ The more gifts we have received from God, the more we should be grateful and humble.
- 9.3. *Buffeting Expected* – Paul's examples (here and elsewhere in his letters to the Corinthians) remind us of the words of Jesus which inform us that persecution is to be expected in the life of believers who stand in opposition to pagan practices and false beliefs (Mt 5.11-12, 44; Mt 10.17; Mt 22.23; Mt 23.34; Mt 24.9; Jn 15.18-27). Men hate and despise Biblical righteousness and will do everything they can to remove it from sight, including murdering Christians if they can get away with it. With regard to suffering afflictions for the sake of Christ, we are to:
- 9.3.1. Expect them (Jn 15.20; 1 Pt 4.12-13; 2 Tim 3.12).
- 9.3.2. Understand that they are the result of fidelity to God, not signs of his displeasure (2 Tim 3.12; Heb 11.34).

⁸⁴ J. P. Lange, et al, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 99.

- 9.3.3. Share in the sufferings of Christ (Jn 15.18; 2 Cor 1.5).
- 9.3.4. Receive them with a spirit of humility and thankfulness (Acts 4.21; James 1.2).
- 9.3.5. Use them as an incentive for more active service (Mt 5.44; 1 Pt 3.16).
- 9.3.6. Believe that God has not deserted us through them (Ps 72.14; Ps 116.15; Rom 8.28; Heb 13.5).
- 9.3.7. Look forward, in faith, to the day when God will reveal fully the reason for them, and the fruit borne from our sufferings (2 Cor 4.17-18).
- 9.4. *Beautiful Expositors* – Paul says elsewhere, ‘As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”’ (Rom 10.15; quoting Is 52.7). This section of the letter to the Corinthians sets a high standard for these ‘beautiful expositors’. Their lives are to exhibit:
 - 9.4.1. Humility.
 - 9.4.2. Faithful dependence on Christ to supply all their needs.
 - 9.4.3. Self-sacrifice and a willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ.
 - 9.4.4. Leadership through caring shepherding not through tyrannical dictates.
 - 9.4.5. Unwavering loyalty to Christ, his Church, and his word.

Ministry and Sonship (1 Cor 4.14-17)

1. What did Paul want to achieve by writing the preceding statements in his letter?
 - 1.1. ‘These things’ could be the entire letter to this point but are more likely the strong words he has just finished writing in verses 6-13.
 - 1.2. His purpose was not ultimately to shame them—which his words probably did—but to admonish them as beloved children so that they would have a change of heart and become humble, repent of their sins (divisiveness schisms [1 Cor 1.10-4.21], deviance that shocks [1 Cor 5.1-13], destructive suits [1 Cor 6.1-8]; disinherited sanctification [1 Cor 6.9-11], and disallowed sex [1 Cor 6.12-20]), and excel in the graces which would glorify God and extend his Kingdom among the pagans.
2. What does he consider to be his relationship with the Corinthian congregation?
 - 2.1. As a father to children.
 - 2.1.1. He was the evangelist to whom the Corinthians owed their conversion, and as such was their spiritual father.
 - 2.1.2. What is included in being a spiritual father (or mother) to another person?
 - 2.1.2.1. Encouraging him to consider Christ through life and words.
 - 2.1.2.2. Presenting to him the mystery of the Gospel.
 - 2.1.2.3. Praying for his conversion.
 - 2.1.2.4. Assisting him as he takes the step of faith to believe in Jesus.
 - 2.1.2.5. Guiding him to a fuller understanding of Biblical truths—this may be facilitated through the teaching of others.
 - 2.1.2.6. Helping him consistently to apply Biblical principles in his life.
 - 2.1.3. How can Paul refer to himself as their ‘father’ in a spiritual sense when Jesus tells his disciples not to call anyone ‘father’ (Mt 23.9).
 - 2.1.3.1. As God delegates the honour of giving life to new persons, and calls them fathers (Gen 2.14; Ex 20.12), even though he is the ultimate giver of life (Gen 2.7; Acts 17.25); so he delegates the honour of giving new spiritual life to men (Dan 12.3), even though he is the ultimate author of spiritual life (Jn 3.8).
 - 2.1.3.2. Therefore, Jesus is probably not speaking of those in delegated ‘father’ roles, but of those who would attempt to usurp God’s ultimate role as father—i.e., to be ‘gods’ to their followers.
 - 2.2. A contrast to their guides, or instructors (*pedagogues*).
 - 2.2.1. Others (e.g., Peter and Apollos) came among them, after he founded the congregation. However, no matter how valuable their instruction may have been, they did not hold the

special relationship he held to them as the one, as the human instrument of the Holy Spirit, who guided them out of darkness into the light of truth.

3. What does Paul exhort the Corinthians to do?
 - 3.1. To imitate him (Phil 3.17; Phil 4.9; 2 Thess 3.7).
 - 3.2. Is Paul being egotistical when he makes this statement?
 - 3.2.1. He qualifies his statement later (1 Cor 11.1; 1 Thess 1.6). He would not want the Corinthians to imitate his sins, foibles, and follies. Rather he wants them to imitate him to the extent that he imitates Christ.
 - 3.3. Good Christian teachers are to be imitated (Heb 13.7; 1 Pt 5.3).
 - 3.3.1. They are not to be imitated in their dress or bodily mannerisms, intemperate behaviour, unhealthy lifestyles, or unholy actions
 - 3.3.2. Rather they are to imitated in their faith, love, good works, holy living, dedication to Christ and his Gospel, hard work (2 Thess 3.6-12), a willingness to serve others (Phil 2.5-8) and to face persecution for the sake of the Kingdom, perseverance in prayer, and communication of sound Biblical instruction.
4. What does Paul say was to be one of Timothy's roles?
 - 4.1. Timothy was to remind the Corinthians of Paul's ways in Christ. What does that mean?
 - 4.1.1. To reinforce the teaching they had received from Paul previously and through this letter.
 - 4.1.2. Paul did not wish to offend the proud Corinthians by suggesting that the young Timothy (1 Tim 4.12) could act as an authoritative teacher in their midst. So, he suggested that what Timothy would communicate would be only what Paul himself would have communicated had he been present with them.
 - 4.2. Who was Timothy?
 - 4.2.1. A disciple of Christ (Acts 16.1; 2 Tim 1.5), from Lystra in Asia, the son of a Jewish mother and grandmother who were believers (2 Tim 1.5), but whose father was a Greek (Acts 16.1, 3) and may not have been a Christian. Timothy had been uncircumcised, but Paul had had him circumcised to make it easier for him to work among Jews in the synagogues (Acts 16.3).
 - 4.2.2. Paul refers to him his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord". Timothy was like Paul's "beloved children" in Corinth. Timothy had been well instructed in the OT (2 Tim 3.14-15) and had believed in Christ but had not necessarily become a Christian through the teaching of Paul (Acts 16.1-2).
 - 4.2.3. Paul took Timothy into his missionary company (Acts 16.3-4; Rom 16.21) and Timothy travelled with Paul. However, Paul also commissioned Timothy to undertake follow-up tasks as his representative in the cities they had visited together (Phil 2.19; 1 Tim 1.5, 18).
 - 4.3. Where was Timothy when Paul wrote this letter?
 - 4.3.1. The ESV has, "I sent you Timothy". Timothy was on his way to Corinth or in Corinth.
 - 4.3.2. Some interpreters believe that Paul had already sent Timothy to Corinth (Acts 19.22) at the time he was writing this letter. Others suggest that Timothy carried the letter, so was with Paul while the letter was being written. And, others suggest that Timothy was taking an indirect route visiting the churches in Asia Minor and would arrive after the letter was sent directly to Corinth. Regardless, Paul intended for Timothy to arrive in Corinth to undertake his work among them (1 Cor 16.10) and wanted the Corinthians to receive him warmly.
 - 4.3.3. The verb (ἔπεμψα) translated 'sent' or 'sending' is in the aorist tense. Normally this is translated into English in the past tense from the writer's/speaker's perspective. However, it can also be understood from the reader's perspective (referred to as an epistolary aorist). In this case, Timothy would have been sent by the time they received the letter. The NIV has, "I am sending to you Timothy" (ESV alternate translation). We could possibly translate it as, 'I have sent'.

5. What did Paul teach everywhere in every church?
 - 5.1. The mystery of the Gospel: man's deep need in sin, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection on behalf of sinners, belief in Christ's work on the cross, repentance of sin, how to live a holy life, and the promise of the bodily resurrection.
 - 5.2. Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that what he had taught while he was with them was the same thing that he taught in all the other churches (1 Cor 7.17; 1 Cor 11.16; 1 Cor 14.33; 1 Cor 16.1). There was no room for innovation in Paul's doctrine or teaching, and the Corinthians had no monopoly on truth.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 4.14-17)?
 - 6.1. *Equality* – All Christians are equal before God (Gal 3.28)—all are depraved sinners saved by grace through faith, not based on any work they have performed (Eph 2.8-10). Likewise, no congregation is unique or special; all are part of Christ's one body.
 - 6.2. *Exactness* – Nothing is to be taught, or practice introduced, in the Church which is inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible, "unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men". Doctrine and practice in the Church are to be only that which can be supported from Scripture: either as "expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture".⁸⁵ Preaching and teaching in every congregation of the Church is to be consistent, clear, and challenging; not nonconforming, new, or novel.
 - 6.3. *Examples* – Church leaders and mature Christians in a congregation are to be examples for younger and immature Christians. And, all Christians are to imitate those who imitate Christ: in faith, love, good works, holy living, dedication to Christ and his Gospel, hard work, willingness to face persecution for the sake of the Kingdom, and communication of sound Biblical instruction. Good examples: illustrate Christian principles, rebuke the wayward, persuade others to follow in the right path, and encourage others to persevere to the end.

Ministry and Strictness (1 Cor 4.18-21)

1. What does Paul attribute to some in the Corinthian church?
 - 1.1. Arrogance; synonyms: pride, conceit, self-importance.
 - 1.2. Why were they arrogant?
 - 1.2.1. They believed that they were not to be held accountable to anyone.
 - 1.2.2. They believed that Paul would not come back to set things right.
2. What does Paul say he will do to deal with the Corinthians' arrogance?
 - 2.1. He planned to visit them and assess the state of their 'power' in contrast to their 'talk'.
 - 2.1.1. He understood sinful human psychology. He knew that people often boast, or make disparaging comments about others who are among their peers, but are more restrained when confronted by an expert or the person they are criticizing.
 - 2.1.2. Tough talk is often nothing more than toothless talk—all talk, no action.
 - 2.2. How would he deal with their arrogance?
 - 2.2.1. He would demonstrate his concern and love for the congregation by visiting them.
 - 2.2.2. He would use his spiritual discernment to identify the arrogant in the congregation.
 - 2.2.3. He would challenge the basis of their supposed power with unassailable logic and Biblical instruction.
 - 2.2.4. He would rebuke them for their bad attitudes and unholy behaviour.
 - 2.2.5. If necessary, he would use discipline (e.g., removing some of them from office or withholding the Lord's Supper from them) to encourage them to repent.

⁸⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 4.

- 2.3. What caveat does Paul place on his pending visit?
 - 2.3.1. He indicates that he will visit them only if the Lord wills it. He uses a similar expression in other places (Rom 15.32; Heb 6.3). For him, the expression “if the Lord wills” was not a trite space-filler but a sincere expression of his humble dependence on God.
 - 2.3.2. His worldview was framed by his understanding that everything which transpires is in accord with God’s eternal plan (Rom 8.28-30; 2 Tim 1.9) and will, and his providential governance.
3. What does Paul want the Corinthians to display?
 - 3.1. Not talk but power, not the ‘power’ of proud men; real power, the power of the kingdom of God.
 - 3.2. What are examples of how people talk instead of exercising or displaying the power of the kingdom of God?
 - 3.2.1. Reciting a creed, as if the words had magical power.
 - 3.2.2. Claiming to belong to Christ but having an unconverted heart (Mt 7.22-23).
 - 3.2.3. Professing allegiance to Christ and a holy life while in the presence of others in the congregation but displaying a very different persona when with those who do not belong to Christ.
 - 3.2.4. Taking a vow to uphold a confession of faith but teaching doctrines or observing practices which are contrary to the confession and vow they have made.
 - 3.2.5. Teaching doctrines (e.g., predestination and election *vs* ‘free will’) as if they believe them, because it is expected by their congregational peers, but denying them in their hearts.
 - 3.2.6. Praying for revival or claiming to care about the state of the unconverted but doing nothing about it.
 - It is insufficient to ‘say’ but not to ‘do’.
 - 3.3. What are examples of how the power of God is displayed in a congregation?
 - 3.3.1. Faith, hope, love
 - 3.3.2. Holiness of life
 - 3.3.3. Forgiving spirit
 - 3.3.4. Helpful hands
 - 3.3.5. Solid teaching
 - 3.3.6. Spirit of praise and thankfulness
 - 3.4. What does Paul mean by the “kingdom of God”?
 - 3.4.1. Jesus uses this expression often in his ministry—as recorded in all four of the Gospels. Paul, and Luke in Acts (in all but two instances speaking about Paul’s preaching), are the only writers of Scripture, outside of the Gospels, who use the expression.
 - 3.4.2. The concept of God’s kingdom has various nuanced meanings in Paul’s writings:
 - 3.4.2.1. God’s sovereign rule (2 Tim 4.1; Heb 1.8; Heb 12.28 [not the exact expression “kingdom of God”]).
 - 3.4.2.2. The reign of God in the hearts of believers (Rom 14.17).
 - 3.4.2.3. The believing Church which overlaps with the visible Church (Col 4.11).
 - 3.4.2.4. The yet-to-be-realized eschatological manifestation of the Church—heaven (1 Cor 6.9-10; 1 Cor 15.50).
 4. What is Paul’s rhetorical question?
 - 4.1. Whether the Corinthians want Paul to come to them with a rod of discipline or with “love in a spirit of gentleness”.
 - 4.2. What would be the expected answer?
 - 4.2.1. That Paul would withhold the rod of discipline and treat them gently.
 - 4.3. What does this question imply?
 - 4.3.1. Paul could, when necessary, firmly exercise church discipline; and the Corinthians may have previously seen evidence of this.

- 4.3.2. He preferred not to have to deal with a congregation in an authoritarian manner, but to see their beliefs and practices established by a love of what is right (Phm 8-9).
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 4.18-21)?
- 5.1. *Presbyterian Practice* – Paul indicated that he would deal with the arrogance of some in the congregation in Corinth. One of the marks of the true church is the exercise of discipline by the elders on those under their care. Thus, overt, public sins in congregations must be dealt with through the exercise of church discipline.
- 5.1.1. However, Paul was in a unique situation as an apostle with a degree of ecclesiastical authority not vested in individual elders/pastors in the Church today. A universal synod had been held to deal with doctrinal matters (Acts 15.1-29), but regional presbyteries had not yet been established. So, Paul could not call upon a presbytery to assist in the resolution of the difficulties in the congregation in Corinth.
- 5.1.2. We have the established Presbyterian practice of regional assemblies of elders/pastors who are able to assist with difficult disciplinary matters, so that they are not dealt with by individuals acting autocratically or unilaterally; and so that a local congregation can refer a matter to a broader assembly of elders to obtain guidance from their wisdom and insight.
- 5.2. *Pastoral Prudence* – Whatever the egregious sin (e.g., excessive boasting, heresy, sexual, gossip or slander, etc.), the elders must deal with it, but in a careful and loving manner. They must not relish confrontation or act in a bitter, heavy-handed, or vindictive manner. Church discipline must be:
- 5.2.1. *Prayerful* – surrounded by prayer to discern the will of God.
- 5.2.2. *Patient* – executed slowly and with careful deliberation.
- 5.2.3. *Principled* – based on clear Biblical principles.
- 5.2.4. *Prudent* – guided by wisdom and counsel.
- 5.2.5. *Pastoral* – to build up, encourage, and reform the offender.
- 5.2.6. *Peaceful* – mild and judicious, seeking long term peace within the congregation.
- 5.2.7. *Private* – by the elders alone, where possible, to avoid gossip and hearsay.
- 5.2.8. *Public* – only where essential.
- 5.3. *Power's Provenance* – Paul speaks of the power of the kingdom, which he attributes to God as its source. The Church is a component of God's kingdom and therefore has the power of the kingdom of God.
- 5.3.1. The NT Church, and local congregations (often made up of men and women from different ethnic groups, languages, cultures, nations, ages, and socio-economic classes) within the Church, can only exist by the power of God. They are decreed by the eternal plan of God the Father, founded and established by the saving work of Christ on the cross, increased by the converting work of the Holy Spirit, and preserved by Christ's mediatorial rule.
- 5.3.2. We obtain proof of the uniqueness of the institution of the Church and of God's power in it by the fact that it exists at all, and by its continuing to exist. Men are by nature God haters and are changed into God lovers as they are engrafted into his Church. Congregations continue to exist despite the personal foibles which often characterize their members, and differences which often arise among them. And, congregations continue to prosper despite the animosity, hatred, and persecution of believers by Satan's demonic hordes and human slaves. If the Church were not imbued with the Spirit of God, it would have died out a few weeks after the resurrection of Jesus and would not be the world-changing force it is today. The progress and perpetuity of the Church are evidence that it is of divine origin.
- 5.3.3. The Church is unique from other institutions (even those established by God such as marriage and civil government) since it has as its principle mission the betterment of human society through its teaching (Mt 28.20) and practices.
- 5.3.4. Since the kingdom of God receives its power from God, it must be:
- 5.3.4.1. *Daring*, courageous and fearless in its stand for truth, in the face of opposition (1 Cor

4.19; Jn 14.27).

5.3.4.2. *Dependent* on the Lord, from whom it receives its power (1 Cor 4.19; James 4.15).

5.3.4.3. *Discerning*, testing human pretensions (1 Cor 4.19; 1 Cor 12.10).

5.3.4.4. *Determined* to deal with sin in its midst as circumstances require, severely or leniently (1 Cor 4.19, 21; 1 Cor 5.13).

Deviance that Shocks (1 Cor 5.1-13)

Church Discipline (1 Cor 5.1-8)

1. What is the second blatant sin in the Corinthian congregation that Paul addresses?

1.1. Sexual immorality.

1.1.1. Paul uses the word πορνεία, which is generally translated as ‘sexual immorality’ in the ESV (and NIV/NKJV). The word occurs 25 times in the Greek NT. Five of the occurrences are in the Gospels (Mt 5.32; Mt 15.19; Mt 19.9; Mk 7.21; Jn 8.41), three in Acts (Acts 15.20, 29; Acts 21.25), seven in Revelation (Rev 2.21; Rev 9.21; Rev 14.8; Rev 17.2, 4; Rev 18.3; Rev 19.2). Of the remaining ten occurrences, six occur in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:1 [2X]; 1 Cor 6.13, 18; 1 Cor 7.2; 2 Cor 12.21), and the remaining four in Paul’s other Epistles (Gal 5.19; Eph 5.3; Col 3.5; 1 Thess 4.3).

1.1.2. The ESV translates it as ‘sexual immorality’ in all but two instances: in 1 Corinthians 5:1 the word occurs twice and the ESV leaves the second occurrence untranslated (the NKJV has ‘such sexual immorality’); in Revelation 19.2 the ESV has ‘immorality’.

1.1.3. It is not surprising that the term ‘sexual immorality’ occurs proportionately more often in Paul’s writings as his mission work and Epistles were directed primarily to (formerly) pagan Gentiles, among whom outward sexually immoral practices were more common than among professing Jews. It was necessary for the council at Jerusalem to direct Gentile congregations to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15.20, 29; Acts 21.25). In addition, more than half of Paul’s references to ‘sexual immorality’ are in his letters to the Corinthians, who lived in a city known throughout the Mediterranean world of its day for its sexual immorality. We noted in our opening considerations of the letter (*Greeting* (1 Cor 1.1-3)) that ‘to Corinthianise’ was a euphemism for sexual immorality.

1.1.4. The term ‘sexual immorality’ is generic, and includes subcategories of unlawful sexual intercourse, such as fornication, prostitution (Jude 7; ἐκπορνεύσασαι), adultery (μοιχεία), homosexual practices (ἀρσενικοῦται; 1 Cor 6.9; 1 Tim 1.10), and bestiality.

1.2. A specific case or class of sexual immorality. What was the particular form of sexual immorality occurring in the Corinthian congregation, which Paul addresses?

1.2.1. A man was having sex with his father’s wife. Not his own mother or Paul would have used the term ‘mother’, but his father’s second wife—presumably a younger wife married after the man’s mother had died. The verb is present active infinitive which implies an ongoing relationship rather than a single act. It is possible that this was not a case of ongoing adultery or Paul would probably have used the term for adultery (μοιχεύσεις) instead. His father was probably dead, and the man took his father’s young widow as his wife, concubine, or lover.

1.2.2. In particular, he was committing incest; defined as: “sexual relations between people classed as being too closely related to marry each other. The crime of having sexual intercourse with a parent, child, sibling, or grandchild.” Incest is sexual activity between blood relatives but may also include sexual activity among those related by affinity (e.g., stepparents or siblings, or siblings by being adopted).

2. What does Paul’s statement about the pagans’ attitude to incest teach us?

2.1. The pagans did not tolerate incest between a parent and a child. Without having immediate access to revealed moral codes, they understood through innate instinct (‘natural law’) that incest between a parent and child is a perversion of the God-intended natural order for marriage.

- 2.2. Paul's statement about the pagans' attitude toward incest between a parent and a child is supported by evidence from his contemporary Greco-Roman culture.
 - 2.2.1. In a Greek fable (*Antigone*), the inadvertent incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother ends in a disaster and Oedipus is punished by blinding and the children of the incestuous relationship are punished for their parents' sin.
 - 2.2.2. Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman philosopher, lawyer, orator, political theorist, and politician, stated, with disgust: "The mother-in-law marries the son-in-law, no one looking favourably on the deed, no one approving it, all foreboding a dismal end to it. Oh, the incredible wickedness of the woman, and, with the exception of this one single instance, unheard of since the world began! Oh, the unbridled and unrestrained lust! Oh, the extraordinary audacity of her conduct! To think that she did not fear (even if she disregarded the anger of the gods and the scorn of men) that nuptial night and those bridal torches! that she did not dread the threshold of that chamber! nor the bed of her daughter! nor those very walls, the witnesses of the former wedding! She broke down and overthrew everything in her passion and her madness; lust got the better of shame, audacity subdued fear, mad passion conquered reason. Her son was indignant at this common disgrace of his family, of his blood, and of his name. His misery was increased by the daily complaints and incessant weeping of his sister ..."⁸⁶
 - 2.2.3. Catullus (84-54 BC), a Roman poet who apparently did not find homosexual erotic relationships disgusting, speaks with disgust of incest between a man and his mother (and sister) and calls it wanton and a sin.⁸⁷
 - 2.2.4. Roman law, as cited in the *Institutes* of the Roman jurist Gaius (c 161 AD), declares, "[A man] may not marry one who has been his wife's mother or his son's wife or his wife's daughter or his father's wife. I say, one who has been so allied, because during the continuance of the marriage that produced the alliance there would be another impediment to the union, for a man cannot have two wives nor a woman two husbands."⁸⁸
 - 2.3. Incest between a parent and child continues to generate shock even in our day.⁸⁹
 - 2.4. Incest between siblings was considered to be less problematic in pagan cultures in the ancient Middle East. For example, ancient Egyptian Pharaohs at times practiced brother-sister incest to maintain their royal blood. Tutankhamun was the son of an incestuous union and married his half-sister. Later, Cleopatra V was married to her brother, Ptolemy XII; and Cleopatra VII was married to her younger brother, Ptolemy XIII.
3. Why is incest a sin (and, in many jurisdictions, a crime)?
 - 3.1. From a purely human perspective incest cannot be immoral, although it may be unadvisable because of the possibility of introducing an increased occurrence of genetic deterioration.
 - 3.2. Ultimately, the only reason incest is sin (and a crime) is because God has said it is prohibited:
 - 3.2.1. Incest between parents and children (Dt 22.30; Dt 27.20; Lev 18.8; Lev 20.11).
 - 3.2.2. Incest between siblings (Lev 18.9; Lev 20.17)
 - 3.2.3. General rules governing consanguinity (Lev 18.8-18; Lev 20.11-21), a man is not to approach the bed of his:
 - 3.2.3.1. Mother, stepmother, mother-in-law
 - 3.2.3.2. Aunt (parent's sister or by marriage)
 - 3.2.3.3. Sister or half-sister; sister-in-law (if wife still alive)

⁸⁶ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, vol. 2 (London: C Bell and sons, 1917); oll.libertyfund.org/titles/655#Cicero_0043-02_151

⁸⁷ Gaius Valerius Catullus, *The Poems*, "88. Incest in the Family: to Gellius"; www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Catullus.htm#anchor_Toc531846813

⁸⁸ Gaius, *Institutes*; DE NVPTIIS; files.libertyfund.org/files/1154/Gaius_0533.pdf

⁸⁹ Adrian Asis, *10 of the Most Shocking Cases of Real Life Incest* (2014-09-21); www.therichest.com/rich-list/most-shocking/10-of-the-most-shocking-cases-of-real-life-incest/?view=all

- 3.2.3.4. Wife's daughter or granddaughter.
- 3.3. Immediately after creation, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve married one another. Cain's wife (Gen 4.17) had to have been one of his sisters (Gen 5.4) or a daughter of one of his siblings. Clearly it was necessary for Cain to marry a daughter of Adam and Eve because there were no other humans around. God introduced a prohibition against the marriage of siblings later (Lev 18.9), as it was unnecessary for marriage to be within that degree of consanguinity, to limit concupiscence among those who cohabited as children, to control abuses of power, and likely to limit damage caused by inbreeding due to accidental genetic mutations that have been accumulating at an accelerating rate since the flood.
4. What response to the sin of incest was displayed by the Corinthians (1 Cor 5.2, 6)?
- 4.1. They were arrogant and boastful about the presence of the sin in their midst, rather than being disturbed by its presence.
- 4.2. What was the reason he called them arrogant and boastful?
- 4.2.1. Even if they considered this form of incest to be a sin, they were not shamed by it or doing anything about it. Instead they used its presence as an opportunity to show their apparent tolerance.
- 4.2.2. They may have believed that the incest wasn't actually sinful because they felt that prohibitions on particular physical things such as foods or sexual practices were irrelevant or merely dealing with physical matters. They believed they were controlled by a new paradigm, "all things are lawful for me" (1 Cor 6.12) and lived on a spiritual plane. They had imbibed a form of dualism (possibly a nascent Gnosticism) which held that the physical plane of existence was separate from the spiritual plane.
- 4.2.3. While Paul was appalled at the presence of the sin in the congregation, his overriding concern was that the congregation wasn't appalled along with him.
- 4.3. What reaction to the sin should they have had?
- 4.3.1. They should have acknowledged the sin for what it was—an overtly abominable sin.
- 4.3.2. They should have mourned that a member of their congregation was flaunting such sin in their presence.
- 4.3.3. They should have acknowledged that tolerating the sin in their presence made them unholy as a body.
5. What was Paul's reaction on hearing about the sin (1 Cor 5.1, 3)?
- 5.1. He expressed astonishment ("actually reported") that such as sin was openly present and tolerated in a congregation of God's people.
- 5.2. He applied spiritual discernment in giving his assessment as wisdom provided by the Lord "though absent in body, I am present in spirit" (Jn 3.6; Acts 18.25; Rom 7.6; Rom 8.4).
- 5.3. He declared the person (man) guilty, based on the report he had received.
- 5.4. How did Paul display pastoral prudence?
- 5.4.1. He was careful not to name the individual, though it was likely reported to him, but used, "a man" (1 Cor 5:1), "him who has done this" (1 Cor 5.2), "the one who has done such a thing" (1 Cor 5.3). This indicates that he was dealing with the matter with as much discretion as possible, giving the person time to repent and to be received back into fellowship. Compare 1 Timothy 1.20; 2 Timothy 4.10, 14 and 3 John 9 where persons are named, and Paul and John express harsh condemnation of them.
- 5.5. Why does Paul say nothing about disciplining the woman?
- 5.5.1. It may indicate that she was not a professing Christian and not part of the congregation and that he was dealing with the matter purely within the Church context (1 Cor 5.12-13).
6. How did Paul want the congregation to address this sin (1 Cor 5.2, 4-5)?
- 6.1. Discipline the man.

6.2. Exercise discipline as a congregation.

6.2.1. They were to deal with the matter when assembled in the name of Jesus. Assembling in the name of Jesus means that they came together as Christians as a congregation who believed in Jesus and invoked the name of Jesus in prayer. This would distinguish their assembly from other forms of assembly such as for political reasons.

6.2.2. The congregation was to act as a ‘judicial’ body. Jesus provided a process, using the assembled congregation, as a means of dealing with sin in its midst (Mt 18.15-17, 20)

6.2.3. What support is provided when a congregation assembles as a ‘judicial’ body in the name of Jesus?

6.2.3.1. The ‘power of our Lord Jesus’ will be present. Jesus has delegated his authority to the Church (Mt 28.18-20) and given the Church in its judicial proceedings authority to bind and loose those from membership (Mt 18.18-19; Jn 20.23).

6.2.3.2. The Spirit of God will be present and bless the assembly and its judicial actions. ‘My spirit’ in 1 Cor 5.4, could possibly be translated as ‘my Spirit’ as in ‘my God’, as in 1 Cor 1.4; although, this is the only place in the NT where this expression is used, so there are no other instances against which to make a translation judgement)

6.3. Excommunicate the man from their assembly.

6.3.1. What terms does he use to describe the action of excommunication?

6.3.1.1. Remove him (2).

6.3.1.2. Deliver him to Satan (5)

6.3.1.3. Purge him from among them (13).

6.3.2. What would the excommunication include?

6.3.2.1. He would be excluded from the fellowship of the congregation (1 Cor 5.11; 2 Thess 3.14-15).

6.3.2.2. He would no longer be permitted to participate in the Lord’s Supper, have the symbol of covenant inclusion applied (i.e., have his children baptized), participate as a member by voting for elders or deacons, serve as an elder or deacon, or teach in the congregation.

6.3.2.3. He would be treated as a pagan (Mt 18.17).

6.3.2.4. He would be identified symbolically as being excluded from God’s protection.

6.3.3. What does Paul mean by ‘deliver to Satan’?

6.3.3.1. Separating him from positive spiritual influences. Handing him over to the world dominated by Satan (Job 1.12; 1 Jn 5.19) and sin. It was not handing the person over to everlasting damnation—Paul wanted this handing over to be corrective (“that his spirit may be saved”)—but to permit Satan to have his way with the man to teach him a lesson.

6.3.3.2. ‘The verb παραδίδωμι is one that Paul uses elsewhere of God’s judicially giving over sinners to further sin (Rom 1.24, 26, 28), and of God’s giving over Jesus to death on the cross (1 Cor 11.23; Rom 4.25; Rom 8.32). “Satan” is, Paul writes, the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). To “hand over to Satan” is, in this context, to commit a person to the realm of Satan.’⁹⁰

6.3.4. What does Paul mean by “for the destruction of the flesh”?

6.3.4.1. It probably does not mean physical punishment (e.g., as occurred with Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5.1-11], and Elymas [Acts 13.8-11]).⁹¹ Rather, it likely means destruction of the fleshly (sinful) passions and practices.

6.3.4.2. ‘Paul emphasizes ... that what is destroyed is “flesh” (σάρξ). In view is not the offender’s corporality so much as his participation and involvement in sin. Paul

⁹⁰ Guy Prentiss Waters, “Curse Redux? 1 Corinthians 5:13/, Deuteronomy, and Identity in Corinth,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 77, Fall 2015, p. 247.

⁹¹ We will address the corporal penalty for incest given in Leviticus 20.11 when we consider 1 Cor 5.13.

indicates that Satan is the instrument of this destruction (ὁλεθρον, cf. 1 Cor 10:10). Paul does not specify the mechanism or method by which Satan brings to pass this “destruction of the flesh.” It may or may not involve physical suffering ... It certainly seems to be corrective or instructive. ...’⁹²

- 6.3.4.3. ‘The “flesh” and “spirit” [in 1 Cor 5.5] refer, in the first instances, to the two orders characterized by sin, curse, and death, on the one hand, and righteousness, blessing, and life, on the other. Each corresponds to the First and Last Adams, respectively (1 Cor 15.22). When Paul pairs these two terms, they customarily bear the eschatological sense. ... the two terms speak of “the whole person as viewed from different angles. ‘Spirit’ means the whole person as oriented towards God. ‘Flesh’ means the whole person as oriented away from God.”’⁹³

6.4. What was to be the objective of this discipline?

6.4.1. That the man might repent and stand with those who have been everlastingly saved on the Day of Judgement (“the day of the Lord”).

6.4.1.1. Paul uses ‘day of the Lord’ four times (1 Cor 5.5; 2 Cor 1.14; 1 Thess 5.2; 2 Thess 2.2) and Peter once (2 Pt 3.10). The same, or an equivalent, expression is used about 20 times in the prophetic books of the OT. Through the use of this expression, Paul and Peter associate Jesus with the LORD, the judge of all the earth, thereby asserting his deity.

6.4.2. To purge out the sinful physical passions and practices so that he might once again become a living temple of, or part of the temple of, the Holy Spirit.

6.4.3. The goal of church discipline is redemption and restoration of sinners not judicial punishment (2 Cor 2.5-11; 2 Thess 3.14-15). The responsibility for punishing for crimes belongs to the state (Rom 13.1-5) and for punishing sins belongs to God (Ex 32.34; Ps 89.32; Heb 10.30) or to parents (Heb 12.9).

7. Why did Paul want this sin addressed (1 Cor 5.5-6)?

7.1. Because it was a sin. It was contrary to the holy (sanctified) life into which a Christian is called upon conversion.

7.2. Because acceptance of this grievous overt sin in the congregation would set a bad example and lead to other open sins. He uses the analogy of leaven (yeast) used in baking bread to illustrate how the influence of one sin can permeate through an entire congregation or society (Mt 16.5; Gal 5.9). Others in the congregation would conclude that sin was not being addressed and that they could indulge their fleshly appetites and yet remain in communicant fellowship with the congregation.

8. How does Paul want Christians to live (1 Cor 5.7-8)?

8.1. To display holy lives, separated from the passions and practices of sin.

8.1.1. He wants Christians to “cleanse out the old leaven” of sin. Christians are to respond to their salvation by regularly cleaning out the old leaven, through ongoing repentance.

8.1.2. Cleansing out the old leaven is an allusion to the OT custom of annually removing yeast from a house prior to Passover (Ex 12.15), as a symbol of repentance.

8.2. To replace the old leavened bread with “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”.

8.2.1. With unleavened bread. In the immediate context he is speaking of abstention from incest (deviance that shocks) and a boastful false tolerance of sin. In the larger context he includes abstention from the other sins he deals with in this letter (divisive schisms, destructive suits,

⁹² Guy Prentiss Waters, “Curse Redux? 1 Corinthians 5:13/, Deuteronomy, and Identity in Corinth,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 77, Fall 2015, p. 248.

⁹³ Guy Prentiss Waters, “Curse Redux? 1 Corinthians 5:13/, Deuteronomy, and Identity in Corinth,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 77, Fall 2015, pp. 246-247; quoting Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians* 5:3-5, in the latter portion.

- disinherited sanctification, and disallowed sex). Holy living is to replace unholy living.
- 8.2.2. With sincerity; i.e., pure, unadulterated motives. The Christian's primary motive for doing right should be to glorify God; not in an attempt to obtain favour with God, gain the praises of men, or to manipulate others for selfish ends.
- 8.2.3. With truth; i.e., with no deception (Rom 1.18) of self or others (Eph 4.15); or exchanging falsehood for truth (Rom 1.25).
- Paul is concerned with the underlying motives which lead to proper passions and practices.
- 8.3. Celebrate the festival.
- 8.3.1. What festival does he have in mind?
- 8.3.1.1. There is only one festival authorized by God, through the teachings of the NT, which is to be observed by the NT Church—the Lord's Supper.
- 8.3.2. What does Paul associate with the Lord's Supper?
- 8.3.2.1. Christ, as the Passover lamb (Ex 12.15-27; Jn 1.29). This is the only place in the NT where the OT Passover (lamb) is specifically associated with Christ who was sacrificed (crucified). Note: The Greek does not have the word 'lamb'. However, supplying the word 'lamb' in English (ESV/NIV) is helpful so that we fully understand the meaning of what was sacrificed—for example, in Exodus 12.11 it is the 'Passover *lamb*' that is to be eaten.
- 8.3.2.2. Paul indicates that the Passover observance, an anticipatory sign pointing to Christ's work on the cross, has been replaced, under the new covenantal economy, by the Lord's Supper. This is what Jesus taught his disciples (Lk 22.20) and Paul later quotes in this letter (1 Cor 11.25).
- 8.3.3. Why does Paul introduce the Lord's Supper at this point in his argument?
- 8.3.3.1. The protection offered by Christ's blood is only available to those who are active participants in the covenant obligations; just as the blood of the lamb only protected those who obeyed the commands of the LORD and smeared it on the lintel of their houses (Ex 12.7).
- 8.3.3.2. The sanctification of the individual believer and of the Church as the body of Christ are the result of our redemption procured through the sacrifice of Christ—i.e., the Church is to be holy because it participates in the sacrificial death of Jesus.
- 8.3.3.3. Participating in the Lord's Supper requires purity of character and conduct, as symbolized by the selection of the flawless lamb. Purity of character and conduct does not mean perfection—but rather abstinence from grievous overt sins, evidence of a desire to live a pure life, and ongoing repentance for sins committed.
- 8.3.3.4. Unrepentant professing Christians, such as the man indulging in an incestuous relationship, are to be excluded from the Lord's Supper.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 5.1-8)?
- 9.1. *Standards Expounded* – Paul indicates, by stating that pagans know that incest between a parent and a child is wrong, that the Law of God is written on the hearts of men, so that they are without excuse (Rom 1.18-32). Paul also applies the Deuteronomic and Levitical case laws in the context of the NT Church, and explicitly quotes from Deuteronomy (Dt 5.13). The NT writers accept the OT law as normative and often carry forward, either by inference or explicitly, specific laws of the OT in NT contexts (1 Cor 5.1; 1 Cor 9.9, 13-14; 2 Cor 6.14; 2 Cor 13.1; 1 Tim 5.18; James 5.4). Many professing Christians today claim that the case laws, and even a portion of the Ten Commandments (e.g., the fourth commandment) do not apply in the NT era. They would claim that we need only to apply the NT as our standard for personal moral behaviour and not as guidance for the laws of nations.
- 9.1.1. What are ironic (and inconsistent) dimensions displayed in this line of reasoning?
- 9.1.1.1. Some sins, which the case laws address, are not repeated in the NT. Yet all true Christians would agree that they are sins and in most cases crimes, such as:

- 9.1.1.1.1.Bestiality (Ex 22.19; Lev 20.15-16; Dt 27.21),
- 9.1.1.1.2.Brother-sister incest (Lev 18.9; Dt 27.22),
- 9.1.1.1.3.Bribery (Ex 23.8),
- 9.1.1.1.4.Astrology and fortune telling (Lev 19.31; Lev 20.6; Dt 18.10),
- 9.1.1.1.5.Moving property boundary markers (Dt 19.14; Dt 27.17),
- 9.1.1.1.6.Using dishonest weights and measures (Dt 25.13-16),
- 9.1.1.1.7.Hiring a paid assassin (Dt 27.25),
- 9.1.1.1.8.Misleading a blind person (Dt 27.18).

They cannot find NT support for their belief that these are sins (except in the case of parent-child incest, from this passage), so their condemnation of these sins is purely subjective.

- 9.1.1.2. In some areas, where the NT is explicit about condemning immoral behaviour, such as divorce except for the case of adultery (Mt 5.32) and homosexual practices (1 Cor 6.9; Rom 1.26-27; 1 Tim 1.10), they do not want to apply even what the NT says.
- 9.1.2. Paul's use of Deuteronomy and Leviticus indicates that he viewed his, largely Gentile, audience in the Corinthian congregation to be the logical continuation of the OT covenant community.
- 9.1.3. What are some principles we should follow when applying the OT case laws in a NT context?
 - 9.1.3.1. God does not alter his Law from age to age. God's law is an eternal and universal moral standard, reflecting his character and defining righteousness. It applies to all mankind, at all times (e.g., 1 Cor 7.19; Rom 2.15; Rom 8.4; 1 Tim 1.8-11; 1 Jn 3.4). It is against this standard that men will be judged on the Last Day. Time or geography do not alter his standard.
 - 9.1.3.2. The fulfillment of the Law by Jesus (Mt 5.17) does not abolish any of God's laws (principles) but does change, in many cases, the specific way we are to observe the laws (and execute penalties). For example, the ceremonial law is not abolished. We are still required to worship God, although some (most) of the external features have been set aside, but none of the principles.
 - 9.1.3.3. The Ten Commandments are the universal and everlasting summary of all of God's laws.
 - 9.1.3.4. The case laws in the OT are applications of one or more of the everlasting principles summarized in the Ten Commandments. Although the principles are always binding on all men (Rom 2.15), the specific applications may not be. For example, we generally do not require builders to put walls around roofs (Dt 22.8); but the principle, derived from the sixth commandment, makes it right for a city council to require fences around swimming pools. The case laws give us examples of how to apply the Ten Commandments.
 - 9.1.3.5. It is not necessary for the NT to repeat a specific OT law in order for it to apply to us. Where specific laws deal with human relations, they still apply in detail today, even as they did in ancient Israel.
 - 9.1.3.6. It is wise for us to operate on the principle that the OT case laws, where the circumstances are the same (e.g., people relating to one another), continue to apply in the same way unless we find a clear reason (either explicit or by inference) in the NT showing that this is not the case.
 - 9.1.3.7. The collection of laws in the OT is not exhaustive (covering every aspect of life). For example, a civil magistrate may create a law requiring us to stop at a red light, as an application of the sixth commandment. Therefore, OT laws that apply today are not the only specific laws we are to follow. However, specific laws created today must be consistent with the principles established in God's law and must follow the examples in the Bible of applying the Ten Commandments to specific situations.
 - 9.1.3.8. The OT forms for observing the redemptive types in God's law—the sacrificial

system (e.g., Heb 7.11, 12; Heb 9.9, 10; Heb 13.15), the ceremonies (e.g., Acts 20.7; Col 2.16-17) and the OT signs of the covenant (e.g., Acts 2.38; Gal 5.11)—are not required by NT Christians because of God’s completed revelation in Christ. The OT physical types have been replaced by NT spiritual counterparts by which Christians fulfill the requirements of the Law.

- 9.1.3.9. Specific laws of holiness and separation (e.g., food laws; clothing, seed and animal mixtures; intermarriage with non-Jews; Levirate marriage; cities of refuge; etc.) are not to be observed today (e.g., Acts 10.9-16) as they were by the Jews. These were physical symbols of principles that are to be manifested in the spiritual life of believers (e.g., Mt 16.11, 12; 2 Cor 6.14-18).
- 9.2. *Sin Exposed* – All sin will eventually be exposed (Num 32.23). Some sins will become publicly known in this life and brought before the (civil and church) assemblies of men (Prov 26.26-27). All unconfessed sins will be exposed on the Day of Judgement (1 Cor 4.5; Job 20.27; Ecc 12.14; Lk 12.2-3).
- 9.3. *Sin Expands* – Paul uses the example of leaven (yeast) in bread dough to teach the principle that endorsed or ignored examples of bad behaviour can give birth to additional bad behaviour. We use the colloquial statement, ‘one bad apple spoils the barrel’, to indicate that a bad person, policy, or practice can ruin everything around it. The ‘broken windows’ concept in criminology, introduced by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982, is a contemporary application of this principle—addressing small crimes such as vandalism, public drunkenness or urination, and jumping over subway fare collection stiles, helps to create an atmosphere of law-abiding order, which contributes to a reduction of more serious crimes. Incidences of sinful behaviour go through a life cycle from incipient corruption to infective corruption to increasing corruption to inherent corruption. If sin is not corralled by God’s general grace and the application of discipline, it grows exponentially (Gen 6.5).
- 9.4. *Sanctification Expected* – Christians should walk circumspectly, because the eyes of our peers and subordinates (e.g., children) and of the world are upon us, and others will either emulate our practices or call us to account. Paul tells us to ‘cleanse out the old leaven’. Our lives should be examples of holy living. What are some examples of how we should live sanctified lives? We can use (selected) answers to questions in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* as an example.
 - 9.4.1. “Question 108: What are the duties required in the second commandment? Answer: The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.”
 - 9.4.2. “Question 117: How is the sabbath or the Lord’s day to be sanctified? Answer: The sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.”
 - 9.4.3. “Question 135: What are the duties required in the sixth commandment? Answer: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust

taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.”

9.4.4. “Question 138: What are the duties required in the seventh commandment? Answer: The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.”

9.4.5. “Question 141: What are the duties required in the eighth commandment? Answer: The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to everyone his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our Judgements, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits and suretyship, or other like engagements; and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.”

Church’s Distinctives (1 Cor 5.9-13)

1. What did Paul not want the Corinthians to misunderstand?
 - 1.1. He did not want them to think that a prohibition against fellowshiping with a member of the congregation engaged in an overt sexual sin was a prohibition on association with any sexually immoral person who was not a member of the congregation. He did not want them to extend the prohibition he applied to those within the assembly of the saints to those outside of the holy assembly.
 - 1.2. In the past, the majority of interpreters understood Paul, when he says, “I wrote to you in my letter”, to be speaking of a previous letter (now lost) that Paul had written to the Corinthians; the contents of that letter had apparently been misunderstood. That a previous letter is now lost is possible, since it is highly likely that Paul wrote (many) other letters than those contained in the NT, and God did not plan for them to be included in Scripture. However, many modern interpreters understand Paul to be speaking of the letter he is currently writing and suggest that the words can be translated as “now I am writing in my letter”, and thus anticipating an objection and correcting it before it is voiced. This is a possibility, since he seems surprised that he has to deal with sexual immorality in the congregation. Also, the identical Greek wording (ἔγραψα ὑμῖν) is used in both 1 Cor 5.9 and 1 Cor 5.11, although most translations translate the two instances differently—the first in the past tense and the second in the present tense. Regardless, of which view is correct, he does not want to be misunderstood—he is dealing with the presence of overt sexual immorality in the Church not in the world.
2. How does he correct their (potential) misunderstanding (1 Cor 5.10-11)?
 - 2.1. He extends the categories of sin from sexual immorality and includes other forms of overt sin which were found throughout society and were contrary to the Ten Commandments—thus pointing out the logical absurdity of concluding that he meant total separation from anyone practicing in any form of overt sin.
 - 2.2. He particularizes the application to someone who “bears the name of brother”—i.e., who

professes to be a Christian—thus making it clear that he is speaking only of associations with those within the Church who persist in practicing overt sins.

3. Why does Paul need to correct this (potential) misunderstanding?
 - 3.1. If professing Christians misunderstood his instruction, and applied it to all displays of overt sin, then they would have to “go out of the world”—since most people they deal with outside of the Church are guilty of one or more of the sins he mentions.
 - 3.2. Paul does not want them to think that he is advocating that Christians cut themselves off from all interaction with pagans, because:
 - 3.2.1. Of the practical impossibility. The economic and government systems of the world are highly integrated. Isolation within a purely and totally Christian community is impossible.
 - 3.2.2. Of the latent nature of sin. Every separatist Christian community has to deal with the presence of overt sins within its midst. It is impossible to maintain total isolation from the world, because a measure of the world still resides within our hearts.
 - 3.2.3. They would have to abandon their mission to the world (Mt 28.18-20).
 - 3.2.4. They would not be applying the example (Mt 9.10-13), teaching (Lk 15.1-32), and prayer (Jn 17.15) of Jesus.
 - 3.2.5. They would not be following Paul’s own example (Acts 17.16-34; Acts 18.3) and teaching (1 Cor 10.27).
 - 3.2.6. The Church is to be a light to the world, which it cannot be if it is hidden from the world (Mt 5.14).
4. What are the open sins he mentions?
 - 4.1. Sexual immorality, greed (miserly accumulation of money and material possessions), idolatry (false forms of worship and worship of false deities), reviling (slander, criticize insultingly, falsely accusing), drunkenness (excessive consumption of alcohol), and swindling (fraudulent means of taking another person’s money or possessions).
 - 4.2. Paul uses similar lists of sins elsewhere in this letter (1 Cor 6.9-10) and in his other Epistles (Rom 1.29-31; 2 Cor 12.20-21; Gal 5.19-21). The fact that his list in verses 10 and 11 vary (and his other lists include other examples of overt sins) indicates that we are not to consider the lists here to be exhaustive, but rather representative.
 - 4.3. How do the sins he lists map to the Ten Commandments?
 - 4.3.1. Idolatry – 2nd
 - 4.3.2. Drunkenness – 6th (lack of sobriety could be considered as a form of self destruction) or 7th (the *Westminster Larger Catechism* includes it with the 7th)
 - 4.3.3. Sexual immorality – 7th
 - 4.3.4. Swindling – 8th
 - 4.3.5. Reviling – 9th
 - 4.3.6. Greed – 10thHe includes examples of overt sins from both parts of the Ten Commandments—our duty to God and our duty to man.
 - 4.4. Paul indicates that the Christian community is to disavow the cultural assumption that participation in such practices is acceptable and is to set a standard for holiness as it applies the Ten Commandments.
5. What emphatic command does Paul give?
 - 5.1. Not to associate with anyone in the Church who professes to be a Christian and lives in open sin—not even to eat with such a person.
 - 5.2. The prohibition on eating with such a person is broader than excluding them from the Lord’s Supper, since Christians are to cut off association with such a person. Thus, this prohibition is against association with them even in family, social, or work settings.

- 5.3. We will explore the serious implications of this command when we address the lessons we can derive from this section
6. What does Paul say is *not* the responsibility of the Church (1 Cor 5.12-13)?
 - 6.1. To judge outsiders.
 - 6.2. What does he not mean and what does he mean?
 - 6.2.1. He cannot mean that Christians are not to speak out with condemnations of open sins committed by unbelievers. He does this himself (Rom 1.29-31; 2 Cor 12.20-21; Gal 5.19-21).
 - 6.2.2. He cannot mean that Christians are not to condemn sins and to call people to repentance and belief in Christ's atonement—that is the essence of the Gospel. He does this himself (Acts 17.30-31).
 - 6.2.3. He cannot mean that Christian civil magistrates are not to judge and punish sinners. He indicates that the civil magistrates (Christian or other) are to punish wrongdoing (Rom 13.1-5).
 - 6.2.4. Rather, he is speaking of the congregation and church courts acting judicially with respect to an unbeliever. For example, his silence about the woman who was involved in the cases of incest (1 Cor 5:1) indicates that she was an unbeliever, and thus Paul did not direct the Corinthian congregation to deal with her sin. Logically, it would make no sense for a congregation to excommunicate someone who was not a communicant—i.e., not a professing member of the congregation.
 - 6.3. Who should judge the sins of pagans (those outside of the professing visible Church)?
 - 6.3.1. Paul indicates that God is their judge. God will make every unrepentant sinner accountable for every sin committed throughout his life (Mt 12.36; Rom 14.10-12; Heb 4.12-13; 1 Pt 4.3-5).
 - 6.3.2. God delegates judgement and punishment of overt sins (crimes) to lawfully constituted civil magistrates (Rom 13.1-4; 1 Pt 2.13-14).
 - 6.3.3. The Church is not to pass judgement on individuals outside of the visible professing church and is not to use the civil magistrate to punish those sins—this occurred during the period of the Inquisition which became a travesty and defaced the witness to the Gospel of Jesus.
7. What is the Church's role for dealing with open sin within the congregation (1 Cor 5.13)?
 - 7.1. To purge the evil person from their midst, through the exercise of church discipline (1 Cor 5.2, 5, 13).
 - 7.2. This raises a question about how church discipline should be exercised, since Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 17.7 (LXX). This verse, in its context in the OT, deals with punishing an idolater with the death penalty. In Leviticus 20.11, the punishment for a man committing incest with his father's wife, was death.
 - 7.3. Does Paul suggest that the Corinthians should inflict a corporal (or capital) penalty upon a person who is engaged in sexual immorality (or another of the sins that he identifies in the preceding verses)?
 - 7.3.1. The Church in the NT is not to administer corporal (or capital) punishment on sinners, he indicates that the 'sword' belongs to the civil magistrate (Rom 13.4).
 - 7.3.1.1. The account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) does not provide a warrant for church authorities to administer corporal or capital punishment on sinners. Peter challenged Ananias about the proceeds from the sale of the land and told him that he had lied to God. Ananias was struck down by God the Holy Spirit. Likewise, when his wife entered, Peter told her what had happened, and she also expired. There is nothing in the account that indicates the Peter acted as a judge administering a sentence.
 - 7.3.2. John Murray in *Principles of Conduct* addresses this question:

- 7.3.2.1. “It must be noted that Paul does not allow, nor does he give any charge in terms of, the sanction by which this sin was penalized in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the death penalty was provided for this sin. ... Paul fully recognizes the sin but he says nothing of this specific sanction. Instead he prescribes the ecclesiastical censure of excommunication.”
- 7.3.2.2. Murray references 1 Corinthians 5.5 and concludes that the handing over to Satan is another way of speaking about excommunication.
- 7.3.2.3. He continues, “In this silence respecting the Old Testament sanction and in the imposition of ecclesiastical censure we discover a principle by which we are to be guided in the interpretation and application of Old Testament norms of behaviour which are of abiding obligation. The New Testament recognizes the permanent validity and obligation of a law which had been expressly enunciated in the Old Testament; there is no alleviation of the gravity with which the violation of this law is esteemed. The gravity of the offences is established [*sic*] by the fact that the extreme of ecclesiastical censure is pronounced upon it. But the sanction by which the gravity of the offence was recognized and penalized in the Old Testament economy is revoked. The sanction has been changed from the corporeal to the spiritual, a change which, by its very nature, underlines the gravity of the offence and therefore the abiding sanctity of the law violated by it.”⁹⁴
- 7.3.2.4. John Murray goes on to state that the death penalty for *adultery* has also been revoked. He bases his brief argument of Jesus’ comment that the aggrieved party can file for divorce (Mt 5.32). However, he misapplies Jesus’ teaching since it does not address the situation where *both* parties are apprehended in the act of adultery (Lev 20.10; Dt 22.22) and presumably with multiple witnesses (Dt 17.6). This is why Jesus does not condemn the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8.3-11), since the Jewish leaders were duplicitous and had not also produced the man who had had the liaison with the woman. Jesus’ teaching relates to the situation described in Numbers 5.11-31, where the adulterer was not caught in the act of committing adultery, but the aggrieved husband could file for divorce.
- 7.3.3. We must be careful in how we apply John Murray’s observation:
 - 7.3.3.1. Some people might apply his argument to every form of capital punishment and say that capital punishment for murder is also revoked—even though capital punishment for murder is defensible as an ordinance enacted before the Mosaic Law (Gen 9.5-6), and from the teachings of the NT (Mt 26.52; Lk 23.41; Heb 2.2; Rom 13.1-7; Acts 25.11).⁹⁵
 - 7.3.3.2. Also, Murray is mistaken when says that Paul indicates that the OT penalty was revoked. Paul doesn’t say that, since he is not dealing with the role of the civil magistrate, but with the role of the Church in exercising discipline. The civil magistrate has a God-delegated right to administer punishment for sexual crimes—and this *may* include corporal and capital punishment.
 - 7.3.3.3. First, we have to define some form of a role for the civil magistrate for punishing sexual sins.
 - 7.3.3.3.1. Many people today (whether hedonistic libertines, conscientious libertarians, or advocates of a *laissez-faire* approach to morality) would argue that the civil magistrate has no role in punishing sins such homosexual practices, fornication, incest, adultery, and the dissemination of pornography. For example, Pierre

⁹⁴ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1957), p. 54.

⁹⁵ For a brief defense of capital punishment in the case of murder, refer to: James R. Hughes, “Capital Punishment – Required for Murder” and “Capital Punishment – A Standing Requirement”; *History’s Opening Act – A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

Trudeau, acting as the Justice Minister, stated, ‘There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation’.⁹⁶

7.3.3.3.2. Today, in North America, about the only sexual sins that most people view as possibilities for some form of punishment by the civil magistrate are rape, pedophilia, and child pornography.

7.3.3.4. Second, if the civil magistrate does have a God-defined role in punishing sexual sins, then we have to determine what the punishments should be. Typically, today they are fines or imprisonment, and it is considered to be inhumane to use corporal or capital punishment to address sexual sins. However, the writer of Hebrews indicates that “every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution” (Heb 2.2). It is difficult to explain how forms of punishment established by God and declared to be just in the OT are no longer just now, since God has not changed his character, his abhorrence of sin, or his law.

7.3.3.4.1. To suggest today, for example, that adulterers caught in the act by witnesses deserve to die (Lev 20.10; Dt 22.22) would be laughed at in society and in the Church. Or to suggest that serial rapists should be castrated would not receive wide approbation.

7.3.3.4.2. Yet, if sexual sins are to be punished, then it is not a simple matter to justify the use of fines or jail sentences (which are charged to the taxpayers) as a means of providing for a proper administration of justice. Nor is it easy to explain why God’s designated punishments are wrong.

7.3.3.5. The topic of which sexual sins should be punished by the civil magistrate and how they should be punished requires more consideration (both within the Church and within society) than can be addressed in this study. Since Paul is focused on the Church’s role in exercising congregational discipline, not the role of the civil magistrate, we will not consider this topic further.

7.3.4. However, the Church is not to use the civil government’s power to punish sins corporally, as was often done by the Inquisition during the late Middle Ages and early Modern period.

8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 5.9-13)?

8.1. *Clan Disassociation* – We need to consider how to apply Paul’s command that we are not “to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality ...”.

8.1.1. John, the Apostle of love, also indicates that if a person calls himself a Christian and persists in the practice of overt sin (that has been dealt with through the process of congregational discipline) we are not to associate with him; and if we do we become complicit in his sin (2 John 10-11).

8.1.2. Jonathan Edwards states, “Particularly, we are forbidden such a degree of associating ourselves with them [openly sinful professing Christians], as there is in making them *our guests* at our tables, or in being *their guests* at their tables... That this respects not eating with them at the Lord’s Supper, but a common eating, is evident by the words, that the eating here forbidden, is one of the *lowest degrees* of keeping company... Keep no company with such a one, saith the apostle, *no not to eat* — as much as to say, no not in so low a degree as to eat with him. But eating with him at the Lord’s Supper, is the very highest degree of visible Christian communion. Who can suppose that the apostle meant this: Take heed and have no company with a man, no not so much as in the highest degree of communion that you can have? Besides, the apostle mentions this eating as a way of keeping company which, however, they *might* hold with the heathen. ... This makes it most apparent, that the apostle doth not mean eating at the Lord’s table; for so, they might not

⁹⁶ 1967-12-21; www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/omnibus-bill-theres-no-place-for-the-state-in-the-bedrooms-of-the-nation

keep company with the heathens, any more than with an excommunicated person.”⁹⁷

8.1.3. Why is this a difficult command to apply?

- 8.1.3.1. It requires us to disassociate ourselves even from family members and good friends who have previously professed faith in Christ but are now living in open, rebellious sin.
 - 8.1.3.2. We tend to make excuses for why we need to ignore even the grievous sins of our family members or dear friends so that we do not alienate them.
 - 8.1.3.3. Andrée Seu Peterson wrote, in one of her blog postings, ‘A woman I will call “Lucille” came to me in distress about a relationship. ... [A] certain friend of hers (I’ll call her “Rebekah”) was [in an] entanglement with a married man, now in its fifth year. Lucille told me she had stuck by Rebekah all this time ... After I had heard the whole story I said, “Lucille, if I could show you in black and white from the Scriptures what God says to do, would you do it?” “Yes!” she replied. “I would.” ... So I turned to a page in one of Paul’s letters and asked her to read.’ She read to her from 1 Corinthians 5.11. Andrée continues, ‘Immediately I felt the mental scrambling begin. Lucille had been brought face-to-face with a plain word commanding to cut off association with someone “who bears the name of brother” who is engaging in sexual immorality. Lucille had told me early in the conversation that Rebekah considered herself a Christian and indeed often liked to evangelize. Like a bird with its leg caught in a net, first Lucille began to pontificate to me that not everything in life is black and white, and that I, not knowing Rebekah in person, had no way of understanding the subtleties and nuances of this complex situation. The next evasion was exegetical in approach. She pointed out that the verse I had directed her to commands us to pull away from all self-proclaimed Christians who are guilty of greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, and swindling. Paul could not have meant that, Lucille said. When I disagreed and said that Paul *does* mean it and that we ought to raise our standards to God’s and not lower God’s to ours, Lucille said in that case there would be no one left in church to associate with. I responded that if the verse can be watered down to mean nothing at all, Paul needn’t have bothered to say it.... Lucille’s third dodge from the command was this: I am the only person who speaks truth to Rebekah. If I stop meeting with her, there is no more light, only darkness. Sometimes the command of God is plain but we make it confusing because we are unwilling. Sometimes we think we know better than God. Who knows what God could have done with Lucille’s obedience five years ago? But for now, Lucille, armed with excuses and fearful of the implications of obedience, is following her desire and suffering the slings and arrows of the disobedient.’⁹⁸
 - 8.1.3.4. Paul says that disassociation (and possible alienation) is precisely what is needed in order to lead rebellious sinners to repentance.
- 8.1.4. How are we to apply the disassociation?
- 8.1.4.1. We have to trust the word of God, and believe that, through Paul, he informs us of the best way to bring a rebellious professing Christian to repentance.
 - 8.1.4.2. We are to apply this only in the case of someone who has publicly professed alignment with Jesus Christ—not to rebellious teens from a Christian family who have not made a profession of faith, nor to those outside of the Church.
 - 8.1.4.3. We are to be deliberate in prayer before we take the initiative to shun the person, and to pray constantly that he will repent.
 - 8.1.4.4. We are not to take individual actions to shun a person—this can lead to personal

⁹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature and End of Excommunication,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1834, reprinted 1986), pp. 118-121)

⁹⁸ Andrée Seu Peterson, “Walking away sad — Faith & Inspiration,” *World*, 2015-12-02; www.worldmag.com/2015/12/walking_away_sad

- vindictiveness. Shunning is to be undertaken only within the context of *congregational* discipline.
- 8.1.4.5. We are to follow the process of church discipline before shunning a person. Shunning is only to be applied once a person has been excommunicated and remains rebellious and recalcitrant.
- 8.1.4.6. We should be careful not to become pedantic (overly scrupulous) about how to apply the shunning. Some among the Amish, while properly implementing the principle, may carry the application too far.⁹⁹
- 8.1.4.7. If the person repents and asks for forgiveness, we are immediately to resume association with him.
- 8.1.5. What sins are to be included in a shunning initiative?
- 8.1.5.1. Paul identifies representative sins in his list. We would generally consider the items in his list to be serious—except possibly for greed. We might argue that everyone is greedy at times.
- 8.1.5.2. The sins:
- 8.1.5.2.1. Must not be one-off occurrences (e.g., a person became drunk at a party that got out of hand) but ones continually indulged in.
- 8.1.5.2.2. Must be obvious to all (with clear evidence from witnesses), not hidden sins of the heart.
- 8.1.5.2.3. Must be particularly grievous. Applying this to greed, the greed must be displayed as a grasping and miserly spirit like the proverbial Ebenezer Scrooge.
- 8.1.5.2.4. Must have been considered sufficiently problematic as to require the intervention of the elders and congregation.
- 8.2. *Correct Division* – Paul teaches that we are not to disassociate from those in the world, even if they are grievous sinners. Therefore, does Paul teach that monasticism or living in a community, like that of the Amish, is wrong?
- 8.2.1.1. It is reading too much into Paul’s statement to conclude from it that Paul is objecting to monasticism or forming Christian business communities or Christian schools.
- 8.2.1.2. Monastic communities which went to an extreme—such as those that lived in the desert and cut off communication with the outside world—were problematic. However, monastic communities which established schools and hospices, cared for the poor, provided jobs (e.g., in the fields, in the smithy, and in the kitchens) for many lay people, and provided good preaching to the community, were not inconsistent with Paul’s teaching.
- 8.2.1.3. Likewise, some Christian communities today are more separatist than others. A community like the Old Order Amish is willing to do business with the “English”—e.g., to sell their farm produce to them and purchase tools from them. Their distinctive is not their ‘separatism’ but their rejection of some forms of technology.
- 8.2.1.4. We must see that the problem is not living in Christian communities, *per se*, but:
- 8.2.1.4.1. Ignoring the mandate of Christ to take the Gospel to the world (Mt 28.18-20).
- 8.2.1.4.2. Pretending that separatism can insulate us from the human heart, which will always bring sin into every community.
- 8.3. *Corporate Discipline* – Paul’s instructions teach us that the Church is to carry out an act of discipline when a person who has engaged in an egregious overt sin refuses to repent.
- 8.3.1. A principle expounded by Paul is that the Church is responsible for exercising sanctions toward the goal of preserving holiness within its midst and bringing grievous, overt sinners to repentance. The Church is to maintain a Christ-like corporate identity to differentiate itself from the world of natural mankind.
- 8.3.2. Jonathan Edwards in a sermon on 1 Cor 5.11 (*The Nature and End of Excommunication*),

⁹⁹ Amish Shunning; www.exploring-amish-country.com/amish-shunning.html

states, “1. There is something *privative* in excommunication, which consists in being deprived of a benefit heretofore enjoyed. ... The privative part of excommunication consists in being *cut off* from the enjoyment of the privileges of God’s visible people. (1) They are cut off from being the objects of that *charity* of God’s people which is due to Christian brethren. ... (2) They are cut off also from the *society* which Christians have together as brethren. ... 2. To the *positive* part, which is expressed by being delivered to Satan, in verse 5. ... Secondly ... by whom the punishment is to be inflicted. 1. When it is regularly and duly inflicted, it is to be looked upon as done by *Christ himself*. ... As it is inflicted by men, it is only done *ministerially*. They do not act of themselves in this, any more than in preaching the Word. ... III [T]he *ends* of this ecclesiastical censure. ... *First*, that the church may be kept *pure*, and the ordinances of God not be defiled. *Second*, that others may be *deterred* from wickedness. *Third*, that the persons themselves may be *reclaimed*, and that their souls may be saved.”¹⁰⁰

8.3.3. What are the principles which should guide church discipline?

- 8.3.3.1. Church discipline is a mark of the true church and an ordinance instituted by Christ, who is head of his Church, delegated to the governing structures of the visible Church (Mt 18.15-17).
- 8.3.3.2. Church discipline is to be handled pastorally, with discretion, gentleness, fairness, and humility (Gal 6.1-5; 1 Pt 5.1-4).
- 8.3.3.3. Examination of an accused person should be conducted in private by the elders, to avoid gossip, to ensure that there is sufficient evidence (Dt 19.15; 2 Cor 13.1), and to support the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty (Ex 23.7; Num 5.14-31; Dt 17.6; Josh 20.3-5).
- 8.3.3.4. If a person has confessed his sin, if necessary, to the offended party, and displays a spirit of true repentance no further disciplinary action is to be taken and the matter is to be closed. Once a person repents, he is forgiven by God. The Church is not to administer acts of penance as was practiced during the Middle Ages and continues to be practiced in some sectors of the Church today.
- 8.3.3.5. If a person refuses to repent, he is to be informed that a censure will be issued. Censures are to be administered when the congregation is assembled (1 Tim 5.20). A public censure is a solemn affair which may change the heart of the offender and will warn others of the danger of falling into grievous, overt sins. The RPCNA recognizes the following forms of church censure: admonition (warning for neglect of duty), rebuke (for neglect of duty in spite of counsel), suspension (temporary exclusion), deposition (from ordained office), and excommunication. If the person contests the charges, he is to be permitted to appeal to a higher level of the church courts in order to ensure an objective, unbiased assessment of the evidence.
- 8.3.3.6. The goal of church discipline is redemption and restoration of sinners not judicial punishment (2 Cor 2.5-10; 2 Thess 3.14-15)—it is to be pastoral not punitive. The responsibility for punishing crimes belongs to the state (Rom 13.1-5) and for punishing sins belongs to God (Heb 10.30) or to parents (Heb 12.9).

Destructive Suits (1 Cor 6.1-8)

1. What behavioural problems in the Corinthian congregation does Paul now address (1 Cor 6.1, 6-8)?
 - 1.1. *Court Challenge* – The primary issue was the use of the Roman civil courts by one professing Christian in the congregation to resolve a civil suit with another Christian.
 - 1.1.1. The Greek word (Ἱπᾶγμα) translated ‘grievance’ appears to denote a civil suit relating to

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature and End of Excommunication,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1834, reprinted 1986), pp. 118-121)

- money or property.¹⁰¹
- 1.1.2. How does Paul refer to the Roman civil courts?
 - 1.1.2.1. As ‘unrighteous’.
 - 1.1.2.2. He does not mean ‘unjust’ (compare Rom 13.1-7; Acts 18.12-17) but a court of the ‘Gentiles’ (i.e., secular) in contrast to one of the ‘saints’ (i.e., church). He is not using the term in a moral sense but in a religious sense.
 - 1.1.2.3. Some interpreters suggest that the reason Paul was upset was that the Roman civil courts were subject to abuse through patronage and vested interests, while the criminal courts were more respectable.¹⁰² Others suggest that Paul’s concern was that using the Roman civil courts might tempt Christians into participating in pagan customs and rituals, including the recognition of idols as having a role in court proceedings. However, in spite of the research conducted into the state of civil courts in the 1st century, these views probably read too much into Paul’s concern.
 - 1.1.3. Paul’s opinion (teaching) is that seeking justice before Gentiles is an unnecessary breach of Christian duty, a disavowal of Christian capability, and an insult to Christian identity; because Christians should be able to handle matters of civil arbitration among themselves through the application of the principles of love, fairness, and forgiveness.
 - 1.2. *Cheating Christian* – The fact that there was a lawsuit indicates that someone had cheated or defrauded another person in the congregation (1 Cor 6.8).
 - 1.3. *Core Causes* – The root causes underlying the suit were pride and greed.
2. How should Christians handle a dispute with a brother in Christ (1 Cor 6.4-5)?
 - 2.1. Jesus gave guidance for how brothers should settle their disputes (Mt 18.15-17). We considered this process, above (1 Cor 5.1-8), when we dealt with the topic of church discipline.
 - 2.2. Paul indicates that within a church congregation (denomination) there is a means for resolving civil issues which does not necessitate appeals to the secular courts.
 3. What reasons does Paul give for why Christians should not resort to secular courts to resolve their disputes with other Christians (1 Cor 6.2-3)?
 - 3.1. He states that the saints are qualified to provide adjudication, since the saints will judge the world and angels with respect to spiritual matters. Thus, matters of this world (‘pertaining to this life’) are trivial compared with matters of spiritual weight.
 - 3.2. How does he introduce his appeal to the Corinthians to consider their capabilities to adjudicate?
 - 3.2.1. He uses the rhetorical question, “Do ye not know?” He is essentially saying, “It is obvious! And, you should know it.”
 - 3.2.2. He asks this question ten times in this letter (1 Cor 3.16; 1 Cor 5.6; 1 Cor 6.2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 1 Cor 9.13, 24), a similar question in 2 Corinthians 13.5, and the same or similar question only a few other times (Rom 6.3, 16; Rom 7.1; Rom 11.2). So, it is clear that he expected the Corinthians to have absorbed the teaching that they received when he was present with them.
 - 3.3. What does Paul mean when he says that “the saints will judge the world”?
 - 3.3.1. Paul could be using a metaphor indicating that the repentance and righteousness of the saints will stand as a contrast to the rebellion of the unrighteous (Mt 12.41-42).
 - 3.3.2. He could mean that the saints will provide evidence against, and stand as accusers of, the unrighteous (2 Thess 1.6-10).
 - 3.3.3. Or, he could mean that the saints will participate with Christ in the actual judgement (assessing the accusations and assigning the punishments) of the unrighteous on the Day of

¹⁰¹ J. P. Lange, *et al*, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 121.

¹⁰² A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 419, 424.

- Judgement (Dan 7.22; Mt 19.28).
- 3.3.4. In any of these scenarios, the final judgement will remain with Christ (Ps 98.9; Jn 5.22, 27; Acts 17.31).
- 3.3.5. At this time, we can only speculate how this judgement will be worked out by God through the saints—it remains in the depths of his inscrutable wisdom (Rom 11.33).
- 3.4. What does Paul mean when he says that “we are to judge angels”?
- 3.4.1. There is similar uncertainty about how the saints will judge angels. Some suggest that Paul is speaking of pagan civil magistrates (judges) and using the term ‘angel’ as a title for them. Since Paul speaks of the unrighteous world of men who will be judged by the saints, the logical conclusion is that he similarly means the unrighteous angels—i.e., the fallen angels, or demons—i.e., those who were once good angels (Mt 25.41; 2 Pt 2.4; Jude 6).
4. What is assumed by Paul, if disputes are to be resolved within a congregational context?
- 4.1. Sadly, he acknowledges that civil disputes will occur. He is not suggesting that Christians are prohibited from seeking resolution of disagreements through arbiters or from taking legal action when necessary. The issue was with how they were going about it—displaying an unloving attitude. Calvin points out that this is often an improper accompanying factor in lawsuits but does not condemn the use of lawsuits.¹⁰³
- 4.2. Even within a small congregation there will be some with the competence to act as arbiters in civil suits. Paul asserts that there will be more than just a few, since the saints will judge (1 Cor 6.2-3). Paul uses a form of sarcastic irony to rebuke the Corinthians who claimed to have spiritual insight. He, in effect says, “You think you are so wise, then show it, act wisely!”
- 4.3. There will be a process and forum for adjudication. He does not deal with the role or appointment of church officers in this letter. However, from his other writings we know that he taught that elders were to be appointed who would be competent to make wise and just decisions in civil adjudication (1 Tim 3.2-7; Titus 1.7-9).
5. What is the shame associated with Christians suing one another before the unrighteous (1 Cor 6.5, 7)?
- 5.1. Paul was not concerned that Christians would be treated unfairly in the Roman civil courts, but that the witness to Christ would be hindered by the lack of a Christ-like spirit in the congregation. For example, as when denominations split and their dispute over buildings and property are adjudicated in secular courts. For Paul, presenting the Gospel was far more important than personal gain!
- 5.2. Paul used shame to show them their faults of setting:
- 5.2.1. Pride above humility (Phil 2.3).
- 5.2.2. Greed above love (Jn 13.34; James 2.8).
- 5.2.3. Selfishness above service (Gal 5.13).
- 5.2.4. Personal interests above the corporate welfare of the congregation (Eph 4.16).
- They were *defeated*, falling short of their holy calling.
6. What alternative does Paul suggest instead of suing a brother (1 Cor 6.7)?
- 6.1. They should be willing to suffer wrong and be *defrauded*, by:
- 6.1.1. Turning the other cheek (Mt 5.39).
- 6.1.2. Submitting to the unjust demands of others (Mt 5.40).
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 6.1-8)?
- 7.1. *Church Courts* – The Church courts should be used by Christians dealing with valid complaints against other Christians.
- 7.1.1. Guidance we can derive from these verses and Jesus’ instructions (Mt 18.15-17) is that

¹⁰³ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xiii.i.html

Christians should:

- 7.1.1.1. Not engage in lawsuits against fellow Christians until all other alternative means of dealing with the matter have been exhausted. Alternative means may include face-to-face discussion and appeal or even, abandonment of trivial matters.
- 7.1.1.2. Use the church courts (session, presbytery, synod) for resolving a legitimate claim with another Christian.
 - 7.1.1.2.1. Mature Christians, even those not trained in law, are as able to judge righteously in civil matters as a trained judge, since they have been given wisdom and insight from the Holy Spirit.
 - 7.1.1.2.2. As a congregation of Christ's church, the members are competent to manage all internal civil disputes
- 7.1.1.3. Not sue a fellow professing believer in a secular civil court.
 - 7.1.1.3.1. A friend of mine married a woman who claimed to be a Christian but took advantage of his generous heart. After the wedding, she asked him to pay off her school debts and to purchase a new car for her. Then she abandoned the marriage and sued for divorce—claiming irreconcilable differences. She refused to pay back the money she had taken. He attempted to go through his church officers and the church officers in the congregation where she was attending at the time. She refused to listen to their admonition. Rather than take the matter to the civil courts, he followed Paul's advice here, and accepted being defrauded.
 - 7.1.1.3.2. When church congregations and denominations take matters related to property before civil courts they bring shame to the cause of Christ.
 - 7.1.1.3.3. If an appeals process through the Church courts is exhausted and a person still believes that he has been treated unfairly, he should abandon the claim and leave the matter with God who will deliver everlasting justice. He should not pursue the matter further in a secular court.
- 7.1.1.4. Not create a parallel, competing system of law and courts to the civil administration.
 - 7.1.1.4.1. Paul does not assume or teach the autonomy (self-rule) of Christ's Church. He speaks only of civil cases and not criminal cases. During the Middle Ages, the Church established lawyers, courts, judges, a detailed legal code, principles of legal interpretation, and penalties. This system of jurisprudence was applied, in particular, when cases (civil and criminal) associated with Church officers (e.g., priests, bishops) were adjudicated. It was believed by many in the Church hierarchy that the civil courts did not have jurisdiction over the matters relating to Church officers. This abused the process Jesus and Paul established for Christians dealing with matters among themselves.
 - 7.1.1.4.2. Muslims who attempt to impose Sharia Law as an alternative to civil common law should be resisted since Islam is a false religion and the civil courts should be used in cases between non-Christians or between a Christian and a non-Christian.
- 7.2. *Civil Cases* – Is it ever right for Christians to use the civil courts?
 - 7.2.1. Christians are permitted to use civil law courts when dealing with unbelievers, because no other remedy is available to them within the Church context. However, they should be used only as a last resort to correct egregious wrongs and not for trivial matters. For example, a tenant could be sued for damage to a rented unit and an unscrupulous contractor should be sued for shoddy workmanship.
 - 7.2.2. Some civil matters should also be handled as criminal matters with associated penalties. For example, a person running a Ponzi scheme (which defrauded Christians), should likely be prosecuted in criminal court.
- 7.3. *Christian Conduct* – Christians are new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15) and should

display behavior consistent with their new identity. Therefore, they should:

- 7.3.1. Give careful deliberation (prayer and patience) before filing a civil lawsuit. If there is any doubt about the rightness of their case it should not be pursued (Prov 25.7b-8).
- 7.3.2. Avoid frivolous lawsuits. There are many examples today of absurd litigation. Christians are not to rush to court at every provocation.
- 7.3.3. Lawsuits should not proceed until alternative means of dealing with the matter have been exhausted. Alternative means may include face-to-face discussion and appeal.
- 7.3.4. Deal lovingly with all their brothers within the Church and neighbours outside the Church, and avoid contentious, unjust, behaviour which would lead to civil actions.
- 7.3.5. Use the right adjudication forum. A Christian who has a grievance against another Christian should not take his case to the secular courts. However, to use the secular courts when the other party is not a Christian is permitted, as shown by Paul's own example when he appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25.11).
- 7.3.6. Never give false statements about their case and against their neighbour (Ex 20.16; Ex 23.1-2; Dt 5.20).
- 7.3.7. Use the processes Jesus and Paul give for dealing with cases of sin in a congregation.
- 7.3.8. Flee from any hint of vindictiveness and making small matters into big issues.
- 7.3.9. Accept the decisions of judges. There may be exceptions (e.g., The Little Sisters of the Poor appealed three times above district courts to the US Supreme Court to stop unjust demands that their health insurance plan had to pay for abortions, under the Obamacare mandate), however the results of a judicial decision should be respected, and a Christian should generally not undertake a lengthy appeals process (Dt 17.10-11). Also, Christians should accept the decisions of the Church and not appeal to the secular courts to contest decisions.
- 7.3.10. Be willing to be defrauded and to accept personal injury rather than jeopardize and damage the Church's witness to the Gospel before unbelievers (Mt 5.39-40; 1 Pt 3.8-17).

Disinherited Sanctification (1 Cor 6.9-11)

1. How does Paul define 'unrighteous'?

- 1.1. He immediately follows his rhetorical question with a list of examples of sinful behaviour, which provide an in-context definition for unrighteousness.
- 1.2. His definition of unrighteousness is relative to God's standards since only one or two of the examples in his list would have been considered illegal or criminal behaviour in Paul's day; and are generally not considered to be sins or crimes or in our own age.
- 1.3. He means those who continue to practice sinful behaviours and do not repent of them.

2. What sins does Paul include in this list?

- 2.1. His list here is similar to the one he gave previously (1 Cor 5.10-11). What are the differences?
 - 2.1.1. Both lists include sexual immorality, greed (miserly accumulation of money and material possessions), reviling (slander, criticize insultingly, falsely accuse), drunkenness (excessive consumption of alcohol), and swindling (fraudulent means of taking another's money or possessions).
 - 2.1.2. In this list he adds thieves (those who make theft a way of life) and expands on sexual immorality with two specific cases—adulterers and men who practice homosexuality.
 - 2.1.3. Why does he include 'sexual immorality' as a separate item from the other sexual sins in this list?
 - 2.1.3.1. 'Sexual immorality' (πόρνοι) can be used generally to refer to many forms of sexual sin, or specifically to refer to premarital sex which differs from adultery (extra-marital sex) and homosexual sex.
 - 2.1.3.2. The ESV translates two Greek (μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται) words as: 'men who practice homosexuality' (compare: 'male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders' [NIV]; 'effeminate nor homosexuals' [NASB], 'homosexuals nor sodomites'

[NKJV], ‘effeminate nor abusers of themselves with mankind’ [KJV]). The second word used in the Greek (only in the NT and post-NT Christian writings) is a compound word from ἄρσεν, a male, and κοῖτης (from the same root as we get the word ‘coitus’ in English), and means something like ‘a male-bed’ (i.e., a homosexual) or in a verbal form, ‘a male who beds’ (i.e., a homosexual act). A translation explanation is provided in the ESV footnote: “The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts.” Fortson and Grams argue (at length) that the two words should not be merged into a single concept, as in the ESV (“men who practice homosexuality”), and should not be used, together, to refer to the two men in an act of sodomy (as in the ESV footnote), but should be understood to refer to ‘soft men’ (μυλακοί); which are men living as women (such as transvestites)—emphasizing orientation—and men performing a same-sex act—emphasizing behaviour.¹⁰⁴ Other translations may come closer to expressing Paul’s meaning, with two distinct words and ideas, than the ESV.

- 2.1.3.3. Some attempt to temper Paul’s statement against homosexual practices by stating that Paul was condemning male-on-male *prostitution* (as he would any form of prostitution) and homosexual acts performed as part of an idolatrous religious practice. They then attempt to suggest that Paul is not ruling out a ‘loving consensual same-sex acts’. However, Paul is echoing OT laws which condemned homosexual acts (Lev 18.22; Lev 20.13; Dt 23.18) whether or not a payment or religious ceremony was involved.

3. What solemn warning does Paul give?

- 3.1. Those who continue to practice sins such as the ones he lists (a non-exclusive list) will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- 3.2. What is the ‘kingdom of God’ that will/will not be inherited?
 - 3.2.1. The ‘kingdom of God’ could be God’s universal rule over the world (Rev 11.15) or the Church of redeemed believers (Mt 21.43; Mk 1.15). However, in this context Paul is likely using the term to refer to everlasting life in heaven (Mt 19.24; Mk 15.43; Acts 14.22).
- 3.3. Why does he say, ‘do you not know’?
 - 3.3.1. He indicates that it is obvious (from natural law, from revealed law in the OT Scriptures, and from what he had taught them) that such sins are the Devil’s handiwork and a one-way ticket to everlasting death (Rom 6.23).
 - 3.3.2. Anyone who knows anything about God’s holy standards and heaven’s holiness (Rev 21.7-8; Rev 22.15), realizes and admits that those who practice such sins cannot be citizens of heaven and heirs of the heavenly city.
- 3.4. Why does he say, “be not deceived”?
 - 3.4.1. He indicates in his letter to the Romans (which he wrote from Corinth), that in spite of knowing what sin is, men continue to practice it because they deceive themselves by suppressing truth (Rom 1.18-19). Self-deception is highly destructive and underlies many sins—“I am not addicted”, “I can quit any time.”.
- 3.5. Is Paul too severe for including those who are drunkards or greedy along with those who are adulterers or who commit homosexual sins as non-inheritors of heaven?
 - 3.5.1. While some offenses may appear unequal in our eyes, every sin is worthy of everlasting death (Gen 2.17; Ezk 18.20). A person who persists in even one unrepented sin—regardless of how ‘small’ the sin—would be damned forever, if it were not for the means of redemption provided through faith in Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁴ S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness – The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville, TN, B&H Academic, 2016), pp. 300-301.

4. What is required for anyone to inherit the kingdom of God?
 - 4.1. To be righteous.
 - 4.2. How does Paul define ‘righteous’ within the context of these verses? As:
 - 4.2.1. Washed – baptized into Christ.
 - 4.2.2. Sanctified – declared holy at conversion and through the symbol of baptism, rather than the life-long process of being made more Christ-like.
 - 4.2.3. Justified – declared righteous through the vicarious atonement of Christ.
 - 4.3. Why does Paul use three terms, ‘washed’, ‘sanctified’, and ‘justified’?
 - 4.3.1. Paul uses a three-fold repetition (a stylistic device used by Hebrew writers) of similar and related concepts to emphasize the completeness or totality of their salvation. He wants the Corinthians to realize that salvation is not the mere act of being baptized, but requires an accompanying holiness and forensic justification.
 - 4.3.2. He views these as three distinct events, as indicated by his three-fold repetition (in the Greek) of the word ‘but’ (ἀλλὰ). However, he is not providing a chronological sequence or logical order of salvation (as he does in Titus 3.4-8).
 - 4.3.3. He may have had a Trinitarian dimension in mind (washed by the blood of Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and justified by God the Father).
 - 4.4. In contrast to the Corinthian’s thinking about their position in Christ, what is missing from Paul’s list?
 - 4.4.1. Paul does not mention knowledge (which the Corinthians declared they had) or belief (or even repentance and faith). It is clear that he is emphasizing the objective dimensions of salvation rather than the subjective dimensions.
5. How are Christians ‘washed’, ‘sanctified’, and ‘justified’?
 - 5.1. In the name of Christ and by the Spirit of our God. There may be an element of Trinitarian thinking in this statement.
 - 5.2. Paul emphasizes that they were saved and declared righteous entirely by the work of God.
 - 5.3. He is not saying that they were perfectly holy and righteous. Clearly this is not the case, given the context of the serious sins (1 Cor 1.10-6.20) in their midst. Their sanctification was still a work in progress. Nevertheless, in spite of their sin, he viewed them as part of Christ’s kingdom—ones who had been declared righteous in Christ, acquitted from the guilt and punishment of their sin, and set apart for God.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 6.9-11)?
 - 6.1. *Homosexuality* – In this passage, along with other places in Scripture (Lev 18.22; Lev 20.13; Dt 23.18; Rom 1.26-27; 1 Tim 1.10; Jude 7), we find an explicit statement declaring that homosexual practices are sin. There is considerable pressure (in the media, through examples in entertainment, and by legislation) for the Church to accept homosexual practices as part of an appropriate ‘alternate lifestyle’. The Bible condemns homosexual practices as an abomination, that is destructive and a curse on society. Any congregation or denomination which accepts those engaged in homosexual practices into membership or ordains them to office is flagrantly disobeying God’s word and will be declared dead (Rev 3.1) and relegated to the dustbin of history.
 - 6.2. *Hope* – Paul states that there were in the Corinthian congregation some who had been engaged in sexual sins, including homosexual practices and adultery, drunken revelry, idolatry, and thievery; yet they had been saved and brought into the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul’s message is clear: anyone can be saved, even the most grievous sinner. Salvation is not dependent on the extent of a person’s holiness before he was saved—which is an impossibility since every unsaved person is dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph 2.1)—but on his believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour (Jn 3.16). The greatest miracle God performs, is transforming the dead heart

of a rebellious sinner into the living heart of a righteous son. Consider one example: David Wood, who was sentenced for attempted murder of his father, but was converted while in prison.¹⁰⁵

- 6.3. *Holiness* – Although the Church is composed entirely (and only) of redeemed sinners, they are expected to abandon their old way of life (‘such were some of you’) and to live a life of holiness that is consistent with their washing, sanctification, and justification—through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 6.4. *Heritage* – All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have a great heritage as sons and daughters of a King (2 Cor 6.18; Gal 3.26), and therefore have an inheritance of an everlasting kingdom (Mt 25.34).

Disallowed Sex (1 Cor 6.12-20)

1. What sin does Paul deal with in this section?
 - 1.1. Sexual immorality; in particular, having sexual intercourse with a prostitute. He is probably referring specifically to prostitution associated with rituals in pagan temples. This can be inferred from:
 - 1.1.1. The historical context in Corinth—the pagans believed that participation in such prostitution brought blessings from the gods.
 - 1.1.2. The reference Paul makes to the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6.19).
 - 1.2. However, he gives direction which is applicable to general sexual morality.
2. What does Paul mean when he says, “All things are lawful for me” (1 Cor 6.12-13)?
 - 2.1. Notice that the ESV has put the statement in quotes. The consensus among the majority of interpreters is that Paul is quoting a libertine slogan or maxim, either invented by the Corinthians or in vogue in Corinth. He doesn’t explicitly state it, but we are to understand him as saying, “You say ... all things are lawful for me, but I say ...” In this, he is doing something similar to what Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount where he says (Mt 5.1-48), “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5.27-28).
 - 2.2. It has been suggested that Paul quotes a number of the Corinthians’ slogans in this letter, and then qualifies or rejects them,¹⁰⁶ for example:
 - 2.2.1. “All things are lawful for me” (1 Cor 6.12; 1 Cor 10.23)
 - 2.2.2. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (1 Cor 6.13)
 - 2.2.3. “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” (1 Cor 7.1)
 - 2.2.4. “All of us possess knowledge” (1 Cor 8:1)
 - 2.2.5. “an idol has no real existence” (1 Cor 8.4)
 - 2.2.6. “Food will not commend us to God” (1 Cor 8.8)
 - 2.2.7. “There is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15.12).
3. What is the second statement made by the Corinthians which Paul counters?
 - 3.1. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” While Paul was in Corinth, he may have taught them that they were not required to observe the OT forms of the ceremonial law. They may have misunderstood him and applied this to justify moral ambivalence—antinomianism—in all areas, including sins listed in the moral law. They may have argued that since there was no longer a moral prohibition against particular foods, then there is also no moral prohibition against particular sexual acts. However, Paul indicates that the analogy is invalid and there is no logical connect between the use of food and participation in sexual intercourse.

¹⁰⁵ youtu.be/kS8aUSygJMQ

¹⁰⁶ B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 167.

- 3.2. If the Corinthians defended the sexual act as something natural, just like eating, required by biology and to be enjoyed, they used an argument similar to that which is used today by proponents of homosexual practices who claim that they are just following their natural inclinations—the way, they claim, that God made them.
4. What governing principles does Paul apply for the use of all things?
 - 4.1. Paul responds to the slogan or maxim by stating that there are things that are always unlawful (e.g., sex with a prostitute) and other things that are lawful under certain conditions and have to be used with discretion.
 - 4.1.1. Even if there are things that are lawful that does not mean that they are necessarily beneficial, helpful, or even lawful in every circumstance. For example:
 - 4.1.1.1. It is lawful and beneficial to use opiate-based painkillers after surgery, but the continual use of them would not be beneficial, and it would not be lawful (2 Tim 3.3; 1 Pt 1.5-7) to use them in every circumstance without a prescription.
 - 4.1.1.2. It is lawful and beneficial to engage in commercial activities six days of the week. It is not beneficial to engaged in these activities excessively (workaholics or shopaholics), and unlawful to engage in them on the Lord's Day (Ex 20.10).
 - 4.1.1.3. It is lawful and beneficial to eat food. However, over-eating is neither lawful, since it is a sin (Dt 21.20; Prov 23.20-21), nor beneficial.
 - 4.1.2. Some Greek philosophers (e.g., Cyrenaics or Epicureans) may have taught that there were no moral boundaries. However, even they would have had to admit that 'all things' could ultimately be applied only to things indifferent. For example, such a hedonist would have challenged someone taking liberties with his wife or children.
 - 4.2. What criteria does he provide by which to assess the application of what is generally lawful?
 - 4.2.1. *Is it helpful?* We do not have a right to misuse what is lawful if it will be to our harm or that of another person. For example, it is lawful occasionally to smoke a cigar, pipe, or cigarette but it would be harmful to smoke regularly.
 - 4.2.2. *Is it addicting?* Paul says that he will not be dominated by (subjected to the rule of) anything (12). Addictions to alcohol, drugs, food, sexual stimulation, or any other form of intemperance is condemned here and elsewhere in Scripture (2 Tim 3.3; Titus 2.2; 1 Pt 1.5-7).
 - 4.2.3. *Is it temporary?* Paul indicates that the body and food will be destroyed, thus implying that we should not be focused on temporal and physical things which will perish through decay, at our death, or when this age is brought to an end. Christians should not be like the beasts whose existence is essentially nothing more than eating and sleeping.
 - 4.2.3.1. Some suggest that when Paul says that God will destroy both the stomach and food, that he means that there will no longer be a need for food nor the ability to digest it in the everlasting realm. Such a view goes beyond Paul's rejection of the transient into the realm of semi-Gnosticism which undermines the goodness of the human body when it was created by God. Food was eaten in the perfect state in the Garden (Gen 1.29) and by Jesus in his resurrected body (Lk 24.42) and will be eaten in heaven (Rev 2.7; Rev 22.4, 14).
 - 4.2.4. *Does its use bring glory to God?* It may be true that we are free to use a particular thing, and yet using it be wrong if our motives are wrong (Rom 14.23). Partaking of the good things that God has given to us can be abused if we are doing it for selfish motives and to ascribe glory to ourselves.
 - 4.2.5. From a mere human perspective, the first two criteria (helpful and not addicting) could be the same criteria used by an unbeliever for assessing an action. For example, a hedonist could eschew over-indulgence based on these two criteria. However, by asking us to consider the transient nature of material blessings, Paul elevates our thinking from the temporal to the transtemporal. His fourth criterion goes further and places our actions and

desires in the context of God's holiness and glory. Paul is not a pagan pragmatist but a principled practitioner.

5. What reasons does Paul give for why Christians should not engage in sexual immorality?
 - 5.1. *Sexual immorality is contrary to the creation marriage ordinance.* (16) Sexual relations are to be confined to a man and a woman, in a life-long (1 Cor 7.39; Rom 7.3), proclaimed (Jn 2.2), and covenanted (Prov 2.17; Mal 2.14) marital relationship. Paul reiterates Jesus' teaching, "the two will become one flesh" (Mt 19.5), in which Jesus alludes to Genesis 2.24, "they shall become one flesh". Thus, in sexual intercourse outside of a marital relationship a man and a woman become 'one flesh', which is a usurpation of the God ordained order for marriage.
 - 5.2. *Our bodies are not our own.* (19) We have been redeemed from sin and now belong to God as his possession in life and death (Rom 14.8); therefore, God sets the standard for the use of our bodies, which are to be used as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6.13).
 - 5.3. *We have been purchased at a price.* (20) We are not our own because our redemption from slavery to sin and the prison of hell was purchased at a heavy price—the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20.28; Heb 9.12; 1 Pt 1.18-19; Rev 5.9). We can no longer return to our former ways. As Calvin says, this "redemption must hold us bound, and with a bridle of obedience restrain the lasciviousness of our flesh."¹⁰⁷ John Chrysostom (349-407 AD), Archbishop of Constantinople, provides a powerful illustration, "For supposing you had a daughter, and in extreme madness had let her out to a procurer for hire, and made her live a harlot's life, and then a king's son were to pass by, and free her from that slavery, and join her in marriage to himself; you could have no power thenceforth to bring her into the brothel. For you gave her up once for all, and sold her. Such as this is our case also. We let out our own flesh for hire unto the Devil, that grievous procurer: Christ saw and set it free, and withdrew it from that evil tyranny; it is not then ours any more but His who delivered it."¹⁰⁸
 - 5.4. *Our bodies are members (part) of Christ.* (1 Cor 6.15, 17) We are married to Christ through spiritual marriage (Eph 1.23; Eph 5.30). To use our bodies with anyone but a spouse is to commit spiritual adultery. In pagan cultic prostitution the prostitute was a surrogate for the deity; therefore, sexual relations with a cultic prostitute, was not only immoral, but idolatrous. Paul asks a rhetorical question to show his disgust with the idea that a Christian would commit spiritual adultery (15) and answers his own question, "Never!"
 - 5.5. *Our bodies will be raised in Christ.* (14) Our bodies will not pass away; they will be raised (1 Cor 15.12-49; Rom 6.5; Rom 8.11; 2 Cor 4.14) in a transformed form that will still be our bodies and be recognizable to our friends and relatives who are in heaven. Paul's reason for including the pending resurrection of our bodies as an argument against sexual immorality is to counter the false arguments of those (e.g., Gnostics) who claim that things done in the body are of no importance; or those (materialistic hedonists) who claim that there is no future for the body after death and we should indulge its passions in this life (1 Cor 15.32; Is 22.13).
 - 5.5.1. What assurance does Paul give that our bodies will be raised?
 - 5.5.1.1. God (the Father) raised Jesus (the Lord).
 - 5.5.1.2. The Father is attributed with raising Jesus from the dead (Rom 6.4; Gal 1.1; 1 Thess 1.10). God the Holy Spirit is credited with raising Jesus from the dead (Rom 8.11). Jesus, God the Son, is credited with raising himself (Jn 2.19-22; Jn 10.17-18). The resurrection was an action of the Trinity.
 - 5.6. *Sexual immorality is a sin against our body.* (18)
 - 5.6.1. The word 'other' is added by modern translators, it is not in the original Greek (see, ESV

¹⁰⁷ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xiii.iii.html.

¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom. "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians." In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 102.

- footnote). It is a legitimate attempt to clarify a statement that Paul makes; the meaning of which is difficult to determine.
- 5.6.2. What does Paul mean when he says that sexual immorality is against our own bodies, whereas other sins are not? Are not other sins, such as gluttony and drunkenness, sins against our own bodies? Interpreters give a broad spectrum of explanations, such as:
- 5.6.2.1. Paul is saying that sexual immorality is worse than other sins against the body. However, surely suicide would be as destructive as is sexual immorality.
- 5.6.2.2. Paul is speaking hyperbolically for effect; not attempting to give a precise hierarchical definition of sins.
- 5.6.2.3. Paul is speaking comparatively. Other sins may have a direct impact on a person's body, but sexual immorality pollutes the body the most.
- 5.6.2.4. Paul is speaking of the consequences or degree of impact, such as arise with sexually transmitted diseases. However, addictions to alcohol or drugs are also highly destructive to the body.
- 5.6.2.5. Other sins use means (food, alcohol, drugs) but sexual immorality uses the body exclusively. However, prostitution requires another person outside of the person's own body to participate in the sin.
- 5.6.2.6. Sexual immorality abuses the body, whereas other sins abuse something external. However, in prostitution, adultery, and homosexual acts, there is abuse of something outside the body—another person.
- 5.6.2.7. Sexual immorality is directly against the sanctity of the body, whereas other sins may not be. However, suicide certainly would be against the sanctity of the body.
- 5.6.3. To interpret this statement, it is helpful to put it into its context. Paul indicates that a Christian's body is united with Christ ('members of Christ') in a marriage-like relationship. So, it may be that Paul is saying that sexual immorality is particularly bad because it makes the sinner one with his sexual partner (they become one flesh) and thereby defiles the marriage relationship with the body of Christ. Whereas other sins may have an impact on the body, but they do not unite with the body.
- 5.6.4. Paul uses the arguments that when a person commits an act of sexual immorality, he "sins against his own body", and that our bodies will be raised again. Thus, he indicates that Christianity is not indifferent to the status or use of our bodies. We are to have a balanced, Biblical, view about the body. Man was created as a living being—soul and body (Gen 2.7). The body is not bad or sinful in itself. Sins proceed from within man's heart or will (Mt 5.18). We must not *despise* our body (e.g., by being slovenly), *defile* it (e.g., with prohibited sexual practices), *destroy* it (e.g., with drugs, alcohol, or gluttony), or *deify* it (e.g., with preening and excessive exercise regimes).
- 5.7. *Sexual immorality destroys the temple of God.* (19) Because a Christian is united with Christ, who is the temple of God (Jn 2.19; Rev 21.2), sexual immorality defaces, despoils, and destroys the temple of God.
- 5.7.1. This verse is often misread. The 'you' is plural, and 'temple' is singular. All Christians, collectively, are in Christ and together are the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- 5.7.2. Bad behaviours of individuals contaminate the entire congregation.
- 5.8. *Everything we do must be done to glorify God.* (20) We are to live our lives for the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31). Sexual immorality is a breach of the moral law of God (specifically the seventh commandment). Thus, a person participating in a sexual sin cannot be glorifying God in his body.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 6.12-20)?
- 6.1. *Flee Fornication* – Paul is explicit that, all forms of sexual immorality are to be avoided absolutely: fornication (sex outside of marriage), adultery, prostitution, and homosexual acts. Abstinence is not sufficient, because it is passive. Active fleeing is required (2 Tim 2.22)—as

Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife (Gen 39.11-12). Thus, we have to be zealous that we do not place ourselves in situations where sexual sins can invade our lives. For example:

- 6.1.1. Do not place yourself in a situation where you are alone with a person of the opposite sex and could be tempted to commit a sexual sin.
- 6.1.2. Do not watch TV shows or movies which endorse sexual sins (e.g., sex outside of marriage) even where no sexual acts are portrayed or implied in the show.
- 6.1.3. Do not click on links which show up in your internet browser which could lead to titillation and temptation.
- 6.1.4. Do not accept the world's false definition of marriage (e.g., same-sex 'marriage').
- 6.1.5. Do not participate in activities which endorse sexual immorality (e.g., a 'pride' parade).
- 6.1.6. Instead, do everything possible to honour marriage (Heb 13.4), which Paul affirms by his quotation of Genesis 2.24, by: waiting to have sexual relations until married, marrying, marrying a Christian, participating in weddings with joy, supporting newlyweds, praying for marriages, and working at making marriage a success and rejecting divorce.

We considered the reasons Paul gives for why we are to flee fornication:

- Sexual immorality is contrary to the creation marriage ordinance.
 - Our bodies are not our own.
 - We have been purchased at a price.
 - Our bodies are members (part) of Christ through a spiritual marriage.
 - Our bodies will be raised in Christ.
 - Sexual immorality is a sin against our body.
 - Sexual immorality destroys the temple of God.
 - Everything we do must be done to glorify God.
- 6.2. *Forsake 'Freedoms'* – This section is not dealing with true Christian freedoms, but rather with claimed 'freedoms'. Christian freedoms, which Paul addresses later in this letter (e.g., 1 Cor 7.25-38; 1 Cor 8.1-13; 1 Cor 10.23-30) and in Romans 14.1-12, do not include many of the things which the world considers to be freedoms. The world's 'freedoms' are rebellion against the moral law of God.
 - 6.3. *Fathom Freedom* – In contrast to the false freedoms of the world, we have a faultless freedom in Christ (Jn 8.36; Rom 6.18). We have been redeemed by Christ—ransomed from sin, a slavery to Satan, and consignment to an everlasting hell. This freedom should be the focus of our meditation, the joy of our lives, and our everlasting hope.
 - 6.4. *Failure Focus* – Some in the Corinthian congregation thought that it was permissible to visit a cultic prostitute. It is hard for us to fathom how this could be possible. However, the Church today has equivalent cultural blind spots, which the early NT Church would have found unfathomable, such as engaging in commerce, or watching or participating in sports, on the Lord's Day; endorsing women in teaching roles in the Church; using mere human compositions as worship; refusing to baptize infants of believers into the new covenant. Lest we become haughty, we all have cultural and tradition-based blind spots (to a greater or lesser degree) and fail to focus on the moral requirements of God.

Solutions (1 Corinthians 7.1-16.4)

1. What does Paul now begin to address?
 - 1.1. He addresses matters raised by the Corinthian congregation. These matters were sent to him in a letter which may have been carried by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16.17), who were representing the Corinthian church.
 - 1.2. What are the topics covered by the questions/matters the Corinthians sent to Paul? We can summarize the topics as:
 - 1.2.1. Regulations for Marriage (1 Cor 7.1-40) – He answers doubts about how marriage should operate in the Christian community.

- 1.2.2.Regulations for Meat (1 Cor 8.1-11.1) – He deals with the question of whether Christians may eat meat sacrificed to idols and how to address those with scruples or those who object to eating meat sacrificed to idols.
- 1.2.3.Regulations for Meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40) – He addresses head coverings, the Lord’s Supper, the use of different languages in a service, and the proper manner of conducting worship services. In the midst of this section he emphasizes the importance of a congregation cooperating with a profound spirit of love (1 Cor 13.1-13).
- 1.2.4.Resurrection Mystery (1 Cor 15.1-58) – He expounds on the reality of the promised physical resurrection of mankind, using the resurrection of Jesus as the evidence for a person’s belief in the resurrection.
- 1.2.5.Regulations for Money (1 Cor 16.1-4) – He provides guidelines for collecting tithes and offerings.
- 1.3. The way Paul addresses these matters provides most of the practical guidance we find in the NT for how a congregation should operate.
- 1.4. The Corinthians may have asked direct questions, but some of the matters they raised seemed to have been formulated as assertive statements (e.g., what we find in the latter part of verse 1) presented to challenge Paul and his authority as an apostle. The elders of the congregation may have sent these matters in this form, “Paul, some in the congregation are saying thus-and-thus, what do you think?”

Regulations for Marriage (1 Cor 7.1-40)

1. What are the topics Paul addresses relating to the matter of how marriage should operate in the Christian community? There seems to have been a number of questions raised about marriage:
 - 1.1. The place of marriage versus celibacy and singleness for Christians, and of sexual relations within marriage.
 - 1.2. The propriety of being married to an unbeliever and of divorce; and the propriety of remarriage.
 - 1.3. As one writer summarized it, this chapter deals with ‘holy wedlock and unholy deadlock’.¹⁰⁹

Sexual Relations (1 Cor 7.1-5)

1. How did the Corinthians misinterpret Paul’s teaching on sexual relations?
 - 1.1. The Greek has ‘touch a woman’, which is a euphemism for “have sexual relations with a woman,” (e.g., Gen 20.6; Prov 6.29). In the OT euphemisms for sexual relationships was ‘to see her nakedness’ and to ‘uncover her nakedness’ (Lev 18.6-7; Lev 20.17).
 - 1.2. Older interpreters were generally of the view that Paul is teaching that celibacy is intrinsically a good thing—i.e., better than the marital state. This would put Paul into a direct conflict with the creation mandates, which endorse marriage and sexual relations (at minimum) for procreation (Gen 2.18 and 1.28); with the example of Jesus who implicitly endorsed marriage through his presence at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2.1, 2); and with Paul’s own teachings elsewhere (Eph 5.31-32). This interpretation was used to support the celibacy of the monastic movement during the Middle Ages.
 - 1.3. However, it is generally understood today that Paul is quoting from what they stated in their letter and rebutting it.
 - 1.3.1.People in the congregation appear to have gone to extremes. Some claimed that Christian liberty permitted sexual behaviours such as incest or sexual relations with a temple prostitute. Others went to the opposite extreme and called for total abstinence from sexual relations (even among the married).
 - 1.3.2.In both cases, they may have been displaying a form of dualism or nascent Gnosticism, which undermines the goodness of the human body when it was created by God and defines

¹⁰⁹ B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 170.

man's body to be inherently of less value or importance than man's spirit or even intrinsically evil.

2. What is Paul's antidote to the temptation to engage in sexual immorality?
 - 2.1. Marriage—each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.
 - 2.2. The temptation to sexual immorality is strong because of natural sexual impulses, exacerbated by sin and the sinful lack of self-control (1 Cor 7.1, 5; 2 Tim 3.3), which together cause natural, and good, passions to go beyond God-defined boundaries.
 - 2.3. What then are the purposes for marriage?
 - 2.3.1. *Conception* – for procreation (Gen 1.28).
 - 2.3.2. *Control* – to restrain fornication (1 Cor 7.2).
 - 2.3.3. *Companionship* – men and women should not be alone and should be together across the two sexes (Gen 2.18).
 - 2.4. These reasons are included in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1559). This wording is widely recognized because of its inclusion in many movies which are based in Georgian, Victorian, or Edwardian England (e.g., the 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice*):¹¹⁰

“Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable state, instituted of God in Paradise, in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy state Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of saint Paul to be honourable among all men, and therefore is not to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discretely, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for the which matrimony was ordained. One was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lorde, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continence might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity, into the which holy state these two persons present, come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can show any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.”
3. How does Paul deal with celibacy within a marriage?
 - 3.1. It appears that in some of the marriages in Corinth one partner had unilaterally decided to become celibate, probably under the false belief that it contributed to holiness or that it was required because the other partner was not a Christian.
 - 3.2. Paul emphatically commanded against this practice as a permanent state. As a temporary state, celibacy was permitted if conditions were met: i) it was a rare occurrence ('perhaps', 1 Cor 7.5), ii) it was by mutual consent, iii) it had a limited duration, iv) it was to enable a period of concentrated prayer (Ex 19.15; 1 Sam 21.4).
 - 3.3. Why did he take this position?
 - 3.3.1. Enforced celibacy within marriage could encourage participation in sexual sins by the other partner (e.g., visiting a prostitute).
 - 3.3.2. In marriage the partner's bodies become 'one flesh' (Gen 2.24) and are mutually shared and not to be withheld from the other.
 - 3.3.3. A marriage relationship becomes sanctified by the faith of one partner who becomes a

¹¹⁰ “Solemnization of Matrimony”, *The Book of Common Prayer – 1559* (spelling updated); justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Marriage_1559.htm

Christian (1 Cor 7.14) and therefore is to continue as a marriage (1 Cor 7.10).

4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.1-5)?
 - 4.1. *Danger* – The Corinthians' questions demonstrate how easy it is to misinterpret Biblical teaching and preaching. They had had Paul among them for many months and yet they were unclear about their responsibilities as Christians. Christians need to learn to interpret God's word correctly by considering both the immediate and larger Biblical context and the circumstances of particular texts.
 - 4.2. *Definition* – Paul defines marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman and teaches that sexual intercourse (a relationship of 'one flesh') belongs only within a marital relationship. Thus, any sexual activity (e.g., fornication, polygamy, prostitution, adultery, homosexual practices) which breaches this relationship is sin.
 - 4.3. *Duty* – Marriage is to be generally considered the ideal state for Christians, not a mere permitted optional state. Within a marriage each partner is to fulfill his or her marital obligations to the other.

Singles' Remarriage (1 Cor 7.6-9)

1. What is the 'this' of the concession that Paul refers to?
 - 1.1. Some interpreters suggest that verse 6 refers to what Paul has said in the previous section—i.e., about sexual relations in marriage—the NIV paragraphing supports this view. However, others suggest that verse 6 is to be applied to what follows—the ESV paragraphing supports this second view. In the Greek, verse 1 and verse 6 both begin with 'now' (δὲ; often this particle is left untranslated), so it may be that Paul is changing the topic starting in verse 6. The ESV is consistent in showing this with 'now'—however, it doesn't use 'now' at the start of verses 8, 10, and 12).
 - 1.2. So, if verse 6 looks forward to what Paul is going to say, then it applies to what is in verse 7, where he states his 'wish'.
2. What is his wish for his readers?
 - 2.1. That all would remain as he was.
 - 2.2. What is the way in which he wished them (everyone) to remain?
 - 2.2.1. In whatever married or unmarried state that he was currently in. The generally agreed view is that we are to understand verse 7 in the context of verse 8 and that Paul is speaking of the situation of those who were currently unmarried like him.
 - 2.2.2. If Paul is stating that in his current situation, he was unmarried, this does not mean that he had never married. It is believed by many that Paul had been married but was at this point unmarried (either he was a widower or, less likely, his wife had left him when he became a Christian). Jewish males in those days were expected to marry and often participated in arranged marriages. In addition, leaders in the pharisaic and rabbinic 'schools' were expected to set a good example of marriage. It may be that the word translated 'unmarried' (in all the major English translations) could be translated 'widower',¹¹¹ and he is speaking (in 1 Cor 7.6-9) to the class of previously married who were at that point unmarried.
 - 2.2.3. If Paul was a widower who did not plan to remarry, then he was saying that he wished that his readers could stay as they currently were—widows or widowers—and not remarry.
 - 2.2.4. His wish must not be understood as a command (1 Cor 7.6) or even as general guidance to widows or widowers. Elsewhere he directs younger widows to remarry (1 Tim 5.14). And, as we noted above (1 Cor 7.1-5) he endorses the married state as proper. Rather, it appears to be a hypothetical wish: "If it were possible, I could wish that all widowers and widows

¹¹¹ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 515.

could remain single.”

3. What does Paul mean when he says that it is ‘good’ for them to remain single?
 - 3.1. Paul does not say ‘better’ but ‘good’. He is not saying that the single state is better than a married state—he is not providing a comparative. Rather he is saying that the single state can have its own goodness and that there is nothing wrong with widowers and widows remaining single—under the present conditions which he will identify.
 - 3.2. He is certainly not advocating celibacy as a higher calling than the married state, nor as a general rule. This section cannot be used to defend the concept of monastic or priestly celibacy which has been done by many in the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹²
4. What are the governing conditions for remaining single by not remarrying?
 - 4.1. If he/she has a gift from God. What gift does Paul speak of?
 - 4.1.1. Being able to remain in an unmarried state without feeling pressures to remarry (e.g., needing companionship or physical intimacy).
 - 4.1.1.1. When Paul wrote the letter, he was (apparently) single and did not have a burning passion to marry or remarry. He understood that this was an advantage for someone engaged in his form of itinerant ministry with the ever-present possibility of persecution. However, he was not suggesting that it would have been wrong for him to have married or remarried and to have taken his wife along with him (1 Cor 9.5).
 - 4.1.2. Being able to exercise self-control over sexual desires and not being tempted to find fulfillment by illicit means (e.g., by visiting a prostitute).
 - 4.2. What conditions does he not include as a condition for staying single?
 - 4.2.1. He does not allow for someone to avoid remarrying because he/she has an abhorrence of the obligations of marriage.
 - 4.2.2. He does not allow for someone to avoid remarrying because he is a misogynist or she is a misandrist.
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.6-9)?
 - 5.1. *Censured* – It is wrong for anyone to put any form of pressure on a person not to marry or remarry. Forbidding marriage to those in a pastoral role is wicked and a recipe for disaster (fornication, concubinage, pederasty, and homosexual acts; all of which plagued the monasteries and priesthood, into modern times).
 - 5.2. *Concession* – Paul is careful to state that his opinion that a person is not required to remarry if a spouse dies is a concession not a command. This concession may be exercised by those who can meet the requisite conditions without feeling (internal or external) pressure.
 - 5.3. *Compassion* – Paul demonstrates that pastors/elders are to deal with the details of marriage among those in their congregation with compassion and charity, within the context of overriding principles: 1) that it is not good for a man to be alone—i.e., unmarried (Gen 2.18), 2) divorce is wrong except for specific reasons (Mt 5.32), and 3) a person may remarry once his/her spouse has died (Rom 7.2-3).

Separation Restriction (1 Cor 7.10-13, 15)

1. What explicit charge does Paul now give?
 - 1.1. Spouses, if they are both professing Christians, are not to separate or divorce. He gives this charge to married couples where both spouses have become believers in Christ (10) and to married couples where only one spouse has become a believer (1 Cor 7.12-13)—in either case a believer is not to take action to dissolve the marriage.
 - 1.2. This emphatic statement is frequently ignored within the Church today, as evidenced by the

¹¹² Mark P. Shea, *Why a Celibate Priesthood?* www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/why-a-celibate-priesthood

number of divorces among high-profile entertainers and athletes who claim to be Christians, and by surveys that show that the attitude of professing Christians toward divorce and the rate of divorces among professing Christians does not appear to be significantly different from society as a whole.

2. What are the situations in which Christians are permitted to separate and divorce?
 - 2.1. In the case of adultery, the innocent party may sue for divorce and remarry (Mt 5.32).
 - 2.2. Paul provides a second situation which Jesus did not deal with when he presented the general principle to his Jewish audience. Paul indicates (1 Cor 7.15) that if an unbelieving spouse of a Christian (presumably a convert who was married before conversion) deserts the marriage, the Christian is not *obligated* to seek reconciliation ('let it be'). Thus, he indicates that in the case of wilful desertion by an unbelieving spouse, the believing spouse may divorce the one who left the marriage and remarry, since "[i]n such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved".
 - 2.3. Why does Paul permit divorce under the situation of wilful desertion by an unbeliever?
 - 2.3.1. Paul views an unbeliever who has deserted a marriage as being 'dead' (1 Cor 7.8, 39). Divorce is unnecessary when a former marriage partner is dead, and the believer is not bound and is free to remarry. Paul permits divorce as a means of declaring the former marriage partner 'dead'.
 - 2.3.2. Believers are not to undertake mixed marriages—Christians with pagans (1 Cor 7.39; Dt 7.3; Ezra 9-10; 2 Cor 6.14-15). So, if an unbeliever leaves the marriage, it becomes as if the person leaving the marriage had committed spiritual adultery.
 - 2.3.2.1. Mixed marriages cannot be conducive to full fellowship in Christ between a husband and wife. In this situation Paul would not force a Christian to have to put up with an abusive God-hating spouse.
 - 2.3.2.2. Mixed marriages make it difficult to train children in the Christian faith, and Paul is concerned that they could not be raised in the discipline and instruction (nurture and admonition) of the Lord (Eph 6.4).
 - 2.3.2.3. Mixed marriages may lead to disharmony rather than peace (1 Cor 7.15) in the home.
3. Why does Paul give this explicit charge not to separate?
 - 3.1. There were ascetics in the early NT Church who believed that holiness required that a married believer separate from his/her spouse; and in some cases, join a single-sex ascetic community (e.g., what became monasteries and nunneries in later history).
 - 3.2. Contemporary Roman society had little expectation that marriages would be enduring. Divorce was permissible for a variety of reasons. Also, long marriages were rare given a high death rate among women giving birth and complications from abortions.
 - 3.3. Jews considered divorce permissible (Mt 5.31; Mt 19.8) and thought that a restriction on divorce would make keeping a wife in line a challenge and discourage men from marrying (Mt 19.10).
 - 3.4. Jews returning from the captivity who had married foreigners were required to put away their foreign wives (Ezra 10.3). This may have led some in Corinth, who had converted to Christianity from Judaism, to believe that it was necessary for them to put away their unbelieving spouses.
 - 3.5. Paul is reminding the Corinthians and the whole Church that marriage between one man and one woman, for life, is a creation ordinance (Gen 2.24) which applies to believers and unbelievers.
4. What does he indicate about the nature of the charge he gives?
 - 4.1. He says that his instruction had come explicitly from "the Lord"; i.e., from Jesus' own teaching (Mt 5.31-32; Mt 19.6; Mk 10.11-12; Lk 16.18).
 - 4.2. Does the fact that a charge such as this comes from Jesus directly make it more of an imperative for believers?
 - 5.3.1. Many people today seem to think that only the explicit words of Jesus (e.g., those highlighted in red-letter editions) are to be considered normative for the Christian life.

- 5.3.2. However, all of God's revelation (OT and NT) is the word of Christ (Jn 1.1), who is God.
- 5.4. Why, then, does Paul state that this is an explicit charge from Jesus?
- 5.4.1. Jesus had provided a corrective to the Jewish misinterpretation of the OT views about marriage and divorce.
- 5.4.2. He contrasts (1 Cor 7.10; 1 Cor 7.12) the source of authority—direct or derived. Nevertheless, he considered his instruction to be authoritative (1 Cor 7.25; 1 Cor 14.37-38).
5. What options does Paul give in a case of a serious difference between professing Christian spouses, which causes them to separate?
- 5.1. Paul recognizes the reality that serious incompatibilities may arise in marriages—even among Christians. Thus, he addresses the situation where one of the spouses is immature or abusive and may subject the other to psychological or physical dangers.
- 5.2. He indicates that their only options are to reconcile or live separated lives, but to remain unmarried to another. To marry another, while the spouse is living, would be to commit adultery (Rom 7.1). Reconciliation is always the preferred and to be hoped for option.
- 5.3. However, if during the period of separation one of the spouses remarries the other would be free to marry as the first would have committed adultery and the second would be freed from the marriage covenant.
6. What are to be overriding principles in marriage?
- 6.1. Marriage is to be a life-long commitment between one man and one woman and not to be torn asunder by separation or divorce.
- 6.2. Marriage is to be a relationship of love, harmony, and peace. However, we should be cautious in how we understand Paul's reference to peace. Some think that he means that a separation may lead to peace, others that reconciliation is necessary for peace to be achieved. The former seems to fit in the context better. A voluntary separation, rather than forcing the continuance of the marriage, may be the only way to ensure peace between a Christian and a pagan spouse.
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.10-13, 15)?
- 7.1. *Prohibition* – God hates divorce (Mal 2.16; see ESV footnote). Christians need to listen to this charge from Paul (supported by the explicit teachings of Jesus) and ensure that they do whatever they can to make their marriages a life-long covenantal commitment.
- 7.2. *Partnership* – God defined marriage to be a partnership of mutual help (Gen 2.18). However, in the Roman world of Paul's day, partnership in marriage was a concept that had been largely forgotten. When Christianity entered a pagan home, marriage could be transformed. Christians set an example in the pagan world of how marriages could transform family life and, indirectly, societal life. In Canada, "[i]n 2011, 46.4% of the population aged 15 and over was legally married, while 53.6% was unmarried—that is, never married, divorced or separated, or widowed—a widening of the gap first observed among the total population in 2001. In contrast, thirty years earlier, in 1981, 60.9% of the population aged 15 and over was married, while 39.1% was unmarried."¹¹³ In Canada, the percentage of first marriages that end in divorce is 33% (2016). So, Christian spouses who make marriage work and live in a peaceful partnership with one another, have an opportunity to let the Gospel shine through their lives.

Sanctified Relationship (1 Cor 7.13-14, 16)

1. Why should a person, who has become a professing believer, continue to live in a marriage relationship with an unbeliever?
- 1.1. Marriage is a creation ordinance from God, intended for all of mankind. As such, marriage is a holy (sanctified, set apart) union, blessed by God, and the partners of the marriage are set apart

¹¹³ Statistics Canada, *Marital Status: Overview, 2011*; www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11788-eng.htm

from the world for one another. In the situation where one spouse becomes a Christian and the other does not, the marriage union remains holy. However, the marriage relationship improves through the presence of a believer in the union.

- 1.2. If the unbeliever consents to continue within the marriage relationship, the marriage relationship should not be dissolved.
 - 1.2.1. This is a different scenario from when, or if, a Christian marries an unbeliever—which he should not do (1 Cor 7.39; Dt 7.3; Ezra 10.2; 2 Cor 6.14-15).
 - 1.2.2. The marriage relationship between two unbelievers is honourable, fulfilling the creation mandate (Gen 2.24). Paul teaches here that the change of status (from unbeliever to believer) does not override the marital relationship that the believer was in before becoming a Christian
- 1.3. An unbelieving spouse is made holy by a believing spouse.
 - 1.3.1. What does Paul mean by this statement?
 - 1.3.1.1. It cannot mean that the unbelieving spouse will be *saved* by the faith of the believing spouse. A person cannot believe in Christ or exercise faith for another person. If a spouse in a marriage relationship could be saved, indirectly, by the faith of the other spouse, Paul's point about the possibility of salvation (1 Cor 7.16) would be meaningless.
 - 1.3.1.2. What it does mean is that God views the marital relationship as set apart from the world and blesses that marriage.
 - 1.3.1.3. The blessing flows through a covenantal relationship—where one person represents another—e.g., Adam represented all his descendants, Christ represents all those for whom he died, and all nations are blessed through the covenant with Abraham.
 - 1.3.2. Someone might wonder how a person who is married to Christ (2 Cor 6.14-16; Eph 5.25-27; Rev 21.2) can legitimately stay married to a human spouse who does not also belong to Christ.
 - 1.3.2.1. The answer lies in both the nature of marriage (it is intrinsically a sacred relationship) and in a covenantal dimension (one spouse represents the other).
 - 1.3.2.2. Paul is explicit that in this instance, the husband's covenantal headship does not take precedence. The sanctifying aspect of a believing spouse takes precedence over the male's natural headship in a marriage.
 - 1.3.3. There seems to be an element of preponderance, degree, or direction that should be considered.
 - 1.3.3.1. Every person is conceived and born a sinner (Ps 51.5) and sins during his life (1 Jn 1.8), including the most devout Christian. However, the direction of a Christian's life is toward holiness. Likewise, in a marriage relationship with one believing spouse, the direction seems to be toward holiness.
 - 1.3.3.2. In other situations, bad behaviour can corrupt good behaviour (1 Cor 15.33). However, in a marriage relationship God gives strength, wisdom, and prudence to the believer in a mixed marriage so that he or she is generally enabled to pull the marriage in the direction of holiness.
- 1.4. Children are holy in a marriage where one or both of the parents is a believer.
 - 1.4.1. Paul is not teaching a form of derived salvation or vicarious regeneration. Children are not saved by the faith of their parents, just as a spouse is not saved by the faith of his or her spouse. Children who are born to Christian parents are sinners from conception/birth as much as children born to pagan parents and are liable to everlasting death unless they are converted. Therefore, they are not holy in themselves but by virtue of their relationship to holy parents.
 - 1.4.2. The holiness of children, of which Paul speaks may have, at least, these dimensions to it:
 - 1.4.2.1. *Covenantal* – Children of one or two believing parents are in a covenantal relationship with God, derived from their parent(s) as covenant representatives (Rom

- 11.16). Paul has widened the nature of the familial covenantal relationship in that the presence of a believing mother (not just of the father) places a child in a covenantal relationship with God.
- 1.4.2.2. *Ceremonial* – The children are not considered to be ceremonially unclean like an uncircumcised pagan would have been to a Jew.
- 1.4.2.3. *Contextual* – Children born or raised within the context of a blessed relationship—a legitimate marriage—are thereby holy. The children are legitimate and not bastards, by virtue of being born to married parents.
- 1.4.2.4. *Circumstantial* – By being raised by one (or two) Christian parent(s), children gain advantages from a Christian education and the discipline instilled in them.
- 1.5. An unbelieving spouse may be converted.
- 1.5.1. It has been suggested that verse 16 could have two different interpretations:
- 1.5.1.1. *Pessimistic* – A believing spouse cannot tell, and it is doubtful, if remaining married to an unbeliever will result in the salvation of the other spouse. Therefore, the believer should not feel constrained to remain in the marriage, particularly if it is filled with discord and abuse.
- 1.5.1.2. *Optimistic* – A believing spouse should be hopeful that through his/her example, the other spouse will come to saving faith. This is consistent with Peter’s teaching (1 Pt 3.1).
- 1.5.2. The connective ‘for’ (in the Greek) at the beginning of verse 16 seems to imply that being called to peace includes an enrichment of the relationship between the spouses through the conversion of both. Therefore, we interpret the verse optimistically—i.e., a valid reason for a professing believer to continue to live in a marriage relationship with an unbeliever is the possibility of leading his/her spouse to faith in Christ. Anecdotal evidence provides many examples of spouses who have been converted through the witness and loving example of their believing spouse. Instances to the contrary do not disprove the conclusion because: 1) in these situations the believing spouse may not have exhibited Christ, 2) the unbelieving spouse has remained stubbornly resentful of the believer’s new-found faith.
- 1.5.3. Paul is speaking here only of the situation where one of the partners becomes a Christian *after* they were married. Christians should not marry unbelievers with the intention of leading them to faith in Christ.
2. Does this section provide support for the practice of infant baptism?
- 2.1. Some argue that since Paul does not mention infant baptism in this section this means that it was not practiced by the apostolic church, or Paul would have mentioned it here.
- 2.1.1. It appears that interpreters of a Baptist persuasion predominantly use this argument. However, this argument is a clear example of the logical fallacy of *an argument from silence*, in which someone interprets another’s silence as anything other than silence and claims that the silence communicates agreement or disagreement with his position.
- 2.1.2. It could be argued, to the contrary, that Paul is silent about the practice of infant baptism because it was so obvious to first-century believers, in particular for those who came out of a Jewish background, that infants were to be baptized just as infant males were to be circumcised on the eighth day.
- 2.2. Some state that children, in a marriage with at least one Christian parent, being declared holy does not necessarily imply that they were baptized as infants.
- 2.3. Some suggest that children being declared holy is an acknowledgement of “virtual Church membership” and that they are therefore eligible for baptism.
- 2.3.1. This conclusion seems to present a difficulty since an unbelieving spouse of a believer is also declared to be holy. Thus, if children of a believing parent are baptized, one could ask if an unbelieving spouse is also eligible for baptism.
- 2.3.2. Some who would support infant baptism might argue that there is a difference between an

adult and an infant because of their ability to make an intelligent decision about being baptized (i.e., the ‘age of accountability’). However, this form of argument reflects a modern, western, independent worldview. In a covenantal and patriarchal society, if a father became a Christian and was baptized his family members were also baptized (Acts 16.33), following the model of circumcising all males in a family based on the faith of the patriarch (Gen 17.10, 23). So, applying the covenantal model, it may be possible that an unbelieving spouse should be baptized—if the administration of the baptism is accepted without coercion.

- 2.4. Paul’s statement that children of one (or both) believing parent(s) are holy, provides support for the practice of infant baptism, because:
 - 2.4.1. Children of Christian parents are declared holy and belong to Christ in a covenantal relationship, through the federal representation of the believing parent(s).
 - 2.4.2. The mention of a household baptism in this letter (1 Cor 1.16), indicates that the concept of covenantal representation was applied by Paul. While we are not told that children were included it is far more likely that there were children present than that none were present.
 - 2.4.3. Children under the covenant have a right to receive the covenant sign. The idea that a male child under the old covenant could receive the sign of the old covenant (circumcision), but a child (male or female) could not receive the sign of the new covenant (baptism) would have blown the minds of Jews coming into the NT Church. The application of the covenant sign has been *widened* under the new covenant, not narrowed, as indicated by the following:
 - 2.4.3.1. Baptism can be applied to either sex, circumcision cannot be.
 - 2.4.3.2. Females were baptized by the apostles—e.g., Lydia (Acts 16.15), the family of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16.33), and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1.16).
 - 2.4.4. Children of believing parents are baptized, not to make them holy, but because they are holy and part of the visible Church (the new Israel of God; Gal 6.16); just as male children of Jewish parents were circumcised because they were part of Israel, not to make them part of Israel.
3. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.13-14, 16)?
 - 3.1. *Compassion* – Paul provides an example of how to apply practical compassion when dealing with difficult marital matters—particularly when people are coming out of a non-Christian background. He was highly principled but did not become overly scrupulous in his application of principles. Following the example of Paul, we can apply his approach to other cases, for example:
 - 3.1.1. A Muslim male (or patriarch in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) with four wives who became a Christian would not be required to divorce three of his wives. Rather, the only restriction placed upon him would be that he could not be ordained as an elder or deacon in his congregation (1 Tim 3.2, 12; Titus 1.6). We are not to tear apart marriages even if they do not follow the God-ordained model of one man and one wife for life.
 - 3.1.2. A friend of mine asked me what to do in a particular situation of a cohabiting couple who would be visiting. I gave her advice by using an example. I asked her to assume that she had a long-time friend who was visiting with her male partner, with whom she had lived for decades and with whom she had had children, but whom she had never married. I suggested that she would not require that couple to sleep in separate rooms because they were not married. Rather she would treat them as if they were married, because they were essentially married, even though they did not have a formal certificate to validate their marriage.
 - 3.1.3. Willkie Collin’s novel, *The Queen of Hearts*, in “Brother Owen’s Story of The Parson’s Scruple,” tells of the Reverend Alfred Carling, Rector of Penliddy, who married late in life Emily Harriet, a widow. Alfred later discovered that Emily had divorced her husband before he had died. As a result of his understanding of Luke 16.18 he separated from his wife and

signed on for a missionary expedition to one of the Pacific Islands. He died during the journey.¹¹⁴ The scruple of Alfred Carling is not an example of the compassion that Paul shows, and would not have been how Paul would have handled the matter. Paul would have concluded that since Emily's former husband was dead, the divorce was irrelevant, and it would be improper to sever the marriage.

- 3.2. *Conversion* – Paul's great mission was to preach Christ crucified (1 Cor 2.2) to lead people to salvation. He would put nothing in the way of the unsaved which would hinder their being saved (1 Cor 8.9), and would do whatever he could, which was not inconsistent with Biblical Law, to facilitate the conversion of sinners (1 Cor 9.19-23). Thus, his guidance for dealing with a question about separation from and divorce of an unbeliever is given in the context of his desire that all would be saved through the witness of the believing spouse.
- 3.3. *Covenant* – Families operate within the context of the covenant model. Spouses represent spouses and parents represent children. The practice of infant baptism is consistent with and supported by Paul's application of the covenant model.

Standing Responsibility (1 Cor 7.17-24)

1. What rule does Paul give (1 Cor 7.17, 20, 24)?
 - 1.1. A person is to remain in the condition in which he was assigned by God, in which he was at the time he was called into his new Christian life.
 - 1.2. This is a difficult section to interpret and to apply. However, we will endeavour to determine what Paul means and why he gives this rule as we expand our consideration of this section.
2. What examples does Paul give to illustrate his rule?
 - 2.1. *Circumcision* – He states that a man is to remain in his circumcised or uncircumcised condition at the time he received salvation, and not to attempt to change his condition by seeking to be uncircumcised or to receive (ritual) circumcision to become a Jew.
 - 2.1.1. What are the implications of what he says?
 - 2.1.1.1. Circumcision is not essential in the NT Christian context; whether one is circumcised or not has no bearing on one's position in Christ or the Church—the new Israel of God (Gal 6.16).
 - 2.1.1.2. His statement indicates that changes have occurred between the old and new covenant administrations. The changes (related to circumcision) include:
 - 2.1.1.2.1. The covenant sign of circumcision has been replaced with baptism.
 - 2.1.1.2.2. The application of the covenant sign—baptism—under the new covenant can be administered to both sexes (1 Cor 1.16; Acts 16.1, 33).
 - 2.1.1.2.3. The covenant sign under the new covenant is invisible, hinting at the spiritual nature of new covenant worship and ceremonial rituals.
 - 2.1.1.3. The replacement of the *essential* sign of the old covenant—circumcision—indicates that other aspects of the old ceremonial system have also been replaced with their spiritual equivalents. For example,

Incense	≡	Prayer (Ps 141.2; Lk 1.9-11; Rev 5.8; Rev 8.3, 4).
Animal sacrifices	≡	Psalms of praise (Ps 27.6; Ps 69.30-31; Ps 107.22; Heb 13.15-16; Eph 5.18-19; Col 3.15-17; 1 Pt 2.5).
Holy garments	≡	Dedicated life (Rom 12.1; Rom 15.16, 17; Phil 2.17; 2 Tim 4.6; Rev 7.9, 13, 14).
Musical instruments	≡	A sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb 13.15). The human heart and voice alone are to render praise-worship to God.

¹¹⁴ www.gutenberg.org/files/1917/1917-h/1917-h.htm#link2HCH0019

- 2.1.1.4. There is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Church (Gal 3.28). All of the elect are the true Israel of God (Rom 9.6; Rom 11.25-26; Gal 6.16). This has current and eschatological ramifications:
 - 2.1.1.4.1. Modern Jews are Jews in name only and no longer God's chosen people.¹¹⁵ Christians (either converted cultural Jews and Gentles) are God's covenant people.
 - 2.1.1.4.2. God does not have a special plan for the salvation of modern Jews as a group, as Dispensationalists believe with their 'parenthesis' theory, other than that individuals may become Christians just as anyone from any other ethnic or social group.
 - 2.1.1.4.3. God will not restore the old covenant ceremonial system, as Dispensationalists believe, in a new temple built in Jerusalem.
- 2.1.1.5. No one is to impose on Christians a ceremonial burden—other than what is prescribed in Scripture. Just as Jewish believers in Christ were not to require that believing Gentiles were to be circumcised, Christians today are not to impose on fellow Christians rules for drawing near to God (e.g., the observance of Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday, or Christmas). Likewise, it is wrong to consider a Christian more or less spiritual than another because he does or does not attend meetings (e.g., Bible studies, conferences, men's breakfasts, women's retreats, etc.).
- 2.1.2. How could someone become uncircumcised?
 - 2.1.2.1. Some interpreters claim that there was a process Hellenistic Jews used to appear as if they were uncircumcised, because they were ridiculed for their appearance (e.g., when using communal baths or gymnasia) and desired to avoid anti-Semitic persecution. Whether there was an actual surgical procedure to splice in additional skin or it was done with gradual stretching of the remaining skin on the penis using weights over many months, is irrelevant.
 - 2.1.2.2. Paul may be thinking of those who attempted to use such a process. However, he could also be speaking hypothetically, referring to those who *wished* that they had not been circumcised.
- 2.2. *Slavery* – If a person is a slave, he is not to use his freedom in Christ as a claim to freedom from an earthly master.
 - 2.2.1. It has been estimated that about one-third of the population of the Roman Empire in the 1st century were slaves. People became slaves when their nation was overrun by Rome and a portion of the population was enslaved, for economic reasons (e.g., to pay debts), or by being born to a slave. The ESV translates the Greek word (δοῦλος) as 'bondservant'.
 - 2.2.2. Paul was giving direction primarily to slaves who had become Christians but were slaves of other Christians. He is telling them that because they are slaves to Christian masters does not give them a right to demand their freedom. Although he might have encouraged Christian masters to release their slaves, he would not demand it (compare, Phm 15-21).
 - 2.2.3. What exception does he give for slaves remaining in their station?
 - 2.2.3.1. Paul does not suggest that it is wrong to change one's station or status in life—rather one should not strive to change it for the wrong reasons. A slave should not become obsessed with obtaining his freedom. However, if a master (Christian, or otherwise) offers a slave his freedom, or a slave is able to purchase his freedom, he is to avail himself of the opportunity.
- 3. How does Paul indicate that this rule is generally applicable?
 - 3.1. He states that this is a rule that applies to all the churches. Thus, it is a general rule that applies throughout the ages of the NT Church and to all professing Christians. Calvin suggests that Paul

¹¹⁵ James R. Hughes, *And so all Israel will be Saved (Romans chapter 11)*, 1988; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

added this statement to assure the Corinthians that he was not being more stringent with them than with other congregations under his leadership.¹¹⁶

- 3.2. His general rule is that Christians should remain in their station or calling until they are given opportunities by God and men to take on new roles and responsibilities.
4. Why does Paul give this general rule?

There are a number of stated or implied reasons for why he gives the general rule that Christians should remain in their station or calling:

 - 4.1. *Roles* (1 Cor 7.17, 20, 24) – Roles and responsibilities to which we are called, are assigned by God. Paul is alluding to God's governing providence by which we are led into the work in which he wants us to serve him. Later, Paul will expand on this teaching with respect to Church offices (1 Cor 12.28-30), but the same rule applies to secular roles and responsibilities. In general, Christians should not strive to change their stations, status, roles, or responsibilities, *because* they are Christians. [An obvious exception is when a person who becomes a Christian has been performing a job which is clearly aligned with sinful practices, such as working as a card dealer in a casino or directing pornographic movies. In this case, a Christian should seek to change his station.] God has a purpose, sometimes unclear to us, for why he has called us to particular positions and places.
 - 4.2. *Rituals* (1 Cor 7.19) – Adherence to outward rituals is not of the essence to the true religion that is based on an inward grace. The early Church had almost been derailed by attempts of Jewish converts who demanded adherence to the Mosaic ceremonies—in particular circumcision, which Gentiles viewed as physical mutilation (Phil 3.2). Paul gave his decided opinion on this matter at the council (presbytery/synod) in Jerusalem (Acts 15.1-41) and in his letter to the Galatians. Formulating a requirement to adhere to rituals which have been fulfilled in Christ is anathema (Gal 1.8-9).
 - 4.3. *Regulations* (1 Cor 7.19) – Observance of ceremonial regulations is not as important as obedience to God's moral law (1 Sam 15.22; Is 1.11-17; Hos 6.6; Amos 5.21-24; Mic 6.6-8). God's moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments, which includes our duties to God and men—correct attitudes and actions and prescribed and proper spiritual worship practices and behaviour. In particular, we are not to substitute rules imposed by men (Col 2.20-23) for correct observance and obedience to God's law. We are not saved *by* obedience but saved *to* obedience (Lk 6.46; Jn 14.15; Rom 6.22; 1 Pt 2.16).
 - 4.4. *Rights* (1 Cor 7.22) – Worldly status is not of the essence of being in Christ. One is not in Christ because he is free or slave, male or female, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, or royalty or commoner (Gal 3.28). The world views these things as important, but in God's eyes they are irrelevant.
 - 4.5. *Released* (1 Cor 7.22) – True freedom is spiritual not physical or temporal. True freedom is release from slavery to Satan and sin (2 Tim 2.26), not release from human institutions or establishments. A person can have no rights to speak, vote, or own property, be 'owned' by another person, or be locked in a jail cell, and yet be free forever (Jn 8.36). True freedom is being set free from the crushing despair of being lost forever, not from the chains or dungeons of this passing world.
 - 4.6. *Redeemed* (1 Cor 7.23) – Christians have been bought with a price—the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pt 1.18-19)—and belong to him and are no longer part of Satan's 'household'. Therefore, regardless of one's station or status in the world, all who have believed in Jesus have been adopted as sons into his family and are brothers and sisters of Christ and part of his royal household. Since we belong to a new household, we do not have a right to sell ourselves into slavery to another—human or demonic person or institution.
 - 4.7. *Restraint* (1 Cor 7.18, 21, 24) – Christianity does not call for rebellion against unjust regimes or against the burdensome circumstances of this life. Christianity is not like Islam which uses force

¹¹⁶ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xiv.v.html

of arms to instantiate its goals. Not is it like governments which use police powers and money to enforce their objectives. Nor is it like human institutions (unions, clubs, charities, or businesses) which use the power of money and human associations to achieve their ends. Christianity is governed by restraint, respect, and the rule of law. None of John the Baptist, Paul, the other apostles, or Jesus endorsed citizens abandoning their callings (Lk 3.12-14) or rising in rebellion against the government of their day (Mt 26.51-53; Rom 13.1-7).

5. What are the overriding principles that Paul illustrates with circumcision and slavery?
 - 5.1. Christ's kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18.36).
 - 5.1.1. A Christian does not need to have any of station, situation, or status in the eyes of the world to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.
 - 5.1.2. Freedom in Christ (true freedom) is not determined by our station, situation, or status in this world and life.
 - 5.2. A man's spiritual condition, not his outward circumstances, is the only thing of ultimate consequence within the Kingdom of Christ.
 - 5.2.1. Male/female; circumcised/uncircumcised; married/unmarried; Jew/Gentile; slave/free; rich/poor; royalty/commoner; and phenotype, language, and occupational differences are irrelevant distinctions (Gal 3.28) before God who chooses the foolish and weak things of this world to shame the worldly wise and strong (1 Cor 1.27-28). These things may have some use in the spatial-temporal realm for how we live out the Christian life but have no relevance for one's standing in the everlasting realm.
 - 5.2.2. Every present calling for a Christian has its own privileges, challenges, and responsibilities when lived for the glory of God. Martin Luther King Jr. is reported to have said, "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"
 - 5.2.3. When Christians seek or strive for upward social mobility and recognition by the world, they can often undermine the message of the Gospel—God blesses the truly humble (Mt 5.3-10); and salvation is a work of God's free grace, not of man's works (Eph 2.8-9).
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.17-24)?
 - 6.1. *Transitioned Practices* – Paul uses circumcision as an example to indicate that the OT ceremonial practices have been abrogated. He expands on this theme in Galatians and in Hebrews. This has relevance for us today in at least two ways:
 - 6.1.1. It indicates that 'Messianic' Jews and Seventh Day Adventists, who cling to the OT ceremonial practices, are mistaken. They ignore the reality that the ceremonial forms of the old covenantal economy have been replaced by NT forms.
 - 6.1.2. It is also a rebuke to the wider Evangelical Protestant Church which is returning to the ceremonies of the Middle Ages (e.g., festivals, saints' days, rituals, and musical instruments in worship) which are evidence of a Judaizing tendency and an emphasis on the externals of religion rather than the spiritual realities of the Gospel.
 - 6.2. *Temporal Priorities* – Paul is not teaching that it is wrong for a Christian to seek an education or to look for a new job with more challenge and opportunity. He is teaching that temporal priorities should be tempered by spiritual priorities and correct motives. He is also stressing the importance of our being content in whatever situation we have been called, and in whatever station God places us (Phil 4.11-12).
 - 6.3. *Transformational Power* – Christianity is not a social or political movement; it is spiritual revolution. Jesus had constantly to resist the expectation that he would lead a Jewish rebellion against Rome. And Paul asserts that Christianity is not first outward conduct but an inward conversion. Nevertheless, Christianity transforms conditions, customs, and cultures—not

through force, but through influence; not by overthrowing existing regimes but by infusing them with the love of Christ; and not from without, but from within. Christians make a mistake when they think that they can engage human institutions or political forces to transform society. Society will only be transformed when hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit and set free from sin and Satan. When hearts are changed, the lazy become productive, the debauched become disciplined, the greedy become generous, the ignorant and superstitious become educated and wise, the sexually promiscuous build families, prejudiced bigots are turned into good neighbours, and demanders of ‘rights’ are transformed into responsible citizens.

Special Recommendation (1 Cor 7.25-38)

Note: This section is more difficult to translate and interpret than almost any other portion of Paul’s Epistles. There are significant manuscript textual variants for some verses in this section, and translations differ considerably—as you can see if you compare the ESV with the NKJV. We will generally not consider the textual variants and will assume that the ESV’s translation of the text (based on the UBS/Nestle-Aland 27th edition on the Greek NT) and interpretation is accurate, and undertake our study based on that translation. No matters of doctrinal importance are affected by the text variants or translation differences of this passage.

1. To what group of people does Paul give a recommendation (1 Cor 7.25, 34, 36-38)?
 - 1.1. An unmarried betrothed (engaged) couple.
 - 1.1.1. Paul says elsewhere that younger widows should remarry (1 Tim 5.11), so this guidance is given to a (young) never-married couple.
 - 1.1.2. Today, marriage engagements are considered relatively easy to dissolve. In the NT context, particularly among converted Jews, marriage engagements could not have been broken easily and required divorce proceedings (Mt 1.18-19). Thus, while Paul’s guidance can have applicability today, it was more particularly relevant within an early NT congregational context.
2. What is Paul’s recommendation (1 Cor 7.26-27)?
 - 2.1. Neither to seek to be free from an existing marriage or to complete a betrothal by marrying.
 - 2.2. In particular, a betrothed couple should remain as they were, unmarried. Some think that he is recommending a permanent dissolution of an engagement, others suggest that he is only recommending a postponement.
 - 2.2.1. He says that it is a ‘good’ thing to remain unmarried. He provides reasons which we will consider shortly.
 - 2.2.2. The Greek word translated ‘good’ (καλός) is a common word and can be applied to moral correctness (Mt 5.16; Rom 7.16, 18), situational blessings (Mt 17.4; Mt 26.24), kindness (Mt 26.10), or aesthetic beauty (Mt 7.17; Mt 13.8; Jn 2.10). In which way does Paul apply the word in this context?
 - 2.2.2.1. It cannot be in a moral sense because he says, in 1 Cor 7.38, that a person who marries does well (καλός). If remaining single was a moral requirement, then he could not say that those who decided to marry also did well (good).
 - 2.2.2.2. The use of the word ‘better’ in 1 Cor 7.38 helps us to understand his use of ‘good’ here. Two things can be situationally or aesthetically good, and yet one be better than another in a specific situation. ‘Better’ can be applied to preferences and situational expediency. For example, vanilla and cookies and cream flavours of ice cream are both good, but one might be better in a milkshake.
3. Does Paul indicate that marriage is not a duty binding on mankind?
 - 3.1. It is not good for a man to be alone, i.e., unmarried (Gen 2.18), and marriage provides benefits such as companionship, mutual support, and reducing sexual temptation (1 Cor 7.2). Therefore,

- in general, men and women should seek to be married in order to be fulfilled in their respective roles as males and females.
- 3.2. In addition, marriage is an essential condition for the continuation of organized human society on earth. Some modern cultural analysts suggest that marriage would not be essential, if society fully adopted the separation of ‘recreational sex’ from reproduction and utilized artificial insemination and “hatcheries and conditioning centres” like those described in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). As society abandons God’s standard that permits sexual intercourse only within the bounds of a male-female marriage relationship, marriage rates decline, divorce rates increase, couples focus on financial security over families, children become despised and not considered to be a blessing, and societies de-populate (e.g., Japan and a number of countries in Europe). Christians should, in general, stand in contrast to these trends by setting the example of marrying and raising children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6.4).
 - 3.3. However, being in the married state is *not* a moral obligation, otherwise all single persons (including never marrieds and widows and widowers) would be living immoral lives. Nevertheless, it is possible that a decision to not marry may be immoral if the motives are wrong—for example, some men may decide not to marry because they are ‘married’ to their jobs or do not want to put anything in the way of their maximizing their time to participate in sports; some women may choose not to marry because they dislike the prospect of being a mother at home with a newborn child or do not like the idea of having a man living in their homes and sharing their lives.
 - 3.4. Paul does not bind the Corinthians with a prohibition on marriage or require a postponement of marriage, because there is a problem with marriage or because ascetic celibacy it to be preferred over marriage. His point is to encourage them to consider how best they could serve the Lord in their present circumstances.
4. How does Paul indicate that he is giving a recommendation and not a command?
 - 4.1. He states that it is his judgement (1 Cor 7.25) rather than a command or rule from the Lord (1 Cor 7.17).
 - 4.1.1. Jesus had not spoken about the matter, nor does the OT address it, therefore he can only express an opinion or give advice; as in “I think” (1 Cor 7.26).
 - 4.1.2. However, he says that he believes that his judgement (opinion/advice) is trustworthy because of the Lord’s mercy. The reference to the Lord’s mercy may include:
 - 4.1.2.1. His being saved, showing that his opinion is reliable because the Holy Spirit has provided him with a renewed worldview.
 - 4.1.2.2. His being granted apostolic authority, showing that his opinion is worth consideration.
 - 4.2. He states that ignoring his advice is not sin. If the couple goes ahead and marries, they do a good thing because marriage is an honourable institution (1 Cor 7.28, 36, 38).
 - 4.3. He says that he does not wish to impose any restraint upon the betrothed couple (1 Cor 7.35).
 - 4.4. He allows for sensitivities—if someone *thinks* he is behaving improperly or unfairly toward his betrothed (1 Cor 7.36). What might those sensitivities be?
 - 4.4.1. There are two possible (primary) translations of one Greek word (ὀρέακμος). The ESV translates it as “passions are strong”. Other translations give “and if she is getting along in years” (NIV) or “if she is past her youth” (NASB/NKJV). The ESV’s translation appears to be more consistent with the form of the pronouns matching the form of the verb; and it fits better with the statement in the following verse, “having his desire under control”.
 - 4.4.2. If we translate it as the ESV does, then Paul makes a concession for strong passions (36)—i.e., for those who are “madly in love” or feel the “pull of passion” beyond reasonable bounds, which could adversely affect their devotion to the Lord (1 Cor 7.35).
 - 4.4.3. If we follow the other translations, Paul may be making a concession for women who are getting older. It has been suggested that since women generally married younger in that era,

- it might have been considered necessary for a betrothed couple to wed if the woman was over twenty years old.
- 4.4.4. Some note that nothing is said about the feelings of the woman about the situation. This is not particularly remarkable in the context of a patriarchal society in which women, as girls, were represented by their fathers or brothers, or, as betrothed or married, by their (prospective) husbands. Paul is not expressing a misogynistic outlook. To the contrary, he suggests that the espoused husband should be sensitive to his betrothed's feelings.
- 4.5. He states that the decision about if, or when, to marry is entirely voluntary, and meeting the following conditions (1 Cor 7.37):
- 4.5.1. A firmly established conviction that his decision is correct.
- 4.5.2. His decision is not rendered under compulsion.
- 4.5.3. He is able to keep his desires under control.
- 4.5.4. It is a decision determined in his heart that he will still plan to marry his betrothed at a future date—i.e., he is not abandoning the engagement.
5. What are Paul's reasons for giving his recommendation?
- 5.1. He speaks of a 'present distress' (1 Cor 7.26). What was the present distress?
- 5.1.1. He does not say. However, archaeological and written historical evidence suggests that there were famines (or food shortages) in Corinth about the time that Paul may have written this letter (late 53 AD or early 54 AD).¹¹⁷ This likely resulted in social turmoil and riots which led Paul to recommend that those who were planning to marry should postpone their wedding until the situation stabilized.
- 5.1.2. Interpreters who wrote before this extra-Biblical evidence was identified placed the 'present distress' into the broader context of the persecution of Christians by Jewish and Roman officials, general persecutions of Christians in all ages, or the specific persecutions expected to occur prior to the imminent (implied in 1 Cor 7.29) return of Christ.
- 5.2. To spare a newly married couple from worldly troubles and anxiety (1 Cor 7.28, 32-34).
- 5.2.1. Notice that Paul uses 'anxious' to refer to concern about pleasing a spouse and pleasing the Lord.
- 5.2.1.1. Some suggest that he uses the word in two opposite senses—a good sense with respect to pleasing the Lord, and a bad sense when applied to worldly things. Then they conclude that Christians should not be anxious about worldly things (which is true).
- 5.2.1.2. However, if the word is understood as "concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune", then it is difficult to see how it applies to pleasing the Lord.
- 5.2.1.3. Rather, it is probable that concerns about serving the Lord and about caring for a spouse are both legitimate. Then, Paul's point would not be that one form of 'anxiety' (concern) is *wrong* and the other *right*, but that one is *better* than the other.
- 5.2.1.4. Jesus appears to illustrate this concept in the account of Mary and Martha (Lk 10.38-42). He uses the same word Paul uses here and concludes that Mary's devotion is better than Martha's service because of their respective attitudes and reasons for undertaking their actions.
- 5.2.2. Life is always full of worldly troubles which leads many to be anxious, e.g.:
- 5.2.2.1. Deaths of family members, relatives or friends;
- 5.2.2.2. Illnesses and disabilities;
- 5.2.2.3. Economic disasters and personal financial challenges; and
- 5.2.2.4. Relational challenges including with neighbours and government officials who are

¹¹⁷ Barry N. Danylak, "Tiberius Claudius Dinippus and the Food Shortages in Corinth," Tyndale Bulletin 59.2 (2008), pp. 231-270; www.tyndalehouse.com/Bulletin/59=2008/4%20Danylak.pdf

hostile to Christianity.

Therefore, a person could conclude that there would never be a good time to marry. This seems to indicate that the worldly troubles of which Paul was speaking were temporarily severe and not ‘normal’—e.g., possibly the consequences of a famine throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

5.2.3. The ESV (NIV/NASB) includes the first part of verse 34 as the conclusion to the sentence begun in verse 33, translating the Greek (μεμέρισται) as ‘divided interests’, and applying it to the man who is to be married. The NKJV (KJV) starts a new sentence with verse 34 and states that, “There is a difference between a wife and a virgin,” translating the Greek as ‘difference between’ and applies this to the woman. The committee which works on creating a standard Greek text from which we translate our NT into English, has identified a number of variant manuscript readings at this point and has marked the reading in the ‘D’ category, “which occurs only rarely, [and] indicates that the Committee had great difficulty in arriving at a decision.”¹¹⁸ Regardless of which way we translate and interpret the text, the idea being expressed is the same—those participating in a marriage relationship have worldly commitments which may distract them from a more dedicated focus on “things of the Lord”.

5.3. The appointed time has grown very short (1 Cor 7.29-31). What is the appointed time that has grown short?

5.3.1. Many commentators suggest that Paul, along with other 1st century Christians, expected that Christ would return shortly, and certainly within their lifetimes. Such a suggestion as the context for interpreting Paul’s statement presents a number of difficulties, since it implies that:

5.3.1.1. Paul was mistaken at this early point in his teaching ministry and he changed his understanding later.

5.3.1.2. Paul mistakenly expected the return of Christ before the evangelization of the world had taken place (Mt 28.19-20; Acts 1.8).

5.3.1.3. Paul contradicts himself, since elsewhere he teaches that the return of Christ would not necessarily be immediate (1 Thess 4.13-5.11; 2 Thess 2.1-12).

Thus, this suggestion would mean that the Holy Spirit included a mistaken belief in a didactic portion of Scripture.

5.3.2. What may provide a clue as to how to interpret this passage?

5.3.2.1. Paul says that Christians should live in a state of constant expectation ‘as if’ they are not attached to the things of this world. He is not suggesting a withdrawal from the world, but a refocused set of priorities.

5.3.3. What may be the correct way to understand his statements “the appointed time has grown very short” and “the present form of this world is passing away”?

5.3.3.1. He could possibly be thinking of the end of the OT economy and era. Since he is probably the author of Hebrews, he was expecting the abolition of the ceremonial sacrifices in Jerusalem, when the city would be destroyed, as prophesied by Daniel (Dan 9.24-27) and Jesus (Mt 24.1-28). However, an expectation of the end of the OT era would not seem to have much relevance as an argument to use with the Corinthians—a mix of Jewish and Gentile converts—living 1,300 kilometers (direct) away from Jerusalem.

5.3.3.2. He could be suggesting that the present distress—the famine—was going to pass. However, that doesn’t fit well with the statement, “For the present form of this world is passing away.”

5.3.3.3. It is more likely that he is saying something like, “Do not get overly attached to this

¹¹⁸ E. Nestle, E. Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, & B. M. Metzger, *The Greek New Testament* (27th ed.), (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), p. 3.

world since it isn't going to last much longer. Live as if Christ could return at any moment." Every generation of believers should live with this expectation.

5.4. So that a person can be fully devoted to the service of the Lord (35).

5.4.1. He is not advocating perpetual celibacy—such as when someone takes a monastic vow. In the immediate context he is speaking of devotion during the present distress. He made a similar suggestion earlier (1 Cor 7.5) when he suggested temporary celibacy for the purpose of heightened devotional attention.

6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.25-38)?

As we noted, this section of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is very difficult to translate and interpret. Nevertheless, we can draw some general principles from it.

6.1. *Cautious Counsel* – Wise and mature Christian counsel or direction should not take a hard line on matters which can be considered beyond the direct scope of orthodox theology or Biblical morality, which is to be controlled by the Ten Commandments. Any moral obligation or guidance must be demonstrably derived from, and consistent with, the Ten Commandments; and consistent with the example of the case laws in the Bible which apply the Ten Commandments. Paul's guidance in this section demonstrates that parents, pastors/elders, and teachers, should give counsel (advice, recommendations, or suggestions) about how to live out the Christian life in the context of contemporary culture. However, they must be cautious about how strenuously they deliver their counsel and should not show disapproval and disappointment if their counsel is not followed. What are some examples, of how to apply this lesson?

6.1.1. Parents should not require that their children marry particular individuals, if an adult child expresses a desire to select his/her own marriage partner—as long as the potential marriage partner is a believer in the Lord.

Examples that go beyond the topic of engagement and marriage include:

6.1.2. Parents should not dictate what jobs or careers their children should pursue—e.g., expecting them to take over a family business—but let them develop their own interests—as long as their chosen job or career is not immoral (e.g., running a gambling casino).

6.1.3. Elders should not dictate which translations of the Bible their congregation should use for private and family reading.

6.1.4. Elders should not require attendance at church-sponsored events and activities—e.g., 'family night'.

6.2. *Christ Commitment* – Any choices we make in this life (including if, who, and when to marry) should be made with a Christ-glorifying focus (1 Cor 10.31) and spiritual commitment (Mt 6.20). Thus, a person's motives for remaining unmarried, postponing a wedding, or marrying must be based on valid motives and not selfish ones.

6.3. *Careful Consideration* – Young people should enter marriage with their eyes wide open—understanding that marriages need to be cultivated and that there will be challenges and anxieties in marriage which they will have to deal with, which at times may hinder them from being able to devote the amount of time they might wish to congregational ministry activities.

6.4. *Conscience Control* – Paul did not bind the conscience of a betrothed couple by requiring a particular practice—either to marry or to remain unmarried. A Christian's conscience is to be bound only by rules and regulations derived (correctly) from the Bible, not with opinions of other believers or manmade laws, which are inconsistent with Scripture.

6.4.1. The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* state, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind

obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.”¹¹⁹

6.4.2. Church elders are not to require practices which are not explicitly laid down in Scripture or are inconsistent with Scripture.

6.4.3. If the elders called a congregation to assemble and they (or one of them) led in a service of worship and introduced an act that is not consistent with God’s requirements for proper worship, they would place a burden on the conscience of any person who did not believe that it was proper to participate in that particular act of worship. The person would feel obligated to obey the elders (Heb 13.17) and yet believe that to do so would be to participate in a sinful action. Thus, a person would be disobeying God’s instruction through Paul, if the word ‘hymn’ in Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16 is understood by the elders to include non-Biblical compositions, and the person refused to sing a mere human composition in worship. It is only by limiting the acts of worship to those acts that the Bible *requires*, that we can guarantee that what the elders command is consistent with God’s will and can be required by the people of God.

Sanctioned Remarriage (1 Cor 7.39-40)

1. For how long is a husband or wife bound in marriage?

1.1. For life; ‘until death do us part’.

1.2. What are some implications of this?

1.2.1. There is no room in Christian morality for divorce when both partners are professing believers, except in the case of adultery by one of the partners (Mt 5.32). We also considered the possibility of divorce when a person becomes a Christian after having married another unbeliever, and the unbelieving partner wishes to dissolve the marriage (*Separation Restriction*; 1 Cor 7.10-13, 15).

1.2.2. A death of one partner frees the other to remarry if he/she chooses to do so.

1.3. Why does Paul mention only a woman as being free to remarry?

1.3.1. Some suggest that the reason is because it would be assumed that a man would remarry if he had children who needed a mother to care for them. However, this seems to be a far-fetched reason. A woman would equally want to remarry, particularly if she had children, since she would be dependent on a husband to provide for her welfare—women in Greco-Roman society rarely had independent jobs.

1.3.2. A more likely reason is that Paul gives his guidance (which he understood to be from the Holy Spirit; 1 Cor 7.40) that women remarry (whom they wished) as a recommendation because he wished to provide an assurance to women in a society which often treated women as second-class humans, that they were free to remarry at their discretion, and not be at the caprice of their fathers or brothers when selecting whom they wished to marry. Paul is protecting women’s freedoms against the oppressiveness which could result from arranged marriages from parents or with brothers seeking to make alliances for political or financial advancement.

2. What conditions does Paul place on remarriage?

2.1. Christians may marry only other Christians—the only mixed marriages which Paul permits are *existing* ones, where both partners were formerly unbelievers and now one is a believer.

2.1.1. Christians are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (Dt 7.3; Ezra 9-10; 2 Cor 6.14-15).

2.1.2. When a Christian marries an unbeliever his/her family priorities and demands are likely to come into conflict with those of his/her spouse. For example, a Christian may find that his/her spouse wants to take the family to an entertainment facility (e.g., Canada’s Wonderland) on a Sunday when he/she believes that the family should be in attendance at

¹¹⁹ Westminster Confession of Faith; chapter 20, *Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience*. section 2.

the Lord's Day services. Paul addressed earlier (1 Cor 7.25-38) the challenges which could arise in a Christian marriage when a spouse wishes to please his/her spouse. The challenges are exacerbated when one of the partners is not a Christian—and it is unwise (and forbidden) deliberately to put oneself into a situation which could cause conflict related to spiritual matters.

2.2. A widow/widower may be happier remaining single.

2.2.1. We probably need to understand his statement in the immediate context of his previous guidance (*Special Recommendation*; 1 Cor 7.25-38) when there are specific opportunities for the widow/widower to serve the Lord in a more dedicated manner. He is likely not making a blanket recommendation (i.e., widows/widowers should always remain unmarried), since elsewhere he instructs younger widows to remarry (1 Tim 5.14).

3. What authority does Paul indicate that he has for providing this direction?

3.1. He indicates that he has the Spirit of God.

3.2. It appears that he believes that he has authority under the explicit direction of the Holy Spirit—i.e., that he received direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

3.3. He is saying that the directions he provides come from the Lord with the authority of a prophetic command, except where he indicates that he is giving a personal judgement (1 Cor 7.25, 40).

3.4. As an apostle, he is conscious that he is writing Scripture with the same authority of a prophetic book such as Deuteronomy or Isaiah

4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 7.39-40)?

4.1. *Complete Bible* – Paul understood that he was contributing to the Bible. He knew that Jesus had delegated to the apostles (or those under apostolic authority, such as Luke or Mark) responsibility for completing the NT canon, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Gal 1.1; 2 Pt 1.21; 2 Pt 3.16). By indicating his awareness that he is an author of Scripture, he demonstrates that a person who adds new components to Scripture must:

4.1.1. Be an apostle appointed directly by Jesus,

4.1.2. Have direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, and

4.1.3. Be aware of his calling to write Scripture.

No one, after the death of John, would be able to make these claims. Therefore, the NT canon is closed, and no one is permitted to add to the complete Bible.

4.2. *Connubial Blessing* – In this chapter, Paul gives a number of guidelines related to marriage. We can summarize Paul's teaching on marriage as:

4.2.1. Marriage is a good thing, and the ideal state for Christians (and mankind in general; Gen 2.8), although not a moral obligation. Paul does not endorse permanent celibacy for Christians of particular classes, such as church leaders (1 Tim 3.2, 12; Titus 1.6).

4.2.2. Sexual intercourse belongs only within a marriage setting between one man and one woman (1 Cor 7.2, 4-5, 9).¹²⁰

4.2.3. A betrothal to marry may be deferred temporarily for emergent reasons.

4.2.4. Marriage should be undertaken for the right reasons—which includes, raising families, companionship, and controlling passions. Paul does not specifically identify wrong reasons for marrying; however, we can surmise that his reasons might include: bowing to parental pressure to marry a particular individual.

4.2.5. Christians should marry only other Christians.

4.2.6. Christians are not permitted to divorce, except in the case of adultery or if an unbelieving spouse is unwilling to continue living with a spouse who has become a Christian.

4.2.7. Marriage involves obligations, such as:

¹²⁰ Nick Eicher, "The great divorce of sex and marriage," *World*, 2016-02-05; www.worldmag.com/2016/02/the_great_divorce_of_sex_and_marriage

- 4.2.7.1. *Intimacy* (1 Cor 7.1-3)
- 4.2.7.2. *Identification* (1 Cor 7:4)
- 4.2.7.3. *Involvement* (1 Cor 7.5)
- 4.2.7.4. *Inclination* (1 Cor 7.6-9)
- 4.2.7.5. *Immutability* (1 Cor 7.10-11)
- 4.2.7.6. *Immunity* (1 Cor 7.12-13)
- 4.2.7.7. *Improvement* (1 Cor 7.14)
- 4.2.7.8. *Indulgence* (1 Cor 7.15-16).
- 4.3. **Contend Boldly** – Christians should hold marriage in high honour (Heb 13.4) and defend marriage.
 - 4.3.1. How? Some ways to hold marriage in high honour (may) include:
 - 4.3.1.1. Marry. Today more than 50% of the adult North American population is unmarried. The rate of people getting married (in the US) is the lowest ever recorded (or ever).¹²¹
 - 4.3.1.2. Do not make disparaging comments about marriage, such as, “marriage isn’t worth the effort” or “being married is a pain”.
 - 4.3.1.3. Reject restrictions on marriage such as enforced celibacy in the Roman Catholic clergy.
 - 4.3.1.4. Pray for marriages—your own and others. These are tough times to be married (e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, marriages were put under additional stress), and Christians need grace to make their marriages a success.
 - 4.3.1.5. Reject divorce as an option (except in the cases of adultery or abandonment by and unconverted party). More than 40% of marriages in North America fail today.
 - 4.3.1.6. Judiciously avoid sexual immorality (fornication and adultery). Do not put yourself in a situation with a person of the opposite sex where hormones can get out control—e.g., e.g., bosses having a private dinner with an employee, co-workers working late alone, accepting an invitation to go alone to a date’s apartment.
 - 4.3.1.7. Wait to have sex until married. Strongly adhere to the position that sexual intercourse belongs only in the marriage bed. Take the ‘true love waits’ pledge and stick to it.
 - 4.3.1.8. Avoid courtship settings between a Christian and an unbeliever.
 - 4.3.1.9. Work at marriage (Eph 5.22-33). It takes work to make a marriage a success through compassion, compromise, and communication. Make Christian marriages a successful example of Christian forbearance. Make it past the 5-year failure and the 7-year itch. Be proud to reach the 25 and 50-year wedding anniversaries.
 - 4.3.1.10. Call sexual sins what they are. For example, sodomy is an abomination not *gay* (i.e., happy), and fornication is whoredom. Do not sugar coat sexual sins and accept the ‘politically correct’ babble of our age.
 - 4.3.1.11. Avoid language euphemisms which soften the wickedness of sexual sins; such as ‘gay’ for homosexuals, there nothing gay about them; ‘making love’ for the sexual act; ‘trial marriage’ for fornication.
 - 4.3.1.12. Refuse to watch movies/TV shows which make adultery (*Doctor Zhivago*) and fornication (*Titanic*) acceptable or make a joke out of marriage. Pick movies with the Dove seal of approval. Read the reviews on ScreenIt.com.
 - 4.3.1.13. If running a business where you are forced to support same-sex ‘marriage’—bake a cake, take photos, etc.—consider options: i) Disobey unrighteous law; ii) Obey the law, but publicize profits being donated to organizations supporting marriage. If a pastor is compelled to perform a same-sex ‘marriage’ ceremony, he should disobey

¹²¹ Maura Hohman, “Marriage rates are at an all-time low, new report finds”, *Yahoo News*, news.yahoo.com/marriage-rates-time-low-report-112052210.html.

- under protest and only read passages from the Bible which speak about God's institution of marriage and the sinfulness of same-sex sexual relations.
- 4.3.1.14. If asked to participate in a 'pride' parade, refuse not only because it endorses homosexuality, but because it glorifies fornication, and dishonours marriage.
 - 4.3.1.15. Encourage leaders in the Church to preach and teach about Biblical marriage.
 - 4.3.1.16. Participate in weddings with joy. God performed the wedding of the first couple and blessed them. Jesus honoured a wedding by attending it and performed his first miracle at that wedding.
 - 4.3.1.17. Support a marrying couple financially, as you are able.
 - 4.3.1.18. Do not participate in congregations or denominations which accept, ordain, and do not discipline leaders who are divorced (except for valid reasons) or favour non-Biblical instances of 'marriage' (e.g., same sex). Do not let the Church be complicit with the redefinition marriage.
 - 4.3.1.19. Speak out in any forum offered, against the world's agenda to redefine marriage.
- 4.3.2. Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, set in Puritan Boston, in the 1640's, speaks of Hester Prynne who conceives a daughter through an adulterous liaison with a pastor. The book explores themes of sin, guilt, and legalism. If such a novel were written today, it would be ignored by publishers as having no market. John Moore, the morning announcer on Toronto's CFRB 1010, says that "Being 'gay' is trendy". Our society accepted an openly lesbian provincial Premier, lesbians and homosexuals hold offices as city mayors, a homosexual was the CEO of major technology company, a female soccer player announced that lesbians make better players than 'straight' players, a president had an affair with an intern and quipped before a grand jury, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is.", revelers parade down Yonge St. naked. flaunting disgusting sexual practices, a president is twice divorced and married a third time, almost 50% of babies being born in North America are to unmarried mothers, almost half of all US women choose cohabitation over marriage as their first union, and Netflix eliminated smoking from its original programming but includes scenes of and references to fornication, adultery, and homosexual relationships. These examples indicate that today there is little shame associated with most of the sexual acts identified as sins in the Bible.
- 4.3.3. The only sexual sins that still seem to invoke a degree of outrage are rape and when adults sexually abuse children—such as, child pornography, coaches or priests being identified as pedophiles, or a financier trafficking underage girls for prostitution on a sex-slave island and inviting princes and presidents to join. However, what causes more indignation in our society is when Christians speak out against homosexual practices and same sex 'marriage'. Since God instituted marriage and blessed the union of the first man and his wife as they became one flesh (Gen 1.27-28; Gen 2.22-25), logic compels us to the conclusion that any other form of sexual union is condemned and accursed.
- 4.3.4. Christians, living by Biblical principles, provide the last human-based defense for proper beliefs about marriage and practices associated with marriage. The more Satan attempts to dishonour marriage (e.g., through Islamic polygamy or man-made laws endorsing same-sex 'marriage' or lewd homosexual practices), the more Christians should be differentiated from the crowd and contend boldly for the proper administration of the creation ordinance of marriage.

Regulations for Meat (1 Cor 8.1-11.1)

Stumbling-blocks Removed (1 Cor 8.1-13)

Puffed Gnosis (1 Cor 8.1-3)

1. What topic does Paul now introduce?

1.1. Food offered to idols. To what does he refer?

- 1.1.1. Eating meat from animals sacrificed in temples to idols representing pagan deities (1 Cor 8.7).
 - 1.1.2. The meat was probably the fleshy portions of the sacrificed animal not offered as burnt offerings, which was eaten at a cultic meal in the pagan temple or offered for sale from the temple or in the markets (1 Cor 10.25-28).¹²²
 - 1.2. Paul uses a Greek word (εἰδωλοθύτων) that appears to be unique to the Christian community (1 Cor 8.4, 7, 10; 1 Cor 10.19; Acts 15.29; Acts 21.25; Rev 2.14, 20). Pagans would have referred to the food as being sacrificed to a god, not an idol. The term is polemical and derogatory, intended to be an insult against the false gods of the pagans (1 Cor 8.4-5).
 - 1.3. Why does Paul address this topic?
 - 1.3.1. The Corinthians had probably asked a question about the propriety of eating this meat, via a letter brought to him by representatives of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 1.11; 1 Cor 5.11; 1 Cor 16.17)
 - 1.4. He raises the topic but does not immediately address it. 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1 covers a single topic. Paul provides a context for his answer by dealing first with the inflated false knowledge of the Corinthians (1 Cor 8.1-3) and the non-reality of pagan gods (1 Cor 8.4-6). Then he returns to the topic of eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols and deals with it in the context of Christian brotherly love. We will deal with his answer after we address the topics in his introductory digression.
2. What ‘knowledge’ does Paul now speak of?
 - 2.1. Paul appears to be quoting back a statement made by the Corinthians—possibly stated in their letter to him, with their accompanying questions. The ESV puts the phrase in quotations, supporting this interpretation. The Corinthians may have said, that they knew that they had a knowledge that enabled them to understand that “an idol has no real existence” (1 Cor 8.4), which Paul agreed with, and therefore “food will not commend us to God” (1 Cor 8.8). Thus, eating meat sacrificed to idols has no meaning since the gods the idols represent do not actually exist.
 - 2.2. In effect, they said, “We know the truth about idols, therefore we are free to eat meat sacrificed to them because we know it really isn’t a sacrifice.”
3. How does he respond to their assertion that they have knowledge?
 - 3.1. There appears to be an element of sarcasm in his response. He may be saying something like, “While it is factually true that the gods behind the idols do not actually exist, and therefore meat cannot really be sacrificed to a non-entity, your pride in knowing the facts is not true knowledge because it is not applied for building up or edifying others in the Church (1 Cor 1.5; 1 Cor 12.8), but for selfish ends.”
 - 3.2. It has been suggested that the differences in the tenses used in verse 2 helps distinguish how Paul uses the word ‘knowledge’.¹²³ The “he knows” is a perfect, active infinitive. Thus, the Corinthians *thought* that they had come to know something. However, the ‘know’ in “not yet know” and in “ought to know” are both in the aorist tense. Thus, their knowledge was not complete, and they had not actually come to know the thing they claimed to know.
4. How is the kind of ‘knowledge’ that the Corinthians claimed to have not helpful in the Church?
 - 4.1. It is a source of trouble because it exalts knowing information over applying information lovingly to build up others in the church. It reflects the nature of Greek, and Corinthian, culture

¹²² B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 191.

¹²³ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 624.

- which considered “telling and hearing something new” (Acts 17.21) to be a measure of wisdom.
- 4.2. This kind of knowledge is exhibited often by people who are gossips, feel left out if they are not the first to know something, or have a lack of self-confidence that is often displayed by divulging news or sharing secrets. It makes the ‘knower’ feel superior (puffed up), important (proud), or needed when he is ‘in the know’.
 - 4.3. Paul is not condemning knowledge and insight obtained through learning. He is not against a person knowing about disciplines beyond theology (e.g., philosophy, history, law, or science). In fact, he displays in his writings and teaching a deep level of learning (Acts 26.24). Rather he is addressing the results which often accompany great learning: arrogance, pride, a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency, complacency, and contempt for others. People who are know-it-alls think that they do not need God and are not aware of the fragility of much of what they know—e.g., what was often considered to be scientific fact 100 years ago has been relegated today to the garbage bin of failed hypotheses.
5. How does Paul write to humble those who are puffed up with this kind of ‘knowledge’?
 - 5.1. He bluntly tells them that their knowledge misses the mark because it is not considered in the context of love.
 - 5.2. He warns them that they really do not know what they ought to know—i.e., how to use knowledge to demonstrate the love of God.
 - 5.3. Thus he says that their claim to know that idols are myths and that food sacrificed to them is meaningless, is not helpful because they do not use this information to build up others in the Church. Rather they use the information to indulge their appetite for food and passion for communal association.
 6. What is more important than the kind of ‘knowledge’ which the Corinthians boasted they had?
 - 6.1. Paul counters their thinking by giving a more important truth, “but love builds up”—i.e., they are to stop boasting about what they think they know and demonstrate that they know the truth by how they display a love that builds up (1 Cor 13.1, 13).
 - 6.2. We will consider what Paul means by ‘love’ in some detail when we address chapter 13. However, we should ask, what he means by a love that builds up?
 - 6.2.1. Paul is speaking of a love (ἀγάπη) that extends beyond one’s self to his neighbour (Lev 19.18; Mt 19.19; Mt 22.39) and is other-directed.
 - 6.2.2. Love is, by definition, selfless. It does not seek recompense or reward for actions rendered (1 Cor 13.4-7).
 - 6.2.3. It is a love *builds up*. The term ‘builds up’ (οἰκοδομεῖ; ‘strengthens’, ‘enables’) Paul uses is a compound word from ‘house’ (οἶκος) and ‘roof’ (δῶμα). We have words in English which may be derived from both Greek words (e.g., economics, the ‘eco’ portion and domicile, via the Latin and French). It is a metaphor for constructing a house (Mt 7.24) and could mean something like “building a house to the roof”.
 - 6.2.4. Since it is other-directed, it must build up others, not one’s self.
 - 6.2.5. Who are the others whom Paul has in mind?
 - 6.2.5.1. Primarily other members of the congregation—brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 6.2.5.2. Paul mentions his own love the Corinthians (1 Cor 4.14) and for Timothy (1 Cor 4.17), Christians’ love for God (1 Cor 2.9; 1 Cor 8.3), and God’s love for us (1 Cor 4.21). However, this is the first time he mentions love in the context of the church fellowship. He doesn’t mention this kind of love again until chapter 13.
 - 6.3. Why is love that builds up more important than knowledge?
 - 6.3.1. Because having knowledge cannot overcome the problem with pride, which is innate to our sinful nature, it can only “puff up” self. Only self-giving love can overcome pride and “build up” others.
 - 6.3.2. Knowledge alone is sterile and unfruitful. Love is applied knowledge (wisdom) based on

truth which bears abundant fruit.

7. What does Paul mean by his statement in verse 3?
 - 7.1. It may be better in this instance to use a gender-neutral translation as in the NKJV, “But if anyone loves God, *this one* (οὗτος rather than αὐτόν) is known by God”.
 - 7.2. In verses 2-3, Paul appears to be following a chain of logic that goes something like this:
 - 7.2.1. True knowledge is applied as selfless love to build up the Church.
 - 7.2.2. Selfless love can be displayed only by those who love God—i.e., have been born again.
 - 7.2.3. Those who have been born again are those who have been the recipients of the electing foreknowledge (love) of God.
 - 7.2.4. Thus, anyone who loves God, must first have been known (loved) by God (2 Tim 2.19; 1 Jn 4.19).
 - 7.2.5. The person who loves God demonstrates that he is the object of God’s electing love by displaying love toward others in the Church.
 - 7.3. What are some implications of this chain of logic?
 - 7.3.1. It is more important to be known than to know—it is not what we know or even whom we know, but who knows us, since we cannot know Christ if we are not first known by God the Holy Spirit.
 - 7.3.2. It is more important to know that we are loved by God than to know anything else—such as facts about God (James 2.19), the material realm, or human psychology; or about the personal freedoms we may have as Christians.
 - 7.3.3. Knowledge about God is important, but it cannot be a substitute for a relationship of love between the Creator and his creatures.
 - 7.3.4. Only a true Christian, known by God, can truly love another person.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 8.1-3)?

Paul indicates that he is going to consider a new topic—the propriety of Christians eating food offered to idols. But first he makes a digression to provide a basic principle—the exercise of love to build up the Church—as the context in which to address the topic. Therefore, before we, as individual Christians or as elders in a congregation, begin to discuss or debate the propriety of a particular behaviour of anyone within a congregation, or attempt to regulate such behaviour, we must ensure that the following are in place:

 - 8.1. *Relationship* – We need to know that we are in a loving relationship with God and are known (loved) by him. This must be more than an intellectual knowledge of the facts of salvation—e.g., Christ crucified as our atoning sacrifice. It must be a real understanding that we have been saved by grace through faith—our faith and concomitant salvation are gifts from the gracious Father (Eph 2.8-9). The knowledge that we have been saved from our heinous sins and adopted into God’s household as his children should engender in us an overflowing thankfulness (Lk 7.36-50). As God has loved us, in Christ, so we should love those in our congregation (Mt 18.21-35; Jn 13.34; Jn 15.12, 17).
 - 8.2. *Restraint* – Before beginning any discussion with other Christians about what they may or may not do, we need to ensure that we apply a balanced restraint, based on a careful consideration of:
 - 8.2.1. God’s explicit commands.
 - 8.2.2. Biblical principles that position approbation or prohibition within the context of the entire Bible (e.g., case law examples which apply the Ten Commandments).
 - 8.2.3. Practical implications, ramifications, and consequences of any approbation or prohibition (e.g., would our direction clear a pathway for sin to enter, and are we, ourselves, being consistent and non-hypocritical?).
 - 8.2.4. A pastoral prudence which considers mitigating factors, without falling into situational ethics (e.g., a couple who have been living together for many years but have not formally exercised marriage vows).

- 8.2.5. Approval or prohibition tempered by a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ which has a primary objective of seeing them built up and encouraged in their faith in Christ.
- 8.3. *Response* – Our goal must be to build up, not to tear down; to love rather than to resent others in the Church. Therefore, what are practical ways that we can respond to our being loved by God and display of love for the congregation?
- 8.3.1. Be humble (Phil 2.3).
- 8.3.2. Provide encouragement (1 Thess 5.11).
- 8.3.3. Prayer for others (Eph 6.18).
- 8.3.4. Give credit to others (Phil 2.3).
- 8.3.5. Be a cheerful giver, sharing what we have been given (2 Cor 9.7; Heb 13.16).
- 8.3.6. Serve others (Mt 23.11; Acts 20.35; 1 Pt 4.10).
- 8.3.7. Teach what Jesus has commanded (Mt 28.20).

Pretend Gods (1 Cor 8.4-6)

1. What topic does Paul now address?
 - 1.1. He indicates that he is returning to the topic of eating food offered to idols which he indicated that he was going to address (1 Cor 8:1) before he provided a context for his answer by dealing first with the inflated false knowledge of the Corinthians (1 Cor 8.1-3) and their need to display brotherly love. In this section (1 Cor 8.4-6) he deals with the non-reality of pagan gods before he directly addresses the topic of eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols.
2. What quotations does it appear that he offers in this section?
 - 2.1. There is debate about which portions of this section are quotations and which are direct statements from Paul. Whether any of the quotations were taken from the letter from the Corinthians cannot be determined. Some interpreters suggest that it is possible that much of the section (1 Cor 8.4-6) is a citation, and that it could be based on a pre-Pauline catechesis—however this is purely a guess and there is no evidence to support the idea that what Paul communicates not from the Corinthians' letter or his own (inspired) thoughts.
 - 2.2. The ESV identifies two quotations: “an idol has no real existence,” and “there is no God but one.”
 - 2.3. Whether the phrases marked as quotations in the ESV are actually quotations or Paul's direct statements to establish principles before he deals directly with the question of eating food sacrificed to idols, does not change the meaning. Paul either agrees with the quotations or he makes emphatic statements.
3. What is the first principle he identifies to address the question about eating meat sacrificed to idols?
 - 3.1. Idols have no real existence.
 - 3.2. What does Paul *not* mean?
 - 3.2.1. Paul does not deny the physical reality of carved or cast images, such as those he saw in Athens (Acts 17.16) but declares that they are lifeless objects (Is 44.9-20).
 - 3.2.2. Paul does not deny the existence of demons (Eph 6.12), which the idols may represent, and to which pagans offer sacrifices (1 Cor 10.20; Ps 106.37; Rev 9.20).
 - 3.2.3. The term ‘idol’ in the Bible is used for:
 - 3.2.3.1. A physical object (Acts 17.16),
 - 3.2.3.2. A demon (1 Cor 10.20), or
 - 3.2.3.3. Anything loved by a person more than God (Eph 5.5; Col 3.5).In addition, idolatry is introducing anything into the worship of God that is not in accord with the Bible's teaching (Gen 4.3-7; Lev 10.1-3; Jer 32.35).
 - 3.3. What does Paul mean?
 - 3.3.1. Demons, or physical idols representing the demons, are not true gods (or God), but so-called gods (Dt 32.17). When compared to one the true God, they are nothing other than

- superstitious fetishes.
- 3.4. In what realms do idols have no real existence?
- 3.4.1. Either “in heaven or on earth”—i.e., anywhere in the entire created universe (Gen 1.1), including in another realm in which angels and (although not stated) demons reside.
- 3.5. What are the implications associated with this principle as it relates to the Corinthians’ question?
- 3.5.1. Food cannot be corrupted by an act of sacrificing it to idols, because idols have no real existence—nothing cannot pollute something, just as nothing cannot create something (the myth of the materialistic naturalists).
4. What is the second principle he identifies to address the Corinthian’s question?
- 4.1. There is only one God.
- 4.2. What are possible categories of belief about God or gods?
- 4.2.1. *Atheism*: there is no God and the belief in God, or gods, is superstitious.
- 4.2.2. *Animism or pantheism*: Spirits inhabit (some or all) natural objects and forces or the universe (or nature) is a divine emanation and everything is part of the impersonal divine force.
- 4.2.3. *Polytheism*: there are many gods; these may be spiritual entities (e.g., an angel or demon) or physical entities (e.g., the sun).
- 4.2.4. *Henotheism*: There are many gods, but there is only one for our tribe or nation. Some interpreters claim that Paul is expressing henotheism in verse 6, because of his expression, “for us”. We will address this claim shortly.
- 4.2.5. *Monotheism*: There is one God (or god) that is distinct from nature (Deism is of this form of belief about a divine entity). This divine entity may be at best a force and may not have a personality.
- 4.2.6. *Trinitarianism*: There is one God, with three distinct persons in the one God. Most anthropologists and researchers studying world religions, and many theologians, claim that belief in gods and God evolved through levels similar to those identified above. However, this is not how beliefs about God developed. The original religion of Adam (and, later Noah) was monotheism with an understanding that God consisted of a plurality of (at least two) persons. Other forms of theistic belief and atheistic unbelief are not precursors of trinitarianism. Rather, the other forms of belief about God (gods) are the result of rebellion and the suppression of the innate knowledge about God which all men have.
- 4.3. What does Paul mean by ‘for us’?
- 4.3.1. Contrary to what some say, Paul’s statement is not a form of henotheism (adherence to a particular god out of several). Paul is not claiming that his (our) god is one tribal god from among many gods. Rather, he is declaring that there is only one God, all other so-called gods are not gods.
- 4.3.2. The expression ‘for us’ should be understood as, “We Christians know and believe that there is only one God.”
- 4.4. What are the implications of this statement?
- 4.4.1. There is only one God. Every other god, defined by man-made religions, is not a god.
- 4.4.2. Paul (and Christians in general at that time) denied the Roman Imperial Cult that claimed that emperors were divine.¹²⁴
5. How does Paul define the one true God?
- 5.1. Incorporating, at least, two persons: God the Father and Jesus.
- 5.1.1. Paul is not providing a fully developed teaching on the Trinity at this point. But he does indicate that monotheism (one God) does not exclude a pluralism of divine persons.
- 5.1.2. Earlier in this letter he identifies Jesus as divine (1 Cor 1.2-3, 9; 1 Cor 6.11) and the Holy

¹²⁴ [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_\(ancient_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_(ancient_Rome))

- Spirit as divine (1 Cor 2.13; 1 Cor 6.11, 19). Thus, he espouses trinitarianism.
- 5.1.3. He explicitly identifies his belief in the Trinity in the benediction to his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 13.14).
- 5.1.4. [Note: we considered the title ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ when we studied 1 Cor 1.2.]
- 5.2. The transcendent creator.
- 5.2.1. As the one from whom all things exist (Acts 17.24, 28).
- 5.2.2. Jesus is identified as the Father’s agent through whom he created all things (Jn 1.3; Col 1.16; Heb 1.2). Jesus is God, and cannot be a created god, since all things (other than God himself) were created by Jesus.
- 5.2.3. Since ‘all things’ come from God, that means that:
- 5.2.3.1. God is self-existent—the eternal ‘I AM’ (Ex 3.14)—and not dependent on any part of the created order.
- 5.2.3.2. God is not part of the universe—i.e., he is transcendent. The universe is part of the ‘all things’ created by God, which rule out any form of pantheism
- 5.2.3.3. A spirit entity (Jn 4.24) can create another spirit entity (e.g., an angel) and a material entity, such as a planet, plant, animal, or human body (Acts 17.25). And a living entity can ‘create’ another living entity in its kind through reproduction. However, the converse is not true. Matter cannot create life; inanimate things cannot make things alive, ruling out evolution which claims that life arose from pure material chemical entities (molecules).
- 5.3. Mankind’s prime objective.
- 5.3.1. Paul says ‘for whom *we* exist’. All mankind, not just Christians, since *all things* exist for God, are to live for the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31).
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 8.4-6)?
- 6.1. *Declare the Fact* – There is only one God. What evidence do we have that supports this fact? This fact can be demonstrated from different perspectives:
- By revelation*
- 6.1.1. Genesis 1.1 opens with, “In beginning God ...”, indicating that before there was anything else, there was only God.
- 6.1.2. God declares that he is the only God (Dt 4.35; Dt 6.4; Dt 32.39; Ps 83.18; 1 Cor 8.4; Eph 4.6; 1 Tim 2.5; James 2.19). Either his statements are true, or they are false. If true, then there is only one God.
- By definition*
- 6.1.3. By definition, only one God can exist. It makes no sense to speak of ‘Gods’ (as distinct from ‘gods’) since there can be no equal to God (Is 46.5).
- 6.1.4. If there were multiple living gods, then we would be confronted with an endless regress, and need to determine what or who is the greatest god that brought the other gods into existence.
- By ontological logic*
- 6.1.5. The logical impossibility that nothing created something, as proposed by those who suggest that a quantum ripple occurred in nothing, points to the Creator God.
- 6.1.6. God must exist because of the impossibility of the contrary. If God does not exist, there can be no rationality, truth or error, morality, or meaning to our existence. ‘The fool says in his heart, “There is not God.”’ (Ps 14.1)
- 6.2. *Disavow Fatalism* – Physical idols, or the physical (e.g., a planet or animal) or spiritual (e.g., Satan or a demon) entities that they represent cannot control anything in this world or provide salvation from sin. A pantheistic force (as identified in *Star Wars*), the alignment of planets (as proclaimed by astrology), or a person’s *karma* (a person’s actions in this and previous states of existence, as taught by Hinduism or Buddhism) does not control events on earth or determine a person’s destiny. There is only one God who rules sovereignly and providentially over all his

creation and creatures. Thus, we need to avoid all forms of superstitious allegiance to, or implicit acceptance of, fatalism. For example, eschewing astrological predictions or fortune telling and rejecting superstitious practices such as knocking on wood. We often do not see our own tendency to live fatalistically. However, converts to Christ from religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism understand how necessary it is to avoid practices which might induce one to resume fatalistic thinking.

- 6.3. *Desert Futility* – Idolatry takes many forms. The term ‘idol’ in the Bible is used for: 1) a physical object, 2) a demon, 3) anything loved by a person more than God, or 4) introducing anything into the worship of God that is not in accord with the Bible’s teaching. All forms of idolatry are futile as they lead a person away from the true God; and un-repentant allegiance to idols leads to hell. Thus, as Paul and John teach, we are to flee from idolatry (1 Cor 10.14; 1 Jn 5.21).
- 6.4. *Deny Falsehood* – There is only one God and only one true religion associated with the one God—Biblical Christianity. All religions, other than Christianity, are false. We must reject the modern ‘politically correct’ notion that all religions worship the same God and lead to the same end—heaven. For example, many people today would claim that Islam and Christianity teach essentially the same thing. However, the truth claims of many religions can be easily assessed by answering a single question that Jesus asked, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Mt 22.42). Muslims deny that Jesus is God and the Son of God. Christians affirm both. Jesus is either God, or he isn’t. The ‘law of non-contradiction’ states that “contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time.”¹²⁵ Since Islam and Christianity define God differently, it is a logical impossibility for both Islam and Christianity to be true and to worship the same God. Similarly, Jews reject Jesus as the Christ (Messiah). Either Jesus is the Messiah, or he is not. Thus, Judaism and Christianity worship different gods, and one of them must be false. Pope Francis, with his ‘authentic syncretism’ and his participation in a multi-faith prayer event, denies Paul’s clear message in 1 Cor 8.4-6.¹²⁶
- 6.5. *Defend the Faith* – Since there is only one God, one Christ, and one true Faith (Eph 4.5), we are to proclaim and defend this truth—through personal witness (Mt 5.16), apologetic arguments (1 Pt 3.15), the preached word (Rom 10.14), and teaching (Mt 28.19-20). *The Faith* can be summarized in various forms, from simple statements such as “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved ...” (Acts 16.31) to more elaborate ones such as the creedal statement adopted at the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD): “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; from there he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Proscribed Goods (1 Cor 8.7-13)

1. What knowledge do not all people possess?

¹²⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_noncontradiction

¹²⁶ George Neumay, “The Post-Christian Pope and Coronavirus - He turns to syncretism during the crisis”, *The American Spectator*, 2020-05-17; spectator.org/the-post-christian-pope-and-coronavirus/

- 1.1. The knowledge that:
 - 1.1.1. Idols have no real existence (1 Cor 8.4).
 - 1.1.2. There is only one God (1 Cor 8.6).Therefore, the entities which the idols represent are not true gods or are nothing more than figments of people's imagination.
- 1.2. The members of the Corinthian church were proud of their knowledge (1 Cor 8:1). But knowledge alone has no value and can be dangerous if applied incorrectly—as Paul now shows.
2. What mistaken belief did some early Christians have?
 - 2.1. Some of those who had come out of pagan idolatry (a “former association with idols”, “pattern of behavior”, “force of habit”) continued to believe, superstitiously, that the food sacrificed to idols was offered to a real deity or demigod.
 - 2.2. What were the consequences associated with this mistake?
 - 2.2.1. They believed that any Christian who ate meat that had been sacrificed to an idol, for example what they or their hosts had purchased in the markets (1 Cor 10.25) or served at a dinner in a pagan temple (1 Cor 8.10) was not a consistent believer in Christ.
 - 2.2.2. They believed that if they ate meat sacrificed to an idol they would be sinning, and their consciences would be defiled.
 - 2.2.3. If they followed the example of other Christians, and ate the meat, then even though they *knew* that there was nothing special about the meat, they *felt* that there was—they were confronted with a conflict between their minds and their hearts.
 - 2.2.4. They were offended by other Christians who ate meat that had been sacrificed to an idol and they wanted other Christians to stop eating the meat.
 - 2.3. What is the ‘conscience’ to which Paul refers?
 - 2.3.1. This is a term he uses often in his letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4.4; 1 Cor 8.7, 10, 12; 1 Cor 10.25, 27, 28, 29; 2 Cor 1.12; 2 Cor 4.2; 2 Cor 5.11) and about 15 times in his other letters (including in Hebrews, which Paul most likely wrote).
 - 2.3.2. The conscience is an inner moral sense of what is good or appropriate conduct. People's consciences are affected by original sin (Rom 2.15; Titus 1.15) and are habituated by the influence of good or bad exemplars, training and instruction, the presence of temptations, and by good or bad practices (1 Tim 4.2).
 - 2.3.3. The Holy Spirit can change and enlighten a person's conscience to identify and pursue good choices instead of bad ones (1 Tim 1.5; 1 Pt 3.21).
 - 2.4. Is the conscience a good guide for moral behaviour?
 - 2.4.1. Because of original sin, the conscience is not a perfect guide for moral behaviour.
 - 2.4.2. In unbelievers it excuses (Rom 2.15) behaviour which believers would find unacceptable.
 - 2.4.3. In Christians, conscience becomes more useful as a guide to the extent that the person has matured in his knowledge of God's law and has become more disciplined in the ways of obedience.
 - 2.4.4. However, every person has a conscience, that by God's general grace, establishes some boundaries for behaviour.
 - 2.5. How does Paul refer to the conscience of the people who do not possess full knowledge of the truth about meat sacrificed to idols? What does he mean by these terms?
 - 2.5.1. As weak.
 - 2.5.1.1. They were unnecessarily scrupulous in their assessment of what Christians are permitted to do and what defines sin.
 - 2.5.1.2. Why did they have weak consciences?
 - 2.5.1.2.1. They were unable to follow solid theological logic—they were weak intellectually.
 - 2.5.1.2.2. They were clinging to old beliefs and habits—they were weak because of religious superstitions.

- 2.5.2. As defiled.
 - 2.5.2.1. A weak conscience cannot be relied upon to give good guidance. Thus, a person can easily be tempted to sin and his conscience becomes defiled.
 - 2.5.2.2. Or the person has doubts about participating in an action (in this case eating meat sacrificed to idols) and yet goes ahead and does it—a person who has doubts about the morality of an action and goes ahead and does it, commits sins (Rom 14.23) and defiles his conscience.
- 2.6. What instruction does Paul give for how to overcome a weak conscience?
 - 2.6.1. He does not give any instruction in this response to the Corinthians' question about how to overcome a weak conscience.
 - 2.6.2. The Corinthian's boasting about their knowledge and strong consciences might have responded to the person with a weak conscience with something like, "Stop being over scrupulous, show some backbone!"
 - 2.6.3. However, in contrast, Paul turns to those who claim to be superior and instructs them to show patience, forbearance, kindness, and love to the person with a weak conscience.
- 2.7. What are some things we can do to develop a strong conscience?
 - 2.7.1. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help so that we can do good instead of evil (1 Cor 2.14-15)
 - 2.7.2. Confess our sins immediately (1 Jn 1.9)
 - 2.7.3. Apply self-control (1 Cor 9.27; Acts 24.16)
 - 2.7.4. Display sincere love (Rom 12.9)
 - 2.7.5. Do good rather than evil (Rom 12.9; 1 Pt 1.15-16)
 - 2.7.6. Practice doing what is right (Heb 5.14)
 - 2.7.7. Advance our knowledge of proper conduct through Bible study (2 Tim 3.16-17)
 - 2.7.8. Avoid unprofitable teachings (1 Tim 1.4)
 - 2.7.9. Seek encouragement through Christian fellowship (1 Thess 5.11)
 - 2.7.10. Follow the example of faithful Christians (1 Cor 11.1).
- 3. What third principle does Paul identify to address the question about eating meat sacrificed to idols?
 - 3.1. The first two principles he mentions are: 1) Idols have no real existence (1 Cor 8.4); 2) There is only one God (1 Cor 8.6)—therefore the entities behind idols are nothing more than figments of people's imagination.
 - 3.2. The third principle he mentions is, "food will not commend us to God".
 - 3.3. Notice that the ESV translators did not consider this to be a slogan of the 'strong' Corinthians or from elsewhere in the Christian community, as some interpreters do; but rather a direct statement from Paul.
 - 3.4. What does he mean by this statement?
 - 3.4.1. The mere act of eating or drinking has no inherent virtue or intrinsic evil associated with it—no food is inherently unclean under the NT economy (Acts 10.9-16; Rom 14.14)—and cannot make us worse off or better off (Mt 15.11). Thus, the act of eating alone does not please or displease God. What God is concerned with is the attitude or passions with which we eat and drink (1 Cor 10.31) and whether or not we are disciplined about our use of food and drink (1 Cor 9.25; Prov 23.19-21).
 - 3.4.2. Eating meat that has been sacrificed to an idol does not enable a person to draw closer to an idol—because the entities idols represent are not gods or exist merely in the imagination of the eater. Likewise, eating such meat cannot bring one near to, or lead one away from, God. Some suggest that the word 'God' should be 'god'; however, if so, Paul would likely have said 'the idol' rather than 'the god'
- 4. What guidance does Paul give to those who believe that eating meat sacrificed to idols is a matter of moral indifference?
 - 4.1. Take care how you exercise your Christian rights or liberties.

- 4.1.1. Paul *may* (but, see below) have agreed with the ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘strong’ in the Corinthian congregation about the nature of meat sacrificed to idols, but he wanted them to consider how the exercise of their rights could influence and affect weaker Christians.
 - 4.1.2. The right to do something does not necessarily turn it into an obligation. For example, a person may have a legal right to carry a firearm, but he may choose not to own a gun. Likewise, a person may believe it is legitimate for Christians to drink alcohol but choose not to drink any.
 - 4.1.3. Rights or liberties can be exercised with a spirit of selfishness—we can perform an apparently right action for a wrong reason so that the means pollute and condemn the ends. This is the opposite of performing a wrong action for apparently good reasons—the ends supposedly justifying the means.
 - 4.2. Do not hurt your weak brother in Christ. What specific things associated with eating meat sacrificed to idols can hurt a weak brother, which Paul told the Corinthians they were not to do?
 - 4.2.1. Place a stumbling block before him. Seeing a ‘strong’ Christian eating meat sacrificed to idols could lead to the brother with a weak conscience following suit. A weak brother might not know if particular meat being eaten in another’s was in fact sacrificed to an idol. However, some of the ‘strong’ believers were even eating the meat in an idol’s temple.
 - 4.2.2. Wound his conscience. If a Christian has doubts about participating in an action (in this case eating meat sacrificed to idols) and yet goes ahead, he acts against his conscience and wounds it.
 - 4.2.3. Sin against him. A person who acts against his conscience commits a sin (Rom 14.23). The person who led him into this situation has sinned against his brother.
5. What is the consequence of causing a brother in Christ to sin against his conscience?
 - 5.1. We harm him.
 - 5.1.1. Paul says the person is destroyed.
 - 5.1.2. What does he mean by the use of this strong word ‘destroyed’?
 - 5.1.2.1. He does not mean that the person is damned forever, since his is a brother for whom Christ died—anyone for who Christ died cannot lose his salvation.
 - 5.1.2.2. Rather it means, when interpreted in light of the similar teaching in Romans 14.22-23, that he is led into sin and his spiritual growth is hindered.
 - 5.1.2.3. Leading a weak Christian into sinning against his conscience is equivalent to kicking a wimp when he has tripped or slapping a person who has a bad headache
 - 5.2. We sin against Christ.
 - 5.2.1. Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians is given within the context of the unity of the Church (1 Cor 12.12-30; Rom 12.5) and the organic union between Christ and his Church (Eph 5.23; Phil 2.1). When we sin against a fellow believer, we sin against Christ himself.
 - 5.2.2. When a Christian suffers, Christ suffers with him (Mt 25.40, 45; Acts 26.14-15). Thus, we are accountable to God for how we treat fellow believers.
 - 5.3. Paul’s point is that whether or not it is okay, in principle, to eat meat sacrificed to idols, we sin if we offend the conscience of a fellow believer and cause him to sin. His consideration of sin goes beyond the cold facts of the action to the warm context of how we treat our fellow believers.
6. Why should we care about what we do to our brothers in Christ and what happens to them?
 - 6.1. Christ died for them (1 Cor 8.11), and they have been adopted into Christ’s family.
 - 6.1.1. Paul mentions brother(s) four times in 1 Corinthians 8.11-13 and a couple dozen times in this letter, and contrary to Cain’s rejoinder (Gen 4.9), we are our brothers’ keepers (Lev 19.18 with Lk 10.27 and Rom 13.9; Mt 25.31-46; Gal 6.2).
 - 6.2. How we treat them is how we treat Christ because they are ‘Christ’ on earth (Gal 4.14).
 - 6.3. Christians should act out of love. The truly spiritually strong person not only knows what is

- right, in contrast to wrong, but acts rightly in love (chapter 13), which includes showing patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control toward weaker Christians (Gal 5.22-23).
- 6.4. Paul is arguing that any perceived rights and liberties we may have, should be constrained to advance the wellbeing of those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, but weak in their faith.
7. How does he close his argument at this point?
- 7.1. He reinforces his argument with his own example and an emphatic hyperbolic double negative—“not not—by no means, certainly not—I will eat meat into the ages” (οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).
- 7.2. Rather than do anything which would cause a brother to stumble, be tripped up, or be scandalized by his actions, he is willing to forgo any rights or liberties he may perceive himself to have and avoid the action. In this case, he declares that he will not eat meat (or more generally, eat any food or perform any permissible action) if by so doing he would cause a brother to stumble into sin.
- 7.3. His statement (1 Cor 8.13) is a summation of what he will cover in chapter 9 as he describes how he will surrender his rights for the sake of the Church.
8. Why didn’t Paul refer to the Jerusalem Council’s directive?
- 8.1. The Jerusalem Council, at which Paul had been present, had forbidden outright eating food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15.29). Thus, why didn’t Paul simply refer to the deliberations and communication of that council and say flatly, “As the council of elders concluded, you are not to eat meat from animals sacrificed to idols.”? In 1 Cor 10.20-21 he is explicit that Christians must not eat in pagan temples or eat pagan sacrifices and expect to sit at the Lord’s table. So, why doesn’t he say something similar here? He appeals to generally accepted practice in the Churches elsewhere (1 Cor 11.15), so why not here?
- 8.2. Paul makes no mention here, in chapter 10, or in Romans 14.1-23 of the council’s decision. Some interpreters say that Paul did not want to appear legalistic and constrain Christians to follow ceremonial practices in which distinctions were made between clean and unclean foods. However, if Paul had disagreed with the decisions and dictates of the Jerusalem Council, he would have spoken out at the council and likely prevailed by persuasive argumentation. Therefore, Paul must have another reason for not mentioning the council’s decisions at this point.
- 8.3. Since he will deal more explicitly with the matter of eating food sacrificed to idols later in this letter, we need to understand the nature of his argument in this section.
- 8.3.1. He doesn’t present a moral absolute here to silence discussion and consideration.
- 8.3.2. Rather he structures his argument in the form of a hypothetical. In effect he argues, “Assume for a moment that eating food sacrificed to idols isn’t forbidden outright—after all the gods represented by the idols do not even exist—does that mean it is helpful to eat this food? No! It doesn’t help you in anyway and it hurts those who have weak faith. You should have more concern for those who are weak in faith and abandon your rights! Now I will show you (chapter 9) what it means to abandon rights for the sake of Christ and his Church.”
- 8.3.3. Before speaking of the unlawfulness of eating food sacrificed to idols, he wishes to appeal to them to restrain *any* ‘freedom’ they might think that they had for the sake of love for the brothers. Paul appeals first to the ‘law of love’.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 8.7-13)?
- 9.1. *Positioning* – Is Paul teaching a form of situational ethics—i.e., what is right for one person is wrong for another?
- 9.1.1. Situational ethics defines right or wrong behaviour by the context in which an action is exercised, rather than by absolute or universal moral standards. For example, a proponent of

situational ethics might argue that lying is proper under certain circumstances (e.g., to keep state secrets or to protect the life of someone facing the prospect of persecution). Paul is not presenting a form of situational ethics in these verses.

9.1.2. Nor is Paul dealing with the absolute rightness or wrongness of the act of eating meat sacrificed to an idol. Rather he points out that if a person has weak faith and goes ahead and does the action (eats the meat) he commits sin. However, a person with strong faith, who believes that eating meat sacrificed to an idol is a matter of indifference, can be equally guilty of sinning if he does not display love for his Christian brother and causes him to stumble into sin.

9.2. *Principles* – Does Paul require that Christians who have ‘strong’ faith concede their rights in any situation where their fellow Christians who have weak faith may object to their behaviour or practice?

9.2.1. Consider the following examples. Should we concede our practices if we believe that a Christian has a right to practice the following actions:

9.2.1.1. A former Hindu young woman who has been converted to Christ, claims that when she sees a Christian woman with ear or nose piercings and wearing jewellery in the piercings, she is tempted to participate in her former pagan rituals, and she reinforces her claim by stating that wearing jewellery is contrary to Peter’s teaching (1 Pt 3.3).

9.2.1.2. A Christian, with a former gambling addiction, claims that Christians playing cards (e.g., bridge in a foursome or solitaire on a PC) in his presence tempts him to go back to gambling.

9.2.1.3. A Christian, who is a former alcoholic, claims that others drinking beer or wine during dinner tempts him to return to his abuse of alcohol.

9.2.1.4. A young man who struggles with temptation to view porn on the internet claims that when he sees other Christian young people dancing (e.g., after a wedding) unhealthy desires are stirred up in him.

9.2.1.5. A married Christian actor/actress is cast in a (descent, family-oriented) movie as a married partner and according to the script is required to kiss the other actor. Another Christian complains and says that he found this action to be offensive and an encouragement of extra-marital affairs and adultery.

9.2.1.6. A group of Christians having dinner at the Mandarin buffet restaurant open the fortune cookies delivered at the end of the dinner and read-out the ‘fortunes’ with laughter. One of the Christians present complains that reading the ‘fortunes’ is participation in a pagan superstition and asks the others not to read them (at least out loud).

9.2.1.7. A former motorcycle gang member, who has been recently converted, claims that when he sees Christians with beards riding motorcycles he is tempted to return to his former gang.

9.2.1.8. A former punk-rocker, converted out of a drug-induced stupor, asks that an elder in his congregation not listen to pop music because of the unedifying lyrics and sensual rhythm of the music, claiming that he will be led into temptation by the elder’s example.

9.2.1.9. A converted Jew or Muslim is invited to attend the congregation’s men’s breakfast and is offended that bacon is being served at the breakfast.

9.2.1.10. A woman is given a ‘charm’ bracelet so she can collect little mementos of places she has visited or symbols of events in her family’s life. Another Christian objects to her wearing it, saying that a charm bracelet was once worn to ward off evil spirits and wearing one is considered a means of procuring good luck.

9.2.1.11. A congregation cancels their Sunday evening service on ‘Superbowl Sunday’ and instead hosts a party in their church basement to which their congregation may invite their unbelieving neighbours. One of the members of their congregation

objects, stating that sponsoring such an event has made it difficult for him to explain to his children why he doesn't permit them to participate in organized little-league sports on the Lord's Day.

- 9.2.1.12. A person converted out of professed atheism tells me that he is offended because I do not celebrate Christmas and that this has caused him to stumble and doubt the reality of the virgin conception and historical birth of Jesus.
- 9.2.2. What principles can we apply which can help us to act properly when addressing questions about exercising or conceding our rights?
- 9.2.2.1. *Do nothing prohibited* – Any practice which is clearly proscribed in Scripture should not be practiced by any Christian. Sadly, many Christians today set standards for what they believe are non-justifiable or justifiable practices (Mt 15.7; Col 2.22; Titus 1.14), and yet ignore the clear commands of the Bible. They arbitrarily opt to ignore laws stated in the OT or NT which they do not like, based on prevailing cultural opinions and preferences.
- 9.2.2.2. *Do not concede to a bully* – Conceding a right to participate in a particular practice applies to sincere, but immature and confused, Christians and not to demands from bullies who use a claim that they are offended or might be tempted to sin in order to impose their beliefs and will on other persons. To concede to a bully encourages him in behaviour which is the opposite of what Paul is teaching here.
- 9.2.2.3. *Concede your rights if the prospect of causing someone to sin is real* – Our rights must be sacrificed if there is a real possibility that our action will cause another person to sin.
- 9.2.2.4. *View concessions as temporary* – Paul does not expect weak Christians to remain weak in their faith and knowledge. He expects them to grow and mature as Christians and outgrow their pagan superstitions (Heb 5.12-14).
- 9.2.2.5. *Be circumspect* – Agree to abstain from legitimate practices which a Christian may perform, only when you are in the presence of a weak brother or sister. But do not be deceptive. Make it clear that you are willing to make the concession in the person's presence, but not necessarily when the person is absent. For example, you might agree not to order alcohol at a dinner when a recovering alcoholic is present but indicate that you will have a glass of wine or beer in the privacy of your own home.
- 9.2.2.6. *Avoid resentment* – Do not resent those who have weak faith and are constraining the exercise of your rights or freedoms; rather build them up and encourage them as they grow into mature Christians which bring glory to God. Also, if you have a weak faith and believe that you will be tempted to sin by the example of mature Christians practicing their right, do not resent them or judge them for their behaviour.
- 9.2.2.7. *Act out of a foundation of love* – Control your actions and attitudes with a spirit of love and concern for all your brothers and sisters in the congregation of Jesus Christ.
- Andrée Seu Peterson provides an illustration of applying these principles: 'Lai is a middle child born to a Buddhist and Confucius Chinese family living near Kuala Lumpur. She started to wonder about God as a teenager and discerned that her high school biology teacher was a Christian because "she did not teach us evolution." Her teacher was not allowed to share her beliefs publicly at that private school, so Lai went to her secretly, and the teacher led her to the Lord. I asked Lai, as we sat at my kitchen table, how her parents reacted. "There was persecution at first," she said matter-of-factly, "and I immediately thought of Jesus' words that 'whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.'" I was given more insight into what was at stake for her parents: To them, Lai's refusal of ancestor worship meant that when they died, their daughter would not take care of their departed souls. Lai reminded me of Jesus' warning that His coming would divide families. Lai decided before God not to eat food offered to ancestors, in order not to be a "stumbling block" to them. For she reasoned, as a young believer, that if her parents saw her, a professed follower of Christ,

eating food offered to the dead, they would think her double-minded about her new faith. I asked her what she thought about eating food offered to idols now. Lai said she still does not eat it in front of her parents (who have over the years come to respect her decision and to make separate food for her) but that in private she has no scruples against it since an idol is nothing in the world.¹²⁷

9.3. *Pedagogy* – A Christian's knowledge, conscience and behaviour must become progressively more conformed to Biblical standards of right and wrong (1 Tim 3.9; 2 Tim 3.16-17).

9.3.1. We must seek to improve our understanding of God's word and of how to apply it in our lives so that we are free from the superstitions of men and free to work and worship as God desires and intends (Jn 8.36).

9.3.2. Thus, it is necessary that the elders and other mature Christians in a congregation instruct weak Christians to think Biblically and overcome their superstitious prejudices and to live Biblically consistently lives. Living as a Christian is not following a list of dos and don'ts, or blindly following the examples of other Christians. It is living a principled and purposeful life, guided by Scripture, for the glory of God.

Surrendered Rights (1 Cor 9:1-27)

Renouncing Privileges (1 Cor 9.1-14)

Lord's Proxy (1 Cor 9.1-3)

1. What digression does Paul introduce in chapter 9? Why?

1.1. Paul digresses from a focus on the Corinthians' conduct to a consideration of his own position and practice as an example—he uses his own situation as an example of surrendered rights.

1.2. He uses a form of argument from the 'greater' to the 'lesser' to demonstrate that the Corinthians should be willing to give up their rights for the sake of their weak Christian brothers. Later (1 Cor 9.8-12) he will use the opposite form, arguing from the 'lesser' to the 'greater'.

1.3. He will return to the specific question about eating meat sacrificed to idols in chapter 10.

2. What is the expected answer to the series of question Paul presents in this section?

2.1. All are rhetorical questions with the expected answer of 'yes'.

3. What does Paul mean by his question, "Am I not free?"

3.1. He is not using the word 'free' in:

3.1.1. An absolute sense—i.e., as God is a free agent; he understood that we are entirely dependent on God's providential governance (Acts 17.28; Rom 8.28-30; Rom 9.1-29).

3.1.2. A civil or legal sense, contrary to the opinion of some; he was not arguing that he was not accountable to any person in authority (Rom 13.1-7).

3.1.3. A moral sense: he knew and taught that we are subject to the law of God (1 Cor 9.21; Rom 7.12; Rom 13.8-10; 1 Tim 1.8).

3.2. Rather, he is using the word 'free' to indicate that he could make responsible decisions, and act accordingly, with respect to matters which some in the Church might view as contentious—some of which he uses to illustrate his point in the following verses (1 Cor 9.4-14).

4. What does Paul mean by 'apostle'?

4.1. He introduced himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus in the opening salutation of this letter.

4.2. We noted, when we considered 1.1, that 'apostle' may be used in a general sense to refer to those undertaking evangelistic work. However, here (and in 1 Cor 1.1) Paul is declaring himself to be an addition to the original twelve apostles, having the same authority in the fledgling Church as Peter and John (see 1 Cor 9.1-3).

¹²⁷ Andrée Seu Peterson, "A little of the breadth revealed," *World*, 2015-03-02; www.worldmag.com/2015/03/a_little_of_the_breadth_revealed

5. When did Paul see Jesus?
 - 5.1. He is likely referring to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (1 Cor 15.8; Acts 9.3-19; Acts 22.14). His commissioning as an apostle was a unique event and extraordinary. The other apostles were not commissioned in this manner.
6. How were the Corinthians a ‘seal’ of Paul’s apostleship?
 - 6.1. Paul uses the word ‘seal’ to indicate that his ‘ownership’ impression was stamped on the Corinthians, indicating that they were the ‘real thing’—the results of his workmanship.
 - 6.2. Paul is assuring the Corinthians that the fruit of his labours among them validates the authority he had been given as an apostle. The fact that they were converted out of Judaism or paganism to true faith in Christ, demonstrates that his work among them was real and endorsed by God (Mt 7.15-20). This, of course, does not mean that every work and practice of every evangelist, preacher, or congregation is endorsed by God because some people have been saved through their witness. God uses even the false means and motives of men to achieve his glorious ends (Phil 1.18).
7. Why does Paul ask this series of questions?
 - 7.1. We can infer that since he defends his apostleship here, that it was being questioned and he wished to remind the Corinthians of his having the same authority as one of the original twelve apostles.
 - 7.2. He wishes to establish his credentials, not to boast or to exercise authority over the Corinthians, but to provide background for his argument—“If I, as a true apostle am willing to cede my rights for the sake of the Church, so you should be willing also.”
 - 7.3. Interpreters and language scholars are divided over whether the ‘this’ in verse 3 refers to the preceding or the following statements. The ESV, following the UBS printed Greek text, includes verse 3 with the following verses. It seems to make more sense that Paul is stating that he gives as his defense to any who examines him, that his having had a personal encounter with the risen Lord was his ultimate qualification of apostleship.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.1-3)?
 - 8.1. *Action* – Paul’s rhetorical questions offer foresight into his actions of love—abdicating his rights for the sake of the Church and to build up the saints.
 - 8.2. *Apology* – Paul speaks of his defense (ἐμὴ ἀπολογία) using the Greek word from which we get ‘apology’ or ‘apologetics’. He demonstrates that at times it will be necessary for us to give a well-reasoned answer to those who challenge our positions on doctrine or practice. Peter supports the importance of being prepared to make a gentle and respectful defense (ἀπολογίαν) to anyone who asks us to explain the reason for our hope (1 Pt 3.15-16). Peter addresses this instruction to all members of the Church, not just to elders/pastors/teachers. Thus, to be prepared to make such a defense, each of us needs to:
 - 8.2.1. Be aware of the types of faulty arguments that will be presented by those outside and within the Church.
 - 8.2.2. Study Scripture and good analyses of Scripture (e.g., faithful commentaries) to understand what Scripture teaches.
 - 8.2.3. Construct counter arguments, based on Biblical principles.

We should avoid the instinctual response of many in the Church, which is to hand over the defense of the faith to others who they believe are more qualified. This reinforces the concept of a ‘priestly caste’ rather than the Biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers and the responsibility of every believer to be steeped in Scripture (Acts 17.11; 2 Tim 3.15-16). We need to learn to think! If interpreting Scripture seems difficult it is because, as Elizabeth Elliot said, God wants no dwarfs, so forces us to think and go beyond our milk diet (1 Cor 3.2; Heb 5.12).
 - 8.3. *Argument* – Paul illustrates how to structure an effective argument, here and throughout this letter. At this point, he uses the rhetorical diatribe approach of classical discourse, as used by many of

his contemporaries—see for example, the work of Epictetus, where he addresses a question from one of his scholars on the beliefs of a Cynic, “And what need I? Am not I without sorrow, without fear? *Am not I free?* [emphasis added] Did any of you ever see me disappointed of my desire, or incurring my aversion? Did I ever blame God or man?”¹²⁸ We, likewise, should consider the use of contemporary forms of argumentation and media to present the message of truth and hope—for example, using (decent—not overly familiar or blasphemous) colloquial language rather than ‘holy speak’ or ‘churchy language’.

- 8.4. *Authority* – Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is a recognized authority structure within the Church (1 Cor 12.28-29). The Church was established on the foundation of the apostles (and prophets), with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2.20). The Church is not a chaotic entity with every man doing his own thing; but is governed by leaders following carefully established procedures consistent with Biblical principles (1 Cor 14.40)—such as a rule by elders, a system of graded courts, and procedures for admission to congregational communicant membership and for excommunication. He does not assert this authority structure to receive honour from men, or to obtain special privileges, but to provide a foundation for his subsequent argument. Likewise, at times it will be necessary for us to appeal to the authority structure within the Church. For example, we may have to appeal to a decision of a council (e.g., Nicaea, Chalcedon, or Westminster) or to a decision of the elders (e.g., synod, presbytery, or session) to provide support and guidance for decisions about doctrine and practice within a congregation.

Legitimate Practice (1 Cor 9.4-7)

1. What rights does Paul identify?

1.1. To eat and drink.

- 1.1.1. It is unclear if he is speaking of his right to eat meat and wine offered to idols (1 Cor 8.1-13) or, as some suggest, the right to obtain his food at the expense of the congregations he served (1 Cor 9.6). In 1 Corinthians 9.4 he uses ‘we’ that aligns with the ‘we’ in 1 Corinthians 9.6. Regardless, he is asserting a right, which he indicates that he forgoes exercising (1 Cor 9.15) because he disciplines himself (1 Cor 9.24-27) to be of use to Christ and the Church (1 Cor 9.19, 23).

1.2. To be married to a believing wife.

- 1.2.1. The Greek says literally ‘sister wife’ (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα), which could be translated as “a sister (i.e., believer) as a wife”. Thus, modern translations have interpreted this as ‘believing wife’ taking ‘sister’ as an equivalent of ‘brother’ and meaning one who is in the Church and a believer in Christ (Rom 16.1).
- 1.2.2. This statement implies that the apostles (including Peter/Cephas; Mk 1.30), and therefore all elders and deacons may marry (1 Tim 3.2, 12). It is likely that all the original apostles were married. Jews, in general, considered marriage to be a requirement and singleness not ideal (Gen 1.28; Gen 9.1, 7). Some Church Fathers and later Roman Catholic interpreters, to support their official requirement for clerical celibacy, feebly attempt to interpret this passage as meaning female missionaries who accompanied male missionaries (e.g., as housekeepers) but were not actual wives. They cannot find support from the Bible that the clergy cannot marry—it is more consistent for them to argue that a pope (Pope John XXII; 1322) or a council (e.g., Elvira, 306; Carthage, 400; Second Lateran, 1139; Trent 16th c) had authority to impose such a position than to twist Scripture to support it.

1.3. To take a wife along.

- 1.3.1. Within the immediate context, the inference is that Paul was arguing that it was legitimate for husbands to have their wives accompany them on missionary journeys and also to expect the Church to provide sufficient financial support so that they could provide for their

¹²⁸ Epictetus, “Of the Cynic philosophy”, *Discourses*, 3.22;

www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0237%3Atext%3Ddisc%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D22

- wives (and families).
- 1.3.2. Whom does Paul refer to as a precedent for his position?
 - 1.3.2.1. The other apostles—meaning likely the remaining eleven.
 - 1.3.2.2. The Lord's brothers—meaning his half-brothers (e.g., James and Jude), who were at one point sceptical about Jesus' being the Messiah (Jn 7.5) but believed after the resurrection (Acts 1.14) and became leaders in the Church.
 - 1.3.2.3. Cephas/Peter.
- 1.3.3. Why does Paul single out Peter?
 - 1.3.3.1. Not, as has been suggested, that the 'apostles' is necessarily a wider group than the original eleven.
 - 1.3.3.2. To appeal to the practice of a most prominent and respected apostle. We can understand him to be saying, "as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord, *even Cephas*"
- 1.4. To be supported financially by a congregation.
 - 1.4.1. There was a difference between 1st-century Greek and Jewish thinking about how to provide financial support for those who acted as teachers. Greek teachers generally had patrons who supported them, or they charged tuition. The Levites were partially funded out of tithes to the temple (they could also receive income from their farms or other employment when not on duty at the temple), but Jewish rabbis in synagogues generally had secular employment and did not receive income for teaching in the synagogues. Paul argues that pastors/teachers had a right to be funded by the congregations they served and defended this right in the next portion of this letter (1 Cor 9.8-14) and elsewhere (1 Tim 5.17-18; 2 Thess 3.8-9), although he would waive his right to expect payment (1 Cor 9.12).
 - 1.4.2. He includes himself and Barnabas, indicating that Barnabas was probably working with him at the time he wrote this letter to the Corinthians. Barnabas was a companion and supporter of Paul from the time of Paul's conversion (Acts 9.27) and a co-worker with Paul (Acts 13.2; Gal 2.9). His Hebrew name was Joseph, but he was called 'Barnabas' (which means son of encouragement) by the apostles (Acts 4.36). He may have been called 'Barnabas' because he had a positive pastoral manner when working with people.
- 2. What is the first *form* of argument Paul uses to demonstrate that a pastor/teacher should receive a salary from a congregation?
 - 2.1. He appeals to examples from domains of human organizations (military) and farming (maintaining a vineyard or raising sheep). He indicates that a soldier expects to have his expenses covered and a farmer expects to receive output from his labours. Likewise, a 'soldier' in God's spiritual army can expect to be supported by the organization (the Church), and a labourer in God's vineyard (the Church) can legitimately expect to be able to partake of the fruit of the vineyard.
- 3. Why does Paul enumerate these rights?
 - 3.1. He is building a case, based on his example of waiving his rights for the sake of the Church, to show the Corinthians that they also should be willing to waive their perceived rights, and abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, out of love for the brethren. He is setting an example that he wishes them to imitate (1 Cor 4.16; 1 Cor 11.1).
- 4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.4-7)?
 - 4.1. *Connubialism* – The married state is permitted for pastors/elders and deacons. It is a mistake (sin) for a denomination to require celibacy for the clergy. In general, it is probably better for pastors/elders to be married, rather than being single—thus being more attuned to the challenges facing married couples and families in their congregations and being somewhat less subject to sexual temptations.

- 4.2. *Compensation* – Churches should provide financial compensation for their workers (e.g., pastors, teachers, and evangelists) at a sufficient level that they can support their families. We will consider principles to apply for determining fair compensation when we identify the lessons in the next section (1 Cor 9.8-12a, 13-14)
- 4.3. *Consistency* – If we, or our leaders, expect people to behave in a particular way, then we and they must be willing to act consistently and behave in the same way. We should be appalled when we see examples of hypocrisy and double-standards exhibited by those in positions of leadership and call them to account (Mt 23.1-4).

Legal Precedent (1 Cor 9.8-12a, 13-14)

1. To what does Paul now appeal to continue arguing his case about his rights—in particular his right to be paid for serving as an evangelist and pastor?
 - 1.1. He appeals to the Scriptures; he makes his case from the Bible's teaching to go beyond human authority. He argues that the right of pastors/teachers in the church to be supported by their congregations, and his own right as a missionary evangelist to receive a salary from the congregations he organized or pastored, is based on a Biblical legal precedent.
 - 1.2. How does he refer to the Law?
 - 1.2.1. As divine authority; in contrast to human practices, traditions, and laws.
 - 1.2.2. Paul views the Law of Moses (i.e., provided in Leviticus and Deuteronomy) as divine revelation, which communicates truth about mankind's condition and God's plan for salvation, and God's regulations that we are required to follow (2 Tim 3.15-17).
2. What section of the OT Law does he use to make his case?
 - 2.1. The Law (Pentateuch); specifically, Deuteronomy 25.4 (used in 1 Cor 9.9) and Levitical practice described in Numbers 18.21 (used in 1 Cor 9.13).
 - 2.2. Some suggest that verse 10 also includes a quotation, but which is not found in the OT. They suggest that he was alluding to a statement found in Sirach, a book which was not considered to be part of the canon of Scripture by the Jews. If Paul quotes from Sirach, it is not necessary to infer that he is quoting it with Scriptural authority. His statement would be similar to what someone might say, 'Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14.6) If this statement is false, then Jesus is a liar or a lunatic. If it is true, then he is Lord.' This statement alludes to the writings of C. S. Lewis to support Jesus' claim, but in no way suggests that the writings of Lewis have Scriptural authority.
 - 2.3. The ESV, correctly, does not put Paul's statement in verse 10 in quotes, leaving it as either Paul's own words expressing an obvious reason for plowing and reaping or an allusion to a commonly accepted cultural proverb.
3. What is the second *form* of argument Paul uses (in, 1 Cor 9.9) to demonstrate that a pastor/teacher should receive remuneration from a congregation?
 - 3.1. Previously (1 Cor 9.7) he used an analogical parallel argument—soldiers, vignerons, and shepherds receive remuneration for their services and work.
 - 3.2. Here, he argues from the lesser to the greater—from caring for an animal to caring for a person.
4. What is the meaning of the text Paul refers to (in, 1 Cor 9.9)?
 - 4.1. The plain sense of the verse (Dt 25.4) is that the farmer is to take care of his animals and feed them from the grain that they help to produce.
 - 4.2. How does he apply this OT passage?
 - 4.2.1. Paul extrapolates from God's concern for the welfare of animals (Dt 5.14; Mt 10.29) to his concern for mankind. He says that if God shows concern for animals, then he has much more concern for people who are created in his image (Mt 10.31; Lk 12.24).
 - 4.2.2. Some interpreters suggest that Paul introduces a new *interpretation* of the passage from

Deuteronomy, which goes beyond the intent of the original author, when he says that this was written for our sake (1 Cor 9.10). Some try to solve the ‘problem’ by suggesting that the immediate context of Deuteronomy 25.14 indicates that the statement in that verse was understood metaphorically, just as Paul applies it—i.e., not speaking about fair treatment of animals but remuneration for human labourers.

- 4.2.3. Paul would not have denied that the statement applied directly to animal husbandry. However, as Calvin says, “Paul’s meaning is simple—that, when the Lord enjoins humanity to oxen, he does not do it for the sake of oxen, but rather from a regard to men, on whose account, too, the very oxen were created.”¹²⁹ Paul uses rhetorical questions not to replace that application but to show that the principle it prescribes can also be *applied* to human affairs—pay everything or everyone who works for you fairly.
5. What does Paul argue, applying from the greater to the lesser (1 Cor 9.11)?
- 5.1. Since he had sowed spiritual things, he should be able to reap material things.
- 5.2. What are the spiritual things of which he speaks?
- 5.2.1. The good news of everlasting life.
- 5.2.2. Being saved from sin and everlasting death into everlasting life is the most valuable thing a person can possess (Mt 13.45-46; Mt 16.26).
- 5.3. What are the material things of which he speaks?
- 5.3.1. Financial support to provide for a missionary’s or pastor’s salary, that is sufficient for him to care adequately and properly for his family.
6. What Biblical precedent does Paul use to reinforce his argument (1 Cor 9.13)?
- 6.1. Levitical practice as prescribed by God through Moses, which permitted the Levites serving in the tabernacle and later in the temple to use the tithes from the people for their own support (Num 18.21; Dt 18.1; 2 Chron 30.22).
- 6.2. How does this evidence to support his argument differ from the previous ones?
- 6.2.1. It is not dependent on an analogy from other domains of life but is a direct instance of providing support for those working in the service of the Lord from the tithes of the people.
7. What additional evidence does he present to conclude his argument (1 Cor 9.14)?
- 7.1. He concludes his argument by stating that the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel (Mt 10.10).
8. In summary, what arguments does Paul present to defend his right and in general the right of pastors/teachers in the Church to receive support from their congregations or the broader Church?
- 8.1. He defends this right by:
- 8.1.1. Providing analogical examples from contemporary culture (1 Cor 9.4-7).
- 8.1.2. Applying a Biblical principle from the Law of Moses (1 Cor 9.8-10).
- 8.1.3. The precedent of others (apostles and the Levitical priests) serving the Lord being supported by tithes (1 Cor 9.12-13).
- 8.1.4. Reminding them that he has given them something of much greater value than they could ever give him, and they owed him for it (1 Cor 9.11).
- 8.1.5. The Lord Jesus’ explicit command (1 Cor 9.14).
- 8.2. No one can claim that he has not made his point adequately and defined the right of pastors/teachers to be supported from the tithes to the Church.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.8-12a, 13-14)?
- 9.1. *Remuneration and Salary* – Churches should provide remuneration for their workers (e.g.,

¹²⁹ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xvi.i.html

pastors, teachers, missionaries, and evangelists). What are some principles we can apply when determining a pastor's remuneration and a salary?

- 9.1.1. *Sufficient*: Remuneration (including salary and allowances for car, housing, pension, and health care; etc.) should be sufficient for a pastor to support himself and his family with a 'living' (1 Cor 9.14). It should not be *necessary* for a pastor's wife to have a job. Where a congregation cannot afford to support a pastor (e.g., in a city with a high-cost of living), the presbytery should provide additional support if it deems the work in that locale to be valuable.
- 9.1.2. *Generous*: Paul states that elders who rule well, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching, should be considered worthy of "double honor" (1 Tim 5.17). He then quotes the same OT passage (Dt 25.4) in that Epistle as he does here; and then he states that a labourer is worthy of his hire (1 Tim 5.17). It is clear from the context, that 'double honour' means that the financial support to be provided to a pastor should be generous and not miserly.
- 9.1.3. *Proportionate*: A pastor's salary should be proportionate or balanced within the socio-economic context of the congregation he is serving. A pastor is a professional and should receive professional compensation. However, his salary and total remuneration should not be too high or poorer members of his congregation might be envious. On the other hand, he should not be required to drive an eight-year-old Kia. As a possible rule-of-thumb, the pastor should receive remuneration comparable the mean or median (if the mean is highly skewed) of the families in the congregation. However, his remuneration may have to be adjusted for circumstances. For example, the cost of housing in Toronto is considerably higher than the cost of housing in North Bay.
- 9.1.4. *Considered*: There may be situations when 'tentmaker' evangelists or pastors are required; for example, in a small congregation or a start-up work, or in a country where a person needs to have a secular job in order to obtain a visa. In these situations, the congregation and presbytery should expect less from the pastor. He cannot do full time pastoral work and fulltime secular work.
- 9.1.5. *Appropriate*: We need to be careful about whom (i.e., what roles) are funded from the tithes of a congregation. Jesus and Paul are explicit—those who preach/teach in the Church are to be supported by the Church. The question that needs to be addressed is what other roles (particularly among those not ordained to a church office) is it appropriate to fund from congregational tithes? We might agree that funding a janitor for a church building or a professor at a denominational seminary may be appropriate. Is it appropriate, for example, to support administrators, daycare workers, pregnancy care centre counsellors, band leaders, A/V technicians, or youth camp leaders from congregational tithes? We won't address this question today. Rather we will only note that any decision to support others than preachers and Bible teachers in a congregational setting must be demonstrably consistent with Biblical principles.
- 9.2. *Revealed Standard* – Paul used examples from contemporary culture to support his argument and then he turned to the Bible to strengthen his argument. Paul viewed the Bible as his ultimate reference point and authority. He provides us with an example of how to apply the Bible—whatever the Bible provides as a principle, in any area of belief or practice, overrides all other arguments. What are some examples?
 - 9.2.1. *Apologetics*: Different forms of argument may be used to defend Christianity—for example, a first-cause argument for the existence of God, or the nature of eye-witness evidence to the resurrection. However, the final argument must be that God says in his Word that he exists, he is the Creator, we have sinned, and Christ came into the world to save sinners. In the Bible, God never attempts to *prove* his existence. He simply states it. The Bible trumps man's beliefs. To attempt to prove his existence would make belief in his existence subject to sinful man's polluted intellectual abilities and corrupted powers of reasoning. God isn't

going to cede his authority by allowing men to think that they can decide whether or not he exists.

9.2.2.*History*: The history that God documents in the Bible is absolutely accurate (e.g., Genesis 1-11, the existence of Esther as Darius' queen, and about the life and times of Jesus and Paul). Men may claim that the Neanderthals roamed Europe 25,000 years ago, but the Bible says that the flood, which destroyed all record of human habitation on earth, occurred about 2345 BC. The Bible trumps man's beliefs.

9.2.3.*Science*: Scientists may claim that evolutionary processes (mutations and natural selection) have formed life as we know it over millions of years. The Bible states that animals and man were created by their kinds over a two-day period. The Bible trumps man's beliefs. Scientists may claim that the universe came into existence 14 billion years ago from an explosion precipitated by a ripple in the time-space continuum. Or they may claim that the sedimentary strata in the Grand Canyon river gorge were formed over millions of years. However, the Bible speaks of historic events—the instantaneous creation of each component of the universe over six natural days, about 6,000 years ago, and a year-long worldwide cataclysmic flood. The Bible trumps man's beliefs.

9.2.4.*Law*: Men may create laws permitting or demanding abortion, euthanasia, same-sex 'marriage', or 'transgender' washrooms. But the Bible teaches that murder is a capital offense, marriage is to be between one man and one woman, and there are only two genders (based on sex at birth). The Bible trumps man's beliefs. The Bible (OT and NT) is the normative standard for law, not just for Christians but for all mankind. Paul often asserts that the OT was given to provide instructions and examples for us (1 Cor 9.10; 1 Cor 10.6, 11; Rom 15.4; 2 Tim 3.15-17). The same applies to the NT (Mt 18.19-20).

9.2.5. We could consider other examples of how the Bible is to be the ultimate standard for all areas it addresses, including in psychology, politics, and economics.

Responsibility to Preach (1 Cor 9.12b, 15-18)

1. What had Paul done with the rights he identifies (in 1 Cor 9.3-7)?

1.1. He had not made use of any of them (1 Cor 9.12b, 15).

2. Why had he not made use of any of his rights?

2.1. He had given up his rights for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. He did not want anything to be placed in the way of the presentation of the Gospel, and was willing to "endure anything", including hunger and privation, rather than put a stumbling block in the way of those who were coming to Christ.

2.2. He did not expect or wish to receive compensation from any of the congregations of which he was the founding evangelist. He presented the Gospel to them free of charge (1 Cor 9.18). However, he did accept unsolicited financial support later from congregations that shared in his ministry (2 Cor 11.9; Phil 4.15).

2.3. He did not want the Greek congregations to claim that he was just like any other peddler of a religion or philosophy who wanted to make money from his teaching. So, while declaring the right for a preacher/teacher to be supported by the Church, he was empathic that he would not accept support from the Corinthians and allow them to claim that he preached from false motives. In particular, he did not want them to think that he was offering something he claimed was free—salvation—and yet expected to secure financial support from them. In contrast, there have been peddlers of 'hope' such as those who sold indulgences and televangelists who are only interested in stuffing their pockets.

2.4. He would rather have died than be deprived of his ground for boasting. What is the boast he wanted to make?

2.4.1. That his motives were pure—he preached for Christ, not for compensation.

3. What necessity was laid upon Paul?
 - 3.1. To preach the Gospel. His strong language implies that he believed that he was doomed or even damned, if he did not preach.
 - 3.2. To Paul, preaching was more than a vocation or avocation it was a preoccupation. Paul was consumed by the necessity of preaching (1 Cor 9.16). Thinking about presenting the Gospel through preaching and teaching filled his thoughts during the day, his prayers (Col 1.9; 2 Thess 1.11), and his nights (Acts 16.19; Acts 18.9-10). Many people are consumed by accumulating wealth (Fugger, Carnegie), winning at sports (Lombardi, Rockne, Steinbrenner), obtaining political influence (Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong), or gaining fame or prestige (Marilyn Monroe, Lady Gaga, Pavarotti). True passion for the advancement of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a rare jewel.
4. Why did Paul not expect to receive any financial reward for preaching?
 - 4.1. His preaching was not a voluntary act, but an action he was commanded to undertake (Acts 9.15-16). If it were voluntary, then possibly he deserved a reward. But, Paul viewed himself to be a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 4.1; Rom 1.1; Gal 1.10; Titus 1.1) and a steward with a commission (1 Cor 9.17; Col 1.25) on behalf of Christ. Slaves are not paid for their work.
 - 4.2. Paul reiterates what Jesus taught, that a servant is not rewarded for doing the job he is assigned (Lk 17.10). For Paul, there was no choice in the matter; he had to preach or be an unfaithful servant.
5. Did Paul begrudge the fact that he was called to preach?
 - 5.1. That he preached because he was a servant carrying out his duties does not mean that he did not want to preach. He viewed his calling to preach as a great privilege (Rom 1.16) with which he was entrusted (Gal 2.7; 1 Thess 2.4) and a reward in itself (1 Cor 9.18) because heaven is filled with rejoicing when a sinner repents (Lk 15.7).
 - 5.2. Paul did not hold a grudge against God for having called him to preach. Rather he delighted in discharging his duty for Christ who had saved him (Philip 2.17-18).
 - 5.3. Paul also knew that he had a far greater reward—a crown of righteousness—in store for him than anything he could receive from the Corinthians or any other congregation (1 Cor 9.23; 2 Tim 4.8).
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.12b, 15-18)?
 - 6.1. *Rights Suspended* – Paul provides a premier example of self-denial for the sake of the Gospel. His arguments in favour of his right to receive financial support from the Corinthians is unassailable. Yet, he throws out this right with a passing ‘nevertheless’ (1 Cor 9.12) because his greater desire is to be fully committed to the service of Jesus. He is teaching the Corinthians to stop debating about whether or not they have a right to eat meat sacrificed to idols and instead to focus on far more important considerations, such as:
 - 6.1.1. What are our priorities?
 - 6.1.2. Is our primary concern to live comfortable temporal lives until we are taken into glory or to be of service to Jesus, the saints, and the lost (Phil 1.23-24)?
 - 6.1.3. Do we care more about being sedated with entertainment or stuffed as epicureans than proclaiming the Gospel?
 - 6.1.4. What are we doing seriously to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ?
 - 6.2. *Rejoicing in Service* – Paul provides an example of rejoicing in service for Christ. He met many frustrations and hardships during his years as an evangelist. However, he rejoiced in his sufferings (Col 1.24) and even from a jail cell rejoices that he had been called to serve Christ (Acts 16.25; Phil 4.4-7).
 - 6.3. *Responding to Summons* – When congregational and presbytery elders assess candidates who are considering pursuing a role as pastor, they look for various qualifications including those which

Paul identifies (1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9) such as a knowledge of Scripture, an ability to preach/teach, and evidence of a sanctified life. They also assess the individual's understanding of this internal call to preach. Paul indicates that for him, preaching was a necessity. Those called to fulltime pastoral work, which will be supported by the Church, should have the same kind of intense summons from the Holy Spirit. For them, the presentation of the Gospel must be more than the desire to hear their own voices rumbling and rambling, but a compulsion and passion to see souls won for Christ (1 Cor 9.19, 20, 21, 22).

Reaching all People (1 Cor 9.19-23)

1. What does Paul mean when he says that he is free from all?
 - 1.1. We must understand this in the context of those who try to impose rules on Christians which are of their own invention—based on over-sensitive scruples, faulty interpretations of Scripture, or a desire to control others.
 - 1.2. He is not speaking of freedom from the laws of God (1 Cor 9.21) or the laws of the civil magistrate which do not require disobedience to God (Rom 13.1-7).
2. Regardless of his official status, what did he assume as his actual position?
 - 2.1. He placed himself into a position of servitude (slavery). He was willing to humble himself in order to be of service to others and, ultimately, to Christ.
 - 2.2. Paul exhibits the principle of servant-leadership exemplified by Jesus.
3. How did Paul become as a Jew?
 - 3.1. How could Paul become 'as a Jew', wasn't he already a Jew?
 - 3.1.1. He was no longer a Jew once he had become a Christian. He was a Hebrew (a descendent of Eber and Abraham; 2 Cor 11.22; Phil 3.5) and an Israelite (Rom 11.1; Phil 3.5) but was no longer a 'Jew'—i.e., an adherent of the religious system observed in the ceremonial practices such as circumcision and animal sacrifices.
 - 3.2. He was willing to act as a Jew when it would not compromise the Gospel, for example when he:
 - 3.2.1. Circumcised Timothy (Acts 16.3)
 - 3.2.2. Took the vow of the Nazarite (Acts 21.21-26)
 - 3.2.3. Attended synagogue services on Saturdays (Acts 13.13, 43; Acts 14.1-2; Acts 17.1-2, 10), even though he would have worshiped on the Lord's Day (Sundays)
 - 3.2.4. Referred to himself as a Pharisee (Acts 23.6; Phil 3.5).
 - 3.3. Is there a distinction between a 'Jew' and 'one under the law'?
 - 3.3.1. Probably they refer to the same group—ethnic Jews who were attempting to make themselves right with God through an outward legalistic righteousness (Phil 3.6), since only the Jews were held accountable for following all the strict requirements of the ceremonial rituals.
 - 3.4. Was Paul inconsistent? Compare his charge against Peter (Gal 2.11-14) with his own practice of observing ceremonial rituals under certain circumstances.
 - 3.4.1. Paul would not have allowed Judaizers to bully him as Peter did. Paul's accommodation was before those who had not yet become Christians (1 Cor 9.19). Judaizers are those who claim to be Christians but insist that Christians should continue to follow the ceremonial rituals of the law which were replaced by their spiritual equivalents with the fulfillment of the rituals in the life and death of Jesus. In Paul's day they were converted Jews. Today they are represented by, for example, Messianic Jews and Seventh Day Adventists.
4. How did Paul become like one living outside the law?
 - 4.1. When living among Gentiles he would not have observed any of the ceremonial rituals which have been fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus. For example, if he were at dinner at a Gentile's home and was offered pork, he would have eaten it.

5. How did Paul ensure that he was not accused of antinomianism (without/against law)?
 - 5.1. He said that he was not lawless—“not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ”.
 - 5.2. What is the ‘law of Christ’?
 - 5.2.1. The ‘but’ in verse 21 leads some to think that there is a contrast or a distinction between the ‘law of God’ and the ‘law of Christ’.
 - 5.2.2. But Paul is not saying, as some seem to infer, ‘not being *under* the law of God but under the law of Christ’. They somehow come to a conclusion that he is saying that he isn’t under the OT law but under the NT law which Jesus himself delivered.
 - 5.2.3. If we translate the ‘but’ (ἀλλ) as ‘to the contrary’ (see, Rom 12.20 for an example) we see that he says, “(not being outside the law of God; to the contrary under the law of Christ)” equates the ‘law of God’ with the ‘law of Christ’.
 - 5.2.4. He uses ‘God’ and ‘Christ’ as synonyms, thus teaching that the law of God is the law of Christ (Gal 6.2), since Jesus is God! Jesus did not teach anything different or contrary to the law delivered in the OT, kept the law perfectly, expounded on the right interpretation of the law (e.g., in the *Sermon on the Mount*), and taught that the law is an enduring standard for OT and NT believers (Mt 5.17-20).
 - 5.3. How can Paul say elsewhere that Christians are not under law (Rom 6.14-15; Gal 4.21; Gal 5.18), but here he says that he is under law (of Christ), and by implication so are all Christians?
 - 5.3.1. It is essential that we interpret his statements within the context in which they occur.
 - 5.3.2. Paul dismissed the idea that by observing the outward demands of the law (ceremonial or moral) a person could be saved, since no one could ever keep the law (Gal 2.16).
 - 5.3.3. Paul strongly disagreed with the idea that Christians are required to continue observing the forms of OT ceremonial aspects of the law (Gal 2.14).
 - 5.3.4. Paul dismissed the idea that there is anything wrong with the law of God (Rom 7.12).
 - 5.3.5. Paul dismissed the idea that being a Christian means that a person no longer has to obey the law of God (Rom 13.8-10).
 - 5.3.6. Paul dismissed the idea that pagans are not under law (Rom 2.14-15).
 - 5.3.7. Paul was under law, not to be saved by law-keeping, not to earn merit with God; but out of a reverence and love for God and a love for his neighbours.
6. How did Paul become weak?
 - 6.1. What does he mean by ‘weak’ in this statement?
 - 6.1.1. If he means unnecessarily scrupulous, superstitious, or applying faulty logic (1 Cor 8.7-13), then Paul would be saying that he became like them and was unnecessarily scrupulous, superstitious, or applied faulty logic. It is difficult to accept the idea that Paul would take such a position.
 - 6.1.2. He could be applying ‘weak’ in two different senses—the first meaning weak in Christian maturity, and the second referring to deferring his rights.
 - 6.1.3. He is probably using ‘weak’ in a socio-economic sense (1 Cor 1.27)—i.e., those who have little political power, wealth, or social standing. In this case, he may be saying that he humbled himself (e.g., by manual labor as a tent maker) and did not flaunt his position as an apostle or as a highly educated rhetorician, following the example of Jesus who aligned himself with the despised and vulnerable in society (Mt 11.19; Phil 2.8).
7. What did Paul wish to achieve through this accommodation to the circumstances of all men?
 - 7.1. To win people for Christ (1 Cor 9.19, 20, 21, 22).
 - 7.2. What does he mean by ‘win’?
 - 7.2.1. To save them (1 Cor 9.22)—i.e., to lead them to salvation.
 - 7.2.2. To take (capture/gain) them from Satan and add them to the Kingdom of Jesus.
 - 7.3. To share with them in the blessings of the Gospel (1 Cor 9.23).

- 7.3.1. To be co-heirs with them of everlasting life.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.19-23)?
- 8.1. *Accommodation* – Christianity is not an ethnically or culturally specific religion. It is:
- 8.1.1. Theologically unique; with the Trinity, Jesus Christ as the God-man, and the Gospel of grace-based salvation
- 8.1.2. Morally unique, with a universal standard based on obedience to the Ten Commandments. Christianity is intended for both sexes, and all classes, ethnic groups, languages, and ethnic backgrounds of mankind (Rev 7.9). Christianity is not defined by education levels, types of employment (as long as the employment is not immoral), types of clothing worn, foods eaten, facilities used, Bible translations received, observed meeting times, or liturgical rituals. Gentiles who became Christians at the time of Paul did not have to adopt particular Jewish practices (e.g., circumcision or clothing). Likewise, people who become Christians today do not have to give up their cultural and ethnic distinctions and practices, unless they are inherently sinful. Therefore:
- 8.1.3. Those who present the Gospel must be sensitive to the cultural context in which the Gospel is being presented and adopt local customs where they are helpful for evangelization (see next lesson).
- 8.1.4. As inferred from Paul's statements ('I made myself' and 'I became'), missionaries, evangelists, and pastors/elders must make a conscious decision to adapt to, and accommodate, cultural differences.
- 8.1.5. "Flexibility, intentionality, and love are crucial aspects of Paul's life and ministry!"¹³⁰
- 8.2. *Adaptation* – In order to accommodate the Gospel to different cultural contexts, it may be necessary to adapt and adopt different practices.
- 8.2.1. What are examples?
- 8.2.1.1. Wear traditional clothing of the target population; for example, a missionary to beach surfers should not go among them dressed in a business suit; or, a missionary to Bay Street professionals may want to wear 'business casual' clothing.
- 8.2.1.2. Use colloquial language; for example, it would be inappropriate to go to a ghetto with academic language or to approach the scientific community with poetry. The use of 'holy-speak' can be off-putting.
- 8.2.1.3. Be 'tentmakers'; for example, a missionary to working class labourers, if mechanically inclined, might set up a car repair garage and work with his neighbours repairing their cars.
- 8.2.2. What are principles that should guide cultural accommodation and adaptation?
- 8.2.2.1. Not do anything inherently sinful.
- 8.2.2.2. Never compromise the essence or message of the Gospel—e.g., by making false statements or promises or by ignoring key aspects of Biblical teaching such as God's righteous law, man's sinfulness, and salvation by grace through faith.
- 8.2.2.3. Be sensitive—e.g., it may be appropriate for a Christian woman conducting a Bible study with Muslim women to wear a headscarf without adopting extreme Islamic apparel. To refuse to wear a headscarf in such a situation may be viewed as being confrontational.
- 8.2.2.4. Deliberately make accommodation as an evangelistic strategy but not to permanently accept cultural differences which may be dysfunctional—e.g., regularly starting public worship late.
- 8.2.2.5. Be innovative. Martin Luther made significant use of the printing press and many 20th century evangelists and preachers used TV. We need to consider how services such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and v-blogs could also be used effectively,

¹³⁰ R. J. Utey, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*, Vol. 6 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), p. 111.

particularly in an era when many people cannot focus on reading anything longer than about 1,000 words.

- 8.3. *Attitude* – Paul teaches about how to apply servant leadership. Too many men called into fulltime pastoral work or Christian teaching begin to think that they are important and expect differential treatment and respect. In contrast, Paul corralled his ego, worked to present himself as truly humble—the chief of sinners saved by grace!—and became a ‘man of the people’. Likewise, we all need to check our pride at the door. We are called to be servants/slaves of Christ, not lords over men.

Regulated Practice (1 Cor 9.24-27)

1. What sports analogies does Paul use?
 - 1.1. Foot racing and boxing
2. Why does he use these sports analogies?
 - 2.1. Foot racing and boxing (along with chariot races and wrestling) were events at the Isthmian Games, held in Corinth every second year, alternating with the games held at Olympia. The Corinthian games had prestige almost as high as those held at Olympia. His use of these contemporary contextual analogies would appeal to the Corinthians interest and pride in their community.
 - 2.2. Paul uses a rhetorical technique (applying a contemporary analogy) which is standard in good teaching as it helps people derive principles from the familiar and apply them to the unfamiliar. He applies the analogies of yeast (1 Cor 5.6), judging angels (1 Cor 6.3), and the Levites eating food from the altar (1 Cor 9.13), in the same way. Jesus uses the same technique often (e.g., Mt 6.19; Mt 13.24-33, 44-52) to make his teaching easy to understand and to improve the hearers’ retention.
 - 2.3. He draws on the necessity of the lesser (physical exertion) to encourage the greater (spiritual exertion). Notice that he begins this section with a rhetorical question, “Do you not know?” (see: 1 Cor 3.16; 1 Cor 5.6; 1 Cor 6.2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 1 Cor 9.13) In effect, he says, “It is obvious, if you have to work hard to reap rewards in the natural realm, then the same applies in the spiritual realm.”
3. How does Paul want Christians to run the ‘race’ of the Christian life?
 - 3.1. We must not try to make his analogy say more than Paul intended.
 - 3.1.1. For example, he is not saying that there is only one winner and, thus, only one person will be saved, contrary to God’s plan to save a vast multitude from mankind (Rev 7.9).
 - 3.1.2. Some people may think that Paul is saying that if we do not run the ‘race’, we cannot win it—i.e., salvation. However, this is contrary to what he says, elsewhere, that salvation is not dependent on our works (Eph 2.8-9).
 - 3.2. His point is that since we have been saved by grace for good works (Eph 2.10) we must work with dedication, diligence, self-control, endurance, and perseverance (Heb 12.1), like an athlete preparing for a race and striving to win the race.
4. How does Paul apply the analogy from boxing?
 - 4.1. Here, he uses ‘body’ to mean the whole person, not just the physical component of our being.
 - 4.2. With the expression ‘beating the air’, he is likely not speaking of shadowboxing, but of a chaotic flailing of the arms. The purpose of boxing is to strike a target with precision and force.
 - 4.3. He uses this second illustration to reinforce his point that we must work out the Christian life with self-control and self discipline.
5. What could be the consequence of living an undisciplined Christian life?
 - 5.1. He speaks in the first person to emphasize the irony that would arise if he taught others that they

- should be disciplined but was, himself, undisciplined and ended up being disqualified.
- 5.2. He uses this personal illustration to indicate that if we do not run the Christian ‘race’ in a disciplined *manner* we could end up being disqualified from the ‘race’.
 - 5.3. Does he mean that a person can lose his salvation?
 - 5.3.1. He is using a similar type of warning as he uses in his letter to the Hebrews (Heb 2.1-3; Heb 3.12; Heb 6.4-8; Heb 10.26-31).
 - 5.3.2. He is speaking of a hypothetical apostasy. It is impossible for true believers to be disqualified (Jn 5.24; Jn 10.26-29; Rom 8.28-39). Therefore, he is saying to the Corinthians, since you are saved, there is only one option—to go forward. However, if you are not moving forward, it may indicate that you are not even on the Christian racecourse, but on the highway to hell.
 - 5.4. If we do not exercise the kind of discipline a runner or boxer uses during training, we will end up succumbing to temptation and become ineffective in our Christian life. The Christian ‘race’ is not a sprint that is over in 10 seconds, it is an ultra-marathon that requires constant vigilance and dedicated self-control (Gal 5.23).
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 9.24-27)?
- 6.1. *Situational Communication* – Various people from Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Billy Graham have been credited with saying that they preached (or wrote) with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. The point of this adage seems to be that a good Bible expositor understands the times in which he lives (1 Chron 12.32) and applies the Bible’s universal principles into his contemporary context.
 - 6.1.1. As we noted, Paul used sports analogies from the Corinthian games to illustrate and enrich his instruction, and Jesus used many illustrations, metaphors, and similes from his contemporary context and situation to make his teaching memorable. For example, when the disciples returned from purchasing food and found him in a discussion with a woman from Samaria, he told them to observe the ripened grain in the nearby fields and applied it to the harvest of souls from the nations (Jn 4.35-38).
 - 6.1.2. Therefore, it is incumbent upon preachers and teachers in the Church to reinforce their teaching with situational communications along with using rhetorical and literary techniques. What are some ways that we can accomplish this?
 - 6.1.2.1. Speakers for CMI are expected to include a ‘relevance’ portion in all their presentations. Before they launch into the evidence for Biblical creation and the evidence against cosmological, chemical, or biological evolution, they are to include a rationale for why a typical person should care about the subject under consideration.
 - 6.1.2.2. Good sermons and Bible teaching should begin with an introductory ‘grabber’ that indicates that the Bible is not a dusty book in a darkened library, but a living communication from God that is relevant in every *situation* at this moment (Heb 4.12). These introductions do not need to be lengthy or convoluted.
 - 6.1.2.3. Illustrations used throughout a sermon or teaching session should be contemporary and relevant to the audience—drawn from the nightly news and generally not from historical events. For example, it is better to relate an account of a contemporary persecution of Christians than to read a section from *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.
 - 6.1.2.4. Illustrations should be appropriate for the audience. Paul used examples drawn from the Corinthian’s own city. If one were speaking to an audience of farmers it would not be helpful to use an illustration from Bay Street but rather to use an illustration of a drought, infestation, or blight to make a point. However, if one were speaking to a room full of financiers, it might be helpful to refer to Ponzi schemes, Bernie Madoff, and the Lehman Brothers’ collapse.
 - 6.1.2.5. Likewise, the use of jargon and colloquialisms should be geared to the audience.

- 6.2. *Self-Control* – Paul illustrates, through his own example, how important self-control is in the life of a Christian. What are some areas of life in which we need to apply self-control?
- 6.2.1. Thoughts (Phil 4.8) – filling our minds with beneficial thoughts, not the sordid.
 - 6.2.2. Temptation (1 Cor 7.2; 1 Cor 10.13) – temptation can come in many forms, such as, covetousness, sexual lust, desiring power, a love of money, or the thrill of titillation from vice.
 - 6.2.3. Time (Eph 5.16) – not wasting time.
 - 6.2.4. Tongue (James 3.5-12) – not speaking blasphemies, falsehoods, or gossip.
 - 6.2.5. Temperance (1 Tim 3.12) – balanced use of all legitimate things such as food and drink.
 - 6.2.6. Training (1 Tim 4.8) – there is value in maintaining physical health to support mental health.
 - 6.2.7. Thoughtfulness (1 Cor 8.13; 1 Cor 10.32) – considering what is best for others and the Church as a whole.

Sacrifice Regulations (1 Cor 10.1-22)

Story of Israel (1 Cor 10.1-5)

1. What historical illustration does Paul use?
 - 1.1. The Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea and their wilderness wandering for forty years.
 - 1.2. What are the blessings Paul lists, which they received during and after their escape from Egypt?
 - 1.2.1. Being led by the pillar or cloud and fire (Ex 14.19).
 - 1.2.2. Passing safely through the sea on dry ground with the water piled up on either side (Ex 14.21, 22).
 - 1.2.3. Inclusion in a covenant relationship, as indicated by the symbol of baptism.
 - 1.2.4. Sustained by spiritual (i.e., not ordinary, but directly from God in heaven) food—the manna (Ex 16.14-16, 31).
 - 1.2.5. Receiving water from a rock (Ex 17.6; Num 20.11).
 - 1.3. What is a clue in the text there are precisely five blessings that he wants to enumerate?
 - 1.3.1. Each is preceded by an 'all'.
 - 1.4. What is significant about each of these five blessings?
 - 1.4.1. Four are physical miracles.
 - 1.4.2. The other (inclusion in a covenant relationship) can also be thought of as miraculous since God shows covenantal favour to a portion of mankind by calling them out of world into his Church—although not necessarily to everlasting salvation (1 Cor 10.5).
 - 1.5. What does Paul want his readers to do with this historical illustration?
 - 1.5.1. He does not want them (us) to be unaware of this history or to ignore it. Rather, he wants them (us) to consider it carefully and understand its application for their (our) contemporary situation.
 - 1.5.2. He uses the phrase, "I do not want you to be unaware", to draw attention to what he wants considered (1 Cor 12.1, 3; Rom 1.13; Rom 11.25; 2 Cor 1.8; 1 Thess 4.13).
2. Who are the 'our fathers' of which he speaks?
 - 2.1. They are the 'all' he identifies—i.e., the nation (men, women, and children) of Israel and the mixed multitude from Egypt (Ex 12.38) that had fled from Egypt.
 - 2.2. He calls them *our* fathers, even though most of his audience was Gentile. Thus, indicating that he is not speaking about physical ancestors but spiritual or covenant-community ancestors.
 - 2.3. What are some of the implications which logically follow from this phrase?
 - 2.3.1. Gentile believers are the spiritual descendants of the patriarchs (Rom 4.1; Gal 6.16).
 - 2.3.2. There is a continuity between the OT and NT Church (Acts 7.38; Gk: ἐκκλησίᾱ).
 - 2.3.3. NT believers (Jews and Gentiles) are part of the same organic entity (the Church) that OT believers were part of (Rom 11.17-21).
 - 2.3.4. There is one Church. God does not deal with two distinct and separate entities—Israel and

the Church, as most forms of Dispensationalism teach.

3. How were the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea ‘baptized into Moses’?
 - 3.1. This phrase occurs only here in the NT.
 - 3.2. It speaks of:
 - 3.2.1. Inclusion in the covenant relationship with God which Moses represented as mediator (Ex 24.8; Ex 34.27; Dt 29.1).
 - 3.2.2. Following Moses, God’s representative, into the Red Sea and through the desert.
 - 3.2.3. Redemption from slavery into a new life of freedom—figuratively a ‘new birth’.
 - 3.3. How does baptism into Moses parallel NT baptisms?
 - 3.3.1. Those baptized by John became his disciples and accepted him as their teacher and leader.
 - 3.3.2. Those who are baptized into Jesus become his disciples and accept him as their teacher and leader. Baptism into Jesus is also a symbol of the new birth. Note, however, that just as all those baptized into Moses were not truly converted, so all those baptized into Jesus may not be truly converted. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward state, not a causal source of that state.
4. How was Christ the rock from which Israel drank?
 - 4.1. Twice, Moses miraculously provided water for the Israelites by striking a rock (Ex 17.6; Num 20.11). Paul attributes this miracle to the spiritual presence of Christ. He appears to allude to a legend some Jews believed that the first rock Moses struck followed the Jews by rolling along behind them (like BB8 follows Rey in *Star Wars VII*). However, Paul does not endorse this belief, rather he rejects the legend by indicating that it was the spiritual presence of Christ which gave them water from the rock and followed them during their desert wanderings. This differentiation, between the belief in an on-going physical miracle and the spiritual presence, is similar to the divergent views between Roman Catholics and Reformed Protestants—the first claim that the bread and wine of the Eucharist actually become the physical body of Christ every time they are set aside by a priest, whereas the latter identify the spiritual presence of Christ accompanying the elements.
 - 4.2. Where is the metaphor of a rock used to refer prophetically to Christ in the OT?
 - 4.2.1. The kingdom of Jesus (Dan 2.34-35, 44-45).
 - 4.2.2. The foundation stone (Ps 118.22; Is 28.16)
 - 4.3. Thus, the ESV (following the KJV; not the NIV or NASB) capitalizes the word ‘rock’ in 1 Cor 10.4.
 - 4.4. Where is the metaphor of water from a rock used to refer prophetically to Christ or his kingdom in the OT?
 - 4.4.1. Water flowing from the rock on which the eschatological temple was constructed (Ezk 47.1-12).
 - 4.5. Where do Jesus and the apostles allude to two of the physical provisions that he gave the Israelites during their desert sojourn?
 - 4.5.1. Jesus indicates that he is the spiritual bread that came down from heaven (Mt 14.13-21; Jn 6.35, 28, 42) and the spiritual living water (Jn 14.14; Jn 7.37).
 - 4.5.2. Paul equates the water from the rock with the spiritual presence of Christ, who provides spiritual living water, as does John (Rev 22.1-2).
5. What happened to these fathers?
 - 5.1. God was not pleased with them (their sinful actions) and overthrew them in the wilderness. He lists some of the specific sins in the next section (1 Cor 10.6-13) that lead to their destruction.
 - 5.2. How was that generation overthrown?
 - 5.2.1. Some were killed by specific punishments (Ex 32.28; Num 25.1-9) but many died of natural causes during the 40 years of wandering in the desert (Num 14.29-30).

- 5.3. Why does Paul say, “most”?
- 5.3.1. When Paul says “most” he means all the adults above the age of 19 who came out of Egypt except for two (Joshua and Caleb; Num 14.30), who were the only ones who had left Egypt and were permitted to enter the promised land.
6. Can we equate the spiritual food and baptism in which Israel participated with the NT sacraments?
- 6.1. I recall a Presbyterian pastor once stating that he asked those who rejected infant baptism if they would accept infant baptism if he showed them a passage in the NT which clearly shows that children were baptized. He referred them to 1 Corinthians 10:2, where Paul says that all (the whole nation, including children and infants) were baptized. Is it appropriate to apply 1 Corinthians 10:2 in the argument for infant baptism, as some do?^{131, 132}
- 6.2. Some commentators claim that Paul draws a parallel between the manna and the water and baptism in the cloud and sea with the elements of the Eucharist.¹³³ Some refer to them having sacraments like ours.^{134, 135, 136} While the provisions in the desert were probably not explicitly sacramental elements like those in the NT sacraments (Lord’s Supper and Baptism) they were typical pointers to Christ and his covenantal relationship (Rom 6.3-11) with his people and their redemption provided by grace. Others, in particular Baptists, emphatically reject the idea that there is any connection between the baptism into Moses and NT baptism.¹³⁷
- 6.3. It is evident that Paul is speaking of a redemptive experience that is provided by God, through grace, which is applied to an entire covenanted body (including believers and unbelievers and including adults and children). Thus, it appears from Paul’s use of the term ‘baptized’ to describe this relationship, that it is appropriate to apply 1 Corinthians 10:2 when defending the infant baptism position.
7. Why does Paul use this historical example?
- 7.1. He uses it to provide a corrective and warning.
- 7.2. In the context of what preceded—being disqualified (1 Cor 9.27)—he provides an illustration of why it is necessary to regulate our practices through discipline and self-control. Perseverance is not passive. It requires the exercise of both God’s covenant love and our continual labour (enabled through grace).
- 7.3. In the context of what follows (1 Cor 10.6), he indicates that this historical example is given so that “we might not desire evil as they did,” and be destroyed as many of them were (1 Cor 10.8). If baptism into a covenant relationship with God, through Moses, could not save the Israelites from disaster when they persisted in rebellion, then baptism into a covenant relationship with and through Christ is not sufficient to save us, when we persist in rebellion. The Corinthians may have misunderstood the nature of baptism, viewing it as magically salvific, rather than symbolic. Baptism is not a spiritual ‘antibiotic’ which kills sin, nor is it a spiritual ‘vaccine’ that inoculates one against damnation (as some mistakenly think, 1 Cor 15.29). Rather, it is a spiritual ‘road

¹³¹ Jason Van Vliet, *Infant Baptism: should We Agree to Disagree?* www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/files/VanVliet-Clarion%2060.17-Infant%20Baptism%20-%20Should%20we%20agree%20to%20disagree.pdf

¹³² A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 724-725.

¹³³ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 322.

¹³⁴ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xvii.i.html

¹³⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,261.

¹³⁶ J. P. Lange, *et al, A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), pp. 196-197.

¹³⁷ Caleb Colley, *Does “Baptism into Moses” Justify Infant Baptism?* www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1060

sign' that points the direction to heaven.

8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 10.1-5)?
 - 8.1. *Chronicle Recited* – Paul uses an historical example of God's providential dealings with his ancient covenant people to correct and warn us. This should teach us why it is important that we know and study history, and in particular the history of the Church. Why should we study Church history? The study of Church history:
 - 8.1.1. Helps us understand different people groups that make up the Church.
 - 8.1.2. Helps us understand change and context—how the Church of which we are members came to be.
 - 8.1.3. Contributes to our moral understanding, so that we know how to live rightly before God.
 - 8.1.4. Provides identity with the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ and within a denominational and congregational setting.
 - 8.1.5. Is essential for good citizenship in the Church community.
 - 8.1.6. Develops critical thinking skills (assess evidence, weigh interpretations, and extrapolate from one situation to another).¹³⁸
 - 8.2. *Church Realization* – A consideration of the situation of the congregation (Acts 7.38; Gk: ἐκκλησίᾳ) in the wilderness indicates that many of them perished because of their sins. Likewise, a consideration of the problems in the church at Corinth indicates that professing believers can be confused about correct belief and about how to live correctly for the glory of God. This informs us that the visible Church in all ages contains saints and sinners, correct and confused, and persevering and paralyzed. This should teach us that:
 - 8.2.1. There cannot be a pure visible church in the spatial-temporal realm.
 - 8.2.2. There cannot be a single manifestation of the Church in this world, and that the Church is made up of various communities of believers with different practices and traditions.
 - 8.2.3. The Church must be reformed and always reforming; with each generation striving to live out its calling correctly both in doctrine and practice.
 - 8.3. *Confessional Relationship* – Membership in Christ's Church is not achieved through ritual but through relationship. We cannot rely on baptism or an outward profession of religion. Rather, we must make a true inward profession of faith (repentance and belief) which unites us with Christ.

Sound Instruction (1 Cor 10.6-13)

1. What does Paul want Christians not to do?
 - 1.1. We are not to desire (to do) evil as they did.
 - 1.2. Who are the 'they'? The Israelites who had escaped from slavery in Egypt in the exodus led by Moses (1 Cor 10.1-4).
 - 1.3. He then provides five examples of sins that flow from a desire to do evil.
2. What were the specific sins of the Israelites, during their desert wanderings, which Paul identifies?
 - 2.1. *Idolatry* (v. 7) – The instance of idolatry he probably has in mind is the fabrication and worship of the golden calf (Ex 32.4).
 - 2.2. *Eating, drinking and 'playing'* (v. 7) – This is a reference to the feasting and sensuous (orgiastic) dancing associated with the worship of the golden calf (Ex 32.6, 19).
 - 2.3. *Sexual immorality* (v. 8) – There is no explicit reference to sexually promiscuous activity in the Exodus 32.1-35 account of the golden calf. Paul is probably referring to the later instance of Baal worship at Peor (Num 25.1-9) as is indicated by his reference to the number who were killed (1 Cor 10.8 with Num 25.9). Fornication with (female and male) temple prostitutes was a component of much of pagan idolatry as practiced among the Canaanites and later the Greeks in

¹³⁸ Adapted from: Peter N. Stearns, *Why Study History?* American Historical Association; www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm

the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth—which made this example particularly relevant to the Corinthian Christians, who might be invited to a dinner party at which temple prostitutes would be made available.

- 2.4. *Putting Christ to the test* (v. 9) – Paul is referring to the incident when the people became impatient and spoke against Moses for leading them into the wilderness where they had only ‘worthless food’ (Num 21.4-9), as indicated by his reference to the (fiery, ‘venomous’?) serpents that the LORD sent among them. Moses was instructed to make an image in bronze (or possibly brass, to appear more shiny) of a fiery serpent and place it on a pole so that anyone who had been bitten by a serpent and looked to the image would be cured.
 - 2.4.1. There is debate about the origin of the image of a snake wrapped around a staff, which is used as a symbol for medicine and health care (for example, by the American Medical Association, the Canadian Dental Association, and the World Health Organization). Some say it comes from the staff that Hermes, of Greek mythology, carried (usually shown as two snakes on a staff with wings at the top), the staff of Asclepius (the Greek god associated with healing and medicine), or pillar created by Moses.
 - 2.4.2. It is possible that the incident in Numbers 21.4-9 (which occurred around 1500 BC) was incorporated into Greek mythology, which arose about 600 years after the event of the fiery serpents. In addition, the image of the bronze serpent that Moses made continued to be displayed in Jerusalem until the time of Hezekiah (800 years later) who had it destroyed because it was being used for idol worship (2 Ki 18.4). Jesus uses the symbol of the snake on a stake in his discussion with Nicodemus when he tells Nicodemus that the Son of Man would be lifted up like the serpent and whoever looked to him in belief would have everlasting life (Jn 3.13-15).
- 2.5. *Grumbling* (v. 10) – The instance Paul likely had in mind was that associated with their complaining about the manna and lusting after the food they had eaten in Egypt (Num 11.4-6). God sent them quail, and then, while they were still eating, a plague (the ‘destroyer’) that struck down many of them (Num 11.31-33). Paul could also be referring to the people’s later grumbling when they rebelled against Moses (Num 14.2, 29) or their grumbling after Korah’s rebellion (Num 16.41, 49).
- 2.6. What is the logical connection among the sins that Paul identifies?
 - 2.6.1. The root of all sins is idolatry. It is manifested in various ways:
 - 2.6.1.1. Pride, which exalts self above God.
 - 2.6.1.2. Worship of idols, which exalts self-made religion above God’s prescribed form of worship.
 - 2.6.1.3. Self-determination, which overthrows God’s righteous requirements delivered in the Ten Commandments.
 - 2.6.2. Idolatry leads to throwing off restraint and an indulgence in comforts and pleasure.
 - 2.6.3. This is soon followed by a shameless immorality in which there are no limits governing sexual, and other, lusts.
 - 2.6.4. A profligate life is followed by unbelief.
 - 2.6.5. Unbelief leads to complaining against God.¹³⁹
 - 2.6.6. Idolatry → Indulgence → Immorality → Incredulity → Ingratitude.
3. How does Paul declare the deity of Christ in this section?
 - 3.1. While referring to the sins of the Israelites during their desert wanderings he says that they put Christ to the test. Jesus would not be born for another 1,500 years, and yet the Israelites were contending with Jesus, and he accompanied them in the desert (1 Cor 10.4).
 - 3.2. Paul viewed Christ, the second person in the Trinity, as the Jehovah (LORD) of the OT.

¹³⁹ Suggested sequence adapted from: A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 734.

- 3.3. Calvin says that, “This is a remarkable passage in proof of the eternity of Christ”.¹⁴⁰
4. What were the consequences of their sins?
- 4.1. They were killed.
- 4.2. How were they killed?
- 4.2.1. By plague, serpents, and spears (e.g., of Phinehas; Num 25.7) and ‘the Destroyer’.
- 4.3. What or who is ‘the Destroyer’?
- 4.3.1. The ESV capitalizes the word, indicating that the translators believed that it was a person. The NIV has ‘destroying angel’, and other translations (NASB, NKJV, KJV) have ‘destroyer’. This Greek word (ὄλοθρευτοῦ), used also in Hebrews 11.28 (ὄλοθρεύων), is also used in the LXX translation (Ex 12.23) to refer to the destroyer (note: the ESV, possibly inconsistently, does not capitalize the word in Exodus) when the Egyptian firstborn were killed at the time of the exodus. In the Exodus context, it is believed by some, that the destroyer is an angel (2 Sam 24.16) or Satan (1 Cor 5.5).
- 4.4. How can we explain the apparent discrepancy between 1 Corinthians 10.8 and Numbers 25.9?
- 4.4.1. Numbers 25.9 refers to twenty-four thousand, whereas 1 Cor 10.8 refers to twenty-three thousand.
- 4.4.2. The explanation is not, as some suggest, unimportant.¹⁴¹ Nor, is it, as others suggest, the result of a lapse of memory on the part of Paul.^{142, 143}
- 4.4.3. Some commentators suggest that Numbers refers to the upper limit and Paul to the lower limit, i.e., through rounding. Others have suggested that Paul’s number did not include the leaders, whereas Moses’ number did.
- 4.4.4. Probably the best explanation is found in Paul’s statement “in one day”, with the remaining 1,000 dying in the following days.
- 4.4.5. Why does this matter?
- 4.4.5.1. If Paul made a mistake reporting or quoting the number, then the Holy Spirit inspired him to make a mistake and there is an error in the Bible. This would strike at the heart of the infallibility and reliability of the Bible.
5. Why were the Israelites punished?
- 5.1. *Earned* – God is clear; sin leads to death (Gen 2.17; Ezk 18.4). They deserved to die. This demonstrates a connection in God’s providential dealings with mankind, between our actions and the consequences of our actions. All of our actions are of temporal (1 Cor 11.30) and spiritual importance. There is no such thing as a ‘little’ sin.
- 5.2. *Example* – Their death is provided as a warning (1 Cor 10.6, 11) for us. God had Moses incorporate the accounts Paul refers to into the OT Scriptures so that we can learn from them—the Bible was not written to entertain but to educate (2 Tim 3.16-17). Paul warns the Corinthians that if they persist in the sins of idolatry and sexually immoral practices, they will be subject to death.
- 5.2.1. We could read verse 11 as, “as an example *and* they were written down”.
- 5.2.2. The word ‘example’ in 1 Corinthians 10.6 (τύποι) and 1 Corinthians 10.11 (τυπικῶς) can also be translated as ‘type’. The punishment of the Israelites was typical and pointed to the final punishment that God will inflict on those who do not repent of their sins and embrace Jesus Christ. For example, the Israelites’ dying in the wilderness and not being allowed to enter the Promised Land was a type for unrepentant mankind’s not being granted access to

¹⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xvii.ii.html

¹⁴¹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 323.

¹⁴² C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Continuum, 1968), p. 225.

¹⁴³ R. J. Utey, *Paul’s Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*, Vol. 6 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), p. 116.

heaven but being consigned to hell.

5.3. What does Paul indicate about the nature of punishment by the illustrations he includes?

5.3.1. Punishment has three primary purposes:

5.3.1.1. *Judicial* – To provide recompense for the debt incurred by immoral and criminal actions—for example, a fine or prison sentence.

5.3.1.2. *Corrective* – To change a person's future behavior—for example, spanking a child who threw a temper-tantrum to demonstrate what will happen in the future if he does it again.

5.3.1.3. *Exemplary* – To provide an example to others to warn them against committing the same action.

5.3.2. Not all punishment is corrective. Those who died in the wilderness did not have an opportunity to change their behaviour in the future. In countries that still have capital punishment, the punishment is not corrective—unless the person makes true repentance before God and is converted. Our culture focuses on the corrective aspect of punishment and does not like to focus on the judicial aspect of punishment. In many jurisdictions in the West, governments call their institutions 'correctional facilities' rather than 'penitentiaries', and capital crimes are no longer punished with capital punishment.

5.3.3. Paul indicates that the punishment of the Israelites was both judicial and exemplary—rather than corrective—to provide a warning to others.

6. What does Paul mean by 'end of the ages'?

6.1. The simplest way of interpreting this expression is to assume that he is speaking of the end of history, as is implied by another term, 'last days' (Heb 1.2; 2 Pt 3.3). Jesus, the disciples, and Paul use similar expressions (Mt 13.39, 40, 49; Mt 24.3; Mt 28.20; Heb 9.26; different Greek words are used for 'end'). Paul, along with the other apostles, believed that with the arrival of the Messiah (Christ) history was rapidly coming to an end (Dan 11.40; Dan 12.1-13; Mt 28.20; 1 Jn 2.18; 1 Pt 4.7), and that the second coming of Jesus, the Day of Judgement, and the renovation of the heavens and earth would occur soon. The apostles believed in the near return of Jesus (Rom 13.11-12; Heb 10.37; 2 Pt 3.8-10), but did not provide any indication of how long the return would be delayed or give any signs which would indicate that the return is upon us. In fact, what they wrote teaches that we are not to look for signs (Mt 24.36-44; Mt 25.1-13; 1 Thess 5.1-3; 2 Pt 3.10). However, they would likely have been surprised if Jesus had told them that his return would not be for at least another 2,000 years.

6.2. Regardless we live in the last days, at the end of the ages. Time and history will end with the return of Christ.

6.3. Some suggest that we should understand Paul to be speaking of the end of the 'world' (KJV) rather than of the 'ages'. However, there is no substantive difference. The world will end (2 Pt 3.10) with the end of time. Others suggest that since he uses a plural ('ends') he is not speaking of the end of history but the focal point between two ages, the OT era and the NT era. However, the Greek word (τέλος) always refers to the final state, outcome, or result, not the beginning of something new.

7. What lesson did Paul want the Corinthians to take from the example of the Israelites?

7.1. A person who thinks that he can resist the temptation to sin should be humble (Rom 11.20) and watch out that he doesn't fall into (grievous) sin like they did. Thus, no one is above temptation and falling into (grievous) sin.

7.2. What is the particular temptation the Corinthians would have been subject to?

7.2.1. Those who believed that they could eat meat sacrificed to idols and even attend dinners in idol temples, could be tempted to partake in a pagan ritual, including cultic prostitution.

7.2.2. They believed that because they had been saved by grace (per Paul's teaching to them) they were secure against temptation and sin.

- 7.3. He uses the examples of the OT covenant people, who were called out by God's grace, to show the NT covenant people that a profession of faith, baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper, and membership in a congregation are not an inviolable assurance against sin.
- 7.4. There are two extremes a professing Christian can lean toward with regard to assurance of salvation. He can doubt that he is saved because he believes that his works can never be good enough to deserve heaven, or he can have a false assurance that he is perfect and cannot sin. Both of these false views are based in pride and a focus on self, and self merit, and not on Christ as our vicarious substitute.
8. What hope does Paul provide in the face of a warning to be careful lest we fall?
Paul warned the Corinthians that they must be careful because it would be easy for them to fall into sin—i.e., to participate in idolatrous practices. We are to heed this warning, because it is easier than we think to succumb to temptation. However, so that we will not despair when faced with temptation and believe that it is inevitable for believers to succumb, Paul provides consolation through promised provisions from God, who helps us deal with temptation.
 - 8.1. *Encounters* with temptation – He indicates that no temptation we may encounter is unique.
 - 8.1.1. Mankind and angel kind in the perfect state were subject to temptation. Even Jesus, in his human nature, was subjected to temptation (Mt 4.1-11). Man succumbed, as did many of the angels. All men, since Adam's sin, are constitutionally subjected to temptation.
 - 8.1.2. However, there is no temptation which professing believers face today which men have not faced repeatedly before, but which some (many) have been able to resist with the help of the Holy Spirit. One does not need to be a super-saint to resist temptation.
 - 8.2. *Extent* of temptation – God is faithful to his covenant promises (Dt 7.9; Is 49.7) and providentially limits the extent of any temptation we receive, so that it is bearable. If we are anxious and 'weak' in faith, the temptations we will receive will be limited so that we can grow and strengthen our faith. If we are mature Christians, our temptations will be commensurately stronger so that God can demonstrate the glory and power of his saving and sanctifying grace throughout our lives (Job 1.8, 22; Job 2.9-10). This should assure us that no matter what our circumstances God will never permit temptation to be greater than the strength with which he has equipped us—"He proportions the burden to the back".¹⁴⁴ He will always protect us (2 Thess 3.3).
 - 8.3. *Escape* from temptation – Not only does he limit the extent of the temptation; he always provides a way of escape from temptation so that we can be rescued from danger (2 Pt 2.9). What are some of the ways he provides ways of escape in different circumstances?
 - 8.3.1. *Reassurance* – By directing the sympathy and succor of Jesus through the Holy Spirit (Heb 4.15).
 - 8.3.2. *Requisitioning* – By leading us to pray, which limits temptation (Mt 6.13), helps us resist temptation, and enables us to see the way of escape he opens before us.
 - 8.3.3. *Remembrance* – By calling to our remembrance the right thing to do in a particular situation (for example, a young man may be tempted by the presence of a young woman but then he may recall a word of exhortation from a sermon or a fellow believer or a command of God).
 - 8.3.4. *Recitation*. Jesus cited Scripture to dismiss Satan's temptations (Mt 4.4, 10). Likewise, we should recite Scripture to ourselves. Reading the Bible regularly and memorizing passages from it is a means of fortifying ourselves against temptation.
 - 8.3.5. *Resistance* – By giving us the strength to resist if we are sincere in our desire to please him.
 - 8.3.6. *Running* – In the next section, we will note that we are to flee from sin (1 Cor 10.14). Likewise, we should flee from temptation to sin, like Joseph fled from a sexual liaison (Gen 39.12).
 - 8.3.7. *Rest* – When we are tired, we are less vigilant and temptation (e.g., to anger) can more

¹⁴⁴H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 327.

easily catch us. Therefore, we need to avail ourselves of the rest that God provides for us each night (Ps 127.2) and on the Sabbath (Ex 23.12).

- 8.4. *Endurance* in temptation – Temptation will never be so overwhelming that a Christian cannot endure it and overcome it, when applying to God for assistance. There may be situations in which Christians find themselves which appear very dark and difficult, yet God provides the strength that we need to bear the temptation. For example:

8.4.1. Someone might be experiencing great pain from cancer and be tempted to end his life to avoid the pain.

8.4.2. A mother might have lost an infant child and be tempted to curse God.

8.4.3. A husband might be in extenuating financial circumstances and be tempted to fudge the accounting books at work.

8.4.4. A teenage girl may be facing a crisis pregnancy and be tempted to seek an abortion.

However, God promises that if we trust him, he will provide both a means of escape and make it possible for us to endure under the pressure.

9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 10.6-13)?

- 9.1. *Summarizing Temptation* – We can summarize the Christian's relationship to temptation as:

9.1.1. Providentially decreed by God; but he does not tempt anyone.

9.1.2. Common to all rational creatures.

9.1.3. Experienced by all believers, whether weak or strong in faith.

9.1.4. Used for building faith, as it is resisted and overcome.

9.1.5. Used for the display of God's glory, as it is resisted and overcome.

9.1.6. Resisted through the faithful preserving grace of God.

9.1.7. Resistance requires action on our part.

9.1.8. Tempered by the compassionate mercy of God.

9.1.9. Accompanied by a means of escape.

9.1.10. Falling into temptation is forgivable, when resistance has failed, and there is sincere repentance (1 Jn 2.1).

- 9.2. *Significant Temptations* – Paul identifies five significant temptations to sin, and their resulting sins, that affected the covenant people who had seen God perform miracles in Egypt and had been rescued from their captivity. He believed that the Corinthian believers were likely to fall into the same kinds of sins. Thus, he warns them and us that if these people fell easily into temptation, no Christian should think that he is incapable of falling into any (or all) sins when tempted. These significant temptations arise for Christians in every generation, and they must be faced and overcome. Our objective, as we look at each class of sin, is to establish how to face the challenge of the temptation to sin and overcome it.

- 9.2.1. *Idolatry* – Paul mentioned idols previously in this letter (1 Cor 8.1, 4, 7, 10), and dismissed them as having any real existence or power (1 Cor 8.4)—although they may be physical representations of demons (1 Cor 8.5). Therefore, food cannot be corrupted by being sacrificed to a non-entity. In the next section of this chapter (1 Cor 10.14-22), he deals explicitly with idolatry, so we will consider now only a few lessons related to idolatry. As we noted previously (1 Cor 8.4-6), we are to:

- 9.2.1.1. *Disavow Fatalism* – Physical idols (e.g., a planet or animal) or spiritual idols (a demon), cannot control our destinies. There is not a pantheistic force governing the universe. God is the only governor; and he works through his providential dispositions.

- 9.2.1.2. *Desert Futility* – Idolatry takes many forms. The term 'idol' in the Bible is used for:

9.2.1.2.1. A physical object (Acts 17.16).

9.2.1.2.2. A demon (1 Cor 10.20).

9.2.1.2.3. Anything loved by a person more than God (Col 3.5).

9.2.1.2.4. In addition, idolatry is introducing anything that is not in accord with the

Bible's teaching into the worship of God (Gen 4.3-7; Lev 10.1-3; Jer 32.35).

All forms of idolatry are futile as they lead a person away from the true God; and unrepented allegiance to them leads to hell.

- 9.2.1.3. *Deny Falsehood* – There is only one God and only one true religion associated with the one God—Biblical Christianity. All religions, other than Christianity, are false and forms of idolatry.

In addition, we are to:

- 9.2.1.4. *Discern Fallout* – Paul implies that there is an order to sin. Idolatry (which at root is based on human pride) leads to a rejection of God's commands and to sexual sins. We noted that the sins Paul refers to in this section can be connected logically as: Idolatry → Indulgence → Immorality → Incredulity → Ingratitude.

- 9.2.1.5. *Depart Fast* – The primary antidote to idolatry is to flee from idolatry (1 Cor 10.14; 1 Jn 5.21). We will consider this command when we study the next section (1 Cor 10.14-22) of this letter.

- 9.2.2. *Sexual immorality* – Paul uses the term 'sexual immorality' multiple times in this letter (1 Cor 5.1, 11; 1 Cor 6.13, 18; 1 Cor 7.2; 1 Cor 10.8). This reference (1 Cor 10.8) is his final warning about the danger of sexual immorality in this letter, before he turns to other topics. However, he refers to sexual immorality again in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 12.21), where he indicates that he fears that when he visits them, he may find that some of them had not repented of the "impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced" When we considered this matter previously we noted:

- 9.2.2.1. The term 'sexual immorality' occurs proportionately more often in Paul's writings than elsewhere in the NT, since Paul's mission work and Epistles were directed primarily to (formerly) pagan Gentiles, among whom outward sexually immoral practices were more common than among professing Jews. It was necessary for the council at Jerusalem to direct (primarily) Gentile congregations to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15.20, 29; Acts 21.25). In addition, more than half of Paul's references to 'sexual immorality' are in his letters to the Corinthians, who lived in a city known throughout the Mediterranean world of its day for its sexual immorality.

- 6.4.1.1. The term 'sexual immorality' (πόρνοι) is generic, and includes subcategories of unlawful sexual intercourse, such as fornication, prostitution, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality.

- 9.2.2.2. In this letter, Paul is explicit that all forms of sexual immorality are to be avoided absolutely.

- 9.2.2.3. Earlier (1 Cor 6.12-20) we noted that Paul identifies a number of reasons why Christians should not engage in sexual immorality:

9.2.2.3.1. Sexual immorality is contrary to the creation marriage ordinance (1 Cor 6.16).

9.2.2.3.2. Our bodies are not our own (1 Cor 6.19).

9.2.2.3.3. We have been purchased at a price (1 Cor 6.20).

9.2.2.3.4. Our bodies are members (part) of Christ through a spiritual marriage (1 Cor 6.15, 17).

9.2.2.3.5. Our bodies will be raised in Christ (1 Cor 6.14).

9.2.2.3.6. Sexual immorality is a sin against our body (1 Cor 6.18).

9.2.2.3.7. Sexual immorality destroys the temple of God (1 Cor 6.19).

9.2.2.3.8. Everything we do must be done to glorify God (1 Cor 6.20).

- 9.2.2.4. Christians have to be zealous not to place themselves in situations where they can be subject to temptation, for example:

9.2.2.4.1. Not being alone with a person of the opposite sex in a situation where temptation could give way to sin.

9.2.2.4.2. Not watching TV shows or movies which endorse sexual sins.

9.2.2.4.3. Not clicking on links which could lead to titillation and temptation.

- 9.2.2.4.4. Not participating in activities which endorse sexual immorality (e.g., a ‘pride’ parade).
- 9.2.2.4.5. Instead, do everything we can to honour marriage (Heb 13.4), which Paul affirms by his quote of Gen 2.24, by: waiting to have sexual relations until married, marrying, marrying a Christian, participate in weddings with joy, supporting newlyweds, praying for marriages, and working at making marriage a success and rejecting divorce.
- 9.2.2.5. In 1 Corinthians 7.1-5 he gives an antidote to the temptation to engage in sexual immorality, which is marriage.
- 9.2.3. *Eating, drinking and ‘playing’* – Paul identifies participating in wild orgiastic partying as a sin. He identifies this sin before he identifies sexual immorality, because participating in wild partying is often a precursor to sexual immorality. However, we will consider it now, after the topic of sexual immorality, because avoidance of riotous and debauched parties is a significant way to avoid being tempted to commit sexual immorality. For example, parties catering to high school and university students can often result in couples pairing off or ‘hooking up’. Many high schoolers seem to think that after-prom parties are an open invitation to engage in their first sexual encounter. Thus, avoiding such parties limits the temptation to go deeper into sin. What are sinful conditions often found at parties, which increase the likelihood that people will be tempted to pursue sexual immorality?
 - 9.2.3.1.1. Drinking alcohol beyond temperate limits.
 - 9.2.3.1.2. Immodest clothing.
 - 9.2.3.1.3. Pounding music and pulsing lighting.
 - 9.2.3.1.4. Sensuous dancing.
 - 9.2.3.1.5. The presence of unbelievers who have no scruples, no inhibitions, and no shame.
 - 9.2.3.1.6. Peer pressure to conform.
- The best way to avoid temptation in environments of this kind is not to attend the party. However, someone (a parent or elder) who makes such a suggestion to Christian young people today is viewed as an old fuddy-duddy or as crimping their ‘style’.
- 9.2.4. *Putting Christ to the test* – The particular historical incident Paul references is when the people sinned, as they became “impatient on the way”, “spoke against God and against Moses” (Num 21.4-5).
 - 9.2.4.1. How can we summarize the nature of their sin? It was showing a dissatisfaction with God’s providences and provisions for his covenant people.
 - 9.2.4.2. What are equivalents in the modern Church?
 - 9.2.4.2.1. Thinking that we have been treated unfairly by God. We hear expressions such as, ‘Why me, what did I ever do to deserve this?’ or “It is so unfair! I have tried to please God and look where it has gotten me!”
 - 9.2.4.2.2. Claiming that God’s rules for the Christian life and for the Church are too restrictive. For example, his requirement that we are not to go shopping or watch sporting events on the Sabbath; or his requirement that women are not to hold the office of elder or teach in the Church (1 Cor 14.34; 1 Tim 2.12). Christians are willing to have Jesus as their saviour, but not as their Lord.
 - 9.2.4.3. What is the antidote to becoming dissatisfied with God’s providences and provisions in our lives?
 - 9.2.4.3.1. Cultivate a clear understanding of our real situation. We are worthless servants, and there is nothing by nature in our behaviour that is of worth or value (Job 1.21).
 - 9.2.4.3.2. Maintain perspective: everything good that we have is a gracious gift from God and God owes us nothing (James 1.17).
 - 9.2.4.3.3. Do not look at what others have and assume that we should have the same.

Besides being covetous, it ignores the truth that God knows exactly what is best for us (Rom 8.28).

9.2.4.3.4. Express constant thankfulness for everything we have received (Eph 5.20; Col 3.17).

9.2.4.3.5. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (Col 3.15).

9.2.5. *Grumbling*. We can consider grumbling under the following subtopics:

9.2.5.1. *Currency* – How common is grumbling? It is universal and constant. What are examples where we hear people grumbling (complaining)? We hear people grumble about:

9.2.5.1.1. Bosses, co-workers, or work.

9.2.5.1.2. Having to travel for work or not getting to travel.

9.2.5.1.3. Not enough pay or the office conditions.

9.2.5.1.4. The weather being too cold or too hot.

9.2.5.1.5. Pastors sermons being too long/short or not practical/too pointed.

9.2.5.1.6. Not enough church meetings or too many meetings.

9.2.5.1.7. Government not plowing fast enough or the plows getting in way.

9.2.5.1.8. Government spending too much money or not spending enough money.

Thus, people grumble about *everything*!

9.2.5.2. *Causes* – What are the root causes of grumbling?

9.2.5.2.1. *Envy*: When others get more or the same as we do. People feel ‘happy’ only if others get less (Mt 20.11-12; Acts 6.1).

9.2.5.2.2. *Jealousy*: Wanting to protect our own interests, position (Lk 5.30-32).

9.2.5.2.3. *Selfishness*: Not wanting to share the blessings God has given to us (1 Pe 4.9).

9.2.5.2.4. *Pride*: An autonomous spirit of unbelief that is unwilling to let God be God and to put ourselves in a humble state before God; wanting to be responsible for our own destiny and salvation, and an unwillingness to let God save the lost (Jn 6.41-44, 60-65).

9.2.5.2.5. *Unthankfulness*: Not rendering to God the thanks we owe him for life and the blessings of life—we deserve nothing and have been given much.

9.2.5.3. *Consequences* – What are the consequences of grumbling? We can answer this question from the writings of Jeremiah Burroughs (1600-1646), a Congregationalist Puritan preacher who graduated from Cambridge in 1624 and was suspended for non-conformity in 1636. He went to Rotterdam (1637) and became a teacher in the English church. He returned to England in 1641 and served as a preacher in London. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly—one of the few who opposed the Presbyterian majority. He was a ‘moderate’ who took as his motto: “Difference of belief and unity of believers are not inconsistent”. He wrote *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, in which he deals with grumbling (murmuring) and Christian contentment. He lists many evils associated with a grumbling spirit, including:

9.2.5.3.1. It displays the spirit of Satan.

9.2.5.3.2. It reveals that there is corruption in the soul.

9.2.5.3.3. God views it as rebellion and provokes his wrath.

9.2.5.3.4. It works contrary to God’s work of grace.

9.2.5.3.5. It evidences a discontent that is exceedingly below a Christian.

9.2.5.3.6. It undoes our prayers.

9.2.5.3.7. We waste time in grumbling.

9.2.5.3.8. It makes us unfit for Christian duty.

9.2.5.3.9. We display a spirit of unthankfulness.

9.2.5.3.10. It is a foolish sin that removes any comfort we might have.

9.2.5.4. *Cure* – What is the cure for grumbling?

9.2.5.4.1. *Repentance* (1 Jn 1.8-10). We are all grumblers and need to confess daily the sin

- of grumbling.
- 9.2.5.4.2. *Avoiding excuse-making*. Excuse making began in the garden of Eden and we are good at giving reasons for why our grumbling is justified. Examples of excuse-making (derived from Burroughs' book), include:
 - 9.2.5.4.2.1. "I am not grumbling; I am just stating the facts about my condition."
 - 9.2.5.4.2.2. "But God has withdrawn his care from me."
 - 9.2.5.4.2.3. "My affliction is too great, more than I can bear."
 - 9.2.5.4.2.4. "My situation is worse than that of others."
 - 9.2.5.4.2.5. "If things were better for me, I wouldn't complain."
- 9.2.5.4.3. *Being truly content* (Phil 4.11).
- 9.2.5.4.4. *Being thankful* (Eph 5.20; Col 3.17); thankful always, and for everything.
- 9.2.5.4.5. *Serving Christ and others* (Dt 10.12; Mk 10.45; Acts 20.35; 1 Pt 4.10) to redirect our focus away from ourselves.
- 9.2.5.4.6. *Singing the Psalms* (Eph 5.19). This leads to thanksgiving (Eph 5.20).
- 9.2.5.4.7. *Bridling our tongues* (James 1.26).
- 9.2.5.4.8. *Learning the lesson from Israel* (1 Cor 10.9-11). Learning from those who were destroyed by grumbling; Exodus was written for our instruction.
- 9.3. *Signifying Termination* – Paul uses examples from Israel's history to warn the Corinthians not to fall into sin under temptation, in a similar manner as Israel of old did.
 - 9.3.1. What were the consequences that immediately followed the sin in each example he cites?
 - 9.3.1.1. The sin was followed by the immediate death of all, or many, of the sinners.
 - 9.3.2. Are there similar instances in the NT of any of these sins being punished with immediate death?
 - 9.3.2.1. One instance that appears to be similar in the NT is the immediate death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11). They were punished for lying. However, their lying was the result of their infatuation with money, which was a form of idolatry.
 - 9.3.2.2. Another is what Paul tells the Corinthians about the consequences of their abuse of the Lord's Supper—"That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." (1 Cor 11.30).
 - 9.3.3. Why does God not punish immediately today the sins of idolatry, sensual partying, sexual immorality, displaying a dissatisfaction with his providences, and grumbling?
 - 9.3.3.1. More generally, we could ask, why doesn't God kill immediately Islamic terrorists who blow up hospitals or shopping malls filled with women and children? Or, why does he not kill immediately adulterers, purveyors of child pornography, doctors who perform abortions, or cocaine dealers, etc.?
 - 9.3.3.2. Possible reasons may include:
 - 9.3.3.2.1. *Comprehensiveness* – God would have to execute every one of us immediately, for we have all sinned (Rom 3.23) at a level worthy of death (Ezk 18.4). Jesus clarifies the extent of our sin in the Sermon on the Mount—sin is not just in our actions but also in our thoughts (Mt 5.21-48).
 - 9.3.3.2.2. *Compassion* – God is immensely patient with sinners in rebellion against him (Ps 103.8; Ps 145.8-9).
 - 9.3.3.2.3. *Conversion* – God gives people an opportunity to repent (Acts 17.30; 1 Tim 2.4; 2 Pt 3.9).
 - 9.3.3.2.4. *Covenants* – God reinforces the seriousness of the penalties associated with a covenant administration through representative cases of capital punishment at the time a covenant is put in place. For example:
 - 9.3.3.2.4.1. Adam died spiritually the day he ate the forbidden fruit (Gen 2.17). Later he died physically (Gen 5.5), and his rebellion brought death on all mankind.
 - 9.3.3.2.4.2. Nadab and Abihu were executed for false worship (Lev 10.1-2).

9.3.3.2.4.3. Ananias and Sapphira were executed for their duplicity (Acts 5.1-11). Between covenant administrations God often withholds *immediate* temporal punishments.

9.3.3.2.5. *Containment* – All sins will be ultimately punished. However, in the spatial-temporal realm, God may be reserving punishments for the Day of Judgement, and heaping ‘coals of fire’ on the heads of the unrepentant (Prov 25.21-22). Mankind will be without excuse when they stand before God on the last day. Those who complain that they have been treated unfairly by God will be shown the overflowing goodness of his general grace that has been directed toward them, before he consigns them to hell.

9.3.3.3. The fact that God does not punish people immediately does not diminish the extent or severity of their sin (1 Cor 11.30).

9.3.4. To what does the punishment of the covenant people in the wilderness point?

9.3.4.1. There is a Day of Judgement coming (Heb 9.27), in which God will deal justly with all the sins of all of mankind.

Shun idolatry (1 Cor 10.14-22)

1. How does Paul now use the examples of the Jews’ sins in the wilderness (1 Cor 10.1-13) to exhort the Corinthians?
 - 1.1. He issues an emphatic exhortation: “Therefore ... flee from idolatry”.
 - 1.2. Why, what is logical connection?
 - 1.2.1. The examples of their sins show the natural direction of the human heart—thus his use of a self-evident indicator of logical consequence, ‘therefore’. The chain of rebellion begins with pride, which is manifested in idolatry (self-made religion), which is itself blasphemous. Then, idolatry is quickly compounded into other sins: sexual depravity, despising God’s providences, and grumbling. As we noted previously, sin follows, without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, an inevitable consequential chain: Idolatry → Indulgence → Immorality → Incredulity → Ingratitude.
 - 1.3. Is there a contradiction between Paul’s imperative here and what he said previously in the letter (1 Cor 8.1-12)?
 - 1.3.1. Paul indicated previously that eating food that had been sacrificed to an idol, outside of a pagan temple context, is not a problem *per se*, since idols are not real gods. However, he indicated that for the sake of the conscience of weak believers the Corinthians should abstain from eating such food. He now deals explicitly with idol worship. Participating in offering a libation or sacrifice to an idol is sin because it gives glory to another entity which belongs only to God (Ex 20.4-6).
2. How does he pastorally position his exhortation to the Corinthians?
 - 2.1. He calls them ‘beloved’ to indicate that the charge he gives them proceeds from a heart of compassion and a desire to see them mature in their faith, not out of a harsh spirit of rebuke.
 - 2.2. He calls them ‘sensible’ with an ability to make wise judgements.
 - 2.2.1. It has been suggested that there might be a hint of irony in this statement (compare 1 Cor 4.10 with 2 Cor 11.19). However, he believed sincerely that even the least educated among them could make wise judgements (1 Cor 6.4-5) since they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
 - 2.2.2. He appealed to them to test what he was saying to establish the truthfulness of it (Acts 17.11). He does not use his authority as an Apostle to ram truth into their thick skulls, rather he expects them as rational and spiritually enlightened people to think about how Scriptural precedent is to be applied to their current situation.
 - 2.3. He maintains a pastoral tone, but this does not reduce the seriousness of his warning.
3. What is the connection between the communion elements (wine and bread), Christ, and Christians?

- 3.1. He refers to the cup (wine) and bread as a *participation* (Gk: κοινωνία, ‘fellowship’) in Christ. What does he mean by this?
 - 3.1.1. He does not mean that the wine and bread become the physical body of Jesus (transubstantiation) or that in some way the resurrected body of Jesus is combined physically with the sacramental elements (consubstantiation).
 - 3.1.2. He uses the sacramental elements as a symbol of our spiritual union with Christ, by which we share in the blessings he has procured for us by his crucifixion—giving his body and shedding his blood on the cross as our substitute (Lk 11.19-20).
- 3.2. Why does Paul mention the *cup* and not the wine?
 - 3.2.1. He may be implying a communal element of the Lord’s Supper, through sharing a drink taken from a shared cup.
 - 3.2.2. Could or should we use this statement by Paul to defend and require the use of a common cup instead of individual plastic cups during observance of the Lord’s Supper?
 - 3.2.2.1. The topic of using or requiring the use of a common eucharistic cup became hotly debated in the recent past among liturgical communities (e.g., Anglicans) because of the fear of spreading viruses such as SARS-CoV-2.
 - 3.2.2.2. Without pursuing a discussion in detail in this study on 1 Corinthians, consider:
 - 3.2.2.2.1. Matthew 26.27 has been translated in various ways—e.g., “Drink ye all of it.” (KJV); “Drink from it” (NKJV/NASB/NIV); “Drink of it, all of you” (ESV). Is Jesus saying ‘drink from the cup’ or drink of the contents of the cup. This ESV’s translation supports the idea that Jesus is speaking of the contents of the cup, rather than the cup itself. Also, a following verse (Mt 26.29) seems to imply that he is speaking of sharing in a drink from the contents of the cup rather than drinking from the cup *per se*, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”
 - 3.2.2.2.2. In Luke 22.17 Jesus does not tell the disciples to drink from the cup, but to ‘divide’ it among themselves. The Greek word used here (διμερίζω) is also used to mean ‘distribute’ (Acts 2.45).
 - 3.2.2.2.3. A review of all uses of the word ‘wine’ in the NT appears not to include any reference to ‘wine’ during the institution of the Lord’s Supper or its administration. Rather, the terms used are ‘fruit of the vine’ (Mt 26.29) and ‘cup’ (Mt 26.27; 1 Cor 11.25). Although wine was undoubtedly used in the last supper, the absence of the word ‘wine’ in the institution of the Lord’s Supper would seem to indicate that the word ‘cup’ is used as a metonymy for the contents of the cup—for example ‘white house’ used instead of ‘president’ or ‘government administration’ or ‘Hollywood’ is used instead of ‘movie industry’. One writer considering examples of metonymy used in the Bible refers to 1 Corinthians 10.21 as an example of a metonymy and says, “People do not partake of the cup and eat of the table. They drink the contents of the cup and eat the food that is placed upon the table.”¹⁴⁵
- 3.3. Why does Paul call the cup a “cup of blessing”?
 - 3.3.1. This is the only verse in the Bible that associates the word ‘cup’ with ‘blessing’.
 - 3.3.2. Some believe that he is referring to the third or fourth cup of wine that was drunk at the Passover meal (compare, 1 Cor 11.25), at which a blessing was pronounced by the head of the family.
 - 3.3.3. However, he is probably contrasting the cups of suffering and of God’s wrath (Jer 25.15; Mk 14.36; Lk 22.42; Rev 14.10; Rev 16.19) with the cup that symbolizes the mercy of God in the blood of Christ (Lk 22.28-30; Rev 19.9).

¹⁴⁵ [Biblical Research Studies Group: Metonymy](#)

- 3.3.4. He may also be indicating that the wine has been set apart for sacramental (holy) use by the elder/pastor officiating at the observance of the Lord's Supper, by the prayer he offers up before distributing the elements (1 Cor 11.24; Mt 26.27).
- 3.4. Is there any significance in Paul's using the word 'break'?
- 3.4.1. Some, following the N/KJV translation of 1 Corinthians 11.24 speak of breaking of the bread as a symbol of Jesus' broken body. However, the ESV does not have the word 'broken' in the main text (following the standard edition of the Greek NT which rates the reading without 'broken' as almost certain "¹⁴⁶{A}"; but does refer, in a footnote, to some manuscripts having 'broken'). Also, Jesus' body was not broken (Jn 19.36), it was pierced (Jn 19.37), fulfilling OT typology and prophecy (Ex 12.46; Num 9.12; [1 Cor 5.7]; Zech 12.10).
- 3.4.2. Later in the letter, Paul provides the explanation for 'break' (1 Cor 10.16)—Jesus broke the bread (1 Cor 11.24) and passed the pieces of the loaf to the disciples. Passing a loaf of bread and breaking off pieces was a mealtime practice in their day (Acts 2.42). The common loaf was shared just as the contents of the common cup was shared. The bread symbolizes the unity of the body of believers with Jesus Christ (Jn 6.41-58), just as the contents of the cup does. Jesus selected the bread from the Passover meal as a symbol of union with him in the New Covenant, rather than the lamb, because the lamb had to be sacrificed and there would no longer be animal sacrifices once he had offered up his body as the final sacrifice (Heb 7.27; Heb 9.26; Heb 10.10).
4. How does Paul apply the presence of the bread in the communion meal to Christians in the Church?
- 4.1. The sharing of the one loaf symbolizes a Christian's union with Christ, and it symbolizes a Christian's union with other Christians. Christians sharing the loaf in the Lord's Supper declares that they are united with Christ and with those with whom they share the loaf.
- 4.2. He mentions only the bread, not to exclude the wine from the one cup which also symbolizes union with Christ.
- 4.3. Paul expands on the concept of unity with Christ later in the letter (1 Cor 12.12-13) and in Ephesians (Eph 2.16; Eph 3.6; Eph 4.4) and Colossians (Col 3.15).
5. How does Paul use the example of OT Israel to reinforce his presentation of the believer's participation in, and union with, Christ (1 Cor 10.18)?
- 5.1. By eating a portion of the meat offered as a sacrifice (Dt 12.27), the people of Israel were symbolically associated with the animals sacrificed on the altar, and thus with the benefit (payment of sin) symbolized by the types to the antitype—Jesus Christ.
- 5.2. What is a logical inference Paul would have expected the Corinthians to draw from the example of the people of Israel being participants in the sacrifice on the altar?
- 5.2.1. A person who eats meat sacrificed to an idol can be viewed as being a participant in the sacrifice to that idol and united to that idol.
6. What false conclusion does he not want us to derive from his instruction (1 Cor 10.19)?
- 6.1. He does not want to be misunderstood as saying that idols represent real gods (Ps 96.5) or have any real existence. Thus, offering food to a non-entity has no real meaning (1 Cor 8.4-5).
- 6.2. However, since idolatry is real—that is the worship of false gods—and the demonic realm is real, and idol worship is demonic (1 Cor 10.20), he must instruct the Corinthians to flee from idolatry (1 Cor 10.14) is demonic.

¹⁴⁶ Nestle, E., Nestle, E., Aland, B., Aland, K., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (1993). [The Greek New Testament](#) (27th ed., 1 Co 11:24). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

7. Why is idolatry wrong (considering the immediate inferences from this section)?
 - 7.1. Not because idols are real gods, but because:
 - 7.1.1. Idols are associated with demons (Ps 106.37-38); which are real and anti-God (1 Cor 10.20).
 - 7.1.2. The elevation and veneration of created things above the Creator is explicitly prohibited by God (1 Cor 10.20; Ex 20.3-5; Rom 1.23).
 - 7.1.3. Christians eat at the Lord's table (sharing the contents of the cup and the bread of the Lord's Supper) within the living Church and cannot eat at the table of another 'king', at a pagan temple, without breaking covenant with God (1 Cor 10.21).
 - 7.1.4. Of the impossibility of defending the exclusivity of Christ (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12) and Christianity if one participates in the worship of false gods.
 - 7.2. The Gospel writers use the word 'demons' extensively. In contrast, Paul uses the word 'demons' infrequently. He uses it four times in 1 Corinthians 10.20-21. The only other place he mentions demons is in 1 Timothy 4.1. James mentions demons once (James 2.19), and John, in Revelation, three times (Rev 9.20; Rev 16.14; Rev 18.2). What might be the reason that there appears to be a de-emphasis on the demonic realm after the resurrection of Christ, during the time of the early NT Church and the epistolary period?
 - 7.2.1. God granted Satan and his demons permission to launch an intense attack of Jesus by tempting him and attempting to derail his Messianic mission. But Jesus demonstrated his authority over Satan and his demons by resisting temptation (Mt 4.1-11) and by casting out demons (Mt 12.27-28).
 - 7.2.1.1. The temptation of Jesus by Satan is a representative repetition of the temptation of Adam—the first Adam failed the test; the Last Adam resisted the temptation and procured the means of redemption for mankind through the sacrifice of his obedient life.
 - 7.2.1.2. The temptation of Jesus is similar to the temptation of Job. God vindicated himself by preserving Job through temptation to demonstrate to Satan that he (God) would have the ultimate victory.
 - 7.2.1.3. God preserved Jesus during his temptations to procure the victory over Satan.
 - 7.2.2. The demonic realm is real, but since the life, death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus, demons, along with Satan, have been bound and severely limited in their influence on humans and the spatial-temporal realm (Lk 10.18-19; Jn 12.31-32; 2 Pt 2.4; Jude 6; Rev 20.2). Most Christians today either make a serious mistake and ignore the influence of the demonic realm (1 Pt 5.8) or they make too much of it and find demons lurking under every rock.
8. Why must we flee from idolatry?
 - 8.1. Idolatry is against the Ten Commandments (one and two).
 - 8.2. We must not provoke the Lord to jealous anger (Dt 4.25; Dt 32.16, 21; Ps 78.58) by:
 - 8.2.1. Walking close to the edge of the precipice of false worship and challenging God.
 - 8.2.2. Submitting to temptation and sinning through idolatry, thus grieving the Holy Spirit.
 - 8.3. We must not make it necessary for the Lord to exercise his jealous nature (Dt 32.21; Ps 78.58). Jealousy is not envy. A person is envious of what he does not possess, but wishes he did possess. Envy (covetousness) is a sin. A person can be jealous about protecting his interest in someone he already possesses and loves. Jealousy over what is rightly possessed is not a sin. Thus, God is jealous to protect his interest in his covenant people (Ex 20.5; Ex 34.14-16).
 - 8.4. Rhetorically, Paul asks, if we are stronger than God. The implied answer is that we are not. We are infinitely weaker than the Lord and cannot stand before his jealous anger when it is stirred against the sin of idolatry.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 10.14-22)?

- 9.1. *Fraudulent Cup* – What is an implication of Paul’s statement that we “cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons” (1 Cor 10.21)?
- 9.1.1. Those who raise the cup of the Lord in the Lord’s Supper should not also raise the cup of demons? How might we do this today—i.e., raise the cup of demons?
- 9.1.1.1. It may be that when we raise a toast at dinners (e.g., at a wedding or award ceremony) we are unwittingly participating in raising the cup of demons.
- 9.1.1.2. Raising a cup of wine in a toast goes deep into pagan myth and ritual. For example, in the *Odyssey*, Peisistratus poured out wine and drank to the health of Pallas Athene, invoking the god Poseidon, and Amphinomus offered a toast to Odysseus.¹⁴⁷
- 9.1.1.3. Many of the Puritans objected to offering a toast. For example, William Prynne (1600-1669), an English lawyer, author, polemicist, and political figure wrote against the custom of drinking healths, calling the practice sinful.¹⁴⁸ The Massachusetts Puritans banned toasting in 1634; although the law was largely ignored, and it was repealed in 1645.
- 9.1.1.4. Raising a cup (of wine) at a toast at a wedding dinner is a superstitious action and should not be participated in by Christians any more than participating in other superstitious actions such as knocking on wood, crossing fingers, or touching a ‘lucky’ pendant before a sporting event.
- 9.1.2. If this latter point seems to be ‘over the top’, consider these questions with respect to the matter or raising a toast (e.g., at a wedding):
- 9.1.2.1. Is the invocation toast sincere—does the person offering the toast desire the good health, prosperity, or fortune of the person being toasted? If not, the toast is meaningless, and why is it offered?
- 9.1.2.2. If the invocation is sincere, then to whom is the toast directed?
- 9.1.2.2.1. If to God, then he is not pleased with an invocation accompanied by a raised glass of wine—it is false worship, since it is not an action that he requires of us.
- 9.1.2.2.2. If not to God, then to whom? If to no one, then the sentiment expressed in the invocation is meaningless since no one can act on the invocation.
- 9.1.2.2.3. Otherwise, the logical answer is that the invocation is directed to a created object—something in the air or sky, a force, a carved image, or a demon. This is idolatry.
- 9.1.2.3. Is it appropriate to dismiss toasting with a flippant, “It is a harmless action, don’t be so pedantic!”? We are imbued with a spirit of idolatry without realizing it.
- 9.2. *Fellowship Communion* – In this chapter Paul begins to provide guidance for participation in the Lord’s Supper. He will consider it in more detail later in this letter (1 Cor 11.17-34). In this section, we learn that Communion is a:
- 9.2.1. *Demarcation* of union with Christ through participation in his blood and body. Christians participating in the Communion meal indicate that they believe that the merits of Christ’s death on the cross have been vicariously applied to themselves.
- 9.2.2. *Declaration* of alignment with Christ’s covenant community. Christians participating in the Communion meal with other Christians declare that they are part of the one body—the Church that extends through time and around the globe. When the Lord’s Supper was observed in the congregation in Corinth it connected them with other believers throughout the Roman world. The Lord’s Supper has been observed from the night in which Jesus was betrayed until this day in an unbroken chain that connects all believers spatially and temporally with one another.
- 9.2.3. *Demonstration* of Christian fellowship and love among believers, through the sharing of a meal.

¹⁴⁷ Homer, *Odyssey*, books 3 and 18; records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/odyssey3.htm; records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/odyssey18.htm

¹⁴⁸ [en.wikisource.org/wiki/Prynne, William \(DNB00\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Prynne,_William_(DNB00))

9.2.4. *Divisive force*. A person must choose between participation in the cup of the Lord or the cup of demons, the table of the Lord or the table of demons. He cannot participate in both without provoking the jealous anger of God. You cannot straddle between two wavering opinions, if God is God, serve him; if Baal (Satan or anything else) is god, then serve him or it (1 Ki 18.21).

9.2.5. *Distinctive of the Christian Church*. Other religions lift cups of adoration or penance (upward). Only Christians participate in the cup that is blessed and provides blessing (downward).

9.3. *False Cultus* – Idolatry in any form—the veneration of created objects, the invocation of a demon, or loving anything more than God—provokes God to jealous anger. We have already considered the futility of idolatry (1 Cor 8.4-6) and the consequences of participation in idolatry (1 Cor 10.6-13). In this section Paul encourages and commands Christians to flee from idolatry. John also warns us to keep ourselves from idols (1 Jn 5.21). Therefore, it is prudent to ask what are examples of idolatry today from which we must flee or from which we must keep ourselves? We can consider examples of idolatry under the following headings:

9.3.1. *Worldliness* – This includes a love of money and material possessions (Col 3.5), adoration of celebrities (in sports, entertainment, business, or politics), an inordinate affection for family and friends, participation in superstitious practices, a lusting after things that are sensual and seeking to be pampered and entertained, and an imbalanced use of time and energy with which God has endowed us.

9.3.2. *Wilfulness* – Declaring ourselves to be independent from God (Ps 14.1) and masters of our own destinies (Prov 20.24; Is 46.10; Jer 10.23; Rom 9.9-16).

9.3.3. *Works* – Every religion that is not Biblical Christianity is a works-based religion and is idolatry. The adherents of these false religions attempt to gain merit or favour with a god of their imagination through their efforts or sacrifices in an attempt to make payment for their sins and to improve their *karma* or standing with that god or the ‘universe’.

9.3.4. *Worship* – Christians can be infected by idolatry in any (or all) of the above forms. In addition, Christians can engage in idolatry through presenting false worship to the true God. False worship practices can include the following:

9.3.4.1. Ignoring or abusing the Sabbath Day.

9.3.4.2. Introducing elements *into* worship, or *as* worship, which God has not prescribed, such as human compositions, rock bands and drama productions; and observance of religious festivals or rituals such as Lent, Christmas, and Easter which God has not required of us.

9.3.4.3. Iconography which uses visual images of Christ or ‘saints’.

Paul indicates, in this section, that Christianity is inconsistent with idolatry, in whatever form it is manifested. If we wish to serve God in spirit and truth (Jn 4.24), then we will abandon all pretenses to introduce any form of ceremony or practice into/as worship which God has not required of us, observe the pure worship of God, and submit our wills to God’s will as revealed in the Bible.

Supreme Responsibility (1 Cor 10.23-11.1)

Gracious Discernment (1 Cor 10.23-30)

1. Compare 1 Corinthians 6.12 with 1 Corinthians 10.23; why does Paul repeat himself?

1.1. When we considered 1 Corinthians 6.12, we noted that the ESV translators put the statement in quotes and, following the consensus among interpreters, conclude that Paul is quoting a libertine slogan or maxim, either invented by the Corinthians or in vogue in Corinth. We are to understand that he is saying, “You say ... all things are lawful for me, but I say ...” using the same form of counter argument which Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5.1-48).

1.2. In the first case, he countered the libertine slogan while dealing with the Corinthians’ claims about sexual freedoms. Now, he repeats the slogan; but builds on his response as he brings to a

conclusion his instructions about the impropriety of eating food sacrificed to idols where it may be construed that one is participating in idolatrous practices or is actually participating in them. In both instances he countered by saying, even if you claim that something is *lawful* (i.e., not contrary to God's law) to partake in, that does not mean it is *helpful* for you to partake in it.

- 1.2.1. In the first case, he indicated that we should not be enslaved (dominated) by our participation in anything, even if it is lawful.
- 1.2.2. In this case, he indicates that we should not participate in something if it does not build up the Christian community.
- 1.2.3. He provides a balance to the use of lawful things by how they may affect us and others in the Church. This is not a form of philosophical pragmatism since he does not determine ultimate morality by its consequences. However, it is a form of proximate pragmatism, since he uses outcomes as a means of judging the usefulness of applying legitimate practices. For example, we can say that it is lawful to eat food, but we should not be addicted to eating or we will become obsessed and obese. Or, we may claim that it is lawful for the youth in our congregation to watch a movie, but that does not mean that we should suggest that they may watch every or any movie, since the immorality displayed in many movies can be destructive, rather than edifying (building up).

2. What should be our prime consideration within the family of Christ when it comes to the use of lawful things? We should ask if the use of a lawful thing is:

- 2.1. Helpful for myself and my family?
- 2.2. Addictive, leading to an overuse or abuse?
- 2.3. Helpful to others in the Church and for their spiritual growth?
- 2.4. Self-seeking or self-giving in love?
- 2.5. Based on a valid love for self and for others (Mt 19.19)?

Thus, our use of lawful things should be considered within the context of our personal reasons and the potential results.

3. What guidance does Paul give the Corinthians about eating meat sold in the meat market?

- 3.1. Even if you suspect that the meat had been sacrificed to idols and then offered for sale, don't ask questions about the source of the meat, buy it and eat it without any qualms. He applies, to morally indifferent matters, the proverbial advice—"If you don't want to know the answer, don't ask the question."

- 3.2. How does he justify this guidance?

- 3.2.1. By quoting from Psalm 24.1 (also, Ps 50.12) he indicates that the good things provided by God are not intrinsically tainted by the false uses to which men put them.

- 3.3. What value does this guidance have for Christians?

- 3.3.1. It provides a practical approach for dealing with matters of conscience. If a person does not know about the source, origin, or use of goods or products before purchasing them, he may use them without any moral qualms. However, if he asks questions about the background of the goods or products and discovers that immoral practices were applied in their creation or use, his conscience, or that of another person, may be disturbed by the knowledge of the facts. Until the background is known, he can honestly say, "I did not know."

- 3.3.2. It protects a Christian's conscience from being over-scrupulous (Ecc 7.16).

- 3.3.3. It provides a general approach for dealing with the purchase of goods or products that are not in themselves immoral to purchase or use, while their production may have been associated with immoral actions. For example, you might wonder if a shirt made in SE Asia or in a warehouse in NY has been produced by indentured workers or children. If you don't know the background, your purchase and use of the shirt isn't wrong. However, if you explore the manufacturing background of the shirt by asking questions, your moral qualms may be raised, and you decide that you cannot wear the shirt.

- 3.3.4. It provides a general practical approach for dealing with some other areas of life—which can be summed up with the Clinton-era “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. For example, you might suspect that a couple, one of whom is a distant cousin, visiting with you are unmarried. If you ask if they are married, then you may be put into the difficult situation of requiring them to sleep in separate bedrooms.
4. What guidance does Paul give the Corinthians about attending dinners of unbelievers?
- 4.1. Attending a dinner with unbelievers, if you wish to do so, is not a moral issue—assuming that nothing immoral is included with the dinner such as performing a sacrifice to a pagan idol (1 Cor 10.14), a display of naked dancers (Mt 5.28; Phil 4.8; 1 Jn 2.16), or coarse joking (Eph 5.4).
- 4.2. What are general principles that can be derived from this guidance?
- 4.2.1. Christians should not cut themselves off from all business or social association with unbelievers (1 Cor 5.10)—as the Jews did at that time (Jn 4.9; Acts 10.28; Acts 11.3) and some of the Amish do with regard to the ‘English’.
- 4.2.2. Christians should put relationships with people above relationships with things.
- 4.2.3. Reaching unbelievers for Christ will involve association and friendship between Christians and unbelievers.
5. When does Paul say that the Corinthians should abstain from eating meat at a dinner party?
- 5.1. If they are informed that the meat being served was sacrificed to idols?
- 5.2. Why?
- 5.2.1. To be a good witness about Christ to an unbeliever. If an unbeliever informed the Christian that the meat was sacrificed to an idol, he may have provided the information to see how the Christian would react and to see if he would be consistent with his claim that he didn’t participate in the worship of idols.
- 5.2.2. To be a good example to a fellow believer who was also a guest at the dinner. If another believer, who had a weak conscience (was spiritually immature), saw the other person eating the meat after being informed that it had been sacrificed to an idol, this could have put a stumbling block in the way of the believer with weak faith or scruples and cause him to sin.
- 5.2.3. Being informed that the meat was sacrificed to an idol should be enough to cause a believer to desist from eating so as not to give the appearance of endorsing idolatry.
- 5.3. What should Christians do if invited to attend a dinner and they discover that pagan or superstitious practices are included?
- 5.3.1. For example, if a Christian is invited to attend a dinner in a Jewish home where the males are all wearing a *kippah* (*yarmulke*), should he also? Wearing the *kippah* is derived from a legend that astrologers told a woman that her son was destined to be a thief. She prevented this by having her son wear a head covering so that he would always be reminded that God is watching his every act. It is pure superstition and should not be countenanced.
- 5.3.2. Christians should be cautious about participating in any ritual which may be construed as endorsing a pagan practice—as we considered in the previous section with regard to raising a cup of wine in a toast, which is a practice rooted in paganism.
6. What principle does Paul give about binding the conscience of a believer?
- 6.1. The (faulty) beliefs of another person should not bind the conscience of a believer. What another person believes is not to be the determining factor as to whether or not a Christian should behave in a particular way—the mere assertion that an action is wrong, does not in fact make it wrong. A Christian’s conscience and actions cannot be bound by the (faulty) beliefs of others, but only by the moral law of God, a personal belief about what Christ has required, and a thankful heart before God for the blessings he has provided.
- 6.2. However, Paul makes it clear that a Christian should abstain from practices which, though lawful

- in their own right, will cause other Christians to be harmed because of their weak consciences. Thus, the motive for abstinence is not to obey regulations of others, but out of a regard for others.
- 6.3. Paul does not contradict himself. In the abstract a Christian may be free to partake of meat sacrificed to an idol because the meat is intrinsically good (1 Tim 4.4), but in practice he should not do so, if the exercise of his freedom will harm members of the Christian community. Selfless interest is more important than selfish indulgence.
- 6.4. Paul did not take sides in the debate about whether or not meat sacrificed to an idol could be eaten. He told the ‘weak’ in the Corinthian congregation that their moral scruples were incorrect. But he also told the ‘strong’ that their instance on their freedom to indulge was also incorrect.
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 10.23-30)?
- 7.1. *Binding Law* – Paul is governed by an overriding principle which should determine what we should do and not do within the Christian community—the law of God. Our guidance should not be the (often) faulty opinions of others but the clear teaching of Scripture. Note: In this section, Paul is not dealing with the question of obedience to the lawful ordinances of the civil magistrate or elders in a congregation. He deals in this section only with imposed sanctions from those who are over scrupulous and who wish to impose their will on others.
- 7.2. *Balanced Love* – Paul provides a second principle: Christians do not live in a state of ethical and personal autonomy. They are bound by the law of love applied within the Christian community. Christians are not to be lawless or loveless. Their freedoms are to be balanced by self-denial. The weaknesses of others are to be tolerated but not to be allowed to become tyrannical.
- 7.3. *Boycott Limits* – Paul provides us with guidance for determining if we should boycott products or services provided by unbelievers. His ‘don’t ask’ approach (1 Cor 10.25) can help us avoid tying ourselves into over-scrupulous knots. In this life (almost) every service or product we obtain from other people will be tainted by sins and superstitions. For example, a store at which we could make purchases may support Planned Parenthood, a homosexual parade, or a pagan festival. However, boycotting such a store will not remove the problem of a tainted tainted product (because the same product is provided by other suppliers with equally evil policies). Even if a product we wish to purchase is not immediately associated with a direct sin (e.g., parts of aborted babies or slave labour are used directly in the manufacture of the product; in a case such as this we must not purchase the product), we will find immoral practices further back in the supply chain. For example, some of the materials used to manufacture the item were produced with child labour, through the mistreatment of animals, or by the application of illegal manufacturing processes, etc. The deeper we dig, the more we will discover things which would make us want to avoid the supplier of the product. The only ‘solution’ would be to live in total isolation from pagan society—a practical impossibility.
- 7.3.1. A relevant current example is the concern that some have expressed that one or more of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccines was tested using a cellular strain that was originally derived from an aborted baby. Whether or not this is true, the testing of the current vaccines did not use parts of aborted babies—which, if it did, would require that we avoid receiving the vaccines. Every invention, manufactured product, and service from the hands of sinful humans is tainted by egregious sin somewhere in its supply chain. We cannot avoid this, and we should not tie up our consciences with an overscrupulous investigation into the past.
- 7.3.2. Another example is that some Christians say that we should invest in ‘ethical’ portfolios. However, the composition of ‘ethical’ portfolios is often defined by ‘latte liberals’ who would make the funds fossil-fuel-free but would include stock in companies that push an equal outcomes agenda or produce cannabis-based products. We can apply Paul’s guidance and should not ask too many questions on the ground of conscience (1 Cor 10.25). A simple rule of thumb for long-term investing may be to place our savings, at arm’s length, in a balanced fund with medium risk.

- 7.4. *Believers' Lives* – With these three principles, Paul provides guidance for how Christians can live in the midst of a society which is becoming increasingly pagan.

Godly Deportment (1 Cor 10.31-11.1)

1. What does Paul do in these verses?
 - 1.1. He provides a conclusion to a section of this letter (3 chapters, 1 Cor 8:1 through 1 Cor 10:30) with summary directives, derived from his preceding instructions.
 - 1.2. He has discussed particulars, and provided regulations, relating to valid and invalid use of meat sacrificed to idols. He now summarizes what he expects from the Corinthians and Christians in every generation.
 - 1.3. He does not summarize his arguments regarding the valid use of meat or the dangers of idolatry. Rather, he focuses on the character he expects to be displayed by those who declare that they are Christians and identifies some of the principles by which Christians should live.
2. What are the imperatives that we find in this summary section?
 - 2.1. 'Do all' (1 Cor 10.31) "do all to the glory of God".
 - 2.2. 'Give no' (1 Cor 10.32) "Give no offense".
 - 2.3. 'Be' (1 Cor 11.1) "Be imitators".
3. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 10.30-11.1)?
 - 3.1. *Glorify God.*
 - 3.1.1. He identifies eating and drinking as activities that are to be performed to the glory of God. Why does he mention these two activities?
 - 3.1.1.1. They are two of the aspects of idol worship that he has previously addressed, but which fall into the category of 'morally indifferent'. A person may eat meat and drink wine, outside of the immediate context of idol sacrifices, and not be confronted with a moral dilemma, whereas he cannot commit fornication, as with a temple prostitute, without breaking God's law. However, eating meat sacrificed to an idol can be a problem if the eater is engaged in presenting the meat to an idol before he eats it, or if a cup of wine is lifted in a toast to a false god.
 - 3.1.2. How does he extend eating and drinking into a universal principle?
 - 3.1.2.1. He extends his command to every category of action—"whatever you do" is to be done for the glory of God.
 - 3.1.3. How can mere humans glorify God since he is the all-glorious one?
 - 3.1.3.1. We cannot add to God's glory. Our actions cannot make God more glorious than he is already (Ps 24.7-8; 1 Pt 4.11).
 - 3.1.3.2. Rather, we glorify (ascribe glory to) God by recognizing and acknowledging the impressive splendour (NT: δόξα) of his majesty and 'weight' (OT: כְּבוֹד) of his being. We ascribe glory to God when we worship him in Psalm-praise (Ps 29.1-2; Ps 96.7-8) or in prayer.
 - 3.1.4. How can any (every) act of life be performed for the glory of God?
 - 3.1.4.1. It must be a *correct* act. It must not be sinful, breaking God's holy law.
 - 3.1.4.2. It must be a *conscientious* act. It must be done with diligence (Mt 22.37), not grudgingly or niggardly.
 - 3.1.4.3. It must be a *commendable* act. It must be a correct and conscientious act, done for the right reason—to please God rather than to satisfy our own pride (Eph 6.7; Col 3.23).
 - 3.1.4.4. It must be a *consecrated* act. It must be sanctified by and through Christ in order to be acceptable to God (Jn 14.13; Col 3.17).
 - 3.1.4.5. It must not be one-off but included in a *comprehensive* set of actions ("all"). As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q1) indicates, the primary purpose of man's existence is to glorify God.

- 3.1.5. What are examples of acts that, in particular, ascribe glory to God?
 - 3.1.5.1. Listening to his word and the counsel given to us in his word—the whole Bible.
 - 3.1.5.2. Keeping his commandments to please him—not out of obligation.
 - 3.1.5.3. Worshiping him through praise and prayer.
 - 3.1.5.4. Repenting of sin and confessing faith.
 - 3.1.5.5. Confessing our dependence on him, through prayer and tithing (returning a portion of our time and possessions of that with which he has blessed us).
 - 3.1.5.6. Expressing thankfulness, with true gratitude, for all his goodness toward us.
 - 3.1.5.7. Demonstrating sincere love for our neighbours (Lev 19.18; Mt 19.19).
 - 3.1.5.8. Rejoicing, not complaining, in all the providences issuing from our Lord (Rom 8.28; Phil 4.4).
- 3.2. *Go Graciously* – Paul says that we are not to give offense. We will consider his directive from both the negative and the positive perspectives—what we are not to do and what we are to do.
 - 3.2.1. What does he mean by ‘offense’?
 - 3.2.1.1. Something that we do or say which will cause others to have a disrespect for Christ, annoy them because of a perceived insult, lead them take an action which they regard as sin, or weaken their faith with a stumbling block (1 Cor 8.9).
 - 3.2.2. What classes of people does Paul include in this prohibition against giving offense?
 - 3.2.2.1. Jews, Greeks, and the Church.
 - 3.2.2.2. He includes all classes of unbelievers and believers, all civic and business relationships, all familial and social relationships pursued by individuals, and all evangelistic and fellowship activities undertaken by the Church community.
 - 3.2.3. In what ways can offenses be given?
 - 3.2.3.1. *Admonitions* – A sharp tongue (Prov 15.1).
 - 3.2.3.2. *Actions* – A sinful or misleading practice (Rom 14.13).
 - 3.2.3.3. *Attitude* – A surly frown over anything (Mt 5.22).
 - 3.2.4. What are positive ways to counter giving offense?
 - 3.2.4.1. Being non-judgemental (Mt 7.1).
 - 3.2.4.2. Displaying gentleness (1 Tim 6.11).
 - 3.2.4.3. Pursuing peace (Rom 14.19).
 - 3.2.4.4. Loving (Jn 13.35) and encouraging one another (1 Thess 4.18; 1 Thess 5.11).
 - 3.2.4.5. Exercising true faith (Jn 14.1).
 - 3.2.4.6. Obeying God’s law (Jn 14.15).
 - 3.2.4.7. Controlling the tongue (James 3.5-12).
 - 3.2.5. When is it proper to give offense?
 - 3.2.5.1. Never with regard to matters of indifference—i.e., matters where God does not give direct guidance, or where guidance cannot be derived by good and necessary inference.¹⁴⁹
 - 3.2.5.2. However, there will be times when it is necessary for a Christian to take a stand against heathen and pagan practices. In taking such a stand, the Christian will give offense—by speaking truth, but not by his demeanour. Speaking against abortion, homosexual practices, or in favour of maintaining a separation of washroom facilities by sex will offend many of the ‘politically correct’ of our day. Declaring Islam to be an evil religious-political system, and not a ‘religion of peace’ will offend Muslims. Declaring evolution to be a myth will offend the majority in academia.
- 3.3. *Gladden Generously* – Paul expands on the admonition not to give offense by giving a positive example of how he strives to live and thus how we should strive to live, by following his example (1 Cor 11.1). Our desire at all times should be to seek the benefit and happiness of others rather than doing things for our own advantage.

¹⁴⁹ Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 6.

- 3.3.1. Whom does he exclude from this principle?
 - 3.3.1.1. No one! He says we should strive to “please everyone”—believers, unbelievers—and work for the collective benefit the “many” rather than for personal benefit (1 Cor 10.24).
- 3.3.2. What would he exclude from this principle?
 - 3.3.2.1. He clearly does not mean that we are to do things that are unlawful or immoral in order to please others. He applies this principle to things that are indifferent.
 - 3.3.2.2. The immediate context provides clear guidance for how to interpret his statement. The things we are to do to please others are to be those things which will glorify God and advance the Gospel.
- 3.4. *Grant the Gospel* – Paul’s primary objectives in life were: 1) to glorify God and 2) to add to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - 3.4.1. What summarizing principle, stated by Jesus, is exemplified through Paul’s priorities?
 - 3.4.1.1. Jesus states that the great and first command is to love God with all our being, and the second command is to love our neighbour as our self (Mt 22.37-40). We demonstrate our love for God by ascribing glory to him through proper worship and by obeying him in everything which we do. We demonstrate our love for our neighbour by striving to see him saved and added to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - 3.4.2. Paul says (1 Cor 9.22) that he became all things to all people that he might save some. How can we save our neighbour?
 - 3.4.2.1. We cannot save anyone; only God can change a stone-cold heart and make a person spiritually alive.
 - 3.4.2.2. However, we are God’s instruments in the salvation of the lost through:
 - 3.4.2.2.1. Displaying the attributes of godliness (see, *Go Graciously*, above).
 - 3.4.2.2.2. Living exemplary lives that attract them to Christ, Christians, and the Church (Rom 11.13-14).
 - 3.4.2.2.3. Praying earnestly for their salvation (Rom 10.1; 1 Tim 2.1-4).
 - 3.4.2.2.4. Being their friend (Lk 10.25-37).
 - 3.4.2.2.5. Being ready to give an answer for the hope that we have (1 Pt 3.15).
 - 3.4.2.2.6. Proclaiming Jesus as their only hope for forgiveness and redemption from sin (Acts 4.12).
 - 3.4.2.2.7. Praying for evangelists and pastors/preachers (Mt 9.37-38).
- 3.5. *Gain Godliness* – What did Paul do, that he wants us to do?
 - 3.5.1. He wants us to imitate Christ, as he imitated Christ, by living godly lives.
 - 3.5.2. We considered Paul’s exhortation to imitate him (1 Cor 4.16) previously and noted that good Christian teachers are to be imitated in their faith, love, good works, holy living, dedication to Christ and his Gospel, hard work, a willingness to serve others and to face persecution for the sake of the Kingdom, perseverance in prayer, and communication of sound Biblical instruction.
 - 3.5.3. What does imitation of Christ not (necessarily) include?
 - 3.5.3.1. Undergoing death on a cross—although it may include facing persecution and even martyrdom (Mt 23.34; Lk 21.12; Jn 15.20) with faith and humility.
 - 3.5.3.2. Performing sign miracles—even though Paul did these at times.
 - 3.5.4. God chooses to make the growth and completion of the Church contingent on the presence and prevalence of righteousness among his people. To the extent that we gain godliness, to that extent God will bless his Church. Where a passion for godliness is absent in his people, there the Church is anemic, apostatising, and abandoned.

Regulations for Meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40)

1. What topic does Paul now introduce?

- 1.1. Chapter 11 deals with the specific topics of head coverings and the Lord’s Supper. These topics

are part of a larger set. In 1 Corinthians 11.2-14.40 Paul deals with proper practices and behaviour when a congregation is assembled for worship. His intention, as he states in his conclusion, is that everything should be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14.40).

Law Source (1 Cor 11.2)

1. What does Paul commend in the Corinthians?
 - 1.1. They remembered him—that is, in prayer—and followed the traditions which he delivered to them.
 - 1.2. Why does he commend them? (Look at 1 Cor 11.17)
 - 1.2.1. He prefaces his next set of instructions with a word of praise, as a counterbalance to the word of rebuke which will follow shortly (1 Cor 11.17). Paul knew that all Christians are torn by mixed attitudes and practices (Rom 7.7-25) and he looked for the good in believers as well as confronting their open sins. Jesus acted similarly when he praised and rebuked the seven churches (Rev 2-3).
 - 1.3. It has been suggested, particularly by patristic and medieval commentators, that Paul is being ironic in his praise. Others have suggested that he is using a rhetorical technique to get his readers’ (hearers’, since the letter would have been read aloud in the congregation) attention before he comes in with a full assault against their bad behaviour. However, it is problematic to suggest that Paul was not entirely sincere in his praise. Paul gives commendation where it is due and encourages those who desire to live lives which will please God.
2. What does Paul mean by ‘traditions’?
 - 2.1. The same word is used elsewhere a number of times in the NT (Mt 15.2-3, 6; Mk 7.3, 5, 8, 9, 13; Gal 1.14; Col 2.8; 2 Thess 2.15; 2 Thess 3.16).
 - 2.2. Jesus used the word to refer to the teachings of the rabbis which the people followed while ignoring the direct commands of God, or even acting contrary to the commands (M 15.2; Mk 7.8-9).
 - 2.3. Paul also uses the term to refer to the teachings of the rabbis (Gal 1.14) and to false teachings (Col 2.8), but in these cases he adds ‘of man’ (‘fathers’, ‘human’).
 - 2.4. He also uses the term to identify the collected body of teachings or instruction from himself or the other apostles, by spoken word or written letter (2 Thess 2.15; 2 Thess 3.6). This appears to be the meaning of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.2.
 - 2.5. Some people present suggestions that are utter nonsense about what Paul means, such as claiming that he is speaking of his own teachings which overrule gender distinctions.¹⁵⁰
3. How did the Corinthians receive these traditions?
 - 3.1. They were delivered to them by Paul—in his oral instruction while he was present with them, but now being augmented through the content of his letters (compare, 2 Thess 2.15).
 - 3.2. From where did Paul receive the traditions which he taught?
 - 3.2.1. From his extensive knowledge of the OT.
 - 3.2.2. He heard Christian preaching such as Stephen’s sermon (Acts 7.1-60).
 - 3.2.3. During a time of seclusion in Arabia he received direct revelation from Jesus (1 Cor 11.23; Gal 1.11-12, 17).
 - 3.2.4. He likely received details about the life and teaching of Jesus when he conversed with Peter and James in Jerusalem (Gal 1.18-19)
 - 3.3. Thus, the traditions which the Corinthians were commended for maintaining, were the instructions which they had received from Paul who in turn had received them from the Bible or directly from Jesus or the other apostles whom Jesus had appointed to go out and teach what he

¹⁵⁰ As noted by: A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 811.

had commanded (Mt 28.19-20).

4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this verse (1 Cor 11.2)?
 - 4.1. *Apostolic Authority* – The traditions which the Church is to adhere to are those teachings which come from the Prophets, Christ, and his apostles (through the Holy Spirit), as recorded in the Bible.
 - 4.1.1. When Paul was writing his Epistles, the traditions of which he spoke included oral teaching as well as written (the OT, early Epistles such as Galatians, and early Gospels such as Mark).
 - 4.1.2. The traditions which we are to maintain are those which came from the apostles. Since the apostolic age has ended and the NT is complete, ‘traditions’ now includes the entire canon of the Bible.
 - 4.1.3. While it is true that Jesus did (and taught) many other things than those recorded in the Bible (Jn 20.30; Jn 21.24-25), this does not mean that new revelation from God is forthcoming *today*. All that God wanted us to know, and is necessary for us to know, is recorded in the Bible. No new traditions can be received by the Church as a standard equivalent to the Bible. The Church does not have Scripture *and* tradition as two equally authoritative standards, as taught by the Roman Catholics and some Orthodox churches. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”¹⁵¹
 - 4.2. *Absolute Authority* – The traditions recorded in Scripture, and received by the Church, are to be observed by the Church.
 - 4.2.1. Our first principle is that the Bible has absolute authority over all other sources of instruction. As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q2) says, “The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.”
 - 4.2.2. What the Bible says should end all controversy when the world says something different from what the Bible teaches. For example, since the Bible says, clearly, that God created the world in six natural (24-hour) days about 6,000 years ago, the world’s belief that the world is billions of years old and that life arose over a period of a 1+ billion years *must* be rejected as erroneous.
 - 4.2.3. Disagreements within the Church over doctrine and required practice must be resolved through a consideration of the teachings of Scripture (comparing passage with passage) not through the introduction of complex cultural and historical interpretations—such as those proposed by feminists on how 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 should now be interpreted.
 - 4.2.4. Our order of precedence for establishing doctrine and practice within the Church must be as follows:
 - 4.2.4.1. The clear passages of Scripture.
 - 4.2.4.2. The less clear passage interpreted by the clear passages.
 - 4.2.4.3. The remaining controversial passages interpreted by the collective wisdom of godly men over 2,000 years (not via ‘new perspectives’ introduced in the last few years!).
 - 4.2.4.4. Subordinate standards such as historic creeds and confessions, such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.
 - 4.2.4.5. Statements of faith and practice established by denominational synods, presbyteries and local congregational elders.
 - 4.2.4.6. Christian prudence and sanctified common sense.

¹⁵¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 6.

- 4.2.5. Anyone who argues against what is established by Scripture, properly interpreted, displays a prideful, contentious, and rebellious spirit which must be brought into subjection to the will of God (1 Cor 11.16).

Locks or Shawls? (1 Cor 11.3-16)

Covering Obligation (1 Cor 11.4-7, 10, 13-15)

1. What subject does Paul address in this section (1 Cor 11.4-15)?
 - 1.1. He addresses the topic of appropriate head coverings for women *and men* when prophesying and praying.
2. What does Paul mean when he says, “head covered” and “head uncovered”?
 - 2.1. What Paul means may not be as clear as some people claim it is.
 - 2.2. This section has apparently presented many interpretive and application difficulties—at least, when we consider the vast amount that has been written on these verses and the significantly divergent views which have been expressed.
 - 2.3. What might make it difficult for us to understand Paul’s meaning?
 - 2.3.1. We have to deal with translation challenges—e.g., should *γυναικός* be translated as ‘woman’ (NIV, NASB, NKJV, KJV) or as ‘wife’ (ESV)? We will address this later in this section of our study of 1 Corinthians.
 - 2.3.2. We have to determine what ‘head coverings’ he is speaking of.
 - 2.3.3. We have to determine why he refers to both males and females being covered/uncovered—i.e., it is not just a simple question of the head coverings for women but for both sexes.
 - 2.3.4. We cannot avoid approaching an interpretation from our ingrained cultural perspective. For example, if someone suggested that Paul is saying that women must wear a veil (as in *burka*) during Christian worship how do you think people in the West would react?
 - 2.3.5. However, interpreting this passage is not necessarily made any easier when, as some suggest, we consider details about Roman-Corinthian culture (e.g., hair lengths of prostitutes or homosexuals) in the 1st century.
 - 2.3.5.1. For example, one mistaken interpretation gained visibility because of a February 2016, Naked Bible Podcast,¹⁵² which was based on an article that appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*,¹⁵³ in which the author, Troy Martin, argues that Paul uses the word (*περιβολαίου*) translated ‘covering’ the way some Greek writers did, as a sexual euphemism for testicles. However, the fact that they used the word this way does not mean that Paul uses it that way. He uses the same word in Hebrews 1.12, where it is translated as ‘robe’ and clearly does not have sexual overtones. Also, the same word is used a number of times in the Septuagint and has nothing to do with sexual organs (e.g., Ex 22.27; Dt 22.12; Job 26.6; Ps 102.26; Is 50.3; Is 59.17; Ezk 16.13). Troy Martin does not mention the use of the word in the Septuagint in his article. Yet, Paul’s thought context would have been the OT (in Hebrew and Greek—he usually quoted from the Greek translation), not the novels, plays, and medical writings of his day (although he may have known many of them). To ignore the Septuagint’s usage of the word, shows a clear bias and lack of scholarship by Martin.
 - 2.3.5.2. Sexualizing Paul is an invention of 20th c. Freudian thinking. If I used the word ‘pussy’, in a sentence such as, “We cannot have her here because of her pussy.” an overly sexualized Freudian would misconstrue what I was saying, just as Martin

¹⁵² podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/the-naked-bible-podcast/id961385822?i=1000430050017

¹⁵³ Troy Martin, “Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Cor. 11:13-15: A Testicle instead of a Head Covering”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 123:1 [2004]; pp. 75-84; www.gilberthouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Martin-Pauls-argument-from-nature-for-the-veil-in-1-Corinthians-11.13-15-testicle-instead-of-a-head-covering-1.pdf

- misconstrues Paul, when what I meant is that “She cannot come for a visit because she has no one to take care of her cat.”
- 2.4. We believe that the Bible’s teachings are applicable to all people in all generations, its teachings are (generally) clear and easy to understand, and (generally) it can be understood by a straightforward reading of what it says. Therefore, we need to consider what the text says, and attempt not to read into it what we *think* Paul meant.
 - 2.5. Since Paul builds his argument progressively in verses 3-16, with loopbacks (like a spiral), a verse-by-verse analysis does not appear to be the best way to address this section.
 - 2.5.1. We will consider the obligations on Christians (females and males) to have or not to have the head covered during worship.
 - 2.5.2. We will attempt to discern what Paul means specifically when he speaks of covered heads during worship.
 - 2.5.3. We will consider the arguments he provides to support required gender distinctions in head coverings during worship:
 - 2.5.3.1. The difference between the sexes based on their creation order,
 - 2.5.3.2. The natural distinctions between the sexes, and
 - 2.5.3.3. What should be the order within the church.
 3. What is the first principle that Paul establishes (1 Cor 11.4-5)?
 - 3.1. There are differences between the sexes that are to be applied during worship (prayer and prophesying). We will look at what Paul means by ‘prophesying’ later.
 - 3.2. Men are to pray and prophesy with uncovered heads, women are to pray and prophesy with covered heads.
 - 3.3. How does he indicate that this principle is important (1 Cor 11.16)?
 - 3.3.1. What he is teaching is binding (“there is no other practice”) on the Church.
 - 3.3.2. Paul’s instruction is not local, nor is it temporary, so it applies to us today.
 - 3.3.3. Therefore, it is important that we discover what it is that he is telling us to do.
 4. When does this principle apply?
 - 4.1. Since Paul mentions prophesying many (most) hold that Paul is speaking about the practice during the worship of the assembled congregation (i.e., what we refer to as ‘public worship’). Yet, some argue that he is speaking of a setting other than corporate public worship. It has also been suggested that he is speaking of a temporary situation, since prophesying has ended.¹⁵⁴
 - 4.2. What in the larger context of chapter 11 seems to indicate that the traditional interpretation (i.e., he is speaking of the assembled congregation) is correct?
 - 4.2.1. The context, with instructions about the Lord’s Supper which follow, seem to imply that Paul is dealing with corporate public worship.
 - 4.3. However, the view that Paul is dealing exclusively with a corporate public worship setting may encounter difficulties. What might that be?
 - 4.3.1. If he is speaking of involvement in corporate public worship, then why did he not use the expressions relating to the corporate meeting as he does elsewhere (1 Cor 11.17 [“come together”]; 1 Cor 14.26 [“come together”])?
 - 4.3.2. If he is dealing with corporate public worship, then this raises the question of why he does not tell the women to be silent, as he does elsewhere (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.12). It is difficult to explain away an apparent contradiction.
 - 4.3.3. Also, if this passage is dealing exclusively with corporate public worship, then on what grounds can a covering be imposed on women who remain silent and do not prophesy or pray out loud? In what way is a woman dishonouring her head if she remains silent?
 - 4.4. To the contrary, what in this section (1 Cor 11.3-16) appears to place Paul’s instructions in a

¹⁵⁴ Gary North, “The Covering for the Woman’s Head: Another View,” *Banner of Truth*, 1971, p. 26

- setting that is broader than just corporate public worship and applies it to all times and places of worship?
- 4.4.1. Paul asks (1 Cor 11.13) if it is proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered, without specifying a time or place. Thus, he appears to place his instructions in a more general context and therefore includes all times or places of prayer, whether or not they are in a corporate public worship setting—thus even in a woman’s home.
 - 4.4.2. Paul reinforces his instruction about head coverings in worship, by appealing to the created, natural order. He applies the God-defined hierarchical order between the sexes (1 Cor 11.3, 7-12) to indicate that women are to wear a head covering as a sign of submission to men. This is a principle that applies in a context that is broader than corporate public worship.
 - 4.4.3. Paul says that by nature men are not to have long hair as a head covering but women are to have long hair (1 Cor 11.14-15). Therefore, the principle about the gender distinctions in head coverings during times of worship is an extension of the God-defined, created distinction that should be evident between the sexes.
 - 4.5. Therefore, it seems that Paul is not dealing only with times of corporate public worship, but all times and places of worship. This conclusion will help us to understand what he means by ‘covered/uncovered head’.
 - 4.6. However, it is not necessary to establish what worship setting this passage applies to, to determine the proper form of head covering to be worn by women and men during worship (public or private).
5. Does this principle of distinctive head coverings apply to married women only?
 - 5.1. In the ESV translation, Paul refers to ‘men’ and ‘wives’; however, the ESV has ‘woman’ in the footnote. As we noted, other translations have ‘woman’. The Greek words Paul uses mean males of marriageable age and females of marriageable age. Therefore, a consistent translation would be either ‘husbands’ and ‘wives’ or ‘men’ and ‘women’ (as in other translations).
 - 5.2. Paul is not, making a distinction between married and unmarried women. Unmarried women were under their father’s jurisdiction as wives were under their husbands’. Single women, under no man’s jurisdiction, were an anomaly in the ancient world.
 - 5.3. The principle of head coverings would have applied to widows as much as to married women.
 - 5.4. The ESV’s translation of *γυναῖκες* as ‘wives’ is probably not accurate. The use of ‘wives’ by the translators was likely guided by a misguided attempt to address the interpretive challenges in this section. However, the use of ‘wife’ actually adds more difficulty for determining what Paul is teaching.
 6. Are women, who have their heads properly covered, permitted to prophesy or pray during worship assemblies of the Church?
 - 6.1. Paul’s mention in this section of women prophesying in the Corinthian church has engendered much controversy. Some state, emphatically, that prophesying means preaching; others are equally insistent that it means prophetic utterances, which ceased at the end of the apostolic age.
 - 6.1.1. Paul appears to mean ‘preaching’ in the general sense of public proclamation of Biblical truth, based on his use of the same word later in the letter (1 Cor 14.1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39)—this, for example, is Calvin’s conclusion.¹⁵⁵ However, he also uses the same word elsewhere (1 Cor 13.9), and seems to imply that this form of prophesying will pass away.
 - 6.1.2. Some of those who argue that Paul means ‘preaching’ conclude that he therefore permits women to preach as long as they have their heads properly covered—although they have a challenge explaining the obvious inconsistency between this conclusion and other passages (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.12), where Paul prohibits women to teach and commands that they remain silent (in the Church).

¹⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xviii.i.html.

- 6.1.3. Those (e.g., Chrysostom¹⁵⁶) who state that by ‘prophesying’ Paul means a spontaneous oracular utterance, often then conclude that Paul is dealing with a temporary, anomalous, situation in Corinth which no longer exists in the Church today.
- 6.2. How can we address the apparent contradiction between what Paul says in this section and what he says later in the letter (1 Cor 14.34-35)?
 - 6.2.1. If Paul is observing that women were speaking (prophesying or praying) in worship assemblies in Corinth, but without censure; this does not provide endorsement of the practice.
 - 6.2.1.1. He deals with one subject at a time and doesn’t jump around in his arguments. At this point, he deals only with the impropriety of men participating in worship with covered heads and women participating with uncovered heads.
 - 6.2.1.2. He deals with the specific matter of women speaking in public assemblies later in this letter (1 Cor 14.34-35). Thus, Calvin states, “It may seem, however, to be superfluous for Paul to forbid the woman to prophesy with her head uncovered, while elsewhere he wholly prohibits women from speaking in the Church. (1 Timothy 2:12.) It would not, therefore, be allowable for them to prophesy even with a covering upon their head, and hence it follows that it is to no purpose that he argues here as to a covering. It may be replied, that the Apostle, by here condemning the one, does not commend the other. For when he reproves them for prophesying with their head uncovered, he at the same time does not give them permission to prophesy in some other way, but rather delays his condemnation of that vice to another passage, namely in chapter 14.”¹⁵⁷
 - 6.2.2. To suggest that if Paul had thought it wrong for women to prophesy, he would not have wasted time discussing the nature of their head coverings, as some do,¹⁵⁸ misses the point. Paul is dealing with head coverings for *both* women and men during worship, not just head coverings for women. Similarly, the converse is also not a valid conclusion—i.e., if men and women do not speak in church then how they cover their heads is irrelevant. Paul is dealing with the visible distinction between the sexes, defined at creation, which it is necessary to display when they participate in worship. He is not dealing, *per se*, with the propriety of either sex speaking in the public assembly. That is a matter he deals with elsewhere.
7. What are the coverings that women and men are to have, or not to have, during worship?
 - 7.1. The interpretations and conclusions offered for this section vary widely:
 - 7.1.1. Some argue that Paul required women to cover their heads with a shawl during public worship, and that this practice is to continue today.
 - 7.1.2. Others argue that Paul was giving temporary guidance to the Corinthians for how to deal with the matter of head coverings during worship in their localized context of Roman culture and prevailing fashions in Corinth—e.g., relating to homosexuals wearing long hair and female prostitutes wearing short hair—but not stating a permanent requirement for the Church.
 - 7.1.3. Suggestions for what Paul specifies as the proper head covering for women (less consideration is given to the covering for men) have included face veils, scarves or shawls, and hats.

¹⁵⁶ John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.” In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 149.

¹⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xviii.i.html; see also J. P. Lange, *et al*, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 224.

¹⁵⁸ As does C. K. Barrett, in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Continuum, 1968), pp. 250-251.

- 7.1.4. The interpreters' cultural contexts have influenced their conclusions. In the 2nd to 4th centuries, it was generally thought that Paul was speaking of veils—even full-face veils. Modern feminists read the passage through an egalitarian perspective. Understanding the historical background of any passage is helpful. However, when it is suggested that it is *necessary* to understand the detailed historical cultural context, then the perspicuity of Scripture becomes compromised. Therefore, as we address the question of what covering women and men should have on their heads during worship, we will attempt to derive our conclusions from what the Holy Spirit, through Paul, says directly in the text.
- 7.2. In these verses, Paul is probably not dealing with veils, robes, hats, turbans, shawls, mantles, hoods, scarves, or any other form of man-made head covering for women or men. What instead is he dealing with?
- 7.2.1. He is dealing with the natural head covering that God provides for mankind—hair.
- 7.2.2. If we consider the cultural context in Corinth, and Jewish practice, in Paul's day, we will find support for the view that what is under consideration is the proper length of hair for women and men, and not the application of a man-made covering during worship. Greek men of Paul's day often wore their hair long. Paul says that this is contrary to nature and a disgrace (1 Cor 11.14).
- 7.2.2.1. Tertullian, writing about 204 AD, supports Paul's statement: "Hence let the world, the rival of God, see to it, if it asserts that close-cut hair is graceful to a virgin in like manner as that flowing hair is to a boy."¹⁵⁹
- 7.2.2.2. In addition, Jewish men of Paul's day covered their heads with the *tallith* or shawl when praying.¹⁶⁰ Paul likely would have done this himself in the synagogue, or he would have been expelled. Converted Jews probably continued this practice for a time after the apostolic age.
- 7.2.2.3. Likewise, it appears that priests in the OT were to keep their hair short, and yet were to wear a turban covering their hair.¹⁶¹ They wore the turban even when they went into the inner court where prayer was offered. The use of the *tallith* is likely an extension of this practice.
- 7.2.2.4. Therefore, the issue Paul is dealing with is not man-made coverings, but the length of hair to be worn by women and men during worship.
- 7.3. Some commentators are unwilling to accept the conclusion that hair is the covering Paul is speaking about. They generally quote verse 5 and the first part of verse 6 and contrast the 'uncovered' woman with the one with the 'shaved head' or 'hair cut off'. They assume that Paul is making a distinction between two things—a man-made covering and short hair. They bypass the latter part of verse 6 and miss the contrast Paul establishes by saying that since it is a shame for a woman to have cut (short) hair, she should cover her head—i.e., with long hair. They mistakenly conclude that Paul must be talking about a veil, shawl, scarf, or hat.
- 7.3.1. Many commentators present their arguments with confused logic. As we consider the following examples, see if you can spot the logic problems in them:
- 7.3.1.1. D. K. Lowery says, "Long hair was a woman's glory because it gave visible expression to the differentiation of the sexes. This was Paul's point in noting that long hair was given to her as a covering. Natural revelation confirmed the propriety of women wearing the physical covering ... She has a natural covering, and should

¹⁵⁹ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

¹⁶⁰ Alan Millard, "Discoveries from the Time of Jesus," Lion Publishing Co., Oxford, 1990, pp. 20, 32. See also the OED's definition: "the garment or mantle (in modern times frequently assuming the form of a scarf) worn by Jews at prayer." The OED references works published by men who had visited Palestine, including: Purchas *Pilgrimage*, Beaton *Jews in East*, and Bonar & M'Cheyne *Mission to Jews*.

¹⁶¹ Ex 28.36-38; Ezk 44.17-20.

follow the custom of wearing a physical covering in a public meeting.”¹⁶² He makes an unsupportable leap from a natural covering to a man-made covering.

- 7.3.1.2. J. P. Lange makes a similar argument, “[H]er hair is given to her instead of a covering.—From this it follows that the artificial veiling which he has spoken of above, is also an honor to the woman, while going unveiled disgraces her, since nature itself seems to have insisted upon the veiling of her head.”¹⁶³ Ironically, Lang says that her hair is given to her *instead* of a covering and then he insists that she needs a physical covering. Elsewhere he says, “*Let her be shorn*. [11.5]—This is not said permissively, but it expresses a command setting forth the legitimate consequence of the unsuitableness of her being unveiled, *q. d.*, ‘if she will do the one thing, let her also do the other.’”¹⁶⁴ However, Paul says, scornfully, using a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, that if a woman has *short hair*, she may as well go ahead and shave off all of her hair—like a prostitute! (1 Cor 11.6)
- 7.3.1.3. This form of analogical argument was also presented by John Chrysostom (349-407 AD). He said, “For this cause He left it to nature to provide her with a covering, that even of it she might learn this lesson and veil herself. “And if it be given her for a covering,” say you, “wherefore need she add another covering?” ... That not nature only, but also her own will may have part in her acknowledgment of subjection. For that thou oughtest to be covered nature herself by anticipation enacted a law.”¹⁶⁵ He acknowledges that hair is a covering but then extrapolates and concludes that it is necessary for a woman to wear a veil.

Each of these authors uses a form of argument with a *non-sequitur*, in which the conclusion does not follow from the premise. It is as if a person said, “God gave us fingers with which to eat food, therefore we should use forks because they are used in polite society.”

7.3.2. What is significantly missing in this section with respect to head coverings?

- 7.3.3. Paul does not use terms for any form of man-made headgear while describing the proper length for a woman’s or for a man’s hair, such as ‘veil’ (κάλυμμα; as in 1 Cor 3.12) or ‘shawl’. The terms that he uses are:
 - 7.3.3.1. κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (4), which translated literally is, ‘against or down [the] head having’, and has been translated as, ‘head covered’.
 - 7.3.3.2. ἀκατακάλυπτος τῇ κεφαλῇ (5), ‘uncovered of the head’.
 - 7.3.3.3. κατακαλύπτεται (1 Cor 11.6, 13), ‘covered’ and κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν (1 Cor 11.7), ‘covered the head’.
- 7.3.4. In verse 4, Paul states that a man should not have anything hanging down from his head—i.e., have long hair. This is reinforced by his later statement that a man should not have long hair (1 Cor 11.14).
- 7.3.5. Paul does not speak of covering the *hair* with something, rather he speaks of hair covering the *head* with hair.

7.3.6. Some writers (such as Ben Witherington¹⁶⁶ and Mark Black¹⁶⁷) argue against this

¹⁶² D. K. Lowery, 1 Corinthians; In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 530.

¹⁶³ J. P. Lange, *et al*, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 227.

¹⁶⁴ J. P. Lange, *et al*, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 224.

¹⁶⁵ John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.” In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 154.

¹⁶⁶ B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 233.

¹⁶⁷ Mark C. Black, “1 Cor. 11:2-16—A Re-investigation”, in Carroll D. Osburn, ed. *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol 1., (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock, 1993), pp. 191-218.

conclusion, and suggest that the extra-Biblical literary evidence supports the contention that Paul is speaking about a shawl rather than hair. However, it has been suggested by another interpreter that these authors have misread the data.¹⁶⁸

- 7.4. Paul is dealing with the nature of hair as a covering on a woman's or man's head, not a covering over her or his hair. Consider the following translation of the passage (1 Cor 11.4-7, 10, 13-15), with the substitution of 'long/short hair' (in *italics*) for the word covered/uncovered:

"(4) Every man who prays or prophesies with *long hair* [his head covered; down over his head having anything] dishonors his head, (5) but every woman who prays or prophesies with *short hair* [her head uncovered] dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. (6) For if a woman will not *have long hair* [cover her head], then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her *have long hair* [cover her head].¹⁶⁹ (7) For a man ought not to *have long hair* [cover his head], since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ... (10) That is why a woman ought to have a symbol of [the man's] authority on her head [i.e., *have long hair*] ... (13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with *short hair* [her head uncovered]? (14) Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears **long hair**¹⁷⁰ it is a disgrace for him, (15) but if a woman has **long hair**, it is her glory? For her *long hair*¹⁷¹ is given to her for [i.e., as¹⁷²] a **covering**."

- 7.5. What in this section (1 Cor 11.4-6, 10, 13-15) indicates that Paul is dealing with hair as a covering, not man-made coverings?

7.5.1. He ends his consideration with a statement about the *length* of hair (in verses 14-15) as an explanation of what he meant by *covering* in the preceding verses.

7.5.1.1. At the end of his argument about hair length, Paul uses the word, περιβολαίου (1 Cor 11.15), which is translated as 'covering'. While "covering" is certainly a valid translation, the interesting thing is that this word also supports the translation 'robe', 'garment', or 'mantle' (e.g., Heb 1.12). It seems that Paul is saying explicitly that a woman's long hair is given to her as a shawl.

7.5.2. He explains that long hair is the covering to be used by women while praying and prophesying to show their submissive position.

7.5.2.1. Tertullian in his essay entitled *On the Veiling of Virgins*¹⁷³ argues that young women of marriageable age should cover their *faces* with a veil to keep young men from lusting after them. However, he then goes on to say, 'If, moreover, the apostle further adds the prejudgement of "nature" that redundancy of locks is an honour to a woman, because hair serves *for a covering* [emphasis added], of course it is most of all to a virgin that this is a distinction; for their very adornment properly consists in this, that, by being massed together upon the crown, it wholly covers the very citadel of the head with an encirclement of hair. The contraries, at all events, of all these (considerations) effect that a man is not to cover his head: to wit, because he has not by nature been gifted with excess of hair; because

¹⁶⁸ A. Philip Brown II, *Witherington & Massey versus Chrysostom and Epiphanius: Long Hair Prohibited as Covering in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 7*, www.apbrown2.net/web/BFLS%20+%20Aldersgate%20Paper%202%20Ending.pdf

¹⁶⁹ Paul is stating a logical conclusion. The Greek expression εἰ γὰρ can be translated 'but if', 'whether', 'since', 'surely'. Thus, 6b is saying: "Since it is a disgrace for a woman to have short hair, she should have long hair." or "Surely it is a disgrace for a woman to have short hair; therefore, she should have long hair."

¹⁷⁰ Instances marked in bold are shown as in the original.

¹⁷¹ The ESV is inconsistent, translating κόμη as 'long hair' in the first instance, but not in the second. The NIV is consistent.

¹⁷² Paul uses ἀντὶ which means that her hair is provided *for* (Mt 5.38; Mt 17.27; Mt 20.28; Rom 12.17; Eph 5.31; 1 Thess 5.15; Heb 12.2, 16; 1 Pt 3.9), *instead of* (Lk 11.11; James 4.15), or *in the place of* (Mt 2.22), a covering.

¹⁷³ Alexander Roberts, *et al*, Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins, chapter 7; *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company) 1885; p. 31.

to be shaven or shorn is not shameful to him.’ Although Tertullian argued (from chapter 11) for young women to wear facial veils, he understood that a woman’s hair provided the covering for her head. In addition, he does not say that a woman must wear a robe, shawl, scarf, or hat on top of her hair.

- 7.6. What additional evidence that Paul is speaking about hair as the covering for the head can be obtained from 1 Timothy 2.9 and from 1 Peter 3.3?

7.6.1. Women are instructed by the apostles to wear simple hairstyles during worship, which would not draw attention to themselves. This instruction would be meaningless if their hair was covered with a shawl or scarf, since no one would have been able to see their gaudy or extravagant display.

- 7.7. Does the regulations about the Nazarite (Num 6.5) have any relevance for the consideration of head coverings?

7.7.1. A person (male) who took a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazarite was to let his hair grow long. This instruction provides support for the view that long hair is the sign of submission in a religious context.

7.7.2. Patrick Fairbairn says the following about a Nazarite: ‘The next thing exacted of the Nazarite was to leave his hair unshorn. And this was so different from the prevailing custom, yet so strictly enjoined upon him, that it might be regarded as the peculiar badge of his condition. ... Thus he was said to bear “the consecration (literally the separation, the distinctive badge) of his God upon his head.” The words readily suggest to us those of the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 11:10, and the appointment itself is perhaps best illustrated by a reference to the idea there expressed. Speaking of the propriety of a woman appearing with long hair, as given to her by nature for a modest covering, and a token of subjection to her husband, the apostle adds, that “for this reason she must have power upon her head”; i.e., (taking the sign for the thing signified, as circumcision for the covenant)¹⁷⁴, she must wear long hair, covering her head, as a symbol of the power under which she stands, a sign of her subjection to the authority of the man. ... Hence it was counted even a shame, a renouncing of the proper standing of a man, a mark of effeminate weakness and degeneracy, for men like Absalom, to cultivate long tresses. But the Nazarite, who gave himself up by a solemn vow of consecration to God, and who should therefore ever feel the authority and the power of his God upon him, most fitly wore his hair long, as the badge of his entire and willing subjection to the law of his God.’¹⁷⁵

- 7.8. In this chapter, Paul addresses the length of the hair for women and men. If a woman wears her hair short, it is as if she were shaved (bald). Men are to have short hair and women are to have long hair.

7.8.1. There is to be no debate on this as far as Paul is concerned.

7.8.2. God’s natural order, and not prevailing custom, is to be the determining factor.

7.8.3. Thus, the issue is not to determine what *hair* covering should be used by women during worship (e.g., a veil, robe, shawl, scarf, or hat) but what is the proper *head* covering that is required for men and women. This passage simply has nothing to do with man-made coverings. It has everything to do with a permanent and God-ordained distinction between men and women that is to be demonstrated by the respective length of their hair, especially during worship.

8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.4-6, 10, 13-15)?

8.1. *Scrupulous Discernment* – The wide variation among the interpretations applied to this passage demonstrates how important is for us to be aware of the cultural differences (and fundamental similarities) between our own time and the time of the authors of Scripture. Although it is difficult, we must question our cultural assumptions and be scrupulous about not imposing them

¹⁷⁴ Gen 17.10.

¹⁷⁵ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 10

th edition, Vol 2 (New York NY, Tibbals & Sons), p. 369.

on our reading of the Bible's text.

- 8.2. *Sex Distinctions* – Paul is dealing with the distinction (and relationship; 1 Cor 11.3-5, 7-12) between the sexes and how this is to be demonstrated. An obvious outward sign of this distinction is length of hair. Paul indicates that it is unacceptable for Christians to worship God with androgynous hair styles, for women to have short hair, or for men to have long hair. It is not a question of absolutes (i.e., men are to sport crew cuts and women are to have hair that reaches to their hips) but of a relative difference that must be obvious.
- 8.3. *Specified Details* – By addressing the use of *head* coverings during worship, Paul demonstrates that no subject is beyond the realm of God's attention. No matter is too small to be considered morally or ethically relevant. In many situations explicit commands are given in Scripture (e.g., we are not to undertake commercial activities on the Sabbath, murder, commit adultery, steal, kidnap another person, use manipulated measuring devices, etc.). When explicit direction is not given, Biblical principles apply to *every* area of life, including what we eat, what we wear, and how we cut our hair.

Constitutional Order (1 Cor 11.3-5, 7-12)

1. What reasons does Paul give for why there should be visible distinctions between the hair lengths for men and women, particularly during worship?
 - 1.1. *Subordination* – Paul's first reason relates to the created order of man and woman. A chain-of-command (a hierarchy of authority) was instituted at the time of creation. What is this chain?
 - 1.1.1. God (the Father) has headship over the God-man, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3.23; 1 Cor 15.27), who has headship over men (1 Cor 11.3); men have headship over women (Eph 5.22-23; 1 Pt 3.1, 5-6); and parents have headship over their children (Eph 6.1) until they form family units of their own (Gen 2.24).
 - 1.1.2. This order applies in the marriage relationship (1 Cor 11.3) and in the Church (Eph 1.22; Eph 4.15; 1 Tim 2.11-13).
 - 1.1.3. A debated topic is whether the headship provision also applies in government or business. Some have argued that women should not hold political office.¹⁷⁶ The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31.10-31 would likely have had male servants whom she commanded. This seems to provide indirect, but sufficient, warrant for the existence of female managers in business settings.
 - 1.1.4. The headship chain-of-command in the marriage relationship did not arise because of sin. The order was in place before Adam and Eve sinned (1 Tim 2.13). In addition, a headship chain-of-command, though voluntary, exists within the holy Trinity.
 - 1.1.5. Being in a subordinate position is not wrong; otherwise, Jesus would not be subject to the Father. Rather it is a sign of love and respect (Eph 5.33).
 - 1.1.6. Paul's statement in Galatians 3.28—there is no male or female—does not eliminate the created distinctions and order of precedence between the sexes. The equality Paul speaks about in Galatians relates to the full equality of all people before God with respect to their humanhood and salvific grace.
 - The principle that Paul is teaching is that men are to show their submission to Christ, and women are to show their submission to men, by the length of their hair. By appearing distinctly masculine and feminine, as made visible by the length of their hair, men and women indicate their submissiveness to God's created order.
 - 1.2. *Symbol* – Paul says that long hair for a woman is a symbol of the man's authority over her (1 Cor 11.10)—likewise, but unstated, a man's short hair is a symbol of God's authority over him.
 - 1.2.1. The Greek text does not have the word 'symbol'. It reads 'authority/power to have' (ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν). Translators have added the word 'symbol' or 'sign'. However, this is not a

¹⁷⁶ For example, John Knox, in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), argues that rule by females is contrary to the Bible.

recent innovation. Ancient commentators, such as Chrysostom and Theophylact, understood ‘authority’ to be a metonymy for a ‘symbol of authority’¹⁷⁷ as did Calvin.¹⁷⁸

1.2.2. It has been suggested that the addition of ‘symbol’ or ‘sign’ could be mistaken, and that Paul is saying that a woman ought to have authority over her *own* head—e.g., to engage in prayer and preaching.¹⁷⁹ However, that suggestion contradicts the point Paul is making about the order of subordination from God the Father to Jesus, to man, and to woman. Another suggestion is that ‘authority’ should be understood as the man-made cover over a woman’s hair (Luther apparently was of this opinion).¹⁸⁰ However, it would be necessary to demonstrate that the Greek word (ἐξουσίαν) is used elsewhere in the NT text as a metaphor for a shawl, scarf, or similar man-made hair covering—which it is not.

1.3. *Shame* – It is dishonourable or disgraceful for men to pray or prophesy with covered heads and for women to pray or prophesy with uncovered heads. Why would such actions bring shame?

1.3.1. Long hair on males is generally viewed as being effeminate (although not in all cultures) and short hair on females is often construed as their appearing masculine. As we noted above, in Paul’s day, homosexuals wore long hair and female prostitutes wore short hair. In our culture, it isn’t much different. One in a lesbian couple will often wear short hair and dress with a masculine appearance (e.g., consider the appearance of Ellen DeGeneres). And, transvestite males (such as ‘drag queens’) wear long hair (usually as wigs).

1.3.2. Paul’s introduction of the ‘shame’ argument is additional evidence that he is speaking of hair as the covering throughout this passage. In general, there is no natural shame associated with a man wearing a hat or for a woman to not wear a shawl or scarf. However, there is a natural shame associated with gender-bending hair styles, just as there is shame associated with nakedness, since Adam’s first sin (Gen 2.25; Gen 3.10).

1.3.3. It is probable that the shame extends up the subordination chain. For example, Paul may be saying that when a man prays or prophesies with long hair, he dishonours his head—i.e., Christ (1 Cor 11.5), and when a woman prays or prophesies with short hair, she dishonours her head—i.e., the man.

1.4. *Synergy* – Paul introduces a fourth reason (in verses 1 Cor 11.8-9, 11-12). It appears that his point is that the partnership between a man and a woman (Gen 2.20) is mutually supportive as they depend on one another. Hair length is indicative of the different roles which men and women undertake in a marriage setting—e.g., women as nurturers and home builders; men as providers and house builders.

2. What does Paul mean by ‘because of the angels’ (1 Cor 11.10)?

2.1. Fanciful interpretations have been postulated, such as the claim of Tertullian¹⁸¹ that this is a reference to evil angels who might be sexually attracted to women who do not wear a veil or hair covering. Some have suggested that the term ‘angels’ is used with reference to church leaders (Rev 2.1; etc.). Calvin¹⁸² and many others identify the angels as messengers from heaven who observe the worship of the Church (1 Cor 4.9; Lk 15.10; Eph 3.10; 1 Tim 5.21), and are offended, on God’s behalf, when the Church offers adulterated worship.

¹⁷⁷ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 836.

¹⁷⁸ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xviii.i.html

¹⁷⁹ Morna Hooker presented this suggestion, as noted by: A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 837.

¹⁸⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 362.

¹⁸¹ Alexander Roberts, *et al*, Tertullian, “On the Veiling of Virgins”, chapter 7; *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company) 1885; p. 31.

¹⁸² John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xviii.i.html

3. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.3-5, 7-12)?
 - 3.1. *Roles* – Males and females have different roles defined by God at creation. This role differentiation is to be maintained (at minimum) within the family and the Church, and to be made evident during worship. Worship is to reflect the order of creation. It is ironic that many of the Christians involved in the ‘head covering movement,’¹⁸³ which interprets 1 Cor 11.3-16 as speaking of the requirement to wear a fabric head covering in worship, choose to ignore Paul’s clear injunction against women speaking in a worship assembly and his command that they should remain silent (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.12).¹⁸⁴ This is an example of how the Evangelical Church today majors on minors and ignores the clear teachings of God (e.g., the Ten Commandments’ requirement for Sabbath keeping) but emphasizes a particular interpretation of a passage that has been contested for centuries (e.g., passages in Revelation).
 - 3.2. *Respect* – When we worship, we are in the presence of the King and his retinue (the holy angels) and are therefore to conduct worship respectfully. Worship is not entertainment, a motivational conference, or psychological counselling; it is bowing before the Lord of the universe!
 - 3.3. *Regulations* – We can infer from Paul’s references to shame and the presence of angels during worship that some forms of worship are acceptable to God and others are not. Later in the letter, Paul indicates that all things related to worship “should be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor 14.40) Thus, we can conclude that God regulates worship and has provided sufficient guidance in the Bible for us to know how we are to properly worship our Creator.

Creation Ordinance (1 Cor 11.14-16)

1. What additional reasons does Paul give for why men and women are to have particular, and proper, lengths of hair when they engage in worship?
 - 1.1. *Creation*. He provides an argument from nature (1 Cor 11.14-15). He says that nature (φύσις) itself teaches that women are to have long hair and men are to have short hair.
 - 1.1.1. What does Paul presuppose in this argument?
 - 1.1.1.1. The existence of innate knowledge and ‘natural law’.
 - 1.1.1.2. We are born with innate knowledge provided (revealed) by the Holy Spirit of God. For example, when a baby begins to observe the world, he quickly realizes that his parents are other entities like himself. As he begins to learn a language, he realizes that objects have names and that the attributes of objects and abstract concepts can be defined by words.
 - 1.1.1.3. The existence of innate knowledge is relatively easy to demonstrate. We see it as instinct in animals (e.g., cats grooming themselves). Likewise, in humans, if we did not have innate knowledge from God, what could we not do? We could not:
 - 1.1.1.3.1. *Do many basic (instinctual) things*. For example, as infants we could not breathe, suckle, or cry when hungry.
 - 1.1.1.3.2. *Experience anything received by our senses*. Our brains and minds would not know what to do with sensations such as light striking our eyes or a touch on our arm. External stimuli would be nothing more than ‘noise’.
 - 1.1.1.3.3. *Learn anything*. We would have to learn everything including basic first principles, but we could not learn anything without knowing basic first principles. It is only because we are born with innate intellectual abilities and knowledge that we can learn new things and reason logically. As an illustration, consider a computer. If you want to use it to write a letter you need software. But that software requires an operating system, which in turn requires BIOS firmware. Without the BIOS your computer would be useless. Our innate and

¹⁸³ www.headcoveringmovement.com/

¹⁸⁴ Notice female worship leaders and preachers in this testimonial: www.headcoveringmovement.com/trondheim-international-church-head-covering-study.pdf

instinctual knowledge is like a BIOS.

1.1.1.3.4. *Communicate with one another.* Your thoughts and my thoughts would be entirely random. For example, if I pointed to something sitting in a bowl on a table and called it ‘apple’, you might conclude that I wanted you to crawl under a bed. Your interpretation of the noise coming from my mouth would be as valid as the meaning I intended to convey.

1.1.1.3.5. *Know that anything existed other than our minds.* We could only conclude that we are a single instance of raw mind. Everything beyond our minds could be imaginary entities in an invented dream world, and even our own minds could be someone else’s concocted bad dream.

1.1.1.4. Most people understand that humans are prewired for many things (e.g., with the ability to learn languages), but they are unwilling to extend the application from the physical realm to the moral realm. However, as Paul states in Romans 1.18-20, we also know innately what right and wrong moral behaviour is. Paul says that men know about the existence of God and of his righteous requirements (Rom 1.18-21, 32), but they suppress that truth and foolishly profess falsehood as truth (Rom 1.22). In the same passage Paul identifies three primary areas in which people rebel against their innate knowledge of what is right. What are they?

1.1.1.4.1. False worship (Rom 1.23, 25)

1.1.1.4.2. Homosexual practices (Rom 1.24, 26-27)

1.1.1.4.3. All manner of unrighteousness (Rom 1.28-31).

The Corinthians’ problems fell into all three of these categories. We have considered some of their issues (e.g., incest and selfish lawsuits), but even the matter of hair length, is a relevant application to the three categories of human rebellion that Paul identifies in Romans 1.24-32—false worship practices, the confusion of natural sex differences, and resistance against legitimate authority (1 Cor 11.16) .

1.1.2. Paul indicates that natural revelation, what we can discern about God and his righteous decrees from instinct, inborn knowledge, and nature, is consistent with the special revelation which God provides in Scripture. Both come from the one God, whose character and law are unchangeable.

1.1.3. The Puritan, William Prynne (1600–1669), in his 80-page book, *The Unloveliness of Lovelocks – Summary discourse proving the wearing and nourishing of a lock, or love-lock, to be altogether unseemly and unlawful unto Christians* (London, 1628), argues that men are to maintain short hair, unadorned, and women are not to cut their hair short.

1.1.3.1. He bases his arguments on Scripture (primarily 1 Cor 11.14-15), the unnaturalness of doing otherwise, the vile practices of pagans that Christians should not follow, and the opinions of church fathers.

1.1.3.2. In his preface to the Christian reader, he says: “I here present unto thy view and censure, a rough and brief discourse; whose subject, though it be but course and vile, consisting of effeminate, proud, lascivious, exorbitant, and fantastic hairs, or locks, or love-locks (as they style them) which every barber may correct and regulate. Yet the consequences of it may be great, and profitable in these dangerous, unnatural, and unmanly times; wherein as sundry of our mannish, impudent, and inconstant female sex are hermaphroditized, and transformed into men; not only in their immodest, shameless, and audacious carriage (which is now the very manners and courtship of the times) but even in the unnatural tonsure and odious, if not whorish, cutting and crimping of their hair, their natural veils, their feminine glory, and the very badge and character of their subjection both to God and man. So divers of our masculine and more noble race are wholly degenerated and metamorphosed into women, not in manners, gestures, recreations, diet and apparel only, but likewise in their womanish, sinful, and unmanly crimping, curling, frowning, powdering, and

nourishing of their locks and hair excrements, in which they place their corporal excellence and chiefest glory. ... of too too many who would be deemed not only Englishmen, but devout and faithful Christians, that their barber is their chaplain, his shop their chapel, the looking glass their Bible, and their hair and locks their God.”

- 1.2. *Custom.* Paul also appeals to custom, practice, or tradition in other congregations of the Church (1 Cor 11.16).

1.2.1. His statement “we have no such practice” should not be misunderstood.

1.2.1.1. He is not saying that there is no practice (or custom) regulating the length of hair for women and men during worship.

1.2.1.2. The NIV and NASB have a different approach (than the ESV and NKJV/KJV), for translating the Greek in this verse. These translations state that there is no *other* practice in the rest of the Church than that which he has just been presenting. They translate the Greek word (τοιαύτην) as ‘other’ rather than ‘such’.

1.2.1.3. However, since the logical antecedent of his statement is “inclined to be contentious”, he is saying that there is no such practice of being contentious about the matter of hair length in the rest of the Church.

1.2.1.4. Regardless, in either form of translation, Paul tells the Corinthians that the custom in the rest of the Church is that women are to have long hair and men are to have short hair, which is to be particularly evident during worship, and that there is no warrant for arguing against this practice held throughout the Church.

1.2.2. What does his use of ‘we’ indicate? Why does he say this?

1.2.2.1. The ‘we’ is a reference to himself and the other apostles, such as the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. Thus, Paul is appealing to the apostolic practice. He is indicating that there is an established practice among the apostles, which he is now communicating to them.

1.2.2.2. During the early days of the NT Church not all aspects of how churches should conduct themselves—government, worship, observance of the sacraments, discipline—had yet been committed to Scripture. Thus, Paul indicates what is the proper practice endorsed by the apostles and observed in other congregations.

1.2.2.3. Paul’s appeal to apostolic practice does not give warrant to the idea that there are practices that were observed by the early church but not stated in Scripture (e.g., handed down from one generation to the next¹⁸⁵) which are necessary for us to follow. Nor does it give warrant to the idea that later generations of the Church may add to the collected ‘traditions’ of the Church. Our only rule for faith and practice is to be the Scriptures.

1.2.3. He ends his discourse about proper hair length for men and women with a peremptory statement. However, rather than saying “Don’t argue about this!” he is more polite, and says, “Others in the broader Church don’t argue about this practice, so you should not.”

2. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.14-16)?

2.1. *Sex Differences* – Paul has been insisting throughout his arguments (1 Cor 11.3-16) that there are natural differences between the sexes, and this is to be explicitly visible, especially during worship. One of his arguments is that nature itself teaches us that these differences are real and are to be maintained. What are some implications of what we know is naturally right?

2.1.1. Women are to have long hair and men are to have short hair (1 Cor 11.14). The distinction between the sexes is to be obvious. As we noted above (*Covering Obligation*) This does not mean that men are required to have crew cuts and women are to have hair that reaches to their hips. Rather what must be emphasized, and visible in hair length is the *relative*

¹⁸⁵ “12. What is Apostolic Tradition?” *Compendium of The Catechism of The Catholic Church*, www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html

- difference between the sexes. As a possible rule-of-thumb, a man should not be able to put his hair into a ponytail or a ‘man bun’, and women with straight hair should have hair that reaches at least to their chins.
- 2.1.2. Androgyny, transgenderism, transvestitism, cross-dressing, etc. are anathema (Dt 22.5).
- 2.1.3. We need to resist the clothing fashions¹⁸⁶ and hair styles of the world where they contradict the Bible’s teachings and dishonour Christ (1 Tim 2.9-10; 1 Pt 3.3-4). The difference between the sexes as demonstrated by hair length is more than just a matter of indifference, as illustrated by comments made in 2021 by Demi Lovato, a singer who had previously declared herself to be ‘pansexual’. She said that she cut her long hair to free herself from the “gender and sexuality norms” imposed on her by a Christian culture in the US south.¹⁸⁷
- 2.1.4. Maintaining the differences between the sexes is critical in our age, where the feminization and emasculation of men is so prevalent.
- 2.1.5. The differences between the sexes are to be outwardly manifested during worship.
- 2.2. *Standards Defined* – Paul indicates that there are standards of uniform practices for the Church, as defined by the apostles. The Corinthians were not to think proudly that they were special in their wisdom or freedom, but to realize that they were to govern the practices of their assembly according to the principles laid down by Paul and the other apostles, and as practiced in the broader Church.
- 2.2.1. These standards are documented in the Bible. In what areas does the Bible’s standards define practice for the Church?
- 2.2.1.1. *Doctrine* – What we are to believe about God, his person and providences, his law our creature hood and sin, and salvation through Christ.
- 2.2.1.2. *Worship* – How we are to worship God rightly, in Spirit and in truth.
- 2.2.1.3. *Government* – How the Church is to be governed through the rule of graded courts of elders.
- 2.2.1.4. *Sacraments* – What the sacraments are and how they are to be administered.
- 2.2.1.5. *Discipline* – What is expected of Christians as they live sanctified lives, how they are to be encouraged to live and how they are to be admonished when they fall short of God’s holy standard.
- 2.2.2. While we believe that all that we need to know, with respect to the standards for the Church, is provided in Scripture, we realize that not everything is laid out with explicit commands. There are standards that we must follow, which are derived through logical inference. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”¹⁸⁸
- 2.2.3. What are examples where proper practice is ‘expressly set down in Scripture’?
- 2.2.3.1. Observance of the Sabbath principle.
- 2.2.3.2. An elder must have only one wife.

¹⁸⁶ Gina Marinelli, *Gender-Neutral Dressing Isn’t a Trend, It’s the New Normal*, 2017-04-11; www.whowhatwear.com/gender-neutral-fashion

¹⁸⁷ Carlos Garcia, TheBlaze.com, *Demi Lovato cut her hair in order to free herself of ‘gender and sexuality norms’ imposed by Christianity* - TheBlaze.com, 2021-04-15.

¹⁸⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 6.

- 2.2.3.3. Women are not to speak (teach) in the public worship assembly.
- 2.2.3.4. The (exclusive) use of the Psalter during worship.
- 2.2.4. What are examples where it is necessary to use logical inference ('good and necessary consequence') to determine proper practice?
 - 2.2.4.1. The participation of women in the Lord's Supper.
 - 2.2.4.2. The inclusion of infants as objects of baptism.
 - 2.2.4.3. The non-use of musical instruments in worship.
 - 2.2.4.4. The rule of elders in a graded court structure.
- 2.2.5. What are examples where proper practice can be determined by 'the light of nature and Christian prudence'?
 - 2.2.5.1. The hours at which worship services will commence.
 - 2.2.5.2. The layout of the sanctuary in which these services will be held.
 - 2.2.5.3. The form of the vows to be taken when people join a congregation.
- 2.2.6. Why is it important that *all* congregations of the Church observe the apostolic practices? The practices of the Church (doctrine, worship, government, sacraments, and discipline) expressly set down in Scripture or determined by logical inference:
 - 2.2.6.1. Are not to change slowly and organically, but to remain static, in conformity with apostolic practice. What Paul described as apostolic practice throughout the Church (churches/congregations) of his day were not for that moment only but were to continue from church to church and generation and generation to our day.
 - 2.2.6.2. Are not to be varied by ethnic, cultural, nationalistic, or linguistic considerations—the Church practices should appear universally consistent (i.e., they should be catholic) throughout time and geography.
 - 2.2.6.3. Are to be entirely consistent with the Church's constitution—the Bible. The Church does not have a 'living constitution' that evolves through time but a constitution established at its foundation by Christ and his apostles.

If changes are permitted into the practices of the Church in one locale or generation, then by what standard are eccentricities to be precluded when advocated by the next generation or in a different locale? For example, the practices of the Church are not to be driven by our popular culture that embraces hyper individualism, rootlessness, a youth orientation, a quest for novelty, instant gratification, and superficiality.

Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.17-34)

Irreverence (1 Cor 11.17-22, 33-34)

1. What is the setting for the problems Paul addresses in this section?
 - 1.1. He continues his regulations for meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40) when the congregation assembles for worship ("come together as a church"; 17, 18, 20).
 - 1.2. He now focuses specifically on regulations related to the observance of the Lord's Supper (20).
2. How does Paul use the word 'church' in this section?
 - 2.1. In this context he uses 'church' as an assembled group of worshipers (Rom 16.5).
 - 2.2. In other contexts, he uses the word 'church' to refer to a specific body of believers (1 Cor 1.2; 1 Cor 4.17; 1 Cor 6.4; Rom 16.1), and the worldwide collection of believers (1 Cor 5.12; 1 Cor 10.2; 1 Cor 11.22; 1 Cor 12.28; Rom 16.23).
 - 2.3. He does not use the word to speak of a building. There is no instance of the word 'church' in the NT being applied to a building. Thus, it is preferable that when we refer to the place where we assemble for worship that we call it the 'church building' rather than the 'church'. A church is an assembly of worshippers, or more exclusively believers, not a building.
3. What problems does Paul address in this section (1 Cor 11.18, 21)?
 - 3.1. *Divisions* – He dealt with the divisive schisms in the Corinthian congregation earlier (1 Cor 1.10-

- 4.21). Why does he mention them again?
- 3.1.1. It is a sad situation when those assembled as brothers and sisters of Jesus bring their differences and divisions into the worship of their Creator and Lord. The observance of the Lord's Supper is intended to breakdown any sectarian spirit (Jn 17.11, 21, 22) and bring together at one table all believers from all segments and strata of society.
- 3.2. *Discourtesy* – The assembled worshipers were showing a disregard for one another by eating their own food without concern for the others. In particular, they were not sharing their food with the poor worshipers in the congregation (Neh 8.10; Acts 4.32-34).
- 3.3. *Drunkenness* – They were consuming excessive amounts of wine at the common congregational meal and becoming drunk. It appears that they had imported aspects of the bacchanalia, associated with the Greek Dionysian cult into congregational fellowship assemblies. They made observance of the Lord's Supper into a substitute for the debauched pagan rituals they were supposed to have left behind when they became believers in Jesus.
4. What *positive* dimension of the conflict in the congregation does Paul recognize? (19)
- 4.1. He says that the presence of factions is necessary in order that the genuine among them might be recognized. The word he uses, which the ESV translates as 'factions' is 'heresies' (αἵρεσεις).
- 4.2. What does Paul mean by 'heresies'?
- 4.2.1. Paul uses this word (or equivalent) elsewhere, in Galatians 5.20 and Titus 3.10, where the ESV translates it as 'divisions'. Peter uses the word once (2 Pt 2.1), and the ESV transliterates it as 'heresies' in that instance. The word is also used a few times in Acts (Acts 5.17; Acts 15.5; Acts 24.5, 14; Acts 26.5; Acts 28.22) where it refers to the 'sect' or 'party' of the Sadducees, Pharisees, or Nazarenes.
- 4.2.2. Paul probably does not mean heretical doctrine (i.e., a departure from the fundamentals of the Christian faith) when he uses it here, but rather differences of opinion about matters of practice. Paul would likely not indicate that it is necessary ('must be') for heretical doctrine to be present. However, the principle he identifies applies to any form of division of opinion in a congregation.
- 4.3. How does the presence of 'heresies' in a congregation, or larger body of the Church, prove helpful for the Church?
- 4.3.1. It identifies differences, so that those who are genuine might be recognized (1 Cor 11.19).
5. What may be indicated by Paul's statement "his own meal"? (21)
- 5.1. Many teachers and commentators, from the earliest days of the church, have indicated that the NT Church, at least in Corinth, held a fellowship meal associated with their time of worship (on the Lord's Day). The fact that Paul says that some in the congregation went hungry, indicates that the meal was intended to satiate hunger and was not exclusively observed with symbolic small portions as in the Eucharist. Following Ignatius, this meal has been referred to as an 'agape feast'.¹⁸⁹
- 5.2. The Lord's Supper appears to have been observed as part of a fellowship meal on the Lord's Day.
- 5.3. The inclusion of a fellowship meal with the Lord's Supper gives indirect evidence about the size of the Corinthian congregation. A few early Christian congregations may have met in synagogues, if all (most) of the Jews were converted. However, many of the early congregations met in the homes of patrons (1 Cor 16.19; Acts 20.8; Col 4.15; Philemon 2). That they could recline at a meal in a home indicates that the congregation was small; probably with fewer than 50 people.

¹⁸⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans," ch. 8, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Vol. 1), (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), p. 59.

6. What does Paul mean by “it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat”? (20)
 - 6.1. They claimed that they were participating in the Lord’s Supper, but their abuse of it made a mockery of the ordinance.
 - 6.2. They came together for a feast, not to observe the sacrament.
7. How does Paul rebuke the Corinthians for allowing the problems of divisions, discourtesy, and drunkenness to hinder their fellowship?
 - 7.1. He doesn’t come at them with the blast of a cannon; rather he approaches the matters in an indirect manner, by saying that he wouldn’t commend them (1 Cor 11.17, 22).
 - 7.2. He uses rhetorical questions to shame them (1 Cor 11.22). His approach is that of a wise and gentle mentor that asks a young protégée, “Do you think that is a good idea?” or “Can you think of a different way of accomplishing the same end?” rather than coming out with direct rebuke.
 - 7.3. He mentions these problems as his first place of concern (1 Cor 11.18). What is his second area of concern?
 - 7.3.1. He does not explicitly state his second area of concern in the rest of the letter.
 - 7.3.2. It has been suggested that it could be:
 - 7.3.2.1. The Corinthian’s misunderstanding of the collective gifts supplied to the Church (1 Cor 12.1-31).
 - 7.3.2.2. Their lack of love displayed between members of the congregation (1 Cor 13.1-13).
 - 7.3.2.3. Their emphasis on speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14.1-5).
 - 7.3.3. He states that there is more that he will address when he sees them in person (1 Cor 11.34), so it is likely none of these topics, since he addresses them in the letter.
8. What solutions does Paul imply would help address the problem of discourtesy (1 Cor 11.22, 33-34)?
 - 8.1. If you are not willing to share what you have brought with others, especially those needier than yourselves, then:
 - 8.1.1. Eat and drink before you come to the assembly so that you will not display a rapacious appetite.
 - 8.1.2. Show a measure of courtesy and concern and wait until everyone is assembled for the fellowship meal and eat together.
 - 8.1.3. Do nothing that would humiliate those who have little of this world’s possessions.
 - 8.2. Why does Paul give this guidance?
 - 8.2.1. Not to condemn congregational fellowship meals.
 - 8.2.2. To enforce a measure of decorum and decency among those who are participating.
 - 8.2.3. To erase the distinctions between rich and poor in the Church of Christ (James 2.1-13).
 - 8.2.4. To encourage a measure of self discipline so that their behaviour will not come under censure and judgement by the congregation, the elders, and God himself.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.17-22, 33-34)?
 - 9.1. *Defilement* – Holy ordinances such as praise-worship, prayer, and the sacraments may become defiled by the participants’ perversions: divisions, discourtesy, and drunkenness. Our worship and observance of the sacraments must be done in the right way, for the right reasons, and with the right attitude. What are some ways that we can defile worship?
 - 9.1.1. Harboring hate against a fellow believer.
 - 9.1.2. Speaking slanderously against a fellow believer.
 - 9.1.3. Questioning God’s providential dealings with us.
 - 9.1.4. Doubting God’s love for his children.
 - 9.1.5. Thinking about the things of the world (business, entertainment, sports, family) while our focus should be on the holy God and praise of his person and works.
 - 9.1.6. Offering false coals (i.e., false forms of worship) to God.
 - 9.2. *Dinners* – Paul’s implicit endorsement of the congregation’s participation in a fellowship meal

on the Lord's Day (1 Cor 11.33), provides a warrant for the continuing practice. What are some of the blessings which may accrue from the practice of congregational fellowship meals?

9.2.1.*Support*. Members of the congregation can share more freely, in face-to-face contact, their joys, praises, needs, and concerns with one another than in a more formal setting of a worship service or during a few minutes in the foyer before leaving the place of assembly or through e-mail, texting, or even phone calls. Thus, they can offer support to one another.

9.2.2.*Subdivision*. Visitors to the congregation may be easily entertained with hospitality by dividing the load of preparation, without placing a burden on one or two families.

9.2.3.*Sharing*. The congregation is given an opportunity of sharing with those in need. Sitting, eating, and conversing with needy persons is better than just serving them in a 'soup kitchen' setting.

9.2.4.*Sabbath*. Members of the congregation can be discouraged from frequenting commercial establishments on the Lord's Day.

9.3. *Distinctives* – Paul indicates that there is some value associated with factions (19) because they allow the genuine to be recognized. In 'wide-tent' congregations or denominations, where any opinion or doctrine is accepted, there cannot be an enduring doctrinal or leadership foundation, and a congregation (or denomination) can easily drift from the truth. When there are no obvious differences of opinion, then no one can be certain about what is true and what is not. Where differences of opinion are evident, it becomes easier to identify the nature of the differences and to make arguments for either side of the debate. Where clarity and rigour of thought is applied, it becomes possible to identify truth (1 Jn 2:19). This implies that establishing distinctives in a congregation or denomination has value for clarifying our beliefs about true doctrine and practice. What does this logically imply?

9.3.1. The concept of having creeds, confessions, and constitutions is legitimate. The 'no creed but Christ' camp mistakenly believes that creeds divide. To the contrary, creeds and confessions unite like-minded believers. Ironically, congregations in the 'no creed but Christ' camp are often plagued by problems of dogmatism, subtle and overt ostracism, and decline into irrelevance.

9.3.2. Where distinctives have been established, confessional, covenant, membership in a congregation is a legitimate practice. Members cannot work together unless they have a degree of principled agreement (Amos 3.3).

9.4. *Differences* – However, a congregation is (should be) a collection of believers from every dimension of society—rich and poor, male and female, slave and free, and intellectual and uneducated. As this passage indicates, differences within a congregation are to be accepted, and even encouraged. The presence of 'factions', *per se*, is not the issue. The issue is how we handle the differences, as Paul explicitly points out in chapters 12 and 13. Our approach must be balanced. We should have agreement and unity on the fundamentals but permit latitude over the less important matters. As has been observed, "in necessary things unity; in uncertain things freedom; in everything compassion".¹⁹⁰ The definition of 'necessary things' must be approached with caution and with due consideration of what is the collective wisdom of the Church fathers in the early ecumenical councils and Reformation synods, and documented in the historic creedal statements and confessions.

Institution (1 Cor 11.23-26)

1. How did Paul obtain his information about how the Lord's Supper is to be observed?

1.1. By direct revelation from the Lord—i.e., Jesus. He indicates that his conversion was facilitated through a direct communication from Jesus (Acts 9.5-6; Acts 22.7-8) and that he learned the message of the Gospel which he preached through direct revelation (Gal 1.11-12). Likewise, he did not receive the details about the institution of the Lord's Supper from one of the disciples

¹⁹⁰ [In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas - Wikipedia](#)

- who had attended the inaugural supper in the spring of 33 AD, but directly from Jesus.
- 1.2. Many commentators accept a late date for the Gospels. Thus, they claim that if Paul wrote this letter in late 53 AD or early 54 AD, it predates the composition and distribution of the Gospels and this account is the oldest written record of the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. However, the Gospels of Mark and Matthew can likely be dated around 42-45 AD¹⁹¹ and no later than 50 AD. Thus, the account here is an independent confirmation of Mark and Matthew's accounts—both this letter and the two synoptic Gospel accounts are independent, consistent confirmation of the origin of the Lord's Supper.
 - 1.3. What does Paul's declaration tell us about his understanding of his role as an Apostle?
 - 1.3.1. Paul knew that he had received direct revelation from God (Jesus) and that he was serving God in the office of a prophet and as an author of portions of the NT additions to Scripture.
 - 1.4. What does Paul's declaration tell us about the institution of the Lord's Supper?
 - 1.4.1. It has divine and apostolic authority. We are provided with an explicit and direct warrant for the observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Baptism was given to the Church also by direct warrant (Mt 28.19). There are only two sacraments for the NT Church. Thus, 'sacraments', such as confirmation, marriage, and holy orders, added by Roman Catholic Church have no divine or apostolic warrant.
 2. When was the Lord's Supper instituted?
 - 2.1. On the night, Jesus was betrayed—the Thursday evening before his Friday crucifixion.
 - 2.2. It was inaugurated as part of the evening meal.
 3. How frequently should we observe the Lord's Supper?
 - 3.1. Paul says, 'as often'. He does not provide an explicit frequency.
 - 3.2. The observance of the Lord's Supper was associated with the fellowship meal in Corinth, which appears to have been a weekly occurrence.
 - 3.2.1. However, there is no explicit statement given in the NT regarding its required frequency.
 - 3.2.2. Arguments put forth in favour of a particular frequency (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually) are not convincing.
 - 3.2.3. Although Calvin believed that the Lord's Supper should have been observed at least weekly,¹⁹² he did not make this into a matter of principle.
 - 3.2.4. The frequency for the observance of the Lord's Supper should be a matter for a local session of elders to establish based on the spiritual state and needs of their congregation.¹⁹³
 4. Why are Christians to observe the Lord's Supper?
 - 4.1. To remind us of Jesus' betrayal and death on behalf of his people—it is a reminder of the historical reality of his sacrifice.
 - 4.2. As a symbol of our participation in the new covenant—a bond inaugurated by a blood sacrifice. Jesus said that the cup was representative of his shed blood (1 Cor 11.25; Lk 22.20).
 - 4.3. As a witness to our covenantal standing in Christ. The word 'sacrament' was introduced into Christian and Church terminology by Tertullian in his book *On Baptism* (from the first or second decade of the 3rd century). The word is derived from the oath (a *sacrare*) that soldiers took binding them to their commanders. Thus, participation in the Lord's Supper declares us to belong to the Lord Jesus.
 - 4.4. To remind us of Jesus' continuing spiritual presence in the world and in our lives—'this is my

¹⁹¹ John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke – A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem*, (Madison, WI, IVP, 1992), p. 223

¹⁹² Calvin, J. (2011). *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2. (J. T. McNeill, Ed., F. L. Battles, Trans.) (Vol. 1, p. 1424). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

¹⁹³ "Of the Celebration of the Communion, or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

- body’.
- 4.5. To encourage us to pursue covenantal obedience, which includes observance of Christ’s commandments (summarized in the Ten Commandments) and a striving for purity and holiness in our lives.
 - 4.6. To provide spiritual food to sustain us—it is a spiritual meal, represented by physical food and drink—to reinforce our faith in Jesus.
 - 4.7. As an act of giving thanks to God for his goodness to us (material blessings and everlasting redemption)—the Greek word translated ‘given thanks’ (εὐχαριστήσας), is the source of our term ‘eucharist’.
 - 4.8. As an act of worship, praising and blessing God—Matthew (Mt 26.26) uses the word ‘blessing’ (εὐλογήσας) rather than ‘giving thanks’.
 - 4.9. To proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes—it serves as a witness to the unsaved world.
 - 4.10. To indicate that we are in a new relationship—no longer slaves of Satan, but brothers and sisters of the King, who invites us to dine at his table.
 - 4.11. To unite his people with one another—it is a communal (‘communion’) meal shared by believers with the spiritually present Lord Jesus. Private communion is an oxymoron. And participation in the Lord’s Supper with other believers is one of the reasons why the Church is to assemble together and not to be a mere virtual entity with only on-line participation.
 - 4.12. As a declaration that Jesus will return—”until he comes”.
5. Why is the covenant called ‘new’?
 - 5.1. It is new because it was inaugurated later than, after all, previous covenant administrations.
 - 5.2. It is new because of its character—it is complete with a final sacrifice of the perfect God-man (Heb 7.27; Heb 9.12, 26) rather than the sacrifice of a myriad of bulls and goats year after year (Heb 10.1).
 - 5.3. It is new because it has a new form—its observance includes only bloodless elements (bread and wine), symbolizing the completion of the sacrificial system.
 - 5.4. While it is new in time, character, and form, it is not new in substance. It is a restatement of the covenant between God and man—I will be your God, and you will be my people; with promises and obligations—which was inaugurated in the garden of Eden with the first Adam; repeated with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David; and finalized with the Last Adam, Jesus Christ.
 6. How is ‘this is my body’ misinterpreted by Roman Catholics and Lutherans?
 - 6.1. Roman Catholics hold that the words ‘this is my body’ means that the elements of the sacrament are physically transformed (transubstantiation¹⁹⁴) into the physical body and blood of Jesus.
 - 6.2. Lutherans believe that the words mean that Jesus’ body is *physically* present (consubstantiation¹⁹⁵) with the elements.
 - 6.3. The Reformed position, following Calvin and many later reformers, is that Christ is *spiritually* present with the elements. Some Protestant denominations, following Zwingli,¹⁹⁶ hold that the elements are purely symbolic.¹⁹⁷
 - 6.4. Why cannot Jesus be *physically* present in the elements of the Lord’s Supper?
 - 6.4.1. His resurrected physical body is finite (not in more than one place at one time), even though it transformed and of a modified spiritual form.
 - 6.4.2. Jesus offered his body once for all time. The idea that his body continues to be sacrificed (as in the Roman Catholic understanding) is blasphemous.
 - 6.4.3. The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice; it is covenant memorial meal.

¹⁹⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transubstantiation

¹⁹⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consubstantiation

¹⁹⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marburg_Colloquy

¹⁹⁷ www.conservapedia.com/Real_presence

- 6.4.4. The ‘is’ (1 Cor 11.24; Mt 26.26) is used metaphorically. As Calvin says, “Let us regard it then as beyond all controversy that Christ is here speaking of the bread. Now the question is—”In what sense?” That we may elicit the true meaning, we must hold that the expression is figurative; for, assuredly, to deny this is exceedingly dishonest. Why then is the term *body* applied to the bread? All, I think, will allow that it is for the same reason that John calls the Holy Spirit a *dove*. (John 1:32.) Thus far we are agreed. Now the reason why the Spirit was so called was this—that he had appeared in the form of a dove. Hence the name of the Spirit is transferred to the visible sign. Why should we not maintain that there is here a similar instance of metonymy, and that the term *body* is applied to the bread, as being the sign and symbol of it?”¹⁹⁸
- 6.4.5. Jesus is physically absent from the world (Acts 1.11), as Paul tells us with the words “until he comes” (26)—although he is spiritually present at all times (Mt 28.20).
- 6.4.6. Jesus also tells his disciples to drink his ‘blood’ (Mt 26.27-28). No Jew would have drunk actual blood (Gen 9.4; Lev 17.10-14), and no Christian is to drink actual blood (Acts 15.20). Thus, as is the blood so is the bread—a symbol of the spiritual presence of Jesus with those communing at his table.
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.23-26)?
- 7.1. *Revealed Reality* – Paul indicates that he received direct revelation from the Lord (Jesus) about the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The concept of direct revelation from God is viewed scornfully by most unbelievers, and by many within the liberal wing of the Church as a fantasy. The idea that a person ‘hears a voice from God’ is viewed as fringe mysticism. However, the concept of direct revelation is not foolish or far-fetched. It is the foundation of truth.
- 7.1.1. According to natural man, how is knowledge acquired?
- 7.1.1.1. According to philosophers, knowledge is acquired, in two ways:
- 7.1.1.1.1. *a priori*—we acquire it independent of experience—either we are born knowing it or we acquire it by reason or intuition.
- 7.1.1.1.2. *a posteriori*—empirically through our senses; for example we read something, hear about something, etc.
- 7.1.1.2. Scientists, who reject God’s creative work, believe that we have a form of *a priori* knowledge built into our genotype that has developed through millennia of evolution; we have a predisposition (instinct) to learn—i.e., we know how to learn. However, it is impossible to create a coherent model of knowledge acquisition based merely on materialistic and evolutionary presuppositions.
- 7.1.1.3. The reality is that we acquire knowledge only because we received direct revelation from God as we were created. As we noted previously, when we considered, 1 Cor 11.14-16, if we had not received this direct knowledge we could not:
- 7.1.1.3.1. Do many basic (instinctual) things.
- 7.1.1.3.2. Know that anything existed other than our minds.
- 7.1.1.3.3. Experience anything received by our senses.
- 7.1.1.3.4. Learn anything.
- 7.1.1.3.5. Communicate with one another.
- 7.1.1.4. Paul also indicates that our knowledge of the existence of God and of his righteous requirements has been directly revealed to all men (Rom 1.19-20).
- 7.1.1.5. In addition, the knowledge of God’s redemptive plan and means for saving sinners has been revealed directly to men (through prophets and apostles) and recorded in the Bible (Acts 1.16; Acts 3.18; 2 Tim 3.16; Heb 1.1; 2 Pt 1.21).
- 7.1.1.6. Thus, the concept of direct revelation from God is not foolish or far-fetched; it is the

¹⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xviii.iii.html

- foundation of epistemological and spiritual reality.
- 7.1.2. Does Paul's statement about receiving direct revelation from the Lord indicate that the Church (popes, bishops, pastors, councils, saints, mystics, etc.) continues to receive direct revelation, which is comparable to the instructions Paul relays in these verses?
- 7.1.2.1. Prophetic and apostolic revelation, which provides information comparable to the contents of the Bible, has ceased. We will not address the arguments supporting this position at this time. We will address the topic later, when we consider 1 Cor 12.10.
- 7.1.2.2. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. ..." ¹⁹⁹
- 7.2. *Required Ritual* – Paul quotes Jesus, who says, "Do this ...". What does this imperative indicate?
- 7.2.1. That the Church, as assembled congregations, is to observe the Lord's Supper as a permanent institution ("until he comes"). The Reformers believed that a proper observance of the Lord's Supper was one of the marks of the true Church (of a true congregation), along with the administration of baptism, preaching sound doctrine, the administration of careful and loving discipline, and the practice of true worship. Thus, an organization such as the Salvation Army, despite its good work, is not a Church because it has abandoned the sacraments. ²⁰⁰
- 7.2.2. That believers in Jesus Christ are to participate in the Lord's Supper. Paul will give guidance for controlling participation (1 Cor 11.27-28). However, any believer who understands the purpose of the Lord's Supper, has been baptized, and is not under Church discipline, is required to attend the Lord's Supper—it is not an optional practice but a required ritual.
- 7.2.3. That believers in Jesus Christ are to partake of the bread and the cup. The Roman Catholic position of withholding the wine from laypersons is an abomination. Thus, the Mass cannot be considered a legitimate form of the Lord's Supper because it does not follow the form Jesus instituted and it makes a mockery (through transubstantiation) of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus.
- 7.2.4. That Jesus has reasons for requiring the Church to participate in the Lord's Supper. What might those reasons include?
- 7.2.4.1. To increase our faith and dependence on Jesus, by reminding us regularly of his vicarious work on the cross.
- 7.2.4.2. To remind us that we are united in faith as his brothers and sisters (Jn 17.11, 21, 22) and that we should strive for cooperation, unity, and peace within the body of Christ, the Church.
- 7.2.4.3. To provide a participatory means of worshiping our God, Creator, Lord, and Saviour. The Lord's Supper includes informing our minds of the reality of Christ's death on our behalf. However, if it were purely cognitive, then we could skip the actions of eating bread and drinking wine and just read the conclusions of the Gospels. As a participatory ordinance it goes beyond the cognitive to draw us into union with Christ and his Church. As we noted previously, participation in the Lord's Supper with other believers is one of the reasons why the Church is to assemble together and not to be a mere virtual entity with only on-line participation.
- 7.2.4.4. To remind us that we are invited to the everlasting supper of the Lamb (Rev 19.9).

Instructions (1 Cor 11.27-34)

¹⁹⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 6.

²⁰⁰ web.salvationarmy.org/ind%5Cwww_ind.nsf/vw-sublinks/80256E520050A2E280256C140045D031?openDocument

1. What is the unworthy manner by which someone might participate in the Lord's Supper?
 - 1.1. By 'unworthy manner' Paul does not mean that only holy people can partake of the Lord's Supper. He would not suggest that anyone who comes to the Lord's Supper is worthy (Rom 3.23-24; 1 Tim 1.15). Therefore, it may be better to translate the word (*ἀναξίως*) as 'improper manner'.
 - 1.2. The previous context (*Irreverence*; 1 Cor 11.17-22) identifies what it means to partake in an improper manner. Someone who persists in causing divisions in a congregation, is discourteous and unwilling to share food at a fellowship meal or comes to the assembly/Lord's Supper while drunk is partaking of the Lord's Table in an improper manner.
 - 1.3. In this section (29) Paul also indicates that someone who does not discern the (Lord's) body participates in an improper manner. A lack of discernment would be demonstrated by an inability to identify what Jesus accomplished with his crucifixion and that the elements of the Lord's Supper represent his crucified body and shed blood.
2. What is the consequence of participating in any improper manner?
 - 2.1. Guilt (1 Cor 11.27). Not necessarily a *feeling* of guilt but actual culpable guilt. People may not feel guilty, even when they are.
 - 2.2. Judgement (1 Cor 11.29, 31).
 - 2.2.1. What form of judgement could this be?
 - 2.2.1.1. He indicates (1 Cor 11.30) that sickness and even death had afflicted some in the Corinthian congregation because of their partaking of the Lord's Supper in an improper manner.
 - 2.2.2. Does this mean that people today who participate in the Lord's Supper in an improper manner are going to become sick and die?
 - 2.2.2.1. There are many instances where sinful behaviour results in sickness and death (Jn 5.24)—for example, excessive alcohol consumption can lead to liver cirrhosis, sexual promiscuity can result in a syphilis infection or AIDS, and often drug addicts die of overdoses. However, illness, afflictions, and handicaps are often not the direct result of a person's sin (Lk 13.2-5; Jn 9.2-3).
 - 2.2.2.2. At the introduction of a new covenant administration, God punished sinners to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and covenant unfaithfulness (Gen 3.16-19; Lev 10.1-2; Acts 5.1-11), and as a warning about the everlasting consequences of rebellion against God. However, God does not punish every person immediately for every sin. If he did, we would already all be dead. In patience, he withholds judgement.
 - 2.2.3. What does this judgement indicate?
 - 2.2.3.1. That participation in the Lord's Supper is a matter that should be taken seriously.
 - 2.2.3.2. That an individual's sin affects the entire community.
3. What means does Paul prescribe for ensuring that we do not participate in an improper manner?
 - 3.1. A person should *examine himself* (1 Cor 11.28). A person should examine his motives for participating in the Lord's Supper—e.g., not to exhibit pride in being qualified to participate, but with thankfulness that, as a sinner, he is invited to the Lord's table.
 - 3.2. A person should properly *discern the Lord's body* (1 Cor 11.29). A person who properly discerns the Lord's body understands:
 - 3.2.1. The purpose of the sacrament—including, as a memorial of Christ's sacrifice of his body and as a reminder of our prospect for everlasting life.
 - 3.2.2. The nature of the elements—as symbols of Christ's sacrificial work and his spiritual presence with the communicants (Mt 26.26; 1 Cor 11.24).
 - 3.2.3. The relationship of believers as the body of Christ (Eph 5.23), which some in the Corinthian congregation were abusing through their improper observance of the Lord's Supper.

- Paul uses the term ‘body’ ambiguously and probably did so deliberately to allow for the multiple meanings to be intermingled.
- 3.3. A person should *judge himself* (1 Cor 11.31). Paul uses judging oneself as a summary and synonym for self examination and proper discernment of the Lord’s body. What does it not mean?
- 3.3.1. Thinking that we need to have obtained a high level of holiness before we can participate. In this life, holiness is unattainable. We are all sinners, and it is only because of God’s grace that we don’t violently pursue overt and grievous sins.
- 3.3.2. Doubting that we are saved. One of the purposes of the Lord’s Supper is as a strengthening ordinance for our weak faith. Therefore, all professing Christians, who are not living in overt rebellion, are invited to the Lord’s Supper.
4. What positive aspect is associated with temporal judgement for partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an improper manner?
- 4.1. If we become weak or sick from an improper partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we are chastened by the Lord and thus warned to desist from continuing our improper participation.
- 4.2. His chastisement keeps us from pursuing a course of increasing rebellion which would demonstrate that we have not truly been saved.
- 4.3. It is better to suffer under the chastising rod of God (Ps 94.12; Heb 12.5-12)—who loves his children—than to face the sword of God—who hates his enemies.
- 4.4. However, if we are in the habit of self examination and sober reflection on the purpose of the Lord’s Supper, we will not be subject to God’s chastisement.
5. What does Paul say that believers should do once they have examined themselves?
- 5.1. Eat and drink (28). After they have examined themselves, they should partake of the Lord’s Supper.
- 5.2. Every believer should attend the Lord’s Supper, unless he is living in open rebellion or is under censure by the elders.
6. What are the ‘other things’ about which Paul says he will give directions when he next visited the Corinthians?
- 6.1. Presumably, they related to the observance of the Lord’s Supper. However, he did not even hint about what the issues might be or about what his directions might be.
- 6.2. Whatever the issues were, they were not serious enough to warrant his consideration of them in this letter. Thus, the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of the Bible, did not deem it necessary to provide us with additional directions for the observance of the Lord’s Supper.
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 11.27-34)?
- 7.1. *Participants* – Paul says ‘whoever’ (1 Cor 11.27) participates, without defining who that may be or should be. There continues to be debates about who can, legitimately, participate in the Lord’s Supper. What are some of the questions that have been raised about who are the proper participants in the Lord’s Supper?
- Are the elements for the laity or the clergy?
 - Is the Lord’s Supper a converting ordinance open to seekers as well as believers, or is it intended only for professing believers?
 - Is the Lord’s Supper to be open to all professing believers attending any congregation, regardless of their denominational affiliation?
 - May children partake of the Lord’s Supper?
 - At what age should children be permitted to take the Lord’s Supper?
 - What expressed beliefs are necessary for participation in the Lord’s Supper (e.g., does one

have to agree 100% with the denomination's/congregation's constitution or statement of faith)?

These questions are instances of a more general question, “Who may participate in the Lord’s Supper?”

7.1.1. *People* – Throughout the Reformed and Evangelical churches today, it is generally accepted that males and females may participate in the Lord’s Supper. What Biblical evidence supports this view?

7.1.1.1. There is no explicit statement in the NT which indicates that women are permitted to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

7.1.1.2. We apply the principle stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and *necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture ...”²⁰¹

7.1.1.3. For example, we infer or assume that the fellowship of believers referred to in Acts 2.42-47 included women, even though the presence of women is not mentioned, and that ‘breaking of bread’ refers to the Lord’s Supper. We also infer or assume that women participated in eating the food of the Passover, for which there is no explicit statement, and that we can extrapolate from that practice since the Lord’s Supper is the NT equivalent of the Passover.

7.1.1.4. I am not aware of any Baptists who refuse women access to the Lord’s Supper because there is no explicit warrant in the NT for including them. Therefore, Baptists are inconsistent in refusing to baptize infants, when they base their argument on the claim that there is no explicit NT statement that infants were included in household baptisms, even though the inferential evidence for infant baptism is stronger than the inferential evidence for the participation of women in the Lord’s Supper.

7.1.2. *Professors* – Reformed churches historically limited participating in the Lord’s Supper to professing believers, whose lives were consistent with their profession of faith.²⁰² However, there are denominations and congregations which have permitted anyone in attendance at a service, including those who have not made a credible profession of faith, to participate in the Lord’s Supper.

7.1.2.1. In the mid 18th century, the Puritan congregations in New England were confronted with this issue. In a letter to John Erskine in Scotland (May 20, 1749), Jonathan Edwards mentioned the controversy: “A very great difficulty has arisen between my people, relating to qualifications for communion at the Lord’s table. My honoured grandfather Stoddard, my predecessor in the ministry over this church, strenuously maintained the Lord’s Supper to be a converting ordinance, and urged all to come who were not of scandalous life, though they knew themselves to be unconverted. I formerly conformed to his practice but I have had difficulties with respect to it, which have been long increasing, till I dared no longer proceed in the former way, which has occasioned great uneasiness among my people, and has filled all the country with noise.”²⁰³ The controversy in his congregation escalated and Edwards asked for time to respond. In response, he wrote “An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, concerning the Qualifications requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christians Church.” This addressed the question of, “Whether any persons ought to be admitted to full communion in the Christian

²⁰¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 6.

²⁰² “Of the Celebration of the Communion, or Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,” *Westminster Standards: The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

²⁰³ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Vol 1), (Edinburgh; Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. cv.

church, but such as, in the eye of reasonable Judgement, are truly Christians?”²⁰⁴ Eventually Edwards was asked to leave his congregation in Northampton, MA because of disagreement with his expressed belief.

- 7.1.2.2. We won't review Edwards' arguments. However, Paul's directions in this chapter indicate that only those who have *examined themselves* (28), *discern the Lord's body* (29), and have *judged themselves* (31), and live consistent with their profession (1 Cor 11.17-22), should participate.
- 7.1.3. *Pledged* – Reformed churches have generally required potential participants in the Lord's Supper to have been baptized, to have made a credible profession of faith, and to be members in good standing in a congregation.²⁰⁵ Within Reformed churches, there is a range of what denominations and congregations practice; some:
 - 7.1.3.1. Permit those to participate who profess Jesus as their saviour in any Christian (most often, Protestant) congregation or denomination—we could refer to this as 'open communion'²⁰⁶.
 - 7.1.3.2. Permit those to participate who are members (in good standing) in a Protestant congregation or denomination, and whose profession of faith and way of life is known to the elders in the congregation—we could refer to this as 'restricted communion'. This is the position, the elders in our congregation hold.
 - 7.1.3.3. Permit those to participate who are members (in good standing) in their congregation or denomination—we could refer to this as 'closed communion'. It can be argued that this position is too restrictive, since the table belongs to the Lord not to a congregation, and a congregation should not exclude true Christians from the Lord's Supper.

Regardless of a congregation's or denomination's position along the participation continuum, Reformed churches have generally instituted elder oversight for admission and exclusion of participants to the Lord's Supper. For example, the Westminster Standards say that, "The ignorant and the scandalous are not fit to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."²⁰⁷ Elders cannot exclude or expel (1 Cor 5.13) those whom they cannot admit.

- 7.1.4. *Percipient Partakers* – There are some in the neo-reformed 'camp' who believe that young children, of believing parents, should participate in the Lord's Supper.²⁰⁸ However, Paul indicates that a participant should have *examined himself* (28), *discerned the Lord's body* (29), and *judged himself* (31). This implies that a degree of knowledge, understanding (i.e., not being ignorant), and discernment are required of the participants. Infants who have been weaned and are able to chew bread are not necessarily at a level of maturity to meet these qualifications.
 - 7.1.4.1. Some may argue that weaned children may participate because they are part of a covenant family, and it appears that children in the OT economy participated in the Passover meal.
 - 7.1.4.2. It may appear that there is an inconsistency in the traditional Reformed (Presbyterian) position, since we include infants in baptism but not as participants in the Lord's Supper. However, Paul's instruction seems to provide apostolic direction with regard to the participants, who must be percipient about what they are doing.
 - 7.1.4.3. Reformed churches (denominations) generally do not give explicit direction about the age of when a child is mature enough to participate in the Lord's Supper and

²⁰⁴ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Vol 1), (Edinburgh; Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. cxvi.

²⁰⁵ For a consideration of church members, see: "I – Is Requiring Church Membership Biblical?" in: James R. Hughes, *Nehemiah the Church Builder: Instructor's Guide*, 2006; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

²⁰⁶ [Definition of Open Communion by Merriam-Webster](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/open%20communion)

²⁰⁷ "Of the Celebration of the Communion, or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*. See also, George Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, Book 3 (chapters 12-18).

²⁰⁸ Douglas Wilson, "Bread and Wine for Children", *Credenda Agenda*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2005; www.credenda.org/archive/issues/18-1.php

leave this matter to the elders of local congregations. For example, there may be children younger than seven who are percipient and demonstrate a credible profession of faith, whereas other children who have passed the age of thirteen may not demonstrate that they understand the purpose and nature of participation in the Lord's Supper.

7.2. *Prescriptions* – Paul's passing remark, in verse 34, about 'other things' for which he will give direction, indicates that:

7.2.1. *Complete Scriptures* – The Bible tells us all that we *need* to know. The Holy Spirit has included all that we need to know in the Bible, and nothing that is superfluous and unnecessary (2 Tim 3.16-17). The Bible includes *everything* that we *need* to know about:

7.2.1.1. God himself (theology, reason, and logic).

7.2.1.2. How we came into existence (metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology), our purpose in life (teleology), and our nature (anthropology, psychology, and epistemology).

7.2.1.3. The origin and nature of sin (hamartiology), Christ's redemptive work (Christology), and how we may be saved (soteriology).

7.2.1.4. God's righteous requirements (ethics and esthetics) and how we are to live in relationship with other people in a civil society (economics, political science).

7.2.1.5. Our destinies (eschatology).

As the *Shorter Catechism* states, the Scriptures "principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."²⁰⁹ Thus, every permanent requirement for mankind (for family, church, and state) is recorded in the Bible.

7.2.2. *Circumstantial Situations* – However, there are many local circumstances (for family, church, and state) which may require attention from God's duly appointed governors (husbands, parents, elders, magistrates). The Scriptures are not exhaustive. They provide principles (e.g., the Ten Commandments) and examples (e.g., the case laws in Leviticus) for how to apply the principles. However, the fact that the Holy Spirit and Paul did not deem it necessary to include exhaustive directions for all areas of life indicates that we should:

7.2.2.1. Ensure that all directions (laws, rules, policies, etc.) for circumstantial situations are consistent with God's permanent instructions.

7.2.2.2. Never consider directions in circumstantial situations to be more important than the permanent instructions given in God's word. For example, confessions of faith in the church must be considered as truly *subordinate* standards. And, every human law in church and state must be a derivative application of God's law.

7.2.2.3. Apply common sense and rational consideration in the enactment of every form of human direction.

7.2.2.4. Not over-legislate—i.e., attempt to give direction to cover every conceivable situation.

What are some areas, related to the observance of the Lord's Supper to which we could possibly apply this principle?

- The frequency of the observance of the Lord's Supper.
- Whether it should be observed at the morning or evening service.
"THE communion, or supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated; but how often, may be considered and determined by the ministers, and other church-governors of each congregation, as they shall find most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge. And, when it shall be administered, we judge it convenient to be done after the morning sermon."²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism's* answer to Question 3 ("What do the Scriptures principally teach?"):

²¹⁰ "Of the Celebration of the Communion, or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," Westminster Standards: *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*. See also, George Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, Book 3 (chapters 12-18).

- Whether it would be proper to observe the Lord's Supper at a mid-week service of the congregation or if it should be observed only on the Lord's Day.
- Whether leavened or unleavened bread may be served?
- Whether grape juice (from the "fruit of the vine"; Mt 26.29; Mk 14.25; Lk 22.18) along with wine may be served?

In all these matters, Christian forbearance and love must be applied: "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Col 3.14)

Living Spirit (1 Cor 12.1-31)

One Holy Supply (1 Cor 12.1-11)

Validation Governance (1 Cor 12:1-3)

1. What new topic does Paul now introduce?
 - 1.1. He begins to speak about "spiritual gifts".
 - 1.2. What are these gifts?
 - 1.2.1. They are gifts that relate to the operation of the Church.
 - 1.2.2. They may be natural gifts such as an ability to teach or to lead.
 - 1.2.3. They may also be, but are not necessarily, supernatural gifts.
 - 1.2.4. The gifts include skills or aptitudes (e.g., to preach or to speak a foreign language), attitudes (e.g., hope and love), and offices (e.g., serving as teachers or ruling elders).
 - 1.3. His instruction about spiritual gifts begins here and runs through 1 Corinthians 14.25—thus it includes the well-known chapter on love (1 Cor 13.1-13).
2. Why does Paul introduce the topic of spiritual gifts?
 - 2.1. The congregation clearly needed an attitude adjustment regarding their understanding of the provision and use of the gifts.
 - 2.1.1. They appear to have believed that the attainment of certain gifts (in particular the supernatural ability to speak in a previously unlearned foreign language) indicated a heightened spirituality and blessing from God.
 - 2.1.2. They were desiring and utilizing the gifts for selfish aggrandizement rather than for the benefit of the congregation and the advancement of the Gospel.
 - 2.2. He did not want the congregation to be uniformed about the proper understanding Christians should have about the allocation of spiritual gifts and about the proper attitude they should have toward the gifts. Thus, he allocated a significant portion of his letter to dealing with the subject.
3. How does he describe the former situation or state of the Corinthians?
 - 3.1. As pagans—i.e., those who were not Jews or Christians.
 - 3.1.1. The word he uses (ἔθνη; from which we derive the word 'ethnic') is also translated as 'gentiles' (Eph 4.17).
 - 3.1.2. It has a similar negative connotation as we associate with the term 'pagan', since it is often associated in Paul's writings with those who believe in false gods and worship idols.
 - 3.2. As being "led astray to mute idols". What typifies pagans?
 - 3.2.1. They are deceived by falsehood—they are led astray into foolish thinking. He appears to emphasize the element of deception that has affected the minds of pagans by saying "you were led astray ... however you were led". It seems that with his use of 'however' what he is saying is that there are many paths to idolatry. What are some ways that men can be led into idolatry?
 - 3.2.1.1. Believing that objects or forces in the material realm can influence their destinies.
 - 3.2.1.2. Superstitious and fatalistic beliefs
 - 3.2.1.3. Thinking proudly that they know better than God does about what men should believe and how they should act.

- In contrast, there is only *one* path to the true God—conversion by the Holy Spirit, faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance of sin.
- 3.2.2. They worship mute (dumb) idols. Their gods cannot communicate or indicate their existence, because they are lifeless (1 Ki 18.26-29; Ps 115.5; Ps 135.16; Hab 2.18-19).
 - 3.2.3. They worship useless gods—objects of stone or metal, celestial objects, or the inventions of their own minds (Is 41.21-29; Is 44.9-20; Acts 19.26) have no powers to influence events.
 - 3.3. They have been informed incorrectly. Paul contrasts being informed correctly—not being uniformed (v. 1)—with being misinformed by being led away.
4. What would someone speaking in the Holy Spirit never say?
- 4.1. “Jesus is accursed!” No true believer in Jesus Christ should (or could) say these words with the intention of cursing Jesus. The Holy Spirit would prevent a truly converted person from uttering such a curse. Thus, as Paul indicates, if a person does intentionally, with malice, utter these words he cannot be speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - 4.2. Understanding what Paul means by this statement has been an interpretive challenge. The fundamental question is why would anyone who claimed to be Christian, speaking on behalf of God, make such a statement? One author has noted that a dozen possible distinct explanations have been proposed.²¹¹ Some suggestions for what Paul is referring to include:
 - 4.2.1. Paul was warning the Corinthians not to curse Jesus in the face of persecution, for example:
 - 4.2.1.1. Apparently, Jews in Corinth used this curse as a method for determining who could remain as a member of the synagogue.
 - 4.2.1.2. Apparently, Roman citizens used this curse to determine if Christians were committed to Emperor worship.
 - 4.2.1.3. Matthew Henry suggests that this may have been the context for Paul’s statement, “Thus did both Jews and Gentiles: they blasphemed him [Jesus] as an impostor, and execrated his name, and deemed it abominable.”²¹²
 - 4.2.2. There is no verb in the Greek. The literal translation of the words (ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς) is ‘accursed Jesus’ rather than ‘Jesus is accursed’, and it could be translated as something like, ‘may Jesus curse you’—a curse which some of the Corinthians were using against others in the congregation. Thus, it is claimed, Paul is stating that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable among people of the one body of Christ who should display love toward one another. Similarly, there is no verb in the words ‘Jesus Lord’. The two expressions should be translated consistently.
 - 4.3. What is the connection between uttering such a curse and being led astray to idols?
 - 4.3.1. Those under the influence of false religions and idol worship may curse Jesus. For example, today, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and professed atheists may curse Jesus or his people.
 - 4.3.2. You will also hear Jesus being cursed by typical modern pagans who use the name of Jesus as a swear word.
5. What is a key indicator that a person is a Christian?
- 5.1. He makes a verbal profession of faith, stating that Jesus is Lord. This is not just a statement in mere words, but is a sincere acknowledgement that Jesus is the:
 - 5.1.1. Infinite and eternal God, a member of the Trinity (Jn 1.1-18).
 - 5.1.2. LORD (I AM) who made a covenant with his people (Jn 8.58).
 - 5.1.3. Creator and sovereign ruler of the universe (Col 1.16-17).
 - 5.1.4. Lawgiver, to whom all nations’ rulers are accountable (Ps 2.1-12).

²¹¹ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 918.

²¹² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,266.

- 5.1.5. Messiah promised in the OT and revealed as the God-man (Mt 16.16; Jn 1.41).
- 5.1.6. Governor of his Church (Mt 16.18; Mt 28.18-20).
- 5.1.7. Providential governor of the lives of believers and unbelievers (Phil 2.10-11).
- 5.1.8. Personal Lord over the professor's life (Jn 20.28).
- 5.1.9. Saviour who gave his life on the cross to pay the debt of the professor's sins (Rom 10.9-13).
- 5.1.10. Crucified and risen one (Acts 2.36; Lk 24.6).
- 5.2. How can a person make such a profession?
 - 5.2.1. He must be "in the Holy Spirit", which appears to mean "indwelt by the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit must have acted in the heart of the person to convince him of his sin (Jn 16.8-14), convert his heart, and bring him into union with Jesus Christ.
 - 5.2.2. Paul's point is not that a person cannot say the words "Jesus is Lord" without the presence of the Holy Spirit, but that one cannot *profess* that Jesus is Lord without the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- 6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 12:1-3)?
 - 6.1. *Sinners' Ignorance* – Unbelievers are deluded.
 - 6.1.1. Because they reject the innate knowledge of God (Rom 1.18-19) they cannot think clearly in any discipline, including in science, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, economics, law, or art.
 - 6.1.2. Because they have rejected God's teachings, they cannot think clearly and are deluded by false religions.
 - 6.1.3. Despite their delusion, God graciously allows sinful men to function, as they produce goods and services, invent new technologies, and govern cities and nations. However, they are able to do these things, not because their underlying presuppositions are correct, but despite their false presuppositions. Natural man, without Christ, is able to function because he ignores the inconsistency of his philosophical pragmatism.
 - 6.1.4. Only Christians can have a proper understanding of truth, in any discipline, because only Christians can have a true cosmological, ontological and epistemological foundation.
 - 6.2. *Secular illumination* (the ability to think clearly in temporal matters) can only be obtained with a Biblical foundation for reality.
 - 6.2.1. This does not mean that every Christian thinks rationally all the time or bases his thinking in every area on proper presuppositions.
 - 6.2.2. Sadly, many professing Christians demonstrate how easy it is to be seduced by the faulty beliefs and teachings of unbelievers—e.g., by accepting an evolutionary model for the existence of life on earth, rejecting God's law as the standard for civil society, applying faulty views of human psychology and sin, adhering to superstitious practices, absorbing consumerism, and believing in a dispensational eschatology.
 - 6.3. *Spiritual Illumination* – As secular illumination can only come through the rejection of idols and the acceptance of the true religion, so spiritual illumination can come only through the same channel.
 - 6.3.1. False religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, or New Age Spiritualism cannot lead anyone to truth about God, God's righteous requirements, the nature man, man's purpose in life, the origin and nature of sin, how to be saved from sin, how to live a life that is pleasing to God, or what happens after death. As Calvin says, men were "destitute of all spiritual light, previously to God's calling them."²¹³ Spiritual illumination does not come from false religions but only leads men deeper into spiritual darkness and everlasting damnation.
 - 6.3.2. There is no other way to God and salvation than through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4.12).

²¹³ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xix.i.html

Varieties of Gifts (1 Cor 12.4-11)

1. What does Paul say is supplied to the Church in a variety of ways?
 - 1.1. Gifts, service (ministries), activities (work).
 - 1.2. The Greek word translated ‘gifts’ is *χαρισμάτων*—from its root (meaning rejoicing or joy) we obtain the words ‘charisma’ and ‘charismatic’.
 - 1.3. The Greek word translated ‘service’ is *διακονιών*—from its root we obtain the word ‘deacon’.
 - 1.4. The Greek word translated ‘activities’ is *ἐνεργημάτων*—from its root we obtain the words ‘energy’ and ‘energetic’.
 - 1.5. What is the difference among these three provisions for the Church?
 - 1.5.1. Paul may be using them as synonyms.
 - 1.5.2. He may be using a three-fold repetition to emphasize his point that God endows the church with abundant provisions.
 - 1.5.3. Some sections of the Church emphasize the term ‘gifts’ and appear to ignore the service/ministries and activities/work of the Church. The gifts of the Spirit cannot be isolated from service and activities. All God’s provisions for the Church are intended for building up the Church.
 - 1.5.4. However, the service and activities are included in the class of ‘spiritual gifts’ he identifies in the opening of this chapter (1 Cor 12.1). Although the word ‘gifts’ does not appear in the Greek in this verse. It might be best to read this verse as, ‘concerning the spiritual things’.
2. What does Paul say is the common source underlying this provision of spiritual gifts for the Church?
 - 2.1. God—identified as the Trinity in verses 4-6; and specifically, as the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned eight times in verses 4-11. The spiritual gifts flow from the Father, through the Son, and are applied in the Church by the Holy Spirit.
 - 2.2. Why does Paul mention the Trinity and, in particular, the Holy Spirit so often?
 - 2.2.1. He emphasizes the truth that all good provisions for his Church come directly from God, who bestows provisions generously and graciously.
 - 2.2.2. Because they are dispensed graciously by God, there should be no boasting by those who are called to administer the provisions on behalf of the Church.
 - 2.2.3. Because all these provisions are from God, they are equally good and profitable for the Church; one is not better than another.
3. What specific spiritual gifts for the Church does Paul identify?
 - 3.1. *Utterance* (message/word) *of wisdom* – The ability to explain to the world God’s plan of salvation through his crucified Son, which is foolishness to the world (1 Cor 1.20-25).
 - 3.2. *Utterance* (message/word) *of knowledge* – The ability to counter the false gnosis of the world with teaching of the truth revealed by God.
 - 3.3. *Faith* – A faith that goes beyond saving faith and places such full trust in God that it can work miracles and move mountains (1 Cor 13.2; Mt 17.20; Mt 21.21). It is a faith that enables men to face any trial with full confidence and dependence on God’s faithfulness (Heb 11.1-40).
 - 3.4. *Healing* – The ability to miraculously heal the sick (Acts 3.6; Acts 19.12; Acts 28.8; James 5.14).
 - 3.5. *Working of miracles*—the ability to perform other miracles beside healing the sick (Mk 16.17-18; Acts 19.11).
 - 3.6. *Prophecy* – The utterance of directly revealed truth (Joel 2.28-29; Acts 13.1; Acts 15.32; Acts 21.9)—both *forthtelling* and *foretelling*—some of which became permanently recorded in the NT Scriptures (1 Cor 7.12, 39; Col 4.16). In this instance he does not appear to be speaking of the ability to preach effectively or expound the Scriptures clearly (compare, 1 Cor 13.2).
 - 3.7. *Distinguishing between spirits* – The ability to distinguish between true and false spirits (Mk 16.17; Acts 16.18), prophets (1 Cor 14.29; Acts 8.20-23; 1 Jn 4.1; Rev 2.2), and teachers (Jude 4); and identify those who are speaking on behalf of the demonic (1 Tim 4.1; Rev 16.13-14) or

who have evil and unrepentant hearts (Acts 5.1-11).

- 3.8. *Various kinds of tongues* – It has been suggested that these could be: 1) the language of angels or heaven (1 Cor 13.1); 2) the primeval language of mankind; 3) ecstatic, unconscious, uncontrollable utterances with no grammatical form or meaning, similar to the sounds emanating from pagan oracles (e.g., at Delphi); 4) unformed groanings (Rom 8.26); 5) the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language not previously learned. The idea that tongues are unintelligible utterances, as definitively claimed by some,²¹⁴ is indefensible for the following reasons:
 - 3.8.1. The root of the Greek word for ‘tongue’ (γλῶσσῶν) is used to refer to languages of the nations (Acts 2.11; Rom 4.11; Rev 5.9; Rev 7.9; Rev 10.11; Rev 11.9; Rev 13.7; Rev 14.6; Rev 17.15).
 - 3.8.2. The tongue had to be intelligible to at least one person, the interpreter (1 Cor 12.10; 1 Cor 14.13), even if not to the speaker.
 - 3.8.3. Jesus condemns the unintelligible babbling (e.g., repeating sounds like ‘ra-ba-sha-ba’ or ‘aum manī padme hūm’) such as the ecstatic practice of the priests of the pagan religions to induce mindless meditative trances (Mt 6.7).
 - 3.8.4. Jesus stated that his disciples would speak in ‘new tongues’ (Mk 16.17), which clearly could not be unintelligible babbling.
 - 3.8.5. The speakers were not to be in an uncontrolled state of delirium, but in control of their thoughts and actions (1 Cor 14.15, 40).
 - 3.8.6. Paul said it was better to use a tongue that everyone in the church could understand (1 Cor 14.2-3, 11).
 - 3.8.7. Speaking in a tongue, with interpretation, was a means of presenting the Gospel (1 Cor 14.5, 22).
 - 3.8.8. The events of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-47) indicate that God desires that all men hear the Gospel in their native language.

Therefore, Paul is speaking of the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language not previously learned.
- 3.9. *Interpretation of tongues* – Related to the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language was the miraculous ability to understand a previously unlearned language and translate it for the hearers. This capability was given on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.5). The Greek word used here, translated as ‘interpretation’ can also be rendered as ‘translation’ or ‘give the meaning’ (Jn 1.42; Jn 9.7).
4. How might we organize or classify these gifts?
 - 4.1. There is not an obvious organizing structure. For example, it isn’t evident that Paul presents them as an ordinal list from most important to least important. If he did, we might expect prophecy to be earlier in the list (1 Cor 14.1). Some suggest that Paul uses a 2+5+2—e.g., the first two deal with the intellect; however, the 6th and 7th appear also to involve the intellect—or 3+3+3 structure.
 - 4.2. Another possible way to organize them might be to put the miraculous in one class and the natural in another. However, it appears that Paul is speaking of gifts which are granted to the Church in extraordinary situations and to an extraordinary extent. It is therefore probable that *all* nine of these spiritual gifts should be classified as miraculous. Thus, the items in this list such as ‘faith’ (which not all believers are granted) and ‘prophecy’ are differentiated from saving faith (which all believers have) and preaching the Gospel. Also, ‘utterance of knowledge’ is not the standard form of knowledge which Christians have about the world and about God, that will never end; it is a miraculous form of knowledge that will pass away (1 Cor 13.8).

²¹⁴H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 398.

5. Whom does Paul say receives these spiritual gifts?
 - 5.1. Paul uses the words ‘everyone’ (1 Cor 12.6), ‘each’ (1 Cor 12.7), ‘one’ (1 Cor 12.8), and ‘another’ (1 Cor 12.8). Thus, most interpreters assume or conclude that all the gifts mentioned in 1 Cor 12.8-10 will normally appear in each congregation and that each believer will have one or more of the gifts; but that no one will have all the gifts (1 Cor 12.29-30).
 - 5.2. What are possible issues with this interpretation?
 - 5.2.1. Paul does not say that each believer in the Church receives one (or more) of the *gifts* he identifies. He says that everyone receives gifts, service, or activities which are empowered by God the Holy Spirit.
 - 5.2.2. The gifts, service, and activities are a “manifestation of the Spirit” for the common good of the Church (v. 7). Thus what ‘each’ person has may not include a miraculous ‘gift’. We cannot therefore conclude that ‘manifestation of the Spirit’ is a synonym for ‘gift’. Paul then says that the extraordinary (miraculous) things (‘gifts’) are given to one or to another (1 Cor 12.8-10). Nowhere does he state that each person receives at least one of the extraordinary gifts. His point is not that each person is given at least one of these gifts, but that gifts are given by God and distributed as he sees fit (1 Cor 12.11, 18), for the purpose of building up the church.
 - 5.2.3. This list is not exhaustive. Elsewhere, Paul identifies other gifts given to the church which are not included in this list (Rom 12.6-8; Eph 4.11). Thus, it is a mistake to assume that each believer should have one of the gifts listed here (1 Cor 12.8-10).
 - 5.2.4. If each believer is expected to have one of these specific gifts, then those who do not have one will be considered as second-class citizens and inferior to those who do—leading to boasting on the part of those who have a gift. This is exactly the opposite conclusion Paul wants us to draw from his instruction in this chapter. The presence or absence of these gifts is entirely at the discretion of the Holy Spirit and no one is to be considered inferior, or consider himself inferior, because he does not have one (or any) of these specific gifts.
 - 5.2.5. If each believer is expected to have one or more of these specific gifts, then individuals who do not have one will undertake a quest to obtain one—contrary to the concept of ‘gift’! This is guaranteed to lead to stress or even deception (e.g., false claims to possess gifts).
 - 5.2.6. If all the gifts listed are expected to be present in a congregation, then a congregation must be considered deficient if it does not have a healer, miracle worker, deliverer of prophetic oracles, and a person miraculously speaking a previously unknown language. This presents an indictment on almost every congregation in the Church for the past 2,000 years.
6. The gifts identified here may all be extraordinary. If so, we must establish whether this form of miraculous phenomena was intended to be permanent in the Church, or we must demonstrate that it was only a manifestation during the apostolic age. Are the gifts, which Paul identifies, a temporary grant from the Holy Spirit to the Church or an on-going resource which the Holy Spirit uses to build the Church in every generation?
 - 6.1. There has been a marked divide in the Church on this question for hundreds of years. For example:
 - 6.1.1. Many in the church believe that God continues to work miracles of physical healing. Performing a miracle has been considered a prerequisite for canonization from the Middle Ages until the present time in the Roman Catholic Church. Pentecostals (e.g., Assemblies of God²¹⁵) believe that divine healing through human mediators is available for Christians today.
 - 6.1.2. Similarly, there have been examples within the wider Church where it is claimed that the gift of xenoglossia or glossolalia has been present, such as in medieval hagiographical accounts, among the Shakers, Irvingites, and Pentecostals (after the 1901 Topeka, KA,

²¹⁵ *Assemblies of God Fundamental Truths*; ag.org/top/beliefs/statement_of_fundamental_truths/sft_short.cfm

Azusa Street Revival), and in the mid-to-late 20th century Charismatic Movement.

However, during the early post-apostolic period, prophecy through glossolalia was reported to have occurred only amongst heretical movements (e.g., Gnosticism and Montanism).

6.1.3. During the patristic period, it was generally accepted that these gifts were no longer present in the Church. For example, John Chrysostom (349-407 AD), writing on these verses says: “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity hath produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?”²¹⁶

6.1.4. The principal Reformation leaders (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Knox, etc.) also believed that the miraculous gifts were no longer present in the Church.

6.1.5. Commentators within the Reformed tradition have generally taken the position that the miraculous gifts Paul refers to here were signs of the presence of a true apostle (2 Cor 12.12) and that they ceased after the apostolic age.

6.2. Notwithstanding the belief that the sign miracles have ceased, we must not dismiss the occurrence of miracles today.

6.2.1. We must not assume that miracles cannot occur because we are wearing post-Enlightenment tinted glasses which cause us to attribute everything in the physical realm to naturalistic causes. This form of dualism has led many in the Church to reject the historical accounts in Genesis which clearly teach that God created the universe about 6,000 years ago over a period of six days and that he sent a worldwide cataclysmic flood that destroyed all of mankind, except those in the ark. Many in the Church also attempt to attribute miracles reported in the Bible (e.g., plagues on Egypt, sun standing still, feeding 5,000 men plus women and children, and even the resurrection) to naturalistic causes.

6.2.2. God is still God. He hasn’t changed his purposes or power and can, and does, perform miracles. If we define a miracle as “a surprising and welcome, direct action of God (i.e., not administered through secondary causes), which is not explicable by the working of natural ‘laws’”, then miracles occur all the time. However, we just don’t label them as miracles because they are common phenomena. Notice there is nothing in the definition provided above about the frequency of an event. Some classes of miracles (e.g., raising the physically dead) may be extremely rare today (if they occur). But other classes of miracles may occur frequently and generally be viewed as non-miraculous because they are so common. However, if we apply the definition above, what are examples of miracles that occur *all* the time?

6.2.2.1. A new human (or animal) life is formed at conception. No one, applying natural processes, can explain how combining a mass of molecules into a zygote can produce a new life. The ‘spark’ of life directly introduced by God into the merged gametes is an act of creation. Because life is more than matter and chemical processes, and requires God’s miraculous intervention, men will never be able to create life out of inert chemicals.

6.2.2.2. A ball falling to the ground. Scientists can explain how natural forces (e.g., gravity, nuclear, electromagnetic) mechanically work, but they cannot explain what the forces are. Men cannot explain why the earth does not fly apart other than by saying that the force of gravity holds it together. Someone might argue that gravity isn’t a miracle since it is explicable by natural laws. But it isn’t explicable by a formula or ‘law’, because the

$$F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$$

²¹⁶ John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.” In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 168.

formula only describes gravity's behavior, not how, or why, two objects of mass are attracted to each other. To answer the question, 'What is gravity?' a NASA web site says "Gravity is what makes pieces of matter clump together into planets, moons, and stars. Gravity is what makes the planets orbit the stars..."²¹⁷ That does not explain what gravity *is*, it only tells us what gravity *does*. Saying that it is a 'force' doesn't help, because then we have to define what a force is. God, in Jesus, directly intervenes in the operation of the universe and literally holds it together (Col 1.17).

- 6.2.2.3. Ongoing existence. No one without a Christian presuppositional foundation can explain why anything exists and why it continues to exist. As Paul stated to the Athenian council, "In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17.28) We exist moment by moment, only because God wills it so and continues to act directly in maintain our existence. From God's perspective, we are less than holograms which disappear the moment the electricity stops flowing. This is not to demean the magnificence of man, created in the image of God, but to remind us that we are nothing without God (Ps 8.4-6).
- 6.2.2.4. Conversion. A person who is spiritually dead cannot bring himself back to life. Only the direct work of the Holy Spirit can change a stone-cold dead heart into a living heart which depends in faith on Jesus and rejoices in God's saving and providential governing work. Jesus says that forgiveness of sins, and thus conversion, is a greater miracle than healing a paralytic (Mt 9.5).
- 6.2.2.5. In addition, God may continue to perform various miracles of healing and xenoglossia today. All reports of such phenomena, from credible witness, cannot be easily dismissed. Although, we cannot claim that God continues to provide direct revelation to men, which is equivalent to Scripture. The canon of Scripture is complete. Thus, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states that, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men." According to the authors of the *Confession*, the Bible is complete and gives us everything we need to know.²¹⁸
- 6.2.2.6. Finally, we must expect the miraculous direct intervention of God at the end of time when he destroys this universe and instantly creates a new universe in which his resurrected elect will dwell for forever (2 Pt 3.10-12).
- 6.3. It is the apostolic sign gifts which we argue have ceased and are no longer found in, or to be expected in, the Church, not the cessation of the miraculous.
7. Why did God give miraculous gifts to the apostolic Church (a question Chrysostom says needs to be answered)?
 - 7.1. During the apostolic period a new form of the true religion was introduced to the world—as intimated by Jesus' statement, "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." (Mt 9.16-17). This form was markedly different from the pagan forms of religion and from the then current Jewish understanding of the OT form of religion. For example, the new form of religion introduced or expanded on previous hints and introduced revolutionary concepts. What are examples?
 - 7.1.1. The Trinity (hinted at in the OT but not as explicit as in the NT)

²¹⁷ spaceplace.nasa.gov/what-is-gravity/en/

²¹⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 4.

- 7.1.2. A trinitarian-monotheism (absolutely unique and not polytheism).
- 7.1.3. The resurrection of all mankind (hinted at in the OT but not as explicit as in the NT).
- 7.1.4. A virgin conception (hinted at in the OT; e.g., in Is 7.14).
- 7.1.5. A God-man (although, a concept found in pagan religions).
- 7.1.6. Resurrection of a dead messiah.
- 7.1.7. A spiritual kingdom rather than a temporal kingdom.
- 7.1.8. The cessation of animal sacrifices.
- 7.1.9. The replacement of a physical seed of Abraham with a spiritual seed—which had been previously revealed only in shadows in the OT.
- 7.2. God's plan was to use the apostles as his instruments to establish his NT Church (Mt 28.18-20; Eph 2.20). Thus, to overcome scepticism and resistance (from Jews and Gentiles) to the new form of the true religion, God empowered the apostles and *some* in the early congregations with miraculous gifts of wisdom, knowledge, discernment, prophecy, faith, healing, and speaking and understanding foreign languages.
- 7.3. The NT was not yet complete, and the sign gifts were provided to validate those who would be instrumental in revealing God's will for the NT Church and providing a permanent record of the life and work of Jesus, the early events in the NT Church, the additional doctrines which the NT Church must accept and believe, and the practices which it must follow.
- 7.4. Since the NT is complete and the Church has been founded, there is no longer a need to validate the apostles' ministry and no longer a need for miraculous revelation such as that received by Paul (1 Cor 11.23; Acts 9.5-6; Acts 22.7-8; Gal 1.11-12).
- 7.5. With the completion of the NT, the words which Jesus attributed to Abraham can be paraphrased and applied to the entire Bible—"they have the Bible, if they do not hear the Bible, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead or performs another miracle." (Lk 16.29-31)
- 8. Can we apply what Paul says about spiritual gifts in a broader context, beyond the church?
 - 8.1. While Paul is teaching about spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12.1), the same principles we have been considering apply to all gifts (extraordinary or otherwise) that God provides to mankind. For example, he equips some with mechanical talents, technical expertise, intellectual adeptness, and artistic abilities (Ex 31.1-11; 2 Chron 2.13-14). God does not equip all people in the same way (Mt 25.14-15)—contrary to the false claims of the equity equalizers of our day.
 - 8.2. God knows what is best not only for the advancement of the Church, and also for societies and civilizations and for individuals. In his wisdom, he equips each person as he sees fit.
 - 8.3. However, mankind's sinful nature rebels against God's distribution of natural gifts. For example, Andrée Seu said, 'Now our nation is engaged in a massive drive for "equity"—by which is meant not equal opportunity but equal outcomes. We insist that every human being should have the right to be a doctor, lawyer, and Indian chief. Boys should have the option to be girls, and girls to switch their sex to boys. The drive to be a "this" when God made you a "that" is only envy, envy being the fetid wellspring of every kind of evil social system down through history.'²¹⁹
- 9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 12.4-11)?
 - 9.1. *Provision* – God equips his Church with gifts. Whether or not they are the extraordinary or miraculous gifts mentioned in this section, God still equips the Church with gifts in every generation, including, ruling, preaching, teaching, service, counselling, caring, praying, etc. Likewise, he distributes gifts to individual believers to a greater or lesser degree.
 - 9.2. *Placement* – There is a variety of gifts and service which God disposes as he sees fit. He knows what is required to build his Church, including in individual congregations, and he provides the right mix of gifts that is needed in any locale and time. Likewise, he distributes gifts to societies

²¹⁹ Andrée Seu, "[Apportioned as He wills](#)" *World*, 2021-02-20.

and civilizations.

- 9.3. *Purpose* – God provides gifts for the common good or profit of the Church. Gifts given to the Church are not to build up individuals but to build up the corporate body—to increase its numbers and to strengthen its knowledge, faith, and dependence on God (Mt 28.19-20). The more general gifts that God distributes outside of the Church should be used for the benefit of mankind and not for the support of the vainglorious aspirations of individuals to whom the gifts have been given.
- 9.4. *Plying* – Since God the HS distributes the gifts for a purpose, if we have gifts, we are to apply and practices them, and use them by putting them into service for the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31). It is wrong for a Christian to ignore or neglect the gifts with which he or she has been supplied (Mt 25.27; 1 Tim 4.14)
- 9.5. *Power* – The gifts are empowered (1 Cor 12.11) by the Holy Spirit and are effective for building the Church because God’s purposes cannot be thwarted. Individuals are called to service through the distribution of the gifts, but the gifts’ effectiveness comes only and directly from God.²²⁰
- 9.6. *Prostration* – The gifts are *gifts*. They are distributed by the Holy Spirit based on his purposes, not on the abilities or merits of the recipients. The recipients must exercise a prideless prostration before God—a truth that the Corinthians needed to learn, as do many in the Church and society today.
- 9.7. *Passivity* – Lusting after a particular gift and taking steps to obtain it contradicts the nature of a gift. Likewise feeling slighted because we do not have a particular gift, displays an envious spirit and an un-submissive individualism that is contrary to the purpose of the gifts for the collective Church. We must learn to be content with God’s distribution of gifts (1 Tim 6.6-8).
- 9.8. *Praise* – In his wisdom, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to the right people at the right time and in the right place. When we see the exercise of gifts in a congregation, in the broader Church, or in society, our response should be to thank God for the gifts he gives to mankind.

One Holy Sanctuary (1 Cor 12.12-31)

1. What does Paul call the Church (1 Cor 12.12, 27)?
 - 1.1. The body of Christ. He uses this image in other places also (Rom 12.4-5; Eph 4.11-16; Col 2.19).
 - 1.2. How does he describe this body?
 - 1.2.1. A single body with many members (one, unity).
 - 1.3. In what ways is Christ’s body (the Church) one?
 - 1.3.1. Every believer is subject to Jesus and calls him Lord.
 - 1.3.2. Every believer is brought into the Church in the same way—through the converting work of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of faith and repentance.
 - 1.3.3. One hope, faith, baptism (Eph 4.4-5).
 - 1.3.4. Every believer is part of the universal Church that extends from Adam to the end of time and includes members from every country on earth. There was not an OT Jewish church that is separate from the NT Gentile Church. All believers are part of a single Church (see Acts 7.38, where ‘congregation’ is used as the translation for ἐκκλησία).
 - 1.4. In what ways does Christ’s body have many members?
 - 1.4.1. The members are individuals, male and female, slave and free, young and old, from every ethnic group, nation, and language group on earth (Gal 3.28; Rev 7.9).
 - 1.4.2. Paul is clearly not speaking of denominations or other divisions (e.g., ‘western’ or ‘eastern’) of the Church. The existence of denominations is not pleasing to Jesus, who wishes his Church to be one holy catholic entity. However, the existence of denominations has become necessary because of sin, to clarify belief around a creedal statement (refer to the earlier consideration of the legitimacy of creeds, in the section dealing with 1 Cor 11.17-22).

²²⁰ R. J. Utey, *Paul’s Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*, Vol. 6 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), p. 142.

- 1.5. In what ways are the individual members of Christ's body related to one another?
 - 1.5.1. Believers are in an organic union with Christ—we are in Christ (Eph 1.1; Php 1.1; Col 1.2; 1 Thess 4.16), and he is in us (Rom 8.10-11; 2 Cor 13.3, 5; Gal 4.19; Col 1.27)—by which means we live spiritually through him.
 - 1.5.2. Since each believer is related to Christ, whose life flows through us, we are then related to one another through our union with Christ. Thus, Paul's statement that we are 'one body' is more than a metaphor. We are intimately connected to Christ and to one another as a single spiritual entity.
 - 1.5.3. Thus, there is no ontological distinction or standing among those who are in Christ—all believers are equal participants in Christ (Gal 3.27-28; Col 3.11).
 - 1.5.3.1. This does not mean that there are no roles or offices in the Church (1 Cor 12.28-29).
 - 1.5.3.2. It is not a contradiction to have complete unity and distinct roles. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all equally God (organically in one another; Jn 10.30; Jn 17.21), and yet they have distinct roles and observe a hierarchical relationship (Jn 5:19; Jn 12.49; Jn 14.26, 31; Jn 15.26).
2. How do we become part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.13)?
 - 2.1. Paul does not mention conversion. However, that is the first step for becoming part of the Church (Acts 2.47; Acts 16.14-15).
 - 2.2. He mentions two outward signs—the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Paul probably uses the term 'drink of one Spirit' to refer to participation in the Lord's Supper (Calvin was inclined to this interpretation²²¹), rather than as receiving the Holy Spirit at conversion as some suggest—sometimes referring to John 7.37-39.²²²
 - 2.3. A person is admitted to the covenant community through baptism and participates in the community through the Lord's Supper.
3. Why does Paul use a body as his analogy for the Church (1 Cor 12.14-21)? It provides a good example of an entity which is:
 - 3.1. *Defined* – A body has many different parts which are needed to define (make up) a whole unit. In his day, machines were not as complex as they are today, and living beings were the most complex entities that people were aware of. The Church is a complex entity where the parts work together to achieve a common purpose.
 - 3.2. *Dependent* – All the parts of a body are necessary for proper functioning of the body—not one of the parts is superfluous or removable without eroding the proper functioning of the body. No part of a body can claim that it is more important than another part—all parts are necessary, or the body cannot function properly. Paul uses a number of examples to illustrate this point. Thus, within the Church, the pastor cannot say that he is more important than an elder, deacon, or young woman who teaches the kindergarten Sunday School class; and one who teaches is not more important than one who prays faithfully. No member of a church (congregation) should feel superior or inferior because he or she has a different role than someone else.
 - 3.3. *Differentiated* – The number of different parts in a body provides a good example of the necessity for a large variety of roles within the Church.
 - 3.4. *Directed* – The body works as a single unit even though it is made up of parts. For example, as a body is walking, the legs and arms naturally and instinctively do the right things without any obvious coordination or explicit direction from the head (mind). Thus, the members of a congregation should function in a cohesive manner, directed to the common goal of glorifying God with their obedient lives and loving service towards one another.

²²¹ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xix.ii.html

²²² R. J. Utey, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*, Vol. 6 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), p. 144.

- 3.5. *Dispositioned* – God endows bodies as he sees fit. Bodies are not self-created. So, it is with the Church. God outfits a congregation with persons having gifts and skills exactly as he sees fit. The composition of each congregation is exactly as God intends to fulfill his glorious purposes.
4. How does God want the Church to work as a unit (1 Cor 12.21-25)?
- 4.1. *Denying self* – God designed the Church (including its particular congregational subunits) so that all of its members must be dependent on one another and no one member may say to another, “I don’t need you”.
- 4.1.1. The followers, needy recipients, and ‘high maintenance’ members are just as important as the self-confident leaders, providers, givers, and doers.
- 4.1.2. A missionary family (on furlough) I knew in high school had a severely disabled daughter who needed constant physical attention (her muscles were mostly paralyzed, and she was confined permanently to a wheeled bed, and she could not speak). They took her with them wherever they went, including to the most remote places of their missionary assignments. The love and devotion which the parents and siblings demonstrated towards this girl brought tears to an observer’s eyes and was a witness to the love of Christ that spoke louder than a sermon.
- 4.1.3. Today, we find very few humble servants of Christ (like Gotthard of Hildesheim, William Booth, Mother Theresa) who are willing to dedicate their lives to minister to the hungry, sick, dying, and orphans (whether in the Church or beyond its bounds) like those of former years who founded hospitals, hospices, shelters and orphanages.
- 4.1.4. If Church members today could give up their selfish demands for recognition and fulfillment and display a selfless love toward the weaker members of their congregations, the Church’s witness and impact on society would be significantly greater than it is today.
- 4.2. *Distinction-less* – God turns our thinking about distinctions, recognition, and honour upside down. The world honours those with power, influence, and wealth. Many in the Church behave the same way thinking that those with distinguished professional careers, high-powered jobs, or preeminent social ranks are more honourable than a salaried worker in the food services industry. But God uses the ‘weak things’ in the Church to confound the worldly wise (1 Cor 1.27; Acts 4.13). Thus, God gives the greater honour to those whom the world despises (Mt 21.42). Likewise, we ought to esteem and distinguish those who are faithful to Christ and his Church whom the world overlooks.
- 4.3. *Division-less* – God intends for his Church to have no divisions—e.g., by gender, ethnic group, social standing, educational attainments, or skills and gifts. One member of the Church is no more or no less important than another, or more or less useful than another. Everyone is important (Christ died for each one of them!) and useful in the areas that he has been assigned. When individuals in a congregation are dissatisfied with their callings, roles, or functions they cease to be submissive to God’s designs and cause division which is displeasing to God. As Matthew Henry said, “Gifts may be valued for their use, but they are mischievous when made the fuel of pride and contention.”²²³
- 4.4. *Dedication* – God desires that the members of the Church “have the same care for one another”—that is that they show a consistent level of love and dedication to everyone else in the congregation. When members show dedication to the wellbeing of others in a congregation, the world knows that they walk with Jesus (Jn 13.35).
5. How does Paul use the body analogy to illustrate the organic union of members of the Church (1 Cor 12.26-27)?
- 5.1. He indicates that if one member suffers or is honoured the others share in that suffering or

²²³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,267.

honour.

- 5.1.1. When one of our political leaders does something stupid or criminal, we feel embarrassed to be associated with that nation or city. Contrarywise, when our city wins a sports championship, we feel part of that success and glory. This worldly example provides an analogy for the Church.
 - 5.1.2. In the Church the suffering and rejoicing are more intimate than in the political sphere because of the familial relationship we have to one another through Christ. In a temporal family, the failures and successes of family members reflect on others in the family and are either welcomed with embarrassment or with familial pride. It is the same in the Church.
 - 5.1.3. Chrysostom illustrates this organic union by saying, “Thus often when a thorn is fixed in the heel, the whole body feels it and cares for it: both the back is bent and the belly and thighs are contracted, and the hands coming forth as guards and servants draw out what was so fixed, and the head stoops over it, and the eyes observe it with much care. So that even if the foot hath inferiority from its inability to ascend, yet by its bringing down the head it hath an equality, and is favored with the same honor; ... The head is crowned, and the whole man is honored. The mouth speaks, and the eyes laugh and are delighted. Yet the credit belongs not to the beauty of the eyes, but to the tongue.”²²⁴
6. What offices and spiritual gifts does Paul identify as having been appointed by God for the Church (1 Cor 12.28-31a)?
- 6.1. In verses 8-10, Paul mentions nine spiritual gifts. In verse 28, he specifically includes three of the ones he identified earlier—miracles, healing, and tongues. He identifies two that he had not mentioned earlier—helping and administrating. He also includes three offices—apostles, prophets, and teachers. The offices of prophet may overlap with the gift of prophecy he mentioned earlier, and the offices of apostle and teacher may overlap with the gift of wisdom and knowledge.
 - 6.2. In this section Paul identifies seven appointments:
 - 6.2.1. *Apostles* – A distinct office that was directly appointed by Jesus (Mt 10.2-4; Acts 1.23-26; Acts 9.5-6; 1 Tim 2.7) with responsibility to establish the NT Church (Eph 2.20).
 - 6.2.1.1. Anyone in the office (other than Paul) had to have been a witness to the entire ministry of Jesus (Acts 1.21-22).
 - 6.2.1.2. They were given extraordinary insight to found the NT Church and as authors of Scripture.
 - 6.2.1.3. Other leaders in the Church were called apostles in a more general sense—as ‘sent ones’—Barnabas (Acts 14.14); James (Gal 1.19); Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; 1 Thess 2:6); and possibly Andronicus and Junias (or Junia) depending on the translation (Rom 16.7).
 - 6.2.2. *Prophets* – Recipients of direct revelation from God, such as Agabus (Acts 21.10) and Silas (Acts 15.32). Philip the evangelist’s daughters were also called prophetesses (Acts 21.9). However, Calvin is of the opinion that these are “eminent interpreters of Scripture,”²²⁵ but the interpretation of Scripture seems to fit better with the office of teachers.
 - 6.2.3. *Teachers* – It is generally stated that Paul is speaking of men who studied, interpreted, and applied the Scriptures, and not an office of special revelation. However, if ‘teachers’ are those who give special utterances of wisdom or knowledge, then it is possible that this was a temporary office. It appears to be a different office from prophets (Acts 13.1), preachers, pastors, or evangelists (Rom 12.7; Eph 4.11; 2 Tim 1.11)—although some men would have

²²⁴ John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.” In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 184.

²²⁵ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xix.iv.html

held more than one office, as Paul did.

6.2.4. *Miracles* – Miracle workers, who had the ability to perform other miracles beside healing the sick (Mk 16.17-18; Acts 19.11).

6.2.5. *Healing* – The ability to miraculously heal the sick (Acts 3.6; Acts 19.12; Acts 28.8; James 5.14).

6.2.6. *Helping* – It is not easy to determine what this gift (or office) includes—the Greek word (ἀντιλήμψεις) is used only here in the NT. Some suggest that it may include those who are assistants to others in the church, others that it could be those who provide spiritual counsel to those who are weak in their faith, or those who support others who are physically weak. Calvin suggests that it might be connected with the office of Deacon and the care of the poor.²²⁶

6.2.7. *Administering* – This is probably a reference to elders who rule well (1 Tim 5.17) through leadership and discipline. The Greek word translated ‘administering’ appears to be related to the word for shipmaster and may bear the idea of directing a ship.

6.2.8. *Various kinds of tongues* – The miraculous instantaneous ability to speak in a foreign language not previously learned. This may include the ability to interpret and translate a foreign language.

7. What does Paul mean by ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third’ in verse 28?

7.1. These ordinals could apply to rank—with the apostles being of the highest rank in the Church. The concept of rank would appeal to those who believe in a hierarchy of church offices—such as pope, cardinal, and bishop; or archbishop, bishops, priests, archdeacons, and deacons. However, this seems to be contrary to the Biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers and the equality among Christians before God. Within the Presbyterian system there are only two offices—elders²²⁷ and deacons—and they are not hierarchical (despite how many view them in practice) but filling different functions.

7.2. Others view the ordinals not in terms of rank but importance or usefulness to the Church, with the most important appointments being centred around proclamation of the revelation of God for the building up of the body. However, this seems to be contrary to the argument of Paul in this chapter that all the spiritual gifts are important for the proper functioning of the body. Also, in verses 29-30 Paul dismisses the importance of these spiritual gifts with rhetorical questions, followed by the statement (verse 31) that there are higher (more important) spiritual gifts which he will identify in the following chapter—as faith, hope and love; with love being the greatest (1 Cor 13.13).

7.3. Others see the first three as ranked, and the remainder as an unranked list of various spiritual gifts.

7.4. Some suggest that Paul may only be counting them off, without implying an actual order. However, it may be significant that he lists tongues last in both sequences (1 Cor 12.10, 28).

7.5. We may be able to understand these ordinals as giving a temporal sequence with the apostles being the positions first appointed in the NT Church, and the foundation upon which the Church is based (Eph 2.20).

8. Why does Paul provide the series of rhetorical questions (1 Cor 12.29-30)?

8.1. He reminds the Corinthians that no office or gift is so important that everyone (or even many) must have it. The series of questions in the Greek contain (untranslated) markers (μή, an interrogative negative) indicating that a negative response is expected to each question.

8.2. Since some (many) in the Church may have none of the identified offices or spiritual gifts, this

²²⁶ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xix.iv.html

²²⁷ Some, have the office of pastor as separate; others divide the office of elder into two functions or roles—ruling and teaching—within the one office.

- shows that the spiritual gifts are given only as God sees fit for the advancement of the Church (1 Cor 12.5, 25). They are appointed by the Lord, not dependent on the recipients' qualifications; so the recipients must not be proud or boast about having received any office or spiritual gift.
- 8.3. No one can have all (or even many) of the offices or spiritual gifts and therefore must be dependent on others in the Church and needs their aid and support.
 - 8.4. Instead of seeking (striving) after these spiritual gifts, he wants the Church to strive after the higher (more excellent, greater) spiritual gifts of faith, hope and love, because they are more conducive to building up the Church (1 Cor 12.31b) which we will consider in our next lessons on 1 Corinthians 13.1-13.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 12.12-31a)?
- 9.1. *Community* – Christians need the Church. On his own, no Christian has access to all (or even many of) the offices and spiritual gifts for building up the Church given by the Holy Spirit.
 - 9.1.1. Man was created to be relational, as an image-bearer of his creator, who is in a tri-union of persons. Man cannot function properly when isolated from other humans. Some people who are isolated in solitary confinement or marooned by themselves on a tropical island go insane because of a lack of human companionship—e.g., talking to a volleyball. Relationships can be formed through marriage and fellowship with other humans. For Christians, after engagement with one's family, fellowship should be facilitated *primarily* through relationships with other believers (brothers and sisters in the body of Christ), rather than through clubs or associations with unbelievers.
 - 9.1.2. Therefore, each believer must be part of a local congregation and become actively involved in its growth and advancement. Membership in a local congregation is not optional.²²⁸
 - 9.1.3. Each believer has an inescapable corporate responsibility to those in the assembly with which he associates, as it is expressed in a particular congregation and denomination. Membership in a particular assembly (congregation and denomination) makes each member responsible for the life, ministry, worship, and teaching of that assembly.
 - 9.2. *Contentment* – The offices and spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for building up the Church, are given as God considers best for the advancement of his cause on earth. As we are not to question any of God's providences (Job 38.2; Job 40.2; Rom 9.20) and to be content with how he sees fit to deal with us (Phil 4.11-13), so we are to be content with how he disposes the offices and spiritual gifts for the Church. A contented spirit is productive not only for personal happiness but for the welfare and peace of the Church. This means:
 - 9.2.1. No one is to be envious of another if he happens to have any office or spiritual gift from God. An envious spirit produces personal misery and corporate strife and discord.
 - 9.2.2. No one is to be proud if he happens to have received any office or spiritual gift from God or to look down on others who have not received the same office or spiritual gift. Contempt of the situation of another is contempt against God's providential dealings with mankind in general, and of his elect saints in particular.
 - 9.2.3. If someone aspires to the office of elder, he desires a noble task (1 Tim 3.1), but no one is to *strive* to obtain any particular office, or spiritual gift. There is a considerable difference between someone preparing to be useful as an elder (e.g., pursuing a seminary study program) and conniving, manipulating, or bribing to obtain a position or a spiritual gift (Acts 8.14-24).
 - 9.2.4. Each person is to show respect for the calling and role of every other member of the Church (Phil 2.3).
 - 9.3. *Cooperation* – The Church would experience God's blessing to an unprecedented level if everyone in the Church took seriously his responsibility to work at his assigned duties and to

²²⁸ For a consideration of church members, see: "Appendix I – Is Requiring Church Membership Biblical?" in: James R. Hughes, *Nehemiah the Church Builder: Instructor's Guide*, 2006; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

work together with others in the Church in humble cooperation. Why is the Church so weak today? Professed believers:

9.3.1. Display a weak faith and have little trust that God can achieve his purposes.

9.3.2. Are unfaithful in prayer.

9.3.3. Have fallen for false doctrines that lead them astray into tangents.

9.3.4. Do not follow the commands of God and attempt to define their own standards.

9.3.5. Offer pagan rituals as a substitute for true worship of the Creator.

9.3.6. Show no commitment to the work of their congregation or the greater Church.

9.3.7. Are proud rather than humble.

9.3.8. Are selfishness rather than selfless.

9.3.9. Do not display love for other believers.

9.3.10. Are unwilling to cooperate with other believers.

- 9.4. *Continuance* – A question often asked when this chapter of 1 Corinthians is read and studied is, are we to expect to find these spiritual gifts in the Church today? The way to approach this question is not to engage in a debate about whether the spiritual gifts, particularly those we consider to be miraculous, continued after the end of the apostolic age. Rather, we need to consider why people ask this question. The reason is because people want to receive these spiritual gifts. They desire to have them, either to experience them personally or to see them manifest within their congregation. Pride is the underlying reason people ask this question. Paul says not to seek after these spiritual gifts but to “earnestly desire the higher gifts.” (1 Cor 12.31b) The question we should ask is not, “Do the spiritual gifts continue today?” but rather, “What are we doing to seek the more excellent gifts?”—the gifts of faith, hope and love. Let us now turn to consider this more excellent way.

Love’s Supremacy (1 Cor 13.1-13)

Priority of Love (1 Cor 13.1-3)

1. What is the theme of this chapter?

- 1.1. Love’s supremacy. This chapter deals with the priority of love—it is more excellent than the other spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit—the properties of love—what makes ἀγάπη love supreme—and the permanence of love—which will remain when the other gifts are no longer required or available in the Church.
- 1.2. This chapter is universally esteemed for its exquisite language and elevated concepts. It has often been presented as a model for a blessed marriage or an ideal life of selflessness. A portion of this chapter (verses 4-7 or 8) is often included on refrigerator magnets, wall posters, T-shirts, embroidered cushions, and needlepoint wall hangings. A Google search even shows the verses tattooed on heels, wrists, arms, shoulders, and overweight stomachs. The attributes of what Paul identifies as the “more excellent way” (1 Cor 12.31) are treated casually, as if they can be achieved by natural human effort.
- 1.3. The Greek word used here for ‘love’ is ἀγάπην. There are four Greek words which can be translated as ‘love’ in English:
- 1.3.1. ἔρως. It is not used in the NT. We obtain our word ‘erotic’ from this word. The word had many pagan associations and was inappropriate to apply in a Christian context.²²⁹
- 1.3.2. Στοργή. It can mean natural affection or obligation. It is used in the NT in Romans 1.31 and 2 Timothy 3.3, but only with the negative ‘α’ prefix; meaning ‘unloving’.
- 1.3.3. Φιλέω. It is used frequently (about 100 times) in the NT for affection, and sometimes as a synonym for ἀγάπη love (compare Jn 3.35 with Jn 5.20).
- 1.3.4. Ἀγάπη (agape). It is used over 300 times in the NT. It expresses the concepts of unconditional affection and tenderness. It was used infrequently as a verb in classical

²²⁹ For example, see the praises of *eros* in Plato’s *Symposium*, where *eros* is referred to as a “great and wondrous god”; archive.org/stream/cu31924073426151/cu31924073426151_djvu.txt

Greek. It appears that it was first used as a noun in the LXX. It is used to refer an essential attribute of God in the NT (1 Jn 4.8). Thus, the word is essentially a Christian term.

2. Why does Paul introduce ἀγάπη love at this point in his argument?
 - 2.1. Some commentators suggest that chapter 13 appears to be misplaced or is at least a digression from Paul's main argument. However, neither idea is correct.
 - 2.2. Paul has completed the first part of his discourse about spiritual offices and gifts and has argued that these are distributed as God sees fit, for the edification of the Church. However, as good as these offices and gifts are, there is a "more excellent way" for building up the Church—through true ἀγάπη love.
 - 2.3. However, contrary to what many commentators suggest, Paul is not presenting a list of virtues (faith, hope, and love) 'open to all Christians without distinction' for which we are to strive. None of Christian faith, hope, or love are obtainable by human effort. Rather, they are the best *gifts* from God, who is their source (Rom 15.13; Eph 2.8; 1 Jn 4.8), and the ones we should most cherish when they are given to individual believers and to the Church as a whole. Paul extends his argument by stating that the spiritual gifts that the Corinthians thought were important are not as essential as they thought, and that there are far more important gifts which they should cherish. Matthew Henry said, "To have the heart glow with mutual love is vastly better than to glare with the most pompous titles, offices, or powers."²³⁰
3. What activities does Paul compare unfavourably to love?
 - 3.1. *Speaking in the tongues of men and of angels* – By qualifying 'tongues' (γλώσσας) with "of men and of angels", he indicates that he is speaking of intelligible languages, acquired miraculously, not the content-less 'ecstatic languages' which some Pentecostals claim is the focus of the spiritual gifts in chapters 12 and 14.
 - 3.1.1. There is no legitimate reason to assume that the language of angels is conceptually any different from a human language. The members of the Trinity communicate with one another (Gen 1.3), God communicates with angelic beings (Job 1.7), and angels can communicate among themselves (Dan 10.13) and with humans (Lk 1.19).
 - 3.1.2. Language requires nouns and verbs, syntax, grammars, semantics, etc. to create meaningful communication. Language is derived from the essence of God, who thinks logically. It is possible that angels communicate in a unique (non-human) language, but they could also use the original language which God used to communicate with mankind when he created them (Gen 3.9-19).
 - 3.2. *Having prophetic powers* – This is the ability to reveal truth directly from God or to predict the future, not the ability to preach effectively or expound the Scriptures clearly.
 - 3.3. *Understanding all mysteries and all knowledge* – This is an extraordinary ability to explain to the world God's plan of salvation through his crucified Son, which is foolishness to the pagan world and a stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor 1.20-25), and to counter the false gnosis of the world with teaching of the truth revealed by God. This form of gift will pass away (1 Cor 13.8) so it is not the knowledge of God and his redemptive plan revealed in Scripture and made available by the Holy Spirit to all believers.
 - 3.4. *Having all faith, so as to remove mountains* – Commentators agree that Paul is not speaking of saving faith, a faith that justifies (Rom 3.28; Gal 2.16), but of a faith that performs miracles. He refers to saving faith, and a deep trust in God, as permanent (1 Cor 13.13); in contrast to the faith mentioned here, which will pass away (1 Cor 13.8).
 - 3.5. *Giving away all that one has* – Some translations add 'to feed the poor'. One Greek word (ψωμίω) underlies the phrase, and it means, 'give away bit by bit'.

²³⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,267.

- 3.6. *Delivering up one's body to be burned* – Paul is likely referring to being executed for a noble cause, and may have had in mind the incident in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the fire (Dan 3.23).
4. How does Paul dismiss these activities, when love is not present?
- 4.1. He disparages them as worthless, as 'nothing'. In particular he refers to the speaking in tongues as equivalent to a 'noisy gong or a clanging cymbal'; which makes the phenomenon irritating rather than edifying.
5. Why did Paul select these activities to contrast with love?
- 5.1. The six activities are examples of high achievements of spirituality or altruism. They are considered among religious pagans to be a sign of moral goodness. Paul suggests that if a person could perform all five of the activities, he would be considered by the natural man to be a most 'spiritual' individual.
- 5.2. These activities are found among pagans and are not evidence of Christian piety or holiness:
- 5.2.1. Priests of false religions have been reported to make ecstatic utterances, which encourages their adherents to believe that they have received oracles from their gods. For example, a priest of Amon (in Egypt), and the Sibylline priestesses and the priestesses at Delphi (in Greece) are reported to have made such utterances. Likewise, some sects of Hinduism (the *bhakti* poets), Buddhism (an *udana*), and Islam (a *shath* in Sufism) have such traditions; which at times do not include intelligible content. Similar phenomena have been observed among North American aboriginals (e.g., those using peyote) and in the shango cults out of West Africa and the voodoo cults of the Caribbean.
- 5.2.2. Some of the pagan religions (e.g., the Mithras cult and the Phrygian cult of Cybele) of Paul's day were 'mystery religions'.²³¹
- 5.2.3. God gave Balaam (Num 22-24), Saul (1 Sam 10.9-13), and Caiaphas (Jn 11.49-52) prophetic powers, which indicates that it is not a power that is reserved for the converted.
- 5.2.4. God may grant to the unconverted the kind of faith that can move mountains (Mt 7.22). It is possible the Judas had the ability to work miracles (Mk 3.14-15; Mk 6.13). With caution, we might be able to state that even Satan may have been granted temporary abilities to perform miracles (Job 1.19; 2 Thess 2.9).
- 5.2.5. Many unbelievers support philanthropic causes and many give away vast sums of money.
- 5.2.6. Some among the unconverted are willing to face execution for their cause; for example, Muslim suicide bombers or Tibetans who immolate themselves for the cause of national freedom.²³²
- Theoretically, a person could be able to perform all these activities and be a Judas in his heart. Being able to perform one or all of these activities provides no evidence that the person belongs to Christ.
- 5.3. Paul selects the activities which impressed the materialistic Corinthians as 'spiritual' and consigns them to the garbage heap if *ἀγάπη* love is not present. Without a true loving concern for others in the congregation, their professed superiority because of their 'spiritual gifts' is as empty as a burst balloon.
6. Was Paul able to perform all of the activities he mentions?
- 6.1. Although the case is merely supposed for the sake of argument, Paul was able to perform each of these activities; he could:
- 6.1.1. Speak in tongues (1 Cor 14.18)
- 6.1.2. Exercise prophetic powers (1 Cor 11.23)

²³¹ [Mystery religion - Mystery religions and Christianity | Britannica](#)

²³² *Self-immolations by Tibetans*; www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/

- 6.1.3. Knowledge of the mystery (Eph 1.9; Eph 3.3)
 - 6.1.4. Work miracles (Acts 19.11)
 - 6.1.5. Give away his goods (1 Cor 9.1-18; Acts 20.33-35; 2 Cor 11.9)
 - 6.1.6. Suffer martyrdom (2 Cor 11.24-27), as Eusebius records.²³³
7. What do we have if we do not have love?
- 7.1. Nothing.
 - 7.1.1. Speech without love is nothing more than a strident sound.
 - 7.1.2. Insights without love are nothing more than imperious idiocy.
 - 7.1.3. Knowledge of mysteries without love is nothing more than a kooky malarky.
 - 7.1.4. Miracles without love are nothing more than magic to mystify.
 - 7.1.5. Philanthropy without love is nothing more than a pride in possessions.
 - 7.1.6. Self-sacrifice without love is nothing more than selfish suicide.
 - 7.2. While Paul could exercise all the activities he mentions, he considered them worthless if they are not performed under an umbrella of caring and corporate love.
 - 7.3. Like Solomon who examined all kinds of phenomena which apparently could give meaning to life (Ecc 1.13-18), Paul had experience with religious zeal (Phil 3.5-6), and supernatural gifts, and was well able, beyond anyone else, to conclude that pharisaical zeal and spiritual gifts are hollow where a love *for* Christ (Phil 3.7-11) and a love *from* Christ (Rom 4.8; 1 Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4.10, 19) are not present.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 13.1-3)?
- 8.1. *Miracles don't make the man* – Spiritual gifts do not make a Christian. The ability to perform the miraculous activities which Paul lists, or any others, is not the ideal for which Christians and the Church should strive. They are incidental artifacts used by God to advance the Gospel and to bring people into a loving communion. An emphasis on these incidental artifacts (e.g., tongues, prophecy, or miracles) will be divisive; but love unites.
 - 8.2. *Motivation makes the man* – Christian ἀγάπη love demonstrates that a man is a Christian (Jn 13.35; Gal 5.6). Unless the application of spiritual gifts is motivated by love they have no benefit for the believer in Christ or for the body of Christ. Without love, it is impossible to draw near to God, since God is love (1 Jn 4.8, 16). If we do not have love, we are without the most conspicuous attribute of God. ‘Love is never attributed to Satan; “love is of God.” As we have love, so far we are like God. Satan has power, knowledge, and is doubtless willing to sacrifice much to secure his own ends; if we have these, without love, we tend to grow into devils. Love is a redeeming, consecrating quality, which, pervading deeds, gives to them a new and God-like character.’²³⁴

Properties of Love (1 Cor 13.4-7)

- 1. How does Paul define ἀγάπη love?
 - 1.1. With fifteen aphorisms, in eight negatives and seven positives.
- 2. What are examples of how not to (negatives), or how to (positives), demonstrate each characteristic in Paul's definition of ἀγάπη love?
 - 2.1. Negatives
 - 2.1.1. Not boast – Do not claim to excel in a skill (e.g., in a sport or playing a musical instrument), speak about your abundant possessions (e.g., owning a fancy car or living in a posh

²³³ Eusebius of Caesaria. *The Church History of Eusebius* (bk 2. ch. 25). In P. Schaff & H. Wace (Eds.), A. C. McGiffert (Trans.), Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine (Vol. 1). (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890). pp. 128–130.

²³⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 449.

neighbourhood), mention your connections (e.g., knowing the mayor), or talk about your accomplishments (e.g., winning an award or advanced degree, or being promoted to an important position at work).

- 2.1.2. Not envy – Do not allow yourself to be distressed when others excel in skills, have abundant possessions, associate with the rich and famous, or have ‘important’ jobs.
- 2.1.3. Not arrogant – Do not look down your nose at those who you *think* are beneath your station, income, or social status and show an unwillingness to associate with those of a different ethnic group or class. For example, do not treat cleaning staff in a hotel with disdain.
- 2.1.4. Not rude – Do not speak impolitely to anyone (e.g., a store clerk or service desk representative), tell crude jokes, use foul language, or say unkind things (even if true).
- 2.1.5. Not insist on its own way – Do not be selfish or stubborn or demand on having the last word.
- 2.1.6. Not irritable – Do not be quick to become angry and lose your temper, particularly over insignificant slights (e.g., a person being late or leaving the toilet paper roll empty).
- 2.1.7. Not resentful – Do not hold grudges, bring up past slights, or dwell on the mistakes of others.
- 2.1.8. Not rejoice at wrongdoing – Do not take pleasure in watching others sin (Rom 1.32; 2 Thess 2.12), getting caught or suffering from their sins (Prov 24.17), or seek opportunities to berate them about their failures or say, “I told you so!”
- 2.2. Positives
 - 2.2.1. Patient – Wait your turn in line or to receive a service or product. Be courteous when your spouse is dressing to go out for dinner. Recognize when it is the right time to encourage or discipline a child.
 - 2.2.2. Kind – Give rather than take and never give anything while expecting to receive something in return.
 - 2.2.3. Rejoices with the truth – Delight in God’s word (every sentence of it) and accept its teachings with joy (e.g., receive historical accounts as accurate and endorse his law as the standard for the life of all men), receive the Gospel as the only hope for lost and suffering mankind, and strive to maintain doctrine and worship so that they are consistent with the Bible. Be candidly truthful and encourage truth-telling in all circumstances. Also, rejoice at positive news.
 - 2.2.4. Bears all things – Cheerfully face everything that comes your way—whether discouragements (e.g., not getting a new job), illness (e.g., being diagnosed with cancer), or persecution (e.g., being sued for taking a stand for Christ)—knowing that God is providentially working out all things for your good and his glory (Jn 9.2-3; Rom 8.28).
 - 2.2.5. Believes all things – Maintain a kind and positive outlook about the motives of others (Prov 10.12; 1 Pt 4.8) and about God’s goodness toward his people.
 - 2.2.6. Hopes all things – Be optimistic and cheerful regardless of the circumstances, praising God for all his providences.
 - 2.2.7. Endures all things – Put up with and forgive personal injuries or insults (Lk 17.4; 2 Tim 2.10, 24), and cover them with polite kindness and generous helpfulness (Lk 6.27-28).
- 2.3. Where does Paul identify a similar list of attributes?
 - 2.3.1. The fruit of the Spirit, in Galatians 5.22-23.
 - 2.3.2. The first item in that list is ἀγάπη love’, both lists include ‘patience’, ‘kindness’, and ‘joy’/‘rejoicing’. ‘Gentleness’ in that list could be equated with ‘not rude’, ‘self-control’ with ‘not irritable’, ‘peace’ and ‘faithfulness’ with ‘bears all things’ and ‘endures all things’, and ‘goodness’ with ‘not rejoice at wrongdoing’.
- 3. Who is the epitome of ἀγάπη love?
 - 3.1. All of the attributes apply to person and life of Jesus. He never boasted or envied anyone, was not arrogant or rude, he was patient, and bore all things, and so on.

- 3.2. Thus, Paul describes the attributes of Jesus, although he doesn't explicitly state that they apply to Jesus.
- 3.3. Therefore, ἀγάπη love is Christ's love. Anyone who lives ἀγάπη love is Christ-like.
4. What is the relationship between law-keeping and ἀγάπη love?
 - 4.1. Obedience to God's law is a key way of displaying love, since:
 - 4.1.1. God equates obedience and love (Dt 11.13; Mk 12.28-31; Jn 15.10-14) since "ἀγάπη (love) is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13.8-10).
 - 4.1.2. Jesus says that keeping his commandments is how we show love for him (Jn 14.15, 23).
 - 4.2. How we show love for God is by doing what he commands. Keeping the commandments is how we show ἀγάπη love to our fellowman. Practicing the ἀγάπη love documented in this chapter results in obedience to God's law. The law of love does not annul the commands of God; it fulfills them (Mt 5.17-20).
 - 4.3. How can we map Paul's list of ἀγάπη love attributes to the Ten Commandments, the summary of God's law. [Note: a number of the attributes could map to multiple commandments.]

	Commandment	Ἀγάπη love Attribute
1	Have one God only	Not insist own way; not resentful
2	No idols	Not boast, not arrogant
3	No blasphemy	Not rude
4	Sabbath observance	Hopes all things (<i>includes reverential worship of God</i>)
5	Obedience to authority	Bears all things; endures all things
6	No murder	Not irritable; patient
7	No adultery	Not rejoice at wrongdoing (<i>much of the entertainment industry endorses sexual infidelity</i>)
8	No theft	Kind
9	No lies or false witness	Rejoices with the truth; believes all things
10	No coveting	Not envy

- 4.4. The answers to questions related to the Ten Commandments in the Larger Catechism, illustrate the connection between ἀγάπη love and the Ten Commandments. For example,
 - 4.4.1. "Question 138: What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?
 Answer: The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.
 - 4.4.2. "Question 139: What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?
 Answer: The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others."²³⁵

²³⁵ Westminster Larger Catechism

5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 13.4-7)?
 - 5.1. *True Religion* – What are themes uniting the attributes which define ἀγάπη love?
 - 5.1.1. *Thoughts more than just actions* – These attributes are more than how a person behaves outwardly; they are primarily attributes of the heart—beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. In this respect they are similar to the instruction which Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount when he turns his hearers' attention to the heart sins which are deeper than outward behaviour (Mt 5.21-47).
 - 5.1.2. *Spiritual rather than natural* – These attributes are unnatural. A natural man, born in sin and steeped in sin, cannot acquire or display them. It requires the Spirit's touch on a person's heart to make it possible for these attributes to be displayed.
 - 5.1.3. *Unconditional rather than conditional* – These attributes are to be displayed despite the recipient's supposed worthiness, not because of it. They direct love to the unlovely, kindness to the unkind, tolerance to the intolerant, and gentleness to the brutal.
 - 5.1.4. True religion is not ritual, it is showing ἀγάπη love toward God and man (Mk 12.28-31). Paul's list of ἀγάπη love attributes and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount inform us of how little true religion there is in the world.
 - 5.2. *Typical Requirements* – What does Paul expect of Christians?
 - 5.2.1. Paul believes, and expects, that Christians should exemplify ἀγάπη love. He tells us to imitate him, as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 4.16; 1 Cor 11.1).
 - 5.2.2. He wants every believer to be Christ-like.
 - 5.2.3. Ἀγάπη love is the standard by which Christians are called to live. We are to desire, and ask, that God would bless us with the gift of ἀγάπη love.
 - 5.3. *Temporal Resistance* – How do we try to avoid applying Paul's definition of ἀγάπη love to ourselves?
 - 5.3.1. We rationalize and make excuses.
 - 5.3.1.1. We excuse irritability with a headache or by saying that we are not a morning person.
 - 5.3.1.2. We rationalize doubt (rather than hope) by saying that we are realists.
 - 5.3.1.3. We justify impatience by saying that we have had to face our share of challenges.
 - 5.3.2. Rather than repent, we redefine sin and love so that we can meet our own 'standards'. Like the Pharisee (Lk 18.11-12), we focus on our outward actions rather than on the blackness in our hearts.
 - 5.4. *Thankful Response* – It is impossible to display ἀγάπη love without the perfect obedience of Christ, the grace of God toward us in conversion, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, and the on-going indwelling of us by the Holy Spirit who enables us to obey God through ἀγάπη love. Therefore, we should thank God for showing his goodness toward us.

Permanence of Love (1 Cor 13.8-13)

1. Why does ἀγάπη love never end?
 - 1.1. Love is not a tangible entity that is subject to decay or aging like mechanical contraptions or our bodies. It is a feeling or emotion, a mental state. However, it is as real as logic or mathematics but intangible. Other mental states (e.g., faith and hope) are also intangible. Negative feelings and emotions, such as hate also exist, and in some cases will exist forever, since those persons (human or demonic) who are condemned to hell, will always hate God.
 - 1.2. Love is of the essence of God (1 Jn 4.8, 16). God is eternal as are his essential qualities. Therefore, love can never end. The love among the members of the Trinity is eternal, as is the love God displays toward those whom he has saved.
2. What is to happen to the spiritual gifts?
 - 2.1. They will end—pass away or cease. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge and, by implication,

- miracles (1 Cor 13.2), will all end.
- 2.2. How can knowledge end?
 - 2.2.1. God's knowledge is eternal, and our knowledge of God will exist forever. Therefore, Paul is not speaking of a standard form of knowledge, but an extraordinary insight—'utterance of knowledge' (1 Cor 12.8)—such is an inordinate ability to counter the false gnosis or the world with teaching of the truth revealed by God.
 - 2.3. This demonstrates that the spiritual gifts listed here (1 Cor 13.2) and earlier (1 Cor 12.8-10) are in a unique class, given for extraordinary situations and to an extraordinary extent. It also indicates that all the spiritual gifts Paul identifies in this Epistle are temporary. Their role will end when they are no longer required.
3. Why will these spiritual gifts cease?
 - 3.1. Something perfect (1 Cor 13.10) will come and replace them or make them no longer necessary for the Church and for the lives of individual believers while we await the second coming of Jesus.
 - 3.2. They are (were) intended for the immature state (the infant age) of the Church (1 Cor 13.11), an age when what can be known is not fully known (1 Cor 13.12).
 - 3.3. They are a poor reflection of the perfect reality which they represent (1 Cor 13.12)—we don't see the real thing itself but only a blurred reflection of the reality behind the image.
 - 3.3.1. Mirrors in the ancient world were not made of glass coated with aluminum or silver. They were made of polished metal and did not provide a clear reflection like mirrors do today.
 - 3.4. They are partial (1 Cor 13.9, 12) and thus not as effective as their perfect replacement.
 - 3.5. They were sign gifts—signs of the presence of a true apostle (2 Cor 12.12) which apparently ceased after the apostolic age.
 - 3.6. Does not mean that the gifts were faulty in themselves? No!
 - 3.6.1. God reveals truth progressively. For example, the nature of the Trinity and of the resurrection became clearer with the arrival of the Messiah and with the completion of the NT.
 - 3.6.2. As finite creatures we need truth to be revealed in ways that we can understand—with human languages and concepts such as anthropomorphisms
 - 3.6.3. The spiritual knowledge given to individuals in the first decade(s) of the NT Church was not wrong or false; it was only incomplete, in the same way that revelation about the coming Messiah provided to Adam and Eve (Gen 3.15), Moses (Dt 18.18-19) or Isaiah (Is 7.14; Is 9.6-7; Is 53.1-12) was incomplete but becoming increasingly clearer as the centuries passed.
 4. What is the 'perfect' that is to come?
 - 4.1. This is the most difficult question we can ask, related to chapter 13. How we answer this question determines how we answer the logically next question: when will the spiritual gifts pass away?
 - 4.2. Various alternatives could be (and have been) proposed, including:
 - 4.2.1. A believer's death.
 - 4.2.2. A believer's admission to heaven.
 - 4.2.3. The formation of the NT Church.
 - 4.2.4. The organization of a formal visible church structure (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church).
 - 4.2.5. The completion of the canon of the NT Scriptures—the entire Bible.
 - 4.2.6. A full display of brotherly love within the Church, particularly between Jews and Gentiles, when Christians have attained the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". (Eph 4.13)
 - 4.2.7. The second coming (the return) of Christ—just as the OT types were fulfilled with his first coming. It is argued that Paul's use of (πρόσωπον) 'face to face' (1 Cor 13.12) implies the

presence of two persons—i.e., the believer and Christ, who knows his people fully.

4.2.8. The general resurrection and final judgement.

4.2.9. The creation/revelation of the new heavens and earth.

4.3. Calvin concludes, “It begins, indeed, at death, for then we put off, along with the body, many infirmities; but it will not be completely manifested until the day of Judgement, as we shall hear presently. Hence we infer, that the whole of this discussion is ignorantly applied to the time that is intermediate.”²³⁶ Thus, he combines two options—a believer’s death and the final judgement.

4.4. Spence-Jones concludes that the ‘perfect’ is at the end of time when Jesus returns, ‘This is the beatific vision. “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). “Now we walk by faith, *not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7). Then shall I know even as also I am known; ... viz. when Christ took knowledge of me at my conversion. Now, we do not so much “know” God, but “rather *are known of God*” (comp. ch. 8:3).’²³⁷ Thiselton holds to a similar view.²³⁸

4.5. However, the immediate context, within this section of chapter 13, for ‘perfect’ (1 Cor 13.10), provides contrasts to the ‘partial’ (1 Cor 13.11), ‘childish’ (1 Cor 13.11), and ‘in part’ (1 Cor 13.12) which apply to prophecies (1 Cor 13.9) and knowledge (1 Cor 13.9, 12). Thus, it seems that the perfect is related to revelation from God. While it is true that at death a believer will know fully—all that God wants him to know—it appears that Paul is saying that prophecies, tongues, and direct extraordinary revealed knowledge, will no longer be required when the full record of revealed knowledge (the ‘perfect’) has come. It seems that Paul is saying that the sign gifts were given to the Church during its infancy—to validate the authors of the books of the Bible—until such time as the Bible was completed. Therefore, it may be best to conclude that the ‘perfect’ is the completed Scriptures, which, as Paul says elsewhere, provide all the knowledge that we need to be saved and fully equipped for living the Christian life (2 Tim 3.15-17). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states that, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”²³⁹ Thus, according to the authors of the *Confession*, the Bible is complete and gives us everything we need to know fully, and could thus be the ‘perfect’ to which Paul is referring.

5. When will the spiritual gifts pass away?

5.1. The answer to this question depends on what we have determined is the ‘perfect’. If the ‘perfect’ is outside of our current time (e.g., at believer’s death or at the Day of Judgement), then the spiritual gifts continue in the Church to this day. However, if the ‘perfect’ is the Bible (God’s complete revelation for mankind), then the spiritual gifts ceased during the first century after the death of the Apostle John, because the ‘perfect’ had arrived.

5.2. Jude (Jude 3), and Paul elsewhere (Heb 1.1-2) appear to provide support for the idea that the revelation of God to mankind was completed with the incarnation of Jesus and the end of the apostolic era. The Bible is now complete—no additions or emendations are required.

6. What abides, in contrast to extraordinary spiritual gifts which cease?

6.1. Faith, hope, and love.

6.2. What does Paul mean by ‘abide’?

6.2.1. Elsewhere the ESV translates the Greek word (μένει) as ‘remain’ or ‘stay’.

²³⁶ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xx.iii.html

²³⁷ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 425.

²³⁸ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1062.

²³⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 4.

- 6.2.2. He is stating that these three are permanent, never ending, graces (gifts of the Spirit; Rom 12.6) given to the Church.
- 6.2.3. Paul does not use ‘now’ in a temporal sense (e.g., the graces existed at the time he wrote), in contrast to ‘then’. Rather, his words (νυνὶ δὲ) are an idiomatic expression which can be translated as ‘and so’ or ‘accordingly’.
- 6.2.4. In contrast to the world, which has only false faith, no hope (Eph 2.12), and lust rather than love, Christians have true and everlasting faith, hope, and love.
- 6.3. Some claim that faith and hope do not abide forever but apply only in the temporal realm. For example, faith and hope pass when love is fully realized.
- 6.4. How can faith remain forever?
 - 6.4.1. Christian faith is more than an act of belief in the perfect work of Christ or a confidence that allows us to perform miracles (1 Cor 13.2); it is trust in, and dependence on, the person of Jesus. This faith will never be annulled; because even in the perfect state of paradise, we will continue to place our absolute trust in the faithfulness of Jesus.²⁴⁰
- 6.5. How can hope remain forever?
 - 6.5.1. ‘Hope’ is used in various ways by Paul in the NT. For example,
 - 6.5.1.1. An expectation of something in the spatial-temporal realm (2 Cor 1.7).
 - 6.5.1.2. A synonym for saving faith (Rom 8.24; 1 Thess 5.8).
 - 6.5.1.3. A conviction about the truth of the Gospel (Col 1.23).
 - 6.5.1.4. A firm expectation of everlasting life (Rom 5.2-5; Gal 5.5; Eph 1.18; Col 1.5; Titus 1.2; Heb 6.19).
 - 6.5.1.5. A belief about the coming judgement and renovation of the universe (Rom 8.20; Titus 2.13).
 - 6.5.1.6. A title for God (Rom 15.13; Col 1.27).
 - 6.5.2. Some of these forms of hope do not continue beyond the achievement of their object (e.g., when used as a synonym for saving faith). However, hope in other forms can extend forever and grow ever more confident; for example, as it:
 - 6.5.2.1. Expects the increasing display of God’s infinite (and therefore inexhaustible) glory.
 - 6.5.2.2. Increases in its trust and certainty in the goodness and love of God for his elect sons and daughters.
 - 6.5.2.3. Delights in the growing happiness with which God will forever bless his children.
 - 6.5.3. “Whereas those without Christ are without God and without hope, living already in a dusk of the spirit that is destined to grow darker and colder. Christians are in the sunshine, endlessly rejoicing in ‘Christ Jesus our hope.’ The inescapable alternatives are *false* hope (Marxism? Spiritism? Happiness through having things? Endless good health?—false hopes, every one), or else *no* hope (total pessimism, inviting suicide), or else *Christian* hope, the electrifying knowledge of ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’”²⁴¹
- 6.6. How can love remain forever?
 - 6.6.1. Because God is love—the essence of his character is love. He is eternal; therefore, his attributes are eternal. God will forever display his love toward his people. Those saved into glory will forever display ἀγάπη love toward God and his people.
- 7. Why is love the greatest of the three graces?
 - 7.1. Love is an essential attribute of God—God is love, he exercises love among the members of the Trinity, and he could not be God without love. God is not ‘faith’ or ‘hope’ and would not be God

²⁴⁰ “In rendering πιστεύω and πίστις it would be wrong to select a term which would mean merely ‘reliance’ or ‘dependency’ or even ‘confidence,’ for there should also be a significant measure of ‘belief,’ since real trust, confidence, and reliance can only be placed in someone who is believed to have the qualities attributed to such a person.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 376). New York: United Bible Societies.

²⁴¹ J. I. Packer, *Revelations of the Cross* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 31.

if he exercised either of them—he is complete in himself and doesn't look with expectation for something he doesn't have to the fullest. In contrast, faith and hope are positive human attributes required because of our finiteness.

- 7.2. Faith and hope are given by God to men to be directed from men toward God; whereas love originates from God and is directed from God toward men (1 Jn 4.19).
 - 7.3. Faith and hope benefit individuals, love benefits others—particularly through its supreme manifestation in Christ dying for sinners (Rom 5.8).
 - 7.4. Love is the end for which the other two graces are means. We have faith in the one whom we love, and we hope for that which we love. Faith and hope can only be manifested through love.
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 13.8-13)?
- 8.1. *Proclamation* – The spiritual gifts passed out of the Church when the last of the apostles left to be with the Lord in heaven and the Bible in its entirety had been delivered to the Church. Churches and individual Christians who seek for these gifts today are confused. Rather than expending energy seeking the spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit has chosen to remove (at least generally, if not totally) from the Church, Church leaders should focus their efforts on solid Biblical preaching and teaching—God's designated means for bringing unbelievers into his Church (1 Cor 1.21; Rom 10.14-15) and for building up believers.²⁴²
 - 8.2. *Precepts* – The perfect replacement for the spiritual gifts has arrived—the Bible; the entire canon of Scripture which provides all the knowledge that we need to be saved and fully equipped for living the Christian life (2 Tim 3.15-17). The Bible should become our daily companion and guide for every decision and action that we take.
 - 8.3. *Priorities* – Our priority should be to display a life of exquisite Christian faith, hope, and love. Every believer in Jesus Christ is endowed with these graces—to a greater or lesser degree. Therefore, we should not squander or abuse them, but cultivate them (Lk 17.5; Rom 5.4-5; 2 Cor 10.15; Eph 4.15-16).

Language Signs (1 Cor 14.1-25)

Tongues vs Prophecy (1 Cor 14.1-5)

1. What did Paul encourage the Corinthians to do?
 - 1.1. *Pursue love* (1 Cor 14.1).
 - 1.1.1. By this statement, he reiterates the message of the previous chapter, and provides a bridge between his paean of love and the proper use of spiritual gifts—he connects the greatest grace, love, with the greatest spiritual gift, prophesying.
 - 1.1.2. After his 'digression' (there were no chapter divisions in the original) about love he now returns to his instructions for how a congregation should operate.
 - 1.1.3. The pursuit of love is to be a primary principle for guiding all action within (or out with) the Church. The spiritual gifts are not a substitute for love, nor are they effective without it.
 - 1.2. *Desire the spiritual gifts* (1 Cor 14.1). Desiring to receive a gift is not wrong (1 Tim 3.1).
 - 1.2.1. We know this from the human realm, where children have a natural desire to receive gifts from their parents on their birthdays. God as our heavenly Father, delights in giving gifts to his children.
 - 1.2.2. Likewise, we know that since we are created in the image of God, we have an innate desire to find purpose in our lives.
 - 1.2.3. A Christian desiring to have a gift that can be used for service for others clearly has a good and proper desire.
 - 1.2.4. However, lusting after a particular gift or pursuing a quest to acquire a gift is not right. A gift is a gift not an earned payment.

²⁴² See: "Appendix L – Preaching and Teaching" in: James R. Hughes, *Nehemiah the Church Builder: Instructor's Guide*, 2006;: available at, www.epctoronto.org.

- 1.2.5. As long as our desire to receive spiritual gifts is conditioned by love (1 Cor 13.1-13), and the reason we desire to receive spiritual gifts is for upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (1 Cor 14.3, 12) and not for the advancement of ourselves, then the desire is not wrong.
 - 1.2.6. Those given spiritual gifts must use them to minister to the Church, not to pridefully display them or to lord it over others, as it appears some were doing in the Corinthian congregation.
 - 1.3. *Speak in tongues* (1 Cor 14.5); use this spiritual gift, if it has been granted to you. However, the spiritual gift of tongues is of comparatively less value than the gift of prophesying and has no value if it is not accompanied by interpretation (1 Cor 14.5) and revelation, since tongues have no other purpose than to communicate divine revelation—the mysteries of God (1 Cor 2.1; Mt 13.11; Rom 11.25; Rom 16.25)—to those who speak a foreign language and do not understand the language being used by the congregation.
 - 1.4. *Prophecy* (1 Cor 14.5). This is of greater value for the Church than speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14.5), since prophesying is to provide understandable content which influences others for good.
2. Why is prophesying of greater value for the Church than speaking in tongues?
 - 2.1. When someone declares a revelation (1 Cor 14.6) in a previously unknown foreign language and everyone else in the congregation cannot understand what is being said, the message is lost and the words coming from the mouth of the speaker are nothing more than the babbling of barbarians (1 Cor 14.11).
 - 2.2. No one can be built up, encouraged, or consoled through words that cannot be understood. Matthew Henry explains it well, “What cannot be understood can never edify. No advantage can be reaped from the most excellent discourses, if delivered in unintelligible language, such as the audience can neither speak nor understand: but he that prophesies speaks to the advantage of his hearers; they may profit by his gift.”²⁴³
 - 2.3. Notice that the debated definition of tongues—a foreign language or an ecstatic language, as many in Pentecostal denominations might claim—is beside the point. If the person speaking in a tongue cannot be understood, then what is verbalized has no value and the person should be silent.
 - 2.3.1. However, the emphasis of this larger section (1 Cor 14.1-25) makes it clear that the gift of tongues Paul is speaking about is the miraculous ability to speak a foreign language, since the words ‘speak(s)’ (11X) and ‘understands’ used in this larger section refer to comprehensible communication.
 - 2.3.2. If Pentecostals claim that speaking in tongues includes the use of ecstatic (non-linguistic) sounds, they are mistaken. Thus, “What then is the gift of tongues in the New Testament? It is the utterance of praise whereby the Holy Ghost takes over the very formation and utterance of the words, so that a foreign language is used by someone who does not know that language and never in his life has been exposed to it. He praises God in declaring His wonderful works of creation and redemption without himself knowing the meaning of that language [cp. Acts 2.8-11].”²⁴⁴
 3. Is there a contradiction between Paul’s statement “desire the spiritual gifts” and his indication that the spiritual gifts will cease (1 Cor 13.8)?
 - 3.1. Someone might conclude that there is no value in pursuing something that will cease (or has limited value, such as speaking in tongues). However, we can dismiss this argument with an analogy. There is no contradiction between these statements: “desire life” and “life is short”. We should use the gifts God gives us—whether temporal or spiritual gifts—fully and for his glory.

²⁴³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,269.

²⁴⁴ Geoffrey Thomas, “Aspects of the Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit,” *The Banner of Truth*, Issue 115, April 1973; p. 18.

- 3.2. The spiritual gifts were of value when used correctly, even if for a limited time, during the infancy of the NT Church; until the canon of Scripture was complete, and the revelation from God for this era was completely documented. In addition, the principles associated with the use of spiritual gifts apply also to the general (i.e., apparently non-miraculous) gifts with which God continues to endow his Church.
4. How could a person who speaks in a tongue build up himself (1 Cor 14:4)?
 - 4.1. A person who could suddenly speak in a foreign language, that he had previously not learned, would experience a sense of elation or elevation²⁴⁵ (an emotional ‘high’) and be susceptible to pride (puffed up²⁴⁶) from being given a gift others had not received, and from being the centre of attention.
5. What condition does Paul give for the use of tongues in the assembly?
 - 5.1. Someone must be available to interpret (1 Cor 14.5, 13) what is proclaimed by the one speaking in a foreign language. Tongues interpreted have the purpose of evangelism (1 Cor 14.22). Tongues without interpretation are but noise with no edifying effect on the hearers (1 Cor 14.11, 23).
 - 5.2. Paul places before the Corinthians a dilemma: how would a person speaking in a tongue know that there was someone present who could interpret what was being said? The speaker could also be provided with the ability to understand the language he is speaking and provide a translation for the assembled congregation (1 Cor 14.13) or a person who already knew the language (or was miraculously gifted to understand it) was already present and could provide a translation. Regardless, Paul places a strict boundary around the use of tongues—they are not to be used unless the content of the communication can be made comprehensible to the entire congregation.
6. How can we apply Paul’s encouragement to desire the spiritual gifts, if they are no longer found in the Church today?
 - 6.1. Paul enunciates a principle about spiritual gifts—whether or not they are miraculous. We are to desire to see the manifestation of spiritual gifts in the Church, whether assigned to us or others, for the edification of the Church. And, we are to apply the spiritual gifts through the lens of love.
 - 6.2. We are earnestly to desire the (apparently) non-miraculous successors of the explicitly miraculous spiritual gifts. What are examples, in the Church today, of equivalents to the spiritual gifts (and offices) Paul mentioned earlier (1 Cor 12.4-11)?
 - 6.2.1. *Utterance of wisdom and knowledge* – The ability for Christians to provide insight into God’s revelation continues, but not in a *revelatory* form. The Bible is complete. However, the vast collective results of 2,000 years of thought and comment on Scripture is available today on the internet.
 - 6.2.2. *Faith* – Every Christian is endowed with faith and is to exercise his faith so that he becomes more confident and trusting in the work of God the Father and God the Son.
 - 6.2.3. *Working of miracles and Healing* – Elders are to pray for healing for the sick, even if they do not have power to work miracles themselves (James 5.14). God may directly intervene in the healing of those for whom the elders pray.
 - 6.2.4. *Apostles, Prophets, and Teachers* – The apostolic successors are preachers and teachers.
 - 6.2.5. *Prophecy* – Preaching and teaching are the successors of prophesying—without being new revelation—and are to be exercises with the illumination from the Holy Spirit.
 - 6.2.6. *Distinguishing between spirits* – Elders have been assigned responsibility for ruling

²⁴⁵H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 457.

²⁴⁶ John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.” In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 208.

congregations with love, wisdom, and discretion ('pastoral prudence').

6.2.7. *Various kinds of tongues / interpretation of tongues* – God endows some individuals with amazing abilities to learn new languages quickly, and organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators are bringing the Bible to the various language groups of the world. Today, about three-quarters of the inhabitants of the world have access to the entire Bible in their primary language.²⁴⁷

6.2.8. *Helping* – This role continues formally in the office of Deacon. In addition, many congregations provide helping ministries (e.g., for the care of the poor or sick) directly or through parachurch organizations.

6.2.9. *Administering* – Elders continue to rule in the congregations of the Church (Titus 1.5).

7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.1-5)?

7.1. *Balance Priorities* – The Holy Spirit provides many spiritual gifts to his Church and distributes them as he sees fit. He also teaches through Paul that some gifts are more important than others—e.g., being able to preach the Gospel effectively is more important than being able to speak in a foreign language (unless, of course, one is a missionary to another language group, who should be able to hear the Gospel proclaimed in their own language). Thus, congregations and denominations should have the same priorities as those given by Paul. They should focus on:

7.1.1. preaching truth based on Biblical knowledge and wisdom,

7.1.2. wise rule by the elders who lead by example and apply church discipline when required,

7.1.3. encouraging faith in their congregation, and

7.1.4. helping the needy in the congregation;

rather than seeking ecstatic language experiences or miraculous healings.

7.2. *Build up Peers* – While we may desire to have a particular gift, we are not to seek it with envy or covetousness. The purpose of the spiritual gifts is for building up the Church. If we have a spiritual gift our objective must be to use it for the edification of our peers not for personal gain—e.g., by seeking recognition, exercising power, or acquiring material benefits. The only way we should use any spiritual gift(s) we have been given is through an active pursuit of love.

Tongues' Purpose (1 Cor 14.6-19)

1. What is the primary purpose of the spiritual gift of tongues (1 Cor 14.6, 8)?

1.1. Since we have concluded that Paul is speaking of the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language not previously learned, the purpose of tongues is to present Biblical truth—the Gospel—to linguistic communities that do not understand a language usually spoken by the evangelist.

1.2. The purpose of tongues is to present information to the minds of the hearers. Paul mentions four dimensions of this information. What are they (1 Cor 14.6):

1.2.1. Revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching.

1.2.2. This list makes it clear that the purpose of tongues is to communicate information in a rational manner.

1.3. What is a key test for the authenticity of the use of tongues that Paul presents?

1.3.1. They communicate information that is consistent with Biblical truth.

1.3.2. If not, then the manifestation of the tongues phenomenon is not a spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit.

1.4. Why was Paul thankful that he spoke in tongues more than his readers did?

1.4.1. He understood how important this spiritual gift was for his calling as a missionary to the Gentiles (Gal 2.9).

1.4.2. He knew that many of those whom he encountered throughout the ancient Mediterranean world would not speak either Greek or Latin. Thus, they needed to hear the Gospel in their

²⁴⁷ *What's been done, What's left to do* – Latest Bible translation statistics; www.wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/statistics.html

own language (Acts 2.7-12).

2. What indicates that Paul uses the word ‘tongues’ as a synonym for ‘foreign languages’ (1 Cor 14.9-11, 13; see also, 1 Cor 14.21)?
 - 2.1. In 1 Corinthians 14.9, he indicates that a tongue must be intelligible.
 - 2.2. In 1 Corinthians 14.10-11, he uses ‘languages’ (φωνῶν) to define what he means by ‘tongues’ (γλώσσαις).
 - 2.3. In 1 Corinthians 14.21, he uses a compound word (ἑτερογλώσσοις), made up of two parts, ‘other’ and ‘tongues’ in a quotation from the LXX (Is 28.11-12), equating ‘tongues’ with comprehensible foreign languages.
 - 2.4. Since tongues are to communicate understandable information, they must be languages known by other people.
 - 2.5. In 1 Corinthians 14.13, he indicates that any time tongues are used there must be someone present who can translate (interpret) what was said for those who do not know the language.
 - 2.6. Thus, contrary to what some claim,²⁴⁸ tongues are foreign languages which can be understood by some people and translated into the common language of those present.
3. How does Paul illustrate the uselessness of speaking in a tongue if no one can understand it (1 Cor 14.7-8, 16)?
 - 3.1. He provides an analogy using inanimate objects—musical instruments—that make sounds that are used to communicate information (tunes or warnings). If they cannot be understood, they are useless.
 - 3.2. If a person cannot understand what is being said and give his assent (an ‘amen’), then the manifestation of the tongue is useless.
4. Is the manifestation of tongues an ecstatic event?
 - 4.1. A number of commentators and many in the Church (including major denominations) today conclude that the manifestation of tongues at the time of the apostles was (and continues to be) an ecstatic experience for Christians. [Defining ‘ecstatic’ as, an experience of mystic transcendence.]
 - 4.2. We concluded above that the manifestation of tongues was the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language, not previously known by the speaker. In that definition there is nothing which requires the experience to be ecstatic. Paul does not state that the manifestation of tongues was an ecstatic experience, so the idea that the manifestation was ecstatic can only be inferred from 1 Corinthians 14.14, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.”
 - 4.3. How should we understand Paul’s statement in verse 14?
 - 4.3.1. It is a difficult statement to interpret. However, it may be that the speaker of the foreign language did not know what he was saying, because he didn’t understand the foreign language that he was speaking. One commentator has suggested that “I am only aware that I *am* praying. I have no definite consciousness as to what I say.”²⁴⁹ This may be why Paul says that those given the gift of tongues should pray that they could also interpret what was said in the tongue (1 Cor 14.13). The speakers on the Day of Pentecost may not have understood the languages they were heard to be speaking (Acts 2.7-11).
 - 4.4. Those who claim that the tongues phenomenon was ecstatic may be interpreting the manifestation of tongues within the context of their understanding of pagan religious rituals such as trances experienced by the Sibylla prophetesses extant at the time of the founding of the NT Church. However, this is an inference which cannot be supported from the text of Paul’s letter

²⁴⁸ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1109.

²⁴⁹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 322.

- and must be read into it. Paul does not associate pagan ecstatic rituals with the manifestation of tongues. Rather he associates tongues, elsewhere, with intelligible communication, as he quotes from the OT (Rom 3.13, from Ps 5.9; Rom 14.11, from Is 45.23; and Phil 2.11, from Is 45.23).²⁵⁰
- 4.5. The manifestation of tongues in Corinth had nothing to do with the ecstatic experiences of the pagan oracles. And, the manifestation of tongues at the time of the apostles has no connection with the modern tongues movement (e.g., in Pentecostal denominations), which is focused on feelings rather than knowledge.
5. Why is speaking in a tongue useless if no one can understand what is spoken (1 Cor 14.9, 11, 14, 16-17)?
- 5.1. The message is unintelligible to the hearers (9).
- 5.2. The words are nothing more than sounds that vibrate air molecules—speaking to the air (9)—and communicate no information to the hearers.
- 5.3. The speaker and hearers become like linguistic foreigners (11) to one another, speaking gibberish.
- 5.3.1. The Greek word (βάρβαρος) translated foreigner has been brought into English as ‘barbarian’.
- 5.4. The experience does not bear any fruit—is unfruitful (14)—because it does not provide any benefit to the hearers.
- 5.5. The experience is selfish since the only (limited) benefit is to the speaker (14), focusing on the individual ‘God and me’ relationship rather than the corporate ‘God and us’ relationship.²⁵¹
- 5.6. No one can give his assent with what is being said, by uttering a hearty ‘amen’ (16), since no one can agree with what he cannot understand.
- 5.6.1. *Amen* is a Hebrew word, derived from the root that includes the ideas of *faithfulness* or *truth*. Thus to utter an ‘amen’ in response to what is said by the speaker, is to affirm that what was said is true (Num 5.22; Dt 27.15; 1 Chron 16.36; Rev 1.6-7).
- 5.7. Tongues are useless unless they are providing revelation for consideration by the minds of the hearers (1 Cor 14.1-5).
- 5.8. The speakers of tongues will be considered as raving maniacs (1 Cor 14.23; Gk: μαίνεσθε) by outsiders if the words spoken are unintelligible; this will bring disrepute to the cause of the Gospel and of Christ.
- Therefore, it is foolish to utter words in a Church assembly which cannot be understood by those present.²⁵²
6. What is the purpose of verbal communication in the Church (1 Cor 14.7, 14-15, 19)?
- 6.1. To inform—to provide information to minds. How does Paul confirm this, in this portion of his letter?
- 6.1.1. He uses words such as ‘know’ (1 Cor 14.7), ‘mind’ (1 Cor 14.14-15, 19), and ‘instruct’ (1 Cor 14.19). These words are associated with the transmission of information from a speaker to the mind of a hearer. Thus, the purpose of tongues should be to inform minds. If no one is present who can interpret the words in a tongue no transmission of information can occur, and the tongue should not be used. The purpose of the miraculous phenomenon of tongues is to inform minds, not (primarily) to stimulate the emotions, of either the speaker or the hearer.
- 6.1.2. Paul uses the word ‘spirit’ (πνεῦμά) in this section (1 Cor 14.14-16) to refer to the

²⁵⁰ D. K. Lowery, 1 Corinthians; In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 538.

²⁵¹ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1116-1117.

²⁵² John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xxi.ii.html

volitional, will or emotional dimension of man as distinct from the ‘mind’ (νοῦς), by which he means the rational or logical dimension of man. Paul is not espousing a form of philosophical dualism and separating spirit from mind as two components of man.

6.1.3. The Gospel is not first an appeal to the will or the emotions, but to mind. The will and the emotions are driven from rational thought; by what we believe and know (1 Jn 5.13), not from what we feel. Thus Paul says (1 Cor 14.19) that he would rather speak few (five) words that provide instruction than many (ten thousand) which cannot be understood by anyone in the assembly.

6.1.4. It is ironic that the Corinthians who took pride in ‘knowledge’ (1 Cor 1:5; 1 Cor 8:1) were undermining the advancement of knowledge with incomprehensible words.

7. What does Paul say is the purpose of singing praises (1 Cor 14.15)?

7.1. To instruct (mind) as well as to stir the emotions (spirit).

7.2. All commonly used Protestant Evangelical translations of the NT (e.g., Tyndale, Geneva, KJV, NKJV, NASB, and NIV) since 1536, translate the Greek as “I will sing”. The ESV translates it as ‘sing praises’, adding the word ‘praises’.

7.3. However, Paul uses a word (ψαλῶ) that is derived from the noun ‘psalm’—i.e., he says “I will psalm”. Wycliffe’s later translation (c 1395) has “I shall sing psalm” following the Latin Vulgate’s verbal form ‘psallam’.

7.4. Since we do not use ‘psalm’ as a verb in English, we should translate it accurately as, ‘I will sing a Psalm’. [Note: ‘psalm’ (ψαλμὸν) is also used in 1 Cor 14.26, , not ‘hymn’.]

7.5. Calvin, notes Paul’s use of ‘psalm’, “When he says, *I will sing Psalms*, or, *I will sing*, he makes use of a particular instance, instead of a general statement. For, as the praises of God were the subject-matter of the Psalms, he means by *the singing of Psalms—blessing God*, or *rendering thanks* to him, for in our supplications, we either ask something from God, or we acknowledge some blessing that has been conferred upon us. From this passage, however, we at the same time infer, that the custom of singing was, even at that time, in use among believers, as appears, also, from Pliny, who, writing at least forty years, or thereabouts, after the death of Paul, mentions, that the Christians were accustomed to sing Psalms to Christ before day-break. I have also no doubt, that, from the very first, they followed the custom of the Jewish Church in singing Psalms.”²⁵³

7.6. What can we conclude from this?

7.6.1. The proper way to inform the mind and to stir the emotions in congregational praise is to sing Psalms which are full of information content, not to sing repetitive choruses which may given an emotional high but can only dull the mind.

8. What are we to strive to do with any spiritual gifts which we may have been granted (1 Cor 14.12, 16-17)?

8.1. Build up the Church. There are two parts to building up the Church:

8.1.1. Teaching and encouraging believers (1 Thess 4.18; 1 Thess 5.11, 14; 1 Tim 4.11; 2 Tim 2.2; Titus 2.1).

8.1.2. Proclaiming the Gospel to unbelievers (outsiders) and adding them to the Church (Mt 28.19-20). Paul uses the Greek word (ἰδιώτου) from which we derive the English word ‘idiot’. Besides being translated as ‘outsiders’, the word has been translated as ‘those who do not understand’, ‘ungifted’, ‘uninformed’ and ‘unlearned’ in the various English translations.

9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.6-19)?

9.1. *Common Speech* – The Bible and the Psalms used in worship, and in preaching and teaching

²⁵³ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xxi.ii.html

should be presented in the common, understandable, language of the audience to which they are addressed. Communication in the Church should:

- 9.1.1. Not consist of useless babbling (1 Cor 14.9; Mt 6.7).
- 9.1.2. Not be in a foreign language which cannot be understood by those in attendance (11).
 - 9.1.2.1. During the Middle Ages, the Church continued to insist on the use of Latin in the worship services, after Latin was no longer the language of the common man.
 - 9.1.2.2. One commentator gives the following anecdote to illustrate this point: “[O]n their way [to Rome, in in 867 AD, Cyril and Methodius, missionaries to the Balkans] they stopped in Venice, where they met stiff opposition to the use of Slavonic in the liturgy. The local bishops [in Italy] informed that there were only three sacred languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Cyril would have nothing of their linguistic imperiousness. “We know of numerous peoples who possess writing,” he said, “and render glory to God, each in his own tongue.” ... he dubbed their views “the three languages heresy”: and “burned them with the fire of Scripture,” according to his biographer, most notably the famous passage in 1 Corinthians [chapter] 14.”²⁵⁴
- 9.1.3. Be understandable to the common man. William Tyndale (16th century Bible translator) is reported to have said that by making the Bible available in the language of the people he, “would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than [the priest] did.”
 - 9.1.3.1. Translations of the Bible should be positioned on a readability index²⁵⁵ so that the majority of the readers can understand the text. Technical, ‘sanctified’ terms (e.g., ‘propitiation’, ‘atonement’) should be used only where essential to preserve the author’s meaning. The Westminster Confession of Faith, states, “[B]ecause [the] original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar [common] language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.”²⁵⁶
 - 9.1.3.2. Preachers are not to impress their audience with their knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or Latin. Preaching is not a language school.
 - 9.1.3.3. Preachers should avoid using words for abstract concepts—for example, instead of saying that “21st century man is existential in his thinking,” a preacher could say, “People today live primarily to experience the moment”.
- 9.1.4. During the 16th century, the Reformers emphasised the importance of providing the Bible, Psalms, and preaching in the common language of their nations. For example, Luther translated the Bible into German and Tyndale translated it into English. Calvin had a number of editions of the Psalter published as metrical versions (translations) of the Psalms became available. Many of these were translated and versified by the theologian Théodore Bèze and the poet Clément Marot. In addition, the Reformers preached in the familiar language of their congregations—for example, the sermons of both Luther and Calvin are easy to understand. Calvin wrote in Latin but also in French (e.g., the *Institutes* were published in both languages), and Luther wrote in Latin and German. They disagreed with the Roman Catholic clergy who wanted to restrict accessibility to the Bible by making it available only in Latin.

²⁵⁴ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1113.

²⁵⁵ E.g., *Bible Translation Guide* www.mardel.com/bibleTranslationGuide; or *Translation Reading Levels*; www.christianbook.com/page/bibles/about-bibles/bible-translation-reading-levels

²⁵⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 8.

- 9.2. *Communicating Salvation* – The spiritual gifts of tongues and interpretation had a specific purpose in the early NT Church—to communicate the Gospel to members of nations who did not know Greek. Likewise, the gifts of prophecy and utterance of wisdom and knowledge were provided to the Church so that it could grow in knowledge and apply that knowledge for teaching about Christ, convicting of sin, and encouraging the saints. Paul insists that the Church should communicate useful and edifying content. All communication in the Church should be like the clear and distinctive trumpet sound and never consist of the babbling of barbarians.
- 9.3. *Christian Sagacity* – Christianity is a sagacious religion. It is based on rational thought, precise definitions, keen insights and discernment, and good judgement. Preaching and teaching (and praise through Psalms) are to be content-rich food for renewed minds (Rom 12.2), which in turn will stir up the emotions to awe and wonder at the God who created and governs the universe and works everlasting salvation for his people. The Christian mind is the medium in which spiritual maturity sprouts and grows.

Tongues' Perspective (1 Cor 14.20-25)

1. How does Paul describe the Corinthians' attitude toward the spiritual gift of tongues?
 - 1.1. Infantile; a self-centred desire to be on display. Why?
 - 1.1.1. They showed a fondness for a gift which appeared spectacular. It may be that only the apostles (and very few others) could perform miracles of healing—as this was an apostolic sign (2 Cor 12.12)—but a larger contingent may have been gifted with the miraculous ability to speak in tongues. Yet, the spiritual gift of tongues was intended for the immature (infant) stage of the NT Church (1 Cor 13.11) when the Bible was not yet widely available in the languages which many could understand.
 - 1.1.2. They may have been influenced by the pagan world's fascination with oracular manifestations—e.g., at Delphi (about 200 kms from Corinth)—and falsely associated the spiritual gifts of tongues with advanced wisdom. Ironically, the spiritual gift of tongues appealed to them more than the real spiritual gifts of wisdom—i.e., utterances of wisdom and knowledge or prophecy.
 - 1.1.3. The ability to speak in tongues appears to have appealed to their emotions over their minds. Many modern Christians feel and think the same way. They would rather have their emotions stimulated than their minds exercised. Thus, they are like children who prefer that which mindlessly entertains over that which challenges contemplation.
 - 1.2. How does he want them to think?
 - 1.2.1. Maturely.
 - 1.3. What does Paul say characterizes a Christian who thinks maturely?
 - 1.3.1. He is as guileless as an infant with respect to the perpetration of evil—i.e., he lives a holy life, as far as possible in this realm (Gal 5.16-24).
 - 1.3.2. He places Biblical wisdom *above* emotions and feelings (Prov 4.5-6). However, this is not an absolute 'either-or' but a prioritized 'both-and'—think and feel.
 - 1.3.3. He does not pursue the sensational but seeks always to apply rational thought when assessing the claims of other Christians or of the world (1 Tim 6.20).
2. What does Paul's quotation from the OT teach about the use of tongues in the Church (1 Cor 14.21-22)?
 - 2.1. Paul uses the term 'Law' in the broadest sense as a synonym for the OT (e.g., Jn 10.34; Jn 15.25 refer to the Psalms), rather than in a narrow sense of 'Pentateuch' or very restricted sense of 'Leviticus' or 'Deuteronomy'.
 - 2.2. The passage to which he refers (Is 28.11-12), indicates that the former Covenant people (of the northern kingdom) who rejected God's message, would have to listen to words of another people—the Assyrians (compare, Dt 28.49; Jer 5.15). Thus, foreign lips would deliver on them a message of judgement as they were taken into captivity a few years later. Likewise, the

appearance of tongues in the NT Church was a sign to the unbelieving Jews that the Gospel was going to the nations because they had rejected their Messiah (Mt 21.43). And, on the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish leaders called the apostles drunk, but the proselytes (from many nations) heard the Gospel in their own languages.

- 2.3. Thus, the appearance of tongues during the early days of the NT Church was a two-fold sign for *unbelievers*: A sign to the Jews of their rejection of the Gospel *and* a sign to the nations that the Gospel was being offered to them. The manifestation of the spiritual gift of tongues was a sign of God's curse and judgement on those who rejected their covenant heritage and a sign of God's blessing and mercy on those who were dwelling in lands of spiritual darkness. In both instances, tongues are a sign for unbelievers, rather than for believers—a sign to those who live within the covenant community and reject the message of the Gospel and to those who live outside the covenant community and are currently unbelievers and are blessed with the opportunity to hear and believe.
3. When is the spiritual gift of tongues useful?
 - 3.1. In evangelistic settings where no one among the hearers knows the language of the speaker and the speaker is thus miraculously enabled to present the Gospel in the language of the audience.²⁵⁷
 - 3.2. Therefore, the spiritual gift of tongues is intended for use among *unbelievers*, not for use within the believing covenant community—i.e., within the Church in the NT era. In contrast, the spiritual gifts of utterances of wisdom and knowledge or prophecy are intended for use, first, within the worship assemblies of the covenant community. In simple terms, tongues have no role within the worship assembly of the NT Church—contrary to the thinking of those in Pentecostal denominations.
4. How will unbelievers react when they enter a church assembly where many (all) people are speaking in tongues?
 - 4.1. They will think that the members of the congregation are out of their minds. We derived our English word 'mania' from the root of the Greek word used here (μαίνεσθε) used here. Thus, they will think the congregation is an insane asylum filled with maniacs. When I was in university, I was invited by fellow student to attend a large Pentecostal assembly, in which there were dozens (maybe even hundreds) 'speaking in tongues' simultaneously. Besides being inconsistent with Paul's injunctions that only one or two speak in tongues (27) and individuals are to speak in tongues only if there was someone available to interpret (1 Cor 14.26-27), the noise was near deafening and almost frightening. It was nonsense, like the vain babbling of pagans. The result was a regression to Babel not a progression to Pentecost. Tongues speaking, unless used specifically in an evangelistic setting, will confuse the hearers and make them think they are encountering the ecstatic rituals of a pagan religious cult; making Christ and Christianity objects of ridicule.
5. What is the role of prophecy?
 - 5.1. With prophecy—in today's Church context, preaching and teaching—the unbeliever will hear the exposition of rational truth and, with the Holy Spirit's blessing, be convicted of his sin, of righteousness, and of the coming judgement. As a result, he will bow down and worship his Creator and come to the realization that Christianity is the only true religion.
 - 5.2. The power of Christianity is in preaching, the effect of Christianity is first on the intellect (the mind; 1 Cor 14.7, 14-15, 19), followed by the emotions and actions. Once a person knows the truth and believes it, then his feelings and actions are changed to conform with that belief.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.20-25)?

²⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1); www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xxi.iii.html

- 6.1. *Priority of Preaching* – It may sound simplistic, ineffectual, and boring to many, but as we have already observed (1 Cor 13.8-13), God’s designated means for bringing unbelievers into his Church and for building up believers is through preaching and teaching. This does not preclude a role for ‘pre-evangelistic’ means of engaging with unbelievers such as offering ESL programs, providing food for the hungry, or being a friendly and helpful neighbour. However, it is not by offering CCM concerts or other forms of entertainment that the Gospel can be, or is to be, presented; nor are these appropriate as acts of worship in the congregations of Christ’s Church (see the next section; 1 Cor 14.26-35). Matthew Henry sums it up well, “Religious exercises in Christian assemblies should be such as are fit to edify the faithful, and convince, affect, and convert unbelievers. The ministry was not instituted to make ostentation of gifts and parts, but to save souls.”²⁵⁸
- 6.2. *Cessation of Charismata* – The spiritual gifts which Paul identifies in this letter were temporary; made available by the Holy Spirit during the infancy of the NT Church. They were signs to validate apostolic authority until the Scriptures were complete and assist the early evangelists to propel the Gospel from Jerusalem and Judea to the outermost parts of the world. Tongues, in particular, were also a sign of judgement on the unfaithful Old Covenant people, and an indicator that the Gospel has now been offered to the Gentiles—God no longer speaks exclusively to the Jews. There is not a holy language (whether that is thought to be Hebrew, Greek, or Latin). Churches which claim to have the presence of tongues and healing miracles in their purported worship services are mistaken and even being deceptive.

Liturgical Services (1 Cor 14.26-35)

Structured Worship (1 Cor 14.26-33a)

1. What chaotic practice does Paul address?
 - 1.1. The unstructured/undisciplined application of spiritual gifts in the worship assembly.
 - 1.2. As each person feels that he is ‘led by the Spirit’, he does his own thing, which can degenerate into confusion and disorder.
 - 1.3. “The Corinthians were rejoicing in this gift [tongues] and abusing its use, so much so that their church meetings were more like the Tower of Babel than a church meeting at Pentecost; everyone was talking in his own language at the same time; no one was waiting for another; prophecies, tongues and psalms were all clamouring to be heard.”²⁵⁹
2. How does Paul illustrate the chaos in the Corinthian’s worship assembly (1 Cor 14.26)?
 - 2.1. A number of people were bringing forward different elements during a worship assembly, in an unorganized manner. [Note: he has already dealt with another form of chaos, with participants being irreverent during observances of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11.17-22, 33-34).]
 - 2.1.1. *Hymn* – The Greek has ‘psalm’ (ψαλμὸν) [the NASB and NKJV follow the Greek]. We need to establish if they were asking to have a Psalm sung from the Psalter, were bursting out and singing a Psalm on their own, or were offering new compositions for corporate singing. Some writers insist that Paul is speaking of the worshipers spontaneously offering new compositions; not a Psalm selected from the Psalter.^{260, 261} However, why is this conclusion suspect?
 - 2.1.1.1. There is absolutely no evidence that anyone in the early NT Church, during at least the first and second centuries, sang anything other than Psalms from the OT Psalter

²⁵⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,271.

²⁵⁹ Geoffrey Thomas, “Aspects of the Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit,” *The Banner of Truth*, Issue 115, April 1973; p. 12.

²⁶⁰ J. P. Lange, *et al*, *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 293-294.

²⁶¹ C. K. Barrett, in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Continuum, 1968), p. 327.

- during a worship assembly.²⁶²
- 2.1.1.2. We should employ the hermeneutic principle that takes the Bible in its plain sense and not read into it our particular modern interpretations.
 - 2.1.1.3. Thus, we understand the activity Paul refers to as individuals breaking into singing (Psalms) with no coordination of congregational singing—i.e., being announced by an elder/pastor or worship leader.
 - 2.1.1.4. Chrysostom makes an interesting observation about the early Church's use of coordinated corporate congregational singing of Psalms, "They all met together in old time and sang psalms in common. This we do also now: but then among all was there one soul and one heart: but now not in one single soul can one see that unanimity, rather great is the warfare everywhere."²⁶³
 - 2.1.2. *Teaching* – Individuals, not necessarily the appointed elders, claimed that they had a teaching (διδάχην) or instruction that the others in the congregation needed to hear. We sometimes encounter this kind of behaviour today during group Bible studies when participants vociferously voice their opinions about the meaning of the text, take the study into tangents, raise their favourite ('hobby-horse') topics, or monopolize a discussion.
 - 2.1.3. *Revelation* – Individuals brought forth (claimed or actual) revelations (ἀποκάλυψιν) from the Holy Spirit. They insisted that the corporate body needed to hear what had been revealed to them.
 - 2.1.4. *Tongue and interpretation* – Individuals burst out speaking in foreign languages, even though no one in the assembly was a native speaker of the language. And, others were (sometimes; 1 Cor 14.28) providing interpretations (translations) of what was said in the tongue.
 - 2.2. What does Paul *not* include in this list?
 - 2.2.1. He does not mention reading of the Scriptures or prayer. They may have been (likely were) present in their worship assemblies.
 - 2.2.2. However, their absence in his list of misused elements may be significant. They may have been inconsistent in the use of the elements of worship in their assemblies.
 - 2.2.3. Paul had to instruct Timothy to maintain the public reading of the Scriptures (1 Tim 4.13), and the early Church in Jerusalem devoted time to prayer (Acts 1.14; Acts 2.42).
 - 2.2.4. The Corinthians may have included consistent reading of the Scriptures (OT and emerging NT Gospels and Epistles) and prayer in their assemblies. However, their troubles were with worship elements that they felt gave them more of an opportunity to participate and to display their skills.
 - 2.3. What was Paul demonstrating by identifying issues with their worship?
 - 2.3.1. The key reason why Paul listed issues with these elements of their worship was to emphasize the fact that there was no coordination of the activities of the Corinthians' worship assemblies. They were engaged in a free-for-all in which there was no one in charge and leading the meetings. They were at one extreme end of the spontaneous *vs* liturgical continuum.
 3. What guidance does Paul give for the exercise of the spiritual gift of tongues (1 Cor 14.27-28)?
 - 3.1. The usage of tongues in a worship assembly is to be limited to two or three times and only to be used when someone is present to immediately provide an interpretation.
 - 3.2. If these conditions are not met, the speakers of tongues were not to use them—they were to keep

²⁶² See: "The Psalter: The Hymnbook of the Church – Ancient Church" in: James R. Hughes, *In Spirit and Truth: Worship as God Requires (Understanding and Applying the Regulative Principle of Worship)*, 2006; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

²⁶³ John Chrysostom. "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians." In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 220.

silent and offer their worship silently to God. Contrast this guidance with the discordant noise of loud babbling heard in many Pentecostal assemblies.²⁶⁴ No wonder Paul says that an outsider will think they are out of their minds! (1 Cor 14.23)

4. What guidance does Paul give for the exercise of the spiritual gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14.29-32)?
 - 4.1. At most three prophets are to speak during a worship assembly. They are to speak one at a time. When one has finished speaking, he is to be quiet while the others speak and not interrupt them.
 - 4.2. What is said by a prophet is to be considered and assessed by the other prophets (and the spiritually mature) who are present in the assembly. A prophet does not have an unfettered freedom to make any pronouncement he chooses. His words must be from the Lord, consistent with Scripture (Acts 17.11; 1 Thess 5.20-21; 1 Jn 4.1-3), and for the purpose of teaching and encouraging all those in attendance at the meeting of the assembly.
 - 4.3. A caution: Paul is not encouraging conceited, censoriousness, criticism. He is charging Christians to use their minds and assess what they are hearing—e.g., to ensure that what is preached is consistent with *the Faith* once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).
5. Why does Paul give the guidance that he presents in this section of his letter?
 - 5.1. All things offered as worship to God in the assembly are to glorify God (1 Cor 10.31; Rev 14.7)—this means that they must be consistent with his standards—and they must build up the saints assembled for worship (1 Cor 14.26). The saints cannot be taught and encouraged if the teaching they hear is nothing more than a cacophony of discordant sounds.
 - 5.2. Worship is to be orderly, because God is not a God of confusion (other translations: ‘tumult’, Lk 21.9; ‘riots’, 2 Cor 6.5; ‘disorder’, 2 Cor 12.20), but of peace (1 Cor 14.33a). His creation and providences are magnificently ordered—disorder, decay, and increasing entropy are the result of Adam’s sin. The Church is to reflect the order exhibited by its Lord in all that it does (Ex 26.30; 2 Chron 5.11-14; 2 Chron 7.4-6; 2 Chron 29.25-30). James 3.16 says that confusion (disorder) is the result of jealousy and selfish ambition, which are inconsistent with Godly order and peace.
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.26-33a)?
 - 6.1. *Ordered Worship*. Paul provides guidance for how worship services are to be conducted; thus, indicating that worship must be ordered. The classic Reformed tradition held to the principle that God regulates the elements (by command), modes (by example), and circumstances (by inferred Scriptural principles) of worship. Our worship must meet his standards and praise and honor him. It must also build up and honor the members of his congregation. Therefore, we must refrain from doing things in, during, and as worship that God has not authorized, and which do not edify those in the congregation, even if those things may please ourselves personally. True worship consists of reverential acts authorized by God, that are directed to him and that are performed to honour him or his name (Ps 96.9).
 - 6.2. *Organized Worship*. Paul permitted variability in the number of speakers and the selection of the Psalms used during worship, but also insisted that the worship be organized so that it didn’t deteriorate into a chaotic frenzy. For worship to be organized does not mean that every aspect must be prescribed in detail—such as with written prayers and a book of common order (e.g., the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*). Organized worship is structured but not stifling. It maintains a balance between the entirely spontaneous—which breeds banality—and the highly liturgical—which breeds boredom. The Westminster *Directory for Publick Worship* supports this balanced approach, giving guidelines for how to organize worship without being overly explicit about the execution of the details. What are some of the possible objections that proponents of modern ‘worship’ practices might raise, and how can we respond to them?

²⁶⁴ *You’re Still God - Worship in the holy Ghost, speaking in tongues*, youtu.be/SLNc21iGtUE; I’VE GOT IT www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST4CdVDxa44; PART 3 PENTECOST SUNDAY AT RAC www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGcD6EnmhY

- 6.2.1. *We need more spontaneity in worship.* The Holy Spirit can work through spontaneous activities (e.g., a person being given an immediate opportunity to present spiritual support in an emergent situation). However, the most effective and edifying ministry is supported by prayer and preparation in contrast to the unplanned. Consider as an example, the effort that went into preparing the collection of the Psalms in the Psalter and individual Psalms such as Psalm 119.1-176, with its acrostic format and careful use of synonyms for ‘law’ and parallelism. Modern hymns and ‘praise choruses’ are mere slapdash compositions by comparison. It has been reported that the song *I Can Only Imagine* was hastily written in ten minutes in 1999 by MercyMe’s lead vocalist, Bart Millard. Of course, as has also been noted, it was based on a lifetime of experience. But, each of the Psalms was composed out of life experiences and with deliberate care. The Psalms will forever endure and be sung by the Church long after *I Can Only Imagine* is a forgotten relic of the 20th century’s CCM movement.
- 6.2.2. *We need more Spirit-filled worship.* If you compare Ephesians 5.18-19 with Colossians 3.16 what does Paul indicate Spirit-filled worship consists of? It is saturated with the words of Christ (i.e., the Bible). Spirit-filled worship is saturated with truth because it reads the Word (1 Tim 4.13), preaches the Word (2 Tim 4.2), prays the Word (e.g., Lk 1.46-55), and sings the Word (Eph 5.18-19; Col 3.16).
- 6.2.3. *We need more visuals to engage the audience.* NT worship, restored by the Reformation, and practiced in our denomination does not *depend* on artifices (e.g., musical instruments, PowerPoint projections, or theatrical props) and could be conducted in any location—in the catacombs beneath Rome, on the moors of Scotland, beside a river outside a town or in a jungle, in a house, in a school auditorium, or in a specifically designed assembly hall.

Silent Women (1 Cor 14.33b-35)

1. What principle does Paul now state?
 - 1.1. Women are not to speak in the church. He repeats the principle three times:
 - 1.1.1. “Women should keep silent in the churches.”
 - 1.1.2. Women “are not permitted to speak”.
 - 1.1.3. “[I]t is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”
 - 1.2. Why does he repeat the same idea three times?
 - 1.2.1. So that there can be no doubt that he considers the application of this principle to be important.
 - 1.3. What does he mean by ‘in the churches’ and “in church”?
 - 1.3.1. He uses ‘church’ as the body of believers assembled for worship, not as a building. Although some early NT congregations could have met in synagogue buildings, if most of a congregation were converted, church buildings were not yet being constructed and the majority of Christian assemblies were held in the homes of people in the congregation.
 - 1.3.2. Thus, his instructions should apply beyond the confines of a church building to anything that constitutes an assembly for worship.
 - 1.3.3. Thus, he means that during a worship assembly women are not to speak.
2. How does Paul indicate that his statement about women speaking in the worship assembly is universally applicable?
 - 2.1. He says that it is a universal requirement, in all the churches of the saints, that women are to keep silent. The NT churches followed the synagogue model in which women would have been silent during the assembly meetings.
 - 2.2. There is debate about whether the clause “as in all the churches of the saints” belongs with the previous paragraph or the current paragraph. We won’t rehearse the arguments in favour of one approach or the other. The three-fold repetition of the principle by Paul is sufficient to ensure that what he states is to be understood to be a universal principle.

- 2.3. Why is it ironic that the NIV and ESV include the clause with the latter paragraph? [The NASB, NKJV, and KJV include it with the former.] Both of these translations were produced during a time when there was an increasing consensus that women may be ordained to the office of elder/pastor and may speak in public worship assemblies.
3. What does Paul mean by ‘keep silent’ and ‘not permitted to speak’?
 - 3.1. He probably does not mean that a woman is not permitted to join in congregational singing of Psalms. Where the topic becomes one for debate is with respect to reading a Bible passage, voicing prayers, and preaching/teaching.
 - 3.2. In his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim 2.11-15) Paul gives us insight into what he may mean in this section of this letter to the Corinthians. When we consider that passage, we understand to ‘keep silent’ as:
 - 3.2.1. Not to teach or preach during a worship assembly (1 Tim 2.11-12).
 - 3.2.2. In addition, he says that a woman is not to exercise authority over a man in the Church (1 Tim 2.12)—i.e., not to hold an office of elder/pastor. Men are to be ordained to the office of elder/pastor (1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9). This view is unpopular today and scholars have attempted to undermine it by making it into a local, contemporary, issue in Paul’s day. They provide no evidence to support the claim that Paul was addressing “a specific problem of deceived women in the church in Ephesus conveying false doctrine”, and question the straightforward translation, “exercise [have] authority.”²⁶⁵
 - 3.2.3. Possibly, not engaging in public prayer during a worship assembly (1 Tim 2.8, 12).
 - 3.3. Women in a worship assembly of the Church are not to read the Scriptures as a sole reader (as distinct from congregational responsive reading) or to teach where men are present in an assembly. And it is possible that they should also not lead in prayer—if the injunction for them to keep silent includes engaging in solo audible praying.
4. Why are women to keep silent in the worship assembly?
 - 4.1. Reading the Scriptures, preaching, and probably leading in prayer, are actions which are to be allocated only to those in positions of authority within the Church. If a woman undertakes one of these actions, she indicates that she has authority over the men who are present in the worship assembly and that she is not in a subordinate station and being submissive to them.
 - 4.2. God’s law, communicated through the Apostle Paul, indicates that a woman should not speak in church.
 - 4.3. It is shameful (disgraceful) for a woman to speak in church, as it is against nature and statute law.
5. Where does the Law (i.e., the OT) dictate the silence of women in the worship assembly?
 - 5.1. There is no direct comparable statement in the OT which says ‘woman should keep silent’ in the worship assembly. Paul draws his conclusion by inference or, as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “by good and necessary consequence”²⁶⁶ he deduces it from Scripture. On what does Paul probably base his deduction?
 - 5.2. He could have inferred it from the appointment of men (and never women) to priestly and prophetic offices.
 - 5.3. However, his primary reasons would be deduced from the time of creation and the fall of mankind into sin:
 - 5.3.1. A woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man because “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2.13)—i.e., a woman is subordinate to a man by nature.

²⁶⁵ Philip B. Payne, “Does 1 Timothy 2:12-15 prohibit women from teaching or having authority over men?” *The Christian Post*, 2023-04-24; www.christianpost.com/voices/does-1-timothy-212-15-prohibit-women-having-authority-over-men.html

²⁶⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*, section 4.

- 5.3.2. “Man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (1 Cor 11.8-9; Gen 2.20-24).
- 5.3.3. “Eve was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim 2.14).
- 5.4. Paul indicates by his reference to the Law that he viewed the OT as normative for NT church practice.
6. How does Paul provide for women who desire to ask questions so that they may increase their understanding of what is being taught in the worship assembly?
- 6.1. They are to ask their husbands at home to explain matters to them. The Greek word (ἐπερωτάωσαν) translated ‘ask’ has a meaning of ‘enquire deeply into’ (‘cross examine’; Mk 14.60-61).
7. What are some of the arguments used by those who don’t agree with the interpretation given above about Paul’s statement regarding women remaining silent?
- 7.1. *Translations support the oppression of women.* For example, “[N]either [14.34 or 1 Tim 2.12] appears to be what is written in the original Greek text. Both, I think, have been deliberately mistranslated in an effort to oppress women.”²⁶⁷ As much as this blogger may claim that theological arguments against women in Church leadership positions are rubbish, his claim that these statements by Paul are mistranslated is the real rubbish, since there can be no difficulty in *understanding* what Paul says, in any language. The difficulty is in *accepting* what Paul says.
- 7.2. *The statement is derived from a contemporary cultural distinctive.* They suggest that Paul is just reflecting the patriarchal society of the ancient world and that this prohibition on women speaking in the worship assembly does not apply in our more ‘enlightened’ era. Ben Witherington, a professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary includes this argument among others in his essay.²⁶⁸ To the contrary, Paul appeals to the creation ordinances to substantiate this position and informs us that it is universal, in all the churches.
- 7.3. *Women prophesied and prayed publicly.* It is claimed that since Paul did not previously condemn women prophesying or praying in the worship assembly, then women must be permitted to speak in these ways—particularly if suitably outfitted with a ‘head covering’. We considered this argument when we studied chapter 11 (*Covering Obligation* 11.3-6, 13-15). We noted that Paul is dealing with one subject at a time. In chapter 11 he dealt with hair lengths for men and women. He reserved comment on women speaking in worship assemblies until this point. However, we can additionally consider the following:
- 7.3.1. Even if women, at times, exercised a spiritual gift of prophecy in the early NT Church, this provides no warrant for them speaking authoritatively in a worship assembly today, since there is no longer the spiritual gift of prophecy in the Church today. The general provision of this section overrules any temporary situation.
- 7.3.2. Paul gives a general rule, which is to be normally followed, even if there are extraordinary exceptions—e.g., women given a prophetic voice under unique circumstances (Judges 4.4; 2 Ki 22.14; Neh 6.14; Lk 2.36; Acts 21.9). This would be similar to the situation Jesus refers to of David eating bread reserved for priests (Mt 12.4)
- 7.3.3. None of the instances of women prophesying in the OT and NT clearly occurred in a worship assembly but may have occurred in private settings. However, Paul’s comments in chapter 11, seem to imply that some women in Corinth were prophesying with short hair. Also, some argue that women prayed audibly in the worship assemblies (Acts 1.14).
- 7.4. *The statement applies only to the situation in Corinth.* Some suggest that Paul is dealing with a

²⁶⁷ John Walker, *Why The Argument Against Women In Church Leadership Is Theological Rubbish*, 2012-11-21; botherer.org/2012/11/21/why-the-argument-against-women-in-church-leadership-is-theological-rubbish/

²⁶⁸ Ben Witherington, *Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical*, 2009-10; www.beliefnet.com/columnists/bibleandculture/2009/10/why-arguments-against-women-in-ministry-arent-biblical.html

particular situation in Corinth, of which he had been informed. A ‘problem group’ of women were argumentative and outspoken and were disrupting the worship assembly. Or conversely, they were chattering among themselves instead of listening to the instruction from those speaking. A related suggestion is that Paul is simply limiting the Corinthian women’s continual outspoken and disruptive questioning or contradiction of other prophets’ messages. These suggestions ignore the universal nature of Paul’s prohibition (1 Cor 14.33b; 1 Tim 2.8-15).

7.5. *The statement applies only to married women.*²⁶⁹ Since Paul tells women to ‘ask their husbands at home’, it is claimed that the command to be silent applies only to married women. This is an invalid claim:

7.5.1. Unmarried women could then theoretically preach, pray, and read the Scriptures in the worship assembly, and be elected to the office of elder, as long as they stayed single. This is an imposition of the same type of un-Biblical celibacy requirement that the Roman Catholic Church places on priests.

7.5.2. The majority of women in Jewish society (and the ANE) would have been married. Paul used the majority example. Unmarried virgins would still have been under the authority of their fathers and would be expected to ask their fathers. Widows (and the very rare spinster) would have been under the authority of their nearest male relative, whom they would be expected to consult for clarification about what was heard in the worship assembly. Likewise, Paul would have expected women with unbelieving husbands to consult with one of the elders or a male Christian friend. The subordination of women to men is not just in the marriage setting; it applies generally—unmarried girls are to submit to their fathers or brothers.

7.5.3. The related passage, 1 Timothy 2.11-12, applies the silence requirement to all women, regardless of their marital status.

7.6. *The statement applies to a particular kind of speech and a related silence.* Some suggest that Paul permits women to speak in the worship assemblies as long as they don’t ask difficult questions of their husbands or challenge them publicly, and thus embarrass them by showing disrespect for them—i.e., the particular kind of silence required is that which maintains the role differentiation between husbands and wives. Again, the 1 Timothy 2.11-12 passage demonstrates that this claim is incorrect.

7.7. *The requirement to remain silent applies to teaching, but not to preaching.* It is argued by some that ‘preaching’ a sermon in a local church is not the same thing as ‘teaching’. In many contemporary contexts those two things can look the same, but biblically speaking, they are not necessarily identical.²⁷⁰ However, preaching and teaching in a church assembly overlap. One cannot preach effectively if one is not teaching. To separate the two is largely a semantic subtlety used for the purposes of obfuscation. Women are to teach one another in the congregation (Titus 2.3-4). But only men are to preach/teach in the full assembly of a congregation.

7.8. *Men and women were created equal, in the image of God, and to exclude women from preaching or teaching in the assembly is a denial of their equality.* Men and women are full image bearers of God, and equal in essence before God. However, that does not preclude the possibility of their having different God-ordained roles with different authority levels. In the human domain, a general is equal as a person to a private. However, they have different roles, and the general has an authority level over the private that the private cannot challenge by claiming that he is the general’s equal as a person. Likewise, the persons of the Trinity are equal in essence. However, the Son took on the role of a servant and became obedient to the Father. So, role and authority-level distinctions are not contrary to ontological equality.

²⁶⁹ Dunn, J. D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (T&T Clark, 2003). p. 591.

²⁷⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Women Preachers: A Response to John Piper*, 2015-05-06; thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/women_preachers_a_response_to_john_piper

- 7.9. *The conclusion, that women must be silent, must be wrong because women have contributed greatly to evangelism through preaching.* For example, Dale Coulter (associate professor of historical theology at Regent University) argues that women have contributed as teachers (including as preachers) in the church throughout the ages, and therefore it should be an accepted practice. He states, “It is time to leave “masculine” evangelicalism behind and reclaim what was the evangelical center in the nineteenth century.” His argument is purely pragmatic with no consideration of the Biblical statements or principles identified above.²⁷¹
- 7.10. *The statement is a non-Pauline interpolation.* Some claim that Paul doesn’t make a general rule for the deportment of women but quotes what others (the Corinthians or rabbinic teaching²⁷²) have said, and rejects it. However, the idea that this is a quotation is merely a supposition with no cogent evidence to support it.
- 7.11. *The statement is a (late) manuscript text addition.* For example, Dr. Philip Barton Payne claims, based on examination of the *Codex Vaticanus* manuscript (early 4th c.), that the scribe copying the text indicated that verses 34-35 were an addition to the text by inserting two dots and a dash in the margin.²⁷³ Some manuscripts include verses 34-45 after 14.40. However, no significant earlier manuscript has these verses missing. The location of the verses does not change their contents. However, some infer that since there is variety in the location of the verses, they were a later addition and were not part of the original statement from Paul. A careful study of the manuscript evidence indicates that the variation occurred at the earliest in the late 4th century and supports the current reading as original.²⁷⁴ The editors of the standard *Greek New Testament* (27th edition) used by translators, who examine available manuscript evidence when determining a reading, do not indicate that there is any doubt about the current reading. The academic who made the claim that the verses were not in Paul’s original, and added later, invented his claim because he does not agree with Paul’s instructions.

The variety and number of alternate suggestions for how to understand what Paul says, indicates that the problem is not with understanding the plain sense of what he says but that modern interpreters do not *like* what he says—a prohibition against women speaking (preaching/teaching, solo reading of Scripture, and likely solo audible prayer) in the worship assembly of the Church is unacceptable to our society’s ‘politically correct’ sensibilities.

We should observe that although Paul prohibits women from speaking in the worship assembly, he would also exclude men who are not believers and men who are under censure for open sin. In our denomination, men who are not ordained as elders/pastors or authorized (licensed) by Presbytery (e.g., lay preachers or students) are also prohibited from preaching in the worship assembly.

Paul isn’t a misogynist. Rather, he is concerned about propriety in worship (1 Cor 14.40) and that worship be led by men who are properly qualified and ordained as elders (1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9).

8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.33b-35)?
- 8.1. *Regulations* – Why is there debate about women speaking or leading in a worship assembly?
- 8.1.1. Since the inception of the feminist movement (c. 1950) there has been pressure on the Church to conform to the world, and much of the Church has capitulated by engaging women to lead in worship assemblies and preach and ordaining them to the office of

²⁷¹ Dale M. Coulter, “Reclaiming the Center of Evangelicalism” First things, 2018-06-04; www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/06/reclaiming-the-center-of-evangelicalism

²⁷² E.g., Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), pp. 76-77.

²⁷³ Olivia Rudgard, “Bible passage used to stop women become ordained ‘added later’, academic claims”; *The Telegraph*, 2017-09-22; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/22/bible-passage-used-stop-women-become-ordained-added-later-academic/

²⁷⁴ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1149.

elder/pastor.

- 8.1.2. Those who support this capitulation attempt to find ways to get around what Paul says here (1 Cor 14:33b-35) and in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. They justify their deviation from what Scripture says by following Satan's tactic when he tempted Eve—questioning God's command, 'Did God actually say ... he couldn't have meant it.' (Gen 3:1, 4)
- 8.1.3. They also make absurd accusations such as the claim that Paul was judgemental or even a misogynist. While the reality is, as historical evidence and current events demonstrate, that Christianity frees women from the thralldom that is imposed on women by false religions such as pagan cults (with their shrine prostitutes), Islam, and Hinduism.
- 8.1.4. When a denomination permits women to lead in worship assemblies, the ordination of women as elders/pastors soon follows. Every denomination which has ordained women into the teaching office has departed from theological fundamentals. It often isn't long before they introduce gross heresies such as feminist theology and endorse homosexual practices. The introduction of women elders, pastors and preachers in denominations invariably leads to the demise of those denominations. As one commentator observed, "When the feminists showed up, Christians began pretending 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and Ephesians 5:23-24 no longer existed. When out-of-wedlock sex became more socially acceptable, Christians began pretending 1 Corinthians 6:9 no longer existed. When divorce laws loosened, Christians began pretending Matthew 19:9 no longer existed. When gay guys showed up demanding to be married in church, Christians began pretending 1 Timothy 1:9-10 and Romans 1:26-27 no longer existed."²⁷⁵ God will shut the doors on the churches in these denominations and purge the Jezebels from his Church (Rev 2:20-23).
- 8.1.5. People who diverge from Paul's clear teaching, but claim to be Christians and claim that they are obeying God's commands, are being dishonest. They really do not want to listen to what God says through Paul and obey God.
- 8.1.6. We must take Scripture in its plain sense—women are to remain silent in worship assemblies and are not permitted to teach when men are present or to exercise authority over men. We must be ever vigilant to apply the teachings of Scripture in every area of our lives—person, family, business, government, and church.
- 8.1.7. How broadly should the regulation regarding women's silence in the churches be applied?
 - 8.1.7.1. At minimum it applies to preaching and teaching during the public worship assembly.
 - 8.1.7.2. Does it apply to other times of assembly of people in a congregation (church) such as during mid-week prayer meetings and Bible studies or in a Sunday School class? It may be possible to make a distinction.
 - 8.1.7.3. Regardless, a line must be drawn somewhere if Paul's instructions are to have any meaning or relevance.
- 8.2. *Roles* – God has ordained distinct roles for men and women. Men are to lead and women are to be submissive to their leadership—at least in the family and in the Church; although Calvin and some of the other Reformers (e.g., John Knox) went further and taught that it was improper for women to lead civil governments.²⁷⁶
 - 8.2.1. Women have been assigned various highly dignified roles, including: witnessing (Jn 4:28-29); praying (Acts 1:14); training younger women (Titus 2:3, 5) and children (Eph 6:1; 1 Tim 5:10; 2 Tim 1:5); providing care and hospitality (1 Tim 5:10; Mt 25:34-40); being mothers (Titus 2:4-5); home making (Ps 113:9; Prov 31:10-31); undertaking acts of service (Acts 9:36); and being a fit helper to their husbands (Gen 2:18). With many of these roles, women are far more capable at filling them than men could ever be, and men certainly

²⁷⁵ Tal Bachman, "Christians, Come Back", *The Bachman Beat*, 2020-09-03; www.stevnonline.com/10607/tal-bachman-christians-come-back

²⁷⁶ John Calvin, *Corinthians* (Vol 1), on verse 34; www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xxi.v.html and John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet — Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558); www.swrb.ab.ca/newslett/actualNLs/firblast.htm

cannot bear children.

8.2.2. The *only* roles women are not permitted to fill, in the Church, are the teaching and ruling offices. Yet many women feel that they are being mistreated if they are excluded from these offices. However, women who usurp men's roles, as men-wannabees, introduce chaos into families, churches, and society. In addition, not every male believer can fill the role of a preaching/teaching Elder. Paul states, for example, that an Elder must be the husband of one wife (1 Tim 3.2). This means that a Muslim who was converted to Christ and had multiple wives could not be an Elder. Paul outlines other conditions for males who are preaching-teaching Elders such as being able to teach and not a recent convert, etc. (1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9). Not all Christian males can meet these qualifications.

8.2.3. A good example of a woman helping to advance the cause of the Church, without usurping the ruling/teaching role is Anne Locke (1530–c.1590). She was a wealthy woman (born into a family that served Henry VIII) who went to Geneva to escape Queen Mary's persecutions in England. She supported some of the Reformers and translated the works of John Calvin from French into English and contributed to the metrical translations of the Psalms (with Psalm 51.1-19). Letters between her and John Knox show that Knox "respected her as a thinker, as an equal, and as a friend". She wrote, "Every one in his calling is bound ... to the furtherance of the holy building, but because great things by reason of my sex I may not do and that which I may do; and that which I may, I ought to do, I have according to my duty brought my poor basket of stones to the ... walls of that Jerusalem whereof by grace we are all citizens."²⁷⁷

8.3. *Responsibilities* – Paul indicates that women are to learn, and men are to teach. Of course, this does not mean that men are not also to learn—they must learn in order to teach (2 Tim 2.2). However, it does indicate that:

8.3.1. Men are to take seriously their responsibility to teach the true religion to their families and in their congregations.

8.3.2. Women are to endeavour to be diligent students of the Word and not to let their husbands, or fathers or brothers, or pastors do their thinking for them.

Lawful Standards (1 Cor 14.36-40)

1. What question does Paul ask the Corinthian recipients of his letter, and why?

1.1. He asks, sarcastically, if they are the only recipients of God's revelation. His questions are rhetorical, with the expected answer being 'no'."

1.2. His primary purpose is to be humble and remind them that the spiritual gifts with which they had been endowed were *gifts*, administered as the Holy Spirit saw fit. Receipt of a *gift* does not endow a person with merit. Rather it should cause a person to be immensely humble and thankful.

1.3. He acknowledged that some of them had received revelations from the Holy Spirit, but rejects their belief that this made them special, or that their opinions had authority over what he had written about the regulations for meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40).

2. What does Paul claim about the things he has written in this letter?

2.1. The things he has written are the command of the Lord. He knew that he had apostolic authority and was writing Scripture (1 Cor 7.40; 1 Cor 9.1; Col 4.16; 1 Tim 2.7; 2 Tim 1.11).

2.2. This indicates that the regulations for meetings which Paul have given are not to be treated as unimportant—for example, because some misguided commentator claims that the silence required of women in the worship assembly was to ameliorate a local problem. What Paul writes is the word of God for the Church in every age.

²⁷⁷ Nathan Eshelman, "Anne Vaughan Locke and Her Basket of Rocks", *RP Witness*, 2017-11-15.

3. Who should acknowledge that what Paul writes is the command of the Lord?
 - 3.1. Everyone. Belief that the Bible, including the portions written by Paul, is God's breathed-out word is not optional. All mankind is to believe that the Bible reflects God's will for us. It is a sad state of affairs when even many professing Christians doubt that portions of what Paul communicates is the command of the Lord.
 - 3.2. In particular, anyone who thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual should acknowledge that what Paul writes is from God. If a prophet is truly receiving revelation from the Holy Spirit, he will know that what Paul writes is what the Lord communicates to the Church. A prophet or spiritual person will understand that the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. He would not communicate through Paul these regulations for meetings and at the same time give a prophetic utterance which would contradict Paul.
4. How are we to respond to anyone who does not take seriously Paul's regulations for meetings?
 - 4.1. Translations of verse 38 vary:
 - 4.1.1.ESV/NASB: "If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."
 - 4.1.2.NIV: "If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored."
 - 4.1.3.NKJV/KJV: "But if anyone [any man] is ignorant, let him be ignorant."
 - 4.2. Following the ESV, we are not to recognize any person who does not recognize that what Paul writes is the command of the Lord. Anyone who ignores (or contradicts) what Paul says is a false teacher and his teaching is to be ignored. Thus, anyone who advocates for women to be ordained as elders, that women be permitted to preach, or misinterprets Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts is to be ignored, not only with respect to those views but also with respect to any other teaching he may pronounce.
5. What final guidance does Paul give for the use of spiritual gifts?
 - 5.1. He established an order of priority for spiritual gifts. Prophecy is more important than speaking in tongues. Seeing the Holy Spirit manifest the gift of prophecy in the Church is to be desired.
 - 5.2. The gift of tongues is not to be pursued, but if manifested its exercise is not to be forbidden. Many (most) Pentecostal churches have this priority backwards. They place an emphasis on the dramatic gifts such as healing and tongues and de-emphasize (even despise) solid study of doctrine and expository preaching/teaching. They generally:
 - 5.2.1.Are Arminian (or even Pelagian) rather than Augustinian/Calvinistic (Pauline) with respect to their views about original sin and a person's role in his own salvation.
 - 5.2.2.Place emotional experiences above the intellect and the acquisition of sound doctrine.
 - 5.2.3.Believe in second-blessing baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - 5.2.4.Hold to a dispensational eschatology.
 - 5.3. Why is prophecy to be eagerly pursued above the more spectacular spiritual gifts such as performing miracles or speaking in tongues?
 - 5.3.1.Prophecy (or, today's equivalent, preaching/teaching), addresses the mind (1 Cor 14.7, 14-15, 19) and builds up the congregation.
6. How does Paul conclude his regulations for meetings?
 - 6.1. He summarizes his regulations for meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40)—i.e., the way a congregation should conduct its worship assemblies—with a requirement that "*all things* should be done decently and in order."
 - 6.2. His regulations are intended to provide for orderly meetings, because "God is not a God of confusion ..." (1 Cor 14.33) An attribute of God is order, not chaos (Gen 2.2). Thus, Christians and the Church should mirror God's orderliness (Gal 5.22-23; Col 2.5; 1 Tim 4.6-10).
7. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 14.36-40)?
 - 7.1. *Dogma* – There is such a thing as absolute and revealed truth—the Word of God, as

communicated through the prophets and apostles, of whom Paul is a representative. Paul's writings, and all writings of the NT and OT, are:

- 7.1.1. True, morally correct and historically accurate.
 - 7.1.2. Definitive, and to be taken as the Word of God to govern the lives of mankind, not as the words of mere men or as mere suggestions.
 - 7.1.3. Understandable, and to be understood in their plain sense.
 - 7.2. *Dangers* – Paul identifies key dangers which the Church must avoid related to the misuse of spiritual gifts. This misuse appears in a number of forms:
 - 7.2.1. Over emphasis on seeking them.
 - 7.2.2. Pride in their existence and use.
 - 7.2.3. A lack of ἀγάπη love.
 - 7.2.4. Prioritizing the extraordinary gifts over preaching/teaching.
 - 7.3. *Disorder* – Paul identifies the sources of disorder in the worship assembly of the Church, through his teaching about regulations for meetings (1 Cor 11.2-14.40). He identifies key problems, including:
 - 7.3.1. The improper length of hair to maintain role and gender distinctives (1 Cor 11.3-16).
 - 7.3.2. Abuses of the observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.17-34).
 - 7.3.3. Misuse of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12.1-31; 1 Cor 14.1-25).
 - 7.3.4. Chaos in church assemblies because of the misuse of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14.26-33a).
 - 7.3.5. Impropriety of women speaking (leading/preaching/teaching) in a worship assembly (1 Cor 14.33b-35).
- By these examples, and his direct statements (1 Cor 14.33, 40), he indicates that the worship of God is regulated by God and must be consistent with the principles provided by God in his Word.
- 7.4. *Devotion* – In the midst of his exposition of these problems he reminds the Church, that love ἀγάπη must reign supreme (1 Cor 13.1-13) among those who profess to be brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Resurrection Mystery (1 Cor 15.1-58)

Resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15.1-11)

Confession (1 Cor 15.1-4)

1. What was the Gospel which Paul preached to the Corinthians (as he summarizes it here)?
 - 1.1. *Christ died* – A perfect person, without any sin, the anointed one, the God-man, died. We expect the unrighteous to die, and we expect all men to die because all have sinned—none is righteous, not one (Rom 3.10). But that a non-sinner would die is beyond all human explanation due to the infinite injustice of it.
 - 1.2. *He died for our sins* – The perfect God-man died for the sins of sinners (Rom 4.25; Rom 5.6). This is another incongruity beyond all human explanation (Rom 5.7-8). Jesus became a curse for us and redeemed us through the substitutionary sacrifice of his perfect life.
 - 1.3. *He was buried* – His body was placed in a tomb. Why is this an important part of the doctrine of the death and resurrection of Jesus? It confirms the reality of his death and of the resurrection. It makes impossible a deceptive false claim of resurrection (e.g., disciples stole his body or the 'swoon' theory), since the burial place was sealed and guarded (Mt 27.66).
 - 1.4. *He was raised (from the dead) on the third day* – The physical resurrection of Jesus is a central doctrinal tenant of the good news (gospel) that God saves sinners. Paul placed it at the centre of his preaching (Acts 17.18, 31-32), as did the other apostles (Acts 4.2). In his *human* nature, Jesus did not raise himself. The resurrection required the power of God—the one who created all things out of nothing. However, Jesus in his *divine* nature was instrumental in his own resurrection as he worked with the other members of the Trinity. God brought back Jesus from the dead—i.e., the Father (Rom 6.4; Gal 1.1; 1 Pt 1.3), the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.11; 1 Pt 3.18), and the Son himself (Jn 2.19-22) who voluntarily laid down physical life and took it up again (Jn

10.17-18). God's dynamic action caused the resurrection, demonstrated his providential governance over all things, and vindicated Jesus' claims to divinity (Rom 1.4). We will consider why the resurrection of Jesus is so important when we address the *Rationale for the Resurrection* (1 Cor 15.12-19).

2. What priority does Paul place on these truths?
 - 2.1. He refers to them as of 'first importance', or basic or foundational truths. Paul says literally, 'in [the] first [things]'. No truth is *more* important to believe than these truths; although there are other truths which are *as* important.
3. What other truths are among, and implied by, these doctrines of 'first importance'?
 - 3.1. The existence of God; since Jesus was raised from the dead by an agent with power over death and life.
 - 3.2. Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the son of God (Ps 110.1), and therefore the God-man (Mt 22.42-43).
 - 3.3. God is a trinity, or at least a plurality, since one member of the Trinity raised another from the dead.
 - 3.4. Jesus has a real body, which could die, be buried, and be restored to life.
 - 3.5. Sin exists and is an evil from which men must be saved, since Jesus "died for our sins".
 - 3.6. God punishes sin, or there is no need for someone to die for our sins
 - 3.7. Heaven and hell must be real or there is no need to be saved from our sins.
 - 3.8. Death has been defeated and will not have the final victory (1 Cor 15.54-55).
 - 3.9. The Bible is God's word, because Jesus was raised from the dead as prophesied in the Scriptures (Is 53.10; Peter and Paul quote Ps 16.10 in Acts 2.27 and Acts 13.35).
4. Why did Paul think it was necessary to remind the Corinthians of these basic truths?
 - 4.1. Some of them were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15.12).
 - 4.2. He considered them to be brothers in Christ; and because of his love for them he did not want them to be lead astray.
 - 4.3. He believed that repetition of truths of first importance is necessary, lest we forget.
5. How does Paul indicate that these basic truths are true?
 - 5.1. He received these truths directly from God (1 Cor 7.40; 1 Cor 14.37; Gal 1.12; Col 4.16). He then passed on these truths to all to whom he preached and taught.
 - 5.2. These truths are in accordance with the Scriptures—he repeats this affirmation to emphasize the importance of this witness to the Gospel message. The Scriptures of which he speaks are the writings in the OT as, at this point, only a portion of the NT was completed and in general circulation. Thus, the accordance with the OT is in:
 - 5.2.1. The fulfillment of specific prophecies (e.g., Ps 2.1-12 with Acts 13.33; Ps 16.9-10; Ps 22.12-21; Is 52.13-53.12; Hos 6.2).
 - 5.2.2. The fulfillment of the general message of the OT—that God is gracious and would send a redeemer, who was first promised in the garden (Gen 3.15) and predicted through various prophecies and types (e.g., animal sacrifice).
6. How were the Corinthians saved?
 - 6.1. They received the Gospel – It is better to use the term 'receive' than 'accept' when speaking of salvation—e.g., 'receive Christ' rather than 'accept Christ'—to maintain an emphasis on the passive role unbelievers play in their salvation (Eph 2.8-9).
 - 6.2. They believed, and not in vain – They exercised the faith they had received and displayed an understanding that they were sinners who needed to repent and believe in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross on their behalf.

- 6.3. They would stand and hold fast to their professions – They would display God’s work of perseverance in their spiritual lives.
- 6.4. False professions in Christ are a sad reality (Mt 13.1-9, 18-23). Paul thus identifies the true conditions for salvation: 1) the converting work of the Holy Spirit, 2) repentance and belief, 3) continued evidence of conversion through sanctification.
7. Are verses 3 and 4 an early creedal statement?
 - 7.1. A number of commentators and authors state (emphatically) that verses 3-4 are a fragment of a creedal statement circulating in the early NT Church, and that Paul quotes from it.^{278, 279, 280, 281} They manufacture arguments to defend this view, such as noting slight differences in word choice from what Paul writes elsewhere.²⁸² This idea is based on a commonly accepted view that there was an oral ‘Jesus tradition’ that circulated in the early NT Church before the NT books were written. They believe that the existence of an early creed, such as this, indicates that the message about the death and resurrection of Jesus hadn’t been affected by legendary accretions.²⁸³ [A similar view is postulated with respect to the existence of early ‘hymn fragments’²⁸⁴ from which Paul supposedly quotes.]
 - 7.2. The idea that a creedal statement had developed from which Paul quotes is at best mere supposition. Those who make this claim cannot substantiate it since if the statement were part of an early ‘oral tradition’ then it wasn’t yet committed to writing. There is no extant written material, prior to the NT books, which communicates the message of Christ and the Gospel. Paul is clear that he was communicating what he had received from the Lord (not tradition) as of first importance. Paul, under the revelation of the Holy Spirit, is the author of these words. He is not quoting from some supposed ‘oral tradition’ or early *credo*. Rather, what he wrote would become the model and basis for future creedal statements.²⁸⁵
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.1-4)?
 - 8.1. *Salvation* – The Scriptures of the OT reveal God’s plan, formed in eternity, to save an elect number from mankind. The revelation of this plan began in the garden, in the midst of a curse on sinful mankind (Gen 3.15). This indicates that Christ’s death happened in accordance with God’s plan and not as a surprise response to an unexpected happenstance.
 - 8.2. *Sovereignty* – God willed and determined (predestined) events so that they unfolded in precise synchronicity with his plan. In the same way, his plan continues to unfold exactly as he wishes it to, as time runs quickly toward its eschatological completion.
 - 8.3. *Scepticism* – There were sceptics among the Jews (Sadducees) who did not believe in the resurrection (Mt 22.23). In Corinth there were doubters among the professing Christians who questioned the resurrection (1 Cor 15.12). In Athens there were scoffers who mocked at the concept of resurrection (Acts 17.32). In every age, the majority of men and women reject the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection. The message about the resurrection, which Paul delivered to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15.4) and to the Athenians (Acts 17.31) must be central

²⁷⁸ B. Witherington, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995), p. 301.

²⁷⁹ R. A. Harrisville, *1 Corinthians*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987); p. 253.

²⁸⁰ C. K. Barrett, in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Continuum, 1968), p. 339.

²⁸¹ Ryan Turner, *An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Creed in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11*; carm.org/analysis-pre-pauline-creed-1-corinthians-151-11

²⁸² R. A. Harrisville, *1 Corinthians*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987); pp. 251–252.

²⁸³ Matt Slick; *1 Cor. 15:3-4 demonstrates a creed too early for legend to corrupt*; carm.org/1-cor-153-4-demonstrates-creed-too-early-legend-corrupt

²⁸⁴ J. W. Thompson, “Hymn”, in C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), pp. 798-799.

²⁸⁵ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 484.

to the preaching of the Gospel in every age. The Church must also be reminded of the central tenets of the faith on a regular basis so that it does not fall into scepticism.

Confirmation (1 Cor 15.5-8)

1. What evidence does Paul present to confirm the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
 - 1.1. The first name he mentions as a witness is Peter (Cephas). Peter had denied Jesus before the crucifixion, but he had been restored after the resurrection (Jn 21.15-19) and had become a visible, outspoken, defender of Jesus as the Messiah and a leader in the Jerusalem church. Peter was known to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1.12), and likely respected by them. His witness to the resurrection would have had some influence over any doubting Corinthians.
 - 1.2. The appearance to the twelve may refer to the event mentioned in John 20.26. If so, then Paul uses the ‘twelve’ as a label for the original apostles, rather than as an exact count, since Judas was no longer among them.
 - 1.3. The appearance to five hundred at one time is not mentioned in the Gospels, or explicitly in Acts—it may be referred to in Acts 13.31. It could have been in Jerusalem or, more likely, the appearance was made to a crowd that gathered at the time Jesus commissioned the apostles (Mt 28.16-18) or at his ascension (Acts 1.6-9).
 - 1.4. The James Paul mentions was likely the half-brother of Jesus, who did not initially believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Mk 3.21; Jn 7.5), but later believed (Acts 1.14). It may have been this special appearance of Jesus to James that convinced James. If so, we can imagine the meeting as Jesus in his glorified body appeared to James and encouraged him to believe in him. This is a clear sign of the love Jesus had for his own human family. Later James became the bishop (elder/pastor) of the Jerusalem church.
 - 1.5. The appearance to all the apostles may be a reference to either the time Jesus commissioned the apostles in Galilee (Mt 28.16-20) or at his ascension (Acts 1.6-11).
 - 1.6. Paul mentions the appearance of Jesus to himself, which likely is a reference to the appearance of Jesus to Paul while he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.5).
2. Which eyewitnesses to the resurrection does Paul not directly mention? Why?
 - 2.1. The appearances to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20.14-18) and the collected women (Mt 28.9-10). These appearances are likely not mentioned because the witness of women in the ancient world had little legal standing. By excluding these instances Paul is not supporting the view that a woman’s testimony was worthless but is not going to increase the scepticism of the doubters in Corinth by calling on an eyewitness whom they would not respect.
 - 2.2. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24.13-34). Since they are not named by Luke, their witness would not have as much influence as the witness of the named apostles.
3. What is the value of these eyewitness accounts?
 - 3.1. Paul gave the Corinthians the name of a witness whom they trusted—Peter (Cephas)—to tell them the truth.
 - 3.2. Identifying additional eyewitnesses, whom the Corinthians could consult if they were inclined to follow up, demonstrates that Paul is writing about an event that actually occurred—an historical reality.²⁸⁶
 - 3.3. Indicating that there were more than five hundred eyewitnesses, many of whom were still alive (less than 20 years after the event), who could attest to the reality of the resurrection, indicates that this was not the invented testimony of a handful of discouraged disciples, or an event that occurred in an unobserved corner of the land (Acts 26.26).
 - 3.4. The witness of James and Paul indicates that the evidence for the resurrection was not concocted

²⁸⁶ Refer to the chapter “Were they Present?” in J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), pp. 159-190.

- by disillusioned fanatics. James and Paul were sceptics until Jesus appeared to them and convinced them that he was alive.
- 3.5. Thus, Paul presents different classes of evidence to support belief in the resurrection: 1) Scripture (1 Cor 14.3-4), 2) trusted friends (Cephas), 3) apostles (the twelve), 4) crowds (the five hundred), and 5) sceptics (James and Paul).
 - 3.6. Paul's statement about the eyewitnesses is also important because he wrote this Epistle in late 53 AD or early 54 AD. At this point, the only other, non-Pauline, NT writings that were likely available were the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle of James. So, this statement is one of the (if not *the*) earliest written confirmations of the resurrection.
4. How does Paul view his apostleship (see, 1 Cor 15.9 and compare with 1 Cor 9.1-2)? Why?
 - 4.1. He believes that he is an apostle, with the same level of authority as the other apostles (1 Cor 9.1-2; 1 Tim 2.7; 2 Tim 1.11). However, he is in awe of the fact that he was called to this office. He refers to his calling as being 'untimely born' (and the 'least of the apostles'). It has been noted that the Greek word used only here is difficult to translate. Some suggest alternate translations such as 'abnormally born', 'prematurely born', or 'born out of time' are possible.
 - 4.2. The point Paul makes is that he did not come through the same process as the other apostles, who were disciples of Jesus during his three years of ministry (Acts 1.21-22).
 5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.5-8)?
 - 5.1. *Credible Witnesses* – Paul argues that the Corinthian sceptics should believe in the resurrection of Jesus because it fulfills Scripture (1 Cor 15.3-4) and the resurrected Lord was seen by over 500 people (1 Cor 15.6-8). This raises the issue of how to judge the evidence of witnesses and, specifically, the evidence they provide to miracles?
 - 5.1.1. Why should we believe the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus? If 500 people claimed to have seen a UFO, shaped like a spinning disk land in front of city hall, and claimed that three shiny extra terrestrial creatures exited from the vehicle, should we believe them? Would we be right in saying that since 500 people make the claim, it must be true? How would we respond if one of our most trusted friends was present at the appearance of the UFO and he insisted that he has seen it with his own eyes, and that he found our sceptical response to the veracity of his statement disappointing? Would we be justified in claiming that he was a victim of a hoax or was deluded? Why is the evidence for the resurrection to be treated differently?
 - 5.1.2. The challenge we have is that we need an objective standard for judging the validity of evidence. However, when we introduce a 'standard'—e.g., the number of witnesses or a means for weighing the evidence, such as a statistical test—we then are confronted with the question of how we validate the 'standard'. For example, a sceptical philosophical materialist could claim that our standard for weighing evidence of a miracle such as the resurrection must preclude the introduction of a nonmaterial, supernatural agent. We would reject such a 'standard', but it illustrates the challenge we have identifying objective standards for evaluating evidence.
 - 5.2. *Conversion Work* – The evidences for the resurrection will not be acceptable to a sceptical philosophical materialist. He will allow his presuppositions—there is no God, miracles are impossible, there is no supernatural realm, etc.—drive his conclusions and he will reject the evidence for the resurrection, no matter how strong it may appear to be. The *only* way that a person can come to accept the evidence for the resurrection and believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, on the third day, is when the Holy Spirit changes his heart so that he accepts the evidence as true.

Certification (1 Cor 15.9-11)

1. Why did Paul consider himself to be the least of the apostles?

- 1.1. Even though Paul knew that he had been forgiven by Christ (Gal 1.15-16; 1 Tim 1.13-14), he continued to remember what he had done by persecuting the Church (Acts 9.1; Gal 1.13; 1 Tim 1.15) and consenting to the death (murder) of Stephen (Acts 22.20). Forgiveness does not wipe out our remembrance of sin. A person may continually ‘kick’ himself for what he did in a grievous, stupid, or hurtful sin and possibly suffer ongoing consequences (e.g., poor health).
- 1.2. He also knew that he had not spent three years with Jesus, as the other apostles had, and were expected to have done (Acts 1.21-22). He viewed himself as having been ‘one untimely born’ (1 Cor 15.8).
2. Why was Paul an apostle?
 - 2.1. Paul attributes his salvation and appointment to apostleship to the grace of God. Paul understood the importance of undeserved and unmerited grace like few people can—he had been plucked out an extreme hatred for Christ and his Church and had been converted into the most zealous of apologists for Christ. Paul knew that this could not happen by a person’s own will or volition. Thus, he emphasizes the role of grace in his other Epistles (Rom 3.21-26; Eph 2.7-10).
 - 2.2. Was Paul a fatalist, as shown by his statement, “I am what I am”?
 - 2.2.1. A fatalist is someone who accepts events as inevitable because they have been predetermined by an inanimate force or impersonal power beyond his own.
 - 2.2.2. Many people claim that the doctrine of predestination is a form of fatalism. However, Paul (and Scripture as a whole) hold God’s sovereign predestination and human responsibility in a tension:
 - 2.2.2.1. While God sovereignly predestines all events including every thought, word, and action of all men (Ps 139.4, 16; Prov 16.33; Acts 13.48; Rom 8.29-30; Rom 9.1-29), men are still truly and fully responsible for their actions (Jer 17.10; Ezk 18.1-32; Rom 6.23; Mt 16.27). God even states that events are both predestined and the actions of responsible agents (Gen 50.19-20; Ex 9.34-10.1; Acts 2.23; Acts 4.27-28). This appears to be a contradiction, but it is not illogical.
 - 2.2.2.2. Man’s free will is a psychological fiction. Men believe that they act entirely from their own rational self-determination. In fact, they are determined by their inborn natures (Jn 8.34). Man cannot behave contrary to his nature physically, morally, or volitionally. Man, as a sinner, is not free to choose to do either good or evil, because he has an evil heart that ever inclines him to sin (Rom 7.7-24). If we were truly free agents then we could choose not to sin—but everyone born, by natural generation, throughout all history has sinned. If we were truly free agents, we could also choose the time and circumstances of our birth and death or choose not to die (excluding suicide). Since we cannot do any of these things, it is clear that we are not actually free agents. The biggest lie that has ever been told is that men are born as free moral and volitional agents. But the Bible nowhere teaches this.
 - 2.2.2.3. Some philosophers and theologians attempt to reconcile God’s providential will and supposed human free will. They use a continuum of Aristotelian causation, claim that our supposed *free wills* can be found in second causes, or state that God decrees man’s free actions which he sees in advance. However, most attempts to reconcile them bog down in definitions based on semantics or convoluted conditions. We must avoid the universal tendency to go to one extreme or the other—to view God as a superhuman being, but with limited knowledge; or to view men as mere puppets and the victims of fatalistic forces. We must not try to outthink God!
 - 2.3. Paul was not a fatalist. He believed that God had foreknown (loved) him from the depths of eternity, predestined him, and saved him (Rom 8.29-30); and he was overwhelmed by God’s grace.
3. What was the outcome of Paul’s being saved by grace?

- 3.1. He says that God's grace toward him was not in vain—i.e., empty, without results, or fruitless. God's grace operated on Paul and through him. God's purposes were not only fulfilled through electing grace but through providential grace; not only through Paul's salvation but through the subsequent works he performed. Paul was saved by grace to perform good works (Eph 2.10).
- 3.2. As a result, Paul understood his responsibility and worked diligently to fulfill his commission (Acts 9.15-16)—harder than any of the other apostles (1 Cor 15.10; 2 Cor 10.12-16; 2 Cor 11.21-30). This is the opposite of a resigned fatalism. Yet, even in his diligence, he knew that his work was propelled by the grace of God.
4. What was the proximate cause of the Corinthians' belief? (1 Cor 15.11)
 - 4.1. The Gospel message (Christ's crucifixion and resurrection) which all the apostles, including Paul, preached consistently was what led the Corinthians to believe.
 - 4.1.1. We have noted previously how important Paul considered preaching to be (1 Cor 1.17, 21; 1 Cor 2.1-5; 1 Cor 14.20-25), because he believed it to be the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom 10.14-15).
 - 4.1.2. We also considered the lack of confidence the Church today has in the power of preaching and how it scrambles to find other means (drama productions, videos, puppetry, dance, music concerts, etc.) to present the Gospel (1 Cor 1.10-17).
 - 4.1.3. The challenge for the Church today is how to get preaching before the world (in the 'agora'), rather than finding alternatives to preaching.
 - 4.2. The grace of God unto the salvation of sinners is applied through the preaching of the truths about Jesus, who is God, the God-man, the Messiah; who lived a perfect life, died as a perfect sacrifice, and gave his life as a ransom for many; who was resurrected and now is seated in his glory, governing the world; and who will return to this world to bring about the consummation of the ages.
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.9-11)?
 - 5.1. *Governance* – We should not be embarrassed by the doctrines of predestination or of God's absolute sovereignty. It is not Reformed Christians who have a problem with these doctrines, it is unbelievers and wishy-washy Christians.
 - 5.1.1. False religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are fatalistic—for example, with their belief in *karma*.
 - 5.1.2. Islam is also an essentially fatalistic religion based around an unknowable and capricious deity.
 - 5.1.3. Religions which are pantheistic are also fatalistic—the 'stars rule our fate'.
 - 5.1.4. Materialistic naturalists, while claiming that men have free will, are determinists—our genes or events at a macro or micro level determine how we will behave.
 - 5.1.5. Many Evangelical Christians limit God ('open' theology) so they can preserve the myth of 'free will' (semi-Pelagianism, in which the beginning of faith is an act of free will).
 - 5.1.6. In contrast, Biblical Christianity maintains the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. We should be supremely confident, knowing that God is working out his providential governance for his own glory and the good of his people (Rom 8.28-30).
 - 5.2. *Grace* – Paul uses the word *grace* three times in these verses, and about 90 times in his epistles (including Hebrews). Without question, he is the apostle of 'grace'. Because of his own pre-grace behaviour, he understood what it means to be saved (justified) by grace. We also should be messengers of grace. We should declare the love of God and his free outpouring of unmerited favour on reprobates who turn to him confessing their sins and professing Jesus as their saviour.
 - 5.3. *Gratitude* – We were by nature debased rebels destined for hell. However, once we became believers, through the Holy Spirit's gracious act of converting our hearts, we were assured of everlasting salvation. Thus, Christians should be the most grateful and thankful of all mankind inhabiting this planet—our destiny is heaven; our hope, a resurrection to perfection; and our

prospect, everlasting joy. Give praise to the God of all grace!

Resurrection of Christians (1 Cor 15.12-34)

Rationale for the Resurrection (1 Cor 15.12-19)

1. How does Paul formulate his argument for the resurrection of the dead in this section?
 - 1.1. He uses a rhetorical technique with seven hypothetical ‘ifs’. And he explores the consequences of each ‘if’ with a question (12) or a series of ‘then’ conditions.
 - 1.2. Notice that Paul repeats the hypothetical concept, ‘not even Christ has been raised’ (1 Cor 15.13, 16), to emphasize the importance of the consequences if the hypothetical were true.
2. What logical inference does Paul make (1 Cor 15.12-13, 16)?
 - 2.1. If the possibility of a resurrection of a dead person is denied, then logically Christ could not have been raised either. However, if Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, then resurrection of the dead is possible.
 - 2.2. He uses the same argument in his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 4.14) and in his letter to the Romans (Rom 8.11).
 - 2.3. If at least one person (Jesus) has been raised from the dead, then the possibility of resurrection of the dead is not theoretical but actual.
 - 2.4. Since Christ has indeed been raised, as an historic fact (Lk 24.6, 34), resurrection of his people is to be expected and anticipated (Jn 14.19; 2 Cor 4.14; 1 Thess 4.14; 1 Pt 1.3).
 - 2.5. One commentator has observed, “No human words ever written have brought such comfort to millions of mourners as the words of this chapter, which form a part of the Burial Service of almost every Christian community.”²⁸⁷
3. Why would some in the Church in Corinth have doubted the resurrection of the dead?
 - 3.1. They were mostly converted Greeks and Romans, and had little knowledge of the OT passages that gave hints about the nature of the resurrection (Gen 5.24; 2 Ki 2.3-12; Job 19.25-27; Ps 16.10; Ps 17.15; Ps 49.15; Is 25.8; Is 26.19; Ezk 37.1-14; Dan 12.2; Hos 13.14), that had led most Jews (but not the Sadducees; Mt 22.23) to believe in a resurrection of the dead.
 - 3.2. Men know experientially that physical death is final, and once the animating spirit has left a body, nothing natural exists which can reanimate that body.
 - 3.2.1. People living at the time of the Paul (Eastern and Hellenistic) had myths about reincarnation and legends about resuscitation of corpses—e.g.:
 - 3.2.1.1. Osiris died and was cast into the Nile, but Isis collected his body and, because of her devotion, the gods resurrected Osiris;
 - 3.2.1.2. Asclepius was killed by Zeus and then was resurrected;
 - 3.2.1.3. Achilles was killed and then resurrected by Thetis, his mother.
 - 3.2.2. Despite these myths, people in the ancient world were as sceptical about the truly miraculous (in particular resurrection; Acts 17.31-32) as are people today.
 - 3.2.3. In addition, there was philosophical scepticism about life after physical death:
 - 3.2.3.1. Some believed that there was no spiritual dimension to man that continued to exist after physical death (e.g., Epicurean materialists and Cebes speaking at the conclusion of Plato’s *Phaedo*²⁸⁸). Modern materialistic naturalist hold this belief.
 - 3.2.3.2. Others believed that, although there is a spiritual dimension to man, the body was shed permanently at death since it was considered to be inferior or evil (e.g., the Stoics’ view of the soul’s emanation from a universal source, and the Gnostics’ view of the soul’s ‘salvation’ from the material world).

²⁸⁷ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 483.

²⁸⁸ Plato, *Phaedo*; classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html

- 3.3. The concept of resurrection—out of death (ἐκ νεκρῶν)—for believers into new immortal glorified bodies, as distinct from reanimation of recently dead corpses (1 Ki 17.22-23; 2 Ki 4.32-35; 2 Ki 13.21; Mt 9.25; Lk 7.14-15; Lk 8.54-55; Jn 11.43-44), is a Christian concept. Therefore, it required considerable re-education of people in the Hellenistic world to bring them to a level of understanding of the Biblical concept of resurrection.
4. What would be the consequences if Christ had not been raised from the dead?
 - 4.1. Preaching is a vain pursuit (1 Cor 15.14) – It is a waste of time to preach the Gospel, since there can be no message of salvation, because death still holds sinners in its clutches. If the religion we preach is purely one of moral living, then we may as well shut our doors and join a Rotary Club or a philanthropic organization.
 - 4.2. Faith is vain (1 Cor 15.14) and futile (1 Cor 15.17) – Our faith would be directed toward a dead saviour who could do nothing. We may as well contract for cryonic containment to preserve our bodies until science can raise us to restored health.
 - 4.3. The apostles and all preachers misrepresent God (1 Cor 15.15) – Christianity would be a myth rather than a proclamation of historic facts and absolute truth. Anyone who would represent God as raising the dead would be a liar. We may as well believe in Santa Clause since it would do us more good, by avoiding being on the naughty list, than hoping for what will never happen.
 - 4.4. Everyone is still lost in sin(s) (1 Cor 15.17) – Jesus was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4.25); but a dead saviour cannot save anyone. We may as well sin to excess, there is no escape from sin, and it will make no difference if we face everlasting judgement.
 - 4.5. Those who have died (fallen asleep) in Christ have perished (1 Cor 15.18) – If the resurrection is a lie, how could we know if men have everlasting souls—that could be a lie also—and all that we could conclude is that people cease to exist at death.
 - 4.5.1. Death is called, figuratively, a sleep in the Bible (1 Cor 15.51; Job 3.1; Ps 13.3; Jer 51.39, 57; Jn 11.11-14; Acts 7.60; 1 Thess 4.13). This ‘sleep’ refers to physical death only, not to ‘soul sleep’. When the spirit of a believer leaves the body, it/he goes directly to be with the Lord in conscious enjoyment (Lk 16.22, 24; Lk 23.43; 2 Cor 5.8; Phil 1.21-23). So also, when the spirit of an unbeliever departs, it/he goes to a place of conscious torment (Lk 16.23). The reason death is called *sleep* is that sleep is temporary. Physical death is temporary, and our bodies will awake (arise or be regenerated) from their ‘sleep’ to be assigned permanently to everlasting life or everlasting death (Mt 10.28).
 - 4.6. We have hope only in this life (1 Cor 15.19) – The pleasure we can eek out of aging, decaying, bodies are our only hope. So, we may as well grab with gusto what is left of our life—eat and drink as if there is no tomorrow—or give up in a Nietzschean despair.
 - 4.7. We are, of all people, to be most pitied (1 Cor 15.19) – Christians are to be pitied for wasting their time on a futile pursuit that has less hope of fulfillment than the SETI project. There is no benefit to be obtained from the time wasted on religious rituals and moral living and forfeiting the temporary ‘pleasures of sin’. In addition, Christians who endure hardships (privation, persecution, and prison) for Christ and the Gospel have exposed themselves without any hope of recognition or recompense.

A number of commentators have noted that Paul uses a powerful rhetorical technique as he piles on the layers of his argument.
5. Why is the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead an essential doctrine of Christianity? Or, why is the empty tomb a necessary reality for Christians?
 - 5.1. *Announcement*: The resurrection declares that Jesus is God (Rom 1.4).
 - 5.2. *Award*: Jesus fulfilled his agreement with the Father, kept the promise of the eternal covenant, and received the award for his work (Phil 2.8-11). The resurrection is necessary for Jesus to receive this award and assume his kingdom in his role as the God-man, the mediator between God and

man.

- 5.3. *Achievement*: The resurrection was necessary to conquer death. A perfect dead substitute might possibly pay our debt of sin, but death would continue consuming forever. Christ demonstrates that there can be no doubt—death is not the final victor.
- 5.4. *Authority*: God's dynamic action caused the resurrection and demonstrates that God is authoritatively in control. God the Father brought back Jesus from the dead (Gal 1.1; Heb 13.20), the Holy Spirit was the agent (Rom 8.11), and the Son himself (Jn 2.19-22) voluntarily laid down his physical life and took it up again (Jn 10.17-18). Thus, all three persons of the Trinity were authoritatively active in the resurrection of Jesus.
- 5.5. *Accomplishment*: If Christ is not risen, he has not completed his mission—our redemption—and we are lost forever (1 Cor 15.16-17). But he has accomplished the work he was sent to perform.
- 5.6. *Atonement*: His resurrection is evidence that atonement has been procured, and the debt of sin has been paid.
- 5.7. *Acceptance*: The resurrection is evidence that God has accepted Jesus' sacrifice. Thus, the resurrection is proof that we are reconciled with God and accepted by him.
- 5.8. *Application*: The resurrection of Jesus as a man, is proof that God takes mankind's side against Satan.
- 5.9. *Agreement*: The New Covenant was inaugurated on the cross and ratified with the resurrection of Jesus. We are the recipients of the blessings under the New Covenant—in which God will be our God and we will be his people.
- 5.10. *Assurance*: The bare resurrection of the man Jesus could not save us any more than the reanimation of Lazarus or the widow's son. But the resurrection of *the* Christ gives us assurance that our redemption is complete, and that there is salvation for his people (those for whom he died) and that we will be raised in him.
- 5.11. *Action*: The resurrection provides us with a spur to action for Christ's kingdom (1 Cor 15.57-58)
- 5.12. *Access*: Jesus has a physical body in heaven (Acts 1.9). His physical presence informs us that we also will have access to heaven with physical bodies (1 Thess 4.16-18).
- 5.13. *Affirmation*: The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge that our resurrected bodies will be like his (1 Cor 15.35-38, 42-43, 49).
- 5.14. *Attestation*: The resurrection is the attestation or guarantee that Jesus will return (1 Cor 15.51-52; Acts 2.11; Acts 17.31).
- 5.15. *Ascendancy*: The resurrection is evidence that Jesus has the victory over all his and our enemies—including Satan and death (1 Cor 15.55-57).
- 5.16. *Amelioration*: The resurrection, of which Jesus' is the firstfruits (1 Cor 15.20), will not only affect human bodies, but all of creation. Our resurrected bodies will live in a restored creation—the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3.13).

Literally, *everything* depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection makes payment for our debt of sin; conquers sin and death; makes us into a new people; and restores creation. Before we believed in the resurrection, we were without hope in the black universe. But now we are not without hope! Thus, we make the affirmation, He has risen! He has risen indeed! (Lk 24.6, 34)

6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.12-19)?
 - 6.1. *Resurrection Paradigm* – The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact.
 - 6.1.1. The eyewitness evidence (1 Cor 15.5-8) corroborates it, the consequences if the contrary were true make the contrary an impossibility (1 Cor 15.12-19), and numerous theological reasons make it essential.
 - 6.1.2. Just as the resurrection of Jesus is an historical fact, so the resurrection of believers to a physical everlasting life (and unbelievers to an everlasting death; Jn 5.28-29; Acts 24.15) is an absolute certainty.
 - 6.1.3. Other religions have myths about reincarnation into new entities or resuscitation of corpses, but no other religion has the concept of a true resurrection from the dead into new bodies—

where the former bodies of the recipients may have long-ago decayed to dust.

- 6.2. *Resurrection Preaching* – The preaching of Christ is the preaching of his death and resurrection (1 Cor 1.23; 1 Cor 2.2; Gal 3.1; 1 Pt 1.3). If the death and resurrection of Jesus is not present in preaching, then that preaching is not Christian, and the preacher's religion is a moralistic fantasy.
- 6.3. *Resurrection Prospect* – The physical resurrection of believers to an everlasting new life is the great hope of Christians. The resurrection of believers is assured, and it is the next major event in the history of redemption, when Jesus returns to conclude this age, judge mankind, renovate the universe, and usher in the everlasting age. Ramifications of this prospect are:
 - 6.3.1. Christians should not fear death. For Christians it is the portal to life—from this 'pre-life' to real life, not an *after*-life.
 - 6.3.2. Christians should not despair over death. The world fears the loss of loved ones because they have no hope or confidence in seeing them again. For Christians, the loss of fellow believers, while sad, is a temporary parting—not a "good bye", but a "see you soon".
 - 6.3.3. Christians should look forward to death (not in a morbid way, but in the Lord's time) as the opportunity to shed our decaying mortal frames (1 Cor 15.37-38; Rom 8.21) and to be with the Lord forever (Phil 1.23), in heaven where there will no longer be any consequences of Adam's sin (Rev 21.4).

Reality of the Resurrection (1 Cor 15.20-28)

1. What does Paul state as an unequivocal fact?
 - 1.1. Christ has been raised from the dead.
 - 1.2. He had stated that he preached that Christ was raised from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15.1-4), and indicated that there were many witnesses to the resurrection (1 Cor 15.5-8). He then gave a series of reasons why it is necessary to believe that Christ was raised (1 Cor 15.12-19). Now he restates, emphatically, that the resurrection of Jesus is an historical fact.
 - 1.3. What words does he add to reinforce the reality of the resurrection?
 - 1.3.1. He adds, "from the dead" to ensure that there can be no confusion. The resurrection was of Jesus' physical body, which had been truly dead.
 - 1.4. What false ideas does Paul's statement exclude?
 - 1.4.1. Jesus wasn't a real man with a real physical body that could die.
 - 1.4.2. Jesus didn't actually die at the time of his crucifixion, but only fainted, and was later resuscitated.
 - 1.4.3. The resurrection was 'spiritual', and Jesus is now in a permanent disembodied state.
2. What does Paul mean by his reference to Christ as the 'firstfruits' (1 Cor 15.20, 23)?
 - 2.1. All instances of resurrections recorded in Scripture, prior to the death of Jesus (1 Ki 17.22-23; 2 Ki 4.32-35; 2 Ki 13.21; Mt 9.25; Lk 7.14-15; Lk 8.54-55; Jn 11.43-44), involved the reanimation of recently dead corpses. In each of these instances, the individuals who were resuscitated were not endowed with immortal bodies and died again after they had lived out their allotted lives. However, in Jesus' case, his resurrection was to an immortal body that was different (transformed) from the body he had had before the crucifixion. His resurrection is therefore substantively different and thus the definitive first instance, or firstfruits, of a resurrection to an immortal physical life.
 - 2.2. Matthew reports that after the resurrection of Jesus a number of believers who had died and been buried were raised and came out of the tombs and were seen in Jerusalem (Mt 27.52-53).
 - 2.2.1. It seems unlikely that they were raised from the dead at the time of the crucifixion and sat in the open tombs for about 30 hours. It is more likely that the tombs were opened by an earthquake (Mt 27.54; Mt 28:2) that accompanied the death and resurrection of Jesus. Then, these believers in the Messiah were raised to life immediately after Jesus was raised, and they appeared in the city.

- 2.2.2. It is also unlikely that they lived among mankind for a time and then died again. Rather, they probably were raised into glorified bodies and, after their being seen, followed Jesus into heaven. If so, then their resurrection would be the 8th instance of a recorded resurrection in Scripture. However, their resurrection was not a resuscitation of a recently dead corpse, but a resurrection into a glorified body—the type of body which Jesus, Enoch, Elijah, and possibly Moses, already possess in heaven. Thus, they represent the harvest of fruits, which follows the firstfruits. There will be an abundance of resurrection fruit as the ‘dead in Christ’, believers who have died, are raised at the return of Jesus (‘his coming’) on the last day (1 Thess 4.16-17)—the ones following in ‘order’, or succession, after the firstfruits.
3. How do death and resurrection come by ‘a man’ (1 Cor 15.21-22)?
- 3.1. Paul applies the concept of covenant mediatorial representation. Death came by ‘a man’—Adam—who was the mediator of the Covenant of Creation and represented all mankind. His sin of eating the forbidden fruit brought death on all mankind (Rom 5.12).
- 3.2. Christ, as the last Adam (1 Cor 15.45), is the mediator of the New Covenant through his perfect sacrifice on the cross and subsequent resurrection, who conquered death and made possible and procured resurrection for his people.
- 3.3. Adam was no mythical entity, but a real person who represented mankind. Likewise, Jesus is not a mythical person, but the God-man who was dead and now lives.
4. How are we to understand Paul’s uses of ‘all’ (in 1 Cor 15.22)?
- 4.1. This verse does not teach the universal salvation of all people. Paul does not contradict himself or Jesus—all people will not be saved (Mt 25.46; 2 Thess 1.5-9). Also, it probably does not refer to the general resurrection of the just and unjust (Jn 5.28-29; Acts 24.15) since the focus of this chapter is on the resurrection of believers to a restored perfect state of imperishability (1 Cor 15.42), glory (1 Cor 15.43), power (1 Cor 15.43), and suitability for heaven as spiritual (1 Cor 15.44).
- 4.2. Paul uses ‘all’ in the covenantal context—all who are represented by each mediator and partake of the mediator’s nature (Rom 5.18-19). The two uses of ‘all’ are not co-extensive. The first ‘all’ applies to all mankind who share Adam’s sinful nature through original sin. The second ‘all’ applies to all those for who are in Christ through faith and repentance (1 Cor 15.23), and for whom Christ died. Outside of Adam, no one dies; outside of Christ no one is raised to new life.
5. What is the ‘end’ of which Paul speaks (1 Cor 15.24)?
- 5.1. The end will come. The end of what?
- 5.1.1. The end of all things in this spatial-temporal realm—i.e., the end of this universe:
- 5.1.1.1. Space, time, energy, and matter will be dissolved.
- 5.1.1.2. The current physical bodies (or remnants) of every person—dead or alive—will be dissolved.
- 5.1.1.3. All animals will be dissolved.
- 5.1.1.4. All human actions (including sin) and works in this world will evaporate into nothing.
- 5.1.2. What transitional events will occur as the current age comes to an end and the everlasting age is initiated?
- 5.1.2.1. *Return* – Jesus will physically return to this earth in glory (1 Thess 4.15-16), in the same way as he was taken from the earth (Acts 1.11).
- 5.1.2.2. *Resurrection* – All people, the just and unjust, will be raised into new bodies (1 Cor 15.20-23; Jn 5.28-29; Acts 24.15; 1 Thess 4.15-17).
- 5.1.2.3. *Reprobation* – There will be a general Judgement, and those who failed to confess Jesus as Lord, will be delivered to everlasting punishment in hell (Mt 13.49-50; Mt

16.27; Mt 25.30; 2 Thess 1.6-10; Jude 14-15; Rev 20.11-15).

5.1.2.4. *Reward* – Those who confessed Jesus in this life will be welcomed into everlasting life in heaven (Mt 25.34).

5.1.2.5. *Razing* – This universe will be destroyed and dissolved with fire (2 Pt 3.10-12).

5.1.2.6. *Renovation* – A new (sinless) universe will be created (Rom 8.19-22; 2 Pt 3.13; Rev 21.1)

6. What will follow the transitional events of the ‘the end’ (1 Cor 15.24-26)?

6.1. Jesus will destroy all his enemies.

6.1.1. These enemies are designated as ‘rule’, ‘authority’, and ‘power’. These refer specifically to demonic powers (Eph 6.12). These enemies will be cast into hell (Rev 20.10).

6.1.2. He will also subdue, under his feet (Ps 8.6; Ps 110.1; Phil 2.10), all human enemies who hated him in the temporal realm, and he will cast them into hell (Rev 20.15).

6.2. He will destroy death. By raising his people to everlasting life, he will render death—the curse resulting from Adam’s sin (Gen 2.17)—null and void (Heb 2.14; Rev 20.14; Rev 21.4).

6.3. He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father. He will deliver to the Father the Church—all those eternally elected by the Father, converted by the Holy Spirit, and saved by the death and resurrection of the Son. Thus, he will declare ultimate victory, to the glory of God.

6.4. Will Christ cease to reign once he has subdued all his enemies?

6.4.1. Some commentators appear to infer that Christ’s mediatorial kingdom will end, once he has conquered all his enemies.²⁸⁹ For examples, Geerhardus Vos says, “After the last enemy, death, has been conquered, there is no further need for the kingdom of Christ: hence it is delivered up to God the Father. Christ’s kingdom as a process of conquest precedes the final kingdom of God as a settled permanent state.”²⁹⁰ This seems to present a contradiction between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of God. Christ’s kingdom is the kingdom of God.

6.4.2. The Greek word (ἄχρι), translated ‘until’ (1 Cor 15.25) in English is commonly understood to mean that something will happen for a duration of time and then will end at a point in time when something else happens. Examples of this usage can be found in the Bible (e.g., Lk 1.20; Acts 1.2). However, we can also understand the word ‘until’ to mean a process or state that will continue beyond the point of time mentioned in the context. For example, in Acts 2.29 (translated, ‘to’) David’s tomb was expected to be there after that day; in Acts 23:1 (translated, ‘up to’) Paul expected to fulfill his duty to God after that day; and in Acts 26.22 (translated, ‘to’) Paul expected to have God’s help after that day.

6.4.3. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7.16; Is 9.6-7; Dan 2.44; Dan 7.13-14; Lk 1.32-33; Heb 1.8; 2 Pt 1.11; Rev 11.15). While aspects of his reign are temporally constrained (e.g., his physical presence is not on earth now, and his reign is not yet universally acknowledged), he will continue to rule his kingdom as the God-man forever.²⁹¹

7. How is the relationship between the Father and the Son portrayed (1 Cor 15.27-28)?

7.1. Paul alludes to Psalms 8.6 and Psalm 110.1 when he states that all things have been put into subjection to Jesus. However, to ensure accuracy, he qualifies his statement ‘all things’ by excluding God the Father. In the economy of the Trinity, God the Father granted God the Son everlasting reign over all things; and the Son, not just as the God-man (Jn 5.26-27, 30) but as the

²⁸⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 2,273.

²⁹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *The Kingdom and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), p. 91; archive.org/details/teachingofjesusc02vosq

²⁹¹ A. W. Pink, “The Kingdom of Christ,” *Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 9, January 1938, p. 18-22.

eternal Son (1 Cor 3.23; 1 Cor 11.3), will continue to honour the role distinction in the Trinity forever.

8. How does God become ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15.28)?
 - 8.1. Isn’t God infinite and eternal, how can he become more than he is?
 - 8.2. The contrast is between the temporal and the everlasting realms. Now, Satan resists God, men blatantly deny God’s sovereignty and flagrantly disobey his commands, and death continues to assail mankind. However, at the end of all things God’s absolute and universal sovereignty will be complete.
 - 8.3. What will be included in God being “all in all”?
 - 8.3.1. The work of salvation will be complete. The last person who was elected by the Father and for whom Christ died will be saved (Jn 18.9).
 - 8.3.2. All men (whether in heaven or hell) will acknowledge Christ’s reign (Phil 2.10-11).
 - 8.3.3. All men will be judged justly, and rewards and punishment dispensed fairly (Mt 16.27; 2 Cor 5.10).
 - 8.3.4. Sin will be banished from the recreated universe (Rev 21.4; Rev 22.3, 15) and confined to hell, the place of everlasting punishment (Rev 20.10, 14-15).
 - 8.3.5. God will be conspicuously glorified.
9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.20-28)?
 - 9.1. *Resurrection Reality* – The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is an historical fact. The physical resurrection of believers into everlasting glory is an assured promise. Jesus’s resurrection is the firstfruits of the harvest that is yet to come.
 - 9.2. *Representational Relationship* – The resurrection of Jesus is applied to believers through their covenantal union with him—he died in their place and stead to pay their debt of sin.
 - 9.3. *Rendered Resolution* – The resurrection of Jesus not only ensures the restoration of believers’ bodies but the resolution of all things. His resurrection demolishes demons, destroys death, and delivers a dominion.
 - 9.4. *Realized Reign* – The reign of Jesus will be fully realized as he returns with power, resurrects and rewards his people, and restores paradise.

Reasons for the Resurrection (1 Cor 15.29-34)

1. What does Paul mean when he refers to being “baptized on behalf of the dead”?
 - 1.1. Analyzing the variety of opinions and inferences drawn from this statement could be overwhelming. One writer has identified thirteen different interpretations, most of which he rightly dismisses as being unconvincing.²⁹² Some of the interpretations which have been proposed, are:
 - 1.1.1. Washing dead bodies.
 - 1.1.2. Metaphorically a reference to a mortal body.
 - 1.1.3. Metaphorically suffering a martyr’s death or suffering for the faith.
 - 1.1.4. Metaphorically escorting the dead to their graves with honor.
 - 1.1.5. Baptism of those nearing death—such as in last rites.
 - 1.1.6. To fill vacancies left by the nearly departed dead.
 - 1.1.7. Confession of the expectation of resurrection.
 - 1.1.8. Baptism for mortal sins.
 - 1.1.9. A repunctuation of the sentence to read, “Otherwise, what shall they do who are baptized? It is for dead persons if the dead do not rise.”
 - 1.1.10. Baptism, not to remedy a deficiency on the part of the dead, but to be reunited with dead

²⁹² A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1242–1249.

believers at the resurrection.

- 1.1.11. Those who are baptized (vicariously or by proxy) to fill the place of the dead who were not believers or were not baptized before death.
- 1.2. Taking the text in its plain sense, Paul seems to be speaking of a vicarious or proxy baptism for dead people, which some in Corinth were practicing, with a faulty (magical) understanding of baptism—for example believing that the dead would be considered baptized at the resurrection and received into heaven. Many object to this view saying that Paul would not mention such a belief without condemning it. However:
 - 1.2.1. Paul is laser-focused on his argument and is presenting arguments in favour of belief in the resurrection which would convince the Corinthians.
 - 1.2.2. Paul does not approve of the practice, and distances himself from it by his use of the abstract third-person, ‘people’ rather than the second person, ‘we’ or ‘you’.
 - 1.2.3. He uses an *argumentum ad absurdum*, to show the illogical stance the Corinthians were taking. Effectively he says, it is absurd for people to baptize the living on behalf of the dead if there is no resurrection. He effectively answers, “a fool according to his folly” (Prov 26.5), assuming for the sake of discussion their faulty view and showing them the results through a *reductio ad absurdum*. We can use a similar approach, when demonstrating the foolishness of unbelieving thought, for example:
 - 1.2.3.1. If a homosexual inclination is caused by a person’s genes, then how can the inclination survive if homosexual practitioners do not have children?
 - 1.2.3.2. If man is the product of evolutionary survival-of-the-fittest processes, then why should we be concerned about protecting endangered species.
 - 1.2.3.3. If the earth has been subjected to a repeated 100,000-year cycle of significant global warming followed by ice ages, why should we worry about the production of additional CO₂ caused by human activities, the world will soon be in another deep freeze.

We do not accept the premises, but the logical consequences show the fallacy of the premises.
 - 1.2.4. He uses sarcasm as a rhetorical technique. It would be similar to someone saying, “Why do the Egyptians embalm their dead and preserve their organs, if there is no resurrection of the dead.”
2. How does Paul apply his own circumstances as he continues his defense of the resurrection (1 Cor 15.30-32)?
 - 2.1. He argues that he had unnecessarily faced persecution for the sake of Christ Jesus (2 Tim 2.8-9), and his efforts to bring the Gospel to the lost was a waste of time, if there is no resurrection—since if there is no resurrection there is no salvation and no everlasting hope.
 - 2.2. He does not give details of the persecutions he had faced—he will provide a list in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11.23-29)—rather he identifies three challenges: dangers every hour, dying daily, and fighting beasts.
 - 2.3. How did he ‘die daily’?
 - 2.3.1. The burdens he faced for the cause of Christ were beyond his strength, so that he despaired of living and felt as if he were under a sentence of death (2 Cor 1.8-9).
 - 2.4. What beasts did he fight at Ephesus?
 - 2.4.1. He could be speaking figuratively and referring the evils he had faced during his evangelistic efforts in Ephesus (Acts 19.1-41). He viewed the challenges of the pagan supporters of Artemis as ‘beasts’—compare, 2 Tim 4.17, where Paul may be referring Nero as a ‘lion’.
 - 2.4.2. Alternatively, he may have faced actual wild beasts—being thrown into their lair or into an arena; much like Daniel faced lions (Dan 6.1-28)—and was miraculously protected as he was later from a snake bite (Acts 28.3-6). Some say that this is unlikely since the city officials would not have persecuted a Roman citizen in this way. However, Roman

administrators persecuted Christians regardless of their citizenship status. They also argue that if he had faced literal beasts, Luke would have mentioned it in Acts or Paul would have mentioned it in his catalogue of challenges in 2 Corinthians. However, this is an example of a logic fallacy, since “the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.”

- 2.5. How are we to understand the ESV’s reference to ‘humanly speaking’?
 - 2.5.1. It is not clear why Paul qualifies his statement about fighting beasts with ‘humanly speaking’.
 - 2.5.2. Literally he says, ‘according to man’. The NIV has, “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons”. The NASB has, “If from human motives I fought with wild beasts”, and the NKJV/KJV has “If, in [after] the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus”. Each of these translations provides a clearer indication of what Paul means, than does the ESV.
3. Logically, how should we behave if there is no resurrection of the dead? (1 Cor 15.32)
 - 3.1. We may as well enjoy every aspect of life with gusto (Lk 12.19), without regard for what is right or wrong. Paul quotes a parable that was known throughout the ancient world. Isaiah states it (Is 22.13; and something similar in Is 56.12).
 - 3.2. If all that there is to life is the 70-80 years we are granted in this realm, and then we die, with no future prospect of living, then there is no reason to experience the privations that pagans do not experience. Other than living with a degree of self-discipline to avoid pain and poverty and disease and debt, we may as well join with the pagans in their dissipations. There is certainly no reason for not enjoying intoxicating agents, sexual libertinism, and gastronomic delights, and pampering ourselves with luxuries.
4. What warning and exhortations does Paul give the Corinthians (1 Cor 15.33)?
 - 4.1. He warns them that ‘bad company ruins good morals’.
 - 4.1.1. He quotes a contemporary proverb, just as we might quote a proverb which makes a good point, such as, “All that glitters is not gold.” or, “Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched.”
 - 4.1.2. By quoting from a pagan playwright (apparently from a writing of Menander or Euripides) he shows that common sense indicates that some among the Corinthians had based their unbelief on the opinions of false teachers.
 - 4.1.3. His point is that Christian truth and moral behaviour are polluted by pagan ideas.
 - 4.2. He charges them to awaken from a drunken stupor. (1 Cor 15.34)
 - 4.2.1. The Greek word (ἐκνήψατε) translated in the ESV as, “wake up from your drunken stupor”, means ‘come to your right senses’. The NIV translates it as, “Come back to your senses”, and the NASB as “become sober-minded”. The root (νήφω) expresses the idea of sober mindedness (1 Thess 5.6, 8; 1 Tim 3.2, 11).
 - 4.2.2. Unbelief in the resurrection is a delusion of a dulled mind—of someone who is not in his right mind, like being inebriated.
 - 4.2.3. They are to awaken to a clear mind and clear thinking (that which is right) about the resurrection.
 - 4.3. He charges them to stop sinning.
 - 4.3.1. Not being in control of one’s own thought processes—i.e., by an overconsumption of alcohol or by the use of a non-medicinal drug—is a sin. Thus, unbelief in the resurrection is also a sin.
 - 4.3.2. To reject the resurrection of the dead is to call God a liar.
5. What is the primary reason that some (many) people believe that there is no resurrection? (1 Cor 15.34)
 - 5.1. They have “no knowledge of God”.

- 5.2. Paul shames the Corinthians who claimed to have knowledge (1 Cor 8.1-3), and yet they were showing that they were ignorant about God, his dealings with mankind, and his redemptive plan.
- 5.3. Paul would use the same indictment against many of the leaders in the Church and in ‘Christian’ academies today. He would say, “You claim to be a Bible teacher and yet you deny the resurrection ... virgin conception ... deity of Jesus ... (Jn 3.10).
6. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.29-34)?
 - 6.1. *Faultless Theology* – Heresy is sin, which Christians should be ashamed to accept and teach. In order to avoid falling prey to heresy what must Christians do?
 - 6.1.1. Obtain an in-depth knowledge of the Bible’s teaching and thereby learn about God and his purposes.
 - 6.1.2. Know and understand the great doctrines which have been systematized over the past 2,000 years of Church history, and are documented in the generally accepted creeds and confessions—in particular, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the ancillary documents (i.e., the *Catechisms* and the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*).
 - 6.1.3. Eschew faddish teachings, particularly when the proponents claim that the new ideas have been missed by the Church for the past millennia (1 Tim 6.3-5).
 - 6.2. *False Teaching* – The Corinthians had imbibed false pagan teaching—and some were influenced by it into rejecting the reality of the resurrection of the dead. The Church today is similarly syncretistic and has been influenced by a pagan mind-set. What are examples of pagan beliefs polluting Christian thinking today?
 - 6.2.1. *Scientism* – A belief that ‘scientific’ claims trump the Bible’s clear statements—such as a belief that the universe is ~14B years old rather than the ~6,000, as the Biblical genealogies indicate.
 - 6.2.2. *Superstitions* – An acceptance of pantheistic ideas such as *karma*, ‘the force’, and the influence of celestial objects on the lives of people.
 - 6.2.3. *Scepticism* – Questioning the reality of the supernatural and the miraculous (e.g., the virgin conception).
 - 6.2.4. *Sensuality* – An abandonment of moral principles (e.g., sexual intercourse only within marriage), an acceptance of immoral behaviour (e.g., endorsement of homosexual practices), and a blatant disregard for several of the Ten Commandments.
 - 6.2.5. *Secularism* – Endorsement of pluralism and the removal of the true religion from the public arena, based on the naïve belief that laws and public policy can be religiously neutral.
 - 6.3. *Far-reaching Truth* – Truth is not the exclusive domain of the Bible. Through God’s general grace, men can discover truth about God’s creation through empirical research and deductive logic. When unbelievers provide valid insights —i.e., consistent with Biblical teaching—into the operations of the physical universe or human psychology we may utilize those insights. Paul illustrates this principle through his occasional quotation of proverbial sayings current within Greco-Roman society.

Resurrection of Corporality (1 Cor 15.35-49)

Means (1 Cor 15.35-41)

1. What questions does Paul anticipate that people will ask?
 - 1.1. “How are the dead raised?” He addresses the ‘how’ in this section.
 - 1.2. “With what kind of body do they come?” He addresses the ‘what’ in the following section (1 Cor 15.42-49)
2. How does Paul initially respond to these anticipated questions? Why?
 - 2.1. He calls anyone who asks such questions a fool, because they are questions which are based ultimately on a scepticism about the supernatural and the abilities of the sovereign Creator.
 - 2.2. Similar questions would be asked today by materialistic naturalists (philosophical materialists)

who claim that everything is purely material, and there is no spiritual realm. Ironically, the materialistic naturalist should accept the concept of resurrection (or at least, resuscitation) of a body, since based on their belief the animating principle in a body is nothing more than molecules stimulated by synaptic currents.

- 2.3. Such scepticism is foolish since it arises from a worldview that is blind to reality. God who created the vast universe by speaking and gave life to man (breathing into him the spirit of life), could surely gather a few molecules and reconstitute a body for a person—even one whose body had decayed into dust. Even ‘natural’ processes reconstitute human bodies. The body we are born with is not the same one which we have at death—but we are still the same person. The fact that much material is added from infancy to adulthood demonstrates this. Also, a fact (not known to the ancients), is that most cells in a human body are replaced regularly (some every few days). A few exceptions appear to be neurons, eye lens cells, and female gametes (eggs; the remaining ones are the same at death as they were at birth).²⁹³
- 2.4. Nevertheless, he addresses their questions; just as we should be willing to address the questions of sceptics, if they are serious about engaging in a discussion and understanding the Biblical worldview.
3. What analogy does Paul use to explain the ‘how’ of the resurrection?
 - 3.1. Anticipating that someone might believe that the resurrected body would be a reanimated body—with its frailties and decay—he uses the analogy of a seed which is planted and then ‘dies’ (changes) as it grows into a new plant form.
 - 3.2. Why is this analogy helpful?
 - 3.2.1. The transformation of a seed into a plant is something that someone could be sceptical about, on hearing about it for the first time. How, for example, a tiny seed can grow into a large tree with branches, leaves and fruit.
 - 3.2.2. The transformation is a common phenomenon, which everyone knows happens. Paul applies the known to the unknown.
 - 3.2.3. The transformation of a seed into a plant takes place without human instrumentality, by the sovereign power of God (Mk 4.26-29). Likewise, God can transform a planted body into a resurrected body.
 - 3.3. What other analogy might be helpful to illustrate the change of the body that takes place at the resurrection?
 - 3.3.1. The transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. A caterpillar can often appear ugly and earthbound, it ‘dies’ as it wraps itself in a cocoon during its pupal stage and emerges as a beautiful creature that can soar above the treetops. Resurrected bodies will be more different than a butterfly is from a caterpillar. Spence-Jones dismisses this analogy, used by ancient ‘reasoners’, as false; but does not give a reason for his dismissal.²⁹⁴
4. What additional argument does Paul present to show that our resurrected bodies will be different from our current bodies?
 - 4.1. He states that the bodies of the different created entities are different from one another. Each kind of living being (human or animal) has a different kind of body. And each class of celestial object (sun, star, moon) also has its own ‘body’ and ‘glory’ (brightness). The implication is that a resurrected body will be different from the body that dies, because it is a different class or kind of body. Paul will go on, in the next section, to explain the constitution of the resurrected body.
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.35-41)?

²⁹³ How quickly do different cells in the body replace themselves? book.bionumbers.org/how-quickly-do-different-cells-in-the-body-replace-themselves/

²⁹⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Ed.) *1 Corinthians* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 493.

- 5.1. *Analogical Reasoning* – Paul demonstrates that nature provides us with analogies for understanding God’s dealing with mankind. Analogies cannot be applied in explicit detail, but as general exemplars they serve a purpose. Paul often uses analogical reasoning where the similarities between the model and reality support the extrapolated conclusions. Examples of Paul’s use of analogies include: The Church as a body made of parts (1 Cor 12.12-31), the armour of a Christian (Eph 6.10-20), release from the law (Rom 7.1-6), and running a race (1 Cor 9.24-27). Jesus also used analogies in his teaching (Mt 6.19-23; Mt 7.9; Mt 13.24, 31, 33, 45, 47; Mt 18.23; Mk 4.1-20, 21-23; Lk 15.1-32; Jn 14.2). C. S. Lewis was effective as an apologist for Christianity because of his use of analogies.²⁹⁵ Thus, the creative use of analogies can help us present the Gospel to a world which has little connection with Biblical concepts.
- 5.2. *Absolute Rejection* – Paul tells us that God created different kinds of living entities, and says that, “not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish”. His statement can be applied for a different purpose than he intended it. It gives us authority to reject the concept espoused by the proponents of biological evolution that there is a supposed graded continuum which connects all living entities in a single ‘tree of life’. It provides explicit support for the creation of discrete classes, or kinds, of animals on the 5th and 6th days of creation. And, according to Paul, mankind is also in an individually separate and distinct class from the animals and did not evolve from a lemur-like creature.
- 5.3. *Authoritative Rule* – Paul says that it is God who gives each class of entity its own body. Thus, Paul affirms the sovereign role of God in all that transpires in the universe. He is the first, ultimate, and final cause of all things. The Bible never suggests that nature progressively develops independent of the providential governance of God—such as deists or materialistic naturalists would have us believe. Rather, as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.”²⁹⁶

Majesty (1 Cor 15.42-49)

1. What question does Paul address in this section?
 - 1.1. He addresses the second question that he said that someone would ask: “With what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor 15.35)
 - 1.2. He says, “With the resurrection of the dead, the bodies of the raised ones are going to be like this ...”
 - 1.3. How does he explain the nature of the resurrected body?
 - 1.3.1. With a series of four contrasts, structured much like contrasting parallelisms (antithetical vs synonymous) sometimes found in Hebrew poetry (Ps 73.26; Prov 10.2; Prov 19.16; Ecc 10.2).
2. What are the contrasts that Paul makes between man’s current body and his resurrection body?
 - 2.1. *Perishable vs imperishable* – Sin introduced *decay* and corruption into the created order (Rom 8.21-22), and sin introduced *death* into the created order (Gen 2.17; Rom 5.14). In contrast, the resurrected body reverses all the ravages of mortality, cannot decay, and is immortal (Rev 7.16-17; Rev 21.4).
 - 2.2. *Dishonoured vs glorified* – The dishonour Paul speaks of is the result of sin. There was nothing dishonourable about man’s body as it came from the Creator. However, because of sin, the magnificent creation God made is defaced with wrinkles, sagging, blotches, palsies, disease, and disfigurement. What sin does to the human body is worse than spraying paint on a Rembrandt. In

²⁹⁵ The Effectiveness of Analogy; blog.cslewis.com/the-effectiveness-of-analogy/

²⁹⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*; chapter 5, *Of Providence*, section 1.

the end the most dishonouring factor is the body's decay into dust (Gen 3.19). "For what is more unsightly than a corpse in dissolution?"²⁹⁷ In contrast, the resurrected body is glorious. The word translated 'glory' (δόξη) includes the idea of 'splendor'. We obtain a hint of the glory of the resurrected body from the transfiguration, in which Jesus's body appeared as bright as the sun and his clothing as white as light (Mt 17.2; Phil 3.21; 1 Jn 3.2).

- 2.3. *Weak vs powerful* – The human body is now weak; again, as the result of sin. We can get some idea of what mankind lost when Adam sinned when we hear of amazing mental feats—such as, individuals who have memorized entire books, can speak ten languages fluently, have four earned PhDs, or can play multiple musical instruments. A window is opened into the depth of human capacity when we hear of child prodigies who can perform intellectual activities (e.g., playing chess or composing music) we normally associate with those who have had years of training. In our resurrected bodies we will be able to use our intellectual and physical capacities to the fullest of God's intention for mankind. We will think, explore, experiment, learn, conceptualize, and create in ways that we cannot even imagine today.
- 2.4. *Natural vs spiritual* – The bodies we now have are suitable only for a spatial-temporal realm. In contrast, the resurrection bodies that we will be given will be suitable for the new heavens and earth.

Our resurrection bodies will be similar to the bodies that we have while being substantially different. The similarity will not be superficial. We will be physically recognizable (Lk 24.39-40; Jn 21.12) as the person we are now, but in a state that will be better than even at our peak health.

3. What does Paul mean by 'spiritual body'?
 - 3.1. Paul does not mean a spirit-body. He does not mean that our resurrected bodies will be immaterial. That would be an oxymoron and inconsistent with the thrust of his entire argument in this chapter, that the resurrection bodies are physical bodies; nonmaterial bodies would not be resurrected bodies.
 - 3.2. Rather, he means a body that is:
 - 3.2.1. Fully animated and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit—no remnants of the old man (sinful by nature) will be present.
 - 3.2.2. Fully sympathetic and synchronized with the will of God.
 - 3.2.3. Fit to possess the new heavens and earth—the new paradise.
 - 3.2.4. Prepared in such a way that it can participate in everlasting life—not just endless time, but a new form of life.
 - 3.2.5. Endowed with amazing abilities.
 - 3.3. Although speculative, it is possible to think that our resurrection bodies will exist in a different kind of physical reality. For example, the veil between the spiritual mind and the physical brain may be removed, and we will likely be more brilliant than Adam was when he came from the hand of his maker. Bodies in this spatial-temporal realm, even possibly Adam's before the fall, are constrained by increasing entropy. An increase in entropy is currently necessary or men cannot undertake any action. For example, friction, which is required for walking, dissipates some heat and increases entropy. When we eat food, and burn calories, we increase the overall entropy of the universe.
4. What will the bodies of those condemned to hell be like?
 - 4.1. This question is not addressed directly in the Bible. However, we can make an inference from what Paul says in this chapter.
 - 4.2. The Bible teaches that every person will be raised from the dead (Jn 5.28-29; Acts 24.15; 1

²⁹⁷ John Chrysostom. "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians." In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 252.

- Thess 4.15-17). This means that even those consigned to hell forever will have physical bodies.
- 4.3. Those consigned to hell will not have bodies fit for the new heavens and earth. Instead, their bodies will be designed for perpetual existence in a physical hell (Mt 13.49-50; Mt 25.30; 2 Thess 1.6-10; Rev 20.10-15). Their bodies will probably be the opposite of the bodies designed for glory. If so, they will be: ‘perishable’ (not dying but subject to everlasting decay), dishonourable, weak, and natural.
5. How does Paul compare and contrast Adam and Jesus (1 Cor 15.45, 47-48)?
- 5.1. Both are ‘Adams’. Both are founders of races of mankind. Christ is called the ‘last Adam’, not the ‘second Adam’. The ‘second Adam’ was Noah, the founder of a new humanity, after the flood.²⁹⁸
- 5.2. The first Adam was *given* life (Gen 2.7) by God; the last Adam *gives* life, at the life-giving God (Jn 1.4; Jn 11.25; Jn 14.6; Acts 3.15; 1 Jn 5.11). The life Adam received consisted of a spirit animating a physical body made from the dust of the earth. The life given by Christ is substantively more—it is everlasting life (Jn 3.16) in a perfect spiritual body formed to exist in heaven (the new heavens and earth).
6. What progression is implied by Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15.46?
- 6.1. There is a progression from a natural (earth-based) body to a spiritual (heaven-based) body.
- 6.2. If Adam had not sinned in response to the obedience test, he was given, he would have moved from the natural to the spiritual state—his body would have been transformed so that it would not be weak and could never see corruption and perish. He would have been lifted out of the potentiality into the realization of a spiritual body.
7. Whose image will believers bear in their heavenly bodies?
- 7.1. The image of the man from heaven—i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 7.2. Just as we derived our natural image from the man of dust (earthly), so we shall bear our everlasting image from the man of heaven.
- 7.3. We noted above that the transfiguration of Jesus gives us a hint of the glory that our resurrected bodies will have. Beyond that, we can only speculate about what these bodies will be like. Even so, our speculations are likely deficient (1 Cor 2.9).
8. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.42-49)?
- We learn from this section that the resurrection bodies of believers will be:
- 8.1. *Glorious* – Our resurrected bodies will be spiritual, fitted for an everlasting new heavens and earth, and not subject to decay, illness, injury, or pain (1 Cor 9.25; 1 Pt 1.4; Rev 21.4; Rev 22.3, 15). It is ironic that many people hope for the emergence of technologies which will allow them to become immortal, such as cryogenic preservation followed by resuscitation, constant organ replacement with organic or non-organic substitutes (eventually replacing all body parts with human-engineered components), or a transhumanism which would merge (upload) the human mind into a machine. For example, one article stated:

Humans have always been fascinated with the concept of immortality but what seems to be even more exciting to some is the thought of using technology to make immortality a real-world application. A movement called transhumanism is even devoted to using science and technology to augment our bodies and our minds, and to allow humans to merge with machines, eradicating old age as a cause of death. So the

²⁹⁸ Hughes, J. and Doyle, S., The multiple ‘Adams’ of Scripture, *Journal of Creation* 36(1):122–127, 2022.

big question is — can we really evade death?²⁹⁹

Yet, they give little thought to the possibility of a guaranteed immortality in a perfect body through belief in Jesus Christ as their saviour. This solution does not ‘evade death’ (would we really want to live forever in bodies subject to decay, when there is an option?) but it does conquer death forever.

- 8.2. *Great* – Our resurrected bodies will be powerful. In this life, we are subject to intellectual and physical constraints that will be lifted. This does not mean that we will be able to do things that are intrinsically impossible for human bodies to do—such as lifting ten tonnes. Rather, it means that constraints that we experience today will be removed. For example, we will have perfect memories and remember everything we experience, think logically and clearly, learn new manual and intellectual skills effortlessly, and apply creativity as we explore God’s recreated universe.

Believers in Jesus Christ have an amazing future to look forward to (2 Tim 4.8).

Resurrection Change (1 Cor 15.50-58)

In this section Paul reiterates that the resurrected body is significantly different from the bodies we currently have (they are *imperishable* (*immortal*) and *invincible*). He then speaks of the *instantaneous* nature of the transformation of the bodies of those who are still alive when Christ returns. He concludes with an *inducement* to persevere—a lesson which we should receive from a consideration of the facts about the resurrection.

Imperishable (1 Cor 15.50, 53)

1. What does Paul mean by ‘kingdom of God’, in this instance?
 - 1.1. The ‘kingdom of God’ is here now (Lk 10.9, 11; Lk 11.20; Lk 17.21), and is coming (Lk 9.27; Lk 21.31; Lk 22.16). There is a distinction, but also a continuity, between the ‘already and the not yet’³⁰⁰—the kingdom of God already exists in the world but is not yet consummated in its fullness.
 - 1.2. Thus, Paul is speaking of the everlasting kingdom—the new heavens and earth—rather than the Church in this age since believers in this age are already part of the kingdom of God.
2. What does he mean by ‘flesh and blood’?
 - 2.1. He means the natural body, as constituted in this spatial-temporal realm. He does not mean a material body *per se*.
 - 2.2. What evidence do we have that he is not speaking exclusively of a material body?
 - 2.2.1. The term ‘flesh and blood’ means ‘mankind in his current nature’ (Mt 16.17; Eph 6.12; Heb 2.14).
 - 2.2.2. Jesus’ resurrection body is material, and it was taken into heaven.
 - 2.2.3. The bodies of those alive at the time of Christ’s return will be changed (1 Cor 15.52) into a new form of material body, and death will be defeated (1 Cor 15.54-56) by the restoration of material bodies at the resurrection.
3. Why can the natural body not inherit the kingdom of God?
 - 3.1. Because it is perishable and subject to decay.
 - 3.2. It is mortal and can die.
 - 3.3. It must be replaced by a body which is imperishable and immortal.

²⁹⁹ Rupendra Brahmbhatt, Will We Ever Cheat Death and Become Immortal With Mind Uploading? Could we interest you in a humanoid vessel to transfer your consciousness into? 2021-12-07; interestingengineering.com/cheating-death-and-becoming-immortal-with-mind-uploading

³⁰⁰ A concept proposed by the theologian, Gerhardus Vos; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_theology

Instantaneous (1 Cor 15.51-52)

1. What mystery (revelation) does Paul disclose?
 - 1.1. Not everyone will experience death. At the time of Christ's return those who are alive will have their bodies transformed into immortal bodies—they will not experience a resurrection.
 - 1.2. The re-creation of the universe, including the reconstitution of human bodies in the resurrection, will be instantaneous—in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, the smallest conceivable measure of time.
 - 1.2.1. God could have created this entire universe in an instant but chose to create in six consecutive 24-hour periods consisting of an evening and a morning, that were the first chronological days of history. Then he rested on the seventh day to establish a pattern of work and rest for mankind (Ex 20.11).
 - 1.2.2. However, the re-creation of the universe—the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3.13)—will be instantaneous because we will immediately enter the everlasting Sabbath (Heb 4.9).
 - 1.3. There will be an audible announcement of the arrival of Jesus at his return.
 - 1.3.1. There will be a loud melodious sound accompanied by a shout of victory (1 Thess 4.16), which every ear on earth will hear simultaneously. At the same time, every person will see Jesus (Rev 1.7).
 - 1.3.2. Clearly this will be a miraculous event since the shape and size of the globe does not permit all people to simultaneously see and hear an event today. The return of Jesus will be seen and heard with the natural senses, not mediated through technology (as might be supposed in a global TV broadcast).
2. Does Paul's use of 'we' indicate that he thought that the return of Christ was imminent (i.e., would occur within the lifetime of some of his readers)?
 - 2.1. He is using the term 'we' in a general 'editorial' sense (i.e., a reference to mankind), not necessarily speaking of himself and his Corinthian readers. Elsewhere he uses 'we' to refer to those who will die and experience resurrection (1 Cor 6.14; 2 Cor 4.14)
 - 2.2. Paul is not suggesting an eschatological timetable. He understood that only the Father knew the time of the Son's return (Mt 24.32; Acts 1.7). Every generation could be the last. We are to live with the expectation that Jesus could return at any moment (Mt 24.33-37).

Invincibility (1 Cor 15.54-57)

1. What will be achieved with the resurrection?
 - 1.1. Death will be defeated, and the curse (Gen 2.17) will be reversed. The resurrection body will not be subject to decay, and it will be impossible to separate the spirit from the body (Rev 21.4).
 - 1.1.1. Paul quotes loosely from Hosea 13.14. The Hebrew and LXX have 'plagues' ('pestilence') but Paul substitutes 'victory'; and 'sheol' ('hades'), but Paul substitutes 'death'. Paul never refers to 'hades' in any of his writings. By using 'death' he provides a God-inspired interpretation of 'sheol'.
 - 1.2. The promises of God (Is 25.8; Hos 13.14) will be fulfilled. Every promise of God is sure to be fulfilled (2 Cor 1.20; Heb 10.23). This is the only place where Paul (in his letters) quotes from an OT prophecy that had not been fulfilled before his day (e.g., in Christ).
2. What does Paul mean by his statements in verse 56?
 - 2.1. *The sting of death is sin.* We might think that Paul would have reversed the order, 'the sting of sin is death'. While this is true, since sin is like a venomous serpent that kills (Rom 5.12; Rom 6.23), Paul says death's sting is sin. It appears that Paul is saying that spiritual death—separation from God—results in sin infecting the entire human race.
 - 2.2. *The power of sin is the law.* Sin is made empowered by the law (Rom 7.12-13) as it revealed for what it is. Without law (a moral standard) nothing can be defined as bad, evil, or sinful; and no

- one can be declared culpable and guilty.
- 2.3. Why does he make these statements?
 - 2.3.1. To remind us of the inextricable connection between law, sin, and death. Because we are law-breakers by nature (original sin) we need salvation from sin to free us from physical death and everlasting death in hell.
 3. What victory do we have through the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - 3.1. In this instance Paul is not speaking of salvation from sin through the victorious work of Christ on the cross (Col 2.14-15). Believers inherit that victory through our organic union with Christ.
 - 3.2. Rather, he is focused on the bodily resurrection of believers. Through the resurrection of the body, both sin and death are conquered forever. The resurrected body will not only be without sin, but unable to sin. And the resurrected body will be immortal and unable to decay and die. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, and we are organically united to him, we also will be raised from the dead to declare victory (Rom 8.33-34, 37).

Inducement (1 Cor 15.58)

1. How does Paul conclude his teaching about the resurrection of the dead?
 - 1.1. He ensures them of his love and encourages them to live for the Lord.
 - 1.2. Even though he has had to rebuke them about some of their beliefs and practices, he still views them as fellow brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus, and therefore expects them to conform their beliefs and behaviour to “the faith that once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).
 - 1.3. Paul consistently demonstrates that doctrine is practical. What one believes directly influences how one behaves. For example, in Romans 1-11 he presents exalted doctrine, and then as chapter 12 begins he says ‘therefore’ and appeals to them to live out their beliefs. Similarly, in Hebrews chapters 1-11 he presents equally exalted doctrine, and then as chapter 12 begins he says, ‘therefore’ and shows them how their faith should be worked out. Likewise, here, after this magnificent presentation of the truth about the bodily resurrection, he says, ‘therefore’ and offers the Corinthians pastoral encouragement to persevere.
2. What does Paul expect our response to be when we consider the glories of the resurrection?
 - 2.1. *Be steadfast and immovable* – These are synonyms which mean to be unwavering in one’s beliefs and positions. Paul encourages believers to resist attempts to divert them from the fundamentals of the faith in Jesus.
 - 2.1.1. What is required if one is to be steadfast and immovable?
 - 2.1.1.1. There must be a standard against which to stay fastened. If there is no foundation, there is nothing against which to be steadfast and immovable.
 - 2.1.2. What must that foundation be?
 - 2.1.2.1. When we considered some lessons that we could derive from 1 Corinthians 15.29-34 (*Reasons for the Resurrection*), we noted that we need to: 1) obtain an in-depth knowledge of the Bible’s teachings, and 2) know and understand the great doctrines which have been systematized over the past 2,000 years of Church history and are documented in the generally accepted creeds and confessions.
 - 2.1.3. What are examples, of false teaching today, which cause professing Christians to become unfastened from the foundation of truth?
 - 2.1.3.1. In our consideration of the lessons for 1 Corinthians 15.29-34, we identified classes of pagan beliefs polluting Christian thinking today: scientism, superstitions, scepticism, sensuality, and secularism.
 - 2.2. *Always abound in the work of the Lord* – The Bible never pits faith against works. Rather, it teaches that both faith and works are necessary constituents of the Christian life (James 2.18-26). A person is saved by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 1.17; Gal 3.11; Eph 2.8-9; Phil 3.9; Heb 10.38) and saved for good works for Jesus Christ (Eph 2.10; Col 1.9-10; Titus 2.14). If either is missing,

one is not a true Christian. A Christian is far from perfect when it comes to abounding in the work of the Lord. However, the way to abound is not to look back, but to go forward (Phil 3.13), confessing our sins and failures and asking the Holy Spirit to help us move in the right direction.

2.3. *Knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.*

2.3.1. We might have expected Paul to say, ‘trusting’ or ‘believing’ that our work for the Kingdom is not in vain. Rather, he uses the word ‘knowing’. Why? Because faith and belief in Christianity are based on knowledge. Belief, in Christianity, is not an irrational leap of faith; it is a rational trust in the God who can be known, and who reveals himself to mankind, through his Word and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

2.3.2. Why is labour (κόπος; hard work, sometimes accompanied with difficulties) for the Lord, never in vain?

2.3.2.1. It is for his glory (1 Cor 10.31; Col 3.17).

2.3.2.2. It is empowered by him (1 Pt 4.11).

2.3.2.3. It is rewarded by him (2 Tim 4.7-8).

2.3.3. Paul assures us that labour for the Lord is not ‘vain’. Where has he spoken, in this letter, of work that is vain or not vain?

2.3.3.1. He assured his readers that Christ’s saving work of grace in his life was not in vain (1 Cor 15.10).

2.3.3.2. He declared that without the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, all preaching and faith in Jesus is vain (1 Cor 15.14).

2.3.4. Thus, Paul establishes a contrast: our steadfast faith in Christ, and our labour for Christ are not in vain, because Christ’s work has been completed—he lives, to save to the uttermost (Heb 7.24-25).

Instruction (1 Cor 15.50-58)

1. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 15.50-58)?

Considering the truths about the resurrection is not a mere intellectual exercise, because it addresses our:

1.1. *Everlasting Hope* – Life without Christ is a hopeless life (Eph 2.12), filled with superficial pleasure (but no real joy), and fear and doubt. By nature, an unbeliever knows that he is a sinner accountable before God (Rom 1.18-20), but he has no idea how his guilt can be assuaged. He also can have nothing but foreboding thoughts about what will happen at his death and after his death. It is only by the general grace of God that the natural man can function at all and does not end up suffering mental collapse as did Nietzsche. In contrast, a believer’s life is filled with hope—his sin is covered by the blood of Christ and all his sins (past, present, and future) have been forgiven. He has the certainty that when he stands before God on the Day of Judgement, he will be welcomed heartily into heaven because of his union with his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1.2. *Encouraging Hope* – Calvin said, “Let us, however, consider this settled: that no one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection.”³⁰¹ Christ’s return and the resurrection of the body are not idle fantasies but certain realities. As Paul says, the trumpet will sound. Christians will inherit a kingdom, resurrected immortal bodies, the new heavens and earth, paradise, and everlasting glory. Thus, Paul says that we are to encourage one another with these words (1 Thess 4.13-18).

1.3. *Energizing Hope* – A sports team that is experiencing a win streak is highly energized and feels invincible. But every human win streak eventually comes to an end, and the team’s excitement and energy deflates. In contrast, Christians are invincibly victorious because they are on the winning side—Christ and his kingdom can never be defeated (Ps 110.1-7; Is 53.12; Dan 2.44; Mt

³⁰¹ Calvin, J. (2011). *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2. (J. T. McNeill, Ed., F. L. Battles, Trans.) (Vol. 1, p. 718). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

16.18; Jn 12.31; Col 2.15; Heb 2.14). Thus, we are energized to persevere in our labours for Christ's kingdom because we are winners.

Regulations for Money (1 Cor 16.1-4)

1. What topic does Paul now address?
 - 1.1. The collection for saints.
 - 1.2. Since he says, 'now concerning' it may have been another of the questions that the Corinthians had sent to him or a topic that he felt it was necessary to address because of news he had heard about the congregation (1 Cor 7.1, 25; 1 Cor 8:1; 1 Cor 12.1; 1 Cor 16.1, 12).
 - 1.3. It might appear somewhat incongruous to follow his exposition of the sublime (the resurrection) with the mundane (money matters). What does this indicate?
 - 1.3.1. Paul had a true pastor's heart, he cared for the needs of others.
 - 1.3.2. Caring for others in the Church is a demonstration of love.
 - 1.3.3. Our faith must be accompanied by works, which demonstrate that our faith is real.
 - 1.3.4. The proper administration of Church practices is as important as having a right understanding of eschatology.
2. What was the purpose of the collection?
 - 2.1. To assist the saints in the Jerusalem church
 - 2.2. He doesn't identify the particulars, but the historical context appears to indicate that there was a severe famine in Palestine that was having an impact on poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11.27-30).
3. Is Paul speaking of a regular tithe, or a special offering?
 - 3.1. He is likely not speaking of regular contributions for the operation of the local church—e.g., to pay the teaching elder (1 Cor 9.14) or to care for the widows and orphans (Act 6.1; 2 Cor 9.12). Since this is a collection for the needy in Jerusalem—which was to be a gift to them (1 Cor 1.3; 2 Cor 8.6).
4. What instruction does he give them about how to administer the collection?
 - 4.1. They were to take up a collection – The money was to be collected. They were not just to place a box at the back and wish for people to contribute. Rather, they were actively to collect the contributions. It is probably a wise practice to pass a collection plate so that children can see their parents contributing and even practice it. On-line donations undermine the visible aspect of this act of worship.
 - 4.2. It was to be a weekly collection – They were to make the offering of funds an organized part of the weekly meeting. And, they were to repeat the collection regularly to make donation behaviour habitual.
 - 4.3. It is worship – As part of the weekly congregational meeting, giving a tribute to the King of kings is a form of worship.
 - 4.4. People were expected to contribute – Paul gave direction, not a suggestion. He said that he had given the same direction to the churches in Galatia indicating that this was not optional. In his letter to the Galatians there is no reference to this direction, so he may have given it in person or in a letter which has not been preserved.
 - 4.5. Money is to be collected from everyone – Paul expected each income earner to contribute.
 - 4.6. Contributions are to be proportionate to income – Each person was not to contribute the same amount (i.e., a poll 'tax'), but to contribute in proportion to income, as God had prospered him.
 - 4.7. The collection and distribution of the funds was to be administered by persons appointed in the congregation.
 - 4.8. They were to avoid a process of appealing for money – Paul wanted the discipline of contributing to the Church to be habitual so that it would not be necessary to make a special

- appeal.
- 4.8.1. Every aspect of Church operation—salaries, infrastructure, and charity or benevolence—should be funded out of the regular giving of the people in the congregation.
- 4.8.2. A congregation should not have to resort to fund raising campaigns for special events or projects (e.g., to fund a conference speaker or replace the carpet in the sanctuary).
- 4.9. Paul will have to remind them of the need for Christians to be generous in supporting those in the broader Church who are in need (2 Cor 8.1-15; 2 Cor 9.1-15), so they must have been negligent in following the instructions he gave here.
- 5. Does this section support the concept of tithing?
 - 5.1. Jesus endorsed the principle of tithing to the LORD, by his instruction to the Pharisees (Lk 11.42; see also Mt 5.20).
 - 5.2. Since contributing to the work of the Church is required by the NT, the extension of the principle of tithing from the OT (Lev 27.30; Prov 3.9; Mal 3.8-10) is a logical conclusion.
 - 5.3. Some argue that he does not apply the OT system of tithing. However, the only thing missing in this section related to the principle of tithing, is the 10% dimension.
 - 5.4. God does not leave the specification of the amount that he requires be given to him, to man's discretion. This would only lead to:
 - 5.4.1. Chaos. We would not know what God requires.
 - 5.4.2. Doubt. We would not know if we had given enough.
 - 5.4.3. Miserliness. We would be tempted to hold back some and to give a little as possible.
- 6. How does Paul indicate that he is not treating the Corinthian congregation differently from other congregations?
 - 6.1. He informs them that he had directed the churches in Galatia to do the same thing.
 - 6.2. Other, predominantly Gentile congregations, were asked to contribute to support the formerly Jewish Christians. We find that the church at Antioch had contributed (Acts 11.27-30) as had others (Rom 15.26).
 - 6.3. Support for Christians in need, by those in other congregations, indicates that the Church is an organic whole, not made up of isolated congregations.
- 7. How did Paul plan to have the collected funds delivered to Jerusalem?
 - 7.1. Trusted appointees, selected by the congregation, were to make the delivery. This indicates that the money collected by a congregation is to be administered at a congregational level, not at presbytery or synod level.
 - 7.2. Money matters in congregations are to be handled by deacons who are to be selected carefully, based on criteria such as trustworthiness (1 Tim 3.8-13).
 - 7.3. Paul was careful about the handling of money and avoided any suggestion that money could have an influence on his ministry (1 Cor 9.12, 15; 2 Cor 8.20-21), because he knew that an inordinate desire for money corrupts people (1 Tim 6.10; Titus 1.7).
 - 7.4. He also indicated that he was willing to write a letter of introduction or accompany those carrying the donated funds, if "it seems advisable"—that is, if the congregation felt that he should travel with their delegates. It appears that he did go with the congregation's delegates (Rom 15.25)
- 8. When were they to take up the collection?
 - 8.1. On the first day of the week. Why?
 - 8.2. The first day of week (Sunday) was the day that Christian congregations assembled for worship (Acts 20.7). It is the Lord's Day (Rev 1.10), a commemorative of the resurrection of Jesus, and the Christian Sabbath. Jesus established the pattern by his post-resurrection appearances to the disciples (Jn 20.19, 26). Sunday was observed by the early Church as a day of assembly and

worship,³⁰² before the time of the emperor Constantine (306-337 AD), who made it an official day of rest in the empire.³⁰³

9. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 16.1-4)?
 - 9.1. *Mutual Concern* – Members of the Church are required to care for one another—materially and spiritually. It is a matter of fact that Christians are to show their faith by their works (James 2.18-26). If we demonstrated greater concern for the deserving needy (James 1.27), there would be no destitute in the (universal) Church, even in countries where poverty is endemic.
 - 9.2. *Mediated Compassion* – We cannot personally care for every needy individual in the Church. Through the collection of money, to be distributed by entrusted representatives (deacons), we can help many more than we could individually. Paul’s use of intermediaries to carry the money to Jerusalem indicates that our compassion for others in the Church can be applied through mediators. This is particularly relevant today. For example, our congregation’s web site often receives a request for financial aid. These appeals usually come from people, who claim to be Christians, in lands where terrorists are active, Islam is in the ascendancy, or there is considerable political turmoil (e.g., Pakistan or Syria). These appeals also usually include a description of the difficult circumstances afflicting the individuals or their families. Does the requirement that we show mutual concern mean that we are to transfer funds in response to every request we receive? We should provide support to those whom we do not know personally only through trusted representatives—e.g., a mission organization or a person we know personally who is also intimately familiar with the requester’s circumstances and profession of faith.
 - 9.3. *Maintenance Collection* – The work of the Church is to be funded through the regular offerings collected from the members of the congregation. These funds are to be used to:
 - 9.3.1. Pay the salaries of preachers, theology teachers, evangelists, and missionaries;
 - 9.3.2. Support works of mercy, which could range from applying a benevolence fund, running a hostel for the indigent, or operating a hospital; and
 - 9.3.3. Maintain the physical infrastructure (building) of the congregation.Providing regular support for the work of the Church—through tithes and freewill offerings—is not to be viewed as an imposition or chore, but as an opportunity to return to God a portion³⁰⁴ (tribute) of what he has graciously given to us. The financing of the work of the Church should not have to be subjected to fund-raising appeals. If every believer took his responsibility to support the Church seriously, much wasted time and energy would be avoided.
 - 9.4. *Mandated Conduct* – Paul indicates that he had directed the congregation in Galatia to follow the same procedure which he gave to the Corinthians. The Church is not to operate as a free-for-all, with everyone doing what seems right in his own eyes. The Church is to be governed by the rules handed down from Christ, through the apostles, and by the application of procedures documented in the constitution of each denomination and/or congregation.
 - 9.5. *Mercy’s Criterion* – The standard by which we are to judge our works of mercy and compassion within the Church is not what others do, like a Pharisee (Lk 18.11-12) but against God’s mercy and compassion toward us. Paul alludes to this when he says, “as he may prosper”. God gives prosperity to each of us as he disposes (Dt 8.18; Prov 8.21; Prov 10.22; James 1.17). We, in turn, should render to others the grace which we have freely received.

Summation (1 Corinthians 16.5-24)

Travel Arrangements (1 Cor 16.5-12)

³⁰² *Didache*, 14:1; www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html

³⁰³ For a detailed consideration of the Sabbath principle and the observance of the Christian Sabbath on the first day of the week, refer to: James R. Hughes, *The Sabbath – A Universal and Enduring Ordinance of God*, 2006, 2013; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

³⁰⁴ See: James R. Hughes, *the Principle of the Portion*, 1992/2002; available at, www.epctoronto.org.

Paul's Personal Travel Plans (1 Cor 16.5-9)

1. What were Paul's near-term travel plans?
 - 1.1. He planned to go to Corinth soon (1 Cor 4.19), after extending his stay in Ephesus for a while longer (1 Cor 16.8). Then he planned to cross from Asia and pass through Macedonia. He would likely have expected to visit Philippi and stay with Lydia or the jailer. Then, he planned to travel south to Corinth, in Achaia, and probably spend the winter with them. From there, he planned to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19.21). However, it appears that he was not able to carry out this plan (2 Cor 1.15-16; 2 Cor 2.1).
 - 1.2. What does Paul mean by "help me on my journey"?
 - 1.2.1. Possibly praying for his ministry and providing financial support.
2. Why did Paul not want to visit Corinth "just in passing", but to "spend some time" with them?
 - 2.1. He probably wanted to spend time with them in fellowship.
 - 2.2. However, he also knew that a visit in person for a period of time would make it easier for him to deal with some of the issues being faced by the Corinthian congregation, than dealing with them through a letter or in a short visit.
3. Why did Paul plan to stay in Ephesus a while longer?
 - 3.1. The Holy Spirit was working, and the Gospel was being received in that city. He refers to the positive reception as a 'wide door' having been opened. He was also concerned that there were many adversaries in Ephesus who would attack Christianity and the new Christians, and he believed that he needed to be there to respond to their attacks. Paul used the metaphor of an 'open door' for the Gospel in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 2.12). We will consider how to determine if God has opened a door for us, when we study 2 Corinthians.
 - 3.2. Paul's decision provides an example of a principle—that missionary evangelists (and pastors/elders) should generally expect to see fruit from their labours. Where there is no reception of the Gospel, after a reasonable time of presentation, it is appropriate to move on to other locales (Mt 10.11-15).
4. Why did Paul say 'perhaps'?
 - 4.1. Paul indicates that he made his plans with a conscious understanding that they were subject to the overriding will of God (1 Cor 4.19; 2 Cor 1.17-18), and that he was willing to be directed elsewhere than he planned by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16.6). He followed the same principle that James (James 4.15) presents—we are to make our plans with the proviso that they are to be consistent with the will of the Lord.

Paul's Partner's Travel Plans (1 Cor 16.10-11)

1. Who had Paul sent to Corinth?
 - 1.1. Paul mentions (1 Cor 4.17) that he had sent Timothy to them.³⁰⁵ Timothy was likely on a journey of pastoral visitation which was to include Corinth. Paul probably expected that his letter to the Corinthians would arrive before Timothy arrived in Corinth. However, Paul wasn't certain that Timothy would make it to Corinth, since he says, 'If he comes' (NIV, NASB, NKJV, KJV), rather than 'when he comes' (ESV). Paul expected Timothy to return to him in Ephesus before he would set out on his next pastoral or missionary journey.
2. How did Paul want the Corinthians to treat Timothy?
 - 2.1. To put him at ease, not to despise him, and help him on his way in peace.
 - 2.2. Paul wanted them to welcome Timothy with respect and to show kindness to him.
 - 2.3. Paul had a particular concern for Timothy, whom he viewed as a son (Phil 2.22) as well as a

³⁰⁵ See the section, *Ministry and Sonship* (1 Cor 4.14-17).

ministry companion.

3. Why was it necessary for Paul to give this instruction to them?
 - 3.1. Timothy was relatively young and inexperienced (1 Tim 4.12) and had a delicate physical constitution (1 Tim 5.23).
 - 3.2. Paul knew that working among the Corinthians could be intimidating and challenging because of their party spirit, snobbishness, moral lapses, and doctrinal issues.
4. What did Paul assure the Corinthians that Timothy was doing?
 - 4.1. He was doing the work of the Lord. He preached the same Gospel that Paul preached and taught the same doctrine and principles for behaviour as Paul taught.
 - 4.2. Paul provided Timothy a ‘letter of reference’ as he sent him to Corinth.

Paul’s Peer’s Travel Plans (1 Cor 16.12)

1. What had Paul encouraged Apollos to do? Why?
 - 1.1. To visit Corinth again, in response to an apparent request from the Corinthians—he says, ‘now concerning’, which he uses to address questions from the Corinthians (1 Cor 7.1, 25; 1 Cor 8:1; 1 Cor 12.1; 1 Cor 16.1).
 - 1.2. It appears that he considered Apollos would be of assistance in addressing the issue in the Corinthian congregation.
2. What does this tell us about Paul?
 - 2.1. Some in Corinth had created a division in the congregation between the ministry of Apollos and the ministry of Paul. However, Paul respected Apollos, who was eloquent, competent in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in spirit, and spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18.24-28). Paul demonstrates that he was not jealous of the preference that some in Corinth had for the eloquent Apollos but treated him as a partner in ministry.
3. Why did Apollos not want to go to Corinth at that time?
 - 3.1. Apollos was pastorally prudent and likely realized that his going to Corinth could stir up additional dissension in the congregation. It appears that he suggested to Paul that they postpone his visit until a more opportune time—for example, after Paul had had an opportunity to visit Corinth and set things in order. We do not know if Apollos ever visited Corinth again.
 - 3.2. This comment about Apollos, and Apollos’ willingness to have Paul reply on his behalf, indicates that he also was gracious, immune to the flattery of the Corinthians, and viewed himself as a co-worker of Paul and not as a rival with his own following.
4. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 16.5-12)?
 - 4.1. *Man’s Contriving* – Man plans, God predisposes. Men are quick to boast of their plans (James 4.13-14) without acknowledging God’s providential governance of all creatures and all their actions. Corporate executives declare that their business plans will increase the company’s stock price, politicians claim that they have delivered ‘peace in our time’ or that their policies will make the nation great again, and scientists proclaim that they will be able to extend human life expectancy with their latest marvel drug. Paul reminds us that respecting our plans we must say “if the Lord permits”, and James tells us that instead we ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4.15).
 - 4.2. *Ministerial Cooperation* – Paul and Apollos displayed a sincere desire to work together for the advancement of Christ’s Church. They did not allow the party spirit in Corinth to affect their judgement of their own skills and abilities, or to dull their desire to do what was best for the congregation in Corinth, regardless of who got the credit. Their behaviour demonstrates how

elders in a congregation, and within a denomination or across denominations within a city, should work cooperatively together. Also, Paul's endorsement of Timothy (and his involvement of many co-workers in his missionary work) shows us that he understood clearly that the Church is advanced best through team ministry, not through men who prefer to do things on their own and in their own way.

- 4.3. *Mutual Care* – Paul demonstrated how greatly he cared for the Corinthians (throughout this letter) and for Timothy. He also encouraged the Corinthians to care for Timothy and show respect for him when he arrived in Corinth. Care and respect between the pastor and elders and a congregation is to be bidirectional. The people are to love and care for their pastor and elders, and the pastor and elders are to love and care for their people.

Timely Admonitions (1 Cor 16.13-18)

1. What was admirable about Stephanas and his household?
 - 1.1. They were the first converts in Achaia. They accepted Paul's preaching and came out of pagan spiritual darkness into the light, and Paul baptized them (1 Cor 1.16).
 - 1.2. They had devoted themselves to the service of the saints. They served as a mature core of believers within the Corinthian congregation and demonstrated that true faith results in giving service (Eph 2.8-10). They had not been appointed to this work by Paul, but in humility took up the example of Christ who gave himself for his people.
 - 1.3. They refreshed the spirits of Paul and of the saints in Corinth. Their work and example brought comfort and encouragement to all those among whom they served.
 - 1.4. What may have been the nature of their service that was refreshing?
 - 1.4.1. Offering hospitality to visitors
 - 1.4.2. Establishing a meeting place for the congregation in their home.
 - 1.4.3. Giving funds to support the work of evangelists, pastors, and teachers; and the indigent.
 - 1.4.4. Offering counsel and comfort to the lonely, discouraged, and fearful.
2. Why does Paul mention the household of Stephanas?
 - 2.1. They were a model of how Christians should serve others.
 - 2.2. They were a model of Christian humility (Phil 2.3-8).
 - 2.3. Many in the Corinthian congregation were proud and divisive, and pursued self-interests. They needed to be shown an example of how they should have been behaving.
 - 2.4. They provided an example of those whom we should deem worthy of respect and imitation, because of their work and service.
 - 2.5. He demonstrates the covenant concept of 'households'. All of Stephanas' household is commended because of the leadership of the family patriarch. The NT mentions other household conversions and baptisms (Cornelius, Acts 11.14-17; Lydia, Acts 16.14-15; and the Philippian jailer, Acts 16.31-33). This is a concept that is foreign in our culture today, which emphasizes the primacy of the individual.
3. With what admonitions does Paul close his letter?

Most commentators find four (they merge 'act like men' and 'be strong') or five admonitions. But, Paul's includes two admonitions or exhortations to follow the example of Stephanas. So, there are potentially seven admonitions:

 - 3.1. *Be watchful*. The exhortation for Christians to be watchful or to stay awake occurs often in the NT (Mt 24.42-43; Mt 25.13; Mk 14.34-38; 1 Thess 5.6; 1 Pt 5.8; Rev 3.2; Rev 16.15). About what are we to be watchful, or on our guard?
 - 3.1.1. Satan's stratagems to tempt us into sin (1 Pt 5.8).
 - 3.1.2. Our own hearts, which are tempted by pride, lust, envy, etc. (1 Cor 10.12; 2 Pt 3.17).
 - 3.1.3. The expectation and hope of Christ's return at any moment (Mt 24.42).
 - 3.2. *Stand firm in the faith*. Paul's use of 'the faith' as distinct from 'your faith' indicates that he is

speaking of an objective faith, rather than a subjective, personal faith, or a subjective interpretation of the faith.

3.2.1. What is ‘the faith’ of which he is speaking? The faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) which is:

3.2.1.1. *Supreme* – Based on an absolute truth. There cannot be multiple ‘truths’. God is the author of the laws of logic, including the law of non-contradiction. For example, Islam says Jesus is not God, the son of God, and God incarnate. Therefore, either Christianity or Islam is wrong (or, logically both could be wrong); both cannot be true.

3.2.1.2. *Stable* – Objective truth is universal, applicable in all time and places. It is not relative, within different cultural contexts. For example, abortion or sex outside marriage, cannot be right in some cultures, and wrong in others. In addition, the fundamentals of the faith do not change based on subjective experience, church councils, or edicts from a church leader (e.g., the pope).

3.2.1.3. *Singular* – There are not many faiths or paths that lead to God. There is one only! Jesus says that he is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14.6). There is no other way to God, but through him.

3.2.1.4. *Scriptural* – The content of the faith is revealed in the Bible, and only in the Bible. The Bible is the breathed-out word of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3.16). All extra-Biblical truths (e.g., from science) must be interpreted within the context God’s revelation.

3.2.1.5. *Systematic* – Today, professing Christians have muddled thinking in many areas (e.g., about the Trinity, existence of Satan, relevance of the moral law, covenants, sexual morality, six-day creation, etc.). The primary reason is that the Church is entertainment focused and not teaching or preaching a systematic theology. Paul tells the Ephesian elders that he declared the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20.27) to them. This is what is needed in the Church. One does not need to take a seminary course to understand the systematic nature of the faith. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* provides an excellent summary of the fundamentals of the faith.

3.2.1.6. *Saving* – “The faith’ is also used to refer to the Gospel (Col 1.23)—the good news that Jesus, the God-man, died in the place of sinners to pay their debt of sin.

3.2.2. How can we stand firm in this faith?

3.2.2.1. *Supplicate* – We need to start with prayer. Our trust in the faith will waver if we are not assisted by the Holy Spirit.

3.2.2.2. *Study* – It requires mental effort to understand the faith correctly.

3.2.2.3. *Submit* – We need to trust confidently in the word of God in the Bible. The world scorns Biblical truth, and laughs at its teachings (e.g., about miracles or sexual morality). We must not be ashamed of what the Bible teaches; it is true! (Rom 1.16) We should not waver but hold fast to our principles and the surety that God will be with us no matter what the world does to us.

3.3. *Act like men*. We are to act with the courage of mature and brave adult males, not as children who think childish thoughts (1 Cor 3.1; 1 Cor 13.11; 1 Cor 14.20) or as feminized males. Paul knew from his time in Corinth that it was a cesspool of sexual immorality, including homosexual practices. He wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth (Rom 16.23) which included his indictment of Roman culture (Rom 1.18-23) which he saw displayed at its worst in Corinth. His admonition to ‘act like men’ is likely an indictment of Corinth’s ‘soft men’ (μαλακοί; 1 Cor 6.9) who lived as women (such as transvestites) and performed a same-sex act. Our culture seems to commonly despise men who display strong positive male attributes (e.g., decisiveness, leadership, responsibility, courage, protectiveness, provisioning, chivalry, and adherence to principles) and neuters them with cries of ‘toxic masculinity’. Instead of displaying positive masculine traits, our culture seems to want men to be docile, obedient, passive, sentimental, and

cowardly.³⁰⁶ In an article about the American Psychological Association's *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*, Jordan Peterson indicates how serious the problem is in our culture, which undermines approaches that "teach boys from an early age to be self-reliant, strong, and to minimize and manage their problems on their own". He noted that the APA's document, "purporting to provide guidelines for the psychological treatment of boys and men is disingenuous, scientifically fraudulent and ethically reprehensible."³⁰⁷

- 3.4. *Be strong*. To act with courage (Josh 1.9), you must be strong and have strong weapons (Eph 6.10-20). Our strength must come from Christ through the Holy Spirit (1 Tim 2.1).
- 3.5. *Let all that you do be done in love*. We have already dealt with the importance of doing all in love when we studied chapter 13. In the Greek, the word 'all' occurs first in the sentence, to emphasize the importance of the scope of the required application of love. Our love for others, including in the congregation, is to overcome our selfish prideful desire for recognition, self-centredness, and seeking after comfort and pleasure.
- 3.6. *Be subject to saints such as Stephanas and his household*. We should respectfully defer to good men and women who voluntarily place the work of Christ's Church as their highest priority. In this admonition, Paul is not establishing a hierarchy of authority in the Church, nor is he suggesting that leaders in a congregation are to be ignored or overruled. Rather, he is giving guidance for how to deal with matters where an informal leadership arises. For example, someone in the congregation could take the initiative and:
 - 3.6.1. Start a visitation ministry to the elderly,
 - 3.6.2. Engage in street evangelism,
 - 3.6.3. Setup a children's club,
 - 3.6.4. Create a hospitality program, or
 - 3.6.5. Organize the church kitchen.Those in official leadership capacities should encourage them and those in the congregation should follow the leadership of those who took on the initiative without a begrudging attitude.
- 3.7. *Give recognition to people such as Stephanas and his household*. Not only are we to assist and follow the leadership of those who take on ministries of service but to acknowledge their efforts. How?
 - 3.7.1. Offering words of praise, without flattery.
 - 3.7.2. Petitioning for their support through prayer.
 - 3.7.3. Sincerely thanking them.
 - 3.7.4. Assisting them to carry out the work of service.
 - 3.7.5. Not attempting to take over their work of service but taking direction from them.
4. Why did Paul rejoice at the coming of the representatives from Corinth?
 - 4.1. Paul displays the heart of a true pastor. He was pleased to have the void he felt at being absent from them by the visitors from Corinth. While this letter deals with the problems in Corinth, of which there were many, Paul would have rejoiced, and had his spirit refreshed, to hear of conversions, baptisms, spiritual growth, and family events among the people he loved (1 Cor 16.24).
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 16.13-18)?
 - 5.1. *Caution not to Fall* – We need to wake up from our drowsy stupor and be vigilant, so that we can resist Satan (James 4.7) and sin. And, we need to maintain a proper understanding of how weak we are in the face of temptation and how easily we can fall into sin.

³⁰⁶ Kenneth Francis, "Toxic Feminism Trumps Toxic Masculinity", *First Things*, 2019-02;

www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm?frm=189568&sec_id=189568

³⁰⁷ Jordan Peterson, "It's ideology vs. science in psychology's war on boys and men", *National Post*, 2019-02-01; nationalpost.com/opinion/jordan-peterson-its-ideology-vs-science-in-psychologys-war-on-boys-and-men

- 5.2. *Contend for the Faith* – Jude (Jude 3) tells us to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”. We determined that *the* faith is objective truth communicated in Scripture. We are to stand firmly on this truth and support it courageously, with a demeanour of love and respect (1 Pt 3.15).
- 5.3. *Contribute to the Fellowship* – Our love for the saints must be more than words. It must be displayed through service. We should each think of ways that we can contribute to our fellowship, as the household of Stephanas served in Corinth.

Termination Address (1 Cor 16.19-24)

Courtesy (1 Cor 16.19-20a, 21)

1. On behalf of whom does Paul send greetings to the Corinthians?

Research has shown that conveying greetings, even from multiple parties, at the end of letter was part of standard letter writing practice in Paul’s day.³⁰⁸ Paul sent greetings from:

- 1.1. *The churches in Asia*. He was in Ephesus, in Asia (modern-day Turkey), when he wrote this letter. Other congregations (e.g., those mentioned in Revelation 2-3) in Asia were near Ephesus and Paul probably visited them periodically and told them of the work in Corinth. They asked to be remembered to the churches in Macedonia and Greece. In addition, since there was regular commercial interaction and trade between Asia and Corinth, the people in the congregations in Asia may have known merchants from the congregation in Corinth.
- 1.2. *Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla)*. This husband and wife pair had been involved with both the founding of the congregation in Corinth and congregations in Asia, including Ephesus (Acts 18.1-3, 18, 26; Rom 16.3-4). Aquila was a Jewish tentmaker (which may have included leather working) who shared his profession with Paul.
- 1.3. *The church meeting in the home of Aquila and Prisca*. Where the majority in a synagogue converted to Christ, a congregation may have had access to a building for worship. However, most of the early NT churches initially met in the larger homes of believers (Acts 2.46; Rom 16.5; Col 4.15; Phm 2). As a tentmaker, Aquila probably had a workshop with a lower street-facing shop, in which Paul or Aquila could converse with customers, and an upper loft for laying out large pieces of cloth. The upper loft could have served for congregational gatherings.
- 1.4. *Himself*. Paul used a scribe to write his letters as he dictated (Rom 16.22). It is possible that Sosthenes (1 Cor 1.1) served as scribe for this letter. Paul would then add a postscript or greeting in his own hand to his letters—this would have been in a different style and larger script (Gal 6.11)—because of Paul’s likely eyesight problem, his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12.7).

2. Why is it significant that Paul sends the greeting in his own hand?

- 2.1. It added the personal touch, indicating his love for the congregation. It would be like someone today typing a letter on a computer and printing it, and then adding a note and signature at the end. This would change the typed letter from a ‘form’ letter, into a personal missive.
- 2.2. He added a signature (2 Thess 3.17) to assure them that the letter (which would have been on a single scroll) was legitimate and not a forgery using his name.

Charge (1 Cor 16.20b)

1. What charge does Paul give the Corinthians?

- 1.1. To greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16.16; 2 Cor 13.12; 1 Thess 5.26; 1 Pt 5.14 [‘kiss of love’]).

2. What is a ‘holy kiss’?

- 2.1. It was a form of friendly greeting common in the ancient Middle East and Mediterranean world

³⁰⁸ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1342.

- (Ex 4.27; Mk 14.45; Lk 15.20; Lk 22.48; Acts 20.37). It appears to have consisted of a light kiss on both cheeks or a quick touch of the cheek-to-cheek on both sides. This practice continues in southern Europe to this day and is often used by the glitterati today.
- 2.2. Some suggest that it was gender-specific, with men kissing only other men, and women kissing only other women—however, it may have been included a cross-gender greeting (Lk 7.37, 45).
 3. What made the kiss holy?
 - 3.1. The qualifying adjective ‘holy’ might indicate that it was: i) chaste, ii) solemn, (iii) a sign of affection used among believers, or iv) a liturgical ritual.
 - 3.2. Some commentators interpret the kiss Paul is referring to as more than a friendly greeting. They conclude that it was a practice already instituted as part of the worship assembly (possibly out of the synagogue model), and associated with the fellowship meal or Eucharist, which was developed into a formalized ritual during the Middle Ages.
 4. What might the holy kiss symbolize?
 - 4.1. Suggestions fall in a broad spectrum: a symbolic expression of love or affection, a sign of forgiveness or reconciliation, a token of brotherly unity and fellowship among believers, a sign of respect.
 5. How can we apply this charge in our cultural context?
 - 5.1. After the time of the apostles, the ‘holy kiss’ (‘kiss of peace’) became part of the liturgy in sectors of the Church. What the Church did with the ‘holy kiss’ in the post-apostolic era and into the Middle Ages has no normative value for us today. The Reformation (in Geneva and Scotland in particular; less so in the Netherlands, and to a limited extent in Germany and England) removed most of the liturgical trappings of the Middle Ages church. Also, our practices within a worship setting should be defined by principles and practices of the apostles, not the bishops, priests, monks, and councils of the Middle Ages.
 - 5.2. We should not object if someone insisted that to be consistent with Scripture, and since there is the often-repeated injunction to greet one another with a holy kiss, we should reintroduce the practice of holy kissing in a congregational setting.
 - 5.3. However, an equivalent, which expresses the same intent, may be a firm handshake or warm hug as a sign of welcome and greeting.

Curse and Consecration (1 Cor 16.22-24)

1. How does Paul conclude his letter?
 - 1.1. With a curse and a consecration.
2. Upon whom does Paul pronounce a curse? Why?
 - 2.1. Anyone who has no love or friendly affection (φιλαί) for the Lord. Whom does this include?
 - 2.1.1. Anyone who rejects Jesus as the God-man and risen Lord.
 - 2.1.2. Anyone who hates the people of Jesus, his Church.
 - 2.1.3. Anyone who has a disregard for his law and refuses to repent of his sins.
 - 2.1.4. Anyone who perverts the doctrines of Scripture and leads people away from the truth (Gal 1.8-9).
 - 2.2. What implication about Jesus can we draw from this statement?
 - 2.2.1. The dividing line between truth and error, between right and wrong, and between life and death is how we approach Jesus. In Jesus, the Godhead dwells bodily (Col 2.9). Jesus asked the fundamental question that all men must address, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Mt 22.42)
 - 2.3. What does it mean to be accursed?
 - 2.3.1. The word in the Greek is *anathema*. In the Septuagint, it is used to translate the Hebrew

word (תָּרַם) that is used for something that is dedicated to the LORD through destruction (Lev 27.28-29; Josh 6.17-19). In Paul's usage, it means someone under a divine curse (Rom 9.3; Gal 1.8-9). It means much more than excommunication or expulsion. It means being handed over to God for an irrevocable and total destruction.

2.4. Is Paul overly harsh with this imprecation?

2.4.1. People of our generation think that they know better than God about how to deal with sin (which they would label as a maladjustment or something similar) and believe that God (at least their view of God as portrayed in the OT) is a malevolent bully. Yet, they have no appreciation for how sinful sin is and how much God hates sin.

2.4.2. God is truly and only good. The final proof that he is good lies in two truths:

2.4.2.1. God, the self-attesting God, declares that he is good (Ps 25.8; Ps 73.1; Ps 100.5; Ps 106.1).

2.4.2.2. God shows that he is good by saving sinners who deserve nothing but everlasting damnation (Jn 3.16; Rom 5.8).

2.4.3. God's retributive justice must therefore also be good. There is nothing logically inconsistent between God's goodness and kindness and his punishing sin. In fact, to the contrary, if God did not punish sin, he would not be good, but wicked and capricious. If he did not punish sinners, we could not consider him good, because he would be allowing them to get away with their evil and would be an accessory to their evil.

2.4.4. God's essential nature requires that he judge the wicked (Dt 32.35).

2.4.4.1. Men know innately that this is true (Rom 1.32). They just do not like the idea of God's punishing sinners—especially when it applies to their own punishment.

2.4.4.2. But justice can only be realized if God is just and punishes sinners.

2.4.4.3. Therefore, we must not look with disgust on the doctrine of God's retributive justice.

2.4.4.4. Rather we must embrace it as a glorious truth (Ps 94.1).

2.4.4.5. God will not permit a single sin committed against his law or against Christ and his people to go unpunished. He will not allow those who have despised him to go merrily into the next life.

2.4.4.6. In justice, God receives the full honour of his majesty.

2.4.4.7. We must rejoice in God's justice as much as in his love!

2.4.5. Paul does not take personal vindictive action. He does not say, 'Damn you!' and curse the opponents of the Gospel. Rather, his use of the passive voice indicates that he is asking God to curse his enemies. Paul asks God to vindicate his cause (Rom 12.19)—as we will see in the next clause.

3. Why does Paul say, "Our Lord, come!"?

3.1. It is debated how the Aramaic expression (Greek transliteration: μαράνα θά) Paul uses is to be translated. For example, is he asking Jesus to come, or declaring that he has come (as stated by Chrysostom³⁰⁹)?

3.2. Why he uses the Aramaic expression is also debated. Some understand him to be using the words in a liturgical sense, related to the Lord's Supper.

3.3. Following the standard translation (ESV, NIV, NKJV), we conclude that Paul is speaking of the eschatological appearance of the Lord Jesus and asking him to come in vindictive justice upon all those who hate him (Ps 96.13; Ps 98.9). John uses the expression "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22.20) in a similar sense, after he has pronounced a curse on anyone who modifies the revelation he has received and recorded (Rev 22.18-19).

³⁰⁹ John Chrysostom. "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians." In: P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Vol. 12), (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), pp. 265-266.

4. How does Paul consecrate (bless) the Corinthians?
 - 4.1. He prays for God's grace to be extended to them.
 - 4.1.1. Paul opens the letter by extending grace to them (1 Cor 1.3) and he closes in the same manner. When we studied the opening of the letter, we noted that grace is a display of freely offered kindness shown by one person toward another, who is unworthy to receive the favour. Since Paul assumes that his readers are saved (1 Cor 1.1), he isn't speaking of God's offering pardon for sin (salvation), but the grace to persevere until the end, when they will receive their reward in heaven.
 - 4.1.2. In 1 Corinthians 15.9-11 he uses the word *grace* three times, and he uses *grace* about 90 times in his epistles (including Hebrews). Without question, he is the apostle of 'grace'. Because of his own pre-grace behaviour, he understood what it means to be saved (justified) by grace. Thus, he sincerely wished God's grace to be extended to his readers.
 - 4.1.3. How does Paul identify the source of the grace that he desires to be bestowed on his readers? It originates with the Lord Jesus. What does this imply?
 - 4.1.3.1. Grace exists; mercy and favour are available to undeserving mankind in a world that is filled with rebellious sinners and saturated with sin's consequences.
 - 4.1.3.2. Jesus is God, who supplies divine mercy and favour, as the representative of the Trinity (Col 2.9), as he demonstrated by forgiving sins (Mt 9.5).
 - 4.1.3.3. Jesus is alive in heaven, otherwise he could not dispense grace.
 - 4.1.3.4. Blessings flow from Jesus to those who live in him through faith. Grace is a necessity for salvation and for living the Christian life.
 - 4.1.3.5. Only by the grace of Jesus are Christians enabled to conquer and receive the blessings of the new heaven and earth.
 - 4.1.3.6. The grace of Jesus is sufficient for us to live out the Christian life, as Paul was informed by Jesus when facing a challenge with his health (2 Cor 12.9).
 - 4.1.3.7. The dispositions of grace are according to the will and wisdom of Jesus. Jesus is willing to grant grace to his people because he loves them.
 - 4.2. He extends his love to them—all of them, including those who have been causing trouble in the congregation and challenging his authority. This statement of his love for them is not a perfunctory closing remark about a passing feeling, but a genuine expression of his continuing compassion and care for them. He assures them that although his words may appear severe at times, they are communicated with a deep desire to see the advancement of their everlasting wellbeing.
 - 4.3. Grace and love are two key themes that run through Paul's teaching, including this letter. Paul teaches that we are saved by grace to live by love.
 - 4.4. He ends with an 'amen', a transliteration of the Hebrew which means 'surely', 'to be firm' or 'trustworthy'. This is to assure them of the sureness of his benediction for them, but also of all that he has written in the letter.
5. What are some lessons that we can derive from this section (1 Cor 16.19-24)?
 - 5.1. *Love for the Congregation* – Greetings for one another with words and a holy kiss are to be the outward signs of a true love for the congregation. This love should be displayed through:
 - 5.1.1. *Succor* – We are to exhort, encourage, and counsel our fellow believers (Col 3.16; 1 Thess 4.18; 1 Thess 5.1; Heb 3.13).
 - 5.1.2. *Support* – Christians are to work together and support one another in ministry (1 Cor 16.10, 12; Eph 4.11-12; Phil 1.5)
 - 5.1.3. *Submission* – Humility is to be a hallmark of our walk (1 Cor 13.4; Phil 2.5-7).
 - 5.1.4. *Service* – Christians are to serve others, rather than selfishly seeking their own gratification (1 Cor 16.15; Gal 5.13; Col 3.23-24).
 - 5.1.5. *Supplication* – Paul prayed for the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 1.4-9; 1 Cor 16.23; 2 Cor 13.7-9), as he did for all the churches. Likewise, we are to pray for all those in our

congregation and to pray for Christians beyond our congregation.

5.2. *Love for the Christ* – True religion is *not*:

5.2.1. Observance of rituals—although there are required practices such as keeping the Lord's Day holy and participating in legitimate acts of worship.

5.2.2. Doing works to please God and earn his favour—although obedience to God's law and an abhorrence of sin are required.

5.2.3. Recitation of creedal statements—although there are fundamental doctrines of the faith which we must believe (1 Cor 16.13; Jude 3).

True religion is faith and trust in Jesus Christ and a love for him. One writer has said that, "The leading feature of Christianity is, that it requires a resolute adherence, and an inviolable attachment to Jesus Christ."³¹⁰

5.3. *Looking for the Consummation* – Our hope is to be in the one who is coming again to judge the world (Ps 96.13), remove the remnants of sin (Jer 31.33; Heb 8.12; Rev 21.4), and usher in the final age of the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3.13). Amen.

³¹⁰ C Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Vol. 16), (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), p. 388.

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