

I CORINTHIANS  
WHEN THE CHURCH GATHERS





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Zack Flipse



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## Bibliography

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Setting the Stage</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<i>The Author</i>	
<i>The Setting</i>	
<i>The Theology</i>	
<b>2. Wisdom &amp; Division (1 Cor. 1:1-3:22)</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>3. A Pastors Place (1 Cor. 4)</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>4. Immorality &amp; Excommunication (1 Cor. 5)</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>5. Lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:1-8)</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>6. Sex, Singles, &amp; Marriage (1 Cor. 6:9-7:40)</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>7. Freedom to Abstain (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1)</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>8. Women in the Church (1 Cor. 11:2-16)</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>9. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-33)</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>10. One Spirit, Many Gifts (1 Cor. 12)</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>11. The Love Chapter (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13)</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>12. Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 14:1-25)</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>13. Worship Order (1 Cor. 14:26-40)</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>14. Bodily Resurrection (1 Cor. 15)</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>15. Closing Comments (1 Cor. 16)</b> .....	<b>107</b>





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# SETTING THE STAGE

## *The Author*

- The Apostle Paul addresses the letter to the church in Corinth. I Corinthians 1:1 also mentions Sosthenes, who could be a co-author. More likely, Sosthenes' mention is a simple greeting on his behalf. We meet Sosthenes in Acts 18:17—a synagogue ruler converted to Christianity.
- Acts 18 records Paul's planting of the church in Corinth, roughly 51 AD. This is toward the end of what is called *The Second Missionary Journey of Paul*—from Jerusalem, around the Mediterranean Sea by land, into Athens and Corinth, and finally sailing back to Jerusalem with a stop in Ephesus.
- Claudius is Emperor of Rome during this time. Two historical facts help date and authenticate the account in Acts 18:1-19:1.
  - *The Gallio Inscriptions* are fragments of a letter from Emperor Claudius to "Gallio, my friend and proconsul." The fragments are dated around 51-52 AD, when Gallio served as proconsul of Achaia for a short time. Acts 18:12 correctly calls him "proconsul of Achaia." It was during this time that Paul establishes the church in Corinth.
    - Gallio is also brother to the famous Greek writer Seneca.
  - *Divus Claudius 25* contains an edict of Cladius forcing Jews out of Rome for what seems to be disturbances between Jews and Christians. For this reason, Aquila and his wife Priscilla are in Corinth when Paul arrives.

"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."

(Seutonius, 195)

"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and

worked with them.”  
(Acts 18:1-3)



*(adapted from The Carta Bible Atlas, 252)*

- Aquila and Priscilla become integral parts and well-known figures of the early church.
- By these people and places, we can date Paul’s initial visit to Corinth sometime around 51 AD.
- Paul spends 18 months (51-52 AD) in Corinth during this first stay (Acts 18:11), the second longest stay of Paul’s ministry. From Corinth he heads by boat to Ephesus, where he would stay for three years (52-55 AD)—his longest stay.
- Communication between Paul and Corinth is frequent during these years, and I Corinthians was likely written during this time—dating the letter sometime between 54 and 55 AD.

“Since Corinth was only two hundred miles west across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus, travel and communication between the two cities was easy.”

(Gromacki, 202)

- Attempts to recreate communication between Paul and Corinth are challenging—largely due to the frequency of correspondence that likely occurs during this time. Perhaps it closely resembles these events:
  - Visit 1 (Acts 18): Paul establishes a church in Corinth during an 18 month stay. He is tried before Gallio by unbelieving Jews in the area, then leaves for a three year stay in nearby Ephesus.
  - Earliest Letter: Paul writes an early letter (alluded to in I Corinthians 5:9-11) urging the Corinthians to disassociate with Christians who continued in immorality. The Corinthians apparently misunderstand Paul’s instruction. This letter has not survived antiquity.
  - Letter from Corinth: A letter is written to Paul from “Chloe’s household” reporting on the state of the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 1:11). The report is not favorable.
  - I Corinthians: Responding to Chloe’s report and clarifying earlier teaching, Paul pens the letter contained in Scripture we know as *I Corinthians*.
  - Timothy’s Visit: Paul sends Timothy to visit and encourage the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 4:17, I Corinthians 16:10-11).
  - Further correspondences are made back and forth before the end of Paul’s Second Missionary Journey, which we’ll save for a study on II Corinthians.

“The question of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and their relationship is complex, the subject of much scholarly dispute and discussion. Such matters are particularly important in discussing 2 Corinthians.”

(Schreiner, 9)

- In Paul’s absence, Apollos is ministering in I Corinthians. We meet Apollos in Ephesus in Acts 18:24-28 where Apollos, a gifted teacher, heads to Corinth under the tutelage of Paul’s friends Priscilla and Aquila.

“Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures...He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more

adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.”

(Acts 18:24, 26-27)

## *The Setting*

- Corinth had been a Greek city, but was destroyed in 146 BC. Julius Caesar had it rebuilt in 44 BC and it quickly became an important Roman city. It was the capitol of the Roman region called “Achaia.”
- Because of its Greek history and Roman prominence, the culture and demographic in Corinth was incredibly diverse. Its people included freed slaves and Roman politicians, trade workers and wealthy Greek patrons.

“It became the seat of the Roman governor of the province of Achaia and soon had a population larger than that of Athens. Although founded as a ‘soldier settlement’, supplemented with some freedmen coming from Italy, it quickly established itself as an important centre of culture and trade. Some of the wealthy families of Greece had been attracted to Corinth and settled in the desirable residential suburb on the slopes of the enormous 1,800 foot outcrop known as Acrocorinth. They were among its leading civic benefactors.”

(Winter, 1161)

- This diversity is reflected in the Corinthian church, and is the cause of much division. Paul hopes to show them how this diversity might be a great strength of their church and a blessing to the kingdom of God.
- Corinth’s growth and success is owed in part to its economy and strategic location. Corinth is an isthmus—a “land bridge” connecting two larger land masses. This made it a necessary trade route for any business in the southern tip of modern day Greece. More importantly, the ports of Lechaion (to the west) and Cenchræe (to the east) were popular for ships seeking to portage through the narrow Corinth rather than sail around the treacherous southern edge.
- Economic opportunity in the trades made Corinth a popular landing site for trades people and freedmen (freed slaves) who could attain great wealth and sit amongst the elites in Corinth.

“Roman freedmen and their families, eager to further their financial success and status, seized the opportunity to migrate to the newly formed colony. Corinth became like a modern boomtown in the American West in the Gold Rush days, a San Francisco of ancient Greece.”

(Johnson, 14)

- Like modern “boomtowns,” this newfound wealth attracted all kinds of people with less-than-impeccable morals.
- Because of the variety of people groups, Corinth was home to a variety of pagan worship. These included at least “Aphrodite (two varieties), Isis and Serapis, Artemis, Dionysus, Poseidon, Apollo, Helius, Pelagrina, Necessity, Fates, Demeter, Maid, Zeus, Asklepius, Hermes, Athena and Hera Butnaea” (Johnson, 17). As a Roman imperial city, emperor worship was also prevalent there, especially after 54 AD.
- This pagan worship seeped into almost every aspect of daily life in Corinth. Prostitution was common, and even the meat sold publicly in the markets was first sacrificed and devoted to the gods in the temples. Guild membership, which meant participating in pagan worship rituals and meeting in pagan temples, was a near requirement for trades people who hoped to be successful. Christians had great difficulty navigating these things.

“The most serious problem of the Corinthian church was worldliness, an unwillingness to divorce the culture around them. Most of the believers could not consistently separate themselves from their old, selfish, immoral and pagan ways. It became necessary for Paul to write to correct this, as well as to command the faithful Christians not only to break fellowship with the disobedient and unrepentant members, but to put those members out of the church.”

(MacArthur, 153)

## *The Theology*

- The church in Corinth naturally inherited a lot of the problems of the broader society. The church has divided over any number of issues. They are divided over whose teaching to follow, they are divided at the Communion Table, they are divided in how to deal with sin. Much of the work Paul is trying to accomplish in the letter is to unify this church. He gives practical advice

about how to heal these divisions and how to ensure that *everyone* in the congregation has a place in the church.

- Paul seems to have a deep relationship with this church, as we would expect of a place he spent so much time. He knows them by name and corresponds with them frequently. And yet, he doesn't hold back rebukes where they are necessary. In several places he challenges them to reign in worship practices that are unbiblical.
- Most of the letter (I Corinthians 5-14) deals with these and other applicable themes ripped straight from today's biggest topics. Paul covers issues of sexual immorality, church discipline, cultural engagement, marriage and divorce, singleness, women's roles in the church, spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, church liturgy and Communion practices.
- While I Corinthians doesn't take on finer doctrinal points with the length of Romans or Hebrews, there are a couple of sections worth noting:
  - I Corinthians 1-2 – Paul articulates a doctrine of illumination, speaking at length about the role of the Holy Spirit in providing the believer with the wisdom needed to know Christ and His Gospel.
  - I Corinthians 15 – Paul articulates the importance of the resurrection in the longest chapter in the letter.
- Along with these lengthier sections on doctrine, we'll also note how Paul assumes the doctrine of the Trinity and makes much of the lordship and divinity of Jesus Christ.
- Perhaps the most important doctrine gleaned from I Corinthians is the nature of the Church. Who are we? What do we do? What are we like? How do we think and behave? These questions are made plain for us in this letter.

“The first letter to the Corinthians speaks to us today because the problems addressed still afflict us. Believers are tempted to fawn on the rich, hobnob with the elite, to curry favour with the powerful and to acclaim intellectuals. Divisions arise because of stubborn pride which represents the exaltation of self. At the same time, sexual sin, whereby the desires of the body are pursued, compromise the holiness of the church. When our doctrines are adjusted to fit the society we live in and our spiritual gifts become a barometer of our spirituality, we see that the errors of the Corinthians are still with us today.”

(Schreiner, 16)

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# WISDOM & DIVISION

## *I Corinthians 1:1-3:22*

*“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
(I Corinthians 1:1-3)*

- Paul’s letter begins like any letter of the era would. It is titled with the author’s name, and his authority as an apostle. This is how Paul begins every epistle but Philippians, Philemon, and the letters to the Thessalonians. His apostolic authority has particular importance in this letter, as he’ll return to the idea in both I Corinthians 4, 9, and 15.
- Sosthenes is mentioned, too. This is, perhaps, the same Sosthenes who in Acts 18:17 is called “synagogue ruler” and is beaten—presumably for his faith in Christ.
  - That he was “synagogue ruler” says something about his standing among the people in Corinth. He would have been an educated man of high moral character.
  - That he was beaten for faith in Christ says something about his conviction and sincerity. There was no doubt about Sosthenes’ faith in Christ.
- Since the rest of the letter is written in first person and from the unique perspective of Paul, Sosthenes’ inclusion in the opening address is a show of unity more than a claim to co-authorship. In other words, “Sosthenes agrees with the contents of this letter, too.”

“The letter has a co-sender, Sosthenes. We cannot be sure whether this was the same Sosthenes who was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17), though I think such a suggestion is likely...The inclusion of Sosthenes probably does not communicate that he cowrote the letter with Paul but that as a respected member of the Corinthian church he agreed with its contents.”  
(Schreiner, 52)

- Following the customary title, address, and blessing, Paul launches into another classic element of the New Testament letter: an expression of thanks.

*“I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”*  
(1 Corinthians 1:4-9)

- Paul mentions their spiritual gifts and blamelessness as reasons for thanksgiving, but curiously both of these attributes will be called into question later in the letter.
  - Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12, 14
  - Blamelessness: 1 Corinthians 5, 6, 8, 10
- This thanksgiving section, then, is less a list of strengths of the Corinthian church, and more a call to what *could* be—or even *should* be.
- Think of Paul’s comments on spiritual gifts and blamelessness as almost a back-handed compliment. It’s like the alcoholic who’s just ordered a drink at the bar. While the bartender is preparing the drink, Paul walks up and says, “I thank God for your sobriety.” The Corinthians almost certainly would feel the shame of their current lifestyle as they read.



- Like the alcoholic in our metaphor, the Corinthian church has the power and ability to walk away and start living into the things that *should* be. This is why Paul emphasizes the work of Christ throughout the section. What he's really thankful for is the *power of Christ* to produce spiritual gifts and blamelessness in the Corinthian church.
  - "I always thank God for you *because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.*"
  - "*In him* you have been enriched in every way..."
  - "*He* will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless..."

"In the thanksgiving sections, Paul often signals the issues he needs to deal with later in his letters. He can always give thanks because God's sufficiency is able to resolve all our needs in the person of his Son."  
(Winter, 1163)

- It's because God in Christ is faithful that the Corinthians are worth correcting. As Paul will make abundantly clear throughout the letter, it's because Christ has supplied all we need that we're able to grow!

*"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you."  
(1 Corinthians 1:10-11)*

- Here Paul begins the meat of the letter, tackling first the divisions in the church body.
- Reports of this division come from "Chloe's household." Since Paul is writing from nearby Ephesus, it would be easy to send reports back and forth.

*"What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'"  
(1 Corinthians 1:12)*

- The problem is this: members of the church preferred the teachings of different leaders. Some preferred the way Paul taught and instructed them. Others preferred Apollos as teacher. Still others preferred Peter (Cephas).

- To be clear, the issue is *not* that one or the other is a false teacher. Paul commends Peter (I Corinthians 15:11) and Apollos (I Corinthians 16:12) to the Corinthians.
- For the Greeks and Romans, it was not uncommon for people to be partial to a particular speaker or another. Rhetoric was a prized skill, not unlike athletic ability today. And like we might feel a strong allegiance to our favorite sports team, the Corinthian was likely to argue passionately for their favorite orator.
- The wisdom and excellence of the teacher was so important that it's possible the Corinthians thought a certain excellence was *necessary* for the growth of their faith. For example, "I can only grow from Apollos' teaching," or "I really only get excited by the preaching of Paul." This, of course, is still a reality in the church today.
- Paul addresses the issue with a lengthy sermon on wisdom before circling back and addressing the divisions more directly.

*"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."*

*(I Corinthians 1:13-25)*

- There is a serious danger here: a Cross emptied of its power. If your faith is based on the skill of a preacher, or the talent of a praise team, or the

kindness of the community, or the fun of a youth group, or the morality of your living, then it is not based on the power of the Cross.

- This concerns the factions in the Corinthian church. If their faith depends on the skill of Paul's teaching, or Paul's baptism, or Apollos' charisma then it's always fleeting. What happens when a craftier teacher comes around? A more pleasurable cult? A better harpist? What happens when the old ideas of the modern philosopher or scholar are replaced by something new? On what, then, is your faith based?
- Instead, the faith of the church is built on the Cross—the power of God to save. It is wiser than man's wisdom and stronger than man's strength. It is a truth that does not change or waver.

*“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’ When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”*

*(1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5)*

- There's a strong Calvinist emphasis here: We have brought nothing to our salvation, Christ has done it all. It is not by human wisdom, influence, or nobility that we earn salvation but by the divine and gracious choosing of God. In this, God alone is glorified.
- Paul is not arguing that the Christian life should be boring and joyless, so as not to distract from the Cross. He's simply exposing the worldly motivations of the Corinthians—and many today.

“Paul’s theology is eminently practical, and he is concerned here about divisions and factions which focus on human ministers rather than on Christ.

When people exalt ministers and their speaking skills and abilities, the significance of the cross has been forgotten. Paul is not saying that sermons and other addresses should be as boring as possible; he is saying that those who proclaim and preach must beware lest they draw attention to themselves instead of to the cross of Christ.”

(Schreiner, 65-66)

- Our Gospel message is not boring, and it’s not void of reason and understanding, either. When Paul says, “the message of the cross is foolishness,” he doesn’t mean that it’s silly and unreasonable. It is only foolishness “to those who are perishing.” In other words, the message of the cross is only foolishness to those whom God has not granted the Spirit to understand it.
- There is a rationality, a sensibility, to the message of the Gospel—but only those whom God has illuminated by His Spirit will know it. This is the turn Paul takes next.

*“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

*However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord*

*that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”  
(1 Corinthians 2:6-16)*

- “Illumination” is the theological term for “God’s secret wisdom,” and speaks to the nature of our “foolishness” in the eyes of the world.  
“Such [spiritual] awareness is natural to none, familiar with Christian ideas though they may be (like ‘the man without the Spirit’ in 1 Cor. 2:14 who cannot receive what Christians tell him...) Only the Holy Spirit, searcher of the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10), can bring about this realization in our sin-darkened minds and hearts...The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called ‘illumination,’ or enlightening.”  
(Packer, 154-155)
- At times, it is difficult for us to convey what we *really* mean when speaking to someone. Sometimes, people misinterpret what we *really* meant. We’re especially aware of this in the digital age—texts and comments come through with no inflection or non-verbal cues to help us convey what we *really* mean. Only the speaker, deep down in her spirit, knows what she *really* means when she speaks. In the same way, the Spirit of God is the only one who *really* knows the message of God. The only way we can *really* know the message of God, then, is to have the Holy Spirit. This is the great power and grace of illumination!
- The Holy Spirit, as the very Spirit of God, provides for us incomparable insight into true spiritual wisdom. But this insight is only known to true believers—it cannot be known by the unbeliever. This is why “the man without the Spirit does not accept” the message.
- The Christian pastor, teacher, or leader *does* then share a wise message! But it’s not wise in the same way as the message of the world. It’s not wise because the speaker is excellent or because the words are big or because it follows the right patterns for speech. It’s wise because it’s “God’s secret wisdom” that we preach and sing.

*“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not*

*mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.*  
(1 Corinthians 3:1-6)

- Paul has now come back around to the specific division at hand: How should the Corinthians rightly view the ministries of Paul and Apollos? He'll answer with two metaphors:
  - A seed planted, watered, and grown.
  - A building built on a foundation

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."*  
(1 Corinthians 3:6-9)

- Paul acknowledges that he and Apollos have *unique* ministries. One plants, the other waters. Still, these ministries are equal—they are *fellow* workers with *one purpose*. This represents a change in the Corinthians thinking that Paul will push further in chapter 12. There are different gifts, but one God.
- Once again we're reminded that the ability of the minister matters not, it's the work of God that causes growth. Paul may have in mind *The Parable of the Growing Seed* from Mark 4:26-29, "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

"The servants, though necessary, are relatively unimportant—even Paul and Apollos—because it is *God who made it grow*...This viewpoint should deflate the proud, competitive boasting of some at Corinth in favor of Paul over against Apollos, or more probably for Apollos over against Paul. God is at center stage. All his servants pale into insignificance if we truly worship him, put him at the center of all."

(Johnson, 73)

- Careful! There is potential for great error here! The hyper-Calvinist suggests, "*Why do any work at all, since God will do as He pleases? Sit back and relax!*" Perhaps they have drawn this conclusion from Paul in 1 Corinthians, "neither

he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

- Yes, it is God who makes it grow—but planting and watering are *necessary* for the growth of the seed. God graciously includes us in His work. Paul uses his next analogy to cut this error off at the head.

*“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*  
(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

- Consider the parable of the wise and foolish builder. The foolish builder’s house was destroyed because he did not have the solid rock foundation. The wise man’s house was safe precisely because he *did* have the solid rock foundation. No mention is made of any of the other building materials. If the foolish builder had built on sand, but with brick and wrought iron would he have fared any better? No, only the foundation mattered. So says Paul. We all have unique and differing gifts from God for ministering, and that is no problem *if* we are careful to build on the solid rock foundation that is Jesus Christ.
- The difference between the preaching of Apollos and the preaching of Paul is like the difference between the wise man building on the rock with silver or building on the rock with gold. Either way, he built on the rock! It’s the foundation that ultimately mattered when judgment came.
- So too, if we have a faith founded on the Gospel of the Cross, the end is assured! Even the cheapest, shoddiest building job can’t thwart salvation for the one founded on Christ.
- This is not, however, a license for sin and carelessness. On the contrary, “each one should be careful how he builds.” Though it contributes nothing to our salvation, our sanctification is a careful, important work.

- Two types of workers are described, and perhaps we can relate them to the farmer in *The Parable of the Growing Seed* who could either “get up” or “sleep.”
  - Example Worker #1 – Gold, silver, or costly stones. These are those who “get up” and work diligently with focus and intentionality, growing in the grace and knowledge of their Lord Jesus. They have stored up for themselves treasures in heaven, and are rewarded.
  - Example Worker #2 – Wood, hay, or straw. These are those who “sleep,” though their faith is genuine. They have not worked so diligently, and have been easily distracted by treasures on earth. When the fire of judgement comes, those earthly treasures are destroyed. Their genuine faith in Christ saves them.

“While the servants’ tasks are different and they share the same purpose, *each will be rewarded according to his own labor*. Certainly they are not rewarded with salvation for their labor, since salvation is a gift of God’s grace, but perhaps they will be rewarded with some form of praise from the Lord. This keeps servants and congregations watchful over and responsible for the ministry to which God has called them.”

(Johnson, 73)

“Even though all growth comes from God, the work of ministers is not negligible or considered to be meaningless or insignificant. The labour of ministers, the quality of work exercised, will be assessed by God and rewarded accordingly. Saying that all growth is ascribed to God does not imply that there is no responsibility for ministry; God will evaluate the quality of work and apportion rewards accordingly.”

(Schreiner, 89)

- What exactly are these rewards? Is it a bigger house in Heaven? Some plaque we receive from Christ? We want to know, but perhaps those details are missing the point. The reality is, we will joyously offer any reward we receive at the feet of our risen Lord Jesus when we greet Him in heaven (Revelation 4:10).

*“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s*



*temple is sacred, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.' So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God."*  
*(1 Corinthians 3:16-22)*

- In these last seven verses, Paul expertly summarizes all he's said over three chapters! What matters is not the ability of the minister, but the foundation of Christ Jesus. God jealously protects those built on this foundation, and will lose none of those He's chosen. To be built on this foundation requires first the work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating our unwise minds with the true message of God. This is God's work, from start to finish. How then could we be divided?



# 3

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## A PASTOR'S PLACE

### 1 Corinthians 4

- Before Paul can put the matter of divisions to rest for a while, he spends a bit more time here fleshing out the implications.
- Remember, the division in the Corinthian church is over preferred pastors—some prefer Paul, others Apollos. The Corinthians wrongly saw these leaders as better/worse, or more prominent/less prominent. After his lengthy dismantling of that way of thinking, now Paul explains a better way of viewing their leaders.

*“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:1-5)*

- Here are the requirements of a Christian pastor:
  - They are “servants of Christ.” Servants are devoted and obedient to their master. It is a position of great humility, a life in submission to the master’s will.
  - They are “those entrusted with the secret things of God.” The example here is a steward of a trust. Just as a steward of a trust is tasked with dispensing the money to the inheritors, so a pastor is tasked with dispensing the truth of God to His children. Pastors, then, must be

knowledgeable believers with the ability to clearly and faithfully retell the message of God.

- They “must prove faithful.” Their Christian character, over time, demonstrates their faithfulness. Pastors, then, are not new believers. This also suggests that pastors can disqualify themselves from the ministry by unfaithful living.
- They are “judged” and “praised” by God for the motives of their hearts. Pastors are servants of Christ and His Church. The Corinthians liked to be the judge of the pastors ability—“we think Apollos is better,” or, “we think Paul is more talented.” The praise and judgment of the people matters not, only the praise and judgment of God. This reward is given on the condition of the heart, not human ability. In saying this, Paul has completely undermined the source of the division among the Corinthians.
- Consider how this overlaps with the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons in I Timothy 3:
  - Entrusted with the secret things of God – “able to teach...He must not be a recent convert...They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.”
  - Must prove faithful – “above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable...not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well...They must first be tested.”
  - Judged and praised by God – “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

*“Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, ‘Do not go beyond what is written.’ Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us!”*  
*(I Corinthians 4:6-8)*

- Thus far, Paul has used only himself and Apollos as examples. Certainly, this equality and these qualifications would apply to any Christian leader.

- What is meant by “Do not go beyond what is written”? This is likely an appeal to Scripture, in other words, “*Don’t stray from Scripture.*” From the context, Paul is speaking specifically about their pride. At the root of their critique of Paul and Apollos is their pride and arrogance, as if they have the right to judge between the speakers and choose who they deem “best.”
- A string of almost sarcastic questions undermines this pride. *What makes you so special, that you judge us? Weren’t we the ones who shared the message with you? Oh, you didn’t need us? You know it all already? You’ve got it all! You’re amazing! You don’t need help with anything!*

*“How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become*

*the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:8-13)*

- It would be great if the message of the Gospel was about health and wealth and status and popularity! We could all be kings, sitting fat and happy on thrones. But the message of the Gospel, remember, is foolishness to the world. God uses the weak to shame the strong, the foolish to shame the wise. We need only look to the life of the Apostles to be reminded that the call of the Gospel is to carry our cross and suffer for the sake of Christ.

“Paul wishes that they did indeed reign, so that he might rule along with them.

The Corinthians’ self-perception is radically askew, for the status of the apostles reveals the true place of believers in the world. By God’s design the apostles are ‘last’ instead of first in the eyes of the world.”

(Schreiner, 102)

- Lest we begin to overemphasize the reward for faithful service mentioned in the last chapter, Paul reminds us of the cost of following Christ.

*“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”*  
(1 Corinthians 4:14-16)

- Paul softens the blow a bit, reminding the church of his love for them. He is, after all, the “father” of their church—in the sense that he founded it.
- Wealthy Corinthians had servants who would serve as guardians to their children as they traveled to school. Paul probably uses this as an analogy for angels. Angels are helpful, yes. But they do not communicate the gospel to us. It is better to have “fathers” (Christian leaders) than “guardians” (angels).

“Rich Corinthians had servants, guardians, who accompanied young sons to school and looked after them. Paul assures the Christians that they too have many such protectors, but it cannot be said they have many fathers. Paul declares that he himself has the relationship of a father to them because in Christ he had brought them into being through the gospel.”

(Winter, 1168)

- In the Old Testament, God had rescued *all* Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). Yet He set up one High Priest to demonstrate for the people what being a priest looks like. In the same way, Paul urges the people to imitate him as he sets an example of Christ-like living.
- In our day, pastors and other Christian leaders serve as this example. Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, we are called to a priesthood of all believers in the New Covenant (1 Peter 2:9). Pastors and other Christian leaders don’t have a special status with God, but they can serve as faithful examples of how Christianity is lived out.

“They were made Christians by [Paul’s] ministry. He was the instrument in their new birth, and therefore claimed the relation of a father to them. There commonly is, and always ought to be, an endeared affection between faithful ministers and those they fathered in Christ Jesus through the gospel. They should love like parents and children.”

(Henry, 619)

*“For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:17)*

- Paul will reiterate the desire to send Timothy in 1 Corinthians 16:10. Timothy serves the church in Ephesus, where Paul is writing from.

*“Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:18-21)*

- This is a fitting warning to end on, as now we move into a chapter where church discipline—with a whip—is required.





# IMMORALITY & EXCOMMUNICATION

## *I Corinthians 5*

- Remember Paul’s expression of thanks from I Corinthians 1. As we noted, this was a thanks for what *could* be, not what is. The Corinthians were praised for their “blamelessness,” and as we’ll see in I Corinthians 5 they were far from blameless. Only because of their connection to Christ are they truly blameless before God.

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?”*

*(I Corinthians 5:1-2)*

- Leviticus 18 articulates in blushing detail the bounds of the Christian sex ethic. A number of improper sexual relationships are prohibited, including “sexual relations with your father’s wife” (Leviticus 18:8).
- This sin seems especially grotesque—even the pagans don’t behave this way! It’s important to remember, though, that the immorality is not defined by the world’s sexual ethic, by our feeling toward the issue, or by some gut instinct. It’s not bad because the pagans agree it’s bad. This is sexual immorality because the Bible, our standard for truth, says so.
- What’s more, instead of being filled with grief, the Corinthian attitude toward sexual immorality is *pride!* This is an especially relevant warning for the church today, as culture (and in far too many circles, the church) moves toward an attitude of *pride* in sexual immorality.

- Rather than feeling pride, Paul asks if the church should have instead put the sinful man out of their fellowship. Today, this action might be called “excommunication.”
- The grounds and goal for excommunication is articulated throughout the chapter.

*“Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”*  
(1 Corinthians 5:3-5)

- Just one chapter ago, Paul warned of passing judgment. Yet here, without even being physically present, Paul is able to judge the man. The notes on church membership and the function of the church in disciplining at the end of this chapter may help here.
- Judgment is not cast arbitrarily. Notice that Paul’s accusation meets the criteria from Deuteronomy 19:15-19.

“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you.”  
(Deuteronomy 19:15-19)

- Paul’s action is consistent with the practice of the people of God:
  - The accusation is established by two or three witnesses
    - Paul (“I am with you in spirit”)
    - The church (“when you are assembled in the name of our Lord”)
    - Jesus (“the power of our Lord Jesus is present”)
  - Fair judgment, thoroughly investigated, is determined in the sight of God
  - The evil is removed from the assembly

- Paul judges, in this instance, the man is to be handed over to Satan. While this action seems counter-productive and even wrong, there is consistent theology here.
  - I Timothy 1:20 – Paul hands Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan to be taught, because they have rejected the faith.
  - Luke 22:31 – Jesus warns the Satan has asked to “sift” Peter, but Jesus will protect Peter’s faith.
  - Job 1:12 – Satan requests that God test the faith of Job, and God obliges.
- If the goal here is that the man be saved on the day of the Lord, why hand him over to Satan? We should be reminded of the pastoral doctrine of perseverance—those who belong to God will not escape His grace but will persist in it unto glory. Even if for a time, the man is figuratively “handed over to Satan,” the true believer will emerge from the discipline sanctified, a workman approved by God.
- The goal of this discipline is the salvation of the sinful man. This is always our goal in discipline. Discipline is difficult to do, but done in love with the goal of redeeming the lost or wandering brother it is a necessary function of the true church.

*“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”*  
*(I Corinthians 5:6-8)*

- Yeast represents sin in this metaphor. There is both a personal and corporate aspect here:
  - First, sin can work and worm its way through us. A little wickedness ruins the batch, in a sense. If we are to participate with Christ at the Table, we must be yeast-less dough—careful to guard against sin.
  - Second, one notorious sinner can work and worm his way through a church. A little wickedness ruins the batch, in a sense. If we allow sin to persist in our congregations, we risk spoiling the dough—allowing that sin to become normative, perhaps.

- These two aspects combine to help us understand just how destructive our sin can be. The sexual sin is not only one individual's sin of immorality, but it also tarnishes the witness of the Church of Christ. Our sins, too, have this double impact.

“Just as unleavened bread symbolized being freed from Egypt by the Passover, so the church is to be unleavened, since it has been separated from the dominion of sin and death by the perfect Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is, therefore, to remove everything sinful in order to be separate from the old life, including the influence of sinful church members.”

(MacArthur, 168)

- For this reason, church discipline remains an important tool of the church not only to protect an individual from the destructive ends of sin, but to protect the Church of Christ as the pure bride She is.

*“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now*

*I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you.’”*

*(1 Corinthians 5:9-13)*

- Paul mentions a previous letter and indicates that the people did “not at all” grasp what he meant in it. There was a letter from Paul to Corinth that predates 1 Corinthians that is unknown to us today. See chapter 1 in this study guide for more details on their corresponding.
- In his previous letter, Paul had warned the people “not to associate with sexually immoral people.” It seems as though the Corinthians read this and thought, “*This is impossible! Everyone in Corinth is sexually immoral, we would have to live in the mountains to pull this off!*” So they ignored Paul’s warning altogether.

- Paul clarifies here that he meant not to associate with the sexually immoral “who calls himself a brother.” This is an important clarification, and gives us valuable insight into the scope of church discipline.
  - The role of the true church is *not* to legislate morality and penalize morality in the world. The role of the church is to guard right practice *in its members*. Churches should be cautious and careful as they administer discipline. What is expected of young members and children? What is expected of new believers? What role does the person serve in? Each case requires its own wisdom.
  - Following the pattern set forward in Matthew 18:15-17 is a helpful guide to approach church discipline wisely. The root of *discipline* is the same as *discipleship*, and in many cases of grievous sin, *discipleship* is what is needed to correct the pattern of sinful living. Discipline may become necessary, but it is only one tool in the toolbelt of the church.

“We must admit that we should greatly hesitate to do today precisely what the apostle commanded the Christians to do...But while today we may find it difficult to think in the precise terms used here by the apostle, that is no reason why we should not take to heart and put into practice the advice he gives, namely, to excommunicate from the congregation one who is a notorious evil-liver.”  
 (Proctor, 977)

- Although persistent sexual immorality and drunkenness tend to be the most public and obvious of the list, we’re reminded here that *all* persistent, unrepentant sin is grounds for discipline—including greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness and more.
- What is meant by “you must not associate” and “with such a man do not even eat.” A few views might exist, and perhaps all are potential solutions in the varying scenarios where church discipline applies.
  - 1) Paul is talking about Communion in the church. There are several factors in support of this view:
    - The content of the entire letter (I Corinthians) is about the function of gathered worship and the unity of the gathered body of believers. It could be that Paul is thinking of the eating that would normally accompany gathered worship in the first century church.

- Paul has special interest in who partakes of the Lord’s Supper in this letter. Paul may have in mind their other abuses at the Table, too.
  - The pattern in Matthew 18:15-17 treats a persistent sinner as “a pagan or a tax collector.” The consistent teaching of Scripture (Jesus in Matthew 18, Paul here) is *not* for the church to separate from the world, but to engage it. A soft understanding of “you must not associate...do not even eat” is a disassociation from the gathered body of believers (worship and sacraments), but *not* from any and all personal relationship.
- 2) A second understanding is that Paul means what he plainly says: “With such a man do not even eat.” It’s this total separation from the community of believers that helps move the sinner toward repentance. Those who have ministered to loved ones who “needed to hit rock-bottom” know of this effectiveness. Perhaps both views have their place in unique scenarios.
- Church discipline is made much easier by church membership, but unfortunately many churches have moved away from formal membership and those who continue with it often don’t utilize it well. Like disciplining a child is easier and more effective when the rules and expectations are clearly defined, so it is with church members.
  - The Christian Reformed Church asks new professing members to be “sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority” (*Public Profession of Faith*, 964). When these expectations are clearly communicated and understood, the motives and means of discipline become clearer.
  - This does not mean that church membership makes discipline *easy*. It does, however, make it function in a much healthier and more effective way.

“The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults.”

(Belgic Confession Article 29)

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# LAWSUITS

## I Corinthians 6:1-8

- The division present in the Corinthian church manifests in various ways. In the instance of the sexual immorality, the church *failed* to take disciplinary action. Yet in other matters, church goes *do* pursue disciplinary action. However, this discipline is not done by the church, but by the state!
- This matter is certainly connected to the previous chapter in the study guide (the sexual immorality). Both are issues of improper discipline. The connection is proved by the return to the topic of sexuality in the next section (I Corinthians 6:9-20).

“Under Roman law this [sexually immoral] person was liable to banishment from this prestigious Roman colony for such conduct if he were brought to court. As no public prosecution service existed, a private prosecution would be required. Such legal proceedings could only be undertaken by a person of equal or higher status. Society and the church often turn a blind eye to the ‘indiscretions’ of socially powerful members but for the church this has always meant great spiritual loss.”

(Winter, 1168)

*“If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life?”*

*(I Corinthians 6:1-3)*

- Roman courts were notoriously corrupt, and several factors contributed to injustices—specifically for those of lower social status. There was no public defender, so every case had to be taken up by a private citizen, making it difficult for lower class citizens to seek justice from the courts.

“Furthermore, certain persons were excluded from instituting legal proceedings against others; i.e. a son against his father, a slave against his master, a freedman against his patron, a citizen against the magistrate, and an inferior against his social superior. Judges and juries were regularly bribed by participants in a case.”

(Winter, 1169)

- The behavior of the Corinthians is exactly backwards! They have chosen to settle their disputes with the unjust worldly judges, rather than seek resolutions through the superior means—the Church of God!
- By using rhetorical questions (“*Do you not know...*”) Paul articulates the excellence available to them in the church.
  - “The saints will judge the world”
    - Christians are children of God, and as such are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). We are given authority on earth (Matthew 16:19, 18:18), and with Christ are made rulers of it (Revelation 2:26-27, 3:21).
  - “Competent to judge trivial cases”
    - As we’ve discussed, Christians possess the Spirit of Wisdom and therefore “have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). We have all we need in Christ to discern the truth—especially in trivial cases.
  - “We will judge angels”
    - Hebrews 1:14 calls angels “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” The author of Hebrews goes on to make the argument that humans, not angels, are inheritors of the promise. While we expect God to judge fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6), there is a real sense in which humans will rule over angels with Christ in the New Creation.

“Believers will judge angels, and here the word ‘judge’ does not necessarily mean that believers will assess and mete out rewards and punishments for angels. It probably means that believers will ‘rule’ over angels, though it is difficult to know if the angels are good, bad or both. We see a similar kind of argument in Hebrews 2:5-18, where rule of the coming world belongs to human beings and not to angels. This rule is given to believers because they belong to Jesus Christ, for Jesus will allow believers to sit on the throne with him to rule the world (Rev. 3:21), and this rule presumably includes rule over



angles. If believers are going to rule over angels, they should be able to resolve disputes over matters of ordinary life.”

(Schreiner, 119)

- How much more the things of this life? Understanding the great wisdom and authority available to the believer in the Triune God makes discerning trivial cases not only doable, but *simple*.
- As we wrestle with the challenge of church discipline in its various forms and situations, we do well to remember this ability in the Spirit-filled Christian.

*“Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?*

*But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!”*

*(I Corinthians 6:4-6)*

- While Paul elsewhere approves participation with the state (Romans 13:1-2), the fact that trivial arguments are too difficult for the church to determine and must be dealt with in the Roman courts destroys the witness of the church. It suggests to Paul that the Spirit of God is not at work among them. It suggests to the world that the Spirit of God is weak—weaker than worldly powers.

*“The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.”*

*(I Corinthians 6:7-8)*

- The example of the apostles is one of great suffering and humility. They are beaten and poor. We are encouraged, in the same way, to take up our cross and follow the example of the apostles as they follow the example of Christ.
- The Apostle Peter has the same teaching as Paul in I Peter 2:19-21.

“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a

beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

(I Peter 2:19-21)

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# SEX, SINGLES, & MARRIAGE

## *I Corinthians 6:9-7:40*

- Remember that the issue of lawsuits is an extension of the issue of sexual immorality—both are products of the divisions in the church. Many suggest these factions divided neatly into socio-economic categories (i.e. the wealthier Corinthians made exceptions for one another). Whether or not this is the case, biblical principles are not being applied to congregants justly.
- We might think of I Corinthians 6:9-20 as a conclusion to the first section of Paul’s letter. He’ll spend the next few verses spelling out clearly why there is no room for division in Christ’s church. The message is this: we were all dead in sin until Christ rescued us, live like He rescued you.
- We’ll include this summary (I Corinthians 6:9-20) with a lengthier section on sex and marital status (I Corinthians 7:1-40) that starts the back half of the letter.

*“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

*(I Corinthians 6:9-11)*

- This is the Gospel! We were wicked, dead in sin, and were it not for Christ would have remained outside of the kingdom of God. But Christ—by His shed blood on the Cross—washed, justified, and sanctified us and gave us the Spirit of God to ensure also our glorification in Heaven!

- As we anticipate Paul’s comments on sex and marital status, we should pause and note some aspects of Paul’s theology of sex and the body. Much has been made of the word choices here, so we’ll mention them briefly.
  - Sexually immoral (πόρνοι, “pornoi”) – a word for all types of sexual misconduct, certainly including the man who took his father’s wife from I Corinthians 5 and any other relationship not glorifying to God. This certainly also includes “pornography,” as the word suggests. This is sufficient to include the entire list of sexual sins in Leviticus 18 and 20.
  - Adulterers (μοιχοί, “moixoi”) – This is the word in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) for the seventh commandment. Jesus uses this in Matthew 5:27 to restate the seventh commandment. Adultery is the specific sexual sin of unfaithfulness to a spouse. Jesus expands our understanding here to include not only the act of sex, but also any lusting for another man or woman who is not our spouse.
  - Male prostitutes (μαλακοί, “malakoi”) – A word for soft or fancy, used as a term for an effeminate male. The condemnation of the effeminate partner rules out interpretations that narrowly define the type of sex described here as rape or predatory, as God would certainly not condemn victims in such cases. What’s being described here is a willing, passive partner in homosexual sex.
  - Homosexual offenders (ἀρσενοκοῖται, “arsenokoitai”) – This word draws the most attention in the list. It is not a known common term for “homosexual” in Paul’s day, but rather seems to be a compound word that Paul has created from the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) version of Leviticus 18. “Arsenos” (male) and “koiten” (intercourse) are both used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where homosexuality is prohibited. Paul’s use of the compound word is clear, and draws us back to Leviticus—as he’s already done with his parallel of Leviticus 18:18 in I Corinthians 5:1.
- The two last terms, “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai,” are better translated together by the CSB as “males who have sex with males.” This should encompass all kinds of homosexual sex.
- We don’t focus in on these words or particular sins because they’re somehow worse than others, but in our day there are attempts to call these things not sin at all, but good. We focus on them only to clarify the biblical position.

“We miss the truly redemptive force of I Corinthians 6:9-10, however, if we allow ourselves to be caught up solely in the discussion of the meaning of *arsenokoites*. Once its definition has been established, we must surely hear the clear teaching of this portion of God’s Word: ‘Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.’”

(White, 150-151)

- Homosexual sex is just one example of sexually immorality, and sexual immorality is just one example of the kind of wickedness that excludes us from the kingdom of Heaven. Thanks be to God for His saving grace that makes all kinds of sinners clean!

*“Everything is permissible for me’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything. ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food’—but God will destroy them both. The body is no meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*

*(I Corinthians 6:12-20)*

- The catchphrases quoted here are meant to represent Corinthian thought. The idea that the physical world was temporal and unimportant was prevalent in Greek philosophy.
- The body matters. What we do to and with our bodies matters.
  - That our bodies will be resurrected will be revisited in I Corinthians 15.
  - That our bodies are members of Christ will be revisited in I Corinthians 12.
  - To establish this argument, Paul reaches back to Genesis 2:24 for a quote, “the two will become one flesh.”

“Our physical bodies, created by God to be the instruments by which we worship and serve him, are very important to God. Far from insignificant or morally irrelevant as the Corinthians claimed, our bodies are not created to be used as agents of fornication. The physical body belongs to and is united to the Lord Jesus; he has a plan for it (including resurrection) ...”

(Johnson, 101)

- Paul now begins a new section of the letter, where he responds to questions from the Corinthian church: “Now for the matters you wrote about...” (I Corinthians 7:1). We’ll see him use “Now about” as he moves through what are probably questions raised by the Corinthians in their letter—perhaps the one from “Chloe’s household.”

*“Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.”*

*(I Corinthians 7:1-4)*

- The Greek here says, “It is good for a man not to *touch a woman*,” and is speaking again about sexual immorality.
- Here, and throughout this section, Paul gives remarkable rights to women and wives in a culture that still largely treated women as property. As we often see when Scripture addresses the roles of husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:28, I Peter 3:1, I Peter 3:7), Paul inserts “in the same way” throughout this section.

*“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command.”*

*(I Corinthians 7:5-6)*

- This is sensible, pragmatic advice. Regular sex decreases the temptations of sexual immorality.

- There is another nod here to “mutual consent” between husband and wife.
- Some understand “I say this as a concession” to be addressing marriage. In this reading, Paul is saying marriage is a concession, and singleness is more desirable for the Christian. This is unlikely, considering what will follow. The “concession” is the withholding of sex for a time. Regular sex between husband and wife is preferable for the Christian.

*“I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and to the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 7:7-8)*

- “As I am” refers to Paul’s singleness. Paul includes single status as “a gift from God,” and in this passage will articulate a few reasons why:
  - Singles uniquely demonstrate self-control
  - Singles have undivided devotion to the Lord
- It’s important to remember these verses are not the only thing Paul has to say about marriage. Without the breadth of Scripture, we might see Paul’s view of marriage as a “fire extinguisher,” meant only as a means to rightly put out the passions of the flesh. We know from Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and elsewhere that Paul has a much more robust theology of the blessing and purpose of marriage.

*“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 7:10-11)*

- Paul adds “not I, but the Lord” because he is drawing on Jesus’ comments on divorce from the Gospels (Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18). This has some incredible implications on the timeline for Gospel authorship, as it implies that a formal Gospel (at least Mark) was already in use by 55 AD.

- Paul uses the word “separate” to describe the wife’s leaving—as opposed to “divorce” when commenting on the husband—because a woman was not able to legally initiate a divorce.
- We could say that while the single has special opportunity to serve God through self-control, the married has special opportunity to serve God through faithfulness and reconciliation.
- Implied in these sections are some things about marriage worth restating:
  - Marriage is between man and woman.
  - Polygamy or polyamory is not in view (“his own,” “her own”).
  - The law, gifts, and blessings of God apply to both man and woman.
  - Marriage is the only situation suitable for sexual activity.
  - The marital union is intended to be unbroken and lifelong.

*“To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”*

*(I Corinthians 7:12-14)*

- The voice has now switched. Paul is no longer borrowing Jesus’ teaching on divorce in the Gospels, but giving his own comment—“I, not the Lord.”
- The unbroken, lifelong intent for marriage is evident in the command to persist even with unbelieving spouses.
- Wives in Corinth had fewer freedoms than husbands, and submitted to the lifestyle of their husbands—as Plutarch notes in the first century.

*“A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions.”*

*(Plutarch, Conjugalia Praecepta 19)*



- As we've noted all along, the Christian standard for marriage demands radical equality for men and women.
- That an unbelieving spouse is "sanctified" cannot be salvific. It is nowhere the teaching of Scripture that salvation is anything else than by the grace of Christ that comes through faith in Him. Instead, "sanctified" should be understood much like the Old Testament idea of "clean."
- Clean and unclean were two unmixable categories of holiness. In the situation of a mixed marriage, the unbelieving spouse does not defile the believer (make them unclean)—even in sex. Rather, the believer makes clean their unbelieving spouse. This is not unlike the woman with the bleeding (Luke 8:43-48) who touched Jesus. Though by law Jesus should have become unclean, He instead transferred His holiness to her!
- Children in such a marriage are likewise "holy," or "clean." That children should receive some spiritual benefit (again, not salvific) from parents is reason for their baptism. They are set apart, covenant members, by their relationship to their believing parent. Churches should baptize the children of believers, even in mixed marriages.

*"But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"*  
*(1 Corinthians 7:15-16)*

- Jesus permitted divorce in the instance of adultery. Paul adds that should a spouse leave the marriage, the believer can "live in peace."
- The church should consider its role in administering peace to those experiencing the hurt of divorce. Church discipline encourages the divorcer to reconcile, or else demonstrates that—if they choose to persist unrepentant in their sin—their behavior is unchristian. In either situation, the spouse who desires to remain in the marriage has not sinned and can "live in peace."
- The final rhetorical questions regarding the salvation of the spouse have been taken both positively and negatively. Either opinion is biblical and useful. Preference is given to the negative reading.
  - Positive: "You never know, maybe your unbelieving spouse will come to know the Lord through you! That's why you stay in that marriage!"

- Negative: “You don’t know whether your spouse would have come to know the Lord or not, so let them leave. Their salvation does not depend on you.”

*“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.”*  
(1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

- Here is the main argument of the entire section on sex and marital status: *Remain in the place God has put you. You are His, keep His commands.*

*“Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs; her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about*

*the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 7:25-35)*

- Another gift of singleness is the ability to be undivided and undeterred in service to the Lord. Maybe this is the reason the story in Acts follows single Paul and his exhaustive missionary work instead of married Peter, who’s commitment to his wife and family may have forced him to stay in one place for longer periods of time or to travel at a slower pace.
- I love my work as a pastor. If I were single, I would be happy to put in 60+ hours a week. I would read and write more. I would take more night and weekend meetings. Singles have a unique ability to serve God with undivided attention.
- It’s important to remember the breadth of Scriptural teaching on marriage, again. I love my work as a pastor, but I also love my family and am happy to lay down my life (and put down my books) to serve them! While Paul doesn’t articulate these things here, he certainly does laud the ability of the married couple to show the love of Christ in other passages (Ephesians 5:21-33).

*“If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 7:36-38)*

- This may seem an odd way to close this section, but it’s really just a way of expressing his main point: each should remain in the situation God has called them. The engaged couple can read this and be blessed with either decision. They could decide to remain single, and be blessed with the gift of singleness! Or, they could be married and be blessed with the gift of marriage!

*“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.”*

*(1 Corinthians 7:39-40)*

- Paul certainly enjoys the gifts of singleness, enough to recommend it strongly to the church repeatedly in this passage. It’s a shame that in the church today, singles are often forgotten or thought of as unwhole. We are reminded here that they, too, like Paul are filled, gifted, sanctified, and glorified by the same Spirit of God.

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# FREEDOM TO ABSTAIN

## 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1

- Paul uses another “Now about...” to address a second topic from the Corinthians’ letter; this time concerning food that had been sacrificed to idols.
- Idol worship, as we noted in the introduction, was common and pervasive in ancient Corinth. Guild membership, festivals, and parades were all wrapped up in cultic practice and idolatry. Among the problems the Corinthian Christians had to work through was the issue of food sacrificed to idols.
- Certainly, the Corinthian Christian wouldn’t *join in* sacrificing to false gods. But what if the food they purchased in the marketplace had been part of a sacrifice? How would they know? What should they do?

“When those sacrifices were made to heathen gods, a part of the animal was given to the priest that officiated, a part was consumed on the altar, and a part (probably the principal part) was the property of him who offered it. This part was either eaten by him at home, as food which has been in some sense consecrated or blessed by having been offered to an idol; or it was partaken of at a feast in honour of the idol; or it was in some instances exposed for sale in the market in the same way as other meat.”

(Barnes, 136-137)

- This is quite the dilemma! To be safe, were the Christians responsible to find out the background information on every piece of food they ever bought? Were they supposed to move out of town and start their own agrarian community to avoid the problem altogether? This was a serious challenge to daily life!

*“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.*

*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 8:1-3)*

- This is a strange angle into the issue, but Paul is setting up a very practical application that will come to a head several verses later. From the context of the next verses, this “knowledge” is the knowledge that idols are nothing and so cannot desecrate food in any meaningful way. This is a freeing doctrine!
- But this knowledge, applied indiscriminately and proudly may lead to all sorts of other issues within the body of Christ. Instead, this knowledge should be applied carefully, with love. Knowledge with love is better knowledge.

*“The man who loves is the one who really knows while the man who says he ‘knows’ does not necessarily act in a helpful way to others. This is the real issue because some Corinthians are not acting out of love but are simply exercising their rights.”*  
*(Winter, 1174)*

- After this philosophical way into the issue, Paul next addresses it head on.

*“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 8:4-8)*

- This is crucial to Christian orthodoxy: God is one and there is none beside Him. It is true what Isaiah 45:5-6 repeats, “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

- Notice the doctrine of the Trinity and the deification of Christ, here. Paul agrees with the Scriptures that God is one, and yet can confess that He is *both* Father and Son. The Son is even ascribed the ability of creating and sustaining.
- Paul speaks here of many ‘gods’ and ‘lords’, acknowledging the pantheon of Greek gods worshiped in his day (as Asaph meant in Psalm 82:1, “God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the ‘gods’”). But these gods are not *real*, they are *false* and powerless.
  - Jeremiah 10:5 – “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.”
  - Isaiah 37:19 – “They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands.”
  - I Kings 18:27-29 – “‘Shout louder’ [Elijah] said. ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they shouted louder...But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”
- The sacrifice made to the ‘gods,’ then, does nothing to the food! There is no power in the mute idol made of stone! Eating this food cannot desecrate the people—it doesn’t have the power. Jesus made this argument in Mark 7:14-23.
- But be careful of running ahead with this right. The Corinthians were warned for this very motto, “food for the stomach and the stomach for food.” God cares about how we live and what we do with our bodies—including eating! The food laws listed in Leviticus 11 are an example of this.

*“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”*  
*(I Corinthians 8:9-13)*

- Here is why Paul began talking about knowledge and love. Consider how knowing—truly understanding—that these idols are meaningless would free a Christian and open to them all kinds of opportunity! “Everything is permissible for me!” They could even eat sacrificed food right in the temple, provided they weren’t participating in the worship of the thing.
- But this knowledge “puffs up.” Everything might be permissible, but it’s not good for us. And it’s outright destructive for our Christian brothers and sisters who don’t have the knowledge. When they see us eating in the temple, they may make the mistake of thinking that *idol worship* is just fine!
- Paul is trying to articulate a good theology of Christian Liberty—that is, the Christian is free to do a lot of things but chooses to *give up those very freedoms* in service to Christ and His Church. Christian Liberty is not just freedom indiscriminately, but freedom *to abstain*. Self-control is among the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).
- In the same way that the Guilt Offering in Leviticus 6:1-7 was about interpersonal grievances and yet had a heavenly component, so our sins against our brothers and sisters grieve not only them but also the God who made them and the Christ who died for them.
- This Christian Liberty—freedom to abstain—applies to more than just food.
  - I hate dressing up. I especially hate my church shoes. They hurt my feet and look silly. But I know that there are brothers and sisters in my congregation who feel strongly that the pastor ought not wear sneakers in the pulpit. Wearing sneakers in the pulpit may be permissible for me, but I wear a collared shirt and church shoes when I preach so as not to destroy my brother or sister.
  - This is also the beautiful thing about blended worship (both traditional and modern elements in a worship liturgy). Take music, for example. *Both* the hymn lover and the radio-hit lover *submit to one another* each week!
- This section closes with three object lessons to demonstrate the value of this kind of Christian Liberty:
  - A lesson from Paul’s own life and ministry
  - A lesson from the athlete
  - A lesson from Israel’s history

*“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*



*This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.' Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it"*

*(1 Corinthians 9:1-12)*

- This is the lesson from Paul's own life: He has worked, and since he has worked he is owed; yet Paul did not collect what he was owed. This is Christian Liberty, the freedom to abstain from what he is owed.
- Note that the worker *is* owed a wage. We're talking about voluntarily giving up the wage to demonstrate Christian Liberty.
  - Soldiers don't work for free
  - Farmers, and their oxen, eat the fruit of their labor
  - Shepherds drink milk from their flocks
  - Temple workers get a share of the food
  - Those who preach make a living from preaching

*“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”*

*(1 Corinthians 9:19-23)*

- Here is a fascinating insight into Paul’s ministry strategy—and really practical, helpful advice for Christians today. Paul was willing and able to reach people where they were. He spoke and evangelized in modes that were accessible for people from all walks of life.
- Unfortunately, this advice is abused in at least two ways:
  - It is entirely ignored by some. They expect all people to know and worship God in precisely the same pattern they do. There is an impossibly high expectation of sanctification, even in the lives of non-believers. They are militant about their preferred Bible translation or music and have little tact when speaking with the pagan world.
  - The pendulum too often swings the other direction. These verses can be used to mask flimsiness—the Christian who talks the talk in the church building but curses like a sailor with their friends. They claim they’re just trying to fit in so they can reach the lost, but they’ve sacrificed truth to do so. Others are willing to receive all kinds of sinful and idolatrous practices into the church for the sake of becoming like the world.
- It’s important to see both errors to have a clearer vision of what Paul means. Paul is a straight speaker, not ashamed of the Gospel and not afraid of the suffering it brings him in this life. He will not sacrifice the truth of God for a lie, it’s just too important. Yet he will go to *extreme* lengths to have an audience with the lost of the world, putting himself in uncomfortable situations and making incredible sacrifices in order to share that truth with Jews and Gentiles of all stripes.

“Within the limits of God’s Word and his Christian conscience, he would be as culturally and socially Jewish as necessary when witnessing to Jews. He was not

bound to ceremonies and traditions of Judaism. All legal restraints had been removed, but there was the constraint of love...Within the bounds of God's Word, he would not offend the Jew, Gentile, or those weak in understanding. Not changing Scripture or compromising the truth, he would condescend in ways that could lead to salvation."

(MacArthur, 182-183)

- Consider these ways Paul "became like" the people he wanted to reach with the light of Christ:
  - Acts 16:3 – Circumcised Timothy so that Timothy would be received well by Jewish audiences.
  - Acts 17:22-23 – Paul borrows the Greek idea of "AN UNKNOWN GOD" as a way of sharing the truth of Christ with the Gentiles.
  - Acts 18:18 – Paul shaves his head to satisfy a Nazarite (Jewish) vow.
  - Acts 21:20-26 – Paul shaves his head and participates in the Jewish purification rites in order to dispel rumors that he was calling Jews away from the Mosaic law.
  - Acts 22:25 – Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship to escape flogging.
  - Acts 23:6 – Paul appeals to his background as a Pharisee to win an audience with the Sanhedrin.
  - Acts 25:10-12 – Paul appeals to Caesar to be tried.
- This idea connects with what Paul's been saying about food sacrificed to idols. He's able to participate in the rites of the Jews, knowing that the purification by water or head shaving is *meaningless* ritual without God. Of course, Paul would never participate in the actual *worship* of the false gods.
- How does this look in our day? Perhaps it's using the term "Heavenly Father" when speaking of God with a Mormon, or "Jehovah" when speaking of God with a Jehovah's Witness. Perhaps it's using the KJV when teaching some and The Message when teaching others. We've already seen how dress might matter to this congregation or that. Perhaps it means sacrificing *the best* praise song for a *good* one.

*"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make*

*it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*  
(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

- Here is the second object lesson: an athlete in a race. Why would the Christian bother with all this self-control? If we have freedom in Christ, why not live it up and enjoy life? Why would we subject ourselves to such a degree of service? Why would we submit ourselves to one another in love?
- The lesson from the athlete reminds us that the difficult, challenging, even painful things we subject ourselves to are to our *benefit* in the race. Just as the athlete suffers to wake up early, take great care in what they eat and drink, subject their bodies to grueling workouts all because it benefits them on race day, so the Christian disciplines themselves because it *benefits* how we serve and enjoy God in this life and the next.
- If the disciplined athlete is a positive example for the Christian, the Israelites in the Old Testament are an example of what *not* to do.

*“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.’ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”*  
(1 Corinthians 10:1-11)

- The athlete is disciplined, focused, and self-controlled; willing to endure pain and suffering in the advancement of the goal. The Israelites, by contrast, took the easy way out at every turn. They were easily distracted by enticements of

the world and were quick to choose pleasure and leisure over devotion to the God who had rescued them.

- Paul references a number of stories from the Old Testament:
  - Exodus 14:26-31 - “under the cloud and...passed through the sea”
  - Exodus 16:15 - “the same spiritual food”
  - Exodus 17:6 - “drank from the spiritual rock”
  - Numbers 20:8-12, 24 - “bodies were scattered over the desert”
  - Exodus 32:6 - “the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry”
  - Exodus 32:28-35 - “in one day twenty-three thousand of them died”
  - Numbers 21:6 - “were killed by snakes”
  - Numbers 16:3-41 - “killed by the destroying angel”
- That the Israelites passing through the Red Sea is considered a baptism is interesting. This is a vague statement, but we should at least note that baptism here is meant to identify a covenant community. It cannot be simply a sign of faith, as the passage will go on to describe how these people did *not* believe. Rather, it was a way to describe those who belonged to this community under Moses.

*“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

*(1 Corinthians 10:12-13)*

- Make sure to follow the example of the athlete, not the Israelites. The disciplines of Christian living and the self-denial of sacrificial love for God and neighbor is a beneficial part of the Christian life and is necessary for standing firm.
- We have all we need in Christ to withstand the sufferings and challenges of this life. These temptations are common even to Christ Himself, “who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Our ultimate victory does not come through our discipline or our own ability to stand up under temptations, but in the Savior who did that for us.
- What great hope we find in the reminder that Christ “shall lose none of all that [God] has given [him], but raise them up at the last day” (John 6:39).

- Following this thread of object lessons has taken us on a rabbit trail away from the original points. Paul now backs up all the way to I Corinthians 6 to re-establish the importance of the body in worship and service to God and then closes with a succinct statement on the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols.

*“Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he? ‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”*  
*(I Corinthians 10:14-24)*

- Much of this section is taken right from I Corinthians 6:12-20, and the point is the same. The body matters to God—what we eat and drink, how we worship, we who marry, how we live with one another. Christian Liberty is not a license to “eat and drink and get up to indulge in pagan revelry,” but rather is the freedom to abstain from the desires of the flesh in pursuit of love for God and neighbor.
- Both this section (eating food sacrificed to idols) and the section on sexuality include this quotation, “everything is permissible.” I Timothy 4 nicely ties a bow on the teaching here.

“They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will

be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.”

(1 Timothy 4:3-6)

- We do have incredible freedom in Christ! We are moving toward the consummation of His Kingdom when all things will be made new (Revelation 21:5). God is redeeming not only our spirits, but our physical bodies and this physical world, too! We celebrate this freedom, while willingly surrendering those very freedoms in love for our neighbors.
- Paul gets around to answering the question about food sacrificed to idols very directly to close this section.

*“Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.’ If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*  
(1 Corinthians 10:25-11:1)





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# WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

## *I Corinthians 11:2-16*

- The discussion in I Corinthians 11:2-16 about the work of women in the church is the source of no shortage of controversy. Issues include:
  - Reconciling this passage with I Corinthians 14:33-35 and I Timothy 2:8-15;
  - The meaning(s) of the word “head” used throughout the section;
  - What is intended by “prophesies”;
  - The location of the prayers and prophecies in question.
- We’ll take on each issue as they arise in the text, saving the reconciliation of the roles of women in the church for a later chapter that includes I Corinthians 14:33-35.
- The issue in the church surrounds the wearing of head-coverings in public worship. Though it is not known for certain what these head-coverings were, many suggest something like a shawl worn by women around the shoulders that could be lifted up over the head when in public.

*“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”*  
*(I Corinthians 11:2-3)*

- Paul’s argument about the role of man and woman relies on the idea of “headship.” The word “head” here is understood in three major ways.
  - Pre-eminence: “Head” is used to describe the greatest or best in a hierarchy. Christ > Man > Woman. This is unlikely, because we cannot apply that understanding to the phrase “and the head of Christ is God,” the doctrine of the Trinity demands that Christ and God are co-equal.
  - Source: “Head” is used to describe the source, like the head of a river. This resonates with 11:8 where the woman is described as “from man” (citing the creation account in Genesis 2). There are also complications in applying

the “source” reading to the idea that “the head of Christ is God,” as the doctrine of the Trinity demands that Christ is uncreated, co-eternal with the Father.

- Authority: “Head” designates authority. This resonates with the other discussions on the roles of men and women throughout Scripture (including Genesis 2, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, I Peter 3). It also allows for a reading of “the head of Christ is God” without negating the doctrine of the Trinity. Just as Christ—though co-equal and co-eternal with the Father—submitted to the Father for their mutual glorification, so the woman—though equal with the man—submits to him for their mutual benefit and to bring glory to God.
- Paul uses the word “head” (understood in this guide as “authority”) as a play on words as the discussion of head coverings is addressed. It is important to distinguish when Paul is talking about authority, and when he is talking about the body part that sits on our shoulders (heads!).

*“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.”*  
(I Corinthians 11:4-5)

- Let’s untangle this. *Every man who prays or prophesies with his head (noggin) covered dishonors his head (authority—Christ). And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head (noggin) uncovered dishonors her head (authority—her male leader). It is just as though her head were shaved (her authority figure was stripped of his leadership).*
- What’s the deal with this head covering? There are a number of cultural elements that might be at play here.
  - Pagan priests may have worn head coverings during pagan ceremonies. It could be that the men in the church were using head coverings to assimilate pagan practices into the church. This dishonors his head (Christ).
  - Others note that head coverings for men may have been a symbol of wealth. As we’ll see in the second half of I Corinthians 11, there is a growing socio-economic gap in the Corinthian church that needs to be addressed. A man using public worship to flaunt his wealth would certainly dishonor his head (Christ) because it divides Christ’s church.

- Head coverings may have been a way for women to express modesty, and for a wife to remove her head covering in public would be lude and so dishonor her head (her husband).
- Still others suggest there were some in ancient Corinth purposefully obfuscating gender—females wore their hair like males and males like females. This dishonors their head (Christ) who had created them as males and females.
- The number of situations that may be in play here certainly complicate matters, but there is truth to be gleaned from each. Though it seems unlikely that Paul had *all* of these scenarios in mind, it speaks to the inspiration of Scripture that it can speak to us in our day in so many clear ways. We'll draw out what principles we can as appropriate.

*“If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”*

*(1 Corinthians 11:6-9)*

- There is a clear acknowledgement in this section that the principles have *cultural* expression. We want to be careful about calling everything “cultural” to cheapen the command of Scripture on our lives today—as if this could only have meaning for ancient Corinth.
- But Paul acknowledges that it’s not about the covering, really. A woman could remove the covering and shave her head if it were culturally appropriate. Unfortunately for these women, it wasn’t culturally appropriate (a shaved head was a sign of a prostitute). Since the bounds of cultural womanhood demanded the use of a head covering in public, the Christian woman ought to use that to her advantage.

“We can assert, without equivocation, that God wants men to look like men and women to look like women, but what that physically looks like will vary from time to time and place to place.”

(DeYoung, 58)

- Remember that at the start of this argument, Paul had clearly delineated roles of authority and submission between Christ, men, and women. Here, Paul roots that argument in creation—Genesis 2 demonstrates the distinct and complementary roles of men and women, showing how man was created first (Genesis 2:7, 22), woman was created from man (Genesis 2:21, 23), and woman was created as a helper for the man (Genesis 2:18, 20-24).
- Genesis 1 makes very clear that God created both male and female in His image and in the same essence (Genesis 1:26-27). This is important to keep in mind, especially when interpreting “he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.” Paul cannot be saying that women are inferior to men or entirely different (and lesser) creatures. That would be to deny the good created order of God. No, men and women must be equal in the sight of God. The same God creates, the same Christ saves, and the same Spirit gifts both men and women.
- Instead, we understand this difficult phrase to be a further comment on the *authority* of men and women. They function in unique roles to glorify God.

“The woman coming from the man does not signal the superiority of man, as if he has more dignity and value than woman. Paul does not endorse the notion that women are ontologically inferior. At the same time, he sees in the created order a different role and function for women, and the differences accord with the notion that the man is the head of the woman.”

(Schreiner, 232)

- There are several barriers to a right understanding of this role for women.
  - First is the clear biblical teaching that women *are* equal to men, created in the image of God and gifted by the Holy Spirit. They receive the same baptism and communion and same access to the Father through the One Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Second is the movement in culture for equality. The church ought to join the fight for equality where it falls within biblical bounds. Women certainly ought to vote, own land, have access to work and care, etc. But we should be clear about where the complementary natures of maleness and femaleness have their bounds—specifically in the home and in the church.
  - Third is a semantic problem; “submission” has very negative connotations. It can be difficult to think of “submission” without equating it to a lesser/greater hierarchy. But in the Kingdom of God, this is not the case

(Matthew 20:25-28). In fact, submission is a virtue. Consider Christ's submission to the Father even unto death, or even Paul's willingness to submit to the church described in the last chapter.

- Like the single has a unique gift of God to serve Him with self-control, the woman has a unique gift of God to serve Him with submission.

*“For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”  
(1 Corinthians 11:10)*

- All sorts of probable (and improbable) interpretations of this passage have been put forward.
- We've already seen that humans will have authority over the angels in the New Creation (1 Corinthians 6:3, page 36 in this study guide). Women have a sign of authority—cultural symbols of womanhood, like head coverings or long hair. This is not because they have authority over the men, but because they have authority over the angels.
- So far, we've articulated a very *complementarian* view of male and female roles. This is the idea that men and women have been created by God with equal but distinct and complementary roles. An *egalitarian* would represent an opposing view; that men and women have been created by God with equal access to all God-honoring roles.
- This study guide maintains a *complementarian* approach when considering the breadth of Scripture, but we must note undeniably that 1 Corinthians 11 has been describing women praying and prophesying in gathered worship! It would be wrong for us to conclude, as some do, that women ought not to have any public role in gathered worship. At the least, they ought to pray and prophesy (and we'd make the argument for singing, dancing, serving, listening, caring, and many other things too).
- We need also to deal with the function of prophesying. What does Paul have in mind here? Again, commentators give several options. We'll discuss the gift of prophecy in more detail in chapter 10 of this study guide, but it seems Paul has in mind “clearly and faithfully retelling the message of God.” This could include reading Scripture, sharing a testimony, giving a children's message, and more. Some bounds will be put on this authority in chapter 13 of this study guide.

*“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”*  
(I Corinthians 11:11-12)

- Here is yet another reminder of the dignity and value of women equal to that of men. “In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

“There is no distinction between men and women as far as personal worth, intellect, or spirituality are concerned. All believers, male and female, are equal in the Lord and complementary in the Lord’s work. Their roles are different in function and relationships, not in spirituality or importance.

(MacArthur, 187)

- It might be helpful to think of this role for women in terms of the Christian Liberty we discussed in the prior chapter. Women are certainly smart, strong, and spiritual enough to hold all of the offices men do in the home and church. But they utilize Christian Liberty—their freedom to abstain—as an act of service to God.

*“Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.”*

(I Corinthians 11:13-16)

- Though men and women are equal in essence, the differences between men and women are self-evident.

“Nature, though, teaches us that men ought to adorn themselves like men and women like women. The natural God-given inclination of men and women is to be ashamed of that which confuses their sexual difference. Culture gives us the symbols of masculinity and femininity, while nature dictates that men should embrace their manhood and women embrace their womanhood.”

(DeYoung, 56)

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# THE LORD'S SUPPER

## 1 Corinthians 11:17-33

- Communion is a central part of Christian worship. Christ instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-38), and the church has served Communion regularly ever since.
- In the second century, worship services were structured in two parts. The first part (singing, scripture, sermon) was open to the public. The second part (prayers, communion) was for baptized believers only. Communion was celebrated each week, and the people brought their own communion supplies to share with the congregation.

“From descriptions and instructions in the writings of the early Church fathers, we can say that a fairly typical service of worship in any congregation of the 2nd century would have been structured something like this: ...Each church member brought a small loaf and a flask of wine to communion; the deacons took these gifts and spread them out on the Lord’s table. The flasks of wine were all emptied into one large silver cup.”

(Needham, 75-77)

- The Corinthians divisions and social hierarchies have been well noted throughout the letter. These sins manifest themselves at the Table, too. Paul’s condemnation of their Communion practices is especially strong.

*“In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. When you come together, it is not for the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in?”*

*Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?  
What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!”  
(1 Corinthians 11:17-22)*

- Here we find yet another social division in the Corinthian church. “Those who have nothing” are humiliated by their Communion practices.
- There are a couple of interpretations of the problem here. Perhaps both are in view for Paul.
  - The wealthier members of the church may be taking Communion first, leaving the poorer members to wait for the scraps. Some have suggested that perhaps the poorer members were not even allowed into the dining room of the house and were forced to wait in the atrium (Schreiner, 242).
  - More favorably, rather than sharing the Communion supplies on a communal table to be distributed by deacons and elders, each member was bringing and eating their own meal. The wealthier members flaunted their wealth by bringing large portions—enough wine to be drunk. Meanwhile, the poorest members were unable to partake at all.

“The problem was not the time of eating, for everyone was eating together. The problem was that some were eating and drinking sumptuously, while others were neglected and hungry.”  
(Schreiner, 242)

- This abuse revealed who had “God’s approval,” or who had a sincere heart of faith. Could a genuine worshiper of Jesus show such negligence in the face of brothers and sisters in suffering? Could a genuine worshiper of Jesus show such pride in wealth and status? Could a qualified deacon neglect the equal distribution to the poor? Certainly not!
- Such a practice could never qualify as “The Lord’s Supper.” What the Corinthians were doing when they ate and drank during the second part of their worship service was not of God, and was not the Lord’s Supper. It was divisive, proud, self-serving, humiliating—a black mark on Christ’s Church.
- Paul offers them an alternative: celebrate how Christ intended.

*“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In*



*the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'*

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

*(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)*

- Paul summarizes the story of the Last Supper, where Christ institutes the sacrament of Communion.
- There are four major views of Communion today. We have space to highlight them only briefly.
  - Transubstantiation – Roman Catholics put the emphasis on the word “is.” When the bread and cup are lifted, the substance transforms into the physical body and blood of Christ. “This is my body.” Christ is physically present in the substance of the elements.
  - Consubstantiation – Martin Luther rejected the view of the Catholics and proposed that Christ was mixed in, with and under the bread and wine. This is like, he argued, how fire mixes with iron—both elements retain their substance, but it is impossible to tell where one stops and another begins.
  - Memorialist – Memorialists put the emphasis on the word “remembrance.” The bread and wine are mere symbols that remind us of Christ’s broken body and shed blood. The memorialist points to the Ascension to say that Christ cannot be *physically* present because He is at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
  - Real Spiritual Presence – Reformed Christians agree that the physical body of Christ is seated at the right hand of God, but that in taking communion “he gives us his life-giving Spirit, through whom the body and blood of our Lord become the life-giving nourishment of our souls” (CRC *Celebration of the Lord’s Supper*, 980). Though Christ’s body is not physically present with the elements, there is a real spiritual benefit for the believer who partakes in faith.
- Paul adds two details to frame Christ’s instruction. This may be simply for context, but perhaps they have more meaning. In both statements, we find support for the reformed understanding of *Real Spiritual Presence* in Communion.

- “On the night he was betrayed”
  - This may just be context in Paul’s recounting of the Last Supper. It was that very night that Christ was arrested in the garden, betrayed by the kiss of Judas.
  - Maybe this inclusion is meant to sting the abusers at the Corinthian table. Paul has already accused them of not having “God’s approval.” Perhaps Paul includes this line to remind the people that Judas, too, sat at the table and received the bread and cup. Like Judas, some in the Corinthian church were participating in Communion without genuine love for God, with hearts full of pride.
  - If this is in view for Paul, the Catholic and Lutheran views of physical presence of the body and blood of Christ are difficult. If it were so that Christ was physically present in the elements, the non-believer would partake of Christ as certainly as they eat the bread and drink the cup.
- “You proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
  - If he’s physically present, how do you talk about His future coming? Real Spiritual Presence allows us to remember His sacrifice, benefit from the means of grace, and yet recognize His absence from us until His physical return in glory.

*“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 11:27-32)*

- It is important to approach the Communion Table with proper respect and seriousness.
- What the Corinthians were doing was *not* the Lord’s Supper. They were eating and drinking in excess—even to the point of drunkenness. Since Communion was celebrated weekly in the early church, we can understand how this routine would not only harm their spiritual health but present real physical challenges as well. It was bad for their health. Paul notes that they

are becoming weak and sick, even dying because of this lifestyle of excess and drunkenness.

“Since he earlier mentions *drunkenness* (11:21), it is just conceivable that a serious decline in health could result causally from excess in gluttony and drink which brought its own judgment, especially if a wealthy host saw an opportunity to masquerade sheer excess under the cloak of ‘doing the Lord’s work’ by hosting frequent ‘Suppers of the Lord.’”  
(Thiselton, 894)

- We must also note that the Lord’s Supper is not just a physical eating and drinking but is of real spiritual benefit to the Christian who partakes in solemn faith. Neglecting the Communion Table also damages our spiritual health.

*“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.”*  
(1 Corinthians 11:33)

“The fact that Paul devoted so much space to teaching concerning the Lord’s Supper shows its importance in the Christian life. At the same time, let us keep a proper perspective in the matter. There are very few direct references to the sacrament apart from the Gospels and this Epistle. Its institution by our Lord and His command to do it in memory of Him lead us to give it a central place in our Christian life. But to make it the one focus of our devotional life upsets the spiritual balance and, as we know from a study of Church history, leads to grievous error and superstition.”  
(Proctor, 984)



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# ONE SPIRIT, MANY GIFTS

## I Corinthians 12

- Paul uses the phrase “Now about” for the fourth time (7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1) to signal a move to a new topic. This discussion about spiritual gifts continues through chapters 12-14, but we’ll focus on each chapter individually.
- In chapter 12, the focus is on unity in diversity. It’s helpful to keep in mind the diversity of gifts Paul has already covered in the letter. For example, singles and married, eating and non-eating, or men and women.

*“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”*  
*(I Corinthians 12:1-3)*

- In the discussion on food sacrificed to idols in I Corinthians 8 (covered in chapter 7 of this study guide), we learned that idols are nothing (8:4). In keeping with this argument, Paul here calls them “mute.”

*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”*  
*(I Corinthians 12:4-11)*

- This is not an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts. Later in the chapter, Paul will add more, as he does in Romans 12. First, an explanation of each gift:
  - *Message of Wisdom* – I Corinthians 1-3 contain a lengthy explanation of what Paul means by “wisdom from the Spirit.” This could be understood as a kind of worldview that makes good sense of the world around us.
  - *Message of Knowledge* – I Corinthians 8 contains a longer explanation of what Paul means by knowledge. Some understand this to mean “knowing information miraculously.” It’s certainly possible that the Spirit could work this way, but considering this verse in context with the rest of the teaching in I Corinthians, this more likely means something like “Knowing the Gospel” or “Knowing the Truth of Scripture.”
  - *Faith* – That faith is a gift of the Spirit is strong evidence for the doctrine of election—those who have faith have been given it by the Spirit of God. Faith comes in different measures, as the Spirit determines. We have experienced this in the brother or sister who, despite their suffering, maintains strong faith in God without wavering. These are those with the gift of strong faith!
  - *Healing* – Anthony Thiselton notes that “gifts of healing” is plural to capture “various kinds of healing, such as ‘sudden’ ‘gradual’ ‘physical’ ‘mental’ ‘with medication’ ‘by direct sole divine agency’” (Thiselton, 948). In other words, healing comes through various means: doctors and caretakers, prayers, and miracles. In His law, God has instructed His people to use observable, rational, natural science in diagnosing and treating sickness (Leviticus 13). That God *also* provides healing through divine intervention is a great grace, but not a promise.
  - *Miraculous Powers* – This might be better translated as “works of power.” The same words are used in Ephesians 3:7 to describe conversion. The spirit can certainly act through willing vessels to accomplish works that break the laws of nature. But be careful to notice that this gift is *alongside* the others. It is not a *greater* gift, as exciting as it may seem to those of us so conditioned to view the world entirely naturally.
  - *Prophecy* – I Corinthians 11 describes the use of prophecy in worship. I Corinthians 14 will give further instruction about it’s appropriate use in gathered worship. We can think of prophecy as an umbrella term to collect all kinds of “clearly and faithfully retelling the message of God.” This might contain *foretelling*, as found occasionally in the Old Testament prophets and even less frequently in the New Testament. It more often contains

*forthtelling*. Prophesying, then, includes—but is not limited to—reading Scripture, preaching a sermon, giving a testimony, teaching a Bible lesson, or spontaneously sharing a revelation.

- *Discernment* – This might be best understood as the ability to gauge the motivations of human hearts. “One who exercises this ministry discerns how the Spirit is working, whether certain manifestations promote the lived-out lordship of Christ as self-effacing, loving service, rather than self-serving status seeking or deceptive uses of Scripture” (Johnson, 226).
- *Tongues* – A longer teaching on tongues occurs in I Corinthians 14. The two major views understand this as either an existing foreign language unknown to the speaker or a spiritual language unintelligible to humankind. We’ll cover this at length later.
- The main point, though, is not the diversity of gifts. Rather, the point is to emphasize that though each member is gifted uniquely, all of the gifts...
  - Are from the same Spirit, Lord, and God
  - Are for the common good
  - Are given purposefully as determined by God
- Consider what this means for the “ordinary” gifts on the list. We usually attribute gifts like knowledge, prophesy, or discernment to human ability. It seems common and attainable. But even these are given by God. It is right to recognize the special, God-given ability of knowledge in Augustine, Luther and Calvin. It is right to acknowledge the God-given gift of prophesy at work in great preachers like Chrysostom, Wesley and Graham. Praise God for His graces!
- Consider also what this means for the “extraordinary” gifts on the list. We are right to be excited by the supernatural ways God can work in the world—by miracles, healings, and tongues. But these signs and wonders cannot be honored above those others.

*“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”*

*(I Corinthians 12:12-13)*

- To illustrate his point about the unity of gifts in the church, Paul uses the powerful metaphor of a body with its many parts. Each part looks different and performs a different function, but all are necessary to form a healthy body.

*“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”*

*(I Corinthians 12:14-20)*

- You belong in the church. The eye cannot say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body.” The eye and hand have the same right to the body! They both are parts!
- When you feel as though you don’t belong in the church, remember:
  - You are a child of God, and belong with the family of God.
  - The church *needs* your unique set of gifts. If a church was made up of only one type of person, it would cease to be the body of Christ.
  - God has given you the gifts He wanted to give you, and placed you *just as He wanted you to be*.

*“Just as it is absurd to think that the body is made up of only the more prominent parts, so is it to think that the body could function without its less prominent parts. Don’t underestimate the importance of your grace ministry to the vitality and wholeness of the body of Christ! You are equal in importance to the body, even if you are not equal in prominence to some other members.”*

*(Johnson, 232)*

- The same case was made to the single and married in I Corinthians 7. The advice was: “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him” (7:20). The church certainly benefits from the gifts of single and married members.



*“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 12:21-26)*

- Now the argument is reversed. Before the eye wondered if it belonged. Now, the eye has a pride and arrogance that puts *other members* out of the body! We are reminded that this goes both ways. Eyes, you need to participate. And heads, you need to *allow* the feet to participate.
- Too often, churches grant participation to members only on man-made terms. For example, a church might extend an invitation to participate in a small group *only* to those who are married. This is an abuse that causes the body to suffer without all its facilities.
- We should note: there are qualifications for certain offices. This is not an argument to let anyone serve in any way they feel. A child can’t be your pastor. But we ought not to limit those gifted by the Spirit from serving in the place God has placed them.
- This section should also remind us of 1 Corinthians 8 and the “weak brother.” In 1 Corinthians 8, the “weak brother” was reason for abstaining from certain liberties that were otherwise available to Christians. There was a “contemporizing” of Christianity that was *allowable*, but because of the associations the “weak brother” had, the church neglected to participate. To those in our day more comfortable with “contemporizing” the church, this can seem as a frustrating limitation. But Paul says, “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” We should be thankful for those in our church who slow the contemporizing and help our communities remain distinct—even odd—to the world! This is a blessing!
- This section should also remind us of the conversation in 1 Corinthians 11. That women participate in the church with head-coverings, or here “special modesty,” is not a comment on their value or worth but on the role in which

they function in the body. The gift of submission given to women is unique, and so provides the body of Christ with another of its necessary senses.

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.”*

*(1 Corinthians 12:27-31)*

- The body suffers and rejoices *together* with *equal concern*. All of the gifts are necessary for a fully functioning, healthy body. Still, there are some gifts that are more prominent and necessary in the life of the church. Both of these things can be true. A fully functioning, healthy body has two hands and two lungs—but the two lungs are more *necessary* to the function of that body.
- The work of Apostles, prophets and teachers are most necessary for the functioning of Christ’s church. To this end, Paul can describe them as “the greater gifts.”
- Many have disagreed over the meaning of “apostles” here.
  - Does Paul have in mind himself and the 12 Apostles in Acts 1? This seems to be how Paul has used the word in I Corinthians 4 and 9. If so, “apostles” are first because the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). In this reading, the ministry of the apostles has ended and no longer functions today.
  - The word “apostles” can also mean “sent ones.” This is how Paul describes Andronicus and Junias in Romans 16:7. In this case, missionaries and church planters might constitute modern day “apostles.”

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# THE LOVE CHAPTER

## *1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13*

- 1 Corinthians 13, “The Love Chapter,” is among the most popular passages in the New Testament. It’s been read at many a wedding—and this is good! It contains a beautiful and full description of Christ-like love.
- The love described in this passage certainly applies to husband and wife, but it’s important to note the placement of this chapter in the broader context. It falls right between two sections on spiritual gifts (chapter 12 and 14), and specifically addresses the use of gifts in the church.

“The whole of this chapter is really a parenthesis, the main theme of the apostle’s argument being taken up again in chapter 14.”

(Proctor, 985)

- While this kind of love definitely includes the love between husband and wife, it is meant to apply to all believers—the kind of love that unites and governs the local gathered body.

*“And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”*

*(1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3)*

- The whole point of the gifts (tongues, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing) is to increase love for God and neighbor. Love, then, is “most excellent;” love is the goal of the gifts. To utilize gifts without love is compared to the noise of a gong or cymbal.

- At a basketball camp, I was asked to work on hand-eye coordination by throwing a ball off the backboard and catching it between my legs. This was a useful skill to aid in basketball playing, but throwing the ball off the backboard and catching it between your legs is *not* the main point. If I focused on that skill and got really good at it, I wouldn't be any better at basketball. In the same way, using the spiritual gifts without building up love and unity in the church of Christ is a wasted exercise that misses the point. Miracles were never the main point of Jesus ministry; the message of the Gospel is! Focusing on the ancillary things can too often distract from the main attraction: Jesus rescues sinners from death by dying in their place.

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)*

- Here is the section that is so well known and often quoted. It's important to note that these are verbs in the Greek—love is active and practiced.

*“Verses 4-7 describe what love looks like with active verbs. Most English translations use adjectives, for understandable reasons, but we should notice that verbs are used in the Greek: love is active and energetic.”*  
*(Schreiner, 272)*

- We could translate it: “Love is being patient, love is being kind...” etc.
- There are beautiful implications here that we often apply to romantic love. But consider how these attributes of love might be applied to the fellowship of a local church.
- Consider Christ's rebuke of the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:1-7. They had worked hard and persevered without growing weary, they had not tolerated wicked teaching, yet Christ calls them to repentance saying, “You have forsaken your first love.” The Ephesians had worked hard for the faith, but were in danger of losing their church because of their failure to love one another.

“The call for repentance and to *do the things you did at first* suggests that the failure of these Christians was not primarily loss of love for God but loss of love for people. When hate for the practices of those who err becomes hatred of those who err, Christians depart from the redeeming love of God in Christ and pervert the faith.”

(Beasley-Murray, 1428)

- This is an applicable warning for many churches today. Love is patient with the failures of neighbors as they grow in knowledge and faith. Love protects and trusts, even in an era where doubt and cynicism reign. A church must maintain love for one another, or cease being a church.
- The Lord’s Supper offers a local church a unique opportunity to gather in love and forgiveness. Our Communion liturgy asks us to prepare for the Lord’s Supper, considering how we might “resolve to live in faith and obedience before our Lord, and in love and peace with our neighbors.” We’re reminded at the Table that “The holy sacrament is also a means of grace that unites us with one another in the bond of the Spirit...Thus, even as he unites us with himself, he strengthens the bond of communion between us, his children” (*Celebration of the Lord’s Supper*, 978-980).
- There are obvious implications on Communion that we can read back into I Corinthians 11:17-34. But consider how this kind of love might have impacted the Corinthian church in its other struggles (and your congregation’s weaknesses, too):
  - How does “Love is patient,” “It keeps no record of wrongs,” and “it always protects” impact the way we discipline those living in sin (I Corinthians 6)?
  - We’re good at considering its impact on the married, but how might this kind of love impact the life of those who are single in your congregation (I Corinthians 7)?
  - How does “It does not envy,” “it is not self-seeking,” and “always trusts” encourage those with varying gifts—greater or lesser—to participate in the life of the church? How might it be an encouragement to the woman in her unique role in the church?
- It is essential to point out that biblical love is not spineless and wishy-washy. It “does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” While we certainly want to be patient and trusting, there comes a point where a loving rebuke for the sake of the Gospel is necessary.

*“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*  
(1 Corinthians 13:8-12)

- In Heaven, when we come to fully know God and commune with him personally like never before, there will be no need for prophecy or tongues, faith or healing. Faith will be sight, there will be no more sickness, and we will know in full. Still, there will be love.

*“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*  
(1 Corinthians 13:13)

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# SPIRITUAL GIFTS

## I Corinthians 14:1-25

- I Corinthians 11-14 should be read as a continuous instruction on the order of gathered worship and the use of gifts in the church.
  - I Corinthians 11:1-16 – In gathered worship, there are distinct roles for men and women.
  - I Corinthians 11:17-34 – Gathered worship ought to promote unity and fellowship, especially at the Communion Table.
  - I Corinthians 12 – Gathered worship benefits from congregational participation. Each has their own unique gifts to bless the church.
  - I Corinthians 13 – For this kind of unity and participation to flourish in the church, real Christ-like love is required.
  - I Corinthians 14:1-25 – The goal of gathered worship is learning; seek to communicate in ways that effectively instruct the whole congregation.

*“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speak in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”*

*(I Corinthians 14:1-5)*

- Prophecy is a greater gift than tongues, that much is plain.
- We discussed the meaning of “prophecy” in chapter 10 of this study guide. In short, it’s the clear retelling of the words of God. This typically occurs in the reading of Scripture, the sermon, or a testimony. Paul says this is for our

“strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” Those who know Scripture well know this to be true!

- We’ll have a longer conversation on the meaning of “tongues.” Alan Johnson (Johnson, 227-228) outlines at least five possible views. We can narrow it to four. We will narrow in on a preferred interpretation as we work through the text.
  - 1) Human language unknown to the speaker. In Acts 2, the Apostles “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” As they spoke, people from many nations heard them in their own language. The Greek word here, “glossai,” can certainly mean “human language,” and does make sense of the plural “tongues” in I Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.
  - 2) Repeated liturgical mantras. Christians from highly liturgical congregations know call-and-responses and other liturgical elements meant to be called out at certain moments in the service. We can understand how an overabundance of such would be distracting—and especially off-putting for “outsiders.” This satisfies the note from Paul that the tongue speaker “edifies himself” and that he offers the phrases “to God.”
  - 3) Ecstatic, unconscious speech. Some understand tongues to mean uncontrolled speech, a “taking over” by the Spirit. This would also satisfy the idea that the speaker “utters mysteries” “to God,” and that the speaker doesn’t know what they are saying, their “mind is unfruitful” (14:14).
  - 4) Groans and sounds from the Spirit. Romans 8:26—which, notably, Paul wrote from Corinth—says, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” These sounds, languagelike or not, are communications of the spiritual expressions of a speaker. This will develop as our preferred understanding.

“Tongues in this view, then, are audible expressions of the deep wells of the heart originated and articulated by the Spirit, and when interpreted by the same Spirit, they may become intelligible language to oneself and others.”  
(Johnson, 228)

“The specific work of the Holy Spirit in actualizing inarticulate yearnings directed toward God from the depths of the heart of the believer in Romans



8:26-27 forms a retrospective summary from Paul's point of view of the phenomenon..."  
(Thiselton, 985)

- For what reason is *prophecy* greater than *tongues*? The answer has to do with edification, or learning.
- In his instructions for gathered worship, Paul has placed a huge emphasis on *togetherness*. Be careful that the Communion is done *together*. Be careful that gifts are used *together*. Make sure that love is shared *together*. Prophecy, the clear retelling of the message of God, is something that the church can learn from *together*, but uninterpreted tongues can only be done solo.
- For this reason, option 1 above (unknown human language) seems unlikely. The kind of tongue in Acts 2 was *togethering!* It was a miracle of the Spirit at Pentecost that *united* people of every nation and language and tongue. There was not even a need for an interpreter. What Paul is describing in I Corinthians 12-14 seems to be a different kind of tongue.
- Paul calls prophecy a "greater" gift. Yes, Paul has taken great pains to explain the *equality* of the ministers of God. We do things *together* as God has uniquely gifted us. Still, there are parts of the body of Christ with greater function—more presentable parts. Prophecy is among the most presentable of the gifts of the Spirit.

*"Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air."  
(I Corinthians 14:6-9)*

- Music is an excellent example for tongues. If I mean to play *Jingle Bells* for you on my piano but plunk a dozen notes at random, I will not have communicated *Jingle Bells* to you. The notes require distinction and rhythm to communicate their intended meaning. So it is with gathered worship.

Speaking is done orderly and intentionally so as to communicate truths of God clearly to all who hear.

*“Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”*  
(1 Corinthians 14:10-12)

- This is the point we’ve been making: unintelligible speech is *othering*. It does not unify the body, and no one learns from it.

*“For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.”*  
(1 Corinthians 14:13-17)

- Here, Paul suggests that this tongue is unknown to the speaker. This renders option 2 (repeated liturgical mantras) unlikely, as these would be well memorized phrases and lines.
- There is also a broadening of the functions of tongues here. We’ve seen that we can *speak* in tongues, but here Paul includes praying and singing among the functions of tongues.
- It’s important to remember that 1 Corinthians 12:10 included tongues as a spiritual gift. Paul nowhere here condemns the use of tongues in worship. In fact, here he acknowledges that tongues are an expression of “giving thanks well enough.” Paul is only rebuking the use of tongues in gathered worship because it contributes to division.

*“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 14:18-19)*

- Lest we begin to think lowly of the gift of tongues, Paul reminds us that our unpresentable parts are to be treated with special modesty. Tongues are a gift from God. Paul thanks God that he has this gift in abundance, and earlier has wished “every one of you to speak in tongues” (14:5). Later, he will remind us to “not forbid speaking in tongues” (14:39). Those whom God has given the gift of tongues ought to thank Him for giving voice to the desires of their heart!
- While speaking of the verses coming in the next chapter of this study guide, we should pause here to include 14:32-33, “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” This makes option 3 (ecstatic, unconscious speech) unlikely, since the gifts of the Spirit are undertaken with control and purpose.
- Paul has assumed this all along, for how could he ask the Corinthians to *stop* doing something they have no control over? If the people were unwitting vessels of the Spirit, wouldn’t the Spirit be at fault for the misuse of the gift? Modern examples of ecstatic tongues, in public or private worship, are not found in these passages.

*“Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: ‘Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,’ says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 14:20-22)*

- The people are encouraged to be naïve toward evil, like infants. That is, they are far from it. But maturity in thinking is a requirement of the Spirit-filled believer. This reminds us of 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.
- Paul then quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12, a section titled “Woe to Ephraim.”

“Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, ‘This is the resting place, let the weary rest’; and, ‘This is the place of repose’—but they would not listen.”  
(Isaiah 28:11-12)

- Isaiah is prophesying of the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians—men “with foreign lips and strange tongues.”
- The point is, uninterpreted tongues bring *confusion*. Paul may have better chosen Babel as his Old Testament quotation.

“‘Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’ So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it is called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”  
(Genesis 11:7-9)

- The confusion of tongues is a curse. Since Babel, it remains as a sign of the unbelief and godlessness in the world—it divides humankind. The miracle of tongues at Pentecost demonstrated that the effects of the curse have begun to wear off. Death has been defeated in the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he returns in glory, the curse of tongues will no longer separate man from man, but every tribe, tongue, nation and language will join in the worship of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).
- Instead of tongues, preference is given to prophecy as the sign of the believer. Remember the discussion on spiritual wisdom from I Corinthians 3. No one can know the deep things of God unless the Spirit has first illuminated their heart and mind. Anyone who can prophesy—clearly retell the message of God—is demonstrating the Spirit is at work in their life! Prophecy is a sign of the believer!
- One last practical scenario sums up this section.

*“So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be*

*laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'"*

*(1 Corinthians 14:23-25)*

- The purpose of gathered worship is that by the clear retelling of the message of God we might be convicted of our sin and worship the God who in Christ can judge us righteous.

“The unbeliever of verse 23 is really the same person as the believer of verse 22, but at an earlier stage. Paul shows how he comes to faith not through the use of the gift of tongues, but through the convicting power of the gospel clearly preached.”

(Proctor, 986)



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# WORSHIP ORDER

## *1 Corinthians 14:26-40*

- This closes Paul’s instruction for the church on gathered worship. It includes some nice concise statements on liturgy for gathered worship, as well as some challenging passages that take some work to reconcile.

*“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”*

*(1 Corinthians 14:26)*

- Here are some elements of worship service that “must be done for the strengthening of the church”:
  - Singing – here it’s reflected as “hymns” and elsewhere “songs, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16). This is a common and normative practice of worship throughout the Old and New Testaments and in all of the history of the Christian church.
  - Preaching – here it’s called “a word of instruction,” elsewhere in this passage—and throughout this letter—it’s best reflected as “prophecy”—clearly and faithfully retelling the message of God.
  - Testimonies – here called “a revelation,” what new thing a believer has come to know about God and His world. This is *not* a new Word of the Lord, as the canon of Scripture is closed. God is not “still speaking” as some progressive religions claim, but He is “still speaking” in the sense that believers continue to grow in both the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is speaking to you!
  - A tongue or an interpretation – this was discussed at length in chapter 12 of this study guide.

*“If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.”*

*(1 Corinthians 14:27-28)*

- As we’ve seen, gathered worship is about the edification of the whole body. Uninterpreted tongues should be omitted from gathered worship.
- We see here that these uninterpreted tongues can be kept between “himself and God.” This is an encouragement for the use of the gift in private worship, as Paul wants “every one of you to speak in tongues” (14:5). Tongues are a legitimate gift of the Spirit for worship when used properly and modestly.
- The fact that tongues could be kept “to himself and God” is further evidence of our understanding of tongues as “groans and sounds from the Spirit” and not ecstatic, uncontrolled speech.

*“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”*

*(1 Corinthians 14:29-33)*

- Prophecy is given equal time to tongues—two or three speakers—but prophecy is given without the need for interpretations. It is clear that Paul expects tongues to be rare in gathered worship, and prophecy to be necessary.
- It seems odd to us today that two or three people would “prophesy in turn.” In our congregation, we have made an effort to include more prophetic voices on a Sunday. A pastor prepares a sermon, a worship leader offers a word or prayer of confession, and an elder offers intercessory prayer. These things are done with order, preparation, and thought.
- But what Paul describes seems to be more interactive—one speaker stops to give another an opportunity to share. This is a different structure than our modern services, but remembering that the early church met in homes in much smaller groups helps us make sense of the style of the service.
- In the next passages, Paul commands women to “remain silent in the churches.” It is *essential* to note that this command is related to his



comments on prophecy. In fact, a few scribes removed these comments on women in the church and placed them *after* verse 40 because it seems to interrupt a cohesive speech on prophecy. But Paul placed them here intentionally, precisely *because* he has prophecy in mind.

*“As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.”*  
(1 Corinthians 14:33-38)

- This is odd, because in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul expected women to be praying and prophesying in gathered worship. How do we reconcile these passages?
- We should be mindful of the breadth of Scripture’s teaching here. We’ll list a few other relevant verses, though this certainly requires a longer conversation than we have space for.

*“Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”*  
(Acts 21:7-8)

*“And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.”*  
(1 Corinthians 11:5)

*“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”*  
(1 Timothy 2:11-12)

- Scripture permits women to prophesy (Acts 21:7-8), even in gathered worship (1 Corinthians 11:5), but also asks them to be submissive in the

church (I Timothy 2:11-12), especially to their husbands (I Corinthians 14:34-35).

- Many solutions have been put forward, but two seem most probable.
  - 1) Paul means it when he allows women to pray and prophesy in gathered worship (I Corinthians 11:5). These verses about women remaining silent are addressing a particular problem in the Corinthian church where women were asking disruptive and distracting questions—and specifically married women challenging the authority of their husbands. Paul is, after all, addressing particular questions from the Corinthians in this section of the letter. In this view, all of the functions of prophecy—including preaching and all pastoral ministry—is open to both men and women.
  - 2) Paul is here talking about a specific *kind* of prophecy. We have shown throughout this study that prophecy is any clear and faithful retelling of the message of God. This could be Scripture reading, a testimony, and many other forms. The function of prophecy that Paul restricts women from in I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-12 is the “weighing of prophecy” (I Corinthians 14:29). This would be the kind of work an elder would do in guarding the doctrine of the church, or a pastor would do in parsing out the doctrine of Scripture.

“All that to say, the command for women to be silent must be understood in context. Just as the command for the tongue speaker to keep silent does not forbid him from ever saying anything in church (14:28), so the command for women to be silent does not assume that in all situations women cannot speak. The explicit situation in which women must be silent is where prophecies are being evaluated. Such evaluation would have involved teaching and the exercise of authority (over other prophets) ...What this means in practice today requires wisdom and contextual awareness. At the very least, churches that do not allow women to speak in church under any circumstances are contradicting the instructions of Scripture.”

(DeYoung, 61-62)

- We should be clear, again, that this has nothing to do with ability, intellect, ontology, or spirituality. Women are of the same essence as men: made in the image of God. They are smart enough to understand the Scriptures, able to teach, and gifted by the same Spirit.

- We would do well here to place the emphasis of this section on 14:32-33: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” All of us submit our giftedness to God for the sake of His Church.
  - Those gifted with tongues submit the gift to the church with all self-control so that love and edification reign in gathered worship.
  - Those gifted with prophecy submit themselves to other prophets in the church with all self-control so that love and edification reign in gathered worship.
  - Women with the gift of prophecy submit themselves to certain types of prophesying in the church with all self-control so that love and edification reign in gathered worship.
- As we’ve seen in previous chapters, to “submit” cannot mean that women are lesser prophets or ought to be disregarded. Submission for the wife or female prophet in the church is a *gift of God* like self-control is for the single or denying freedoms is for the Christian.

“As a general rule, I believe most complementarian pastors could do a better job finding biblically allowable ways to use women in church gatherings to pray, to relate a story of God’s grace, or to share an encouraging word.”

(DeYoung, 62)

- This is about order in the church, order that speaks loudly about the kind of God we serve. With joy, we submit ourselves to one another out of love and for the benefit of our neighbor’s faith.

*“Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”*

*(1 Corinthians 14:39-40)*



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# BODILY RESURRECTION

## *I Corinthians 15*

- We could think of I Corinthians as having two main sections:
  - I Corinthians 1-6 – Paul’s appeal for unity in the church
  - I Corinthians 7-16 – Paul responds to their questions
- Interestingly, both of these sections end with a teaching on the body (I Corinthians 6:12-20 and I Corinthians 15). I Corinthians is an incredible blessing to the church today because it’s overflowing with practical application. But daily Christian living *demand*s a theology of the body. If our bodies don’t matter to God, why would we do things with them?
- At the Cross, Jesus died for our sins. But this is not just a spiritual justification, the fact that He also rose and ascended bodily proves to us that our bodies matter. In the same way that God created us body and soul and called it very good (Gen 1:31), we look forward to very good bodies and souls in the New Creation.

*“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”*  
*(I Corinthians 15:1-8)*

- It's faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves. Paul lays out the earliest creedal statement we have in I Corinthians 15:3-8: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve..."
- This creed is significant for apologetics. Remember, Paul is writing in 54 or 55 AD, and he is has "passed on to you" this creed (this is why I Corinthians 15:3-8 is sometimes called "The Pre-Pauline Creed"). These central beliefs about the Christian faith are certainly developed and agreed upon within 15-20 years of Christ's death and resurrection.
- That this creed was developed so close to the events of the Cross—together with the fact that "most" of the "more than five hundred" eye witnesses to the resurrection were still living—is satisfactory historical evidence that the events of the resurrection are *not* myths. Historians often assume it takes three generations (over 100 years) for myths to develop; you need eye witnesses to die off and time for stories to exaggerate. This is not the case in the historical accounts of the resurrection.
- Most of these eye witnesses are still alive, but some have "fallen asleep." This is a common way of expressing death (John 11:11, I Corinthians 11:30, Ephesians 5:14, I Thessalonians 4:14-15).

*"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."  
(I Corinthians 15:9-11)*

- Paul considers himself "abnormally born" because his witness of the resurrected Christ was very different than the others. The women saw the risen Christ outside the tomb (Matthew 28:9), the 12 saw Him in the upper room (Luke 24:36), two men walked with Him on the road (Luke 24:15). These were all pre-ascension appearances of the risen Christ.
- But Paul met the ascended Christ and heard only His voice (Acts 9:4-6). For this reason, some did not count Paul an apostle (I Corinthians 9:2).

“We come to the heart of Paul’s point. Undeserved, unmerited grace which springs from the free, sovereign love of God alone and becomes operative in human life not only determines Paul’s life and apostolic vocation but also characterizes all Christian existence, not least the promise of resurrection and the reality of the activity of Christ as Lord.”

(Thiselton, 1211)

- For us as for Paul, the truth of the Gospel is matter-of-fact. “I am what I am,” “this is what we preach,” “this is what you believe.” There is no room here for additions or subtractions. The Gospel is a coherent truth that holds together. When believed, it is grace with effect. People are changed. The world is changed. God is glorified.

*“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”*

*(1 Corinthians 15:12-19)*

- Here we find the problem: “Some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead.” Consider how this undermines the power of the Gospel!
  - If the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised.
  - If Christ was not raised, either God is not sovereign over death or God doesn’t care about the body.
    - If God is not sovereign over death, He is not Almighty God.
    - If God doesn’t care about the body, neither should we.
- If we have no hope for a resurrection, then the Gospel only has power to bring us hope in this life. If hope in this life is all we receive from faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then this is a pathetic faith. We suffer more than the world, deny ourselves, and submit to one another all for hope. And if there is no resurrection, what are we hoping *for*?

“If the Christian faith is some mere panacea in this life, then given the cost of being a Christian in the pluralistic world of Corinth, Christians were the most pathetic people on earth. Paul has brought this false view to its logical conclusion. They should abandon their profession if there is no resurrection of the body.”

(Winter, 1184)

- It’s interesting to consider how Paul has been prepared for this argument. Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6, Philippians 3:5). The Pharisees were the sect of Jews that believed in the resurrection, while the Sadducees denied it (Matthew 22:23). Paul was aware of this dispute over the resurrection and even used it to his advantage while on trial in Acts 23:1-11.

*“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”*

*(1 Corinthians 15:20-22)*

- Thanks be to God that He does have power to raise the dead (Matthew 22:29-32)! Christ has been raised, and so will we!
- Christ is called “the firstfruits” because He is the first to receive a resurrected body.

*“But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom of God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now, when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”*

*(1 Corinthians 15:23-28)*



- Some brief comments on Christ’s second coming:
  - Christ is the first to receive a resurrected body. Here, we learn that “when he comes, those who belong to him” will receive *their* resurrected bodies.
    - We believe in *one* bodily resurrection when Christ returns. Those who have “fallen asleep” are with God now (I Thessalonians 4:14-15), but will receive their resurrected bodies when Christ returns.
    - There is no room for the Catholic doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. *Only Christ* has received a resurrected body.
  - Christ has the kingdom of God the Father, and “must reign,” even while death is still a present enemy. This passage is strong support for an amillennial eschatology (Jesus is reigning in Heaven now, we are not waiting for a future reign).
- That the Son will be made subject to the Father is not meant to communicate some hierarchical distinction in the Trinity. Remember, this section is about the importance of Christ’s *physical* resurrection. The Son is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Spirit in His divinity, but in His humanity has demonstrated submission to the Father for us (John 14:28, I Corinthians 11:3, Philippians 2:5-11).
- Remember that “submission” is not a degrading word. Christ is not less than the Father because He willingly submits His humanity. In the same way, a wife is not less than a husband when she willingly submits to his authority.

*“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?”*  
(I Corinthians 15:29)

- This is a strange idea. Whether or not this is something Paul condones is debated, though it seems unlikely that Paul would prescribe the practice of being baptized for the dead and comment on it nowhere in Scripture.

“Verse 29, *baptized for the dead*, has been called the most difficult and obscure verse in the Bible. Certainly it holds the record in this epistle. Thiselton counts no fewer than forty different explanations; Ralph Martin suggests two hundred is closer to the truth. I am tempted to skip it altogether! ...What is important to Paul’s argument is that some Christians at Corinth were practicing baptism in such a way (whether approved by Paul or not) as to express belief and hope in

the final resurrection. Otherwise what they were doing would not make sense.

That much we can with confidence affirm.”

(Johnson, 295-26)

- Here are some potential explanations:
  - As we see in some Mormon baptisms, people may have been baptized *on behalf of* pagan loved ones hoping it would benefit them in the afterlife. If this was the practice, it certainly reflects the idea of a future, physical hope (bodily resurrection), but would be a *wrong* way of thinking about salvation and the sacrament of baptism.
  - Better theology is active if Paul means something like, “those who are baptized with death in mind.” Perhaps Paul means for them to remember what their future hope is: a physical heaven. Baptism is, after all, a symbol of their dying and rising with Christ. If Christ is raised, so are we who are baptized into that promise and sealed in faith.

*“And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day—I mean that brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.”*

*(1 Corinthians 15:30-34)*

- Here is why good theology of the body matters: “stop sinning.” All Paul has said in this whole letter is *meaningless* if the physical world is meaningless. If our bodies don’t matter to God, let us join the pagans in Corinth and eat and drink, for the body is going to pass away in death. But our bodies *do* matter, and so the call to “stop sinning” effects the way we live and move and have our being *here and now*.

*“But someone may ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men*

*have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 15:35-43)*

- Maybe Paul’s familiarity with the Sadducees trick questions relating to the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33) allows him to see the true motives of the questions here.
- There is a powerful metaphor here with seeds. Our bodies on earth are like seeds. We are alive, but we need water to produce any life—and seeds must first go into the ground. But when planted and watered, seeds produce all kinds of plants of various types, colors, and sizes.
- So it is with our bodies. We are alive, but we need the water of baptism in the Triune God to be able to produce life—and we know we are first going into the ground before we receive our resurrected bodies. As it is with the plants, so it is with our bodies. We will be raised up a new, more beautiful form.
- Our resurrected bodies are *unlike* our earthly bodies in four ways:
  - Earthly bodies are perishable, and will experience death. Heavenly bodies are imperishable, and will live for eternity.
  - Earthly bodies are dishonorable; that is, tainted by the sin we inherit. Heavenly bodies are glorified, without sin or blemish of defect.
  - Earthly bodies are weak, experiencing all kinds of sickness and pain. Heavenly bodies are powerful, without sickness or sorrow or pain.
  - Earthly bodies are natural, and relate to God primarily through veiled earthly elements. Heavenly bodies are spiritual, and will be reunited with God for eternity.

*“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from*

*heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”*  
(1 Corinthians 15:44-50)

- We see the natural body, like Adam, contrasted with the spiritual body, like Christ. In a very true sense, our resurrected bodies are like Christ’s resurrected body. We take great comfort in the stories the Gospels recount of Christ, with His resurrected body, eating and traveling and communing with friends. These joys will also be ours in Heaven!
- The Kingdom of God is only for those who have been born again. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” We must be made new in the Spirit if we are to be saved.

*“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”*  
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

- This echoes much of what Paul has already mentioned in regards to eschatology.
  - Resurrected bodies are given *at His return*, not earlier.
  - “We will not all sleep” means Paul expects Christians to be on earth when Christ returns. For one, it’s difficult to write in the unbiblical idea of a rapture in this timeline. Also, this is consistent with the teaching of the Apostles that they expected Christ to return at any moment. They were not waiting for a rebuilt temple or a special dispensation to manifest in all kinds of signs. They simply watched and waited for Christ’s imminent return. So should we.

*“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory,’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory?’*

*Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 15:53-58)*

- Thanks be to God for the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Though sin and death had reigned in our mortal bodies, Christ has swallowed them up in victory! Through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension to Heaven we have sure hope of forgiveness, life, and heavenly blessings!
- This truth impacts the way we live. Our bodies and this physical world matter to God. When we “give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord” we know that this “labor in the Lord is not in vain.”



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## CLOSING COMMENTS

### *1 Corinthians 16*

- Following the normal pattern in New Testament letters, Paul closes with some future travel plans, a few encouragements, and finally a blessing.
- He begins with a fifth and final “Now about...”, addressing the last of the questions from the Corinthians.

*“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.”*

*(1 Corinthians 16:1-4)*

- This collection is not for Paul. He has already said that he does not take a collection for his preaching in Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:15). This money was to be sent to needy Christians in Jerusalem.

*“Normally, the Jews of the Dispersion sent gifts to fellow Jews in Jerusalem, but the fact that the Gentile churches collected money for Jewish Christians showed the nature of the gospel which could break down the decisive racial barrier.”*

*(Winter, 1185)*

- In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul praises the Corinthians for their generosity and eagerness to give. In that instance, Titus and two others are selected to carry the offering.

*“After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so*

*that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.”*  
*(1 Corinthians 16:5-9)*

- Paul stays in Ephesus for three years, longer than any other stop in his missionary career. He is deeply connected with Timothy, who will become the bishop of the church in Ephesus. He is so deeply connected with the elders there that they weep when he leaves (Acts 20:36-38).
- Interestingly, one of the ways Paul notices an open door for effective ministry is that many oppose him. Jonathan Edwards makes the same argument, stating that one way to identify a revival is opposition.
- When his work in Ephesus is finished, Paul plans to travel to Corinth and stay for an extended period of time. He will travel by land north through Macedonia and then down to Corinth before accompanying them with the funds for Jerusalem by boat.



*(map adapted from The Carta Bible Atlas, 252)*



- At some point, Paul’s plans changed so that he intended to visit them twice. He will visit them *first*, sailing across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus. Then, after ministering in Macedonia, will visit them *again* before sailing for Jerusalem.

“Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.”  
(II Corinthians 1:15-16)

- These plans change after a visit from Timothy that apparently unearths some more difficult challenges arising in the Corinthian church.

*“If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.”*  
(I Corinthians 16:10-12)

- This visit from Timothy does happen, but they do not “send him on his way in peace.” This is why Paul changes his plans and heads straight for Corinth to address these issues in person.
- Unfortunately, this first visit does not go well. Paul heads *back* to Ephesus where he a ‘severe’ letter that is lost. Reference to this letter is found in II Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12.

“Once back in Ephesus, Paul wrote his so-called ‘severe’ letter to the Corinthians. This letter is now lost. From references to it made by Paul in subsequent correspondence, it appears that it called upon the Corinthian church to take action against the one who had attacked him during the ‘painful’ visit, and so to demonstrate their innocence in the matter and their affection for him.”  
(Kruse, 1188)

- After this, Paul would make the return trip to Corinth as initially planned—traveling north through Macedonia and down to Corinth. While in Macedonia, he writes letters that will become II Corinthians. According to Acts 20:2-3, he spends three months in Corinth. He writes his letter to the Romans during these three months before making his planned trip to Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-16).

*“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors in it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings, Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.”*

*(I Corinthians 16:13-20)*

- Since they are without Paul and Apollos for a time, Paul encourages them to stand firm in the faith and to be strong in the face of the challenges in the culture and in the church. God has raised up leaders in Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus who can lead well.
- It seems as though, like any church, the Corinthians continued to go through seasons of strength and weakness. At different points there was reconciliation, then another period would bring strife.
- By the time Paul leaves them, they have reconciled. But a letter from Clement in 95 AD suggests division has returned to this church. Clement’s letter includes an appeal for unity, a willingness to submit, an order for gathered worship, and belief in the resurrection.

*“But when good repute and rising numbers were granted you in full measure, the saying of Scripture came to pass: my beloved did eat and drink, he grew and waxed fat and kicked. Envy and jealousy sprang up, strife and dissension, aggression and rioting, scuffles and kidnappings.”*

*(Clement, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 24)*

“Think, my dear friends, how the Lord offers us proof after proof that there is going to be a resurrection, of which He has made Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead. My friends, look how regularly there are processes of resurrection going on at this very moment... take the fruits of the earth; how, and in what way, does a crop come into being? When the sower goes out and drops each seed into the ground, it falls to the earth shriveled and bare, and decays; but presently the power of the Lord’s providence raises it from decay, and from that single grain a host of others spring up and yield their fruit.”

(Clement, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 33)

“It follows, then, that there ought to be strict order and method in our performance of such acts as the Master has prescribed for certain times and seasons. Now, it was His command that the offering of gifts and the conduct of public services should not be haphazard or irregular, but should take place at fixed times and hours. Moreover, in the exercise of His supreme will He has Himself declared in what place and by what persons He desires this to be done, if it is all to be devoutly performed in accordance with His wishes and acceptably to his will.”

(Clement, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 39)

- Our sinful and selfish tendency to break down what God has ordered means the kind of unity called for in I Corinthians is a life-long labor. The church today can be encouraged that, despite their constant struggles, the Corinthians were able to truly reconcile, repent, and unite for the glory of God—if only for a time.
- I Corinthians is packed with practical application for the individual and for the gathered body. But essential to these practices is love—the kind of love that promotes unity. How can delicate things like discipline or submission be done in good order if there is not love between the brothers and sisters? How can we encourage the participation of all the members of the body—the presentable and unpresentable in good order—if we don’t have genuine love for one another? Paul has demonstrated through humble service, heartfelt prayer, earnest preaching, and routine visits that he has this kind of love for the Corinthian church.

- Thanks be to God that this labor of love is not in vain! Christ's resurrection is the sure hope of our own bodily resurrection. Our bodies matter, and how we live and love today matters.

*"I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."  
(1 Corinthians 16:21-24)*





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