

*A pay-it-forward ebook provided by Freedom Quest, through GoServ Global*

# First Corinthians

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



The City of Corinth sits just to the west of the Corinth Canal, which connects the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea. It's a straight cut through solid rock four miles long started by emperor Nero in 67 AD using Jewish prisoners captured during the First Jewish-Roman War. It's been plagued by financial, political, and geological problems from the moment the idea of its construction was proposed hundreds of years before construction ever began.

In the first century AD, Corinth was a center of wealth, commerce, Greek mythology, and unabashed hedonism. The Greek temple there employed a thousand prostitutes –by law.

It was the Sin City of its day.

The Apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth is a laser-straight cut through the sin and immorality that had crept into and become entrenched in that church. He never wavered from his task of bringing that church back on the straight and narrow as he addressed sexual sin, idolatry, church finances, orderly worship, lawsuits within the church, swindling, divorce and remarriage, prophecy, speaking in tongues, the role of women in the church, and more.

As we navigate the book of First Corinthians, we find it's just as relevant for the Church today as when Paul penned it almost 2,000 years ago.

Agape love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ can and are still changing the world!

© 2024 Written and published by Reverend Terry C. Baxter.

Freedom Quest pay-it-forward ebooks are written and produced for pastors and others bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world in fulfillment of the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20) As such, you may use this publication as you see fit for that purpose at no cost to you. This includes, printing, copying, and distributing these materials. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes, except for short quotations in printed reviews, without the written permission of the publisher.

If you find these materials helpful and useful, we ask that you make it possible to provide this and other up-coming ebooks to ministries around the world by making a donation to GoServ Global's Freedom Quest program at <https://goservglobal.org>. Please include the note "ebooks" when you make your donation. The amount of your contribution is between you and the Holy Spirit.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)) Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the NASB.

Cover photo by hrijssen, courtesy of Pixabay

Maps courtesy of [www.naturalearthdata.com](http://www.naturalearthdata.com) and [www.bibleatlas.org](http://www.bibleatlas.org)

Cover design by Dan Jones.

Edited by Dan Jones.

Photo on page 111 of prayer tower outside Jerusalem, Israel, by Dan Jones. No rights reserved. Ministers, pastors, preachers, and laypersons are free to use the image for the advancement of the gospel and the glory of the name of Jesus Christ at no charge.

# **First Corinthians: A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter**

*(Edited and occasional comment by Dan Jones)*

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Sin City: 1 Corinthians 1:1-2</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Snapshot of the Church at Corinth: The Back-Story.</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Church at Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1:2.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Salutation or Greeting: 1 Corinthians 1:3.</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>A Good Starting Point: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Fights, Quarrels and Christian Dysfunction: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Avoiding Confusing the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 1:13-17</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The Word of the Cross: 1 Corinthians 1:17-18</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Human Reason Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians 1:18-21</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>God's Way: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The Immeasurable Gap Between God and Man. 1 Corinthians 1:25</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The God Factor: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Rooting Your Faith in the Power of God: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Growing Deep in Communion With God: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Rational Arguments Cannot Change Human Values: 1 Corinthians 1 &amp; 2</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Tragic Plight of Worldly Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 2:6-9</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Three Kinds of People: 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Taking Carnality to the Surgery Room: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>The Signature of Carnality: 1 Corinthians 3:2-4</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Receiving Input From Many Others: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Don't Build a Straw House on a Magnificent Granite Foundation: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Seeing Yourself as a Sanctuary of God: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Two Opposing Views of Self-Esteem: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23 versus 1 Corinthians 4:1-5</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>The Power of a Clear Conscience: 1 Corinthians 4:3-5</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Getting Beyond Outward Appearance and Comparison: 1 Corinthians 4:5-7</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>A Difficult Path to Walk: 1 Corinthians 4:8-13</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Pick Life Mentors Carefully: 1 Corinthians 4:14-16</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Building Your Life on Godly Disciplines: 1 Corinthians 4:16-17</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Confirming God's Anointed: 1 Corinthians 4:18-21</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Winning the War of Moral Freedom: 1 Corinthians 5:1-2</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Opening Pandora's Box. 1 Corinthians 5-7</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Getting Deadly Serious About Sin: 1 Corinthians 5:3-5</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Determine Your Basis of Morality: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>The Mystery of the Lost Letters: 1 Corinthians 5:9 &amp; Colossians 4:16</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>A Clear Understanding of Christian Morals: 1 Corinthians 5:9-13</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Swindlers in the Church: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8</b>	<b>54</b>

<b>Be Careful Who You Appoint as Judges. 1 Corinthians 6:1-11</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>The Principle of Freedom. 1 Corinthians 6:12</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>The Principle of Design: 1 Corinthians 6:13</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>The Principle of Resurrection Life: 1 Corinthians 6:14</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>The Principle of Bonding: 1 Corinthians 6:15-17</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Principle of Bonding Part II: 1 Corinthians 6:15-17</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>The Principle of Diminishing Returns: 1 Corinthians 6:18</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>The Principle of Fleeing: 1 Corinthians 6:18</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>The Principle of the Temple: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Principle of the Temple: Part 2: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>The Principle of Ownership: 1 Corinthians 6:19-7:4</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>The Importance of a Commitment to Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:1-2</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Sex and Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:2-5</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Marriage, Dignity and Personal Healing: 1 Corinthians 7:5-7</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Being Single And On Fire for God: 1 Corinthians 7:7-9</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Defending the Sanctity of Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:10-40</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>A Very Restrictive View of Divorce and Remarriage. 1 Corinthians 7:10-40</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>The Bigger Picture: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Dating and Courtship in the Early Church: 1 Corinthians 7:25-38</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>A Moral Compass Based On Your View of God or the gods. 1 Corinthians 8:1-3</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Culture and the Battle of the gods: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Standing With Jesus Christ and Exposing the Enemy: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Denying Self to Encourage Others. 1 Corinthians 8:8-13</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>The Sent Ones: 1 Corinthians 9:1-2</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Personal Rights versus Self Sacrifice: 1 Corinthians 9</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Ministry and Money: 1 Corinthians 9:7-11</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Sowing and Reaping: 1 Corinthians 9:11-14</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>The Significance of the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 9:15-18</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Focused on Sharing the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>The Value of Self-Discipline: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>God Has a Trigger Point. 1 Corinthians 10:5-11</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Dust Off Your Bibles and Start Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:11</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Extreme Makeover: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>The Idol Trap: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Set Aside For God: 1 Corinthians 10:19-22</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Being Godly And Friendly At The Same Time: I Corinthians 10:23-30</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Putting Jesus and the Gospel First: 1 Corinthians 10:31-33</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Be An Imitator of Jesus: 1 Corinthians 11:1</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>An Important Discussion: 1 Corinthians 11:2</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Head Coverings: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>The Value of Trials in the Church: 1 Corinthians 11:17-19</b>	<b>107</b>

<b>A Special Revelation: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Frequent Self-Examinations: 1 Corinthians 11:27-32</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Introduction to Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:1-3</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>The God of Variety: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>A Natural Sequence: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 12:7</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>The Manifestation Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:8-11</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Distributed Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:11</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Your Place in The Body of Christ: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Lessons From the Body: 1 Corinthians 12:14-20</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>The Amazing Systems of a Healthy Body. 1 Corinthians 12:18-20</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Finding a Good Church: 1 Corinthians 12</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>A Living Body Versus A Dead Organization: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>A More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 12:31 &amp; 13:1-3</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Understanding the Importance of Agape Love: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Agape Love and Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Contrast between Prophecy and Tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:1-5</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Good Oration is Music to My Ears: 1 Corinthians 14:6-9</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Overcoming Babel: 1 Corinthians 14:9-13</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Knowing When to Wear Pearls. 1 Corinthians 14:12-33</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>A Narrow View of the Gift of Tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:20-22</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>God Exposes Sin: 1 Corinthians 14:22-25</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Jesus Communicating With His Early Church: 1 Corinthians 14:26-33</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>The Oracle of the gods: 1 Corinthians 14:34-36</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Dropping the Hammer: 1 Corinthians 14:37-40</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>The Full Gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:1-5</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>The Amazing Gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:1-9</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>The Point of Vulnerability: 1 Corinthian 15:12-19</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>When Normal is Set Aside: 1 Corinthians 15:5-11</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>People Have Value: 1 Corinthians 15:20-22</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>A Mysterious Timeline: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Daily Application of the Hope of the Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Something Greater is Coming: 1 Corinthians 15:35-41</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Our Coming Heavenly Bodies: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>An Amazing Mystery: 1 Corinthians 15:50-53</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>The Victory Cry: 1 Corinthians 15:53-55</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>The Sting of Death: 1 Corinthians 15:56-57</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Become a Rock for Jesus: 1 Corinthians 15:58</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Transition from Temple to Church: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Prepare a Place: 1 Corinthians 16:5-7</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Seeking An Open Door: 1 Corinthians 16:8-9</b>	<b>167</b>

<b>Defeating Adversaries: 1 Corinthians 16:9</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Guarding Fellow Workers: 1 Corinthians 16:10-11</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Ministry Unity With Autonomy: 1 Corinthians 16:12</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>The Christian MOA: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>The Story of Stephanas: 1 Corinthians 16:15-18</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>The Unseen Ministry: 1 Corinthians 16:19-20</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Final Farewell: 1 Corinthians 16:21-24</b>	<b>175</b>

## **Sin City: 1 Corinthians 1:1-2**

“1) Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

The question often comes, “Can the gospel thrive in a secular culture?” With the call and ministry of the Apostle Paul, the gospel pushed west from Palestine and its rather sheltered and protective Jewish culture to Corinth, which was the center of Greek mythology, secular values, wealthy commerce, and unchecked immorality.

The city was located a mere forty miles west of Athens on a narrow strip of land or isthmus that connects Macedonia (the Greek mainland) to Achaia, which is home to the city of Sparta. The strip of land Corinth is built on is only five miles across and nearly connects the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea.

Initially, they designed elaborate methods of portaging ships across the land to save dangerous sea travel around the southern tip of Achaia. This was eventually replaced by an amazing canal that connects east to west. It can be argued that this engineering feat rivals and possibly surpasses that of the Panama Canal because it literally cuts through five miles of solid rock hundreds of feet deep in the center. The canal is still in use today.

Thus, Corinth had vital sea ports on both the east and west side of the isthmus. This positioned Corinth to become the most important trade route and metropolitan city in the ancient world. Corinth was home to the original Olympic Games where the world came together to compete in athletic games every other year.

Corinth also had a temple to the Greek goddess of love that by law had to employ 1,000 temple prostitutes at all times. This meant that Corinth was the destination for ancient sexual pleasure and trade. Every form of sexual activity was legal and promoted in Corinth. Thus the city boasted everything from trade, commerce, wealth, entertainment, and unchecked pleasure. The party literally never ended in Corinth.

It was said that many people came into Corinth one week with great wealth and left the next in total poverty, because the party life of Corinth quickly drained the money bag. Corinth was the Las Vegas of the Greek Empire.

It was into this city that God sent a small handful of believers armed with the gospel. Never doubt God's love for lost people. A church soon started and Paul himself spent 18 months in this city. As we shall see, the story is amazing!

### **Snapshot of the Church at Corinth: the Back-Story.**

So how can we reach a sinful and lost city like Corinth? If it is true that God loves the world, He must have a plan to reach the Corinthians of the world. It just happens that Acts 18 tells the story. (Read the whole chapter to get the background for this post.)

This text excites me. God sovereignly started to pull together His team. It started with a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla. They were a Jewish couple who had recently fled from Italy because of persecution. By trade they were tent makers.

In the previous few chapters of the book of Acts, Paul and Silas had just had some very difficult ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Just the typical stuff of being publicly beaten, thrown in jail, the focal point of a few riots and severe opposition. But through it all the power of God was present and some had become believers. Paul left Athens and headed the forty miles to Corinth.

It was there that he connected with Aquila and Priscilla. The text is not clear whether or not they were already believers, but Paul joined up with them to work in the trade of tent making. Their common denominator seemed to be that they were all victims of persecution and needed to earn some money. The couple soon became believers and part of God's initial ministry team in Corinth.

It just happens that there was already a Jewish synagogue in Corinth. They had an understanding of the God of the Old Testament but had not yet heard the Gospel or embraced the good news of Jesus Christ, Who is the Messiah. They were religious but not born again. That became a starting point, but also created some road blocks.

Soon opposition started, but the Gospel reached a man named Crispus, who was a leader in the synagogue. The gospel also reached a man named Titus Justus. He had a house next to the synagogue and opened it for Paul and the handful of new believers. From the text, it sounds like this became the host location of a home church.

Because of opposition from the Jews, Paul switched his focus to sharing the gospel with the Gentiles in Corinth. He was shortly joined by Silas and Timothy and began to focus more and more on the growing ministry.



Though opposition started to brew, more Gentiles were turning to the Lord. According to 1 Corinthians 6:9-13, many lost and sinful people started turning to Jesus Christ. Soon the church was full of new believers from every sinful background imaginable. God loves lost people.

The growing congregation represented a cross-section of Corinth. There were former thieves, drug addicts, prostitutes, fornicators, adulterers, cross dressers, homosexuals, and religious folks from a Jewish background and possibly merchants and a few politicians. You can imagine the potential for conflict. Because Corinth was on the trade route, most likely people from all over Europe and Asia heard the Gospel while passing through Corinth. This represented a huge discipleship challenge for the new church.

The books of Acts says that Paul devoted 18 months to help this church get started and wrote at least three letters back to them after his departure. History also holds that Paul wrote the book of Romans during his stay in Corinth. If that is the case, the book of Romans is a great example of Paul's teaching to the new converts in the city of Corinth.

It would be a gross exaggeration to say that all of Corinth turned to Christ or that the church was trouble free. As the book of 1 Corinthians indicates, the church was full of problems, but God was at work. I personally believe that the book of 1 Corinthians is the best New Testament picture of an effective church in the heart of secular culture. It was very alive, full of personality conflicts, and had plenty of issues but was reaching and making disciples of lost and sinful people.

I love the books of 1st and 2nd Corinthians. These two books are my personal model for effective and realistic church ministry in the modern world of secular culture and humanism. They give me hope that the Gospel can reach and be effective in our modern world.

I must also point out the religious synagogue in Corinth had been there for a long time but failed to change lives in Corinth. So what was it about the new Christian church that made it so effective? The answer to that question has the potential of bringing revival to dying churches around the world today.

### **The Church at Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1:2**

"2) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:"

Now that we have a basic understanding of Corinth and its Greek morals and values, this verse now takes on significant meaning. No matter how sinful or bad a person's past might be, Jesus Christ and the Gospel sanctifies them at the moment of salvation.

The word "sanctified" in this verse is in the past tense and literally means "to be made holy." In the New Testament, there are two aspects to being sanctified. The first is related to justification

by faith. It happens at the moment of salvation when the believer is given the righteousness of Jesus in exchange for our sinfulness. Faith in Christ makes us clean.

The second aspect of sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the believers life to cleanse and purify them on the experiential level. Both Titus 3:5-6 and Ephesians 5:26-27 refer to this washing and cleansing process. Paul also used the word sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 to talk about sexual purity.

The bottom line is that Jesus Christ saves, forgives, justifies, cleanses, purifies, and transforms sinners into saints. It is both an event that happens at the moment of salvation when the new believer is clothed with the righteousness of Christ, but then it becomes a life-long process of the Holy Spirit washing and cleansing the Christian on a daily basis.

Being part of the “church” means that the new believer is joined to the “ekkiesis”. This is a Greek word that means “called out ones that assemble together.” The Christian does not walk alone in life. The Holy Spirit joins them to the body of Christ. It is vital that every believer finds and gets active in a local church.

As we shall see in this book, the local church in Corinth had serious problems with unity, harmony, and theology. It was not a perfect church, but Paul did not give up on this group of believers. In fact, he wrote this letter to help this church function better.

There is nothing more powerful than a well-organized and Spirit-empowered local church. Maximum spiritual growth and service are intended to take place through interaction with other believers in a local church. On the other hand, there is nothing more pathetic than a distracted, carnal, conflict-filled and disjointed church that becomes nothing more than a local country club. Paul was writing this letter to move the church in Corinth in the right direction.

He wanted them to focus on the worship of God, prayer, unity, and powerful spiritual service. He wanted them to call on the Name of Jesus Christ. His goal was for them to begin to function in the Spirit and employ their gifts and talents for the glory of God and significant impact of Corinth with the Gospel.

The main goal of this book was helping these believers become a healthy local church. This topic has intrigued me my entire Christian life. I have devoted much of my ministry to church renewal and local church revival. Part of this might be because the book of 1 Corinthians was the first book I memorized as a new Christian. I love the local church and have been privileged to minister in hundreds of them around the world.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that God's work in the world in this age is through local churches. In fact, we are living in what is called “the church age.” The church is the bride of Christ. The church at Corinth gives me great encouragement that Jesus is committed to building local churches.

## **The Salutation or Greeting: 1 Corinthians 1:3**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This verse represents the greeting Christians would give each other in the early church. It was a signature of Paul in many of His writings. It goes beyond a casual greeting to include a blessing pronounced on the other person. It most likely had a Jewish flavor and origin attached to it.

In Matthew 10:11-13 Jesus instructed the twelve He sent out to give a “greeting of peace” to any house they entered, especially if they hosted them for the night. When used in a greeting, the word meant a state of untroubled and undisturbed well-being. It denoted the absence of strife.

The Hebrew word “Shalom” may be the root to this practice. The word is a blessing of peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, wellbeing and tranquility. It can be used as both a hello and goodbye. This is a common practice even today among Jewish people.

But notice that Paul preceded his greeting of peace with the word “grace.” This was uniquely Christian as the word grace is seldom used in the Hebrew Old Testament. It points to the character quality of God rooted in the redemptive work of Christ. It is both the basis of salvation as in Ephesians 2:8, and the strength and power for daily living that comes from the indwelling Spirit of God.

When the words grace and peace are placed together, the greeting becomes more theological than merely secular. It is both the recognition of the sovereignty and providence of God over someone, and also the pronouncement of a divine blessing over the other person.

Though it can become mundane and common through repeated use, it can almost be illustrated by Jesus awaking from His sleep in the midst of the raging storm and saying, “Hush, be still!” (Mark 4:35-41) This greeting among early Christians was an acknowledgment that only Jesus can calm the inner storm.

But the context of this greeting is especially significant. Paul was not writing to an individual, he was writing to a local church. As we shall see, it was a church filled with storms, strife, conflict and division. This salutation was pointing the Corinthians to Jesus as the only solution for the many storms raging within the local church. The same holds true for every church today.

## **A Good Starting Point: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9**

“4) I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5) that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6) even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7) so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8) who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9) God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Whatever was about to follow in this letter, Paul made one thing clear from the beginning, he did not question the salvation of the believers in the church at Corinth. They understood grace, they could comprehend spiritual truth, they had a testimony of salvation, spiritual gifts were functioning among them, and they were looking forward to the promised return of Christ. These are definite signs of salvation.

Paul also assured them that God was not going to give up on them. The cleansing and purifying work of the Holy Spirit was going to bring them to spiritual maturity so that they would be blameless in the day of Christ. God is absolutely faithful to finish what He starts in the life of a genuine believer. It may take time, but God does not abandon His people.

Why is this important? Because as we shall see in this book, the Christians in the church at Corinth struggled with all kinds of conflict, sin, and moral issues. But Paul kept pointing them toward holiness and Christ-likeness. He didn't lower the standard, he simply pointed them toward maturity. He was mentoring them toward the goal of becoming godly, fruitful, and mature disciples of Jesus Christ. (See 1 Timothy 1:5)

Becoming a Christian is accompanied with the promise of a new life, but it is a journey of stumbling toward maturity. Perfection is not the goal; godly maturity is the goal. There is a difference. Only God is perfect. Christians are works in progress.

In this book, Paul used the analogy of a young child growing toward adulthood. (See 1 Corinthians 3:1-3) He acknowledged that there is a growth process in the Christian life. We need to be patient with both ourselves and others as this process unfolds, but he in no way made excuses for believers to be stagnant or remain in infancy. Spiritual growth can and should proceed quickly.

Every Christian needs to go through the process of putting off the old self, being renewed in their inner mindset and then putting on the new self that reflects Christ. (See Ephesians 4:22-24) The problem with the Corinthians like many today, they were stuck in a rut. Instead of moving forward, they accepted carnality as normal and in the process excused their sin and compromise.

Paul was writing this letter to pull them out of the rut and point them toward God's plan for the Christian life. As this letter unfolds, Paul is very bold and candid in the way he exposes deception, points out sin, calls for repentance, and then proceeds to build a "truth-based" foundation for Christian conduct and living. At one point he even calls himself a "master builder." (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

If you are content with mediocrity and a shallow Christian life, you might want to skip the book of 1 Corinthians. It was written to move believers from diaper bags, potty training, and pacifiers to adulthood, maturity, productivity, and trustworthiness. This is a very blunt and hard-hitting book.

It was exactly what I needed as a new Christian struggling with all kinds of sin and moral issues. God providentially had me join a Bible Quizzing team as a new Christian and spend a full year studying and memorizing the book of 1 Corinthians. It became my launching pad for Christian growth. I believe God wants to use this book in your life as well!

### **Fights, Quarrels and Christian Dysfunction: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

“10) Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11) For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. 12) Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” 13) Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

There are many things that can divide Christians. In the next several verses Paul identifies two of them. Christians can squabble over their favorite preachers, teachers, and theologians; and they can be divided over various approaches to the sacraments and ceremonies in the church. Satan loves to divide Christians.

Evidently, someone from the family of Chloe had made their way to Ephesus while Paul was there and reported that factions were forming in the church at Corinth. The split was strong enough to threaten the unity in the church.

The factions were lining up behind different Christian leaders. Some favored the Jewish leanings of Peter and his practical application to the Christian life. Others loved the oratory skills of Apollos. He was most likely more Greek in his use of logic and reason. Others favored Paul and his technical explanation of Christian doctrine. He was very rational and authoritative. Still others preferred the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the early Gospels that were circulating in the church.

As a young believer, this text of Scripture became a warning to me not to embrace a certain theological prejudice or tradition to the exclusion of others. I never engaged deeply in the fruitless debates at Bible college around Calvinism versus Arminianism, or the evangelical and Charismatic divide. Rather, I gleaned insights from all of them and filtered them through Scripture.

My calling and emphasis has always been more on front-line ministry rather than late night fruitless and irrelevant debates over the differences between Christian leaders. I was more absorbed reaching the lost on the streets of Chicago and organizing evangelistic events for college breaks than debating theology. I am more concerned about ministering to the lost, hurting, disillusioned, and seeking than the tense of a certain Greek word.

Satan loves to distract the church. He would rather have Christians fight and argue within rather than unite and work together to reach the lost. I have discovered that the power, anointing, and

miraculous works of God show up on the front lines of ministry, but the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched when Christians fight and quarrel. Rather than hide in the church and debate whether or not God does miracles today, I would rather roll up my sleeves, step out of my comfort zone, and onto the front lines where miracles are common.

This opening text in the book of 1 Corinthians is profound. Paul is trying to avert a major pitfall among Christians and within churches. He is trying to steer them around major distractions that burn up countless time, energy, mental creativity, and the potential power of unity. He is trying to get them on target in Christian service rather than becoming the target of splits and divisions that derail and immobilize the church.

Tension and conflict between Christians is Satan's favorite way of draining the life and vitality out of a church. It happens all the time and over the dumbest things. Don't trip on the trivial on your way into the glorious presence and anointing of God!

### **Avoiding Confusing the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 1:13-17**

"13) Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14) I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15) that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16) Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void."

If Satan cannot stop the Gospel, he will settle for distorting the Gospel. Nothing twists the doctrine of justification by faith faster than adding human works to salvation. One example of this is what is called "baptismal regeneration." It is the notion that the physical act of being baptized as an infant or an adult is what saves a person.

Though I agree that baptism is an act of obedience for a believer, I disagree that it has redemptive value. If it was essential for salvation, how can you explain Paul's words in the above text? He actually says that God did not send him to baptize but to preach the gospel so as not to confuse or minimize the work of Christ on the cross. This text is of paramount importance.

Think about this, Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He was a church-planting evangelist and missionary. Yet he refrained from baptizing people so as not to confuse the gospel message. He was not opposed to baptism, he did baptize a few individuals at Corinth. He was just careful not to confuse baptism with the actual message of salvation.

As you read his epistles, it becomes clear that Paul was sent to define and confirm the gospel message. In Philippians Chapter One he uses the word "gospel" six times and points out that his mission was to define, defend, and confirm the message of the gospel. Not once did he

connect it with baptism, taking communion, circumcision, or any religious work done by people to earn salvation.

Why is this important? Many people look at baptism as the means and basis of salvation, and not personal saving faith in Jesus Christ. Review John 3:1-18 for the basis of salvation. Jesus was talking to a very religious person who had fulfilled every religious rite and ritual, but Jesus pointed out that Nicodemus was not born-again. He had fallen short of personal faith in Jesus.

I have attended many funerals over the years for people from mainline denominations, only to have the pastor or priest point to their infant baptism as assurance and proof of their salvation. That is biblically, doctrinally, and morally wrong. It confuses the gospel and gives a false understanding of salvation. The same religious leaders will argue vehemently against a born-again message of personal saving faith in Jesus Christ as the sole basis of salvation.

As you study the New Testament, you will discover that personal saving faith in Jesus Christ always comes before baptism. (Read Acts 8:35-38) Philip was not going to baptize the Ethiopian until he first professed saving faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism apart from personal saving faith in Jesus Christ is a mere religious ritual that accomplishes nothing.

If you are reading this post and getting frustrated because your church background practices baptismal regeneration, I encourage you to go back and wrestle with this text. Better yet, make sure you respond to the gospel by placing personal saving faith in Jesus Christ.

I would encourage you to study the entire New Testament and clarify for yourself what constitutes the gospel message. 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 might be a good starting point. Make sure you get the gospel right because your relationship with God and eternity is based on the gospel.

### **The Word of the Cross: 1 Corinthians 1:17-18**

“17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The Gospel is keenly focused on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection. Paul did not want to do anything to obscure what Jesus accomplished on the cross. God sent His only Son to die in the place of sinful humanity and bear the punishment of sin. Though only one died, He bore the sins of all humanity and opened the door of salvation. (See 1 John 2:2)

Paul had just come from Athens and his encounter with the Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers on Mars Hill. (See Acts 17:16-34) The Gospel sounded like foolishness to them. They opted instead for the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. They were deeply embedded in idolatry and Greek mythology. They worshiped many gods.

Paul's message sounded like foolishness to them. The Greek gods toy with mere mortals. They are amused by them and even exploit them for their own sick pleasure. To think there is only One Creator God and that He would pay for human sin through crucifixion on a Roman cross was preposterous to them. To them, Rome won and Jesus lost.

But Paul points out that there is power in the message of the cross. It redeems people, sets them free from sin and bondage and brings new life. It also opens the door to the power of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The word of the cross might be foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to those who are saved.

Here is the problem: There is nothing special about religion. People have been religious since the beginning of time. The Romans had religion. The Greeks had religion. The Gentiles had religion. The Jews had reduced the Law to a works-based religion. New religions come and go all the time. Even Oprah Winfrey started a new religion. Many denominations have reduced Christianity to nothing more than religion by leaving out the word of the cross and the call to a born-again experience based on faith in Christ. They have replaced it with good works, rituals, and ceremonies.

Paul's own conversion was miraculous. God saved him and radically changed him. (See Philippians 3:1-16). He was religious but lost. The Resurrected Christ and the message of the cross changed him. He discovered the message of salvation and the only way to God. There was no way Paul was going to obscure that message or minimize Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. Paul literally gave his life to defend the clear message of the Gospel.

So the question comes, "Are you religious or have you been saved through the message of the cross and the gospel of Jesus Christ?" You have to answer that question for yourself. What are you trusting in as the basis of your salvation? Are you trusting in your good works, your church, or some religious ceremony you have gone through?

If that is the case, the word of the cross has been made void in your life. You've missed it! Take time and seriously ponder what Paul is saying in these verses. Don't argue with me, rather take time and wrestle with God and His Word. Come to the place where you thoroughly understand the Gospel and enter into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is simple and yet profound. It is basic and yet powerful. It is foolishness to the lost, but the power of God to those who have been saved. Once your salvation has been sealed by the Holy Spirit there will be no more doubt. His Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. (See Romans 8:16) New life will begin because you have been born of His Spirit!

### **Human Reason Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians 1:18-21**

"18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." 20) Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe?



Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

The message of the cross may sound like foolishness to the lost, but have you ever sat back and seriously evaluated the wisdom of the secular world? I have! I have taken numerous philosophy, ethics and psychology classes at secular colleges. At some point, most of them reflect comedy more than a sincere search for truth.

They ponder things like; "if a tree falls in the woods and no one is there, does it actually make a sound?" Or they come up with redeeming conclusions like "I think... therefore I am." That helps the skeptic who is questioning his or her own existence. Many change ethics and morals to accommodate their lifestyles only to eventually contract STDs. But the guilt is with the pharmaceutical company that hasn't found a cure for the new STD. Meanwhile, wisdom and caution are abandoned because they hinder freedom of expression.

Or how about their cry for "tolerance" and "open mindedness"? That applied only until they are in control. Then they become radically intolerant and everything is filtered through their own philosophical grid. If you don't believe me, try writing a paper on the science behind creation in a secular biology or earth science class. You will soon discover extreme bias and intellectual censorship. Your evidence will be dismissed as irrelevant because it doesn't fit their grid. Meanwhile, they can no longer figure out if a person is male or female.

Here is a great illustration of absurdity: Just have the audacity to say, "All Lives Matter" at the BLM rally. Soon a bunch of enraged white people will attack you because you believe all people have dignity and value. Then they will justify their actions because you are being racially biased. Is there something irrational about this picture?

Paul asks some profound questions in verse 20; "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Keep in mind, he had just come from Athens.

At some point, the reasoning of the wise becomes foolishness. They will put punishing regulations in place that hinder the economy. They will implement policy to solve problems that don't exist. They will come up with conclusions that defy common sense. They will call for changes that will adversely affect themselves.

Some today are so driven by the notion of global warming that they postulate the idea of controlling the weather by surrounding the earth with space mirrors to prevent global warming. So, if they love trees and green plants, why would they deflect the sunlight needed by the trees for existence? Logic no longer matters. They are on a mission.

So, have I departed from this text? Not in the least. All of this happens simply because they reject the existence of God and the concept of absolute truth based on His character and

nature. And how does God respond? He is well-pleased to let them wallow in their own deception and sink in their misguided search for truth. Paul observes that the world through its own reasoning will never arrive at the truth about God. They will invent religions to satisfy their “god vacuum” but that also accommodate human depravity.

The further they drift from God the more bizarre their morals, ethics, values, and philosophies become. At some point they will call good evil and condemn and even put to death the righteous. They will attack and mock anything that points to a good and moral Creator God.

Paul points out in this text that God is not impressed with misguided human reason, logic, or morals. He is well pleased with the simple gospel message to save those who believe. Becoming a Christian involves the active illumination of the Holy Spirit. God draws those whom He calls. The secular mind will never arrive at the truth about God through mere human reason. It is twisted by sin and depravity.

### **God's Way: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25**

“22) For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23) but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24) but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25) Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

People want God on their terms. It doesn't work that way. We need to come to God on His terms. Paul mentioned that the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks demand wisdom.

During His public ministry, the Jews constantly asked for signs to prove His claim of Deity. (Matthew 12:38-39; Matthew 16:1) The Greeks on Mars Hill wanted to hear something rational and philosophical about the new Christian faith. They were disappointed when Paul pointed to the crucifixion and the resurrection. (See acts 17:16-34)

What kind of demands are you making of God before you believe in Him? The gospel message is the basis of salvation. You need to acknowledge the fact that you are sinful and lost, but God loves you so much He sent His Son to atone for your sin.

The gospel may sound foolish to some, but to those who are called no matter their race or background, it becomes both the power of God and the wisdom of God. It opens their eyes, places new life within, and transforms them into new people. The gospel places them in fellowship with God. Nothing this world has to offer compares to knowing God.

Paul then says, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” God has no equal. He created all things and holds the universe in the palm of His hand. A sneeze from God has the power to destroy a solar system or create a new galaxy. Who is man to challenge, mock, or scorn God? I am confident He is not moved by the foolishness of

the atheist or the ignorance of the agnostic. God is content with the simple gospel message to save those who come to Him.

### **The Immeasurable Gap Between God and Man. 1 Corinthians 1:25**

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

This verse has always intrigued me. It is basically saying that God is infinitely wiser and stronger than men. Obviously, God does not have a lapse in His wisdom or knowledge, nor does He have a gap in His strength. Paul is using a figure of speech to say, “God at His least is infinitely greater than man at his best.” There is no comparison.

I thought it might be fun to issue a challenge to come up with some illustrations of this point. For example: The surpassing knowledge of God compared to man would be like the combined knowledge of all the supercomputers in the world compared to the knowledge of a new born baby. The gap of knowledge between the two is immeasurable.

Here is one I thought might illustrate the surpassing power of God: The weakness of man compared to God would be like a man in a row boat armed with a BB gun facing down a US Naval Battle Fleet and demanding surrender. The word picture is humorous and preposterous, but illustrates the point. The guy might not survive the wave from a ship passing him by.

Ok, it's your turn. Let's see what kind of illustration you can come up with to illustrate Paul's point. Both of mine actually fall short of the gap, but were a fun mental exercise. My goal is to get you to think about the surpassing greatness of God.

The bottom line is that the gap between God and man is immeasurable. Yet pompous man never ceases to taunt God. “He who sits in the heavens laughs.” (Psalm 2:4)

### **The God Factor: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29**

“26) For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29) so that no man may boast before God.”

God delights in taking the common and the ordinary to confound the worldly wise and the mighty. The Bible is full of stories of men and women like Joseph, Esther, David, Daniel, and four fishermen from Galilee. Even Jesus Himself was born in a manger.

I have been amazed over the years to discover how many people God has promoted from modest beginnings to the top of virtually every field. From the fields of education, science, math, medicine, business ownership, sales, music, art, engineering, inventing, athletics, astronomy, military service men and women, to astronauts and political leaders; God has promoted common and ordinary people who know and love Him to the top in virtually every field.

It is common for these humble but extraordinary men and women to give glory to God. Many overcame obstacles, addictions, setbacks and disadvantages to be promoted by God. Most of them display a sense of divine favor and blessing on their lives as the only explanation of their rise to prominence.

Does this capture what Paul is saying in these verses? Not entirely, but it exemplifies his basic theme. Those who seek and honor God are crowned with favor and blessings that defy the odds and confound the world. They can be put down but they bounce back. They can be held back but they persevere. It is impossible to erase the God-factor from human achievement. God has left abundant testimony of this principle in the world.

### **Rooting Your Faith in the Power of God: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

“1) And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4) And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5) that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

This text deserves paramount attention. Paul cut through the religious flack and flowery language to God Himself. Like Elijah on Mount Carmel he was saying “the God who answers with fire, He is God.” (1 Kings 18:24)

Paul was not impressed with a big vocabulary, logical arguments, or mere human reason. He preached the simple gospel message of why Jesus Christ was crucified and pointed people to the power of the Holy Spirit. He wanted souls to be converted and not merely minds to be convinced.

Paul was more concerned about a clear presentation of the gospel than complicated and empty theological arguments. The Pharisees could argue religion. The philosophers on Mars Hill could debate. The Jewish rabbis could talk for hours about the finer points of the Law. But they all left people lost, without hope, and slaves to sin. They ignored the true hurt of the human heart.

Paul was interested in one primary thing; “What is your view of Jesus Christ?” Is He God’s Son? Why did He die on the cross? Have you trusted in Him as your Lord and Savior? Paul focused on the gospel. His theology was based on justification by faith in Jesus Christ and his ministry turned out Spirit-empowered disciples.

Verses 4-5 should be the focal point of every Bible College and Seminary. Paul wanted his ministry team to point people to the simple gospel message and the power of the Holy Spirit. He was insistent that every Christian have a faith that was rooted in the power of God and not human wisdom or empty church doctrine.

If Paul were to sit on an ordination council, he would ask questions about good theology, but then he would demand to see the fruit of God's anointing on the man's life. He would want to hear a clear testimony of conversion followed by ample examples of the Holy Spirit working both in and through the person.

If a man or woman has good theology but is void of any fruit or examples of the power of God working through their lives, they certainly don't qualify to lead a church or a ministry team. Paul pointed people to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ and to the power of God. He was a man of unction as well as action. He demanded anointing before appointing. He wanted the faith of people to rest in God Himself and not in empty religion, theological arguments, or human personalities. Paul didn't want people to follow him, he wanted people to follow God.

Many churches today are led by pastors who demonstrate no more power of God in their lives than an atheist or agnostic. Their whole ministry is rooted in religious rituals, intellectual assent to certain theological doctrines, and conformity to external norms of conduct. In this text Paul is asking, "Where is the evidence of the power of God in your ministry?" "At what point does God show up?" "Show me where the Holy Spirit is working."

If this text makes you uncomfortable, welcome to the crowd. God used this text to drive me to the prayer closet and to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. You may need to cry out to God to answer with fire in your life and ministry. Never be shy about seeking God more fervently or crying out for more anointing of the Holy Spirit in your life. If you are empty, ask God to fill you.

### **Growing Deep in Communion With God: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16**

"6) Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7) but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;" .... "10) For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13) which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

In these verses Paul hints at something profound that has captured the minds of scholars for centuries. Keep in mind he was in Corinth which was the seat of the ancient mystery religions.

Their core belief was that the gods communicate with men and reveal secret knowledge to them.

The priests in these ancient religions were evil and used occult practices to control and manipulate people. Many were persuaded to sacrifice their children to the gods, participate in gross immorality, and excuse the practice of extensive human sacrifice as a means of appeasing the gods. It amounted to evil and vile human manipulation. This wicked phenomenon mysteriously spread to nearly all ancient pagan religions, including into South America.

Paul boldly exposed these false religions as demonic in his letters. (See Ephesians 6:10-12, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21, and 2 Corinthians 11:1-15) He also warned that Satan's false workers would try to lead Christians astray and back into slavery to deception, sin, and corruption. (See Colossians 2:8) Satan will use everything from false philosophy to false workers to accomplish his goal.

You may notice we skipped over 1 Corinthians 1:30-31. These verses capture the huge difference between Christianity and the ancient mystery religions. Look carefully at verse 30, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." Christianity imparts new life to the child of God. It sets people free from sin and bondage. The ancient false religions would steal, exploit, kill, destroy, and indulge in gross and vile practices. The contrast is as different as light and darkness.

But Paul did not stop there, he took the huge step of proclaiming that the true God does have a way of communicating the deep mysteries of God to His people through His Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6-16) Though the walk in the Spirit does have power as we saw in the last post, Paul stressed that it is also based on truth and wisdom. According to verses 6-7, mature believers "speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory."

I do not have space to elaborate at this time, except to say that God does have mysteries and hidden knowledge to impart to His people. The ways of God, the riches of Christ, the full understanding of things to come, the scope of the inheritance we have in Christ are all shrouded with mystery. These are revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and the illumination that comes through communion with Him in the Spirit.

This illumination process through the Holy Spirit was the core of Paul's prayer for true believers in Scriptures like Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21 and Colossians 1:9-12. He wanted every believer to have the eyes of their heart opened to understand and perceive the depth of the riches we have in Christ.

This text in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 begs the question, "does God speak to people?" Paul's answer was "yes". The Spirit of God is the teacher for all believers. He should be dynamic and not passive. He both illuminates and teaches individual believers and He speaks to the combined

body of Christ through the spiritual gifts as laid out in 1 Corinthians 12-14, but He can be grieved, quenched, and silenced.

Paul was writing to the Corinthians because they had become carnal and fleshly rather than mature and walking in the Spirit. The whole ship was sinking into the dark waters of pride, self promotion, carnality, dabbling in pagan idolatry, immorality, and blending Christianity with aspects of the mystery religions of Greece. Satan was trying to infiltrate the church to distort and manipulate the spiritual gifts being practiced by the believers.

The book of 1 Corinthians is both corrective and instructive. It was written to help individual Christians walk in the Spirit and to help the body of Christ function together in the Spirit with the full spectrum of distributed spiritual gifts.

The context is warning that when the Holy Spirit is minimized and neglected, Christianity can be reduced to powerless and empty rational religion. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) On the other hand, when carnality goes unchecked, it opens the doors for Satan to manipulate and distort the Charisma gifts within the local church. (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)

In between these two warnings is the most beautiful picture of communion with God through His Spirit found in the whole Bible. Our goal is to become spiritually mature in our walk with Jesus Christ through His Spirit and enter into this blessed calling of intimate fellowship with God. I pray that Jesus brings revival to His Bride in these days and moves many believers to Spirit-filled and functioning godly maturity as described in this text.

### **Rational Arguments Cannot Change Human Values: 1 Corinthians 1 & 2**

Let's take a moment and string together some verses from 1 Corinthians chapters one and two. These verses talk about how the unsaved world looks at the gospel and the full scope of the wisdom of God. (Please read the full context to get the full impact of what Paul is saying.)

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

2:8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

Paul is making an important observation in these verses. Because the unsaved are void of the Holy Spirit they cannot understand or perceive either the gospel or the wisdom of God. The Bible makes no sense to them.

Sure, they can read it and point to a few texts here or there that seem to undergird their secular value system, but they do not have a cohesive and unified understanding of the ways of God. Rational conversation with them about biblical wisdom usually results in either an argument or evokes mocking from them.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul was driving home an important premise. Understanding the Bible is not a function of the human soul or human reason, it is a function of the revived spirit of people who have been born again and therefore quickened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus warned His disciples about this in Matthew 7:6 when He said; “do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under feet and turn and tear you to pieces.” The starting point has to be the gospel and salvation. Paul was insistent on getting people saved before he tried making disciples of them. (See 1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

He observed that even the word of the cross was foolishness to those who were perishing. (See 1 Corinthians 1:18) This was especially true in the Greek and Roman culture of his day. Keep in mind, the gods of the mystery religions indulged in human sacrifice and promoted gross and vile practices. The pagan temple in Corinth by law maintained 1,000 prostitutes to fulfill degrading passions.

Can you imagine how strange the message must have sounded to them that there is a Holy and Loving Creator God Who sacrificed His Son for the sins of people and that He had a plan to forgive, cleanse, and transform sinful people into godly people? The gospel and the Christian message was the exact opposite to the message of the pagan gods and the resulting secular culture. Our culture is approaching that point today.

But for the sake of discussion, I need to acknowledge that there are people who have a more developed sense of human conscience. They feel guilt and know that crossing over innate moral lines is wrong. As a result they often adopt a sense of trying to please God by being good and earning His approval, but they constantly wrestle with failure. Ironically, all false religions seek to earn the approval of the gods.

Here are the points Paul was making, 1) this gap of understanding cannot be crossed by mere rational arguments; 2) nor can personal holiness be attained by legalism or trying to keep strict religious codes. It requires both the inner Illumination of the Holy Spirit and the inner regeneration and cleansing of the Holy Spirit.

Settling for anything less than a born-again experience will be like trying to change the nature of wild animals that are controlled by instinct. Your efforts will be met with frustration and failure. No matter how long you try convincing dogs or swine of the value of precious pearls they are not going to understand. They have no basis to embrace your value system.

They are driven by instincts, hormones, and appetites. Neither pearls, rocks, or coins mean anything to them. Therefore these things have no value to them. The end result is that no matter



how much teaching, training, or educating you attempt, they cannot understand, appreciate, or embrace your value system. They would rather have you for lunch than waste time sorting pearls.

The same is true when Christians try forcing their value system on secular society or unsaved people. Paul said the starting point has to be sharing the gospel with lost people and not arguing morality. When people come to Jesus Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit. He will do the cleaning from within. Rational arguments will be less needed because inner illumination from the Holy Spirit will begin. As their nature changes they will begin to value biblical pearls.

This text has helped me understand the futility of religious debates and arguments. When someone becomes defensive against biblical pearls, it usually means I need to move the conversation back toward Jesus and the basic gospel message. They need to be saved before they can comprehend, appreciate, or embrace biblical values.

### **The Tragic Plight of Worldly Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 2:6-9**

“6) Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;... 8) the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9) but just as it is written, “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.”

The secular world brags that it is superior in intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge, but Paul disputes that claim. He actually says the rulers of his age and all of their counselors were ignorant of God’s wisdom. Why? Had they perceived the wisdom of God they would have never crucified the Lord of glory.

The truth is they were blind, deceived, and wicked. Keep in mind, it was the religious Jewish leaders that led the way in crucifying Jesus. They claimed to know God and that they were the guardians of truth, but Jesus often accused them of being blind guides of the blind.

But Paul in no way limited his charge of ignorance to the Jewish leaders. In this text He twice mentioned “the rulers of his age.” He may have been referring to the leaders in every field including government. At the time of his writing, he had recently debated the philosophers of the Greek world on Mars Hill and pointed out their utter ignorance. (See Acts 17:22-34) The bottom line is that they had missed the true God.

Not much has changed. The secular world still brags of being intelligent only to wallow in foolishness. In some ways it's getting worse today. Many of the leaders of modern secular movements like antifa and BLM are college professors and school teachers. They are not only void of common sense, they are bent on anarchy. They constantly think logically to wrong conclusions.

Paul says something far superior to anything the secular world can produce awaits the believers. Verse 9 says God is preparing something that surpasses anything the human eye has seen, the ear has heard or the human mind has pondered. I believe that those who know and love God not only have a huge edge in this life, but also an eternity waiting for them that requires a whole new kind of body in order to enter and participate in. (See 1 Corinthians 15:42-49)

The good news is that the Holy Spirit starts putting this heavenly longing and reality in Christians during this life. The Bible not only gives us a radically different view of origins and history than the secular world embraces, it also gives us a totally different value system for this life and a superior view of the future. We have a forward-looking hope and expectation, the atheist and agnostic have nothing.

I would rather be martyred for the biblical hope of eternity than live for the empty promises of the secular world. Their end result is bondage, boredom, depression, and futility.

The world screams about the unprecedented rise in depression, mental illness, and suicide today. But they fail to realize when you connect the dots it all leads back to a godless and depraved education system. When God is left out and truth is surpassed, the end result is inner chaos. The secular world produces a prison for the human soul which only the gospel and Jesus Christ can pierce. The answer is not more humanism, the answer is turning back to God and His ways.

That is a summary of the book of 1 Corinthians. Paul was telling the undecided believers that God's ways were superior and that he had something far better than the loose living in Corinth could offer. There is pleasure in sin for a season, but the end is deadly. It steals, kills and destroys. As we shall see in the next chapter, it also leads to a disastrous eternity.

### **Three Kinds of People: 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3**

“14) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16) For “who has known the mind of the LORD, that he will instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. 1) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2) I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3) for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

In this text, Paul turns his attention to describe three different kinds of people. First, he talks about the natural or unsaved person. (Vs 14) These are non-Christians who are void of the Holy Spirit and therefore have no spiritual understanding. They embrace a secular world view and the wisdom of God is rejected as foolishness by them. They live a worldly lifestyle without apology and even vehemently defend it.

Second, Paul talks about the spiritual person. This is the born-again Christian who is walking in the Spirit, growing in their understanding of Christ, standing in grace and moving toward godly maturity. They are not perfect, but they have a sincere walk with God and embrace His Word and His ways as the map for their life. They have a growing degree of spiritual understanding and comprehension and are becoming fruitful in reproducing godly character and making disciples. Paul would consider this the normal Christian experience. They embrace and seek to live out a biblical worldview.

Third, as chapter three opens, Paul talks about the carnal or fleshly Christian. These are the people who have become Christians but retain worldly values and are still trapped in sinful living by choice. They are babes in Christ and are not ready for the deep things of God. They live and act like spiritual infants. They can only digest milk, have terrible attitudes, and throw spiritual tantrums. Paul uses this term to explain the problem with many believers attending the church in Corinth. For all practical purposes, they live and act like non-believers. They have a clear testimony of salvation and may display a few spiritual gifts, but for some reason never lifted off the launching pad into the Christian life.

The tragic thing about this group of people is they are stuck in a sinful rut because of their own choices. They are disobedient and immature. Paul makes no excuse for them and calls them to repentance and a new direction in life. They may be in need of discipleship, but more importantly, they need to get off the throne of their life and put Jesus on the throne. But let me stress Paul did not give up on them. He was writing this Epistle to the carnal church. He had been taking inventory.

From a practical standpoint, all Christians struggle with sin, temptation, and spiritual growth. The difference is the spiritual ones Paul talked about in Chapter Two progress steadily in a godward direction, while the carnal ones are forever wandering in a sinful wilderness and fail to move beyond infancy.

Every pastor and Christian leader will deal with carnal Christians. They are energy-takers, noise-makers, and back-stabbers. They resist godly vision, throw cold water on spiritual fire and momentum, and usually create turmoil and division. My approach is to go with the goers and pour myself into the growers. I am there for everyone, but prioritize my time and energy for those who are showing signs of sincere growth.

I do not try to second-guess spiritual potential. I preach and teach the Word without compromise, provide a full menu, and watch for genuine growth and fruit. When I see spiritual life and vibrancy, I fan it and encourage it. God causes growth. I love inviting people on weekend retreats or mission trips to get them out of their comfort zone. God often uses these focused times to break through complacency and pull down strongholds.

You may be reading this and concluding that you are stuck in carnality. Isn't it time to get serious about God and your daily walk? Why not plot a new course for your life? I would encourage

you to pursue God with fresh zeal and abandonment. Roll up your sleeves, pull up to the table and start feeding yourself on the meat of God's Word. When you're done eating, put on your work gloves and get active for God! Turn from your former ways and start walking with God.

### **Taking Carnality to the Surgery Room: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4**

"1) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2) I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3) for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4) For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?"

Paul had a serious problem with the carnality among the Christians in the city of Corinth. It was not normal. He was not writing to promote or condone a second class of Christian. He was writing to warn them of their sinful ways.

In these opening verses of Chapter Three, Paul points out that they were babes or infants spiritually. He gave them milk to drink and pampered them along. Tragically, they were not ready for the deep things of God.

The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote of this same dysfunction in Hebrews 5:11-6:3. He even used the same terminology of Paul by referring to serving them milk instead of solid food. In verse 12, he laments the fact that "by this time" they should be teachers, but they were stuck in kindergarten.

In 2 Peter 1:2-8 Peter talks about normal Christian growth and maturity. It is exciting watching the Spirit of God transform new believers into mature and fruit-bearing people. But then in verses 9-11 he also warns about those with stunted growth. He called this same category blind and short-sighted. They were constantly in danger of falling or stumbling.

I am not going to detour into the question as to whether or not a carnal Christian can lose their salvation. Paul will deal with that question later in 1 Corinthians Chapter Three. However, I am very intrigued by his focus in the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians of systematically pulling down the strongholds that were hindering spiritual growth. He did this by talking about sin and calling for repentance. He did not ignore the subject.

The bottom line is that Paul and all of the New Testament writers tackled sin among God's people head-on. They did not ignore the subject. They did not soft-peddle sin or condone carnal living. They saw the gospel as pulling people out of the muck of life and not leaving them in the quicksand of sin.

However, they did not tackle the problem of carnality in a condemning or judgmental way. They did it with the love, skill, and the urgency of a surgeon opening up the cancer-infected cavity of a

critically ill person and attempting to remove the tumor. They were there to give help, hope, and a direction in life.

They spoke truth in love and walked with people through the ugly chapters of life. Their goal was putting people on track to spiritual growth and maturity. They were into disciple-making and not babysitting. They were changing lives and not changing diapers.

There is no shame in admitting and confessing personal sin, bondage, and dysfunction. Getting a clear x-ray or diagnostic test is the starting point of a new life. That's exactly what Paul was doing with the Corinthians. They had sincerely written to him and expressed a desire to learn and grow. Paul responded by pointing them to the surgery room.

So what is your inner condition? Are you stuck in a rut or drifting in your spiritual life? Isn't it time to face your sin and bondage and pull down every stronghold? For those of you who are reading ahead in I Corinthians, why settle for building with wood, hay, or straw when you can build with gold, silver, and precious stones? The foundation of Jesus Christ can support a glorious skyscraper. Why settle for a shanty or chicken coop Christian life?

### **The Signature of Carnality: 1 Corinthians 3:2-4**

"2) I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3) for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4) For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?"

Carnal Christians are typified by petty arguments, quarrels, fights and divisions. They can argue theology but fail to live a godly life. Many have keenly developed intellects and can argue doctrine all day while they are secretly addicted to pornography, cheating on their taxes, or involved in some form of business fraud. I think you get the idea.

Usually when I am approached by a polished Calvinist or Arminian who has a hair trigger to argue theology, I recognize I am in the presence of a carnal Christian. Just like in Corinth, some were backing Paul while others were lined up behind Apollos. The whole thing resulted in fruitless banter. These fruitless debates were the signature of carnality.

Such argumentation is rooted in the rational soul and not the Spirit-filled and controlled inner sanctum. These doctrinal quarrels have little concern for spiritual anointing, unction, or worship. They would rather debate and win arguments than see people set free from sin or bondage.

I am in no way saying Spirit-filled people are not theologically sound. I would suggest that Jesus and Paul were both theologically sound, but neither reduced their ministry to merely arguing theology. They were motivated by getting people to live fruitful and mature spiritual lives.

Unfortunately, the atmosphere at many Bible colleges and seminaries is reduced to rationalism and academic mastery rather than godliness or Spirit-empowered living. The result is that many graduate as pastors with no sense of what it means to walk in the Spirit, discern God's voice, and lead or have a clear vision or calling in their lives. This is a travesty and the reason why so many pastors fail or wash out in their Christian lives. This is the signature of carnality that plagues the western church and many denominations.

### **Receiving Input From Many Others: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9**

"5) What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7) So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8) Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9) For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

Paul was a master at using analogies to explain spiritual principles. In the next eleven verses he talks about both farming (Vs 5-9), and building construction (Vs 10-15). He was addressing two basic principles. First, he wanted the Corinthians to appreciate and value God's full ministry team He sent to help them grow. Second, he wanted them to realize that they were responsible for building the quality of their spiritual lives and their own walk with God.

In verses 5-9, Paul was addressing the factions and divisions that were starting to create serious problems with harmony in the church. In these two verses, he mentions only himself and Apollos. Previously in 1 Corinthians 1:12 he also mentioned Peter in this same controversy. The Corinthians were lining up behind different spiritual leaders and teachers.

To remedy the problem, Paul pointed them to the illustration of farming. He said that different workers fill different roles. He looked at himself as a planter. Apollos was involved in watering and irrigation. Though not stated, Peter could be viewed as cultivating or pruning. The bottom line is that each role is important to the growth, health, and ultimate yield of the crop.

Early in my Christian life, I followed only one or two Christian teachers and fell into the trap of writing others off completely. I refused to listen to them at all. As I have grown, I have gleaned much by listening to multiple speakers and authors. I don't expect one leader to be it all or do it all for me. I can now appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each of them and let them shine in their God-ordained role.

For example, George Whitfield, Charles Finney, George Verwer, Loren Cunningham, and Billy Graham were all amazing evangelists and revivalists. Josh McDowell, Henry Morris, and Ken Ham are exceptional Christian apologists. John MacArthur, R.C. Sproul, and Charles Ryrie were good scholars. Warren Weirsbe, Chuck Swindoll, Tony Evans, and John Piper were among my favorite preachers and expositors. Erwin Lutzer and Rick Warren stand out as helpful Christian philosophers. James Dobson and Caroline Leaf are among my favorite Christian psychologists.

John Maxwell, Jim Rohn, Zig Ziglar, and Joel Osteen are among my favorite motivational speakers. God has used Dave Ramsey and Robert Kiyosaki to help me understand finances and investing. I have also gleaned much from common and ordinary people God has placed in my path.

It is always dangerous to name leaders because significant people will be left out. But I want to illustrate a point. If you look at this list, it is easy to find sharp disagreement between them on various issues. I have no problem with iron sharpening. God has used each of them and many more at various times to speak into my life. I have gleaned insights from Calvinists and Arminians; Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians; Evangelicals and Pentecostals; Christians and few non-Christians.

Has this created conflict within me? Not at all, because God and the Bible are my ultimate source of truth and authority. My diet has been 80% personal time in the Word and 20% from other people. That is vital!!!! God does not want us to become a clone of any one leader and we shouldn't expect any one of them to have it all together. God brought each of them into my life for a purpose and for a season for planting, watering or cultivation in areas of growth I needed at that time.

Did you notice in 1 Corinthians 3:7 that God causes the growth? Your focus has to be on God. The more you put your eyes on people the more you will find cause for disappointment and discouragement. Why? Because all people have temptations, weaknesses, sin, personal bias, and personality quirks. Get over it! Look beyond it! Glean what God wants to give you from them and move on. Set your compass on God.

The goal is to be well-rounded, victorious, loving, mature, Spirit-filled and controlled, biblically sound, and fruitful for the glory of God. Remember, you are a disciple of Christ and not some other person.

I am approaching the point in my life where I can set aside a critical and argumentative spirit and truly value input from other people. At the same time I guard against error and deception. I use the Bible as my filter. I quickly remove negative information or erroneous content from my life. I try to grab what God has for me and move on to the harvest in that area of my life. I have become very intentional about personal growth and development while trusting Jesus to guide the process in my life.

### **Don't Build a Straw House on a Magnificent Granite Foundation: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15**

"10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14) If any man's work which he

has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

Paul now turns to his second analogy. He calls himself a Master Builder. That was a profound claim in that he was in the heart of the Greek world with its marvelous granite buildings that have inspired humanity throughout the ages. The foundation stones on these buildings were beautiful, humongous, and weighed tons. There was no mistaking the comparison.

As a Master Builder through God's grace and calling, Paul said that He laid a foundation. That foundation was the gospel of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of justification by faith. It proclaimed that Jesus Christ did everything to purchase human redemption through His death, burial, and resurrection, and Salvation is based solely on faith with no human merit from works. (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-10)

There are many foundations for life. Paul stresses that only the foundation of Jesus Christ was accepted by God and qualified for human salvation. The adage that "all religions lead to God" is absolutely false. (Compare with Acts 4:11-12) It is not faith that saves –it is faith in Jesus Christ that saves!

Paul then emphasizes that each Christian is responsible to build on the foundation, but they need to take heed of how they build. They need to choose their building materials carefully. Some are diligent and careful builders and choose gold, silver, and precious stones. Those were the materials chosen to build the temple in the Old Testament and that the Greeks used for their astounding buildings.

The other choice was wood, hay, and common stubble. These were the building materials of the poor and common people. Some mixed them with mud to make bricks, but many built with sticks and used straw for thatched roofs. These buildings were vulnerable to all kinds of natural disasters from things like heavy rains and strong winds. But the most feared disaster came from fire. Entire villages could be burned to the ground in a matter of hours. Looters exploited the obvious vulnerability of these structures.

That's exactly what Paul warns about next. He says that each man's work is going to be tested with fire and it will test the quality of each man's life. Many Christians will have their works reduced to ashes. Those who built with gold, silver, and precious stones will be rewarded.

But what about those who lose everything? Do they forfeit their salvation? Are they lost? Notice verse 15; "If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." Why will he be saved? The answer is that salvation is based on faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and not our works.

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith precludes this answer. Any form of religion that is based on earning salvation by human works nullifies the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the



cross to purchase human salvation. No fire can destroy the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to make this point absolutely clear.

Yet his emphasis was; “take heed how you build on the foundation.” Paul was reminding the Corinthians that they had a spiritual foundation in Christ that surpassed the magnificent marble stones under the great buildings of Greece or the temple back in Jerusalem. Why would anyone build a straw house on a magnificent marble foundation?

This text weds divine works with human responsibility. God did absolutely everything to provide for our salvation. No human effort or works can add to what Jesus did on the cross. His last words were, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) Stop trying to pay with your good works what Jesus already paid in full. Simply accept His payment by faith, and go and start building!

Those who put faith in Jesus Christ are born-again and have unlimited potential. They are forgiven. They have been sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit. They have the Bible that is filled with truth and promises. They have access to intimate fellowship with God. They are called and they are sent to be God’s hands, feet, and voice to the world. Paul was saying “grow deep and build big for the glory of God!” Building is both an opportunity and a responsibility. You control your growth and what kind of life you build. You are responsible for the results. It will be tested with fire.

### **Seeing Yourself as a Sanctuary of God: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (A Basis for Self Respect and Dignity)**

“16) Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17) If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

Becoming a Christian adds a new level of respect and dignity to self. We become an abode of the Holy Spirit. He indwells every believer. Every Christian becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit.

This reference is not to an ordinary pagan temple. Shrines and temples were everywhere in the ancient world, and still are in countries like India. Paul was referring to the Jewish temple back in Jerusalem. But he even went beyond that to refer to the very Holy of Holies where the glory of God dwelt. It was the most holy place on earth.

As a believer, you have value not only because you were created in the image of God and because you were redeemed with the priceless blood of Jesus; you also have innate value because you are a sanctuary of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You may not see yourself as holy, but God sees you as holy and valuable. You may need to start seeing yourself as God sees you.

Paul returns to this theme again in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. The context is talking about sexual immorality. In this text Paul argues that Christians are not free to treat themselves cheaply because they were bought with a price and now belong to God. We no longer belong to

ourselves, we belong to God –and He places huge value on us. Our calling is now to use our bodies to bring glory to God!

As we look a bit deeper, Paul gives a strict warning in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 against destroying the temple of God. I do not believe this is talking about suicide as some propose, though that thought may be included. Rather, I believe it is talking about self abuse that can come in many forms. It can be from overeating, drugs and addictions, physical fitness neglect, sexual indiscretions, and even recklessness.

These verses are some of the most compelling in the Bible to take care of yourself, show self-respect and to work on self-growth and improvement. Self-indulgence and self-neglect are both a slap in the face of God.

I came to Jesus with a broken self-image. I hated myself. God used these verses in my healing process. If God saw this kind of value in me, I needed to start viewing myself as valuable. For me it has been a journey toward health, wholeness, and self-respect. As a result, I am a very different person today.

These verses also helped me see innate value in others. They give me the basis to love, respect, and dignify all people. I now see humanity as the crown of God's creation. I see value and potential in everyone. God loves all people and gave His Son to redeem them. (John 3:16)

This concept is the foundational reason why I see sanctity in human life from the moment of conception. People are not the product of evolution from the animal kingdom, they are a special creation in the image of God made with the capacity to become a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

Humans are very unique. They have innate value. They have unimaginable capacity and potential. There is a reason why two kingdoms are locked in a cosmic battle over humanity. Unlike animals, people have eternal value and the ability to be host to either the Holy Spirit or evil spirits.

This concept has far-reaching implications. God sees you as valuable. You need to start viewing yourself and others through this lens as well.

### **Two Opposing Views of Self-Esteem: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23 versus 1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

These two texts stand in stark contrast to one another. Take a moment and read them carefully. Paul starts by exposing a false reliance on self. Being boastful, arrogant, or proud is not good. The person who thinks they are wise may be among the greatest of fools. Some Christians have an aversion to the phrase "self-esteem." I understand their reservation to that term. The modern self-esteem movement falls into the caution of 1 Corinthians 3:18-23. It places the focus on self.

In these verses Paul warns against becoming reliant on our own wisdom, talents, skills, and abilities. Some people worship themselves as a god. But the world does not revolve around any one of us and we are at best fragile and tragically limited. By contrast we need to acknowledge the hand and providence of God behind everything in our lives. (Vs 21-23)

In these verses Paul points out that God and others are significant to our success and achievements in life. In these verses we again read about Paul, Apollos, and Cephas –but with a different spin. He points out that they all belong to God. They are part of the same team.

He wanted the Corinthians to see the bigger picture rather than focus on themselves. We need to view ourselves against the backdrop of God's bigger plan. Our questions should be, "How do I fit into what God is doing in this situation?" And, "What can I contribute through my gifts and resources to the bigger plan of God?"

This feeds into the next context. How should we view ourselves? What is the proper view of self-esteem? Paul gives a big hint in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. We need to see ourselves as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." We need "God-Confidence" and not "Self-Confidence." I like the conclusion Paul came to in Philippians 4:13; "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

When we line up with God and His plans, we don't need to buy into the comments of the critics or the condemnation of the world. We don't need to be swayed by criticism or have the wind knocked out of our sails because of grumpy, negative, and complaining people. I believe we can move into auto pilot mode as we focus on praising, pleasing, and serving God. The critics will still be there, but God's abundant grace will cover us with teflon.

As Christians we can follow Paul's example and be anchored in "God Esteem" instead of "self-esteem." We need to see ourselves as God sees us as we step out of our own comfort zones and attempt God-size ventures in life rather than man-sized. We need to pull the stops, throw off intimidation, and resist being overly inhibited. God wants to set us free in Christ to "be all" and "do all" for His glory. He wants to magnify us beyond self by working through us with His multiplying power and grace. (Review that sentence several times)

When you begin to grasp this concept, then you will understand what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. God delights in using common and ordinary men and women to confound the wise. When you focus on self-esteem you forfeit God-Esteem. The "you" focus causes you to miss the "God" focus and the "we" focus. "In Christ" we never stand alone. God wants us to abide in His favor, grace, and power. He wants us to become the glove over His mighty hand.

### **The Power of a Clear Conscience: 1 Corinthians 4:3-5**

"3) But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4) For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5) Therefore do not go on passing

judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

These verses have helped me understand the power and value of a clear conscience. We all have critics in life. For some reason people are always pointing their finger trying to put others down, discredit them, or prevent them from some promotion or advancement. Some even make a living by frivolous lawsuits against innocent people.

Paul had plenty of critics. In fact, according to Acts 21-28, Paul fought against false accusations from violent critics who tried putting him to death. He spent much of his last years defending himself against these accusations for which he became a prisoner of Rome. He finally appealed to Caesar himself and was sent to Rome to defend his innocence.

Understanding this backdrop gives special meaning to these verses. Because Paul had a clear conscience he could face any critic. Paul recognized the ultimate judge was God Himself. This gave him not only personal peace but also boldness in the face of his adversaries.

Because of this, Paul was able to cut others slack and he resisted judging others. He adopted the personal policy of leaving the verdict in God's hands. (1 Corinthians 4:5-6) He didn't go through life as a negative fault-finder, he preached the gospel of grace and focused on building people up.

Ironically, Revelation 12:10 calls Satan the accuser of the brethren. He spends all of his time heaping guilt, shame and condemnation on people. He entices people into sin only to turn on them and rub their faces in harsh self-condemnation. His goal is to steal, kill, and destroy. He wants to rob people of all dignity, motivation, and self respect. (John 10:10)

But Jesus came not to judge the world but to save the world. (See John 3:16-18) Jesus can save and forgive because He paid for your sins. His goal is to forgive, heal your brokenness, set you free from bondage and give you a new life!

When you become a Christian, Jesus fills you with His Holy Spirit and begins a cleansing and purifying process. His focus is on consecration and not condemnation. He works to make people clean and not dirty. He is for you and not against you. When you confess your sins to Him and ask forgiveness, He forgives and forgets. He points people to a new future and not a messed up past!

### **Getting Beyond Outward Appearance and Comparison: 1 Corinthians 4:5-7**

"5) Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. 6) Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to

exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. 7) For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

One limitation with human judgment is that we cannot see the hidden things. We do not know the hearts of other people. There are some who look poor but have great wealth. Others look rich but have leveraged their debt to the max. Some seem to lack compassion by requiring people to work, but are actually encouraging personal growth and development in the other person.

At some point you need to get beyond the superficial to truly value other people. People form friendships for all kinds of reasons. Some want your influence. Some may want your money. Still others may have more heinous reasons like sex or a bribe of some kind.

But Paul learned the value of friendships for the glory of God. His goal was to help others grow and become fruitful for the kingdom. He accepted them no matter their status in life and pointed them to God. He recognized there was great diversity in the kingdom of God and knew that a very diverse group of people needed to function together as the church.

This calls for acceptance, trust, and friendship without external conditions. Paul was not in Corinth to get rich or exploit influence, he was there to serve others and point them to Jesus without favoritism or hypocrisy. He genuinely wanted people to know Jesus and grow in that relationship. He learned to look beyond outward appearances and get to the heart.

There is also the issue of accepting God's plan for your life while celebrating the radically different circumstances of others. For example, some couples are blessed with many children while others struggle with infertility. Some are athletic while others are geeks. Some are very outward going and charismatic while others are reserved. Some are tall while others are short. Some have severe trials while others seem to coast trouble-free through life. You will never enter into Christian fellowship until you set aside a judgmental spirit.

It took me a long time to accept myself without being jealous of others. Over time I discovered God wanted me to shine in my gifts and abilities while celebrating others. I can preach and teach, but don't expect me to lead singing. I can build almost anything, but don't ask me to turn wrenches or fix your broken car. I'm great at imparting vision and inspiring people, but don't expect me to be a detailed planner or organizer. God wants us to value others and make room for them and their gifts.

The bottom line is that we need one another and no one person has all the gifts or talents. Part of the motivation in writing the book of 1 Corinthians was to get the local church to appreciate one another and function together for the glory of God. Learn to value and make room for others while becoming everything for God that you can be.

## **A Difficult Path to Walk: 1 Corinthians 4:8-13**

“8) You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. 9) For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10) We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. 11) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12) and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 13) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.”

Being in full time ministry can be a lonely and difficult place. Sure, there are a few who use Jesus to exploit people and get rich, but the vast majority walk in the sandals of Paul. They sacrifice, work extra jobs to make ends meet, and often go without what others around them have.

It can be a life of driving old and used cars, shopping at outlet stores and being thankful for garage sales and giving always. Many times it also places you on the shunned list. You can be slandered and even despised by people who have never met you or talked to you. Some who started well in Christian service have gotten angry and bitter and even walked away from God.

It can even be worse for the missionary serving in remote or isolated areas with little or no fruit. Some fields of service are extremely difficult and even depressing. These are the men and women the book of Hebrews was talking about when it referred to “men of whom the world was not worthy.” (See Hebrew 11:38)

I have had the rare privilege of traveling the world and training many national pastors and Christian leaders in very underdeveloped countries. Many make sacrifices for Jesus and the gospel beyond what words can describe. Many are poor and destitute while serving under severe oppression. Yet they remain faithful and see the hand of God provide against all odds.

It is easy to fall into the trap Paul was talking about and start looking around at the abundance of others who are either not Christians or who are working regular jobs. It can be easy to fall into the jealousy and envy trap. This is especially true in places where persecution is severe.

But that’s not the end of the story. God also shares His glory with those who serve Him with a pure heart. I have witnessed the glory and provision of God in miraculous ways. I have embraced saints who are unknown in this life but who are renowned in heaven. God has given me the privilege to surf on the wake of the supernatural and visit places that Natural Geographic Magazine does not even know exists. I have also witnessed God do miracles the naturalists will deny.

These experiences have changed both me and my value system. I have become far more resourceful and creative than many. I have also become more giving and tender. There is a huge place in my heart for orphans, widows, refugees, the persecuted, incarcerated, and oppressed and those entrapped in the ravages of human trafficking. My heart bows to them.

But there is also a flip side, I am not easily moved by the demands and rude threats of the entitlement mindset or liberal agenda in America. Though I have served in the Iowa Legislature, I do not see government as the answer to human suffering. When government throws money at needs it often compounds the problem and creates more dependency. I believe in “One Nation Under God” and the need to acknowledge and honor Him. We desperately need revival and awakening in America.

So have I departed from the text? Maybe, but I do think we’ve pulled the curtain of understanding back a bit. Paul was looking into the veneer of Corinth and was not lured away by the fun, pleasure, noise, or fluency. He saw empty lives, hurting hearts, and lost people everywhere. He realized the coliseums and original Olympic Games were an illusion and distraction. They created external excitement and were fun for a season, but when the party was over the emptiness returned. They were a mere bandage on the true quest of the human heart.

By contrast, Paul found a surpassing value in Christ that words cannot describe. (See Philippians 3:7-11) He wasn’t about to trade it away for the sewage this world has to offer. His sacrifices and trials were minor compared to His surpassing glory of intimacy with Christ.

### **Pick Life Mentors Carefully: 1 Corinthians 4:14-16**

“14) I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15) For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16) I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.”

Paul had written some difficult things to the Corinthians. He was about to touch on some more very personal and delicate subjects. Paul tackled sin head-on, but his motivation was love.

He made it clear in these verses that he did not want to shame or humiliate them. Rather, he wanted to admonish and build them up. Though this letter was convicting it was not filled with condemnation.

The balancing point was Paul’s close relationship with these believers. He had recently spent 18 months with them. They were family. He identifies them as “beloved children.”

Paul then identifies himself as both a tutor and a father to them. Few people have the privilege of having a close life coach or mentor. It is impossible to make disciples without some kind of connection with people.

This affinity comes through every epistle Paul wrote. There was no questioning his love for people or his desire to see them grow and excel in their Christian walk. The more time you spend studying the Pauline Epistles the more connection you develop with the beloved Apostle Paul.

Paul closes this section with a bold statement; "be imitators of me." He says the same thing again in 1 Corinthians 11:1 only he adds the phrase, "just as I also am of Christ."

Paul was the real deal. There was no questioning his devotion to Christ or the anointing on his life and ministry. Jesus Christ was his "surpassing value" and his single-minded focus was knowing Him even more. (See Philippians 3:7-16) He also suffered much for Jesus and the gospel. His motives were pure and his walk was genuine. He passed the test of a worthy mentor.

My problem with the modern education system is that so few of the teachers or professors are worth imitating. Their content is not based on truth and many lead personal lives that are morally shipwrecked. Many are the leaders of the social unrest and anarchist movement of our day. It baffles my mind to understand why Christians send their treasured children to be mentored into a secular and very liberal antichrist value system by what the Bible calls "false teachers." Please explain this to me.

I close with a challenging question; "if people imitated you would they be closer to Jesus and moving in the right direction?" Paul was not drawing attention to himself, he was merely saying that what he found in Christ was worth sharing with others. His goal was to point people toward Jesus. We should do the same.

### **Building Your Life on Godly Disciplines: 1 Corinthians 4:16-17**

"16) I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. 17) For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."

These two verses intrigue me. On the one hand, Paul was inviting people to imitate Him, but in the next verse he talks about "my ways" which are in Christ. I confess, we need to do some godly speculation at this point, but I believe Paul was talking about godly disciplines he had built into his daily life. These were modeled by Jesus as well.

The foremost was probably his life of prayer. Not only did Jesus model a profound prayer life, Paul also frequently talked about his daily focus on prayer. (Ephesians 1:15-16; 3:14, Philippians 1:3-4, Colossians 1:3) These are just a few examples. Paul developed a routine of



spending much time in prayer and communion with God. Every godly man or woman who has left a mark on the world shared the same common denominator. I strongly encourage you to set aside daily time for prayer and communication with God.

Second, Paul spent abundant time in the Word of God. In his day that was a challenge because copies of scrolls and parchments were rare. In writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:13 he reminded him to bring the books and parchments he had left behind. In 1 Timothy 4:13 he reminded Timothy to give attention to the public reading of Scripture.

One of the reasons Paul would often seek out a local synagogue was because each of them had a collection of scrolls to read from. The same became true for the early churches. They collected sacred writings and especially the letters from the various apostles.

We are spoiled today. We have access to the Bible everywhere and in thousands of languages. We even have electronic Bibles and commentaries. There is no excuse for any child of God today to be biblically illiterate, but spending time in the Word of God must become a daily discipline.

It should be noted that prayer and the study and preaching for the Word of God were the two primary focuses of the early Apostles noted in Acts 6:4. They made these two callings their highest priority. The only way they could offer the same study to the body of Christ was to have daily Bible studies, prayer times, and meetings for fellowship.

This in fact became the third characteristic of the early church. They devoted themselves to many prayer and praise services and fellowship times. See Acts 2:41-47. Spending time with others for prayer and Bible study was paramount. They did this daily to the point where it is nearly impossible to establish which day the early Christians set aside for a weekly worship service. Their focus was daily and not weekly. This was the place for “body life” and the corporate function of spiritual gifts which was essential in the early church.

A fourth discipline Paul built into his life was giving and financial stewardship. He talks at length about this in texts like Philippians 4:10-20 and 2 Corinthians chapters 9-10. I believe the early church practiced both tithing and giving to needs as the Holy Spirit prompted them. Practicing hospitality and generosity were spontaneous in the early church.

The natural outgrowth of these four disciplines was walking in the Spirit and becoming fruitful in Christian service. But I must emphasize that these things were not done to become a burden or a new form of legalism. Rather they were done to ignite faith and pour gasoline on spiritual growth. The early Christians were on fire and that fire can be traced back to spending abundant time with God and with one another in the pursuit of spiritual growth.

Christian growth does not happen randomly. It is the outgrowth of study and intentionality in seeking God. I was challenged early in my Christian life with the concept of godly disciplines as a launching pad for walking with God. These things are not burdensome, rather they are the

secret to untold blessings and intimacy with God. I trust you are making them a priority in your life as well.

### **Confirming God's Anointed: 1 Corinthians 4:18-21**

“18) Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19) But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. 20) For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. 21) What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?”

As we continue our verse-by-verse study of the book of 1 Corinthians, we come to an intriguing subject. At first it might be tempting to skip these verses, but Paul is opening up a crucial issue.

Evidently, there were some agitators in the church at Corinth who were stirring up controversy and challenging the authority and teachings of the Apostle Paul. They were glad he had moved on and were hoping that he was not coming back to Corinth. But in this text Paul announces his plans for a future visit.

What he says next is astounding. He was not going to get locked into an intellectual argument or debate with the agitators. He wasn't interested in words, he was interested in spiritual power. Like Elijah on Mount Carmel, he was going to call them out and see whose God answered with fire.

The word “power” in this text is the Greek word “dunamis.” In Acts 1:8 this was the “power” promised to those who were filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter two it was the distinguishing characteristic coming from the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Throughout the book of Acts it was associated with both the preaching of the Apostles (Acts 4:33) and signs and wonders that accompanied the early church leaders. (Acts 6:8; 8:4; 20:11-12)

This is also a reference back to 1 Corinthians 2:4-5. Paul wanted the faith of the believers to be anchored in the power of God and not mere human reason, logic, or empty rhetoric. At some point talk is cheap and arguing doctrine can be counter-productive. Paul wanted to examine the fruit and find evidence of the hand of God at work in people's lives.

I come from an evangelical background that stressed human reason above spiritual unction and anointing. At some point that emphasis often becomes empty and reduces the Christian life to intellectual analysis rather than a divine encounter with the Almighty. Though Paul was in no way opposed to good theology, he refused to move away from the need for Spirit filled, empowered, and anointed ministry.

The former model places the emphasis on the person and their academic status or achievements. The later model places the focus on God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul was driving home the point that there is no substitute for Spirit-based “dunamis.”

It is extremely problematic for me that most pastoral search committees today focus on academic achievement with almost no emphasis on Spirit anointing, unction, or fruit to confirm divine calling. This is a sure outcome that the carnal agitators of Corinth are going to pastor our churches rather than the courageous men and women groomed in the presence of God.

As you read through both 1 and 2 Corinthians, you quickly discover that this tension is woven through both books. Paul was constantly defending his calling and authority against false teachers and deceitful workers. If Satan cannot destroy the church, he seeks to neuter the church by stripping it of spiritual unction and power. Beware of this drift away from Pentecost and into Greek rationalism.

Paul did not want to come with “a rod.” This may be a reference to Numbers 17 and the rod of Aaron that budded. When Moses and Aaron had their leadership challenged they resorted to “a test of rods.” They asked God to confirm His anointed and identify the rebels. Sure enough, Aaron’s rod not only budded and blossomed, but it also bore ripe almonds.

God can and does have ways of confirming His anointed. It usually has to do with Spirit anointed fruit and not a sterile resume. (See the flow of John 14-16) It is also telling that Paul wanted to come with love and a spirit of gentleness, rather than a confrontation. The fruit of the Spirit was abundant and low hanging in his life and ministry.

We conclude with a brief look at 1 Corinthians 4:20; “For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.” In your quest for God, do not settle for a church that has lots of words but is void of power. Carnal churches do not turn out mature disciples of Christ. They perpetuate the problem and leave people in sinful bondage.

### **Winning the War of Moral Freedom: 1 Corinthians 5:1-2**

“1) It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. 2) And you have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”

The Apostle Paul now tackles the greatest sinful stronghold not only of the Greek Empire and the Gentile world, but also of humanity in general. When he sets his sights on immorality, he uses the Greek word “porneia” from which we get the English word pornography. It relates to every form of sexual activity outside of the sanctity of marriage.

Sexual Immorality is one of seven basic strongholds the Bible identifies that Satan uses to entangle, enslave, and entrap people in sin that can become an addictive bondage. It covers everything from lusts, fantasy and self sexual stimulation, to fornication, adultery, bisexuality, homosexuality, and beyond.

Sex was created as a wonderful gift from God, but it was exploited, twisted, distorted, perverted, and weaponized as one of Satans' primary strategies against humanity. The biblical word "immorality" covers the whole spectrum of immoral sexual activity. They all fall under the Seventh Commandment that says; "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery." (Exodus 20:14)

This subject was, is, and always will be the obsession and tripping stone of humanity. It is every man's and every woman's battle. Paul tackles it head on in 1 Corinthians 5-7. These chapters are packed with truth, hope, principles, and insights that can help set captives free and move Christians from sexual bondage to moral freedom.

Paul does not deny that Christians have battles with lusts and all forms of sexual immorality –he assumes it. His goal in this text is not to shame or condemn people, rather he offers hope, forgiveness, and a pathway to freedom.

As we walk through these three chapters, we will discover the principles that helped the early Christians move from Corinthian morals and values to moral freedom. Applying these principles to your life will help you win the war, but there will be battles as long as you live in this world in a human body that produces hormones.

Let's start by tackling a false premise. The Bible does not define moral freedom as the absence of temptation; rather it presents it as the grace to overcome the battles and move on to a productive and fruitful life that is wholesome, godly, humble, and holy.

It also does not present moral freedom as an event but rather a journey. It is the result of the inner washing and cleansing process of the Holy Spirit. Repentance is stopping the outer activity. Sanctification is the process of the Holy Spirit changing the inner core of the person. This involves renewing the mind, bringing inner healing, applying forgiveness to yourself and others, and the pursuit of God.

God has used these three chapters in my life and journey to moral freedom. It has been a long and hard-fought journey. My battles are not over, but obeying and applying the biblical principles packed into these three chapters has brought an end to the war. God's ways are both a shelter in the time of storm and a strong tower of refuge and safety.

These three chapters present amazing principles that can drastically reduce the intensity of your battle with sexual immorality and bring a sense of tranquility into your daily life. If you adopt these principles the war will subside. If you ignore or reject them, the battles will intensify.

My prayer is that God will use these three chapters in your life as He has in mine. May God's grace abundantly enfold you in your journey to moral freedom and the discovery of powerful principles to equip you for victory.

### **Opening Pandora's Box. 1 Corinthians 5-7**

“1) It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. 2) You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”

As we return to these verses on sexual immorality, we discover that the church in Corinth had adopted a very casual and even permissive attitude toward the subject. They had written to Paul about how to deal with a big and obvious sin of incest, but were silently excusing other immoral sins in the church.

According to the text, there was a man attending the church who was either in a consensual relationship with his father’s wife, or who had actually married her. Leviticus 18:8 condemns this relationship as incest. Deuteronomy 22:30 and 27:20 pronounces the same curse on this lifestyle. They all appear in contexts of Scripture that deal with sexual sins and perversions. This brings us to an important point that is seldom taught or understood today.

Some assume because the New Testament does not elaborate extensively on specific sexual sins they are all covered by grace and excused as bad but not really serious. They adopt the stance that Jesus “understands my struggle” and just turns His head as He smiles or blushes at the whole subject. One early church heresy actually taught that sins of the flesh do not affect the spirit of a born-again person. The end result was disastrous and grossly immoral.

Granted, the Old Testament moral code is very candid and specific about sexual sins. (Read the above chapters in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy.) But keep in mind, the New Testament is built on the foundation of the Old Testament. The standards do not change unless the New Testament specifically changes them.

In the case of sexual sins, Jesus actually raised the standards. (See Matthew 5:27-32) In the case of reactions to physical force from an adversary, Jesus admonished self-restraint and a response of love not seen in the Old Testament. (See Matthew 5:38-48)

Also, it is a tragic error to assume the New Testament is silent on warnings against sexual immorality. When the New Testament is considered as a whole, it actually talks more about the subject than the Old Testament. (See Matthew 5:27-32, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 5-7, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:17-19, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and Revelation 18:1-8) These are merely a few passages. The main difference is that the Gospel of Grace offers hope of forgiveness, freedom, and a new life. The indwelling Holy Spirit cleanses, changes, and transforms people.

So why is the subject of sexual immorality so important? Because, a small mistruth or deception on this subject can empower sin and bondage in your life. Knowing and accepting truth is the first step toward freedom. (John 8:31-32, Galatians 5:1,13 ) Many Christians are slaves to sexual immorality because they do not understand the severity of the sin or the tragic personal consequences.

As we return to 1 Corinthians 5:2, we discover this was the basic problem with the Corinthian church. They had adopted a casual approach to the subject of sexual immorality. It was viewed as a private matter. They had become arrogant and indifferent and therefore did not grieve over this open display of incest by this man who had his father's wife.

It was obviously wrong, but they didn't want to open a Pandora's box. Why? Because others in the church had serious problems as well. Some were slipping off to the pagan temple to engage in sex with temple prostitutes. (See 1 Corinthians 6:15-20) 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 implies the sexual sins were even more pervasive and included many forms of immorality. The bottom line is that Paul was writing to a group of sexually active and addicted people, but he wasn't about to leave them in bondage. He refused to adopt the sexual standards of Greek Corinth as the norm for the church.

Yet, by God's amazing grace, there were some in the church who had left the past behind and moved on toward moral freedom in Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:11) Paul did not want to jeopardize their progress by soft-peddling this issue. He knew that a little leaven and sinful compromise would undermine the morality of the whole church. He refused to sweep this subject under the rug and merely deal with the big and obvious sin of incest. Instead in these three chapters Paul opened the whole Pandora's box.

The double standard with this subject is far-reaching in the church. Some condemn homosexuality but excuse fornication or adultery. Others are eager to expose those who slip into a sexual transgression while hiding their own addiction to pornography, fantasy novels, or sleazy movies.

Please understand this, Greek culture lumped it all together and promoted and exploited the whole spectrum of human sexuality. They were all accepted and normalized. As a result, Paul tackled the subject the same way. He didn't expose one while excusing or overlooking others. To him, sexual bondage was sexual bondage no matter what the outer wrappings looked like.

He drew a straight line in the sand and said, "all forms of sexual sins are porneia and must be conquered by the gospel of grace." Don't compare yourself to others and excuse your sexual immorality as less serious. If you fall into that thinking, you will never conquer your sin because you do not perceive yourself as having a problem. The first step to freedom is to acknowledge and confess that you have a serious sin problem.

### **Getting Deadly Serious About Sin: 1 Corinthians 5:3-5**

"3) For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4) In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5) I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

I remember as a new believer reading these verses and thinking; “Wow, Paul was serious about sexual immorality!” Suddenly, all of that talk in this letter about the power of God converges in these verses. Notice the progression from 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1:24, 2:4, 2:5, 4:19, 4:20 and then 5:4. Then I thought, “I can either trust in the power of God to set me free from my sin or face the power of God actively disciplining me for my sin.” I confess, I have been spanked a number of times over the years.

This text was a major showdown between Paul and the false teachers who were promoting and excusing immorality. All of that talk at the end of Chapter Four about power and coming with a rod or with love and spirit of gentleness suddenly becomes very relevant.

I also discovered the rationalization often used by Christians excusing a life of wanton pleasure did not fly in this case. Paul trampled the notion that we should not judge others under foot in this text. He declared that he had already judged this man. He expands on this theme in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 by saying we do not judge outsiders, but we do judge those who are in the church. There will be more discussion on that topic as we continue.

It’s sufficient to say that God does not call us to be critics, but He does expect us to hold one another accountable. He wants us to bear the burdens of the weak and those caught in any trespass, and to adopt strong measures against rebels and flagrantly immoral Christians. The long-term goal is always restoration and affirmation.

Next, we discover in this text that Paul decided to turn this person over to “Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus.” I have heard tons of debate and speculation on this verse over the years. What was Paul saying?

Well, at the very least he was removing God’s protective hedge from this person. Whatever Paul did must have worked, because by 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 this man repented and turned back to God. At that point, Paul called on the church to forgive him and shower him with love again.

But the question comes, was Paul actually willing to deliver this man into the ravages of Satan to steal, kill, and destroy his flesh? The answer seems to be “yes.” If you are not willing to pick Jonah up and throw him overboard into the merciful discipline of God, you will perish in the storm with Jonah.

I have such a merciful gift as a pastor, I used to take extreme measures to deliver people from the severe consequences of their sins. I thought it was my call to love without reservation. Watching people go through severe trials used to exasperate me. I was failing to discern what God was doing.

At one point the Spirit of God whispered to me, “Terry, if you were in the boat when they threw Jonah overboard, what would have you done?” Without hesitation I responded by saying, “I would have jumped overboard and tried to save him!” I still remember the Holy Spirit

whispering, “Then you would have saved Jonah from the very trial I designed to save him!”  
Wow, that was a huge revelation for me!

Parents do this all the time with their children. Instead of letting them face the consequences of their actions, they step in and rescue them. In the process they are reinforcing bad choices and condoning bad behavior. Stop defending sinful behavior and sheltering your loved ones from God’s discipline. Sin always moves from bad to worse.

I know many parents who now grieve over their incarcerated children wondering where they went wrong or why they didn’t have the power to prevent the prison sentence. The answer is often that they intervened with God’s discipline so often along the way, that God in His love and grace had to arrange something big enough to reach the child that the parent couldn’t mess up.

The modern church does not take sin seriously. We ignore it, soft-peddle it, minimize it, excuse it, and even defend it. But the Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) Sin is deadly serious!

So was Paul overreacting to this sin in 1 Corinthians 5:5? I will let you wrestle with that question, but as mentioned earlier his course of action worked and the man repented.

But here is a more important question; “Are you under-reacting to the sin and bondage in your own life?” Are you deadly serious about your own sin? I sincerely doubt you will get victory until you get deadly serious. What do I mean?

Galatians 5:24 says; “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Romans 6:4-11 adds significant meaning to this concept. Verse 11 concludes; “Even so consider yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The Bible is deadly serious about sin.

The sanctifying process of God in the life of the born-again believer is active and ongoing. We either deal with our sins and put them to death through the power and grace of God, or we face them over and over again under the loving but persistent discipline of God. (Hebrews 12:4-13)

The bottom line is that God deals with us as His beloved children. “He parents us!” He is for us and not against us. He is 100% committed to our growth and progress. But most important, He wants us to enjoy the journey as He forgives, frees, sanctifies, changes, and empowers us.

Proper parental discipline doesn’t make a child miserable, rather it delights in them as it delivers them from a life of regret and misery. It patiently nurtures them into a life of love, joy, peace, happiness, dignity, trustworthiness, productivity, fruitfulness, and what the Bible calls righteousness. The Bible uses the parental analogy as the way God moves His people to maturity.

**Determine Your Basis of Morality: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8**



“6) Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7) Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8) Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

It appears from this text that some in the church who were not personally participating in immorality were defending immoral friends or life-styles. Paul brings them a sober warning. He said that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” Sexual immorality is not neutral. If you dabble in pornography, it will ensnare you. If you read fantasy novels or feed on movies with immoral story lines, they will affect your inner values. If you embrace immoral friends you will have immoral seeds sown in your soul.

No one is immune to the lure of sexual sins. They trigger hormones and stimulate lustful thoughts. It is like a little leaven placed in a lump of dough. It soon affects the whole lump. The good dough doesn't neutralize the leaven. The leaven affects the whole lump of dough.

Let me make an observation from years of ministry; a person's morals often influences their theology more than their theology impacts their morals. I have watched defenders of truth switch camps because of a new close friend or family member who embraces an immoral lifestyle. Theology is often more rooted in emotions than an impartial study of Scripture.

Just because you reject a sin doesn't mean you reject the person. Otherwise good people can struggle with immorality. Just because something feels good and brings pleasure doesn't mean it is good and should be embraced. Opinion polls are a poor way to establish personal morals and values. A wrong thing is not right no matter how many people embrace and promote it.

The only question that really matters is “what does God think about it?” If the Bible says it is wrong and sinful, then it is wrong and sinful no matter who flaunts it. Just because you cannot see the immediate consequence of a sin or compromise doesn't mean they are not there or brewing.

You cannot stop the far-reaching personal consequences of immorality. Proverbs 5:9-14 paints a tragic picture of the personal cost of sexual immorality. Ephesians 4:17-19 graphically describes the downward tail spin of those caught in the ravages of sexual bondage. These biblical warnings prevented me many times from pulling anchor and drifting into currents my emotions wanted to embrace.

The boastful, proud, and arrogant people Paul was addressing in Corinth had pulled anchor. They were openly embracing sexual sins while going through the motions of the Christian life. They were trying to convince themselves and others that there were no consequences to immorality. Or even worse, they were trying to move the boundaries of what constitutes immoral sin.

They were enjoying the party life of Corinth Saturday night and going to church and taking communion Sunday morning with no sense of guilt or remorse. They were celebrating the feast with the old leaven of malice and wickedness. They were not walking in sincerity or truth.

They were in effect pulling the cloak of Christianity over some sexual sins and saying that God approves of the lifestyle. They were presenting themselves as self-validating proof that you could embrace certain sexual expressions and be spiritual at the same time.

Satan has used this ploy since the beginning of time. It was exposed in his dialogue with Eve in the Garden. (See Genesis 3:1-6) His argument to Eve basically said; “Did God really say that?” ... “You shall not die”... “there are no consequences”... “In fact, eating this fruit can make you wise and you can discover your own divinity!” This brief conversation tainted Eve’s theology and morals.

Paul’s solution to this problem was to clean out the old leaven. That means that you accept the morality lines drawn in Scripture and don’t barter with them. Filter your life through the standards of Scripture rather than filtering the Bible through your thoughts, experiences, or the accepted values of secular society.

Making the Bible your standard of truth is your first essential step to freedom. If you erase this line or make it fuzzy, sin will have a playground in your mind and life.

Early on in my Christian life I drove this stake deep in the ground. I decided that the Bible was the absolute standard of truth and morality no matter my personal struggles, emotions, experiences, or the opinions of secular society. This concession pushed the momentum of my life in God’s direction.

I invited God to use His Word to correct me rather than trying to bend, twist, or adapt the Bible to condone my struggles. Where there was a discrepancy, by faith I acknowledge the Bible was right and I was wrong and I repented. I invited the Holy Spirit to use God’s Word as a sword in my life to convict and cut away my sinful ways. Sometimes the cutting was deep, painful, and even irrational by secular standards, but necessary. I wanted to love and worship God in sincerity and truth. I did not want to be a Corinthian Christian.

Had it not been for this simple decision early in my Christian life to place myself under the authority of Scripture, my faith would have been shipwrecked long ago. You need to build your life on a solid rock to endure the immoral storms and temptations of this life. When you stray God’s Word can correct you, when you fall it can lift you up. But if you have no basis of truth in your life, you are at the mercy of every wind, wave, or social trend that comes along. Your life will be reduced to jello and you will be used, exploited, and thrown away by the world.

**The Mystery of the Lost Letters: 1 Corinthians 5:9 & Colossians 4:16**

“9) I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;”

“16) When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” Colossians 4:16

In this post, I want to take a slight detour from the contextual topic of sexual purity and run down a short rabbit trail. In verse nine, Paul mentioned a previous letter he had written to the church at Corinth. In the book of Colossians he also mentioned a letter he wrote to the church at Laodicea. The question is, “Where are these letters?”

Unfortunately, we do not know. They were apparently lost. Most likely they were on a list of banned writings in Rome or Jerusalem and were rounded up and destroyed. The other possibility is that they were hidden away when the owners were martyred and have never been found. It is an unsolved mystery.

For me, this only highlights the amazing treasure that we have in the Bible. It is a collection of 66 smaller books or letters written by around 40 human authors over a span of 3,000 years and yet it speaks with unity and harmony on very controversial topics. It reads as if one Divine author was behind the process. I believe God did inspire the process so that the result is indeed the “Word of God.”

No book has endured more criticism, hostility, and attack than the Bible. It has been banned, burned, and outlawed by many devious and wicked people over the centuries, and yet it endures. It has been translated into more languages and quoted from more than any other book, secular or sacred. It has also inspired more music, poems, papers, articles, and other books than any other original source. It does not appear on the New York Times annual “Best Seller List” only because it utterly eclipses the sales every year since they started tracking book sales. It is viewed as unfair competition.

Rather than ignoring the 66 books that compile the Bible or chasing down some conspiracy theories about missing books, I devote my time and attention to what God has delivered to us. I have devoted much of my life to the daily study of the Bible. I read it, listen to it in audio form, have memorized a good portion of it, and meditate on it day and night. If I had a hundred lives to live I could not deplete its vast depths or absorb the wisdom, knowledge, and mysteries hidden therein.

The bottom line is that God inspired and ordained the text we now have in the Bible. It is His letter to mankind. I refuse to add to it or subtract from it. It is my authority and standard for truth. It has endured the tests of time, persecution, criticism, and political attacks, as well as extreme social, moral, psychological and philosophical drift in the secular world. Yet it remains.

The Bible is a treasure not to be put on a shelf and worshiped, but to be opened and studied daily. Take your questions to the Bible and see what it has to say. You will be astounded by its

broad scope and deep wisdom. Despite the fact that there are mysteries in the Bible that I do not understand and questions I cannot answer; Upon This Rock I Stand!

### **A Clear Understanding of Christian Morals. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

“9) I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10) I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11) But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. 13) REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.”

Christians should hold one another to a higher standard. We are called to live by biblical standards. This standard can be summarized by agape love. See Romans 13:9-10. Even the world expects Christians to be different.

But God has not called the church to force its morality on the world. The world needs to be viewed as our mission field. The gospel works from the inside out and not the other way around. The Old Testament system was based on an external moral code called “the Law.” It did establish a consciousness of sin but it failed to change the human heart. Sinful humanity trampled it under foot.

The New Testament is based on the Gospel of grace, forgiveness, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and inner transformation through His work of sanctification. It comes from dynamic faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ dying on the cross to break the power of sin. Those who are born-again become new people. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

God calls Christians to be in the world but not of the world. (John 17:15-18) He wants us to shine as lights of love, grace, forgiveness, and the hope of a new and free life. He does not want us to be condemning or condescending. He wants us to build sincere bridges to the lost.

But what happens when a person claims to be a Christian but shows no signs of repentance, change, or growth in a godly direction? Even worse, what happens when they live in open sin, flagrant rebellion, and embrace and promote ungodly values while flaunting a sinful lifestyle? This is where Paul said the church needs to take action and intervene. To welcome that person into the church is to condone their value system. It confuses the Gospel and any understanding of a call to holiness.

Keep in mind, this is an internal matter within the church and not an external matter out in the world. In this text Paul is defining church discipline. He is not calling for shunning or no contact,

rather he is calling on the church to withhold the right hand of fellowship in areas precious among God's people. They are no longer invited into the inner circle of fellowship.

The ultimate goal is to reach them in a loving way while not embracing or endorsing their false message expressed by flagrant sin. This goes way beyond a sincere Christian struggling with sin and bondage. We are talking about blatant rebellion to the gospel and a call to godliness. We are talking about the false teachers in the city of Corinth who were trying to get Christianity to embrace and endorse immorality as acceptable Christian conduct.

Paul would have no part of it. This was not only moral confusion, it was outright heresy. It was a distortion and subversion of the Gospel. To be blunt, in this case at Corinth it involved a man who was trying to get the church to endorse incest. He wanted them to approve and endorse his sexual union with his father's wife. This was a clear violation of God's standards of morality spelled out in Leviticus Chapter 20.

Please understand that the New Testament does not change the moral standards of the Old Testament Law. Rather the Gospel and salvation changes the inner nature of those who are born again. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives them the agape love and grace to embrace and keep God's moral code. Agape love is the fulfillment of the Law. The fruit of the Spirit automatically embraces righteousness.

### **Swindlers in the Church: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

"Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?"

Paul now takes what looks like an untimely detour away from his main subject of sexual purity to talk about Christians embroiled in lawsuits with one another. How could he get so distracted from his main subject?

Actually, he was going back to 1 Corinthians 5:11 and talking about the broader subject of Christian morality. In that list he included not only the sexually immoral, but also those who were covetous, revilers, and swindlers. The bottom line is that godliness includes honesty in business dealings, work ethics, and timely payments of debts and other obligations.

The church in Corinth had people taking advantage of each other in far more ways than just sexually. Evidently, some very unscrupulous and devious people were attending church and preying on the Christians. Some were ripping off their fellow Christians so badly they were forced to go to secular court and file lawsuits. There were swindlers in the church. It turned into a mockery of Christianity. They were the joke down at the local pubs.

Rather than being a detour from the subject of Christian morality, Paul was drawing business ethics and personal integrity into the conversation. Godliness encompasses all of these issues.

It covers the way you do business, the quality of your work, the way you pay your bills and the way you treat people.

So was Paul saying Christians should not be involved in legal actions or lawsuits? Not necessarily. However, his point is: “not with one another... especially within the church.” A lawsuit by nature is a statement of lawlessness and inequity against another. It is a charge of ungodly and unethical behavior. It is utterly shameful that any Christian should have such an allegation against them, especially by another Christian.

Paul then makes the case that the church should have a mechanism of negotiating legal conflicts between Christians. This was a throwback to Moses spending hours sitting on the judgment seat solving conflicts between people and then finally appointing judges. The Old Testament Law is the oldest comprehensive legal code known to mankind. It is still the foundation of our modern legal code in America today.

Let's face it, there will be legitimate clashes between people. If an ox gores another ox or someone falls into an uncovered pit you dug in your backyard, there is cause to settle for just compensation. The whole legal system started with Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was incomprehensible to Paul why the Word of God and the church should be incompetent to settle such conflicts between believers.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 are actually profound verses. Possibly the church or broader Christian community should set up a binding approach to settle disputes and work out conflict resolution, restitution, and reconciliation in a godly fashion today. I have heard of some innovative and godly approaches to do this very thing in some regions of our country today.

Paul concludes by saying preserving the testimony of Christ is more important than settling a minor dispute. Forgiveness is profound and may guard your heart from anger and bitterness. It is impossible to place a dollar figure on a clear conscience. The peace coming from forgiveness may save you thousands in medical bills alone rather than carrying stress, bitterness, resentment, and revenge.

In these verses Paul also makes the passing statement that the “saints shall judge angels, how much more matters of this life.” (Vs 3) This takes some speculation, but there is a day of judgment and reckoning coming for angels. Grace and the benefits of the work of Christ on the cross does not extend to angels. They are not candidates for salvation. One might surmise however that it is a compassionate plan having redeemed and grace forgiven people sitting in the jury and deciding the cases.

### **Be Careful Who You Appoint as Judges. 1 Corinthians 6:1-11**

“4) So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?”

“9) Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 11) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 12) And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Many times verses 9-11 are sighted as a profound testimony of the forgiving power of grace and the dynamic transformation the gospel makes in the life of a born-again Christian. And that is absolutely true. But in the context, Paul is saying something much more profound. Stick with me. Good hermeneutics (Principles of Biblical Interpretation) are about to launch us into a very deep discussion.

Keep in mind the context is talking about lawsuits and the radical difference between the moral foundation of the secular Greek legal system that governed Corinth and a Christian legal code based on the Old Testament Law honored by the church. The paragraph starting in 1 Corinthians 6:1 actually extends all the way to 1 Corinthians 6:11. That means verses 9-11 are tied to the conversation about lawsuits, legal codes, and who we appoint as judges.

It should not surprise us that the moral foundation of the kingdom of God is radically different from the moral foundation of secular Greek culture. (Vs 9) When Paul said that “the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God”, he was explaining why the moral code of Greece was so radically different from the moral code embraced by the Christian church. It came down to who was appointed as the judges over civil courts.

Paul was making the observation that when the unrighteous listed in verses 9-10 are the judges in civil courts and Greek values are the basis of judgment, the outcome will be radically different from the values of the kingdom of God and the church. Let that thought sink in because it is the root behind the current tension in modern society.

To strengthen his argument, Paul said in verse 11; “And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were justified, but you were sanctified in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God.” He was emphasizing that salvation and the Gospel changed their inner moral code. What was formally acceptable behavior for them suddenly changed with the renewed conscience brought on at the moment of salvation.

Paul was making the point that secular courts and judges will have a very different moral value system than Christians and the kingdom of God. When Christians sue Christians in secular court, the outcome will not reflect biblical values. The root morals and values of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness are very different.

In this context, Paul was driving home the point that when Christians went to the secular law courts in Corinth to settle conflicts, the outcome would not reflect kingdom values. The core values of secular Greece were very different from Palestine and the Old Testament moral code.

So how does this apply to life today? Well, we know that the United States Law Code was based on the Old Testament at our founding. There has been a rapid drift in recent decades toward Greek values. Why? Simply because the church and Christians have separated themselves from the public arena of civil service.

When we bought the lie of separation of church and state, we handed the baton of civil moral values over to a growing number of liberal educators, lawmakers, and judges. As a result, we have inherited the outcome of liberal lawmakers and judges pushing us toward a secular Greek value system.

Verse 4 may be the strongest verse in the entire New Testament on the importance of appointing godly judges to civil courts. After arguing in verses 2-3 that Christians are competent to serve as exceptional judges, he then asks the question; “4) If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?”

Make no mistake about it, Paul was saying in these verses the reason they had liberal and immoral laws in Corinth was because they appointed lawmakers and judges of liberal moral character and values. (Vs 9-10)

But, you argue; “Of course, Corinth was under Roman rule?” My response; “So was Palestine and Jerusalem, but it was governed by a radically different code of ethics.” Stick with me, we are about to discover a profound historical insight about the Roman Empire.

The practice of the Roman Empire as it conquered new territory was to allow local people to put courts and judges in place to enact laws that reflected the religion and moral values of the region. That’s why Palestine and Greece were governed by such radically different moral codes even though they were both Roman colonies.

In this context, Paul was actually telling the Christians in Corinth that they were approaching the point of being able to put judges in place in secular courts who reflected Christian values. The spread of the gospel at some point should impact secular society in a distinctly Christian direction.

I believe in this text Paul was encouraging Christians to step up and serve in civil government and bring their Christian moral values with them. If my interpretation of this context troubles you, I encourage you to wrestle with the text and not with me. What Paul was saying is extremely profound and has significant ramifications for Christians living in secular society.

As Paul moves beyond this discussion, he transitions into the question of how Christians should live with moral purity in a culture governed by immoral secular laws and values. This becomes the thrust of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Stay tuned for Paul’s next step!



## **The Principle of Freedom. 1 Corinthians 6:12**

“12) All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

Paul was about to tackle the issue of how to live in a secular culture without embracing its moral values. He observed that in Corinth many things were lawful that were not morally acceptable to God or good and wholesome. Yet, the legal code of a society is not our conscience, God is. Just because something is legal does not mean it is beneficial or profitable.

For example, abortion is legal in some places but that does not make it morally acceptable. Drinking alcohol is legal but it can lead to addictions. Smoking is legal but it can result in lung cancer. Gambling is legal but it can be a pathway to bankruptcy. There are many such things in secular societies. Junk food is abundantly available but it can lead to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. You need to assume responsibility for your own health and fitness.

As a result, Paul adopted a number of principles in the balance of this chapter that are great guidelines for living holy in a hellish society. The first one I simply call the “Principle of Freedom.” Paul was not going to allow sin to become his Master. He protected his moral freedom. He wanted to live with a clear conscience and relished self-control. He protected the things that were important to him.

Paul was not going to allow his hormones or his emotions to be his god. He loved and served God more than the passing pleasures of this life. As a result, he established well-defined moral standards, convictions, priorities, and personal boundaries.

Just because something feels good doesn’t mean it is good. Placing moral boundaries around your life is a good thing. Paul used Scripture as his guide to set the parameters around his life.

Freedom is valuable and worth protecting. It is priceless. It is costly both to gain and maintain. This is true both nationally and personally. It is true both physically and spiritually. Paul valued both his political freedom (Acts 22:24-29) and his personal freedom. (Galatians 5:13)

The Principle of Freedom is very helpful in deciding personal morals and values. Wrong decisions can lead your life down some terrible paths that are very difficult to undo. The bottom line is that we have great latitude in deciding our personal morals and values. Some values will lead to freedom and good character. Others will open the door for moral traps and personal bondage. Decide well!

## **The Principle of Design: 1 Corinthians 6:13**

“13) Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.”

At first glance, this looks like a strange verse. What does food and the stomach have to do with immorality? Well, let's see if we can break this verse down.

Notice that Paul said that food and the stomach are for each other. Food was designed to be digested by the stomach and to provide the fuel for life. In the same way, the stomach was designed to take a variety of food and break it down into all the usable nutrients for the body. The whole study of how the stomach accomplishes its role is fascinating.

Paul's point is that God had a design for everything He created. Sometimes there is a primary design and a secondary design. For example, the stomach has the primary design of digesting food, but it also serves as an alarm clock that says, "it's time to eat." There is a danger of getting these two functions interchanged. Some people eat way too much.

Paul takes this principle of design and applies to the human body and sexuality. He observes that the primary design of the human body is for the Lord. The human body was created to serve as a temple of the Holy Spirit. He then states that the secondary purpose of the human body is for procreation and sexual pleasure.

He is opening up a subject that deeply intrigues me. In essence, he is saying that the potential pleasure and fulfillment of intimacy with God can surpass the pleasure of sex. He is boldly stating that God designed the human body with spiritual capacity as His first and primary purpose and physical activities as lesser priorities. The whole concept of worship and religions is a uniquely human phenomenon.

Satan's strategy is to get people to switch around the principle of design. He wants people to make sex their top priority and worship of God below that –or not at all. Some people actually worship sex. That is the point at which sex switches to immorality and becomes a bondage.

Many people in society have accepted the lie that they can live without God, but they cannot live without sex. The opposite is actually true. Sex is a wonderful gift, but it pales in comparison to the walk in the Spirit and the sheer ecstasy that can accompany an encounter with God in the Spirit.

I must quickly add that every time Paul referred to the gospel in the book of 1 Corinthians, he tied it to being plugged into the power of God and not an empty rational exercise. (See 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:4-5) I am the first to admit that religion and many worship services can be boring and a flat tire. If your walk with God is merely rational, you have no idea what Paul is talking about in this text.

Satan loves it when church becomes boring and mundane. There is a reason why many people get more excited about sports or sex than religion. But Paul is talking about worship along the lines of John 4:23-24 and Acts 2:13-21. Don't settle for empty rationalism as your notion of what Paul is talking about in this verse.

This subject must be viewed against the backdrop of Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:3 of the natural man, the carnal man, and the spiritual man. You will have no basis to comprehend this subject if you are not born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit. That also means the inhibitions of rational evangelicalism might need to be overcome as you venture into the walk in the Spirit.

Your body was designed to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit. If that is not true in your case, run to Jesus and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and guide you into the full potential of worship and communion with God. We were created as body, soul, and spirit. Don't waste your life merely on physical or rational appetites. Move on to develop the full capacity of a walk in the Spirit.

I also need to add a subscript. Some people have been deeply wounded by sexual exploitation or abuse. Healing can only come through Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God. Developing a deep walk with God and accepting His design for marriage can improve physical intimacy as well. This is a huge subject and way beyond the scope of this post. Let me just say, a right relationship with the Creator can restore all of His designs in your life.

### **The Principle of Resurrection Life: 1 Corinthians 6:14**

"Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power."

At first glance, this verse does not look like it fits in the context of a study on overcoming sexual sins. What does our future resurrection have to do with overcoming sexual temptation?

Paul is applying a principle to this subject that he develops at length in Romans 6:8-14. I call it the Principle of Resurrection Life. Let me quote the verses for the sake of our discussion:

"8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10) For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11) Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

The early Christians understood this principle. The bottom line is that dead people do not sin. They are not even tempted. That's why Paul said "consider yourself as dead to sin but alive to Christ."

Resurrection life is available here and now. It is based on grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. It may sound foolish, but it actually works. The next time you are battling a temptation just say,

"I'm dead to..." and turn and walk away. Then say, "I'm alive to new life"... and move on to other things.

Don't try to die to some things unless you are ready to live to other things. Fill the void. If you focus on something good you will not long for the bad. Don't just sit around and do nothing. If you decide on inactivity you will intensify your battle.

This is also true in your thought life. Philippians 4:8-9 gives a list of positive things to think about. Make the list a standard for your thought life. Memorize some Scripture and start meditating on it when your mind wanders.

I have also learned the value of an audible Bible. When my mind is in neutral it can wander into all kinds of fruitless things. I keep my cell phone next to me and when my mind starts to wander, I listen to an inspiring message or Scripture. The Principle of Resurrection life is proactive and not passive.

### **The Principle of Bonding: 1 Corinthians 6:15-17**

"15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! 16) Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, "the two shall become one flesh." 17) But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

In this text of Scripture, Paul disputes the claim that sex is a mere physical encounter between two people. Rather, he states that a deep bond is formed between people during intimacy. It happens on the level of the body, soul, and spirit. He goes so far as to say "the two become one flesh."

Jesus cited this same concept in Matthew 19:5 when talking about marriage and why divorce is so devastating. As the carpenter's son, Jesus knew something about bonding two pieces of wood together. He also knew that the bond could not easily be broken. There is never a clean break when they are forced apart. Both pieces of wood are scared when they are pried apart.

Even the most casual sexual unions cause bonding and leave scars emotionally and spiritually when separated. With multiple encounters with different partners, a hardening takes place in the human conscience. According to Ephesians 4:18-20, over time sensuality leaves people hard and calloused.

The damage can be deep and long-lasting. Eventually the potential to enjoy lasting pleasure with one partner is dampened as love is replaced with lust and fantasy and partners become victims to be used and exploited rather than a spouse to be cherished. Sexual addiction leaves people faceless and valueless. It is the most debased means of self worship while the dignity of the other person is sacrificed on the altar of self-pleasure.

There is a reason why many people become angry, bitter, and vengeful about sex. Many victims long to be loved, valued, and accepted but continually face exploitation, abuse, and rejection. The wounds can be deep and leave people at the mercy of hate and vengeance. Often the victim becomes a future perpetrator of sexual abuse to others.

What Paul was unpacking in these verses was a picture of the emptiness and brokenness of many in the city of Corinth. Sin always steals, kills, and destroys. This is especially true of sexually immoral sins. It is compounded many times over when the violations happen from incest, to children, or through rape.

I have worked with many people over the years who carried the wounds of being sexually violated as children into their later adult years. Healing involves forgiveness and opening up some very painful memories. Many times behind alcohol or drug addictions are painful memories of sexual abuse that they are trying to medicate. It can also manifest itself through obesity, bitterness, or workaholism. It is the unending search for meaning, value, and affirmation.

The bottom line is that Jesus offers both forgiveness and healing. Salvation creates a healing bond with Him that is safe, secure, dignified, and beautiful. Jesus came to bring abundant life. The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 is the quest of every person. But many seek to find these aspirations in all the wrong places and are left disappointed and empty.

However, I must add that a sexual union within the loving and lasting bonds of marriage can be beautiful, fulfilling, and healing. It is a gift from God designed for pleasure and for completeness.

If this post has exposed some deep wounds and hurts in your life, let me encourage you that there is hope and healing in Jesus Christ. Those who invite Jesus into their lives become one spirit with Him. This is a picture of completeness and acceptance.

Let me emphasize that the Gospel is for everyone, including those former and current residents of the city of Corinth. God sent Paul to Corinth because He came to save and heal people on both sides of the coin. He came to redeem the sexually addicted and the sexually abused. The Gospel is the only source of forgiveness, restoration, and healing that I have found that genuinely brings new life beyond the ravages of Corinth.

I am so thankful that God included 1 Corinthians 5-7 in the Bible. These chapters are a beacon of light in dark places. They offer hope, healing, and new life no matter how deep your wounds or broad your despair. I write with compassion and grace because I too am a former resident of the city of Corinth. My life is a testimony of the forgiving and healing power of the Gospel. Jesus came to bring new life, dignity, and purity. Forgiveness and healing is a journey worth taking.

## **Principle of Bonding Part II: 1 Corinthians 6:15-17**

“15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16) Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “the two shall become one flesh.” 17) But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

Paul talks about two very different kinds of bonding in these verses. In the last post, we looked at the negative consequences of sexually immoral bonding outside of marriage. The consequences are many and the wounds can be deep and long lasting.

But in this text he also holds out a second kind of bonding with unimaginable potential. In these verses he mentions being “members of Christ” and “becoming one spirit with him.” Salvation creates a bond with Christ in the Spirit that is life-changing.

This is the concept Paul alluded to in verses 13 under the principle of design. People were created for a very unique relationship with God. We can think in abstract concepts, communicate complex thoughts, learn, expand our intellect, and have the capacity for worship. We were created in the image of God and for God.

This translated into the potential for indescribable communion with the Holy God of creation. I stress the word “Holy” because that is what He is. At the moment of salvation, He even fills us with His Holy Spirit. The holiness of God creates a wall of separation between God and sinful people.

In this context, Paul presents a paradoxical situation for the carnal Christian. How can you have an immoral sexual bond in the flesh while maintaining a holy spiritual bond with God in the Spirit? The two are in conflict with each other. According to Ephesians 4:30-32, the Spirit of God can be grieved by things as minor as anger and bitterness. What about outright sexual immorality?

Paul's goal in this text was to get the Corinthian Christians to embrace the higher and most holy calling. He wanted them to experience healing, freedom, and unhindered bonding with God. He wanted them to worship God in Spirit and in truth. He wanted them to experience the anointed, empowered, and uninterrupted walk in the Spirit. He wanted them to maximize their worship experience and thrive in both fellowship with God and spiritual service.

But because of their immorality, Paul pictured them as being slaves to sin and mere babes in Christ embroiled in constant conflict with one another and constantly distracted with fleshly drama. They were falling short of fellowship with God. They were Christians that had returned to the slavery of Egypt rather than moving into the promised land. (1 Corinthians 10:1-13) They were under God's discipline and not His favor.

The potential we have as Christians to walk with God and literally abide in His presence is impossible to describe to a carnal believer. But the invitation is there for every Christian. God welcomes us into His presence. This is the flip side of the discussion on bonding. The two cannot coexist at the same time. We cannot be bonded to a life of immoral sin and experience communion with God at the same time.

The pursuit of God is an awesome thing. Becoming one with God in Spirit is incomprehensible, but within the reach of every child of God. Paul was encouraging the Corinthian Christians to decide between fleshly immoral bondage and Spirit empowered bonding with God. He was holding out two hands and saying, “pick one or the other!”

### **The Principle of Diminishing Returns: 1 Corinthians 6:18**

“18) Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

As Paul continues his discussion of sexual immorality, he moves to the Principle of Diminishing Returns. He points out that sexual sins have worse personal consequences than other kinds of sin. Why? Because the immoral man or woman “sins against their own body.”. What does that mean?

Well, when it comes to sexual sins, your body produces hormones to drive your temptation and your pleasure. Each sexual encounter both programs and reinforces your sexual drives. Your body does not produce a hormone for sins like lying, stealing, cheating, or murder, but it does produce hormones to reinforce your sex drive.

These hormones when not controlled feed lust and fantasy. They become the appetite behind pornography and fantasy novels. But there is a hidden trap with immoral sins. What the mind is exposed to, the body begins to crave. Soon the seeds for every form of sexual expression can be planted and take root in your mind and flesh.

The whole concept of sexual addiction is clinically accepted within many addiction treatment facilities today. In fact, sexual sins can best be understood through the chemical addiction model and the law of diminishing returns.

This law recognized the phenomenon that the first time someone tries a new drug they can get a big buzz with a relatively small amount of the chemical. But as use continues, there is a diminishing effect. Soon, to get the same buzz they will either have to increase the amount of the same stimuli or switch it for a stronger drug. With time, the body gets dependent on the drug for normal function.

The same happens with sexual sins. Over time, the sexually immoral person begins to crave more partners and new forms of sexual experiences. Soon the sexual drive becomes an obsession and controls their thoughts and actions. Pornography feeds the fantasy and warps

their thinking and view of reality. In short order they can spiral down the whirlpool of depravity Paul describes in Ephesians 4:17-19. They become obsessed with sex but are never fulfilled.

In Ancient Greece, Corinth was looked at as being sex city. It became the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Greek Empire. Many of these people became either slaves to their own passions or victims used to fulfill the warped fantasies of others. Laws against sexual exploitation were erased and there were no moral boundaries.

But God still loved these sinful and broken people. He sent the Apostle Paul to preach a gospel of forgiveness and new life in Christ. The gospel promised not only forgiveness and freedom from degrading and shameful passions, but also a restoration of personal dignity, self respect, self-control, and a productive life that included the potential of a loving and fulfilling marriage. The long term picture included children, a family, wholesome relationships with others, and a relationship with the One and Only True God.

The gospel was scratching the inner itch of every person created in the image of God. The alcohol, drugs, parties, sex, and self-indulgent living did not satisfy the inner craving and yearning for God. The pagan religions of Greece and Rome led down another dead end road to disillusionment. They offered no hope of forgiveness or promise of a new life. The gospel of Jesus Christ became a beacon of light shining in a dark place.

That same beacon of light is shining today. It is reaching into the darkness of modern society and offering forgiveness, grace, and a new life to lost and sinful people. God is still in the business of changing lives. 1 Corinthians 5-7 is a road map for those caught in sexual bondage, addiction, or exploitation to move toward forgiveness, healing, freedom, and personal respect and dignity. Jesus Christ wants to break into your darkness and end your nightmare. He loves you and sees value in you. Your journey to freedom and a new life starts the moment you invite Jesus Christ into your life.

Becoming a Christian includes culture shock because the ways of God are drastically different from the ways of the world. Breaking the sexual addiction cycle is more of a process than an event, but God's grace is there for every step of the journey. Over time, the old things will pass away and new things will come. The Holy Spirit will pour agape love into your life as inner change starts taking place. I am praying for you and your journey. Keep seeking God through His Word and inviting the Holy Spirit to work in your life. God can and does bring beauty from ashes as He sets captives free.

### **The Principle of Fleeing: 1 Corinthians 6:18**

"18) Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."

If you look carefully at this verse it consists of two sentences. The first one is only two words long. It says "Flee immorality." A sentence by definition embodies a full or complete thought.



Paul was telling the believers in the city of Corinth to “flee from sexual immorality.” He was referring to both the temptation and immoral acts.

Over the years many Christians have come to me with a misconception. They say, “Doesn’t Ephesians 6:13-14 tell us to “stand firm” and James 4:7 says to “resist the devil and he will flee?” Yes, both are true. But you stand firm in your purity by fleeing from immoral temptations and you resist the devil by breaking away from sexual bondage. Don’t be like Lot who stayed in Sodom and had his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds. ( 2 Peter 2:8) In the process he lost his marriage, family, testimony, and dignity.

There are some temptations and battles the Bible tells us to flee from. They include sexual immorality, idolatry, hedonism, and youthful lusts. (See 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Corinthians 10:14, 1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:22) If you want victory you need to follow biblical principles.

It is not cowardly to run from Satan’s proven traps that can destroy you. Read the many Old Testament stories that illustrate this principle. Joseph fled from an affair with Potiphar’s wife and was ultimately promoted. (Genesis 39-41) David seduced Uriah’s wife into an affair and brought long-term consequences on himself, his family, and the kingdom of Israel. (See 2 Samuel 11-13) The book of Proverbs strongly warns of the tragic pitfalls of sexual immorality. (See Proverbs 5-6)

So how does this apply to our days? I’m going to be very blunt because hormones breed stupidity and block common sense. 1) Repent and break off every immoral relationship in which you are entangled. 2) Take extreme measures to get rid of all pornography, fantasy novels, and immoral entertainment from your life. 3) Begin an honest and sincere walk with God as you renew your mind and moral convictions around biblical truth. 4) Focus on your present marriage or save yourself for your future spouse. 5) Get involved in a good local church that offers solid Biblical preaching and teaching and fosters positive mentoring relationships. 6) Develop your spiritual gifts and thrust yourself into fruitful ministry serving others. 7) Be patient and forgiving of yourself and others as you enjoy your journey to freedom and the abundant life.

The bottom line is that Jesus has something much better for you than what sinful living and worldly values produce. You cannot erase some of the consequences of your past life of sin, but you can break the bondage and move forward to build a new life surrounded by the fruit of the Spirit, new and wholesome friendships and a transformed personal identity based on dignity and self respect –but you need to sincerely cooperate with the process.

### **The Principle of the Temple: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

“19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20) For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Your body is important. It is your ticket to life in this world. The word “body” is used seven times in 1 Corinthians Chapter Six alone. There is something very significant about the human body. The Bible teaches that it was created for something much more significant than mere biological life.

Your body was created for spiritual life. Your body was created with the capacity to house the Holy Spirit and engage in fellowship and the worship of God. No creature in the animal kingdom has that capacity. Mankind is unique. People are special. God created us to share in His glory.

It is with this realization in mind that Paul introduces what I call the Principle of the Temple. Our bodies were created to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple was a holy place. It was the place where God’s glory dwelt. The problem was that the people of Israel often defiled the temple and treated it with contempt. At one point God destroyed the Temple in the Old Testament because the people defiled it and filled it with profane idols. God wants us to treat His temple with respect.

I am reminded of the story in John 2:13-22 of Jesus entering the temple in Jerusalem and finding that it was turned into a common market. It was full of oxen, sheep, doves, money changers, and merchants. It had become a barn and was full of hay and manure. It was putrid.

John 2:15 says that Jesus made a “scourge of cords” and drove the animals out of the temple. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and turned over their tables. Why? Because the temple was to be a place of prayer and seeking God, but they turned it into a house of merchandise. One translation says “a robbers den.” When you burn that picture in your mind, you are ready for the Principle of the Temple as it relates to the discussion of sexual immorality in the context of 1 Corinthians 5-7.

Let me set up the discussion: When I speak at youth camps, I am often asked the question by Christian young people; “How far is too far?” It’s an important question. Instead of giving rules, I simply explain the Principle of the Temple.

I tell them to imagine they are sitting in the Temple with their boyfriend or girlfriend holding hands and Jesus walks in. How does He respond? Then we move to hugging, kissing, petting and ... by that point they usually say they have crossed over a line. Jesus would take drastic measures because they are defiling the temple.

I love that illustration because it is so clear. The Principle of the Temple is easy to picture when placed in that context. But that’s exactly what is happening. The Spirit of Jesus is always present with the Christian. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. When you view pornography or read fantasy novels, Jesus is present. When you swear, lust or engage in fornication or adultery, Jesus is present. When you stick a needle in your arm or sell your body for your next fix, Jesus is there.

I use this principle so much it has become second nature for me. When I'm in doubt about the wholesome nature of a moral activity, I just picture myself sitting in the temple engaging in that activity when Jesus walks in. Then I ask myself, how would He respond? My desire is to see Jesus smile and say, "well done good and faithful servant." The amazing thing about the Principle of the Temple is that it is so simple and practical. It makes Jesus and not self the focal point.

It is no coincidence that the physical temple in Jerusalem does not exist today. Let me drive this point home; "So where does the glory of God dwell in the world today?" His glory dwells within His people through the indwelling Holy Spirit. If you are a born-again Christian, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You and I are part of something very special in this age of grace. Whether you like it or not, we are living in "The Principle of the Temple."

### **Principle of the Temple: Part 2: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

"19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20) For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

To go deeper with God, we need to take the Principle of the Temple a step further. Many have noted that the temple had three parts. There was the Court of the Gentiles, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. I believe this corresponds to the body, soul, and spirit of mankind.

The glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies, which is comparable to the spirit of man. When someone is born-again, the Holy Spirit indwells the human spirit. But that still leaves the soul and the body. I see the soul as comparable to the Holy Place, and the body like the Court of the Gentiles. Stick with me on this, we are about to wrestle with a profound insight.

The question is, "When Jesus cleansed the temple in John 2:13-22, what part did He cleanse?" How far into the temple ground had the merchants encroached? Well, we know it wasn't the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest went in there once a year. So that leaves two options. The merchants may have moved the sheep, oxen, and the money changing tables right into the Holy Place. This is where the sacrifices took place. If that is the case, no wonder Jesus took drastic measures.

If that was the case, then Jesus was emphasizing that our minds matter to God. Our soul corresponds to the Holy Place. It is the seat of the human intellect, emotion, and will. Satan wants us to fill our heart and mind with all kinds of negative and deceptive things. He wants it full of greed, lusts, fantasy, pornography, pride, anger, and bitterness. He wants to turn our soul into a barnyard full of manure. No wonder the New Testament talks about the importance of renewing the mind. (See Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 4:22-24) You will not win the battle for moral freedom until you win the battle of the mind.

But there is another option. The merchants could have simply moved from the city and into the Court of the Gentiles. In this case Jesus would be saying; “Don’t turn your body into a barn yard.” I personally like this option for four reasons.

First, in 1 Kings 7-8, we have the amazing story of Solomon dedicating the 1st Temple. The glory of the Lord filled the Holy of Holies to the point that the priests could not stand to minister before the cloud. (See 1 Kings 8:6-11) Then Solomon prayed a special prayer of dedication over the temple. Finally in verse 64 there is a footnote that is easy to miss. It says, “On the same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord...” This seems to be referring to the Court of the Gentiles.

Second, Nehemiah 13 tells the story of cleansing the temple grounds and restoring the Sabbath in the city. The Gatekeepers were commanded to not even let the merchants into the city on the Sabbath. (See Nehemiah 13:19-22) It seems that the merchants had access to the city but not the temple grounds.

Third, in Mark 11:17 when Jesus cleansed the temple He said, “... Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?”” The Court of the Gentiles is where “all nations” had access. They came from far and wide to seek God’s favor.

Finally, the context of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:18-20 are both talking about the body. Let me stress this, your spirit and soul are important to God, but so is your body. The solution to keeping the temple grounds clean came down to the Gatekeepers. People could bring their sacrifices into the Temple grounds, but the buying, selling, and trading were to be left outside.

So the Principle of the Temple begs the question, “Do you have a Gatekeeper in your life?” Are you trying to protect just your spirit or do you guard your mind and heart as well? But I think Paul was saying we should be even more diligent and place the Gatekeeper at the entrance of the body. This fits Romans 12:1 where Paul begs believers to present their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God.

Many battles are lost because we do not have a Gatekeeper in our life nor do we see our bodies as important to God. We fail to protect that which is holy. We invite the world into our bodies and into our heart and soul. Then we wonder why we struggle with temptations and sinful bondage. We need to envision Jesus stepping into our lives with the same zeal He had when He cleansed the Temple. We need to value our bodies the way Jesus does and get serious about a Gatekeeper in our lives.

### **The Principle of Ownership: 1 Corinthians 6:19-7:4**

“19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20) For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

As you read these verses, keep the context in mind; Paul was talking about immorality and sexual bondage. He had already given several principles to support his case for purity and help in the journey to moral freedom. Now he presents “The Principle of Ownership.”

In these verses, he makes the case that the Christian has been bought with a price and therefore no longer belongs to ourselves. We belong to God.

He doubles down in 1 Corinthians 7:4 by saying that the body of the married person does not belong to themselves, but to their spouse. It comes down to ownership. We are not free to do whatever we please with our bodies.

So why is this important? I hear the argument all the time that “this is my body and I can do with it whatever I please!” That is the primary argument behind abortion. It is also the primary argument behind all kinds of sexual indulgence and indiscretions. But for the Christian that is not true! We belong to God. He redeemed us with the priceless blood of Jesus Christ.

When I discovered this principle, it was revolutionary in my thinking. It implied that before I could carry out an immoral sexual act, I needed to get both God’s permission and my wife’s permission. This included viewing pornography or carrying on flirtatious conversations. It also meant that I had to live in such a way as to be pleasing to both God and my spouse.

Let me share a true story from our marriage that I now find embarrassing. I have always been into weight lifting and casual bodybuilding. Years ago, I subscribed to Muscle and Fitness Magazine. It had great workouts, lifting techniques, and nutritional ideas.

One day my wife came to me very upset and said, “This is pornography, I don’t want you to view these nearly naked women.” I was flabbergasted and defended my magazine. It turned into an intense argument.

Finally, we arrived at a compromise. Every time I got a magazine she would take it before I viewed it and cover up everything she found offensive. She basically took a marker and put clothes on both the men and the women and crossed out any articles she deemed sensual.

When I finally got my magazine, I was frustrated and irritated at what she had covered up. The magazine wasn’t the same without the pictures. It soon became apparent that I had a lust problem and reluctantly canceled my subscription. God used my wife to close a door that I defended, but that was a trap for me. She was harder on me than the Holy Spirit.

Ownership is important. Growing up, I was taught to care for other people's stuff a lot better than my own. Why? Because it placed me in a position of accountability. I had to answer to the owner for the way I treated their belongings.

One day my dad borrowed my very nice shotgun to go duck hunting with some friends. They flipped over a canoe and one guy lost his shotgun. When they got home, as my dad told the story he said it was my shotgun that was lost. He was testing my reaction.

To his surprise, I started laughing. When He asked about my unexpected response, I said, "I'm just thankful you lost my shotgun instead of me losing yours. You would have been infuriated with me."

The whole scenario put me in a position of authority. He was suddenly accountable to me for my shotgun. Our roles were briefly reversed. I must confess, the incident and my response earned me much more grace and patience from my dad. He cut me a lot more slack after that episode.

The principle of ownership has far reaching implications for the way we care for our bodies, but it can be applied to much more than our sexuality. It spills over to the biblical concept of stewardship that Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. Technically, everything we have belongs to God. For the Christian, everything we have, everything we do, and everything we are is intended to bring glory to God.

If you haven't done it yet, dedicate both your body and your possessions to God in a new and intentional way. This conscious act can bring amazing freedom when you are in the face of temptation. Just pause and ask, "What would the owner say about this?"

### **The Importance of a Commitment to Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:1-2**

"1) Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2) But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband."

In these verses, Paul alludes to a letter he received from Corinth and questions about how to deal with sex drives among Christians. We do not know exactly what the questions were, but we can surmise that it involved how to handle sexual temptations while living in a city like Corinth and frigid marriages.

I believe Paul was answering the sexual questions from that letter all the way from Chapter Five through Seven of 1 Corinthians. In these verses, he makes a shocking statement that goes 100% counter to most evangelical teaching today. (Warning: I am about to get very controversial. Please stop reading here if you are not willing to wrestle with an explosive subject.)

The first thing he says is men should not be touching women in a romantic or sexual way except in marriage. No matter the circumstances, Paul said "keep your hands off her." Why? Men are stimulated by sight, women are stimulated by touch. When sight and touch come together, mutual chemistry can kick in and reason and self-control usually check out.

Surprisingly, Paul says, “because of pronia” or “because sex drives frequently leads to immorality” you need a contingency plan. Let me say this in plain English. The church today says, “if your spouse has problems with sexual immorality, get divorced.” But in these verses Paul said, “If you have problems with sexual immorality, get married.”

Here is the deal, God created us as sexual beings. Most people have sex drives and they can become very strong in a city like Corinth that had no restraints and no boundaries. Welcome to the secular world today. God’s solution is to get married and work on building a sexually-fulfilling relationship within marriage.

One of the reasons God created marriage was for sex. In the next few verses, he commands both the husband and the wife to figure out the sex needs of their spouse and fulfill them in marriage. If your spouse is struggling with sexual temptations and you respond by withdrawing or building walls, you will destroy your marriage and push your spouse into the arms of another man or woman. I am not saying there are not serious ramifications to infidelity in marriage and that drastic measures may need to happen to fix the relationship.

However, marriage needs to be a safe place for intimate communications about sex drives and how to meet each other’s needs. Hebrews 13:4 implies that marriage is the honorable place to enjoy sex with a clear conscience so as to avoid fornication or adultery. The bottom line is that God created sex as a wonderful and fulfilling pleasure to be abundantly enjoyed within marriage. (See Proverbs 5:15-23)

But you say, “Terry, I object! Didn’t Jesus say in Matthew 19:9 that if your marriage partner commits adultery you have a basis for divorce?” Well, Jesus did say in that verse if you get divorced and marry another person you commit adultery. Then He gave one exemption and that was “immorality” which comes back to our Greek word “ponia.”

So what was Jesus saying? I believe He was referring back to Leviticus 18 and forbidden relationships. In other words, Jesus was saying, “If your marriage itself is immoral, it is not wrong to repent, get divorced, and then pursue a biblical relationship.”

Ironically, that was exactly what Paul was dealing with in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 with the man who had his father’s wife. Paul was saying, “this is an immoral relationship and it must be ended.” He was not saying if your spouse has hot sex drives and temptations or struggles with immorality, get a divorce.

Actually, what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 was the exact opposite of contemporary Christian teaching. He was teaching if your spouse is struggling with immorality, open communications, learn forgiveness, work through the issues, and figure out how to have a fulfilling sex life in your marriage.

We are dealing with an unprecedented breakdown in society today. Even in the legislature where I served as a State Representative, we recognize the root problem is the breakdown of

marriage and the family. Some have proposed we make laws to slow down divorce rates and keep married couples together for the sake of the children. That is a very complicated proposal.

Ironically, part of the problem comes down to a misinterpretation of Matthew 19:9. I know Christian counselors who advocate people have the right to get a divorce if their spouse struggles with pornography.

I believe we could turn the corner on the destruction of the family if Christians and churches would adopt Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. We need to accept the reality that we are sexual people and Christians are not exempt from battles with immorality. Then we need to look at committed marriages as the solution to the problem.

I recognize this is a very difficult subject and some people are in what appears to be irreparable marriages. Let me just say that I have seen God do miraculous things in some very messed-up marriages. I believe every marriage will have problems, but marriage is worth fighting for. My take away from this text is to "fight for the marriage you are now in and invite God to change you into a more loving spouse."

### **Sex and Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:2-5**

"2) But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3) Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4) The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5) Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Welcome to sex and marriage. In this text Paul sets out some guidelines for intimacy in marriage. In verse 2 he laid out the importance of marriage for those with strong sex drives. Even a casual reading of this verse concludes that sex was created for marriage and marriage was designed to fulfill sexual needs. Intimacy is intended to be a mutually beautiful and fulfilling gift from God.

Then in verses 3-4, he bluntly concludes that both the husband and wife are responsible to fulfill the sexual needs of their spouse. Let me take a moment and explode a myth. It is not true that men only think about sex and women are more sexually passive.

Sex drives are actually a very individual thing. Some men have strong sex drives and some are very passive. Some women have strong sex drives and some are very passive. Ironically, these two verses acknowledge that phenomenon and place equal weight on both the husband and the wife to discover and fulfill each other's needs.



I also want to quickly emphasize that marriage is about far more than sex. It was created for companionship, mutual help, and encouragement, procreation, and raising a family, career and work development, open communications, financial success and stewardship, joint ministry fruitfulness, and worship. Married couples are to value one another and are bound deeply on many levels. The two are intended to become one. Marriage is intended to be a shared total life journey in every area.

If marriage is reduced to merely the sexual it becomes demanding, exploitive, demeaning, and boring. Without strong companionship, tenderness, and romance a spouse can begin to feel they have no value other than being a sex slave. I have seen some very ignorant and immature Christians use this text to justify that kind of demeaning marriage.

I have also seen the opposite extreme where a spouse will use sex as a reward or punishment tool. This is sexual manipulation that is equally as damaging to the marriage.

As I have worked with hundreds of married couples over the years, I have discovered that marriage conflicts are often rooted in three areas. They are: 1) Communication problems, 2) Financial problems, and 3) Sexual problems. They are often interrelated. Paul was saying that it is important to meet each other's sexual needs as you work on strengthening the relationship in other areas.

The bottom line is that Paul was telling married couples to open communications and discover each other's sexual needs, and then meet those needs to protect the marriage from immoral temptations or intrusion from others. Sexual bonding in marriage will be a lifelong adventure and most couples struggle as that adventure grows.

I am by no means a marriage therapist, but I encourage every married couple to build a marriage tool box. Read quality books like "The Five Love Languages", by Gary Chapman, and "What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women", by Dr James Dobson, and "What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men" by Patrick Morley. Invest in your marriage. Attend marriage retreats, marriage conferences, and take regular romantic getaways.

A strong marriage is built over time and requires constant maintenance. Learn, grow, experiment, and discover life together. Enjoy your marriage. No matter how good or bad it is, it can get better.

### **Marriage, Dignity and Personal Healing: 1 Corinthians 7:5-7**

"5) Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6) But this I say by way of concession, not of command. 7) Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that." 1 Corinthians 7:5-7

It is very important within marriage to fulfill each other's sexual needs. Open communications are important. But Paul implies there are times for abstinence even in marriage. The Old Testament guidelines included times of abstinence during menstrual impurity (Leviticus 15:24-33; 20:18) and surrounding childbirth. (Leviticus 12) These are great times to learn self-control and to focus on God and prayer as Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:5.

Technically there are three kinds of fasting in the Bible. The first and most common is going without food for the purpose of seeking God in prayer. (Isaiah 58, Matthew 6:16-18) This is an expression that God is more important than food. The second is called "watching." This is going without sleep for the purpose of prayer and seeking God. (Matthew 26:40-41) This is an expression that God is more important than sleep. The final kind of fasting is going without sexual intimacy within the marriage for the purpose of seeking God and prayer. (1 Corinthians 7:5) This is an expression that God is more important than sex. This should be done with clear communications and mutual agreement.

When embraced, this Jewish and Christian view of human sexuality is radically different from secular values or many pagan religions that actually worship sex. The Bible makes it clear that we are responsible to control our sex drives. Sexual addicts have accepted the lie that they have no control over their sex drives.

The important truth from this text of Scripture is that we can control our hormones and sex drives rather than being controlled by them. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit. If you embrace the lie that you have no control over your sex drives then you concede there is no basis to criminalize rape, incest, child exploitation, sex trade, or the degradation of women. This is a pathetic view of life. The Bible teaches we are responsible for our actions.

Exposing this lie was a huge step toward my personal freedom. The truth is that our sex drives are influenced and controlled by what we feed our minds. If you view pornography, read fantasy novels, or consume garbage movies then your lust meter will go way up and your self-control will go way down. When you guard your heart and mind then purity, peace, and balance can rule in your life.

I have had my battles over the years, but freedom came when I started valuing my relationship with God and a clear conscience as a greater value than the fleeting pleasure of fantasy or lust. When I stopped feeding my flesh and started consciously and consistently feeding my spirit, amazing change started happening within me. I gained freedom over sexual obsession. (See Galatians 5:16-26)

Over time another benefit started unfolding. I became less demanding and grumpy in our marriage and started to value my wife more as a person. This grew into a better romantic relationship in our marriage because intimacy was no longer about sex, it was about each other.

The whole book of the Song of Solomon is about romance. It speaks loudly that God wants His people to enjoy the pleasure of intimacy without becoming slaves to our sex drives.

The boundaries of a God-honoring and Christian marriage were intended to be a safe place to work through sexual issues while growing in your walk with God. Christians can be dignified, sexy, and godly at the same time with God's full blessing on marriage and the family. Godly people are very attractive because their countenance begins to glow and shine. And best of all, they can enjoy intimacy without guilt or regret while imparting value to their spouse at the same time.

As a footnote, let me also say that the whole arena of human sexuality is one of Satan's primary playgrounds. Notice that Paul mentioned him in this text. His goal is to hurt, wound, enslave, distort, exploit, confuse, and destroy people. It has amazed me over the years of working with hundreds of people how many major life hang-ups are directly connected to bad past experiences or very distorted views of human sexuality.

Almost without exception the journey to personal healing and freedom will cross the valley of human sexuality and there will be many battles on that journey. Don't let the enemy shame, condemn, or paralyze you because of your past or present battles. Jesus is there for you and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

It is vital that you make truth your guide. There are piles of false information and twisted sexual ideas and values out there. Beware of the enemies traps and invite the Holy Spirit to bring help and healing into your life!

### **Being Single And On Fire for God: 1 Corinthians 7:7-9**

"7) Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. 8) But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9) But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Paul now tackles the subject of marriage versus remaining single for the sake of serving God. The theme runs all the way through verse 38. He includes young single adults, widowed adults, divorced people, and married people in his discussion. It is a lengthy and detailed treatment of the subject.

In the three verses above, he points out that some people have a unique gift to be single, sexually pure, and happy all at the same time. They can be very focused, devoted, and fruitful in serving God. Many of the young men that traveled with Paul and were disciplined by him fell into this category. They were able to travel much, sacrifice much, and go to extremes in serving God that was not possible for most married couples.

The exception in Paul's disciple making practice was Aquila and Priscilla who were the New Testament model of a married couple in ministry together. They broke the norm in mission work and were truly one in ministry as a married couple.

We are not sure how many of the Apostles were married, but in 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul states that most of the Apostles were married, the half-brothers of Jesus were married and he reserved the future right of marriage for himself as well. We also know that Phillip the Evangelist was married and had four virgin daughters who were active in ministry. (Acts 21:8-9) There is no requirement for Christian leaders to remain single in the New Testament.

However, Paul strongly argues in 1 Corinthians 7 that there were practical advantages to being single and mobile for the glory of God. Singles have the advantage of undistracted devotion to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

I take my hat off to the many single women in missions who have pulled much more than their share of work for the glory of God. In many countries they make up the bulk of the mission task force. Over the years, I have met many (both men and women) who are single and on fire for the glory of God. I praise God for them!

In this chapter, Paul makes the case that building a solid marriage takes time, energy, commitment, and devotion. He comes close to conceding that it is better to be single wishing you were married than being in a bad marriage wishing you were single. He concludes that if you do not have self-control over your hormones, it is better to marry than to burn with temptation.

We will get into more detail on the subject of divorce and remarriage in a future post, but for now, I want to emphasize that there was no negative stigma attached to single people in the New Testament Church. They were workers for the glory of God who advanced the gospel around the known world of that time.

I would argue that the Apostle Thomas was single and that enabled him to carry the gospel all the way to southern India, where he was martyred for Christ. I have visited the Mound of St Thomas. It was a very moving experience for me. Paul was also single and that enabled him to shake the Roman Empire for the glory of God and to write much of the New Testament.

### **Defending the Sanctity of Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:10-40**

“10) But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11) (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

Paul now turns to a discussion of divorce and remarriage. Before we unpack these verses, I need to lay a biblical and historical backdrop to this subject and why a high view of marriage is so crucial to Christianity.

Keep in mind, as Paul wrote these verses, he was writing to a Gentile church on the front lines of world missions in the city of Corinth. Why is that important? Because many of the marriage

conflicts were directly related to tension between Christian morals and Greek morals, especially when one spouse became a Christian and the other did not.

History tells us that both Greek and Roman culture of the day embraced very loose standards of morality. Marriage was for legitimizing children and posterity, but much of the sexual pleasure for men was fulfilled outside of the marriage with other pleasure seeking people including temple prostitutes, during pagan religious ceremonies, and through the slave trade.

Wife-swapping was commonplace as illustrated by Herod having his brother's wife. (Matthew 14:1-12) John the Baptist was beheaded because of his stand on the sanctity of the marriage covenant.

Jesus promoted the same standard for marriage. (See Matthew 19:3-12) This was part of the reason why the Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders hated him so much. One of His signature teachings was to restore the sanctity of marriage in the face of the religious leaders finding a loophole in the Law to legitimize wife-swapping. Jesus tackled that sin head-on. He defended the sanctity of marriage.

The whole context of 1 Corinthians 5-7 was to establish Christian morality in the midst of Greek pornia. This involved changing the definition, meaning, and sanctity of marriage wherever the gospel spread. Christian morality adopted a very high view of the marriage covenant based on the teaching of Jesus mentioned above.

This high view of marriage became a central theme in the teaching of the Apostles and the New Testament writers. (See Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7) They all viewed a committed marriage as the best place to work through personal sexual struggles. (See 1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

Another great example of this is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Many scholars believe this text is talking about marriage. When verses 4-5 mention "possessing his own vessel in sanctification and honor", it is often viewed as a reference to a Christian spouse and the sanctity of marriage. The early Christians were taught to guard the sanctity of marriage. There was no room for sex outside of the marriage covenant.

A high view of the sanctity of marriage was also important to the Christian church because marriage is the analogy behind salvation and the relationship of Jesus to His bride. (See Ephesians 5:22-27 and Revelation 19) The whole doctrine of the assurance of salvation is based on the biblical definition of the sanctity of marriage. Jesus is committed to His bride despite her struggles. The end goal is holiness.

I will fight and defend the biblical sanctity of marriage tirelessly. Why? Because on this rock rests the whole basis for Christian morality. Solid marriages and families are the foundation to strong communities and nations. Open your eyes! The foremost battle to reinvent America by liberals today is a tireless attempt to redefine marriage, the family, and human sexuality. The immortality of secular Babylon will never voluntarily yield to God. (Revelation 18)

Unfortunately, the greatest battle to defend the biblical sanctity of marriage today is being fought in the church. We have totally abandoned the biblical teaching of the permanence of the marriage covenant and have become much like the Pharisees who came to Jesus defending their liberal practice of divorce and remarriage. (Matthew 19:3-12)

I know this is a hard message to accept, but this is the line Paul was drawing in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. He punctuated this message at the end of his discussion in 1 Corinthians 7:39 by saying; “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, but only in the Lord.” This is why the Christian marriage vow says “until death we do part.”

It is instructive that the bulk of his teaching on marriage related to the next generation. (See 1 Corinthians 7:25-35) Adopting a biblical view of the sanctity of marriage is often a multi-generational process. Culture changes slowly.

My greatest supporters over the years for a strong view of the permanence of the marriage covenant have been divorced and remarried couples. They know best the hurts, pains, ravishes, and challenges of divorce and remarriage. They want their children to get it right and take dating, courtship, and marriage seriously.

Let me speak briefly to those in troubled marriages. Jesus made it clear to the Pharisees that the reason they had problems in their marriages was because they had problems in their own hearts. (Matthew 19:8) Marriage is intended to expose your personal heart problems. Marriage is not easy. Every marriage has struggles and conflicts. Marriage is not about finding the right person, it is about God changing you into the right person. The biblical view of marriage includes dynamic personal transformation. More spiritual wrestling and growth comes through marriage struggles than any other area of life. Marriage exposes you.

### **A Very Restrictive View of Divorce and Remarriage. 1 Corinthians 7:10-40**

“10) But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11) (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

Paul is very straightforward in his discussion of divorce and remarriage. He plays no favorites and he takes no prisoners. He is not concerned about feelings, emotions, or hypothetical situations.

He simply says that the wife should not leave her husband, but if the marriage does end, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. He speaks with the candor of the prophet Malachi when he declared that “God hates divorce.” (See the full context of Malachi 2:13-17) God fully expects people to fulfill their marriage vows.

Paul gives exception to a Christian spouse who is sent away or abandoned by a non-Christian spouse, but even then he closes this section with a very strong statement on the permanence of the marriage covenant. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 he says, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives."

But you say, "What about 1 Corinthians 7:15 where Paul says that when a mixed marriage ends, that the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases?" I fully concur. Some marriages are violent, immoral, degrading, and abusive. God does not expect a person to stay in an abusive marriage, but neither does He grant the freedom to go spouse-shopping after a divorce.

God intends for the divorced person to work on themselves and their relationship with God, while He deals with the renegade spouse. The long-term goal should be reconciliation. (1 Corinthians 7:11) I have seen God reconcile some very impossible marriages and fill them with His forgiveness, love, glory, and grace.

From my admittedly narrow reading of Scripture, there are three scenarios under which a divorced person can remarry: 1) If they are reconciling to their spouse, 2) If their spouse has died ending the original covenant, or 3) if their spouse has remarried making future reconciliation impossible. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) I admit this seems narrow, but so do the Ten Commandments.

I fully recognize we are living in a culture of divorce and remarriage. This is true even in the church. But culture and opinion polls do not change the clear teaching of Scripture. I recognize there is forgiveness and we cannot undo the past. At some point we need to move forward.

My personal approach on this issue is that I fight for the marriage people are now in, but I refrain from conducting a marriage ceremony for a divorce person who does not meet the three qualifications in the previous chapter. Why? Jesus said, "let not man separate what God has joined together." (Matthew 19:6) Let me launch into this for just a moment.

From my perspective, it is not the judge who separates what God has joined together by granting a divorce; rather it is the pastor who makes reconciliation impossible by performing a marriage for a divorced person. Ponder that for a moment.

Let's be honest: It's not that what God joined together cannot be separated, the problem is that it cannot be separated without severe consequence. For example, when the electron and protons of the atom that God joined together were finally separated by mankind, it resulted in an explosion with long-term fallout. Every divorce I have seen is explosive and has long-term consequences.

One of the consequences of the modern churches very liberal and permissive stand on divorce and remarriage is that attending church has become a potential threat to your marriage. Divorce and remarriage among Christians is much higher than many other segments of secular society.

In fact, the marriages of atheists, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are much more secure than marriages among Christians.

Some honest but twisted people tell me they go to church shopping for a future spouse with no regard for who is wearing a wedding ring. Then they add, “with the pervading liberal views on divorce and remarriage among Christians today, anyone could be a potential future spouse.” Something is terribly wrong with this picture.

I have never seen a divorce that is not a playground for Satan. It feeds anger, jealousy, hate, revenge, and hedonism. These are not fruits of the Spirit. Divorce also destroys children and contributes to the breakdown of society.

I hope you are getting the picture that I am restrictive on the practice of divorce and remarriage. Every marriage will have problems and conflicts. A very positive turn-around came in our marriage when my wife informed me that “divorce is not an option for us.” She then said, “As long as you entertain the option of divorce, you will not have the resolve or fortitude needed to work through our struggles and arrive at a great marriage.”

She was right. It wasn't until I let go of the notion and possibility of divorce that God's grace flooded our relationship to work on building a good marriage. It also meant that I had to work on myself. I had to face my sin and deception and beg God to change me. This was a significant turning point in my life and walk with God.

I once had a heart-to-heart conversation with a friend from India on the practice of arranged marriages. He said they had very few divorces among Christians in India. When I asked why, he replied by saying; “In America you marry the one you think you love, in India we love the one we marry.” What a profound punctuation mark to this discussion.

### **The Bigger Picture: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

“17) Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. 18) Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. 19) Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. 20) Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. 21) Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22) For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23) You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24) Brethren, Let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

Paul was writing to a very diverse group of people. The recipients of this letter came from many different nationalities, marital conditions, religious backgrounds, and every social and economic situation imaginable. Some had strong Jewish backgrounds, while others had Greek



philosophical heritage, and others had very diverse Gentile heritage. Some were slaves while others were free.

This church was a powder-keg. The potential for disagreement and conflict was explosive. Yet Jesus Christ and a born-again experience turned this group into a local church which was intended to love one another, care for one another, and value one another. How could it happen?

Jesus Christ, the gospel, the indwelling Spirit of God, and acceptance of the Word of God as the final authority for life and practice became the glue to bond them together. The Corinthian church itself was a marriage that required God's love, grace, and truth to help them navigate stormy waters.

As you read this book, you quickly discover that the underlining counsel Paul gave every individual was to take their eyes off of themselves so they could serve God and others. The Christian life is not about me, it is about God and others.

It can work within every life circumstance. God's forgiveness, grace, and love are available to everyone to start right where they are and move toward a transformed, fruitful, and godly life. It is called the "Christian Life" because it starts with personal salvation and becomes a lifelong journey. It is a daily walk with God through all the trials and curveballs life can throw your way.

Be patient, transformation takes time. The Christian life is based on the law of the sower. (Galatians 6:6-10) Sow godly seeds each day and eventually you will become a transformed person. The change starts inwardly and moves outwardly. As you plant God's Word in your life and obey Him daily in every circumstance, a new harvest will come your way.

This principle can be applied to your marriage, your family, your career, and your long-term ambitions in life. Our job is to be faithful in applying and living biblical truth on a daily basis. God's job is to move the mountains in our lives. They move over time. Several years down the road you will look back and marvel at what God has done if you are faithful to walk with Him.

There will always be rebels, mavericks, and immoral people. It might even be a spouse. Our calling is to honor God and let Him deal with the external circumstances of life. We are called to do our part and trust God to do His part.

Don't take your eyes off the big picture and the long-term goal. Transformation unfolds over time and nothing can stop the blessings God has for you as you faithfully seek and obey Him. You cannot change your spouse, your children, your work associates or other people, but you can invite God to change you. It is a mystery, but the Holy Spirit will honor your faithfulness and cause all things to work together for good in your life.

The disobedience of others does not stop the goodness God has for you. You can enjoy God and grow in Him no matter what others around you do. Don't be impatient with God when things

are not unfolding as you envision, especially if your spouse goes rogue. Turn them over to God, but choose the high road for yourself. Let God write the chapters of your life.

### **Dating and Courtship in the Early Church: 1 Corinthians 7:25-38**

“25) Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 26) I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27) Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28) But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.”

Paul now turns to a discussion of dating and courtship from a Christian perspective. Let me make a few observations and share a brief insight from church history.

Dating and marriage practices in the early church were much different than contemporary western culture. It was much closer to the arranged marriages practiced in India without the dowry. The fathers protected the dignity and virginity of their daughters very closely.

Prior to courtship, a prospective man had to meet and gain approval from the father first. They formed a tight mentoring bond that served the future marriage well. If the father did not approve of the man, the daughter was not allowed to date or emotionally bond with the prospect. The whole practice of emotional bonding was saved for marriage.

Many fathers were very protective of their daughters and guarded their emotional, spiritual, and sexual wellbeing by not allowing them to play the field and date multiple guys. This sounds strange by western standards today, but virgin daughters were encouraged to seek and serve God while developing their spiritual gifts as they waited for a spouse.

Church history tells us that Christian families led the way in caring for abandoned newborn babies and throw-away children. Many babies in Rome were abandoned shortly after birth simply because they were girls. Boys were more preferred because they carried on the family name. The very large slave industry across the Roman Empire also produced many unwanted children.

In Greece where Corinth was located, many of these abandoned children came from the expansive prostitution industry. Newborn babies were daily thrown in dumps across the Roman Empire to die of exposure. This was entirely legal under Roman law. Human life had little value in Rome as seen in the deadly gladiator games practiced in coliseums all across Rome.

Christianity had a very different view of the value of human life. They would go out daily and comb the dumps for these abandoned babies and adopt them into their families. The whole phenomenon of orphanages grew out of the Christian love for children and dignity of all human life.

As we fast-forward fifteen to twenty years, there was a shortage of young virgins for prospective wives across the Roman Empire. This was not true among the Christians. They not only adopted a Jewish approach to home education, they also prepared children for careers and adulthood. These Christian children were well educated, respectful, skilled, and godly.

But the Christian fathers were also protective of their children and would not let them marry non-Christians. Soon many Greek and Roman men heard the gospel and were lectured in theology in their search for a wife. This is partially what led to the Roman Empire adopting Christianity as its formal state religion.

This historical perspective brings Paul's teaching on courtship and marriage into focus. The bottom line is that the Christians valued their children and protected them from the ravishes of secular culture. They especially valued and protected young women from the harsh abuse and exploitation of Roman society.

I would suggest that we have much to learn from the early Christians on the whole subject of marriage, family living, and the love, care, and nurturing of children. It was the extraordinary focus on the family among the early Christians that changed the course of human history.

The eroding of these family values in western culture today is partially responsible for our current crisis of mental health, identity confusion, addictions, suicide, and the unending search for the meaning and purpose of life. I believe the stage is being set for a major revival and awakening.

### **A Moral Compass Based On Your View of God or the gods. 1 Corinthians 8:1-3**

“1) Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 2) If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 3) but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”

Paul now takes what appears to be a giant leap into a discussion about things sacrificed to idols. His transition is so abrupt the reader is left wondering how this relates to sexual morality and marriage. But as we shall see in a moment, the two are closely related.

Paul builds his case by contrasting two radically different world views. Greece was very much like India today in that they worshiped many gods and had idols everywhere. Favor from the gods and the search for knowledge and guidance in life came through the practice of sacrificing to idols. People were constantly trying to appease the gods.

There were no atheists in the Greek or Roman world. They were very spiritual, but they had a very pagan view of the spiritual realm and personal morality. It would be helpful to go back and read Acts 17:16-34 and Paul's experience at Mars Hill in Athens to get a view of Greek culture. It was a religious system based on the worship of idols and many gods.

Notice how Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 focuses on knowledge. The mystery religions and the system of idolatry as practiced in Greece was a constant search for hidden wisdom and knowledge. But the knowledge imparted by the demonic realm is very different from the knowledge that comes from God and the Bible. They result in radically different world views.

Paul then presents a profound contrast. He compares pagan knowledge to agape love. He points out that knowledge alone makes a person arrogant and filled with boastful self conceit, but agape love edifies. The Greek word used for "edify" means "to build" as in building a house. *He was stressing the point that knowing Jesus Christ results in a positive life-building process wrapped in agape love.*

By contrast, the knowledge acquired by seeking the pagan gods had no compass, purpose, or specific direction for life. The Greek view of life based on the gods was very random and resulted in a senseless futility. It could lead in a thousand different directions, but agape love always built up and led to God.

This was not true in Greek mythology or pagan religions. Sometimes the gods made sport of people in very cruel and heinous ways. A person's plight in life was as futile as the whim of the gods at any moment. One day the gods might be for you, but the next day they might be against you. The gods of Greece and Rome were moody, often vile, random, and in constant strife and conflict with one another and often made sport of mere mortals.

This is a stark contrast to the God of Christianity. He is honest, faithful, loving, merciful, true, consistent, all knowing, all powerful, all present, unchanging, moral, good, and consistent. The God of Christianity adds meaning, purpose, value, and dignity to life. Viewing life and reality through the lens of His character leads to a radically different world view than Greek Mythology or modern secular humanism.

For Paul, the highest goal in life was to love God and be known by Him. The Gospel of Jesus Christ made this possible and launched people into a life transforming walk with God that became a surpassing value beyond comparison. (See Philippians 3:7-11) This relationship with God then shaped everything for the Christian from marriage and family to life purpose, calling, and direction.

### **Culture and the Battle of the gods: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6**

"4) Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5) For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

Let's have a serious but difficult conversation. To the casual western reader who has never traveled or lived in a very foreign culture, these verses sound simple. But Paul was tackling a huge issue. How can you live as a Christian in a non-Christian culture? The influence of Greek religion and idolatry permeated the culture around Corinth.

The culture of Greece was much like Hinduism in India today. Idolatry shapes the way people live, dress, decorate, think, eat, marry, and raise children. Every vehicle has idols on the dashboard and every town square has a shrine filled with idols dedicated to the gods over that village. A westerner visiting India is bombarded with extreme culture shock.

Every cafe and restaurant has a small shrine and incense burning to some god. Idolatry fills the landscape and shapes public consciousness. It is in the air. There is no escaping the influence of idols. Everything from art to architecture to music reflects the Hindu world view of many gods. Everything looks different, tastes different, smells different and even sounds different.

But there is a growing number of Christians in India. They worship Jesus Christ and have no idols in their homes, but they still practice arranged marriages, shop in stores run by Hindus, dress in Indian style and eat in public restaurants. They shop in open markets and buy food raised by Hindus. They are still Indians and proud of their cultural heritage. So, how can you be in the world but not of the world in a culture built around a radically different religious world view? Can we differentiate between culture and religion?

Welcome to Corinth and the practical daily struggles of Christians living in a radically Greek culture. Every missionary leaving a country built around a Western Christian worldview faces this challenge as they try to adapt to a new culture and reach people with a very different view of reality.

But they face an even bigger challenge when it comes to discipleship. How do they impart Christian values without injecting western culture? This is a very difficult challenge facing world missions.

Stop for a moment and think about the radical adjustment Paul faced growing up in the Jewish culture around Jerusalem, being a former Pharisee and having a worldview based on the One all powerful Creator God who strictly forbids the making of idols. Suddenly, he finds himself trying to reach people in the epicenter of Greek philosophy, religion, and culture. He faced many challenges trying to separate culture from religion.

Prior to my first ministry trip to India to conduct a pastors training conference, my host stressed the importance of "contextualizing the Word of God." He didn't want me preaching and teaching western culture, he wanted the universal truth of Scripture that can be applied to any culture. His pastors wanted to form uniquely "Indian Christian Churches" designed to reach and care for their people.

Until you wrestle with these cross-cultural issues you will miss the huge significance of this chapter in 1 Corinthians. Can we separate culture from the battle of the gods? For that matter, how much of our lives as Christians in America today is biblical versus cultural? It is very difficult to separate the two.

### **Standing With Jesus Christ and Exposing the Enemy: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6**

“4) Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5) For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

Paul did not give undo recognition to idols nor did he acknowledge the false Gods of the Greeks or Romans. He recognized that idols were the mere work of men’s hands, but he did acknowledge that there was demonic activity behind them. (See 1 Corinthians 10:20)

Paul recognized false gods and false lords, but his view of the spiritual realm was based on the Bible. In his other writings he acknowledged Satan, fallen angels, and demonic activity. (See Ephesians 6:10-13) He taught that the gods of the Gentiles were demons of deception. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) Satan is constantly disguising himself to deceive and enslave people.

In no uncertain terms, Paul built up the Lordship of Christ and the Pre-eminence of the God of Creation. (See Philippians 2:9-11) He agreed with the Apostle John that Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil. (1 John 3:7-8) He also knew that false spirits could be exposed. (1 John 4:1-6)

The problem with the deception of the demonic realm is that we give these false entities a foothold in our lives and room to work when we fail to resist them or fall into their traps. Such was the case in Corinth and eating things sacrificed to idols. A knowledgeable and mature Christian might not be affected, but it could open a door for young or new believers to be deceived or even tormented.

This is where Paul drew a line between culture and the influence of false religions. He wanted believers to stand in truth and victory without opening a door for the enemy in any way. He wanted them to stand on the foundation of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:6) He gave no credence to Greek mythology or pagan idolatry. His world view was strictly biblical.

### **Denying Self to Encourage Others. 1 Corinthians 8:8-13**

“8) But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9) But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

12) And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13) Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”

Paul was sharing a principle in this text that applies to much more than eating meat sacrificed to idols. He was willing to put aside a personal liberty if it could cause others to stumble.

In the context of Corinth, it applied to eating meat sacrificed to idols. Helping others walk with God was more important to him than a goat steak.

A few chapters later he shared his personal standard. (See 1 Corinthians 10:25-30) He ate anything put before him without asking questions. But if someone said, “this meat was sacrificed to idols”, he would refrain. This was a very practical way to deal with this principle.

I apply this principle to other things like social drinking as well. In our culture, many people struggle with addictions such as alcohol. Though I have the liberty in Christ to drink wine or a beer, I refrain for the sake of others. Once in a while I might have a glass of wine if the occasion merits. For example, if I am at a formal government function and a toast is being made, I may take a few sips of wine, but I never use my free tickets at the bar at a legislative reception. I usually ask for a bottle of water or have a soft drink. I also take communion in churches that use wine.

I would much rather refrain for the sake of my struggling brothers and sisters, rather than setting an example that could set others up for a disastrous fall. I come from a family with generations of alcoholism. I do not want to open that door in my life nor in my children's. I try to keep a very tight rein on my own liberties in areas of potential addictions.

On the other hand, I do not let others manipulate or control me. Some Christians need to buck up and learn how to accept others with different values. If my hunting, fishing, or enjoyment of beef steak or pork chops offends you, I'm more than content to let you sit in a corner and chew on a carrot. I happen to enjoy the full spectrum of foods God prepared for us.

At the same time, I sometimes go on a vegetarian diet for a defined period of time just to practice self-denial and self-control. I do like carrots and apples. I also value the health benefits. But my choice of foods does not make me a better Christian. It is not a spiritual issue for me.

The bottom line is that I try to put others first. I want my focus to be on the eternal and truly significant issues in life. I sincerely try to encourage the growth and progress of others in the exercise of personal liberties.

## **The Sent Ones: 1 Corinthians 9:1-2**

“1) Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2) If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Paul had an uphill climb defending his apostleship. He was not one of the original twelve Apostles (Matthew 10), nor was he one of the 72 disciples called and sent by Jesus later in His ministry (Luke 10). In fact, Paul was not even a Christian when Jesus was crucified and, as Saul of Tarsus, he led the early persecution against the Christian church. (See Acts 8:1-3) So how could he make the claim of being an apostle?

The answer is found in the difference between those appointed by Jesus to serve as apostles (Matthew 10:1-5), and those gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve as apostles or “sent ones” to start new works. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Absent from this list of leadership gifts in Ephesians 4:11 is the modern missionary gift or calling. Instead we see the word “apostle” which literally means “sent one.” So where is the missionary gift or calling found in the New Testament? I believe the answer is right in front of us and exemplified by Paul and Barnabas. Let’s launch into a fascinating discussion.

According to Revelation 21:14, there were only twelve Apostles of the Lamb. These were all called and appointed by Jesus Himself prior to the day of Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit. But according to Ephesians 4:7-13, after his death and resurrection, Jesus gave “grace gifts” to the body of Christ to help the church grow and mature. Notice according to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, the Holy Spirit has the role of distributing grace gifts in the church among born-again believers.

So why did I mention Paul and Barnabas? It just happens that in Acts 14:14, they were both called apostles, but neither were Apostles of the Lamb. So how do we account for this mystery?

There is also the phenomenon of James the half brother of Jesus. According to Acts 12:2, the Apostle James who was the brother of John was the first Apostle to be martyred. But in Acts 15:13, we see another James seated among the Apostles at the Jerusalem council. Galatians 1:19 answers the mystery by referring to James the brother of Jesus as an apostle. But again, he was not appointed as an apostle by Jesus during His public ministry.

This can get confusing until you distinguish between “The Twelve Apostles of the Lamb” and those gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be “Sent Ones” to spread the gospel and start new works.

Both Paul and Barnabas went on extensive missionary journeys. They were sent out by the church in Antioch for this purpose. (See Acts 13:1-4) But notice that verse 4 specifically says



they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit.” The confusion evaporated for me when I simply acknowledged this as the “Missionary Gift and Calling” in the church age.

Many have made the case from Galatians 1:17 and 2:7-9 that Paul was formally recognized as “The Apostle to the Gentiles.” In no uncertain terms there was a unique anointing and unction on his life. In 2 Corinthians 12:11-12 he pointed out “the signs of true apostle” were preformed by him among the Corinthians. This is a significant clue about those gifted to be “sent out.” Paul had multiple gifts and anointing flowing through him. This may be a common denominator of those with the spiritual gift and calling of an Apostle. They are most likely multi-gifted people because they are often alone on the front lines of pioneering new works.

I personally believe this “missionary gift” is functioning in the modern church today, though it is not well defined or understood by many denominations. Those who have this gift often do not know how they fit into the sending church when they return home from the field.

I personally like the idea of multiple gifts and positions of leadership in the church. I embrace the Antioch model of church structure (Acts 13:1), but it is nearly impossible to find in the western church today. I yearn for a church with a broader view of church leadership and ministry gifts. The whole phenomenon of para-church organizations may have never started if the western church had embraced the full spectrum of leadership gifts as listed in Ephesians 4:11-12.

### **Personal Rights versus Self-Sacrifice: 1 Corinthians 9**

“3) My defense to those who examine me is this: 4) Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5) Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6) Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7) Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?”

Paul now engages in one of the most extensive talks on personal rights and humble self-sacrifice found in the entire Bible. In this chapter, he emphasized that as an apostle he had many rights, but he set them aside to be a servant of Christ and effective in connecting with lost and hurting people for the sake of the gospel.

He talked about the right of eating or drinking whatever he pleased, the right of having a believing wife join him on the front lines of ministry, the right to take time off from work and even the right to be compensated generously for his work. But he willingly set these rights aside to be more effective in his calling. Paul lived a life of personal sacrifice for the sake of the gospel.

At the same time he was not demanding others adopt his sacrificial lifestyle. As a Spirit-called and anointed apostle/missionary, Paul was a genuine and sincere servant leader. Often the greatest callings involve the most personal sacrifice.

This is especially true of missionaries who leave family, friends and homeland to go to a foreign land where they are often despised and rejected by the very people they are trying to reach with the gospel. They will have a thousand reasons to moan and complain if they focus on self and personal rights. They are often underpaid, overworked, misunderstood, and not appreciated.

Jesus warned the twelve that they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves and face persecution. (Matthew 10:16-42) That is most true of the apostle/missionary calling. Let me make a contrast: A pastor is like a shepherd in the midst of the sheep, but the missionary is like a lamb in the midst of wolves. They are very different callings. The missionary call is not for the faint or weak of heart.

Every believer and disciple of Christ is called to be a shining light in a dark world. The Christian life is not about self, it is about Christ and serving others. If your focus is continually on yourself and your rights, you have no clue what it means to be a servant of Christ.

True ministry begins on the second mile. It begins just beyond your personal comfort zone, guarantee of personal safety, or right to live in a five star motel on the mission field. It begins when you are willing to go without a few meals, hug and hold a starving child, or associate with the poor, destitute, sick, and despised. True ministry begins when you take the focus off from yourself so you can start serving others in the name of Jesus.

God has used 1 Corinthians 9 in my life repeatedly over the years for an attitude adjustment. It is a call to selfless servanthood as a disciple of Christ. It starts the moment you put aside your self-focus and step into the sandals of Christ and walk through each day exactly where Jesus would have walked in His ministry to lost, hurting, displaced, and sinful people.

### **Ministry and Money: 1 Corinthians 9:7-11**

“7) Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8) I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9) For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10) Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11) If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

Paul now deals with the subject of financial compensation for pastors and Christian workers. Ministry is not the place to get rich, but God promises to take care of His own. If a preacher is obsessed with money, he or she is most likely guilty of “false profit.” (Forgive my pun)

Paul cites several examples from everyday life of just compensation for hard work. He notes that the farmer and the shepherd both get their living from their work. He also notes that even

the oxen eats freely while it is treading on the grain. There is a principle that the laborer is worthy of his compensation.

The same is true for those in ministry. People need to take good care of their pastors and spiritual leaders. They should be able to devote their undivided time, energy and attention to ministry. When done properly for the glory of God, ministry is a hard, noble, and rewarding calling.

When it comes to missionary work, I believe God confirms His call by His provision. If there is no financial support from God's people, a person has every reason to question their call into ministry. Maybe God wants them to work hard in the real world and be self-funded. Maybe He wants to test their level of commitment to their calling.

Paul was willing to put skin in the game. He occasionally worked on the side as a tentmaker to earn support money. That can be a necessary thing for missionaries or church-planting pastors.

At the onset of starting new works, money can be in short supply. But as the new church grows, people need to learn stewardship. They need to learn how to support God's work and God's workers. It takes ten to fifteen faithfully tithing families to support a full time pastor at the average income of the congregation. Beyond that, there are serious budget needs for the ministry.

It may come as a surprise to some people, but ministry takes money. Even Jesus had a support team and a treasurer. He paid his way through life. You will not stay in ministry long if you do not discover good budgeting practices both for your ministry and your personal finances.

We have spent over 40 years in ministry. Over half of that time we have been faith-based missionaries. We have been responsible to raise our own support from people and churches who believe in us. On the one hand, we have been very frugal and found ways to live on less and stretch money. On the other hand, God has taken care of our needs in amazing ways. Over and over again, He has provided in supernatural ways.

There have been times of great need and times of abundance. We have tried to cultivate a spirit of gratitude and generosity to others. Our goal is to perfectly balance our earthly ledger in our journey through this life. Our bigger focus is to store up many treasures in heaven.

One trap we foolishly fell into along the way was debt and credit cards. We had to learn contentment and that God is not a "Plastic Provider." There is a difference between wants and needs. It has taken years to work our way out of foolish debt, but we eventually reached the finish line of being debt-free.

I highly advise every individual and couple to take the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University Course. He does a great job of unpacking a biblical strategy to financial freedom followed by wealth accumulation.

It may shock some people, but the Bible talks more about money and financial principles than many other subjects. It is a very important study for every Christian.

I know a number of very successful Christian business owners who are very generous to tithe insane amounts from their business profits to missions and ministry. A few of them support more Christian ministry world-wide than most churches or mission agencies. God blesses them in unimaginable ways as they put Jesus first in their businesses. I believe God wants to call many more business owners into His supernatural supply chain.

We are living in times when Christians and churches need to take a fresh look at the subject of financial stewardship, earnings, saving and abundant giving. These are days of great open doors for the gospel and unprecedented opportunity to make a major impact for eternity with your giving.

If you need a trustworthy and very responsible mission ministry through which to direct your giving, I highly encourage you to check out GoServ Global on the web. We have built this ministry from the ground up around biblical principles of financial accountability and courageous mission endeavors. In most cases, every penny given goes directly to the cause given toward. Very few ministries can make that claim and substantiate it with public records.

### **Sowing and Reaping: 1 Corinthians 9:11-14**

“11) If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12) If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13) Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14) So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

The Gospel is not about money. It is about reaching the lost and seeing lives transformed. Yet ministry does take money. Those who share the gospel still have to pay their way through this life.

God wants ministry to be funded by Christians. He wants God's people to pay for the spread of the Gospel. Those who reap spiritual benefits should support those set aside for ministry. Paul called this a right, but he quickly noted that he did not demand money from people. He did not use this right.

Paul did not want to get distracted by the lure of money. He did not want to confuse the free gospel message with the idea of paying for salvation. He knew that the Holy Spirit would move those who were saved and loved God to support the spread of the gospel.

Jesus made it clear that a person's heart follows where they spend their money. (See Matthew 6:19-21) The opposite is also true, your money follows your heart. He wanted people to lay up treasures in heaven. You can tell a lot about a person by how they spend their money.

Paul was not in ministry as a means of making money. To the contrary, he put his own skin in the game of spreading the gospel. He made tents on the side, lived a modest lifestyle, and worked very long hours. Jesus Christ and the spread of the Gospel was his priority.

There is a fine balance between making needs known and trusting God to provide. The motto I've adopted in my life and ministry and built into GoServ Global is: "It's our job to tell the story, it's God's job to move the mountain." We try to share the gospel with everyone and openly share the story of what God is doing along the way. We make needs known, but focus on being faithful in the ministry.

We present Jesus as Savior and trust Him to be the Provider. We also openly invite others to join us on the front lines of ministry around the world. We usually send about 350 short term workers a year to help with our various projects.

It is there on the front lines that the Holy Spirit wrestles with hearts. When people get a first-hand taste of ministry it becomes life-transforming. God shows up in miraculous ways on the front lines of the Great Commission. It is there that efforts of man and the power of God converge to make an eternal difference. I invite you to check out GoServ Global and seriously consider becoming part of an amazing story.

### **The Significance of the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 9:15-18**

"15) But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. 16) For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17) For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18) What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."

Paul treated the Gospel with the utmost respect. He lived in such a way as to undergird its message. He preached in such a way as to make it as clear as possible. He worked in such a way when needed to earn his keep so as to highlight its significance. He was willing to do all things for the sake of Jesus and the gospel so as to reach the lost. He did nothing to market or commercialize the gospel. It wasn't for sale.

To Paul, the gospel was a priceless free gift from God to lost humanity. He knew that within its message was the very power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18) There was no substitute for the gospel. Paul's approach to living and preaching was for the sole purpose of promoting the gospel and the power of God. (See 1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

Paul refused to allow religious traditions, rituals, or sacraments to confuse its message or take away from the significance of the gospel. (See I Corinthians 1:17; 11:17-34) He put these things in their proper place. His energy, passion, gifts, anointing, and financial resources were strategically focused on the advancement of the gospel.

As I close this post, I must ask you a few questions. Have you understood and accepted the clear message of the gospel, or are you merely religious? Have you repented of your sin and placed faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Are you using your financial resources, talents, and spiritual gifts to advance the gospel? Are you living in such a way as to honor God and advance the gospel?

### **Focused on Sharing the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

“19) For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20) And to the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21) to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22) To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23) And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Paul truly was set apart for the gospel. Sharing the good of Jesus Christ with all people was his obsession. As a result, he became very innovative to meet people where they were and package the gospel in such a way as to be palatable for them.

He had an approach for sharing the gospel with virtually everyone. He could use the Old Testament Law to share the gospel with Jews and he could use the laws of nature to share the gospel with gentiles who had never read the Old Testament. (See Romans 1:18-32) He could preach to both religious people and lawless people. He had a ministry to both slaves and slave owners. He ministered equally as effectively in palaces to kings and prisons with criminals. He effectively ministered to both strong and weak, rich and poor, male and female, young and old as well as the uneducated and the very educated. He spoke several languages.

For the sake of the gospel, he became all things to all people without compromising his morals or watering down his message. He did it for the sake of the gospel. His goal was to reach as many people as possible with the message of salvation. Is it any wonder that God worked through him in miraculous ways?

I confess, this is one of my favorite texts in the whole Bible on ministry. Paul was not stuck in a methods rut or a theological rut. He shared the gospel with everyone and left the results in God's hands. He brought Jesus and the gospel into the trenches of life.

I believe this was the dynamic he built into every church he started and every person he disciplined. They took the Great Commission seriously. It became the pulse for effective ministry. It became the fuel to ignite the amazing spread of the gospel in the first century.

Let me say this as clearly as possible; “This is the missing link in the western church today.” We have marginalized and totally abandoned the significance of sharing the gospel. We reap little or no harvest because we sow little or no seed. What is sown is primarily in the church and not in the world or in the hearing of non-Christians. Our gospel is hidden.

In the New Testament, the power and outpouring of the Holy Spirit followed the preaching of the gospel. Revisit Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 if you want to plug into the fervor of the early church. If you want to experience New Testament dynamics, switch to New Testament priorities.

### **The Value of Self-Discipline: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

“24) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25) Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26) Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

This is the original text on “The Purpose-Driven Life.” Paul was intentional about everything he did. He lived his life like a self-disciplined athlete.

Corinth was home to the original Olympic Games. This is where the best of the best gathered to compete for the right to wear the wreath of the gods. Winning was a fleeting glory, because the wreath only lasted a short time before it weathered away. By contrast Paul understood that the faithful Christian would be crowned with an eternal reward.

Paul knew the importance of keeping his body under control. He forced it to serve him rather than becoming a slave to his fleshly desires. Though Paul undoubtedly walked in the Spirit, this text points out that he also had will-power. Never minimize the value of personal self-discipline.

### **God Has a Trigger Point. 1 Corinthians 10:5-11**

“5) Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6) Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7) And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” 8) Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9) Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10) Nor grumble, as some of them did, and

were destroyed by the destroyer. 11) Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

In these six verses, Paul cites examples of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt and how God disciplined them in the wilderness because of their rebellious and sinful ways. They were bound for the promised land, but they got terribly sidetracked and pushed God's patience way too far. Paul cites examples of idolatry, immorality, irreverently testing God, and grumbling against God-appointed leadership.

Paul acknowledges that though God is loving, gracious, and patient with His people; He has a trigger point. He can be moved to judgment against the wicked and severe discipline toward His own people. God is not to be spurned or treated irreverently.

There are literally hundreds of examples of this point in the Old Testament. This quality of God can be seen in sending sinful Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It can be seen in the destruction of the whole world by the flood of Noah's day. It can be seen in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It can be seen in God's dealing with His people as they came out of Egypt. It can be seen in God's actions against the wicked sons of Eli the priest at the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel and the removal of King Saul at the end of 1 Samuel. It can even be seen in His strong discipline of King David because of his sin with Bathsheba. No one is beyond the justice of God.

When Solomon dedicated the temple, he very specifically prayed about this matter. Read 1 Kings chapter 6 and 2 Chronicles 6. He petitioned God to be patient and willing to forgive His people when they repented and turned back to Him.

God responded to Solomon with the greatest promise of forgiveness and revival found in the Old Testament. See 2 Chronicles 7:12-22. This set the groundwork for the work of Christ on the cross and the redemption of humanity.

But in this text in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Paul is warning Christians that salvation does not exempt them from God's discipline. God has not changed. He is still holy, righteous, and just. God still has a trigger point. God does not blush or turn His head when Christians live in sin and rebellion. In fact, Paul insinuates that God expects more from born-again and Spirit-filled Christians.

Paul's goal in this context is to combat the notion that God is all-loving and His grace covers all sinful and lawless behavior among Christians. This text, and many others like it in the New Testament, shakes me to the core with a holy fear and reverence of God. Never, ever take lightly the holiness and justice of God. Do not spurn the notion that God has a trigger point.

This is the missing message in the modern church. Individuals, families, local churches, and nations can all cross the trigger point for God. His justice is not to be spurned.



## **Dust Off Your Bibles and Start Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:11**

“11) Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

The events recorded and the stories told in the Bible are there for a reason. They undergird and illustrate the ways of God. We discover His character and glean wisdom by reading and understanding His dealings with mankind throughout biblical history.

God will never change. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. The God of Creation is indeed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of Moses, David, Daniel, and Peter, James, and John.

The best way to know God is by reading His self-revelation to mankind as revealed in the Bible. Why are the Bible stories so important? Because “these things happened to them as an example and were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11)

God wants you and me to put a solid and ever growing biblical foundation under our lives. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to teach, guide, lead, and instruct the people of God. A Christian without a biblical foundation is a reckless and emotional maverick tossed here and there by social trends, opinion polls, secular influences, gas pains, and indigestion. God has a better plan for His people. He wants them to build on the solid foundation of biblical truth.

It has been observed that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. They are interdependent on one another. Read and study the whole Bible. Make it your basis of truth, knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, psychology, work ethics, finances, character, and world view.

You cannot go deep in your relationship with God if you remain ignorant and shallow in your knowledge of the Bible. As the end of the ages come upon us, it will be even more vital that God's people are rooted and grounded in the Bible and living it in their daily lives. Take daily time to lay a solid and growing biblical foundation under your life.

People wonder why our nation is in such moral decline and liberal drift? The answer is simple. Our founding fathers had a deep biblical foundation and solid Christian worldview. It became the basis of “one nation under God.”

By contrast, the majority of our modern leaders are biblically illiterate and increasingly biased and militant against the Bible. When we took the Bible out of our education system we plotted a new national course into secular humanism. When the church swallowed the lie that Christians should not serve in politics, we handed the reins of our nation over to atheists, agnostics, evolutionists, humanists, socialists, and a host of radical special-interest groups. The results were both predictable and inevitable.

The irony is that all of this happened because the modern church is ignorant of the biblical history lessons recorded in the Old Testament books of Judges through 2 Chronicles. The same drift happened over and over again in the Old Testament. There is nothing new under the sun or in the affairs of mankind. "These things were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages have come."

Christians, it's time to dust off your Bibles and start reading. It's time to seek the full counsel of God. It's time to start building every area of your life on solid biblical truth and principles. It will transform your marriage, your family, your career, your income, your value system, your community, and your future.

### **Extreme Makeover: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13**

"12) Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 13) No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

There are two very clear conclusions Paul made from his survey of biblical history in the proceeding several verses. First, every human has sin, temptation, and personal frailty. It doesn't matter who you study in the Bible or their time in history, they all had trials and obstacles to overcome in their walk with God. Don't expect the Christian life to be easy and don't assume you've arrived.

Abraham had problems twisting the truth. Isaac and Rebekah struggled with infertility. Jacob was a deceiver and it finally caught up with him. Joseph struggled with rejection and betrayal. David fell into immorality and had episodes of depression. Daniel faced harsh critics who wanted to destroy him. The Bible's transparency in telling the story of their lives gives encouragement, wisdom, and insight to those seeking to walk with God or overcome similar trials in a hostile and often anti-God culture.

Second, no matter what trials or temptations you face, others have walked in your sandals and have overcome. God's grace is available and He provides a way of escape. Rather than pulling anchor and giving way to your sin and temptations, look to God for wisdom and grace. Go to the Scriptures and do a wisdom search. See what the Bible says about the subject.

Here is the exciting thing I've discovered over the years about the Bible: It has something to say about virtually every subject. It speaks to individuals and nations. It reveals the character of God and exposes the sinfulness of man. It talks about origins and foretells the future. It covers morals and ethics as well as grace and forgiveness. It exposes sin and points to salvation. It gives principles for marriage, family, and wholesome friendships as well as life callings, work ethics, and wealth accumulation. It shows how to break sinful bondage, pursue good health, and healing as well as how to live with a clear conscience.

In the Bible God provides much more than a plan for human redemption, He lays out what is called “His ways.” (See Isaiah 55:6-13) The Bible presents a complete and comprehensive Christian ethic or philosophy for living. Personal salvation is the first step in the journey of discovering and adopting a biblical worldview.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul was laying out a Christian moral ethic that was very different from Greek or secular morals and values. In chapter one, he presents the fallout from the clash between what he called the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. (See 1:18-31) The two are very different.

Part of the battle for the new Christian is putting off their old life which was based on worldly wisdom and values and putting on the new life which is based on godly wisdom and biblical values. (See Ephesians 4:22-24) This journey is not easy. It is a long process. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to accomplish this transformation.

However, it is not valid to simply add Jesus to worldly wisdom and secular morals and assume you have Christianity. That is a huge mistake. As you revisit 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 in context, you discover that it took God one day to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt, but it took forty years to take Egypt out of the Children of Israel. God did not leave them as secular Egyptians. He changed them.

The Christian life is the same kind of journey. Don’t expect it to be easy. God’s way of escape includes molding you into a new person based on godly wisdom, a biblical worldview, and “His ways.” The three are synonymous for me.

The Christian life is an extreme makeover. It is so extreme the Bible describes it as being “born-again.” God is there to help you every step of the way. He will help you through each temptation and ultimately guide you into the promised land of a new life in Christ.

### **The Idol Trap: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22**

“14) Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15) I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16) Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17) Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.”

Paul now moves into a discussion on idolatry that is hard for the western Christian to understand. I confess, I do not fully comprehend this discussion, but will offer some thoughts on the subject as presented by Paul.

In religions that focus on idol worship, like Buddhism or Hinduism, an idol is a public statement of loyalty to a god. It is an indication that you want that god or those gods to be active in your life. You are loyal to them and have an affinity with them.

In the broader context, Paul states that the physical idol itself is nothing, but behind the idol there is demonic activity. (See 1 Corinthians 10:20) Paul did not want the Christians in Corinth to open a door to demonic activity by owning or having an idol in their immediate environment.

Remember, the second commandment specifically forbids God's people from making or possessing idols. (See Exodus 20:4-6) God said He is a jealous God and visits the iniquities of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him, but shows His lovingkindness to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments.

So the big question is; "What is the basis of ownership that distinguishes us as God's people?" In the New Testament it comes down to the fact that Jesus redeemed us by His work on the cross. We as Christians place personal faith in Him as our Savior and we express that relationship through the ordinances of believers baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Our identity comes from Jesus Christ. Keeping these ordinances does not bring salvation, rather they are our way of identifying with Christ and His work on the cross to save us. Being saved by His grace also unites us in the body of Christ. The testimony of salvation makes us family.

The problem in Corinth was that some people wanted to be Christians and idol worshipers at the same time. For example, in Hinduism, you can have many gods and idols at the same time. Some Hindus want to add a cross to the shrine of other idols in their homes to show that Jesus is another god that they worship.

But Christianity does not work that way! Jesus is either LORD of all, or He is not a lord at all! In India, when a Hindu repents and is baptized, they get rid of all other idols. It is only at that point that the church embraces them as genuine Christians. That is also the point at which persecution begins because they no longer embrace idolatry or Hinduism. The same was true in Ancient Greece and Rome.

Western culture does not have wood, stone, or silver idols. We have made idols of money, sex, drugs, power, political affiliation, celebrities, sports, and a variety of hobbies or interests. Anything that we love or prize above God can be an idol. Don't let anyone or anything compete with God as LORD in your life.

### **Set Aside For God: 1 Corinthians 10:19-22**

"19) What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20) No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 21) You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22) Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?"

God wants His people to be set aside for Himself. Just as no man can serve two masters, such as God and money (Luke 16:13); so no one can channel demonic spirits and walk in the Holy Spirit at the same time. God shares His glory with no deceptive spirit. Truth and deception do not mix. Any attempt to blend them turns truth into deception.

Paul was warning the Corinthian believers against trying to mix idolatry with Christianity. If you want Jesus Christ to be Lord of your life, you need to repent and turn from idols and sinful bondage of every kind.

This text has applications that go beyond idolatry. God calls His people to freedom from all sin and bondage. He wants to set you free. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot dine in God's presence and embrace the world's values.

The Apostle John warned the early believers to not love the world because none of its values come from God. (See 1 John 2:15-17) Affinity with the world amounts to hostility toward God.

From the first verse in 1 Corinthians 10 through the end of the chapter, Paul was comparing the Christian life to the Exodus journey of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt to the promised land. His point is well taken as there are many traps and pitfalls that await the believers en route.

Many of these traps can be summarized by the sin of idolatry. These are the things that demand your time, attention, resources, emotional affinity, and loyalty as a higher priority than God. They want to be your god.

The Christian life is also compared to a marriage. (Ephesians 5:22-27) The core of the marriage vow is forsaking all others to be devoted only to your spouse. So God does not want to share His bride with the world or other gods. He is a jealous God. He wants us to be devoted to Him.

### **Being Godly And Friendly At The Same Time: I Corinthians 10:23-30**

"23) All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24) Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. 25) Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26) for the earth is the LORD's and all that it contains. 27) If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28) But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; 29) I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30) If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?"

This is a great example of how Paul and the early church dealt with gray areas in the Christian life. The issue came down to edifying others. We have the freedom in Christ to do many things that are not specifically condemned as sin in the Bible, but in these areas we need to consider

how our actions affect others. Does it edify them or tear them down? Do we become a positive witness or a stumbling block?

Notice how Paul worked out personal guidelines for eating things sold in the marketplace or when dining with unbelievers. He did not get bound up in legalism, he simply decided to avoid things he knew were sacrificed to idols. I can imagine the conversation it opened for the gospel. Paul was able to explain the Lordship of Christ and what it means to belong to Jesus. In some cases it was an open door for evangelism, in others it was discipleship.

Maybe the biggest takeaway from this text is that Paul was often invited to eat in the company of unbelievers. What an example of relational ministry. He took Jesus with him into the highways and byways of life and didn't use religion as an excuse to isolate himself. Wherever Paul went, he was constantly building relationships with unbelievers. Living out his faith enhanced his connection with people and did not hinder it. His personal convictions did not make him awkward in relating to people.

This is very important. As noted in Chapter 9, Paul was able to become all things to all people to reach more with the gospel. He was never lawless, but was flexible and effective in relating to people and pointing them to Jesus. His approach to personal liberties enabled him to live with a clear conscience and build bridges with unbelievers at the same time.

Forcing personal convictions on others is not evangelism. Nor is building walls of condemnation over things like smoking, drinking, vulgarity, or overtly sinful choices people might make. Our job is to love them and share Jesus and the Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit's job to bring conviction and transform them after they become Christians. Stop playing the Holy Spirit in people's lives. Leave that to God.

Some Christians are so legalistic, awkward, and condemning I don't even like being around them. One of my unwritten jobs down at the Iowa Capital was to meet with the loud and condemning, in-your-face, turn-or-burn, Bible-wielding, yelling, self-appointed prophets that show up every session to call judgment down on the Governor and the legislature. They think they are doing good. But they are grieving the Holy Spirit and setting the cause of the gospel way back. A few might even have demonic issues.

This is not how Jesus approached the Samaritan woman in John Chapter Four. It was not the approach of the father with the prodigal son. We are called to speak the truth in love while we pray like crazy and depend on the Holy Spirit to do the inner work. Though these chapters in 1 Corinthians may seem irrelevant, they are absolutely timely and profound. You can be godly and friendly at the same time.

### **Putting Jesus and the Gospel First: 1 Corinthians 10:31-33**

“31) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32) Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33) just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”

Paul was not a man-pleaser, he was a God-pleaser. His primary motivation was bringing glory to God and remaining faithful to Him.

He knew the gospel would offend some people, but he did not want to complicate the offense by adding undue personal insult. Remember how Paul died. No martyr ever has their own interests in mind.

Paul's goal was to clearly present Jesus Christ and the gospel to the world. The determining factor behind everything he did was whether or not it would help advance the cause of Christ. Paul wanted people to come to Jesus and be saved.

The very next verse indicates that he wanted every Christian to adopt this mindset. He wanted every Christian to be an imitator of this value.

Let me get really personal and ask a significant question, “Are people being drawn to Christ because of you or are you a stumbling block for the gospel?” Are you living for self or for God?

### **Be An Imitator of Jesus: 1 Corinthians 11:1**

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Paul sincerely tried to walk in the sandals of Jesus. His goal was to become Christ-like in character and conduct.

This is the goal of true discipleship. We should all seek to be like Jesus. In Luke 6:40, Jesus said the goal of a pupil is to become like his teacher. Jesus should be our highest teacher.

A number of years ago the Christian community was swept by the phrase “WWJD.” It meant “What Would Jesus Do?” If I were to summarize being “Spirit-Filled”, it would include the idea of doing what Jesus would do in any given situation through our unique personality. Jesus doesn't change our core personality, He shines through it.

At first, this claim of Paul being an imitator of Christ seems a bit proud and pious, but he was being very sincere. He was living out his faith and applying biblical principles the way Jesus would.

When I look for friends and mentors, I look for Jesus-like people. I seek out people with a godly glow and an inner compass pointing to heaven. I want them to rub off on me.

I have been blessed over the years to be in the company of many godly saints who radiate the presence of Jesus. I have a long way to go in my journey, but I seek to be like them. I try to be a sponge and soak in their Jesus-like characteristics.

The Christian life at its best is people influencing people for the glory of God. Seek to be like Jesus and look to see who God has following in your wake. Paul was not perfect, but he had a major influence on people. This is the call to bear much fruit. (John 15:16)

### **An Important Discussion: 1 Corinthians 11:2**

“Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”

In chapter 11, Paul talked about two traditions that were practiced in every church he founded, but seemed to be somewhat flexible. In this chapter, he talked about head coverings for women and precautions in taking the Lord’s supper.

Let’s use this verse to have an important conversation. Pour a cup of coffee, pull up a chair, and let’s have a chat about traditions. Be aware that this conversation might make you angry or cause you to draw and defend some battlelines over religious stuff that others do not value. It’s ok, we all wrestle with this subject.

Traditions can be both good and bad. They can capture meaning, become a means of teaching, and pass on positive values. But they can also become trite, mindless, and be wrongly looked at as a means of grace or a basis for salvation.

In Matthew 15:1-14, Jesus had a heated discussion with the Pharisees over traditions. They rebuked Him for not washing His hands according to the traditions of the elders before eating bread. Jesus replied twice in the context that they invalidated the Word of God for the sake of their traditions. (See verse 3 & 6)

They got very heated, offended, and huffy over something in their religious experience that Jesus failed to value or embrace. Jesus exposed their false sense of spirituality. I suspect that we all carry religious traditions that we are willing to fight for and defend that have little or nothing to do with the Great Commission or the Gospel.

His warning must be taken seriously. It doesn’t take long for traditions to form and then displace the promptings of the Holy Spirit or violate the basic call to agape love. Let me cite a few examples of traditions gone bad.

I have seen churches reject people and even discipline them because they did not adhere to a certain hair length for men, dress code for women, or use a certain translation of the Bible. I knew of one church that had a barber shop in the building and gave haircuts to men before



admitting them to the church service if they could not see skin around the ears. In another case, a friend of ours was asked to leave a church because she wore slacks instead of a dress to a church service she dropped in on while on vacation. Similarly, I was once publicly rebuked by a pastor from the pulpit and ushered out of a church service because he noticed that I was carrying “the wrong version of the Bible.”

These are examples of traditions gone wrong. I have witnessed many others over the years. I have seen churches split over worship style, young Christians chastised because they were smiling in church or raising their hands during worship, and people going into hysterics because pews were removed and replaced with chairs so the building could be more multi-purpose.

I am in no way opposed to traditions, but I try to keep them in perspective. Ironically, the New Testament is very non-traditional. I challenge you to find a dress code, wedding, or funeral service, liturgy, or church building design in the New Testament. We must ask why the New Testament is silent on these issues?

I believe it is by design. Christianity is intended to be international and inter-cultural. The gospel is the same, but traditions can be very different. Worship days and styles can be radically different in different places and various countries. It is Jesus and not a certain tradition that should be our focal point. We need to be sure we are exporting the gospel and not western traditions in our mission endeavors.

It might be a valuable exercise to stop and take inventory of the things in your walk with God that are merely traditional versus truly biblical. The older I get and the more I travel nationally and internationally in the body of Christ the slower I am to build walls over religious traditions. I do not stray from my biblical foundation, but I am much more flexible with worship style, outreach methods, and local traditions.

### **Head Coverings: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16**

“2) Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 3) But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. 4) Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. 5) But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.”

After talking about traditions, Paul launched into a lengthy conversation about God’s order in creation and head coverings. The discussion goes all the way through verse 16.

This is what is called a “Text of Obscurity.” It is not found in any other passage of Scripture in the Bible. This leaves the question as to whether or not Paul was laying down a tradition for gentile regions or if this was intended to be a biblical doctrine. He also backs away from this being an

absolute rule by saying that a woman should have long hair and her hair is given to her for a covering. (Vs 15)

It also leaves the question wide open as to whether head coverings were intended for worship services or to be worn at all times? I see Paul as dealing more with the Christian virtue of love, modesty, and respect in Christian marriage rather than something oppressive.

Our practice over the years of traveling interdenominational is to submit to practices of the host church. We try to be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel. I do not view this as a divisive issue or an issue worth fighting over.

As you can tell, I do not have a strong opinion on this subject either way and I have studied it in depth many times. I will leave this to you as a Bible student to wrestle through.

### **The Value of Trials in the Church: 1 Corinthians 11:17-19**

“17) But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18) For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19) For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

The church at Corinth was full of new believers and all kinds of problems. There were divisions, factions, immorality, self promotion, carnality in celebrating the ordinances, and misuse of spiritual gifts.

One of the reasons I love the book of 1 Corinthians is that it reminds me there is no such thing as a perfect church. But Paul makes a profound point in verse 19: Struggles and challenges in the church brings mature and gifted leaders to surface. Every problem can be a teaching opportunity and a ministry opportunity.

Immature leaders often face trials in the church with force and a personal agenda. They feed problems and cause divisions. Godly leaders pray things through and seek God’s intervention in difficulties. Their only agenda is to glorify Christ and advance the gospel.

After studying the Bible for years I now believe that God doesn’t save His people from problems, He saves them through problems. Trials are an invitation to cry out to God. Nothing is more bonding for a congregation than to watch God show up and gracefully navigate huge challenges.

Jesus is always at work building “His Church.” Nowhere in the Bible does He commit to build “our church.” It ceases to be His Church when carnal leaders take control.

## **A Special Revelation: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

“23) For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25) In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 26) For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

Paul makes the claim that he received from the Lord special details of the Lord’s Supper. Keep in mind, He was not in the upper room with the twelve Apostles. He was not even a believer yet.

Jesus personally revealed to Him the details as to what transpired during that Passover meal. It was a much broader revelation than merely taking of the bread and drinking of the cup. It was entering into the full experience of how Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the Passover meal. He was indeed “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (See John 1:29, 35). In that meal the whole Old Testament comes alive and points to the Messiah.

The full meaning of the Lord’s Supper was relatively easy for someone from a Jewish background to understand. The Holy Spirit illuminated them quickly into the imagery of the Passover Meal, but that was far from the case for the new Gentile believers in the city of Corinth. They had no biblical foundation. They had no anchor of understanding. They had never celebrated a Passover meal.

As a result, this precious ordinance was scorned and minimized among them. Some focused on the meal and came just for the food. Others focused on the wine and used it as an excuse to go on a drinking binge and get drunk. They missed the meaning of the meal. Paul was writing to correct this tragic disconnect.

I believe participation in the Lord’s Supper is a moving worship experience. It is a review of the Gospel. It is an expression that the believer has trusted Jesus for their salvation. It is a time to remember what Jesus did to purchase our salvation and that His blood totally paid for our sins.

## **Frequent Self-Examinations: 1 Corinthians 11:27-32**

“27) Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28) But let a man examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29) For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30) For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31) But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32) But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.”

It is important to have regular checkups for our physical health. It is a way to catch potential problems early. The same is true for our spiritual lives. God wants us to have regular self-exams. That is one purpose for the Lord's Supper. It is a weekly or monthly time to stop and take a serious personal inventory of our heart and our walk with God.

Some believers make the mistake of thinking that taking communion is a means of grace or forgiveness. Actually Paul says if we are not right with Jesus, we should abstain from the Lord's Supper. God wants us to repent and get things right with Him before we dine with Him. This way we can meet Him at the table with purity and sincerity of heart and not be a Judas.

If you think about it, the Lord's Supper was intended to make us right with God. Judas could have been redeemed when he ate the bread at the hand of Jesus. Instead he was exposed. Satan entered into him. It did not make him better, it bent him on his evil path. He deceived himself into thinking that taking the bread would somehow smooth over his evil plans to betray Jesus.

So Paul warns that those who eat of the bread or drink of the cup in an unworthy manner are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. They actually bring judgment on themselves. He pointed out that some people's hypocrisy was so bad that they were judged by the Lord. Verse 30 actually says that some were weak, sick, and a number had died. This is a very sobering verse. God was trying to get their attention.

He follows this in the very next verse by saying "If we judge ourselves rightly we would not be disciplined by the Lord." I take this to mean we need to examine the condition of our hearts. If we are out of step with God we should humble ourselves and pray and turn from our wayward path.

This puts us in line with 2 Chronicles 7:14. It is the idea of repenting and turning back to God. The pre-communion check-up is a regular call to revival. This helps us walk in 1 John 1:9 and sincerely confess our sins.

I've discovered when I want to go to church the least, I need it the most. I need God to break through my self-deceived and straying heart. I need Him to confront me. I need times in my life for serious self examination.

I want to be right with God far more than I want to be accepted by people. I can handle rejection from people. I cannot handle being in a state of broken fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit can be grieved so easily. (Read Ephesians 4:30-32) Some Christians are so worldly, carnal, and calloused they don't know the difference.

Such was the case with the Corinthians. They treated the Lord's Supper more like a gas additive than a needed overhaul. They ignored the warning lights until their walk with God totally stalled out and everything fell apart. Don't be like them.

## **Introduction to Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:1-3**

“1) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. 2) You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you were led. 3) Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul opened the discussion on spiritual gifts to correct both deception and demonic influence that had crept into the church at Corinth. He wanted them to get this area right. Corinth was a very spiritual city, and most of it was not from God.

The word “spiritual gift” means a “charis gift” or a “grace gift.” These are often referred to as “charismatic gifts.” They are special gifts or grace enablements given by the Holy Spirit to equip believers to be effective in ministry and enhance communion with God. Technically they are intended to build up the local body of Christ and not just the person with the gift.

Notice in verse two that Paul did not want the believers to be unaware, uninformed, or ignorant about these gifts. He points out that while they were pagans or unbelievers, they were led astray by speechless or mute idols into all kinds of deception. Demonic activity, deception, and influence can be very strong. But what would happen if the enemy gave false or counterfeit gifts that resembled these spiritual gifts to unsuspecting people? It would be disastrous.

Paul went on in verse three and gave a simple test of the spirit behind a gift. Does the person lift up the lordship of Jesus Christ or do they curse, minimize Him, or bring confusion? God wants us to test the fruit behind a person with a “charis gift” rather than accept things at face value. Satan loves to plant seeds of deception.

He then devoted three chapters to this fascinating subject. God wants us to get this right and He wants us to be Spirit-filled and walk in the Spirit. Satan wants Christians to be shy, timid, inhibited, and uninformed about this subject. He fears few things more than a mature believer filled with the power of God and walking in the Spirit.

My personal journey into these gifts has been rather long and cumbersome. I attended a Bible College that was great in most areas of theology but very biased against the Charismatic Movement. As a result, I avoided the whole subject.

Over time I could not ignore the book of Acts and Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 12-14. Truth prevailed and God graciously put me into an interdenominational ministry. I’ve seen it all and can verify that sin and carnality shows up in every brand of church. There are good and godly believers in all camps, and there are sinful, carnal, and deceived people in all camps.

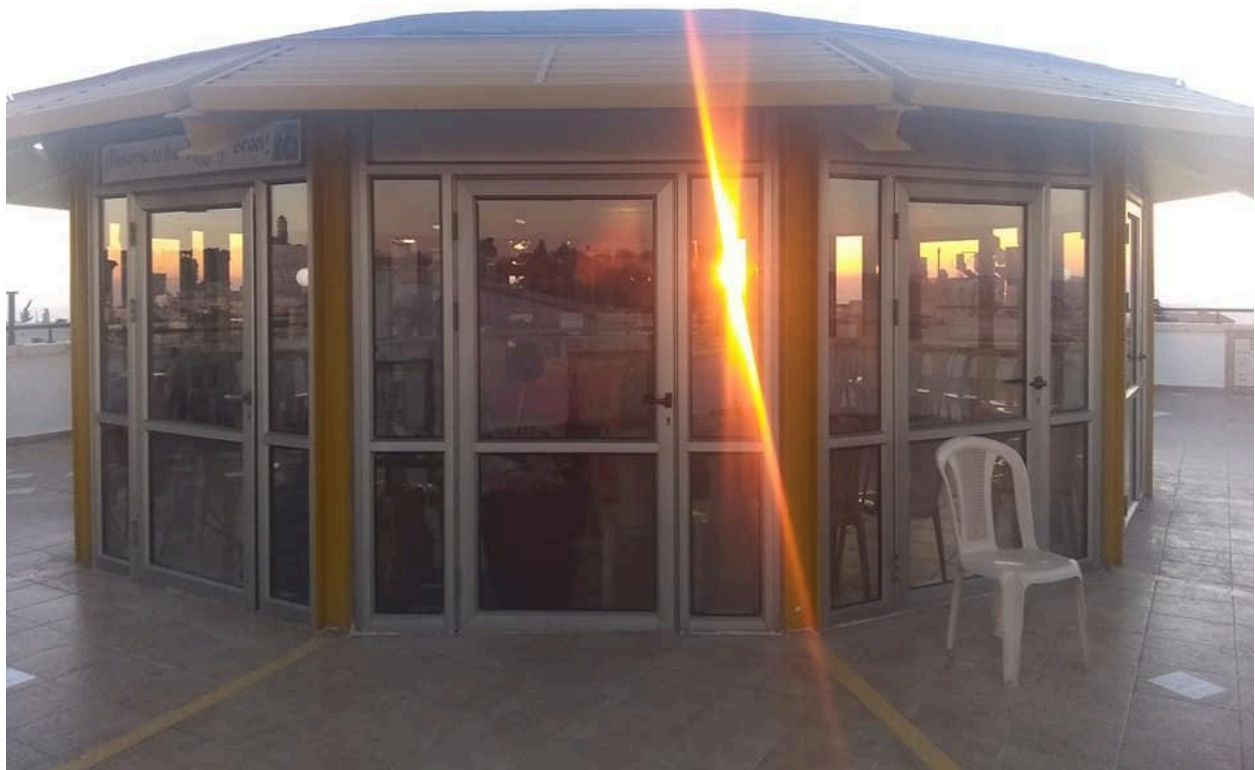
I know godly and mature believers in Pentecostal and charismatic churches and I know godly and mature believers in evangelical and traditional churches. Over the past thirty years, God

has been breaking the walls down between denominations and emphasizing a sincere love for Jesus, His Word, and His Lordship.

I believe Jesus is preparing His bride for His return. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is central to this process. These are very exciting days. Stay tuned as we dig into the subject of Spiritual gifts as we work our way through 1 Corinthians 12-14.

(My first mission trip was to the Dominican Republic in 2015. All throughout the streets –on power poles, on buildings, on parking lots– I saw handmade signs with the words “Cristo Viene” written on them. They were everywhere and the words mean, “Christ Returns.” The implication is that it will happen soon.

My first trip to Israel was in 2019. One of the places our group visited was a prayer tower outside Jerusalem. (Pictured below.) People were there praying 24/7 for all the nations of the world and had been doing so for years. I was overcome by the Holy Spirit and moved to tears that would not stop. As I stood on that tower, no matter which direction I faced, I could clearly hear the voice of Jesus saying, “Come,” calling all the people of the world to Him because He was coming back. And He meant soon.) -dj



## **The God of Variety: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7**

“4) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5) And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6) There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7) But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

As we prepare to launch into a study of spiritual gifts, let me give you a warning: God is about to place before you a huge door called “variety.” He is about to stretch you way beyond your own small background box of a certain way of thinking, doing things, religious traditions, and methods, and theological quirks and biases. Let me give you a big hint... we all have them and they taint our thinking, worship style, and view of God.

Here is the concept Paul lays down at the beginning of this subject: “God is not stuck in a rut.” Three times in these four verses He uses the word “variety.” Notice, there are varieties of gifts, varieties of ministries, and varieties of effects, but it is the same Spirit, same Lord, and same God behind all of these.

God is a God of great diversity, creativity, and variety. Look at how He created people. The 23 pairs of chromosomes results in an almost infinite variety of traits within people. Why is that?

Because God did not clone us, He chromosomed us! The mathematical variety available within the 23 chromosome combinations made up of unique genes from our father and mother is mind-boggling. People are very special, unique, and different. Not surprisingly, people and the human body is going to be the analogy Paul uses for spiritual gifts later in this chapter.

The same is true of spiritual gift combinations. There are between 19 and 21 different spiritual gifts depending on whose list you look at. On top of that, there are many different talents, abilities, interests, and hobbies among people. Then let’s throw in thousands of different human languages around the world which affect the way people think and process depending on their language. On top of that, let’s not forget the impact of various cultures themselves. What is the result? Variety!

Let me share my story. God took me as a very sheltered country boy from rural Minnesota and stretched me beyond description. My first big stretch was going to Bible College in Chicago. That was a cultural stretch.

Then, He placed me in an itinerant ministry. I started speaking locally in Minnesota within rural churches very similar to my own background. But soon I was invited to minister across denominational lines. I was an evangelist so I stuck to the gospel and clear texts of Scripture. But to my surprise, I met some very godly people within many different denominations. I also saw different ways of doing things that were within the boundaries of Scripture.

Shortly, I started working internationally and meeting believers from radically different cultures, church backgrounds, worship styles, and traditions around the world. Keep in mind, all of these

were born-again believers who loved and worshiped Jesus. I soon become a sponge for Spirit-filled variety in worship. I also stopped focusing on differences and started focusing on Jesus and His Kingdom.

My values have totally changed. I no longer pay attention to the church vehicle as long as it is biblical. I just want to meet and worship Jesus and listen to what His Spirit is saying to me as I commune with Him and His people gathered together for worship.

Many times as I travel around the world, the services are in a different language. That's Okay! I have learned that God is fluent in every language and expressive in every culture. He is glorified by variety in worship as long as it is morally pure and biblically sound. I have discovered that He sets the parameters and not my narrow background.

Let me say it again: God is a God of variety. I have found that the hang-ups are not within God or the other people, they are most often within me. When I become critical, grumpy, or judgmental about 1 Corinthians 12-14 variety stuff, the problem is often within me. God created and embraces variety.

#### **A Natural Sequence: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7**

“4) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5) And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6) There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7) But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

These verses are often skipped over, but they are the foundation for Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. Notice they form a sequence. Let's thread them together. There are a variety of gifts, which results in a variety of ministries, which are accompanied by a variety of effects. Hang on, this is about to get interesting.

The focal point of what Paul taught on spiritual gifts in the New Testament was not on the gifts, it was on the many ministries they support and undergird. In Acts 1:8, Jesus taught that every believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit so that they can become effective witnesses.

This was also the thrust behind Ephesians 4:7-16 which is a parallel text on spiritual gifts in Paul's writings. Notice, he said the leadership gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers should focus on equipping the saints to do the work of ministry. (See verses 11-13) Bingo! There is that word “ministry” again.

God wants every Christian to be involved in ministry of some kind, and according to the Great Commission, most of that ministry should be outside of the church as they go through daily life out in the world. (Matthew 28:18-20) Let me make a lightning bolt observation: Very little of the ministry Jesus did happened inside of a church or synagogue! His ministry happened every single place He went as He walked through life. He was the model of a Spirit-filled life.



Let me say it this way: Gifts are given to equip people to do ministry *as they go through everyday life*. As people follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and are faithful at making Jesus known, a variety of unique ministries will spontaneously start for the purpose of spreading the Gospel in the world –and they will be developed and led by laypeople.

God wants every Christian to be active in ministry. The church leaders are set aside to equip, empower, and unleash believers to go and do ministry in the world. Unfortunately, many churches do just the opposite. They quench, hinder, discourage, and try to control or forbid laypeople from spontaneously birthing ministries or bearing fruit.

But this is not what God intends. When we revisit the sequence of 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, a natural process begins to unfold. This is the disciple-making process. This natural process can be illustrated by Jesus being the true vine and His people being branches in John 15. The branches that abide in Jesus naturally start producing fruit. The barren branches are unproductive and are removed.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 describes this natural process. The variety of gifts which result in a variety of ministries are accompanied by a variety of effects. So what does that mean? The Greek word for “effects” is “energema”. What does that sound like in English? It is connected to the Greek root word from which we get the English word “energy.”

If you are an observant person you recognize that people have different personalities and energy levels. Some are gentle and peaceful while others are intense and driven. God tailors ministries around our personalities. He wants fruitful ministry to naturally flow through His people. The early disciples were all engaged in ministry, but they each had different effects.

God wants you to be yourself in ministry. Growth and development will take place as you do more ministry, grow in your gifts, and develop your talents. Be willing to be stretched, be a learner, find a godly mentor, get involved in a good church, try new things, watch others, listen to the Holy Spirit, undergird everything with prayer, and when God leads be willing to do things outside of the traditional box. But do not live your life in neutral or be idle with your time, gifts, or talents.

One of the natural conclusions of the Great Commission and these texts on spiritual gifts is that there are as many forms of ministry and evangelism as there are gifts, abilities, hobbies, talents, and interests in the body of Christ. According to John 15:16, God called you and me to go and be fruitful for His glory. He does His greatest work through the most unlikely people and in unusual ways.

So what might some of these ministries look like? The list is very long. These ministries can focus on meeting the needs of people in Jesus name and sharing the gospel with them. This can be anything from building orphanages to emergency and disaster relief efforts. These ministries can also involve connecting with people around common interests or hobbies and building bridges of friendship with them for life-on-life ministry. I have seen amazing hunting,

fishing, golfing, quilting, and baking ministries. These ministries can also target certain groups of people like mothers of preschoolers, single parents, athletes, or business people.

Ministry opportunities are everywhere and God wants to equip and empower His people to be active and effective in ministry everywhere. He wants to unleash His church in the world. He wants “each one to reach one” like Andrew, and He wants some to reach many like Peter. But every believer needs to be gifted, empowered, and led by the Holy Spirit. The next post will begin to look at how the various gifts can enhance ministry.

### **The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 12:7**

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Let’s take a few moments and dwell on this verse. The Holy Spirit gives gifts and works through each individual believer for the sake of the whole body. Paul goes to great lengths later in this chapter to explain that every believer is important to the functioning of the local body. Your involvement is important.

This means that when you step out to follow a prompting of the Holy Spirit, God is not going to abandon you. The Holy Spirit will show up and accomplish His purpose. God can do significant things through unlikely people because His work is not measured by the person but by His own power and Spirit.

God doesn’t need us to accomplish His will, but He dignifies us by inviting and involving us in His work. It is a great mystery to me, but God works through people. In the process of service we grow both in terms of our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and as individuals.

The biblical Christian life includes stepping up for service and ministry. Growth does not happen in the easy chair, on the sidelines, or as spectators in the grandstands of life. Growth happens on the front lines when we step up and step out for God and with God.

We will make mistakes in the course of spiritual growth, but God uses our blunders to perform His wonders. Often the problems are rooted in the carnal way we treat each other or respond to the offenses caused by others. We all have anger, tempers, and self-agendas that can get in the way. We get hurt and switch into “self-defense mode.” In the process we become part of the problem, but God is still faithful to accomplish His purpose.

This verse also helps explain how God sometimes works through awkward and even sinful people to accomplish His greater purpose. The common good is important to God. He has His eyes on the whole church and the overall direction of our lives. God knows our heart and our potential. He guides us through the bumps of life on the way to maturity and future fruitfulness.

Just take a look at the early disciples. They were a challenge. They were not perfect. Peter was impetuous and even pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Him. (Matthew 16:21-23) James and John were very forceful with people. At one point they wanted to call fire down from heaven and destroy an entire village. (See Luke 9:54-56) Jesus warned them of the potential evil lurking within them. Judas had a terrible problem with greed and sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. But these human sins and shortcomings did not thwart the ultimate plan or purpose of God. This brings me great comfort.

Spiritual gifts are given to fill the gaps in our life. None of us are adequate in ourselves to serve God or accomplish His work. The Holy Spirit fills the voids and grooms us as we move forward and grow toward maturity.

The manifestation of the Spirit also means that God gets the glory for the good that comes from our positive works. He is the one doing it and not us. When the Holy Spirit is at work God-sized things begin to happen in God-condensed timing. He radically changes people and outward circumstances. Miracles begin to happen. The book of Acts kind of stuff begins to unfold in our midst. Don't be fooled –it is not you but the Holy Spirit at work.

Those from a Pentecostal or Charismatic background are much more intentional about seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their worship services. They both invite and expect God to show up and speak to His people. Though they sometimes drift into emotionalism, God often does visit His presence among them in awesome ways.

Every church should seek the presence of God when they assemble together. One of the functions of spiritual gifts is for the Holy Spirit to visit His people during worship services. It is an awesome and fearful thing to be in the presence of the Holy God when He visits His people in this fashion. More about that as these chapters unfold.

### **The Manifestation Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:8-11**

“8) For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9) to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10) and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

In this brief text, Paul describes nine manifestation gifts given within the body of Christ. These are supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit through a person to perceive, know, or do something beyond that which is natural. Each Christian has at least one of these gifts, and the Holy Spirit may express Himself through an individual Christian with any of these gifts as needed in a given situation.

It is important to note that every Christian should have some natural proficiency in each gift, but the person manifesting a specific gift has an exceptional grace at that moment in the area of the gift. For example, we should all have faith, but the person with the gift of faith has unshakable confidence despite all odds in the face of what is seemingly impossible.

Another note that is significant, each gift has a Great Commission purpose. They are given to either help spread the gospel or assist in making mature and godly disciples and spiritual leaders. For the sake of space, I am going to give a straightforward description of each gift followed by a biblical text to illustrate or explain the gift.

Don't trip over these gifts. They are very beautiful and unfold within the human spirit of born-again believers and not at the level of the human soul or human intellect. They can be easy for people with a purely rational approach to God to dismiss. They are intended to help God's people learn how to walk in the Spirit and not merely lean on their own understanding and talents.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GIFT: 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

A. **Word of Wisdom:** Though every believer is invited to ask for wisdom from God (James 1:5), the person with a word of wisdom gift brings Godly wisdom and solutions in timely, specific, and unifying ways. They speak the mind of Christ into a given situation.

Example: James in Acts 15:13-21 at the Jerusalem council

B. **Word of Knowledge:** Though every believer is admonished to study and grow in the knowledge of Christ (1 Peter 1:2-4), the person with this gift is supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit a word of knowledge of something otherwise unknown.

Example: Acts 5:1-11 Peter knowing the deeds of Ananias and Sapphira

C. **Faith:** Though every believer is instructed to put on the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16), the person with this gift has extraordinary faith in the face of otherwise impossible situations.

Example: Acts 27:21-26 Paul admonishing the ship crew.

D. **Gifts of healing:** Though every believer is commanded to have the elders pray over them for healing (James 5:13-18), the person with this gift is used for spectacular healings to open a door of utterance for the gospel often in a public setting.

Examples: Acts 3-4 Peter and John and the beggar at the Temple, Acts 28:7-8 Paul healing Publius.

E. **Effecting of Miracles:** Though every believer has God's protective grace and power (1 Peter 3-5), the person with the effecting of miracles often has extraordinary events take place to confirm the Gospel message.

Example: Acts 28:1-6 Paul with the snakebite.

F. **Prophecy:** Though every Christian should be wise and discerning to counsel others (Galatians 6:2), the person with this gift speaks on behalf of God to people with amazing insight, edification, exhortation, and consolation.

Example: 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul 's explanation of one who prophesies, Acts 21:8-12 Agabus telling things to come for Paul.

G. **Distinguishing of spirits:** Though all believers are commanded to test the spirits (1 John 4:1-4), the person with this gift can quickly discern the activity of a demonic spirit and often helps set people free.

Example: Acts 16:16-18 Paul in Philippi and the slave girl.

H. **Various Kinds of Tongues:** Though all believers have language and communication skills and are admonished to pray and express praise to God (Ephesians 6:18-20), the person with the gift of tongues has a special prayer language for praise and intercession to God with either a known language they did not previously learn or an unknown language given between them and God.

Example: Acts 2:1-4 the day of Pentecost, 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul's explanation of one who speaks in a tongue

I. **Interpretation of Tongues:** Though all believers should be able to enter into the spirit of what God is doing in a given context (Romans 8:26-30), the person with the gift of interpretation allows others to understand a message God is giving through a person speaking in tongues.

Example: 1 Corinthians 14:6-19 Paul's explanation of the futility of the public use of tongues without an interpreter

## **Distributed Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:11**

“11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

The Holy Spirit is sovereign over the giving of spiritual gifts. He knows what you need and when you need them. A few gifts may be permanent but others may come or go as occasion requires. Let me share two personal examples.

I do not have the gift of the word of knowledge, but two times God spoke into my spirit a word that was needed. Once was during a casual conversation with a stranger. The conversation was at a dead end when God twice spoke the word “abortion” into my spirit almost in an audible voice.

Shortly, I got up the courage and said, “Do you mind if I ask you a very personal question?” She said “sure.” I then asked; “have you ever had an abortion?” She broke into tears and started sharing the heart breaking story of a recent abortion and how she was close to suicide over the guilt and remorse.

It opened the door for the gospel and within minutes she was receiving Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Her whole personality changed in front of my eyes. I prayed over her, gave her a Bible and pointed her toward some campus ministries where she was a student. I never saw her again. I had done my part. I commended her into the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Another time was during a mission trip to Peru, South America. My daughter Bethany was with me. We were traveling up a jungle river in a river boat when a servant of the missionary we were with handed me a cup of coffee. As he did, the Holy Spirit spoke into my heart in a very clear voice: “Nelton is going to marry Bethany.”

At that point, they had not even talked to each other. I kept it to myself for three years and did very little to encourage the relationship. I shared it publicly for the first time at their engagement ceremony. I needed that word of knowledge to confirm that God was behind the relationship. He has blessed them in unimaginable ways. They now lead one of our Peru ministries.

Notice that Paul said the gifts were distributed to each one individually just as the Holy Spirit wills. The Greek word for “distributing” is “diaireo”. It means “to take from one and divide, part, apportion, or assign to another.” In this case, it is taking the diverse abilities or manifestations of the the Holy Spirit and giving those gifts or graces to people individually as the Holy Spirit wills.

It seems that all gifts are distributed and none are held in common by all Christians. Paul undergirds this thought in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 where he points out that not all people have

the same gifts. Notice that he includes speaking in tongues in his rhetorical questions in verse 30 by stating that “all do not speak in tongues, do they?” His point is that it is a distributed gift.

This is where I disagree with those who wrongly claim that a person needs to speak in tongues to be a Christian. Their opinion is contrary to the clear teaching of the Apostle Paul and the Word of God. It opens the door for false experiences and, in some cases, demonic influence. The subject points us back to his opening caution in 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 about mute idols, deception, and the need to test the spirit behind a gift.

Keep the context of the book of 1 Corinthians in mind. Paul was writing to Christians living under the shadow of Greek mythology, mystery religions, and numerous cult and occult groups. Every one of the manifestation gifts were counterfeited in those false religions.

These manifestations also happen in Hinduism and in many new-age religions today. The modern surge of spiritism in western culture has also been accompanied by numerous false manifestations including visions, guardian spirits, false inner voices, and what could be called “miracles.”

Do not be so desirous of a gift that you fail to discern the source. Keep your focus on Jesus and not the gift. In the context of his discussion on spiritual gifts, Paul said; “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking, yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.” (1 Corinthians 14:20) He then goes on to talk about speaking in tongues and prophecy.

He was saying that Christians need to “grow up” when they discuss this subject. That includes those in the camp who, contrary to Scripture, claim that some gifts are no longer given today. Remember, the word “distributed” means that these gifts are manifestations taken from the Holy Spirit and given to people. What attribute or power of the Holy Spirit is less today than in the days of the early church? Do not minimize God or put Him in a box.

There is nothing more edifying, encouraging, and powerful than being in the company of mature, seasoned, and gifted men and women of God who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. God is moving through them around the world today as in no time in history to advance the gospel and reach millions.

Jesus is again fulfilling the words of the prophet Joel that Peter preached about in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. (See Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-24) Notice that Peter made it clear that God did this to point people to Jesus and the gospel. Let me say this again very boldly, “the gifts are not about the gifts, they are about pointing people to Jesus and fulfilling the Great Commission.”

### **Your Place in The Body of Christ: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13**

“12) For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized

into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Paul now uses the human body to illustrate how every believer fits into the body of Christ. It doesn't matter what your age, race, nationality, gender, social economic status, or background might be, Jesus gifts and fits believers into the body of Christ as He pleases.

Some gifts and therefore people may be more prominent than others, but all are significant. As people grow and mature in Christ, God will likely entrust them with greater ministry responsibility. God wants every Christian to be a Jabez. (1 Chronicles 4:9-10) He wants to bless those who seek and serve Him and expand their borders.

The key is not their gifts or talents, the key is the depth and quality of their walk with God. By one Spirit every Christian is baptized into the body of Christ, but for some reason not every Christian grows at the same pace or has the same love for and commitment level to Jesus Christ.

The backdrop to this whole discussion on spiritual gifts is growth from infancy to maturity. (See 1 Corinthians 13:11) *Having a certain spiritual gift does not equate to spiritual maturity.* In fact, the problem with the church in Corinth was immaturity and the lack of spiritual growth. Paul did not nullify the gifts, he encouraged growth in the people.

This is part of the reason Paul used the human body as an illustration. Over time the human body grows and matures. It naturally moves from infancy to adulthood. This applies to individuals, churches, and ministries. Jesus adds growth and fruitfulness over time. If you are stuck at the same level you were at one, five or ten years ago, something is terribly wrong.

The Holy Spirit wants to work in your life, but you are either unsaved, very carnal, sinful and self-focused, or unwilling to listen, learn, and grow, you are at a very dangerous place. God will not promote you beyond your maturity level despite your Bible knowledge and gifting. Jesus will not work through you beyond His work in you.

Gifts are helpful but they are not a shortcut to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. It might be wise to slow down and invite the Holy Spirit to do a deep, fresh, and personal work within you before you become part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Paul wrote this letter to Corinth because carnal Christians were making a mess in the church. The whole church had become critical, judgmental, divided, sinful, and full of grumbling and complaining. If you display those attitudes and export that mindset, stop in your tracks and repent. The church is not about you, it is about Jesus and the Great Commission.

You may need to go back and read his warning to these carnal Corinthian believers recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Your spiritual gifts are only as helpful as your maturity level and the direction and momentum of your walk with God. They do not transform you into a “Super Saint.”



I've learned over the years that every gift can be used for great good or potentially cause great hurt and damage to the cause of Christ when plastered with carnality or used for self-glorification. This includes the gifts of the pastor and teacher. I no longer look at the gifts, I look for the fruit and maturity level in the person.

Godly and seasoned saints with an unction for intercessory prayer who know how to use their prayer language – and are therefore often in God's presence– are welcome on my prayer team any time. I seek out seasoned intercessors. Prayer is one of my shortcomings. On the other hand, when I see people flaunting any spiritual gift, I run far and fast. It is a good sign of carnality, emotionalism, immaturity, and deception.

All of the New Testament Churches were proficient with spiritual gifts. Paul focused on the gifts when writing to Corinth because they had made a mess of them. Paul did not throw out the gifts, instead he set out to grow up the immature and carnal believers.

God can add gifts as needed to growing Christians, but He will expose rather than promote sinful and carnal Christians. Some might even fall from prominent places in church leadership. God is not impressed by us or our self-made ministries. Our call is to promote Jesus and the gospel and not ourselves.

It all comes down to lifting up Jesus. God wants us to drink from the fresh rivers of the Holy Spirit and not from the empty wells of carnality, pride, or self-promotion.

### **Lessons From the Body: 1 Corinthians 12:14-20**

“14) For the body is not one member, but many. 15) If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16) And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19) If they were all one member, where would the body be?” 20) But now there are many members, but one body.

Paul now begins to unpack a significant problem that existed in Corinth. Some in the church were promoting themselves beyond their calling and gifting, while others were sitting dormant because they did not see their value or significance.

Paul makes the point that every member of the human body is significant and important. The foot has no need to be envious of the hand nor should the ear crave to be an eye. Every part is important and necessary for the health and good of the whole body.

My motto over the years has been to “grow where I am planted.” I try to be faithful with what God entrusts to me each day. I also believe that we “grow as we go” and that it is important to make room for others on the team. Get moving.

There are few things as pathetic as an eye that tries to do or be it all. It ends up being very awkward and handicapped. Yet some people try to control or do everything. Some churches and ministries are small because the pastor or leader is small and demands to be involved in everything. The micro-manager will end up with a micro church or organization.

Jesus quickly recruited and trained others to do ministry. He started with twelve and then added 70 more. As He went, He ministered widely and planted many seeds, but He trained a group of 120 committed prayer warriors that He left behind to pray in the day of Pentecost. (See Mathew 10, Luke 10 and Acts 1) That leadership team was responsible to lead and manage the explosive growth that came after the day of Pentecost. They soon sought out more gifted and Spirit-filled leaders and helpers. (See Acts 6:1-8)

If you are sitting on the sidelines in your Christian life, or investing all of your talents, energy, and resources in the world, it's time for a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ. Then roll up your sleeves and get busy for the glory of God! Start right where you are, be faithful, cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life, and let God direct your path and your life momentum.

Keep your eyes on Jesus and remember the sequence of 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. God will soon use your gifts to open the door for ministry tailored to your personality. Don't run ahead of God and don't put Him in a box. Become His disciple. Seek to be like Jesus in character, attitude, and service of others. Invite Jesus to build His church through you. Expect the Holy Spirit to lead, gift, and empower you as you pursue God.

Build every day on the basics of prayer, Bible study, serving, and adding value to others. And then make Jesus known as you seek opportunities to share the gospel. Don't force it. Be natural, enjoy the journey, and let God lead you!

As you do this, God will place you in the body right where He wants you. As you are faithful in your daily walk with Jesus, don't be surprised when new doors open or He pushes you beyond your comfort zone. Welcome to a growing, deepening and abundant walk with God.

Don't get hung up on the gifts. As you focus on Jesus and grow where you are planted, the gifts will emerge as needed.

But by all means add value to yourself. Study personal growth and leadership material from quality teachers like John Maxwell. Seek to become more educated in areas that will add to your capacity in ministry. A year in linguistics school learning the language will greatly expand your ministry's usefulness and fruitfulness if God is calling you to a foreign country. Find a godly and challenging life mentor. Do not be mediocre and never settle for average.

The human body is never stagnant. It is constantly growing, changing, and regenerating until it finally expires. Never settle into a comfort zone that no longer challenges you or no longer forces you to call out to God. Pursue Jesus and yield to Him as Lord of your life!

(I had a breakthrough in my spiritual life when I realized that a disciple is someone who simply follows Jesus. I don't have to be in charge. I don't have to have all the answers. All I have to do is follow where He leads. There is incredible, amazing freedom in that. It's a wonderful gift to be able to wake up each day and pray, "Lord, here I am. What are we doing today?" Even more glorious is to hear Him answer, "You'll see.") -dj

### **The Amazing Systems of a Healthy Body. 1 Corinthians 12:18-20**

"18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19) If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20) But now there are many members, but one body."

In the broader context, Paul is giving us the characteristics of a healthy church by looking at a healthy human body. The human body is amazing. Though some members get more attention, every member and every system in the human body is important.

Let's have a little fun and quickly walk through the 11 systems that make up the human body and see how each might relate to a healthy local church. I recognize this involves some degree of speculation, but I trust it will be a fun, creative, and insightful exercise as we briefly reflect on 11 systems that make up the human body,

(I am pulling this material from one session of a leadership conference I taught a number of years ago to church leaders. I love analogies in the Bible and glean great personal joy as I invite the Holy Spirit to bring illumination as I dig deeply into analogies. I trust you enjoy this material.)

1. Skeletal system- The skeletal system is the framework of the body. It is what gives the body its basic shape, while protecting the delicate internal tissues and organs. The joints of the skeletal system act as levers that are attached to various muscles. The elbows, knees, ankles are just a few examples of these levers.

Possible Spiritual counterpart in the church: Biblical Doctrine. (Ephesians 4:14-16; II Timothy 3:16-17) Solid biblical doctrine is the framework of the local church. It is vital that the church has a biblically sound support system to hold up and protect everything else. This is what gives shape and function to the church and prevents it from becoming jello or mush.

2. Muscular system- There are three types of muscle tissue included in this system; skeletal, cardiac, and visceral. A.) Skeletal muscles are voluntary muscles that work with the connective tissues to allow the body to move. Voluntary simply means the muscles respond to impulses from the brain that are a result of your desire to move. B.) Cardiac muscles are those that form the bulk of the heart's wall. They provide involuntary heartbeat. C.) Visceral muscles are also

involuntary. They are the smooth muscles that help move food along in the digestive tract, veins and arteries, as well as the tubular structures of the urinary tract.

Possible Spiritual counterpart in the church: Empowering leadership: (Acts 6:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-12) Equipping and training leaders in the church and then empowering them to do ministry is similar to the muscles in the body. Just as it takes many muscles to move the body and accomplish a task, God desires many people in the church to be trained and empowered for ministry.

3. Digestive system – The digestive system comprises all the organs that help break down food into absorbable forms and nutrients the body uses for fuel.

Possible Spiritual counterpart in the church: Applicable teaching. (Matthew 4:4; I Peter 2:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14) Solid doctrine is vital to the church, but God's word must be understood and applied to daily living. It is vital to minister the Word of God on the level of people where it can be applied to their lives.

4. Circulatory system: This is the vital transportation system within the body. It comprises the heart, veins, arteries and blood. It carries everything from oxygen, nutrients, hormones, and blood cells to every cell in the body. It also carries wastes from the cells back to the liver and kidneys to be eliminated.

Possible Spiritual counterpart in the Church: Gift-Oriented Ministry. (Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12:4-11) The Holy Spirit is like the life-blood of the body. He gives unique spiritual gifts to each person so they can carry out their vital functions in the body.

5. Respiratory system: It is in the lungs that oxygen from the outside meets the blood by way of the thin tissues in the lungs. The process of breathing takes in oxygen and lets out carbon from our body.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the Church: Inspirational Worship. (John 4:23-24; Ephesians 5:18-21) Worship is to the church what breathing is to the body. It is the breath of life to the church.

6. Integumentary system (skin) This is the largest of all systems. It comprises the skin, hair, and nails as well as the sweat and oil glands. It functions as a protective covering for the underlying tissues against drying and invasion by toxins or pathogenic organisms. The skin is also responsible for regulating body temperature.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the church: Functional Structures. (I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-2:5) Just as various people groups have different colors of skin, there seems to be room for diverse approaches to church organization and structure. The key is that the structure should be flexible and functional to serve the needs of the church just like the skin encloses the body.

7. Nervous system: This is a very complex system by which all parts of the body are controlled. It is made up of the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. It also includes special sense organs such as the eyes, ears, and taste buds.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the church: Passionate Spirituality. (Acts 4:13-31; Philippians 1:20-24, Philippians 3:7-16) The early believers were passionate in their Spirit-filled devotion to

Christ. This fire or fever became like the nervous system in the church to set the tone and excitement level high for Christ.

8. Excretory system: This comprises both the large and small intestines as well as the urinary tract. As a whole, it ensures the absorption of proper nutrients into the blood as well as the removal of toxins and waste products from the body.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the church: Discipleship, accountability groups, confession (I Timothy 2:1-9; Acts 2:42-47, I John 1:9) These work together like the stomach, intestines and colon for big life transformation. These close and vital relationships are the place where the old life is set aside and the new life is nurtured. These are so effective when understood and done well that they have been called by a number of dynamic names including "Growth Groups" and "Shepherding Groups."

9. Reproductive system: The reproductive system includes the external and internal organs as well as related inner structures that are required for the reproduction of another human being. It can also provide great pleasure and fulfillment.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the Church: Witnessing and Evangelism. (John 15:16; Acts 1:8; I Thes 1:2-10) This is the exciting activity responsible to new birth in the church. In the early church it was often need based but always included sharing the seeds of the gospel message and the birth of new believers.

10. Endocrine system: Although there are few parts to the endocrine system it is vital to the health of the individual. It is made up of organs called endocrine glands that produce hormones. These hormones in turn regulate growth, use of food within the cells, and reproduction. The thyroid and pituitary glands are the two main endocrine glands.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the Church: Loving Relationships. (John 15:34-35; I John 4:7-12) People need to be enfolded into the body of Christ in loving and connected relationships. This ingredient of love sets the tone for body life. Love is powerful and the fruit of the Spirit through each Christian is meant for ministry to others. Paul said about the church, "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:16 NASB)

11. Immune System: This system is the body's defense against infectious organisms and other invaders. Through a series of steps called the immune response, the immune system attacks organisms and substances that invade body systems and cause disease. It also promotes healing in the body when injured.

Possible Spiritual Counterpart in the Church: The armor of God (spiritual warfare) coupled with prayer and intercession for the body. (Ephesians 6:10-20, Galatians 6:1-4, James 5:13-18) Just as the immune system constantly monitors the health of the body, the armor of God is intended for protection. The final weapon against the enemy in Ephesians 6:18-20 is intercessory prayer for all the saints. We are to bear one another's burdens and rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We also surround the sick and pray for them.

## **Finding a Good Church: 1 Corinthians 12**

“24) whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25) that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27) Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

In these verses, Paul is standing back and making some important observations. First, every person in the body of Christ is needed and must step up and fill their role. The body is only as strong or weak as the healthy functioning of each part.

Second, Jesus wants every local church to be healthy and functioning down to its newest member. The human body is constantly adding new cells and regenerating itself. If it is not, it is dying.

Third, no one member can make it on its own. We are individually part of the whole. If we don’t plug into a local church for some reason, we are hurting ourselves. God will fill the void in the church, but we will miss out on the Acts 2:42-47 dynamics needed for personal growth and fruitfulness. Those cut off from the vine shrivel up and die. (See John 15:1-8)

Fourth, God wants to use the other members of the body to help us learn, grow, and thrive. We need their input, feedback, accountability, prayers, encouragement, correction, perspective, exhortation, fellowship, care, spiritual gifts, and group worship. Christianity by nature is highly relational. God wants to immerse us into life-transforming relationships.

Finally, there will be disagreements, varying opinions, misunderstandings and hurts along the way. Proverbs 27:17 says; “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” The sharpening process involves heat and sparks. If you constantly walk away from the heat you will never be sharp or strong. You need to commit to a local church long enough for people to get to know you and speak into your life. Growth happens when you go deep and get connected, not when you remain shallow or constantly walk away.

So what is the optimal size for a church? Jesus focused on twelve disciples plus their families for much of His ministry. That was His core small group. Between the resurrection of Christ and Pentecost the church had 120 people gathered for prayer and seeking God. (See Acts 1:14-15) After Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 more were added to the number. From that point forward many were added day by day, but they continually focused on small group activities. (See Acts 2:42-47) Most mega-churches grow through focusing on smaller growth groups.

The minimal size has to be large enough to offer some form of mature leaders and enough people for the gifts to be functioning. The maximum size is open-ended. The bottom line is that if the Holy Spirit is leading, the Bible is being studied properly, and the Great Commission is

being obeyed and life changing-conversions are taking place, the group will grow. Paul pictured the body as being alive and dynamic and not stagnant and dying.

Sincerely pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to a church or fellowship group that will enfold you, speak truth to you, love you, help you grow, challenge you, and mentor you into godly, fruitful, and mature Christian living and service. Your ultimate goal is to grow in your love for Jesus and to be on fire for God. When you find a good church then get committed and get involved. Don't be a spectator Christian.

### **A Living Body Versus A Dead Organization: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

"27) Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 31) But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way."

In this list of gifts, Paul seems to be setting up some form of hierarchy or order in the church. No matter our gifts or position in a church, we all need to learn how to serve. Some will need to learn how to humbly serve those under them without going on a power trip. Many will need to learn how to serve alongside others without being jealous or competing. Most will need to learn how to serve those above them while showing great honor and respect.

No one person has all of the gifts, yet each gift is important and has a place in the church. Gifts complement leadership, but God sometimes puts leaders in place who do not have prominent gifts. They need to make room for others to shine.

We often expect our pastors to be and do it all. This is totally unfair. Some pastors are great students of the Word and great preachers, but may lack people skills. Others may be good shepherds who easily build strong relationships with people, but who struggle with preaching. Often a great visionary is not a good administrator or manager. Why?

Because God focuses on teams and a living body. If you look at the church in Antioch as mentioned in Acts 13:1-4, the church had multiple leaders over it. There were multiple prophets and teachers over the church. The same was true of the church back in Jerusalem with Apostles and elders overseeing the church. (See Acts 15:16-22)

Occasionally, God raises up multi-gifted people He sends out as missionaries to start new works. Both Paul and Barnabas were good examples of this. But as soon as possible, they set about making disciples, raising up leaders, and when the time was right, they appointed elders over the church. It is almost like they carried the church in their womb until they gave birth. (See

Galatians 4:19-20) Paul used the illustration of being in labor as an example of giving birth to a church. Why? *Because a church is a living organism and not a secular organization.*

There are three primary illustrations for the church in the New Testament. It is a living building made up of many parts (Ephesians 2:19-22); it is a living body with many members (Ephesians 4:14-16); and it is also sometimes pictured as a whole flock of living sheep. (See 1 Peter 5:1-5) In John 15 Jesus also talked about being the true vine with many branches. Notice, each one is living or organic.

The challenge with each analogy is getting the church to function as a healthy and living organism with each part or member contributing to the whole. When this begins to happen it is beautiful, living, dynamic, and powerful.

But the common tendency is to switch church form and function from a living organism to a secular organization. Life is lost in the process. Passion gives way to politics and Spirit-filled service is replaced with job descriptions, duties, and programs. At some point the focus shifts from Jesus as the cornerstone or head to the CEO who controls everything.

So have I wandered down a rabbit trail with this discussion? Not at all. Paul was writing to the church in Corinth where everything was based on Greek and Roman models of structure and organization. Paul went to great lengths to point the church back to an organic model of a body rather than a secular model of a senate.

This discussion of the Spirit of God and godly wisdom versus human wisdom and structure started way back in chapters 1-2 of this book. Paul was returning to this subject with a vengeance in chapters 12-14 and moving the discussion back to an organic view of the body of Christ and spiritual gifts.

Welcome to the amazing study of body life which is a total departure from any form or structure in the secular world. The first step in killing a church is turning it into a secular organization. Over time life will be sucked out of it and prayer and seeking Jesus will be marginalized and replaced with board meetings and committees.

My goal with this discussion is to get you to reflect and not to react. The Old Testament had detailed structure and organization, but the New Testament put new wine in new wine skins. Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit changed many things including form and function.

The big question is: “how does the Spirit of God become a game-changer to produce vibrant life in the body of Christ and among God's people?” Or, “What is the more excellent way Paul refers to in verse 31?” Stay tuned!



## **A More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 12:31 & 13:1-3**

“31) Earnestly desire the greater gifts, and I show you a more excellent way.”

“1) If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2) If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3) And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Paul was making an important observation. The more excellent way is agape love. It is more important than any spiritual gift, deed of service, or deep sacrifice that a person could make. You need to read these verses over and over again until this truth sinks in.

The new commandment that Jesus gave His disciples was agape love and not the manifestation of any of the spiritual gifts. Read John 13:34-35. Jesus concluded by saying “by this shall all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Notice, He did not say they would be known by speaking in tongues, uttering prophecies, performing healings, doing miracles or giving words of knowledge. The false religions and cult groups of Greece could duplicate these things, but they could not produce agape love.

According to the book of 1 John, God is light and God is love. (1 John 1:5 and 1 John 4:8 & 16) Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light and he can pretend to love, but he is far from agape love. Given a little time his true colors will come through and his true character will show up, but God is always the same. He doesn't change.

If I were given a choice between being part of a church like Corinth with manifold gifts being manifest but that was full of strife, jealousy, sexual bondage, and sinful compromise or a church with consistent agape love, I would take the agape church every time. I can live without the gifts, but I cannot live without the love of God.

By the way, there are many churches that do not practice the gifts and have the same kind of carnality as Corinth. They are equally as distasteful. Again, they are absent of the love of God. Don't judge a church by the sign out front.

But there is another option. You can have a godly and mature church that is filled with the Holy Spirit, full of agape love and that also practices the spiritual gifts in an orderly, proper, and biblical fashion. These churches are not perfect, but they know how to worship in Spirit and truth, study and obey the Word of God, and focus on the Great Commission with passion and in the power of God. Sinful people are being reached, lives are being transformed, and Jesus is being lifted up in these churches.

I know many churches like this. It comes down to the individual church and what God is doing within it. Some have the name Methodist, Lutheran, or Baptist on the sign out front. Some may be Evangelical Free, Non-denominational, Charismatic, or Pentecostal. Some are registered churches and some are underground churches. Don't be fooled by the name out front. Many of the churches mentioned above are absolutely dead or very worldly.

Don't look for a perfect church. Look for a godly and mature church that studies the Word of God, loves Jesus and one another, and that knows how to worship. Look for a church where the Holy Spirit is working, lives are being transformed, and where people are on fire for God. When you find one, get involved and let God change you.

Don't be discouraged if your church is struggling. Satan attacks good churches and they can go through seasons of struggles. Many times you need to stay in the trenches and invite God to do a deep and fresh work. Be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Bring a spark of agape love.

"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body."

1 Corinthians 12:14-15

I had no idea at the time that my knee replacement surgery would land right at the time we would be studying about the body of Christ from 1 Corinthians 12-14. This surgery and recovery has given me many insights into the way the body of Christ should operate. Let's briefly share a few.

First, when my left knee started acting up the rest of my body needed to step up and fill the gap. This was especially true after surgery. When one member suffers all members suffer with it.

Second, I had to learn how to lean on other things and people to get me through. My wife picked up the bulk of the slack. She was awesome as my taxi driver. The Bible says of marriage that the two become one. I have never appreciated her more than now.

Third, I've learned how important and supportive my family is to me. My son Daniel and his wife Elizabeth opened their walk-in basement and living quarters for us for as long as needed. Jonathan and Andra were amazing in many ways by picking up the slack and giving us some meals. The others cheered me on through social media. The grandkids are so fun and encouraging. They came over and played with all my new gadgets and even exercised with me to push me on. If they heard something I should or should not be doing they were very quick to point it out.

Fourth, I had to be creative and learn new ways of doing things. Getting in and out of chairs and in and out bed is a good example. Even going to the bathroom was a challenge. I had to develop new systems for everything.

Fifth, though I was beaten down, I refused to be defeated. I did everything I could to do everything I could. I was willing to push through some hurt and pain to get healthy. Some stretching was painful but necessary. If I don't buffet my body and make it do things it has to be able to do at this time, it would have hurt the long process. I also learned the value of rest and sleep.

Sixth, there were so many people who were so wonderful with encouraging notes on social media, texts, and prayers. I felt like I had an army standing with me. Thank you so much!

Seventh, the surgery opened up many new relationships within the hospital system and great opportunities to be light for Jesus and the gospel.

Eighth, I learned the value of good humor and a positive attitude. The hospital staff was fabulous. They turned the situation into a fun and joyous journey. They know that attitude and outlook have a lot to do with the final outcome. I highly recommend the Iowa Specialty Hospital system in North Iowa for all of your health care needs.

These principles also apply to the body of Christ and the church. I know I have missed many observations, but I'm sure you get the idea. God wants to turn real life situations and trials into vital learning and growth opportunities. I grew so much closer to Jesus and the Holy Spirit through this trial. God allows some storms for our good, growth, progress, witness, and deep communion with Him.

### **Understanding the Importance of Agape Love: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**

"4) Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5) does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8) Love never fails..."

We are now looking at God's definition of agape love given through the Apostle Paul. That in itself is surprising considering Paul's former background as the Pharisee that launched the persecution against the early church and killed many who believed in Jesus. What a difference Jesus Christ made in his life!

This definition stands alone and needs no explanation. It is the measuring stick of what I call "The God kind of love." This is most likely the definition that the Apostle John uses in 1 John 4:7-21, where he twice makes the statement that "God is love."

Because of this, I believe there is an attribute of God the theologians sometimes miss. They talk about God being Omnipotent (All Powerful). God is Omniscient (All Knowing). God is Omnipresent (He is always everywhere). I believe God is also Omnibenevolent (All loving and kind) But there are more attributes than these four.

Other attributes of God include that He is Infinite (Self existing- Without beginning or end - Eternal). God is Immutable (Never changing) God is Self-sufficient (He has no needs outside of Himself). God is Wise (He is full of perfect wisdom) God is Faithful (He is true, honest, dependable and always consistent with Himself). God is Good (Infinitely and unchangeable full of kindness and good will) God is Just (Right, perfect and blameless in all He does). God is Merciful (Compassionate, kind, forgiving and willing to pardon and therefore approachable) God is Gracious (He is infinitely inclined to spare the guilty). God is Holy (Unchangeably perfect, pure and clean) God is glorious (He is infinitely Beautiful, Magnificent, and Great).

When you study this list of attributes, you quickly discover that it parallels Paul's definition of agape love. These attributes also encompass Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit recorded in Galatians 5:22-24. This is an amazing list to aim for in our behavior, character, and conduct as Christians. They are impossible for fallen man to attain.

So this raises the question "How could God expect people to live up to the standard of agape love? The answer is given in Romans 5:1-11. Notice that verse 5 emphasizes that the "Love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." At the moment of salvation, the new believer is filled with the Holy Spirit. This indwelling unleashes agape love within us. The indwelling Spirit of God brings all of the attributes of God with Him. Agape love is not a standard to live up to, it becomes a divine source ever present within us to tap into and appropriate in our daily lives. This happens as believers learn to walk in the Spirit.

Now let's go back to our context of 1 Corinthians 12-14. When spiritual gifts are forced apart from agape love, the results are often carnal, fleshing and sinful. People can use fleshly words of knowledge, words of wisdom or prophetic utterance to control and manipulate others. The church at Corinth had all the gifts present but they were functioning in sinful and carnal ways. There was confusion, disorder, division, and selfish ambitions everywhere. They were not using the gifts to glorify Jesus or reach the lost. They were using them to lift up themselves and promote self-agendas.

Paul's advice to them was to back away from the gifts in public gatherings until they put on gape love as their guiding principle. He wanted then to put checks and balances in place for public services and approached the gifts in a decent and orderly fashion. Those who exercise spiritual gifts need self-control and submission to godly leaders.

There is a principle I learned years ago that says, "God desires to work deeply in me before He works mightily through me." Can you imagine the confusion in Corinth when Christians would gather and manifest gifts like prophecy, healing, or tongues and then go out and get drunk, treat their wife and children like dirt, file lawsuits against other believers, or go and hire the services of a prostitute? This was not only hypocrisy, it totally falsified the character and nature of God to the world.

But wait! This behavior, character, and conduct was totally consistent with the pagan gods of Greece and Rome. The mission of the church is much broader than evangelism. It includes

explaining and defining God to the world around us. The gifts of the Spirit are intended to undergird the character, nature, and attributes of God while being manifest through the fruits of the Spirit.

This is why Paul put the brakes on in Corinth related to Spiritual gifts and inserted chapter 13 as “the more excellent way.” Apart from agape love, the gifts can be damaging to the cause of Christ and the spread of the Gospel. In other words, agape love is the context for manifesting spiritual gifts.

### **Agape Love and Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

“8) Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11) When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13) But now abide faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Spiritual gifts can let you down and even mislead you. This happens when someone uses their gift in the wrong way to manipulate or control other people.

I have seen this with prophecy and a word of knowledge. I am very leery when I see someone use these gifts to dictate specific direction to others rather than for edification, exhortation, or consolation. (See 1 Corinthians 14:3)

I am very cautious when someone approaches me and says; “God showed me that you should....”. If God has been speaking to me about the same matter, I use it as confirmation of God's leading. If it is radically different from the course God has me on, I stand back and pray, watch and listen. They were most likely speaking from their fleshly emotions.

By contrast, agape love never fails. Love not only fulfills the Law, it also completes fellowship and godly relationships. If I could inject agape love into any struggling marriage or church, things would turn around very quickly. Love never fails.

Some have used 1 Corinthians 13:8 to conclude that gifts like prophecy, tongues, and a word of knowledge were temporary gifts that have now ceased. There are two problems with that position.

First, verse 10 qualifies verse 8 by saying, “when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.” The question is, “What is the perfect that is promised?” They respond by saying it was the complete text of the Bible. I cannot find that promise anywhere in the context. The perfect seems to be defined in verse 12 where Paul talked about seeing “face to face.” I take that to mean the return of Jesus Christ for His bride. (1 John 3:1-3)

Second, they argue “if the purpose for which a gift was given has ceased then the gift has ceased.” The problem is they often assign the wrong purpose for a gift. This is especially true of the gift of tongues.

If we use their argument and turn to 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul explains the purpose of tongues. He basically says it is for the purpose of talking to God. In other words, it is an intercessory prayer gift. Keep in mind, this purpose was given by Paul in the context of the discussion. So now the question is “do we still need intercessory prayer today?”

Now let’s reflect back over these verses and capture an analogy Paul used for spiritual gifts. In verse 11 he talked about a child growing into manhood. Many things change on the journey from childhood to adulthood. Paul was telling the Corinthians that they needed to “grow up” and use the gifts in an appropriate manner.

He then devotes chapter 14 to a discussion on how to use the gifts in a mature and proper fashion in a church setting. His goal was to erase confusion and restore decency and order.

He closes chapter 13 by saying; “But now abide faith, hope, love; these three, but the greatest of these is love.” This verse is very important to our discussion of spiritual gifts. Notice, the next chapter opens by saying; “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts.”

Paul was insisting that agape love needed to be the backdrop for spiritual gifts. If the atmosphere is filled with strife, anger, bitterness, jealousy, slander, pride, and self promotion, the Spirit of God is grieved. (See Ephesians 4:30-32) Any spiritual gift manifest through carnal Christians in the midst of strife and conflict will most likely be tainted.

It is very wise for church leadership to set boundaries for the public use of spiritual gifts until people grow up and display godly maturity. That is essentially what Paul does in chapter 14. Stay tuned as our study continues in the next section.

### **Contrast between Prophecy and Tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:1-5**

“1) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2) For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3) But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4) One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. 5) Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.”

In these verses, Paul begins to tackle a problem that was boiling in the church at Corinth. It seems that some who spoke in tongues did so constantly and frequently during their public

assemblies with no interpreter. It quenched the Spirit and turned into a major distraction. In Chapter 14, Paul sets out to bring order to the chaos.

In verses 1-5, he explained the difference between tongues and prophecy. Notice from verse 2, “one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.” From this and verses like 1 Corinthians 14:14, we can conclude that tongues are primarily an intercessory prayer gift.

By contrast, verse 3 says, “but one who prophesies speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and consolation.” The Holy Spirit speaks through this person to God's people to bring encouragement, insight, and direction.

There is also the gift of “a prophet” as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. I see these as two different gifts. The prophet is a leadership gift as well and the ability to foretell the future. (See also Acts 13:1) The gift of prophecy is giving timely encouragement and guidance to God's people usually during a public assembly.

The key contrast between the gift of tongues and prophecy, is that the person with tongues edifies himself, but the one who brings a word of prophecy edifies the church. Pauls concluded that if there was no interpreter present, the person with the gift of tongues should remain silent in the public church services. (1 Corinthians 14:28)

This does not mean the prayer warriors are inactive during a worship service. To the contrary, they are crying out to God and wrestling earnestly in the spiritual realm as the service unfolds. They ensure that God's people and the whole service is covered in prayer and the enemy is held in check.

I like to include Romans 8:26-30 in the discussion of the intercessory prayer gift. Many times prayer warriors have an overwhelming unction or burden to pray for someone or something, but they do not know why. This is where the prayer language can fill the gap.

This in no way means those without this gift should not develop their prayer lives. God calls all of us to prayer. It merely means those with this gift have an extra grace and anointing in prayer.

When I am invited to an intercessory prayer meeting, I have no problem hearing people praying in tongues with no interpreter. A prayer meeting is very different from a public worship service. I love being present when intercessors gather.

Though I do not have this gift, I have developed a proficiency and dependency on prayer over the years. I am drawn to prayer warriors more than to any other group of people in the church. They are the mountain movers.

## **Good Oration is Music to My Ears: 1 Corinthians 14:6-9**

“6) But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? 7) Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? 8) For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 9) So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.”

In this context, Paul makes the case that understanding is important to effective communications. When the early church gathered together this was especially important because the New Testament was not yet written. Visiting scholars like Paul, Apollos, Peter, Timothy, and others were especially important.

They had the task of unpacking the full meaning, content, and doctrine of the Christian faith. It was a time of unparalleled illumination from God to His people. Each gathering was like drinking from a fire hydrant of truth and insight. Paul made the point in this context that he did not waste his time by merely speaking in tongues during these visits.

Verse 6 suggests there were four distinct kinds of instruction given during early church gathering. This verse could be an extensive study all of its own, but let's briefly touch on these during this post.

First, there was revelation. This was the Holy Spirit unveiling significant insights into how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews stands as an example of revelation. It is like taking a black and white photo and adding color or sitting in a dark room when the lights are turned on. Second was knowledge. This related to truth learned by experience and application. We might call these “principles to live by.” This was crucial to helping new believers get started in the Christian faith. Third was prophecy. This was encouraging instruction aimed at local situations the believers were facing. 1 Corinthians 14:3 indicates these utterances were full of edification, exhortation, and wise counsel. Finally, Paul used the word teaching. This was a time for the teachers to arrange and unpack significant truth in an orderly and comprehensive way.

Christians would gather from far and wide for public services to hear this vital instruction. They were thirsty and hungry for truth. They longed for more revelation, knowledge, application and teaching. They were like the multitudes that would gather to listen to Jesus. But there were two problems in Corinth.

First, because it was a cosmopolitan city, they already faced the challenge of translating into numerous languages. There were people from all over Europe, Africa, and Asia passing through Corinth. This was great for evangelism, but challenging for in-depth discipleship. I have taught in settings that needed multiple translators and found it very difficult and time-consuming.



But second, evidently there were several people in the church at Corinth with the gift of tongues. They were monopolizing the services and giving long utterances in tongues which no one understood and which were not being translated. It was an embarrassment and a disaster. Visitors had no clue what was going on.

This is part of what motivated Paul to write the book of 1 Corinthians. He had to address this crisis before the church fell apart. Chapter 14 summarizes his solution to the problem.

In 1 Corinthians 14:7-8, he explained the importance of effective communications by looking at music. He used the flute, harp, and bugle as an example. In the hands of an accomplished musician, these instruments are phenomenal. The bugle can even summon troops to battle. But in the hands of a novice, they produce nothing but repulsive noise.

In verse 9, he then applied this to the human tongue and language. Just like an accomplished musician, clear speech and good oration is invaluable. I love sitting under good Bible expositors, but mere babble serves no purpose.

Paul did not minimize the gift of tongues, he merely put it in its proper place. He used the balance of the chapter to conclude that the gift tongues was not intended for public services, it was intended to be used in the prayer closet.

### **Overcoming Babel: 1 Corinthians 14:9-13**

“9) So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10) There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. 11) If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. 12) So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. 13) Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.”

Paul was getting very practical in these verses. If you are ever in a setting where you do not know the language being spoken, it is a very awkward situation. You feel like a barbarian.

I have been in this situation many times during international travel and ministry. When I finally hear someone speak in my own language it is like a breath of fresh air. There is an automatic bond with the person. There are thousands of languages around the world. They amount to a wall or separation between people.

Reason with me for a moment. God did something very unusual at the Tower of Babel. The story is recorded in Genesis 11:1-9. God wanted people to spread out and populate the whole earth, but because the whole world spoke the same language, they did just the opposite.

They devised a plan to build a tower unto the gods of the sky or the heavens to prevent them from spreading out. The plot was diabolical and cloaked with wickedness. Something very bad was happening shortly after the flood of Noah's day. The text says that God saw what they were doing and confused their languages in order to force them to spread out over the surface of the earth.

The word "Babel" means "confusion." Giving various tongues was intended to divide and not unify. God had a different plan to draw people together. He wanted to unite the world around the good news of the gospel and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

That is the whole thrust behind the Great Commission. God wants His people to go into the whole world with the gospel. He wants them to overcome language barriers with the good news of salvation. But something problematic started happening in Corinth.

Notice, 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not (a God) of confusion but of peace." Rather than coming together around the gospel in the church at Corinth, the way the gift of tongues was being wrongly used during public services was doing just the opposite. It was causing division and confusion. It was driving people away from the church.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul set out to correct this problem. He put checks and balances in place to promote order and unity. He wanted to overcome the curse of Babel.

### **Knowing When to Wear Pearls. 1 Corinthians 14:12-33**

"12) So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. 13) Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14) For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15) What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. 16) Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? 17) For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. 18) I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19) however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

Paul was tackling a difficult issue. What was intended to be a wonderful gift of intercessory prayer had become a divisive issue in the church. His solution was "to seek to abound for the edification of the church." He concluded that if someone spoke in a tongue, they should also pray for the gift of interpretation.

Later on in 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, Paul put a policy in place that for public worship services every tongue should be followed by an interpretation and that there should be no more than three tongues given during any public service. He also included that if there was no interpreter

present, the person with tongue should keep silent in the church. His focus was on Jesus Christ and not the gift of tongues. This need not be a divisive issue.

I come from a non-charismatic background. Tongues and prophecy were not practiced within our denomination, but the gospel was openly shared, expository preaching was practiced, Jesus was worshiped, the Great Commission was a priority, and the Spirit of God worked in amazing ways. People were saved, lives were transformed, and new mission fields were opened for the glory of God. I have always been drawn to the front lines of world evangelization.

As I moved into interdenominational and international missions work, I've worked side-by-side with fellow believers from every flavor of born-again and spirit-filled church background imaginable. The body of Christ is precious and very diverse. In every case, the common denominator has been a passionate love for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and not loyalty to a pet doctrine, tradition, or view of the spiritual gifts. Jesus alone has been the focal point.

That seems to be the thrust behind 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul wanted everyone to abound for the edification and building up of the church. (1 Corinthians 14:12) He did not want the enemy to divide the church over the ministry of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, and that's exactly what was happening in Corinth.

Having said that, there still remains a mystery in the text. 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 talks about both praying and singing in the spirit. I have no idea how there can be a public interpretation to singing in the spirit. I do believe there is a solution, but this is mere speculation.

I suspect there may have been a distinction between intercessory prayer and praise services for leadership and mature believers and the public church services for the general population. I do not picture Acts 13:2-4 being a public church service, nor do I picture the praying mentioned in Acts 6:4 by the Apostles being open to the public.

If that were the case, the guidelines set down by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 applied to the public worship services of the church and not private intercessory prayer meetings for the mature. In 1 Corinthians 2:6, Paul alluded to in-depth communications among the mature that dealt with the deep things of the Spirit.

I have no problem making a distinction between the two. I value saving the pearls of the faith for the godly and the mature and not throwing them out before the world. In this chapter, Paul was trying to get the believers to know when to wear pearls.

### **A Narrow View of the Gift of Tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:20-22**

"20) Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. 21) In the Law it is written, "by men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me," says the Lord. 22) So then tongues

are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.” 1 Corinthians 14:20-22

I want to devote some time to this text, because it has been cited as a proof text for the concept of “temporary gifts of the Holy Spirit.” In this text, the Apostle Paul looks at the gift of tongues as a prophetic fulfillment to the nation Israel. He points out that God was going to use gentiles to speak to Israel in strange tongues. (See 1 Corinthians 14:21)

That certainly happened on the day of Pentecost when the multitude spoke in tongues. As you read Acts 2:4-13, the witness of that event was very public and had a profound impact on Israel. Peter used what happened with the tongues to launch into an evangelistic message to the Jewish people. The result was that 3,000 came to Jesus that day and many more in the days that followed. (See Acts 2:14-42)

Some have used this to conclude that the gift of tongues had a very temporary purpose as a witness to Israel and that shortly after that event it ceased. It had fulfilled its purpose and was no longer needed. This is a widely held view in some theological circles and it has some merit.

But there are numerous problems with this theory. Let me cite a few of the more obvious ones.

First, the gift of tongues is listed among the other distributed gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12:4-11) Second, Paul became a believer several years after Pentecost, and yet he said that he spoke in tongues more than others. The gift had not ceased by that point. (See 1 Corinthians 14:18) Third, Paul became the apostle to the gentiles and wrote the book of 1 Corinthians to a gentile church. The gift seemed to have significance to the gentile churches as well. Fourth, the book of Acts shows the gift of tongues still being given a number of years after Pentecost. (See Acts 11:15-18; Acts 19:6). Fifth, Paul spent considerable time on the subject of spiritual gifts in his epistle to the Corinthians and laid out guidelines as to how they were to be used in public services in conjunction with the other gifts. (1 Corinthians 12-14) Sixth, in 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul stated that the purpose of the gift of tongues was to speak to God. It seemed to be an intercessory prayer gift. Seventh, the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was an event that launched “the age of grace” and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The “grace gifts” that accompanied that event were “age long” as well. Eighth, the only mention of tongues ceasing in the New Testament is found 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, and the testimony was that they will endure until “the perfect” comes. “The Perfect” seems to be seeing Jesus face-to-face according to verse 12. That event will mark the coming of a new age. Finally, there is ample evidence of all of the gifts being active in the body of Christ today for the unbiased observer.

I share these biblical observations because I came to Jesus from an evangelical background that was non-charismatic. I also attended a very non-charismatic Bible College that was biased against the Charismatic Movement. However, the first book of the Bible I memorized after salvation was 1 Corinthians for a Bible quizzing team. As a result, I was and still am very unbiased about the subject of spiritual gifts. I cannot deny the biblical foundation for spiritual gifts. I see them as valid with strict boundaries laid down for their use in the church.

I love my Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal brothers and sisters in Christ and see strengths and weaknesses in all camps. I have watched a healthy blending taking place over the past forty years and walls coming down between the various camps.

I am very dependent on the power, anointing, and unction of the Holy Spirit in my personal life and ministry and am very comfortable in a variety of settings. However, I do reject some non-biblical extremes in some camps. I adhere to the boundaries the Bible puts around spiritual gifts and manifestations.

I also come from a background of many years of working and teaching in the area of spiritual warfare. I believe in the importance of testing the spirits and agree with Paul that Satan can deceive Christians and exploit immature and carnal use of the gifts. He also fears nothing more than Spirit-filled and on-fire believers that know how to stand in their position in Christ while living in total freedom.

I have also been privileged to work extensively around the world in the persecuted church. The blood of the martyrs has a way of erasing petty differences between Christians. As one pastor told me in a very interdenominational pastors conference in India, "When we are persecuted for Jesus we all bleed the same blood. We desperately need each other." Harsh persecution can be very cleansing.

### **God Exposes Sin: 1 Corinthians 14:22-25**

"22) So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. 23) If Therefore the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? 24) But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; 25) the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."

Charles Finney, the Presbyterian preacher of the Second Great Awakening became a controversial figure because of the way the Holy Spirit would work during his revivals. It was said that when Finney arrived in a new town, the presence of God with so much conviction of sin would accompany him that people would leave their jobs and seek a place to repent and get right with God even before his revival meetings began. In his preaching, he often referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Hound Dog from Heaven" because of the way He exposed sin and brought people to contrition and repentance.

Such seemed to be the case in the early church. In the above text, Paul infers that the gift of tongues was sometimes met with mocking by the ungifted or unbelievers, but then they were exposed by those with the gift of prophecy. The secrets of their hearts were disclosed and they would fall on their faces and worship God, declaring that "God is certainly among you."

I have seen this happen. I have watched gang members, hecklers, and mockers come into some of our events to interrupt our meetings and cause trouble only to be subdued by the presence of God. It is not uncommon for some of them to cry out to God in repentance.

In one case, I witnessed a major breakthrough in the case of a spiritually indifferent married couple who were close to divorce. They appeared to want help with their marriage, but were making no progress. By all outward appearances, they looked like a good Christian couple.

They had invited me and a few guests over to their home to seek counsel. I had a few Christian friends visiting me, one of whom had recently been saved from a life of hardcore drug addiction and the other was in Christian worship band. The conversation was going absolutely nowhere as far as offering hope for the marriage.

Suddenly, the newly-saved believer started speaking very loudly in tongues for a few minutes. To say it was awkward would be an understatement. I felt like crawling under the coffee table. After a moment of silence, my other friend started addressing them very boldly, each in turn in a prophetic voice. He accused the man of multiple affairs and included the names of his lovers. He then turned to the wife and did the same thing. He accused her of equally sinful and shameful acts. When he finished, he just sat silently looking at them.

I was waiting for them to throw us out of the house. Instead, they both broke down in deep confession and repentance. The Hound Dog from Heaven had exposed them. The games were over. They fell on their faces declaring that God was certainly among us.

Never play games with God. He knows the secrets of your heart and will expose your sin. That is what happened to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. Their sin and deception was exposed. They were seeking to be leaders in the church, but God would have no part of it. Peter exposed them through his prophetic gifts and God took their lives.

The result was recorded in Acts 5:11. It says; "And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things." A fearful reverence for God spread through the whole region. I sometimes wonder what would happen if God worked that way today?

I often hear people talk about revival and even pray for revival. But they fail to realize that during times of revival God deals very deeply and personally with sin and compromise. Many times those who pray the most for revival end up rejecting it when it comes because it is so intensely personal. They think everyone else needs it, but then the Holy Spirit begins to expose them. It has been said; "Revival is God's finger pointed at me!"

Over the years of conducting many church renewals and revivals, we have seen God do some very awesome things. When God visits His people with true revival your church denomination, doctrinal positions, view of spiritual gifts, favorite worship songs, or translation of the Bible means nothing. We have seen God bring deep conviction on pastors, elders, deacons, business

people, and prostitutes with equal impact during the same service. An awesome awareness of the Holy presence of God falls on His people and they are stripped to the core in His presence.

It might best be compared to 2 Chronicles 7:1-3 when all the people fell on their faces on the pavement before God. The same fire fell in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. The same convicting fire can fall any time people come into the presence of the Holy Spirit. It can last for a moment, days, weeks, and even years. For the early church, the presence of God was among them for a long time.

But remember; God's presence is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29) The Holy Spirit is not into religion; He is into renewal, regeneration, washing, cleansing, and sanctifying. He deeply changes people. But He can be resisted, grieved, and ignored. That's when Christians became cold, carnal, petty, bitter, and indifferent. That's what happened to the church in Corinth. That's what's happening to many churches today.

### **Jesus Communicating With His Early Church: 1 Corinthians 14:26-33**

"26) What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27) If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; 28) but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. 29) And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 30) But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. 31) For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32) and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; 33) for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

This is a very important text of early church history. It is the only recorded description in the Bible of what a church service looked like for the early believers. There are a few other glimpses given here and there, but this is by far the most complete.

It must be noted that the early believers did not yet have the finished canon of New Testament writings. Why is that important? They could not go back to the written Word to validate truth from error as we can today. They were pioneers on a new frontier.

As a result, every word of prophecy had to be examined carefully. That is the significance of verses 29-33. Each utterance was judged carefully and the spirit of the prophets were subject to the prophets. They were on constant guard against error and false teaching which could creep in so easily.

At the same time, this context is a beautiful picture of Jesus speaking through His body to His body. Every believer participated. They came prepared to share an Old Testament Psalm or elaborate something the Holy Spirit had taught them that week. Others would share a revelation from God.

I take it that the “revelation” was in accordance with Ephesians 1:17-18 and 1 John 2:27. It was merely a spiritual insight and not something that was intended to become part of the infallible biblical canon. They simply shared what God had been teaching them.

Ephesians 5:18-21 suggests there was also ample time given to singing, praise, worship and prayer. The early Christians knew how to celebrate Jesus and worship.

Still others would participate through the manifestation gifts as listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. I could argue that these gifts were intended primarily for Christian assemblies. They were the primary means of Jesus speaking to His people through His people by the Holy Spirit. They were intended to edify and build up the body.

This is why attendance at these services was so important, especially in outlying areas like Galatia, Ephesus, or Corinth where there was only one local church. There were no Christian books, Bible commentaries, Christian radio stations, or alternative church services. You were either involved and plugged in... or you missed out completely.

I encourage you to set aside your bias and tainted views of “evangelical”, “charismatic” or “Pentecostal”, and go back and read this context several times with the simple motive of trying to understand the assembly services of the early believers. This simple exercise will open up many new and valuable insights into 1 Corinthians 11-14 and how Jesus communicated with His early church.

### **The Oracle of the gods: 1 Corinthians 14:34-36**

“34) Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35) And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. 36) Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?”

Ok, let’s touch on a controversial subject. Let me start by saying this is not a personal hobby-horse of mine. Why? Because I suspect the historical rationale behind these verses has long been lost in western culture. Stick with me as I unpack “the Oracle of the gods” that was everywhere in the ancient world. Grab a cup of coffee, sit back, and let’s take a trip back in history.

It is very important to note where these verses come in the context of this letter to the Corinthians. Paul had previously mentioned women having their heads covered while praying and prophesying. (See 1 Corinthians 11:5) He was by no means saying women do not have the manifestation gifts, nor was he saying they were not allowed to pray or sing during worship. Something else must have been happening here.



Instead, I believe he was talking about the time in the service when teachings, revelations, tongues, interpretations, or prophecies were publicly given from the above verses in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33. It was during this part of the service that the “the spirit of the prophets were subject to the prophets.” Every word was carefully evaluated because “God was speaking to His people.” Notice that hymns, spiritual songs, testimonies, and praying were not mentioned in these verses, but they were obviously part of the church service. So what was happening?

In my last post, I made the point that the New Testament canon was not yet complete at this early period of church history. As a result, the prophets and teachers carefully evaluated and guarded every word spoken during this time of the church assembly. They understood this was a time for God to speak through His approved leaders. It was not a time for newcomers, unauthorized visitors, women, or children to speak. It was guarded very carefully.

Notice that Paul mentioned “the Law” also establishes this practice. A similar practice was used in the Old Testament temple service and in the synagogues. The priesthood and rabbinical system was very screened and approved and appointed for men only. Even laymen were excluded from these roles.

But there seemed to be another issue at play behind this practice. Paul hinted at something in 1 Timothy 2:12-14. In these verses and also briefly in 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul pointed out that Satan deceived Eve at the time of the fall but not Adam. Women are very spiritual and I might argue that many times they are more so than men. It seems that Satan can exploit this disposition to his own advantage.

This was punctuated for the early Christians as they traveled around the Greek Empire. Everywhere there were temples to Greek goddesses like Artemis in Ephesus (See Acts 19:23-41) or Aphrodite in Corinth. These feminine goddesses spoke to the people through many priestesses and spiritists who were oracles for the gods and goddesses. *Note that the oracles for the gods were mostly women in those religions.*

This is why Paul and Silas were beaten publicly and thrown in jail in the city of Philippi for casting a demonic spirit out of a slave girl who practiced divination. (See Acts 16:16-21) Women in almost all non-Jewish culture and religions were the mouthpiece for the gods. They provided essential services for the people on behalf of the gods.

I believe this was what motivated Paul in Gentile regions to implement 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 during the 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 portion of the church assembly. That may sound confusing but it makes perfect sense when you read the context.

The practice of the early Christians to have women remain silent during this time of the worship service “when God spoke to His people” was the exact opposite of secular culture and pagan religions. The Christians were carefully guarding this portion of the service. They did not want an oracle from the gods creeping into the church services and introducing false teachings.

Requiring women to be silent during this part of the worship service may sound like a radical measure, but I would argue that it made perfect sense in the days of Paul. In the religious culture of Greece, if a man and a woman both spoke about spiritual matters, the woman was automatically viewed as the authority. In fact, most of the time she was viewed as the “Oracle of the gods.”

### **Dropping the Hammer: 1 Corinthians 14:37-40**

“36) Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?” 37) If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. 38) But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39) Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. 40) But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

I love the zeal of new believers and the energy of those new to the ministry with a fresh bag of new ideas, but God has purposefully put boundaries around Himself and established high standards for ministry. It has to be biblically sound, morally pure, and financially responsible. It is vital to remain teachable, find accountability, and remain open to constructive criticism.

But there was a problem in Corinth. Some self-proclaimed spiritual authorities had come to power. They were arrogant, self-willed, morally compromised, and refused to acknowledge Paul, the Jerusalem Council or other gifted teachers. (Review 1 Corinthians 4:14-21) They were trying to take control of the church in Corinth and place themselves as absolute authorities over the church.

Chapter 15 indicates they were also trying to distort the message of the Gospel. They were denying the resurrection of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:12) They were steering the church in a very dangerous direction.

As we retrace our steps back over the landscape of the book of 1 Corinthians, these closing verses in chapter 14 take on the impact of a strong rebuke from the Apostle. Though I may be moving into a bit of speculation, it sounds like these deceitful workers were using the manifestation gifts to control and manipulate the church.

Verse 37 indicates they were claiming to be prophets and spiritual, but they were actually power-hungry. They loved saying, “Thus says the Lord,” because to question them was to disobey God Himself. This is when Paul dropped the hammer and said, ... “let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” (1 Corinthians 14:37-38)

Paul was not opposed to the manifestation gifts, but he saw the potential for inherent manipulation and distortion within them. Yellow lights start flashing very brightly anytime someone says to me; “God showed me...”, “God told me you should...”, or “I received a word from the Lord and we should...”. I have had too many bad experiences over the years from this

stuff to act impulsively, but I have also had a few very timely insights. So how do I deal with them?

As you can tell, I am not significantly moved by those words. When they come, I tuck them away and consider the source, measure them by the Word of God, compare them to God's overall leading, evaluate if they confirm something I am seeking God about, test the spirit, see how they line up with agape love, bounce them off a few trusted friends, and chew on them for a while. If they line up with this list, I spend several days in prayer as to what God might be saying. I never make big decisions in my life based on a supposed "word from the Lord" alone.

This may sound like a cautionary note to end these three chapters on spiritual gifts, but that's basically what I see Paul doing at the end of chapter fourteen. God's ways and words always fit into the boundaries of love and truth and result in proper and orderly living. He is not random. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

### **The Full Gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:1-5**

"1) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5) and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

As Paul opens chapter 15, he gives the most concise summary of the gospel recorded in the Bible. Notice that this is the gospel message that Paul himself preached. This is consistent with what he said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. The message is simple, clear, and totally about the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Notice from verses 3 and 4 that the message focused on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This is the message Paul preached, this is the message they received, and this is the message by which they were saved.

They were not saved by merely believing in God, believing in the Bible, doing good works, baptism, church attendance, keeping the Ten Commandments, raising their hand at a Christian concert, or saying a prayer. They were saved by personal faith in the fact that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, that He was buried, and that He rose from the dead. Salvation is based solely and squarely on what Jesus did on the cross to pay for the sins of humanity. They were saved by faith in what Jesus did for them and not by what they were doing for Jesus.

But let me make another important observation. Paul had just finished the most extensive teaching on spiritual gifts in the entire Bible. Notice, he did not say that salvation was based on having a spiritual gift. Why is this important?

If the gift of tongues is a sign of salvation, wouldn't this be the perfect place for Paul to clearly state that point? Two verses prior to sharing what constitutes the gospel, he was speaking about tongues and prophecy, but he doesn't tie them together.

Year ago, I had some good friends who attended a Full Gospel Church. I would often ask them to explain "the full gospel." They insisted that it included speaking in tongues.

One day, I brought them to this text and asked them the same question. They were shocked to discover that Paul did not include spiritual gifts in his definition of the gospel, especially in this context of the book of 1 Corinthians.

I was vindicated. They had to accept the fact that there are many people who are born-again who do not speak in tongues. They are not missing a portion of the gospel that was left out of the presentation.

### **The Amazing Gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:1-9**

"1) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5) and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6) After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7) then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8) and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9) For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

There are three nearly incomprehensible parts to the gospel message. First is the identity of Jesus Christ. He was the innocent Son of God who died to atone for sinful humanity. (John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21) Many died on crosses in Rome, but as Pilate had written in three languages above the cross; "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." Do you know Who He is?

Second, is the paradoxical truth that eternal God died on that old rugged cross. Theologians cannot explain it, philosophers are stumped by it, and atheists simply chose to deny it; but the Creator died on that cross to redeem what sin had marred. (Philippians 2:5-11) There is no greater expression of love than Jesus taking your place and my place on the cross and paying for our sins. (John 3:16) Do you understand what He did?

Finally, the resurrection proved His claim of Deity and set Jesus Christ apart from every other religious leader that has ever lived. Many people died on crosses in Rome, but only One rose from the dead. Romans 1:4 says it this way; “who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” Do you recognize that He is alive?

These three points taken together make up the Gospel. This was the message Paul gave his life to define and defend. (Read Philippians 1:3-30. Six times in this chapter Paul used the word “gospel”.) This is the message that brings the hope of salvation to lost humanity. This is the message the Holy Spirit empowers to bring conversion to sinners. This is the message that changed the course of human history. This is the message that separates heaven from hell. This is the message Satan hates and God loves. This is the message that will determine your eternal destiny.

Read it. Study it. Ponder each point. Pick it apart point-by-point. Analyze it. Check out its claims in the historical record. Meditate on it. Let it sink in until you understand it. And then by all means ... believe it!

This final point of belief is what produces salvation. It brings forgiveness, breaks the power of sin, and sets captives free. But more magnificently, it ushers people out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. It results in being “born-again.”

This is the point at which a person becomes a child of God and everything begins to change. They are sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit and set off on a new path in life. This is the point where they begin to live it and share it with others. Welcome to the amazing Gospel!

### **The Point of Vulnerability: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

“12) Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14) and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15) Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important to the gospel and to Christianity, that Paul issued a challenge to the critics of his day. After mentioning the many post resurrection appearances in verses 5-11, Paul basically told the enemies of Christianity how to destroy the new faith.

I call it “The Point of Vulnerability.” Paul boldly proclaimed that Christianity stood squarely on the claim of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was saying to the critics, “Here is a list of witnesses, go and interview them! Examine the evidence!” Or more profoundly, he was saying, “If you want to silence the Christians and destroy this new movement, here is how to do it!”

Let me share a brief story to illustrate the importance of the Point of Vulnerability.

It was a loaded question. I was attending St Cloud State University in Minnesota to earn credits toward my degree from Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago. I had graduated with a diploma in evangelism and was working on liberal arts credits toward a degree.

The first day in my sociology class, the professor asked how many Christians were in the class. I was among ten or fifteen who raised my hand. For the next thirty minutes he launched into boisterous denunciation of Christianity. He cursed and swore as he reviewed atrocities perpetrated by the church throughout history and then expounded on hypocrisies among Christians.

Toward the end of the class he suddenly got quiet and asked, "How many of you would still claim to be a Christian?" I must admit, he had provoked me. Without a moment's hesitation, I raised my hand and said in a firm voice, "I will sir!"

He then said, "Young man, I want you to come forward, I am going to use you to demonstrate one final point to this class about Christians."

He then said to the class, "I am going to use this guy to prove to you how closed-minded and dogmatic Christians are when it comes to truth. I will ask him one question and I want you to listen carefully to his answer."

After a rude exchange to get my name, he then asked the following question, "Is there any evidence I could give you that would cause you to deny Christ and Christianity?" He then sarcastically added, "Class, I want you to listen very carefully to this answer."

I smiled and said, "Of course there is!" With that answer his entire countenance suddenly changed. The wind was gone from his sail. It wasn't the answer he was expecting.

He then turned to the class and said, "After 40 years of asking that question, this is the first time any Christian has replied with a 'yes!'" He paused for a moment and said, "Please end my suspense, what must I prove to you?"

It was hardly fair. I had recently graduated from Bible college and had several New Testament books memorized including 1 Corinthians. It was like handing the class over to an evangelist. I replied, "With all due respect sir, your lecture missed the point completely. Christianity stands or falls exclusively on the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Then I added, nearly 2,000 years ago the Apostle Paul issued a public challenge to the critics who had vested interest in stopping the new movement at its inception. There were many of them! In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 Paul clearly stated that if the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not happen, Christianity is invalidated! It's over! Shut off the lights, close the door, end of discussion."

I paused for a moment and then continued, "To answer your question, all you have to do is produce the dead body of Jesus Christ! May I remind you, it's been nearly 2,000 years since Paul issued that challenge. Many of the most vicious critics have become converts to Christianity as they've studied the evidence." Saul of Tarsus was among the first.

I then added, "Now I have a question for you", I looked directly into his eyes, "Is there a point at which you will set aside your dogma and become a Christian?" He was silent. Many in the class started clapping.

I did not view it as a victory. My heart went out to him. I wanted to know his story and what motivated his venom toward Christians. I worked hard that semester at gaining his respect. We ended up developing an odd friendship.

One evening, he invited me to his house. I found out he had an extensive and colorful background from all over the world. He had worked much of his life as a "secret asset" for the US government. He was one of the last out of China after its fall to communism. He had seen, experienced, and participated in many things he could not divulge. Furthermore, he had lost his wife and children to an accident years earlier. He was angry, calloused, lonely, and bitter.

Much of his story was "classified." It was obvious by his home that he was wealthy, but also very much alone in the world. We talked at length about Jesus, the Bible, and the gospel. It was an amazing evening with mutual respect. He was a very unique man. To my knowledge he did not become a Christian, but the seeds of the gospel were firmly planted. For some reason, God granted me an unusual favor with him. Maybe it was because my faith was not based in blind dogma.

After the semester ended, we quickly drifted apart. He was right at retirement age and I was new in ministry and starting a family. Our lives were very different. We came from two radically different worlds. I never saw or heard from him again, but my job was done. I commended him into the hands of God's grace, but I could understand his hurt, pain, and emptiness.

I have learned over the years that most critics and enemies of the cross have a story. When we care enough to connect and hear their story, we often win a sincere hearing for the gospel.

What about you? What is your story? What is keeping you from a sincere hearing of the claims of Jesus Christ? He really is amazing. The evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming. The resurrection and "The Point of Vulnerability" is what separates Jesus Christ from every other religious leader. Make sure you are aiming your search for truth at the right target!

### **When Normal is Set Aside: 1 Corinthians 15:5-11**

"5) and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6) After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

7) then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8) and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9) For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11) Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

As Paul gives this list of post-resurrection appearances of Christ, one point stands out with striking clarity. All of these appearances happened prior to the ascension of Christ; except one. Saul was not even a Christian at the time of the ascension. In fact, he single-handedly led the persecution against the early church. (See Acts 8:1-3)

The story of his conversion is told in Acts 9:1-31. Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus where Saul was heading to arrest and imprison Christians. He stopped him in his tracks, appeared to him in a bright light, and audibly spoke to him.

I love the story. Verses 4-7 say; 4) and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5) And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6) but get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.” 7) And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.” Saul arose but was blinded for some time.

Then Jesus had to appear to Ananias in a vision to get him to go and pray for Saul. It was harder to get the church to accept Saul than it was to get Saul to accept Jesus. But God had such a special mission for him, that Jesus had to personally recruit him. He was uniquely prepared by God to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and suffer much in the process.

The story of Paul's life almost defies explanation. He endured more for Jesus and the gospel than any other New Testament figure. In fact, he is to the New Testament what Moses was to the Old Testament. God personally recruited each of them and called them by name. As God revealed the Law through Moses, He gave the doctrine of Justification by faith through Paul. The comparison and contrast is actually very long. Eventually God used Paul to write much of the New Testament.

There is a profound lesson to be learned by this text in the book of 1 Corinthians. God often does things in predictable ways, but sometimes He does something unique and special. Jesus appeared to most of the witnesses of the resurrection prior to His ascension, but He stepped out of the ordinary box and appeared to Saul much later.

But please understand this; when God does something extraordinary it is for a reason. Many may not accept it and what He does may be unorthodox, but you better pay attention because God is about to write a unique chapter in the affairs of mankind. That is exactly how the book of 1 Corinthians began in 1:26-31. God often accomplished His work in unlikely ways through unlikely people.



I believe we are seeing one of these very unusual events unfold at this present time. I confess, I do not understand all of what has happened in our world in the past several years, but I know God is in control. He is working. Something very big and unprecedented is unfolding before our very eyes.

The list is too long to unpack. Everyone knows it but no one seems to understand it. I for one am crying out to God as no time in my life to make sense of the chaos. God has my attention.

### **People Have Value: 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**

“(20) But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21) For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

I do not know what motivated the false teachers in Corinth to deny the resurrection. In verses 12-19 Paul laid out a strong case against them. He made the point that everything about Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Christ. But there is much more to this discussion than mere theological concepts. Stick with me as Paul hints at the eternal value of people.

Paul moves forward and boldly proclaims that Christ is the first fruits of those who have died. We as Christians look forward to becoming very much like the resurrected Christ. 1 John 3:1-2 makes the same observation. He stated that when Jesus returns, we shall see Him as He is, and we shall be like Him. Our mortal bodies will take on the attributes of His resurrected body. The full scope of that transformation for Christians is the theme of the balance of 1 Corinthians 15.

I believe this is the fulfillment of 1 Corinthians 13:12 and what it means to see “face-to-face” and to “know fully.” There will be no need for the manifestation gifts in eternity, because the gaps and mysteries will be erased. 1 Corinthians 12-14 are not the climax of the book of 1 Corinthians. The climax in our coming resurrection as described in 1 Corinthians 15. We have an indescribable future awaiting us.

Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 2:9; “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that has prepared for those who love Him.” I have spent much time over the years pondering this verse. The full putting on of our resurrection bodies will happen with the return of Christ.

But notice that Paul makes an astounding observation. Just as all humanity followed the steps of Adam in physical death, so all humanity will reap the benefits of the resurrection of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 15:21-22) Notice, he says “all shall be made alive.” So this begs the question, “Was Paul saying that all people are going to be saved?”

Not at all, but it does underline the point that all people are eternal and therefore have value. Eternal destiny will be very different for the saved and the unsaved. It will be as different as heaven and hell itself. Revelation 20-22 draws a sharp distinction between the saved and the unsaved and what awaits them.

But Paul's statement opens up another discussion and hints at something very diabolical. Satan is waging a cosmic battle against God for humanity, because he wants to cash in on the eternal nature of the soul and spirit of people. He has something to gain or profit from them. They have value to him. He is not fighting for plants, animals, or this planet. He is fighting for people. Why? Because people have eternal value.

The full scope of what Satan has to gain from lost people is cloaked in mystery in the Bible. I suspect it is much deeper than the proverb that "misery loves company." I dare not speculate. I do know that Jesus spent significant time in His teachings warning about hell. He pictured it as an utterly horrible place. (See Matthew 5:29-30, Luke 16:19-32) Trust me, you do not want to go there!

But let me underline the point that people have value. People did not evolve from animals, they were created in the image of God. God stamped something on humanity that is eternal and has eternal value. The death and resurrection of Christ redeemed what sin and Satan had stolen. There is a very real battle being played out in the invisible world around us for people. Never, never, never forget the point that all people have value.

### **A Mysterious Timeline: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28**

"20) But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21) For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23) But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24) then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25) For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26) The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27) For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28) And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all."

In these verses, Paul presents a mysterious timeline. It started with the work of Christ on the cross, His death and His resurrection and it will continue until "the end" when Jesus will deliver up the kingdom to His Father. (Vs 24)

During this time the text says a battle has been taking place between Jesus and some enemies. Those enemies are not defined or explained in the text. But it does say that the last enemy that He will defeat will be death itself. (Vs 25-26)

The end of verse 24 gives us the clue that these enemies include, “all rule, and all authority and power.” It sounds strikingly similar to Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 1:12 and Colossians 2:15. These Scriptures give the idea that something is unfolding behind human history far greater than what the secular history books describe. That “something” is what is taking place in the spiritual realm.

I would suggest that the mystery of life and the unending pursuit of humanity to find meaning and purpose in life cannot be achieved until this aspect of the spiritual realm is put into the equation. In other words, you and I are part of something much bigger than what is being covered in the evening news. Let’s stand back and ask a few questions and look at a few clues.

First, it has been almost 2,000 years since Paul wrote these words, “what is taking so long?” Well, let me ask another important question; “What has been happening over the past 2,000 years?” The answer is that many people have been born, lived, and died. Many generations have come and gone. Could it be that this process is the key to the mystery and a central part of the program?

Second, we noted previously that people have value because their soul and spirit are eternal. God created people in His own image. God loves people. Jesus came to bring life, but Satan thrives on death and misery. (See John 10:10). There is a battle taking place and it seems to center around people.

Third, notice that Jesus is locked in a linear battle that has a timeline that will one day come to an end. Verse 24 talks about “the end”. Verse 25 mentions all enemies being put under His feet. And then verse 26 says the last enemy that will be defeated is death itself. Finally, when that happens, Jesus will deliver up His kingdom to His Father. Hmm, the pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together.

Fourth, I must add that the Bible gives a radically different view of creation and human life on earth than what evolution and secular humanism presents. The latter is very random and nonsensical. The former is very purposeful and meaningful.

According to the Bible, God created two people on planet earth and then blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Through sin and Satan interfered with the program, God’s plan of human redemption produced a Gospel that results in born-again people being added to God’s Kingdom. As the timeline unfolded through history, the human population has continued to grow.

So let’s pull it all together and ask the question; “What on earth is happening?” The answer is that God is populating heaven with redeemed people. The past 2,000 years have been part of that program. Human birth, life, and death are part of that program. The battle for humanity mentioned in the previous post is part of the reality behind this program.

According to the balance of 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, when the trumpet sounds and Jesus returns, all the dead in Christ will be raised and those who are alive at His

coming will be changed in a moment –in the twinkling of an eye– and will put on new and glorified heavenly bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58 goes into great detail about these new and glorified bodies. I will not get ahead of the text, but these new bodies will be “heavenly bodies” and will not be bound by the laws of physics that apply to the natural realm. We will be like Jesus and His post-resurrection body.

Let me conclude this section by saying that God’s plan and God’s program are right on schedule. I suspect we are approaching “the end.” The trumpet is about to sound. This present age is nearly over. I suspect the current chaos in the world is an indication that Satan and the rulers, powers, and authorities of this present age mentioned briefly in this text know the time is short.

What an exciting time to be alive and be part of the climax of human history and the birth pangs leading into the next event on God’s calendar! If you are reading this and do not know Jesus Christ, I would not put it off. I consider it an honor to be alive in these last days and share in what God is doing at this time.

(By the way, if you are riding with me in my car and are not a Christian and you hear a loud trumpet blast, grab the steering wheel, because this driver has an appointment with His King and Master.)

### **Daily Application of the Hope of the Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34**

“29) Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30) Why are we also in danger every hour? 31) I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32) If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. 33) Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” 34) Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.”

When you read these six verses, keep the context of Paul’s defense of the resurrection in mind. He is basically saying, “If the resurrection does not happen, why would we be so devoted and go to such extremes for the gospel?”

First, in verse 29 he makes a statement about baptism for the dead that at first glance makes very little sense. I do not believe the early church had a practice like the Mormon church does of having baptism services for dead people.

Rather, I simply believe Paul was saying; “How do you explain the ordinance of water baptism apart from the hope of the resurrection from the dead?” In Romans 6:3-11, he made it clear that the practice of water baptism identifies the new believer who was formerly dead because of sin

with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Through faith in the Resurrected Christ they are born-again to newness of life. Baptism is a testimony that the old and dead self is gone and new life has come.

Second, Paul asks the question, “why are we also in danger every hour?” In the next verse he expands on this by saying it was so bad that “I die daily.” Paul laid it all on the line every day to defend the gospel and the hope of the resurrection. He made this clear in Acts 23:6 during his defense before the Jewish council. He was on trial for the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Third, then in 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul made mention of “fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus.” This has left many wondering if he merely faced intense persecution from beastly opponents as described in Acts 19:23-33, or if he actually faced wild beasts in the coliseum? Whatever the case, Paul endured constant persecution and opposition for the hope of the resurrection.

Fourth, at the end of verse 32 he basically says, “if there is no resurrection, then let's just eat and drink and party and live reckless lives full of pleasure and self consumption because apart from the resurrection of the dead we will never be held accountable for our actions done in this life!” This may be what motivated the false teachers in Corinth. Many believe that after death there is nothing. But that is totally contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early church. (See Matthew 5:29-30 and 2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Finally, Paul says in verses 33-34 to beware of the friends you make and the company you keep, because they can cause you to lose sight of your eternal perspective. If they are pulling you away from Jesus Christ and consecrated living then you are suffering great loss. Never barter away your eternal rewards for the passing pleasures of this life.

In these six verses, Paul lays down some very short but profound arguments about how the hope of the resurrection shaped his daily life. They are worthy of your intense consideration if you question whether or not there is life after death. Paul lived daily with an eternal perspective. If you have not resolved this issue, you are most likely drifting through life without worthwhile focus, direction, and purpose.

### **Something Greater is Coming: 1 Corinthians 15:35-41**

“35) But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” 36) You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37) and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38) But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. 39) All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40) There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.”

Paul now sets up the most amazing discussion of our coming resurrection bodies by answering his critics with some observation from the natural world. First, he notes that seeds must fall into the ground and die before they can produce a new and glorious plant. So also, this present physical body is like a seed for our future glorified body. After death, something new and glorious will come for the Christian.

Second, he looks at the animal kingdom and notes the variety of species. People, animals, fish, and birds differ greatly. God gives them bodies to match their environment and purpose. Fish can swim and breathe oxygen from water via gills. Birds can fly and soar in the air. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Land animals can run and climb while some feed on plants and others on meat. People are different from them all because we were created in the image of God. We can learn, discover, invent, communicate in complex thoughts, and tackle technical engineering feats. People are in a very different category than the rest of the biosphere.

Third, in verse 41 he points to the vast difference between stars and planets. He had no idea of the full size, scope, and diversity of what he was observing. Some are luminaries that shine like stars. Others are reflectors like planets. Little did he know, but many stars he was seeing with the naked eye were actually entire galaxies. Modern science is just starting to uncover the vast amount of dark matter in the universe. There are more mysteries to the universe than modern science has even begun to discover.

Finally, in verse 40 he made an astounding observation. He said there are earthy bodies and there are heavenly bodies. He was pointing to the difference between the physical realm and the spiritual realm. They are both real, but encompass different dimensions of reality that overlap and yet are independent of each other.

He goes on in the next section to elaborate that the human physical body is like a seed that after death will give birth to a spiritual body that is very different from the present fleshly body. We will look at his comparison in the next post, but for now it is important to grasp his argument. Your present human body, soul, and spirit are merely seeds of what is to come in the next life. Don't assume this life is all there is, rather invest this life in preparing for the next.

I must now make an observation for the Christian in the context of the previous three chapters. Being born-again, filled with the Holy Spirit, and having access to the spiritual gifts is a foretaste of what is to come. Our eternal life begins the moment we accept the gospel and invite Jesus Christ into our lives.

1 Corinthians 13:9-13 is a clue that walking in the Spirit and maturing in the exercising of spiritual gifts is but a foretaste of what is to come. These gifts will not be needed in the next life, because we will enter into the full reality of the spiritual dimension where God dwells. What we have now is a mere glimpse of what is to come.

The early Christian understood they were pilgrims on a greater journey. Instead of making this world their home, they looked to their eternal citizenship in heaven and the new and glorified

body that is to come. Take a moment and read Philippians 3:20-21 as it relates to this discussion and what is to come.

God did not create us for this present stage of existence. This is not the finished product. We are just passing through. Something much better is coming. Settling for this life would be like the rose bud saying, "I've finally arrived at my glory." I can only imagine.

### **Our Coming Heavenly Bodies: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49**

"42) So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43) it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44) it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45) So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46) However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47) The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48) As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49) And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly."

Paul now gives the most detailed description of our future heavenly bodies contained in the Bible. The contrast is breathtaking and profound. What is to come in the next life far exceeds what we know and experience in this life. Let's look briefly at his comparisons.

Our current bodies are perishable. They age, suffer from sickness and disease and are subject to accidents, injury, and death. Eventually, according to 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5, our physical bodies wear out. By contrast our heavenly bodies will be imperishable. They will last forever.

Our current bodies are sown in dishonor. They are the result of the fall and resulting curse that came on humanity. By contrast, our future bodies will be glorious and flawless and self-sustaining. In the next section, Paul explained this by the contrast between mortal and immortal. (Vs 53)

Our current bodies are sown in weakness. They are dependent on many things like food, water, and shelter for survival. They are weak and vulnerable. Plus we live in a fallen world that is scarred by sin. Our coming bodies will be defined by power. They will not be weak or frail, nor will they be subject to the consequences of the fall.

Our current body is a natural body. It is restricted to time and space and must obey the laws of physics. By contrast, Paul said our new bodies will be spiritual bodies. After His resurrection, Jesus entered rooms without doors being opened. He appeared and disappeared at will. During his ascension, Jesus defied the laws of gravity and was taken up into heaven. It is a mystery, but I suspect our future spiritual bodies will be much like His glorified body and not subject to the limitations of the physical realm.

Toward the end of this context, Paul stressed that our current bodies are earthly but our future bodies will be heavenly. Most of our limitations in this life come from the fact that our current bodies are earthly and therefore subject to all the laws of physics that govern this realm. The spiritual realm plays by different rules. It seems to be able to interact with the physical realm, but transcends it.

Here is the problem when we face this subject: Our view of reality is limited by what we have experienced. When someone asks, "What will heaven be like?" it is impossible to comprehend or explain. Why? Because our minds and vocabulary are bound by what we have experienced in this life. As a result the secular humanist will conclude that there is no spiritual realm. Their thinking is bound by naturalism.

Paul alluded to this in 1 Corinthians chapter two when he tried to explain the tension between the spiritual man and the natural man. In verse 9 he said; "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." He then went on in the next few verses to say that the Holy Spirit reveals some of these things to those who know God. The born-again child of God has the seeds of eternity sown in their heart, but it is still a mystery.

The next obvious question is: "When will these things happen?" That is the subject matter of the next several verses. We will tackle them in the next post. For now, the above eight verses are enough to chew on for a long time. They intrigue and fascinate me beyond description. I can only imagine.

### **An Amazing Mystery: 1 Corinthians 15:50-53**

"50) Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51) Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality."

God has a sense of humor. As we are studying our new, glorious, and imperishable bodies that are to come in this verse-by-verse commentary of 1 Corinthians, I am three weeks past total knee replacement surgery. Things are going well. I work daily at exercises and three times a week I attend physical therapy. I am ahead of schedule on progress, but I am reminded daily that I live in a perishable body. I can only imagine what is to come in the next life.

Notice that Paul states very clearly in verse 50 that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Our present bodies are made for existence in this current physical world and environment. In this world, we are subject to accidents, aging, sickness, disease and death. Our current bodies are mortal and fragile. They were not designed to stand in God's presence nor to exist and function in the heavenly realm. Something better and very amazing is coming.



But you may wonder, “When will all of this happen?” Christianity has what is called a linear view of time and history. The Bible teaches that God has a plan that moves from a beginning point of time and physical matter through several stages of history and then into eternity. We are currently living in what is called “The Church Age”, “The Age of Grace”, or “The Age of the Indwelling Holy Spirit.”

This is a marvelous age built on the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Those who put faith in Christ and receive the Gospel message are “born-again.” We are forgiven of sin, filled with the Holy Spirit, constantly changed from the inside out and placed into the body of Christ. We are also given special spiritual gifts to empower us to worship God and serve Him with amazing capacity.

As the gospel has been spreading for two millennia, millions of born-again saints have been added to God’s people from the Old Testament era. Their souls and spirits are now present with God in heaven awaiting the return of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:35-58, 2 Corinthians 5:1-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

According to the sequence of events laid out in the Scriptures above, that event will be announced by a loud trumpet blast from heaven. At that very moment, Jesus will return and bring all those who have previously died with Him. Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised imperishable and we who are alive at His coming will be changed instantaneously. (Compare 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 5:14-17)

Paul called this a mystery. (See vs 51) We do not know all of the details nor have answers to all of the questions. But as amazing as this present earthly body is, it is dim compared to what is to come. We will put on heavenly bodies that are glorious, spiritual, imperishable, and immortal. They are bodies uniquely prepared to enter the very presence of God.

But there is one part of the mystery that is easy to miss. All of those who have gone before and we who remain until the coming of Christ will all be changed at the same time into our new and glorified bodies. (See Hebrews 11:39-12:1) In other words, this transformation of the dead and the living into these new bodies will happen concurrently according 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians.

Let me stretch your thinking. It is hard to imagine, but Adam, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Issac, Esther, David, Daniel, Mary, Peter, Paul, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Billy Graham, and many believers you have known who have died, will all be transformed at the same time. Those who have gone before are eagerly waiting for us and for the trumpet to sound just as we are. This will mark the beginning of the next age in God’s amazing plan. I can only imagine.

### **The Victory Cry: 1 Corinthians 15:53-55**

“53) For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54) But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on

immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. 55) "O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting?"

The return of Jesus Christ will be accompanied by the victory cry to an age-old battle. Keep in mind, the last enemy that Jesus will abolish is death itself. (See 1 Corinthians 15:26)

The Bible teaches that Satan has been a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), and that he comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. (See John 10:10) Death and the fear of death is his ultimate weapon against humanity.

But there is a more basic question that begs an answer; "Why does Satan hate humanity?" Or we could ask; "Why has he targeted humanity so viciously?"

In order to answer that question, we need to dispel a commonly-held misconception. Many people falsely believe that when people die they become angels. Nothing could be further from the truth. Angels are individually created beings. People are part of a race created in the image of God.

Satan is jealous and not willing to one day become the servant of humanity. (See Hebrews 1:14) This jealousy not only cost him his high position in heaven (Ezekiel 28:11-19), it also launched him in a vicious battle against humanity. (John 10:10) He knew that human sin would result in death (Genesis 2:16-17), and would put a wall of separation between a Holy God and sinful humanity. (1 John 1:5-7) His goal was to make humanity a slave to sin and to death (Romans 6:12-18), and to steal world dominion away from humanity. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

His plan worked well for a long time, but God made a promise to one day redeem humanity. (See Genesis 3:15) The Old Testament is the story of God setting the stage for the eventual birth of the Messiah. The birth of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross was a mystery to Satan. He knew the Messiah would one day be born, but he had no idea that the plan of redemption was in His death, burial, and resurrection. He thought it was in His birth and early reign.

Death had been Satan's weapon against humanity. He had no idea it was about to become the means of human redemption and the power of the Gospel itself. When Jesus returns and His people put on their new imperishable and immortal bodies, death will literally be swallowed up in victory. That victory cry will be heard throughout the heavens.

It will usher in a new era and the beginning of a new age. It will change the present order of things and put Jesus in place as the new administrator over planet earth. He and His people will rule and reign on earth for 1,000 years. That time frame is briefly talked about in Revelation 20:1-6.

I do not have time or space to develop the prophecies of what is to come, but I am listening for the trumpet sound and the victory cry. I am ready to lay mortality aside and step into my new

imperishable and immortal body. I am setting my faith and hope on Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the Word of God. I can only imagine!

### **The Sting of Death: 1 Corinthians 15:56-57**

“56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57) but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

These two verses are simple but profound. The Law is good because it defies sin, but it also becomes the basis for temptation. For example, the Ten Commandments defines God’s holiness while exposing man’s sinfulness, all at the same time.

Some people who have a merely religious approach to God look at the Ten Commandments as a basis of salvation. They assume that keeping them makes someone good enough for salvation, and surely I would not argue against trying to keep the Ten Commandments.

The problem is that no man, woman, or child can or has kept the Ten Commandments on their own. Why? Because people are sinful. The Ten Commandments exposes human sin and points to the need for a Savior.

But there is more to it. The sting of death is sin. As Paul argued in Romans 3:23; “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Romans 6:23 comes back and says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Those two verses taken together convey the same message as 1 Corinthians 15:56.

But the Bible does not leave people lost and in despair. It points people to Jesus and the gospel. “57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus did not come to condemn or judge the world, He came to save the world. (See John 3:16-17)

Don’t fool yourself into thinking being religious or just trying to keep the Ten Commandments can save you. Accept the fact that you’re sinful and lost and need Jesus Christ to come into your life. Come to Him by grace through faith and live for Him by grace through faith. He will always lead you to victory.

### **Become a Rock for Jesus: 1 Corinthians 15:58**

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

Paul closes his text on our new and glorified bodies by telling the Christians in Corinth to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. This can only happen when all doubt is removed and faith is translated into assurance that what God has promised will come to pass.

At some point you need to settle the question of eternity in your soul. You need to decide if God is trustworthy and if His Word is true. Most people who turn back or end up embracing this world rather than God do so because eternity has not been burned into their soul. They are like the ones Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 15:19, they hoped the gospel is true but they are not fully decided.

God wants us to roll up our sleeves, pull all stops, and live as for Jesus as Paul testified in Philippians 1:21; "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What I have gained from Christ in this life is much more than what the world has to offer, anything beyond that is mere gain. Know that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

### **Transition from Temple to Church: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4**

"1) Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2) On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3) When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4) and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me."

His doctrinal part of the letter ended with the close of chapter 15. Heavy on Paul's heart was the persecuted church back in Jerusalem and Judea. It was a persecution that he himself had started while he was still Saul. (Acts 7:54-8:1) He had personally led the first wave of violent persecution against the Christians.

After His conversion, a time of peace settled into the church, but it proved to be short-lived. (Acts 9:31) The persecution soon gained momentum again. Many Christians lost their jobs and homes. Many fled to outlying areas. Times were very hard for the early Christians, but God used the dispersion to spread the gospel.

But as the gospel spread to gentile regions and strong churches were planted, they in turn took offerings to relieve the suffering of their Jewish brethren. The distribution of these funds to needy Christians was handled by the church back in Jerusalem.

Some argue that tithing was not practiced in the New Testament church. Jesus talked about it and the book of Hebrews mentions it three times. The concept of giving is a common theme in Paul's writings, but significant changes took place.

The big difference was that the giving was no longer for the support of the temple or the priesthood back in Jerusalem. Rather the Christians gave to support relief and ministry efforts through the churches. They financed the spread of the gospel. They gave to support the needs of those in full time ministry (1 Corinthians 9:14). They gave to relief efforts for the persecuted church. They gave toward benevolence issues like widows and orphans and people in need.

The whole subject of stewardship and giving is central to the book of 2 Corinthians. It consumes two full chapters of Paul's second letter. However, at this point Paul was encouraging them to give on the first day of every week, so that money could be pooled together to be sent for the relief of the persecuted church.

So why the first day of the week? Some of the early church fathers noted that Christians started meeting on the first day of the week instead of the Sabbath to avoid confusion and persecution. Jesus fulfilled much of the Old Testament sacrificial system and new wine was being poured into the church. The book of Hebrews explains much of what Jesus fulfilled.

This was a time of transition from the Old to the New. Instead of celebrating the finish of creation, they were celebrating the new creation which was ushered in by the resurrection of Christ. Instead of meeting at the temple and synagogues to fulfill the sacrificial system, they started meeting in home churches for fellowship and worship. Instead of focusing on the Law, they were focusing on grace and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Instead of looking to the Old Testament priesthood, they were going to Jesus and their new High Priest.

The change was not easy. It required many new systems and a radical change in focus and priority. It fell on the early church to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in establishing leadership and structure in the early church. This was far from an easy task because the New Testament does not dictate structure the way the Old Testament does.

At the time of this writing, Paul was merely consumed with the crisis among the Jewish believers. They needed help and needed it desperately. Paul was calling on the young church in Corinth to answer this call. It was time to put their money to work for Jesus. Every Christian will be invited into stewardship to support the work of Jesus in the world through the body of Christ.

### **Prepare a Place: 1 Corinthians 16:5-7**

"5) But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 6) and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. 7) For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.

I love the way the early church made ministry affordable and practiced hospitality. Paul informed the church at Corinth that he planned to come there and even spend the winter. It promised to be a fruitful time of ministry. I am sure Paul would make the most of the opportunity.

He was inferring that they should prepare to take care of his needs while among them. This most likely included food and lodging. No problem. The early church excelled at practicing hospitality. And then they most likely took up a love offering to send him and his team on their way.

For many years our family was involved in a traveling ministry. We traveled much of the year conducting church renewals, special evangelistic events, and numerous ministries in Bible Camps.

One year we did over 50 events that were three days long or longer. It was normal to preach five messages during a three day event. Some events were ten days long and I often preached twice a day. I thrive on that kind of schedule.

As we scheduled events with local churches, they would often offer to lodge us in a motel and then arrange meals at a local restaurant for our family and ministry team. But we encouraged them that it would have a much bigger impact on the church if families in the church would open their homes and host us. Then we encouraged them to schedule lunch and dinner with various other families in the church. It was amazing!

Many lasting relationships were built. We were able to do extensive ministry beyond the evening events. It turned the events into relational ministry. The impact of our time in the community was multiplied many times over when they opted for this plan.

I share this story because it captures the spirit of this text and how the early church took care of itinerant workers and Bible teachers. Ministry is intended to be life on life, but we have made it distant and sterile. This text hints at one of the amazing dynamics of the early church.

The blessings of caring for God's servants cannot be measured. Take a moment and review 2 Kings 4:8-37 if you want to find a Biblical anchor for this principle. Could you imagine hosting the Apostle Paul, Timothy, Silas, Philip, or Apollos in your home for a week or more?

Hospitality is a ministry of indescribable blessings. I have met numerous pastors and missionaries who share the story of how the seed of their call into ministry was planted when their parents hosted missionaries in their home. The call into ministry is intended to be contagious.

### **Seeking An Open Door: 1 Corinthians 16:8-9**

"8) But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9) for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."

Paul was sensitive to "open doors." It's a time of "break through" in a geographical region when the spiritual climate changes and many people become open to the gospel. He mentioned this same concept in 2 Corinthians 2:12 and Colossians 4:3.

In the Colossians context, the process started with a specific focus of praying over a region. Paul wanted them to pray for an open door and for utterance in communicating the gospel. This could be called an awakening for the gospel in an otherwise non-Christian area. Paul used the

same terminology in Acts 14:27 to describe how God had opened a door for the gospel among the gentiles.

Let me make a few observations: First, it seems that the early church practiced praying over regions for an open door before and as they started extensive preaching or church-planting. The number one mistake I see in modern ministry efforts is a terrible lack of prayer.

Second, the early gathering of 120 believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to prayer for forty days before the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. The result was a massive open door for the gospel and thousands were saved and added to the church within a short time frame. (Review Acts 1:14-15 and chapters 2-5 of Acts) They understood this as a fulfillment of Acts 1:4-8 which Jesus commanded them to seek and wait for before moving out.

Third, as ministry exploded in Jerusalem after Pentecost, the apostles and church leaders got so consumed with ministry they neglected the prayer closet. The results were very negative. As opposition set in from the outside, grumbling, and complaining emerged from inside the church. It was like God's favor and blessing had been pulled away.

Fourth, to remedy the situation, the Apostles returned to the priority mentioned in Acts 6:4. From that point onward, they devoted themselves to prayer followed by the ministry of the Word. I believe they were seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit in unction, anointing, and open doors before preaching. They wrestled in prayer in the spiritual realm before wrestling through preaching in the physical realm. Do not miss the biblical order of 1) pray then 2) preach. The results are totally different than just preaching without a prayer covering.

Fifth, notice that this was the practice of the church leadership in the church at Antioch. (Study Acts 13:1-4) As they were ministering to the Lord in fasting and prayer, God spoke to them about how to move forward with a new focus in ministry. As a result Paul and Barnabas were "sent out by the Holy Spirit" on their first mission journey.

Sixth, Paul reminded Timothy that this should be his number one priority in pastoral ministry. (See 1 Timothy 2:1-8) He was admonished to diligently pray over his region, including local political leaders for favor and openness to the gospel. It does not surprise me that Timothy was pastoring in Ephesus at the time Paul wrote to him. It must have been very effective because Paul later observed that "God had opened a door for the gospel in Ephesus." This brings us full circle back to our text in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

Seventh, when God opened a door for the gospel in a specific region, the early church devoted focused time, energy, and resources to that area. When God opened a door they ran through it. That is why Paul decided to stay in Ephesus himself for more ministry focus at the time of his writing this letter to Corinth.

We work with a pastor in India who opened my eyes to this principle. They do evangelism ministry in many remote villages, but they do not start a church in a village until God gives them a green light.

One day I asked him what that looks like? He quickly responded, “we wait for the outpouring in a village.” He went on, “An outpouring follows several conversions in a village. As those believers begin to diligently pray over the village, at some point we see the spiritual climate change and multitudes come to Jesus. That’s when we launch the church and devote significant time, energy, and resources.”

I share that short story because it illustrates this biblical principle so well. This seems to be the model the early church followed in the spread of the gospel. It was not random or haphazard. They fasted and prayed, did some personal evangelism and held some gospel meetings in new regions. Then it seems that they waited for the open door.

It may be that your church is stagnant and your region basically closed to the gospel. Not much is happening or you are even going backwards. My urgent advice is to return to Acts 6:4. Starting with the church leaders or whomever you might be able to recruit, devote yourself to a season of fasting and prayer over your region. If you do not win the battle in the spiritual realm, you will face many battles in the physical realm and live in a state of perpetual spiritual drought. When the outpouring comes, do not neglect the prayer room. Revival is sparked and sustained by prayer.

### **Defeating Adversaries: 1 Corinthians 16:9**

“9) for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Paul was enjoying a fruitful ministry with open doors, but he closes verse 9 by saying, “and there are many adversaries.” I want to take a moment and focus on the adversaries. Every Christian will face them. We live in a fallen world and life is not easy.

In Mark 4:1-9 Jesus told the Parable of the sower and three kinds of soil. There was hard ground and birds feasted on the seed. There was rocky ground and the seeds started well but got burned by the sun. And there was otherwise good soil filled with weeds and the thorns grew up and choked out the seed.

In His explanation found in verses 13-20, Jesus talked about three adversaries. The birds on the hard ground represented Satan. He is always there to steal the seed as fast as he can. He is an adversary we must all face.

The rocky soil represents other people who come along to ridicule, mock, and discourage us. They turn up the heat. Some might come in the form of persecution. But don’t be surprised if other Christians are behind the heart ache, jealousy, and division. I’ve been burned numerous times over the years. Just be prepared for some people to be against you.



Finally, Jesus identified the grounds filled with thorns. Notice, they are all within us. They are the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things. If His adversaries are listed in ascending order, then He seems to imply that self will be by far the most difficult to defeat. That has certainly been my experience of nearly 50 years of walking with Jesus.

The good news, for the seed that perseveres, there is an amazing harvest of good fruit. According to verse 20, some bear thirtyfold, others sixtyfold, and still others a hundredfold. That is huge! Let me explain.

The return Jesus talked about was not 30%, 60%, or 100%. The word “fold” means something radically different than “percent.” Let me illustrate. A 30% return on a dollar is only thirty cents, but a thirtyfold return on a dollar is thirty more dollars. I will let you do the math on the sixtyfold and hundredfold. Let me say it again; Jesus was talking about something huge!

But, be prepared to face adversaries and work through challenges on your way to this kind of fruitfulness. Every Christian will face the devil, the world, and their own selfish, sinful, and deceitful flesh. There is no such thing as a trouble-free Christian life, but any Christian with God’s grace and determination can press on to the fruitful harvest mentioned above. One secret is removing the words “quitting and surrender” from your mindset and vocabulary.

The thing I love about Paul is that he was willing to remain on at Ephesus and help them overcome the adversaries and maximize the open door. I would have cherished sitting under his teaching on this subject of defeating adversaries. One day God showed me how to access his material.

If you want to study “Paul’s Condensed Handbook for Overcoming Adversaries”; it would basically encompass Ephesians chapters four through six, Romans five through eight, and Galatians five. In these chapters he walks the believers through boot camp on facing and defeating the adversaries of life. He spends most of his time dealing with the inner adversaries and finally gives practical training on spiritual warfare and effective praying.

Welcome to the world of open doors and adversaries. They seem to go hand in hand, but keep your eyes on the promise of the harvest of your faithfulness. It is many fold larger than you can imagine.

### **Guarding Fellow Workers: 1 Corinthians 16:10-11**

“10) Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am. 11) Let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.”

These are precious verses that show the concern of a father for his true son in the faith. Paul was about to send Timothy to minister to the believers who lived in Corinth, so he was asking his trusted friends to look after him. After all, this would be Timothy's first trip to the city of Corinth.

So you might wonder; "What could a young, single, handsome foreigner like Timothy possibly be afraid of in a city like Corinth?" Well, Paul had given a pretty good list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The city was very immoral. Prostitution was everywhere and openly practiced. There were also many thieves, revilers, swindlers, exploiters, and cons in the city.

Beyond that, markets had several price levels. Residents always paid a flat low price. Travel-wise people got a better deal, but tourists and foreigners always got ripped off and paid inflated prices. We usually have trusted nationals do the shopping and negotiating for us.

The coins in the money bag of the tourist always passed quickly into the hands of the merchants. Many times this happened by the sly hand of the money changers or professional panhandlers before they even reached the markets.

Let me just say, I have been in these sandals many times over the years. Sometimes even so-called "Christian hosts" in these countries prey on the compassion of unsuspecting Christians. Much fraud comes from wolves dressed in sheep's clothing.

Paul was reminding the Christians in Corinth that Timothy was there as his representative and he was doing the Lord's work. Paul also reminded them that Timothy would be reporting back to him personally. There would be accountability for the way they treated Timothy.

As I read these verses from my current vantage-point of many years of itinerant ministry, I smile and note that things have not changed over the centuries. Fallen human nature abounds and sin and temptation is crouching at the door in each of our lives.

Serving God and being filled with compassion is no guarantee against being exploited. Sadly, many con-artists breed and swarm in the shadows of Christian charity and good will. These two verses hold a lot of common-sense wisdom.

When in doubt, I still err on the side of compassion and trust the leading of the Holy Spirit with personal gifts I may give to the needy I encounter "on the way" in my travels. I do not want the fear of exploitation to crucify personal compassion in my life. I make a practice of allocating some personal funds for "mercy gifts" beyond my usual tithes and offerings.

### **Ministry Unity With Autonomy: 1 Corinthians 16:12**

"12) But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity."

Apollos was part of the “John the Baptist wave” of Jewish workers in Macedonia. His conversion story is told in Acts 18:24-28. He was out ministering as a follower of God equipped only with the message of John the Baptist.

Pricilla and Aquila pulled him aside and filled in the details of the Gospel and the full story of Jesus Christ. He was scholarly, eloquent, and excelled very quickly as an evangelist and defender of the gospel. He quickly became part of the overall ministry in Macedonia, but there is a slight twist: He practiced some autonomy from Paul and his team.

According to Acts 19: 1-7, we discover that Apollos followed Paul to Corinth and spent some time there while Paul was in Ephesus. His ministry had been fruitful even prior to receiving the full gospel.

His previous ministry in the area most likely accounts for the phenomenon Paul encountered in the upper region of Macedonia. He encountered some disciples in this region who were merely familiar with the message of John the Baptist. They knew about repentance from sin, but nothing of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ or of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. According to the text, they caught on very quickly.

Soon a tension started to develop among the believers in Corinth. Paul addressed it in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Some were loyal to Paul, some to Apollos, others to Peter, and still others merely claimed to follow Jesus.

Divisions were developing among the believers and it looked like the church could have split into four distinct groups. The seeds of denominational factions among God's people were sown early in the church. Satan loves to divide and conquer.

Ironically, these same four divisions have plagued the church throughout church history. Some like Paul focus on the doctrine of justification by faith and the ministry of the Holy Spirit with no additives. Others like Apollos emphasize believer baptisms to prove sincere conversions and repentance. Others are more like Peter and adhere to a more Jewish understanding of God and Covenant theology. Still others decry doctrine and theology and merely want to follow Jesus and become more like Him.

Paul would have none of it! He worked diligently to stop the divisions. He wanted the Bride of Christ to be unified and work together for the spread of the gospel. With this tension in mind that settled over the mission field in Macedonia, it might be wise to go back and read Ephesians 4:1-16. Paul worked tirelessly to bring unity to the church.

This text in 1 Corinthians 16:12 shows that Paul and Apollos were unified but a bit autonomous from one another. They worked together and communicated with each other, but Apollos had the freedom to pursue his own itinerary ministry and schedule. It does not appear that Paul directed him the same way he did his own team of young men like Timothy or Silas.

For me, this is a liberating and refreshing study. It may be the motivation behind 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts. It is worth reviewing with this background in mind. This comes back to the word "variety" that we studied earlier. Paul acknowledged a variety of gifts, ministries and affects, but saw God behind them all.

I have always looked for a basis to build bridges and not walls with my brothers and sisters in Christ who love Jesus but have different worship styles, methods, and traditions. The spread of the gospel is much more important than our petty differences. We have much to learn from the persecuted church. They desperately need each other and have little time or resources to waste on petty differences.

### **The Christian MOA: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

"13) Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14) Let all that you do be done in love."

In verses 13 Paul was calling Christians to be informed and know the truth. To stand firm in their faith. Then to be courageous like men and to be strong. Christianity is to be marked by godly character, courageous conduct, and an unshakable dependence on God and His ways.

But most of all, Christians are to be characterized by love. This is a reference back to the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35. Jesus made it clear that agape love is the distinguishing characteristic of true Christianity. There is no exception to this point.

These two verses are worth memorizing and measuring your thoughts and actions by in the coming year. They are both profound and powerful. This is the Mode of Operations for every Christian.

### **The Story of Stephanas: 1 Corinthians 16:15-18**

"15) Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16) that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17) And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18) For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men."

There are many untold stories in the Bible of men and women who excelled and became productive workers for the glory of God. Stephanas was one of them.

We know from this text and 1 Corinthians 1:16 that he and his family were the first to come to Christ in Corinth and all of Achaia. Paul personally baptized him and his family. Now we discover that he and his family devoted themselves to ministry to the saints.

This was the normal pattern in the New Testament church. People were saved, disciplined and became part of the ministry team. They grew and became fruitful for the glory of God. This is the picture Jesus presented of salvation in John 15:1-16. God wants every believer to grow and bear much fruit. (See verses 8 and 16) He does not want them to stagnate and settle into a state of complacency.

When people accept Jesus today we act like they've crossed a finish line. When people came to Jesus in the early church, the starting gun fired. It was the beginning of a new life defined by unlimited potential in walking with God and serving Him.

If you doubt me, go back and study the way Paul prayed for new believers in Ephesians 1:12-23, Ephesians 3:14-21, Colossians 1:3-12 and Philippians 1:9-11. He prayed that God would move them from new believers to godly, mature, and productive workers for God and His kingdom.

There is a very profound truth in these verses. Though it's always exciting when God sends a new and mature worker along to join hands with the work, for the most part leadership in the New Testament Church was raised up from within and not recruited from without.

I have always maintained that the leadership needs of any church have already been provided within the untrained members of the church who are sitting on the sidelines. God doesn't want spectators, He wants participants.

I recently heard that the average Christian grows for two years and then plateaus. That is pathetic. By two years they should be on the front lines of personal evangelism, disciple-making, fruitful ministry, a seasoned prayer warrior, and contributing significantly to the local church body with their spiritual gifts and talents.

Spiritual growth and fruitfulness should be onward and upward for every believer until Jesus takes them home. Don't settle for mediocrity. Don't be average. Sell out to Jesus Christ and be all that you can be on the front lines of world evangelization at home and abroad!

### **The Unseen Ministry: 1 Corinthians 16:19-20**

"19) The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20) All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss."

I barely remember the days of the old rotary dial phones and the party telephone lines. We shared a telephone line with three or four neighbors. A long ring was for the Andersons. A short ring followed by a long ring was for the Larsons. And two short rings was for the Baxters.

It was great having a telephone, but we were never guaranteed privacy. Anyone on the party line could pick up and listen in on a conversation. And then there was the phone operator. She could listen in on any call. I think this was the origin of the term “gossip line.”

I remember working a summer in remote Alaska. Up there it was literally the Radio Station. A few times throughout the day they would depart from regular programming and devote time to sending messages for people over the radio. You could be sure that everyone was listening in on the messages.

Such was the case when the New Testament writers closed their letters. They often sent short messages to and from other people. “The churches of Asia greet you.” “Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is their house.” “All the brethren greet you.”

If you want to have fun sometime, take an hour and read the last chapter of every letter Paul wrote. You can catch up on glimpses of the news from many people. For some, this was the only mention they got in the Bible.

But this did serve another purpose as well. It kept the churches connected across geographical lines. There is nothing more precious than building relationships with believers from around the world.

We live in the best of days for this phenomenon. I would encourage you to utilize technology for the spread of the gospel. That’s the reason I write these daily posts. They are read and shared around the world. To God be the glory!

### **Final Farewell: 1 Corinthians 16:21-24**

“21) The greeting is in my own hand—Paul. 22) If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. 23) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24) My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Paul closed every letter with his own handwriting. Many claim he had some form of eye problem that prevented him from writing his own letters. They get this from Galatians 4:12-16 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. The One whom God used to heal many others had a thorn in his own flesh that God chose not to heal. God has a different plan for each of us.

He then wastes no time getting to the heart of the issue: The greatest priority in life is to develop a love for Jesus. This is more important than health, nationality, gender, financial status, or political affiliation. Do you love Jesus?

In the Greek language, he then uses the word “anathema.” It means, “let him be accursed.” Those who die without a personal relationship with Jesus and love for Him face a terrible future. They are cursed.

He then followed this by another Greek word often used by the early Christians as they said farewell for one another. It was the word "Maranatha." It meant "Lord Come Quickly!" This was the hope, prayer, and heartbeat of every Christian in the early church.

He then assured them of his agape love for them, and closed by saying "amen." It means "let it be done."