

1 Corinthians - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

Purchase and Redemption: The Difference Between Bought and Redeemed, Various Scriptures That Give the Results of Purchase & Redemption

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I would now like to look at some further Scriptures to do with purchase and redemption. These passages do not necessarily use the actual words “bought” or “redeemed,” but they do speak of the results or effects of such.

Let’s turn to John 17:2: “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.” Here we see the effect of both purchase and redemption brought together in one verse. Christ has “power over all flesh”—the title and right over all men, because of His purchase. Then it goes on to say that He gives eternal life to those that God has given Him—that is, the elect among mankind. This is the effect of redemption. Those that He has redeemed are given eternal life and all the special blessings that are associated with the salvation of our souls.

Now in Hebrews 2:9-10: “... so that by the grace of God He should taste death for every thing. For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” As mentioned earlier, we see here that the work of Christ is so broad that it takes in not only all mankind, but also all things. He tasted death for “every thing.” It is the effect of His purchase. It doesn’t mean that everybody will be saved, but that Christ has paid the price so that He could have title and right to it all. It is universal. Then the passage goes on to speak of Christ calling “many sons unto glory” out of the mass of mankind. These are the redeemed. Notice, it is “many,” not all men. They are a special class—believers.

Another passage that has the truth of purchase and redemption is 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.” Christ dying “for all” is His universal purchase; “they which live” are the redeemed among men who have been set free. It is a pity indeed that there are believers who want to use their lives to live “unto themselves,” even though they have been set free to live for Christ.

Let’s look at another Scripture. First Corinthians 7:22-23, “For the bondman that is called in the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; in like manner also the freeman being called is Christ’s bondman. Ye have been bought with a price; do not be bondmen of men” (J. N. Darby Trans.). The subject is completely different here, but the principle is applicable. He is speaking of persons being saved when they are slaves, and others being saved as freemen. He says that in whatever station in life wherein we have been called by the gospel, we are to abide therein. But if a slave could be free, he was to “use it rather” (vs. 21), because being free he could serve the Lord in a broader sphere.

In these verses, the apostle speaks of a “bondman” and a “freedman.” W. Kelly makes mention that these two things are the practical result of purchase and redemption being realized in the soul of the believer. The recognition of Christ’s work in redemption makes the believer “the Lord’s freedman,” but the recognition of Christ’s purchase (bought)—the cost He paid on the cross being brought home to the heart—makes the believer “Christ’s bondman.” When the believer realizes, in some measure, what Christ paid to purchase and set him free, the power of such love and grace causes him to willingly yield his life to Him as His “bondman.” That’s why the apostle adds, “Ye are bought with a price” (vs. 23). The power of Christ’s love constrains us to yield ourselves to Him as His bondmen. The great effect of such love is that we realize that we are no longer our own; and that our lives, henceforth must be used for His glory (1 Cor. 6:20).

This reminds me of a tract I once read, about a man who went to a slave market to buy slaves to set them free. He saw one particular woman that caught his attention, and he made his bid for her, and bought her. She was angry at the whole idea and would hardly look at the man. But when he explained to her that he had bought her, not to use her as a slave, but to set her free, she couldn’t believe her ears. She burst out in praise and thanksgiving to the man, and said, “Oh thank ya, thank ya! How can I repay ya? I’ll do whatever I can for ya because of what you’ve done for me! I’ll serve ya forever!” I don’t know if the man accepted her offer, but she was so taken by his act of kindness that she willingly offered her services to him—but it was on a totally different basis than her previous servitude. She was so grateful that she willingly put herself into his servitude! Similarly, Christians who, in some measure, realize what Christ paid for them, willingly yield themselves to Him. The power of His great purchase causes them to yield their lives to Him and His service. “Ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20).

bondmen

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 4) Failure to Understand Christian Liberty in Regard to Morality

(Chap. 6:12—7:40)

Since some at Corinth in their unconverted days had lived according to the corrupt and wicked lifestyle mentioned in verses 9-10, they were in danger of lapsing into their old habits and sins. This leads the Apostle to engage in a long dissertation on the subject of Christian liberty in

relation to holiness and testimony. This will be his theme from chapter 6:12 to chapter 11:1. Several things needed to be addressed in this large topic. He takes them up under two headings—morality (chap. 6:12–7:40), and idolatry (chap. 8:1–11:1).

Paul first addresses the subject of morality in relation to our bodies (chap. 6:13–20); then in relation to our marriage partner (chap. 7) before passing on to deal with idolatry in chapters 8–10. He uses his own life as an example of how Christians are to behave in connection with liberty, except in marriage.

The saints at Corinth had totally misunderstood the whole subject of Christian liberty. They thought that it meant that they could indulge in things, be it moral or spiritual, for which Christ suffered and died to bring them out of. Many were using their so-called Christian liberty to live as they pleased. This had an effect on the others in the assembly, so that the assembly as a whole was in a deplorably low state. The Apostle, therefore, takes up the subject with them in the light of the Lordship of Christ. Paul's teaching on Christian liberty is much needed today, for the Church at large is in a similar state as the Corinthians. Christian liberty is equally misunderstood and misused in our day.

Simply put, Christian liberty is not liberty for the flesh. Thus, liberty is not licence. True Christian liberty is liberty for the Spirit who dwells in every believer to act—leading him to live not for self, but for Christ.

Two Governing Principles

Vs. 12—The underlying motive in the actions of the natural man is self-gratification. Everything he does with his body is done to that end, though the motive may be hidden at times. For the Christian, this ought not to be so. The Apostle proceeds to give the Corinthians two great principles that are to govern the actions of every Christian.

He says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [profitable]." This is the first thing that should govern our Christian liberty. Having been saved and brought under the Lordship of Christ, our liberty must be regulated by whether the thing which we allow is spiritually profitable or not. (When the Apostle speaks of "all things" being lawful, he is referring to all things that are morally right. Sin, of course, is not lawful for a Christian at any time.) The point he is making here is that even though certain things may be morally right (lawful), they may not be profitable for a Christian, as far as his spiritual health and testimony are concerned.

Then, secondly, he says, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." This is another great principle that should regulate our liberty. If the thing that we allow has power over us, in the sense that it is captivating and enslaving, then it's something that we shouldn't be doing. We should not allow anything in our lives that will dominate and control us apart from the Lordship of Christ. These two underlying principles are to supervene (interpret) the course of all our actions as Christians.

This long section on the use and misuse of Christian liberty begins and ends with the Apostle citing these same two underlying principles (chap. 6:12; 10:23). They act as bookends to his treatise on the subject.

Christian Liberty in Relation to Our Own Bodies

(Chap. 6:13–20)

Vs. 13—In taking up this subject of liberty in relation to our bodies, Paul focuses on the two greatest appetites of the body—food and sex. These things are not wrong in their place, but if they are indulged in outside and beyond God-given limitations, it is sin. He shows that there is a danger of a person using those right things in a wrong way, and consequently, coming under the power of them.

He speaks first of food. It's possible to come under the power of "meats" (food) in self-indulgence and become a glutton. Then he goes on to speak of fornication (illicit sex), giving four reasons why the Christian cannot be engaged in such a thing.

Four Reasons Why We Don't Give Our Bodies Over to the Gratification of the Flesh

1) Our bodies are destined for honour and glory when we reign with Christ in His kingdom. "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power" for that purpose (vs. 14). Having such a high and holy purpose for our bodies, we cannot rightly "make them members of a harlot" (vs. 15). By being "joined to the Lord" by "one Spirit," we are members of His body; we simply cannot use them for such an unholy purpose. It is completely opposed to the very thing that we have been brought into as members of His body (vss. 16–17).

2) The person who engages in immorality sins "against his own body" (vs. 18). He opens a "wound" that never properly heals (Prov. 6:27–28, 33), and as a result, he becomes susceptible to falling back into that sin thereafter. It also brings the governmental judgment of God into our lives (2 Sam. 12:10–12).

3) Our bodies are "the temple of the Holy Spirit," and we cannot link the Spirit—who is a divine Guest dwelling in us—with sin (vs. 19). The Spirit will be grieved, and He will not have liberty to work in our lives for blessing (Eph. 4:30).

4) We have been "bought with a price," and our bodies no longer belong to us (vs. 20). They belong to the Lord and are for Him to use as He pleases. Therefore, we are not at liberty to do what we want with our bodies; they have been purchased for another purpose—to glorify God. The great motivation that brings the Christian to recognize this, and surrender his body for the use of glorifying Christ, is the "price" that He paid—His atoning sufferings. How could a truehearted Christian carry on with sins in his life that cost the Lord the agonies of Calvary? How could we take pleasure in something that cost Him suffering? It was love that led Him to give Himself for us (Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14). The normal response from us, therefore, should be willingness to yield ourselves (our bodies) to Him for the furthering of His glory, and thus, live a holy life for Him. Throughout this passage Paul has shown that the Christian's body is not to be used for GRATIFICATION but for the GLORIFICATION of God.

Christian Liberty in Relation to Marriage

The subjects touched on from chapters 7-11 are the Apostle's response to questions the Corinthians had written to him about their concerns. In chapter 7, he continues the subject of liberty, speaking of it in a slightly broader sphere—marriage.

The Lawfulness of Marriage & Its Duties

Vss. 1-9—The Apostle speaks, first of all, of the lawfulness of marriage and its duties. He speaks of God's legitimate way to avoid the temptation of fornication—being married, whereby the natural appetites of the body can be fulfilled lawfully. He says, "Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (vs. 2). Note, it is written in the singular, because polygamy is not God's ideal. He designed marriage in the beginning to be for one man and one woman (Mark 10:6-8). Polygamists can be in fellowship at the Lord's table when they are converted, but they were not to be in a place of handling the administrative affairs of the assembly (1 Tim. 3:2). This statement of the Apostle debunks the Catholic idea of celibacy (1 Tim. 4:3). Paul insists that "every" man and woman in Christianity has the liberty to be married—even those who minister the Word (1 Cor. 9:5).

In verses 3-5, he goes on to spell out some of the responsibilities in marriage. Spouses are not to sexually "defraud [deprive]" one another of their bodies, because there is a real danger of Satan tempting them in their incontinency (lack of self-control) in immorality outside the marriage. The one exception is for a special exercise of prayer, and that only for a specified time.

In verses 6-9, Paul is careful to show that he is not commanding the saints to marry in the foregoing verses, but rather counselling them. They have that liberty, but some may, as Paul, have a "gift of God" to forgo marriage to serve the Lord without distraction. However, if one cannot "contain" ["control"] himself, he should marry, for it is better to marry than to "burn" with lust.

Troubled Marriages

In verses 10-24, Paul gives his comments for troubled marriages. He considers two scenarios. The first is a Christian marriage where both husband and wife are saved (vss. 10-11). If the wife should depart for some reason, she is to remain separated from him and not to remarry. Similarly, the husband is not to divorce his wife if she departs. The reason for this is that there may be an opportunity at a later time to be "reconciled." If one or both went ahead and re-married, it would make this impossible. This was an apostolic "command" from the Lord.

In the second scenario Paul was not giving an apostolic command from the Lord, but his apostolic advice. It has to do with a marriage of unbelievers, where one partner gets saved. Thus, there results a mixed marriage—one partner is saved and the other is not (vss. 12-24). He is not referring to a Christian who has disobeyed Scripture and has gone and married an unbeliever. It is rather, a situation that was prevalent in places where the gospel was new—where the grace of God penetrates a home where both husband and wife are lost, and one gets saved. There is mercy in such cases, as the Apostle goes on to explain.

He shows that the unbelieving partner is in a place of outward favor in Christianity. "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the (believing) wife" (vs. 14). In Old Testament times, if a Jew married a heathen, he (or she) profaned himself (Ezra 9:1-5; Neh. 13:23-28). In Christianity, it is the other way around; if the grace of God has worked in a home and one gets saved, the unbelieving partner is sanctified by his or her connection with their believing partner. Even though he is sanctified, he is still an unbeliever! This may sound strange, but it is an "external" or "relative" sanctification only.

In such mixed marriages, if there is wilful desertion on the part of the unbeliever, the believer is free to remarry. Note: the Apostle gives no liberty for the believing partner to depart and remarry (vss. 15-16). Hence, Scripture allows for re-marriage under three conditions:

Death (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39).

Desertion (1 Cor. 7:15).

Infidelity (Matt. 19:9).

Since the tendency of the human heart is to want change, in verses 17-24, the Apostle passes on to speak of the call of God coming to persons in various stations of life. The general principle is to remain in the calling wherein the person is called. However, if a person could free himself from menial servitude, he was to "use" (not abuse) that freedom to serve the Lord (vs. 21).

Apostolic Advice for the Unmarried

In verses 25-40, Paul gives his "opinion" to the unmarried, whether male or female. (The word "virgin" is used for either.) His general advice is that if one truly has the service of the Lord before him and has received a "gift" from God to live free of lust in his unmarried state, he should remain single. He gives three reasons for remaining single:

Firstly, due to the hostile condition of the world toward the Christian faith, there was the very real possibility of martyrdom. There was "the present distress" of Roman persecution. With extenuating circumstances of having a wife and family, one's responsibilities to them were greater. There is the worry for their safety, etc. and the very real possibility of widowhood and orphaned children. Hence, Paul judges that if a person could receive it, it would be good for a Christian to remain single (vss. 25-26).

Secondly, there is "trouble in the flesh" in marriage (vss. 27-28). It's not that marriage isn't rewarding, but difficulties come with it. Problems on account of having the fallen human nature (the flesh) are multiplied in marriage. It is hard enough for one person, who has the indwelling sin-nature, to keep the flesh in the place of death, let alone living with another person who has the flesh too. When two people become one, there are two wills, and two personalities with distinct likes and dislikes, etc. Living together requires grace. By remaining single, a person can be "spared" from such difficulties.

Thirdly, there are preoccupations in marriage (vss. 29-35). The Christian is to live in view of the fact that “the time is short,” for we expect the Lord to come at any moment. This world will soon pass away. Therefore, everything is to be prioritized toward devotion to the will of God. However, in marriage there are responsibilities in maintaining a happy relationship and family life. The joys and sorrows, and the possessions of life that go with it, have a way of pressing into our time. The married person is forced to use the temporal things of this world (but “as not abusing” them) in a way in which to “please his wife,” whereas a single person does not need to involve himself in such things, and therefore, will be freer from earthly ties to serve the Lord. He gives an example in verses 32-34. The single person has more time to “attend upon the Lord without distraction.”

Vss. 36-38—However, if one has difficulty controlling his sexual desires that he (or she) should give their virginity in marriage, for it is better to “marry than to burn” with lust (vs. 9). A person shouldn’t feel guilty in doing so—he has done “well.” But the Christian, who has “power over his own will,” having a “gift” from God for it, does even “better” by remaining single.

Vss. 39-40—As far as re-marriage is concerned, the Apostle gives one word of advice. The divorced or widowed are at liberty to marry whom they think best, but they should marry “in the Lord.” This is something higher in principle than marrying “in Christ.” “In Christ,” as we have noted earlier in the epistle, is the position of every Christian before God in the acceptance of Christ. It does not take into consideration the believer’s state. Therefore, to marry “in Christ” would be to marry another Christian, without considering their personal state or interest in the things of the Lord. However, Paul does not tell them to marry “in Christ,” but rather to marry “in the Lord.” This is a higher thing in which both persons in the marriage recognize the Lordship of Christ practically in their lives. Hence, a Christian marriage should be a union where both persons in the relationship own the Lordship of Christ.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 3) Failure to Resolve Personal Disputes

(Chap. 6:1-11)

Paul turns to address a third disorder among the saints at Corinth—lawsuits among fellow Christians. The Corinthians were taking one another to court to solve their personal disputes, and the Apostle rebukes them for it.

Three Reasons Why Christians Should Not Take One Another to Court

He proceeds to give three reasons why they shouldn’t be taking their matters before “the unjust” magistrates in the world’s legal system (vs. 1).

1) Vss. 2-5—The Christian does not need to take his brother to court because, through having the Spirit and the mind of Christ, he is able to judge more correctly than the unregenerate men of the world (1 Cor. 2:10-16). The believer’s competence to judge is such that God is going to have the saints “judge the world” in the Millennium! (Dan. 7:22; Rev. 20:4) This will not be in regard to eternal judgment for sins, but judgment in the administrative affairs of “the world to come”—the Millennium (Mark 10:30; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5).

The Apostle’s reasoning is unarguable: “If the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” Not only will Christians judge in the affairs of the world to come, they will also “judge (fallen) angels” after the Millennium has run its course. (The elect angels do not need to be judged.) Since this is so, why would they ever need to take their problems before the “unjust” judges of this world?

In verses 4-5, the Apostle chides them for such folly. He tells them to “set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church,” and they would be competent to settle their issues. He asks, “Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?”

2) Vs. 6—The Christian should not take his brother to court because it renders a bad testimony before the world. He says, “Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.” Christians are to manifest a testimony of love and unity before the world. When the world sees Christians not getting along with each other, it gives them an occasion to blaspheme the Lord (Compare Rom. 2:24; Phil. 2:14-16). Since a Christian bears the name of the Lord, he has to be very careful what he does. It is, therefore, unwise to put our “dirty laundry” out before the world (2 Sam. 1:19-20). It should be settled within the Christian community.

3) Vss. 7-8—The Christian does not stand up for his rights when he believes that he has been defrauded, because it is out of keeping with Christian character. Paul asks, “Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” It would be better to suffer loss than to give the world an occasion to blaspheme the name of the Lord; it would be the Christian thing to do. The spirit of Christian grace is to suffer wrongs, committing it to the Lord who is over all things, and He will set them right in His time (1 Peter 2:20-23; Heb. 10:34; 2 Sam. 19:24-30).

Warning to the Mixed Multitude

Vss. 9-11—With the horrendous practises reported to be among the Corinthians, Paul had reason to believe that there were some among them who were mere professors and not true believers at all. Hence, throughout the epistle he addresses the Corinthians as a mixed multitude (1 Cor. 1:2—“both theirs and ours”). The presence of mere professors among them perhaps is what produced a number of their problems. These people would naturally act on selfish and worldly principles, and thus bring impurity into the assembly. Knowing this, the Apostle gives a solemn warning here.

He reminds them that there is judgment coming for all who are characteristically “unrighteous.” A believer may act unrighteously in a certain circumstance, but one who lives that way habitually is not saved and will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” Being outwardly on Christian ground through profession is not what secures our eternal security. One needs to be “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified.” Some of the Corinthians had been marked by the sins the Apostle lists, but were now saved, and needed to be careful not to lapse back into those former

sins. He reminds them of what they are by the grace of God, and then in the next section (Chaps. 6:12–10:13) he exhorts them to live in accordance with their position.

To be “washed” (aorist tense in the Greek) is a once-for-all thing (John 13:10). It is the moral cleansing which results from new birth (quickening). They were washed from their old condition and were “sanctified” (set apart) to a new place before God. When sanctification is mentioned before justification in Scripture, it is always absolute (positional) sanctification. They were also “justified,” which is to be cleared from every charge against us by being put into a new position before God in Christ where no further charge of sin can ever be laid (Rom. 8:1). The Christian is “justified in Christ” (Gal. 2:17 – J. N. Darby Translation). “In Christ” is an expression used by Paul in his epistles to denote the believer’s position of acceptance before God. The new place that Christ is in as risen and seated on high in the glory is our place (Isa. 50:8; Rom. 8:33-34). To be “in Christ” is to be in Christ’s place before God. The very place of acceptance that He stands in before God belongs to the believer!

Thus, the Corinthians, being washed, sanctified, and justified, were brought under the Lordship of Christ—“in the Name of the Lord Jesus”—and were expected to acknowledge His Lordship in their lives practically.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 2) Failure to Judge Moral Evil

(Chap. 5:1-13)

Verse 21, of chapter 4, properly belongs to chapter 5. The Apostle turns to deal with another problem among them. In regard to it, he asks the Corinthians whether they would like him to come to them with a rod of correction or in the spirit of love and meekness. He was referring primarily to a flagrant case of immorality that was unjudged in their midst. If they continued to do nothing about it, Paul would be forced to act with apostolic authority to judge them with “a rod.” However, if they heeded the warning and correction of the Apostle he would come to them in “love” and “the spirit of meekness.” This case among the Corinthians was “universally reported” among the saints, yet the Corinthians had done nothing about it (vs. 1). The nature of this sin was “not so much as named among the Gentiles.” Yet it was found in the Christian circle! Something had to be done.

The Proper Attitude the Assembly Should Take in Exercising Holy Discipline

Vss. 1-2—It may be argued that the Corinthians had heretofore not been given any specific instructions for such a case, and consequently, they didn’t know what to do. If that were the case, the Apostle points out that at least they could have had the moral sensibility to mourn over it. Had they “mourned,” and besought the Lord about it, He would have acted by a stroke of governmental judgment, whereby “he that hath done this deed might be taken away” from among them (vs. 2). Paul was referring to the Lord taking that person home to heaven through death. The Apostle John refers to this same governmental action, saying, “There is a sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). The Lord also spoke of it when He said, “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He [His Father] taketh away” (John 15:2). See also James 5:19-20.

This shows that mourning is the proper attitude that should be taken when the local assembly has to deal with sin in its midst (Josh. 7:6-9; Judg. 20:26). Each individual should lay their hand upon their own heart in self-judgment realizing that they could have done that sin. They must treat the sin as their own. This is called, “Eating the sin offering” (Lev. 6:26; 2 Cor. 2:2-4). We are called to judge such in the consciousness of our own sinfulness—“considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 10:12). Each person in the assembly should ask, “Have I contributed to the person’s fall in some way?” Had the erring one been properly looked after. Had he or she been shepherded? Had they been prayed for? Did we give them a godly example?

But instead of being humbled about such a thing in their midst, the Corinthians were “puffed up!” They were quite insensible about it. Their carnality had manifested itself not only in the presence of divisions among them, but also in their extreme laxity of morals. They were occupied with their gifts and glorying in them when they should have had their faces in the dust.

Three Reasons Why Evil Must Be Judged in the Assembly

The Apostle proceeds to give us three great reasons why evil must be judged in the assembly. The instructions herein given affords the Church with light as to what to do if such sins should come up in its midst.

1) The Maintenance of the Lord’s Glory

Vss. 3-4—The Lord’s name had become associated with the sin in their midst and needed to be vindicated. Hence, the assembly was enjoined to carry out an administrative judgment of excommunicating the person in question. Putting the offender out of fellowship disassociated the Lord’s name from the evil, and thereby His name would be exonerated.

In verse 4, the Apostle gives them the procedure. Even though he was not present, he knew what should be done, and laid it out for the Corinthians. When they were “gathered together” in assembly, they were to act in their administrative capacity, excommunicating the person (vs. 13). This action would have the authority of the Lord—“the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The action must be carried out when they were gathered together in assembly, whereby the Lord would be in their midst, thus giving His authority to the action. It is referred to in Matthew 18:18, 20, where it says, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. ... For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”

2) The Correction and Restoration of the Offender

Vs. 5—There is another reason why the person must be put out of fellowship—“for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” The person in question needed to be corrected and restored. His will needed to be broken down so that

repentance would bring forth its fruit. Being put away from the fellowship of the saints would work to that end. Having the warmth of the Christian circle of fellowship taken from him, and being left in the coldness of the world, is calculated to produce the needed repentance. He would be delivered to Satan's domain or sphere, which is the world.

"The destruction of the flesh" refers to the body. This shows that the most Satan can do is touch the child of God's body. Job is an example. Ultimately it could lead to death, if repentance had not worked in the man's soul. If it got to that, "the spirit" of the man would still be "saved," because Satan cannot touch the Christian's eternally secure standing in Christ.

All assembly discipline should have the correction and restoration of the offender in view. The assembly does not put such a person out of fellowship to get rid of him. The excommunication is for the breaking down of the individual's wilful course, so that he might feel what he has done and repent. Then the assembly has the happy privilege of restoring him to its fellowship. The censure placed on the person can be "loosed" (Matt. 18:18). In the case of this individual at Corinth, that is exactly what happened. Being put in the outside place, his will was broken down, and the necessary repentance was produced, whereupon he was restored to the Lord and to the fellowship of his brethren (2 Cor. 2:6-11).

3) The Purity of the Assembly

Vss. 6-11—The Apostle mentions a third reason why excommunication was necessary. Since holiness becomes the house of God (Psa. 93:5), the assembly is responsible to maintain holiness in its midst. There are two reasons for this: firstly, so that it would be a fit place for the Lord to dwell in the midst; and secondly, so that the leavening character of evil wouldn't permeate the whole assembly and many be affected by the evil and follow such ways.

To teach this important lesson Paul uses the illustration of a lump of dough. Just as leaven in one part of a lump of dough permeates through the whole lump, so evil left unjudged in the assembly spreads. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (vs. 6) This teaches the important lesson that association with evil defiles. This is true whether it is doctrinal evil (2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 John 9-11; Gal. 5:9), moral evil (Josh. 7:11; Judg. 20:13), or ecclesiastical association (1 Cor. 10:15-23; Haggai 2:11-13).

Even though we may not do the sin, if we are in fellowship with a person who does, we are associated with it. The principle of association with evil is illustrated in the case of the sin of Achan. When he sinned, God said, "Israel hath sinned" (Josh. 7:11). Nothing more clearly condemns the false idea that sin in a person concerns only that person and does not involve the others with whom he is in fellowship. Quite to the contrary, God looks at the toleration of evil in an assembly as complicity with the evil.

The responsibility of the Corinthian assembly was to "purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." The Apostle wanted them to bring their collective state up to their standing before God as "unleavened" (vs. 7). They needed to be in practise what they were in position. Cutting off the leaven in the assembly by putting the incestuous man out of fellowship would do this in a collective sense.

Thus, the Apostle would have them to "keep the feast," not with an indifference to sin, but "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (vs. 8). "The feast" is not just the eating of the Lord's Supper but refers to the whole period of the believer's life on earth. Our whole life should be a "feast" of fellowship with God in holy separation from sin. It is not to be kept with "old leaven," which is a reference to pre-conversion sins that might spring up in a believer's life.

In verses 9-10 the Apostle shows that the exercise of holy discipline can only be practised within the Christian circle. To attempt to exercise such discipline toward the man of the world would be impossible. The Christian has no business trying to set the world right. By saying "yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world," he was making allowances for such situations where the Christian might have an obligation to eat a meal with an unsaved fornicator of this world—perhaps with an employer. He explains that to attempt to carry out discipline toward the lost of this world, one would have to "go out of the world" altogether, which is impossible.

He hastens to say that if "any man that is called a brother" were going on in such a sin, we are "not to mix with him" (vs. 11). That is, we are not to keep company with him or show any fellowship toward him—even to the eating of a common meal. Being shunned by the Christian community, the man would be made to feel the seriousness of what he has done, and repentance would begin to work in his soul.

The Apostle also mentions that the need for excommunication was not to be confined to a "fornicator" but would include a "covetous" person, or an "idolater," or a "railer" [abusive], a "drunkard," an "extortioner," etc. It is not a complete list, for a murderer and a blasphemer are not named but would surely be excommunicated, as the others he mentions.

The Responsibility of the Local Assembly

God will do that in His own time. But we are responsible to judge sin in a person who is

the Christian circle of fellowship.

he says,

Note that he does not call the person in question a brother, but rather a

This is because if a person has not judged the course of sin that they are in, it is questionable whether he is a true child of God, because normal Christianity is that every brother and sister lives a holy life for the glory of God. If someone does otherwise, there is a question as to whether he or she is truly a believer. The man in this chapter proved to be a real believer by his repentance, seen later in 2 Corinthians 2:6-11. At this point, he had not shown repentance, and therefore, was called a

"Within" and "Without"

In these verses Paul indicates that there is a “within” and a “without” in connection with the fellowship of the assembly. In the days when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, there were no other fellowships of believers besides those on the ground of the Church. The sad outward sectarian divisions in the Christian testimony had not yet developed. At that time there was “the whole church,” outside of that there were only “simple persons” or “unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:23). Those who were “called a brother” were in the one fellowship of Christians who were gathered unto the Lord’s name (Matt. 18:20). When the assembly at Corinth acted to put away the fornicator, they acted on behalf of the whole Church. He was, therefore, outside the fellowship of the whole Church of God on earth. If anyone was outside the assembly in that day, he was in the world where he would have no Christian fellowship.

Today things are different because of the ruin of the Christian testimony. As a result, there are many man-made fellowships of Christians meeting independently of one another. Today if a person is put out from among the saints gathered to the Lord’s name, while he is universally outside the fellowship of the saints so gathered, he is not necessarily outside of Christian fellowship. He could quite easily go down the road to another group of Christians and feel welcome there. The question is, “Is that person ‘without’ in the sense that Paul spoke of in the days of the early Church?” Today, because of the ruin, we would have to say, “No.” He cannot be put into a place where there is no Christian fellowship, but the person can still be put “without” the fellowship of the saints who meet on the ground of the one body. The “within” and the “without,” whether then or now, has to do with being in or out of the fellowship of the saints gathered to the Lord’s name where He is in the midst according to Matthew 18:20.

Since the breaking of bread is the meeting wherein our fellowship at the Lord’s Table is expressed (1 Cor. 10:16-17), the “within” and the “without” should be outwardly marked so as to distinguish those who are in fellowship and those who are not. Those who are not breaking bread should sit back. This was especially needed in the early days of brethren when the meetings were very large. Without it, it would be difficult knowing who was in fellowship and who wasn’t and could lead to confusion. There is no rule as to this, but all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). A. P. (Lord) Cecil said, “I have no doubt that the within and without of the assemblies should be outwardly marked and kept distinct: otherwise there is confusion.” 18

Paul's Twelve Men: The Scriptural Meaning and Application of Some Technical Terms in Paul's Doctrine, "Carnal" Man and the "Perfect" Man, The

In 1 Corinthians 2:6 the Apostle says, “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” And then, in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, he says, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal.” While these two terms are not found in the same verse, they appear to be another contrast where Paul compares the state and maturity of Christians.

THE CARNAL MAN

“Carnal” means “fleshly.” It indicates a state of being governed by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. A “carnal” man could even be a Christian who has the Spirit of God, but doesn’t live according to the Spirit. A carnal Christian will be stunted in his spiritual growth. This was the problem with many of the Corinthians.

There are three times when the Apostle Paul speaks of a babe in an undesirable way. Many of the Jewish believers were still in that state because they had not let go of the forms and rituals of earthly religion—Judaism (Heb. 5:11-14). Likewise, a believer who clings to an outward, formal, religious order in Christendom will also be hindered in his growth. Then in Ephesians 4, Paul speaks of Christians remaining as “babes” through not availing themselves of the gifts given to the Church from Christ the Head in heaven (Eph. 4:14 – J. N. Darby Trans.). The purpose of these gifts is to help the saints to understand the truth and to walk according to it. Then there were the Corinthians who were “babes” for another reason—carnality in following men (1 Cor. 3:1-2). None of these, of course, are commendable. The only time spiritual babyhood is acceptable is when a person is young in the faith, being newly saved (1 John 2:18-27).

THE PERFECT MAN

“Perfect,” carries the thought of “maturity” or “full growth.” A “perfect” man isn’t one who never makes a mistake, but a believer who has one object in His life—Christ (Phil. 3:13-15). When the Lord comes, we will be made “perfect” in every sense of the Word. We will no longer have the flesh, and hence, will no longer fail in any way (Phil. 3:12; Heb. 11:40; 12:23). But until that time, God’s desire is that we would spiritually “come in [into] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children [babes]” (Eph. 4:13-14).

Paul’s habit was to speak the wisdom of God “among them that are perfect” (1 Cor. 2:6). Remarking on this verse, Hamilton Smith said, “The term [“perfect”] does not simply designate a believer in contrast to a sinner. It is used rather to describe a full-grown, mature believer in contrast to those whom the Apostle speaks of as babes.” It means that Paul sought to reach those in his audience who were going on spiritually. If they received his doctrine and were built up by it, they in turn could give it to the others when they were able to receive it. Paul instructed Timothy to do the same. He was to give the truth to “faithful men” who would teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). While the majority of the Corinthians were “babes” because of their carnality, there were some who were “perfect” in this sense. 1 Corinthians 16:15-18 indicates this. It was to such that Paul sought to communicate the “meat” of the truth, but to the “babes” he fed them with “milk” only.

A Scriptural Profile of the Perfect (Full-grown) Man

He has one interest in life—Christ (Phil. 3:13-15).

He takes meat, and not milk only (Heb. 5:11-12).

He walks in separation from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

He judges himself (2 Cor. 7:1).

He has left Judaism and all its Judaistic principles (Heb. 6:1-4).

He is governed by simple obedience (1 John 2:5).

He has a deeper, wider love for others (1 John 4:11-12).

He is less anxious in trial (James 1:2-4).

He controls his tongue (James 3:2).

He is generous with his possessions (Matt. 19:21).

He keeps in step with his brethren (John 17:21-23).

His service is according to the mind of God (Heb. 13:21).

Some Practical Considerations

We may wonder why it is that some Christians after getting saved, make rapid progress in divine things, while others seem to progress more slowly with many ups and downs. If we had it marked on a chart, the line would be almost vertical for some, while for others it would waiver up and down. Some imagine that it's because we all have different levels of intelligence. Others will say that it has to do with whether you are studious or not—often excusing themselves by saying that they are not readers. And then some think that you need to have a gift for it, and not all Christians have that gift. But these are not the reasons why some grow faster than others.

Someone said that spiritual growth is like building a fire. You can set the kindling in such a way that when you light the fire, it really catches hold and burns well. But you can also arrange the kindling in a haphazard way so that the fire doesn't get going very well. It is just the same in the things of God. We need to have certain principles in place in our lives so that the Spirit of God can take the truth of God and apply it to our hearts and consciences to create real growth. Since there is a parallel between natural growth and spiritual growth, we need to have the following things in place in our lives:

Good food—Feeding on Christ in the Word of God (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Fresh air—Breathing the heavenly atmosphere of communion with God the Father and the Son (John 14:23).

Regular exercise—Self-judgment through which every fleshly thing is removed from our lives (1 Tim. 4:7).

An environment free of contamination—Christian fellowship in separation from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-17; Acts 4:23; 2 Tim. 2:22).

Paul's Twelve Men: The Scriptural Meaning and Application of Some Technical Terms in Paul's Doctrine, "Natural Man" and the "Spiritual Man", The

The terms having to do with "natural" and "spiritual" men are found in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth [discerns] all things, yet he himself is judged [discerned] of no man." This couplet contrasts men who do not have the Spirit of God with those who do.

THE NATURAL MAN

The "natural man" is a term used to describe man in his lost condition apart from the new birth. Without the new life and the indwelling Spirit, he does not have an inward faculty to process and understand spiritual concepts and truth. Therefore, he is completely devoid of understanding the divine revelation. Nor can he by his own searching find out God (Job 11:7). In this condition, the "natural man:"

Cannot "see" (John 3:3).

Cannot "enter" (John 3:5).

Cannot "receive" (John 3:27, 32).

Cannot "come" (John 6:44, 65).

Cannot "tell" [understand] (John 8:14).

Cannot "hear" (John 8:43, 47).

Cannot "please God" (Rom. 8:8).

In verse 9 of this chapter, Paul quotes from Isaiah to show that men have three main ways of learning: the “eye”—observation, the “ear”—tradition (listening to things that have been handed down by previous generations), and the “heart”—intuition (by the instincts of the heart). But these three methods in themselves are not enough to apprehend divine subjects and to find the true wisdom of God. Note: the passage that he quotes is in the negative. It says, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man...” Hence, the truth of God is not discovered by the natural senses of man, regardless of how keen they may be in an individual. It requires an action of the Spirit of God.

THE SPIRITUAL MAN

The “spiritual” man is a believer who is born of God and indwelt with the Spirit but who also lives under the control of the Spirit. As a result, the Spirit of God illuminates his soul, and he is capable of understanding God’s revelation in His Word. The Spirit of God gives him the capacity to think on spiritual terms and to know the truth, and thus he is instructed in “the mind of Christ” (vs. 16).

Some Practical Considerations

Knowing that we are totally dependent on the Spirit of God to know the truth should make us thankful for His operations in us. However, while every Christian has the indwelling Spirit, that in itself is not enough to enable him to discern the truth. There are many believers (who have the Holy Spirit) who are thoroughly confused when it comes to the truth. The Christian must be “filled with the Spirit” and be in communion with the Lord in order to get the practical benefit of the Spirit’s presence (Eph. 5:18). And let us remember that today’s filling will not do for tomorrow. We need to be:

“Daily” searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

“Daily” crying out to God in prayer (Psa. 86:3).

“Daily” taking up our cross and following Christ (Luke 9:23).

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 1) Failure to Maintain Unity in the Assembly

(Chaps. 1:10–4:21)

The Characteristics of Division

Vss. 10-16—Paul had heard that there were rifts in the local assembly at Corinth and immediately turns to address this problem. It was necessary to correct this disorder first, for without unity restored in the assembly there would be no power to deal with the other evils that needed to be judged. Making assembly decisions would be nigh impossible if the assembly remained in a divided state.

The Corinthians were walking as carnal men and were immersed in the world around them which was full of schools of opinion under various philosophers. In like manner, they formed different parties in the assembly under the leadership of certain gifted men and arranged themselves around them according to their personal preferences. However, this worldly idea threatened the public testimony of the unity of the assembly in Corinth. It was a basic problem of the world and worldly thinking getting into the assembly.

Vs. 10—Paul begins by beseeching the Corinthians in “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” that such would not be the case among them, and that they would look to correcting the problem immediately. By bringing in the Lord’s name, as he does, he was showing that it was not just his idea for them, but that it was the will of the Lord (chap. 14:37). And by carrying on as they were, they were clearly not living under His Lordship authority.

He tells them that for an assembly to exist in a healthy state, there cannot be “divisions [schisms]” (the same word in the Greek) among them. This refers to an inward rift among brethren, even though they all may be meeting together outwardly as one company. Then, he says that a properly ordered assembly according to the will of God will “be perfectly joined together in the same mind [opinion] and in the same judgment.” In stating this, Paul seeks to reach their conscience, and really puts his finger on how these things develop. Divisions among the Lord’s people begin with something as small as differences of “opinion” and judgment (vs. 10). These differences will lead to “contentions [strifes]” (vs. 11). And, if contentions and strifes are not judged, they will develop into “divisions [schisms]” (vss. 12-13).

Later in the epistle Paul tells the Corinthians that “divisions [schisms],” if not judged, will lead to “heresies [sects]” (chap. 11:18-19). This is even more serious. A sect or a heresy (the same word in the Greek) is an outward split or division among the saints, where a party detaches itself and meets independently. This meant that the problem of division among the saints at Corinth was a serious evil, and that it needed to be corrected immediately.

Vs. 11—This problem among them was not just hearsay; Paul names the source from which he had heard these things. It was from “the house of Chloe.” This emphasizes a principle that should always be acted on in dealing with problems in the assembly—everything must be done “in the mouth or two of three witnesses” (2 Cor. 13:1).

Vss. 12-13—The parties or divisions that had formed among the Corinthians were not actually around “Paul,” “Apollos,” and “Cephas” (Peter), though he uses his and other prominent labourers’ names. In chapter 4:6 he mentions that he purposely “transferred, in their application,” the names of the leaders in their midst to himself and the other servants of the Lord to make his point to the Corinthians. Using spiritual tact and delicacy, he did not want to identify by name those persons whom they were rallying around, lest they might say that Paul was jealous of them. Therefore, he used himself and Apollos, etc., for sake of illustration. Each time he makes reference to those factions and their leaders, he transferd the application to himself and Apollos, etc. (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 3:22; 4:6). Of all the schisms in their midst, “I of Christ,” was

perhaps the worst of all, for it implied that they were the only ones who were of Christ!

Vss. 14-17—Such were the inclinations of the Corinthians that Paul was thankful that when he was among them he let others do the baptizing, lest they would set up his name and form a party around him. He did, however, baptize “Crispus and Gaius,” and “the household of Stephanas,” the first believers in that region (1 Cor. 16:15). Thereafter, he let others do that work so that it didn’t look like he was the founder of some new sect. This is a wise principle and should be acted on today in Christian service. Those who are prominent and gifted should defer certain tasks to others in the work of the Lord so as to take the spotlight off themselves. This will help to defuse any ideas the Lord’s people may have of wanting to rally around any one servant.

The Cause of Division: The Intrusion of Human Wisdom in the Assembly

In chapters 1:17-2:16, Paul traces the cause of such schisms among the Corinthians to its source—the intrusion of worldly wisdom into the assembly. Being converted out of the world, the Corinthians brought a lot of excess baggage with them. The Greeks had their various schools of philosophy to which they would flock, and these dear saints thought that Christianity was the same. But they were wholly mistaken. The sad fact was that such things only led to the formation of parties among them. This being the case, Paul proceeds to expose the futility of man’s wisdom in the things of God.

Vs. 17—“The cross of Christ” is God’s answer to the wisdom of the world. The Apostle points to the cross to show the Corinthians that all worldly wisdom has been judged by God there, and therefore, has no place in the assembly. (We are not referring to knowledge that man has gained in the fields of science, medicine, technology, etc., but the world’s so-called wisdom and philosophies of life—those things that pertain to the essential values of life that are moral and spiritual.)

The cross stands as the supreme proof of the folly of worldly wisdom. Men, in their so-called wisdom, looked on Christ when He came into this world and saw no value in Him, and called for His crucifixion! Paul, therefore, would not give it a place in his preaching and teaching, and exhorted the Corinthians to do the same. Neither should we give it a place in our ministry. The wisdom of this world has no place in the assembly. If the gospel is to be communicated by using man’s methods of wisdom, then the cross of Christ is made of “none effect,” because the very purpose of the cross is to glorify God over the question of sin and to pass judgment on all that is of man in the flesh—including his so-called wisdom. The gospel announces that all such human philosophy and wisdom has been judged at the cross; how then could we implement it into our preaching and service for the Lord?

To emphasize this, the Apostle goes on to show the futility of man’s wisdom:

Firstly, in communicating the gospel to lost souls (chap. 1:18-31).

Secondly, in teaching the saints the truth of God (chap. 2:1-16).

The Futility of Human Wisdom in Helping Men Understand the Gospel

Vss. 18-20—Human wisdom and philosophy, either in communicating the gospel or in receiving it, has only hindered men from seeing the value of the work of Christ on the cross. Paul says, “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.” The wise of this world do not see the glory of the Person who hung on it, nor do they see the love of God that gave His Son to die there. They do not see the holiness of God that demanded such a sacrifice and the utter ruin of man that must be judged. The world’s wisdom is thus exposed as being worthless and a hindrance in divine things.

Some of those who taught in the assembly at Corinth were trying to make the gospel intellectually respectable. Their occupation with the wisdom of the world made them sensitive to those aspects of the Christian message that were offensive to the philosophers and the general public. They didn’t want to abandon the faith; they just wanted to redefine it, so that it would be more palatable to the men of the world. Paul shows that you simply cannot mix the two, for they are total opposites. Man’s principles, motives, and objectives are the opposite of God’s and are only a hindrance to understanding the things of God. The natural mind of man can never learn the truth of God, except by the revelation of the Word of God (Job 11:7; 1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, at the cross, God has destroyed “the wisdom of the wise” in passing judgment on the whole order of man after the flesh. It now can be said, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world?” It all has been set aside (Rom. 8:3).

Vss. 21-25—Since the world by its wisdom has proved that it cannot know God, God has been pleased to bless man on an entirely different principle—faith. Through “the foolishness of preaching” He would “save them that believe.” This exalts “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” It is not that the world thinks that the medium of preaching is foolish, because the world uses that medium too; it is what is preached that is foolishness to them.

Vss. 26-29—The “calling” of the Corinthian saints was an outstanding proof of this very point. They were not of the class of great philosophers and wise men, or wealthy, or famous in society—such people are usually hindered by their intellect and their station in life. Paul mentions three classes of important persons in this world who are usually stumbled by the gospel.

“Wise” – the highly educated (intellect).

“Mighty” – the famous and wealthy (riches).

“Noble” – those of high society, nobility, etc. (birth).

To teach the lesson of the emptiness of human wisdom, God has purposely chosen “the foolish,” “the weak,” “the base,” and the “despised” persons in this world to have and communicate His truth. In this way, no wise man after the flesh, if he gets saved, has a case in which to glory (boast).

Vss. 30-31—The chapter ends with the Apostle speaking of Christ in glory, and the believer's place before God in Him. This is seen in the expression "in Christ Jesus," which refers to Him risen and ascended on high. 1 He is set forth as the source of true "wisdom." Where is true wisdom then? It's in a glorified Man in heaven! We need not to turn to the world's wise men and their principles of philosophy for wisdom; we have it in Christ. Not only does the Christian have "wisdom" in Christ, he has "righteousness," "sanctification," and "redemption." 2 Do we need righteousness? We have it in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Do we need sanctification and redemption? We have it in Christ (Heb. 10:10, 14; Rom. 8:23). Everything we need is in Christ! We have no need to look outside of Him for anything. Therefore, if there is to be any boasting or glorying, it must be in Christ and what we have in Him (vs. 31).

Hence, chapter 1 sets forth Christ on the cross (crucified) as a statement of God's judgment of man in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). It also sets forth Christ in glory as the measure of the believer's position before God and his blessings and resources in Him (Eph. 1:3).

The Futility of Human Wisdom in Helping the Saints Learn the Truth of God

In chapter 2 the Apostle goes on to expose the futility of man's wisdom in teaching the saints the truth. Hence, human wisdom cannot help a person understand the gospel (chap. 1), nor can it help the believer learn the truth of God (chap. 2). Paul points to his own ministry as a demonstration of this. He refused the flesh in himself and his ministry so that there would be no hindrance to the working of the Spirit of God in souls. When He came to Corinth, he made no appeal to the natural man by refusing to use "excellency of speech" or any display of human wisdom. He purposely avoided using such methods to communicate the truth.

Vs. 1—The style of his preaching was "not with excellency of speech."

Vs. 2—The subject of his preaching was "Christ crucified."

Vs. 3—The spirit that characterized his preaching was "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

Vs. 4—The source of power in his preaching was "the Spirit."

Vs. 5—The end in view in his preaching was that their "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Vss. 6-9—In the opening verses of chapter two Paul refers to wisdom many times; in each case it is to utterly discredit it. We might conclude from this that wisdom is something that the Christian should distrust and shun. We might think that the Christian faith is only for a person's feelings and emotions, and has nothing in it for the thinking man. However, Paul is not saying that. He said, "We speak wisdom ... " (vs. 6), which shows that he valued wisdom, but it was a certain kind of wisdom that he upheld and sought to communicate—divine wisdom, which is wisdom that is only found in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30).

Moreover, he sought to minister the true wisdom of God "among them that are perfect"—those who were full-grown or mature believers. 3 This shows that Paul would not minister the truth to please the Greek philosophical mind. Nor would he minister the things of God in a way that would please the carnal Christian. Instead, he sought to reach those who were going on spiritually in his audience, and let them teach the others as they were able for it. Notwithstanding, there are some today who insist that the ministry in the meetings should be on the level of the youngest believer. It seems they want everything to be kept on the level of not much more than the Sunday school. But that was not Paul's way. It is not that he refused to drop "handfuls of purpose" to the young in his ministry (Ruth 2:16; 1 Cor. 3:1-2), but the main thrust of his ministerial labours was to reach the mature believers in his audience ("the perfect"). If they received his doctrine and were built up in it, they in turn could give it to the others. Paul instructed Timothy to do the same. He told him to teach the truth to "faithful men" who would teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). Ministering to those who were "perfect" did not require an intellectual manner of speech, for even the deepest truths in the Bible can be ministered simply so that all who want it will understand.

He said that the wisdom of God is "in a mystery," which is a secret, that can only be known by God revealing it (vs. 7). Man's philosophical searching can never find it (Job. 11:7). The great ones of the world ("the princes") 4 proved this by failing to see the wisdom of God in Christ, and "crucified the Lord of glory" (vs. 8).

Paul quotes Isaiah to prove that man's way of acquiring wisdom and knowledge is wholly inadequate in the things of God (vs. 9). Men have three main ways of learning: the "eye"—observation; the "ear"—tradition (listening to things that have been handed down by previous generations), and the "heart"—intuition (by the instincts of the heart). But note: the passage that he quotes is in the negative. The "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." These three methods, in themselves, cannot find the wisdom of God. Hence, the truth of God is not discovered by the natural senses of man, regardless of how keen they may be in an individual. It is, therefore, futile to use such methods to learn the truth.

How True Wisdom Is Acquired

The question naturally follows, "How then is true wisdom to be acquired?" In the latter half of the chapter Paul shows that true wisdom is all from God who is its source, and that it can only be learned by the power of the Spirit of God.

From verse 7 to the end of the chapter, he traces a chain of things by which God has brought the truth to us. Firstly, it was "ordained" (set up) before the ages of time began—before everything natural was created. Since it has existed before natural things, it is completely outside the scope of natural things. Hence, natural men, though intelligent, do not know it by their natural tuition. The greatest proof of this is that "the princes of this world" crucified Christ (vs. 8).

Vs. 9b—Secondly, the truth of God had to be "prepared" for us. God could not give these precious things to men except on a righteous basis, which was laid by Christ accomplishing redemption. His work in redemption prepared the way for God to bring it to us.

Vss. 10-12—Thirdly, what has been ordained and prepared for redeemed men required the power of the Spirit of God to bring it to them. Hence, it was "revealed" to special vessels (the apostles) "by His Spirit," who were raised up for the purpose of bringing the truth to the

saints. "Us" in verse 10 refers to the apostles. They were given special revelations of the truth for the purpose of delivering it to us, so "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." "The deep things of God" are not prophecy, but the truth of the mystery of Christ and the Church, and all the related truths having to do with Christian position and practise, which heretofore had been "hid" in the heart of God (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26).

Vs. 13—Fourthly, the means by which the apostles would communicate the truth to the saints was through divinely given "words." They are not necessarily the words that the intellectual wise men of the world would use, "but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; communicating spiritual things by spiritual means." The apostles, regardless of how godly and gifted they were, were but men with human limitations. They had no power in themselves to convey the truth to the saints in the absolute fidelity and perfection in which it had been revealed to them. Hence, a further action of the Spirit was needed. The spiritual "means" by which they communicated the truth is divine inspiration. In the early Church, the apostles made the truth known to the saints in oral ministry, but they were also led by inspiration to write it out for us in the New Testament Scriptures. This is called "verbal inspiration," which is God's thoughts given in God-chosen "words." Some have thought that "communicating spiritual things by spiritual means" is referring to our labours in Christian ministry of communicating the truth to others. But this verse is really not speaking of our ministry, but of the apostles' work under inspiration.

Vss. 14-16—Fifthly, there is yet one further thing necessary in order for the truth to be received and understood by the saints. It has to be spiritually "discerned." Having a saved soul with a new life is not enough to receive the truth; the believer needs the indwelling Spirit of God to help him take it in. This is called illumination. The Spirit of God illuminates the soul, causing the believer to understand the truth. However, being "spiritual" is more than just possessing the Spirit, it implies a condition where one is under the control of the Spirit. This shows that a spiritual state of soul in us is imperative for learning the truth. If we walk in the power of the ungrieved Spirit of God, He will give us the spiritual discernment to know the truth (1 John 2:20-21, 27). "The natural man" (the lost soul) cannot receive the things of God because he has no spiritual capacity to do so. "But he that is spiritual discerneth all things."

These five things show that God works from both ends in bringing the truth to the saints. He ordains and prepares the truth, then reveals it to the apostles, inspiring them to write it down in the Holy Scriptures. But then He also works in the saints to produce a state of soul whereby they are illuminated and are enabled to take it in.

Hence, in connection with the giving and the receiving of the truth of God, there are five links:

Ordination (vs. 7)

Preparation (vs. 9)

Revelation (vs. 10)

Inspiration (vs. 13)

Illumination (vss. 14-16)

In summary of the first two chapters, Paul has stated two great things for the correction and blessing of the assembly at Corinth—the cross of Christ and the Spirit of God. The cross shuts man out, and the Spirit brings God in. The grand result is that the saints are instructed in "the mind of Christ" (vs. 16), which means that they have the ability to think on spiritual terms and know the truth of God. But note: this whole process of bringing us the truth is altogether outside the resources of the natural man and his wisdom. This proves conclusively that man's wisdom and philosophy is worthless in the things of God and should not be given a place in the assembly.

If there is any hindrance now to Christians learning the truth, it wholly has to do with their state of soul. If we do not understand a particular part of Scripture, it is because:

We have not read the passage carefully enough.

We have brought pre-conceived ideas to the Word and are attempting to interpret Scripture from those notions.

Our will is at work, and we don't want the truth.

The Consequences of Worldly Wisdom in the Assembly

In chapter 3:1-17, the Apostle continues to expose the dangers of human wisdom. In chapters 1-2 he has shown that worldly wisdom will not produce anything positive in the things of God. Now, in the third chapter he shows that it actually has serious negative effects on the assembly.

Paul proceeds to tell the Corinthians of the sad consequences that result from the working of worldly wisdom among the saints. Far from being profitable, it was destructive to the life of the assembly. He shows that it:

Vss. 1-2 - Dwarfs the saints.

Vss. 3-8 - Divides the assembly.

Vss. 9-17 - Defiles the house of God.

1) Spiritual Growth Is Stunted

Vss. 1-2—Firstly, worldly wisdom, being the opposite of God's wisdom, is counterproductive to spiritual growth in the saints. Human ideas in philosophy not only didn't give the saints the truth of God by which they would grow—it actually stunts growth! The Corinthians were a living

proof of this. They were spiritual dwarfs. Paul wrote this epistle to them about five years after they had become Christians, and at the time of its writing they were still very much “babes in Christ.”⁵ This was to their shame.

The Apostle refers to three states in this part of the epistle. At the end of chapter 2, he spoke of those who were “spiritual” (a believer possessing the Spirit and controlled by Him) and of those who were “natural” (a lost person who does not have the Spirit). Now in chapter 3, he speaks of those who were “carnal.” This refers to a person who is saved, possessing the Spirit, but does not live under the control of the Spirit.

The problem with the majority of the Corinthians was that they were in a carnal (fleshly) state: To prove this, Paul points to the fact that he could not minister “the deep things of God” (“meat”) to them but only the elementary truths of the Christian faith (“milk”). They simply were not in a state to take in anything more.

2) a Spirit of Rivalry Develops

Vss. 3-8—Secondly, another negative result of promoting worldly wisdom is that it fosters rivalry in the assembly. Party-making, of course, does not produce godly unity, but rather, stirs up the flesh with “envying and strife” (vs. 3). The Corinthians had copied the world’s ways of boasting in its founders of certain schools of thought, saying, “I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos.” It led to pride of party—each seeking to defend his favourite teacher. This rivalry polarized the saints and created “divisions” among them and only confirmed their carnal state (vs. 4).

When there are troubled waters (contention and divisions) in a local assembly, it indicates that the assembly is in a low or “carnal” state. If the saints are distracted with in-fighting and problems in their midst, they cannot feed and grow together. It is imperative, therefore, to have “still waters” in the assembly (Psa. 23:2).

The Apostle explains that the gifted teachers in their midst were not to be set in a rivalry against one another. Each had a different place to fill in the body, and each had a different service to discharge. It was the Lord who gave them their distinctive gifts, and therefore, it was impossible to compare them when there was such diversity of service (vs. 5).

Far from setting the labourers in a rivalry, Paul shows that they are to be united in their labours. He speaks of himself and Apollos as an example. One “planted” and the other “watered.” Their work complemented each other. They were not competing with one another as rivals; they worked together toward the same common end. Furthermore, any results that their labours produced were not their doing anyway; it was only a result of God’s working. He says, “God gave the increase.” Therefore, it was completely out of place to exalt the Lord’s servants when it was really all the working of God (vs. 6).

The servants of the Lord should not see themselves as “anything,” whether it’s he that “planteth” or he that “watereth” (vss. 7-8). If we are going to be used of Him in His vineyard, we need to see ourselves as nothing. The Apostle’s attitude reflects this; he said, “Who then is Paul?” This is the right spirit to have. One of the things God does in His training of His servants is to whittle them down to a useful size. If we are too big in our eyes, or in the eyes of the saints, we probably won’t be used of the Lord in any appreciable way. If those who serve in public ministry see themselves to be something important among God’s people, it could draw out pride in those that look to them for ministry, and lead them to boast in those servants, which in turn could lead to the formation of a party. An old brother who was much used of the Lord in his life was asked when the Lord first began to use him. He replied, “When I realized that He didn’t need me!” This is an important thing to understand for all who serve the Lord. He doesn’t need any one of us, even though He is pleased to use us at times. When He does, we should consider it a privilege, and seek to carry that work out humbly.

3) It Brings Worldly Defilement Into the House of God and a Loss of Reward

Vss. 9-17—A third negative consequence in imbibing and propounding worldly wisdom is that it brings defilement into the house of God, which results in a loss of reward for the labourer.

The Apostle shows that in labouring in God’s house, it’s possible to build with bad material which will not meet the Lord’s approval. This leads the Apostle to speak of the quality of work with which one must labour in order to meet the approval of the Lord. Each servant’s work will be reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ. Paul points out the solemn fact that when our labours are reviewed, we could “suffer loss.” Promoting worldly wisdom and supporting division amongst the saints is wasted energy that otherwise could be used to build up the house of God. It will not stand the test of the judgment seat of Christ. All who do work on fleshly lines will “suffer loss.”

Vs. 9—Two figures are used to describe the sphere in which the servants of the Lord are to work for Him. One is “God’s husbandry” (a vineyard); the other is “God’s building” (a house). They present two aspects of the sphere of the labourer. The following verses focus on the house aspect particularly (1 Tim. 3:15).

Vss. 10-11—There are two aspects to the assembly as the house of God. Firstly, believers are looked at as “living stones” in the house (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20-21; 1 Peter 2:5; Heb. 3:6). Christ is seen as the Builder (Matt. 16:18), and all who compose the house in this aspect are real. Secondly, there is the aspect of the house of God where profession is included (Eph. 2:22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:20-21). That is, it embraces all who make a profession in Christ, whether they are truly saved or not. In this aspect, men are seen as having part in the building, and therefore, there is a possibility of bad material being built into the house. Paul says, “Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” All that is built must be in accord with “the foundation,” which is Christ Himself, in order to meet the approval of God (vs. 11). This shows that there is responsibility connected with labouring in the house of God.

Three Kinds of Good and Bad Material

Vss. 12-13—The Corinthians needed to understand that even though some in that assembly had assumed the role of teaching, it didn’t mean that they were necessarily labouring with God’s approval. One might be doing (what he thinks is) a work for God, but it is not a work of

God—that is, God is not the Author of it. Paul, therefore, indicates there are ones who may labour or build in God’s house with materials that are wholly unsuitable. Good intentions are not the criteria for God’s approval, but whether it is according to the truth.

He refers to three kinds of good materials that are figurative of labour that meets the Lord’s approval:

“Gold” speaks of the glory of God—i.e. labours that pertain to the exaltation of God’s glory in Christ.

“Silver” speaks of Christ’s work of redemption (Ex. 30:12-16)—i.e. labours in the gospel and teaching that helps to establish believers in the blessings of the gospel.

“Precious Stones” speak of the formation of Christ in the saints of God (Mal. 3:17)—i.e. labours that pertain to the perfecting of the saints in their walk with the Lord.

He also refers to three kinds of bad material that are figurative of labour that will not meet the Lord’s approval. Sad to say, the Corinthians had brought all three of these things into the assembly:

“Wood” speaks of what is natural and merely human (Amos 2:9; Mark 8:24; Luke 3:9; Isa. 2:12-13; 7:2; 10:16-19).

“Hay” speaks of what is fleshly (Isa. 40:6; 1 Peter 1:24).

“Stubble” speaks of what is positively wicked (Job 21:17-18; Mal. 4:1).

Three Kinds of Builders in God’s House

Paul then speaks of three kinds of builders in the house of God. Each of these builders is indicated in the text by the words, “If any man ... ” (Vss. 14-15, 17).

Vs. 14—A good builder is a God-fearing believer who strives “lawfully” in his labours (2 Tim. 2:5). Paul speaks of himself as being “a wise master builder” under Christ, laying “the foundation” in Corinth, by first preaching the gospel whereby they were saved (vs. 10). He would be an example of a good builder. He sought to work according to the principles of God’s Word, and therefore, his work will stand the test of the judgment seat. “He shall receive a reward.”

Vs. 15—A bad builder is a true believer, but he labours on his own principles in ignorance or defiance of God’s Word. “He shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved.”

Vss. 16-17—A corrupt builder is one who is not saved, and he defiles the house of God by his presence and his doctrines. The labours of ones in this class are usually that which attack the Person of Christ and work of Christ or undermine the Christian faith in some way.

“The Spirit of God” dwells in the house of God, God’s temple. He not only dwells in the saints but also dwells among them collectively—which is the aspect of the Spirit’s presence here (see also John 14:17—“with you” and “in you”). “You,” in verse 16 is plural, and refers to the saints collectively. This means that it is possible for a lost person (a mere professor) to move among the saints and to be where the Spirit of God is working. He is thus made a partaker of the Holy Spirit in an outward way. 6 But because he occupies a privileged place in the house of God, he is held responsible for his actions, and his end is judgment—“him shall God destroy.” King Ahaz is a type of one who defiles the house of God as a corrupt builder (2 Kings 16:10-16).

The Apostle uses the expression “know ye not” ten times in the epistle. The Corinthians boasted in their knowledge, but it is appalling what they didn’t know. They didn’t seem to know:

The saints collectively are God’s temple – Chap. 3:16.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump – Chap. 5:6.

The saints will judge the world – Chap. 6:2.

The saints will judge angels – Chap. 6:3.

The unrighteous won’t inherit the kingdom – Chap. 6:9.

The saints’ bodies are members of Christ – Chap. 6:15.

He who is joined to a harlot is one body – Chap. 6:16.

The saints’ bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit – Chap. 6:19.

Those that minister the holy things live out of those things that were offered – Chap. 9:13.

Those that run in a race run against all participants – Chap. 9:24.

The Cure for Division

In chapter 3:18-4:21 Paul proceeds to give the remedy for the problem of division in the assembly.

1) Have a Proper View of Ourselves

Vs. 18—If there is going to be a cure for the problem of division in an assembly, we must first have a right view of ourselves. Many of the Corinthians had a high opinion of themselves intellectually. They considered themselves to be connoisseurs of philosophical wisdom; it was largely part their culture. They were glorying in the worthless principles of worldly wisdom, which tended to blind their eyes and deceive their hearts. Being able to talk in the philosophical terms of the world's wisdom can give one a false sense of importance. Paul, therefore, warns of the deceiving character of it, saying, "Let no man deceive himself." He then calls them to self-judgment, saying, "If any one thinks himself to be wise among you in this world, let him become foolish, that he may be wise." Hence, they needed to have a change in their thinking which would result in a proper view of themselves before God. This would particularly apply to those who had the teaching roles in Corinth.

To think of ourselves as being something important in the assembly is, of course, nothing but pride. Since the heart is inherently deceitful (Jer. 17:9), it is difficult to detect this in our hearts. Nevertheless, unjudged pride is usually at the bottom of every division (Prov. 13:10; 28:25; 1 Tim. 6:4; 1 Cor. 4:6). J. N. Darby said that pride is the cause of division, and humility is the secret of unity and true fellowship. How true this is! If every person in a local assembly judged the pride of his or her heart, strife and division would not develop. Mr. Darby also said that we need to see the flesh in ourselves and Christ in our brethren! This would keep us from being critical and asserting ourselves in the assembly.

2) Have a Proper View of the World's Wisdom

Vss. 19-20—Paul went on to state a second thing that would lead to curing the divisions in their midst. He said, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." In saying this, he was telling the Corinthians that they needed to see the world's wisdom for what it really was before God—"foolishness." They needed to have a proper view of it—to see it as God sees it—and shut it out of the assembly. It was at the bottom of the divisions at Corinth, and it was time that they ceased from all such worldly thinking.

While the world's wisdom on moral and spiritual subjects may command the respect of natural and carnal men, it is only "foolishness with God." Paul quotes a couple of Old Testament passages to confirm the fact of human wisdom being foolish and vain (Job 5:13; Psa. 94:11). What a paradox this is! The world thinks the gospel of God is foolish (chaps. 1:18; 2:14), but God says the world's wisdom is "foolishness." We, therefore, should be content to be considered fools in the eyes of the world and not concern ourselves with trying to be acceptable to the world. We have to accept the fact that Christians appear foolish to the people of the world.

3) Have a Proper View of Those Who Minister the Word

Vss. 21-4:5—Thirdly, there were those in the assembly at Corinth who were making too much of their teachers—putting them on a pedestal. The Corinthians gloried in their teachers around whom they rallied. They had a distorted view of grandeur of those who ministered among them and tended to venerate them in a fleshly way. They saw "men as trees, walking" (Mark 8:24), having "men's persons in admiration" (Jude 16). They needed to cease and desist from this immediately because this undue emphasis on glorying in men stirred up party spirit. It fuelled the contentions and created rivalries among the saints at Corinth, causing sad divisions.

The Apostle's remedy for this was, "Let no man glory in men" (vs. 21). He says, "All things are yours;" whether it was the Lord's servants, or all things in the world—both at this present time and that which is to come—even "life or death!" (vss. 22-23) 7 Everything belongs to the Christian because he is a joint-heir with Christ who is the "heir of all things" (Rom. 8:17; Heb. 1:2). Understanding their dignified position "in Christ" (which is to be in Christ's place before God) would liberate the Corinthians from glorying in certain teachers and rallying around them because it was beneath the dignity of the Christian position to do such a thing. As Christians, we do not belong to men and their parties because all things belong to us in Christ. Hence, we don't belong to them—they belong to us! They have been given to the Church as servants to help us understand the revelation of God and to walk in the light of it (Eph. 4:11). Understanding this will cure any notion we might have of putting the Lord's servants on a pedestal and being gathered under their feet as a follower of them.

In chapter 4, Paul continues to elaborate on this point, showing that it is not for the saints to be evaluating the various gifts Christ has given to the Church. The tendency among the saints is to rate God's servants by their knowledge or eloquence, but it's purely a carnal thing. We are to account them all merely as "the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God," without rank (vs. 1). A servant's true value in the sight of God is measured by his faithfulness and not his popularity among the saints! (vs. 2)

Moreover, if any were to start rating the servants of the Lord according to their personal criteria, they were to follow the Apostle's example. He said that such fleshly and carnal practises were "a very small thing" to him because he put no confidence in their ability to evaluate correctly (vs. 3). Paul wouldn't judge his own labours but left it all "until" the Lord would come. Then He will evaluate everything properly at His judgment seat (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). At that time, the Lord will even probe into the motives behind our actions in service. He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

In chapter 3:13-15, he spoke of the Lord's judging our works of service at the judgment seat; here he speaks of Him judging our motives in service. This shows that only a divine Person having omniscient attributes can properly evaluate the service of His servants. Scripture says, "By Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3). Only He is able to weigh the motive behind an action. It proves the folly of mere creatures attempting such a task. The most spiritual and sincere Christian, being a mere human, cannot weigh the motives of someone else's heart—much less carnal Christians such as the Corinthians! When Paul said, "Judge nothing before the time," he was referring to the motives of the heart in service. Elsewhere we are told to judge a person's words, his oral ministry, and his actions (1 Cor. 5:12; 10:15; 14:29). At the judgment seat of Christ, He will find cause to reward every one of His people for what they have done for His name's sake. "Then shall every man have praise of God" (vss. 4-5).

4) Emulate Paul's Ways in Christ

Vss. 6-21—The final words on this subject are directed toward the leaders of the parties that had developed among the Corinthians. The way they were carrying themselves contributed to the polarization of the saints in their divisions. Paul, therefore, had a word for them. They could help defuse the saints' desires to put them on a pedestal by emulating the Apostle's "ways which be in Christ" (vs. 17). Hence, Paul points to the humble manner of life as he served the Lord; it is a pattern for us to follow (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Tim. 1:16). This is something that all the saints

should emulate, not just those who take the lead in public ministry.

Throughout these opening chapters Paul “transferred” the “application” of these things concerning party leaders at Corinth to himself and Apollos, when really it was certain teachers in their midst whom they were rallying around. He did this so that he wouldn’t expose those leaders by name and avoid any open conflict that might erupt from it. He now mentions another reason why he did it—“... that ye may learn in us the lesson of not letting your thoughts go above what is written, that ye may not be puffed up for such a one against another” (vs. 6). Those who taught in Corinth desperately needed to “learn” how to conduct themselves in service by observing the ways of Paul and Apollos. The apostles and those that served with them were models for other servants to follow. Quite the opposite of being “puffed up” with pride “one against another” (as were the Corinthian teachers), Paul and Apollos were clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:5). They needed to be “followers” of the Apostle (vs. 16) and imitate his “ways” (vs. 17). He laboured together with the other servants of God in harmony under the Lordship of Christ.

In verse 7, he addresses the leaders directly, saying, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” Apparently, they were glorying in their gift as being distinct from other gifts. But if, by reason of a servant’s gift, he differed from others, it was only that which he had received from God anyway. How then could he boast as though it were something that he had produced by his own power? To use what God has given us to promote our own glory in the assembly is nothing but a shameful display of unjudged pride. Making public ministry an arena of competition was only helping on the problem of division. The use of a spiritual gift is not for the purpose of exalting oneself, but for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16).

It was evident that the Corinthian teachers were living for the present—for “now”—and were seeking the praise of men (vs. 8). In contrast to this, the true servants of God lived in view of the future (to the judgment seat of Christ)—a time Paul calls “then” (vs. 5), when they would have the praise of God. What a striking contrast! This shows that there was something seriously wrong with the Corinthians’ view of Christianity. They were living like “kings,” which was completely out of character for those who are supposed to be pilgrims (vs. 8). Their lifestyle was not in keeping with the pilgrim character of Christianity. Paul desired that the reigning time had truly come, and then all the saints could reign together, but it was not time for that, for we are still living in the time of Christ’s rejection. The right attitude for us now in the time of Christ’s absence is that of mourning and fasting and abstaining from worldly pleasures (Mark 2:20; 2 Sam. 19:24; 1 Peter 2:11).

In verse 9, Paul again turns them to the lifestyle of “the apostles” who were models of Christian character and purpose. He alludes to the Roman amphitheatre (where Christians were fed to the lions as a spectacle) to show that the apostles were similarly a “spectacle” to all. However, their amphitheatre was much larger. It was the whole universe; both angels and men (heaven and earth) were watching. And what were they seeing?—men that were rejected by the world who considered them “fools,” “weak,” and “despised” (vs. 10a). The apostles were content to be thought of as such by those who crucified their Saviour. In contrast to this, the Corinthians were trying to court the world’s favour! They were attempting by their knowledge of divine things, to be “wise,” “strong,” and “honourable” in the eyes of the world (vs. 10b). To make the Christian revelation palatable to the man of the world is impossible without compromising it in some way, but this was what the Corinthian teachers were doing.

On the other hand, the apostles were paying the price for preaching the truth. They were suffering “hunger and thirst ...” etc. (vs. 11). Furthermore, they were “working” with their “own hands” to support their labours, which the teachers among the Corinthians were evidently not doing. They were living off the gifts of the Corinthian saints (1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 2:17). In short, the apostles were suffering reproach and persecution from the world while the Corinthians and their teachers were courting the favour of the world. Something was seriously wrong with this picture (vss. 12-13). Paul said to Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Living normal Christianity naturally results in being rejected by the world.

The Apostle wanted them to understand that he was saying these things because he loved them, calling them, “My beloved children.” He warned them because there were serious dangers involved in courting the favour of the world (vs. 14). They may have had many “instructors” (teachers), but where were the “fathers” among them that would faithfully point this danger out? (vs. 15) Paul, on the other hand, had been a spiritual father among the Corinthians, sacrificing himself for the good of the saints. This is what the local teachers around whom they were rallying should have been doing.

Paul concludes his remarks by saying, “Be ye followers of me” (vs. 16). This is the model for conduct for all in the local assembly. He and the other apostles walked in humility. They did not seek a place in this world (Jer. 45:5).

To help the Corinthians in this difficulty of division, Paul sent Timothy to bring to “remembrance” his “ways which be in Christ”—which was the divine remedy for all such difficulties. His model of conduct was for “every where in every assembly” (vs. 17). It is essential for assemblies to go on happily together. Timothy would support this by word and by conduct among them. If these things were practised by all in the assembly, the problem of division in their midst would be cured.

A Summary of Paul’s Solution for Divisions

In summary, the Apostle’s solution for division in a local assembly is as follows:

Have a proper view of ourselves—understanding that we are nothing. We need to see the flesh in ourselves and Christ in our brethren (chap. 3:18).

Have a proper view of the wisdom of the world—understanding that it is nothing. Knowing this, we don’t want to give it a place in the assembly (chap. 3:19-20).

Have a proper view of those who minister the Word—understanding that they are nothing. Therefore, we should be careful to not put them on a pedestal and glory in them (chap. 3:21-4:5).

Emulate the apostles’ conduct of humility and self-sacrifice because they sought to be nothing that Christ might be everything (chap. 4:6-21).

Chap. 4:18-20—Paul anticipated that there would be resistance to his corrections and closes with a word of warning to those who presumed to do otherwise. Having the cause and the cure for division clearly laid out before them, the Corinthians were responsible to follow the instructions the Apostle had given them. If there were those who would not heed his advice, imagining that these were but idle words, Paul warned that he would have to come to them in judgment, and then they would know not only his “word,” but his apostolic “power.” He reminds them that the kingdom of God is not characterized by words, but by moral and spiritual power. He said, “What will ye?” In other words, the choice was theirs to make. If they chose to neglect his solution for division, he would be forced to come to them in judgment to correct the problems among them.

Chapter 4:6-8 is a reproof for being “puffed up.”

Chapter 4:9-16 is an example of not being “puffed up.”

Chapter 4:17-20 is a warning to those who are “puffed up.”

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, The

The Maintenance of Order in the Local Assembly

Grave disorders existed in the assembly at Corinth, and they were the reason for the writing of the epistle. The Apostle Paul had been with the Corinthians for 18 months and he surely wouldn’t have allowed such things to carry on when he was there. It is fair to assume, therefore, that things in the assembly at Corinth had deteriorated significantly.

Paul elected to write to the Corinthians regarding the problems in their midst, rather than visiting them in person. Had he gone to Corinth, he would have had to use his apostolic authority as a rod of correction and judge many of them who were at fault (1 Cor. 4:21). Therefore, in mercy, he stayed away and wrote to them and waited for God to produce repentance in them whereby they would set right the things that were in disorder (2 Cor. 1:23). Hence, the epistle treats various matters pertaining to the internal order of the local assembly, as well as its public responsibility. It views the assembly of God in its privileges and responsibilities on earth and presents God’s appointed order for normal function. Thus, we are furnished with divine insight for the maintenance of order in a local Christian assembly.

The Introduction of the Epistle

(Chap. 1:1-9)

Vss. 1-2—Paul establishes His apostleship at the outset so that the saints at Corinth would clearly understand that the things he was about to write concerning the disorders in their midst were not personal prejudices of his, but apostolic injunctions from the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

The instructions he gives not only apply to the assembly at Corinth, but also to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” This means that the epistle is applicable to all Christian assemblies, both then and now. Being written in a corrective manner, we are instructed as to how we are to deal with such problems if they were to arise in the Church today.

Ten Disorders Addressed & Corrected

Paul proceeds to correct at least ten disorders in the assembly at Corinth. Thus, in his remarks we are furnished with a composite exposition of what should characterize a local assembly of Christians. They are:

Failure to maintain unity in the assembly.

Failure to judge moral evil.

Failure to resolve personal disputes.

Failure to understand Christian liberty regarding morality.

Failure to understand Christian liberty regarding idolatry.

Failure in regard to headship and its sign.

Failure to have sobriety at the Lord’s Supper.

Failure in regard to the nature and use of gifts.

Failure to maintain sound doctrine.

Failure in regard to collections.

Vss. 3-9—Before launching into those things that needed correction, the Apostle praises the Corinthians for all that was of God among them. It would make the Corinthians more willing to receive his coming admonitions. This is a principle that we would do well to heed. Christian love will commend, if possible, before it will correct.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, Closing Exhortations

(Chap. 16:5-24)

Before closing the epistle, the Apostle gives the Corinthians some practical exhortations that he hoped would encourage them to do the will of God, and those things that he exhorted in the epistle.

Paul's Planned Visit to Corinth Postponed

Vss. 5-9—Paul tells them of his plans to visit the assemblies in “Macedonia,” and also to come to them at Corinth, but for the time being he would stay at “Ephesus” because there was an open door in the gospel there (vss. 8-9). This shows that it is not wrong for the Lord’s servants to have an itinerary as he serves the Lord.

Verse 6 indicates that while the servant may have definite plans in his travels, he should also be flexible in those plans. He said that he would like to come to Corinth if the Lord opened the way (vss. 5-6), but for the time being he had postponed the trip (vs. 7). Had he gone to Corinth, he would have had to use his apostolic authority as a rod of correction and judge many of them who were at fault. Instead, he waited and looked for repentance in them and a setting right of the disorders in the assembly. He didn’t come out and tell them that directly here because it might have given them a wrong reason for correcting things. Therefore, he wisely desisted, and waited on the Spirit of God to work in them producing the necessary fruits of repentance. Later, when they had corrected the disorders in their midst, he wrote the second epistle and was free to tell them why he did not come at this time. It was to “spare” them (2 Cor. 1:23). He would have had to use his apostolic power in a disciplinary way (1 Cor. 4:21—“a rod”).

Service Under the Lordship of Christ

Vss. 10-18—In this whole closing passage we see a beautiful picture of the various servants of the Lord at work in His vineyard. Some were travelling from place to place ministering to the Lord’s people—such as “Paul,” “Timotheus,” and “Apollos.” Others were serving locally such as “Stephanas,” “Fortunatus,” and “Achaicus.” They are all found working under the Lordship of Christ and being directed by Him in their work. There is no mention of them reporting to a missionary board that would dispatch them to their appointed place of work, as it is usually done today. Such is a man-made idea that interferes with the servants’ immediate responsibilities under the Lordship of Christ.

This chapter shows that when Christ gives gifts (Eph. 4:11) that they are directly responsible to Him in their ministry. The Head of the Church is in heaven, and He will direct the members of His body in their sphere of ministry, if they look to Him. We find that in the early days of Christianity the work of the Lord was not carried out under an organization of men—not even the apostles. That was, and still is, solely the work of the Spirit of God. What He did then we can count on Him to do now. Scripture says, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:38). And again, “As they were ministering to the Lord, and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and having laid their hands on them, they let them go. They therefore, having been sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia” (Acts 13:2-4).

These references indicate that the Lord’s servants are to be free to act under His immediate direction. Scripture knows nothing of the Lord’s servants being controlled by an earth organization of men, but by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The Lord, by the Spirit, sent Paul and Barnabas into the field, and there is no mention of them reporting to a board for direction and support in that service. Neither was there any mention of the servants of the Lord in that day going to a seminary before they ministered. The possession of a gift to minister the Word was their warrant to use that gift (1 Peter 4:10-11). It should be the same today.

The Church should recognize a gift as being sent of the Lord and should give the person “the right hands of fellowship” in that work that he does, as was the case in Antioch in regard to Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:3; Gal. 2:9). This might be a practical gift of financial support. But the Church or any parachurch organization involved in the work of sending servants is really interfering with the servant’s immediate responsibility to act under the Lord. They tend to become servants of that organization to fulfil its goals and are made answerable to it in their ministry.

We don’t see any such thing in this passage or any passage in the Scriptures. Earlier in the epistle Paul said that he would encourage Timothy to go to Corinth and remind them of his ways in Christ, and to exhort them as to their responsibility to set things in order (1 Cor. 4:17). This was a nice desire of Paul, but it is as far as he would go. No apostle had authority over another servant to send him to a work if he didn’t feel led to do so. An apostle could recommend it, and encourage one in that direction, but ultimately a person has to feel led of the Lord. He says here, “Now if Timotheus come” (vs. 10). This shows that even though the Apostle desired Timothy to go to Corinth, he understood that Timothy had to be directed of the Lord in it. There was a possibility that Timothy would not feel led to go.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians that “if” he did come, that they were to let him be among them “without fear.” Timothy was a timid young worker, and they needed to give him space to exercise his gift in ministry. With the confusion going on in their meetings (chap. 14:26), someone like Timothy would never be able to get a word in. So Paul said, “Let no man therefore despise him” (vs. 11). Timothy not only did “the work of the Lord,” but he did it in the same manner and spirit “as” the Apostle Paul. This was a high commendation indeed.

We see here that “Apollos” was not under apostolic direction either (vs. 12). Paul said that he “greatly desired” that Apollos would go to Corinth, but he had other places on his heart. Apollos looked to the Lord and felt directed not to go at that time. The Apostle, having expressed his desire, respects his convictions and leaves the servant of the Lord free to act before his Master.

We might wonder if Paul would not go to Corinth because of the problems, and why he would encourage other servants to go. The reason, we believe, is that he was an apostle and would be forced to act in judgment among them. Carrying such a responsibility, he desired that others would go and seek to bring them to repentance, so that when he came, he would not have to act in judgment.

Verses 13-14 indicate that the assembly at Corinth was not dependent on the servants of the Lord coming to correct things; they were directly responsible to the Lord to set things in order themselves. Five little exhortations follow. All were aimed at stirring the Corinthians into action in regards to the need to set right the disorders in their assembly. He says, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity [love]."

We see in the case of "Stephanas," "Fortunatus," and "Achaicus," that they too were doing the work of the Lord. But it was primarily in a local sense. "The house of Stephanas" is set before us as a model of leadership in the assembly. They were marked by caring for the flock. They had "addicted [devoted] themselves to the ministry [service] of the saints" (vs. 15). This is a beautiful commendation. We do not read that Paul had appointed elders in that assembly (perhaps because of their carnality), but even though there were none in that place officially, the work of oversight went on.

This is a pattern for us today since we have no apostle to appoint elders in our assemblies. The Spirit of God can still raise up ones to take the lead and care for the flock, and the work of oversight can still go on (Acts 20:28). It is just that we don't have any apostolic power to appoint them to that place officially. The Corinthians were to "submit" themselves to such (vs. 16) and "acknowledge" them in that place (vs. 18). Compare also Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11-12.

We find that as was the case with the other servants of the Lord, "Stephanas," "Fortunatus," and "Achaicus" were not under any apostolic direction. They had gone to the Apostle on their own volition as led by the Lord and supplied things to him which were "lacking" on the part of the Corinthian assembly (vs. 17). This is a reference to their practical fellowship with the Apostle that the assembly as a whole did not communicate. In the face of this lack, these three brothers provided for Paul out of their own pockets.

Final Salutations

Vss. 19-24—Various salutations from various assemblies and individuals are given by the Apostle as he closes the epistle. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that even though there were serious things in their assembly that needed to be corrected, the other assemblies were still in fellowship with them, and saluted them. This was to confirm to the Corinthians that the assemblies abroad had not abandoned them. If they refused to correct those things, actions would have to be taken whereby they would be disowned as an assembly, but until that time they were still in fellowship. This is an important principle. The presence of sin in an assembly does not automatically make it cease to be an assembly gathered to the Lord's name (Matt. 18:20). It is only after patience and remonstrance with such an assembly that proves to be harbouring evil in its midst in self-will, that an action must be made to clear the Lord's name. Another assembly that is nearest to the problem morally—in the sense of having had some prior interaction with them in regard to the issue at hand—should act on behalf of the assemblies at large to disown the assembly at fault. They may not be the assembly that is geographically nearest, but they are morally nearest the problem.

Paul closes with a solemn warning to any among them who might not be saved. He says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (vs. 22). "Anathema Maranatha" means to be accursed when the Lord comes. He has alluded in various places in the epistle that there was a strong likelihood that there were some among them who were mere professors. Every true believer will "love" the Lord Jesus Christ. They prove their love to Him by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; 1 Cor. 14:37). Those who will not walk in obedience prove themselves to be false, and Paul warns that certain judgment was awaiting them.

"Grace" from the Lord Jesus Christ and "love" from the Apostle is commended to the Corinthians as the final motive to bestir them to action in dealing with the various things that needed to be attended to in regards to the disorders in their assembly (vss. 23-24).

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 10) Failure Regarding Collections

(Chap. 16:1-4)

Vss. 1-4—The Apostle deals with one more thing that needed to be set in order at Corinth—"the collection." Apparently, the Corinthians didn't have a regular weekly collection. What he was about to tell them in regards to this was not something specific to them alone. He had taught the same to "the churches of Galatia."

The collections of the saints should be used for the needs of the Lord's people. It could be for His servants from whom we receive spiritual help (Phil. 4:14-18), or for special needs of the poor of the flock (2 Cor. 8-9). On this occasion Paul was not speaking of a collection for those who ministered the Word, but for "the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:25-26). We see the wisdom of the Apostle here in addressing the saints on this subject. Had the collection to which he refers been for labourers, it could have been construed that he really wanted a gift from them after all, even though he said he wouldn't take one from them (chap. 9). But that was definitely not his intention (2 Cor. 12:17). He tactfully waited for this moment when there was a need for others. Then he would speak about the collection and the dispersing of it without anyone thinking that he wanted it for himself.

The saints at Jerusalem were poor for a number of reasons. Their faith in the Lord Jesus had brought them into severe "persecution" (Acts 8:1), and many of them had their earthly possessions confiscated (Heb. 10:34). Some of them were killed and thus left behind widows and orphans who needed support. There was also a "great dearth" (famine) in that area, and this stressed the saints beyond measure (Acts 11:28-30). What made matters worse was that the saints at Jerusalem, in their zeal for the Lord, had sold their possessions and their lands and houses (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). When the trouble came, it magnified their problem, for they had nowhere to turn for food and shelter.

Our all-wise God had His good reasons behind allowing the need to arise in Jerusalem and Judea. It became an occasion for the Gentile Christians to have fellowship with the Jewish believers, thus bonding them together in a very practical way. The Jewish saints may have had

thoughts of not needing the Gentile believers, or that the Gentiles were in a class beneath them, but this gift from the Gentile saints to the poor Jewish saints at Jerusalem helped to dispel that. It caused the Jewish believers to lift up their hearts in thanksgiving in genuine appreciation for their Gentile brethren (2 Cor. 9:11-13). If there had been any reserve toward the converted Gentiles, prior to this trial, this expression of love and fellowship dispelled it.

Paul told them that they should take care to have a regular collection “upon the first day of the week.” This was the day when the saints universally came together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Hebrews 13:15-16 connects this kind of giving with “the sacrifice of praise to God.” Both are a priestly function. In fact, both are said to be a “sacrifice” to God. All such monetary gifts are given to the Lord as part of our worship. Since this passage in 1 Corinthians 16 synchronizes with Acts 20:7 when the saints were gathered together to break bread, it is fair to assume that both offerings to God would be given at the same time at the remembrance feast.

Paul said that “everyone” in fellowship ought to give in the collection. Some have mistakenly thought that the husband who is the head of the house (and the one who usually brings the money into the home) ought to give on behalf of his household. Therefore, there is no need for the wife to contribute too. This is what was done in Judaism (Num. 7:2), and it was right and proper for Jews in a natural religion. However, Christianity is a direct contrast to Judaism (John 4:21-24). To practise such in Christianity is to confuse natural relationships with the new spiritual relationships that we have been brought into in the body of Christ. In Christianity, we don’t worship God as members of a family, but as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). The wife is a member of the body of Christ as much as her husband and should participate in this aspect of worship. This mistaken idea may have been borrowed inadvertently from Christian denominationalism. Such organizations approach God in what they call “Family Worship,” but it is a misunderstanding of true Christian worship. Since both brothers and sisters are priests, none should be hindered in this priestly function (Heb. 13:15-16). A single sister gives in the collection, and when she gets married, this priestly function shouldn’t be taken from her because she has married.

The funds were to be stored until such time that someone who was travelling to Jerusalem could take the gift to them. Note that everything having to do with handling the Lord’s money is to be done above suspicion. Since they would know the character of those in that assembly best, Paul said that they should choose “whomsoever” they thought best to carry the funds (vs. 3; 2 Cor. 8:19). In this way, they would be “providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21).

Paul's Twelve Men: The Scriptural Meaning and Application of Some Technical Terms in Paul's Doctrine, "First Man" and the "Second Man", The

This second couplet is found in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49. “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from [out of] heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

Like the first couplet, the “first man” and the “second man” are also racial terms, but they define the two races of men under Adam and Christ from a different perspective altogether. The “old man” and the “new man” are terms that focus on the contrasting moral orders connected with each race, whereas the “first man” and the “second man” are terms which focus on the natural and spiritual orders connected with each.

The race of men under the “first man Adam” is just that—the first. There were no other races of men on earth before Adam. This rules out the notion of Java man, Piltdown man, Neanderthal man, etc. The new creation race under Christ, the “Last Adam,” is also just that—the last. There will be no other races of men to follow. This rules out science fiction ideas that suggest there may be another race of men in the future.

There are three basic differences that mark the heads of the two races of men under Adam and Christ.

The first man Adam was “made” a living soul, being a creation of God; whereas Christ, the Last Adam, was not made; He is the Creator. (The words “was made” in connection with Christ are in italics, in verse 45, and are not in the Greek text).

The first man Adam received life, whereas Christ, the Last Adam, is a “quickenning Spirit” who gives life to His spiritual progeny under Him in His new race (John 17:2; 20:22).

The order of manhood under Adam is “natural” (soulish) and “earthy,” but the order of manhood under Christ is “spiritual” and “heavenly” (vss. 46-47).

Some further specifics as to the “first” and “second” men are as follows:

THE FIRST MAN

The “old man” and the “first man” are terms used by the Apostle Paul to define two different aspects of the human race under Adam. The “old man” denotes the corrupt state of the fallen race, whereas the “first man” denotes what is natural and earthy in the race. Hence, they are not terms that can be used inter-changeably.

The “First Man” is Never Said to be Sinful

In Scripture, the “first man” is never said to be corrupt or sinful, while the “old man” is nothing but that. The “first man” is a term that focuses on the earthy and soulish side of the race under Adam—on what is purely natural in humanity. What is human and natural is not evil. For this reason, the “first man” is never said to be “crucified” with Christ or having come under the judgment of God, as is the case with the

“old man” (Rom. 6:6).

The creation of man after the first order has many attributes of God Himself, for he was created in His “image” and after His “likeness” (Gen. 1:26). For instance, man has a definite personality with likes and dislikes. He also has feelings and reasoning powers, etc. Natural graces and intellect are not evil, but are part of the makeup of a human being. God has not brought this into judgment, for it came forth from His own hand in creation. It is the same with our bodies; they are never said to be evil. As mentioned earlier, the KJV translates Philippians 3:21, “Our vile bodies,” but this is not the best translation, for what God has created is not vile. If our bodies were vile in the modern sense of the word, we would never be asked to present them to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Similarly, the material creation that has come forth from the hand of God is never said to be evil. It has become unclean through the effects of sin and will need cleansing (Job 15:15; 25:5; Heb. 9:23), and some day it will be folded up and replaced with a new heaven and earth (Heb. 1:10-12; Rev. 21:1). But it is not said to be judged by God, as is man in the flesh.

While what is natural in the “first man” is not said to come under the judgment of God, that whole order of manhood has been superseded by another order of manhood under Christ that is superior. This is the force of the word “afterward” in 1 Corinthians 15:46. Hence, the first man has been set aside and replaced by the new order of manhood under Christ. Christians are part of that new race now, and are waiting to bear the image of the second physically (1 Cor. 15:49).

THE SECOND MAN

The Lord is the “second Man” and the “Last Adam.” As the “second Man,” His humanity was of an entirely new origin, being conceived of the Holy Spirit through a virgin (Luke 1:35). There was a union of the divine and human natures (yet sin apart) that formed this new order of humanity as seen in Christ. When the Lord rose from the dead, He became the Head of the new race of men as the “Last Adam.” This race is characterized by what is “spiritual” rather than by what is “natural.” It is:

Heavenly in origin (vs. 47).

Heavenly in character (vs. 48).

Heavenly in destiny (vs. 49).

The Lord did not bring His humanity down from heaven when He came into this world; it was He who was “from heaven”—that is, He was a heavenly Person. Note also: verse 48 says we “are” heavenly. We are waiting for our bodies to bear the image of the heavenly, when the Lord comes (vs. 49), but we don’t have to wait to be heavenly—we are heavenly creatures now (vs. 48). As part of this new heavenly race, we are to value everything that bears its stamp, and to cultivate those heavenly graces and qualities in our lives and in the assembly.

Some Practical Considerations

Since we are part of this heavenly new creation race, which has superseded the first race under Adam, we are to walk as such. Being heavenly creatures, we need to be careful not to introduce anything of the first order of man into the sphere of the new. What is of the first man should not intrude into divine things. To think merely on earthly and natural lines is to walk beneath what we are as heavenly beings. Natural graces, human intellect, human sentiment, etc. are not evil, but these things emanate from the first man and have no place in the assembly. The intrusion of these natural things was a problem in the Corinthian assembly. In fact, in this very chapter (1 Corinthians 15), Paul was dealing with this. The Corinthians were, with their human intellect, trying to understand “how” the dead were raised (vs. 35). Since they couldn’t figure it out, some of them didn’t believe that there was a resurrection of the dead.

We can apply human intellect and reason in the things of God, and it will surely lead us into error. Have we not sat in care meetings and listened to human ideas and opinions—well-meaning as they may be? Such intrusions ought not to be used in the spiritual realm, where the Word of God is to be our sole guide.

To bring music into the worship of God in a Christian assembly would be an intrusion of the “first man” in the things of God. Human skill, in playing beautiful music, is a natural thing. It is acceptable in its place, but it doesn’t belong in the realm of spiritual things in the assembly. On the other hand, to put oneself forward with pride and vainglory is a characteristic of the “old man,” and it certainly has no place in the assembly either.

Human sentiment and emotion, which emanates from the first man, can affect our actions in the assembly and lead us contrary to the Word of God. An example would be someone affectionately hugging a person who has been excommunicated for some evil (whom Scripture says we are not to have fellowship with) because they feel sorry for that person.

Moreover, what is decent and respectful in the “first man” can be countenanced and given a place in the assembly. There is a tendency to value a brother who has natural charm, grace, and intellectual powers, rather than to value him for his spiritual qualities.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 7) Failure to Have Sobriety & Reverence at the Lord’s Supper

(Chap. 11:17-34)

At this point in the epistle the Apostle turns to address matters in the assembly when they were gathered together for worship and ministry. He says, “First, when ye come together in assembly...” As mentioned earlier, this phrase occurs seven times through the next few chapters, indicating that he is now addressing disorders having to do with the saints when they are together “in assembly.” It is significant that before

speaking of ministry in the assembly, which is the exercise of gift, he addresses their behaviour at the Lord's Supper. This is the sphere of priesthood where praise and worship are offered. Since worship should always precede the exercise of gift in service, he addresses this first.

Prayer, praise, and worship all belong to the sphere of priesthood. Scripture teaches that every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), and when the assembly is gathered together, the brothers should be in a good spiritual state so that the Spirit of God can lead them to act as the mouthpiece of the assembly, expressing publicly its dependence on God and its worship of God (1 Tim. 2:8). The Lord's Supper is perhaps the preeminent meeting of the Church. It is not a meeting for the exercise of gift, but for the remembrance of the Lord in His death. It is not called a "worship" meeting, but worship certainly flows from the hearts of the saints when they are occupied with the Lord's sufferings in death. It is a time when the saints can exercise their priesthood collectively in offering worship and praise to the Father and the Son.

Dishonouring the Lord's Supper

Vss. 17-19—Such grave disorders existed in the assembly at Corinth that the Lord's Supper, which should have been for their blessing, had become the occasion for bringing the governmental judgments of God upon them. Hence, Paul says, "Ye come together not for the better, but for the worse." Coming to "the Lord's Supper" in such a deplorable state was only for their "worse" in the sense that they were suffering under the governmental dealings of God for it, as verses 27-32 indicate.

The breaking of bread is the way in which the members of the body of Christ express their unity as set forth in their partaking of the "one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17). However, the coming together of the saints at Corinth for that feast only manifested a state of division among them. The very feast that was supposed to manifest their unity manifested their spirit of division! He says, "There be divisions among you." This was to their shame.

Moreover, since there were divisions, he tells them "there must be also heresies." A division (a schism) is an inward rift among the saints, but a heresy (a sect) is an outward split among the saints where a party splits off and no longer meets in fellowship with the others. Paul warns that if those divisions (schisms) were not dealt with, sooner or later they would develop into a heresy. It was, and still is, Satan's way of destroying the assembly from within. The Apostle says that if things get to that point, "they which are approved" will be made "manifest." In other words, God allows these things to test us, and our state will be manifested by which side we take in the heresy.

Vss. 20-22—The Corinthians were apparently coming together for a preliminary social feast. Then at the end of it, they partook of the Lord's Supper as sort of an add on. This was a terrible misunderstanding of the purpose of the Lord's Supper. Paul would not have allowed it to happen when he was there with them for 18 months (Acts 18:11), so their meetings must have deteriorated considerably in his absence. Since some were poor and others were wealthy, it forged natural divisions among them as they ate their meals. Some brought an elaborate spread of food to indulge in, but others went "hungry." This was diametrically opposed to the purpose of the breaking of bread at the Lord's table. Their coming together had thus become a practical denial both of the Lord's Supper and the truth of the assembly of God. To correct this, he tells them that they shouldn't mix a social feast with the feast of remembrance. They could have their social feasts at home.

The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

In verses 23-26, he goes on to speak of the real purpose of the Lord's Supper. The setting in which the Lord instituted it is touching indeed. The very night that the evil of man rose to its height in the betrayal of Christ, His love was displayed in all its beauty. When lust led to betrayal, love instituted the Supper! Love and affection was the setting in which it was instituted, and love and appreciation is the manner in which it is to be eaten.

It is not called a "worship meeting," but worship at the Supper spontaneously rises to the Father and the Son. With the hearts of those who partake of the Supper being deeply affected with gratitude, worship can't help but rise from that scene. We do not come to remember our sins in the breaking of bread, but His love that suffered to put our sins away. This touching memorial of the Lord's death is a stark contrast to the drunken feast to which the Corinthians, through their insensitivity, had reduced the Supper.

The habit of the early Church was to break bread on "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). This was not merely something that the saints at Troas did locally; it was what the disciples did universally. This is what the Church should be doing today, but sad to say, the Church has largely put this preeminent feast into disuse. Some Christian groups have a form of the Lord's Supper once a month; others do it quarterly.

The Difference Between the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper

with

Oftentimes these two terms are used interchangeably as if there were no difference between them:

- "The Lord's Table" is a symbolic term that signifies the ground of fellowship upon which the members of the body of Christ meets, where the Lord's authority is recognized and bowed to (1 Cor. 10:21).
- "The Lord's Supper" on the other hand, is a literal ordinance that Christians partake of when they remember the Lord in His death in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:20, 23-26).

We must not think that the Lord's Table is a physical table that the brethren set in the middle of the room upon which they put the emblems. Nor should we think that the Lord's Table is the act of breaking bread. As mentioned, it is a symbolic term. If we are truly gathered to the Lord's name by the Holy Spirit, we are at "the Lord's Table" 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but we only eat "the Lord's Supper" at a specific hour on the Lord's Day, once a week. Under normal conditions, a person should come to the Lord's Table once in his life, when he comes into practical fellowship with those gathered to the Lord's name, but he should come to the Lord's Supper every week. The Lord's Supper (the act of breaking bread) is to be eaten at the Lord's Table—the ground of fellowship upon which the Spirit gathers the members of the body of Christ. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that we go to the Lord's Table on the Lord's day; but rather, that we go to partake

of the Lord's Supper on that day. Well-meaning people may say things such as, "Brother so and so stood up at the Lord's Table to give thanks," but the comment would be more accurate if it was said that brother so and so stood up at the Lord's Supper to give thanks.

When a person is received into fellowship, he is received to "the Lord's Table" wherein he has the privilege of eating "the Lord's Supper." If a person is "put away" under an administrative act of judgment by the assembly (1 Cor. 5:13), he is put away from "the Lord's Table," not merely "the Lord's Supper." He is put outside the fellowship of the saints gathered to the Lord's name as a whole, which would include the privilege of breaking bread. Some think that the eating mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:11 is referring to eating the Lord's Supper. Hence, they conclude that we are not to break bread with him, but we can have fellowship with him on an individual basis. However, it has to do with any kind of eating—whether it is in the breaking of bread or at a common meal in our homes.

The question may be asked, "Can those who are not at 'the Lord's Table,' but in the various man-made church organizations, partake of 'the Lord's Supper' where they are?" J. N. Darby said, "They may individually remember the Lord's death, and in that sense have the Lord's Supper." W. Potter said, "Take the tables in the various denominations: to these Christians the table with them is that of the Lord and the supper His, and as such they partake of it. Some among us were for years at one or the other of these tables, and there in all sincerity, there for want of further light. Could it be said in truth we had never partaken of the Lord's Supper until we were found among those gathered on Scriptural ground? Surely not, though the way in which we had partaken of it was not according to Scripture." Christians can eat the Lord's Supper in their denominations, but if it is to be eaten rightly, it should be done at "the Lord's Table."

Two Aspects of the Breaking of Bread

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whereas chapter 11:23-26 is the individual act of breaking bread. It says,

ye

In chapter 10:15-17 "the bread," viewed in its unbroken state, represents the mystical body of Christ, whereas the "bread" in chapter 11:23-26 represents the Lord's physical body in which He suffered and died.

Chapter 10:15-17 puts "the cup of blessing" first, then followed by "the bread," because it is speaking of our title to be at the table as redeemed believers—which is a result of His blood being shed. In chapter 11:23-26 the order is reversed, putting the breaking of the bread first, then followed by the drinking of the cup, which is the order in which it is to be eaten (Luke 22:19-20). This is because we eat the Supper in remembrance of Him in His death, and He suffered in His body first, then after dying He shed His blood.

In chapter 10:16-17, the breaking of bread is in connection with "the Lord's Table," wherein we show forth the fellowship of the body of Christ (vs. 21). In chapter 11:26, the breaking of bread ("the Lord's Supper"), we show forth Christ's death.

Chapter 10:15-22 has to do with our responsibility to keep separate from all other tables (fellowships)—be it schismatic Christian tables, Judaistic tables, or idolatrous tables), whereas chapter 11:23-32 has to do with our responsibility to maintain purity in our personal lives.

Many have thought that since Christians drink of the "cup" (which represents Christ's blood) that they are those with whom the New Covenant is made. It is true that the cup is connected with "the blood of the New Testament [Covenant]" (Matt. 26:28), but the New Covenant is what the Lord will establish with Israel when they are restored in a coming day (Jer. 31:31-34). The Old Covenant was made with Israel and was sealed with the blood of bulls and goats. The New Covenant will also be made with Israel, but it is made with the blood of Christ.

It is a common misunderstanding to think that the New Covenant is made with the Church. The Church partakes of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant without being formally in the New Covenant, because it rests in faith on the same foundation of the finished work of Christ—of which the blood speaks. In fact, whenever the making of the New Covenant is mentioned in Scripture, it always specifies that it is with "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah" (Heb. 8:8). Furthermore, the fact that it is a "new" agreement or covenant implies that there has been some agreement in place prior to it. It is called "new" because it has been brought in to supersede the old. Hence, the New Covenant is made with those (Israel) who had the old. Gentiles who are being saved out from among the nations during this present time (Acts 15:14) never have had any previous agreement or covenant with God. It is not with them that a "new" covenant would be made. Similarly, you wouldn't say to a person with whom you have never had any prior dealings, "Let's make a new deal." You wouldn't call it "new" in that case.

Verse 26 tells us that this remembrance feast is something that is to be carried on "till He come." We cannot help but think that if the Lord has asked us to do something that He will provide a way in which it can be done—even in this late day in the Church's history.

Six Things the Lord Has Asked Us to Do "Till" He Comes

Follow Him in the path of faith (John 21:22).

Hold fast the truth that God has given us (Rev. 2:25).

Occupy (trade) in the field of service (Luke 19:13).

Don't pass judgment on the motives of others (1 Cor. 4:5).

Be patient (James 5:7).

Remember Him in His death (1 Cor. 11:26).

The Danger of Partaking of the Supper in an Unworthy Manner

Vss. 27-32—The Apostle reminds them of the very real possibility of partaking of the Supper in an unworthy manner. God's provision and remedy for any who were in a bad state of soul is self-judgment. He says, "Let a man examine [prove] himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Therefore, if our conscience accuses us, there needs to be an honest self-examination followed by thorough self-judgment (vs. 28). Even if our conscience does not directly accuse us, it is a good habit to search our hearts in self-judgment before we eat the supper (Psa. 26:2-6; Psa. 139:23-24). There may be things in our hearts that we are not aware of that will spoil our enjoyment of that privilege (Job 34:32).

To partake in an unworthy manner would be to eat the Supper without having judged ourselves. If one does that, he eats and drinks "damnation [judgment] to himself." This apparently was happening at Corinth, and the proof of it was that God's hand in governmental judgment was upon them. Some were "weak and sickly," and many had been taken away in death—"sleep" (vs. 30). Paul said that if they had been judging themselves, this would not have happened. He says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (vs. 31). Notice that he includes himself in the need for self-judgment, saying, "We ..." This is because no saint on earth is beyond the need for self-judgment. Moreover, our self-judgment should not be superficial. It is not merely our ways that we are to judge, but "ourselves." This would go to the inner springs of our thoughts and motives. We need to judge the very condition of our souls that has led to the unholy acts that we have done.

These verses tell us that we cannot do as we like in the holy things of God. It is a solemn thing to be laid aside through a governmental dealing of God, and even more solemn to be taken away from the place of testimony on earth through death. Paul says, "... and many sleep." The Apostle John also speaks of this, saying, "There is a sin unto death." This does not mean that a Christian loses his salvation, but that he would be removed from the place of testimony on earth through death because his life is a dishonour to the Lord (John 15:2; James 5:20; Acts 5:1-11; 1 John 5:16).

Vss. 33-34 – Note that in correcting the gross irregularities that were among the Corinthians at the supper, there is no suggestion of having some appointed official minister. Paul commends them, rather, to the leading of the Spirit. This is alluded to in that fact that he says that if they were in a right condition and waited "one for another," the Spirit of God who is the God-appointed Leader of all proceedings in the assembly, would correct the disorder.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 6) Failure to Understand Headship & Its Sign

(Chap. 11:2-16)

Paul moves on to another disorder among the saints at Corinth—the misunderstanding of headship and its sign. The first part of chapter 11 gives very clear instructions for sisters to have their heads covered when divine subjects are in discussion. Apparently it was not in practise at Corinth, and the Apostle sought to correct this.

From the 17th verse of this chapter to the end of the epistle, he addresses the disorders that existed when the saints were together "in assembly"—when they met together for worship and ministry. This is indicated by the phrase, "When ye come together." It is stated seven times in the closing chapters of the epistle (chap. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26). Since assembly meetings do not come into view until verse 17, the subject of head coverings (vss. 2-16) cannot be confined to assembly meetings. Its sphere of application is broader than when the assembly meets together, and applies to whenever the Word of God is open and read, and whenever prayer is being offered, whether in public meetings or in private.

The Principles Involved in the Use of Head Coverings

The Apostle launches immediately into explaining the meaning of headship and its sign. He shows that the acts of uncovering the heads of brothers and covering the heads of sisters are a demonstration of the principles involved in the confession of Christianity. In Christianity, a man's "head" (a brother) represents Christ, and a woman's "head" represents man. He says, "I wish you to know that the Christ is the head of every man, but woman's head is the man, and the Christ's head God" (vs. 3). Since this is so, the brothers are to uncover their heads when divine subjects are in discussion. By doing this, they acknowledge that all glory belongs to Christ. It is a deliberate act on the part of the brothers and should be undertaken with that in view, for he says, "A man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God" (vs. 7).

On the other hand, a woman in Christianity represents the glory of man. It says, "Woman is man's glory. For man is not of woman, but woman of man. For also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man. Therefore ought the woman to have authority [a symbol of authority] on her head on account of the angels" (vss. 7-10). The woman's hair is a sign of the natural glory of the first man. It is her permanent veil of glory and beauty (vs. 15). The woman's hair, therefore, should be covered when divine things are in discussion because of what it represents. When sisters wear a head covering, they are telling out the fact that we do not recognize the first man as having any place in Christianity. It is a confession that man and his glory has no place in divine things.

It says in verse 5, "Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth ..." These two things cover the whole of a person's activity in the spiritual realm. Praying is the sphere of priesthood, and prophesying is the sphere of ministry. Praying is towards God and prophesying is towards our

fellow men. The woman's hair, therefore, should be covered when either of these spheres is in exercise. It could be whether she is praying, or when she is in the presence of another praying, adding her 'Amen;' or it could be when the Word of God is being ministered.

The Apostle adds, "... because of the angels" (vs. 10). God has established a certain order in His creation. Christian men and women are not to neglect this order, but to remember that they are a divinely appointed spectacle. The angels, as well as men, are learning the manifold wisdom of God in His ways among Christians on earth (1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10).

Disputes Regarding Head Coverings

History tells us that this subject has not been an issue in the Church until approximately the last 60 years. Today it is a subject that is much disputed. One argument is that these instructions from the Apostle Paul were only for the Corinthians of that day, and hence, has no application for our day. The need for wearing of a head covering is explained away as being an ancient cultural custom that doesn't have any application to women today. What Christian could entertain the idea that part of their New Testament Bible has nothing to say to them, but someone who was deliberately trying to get around a certain passage? We would remind the reader that things that Paul taught regarding head coverings are not something that was exclusively for the Corinthians of that day, but are for "all ... in every place" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Making head coverings a cultural thing of that day is a fabrication. Paul makes no comment to that end. To teach such is to infer something that is not in Scripture. He has explained the reason for wearing them—it is a confession that the first man has no place in Christianity. If this passage were something only for the early days of the Church and not for today, then we are really saying that the truth of Christ's headship is not needed today! Without realizing it, those who hold such arguments are suggesting that the first man should be given a place in the assembly today. Such was just the problem in the assembly at Corinth, and such is our problem today.

Moreover, if head coverings were only for that day, why is it that the Church at large has observed these instructions from its inception until about 60 years ago? That is over 1900 years! Has the Church been wrong in doing it all those years and has only lately come to the knowledge of the truth? We would rather think that it is what Paul told Timothy when he said, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ... and they shall turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Such is the character of the last days.

Two Coverings for the Head

Another argument is that a woman does not need to wear an artificial head covering because her hair has been given to her for that purpose. This is taken from verse 15 which says, "If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." This is a common misunderstanding. The idea comes from not seeing that there are two coverings mentioned in this passage. The Apostle purposely used two different words to distinguish them. Unfortunately, in most English Bibles, the translators have not indicated it; and therefore, the reader might honestly conclude that the woman's hair is a sufficient covering.

The word in the original language for "covering" in verses 4-6 is "katakalypto" which indicates an artificial covering for the hair, such as a hat or a scarf, etc. The word in verse 15 is "peribolaion" which indicates one's natural hair flung around the head. Modern language might call it a hairdo or something equal to that. Hence, a woman's hair is a veil (or covering) of glory and beauty that nature has given to her. It speaks of the natural glory of the first man. (The article "the" should not be in the text in verse 7b. It is not "the man," but simply "man.") Therefore, her head is to be covered with an artificial covering. By doing this, we thus confess that we do not recognize that the first man has any place in Christianity.

If hair is the covering referred to in verses 4-7, then men have a covering on their heads, for they have hair too. And if that were the case, then how would they ever be able to pray and prophesy in obedience to God's Word, for the brothers are not to minister with their heads covered? (vs. 4) The only other option if one wishes to minister the Word is to be shaved (vss. 5-6). Surely those who have these objections don't mean that all brothers who pray and minister the Word publicly should have their heads shaved? And if they believe that, why don't they practise it?

The Spirit of God seems to have anticipated this time in which we live when there would be those who would dispute these things. So the Apostle says, "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (vs. 16). The "we" in this verse is the apostles who were given to lay the foundation of Christianity through their ministry. He says that if there are those who want to argue about these things, let them know that "we" have "no such custom" that women should appear with their heads uncovered when divine subjects are in discussion. They did not deliver any such custom to the Church—not in Corinth, or in any of "the churches of God."

Should Head Coverings Be Worn at Hymn Sings?

Some have asked whether sisters should wear head coverings at hymn sings. Verse 5 says that sisters should be covered when they pray or prophesy. This, as mentioned, refers to the two spheres in which she functions before God—priesthood and ministry. Colossians 3:16 indicates that spiritual singing has both dimensions. It says, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." In the light of this verse we would say that the sisters should be covered.

"Hymns" are compositions addressed to divine Persons. Some are prayers and others express worship. These fall in the category of priesthood. The verse quoted says that are sung "to the Lord." "Psalms" and "spiritual songs," on the other hand, are compositions that ought to instruct us in the truth. There is (or at least should be) a "teaching and admonishing" dimension to them, which is the sphere of ministry. Therefore, at hymn sings sisters should have their heads covered, and accordingly, the brothers should be uncovered, because they are participating in a priestly and ministerial function.

First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians: The Maintenance Of Order In The Local Assembly, 5) Failure to Understand Christian Liberty in Regard to Idolatry

(Chaps. 8:1-11:1)

In chapter 8, the Apostle continues the subject of Christian liberty, but in relation to idolatry. In chapters 6:12-7:40 he has dealt with the subject in the sphere of moral things; now he looks at it in relation to spiritual things. In chapter 8, he deals with the Christian's liberty in relation to how it will affect the Christian community, and then in chapters 9-10 he looks at it in relation to those who are without—the public testimony of Christianity before the world. Thus, he treats the subject from the smallest point and works out to its widest. He starts with our own bodies (chap. 6), then moves to our marriage partner (chap. 7), then to our brethren with whom we walk (chap. 8), and then lastly, before the world (chaps. 9-10).

Christian Liberty in Relation to Our Brethren

(Chap. 8:1-13)

There were those at Corinth who were taking liberty to eat meats offered to idols, but in doing so, they were in danger of causing some of their brethren to stumble. Paul, therefore, turns to correct this by giving them a universal principle that would regulate Christian liberty in relation to things offered to idols.

This chapter is similar to Romans 14 as both deal with the use and misuse of Christian liberty. There is a difference however; Romans 14 is dealing with the weak Jew who has been converted out of Judaism, whereas 1 Corinthians 8 is dealing with the weak Gentile who has been converted out of idolatry.

The Difference Between Knowledge and Love

Vss. 1-3—Most at Corinth understood that since an idol was nothing that food was a non-issue with God. They thought they were free to act as they pleased in regard to food offered to an idol and there would be no strings attached. Paul teaches them that their liberties needed to be regulated so that they wouldn't offend any who were "weak" in the faith.

A person might know that an idol is nothing, and therefore, go into an idol temple and eat meat offered to an idol (vs. 10), or buy meat in the market place that was offered to an idol (chap. 10:25). But this raises a question, "Would it be right to do it if it stumbled our brother?" Paul shows in this chapter that knowledge in itself is not sufficient to guide us in these matters. This question cannot be answered merely by "knowledge," but it can be settled by "charity [love]." Knowledge without the exercise of love can lead a person to act without considering the effect that his act may have on others.

This leads the Apostle to compare knowledge and love. "Knowledge," not held in communion with the Lord, tends to puff a person up with pride, whereas "love [charity]" considers the welfare of our brother (vs. 1). There is quite a difference; knowledge tends to puff up oneself, whereas love builds up (edifies) others. Knowledge occupies us with the thing in question—its merits and demerits—but love thinks of our brother. If knowledge were the only principle that applied in the matter, it could lead to outright arrogance, and surely offence. Paul was not belittling knowledge; he was showing that it must be held in love.

He goes on to say that since none of us know all the truth, for we can only know in part now (1 Cor. 13:9), we should be careful in using our knowledge without considering that we might not have things quite right. If one imagines that he has acquired knowledge, and is complacent about it, he is showing that he lacks understanding on how it ought to be held and practised (vs. 2). Moreover, if a person truly loves God, it will be manifest in his actions toward his Christian brother (1 John 5:1-2). The person who approaches this subject of liberty from the standpoint of love will be "known" of God in the sense that He will take note of that person and will give him a special sense of His approval (vs. 3).

The Difference Between Idols and the True God

Vss. 4-6—The question of eating meats offered to idols leads the Apostle to draw a brief but important comparison between idols and the true God. Idols are only "called gods" because they are either outright fakes or manifestations of demons. None of them are truly gods. Knowing this gives one to understand that there is nothing to an idol.

Knowledge Must Be Regulated by Love

Vss. 7-10—Since we are all at different stages of growth, not all Christians have this knowledge concerning idols. Some were not able to rise above the deeply rooted prejudices of their respective backgrounds in regard to idols. They were "weak" in the sense of being deficient in Christian knowledge. Some converted out of heathendom were not entirely convinced that idols were non-entities and that meats offered to them were no different from other meats. Care must be taken not to stumble these persons (vs. 9). For some, to eat meats offered to idols could lead to a bad conscience, and abandoning a good conscience could lead a person to do something that would destroy ("perish") him, in the sense of making shipwreck of his Christian life and testimony (vs. 10). He, of course, wouldn't perish in the sense of losing his salvation, for the Lord said that His sheep "shall never perish" (John 10:27).

In verses 11-12, the seriousness of offending a weak brother in Christ is emphasized. If the Lord loved that person so much that He was willing to die for him, shouldn't we be careful not to hinder his spiritual progress by doing something that would stumble him? It would be a "sin against Christ."

In verse 13, he concludes his remarks by laying down a simple principle that would regulate our liberty in regards to our Christian brother. Before we exercise our liberty in a given area not forbidden by Scripture, we should consider what effect it will have on our brother. If the thing that we allow might cause him to stumble, then we ought to forego it—love would do that. In all such matters the Christian must not

only use knowledge, but also love.

This principle that Paul has brought before the Corinthians is essential to the health and welfare of a local assembly. It has a broad application to all things having to do with life in the assembly that are of a secondary importance--i.e. things which do not attack or undermine the Person and work of Christ. If this principle were acted on in our interactions with one another, there would be far less offences given and taken.

Knowledge tends to see things black and white, without considering any other qualifying factors. A person acting merely on that line sees things as either right or wrong. Often they will go around correcting others in the assembly on small issues that they feel are wrong, thinking that they are doing God a service. But they often leave a trail of offence behind them. They feel justified in their actions and "chalk it up" to being faithful. Unfortunately, dealing with things on the line of knowledge only is usually destructive to happy assembly life. It does not make for peace (Rom. 14:19). Divine love, on the other hand, considers our brother "for whom Christ died" and is careful not to offend in these secondary matters. It will not compromise principles, but also considers the state and the stage of growth in the ones whom it seeks to reach. Love waits for its opportunities and deals with things with the love of Christ.

Christian Liberty in Relation to Serving the Lord

(Chap. 9:1-10:14)

In chapter 9, Paul continues the subject of Christian liberty, applying it to the service of the Lord. He digresses from the subject of liberty in relation to idolatry to illustrate his point in chapter 8: Namely, that we must be willing to forgo certain liberties for the testimony of the Lord. Again, he uses his own life and ministry as an example. He fastens on two "rights" (J. N. Darby Trans.) or liberties in particular that he had as the Lord's servant and shows that while he had every "right" to those liberties, he surrendered them for the sake of reaching and helping others.

The Verifications of Paul's Apostleship

Vss. 1-3—His apostleship was something that some among the Corinthians questioned, since he was not among the twelve chosen by the Lord on earth. He states that he is indeed an Apostle because he had "seen Jesus our Lord" (Acts 9:4-5). A further evidence to his apostleship was the assembly at Corinth. It owed its existence to his labours (Acts 18:1-11). He says, "Are not ye my work in the Lord?" These were two verifications of his apostleship. Having established that, he takes up two specific areas where he had "power" (a legitimate "right") as a servant of the Lord to partake (vss. 4-27).

Paul's "Right" to Partake of the Ordinary Mercies in Natural Life

Vss. 4-5—Firstly, he speaks of his liberty to partake of the ordinary mercies of life—"to eat and to drink" (vs. 4), and to "lead about a sister, a wife" (vs. 5). Being a servant of the Lord, he had that power ["right"]. He had liberty to partake of the normal things of life, and points to the "other apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas" (Peter) who all rightly partook of that liberty.

Paul's "Right" to be Financially Supported by Those to Whom He Ministered

Vss. 6-14—Secondly, Paul had a right to be financially supported by those to whom he ministered. He had a "right" to "forbear working" (full time) and to receive help in "carnal (temporal) things" in return for his ministry in "spiritual things" (vs. 7). He proceeds to list several things to support this right:

- 1) It is customary to remunerate workers. He cites three examples from ordinary life—a soldier, a farmer, and a shepherd (vs. 8). Working for the Lord should not be treated with any less importance.
- 2) It is according to the Mosaic Law (vss. 8-9). He quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 to show that the Law of Moses supported such a practise in principle. It was not written merely for God's care of oxen (who are typical of servants of the Lord) only but for "our sakes" (vs. 10).
- 3) The tabernacle and "the temple" system that was ordained of God supported the idea of paying those who did the work (the priests and the Levites). Those who "attend at the altar partake with the altar" (vs. 13; Num. 18:8-20).
- 4) It was exercised by other Christian workers. If they had a "right" to be supported by those to whom they ministered, why couldn't Paul? After all, he was their spiritual father in the faith, and therefore, had a right to their "carnal things" (vs. 11).
- 5) The Lord ordained it for His disciples when they were sent out to preach (Luke 10:7). "They which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (vs. 14). In this, He set the example for Christian workers.

The Principle of Surrendering One's "Right" for the Blessing of Others

Vss. 15-23—Having established that he had such "rights," Paul hastened to say, "But I have used none of these things" (vss. 12, 15). He had a "right" to such liberties, but he elected to not exercise those rights because he didn't want to stumble any to whom he preached. He relinquished them so that he could reach more souls. For instance, when he was among the Corinthians, he worked with Aquila and Priscilla in making tents, which was their mutual profession (Acts 18:1-2; 20:34; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). This beautifully illustrates the fact that Christian living and service is all about making sacrifices for others; its object is not to please self. The Lord Jesus is our great example. He "pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15:1-3).

Vss. 17-18—Paul felt compelled to preach the gospel, and he did it "willingly." He threw himself into the ministry of the Word with unselfish abandon. While he refused material recompense, he knew that he was not without reward for his labour. He could boast that the gospel was "without charge," and he had the joy of reaping—seeing souls being saved.

Vs. 19—In one sense, refusing to exercise his “right” gave him greater liberty. It made him “free from all men,” in that he was not dependant on any human for financial help, and thus would be less likely to be influenced by their desires. In doing this, he sought to make himself a “servant unto all” that he might “gain the more” people by the gospel. He surrendered his right of Christian liberty to reach them and made himself “as” they were, as far as their customs were concerned. He would adapt himself to those to whom he sought to reach with the gospel if it didn’t compromise the truth. It was a voluntary restraint of his liberty and just shows the lengths to which his love for souls would go to reach them with the gospel.

Vss. 20-21—When he was trying to reach the “Jews,” he would surrender his right of Christian liberty and become “as a Jew.” He did this, he says, so that he might “gain them that are under the law.” Note: he doesn’t say that he formally took up the position of being a Jew again; he says became “as” a Jew. This would be in customs, habits, dietary concerns, etc. Vice versa, when he was reaching out to “them that are without law” (the Gentiles) he would be “as without law.” In case any might think that this included abandoning his morals and living like the heathen, he adds in a parenthesis, “Not as without law to God, but as legitimately subject to Christ” (vs. 21—J. N. Darby Trans.). This means that he would go along with the customs of the Gentiles as far as he possibly could, without compromising principles of holiness and spirituality. This was the kind of wisdom that won souls (Prov. 11:30); it involved self-denial.

Vss. 22-23—Paul says, “To the weak became I weak, that I might gain the weak.” That is, to those who were simple in their understanding of divine subjects, he was careful to bring things down to their level when communicating with them, using simpler terms to express the truth. He would focus on elementary truth with such. Thus, he adapted himself to the various situations in which he found people, but at the same time, he took care to not compromise principles of holiness and truth.

In chapter 8, love would not let the Apostle do anything that would offend the consciences of his weaker brethren. In chapter 9 his love went farther—beyond the Christian community—it would not allow him to do things that would be offensive to unbelievers to whom he witnessed. By purposely relinquishing his Christian rights or liberties to win those to whom he ministered, he was an example to the Corinthians of normal Christian love sacrificing itself for the blessing of others. It shows that all such rights in Christian liberty are to be subservient to the interests of Christ and His testimony in the gospel.

The Need for Self-Control in Exercising Christian Liberty

Vss. 24-27—He goes on to show that a person has to be careful in taking liberties for another reason—it could have a negative effect on him, whereby he comes under the power of the carnal appetites of the body. He has spoken of the need for self-denial in the giving up of one’s rights or liberties; now he speaks of the need for self-control of the baser instincts of human nature. Later he will speak of the need for self-judgment (1 Cor. 10:12; 11:28).

He points to the athletes of the world being “temperate” (having self-control) in all things as they train themselves to compete for “a corruptible crown” in their games—an allusion to the original Olympic Games (vss. 24-25; 2 Tim. 2:5—J. N. Darby Trans.). Likewise, a Christian in the service of the Lord must also use self-control to have the Lord’s approval in the coming day of glory. To win “the prize” one had to live and serve in God’s vineyard according to God’s principles. To do this required keeping the body “under” control.

In verses 26-27, Paul used himself as an example in self-control. He was careful to not indulge in the appetites of the body, but kept it in “subjection” so that it would not be a hindrance to him in service. It has been said that the body is a good servant, but a poor master.

He shows that it is possible for one who was preaching to end up as a “castaway.” The word “castaway” is translated elsewhere “reprobate” and surely refers to a lost soul (Rom. 1:28; 2 Cor. 13:5-7; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:16). We mustn’t take from this that a Christian can lose his salvation. The subject in question in the chapter is preaching, not salvation. It’s possible for a person to be a preacher and yet not be saved, and thus, end up a castaway. Judas Iscariot was such a person. The man the Lord spoke of in Matthew 7:22 is another example. There are many who are such today in the Christian profession.

He brings this in because there were ones among them who were preaching who did not seem to be real at all. Their habitual indulging in the things of the flesh (taking liberties) without self-control brought to light that something was terribly wrong. If one carries on in such activities, it may be that they are not saved at all.

Some have thought that since the word means “disapproved” or “rejected” that Paul was referring to a man’s ministry being rejected, not himself personally. Hence, his ministry would be rejected because his life was in disorder. This would certainly be true, but the word “castaway” must not be taken in that limited sense. It is not used that way elsewhere in the New Testament. It means that the whole person is rejected because he is lost. J. N. Darby said, “To be a castaway is to be lost—to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” Paul, “in a figure, transferred” such to himself (1 Cor. 4:6) and thus handled the matter delicately, not singling out anyone in particular. The point he makes here is that he wanted to show by his whole manner of life (in keeping his body in subjection) that he wasn’t one of those reprobates.

Abusing Christian Liberty Brings the Hand of God Upon Us in Governmental Judgment

Chap. 10:1-14—Such being the case, Paul goes on to address the mixed multitude among the Corinthians and warns those who were mere professors of the danger of God’s judgment. This shows that it is a solemn thing to be externally connected with the testimony of God and not be real.

He shows that all who identify themselves with the Christian testimony are going to be tested as to their reality or their lack thereof. And even if a person was a real believer, partaking of spiritual privileges doesn’t guarantee his preservation. If he didn’t “keep under” his body, but misused his liberty, he would come under the governmental dealings of God.

He points to Israel as an example. They were given some wonderful privileges in their relationship with Jehovah, yet when they were tested in the wilderness many of them proved to not be real at all. He outlines five great privileges that Israel had and then passes on to speak of five

different evils that they fell into and God's corresponding discipline. The net result was that they were sifted out of the testimony of the Lord. They were "strewed in the desert" (vs. 5 – J. N. Darby Trans.). Deuteronomy 2:14 says that they were "wasted out from among the host."

The privileges that they had, in principle, are the same that Christians have—only we have them in a greater way. And the evils that they fell into are the same evils that Christians can fall into. Furthermore, the governmental judgment that fell on them is the same, in principle, that can fall on us. His ways with Israel demonstrate the very real possibility of being sifted out of God's testimony today.

Five Great Privileges

Vs. 1—"The cloud"—they had His divine presence with them. Christians also have the Lord's presence with them (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Vs. 1—"All passed through the sea"—they had a divine deliverance. Christians have experienced a great deliverance in the death of Christ (Gal. 1:3-4).

Vs. 2—"All baptized unto Moses"—they had a divinely appointed leader. Christians have Christ as their Leader (1 Pet. 2:25).

Vs. 3—"All ate the same spiritual meat"—they had a divine provision of food (the Manna). Christians have Christ as their food (John 6:47-58).

Vs. 4—"All did drink the same spiritual drink"—they had a divine provision of running water. Christians have the divine provision of the Spirit of God given to them which springs up into the enjoyment of eternal life (John 4:14).

Five Evils & Their Corresponding Discipline

Vss. 6-11—Having such privileges made the children of Israel very responsible before God, for with every privilege there is a responsibility. Since Christians have those privileges in a greater way, we are even more responsible than Israel. If we abuse our liberty and live after the flesh, God will put His hand upon us in a governmental dealing, by which we will be taught by discipline to walk in holiness. It is a solemn fact—God judges His people in a governmental way if need be, but of course, not in an eternal way. Peter says, "It is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:16-17). He also says, "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:10-12). Again, he says, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

In using Israel's history as an example, Paul shows that there are at least five different ways a person could be sifted out of the fellowship to which all Christians are called (1 Cor. 1:9). (The Apostle does not take them up in chronological order.)

1) Lusting After the World

(Vs. 6; Num. 11:4-6, 33-34) The children of Israel wanted Egypt's foods, and God gave it to them, but He also sent leanness into their souls (Psa. 106:14-15). By insisting on having those things, they perished under the judgment of God and thus were removed from His testimony through a plague from the Lord. This is a type of Christians lusting after the world and insisting on it to the point where they are drawn away. God allows the "plague" of the world's influence to affect them, whereby they are drawn away by it and thus sifted out.

2) Practising Idolatry

(Vs. 7; Ex. 32:1-8, 25-29) The children of Israel worshipped the golden calf and called it a feast unto Jehovah. They consequently became insensible through that spiritual corruption (Ex. 32:6, 18, 25; Psa. 115:4-8). They came under judgment by the hand of their brethren who acted for God (Ex. 32:26-28). This is a type of those engaging in spiritual evil (perhaps doctrinal or ecclesiological) whereby they come under the administrative judgment of excommunication by the hand of their brethren.

3) Engaging in Immorality

(Vs. 8; Num. 25:1-9) The children of Israel were invited to enter into fornication with the daughters of Moab. Judgment fell on them by the javelin of Phinehas and through the plague of the Lord. This is a type of being excommunicated for moral evil (1 Cor. 5:11-13).

4) Tempting the Lord

(Vs. 9; Num. 21:4-9) The children of Israel tempted the Lord by questioning the wisdom of His ways. God sent serpents among them and many perished. We, too, can question the wisdom of God in His sovereign will in our lives, but it is a sin that He does not take lightly. What happened to Israel is a type of God allowing Satan, "that old serpent" (Rev. 12:9), to get in on us in a special trial whereby we are taken away in some way. It is a stroke of God's judgment.

5) Murmuring and Complaining

(Vs. 10; Num. 16:1-3, 41-50) These people murmured and complained about a dealing of the Lord with a party of men that rose up in rebellion against the God-appointed leadership in Israel. Korah and his company had formed a party to challenge God's order of priesthood. They thought that they had a justified cause in challenging the place of Moses and Aaron, but God took them away in judgment. After the judgment fell, the people referred to here sympathized with the rebels who were judged. They murmured and accused Moses and Aaron of killing them! These also fell under God's judgment and were swept away. It is a type of those who would sympathize with a party that has gone out from the assembly in some cause. God's judgment on such is for them to be swept away with the party and removed from the fellowship where the Lord is in the midst. There have been many who have been removed in this way—in the so-called "divisions" that

happen among God's people.

Vss. 11-13—The Apostle has given a lengthy warning to all who might be inclined to abuse Christian liberty by indulging in the flesh in some way. He has shown that we cannot do it without incurring the discipline of God. He reminds us that those things that happened unto them (Israel) were written as “ensamples [types]” for “our admonition.” In other words, we are supposed to learn from these things.

He concludes by giving a call to self-judgment, saying, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Pride and self-confidence lead to having a fall (Prov. 16:18). If there were any who thought that the temptations they were facing were too great, he adds the encouraging words, “God is faithful, who will not suffer (allow) you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Christian Liberty in Relation to the Lord's Table & Fellowship With Idols

(Chap. 10:15-11:1)

The Apostle has addressed Christian liberty in relation to our brother in Christ (Chap. 8) and in relation to our service for the Lord (Chap. 9:1-10:14). Now he looks at Christian liberty in relation to fellowship at “the Lord's Table” (Chap. 10:15-11:1).

A “table,” in Scripture, symbolizes fellowship. In the case of “the Lord's Table,” it symbolizes the ground of fellowship God has for all Christians where the Lord's authority is recognized and bowed to. It is a spiritual ground of principles upon which Christian fellowship is expressed and the unity of the body is exhibited in practise. Scripture does not say the Lord's “tables” (plural), but the Lord's “Table” (singular), because there is only one such ground of fellowship to which Christians are called and that the Lord owns with His presence in their midst (1 Cor. 1:9; Matt. 18:20).

The Principle of Identification

Vss. 15-20—In these verses, the Apostle lays down a basic principle in regard to fellowship, and then applies it to the situation at Corinth. We might call it the principle of identification. That is, by partaking in a religious service of any kind we are identified with all that that system upholds and represents whether we personally believe such things or not. Our act of partaking with them is an expression of our fellowship with all that exists there. He shows that it is true in Christian worship and fellowship, and also in Judaism and in paganism. In each case, the principle of identification exists.

In regard to Christianity, he said, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not fellowship with the blood of Christ? The loaf which we break, is it not fellowship with the body of Christ?” (Vs. 16—W. Kelly Trans.) It is clear from this that our act of breaking bread (partaking of the Lord's Supper) is an expression of our fellowship with the Lord and His table and all those with whom we break bread.

In regard to Israel (Judaism), he shows that the same principle exists, saying, “See Israel according to the flesh: are not they that eat the sacrifices in fellowship with the altar?” (Vs. 18—W. Kelly Trans.) One who partakes of the sacrifices at the Jewish altar is identified with all that that altar represents.

He also shows that the same principle holds true with the idolatry in paganism, saying, “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons] and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils [demons]” (vs. 20). Those who partake of the “cup of devils [demons]” are in fellowship with demons.

Vss. 21-22—The Apostle then reasons with the Corinthians concerning their carelessness in regard to their associations. Apparently, they had been partaking of things that were in pagan temples and thought nothing of it. But God does not want His people to be in fellowship with spiritual evil or practise (2 Cor. 6:14-18). By doing so they were identifying “the Lord's Table” with the table of demons. Therefore, Paul would have them to desist immediately, saying, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils [demons]: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and of the table of devils [demons]” (vs. 21).

This principle of identification has a much broader application than idolatry. The point Paul establishes in these verses is that if we partake of the Lord's Table, we must watch that we do not partake in anything that is inconsistent with it and its holiness. It means that breaking bread at the Lord's Table demands separation from all other tables, whether it is in Judaism, or in paganism, or even in the unscriptural Christian places of worship in Christendom. Being in “communion [fellowship]” with the “blood” and “body” of Christ at the Lord's Table necessarily demands the exclusion of all other communions (fellowships). To do such is to provoke the Lord to act in a governmental dealing of judgment, as He did with Israel (vs. 22).

There are many man-made tables (fellowships) in the Christian world today, but the Lord cannot condone their existence with His presence in their midst collectively. In doing so He would be condoning the many divisions in the Christian testimony. He is with all Christians individually at all times (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5), so in one sense He is with them. However, He cannot be in the midst of the various Christian fellowships in the sense of Matthew 18:20—which is His presence collectively, condoning the very ground upon which His people gather and authorizing their administrative acts. He is simply not in every place where Christians gather in this sense. Therefore, if those who eat at the Lord's Table eat at these other tables also (either schismatic Christian, Jewish, or pagan), they could incur the governmental judgment of the Father (1 Cor. 11:27-32; 1 Peter 1:16-17).

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is—the Lord! It is His table, and He is leading exercised believers to it. There is always a danger of shifting the focus from the Lord in the midst to the people whom the Spirit of God has gathered and saying that they have the Lord's Table. This is a mistake; our focus should be Christ. Our gathering together is to be

(Heb. 13:13).

The fellowship expressed at the Lord's Table in the breaking of bread embraces all true Christians, though all may not be at His Table. We see in the "one loaf" every member of the body of Christ (vs. 17). The Lord's Table is where all Christians should be. Since the Christian profession today is in ruin, and there are hundreds of Christian fellowships all claiming to have the Lord in their midst, exercised Christians must seek out that place of the Lord's appointment where His table is, using the resources God has given—the principles of the Word of God, prayer, and the leading of the Spirit of God (Psa. 25:9; Prov. 25:2; Luke 22:10). It comes down to this simple fact—there cannot be two (or more) fellowships of Christians on earth that the Lord identifies with as being on the divine ground of gathering. Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13).

Leavened or Unleavened Bread in the Breaking of Bread

Some have wondered whether there should be leavened or unleavened bread in the breaking of bread. At the time when the Lord instituted the feast of remembrance, it certainly was unleavened bread that they used, because Jews were not to have anything leavened in their houses at the Passover (Exodus 13:7). The Lord surely would have kept the Passover supper in accordance with the Scriptures. But, let us remember, when He instituted the Lord's Supper, it was still in a Jewish setting. It was for Jewish disciples who were waiting for the setting up of the kingdom on earth (Matt. 26:26-30). It had not its Christian significance at that time. Paul's ministry in this chapter sets it in its proper Christian place, and gives it its Christian meaning. In the Greek, the word "loaf" (vs. 17) implies bread risen with leaven—yeast. Unleavened bread is never translated as a "loaf" in the New Testament. Since Paul speaks of the bread used in the Supper as a "loaf," it is quite acceptable to have bread that is leavened in the breaking of bread.

Difficult Questions Regarding Identification

Vss. 23-30—Having warned of fellowship with idolatry through identification, the Apostle goes on to answer some questions that might arise concerning eating meats apart from the idol's temple. Difficulties would present themselves in markets and at meals in private homes where food had been offered to an idol. The pagan world was filled with idols, and most of the animal carcasses on sale at marketplaces and eaten in homes had been killed in connection with idol sacrifices. Since that was the case, the question was, "What should they do in such situations?"

He goes back to the great principle he laid down in chapter 6:12 in regard to Christian liberty. He says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [profitable]." Notice: he applies it to himself, for each must be "fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). He reminds them of the basic principle of Christian sacrifice for others, saying, "Let no one seek his own advantage, but that of the other" (vs. 24 – J. N. Darby Trans.).

If there were ones who had a weak conscience about such things (1 Cor. 8:7), they were to be careful about what they did by not asking where the meat had come from when buying or eating it. They were to do this for the "conscience sake" of that weak brother. If they were at a feast, they were not to ask questions about where the meat came from so they could honestly say they didn't know the meat's prior connection (vs. 25). But if someone at the dinner voluntarily told them that it was "offered in sacrifice unto idols," they were not to eat it so as to protect the conscience of a weak brother. This is the kind of godly Christian care that we should have for one another (vss. 27-28).

We are, therefore, governed somewhat by the "conscience ... not thine own, but of the other" (i.e. our brother). Genuine love and concern for one another would make us glad to forego some liberty so that our weak brother would not be stumbled (vss. 29-30).

Two Further Principles of Christian Liberty

Vss. 31-33—Before closing his remarks on Christian liberty, he gives two further principles that are to govern us. He has already spoken of two great principles when he opened the subject—first, we should partake of something only when it is spiritually "profitable" (1 Cor. 6:12a), and second, when it doesn't bring us under its "power" in an enslaving way (1 Cor. 6:12b). Now he adds two further principles.

If we engage in some liberty, we are to make sure that we are doing it "to the glory of God" (vs. 31). If it's done merely for self, then it probably is not for the glory of God. Another underlying principle is to make sure that we "give none offence" in what we allow (vs. 32). This care is not just toward our brethren, he says, "neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." We are to be careful not to give offence to anybody as every person in the world is in one or the other of these three classes. Our liberty, therefore, is to be regulated in regard to the public testimony of Christianity in general (vs. 33). The purpose of making such sacrifices in Christian liberty is not in seeking our own profit, but the good of others, so "that they may be saved."

Summary of Four Great Principles That Are to Govern Our Christian Liberty

Paul has touched on four great governing principles in regard to the exercise of Christian liberty:

We are to partake of something only when it is spiritually "profitable" (1 Cor. 6:12a).

We should partake of something only if it doesn't bring us under its "power" in an enslaving way (1 Cor. 6:12b).

We should partake of something only if it is "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

We should partake of something only if it will not stumble our brethren (1 Cor. 8:13) and/or "give none offence" to others (1 Cor. 10:32).

Paul's life was a shining example of this. Therefore, he ends his comments on Christian liberty by saying, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

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