

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

*First
Corinthians*

Deane Meatheringham

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER

1. PERTINENCE

The situation, context, problems, and the answers given in this letter of Paul's are relevant to the Church in every age. But it could be no more pertinent for the people of God than at a time when the Church is being renewed in the midst of contemporary paganization.

Corinth was the most cosmopolitan of the cities of the Mediterranean, with the possible exception of Rome itself. It was an immigrant population without the deep roots of tradition and more ready to partake of the vices rather than the virtues of their adoption. The Jews, it seems, were only a minority. There was no Old Testament background to build upon, so that it did not have the accepted authority which it would have had in a place like Berea with its more solidly Jewish community (Acts 17:11). No common habit of thought gave the Christian group stability, coherence, and a form of unity. Speculation, debate, conjecture were rife. This letter deals with a situation which has much to show us in our modern world of pluralism, remissiveness and confusion over authority.

2. THE CITY OF CORINTH

Corinth was situated at the south-western extremity of the isthmus that connects mainland Greece with the Peloponnese.

Placed as it was geographically, Corinth had a guaranteed prosperity, being the natural stopping place from Rome to the East. It was also the focus of a number of trade routes.

Historically a sharp line was drawn in 146 B.C. when Rome sacked Corinth. Rebuilding was forbidden until 100 years later when Corinth was refounded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar. The new settlers came from many parts of the Empire, and while many would have been Greek, the traditions of Corinth would have meant little to them. It became a city where 'Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians and Jews bought and sold, laboured and revelled, quarrelled and hobnobbed, in the city and the ports, as nowhere else in Greece.' (Moffatt)

New Corinth was thus a cosmopolitan city. It was a melting pot of people and languages. Corinth inherited the Greek propensity for intellectualizing, and had a name for immorality.

It was to this important capital of the Roman province of Achaia that Paul

came on his second missionary journey.

While the purifying power of the Gospel was needed in the city Paul probably also saw it, with its floating population, and its geographical situation, as a centre from which the Gospel could radiate.

3. THE FOUNDING -OF THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Acts 18 describes Paul's coming to Corinth from Athens. He was alone. He found hospitality with Aquila and Priscilla, Jews expelled from Rome, and he worked with Aquila at the same trade (Acts 18:1-3).

Paul first preached in the Jewish synagogue, and continued with enthusiastic regularity.

Crispus the ruler of the Synagogue and his household received Paul and his message, but the Jews agitated trouble and rejected Paul.

Expelled from the Synagogue, Paul did not avoid trouble by going to the house next door. Many Corinthians, who came from pagan backgrounds and may have been loosely attached to the Synagogue, responded to Paul's Christ, perhaps influenced by the godfearer Titius, from whose house Paul ministered.

Being encouraged through a vision from the Lord, Paul kept on preaching and encountered concerted opposition and politicking from the Jews, which was eventually dismissed by the Roman authority.

Thus Paul, realizing his commission, preached 'Christ and him crucified' (I Cor. 2:2). By the power of God a lively, enthusiastic and richly endowed church arose in the Corinthian cosmopolitan culture.

The foundation laid by Paul was Christ (3:10f), and others like Apollos and maybe Peter built upon it. If Peter did not personally go to Corinth, he was at **least a symbol** of a certain strand of Christianity.

It seems that this church was subsequently marred by some of the same endemic faults of the city of Corinth. Two which stand out early in the letter are factionalism and philosophical speculation.

4. THE CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

Details of the chronological setting of Paul's letters and visits to Corinth after the founding of the Church can be complicated, novel and difficult for the student. Yet to put the letter in its context, and to make clearer understanding possible, a sketch of this will be given as a summary of the commentators.

- (1) Paul evangelizes Corinth and stays about 18 months.
- (2) Paul writes a letter to the church. Called 'the previous letter' (5:9). It seems this letter was misunderstood.
- (3) Paul receives news about the church from individuals who came from Corinth. Chloe's people (1:11, plus 5:1, 11:18). Paul's authority as an apostle disputed.
- (4) A letter is sent to Paul by the church (7:1, 16:17).
- (5) As a result of these things Paul writes and sends what we have as I Corinthians.

- (6) Timothy is sent by Paul for news, before I Corinthians is dispatched (4:17).
- (7) Paul leaves his work at Ephesus and pays the church at Corinth a hurried visit. This is called the 'painful visit' (II Cor. 13:1-2, 12:14, 2:1).
- (8) The problem at Corinth does not clear up, so Paul sends a 'severe letter' (II Cor. 2:4, 7:8). (Like the first letter, this has been lost.)
- (9) Out of his joy in hearing that the rift at Corinth was being healed, Paul writes 11 Corinthians.
- (10) Soon after this Paul probably visited the church again.
- (11) Summary: This means Paul made three visits and wrote four letters. We can see that Paul's dealings with Corinth are more complicated than at first appear, but it shows the agony of love and personal involvement, from which comes a letter of practical advice based upon rich theological principles. The practical and the principles are all one, and Paul gives us not only his revelation from the Lord, but also his manner of applying it in living practice.

5. PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING

Paul wrote while busily occupied at Ephesus (16:8), and the most commonly accepted date is A.D. 57.

6. THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND ISSUES FOR WRITING

1. W. Baird lists five major problems at Corinth: Division, morality, secularism, worship, and death.

It has been argued that behind the problem of division (1:10, 3:3, 11:17-22) was a form of philosophy or proud intellectualizing. Paul will have nothing to do with this pseudo 'knowledge' which was already corrupting Greek thinking. Pride was at work here.
2. News had come to Paul, independently, of what was happening in the church.
3. The letter received by Paul from the church sought answers to questions about:

Marriage, celibacy, food offered to idols, worship, the gifts of the Spirit, the Lord's Supper, the resurrection of the dead.
4. Paul deals with these issues in his Christology by showing that Christ is 'the wisdom of God, (1:24). This is the one who is the second Adam and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He is the source of true power as seen in his 'weakness'.
5. In dealing with puffed-up knowledge, separatism, and the gifts of the Spirit, Paul expounds the true nature of grace and Christian freedom.
6. The essential quality and indispensable action of love is the unifying factor in the church, as well as the purpose of **the gifts of grace (8:1-3, Chapter 13)**.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 1:1-8

1. TO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH (VERSES 1-3)

This could be called Paul's greeting or salutation. It is this, but personally addressed to the church which he had fathered as an apostle. Hence, Paul begins his letter, as is his regular custom, with three particulars:

- (i) He personally identifies himself. '*Paul, called by...*'
- (ii) There is a personal address. '*To the church....which is at Corinth*'.
- (iii) His blessing or greeting. '*Grace to you*

PAUL - APOSTLE

Paul's authority as an apostle was disputed, which undermined what he said and also unsettled the church (4:lff, 9:1-23, 11 Cor. 4:1-15, 11 Cor. chs. 10-13). He will make clear the true nature of his authority and power in the process of the letter, but from its commencement Paul describes his apostleship as having not originated in himself, but in God. In three interrelated descriptions Paul gives the basis of his apostleship.

- (1) 'Called' is the first description. God is known as 'the God who calls' (Rom. 9:11, Gal. 5:8, 1 Thess. 5:24). His call is sometimes corporate, but always personal, because God's calling arises out of his own nature (e.g. Isa. 49:9-10). Further, God's call is always in conformity with what he has purposed or planned. It is not arbitrary, capricious, or fatalistic. We also know that as the Creator/Father of his creation, God effects whatever he purposes, i.e. God wills a certain thing and it comes about (Romans 8:28-30). God's calling is our vocation.
- (2) Paul, secondly, *links his* call with 'the will of God'. God's will flows from his being 'the God of all grace'. It means that calling is not caused by our prevailing on God, our self-determination, our initiative, potential, or virtue (Gal. 1:1, 15). The calling goes back prior to creation and flows from the eternal purpose of God (Ephes. 1:3-7, 11 Tim. 1:9).
- (3) The purpose of the call is apostleship, i.e. 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. Such an apostle, through the will of God, belongs to and is sent by Jesus Christ (who is Lord of all) as a representative of his, and to act in his

name, with his authority.

The grounds of Paul's authority conversely shows the lack of authority of those who, no matter how impressive their eloquence, techniques and human relationships, have not been appointed by God's will, by which men alone are appointed to genuine service (II Cor. 10:12-18, 11:12-23, cf. Jer. 23:16-40).

Paul's companion is 'the brother' Sosthenes. If the right translation is 'our brother' then he could be from Corinth, and maybe he was converted subsequent to Acts 18:17 where a man of that name was the leader of the synagogue. But we are not certain. That they were brothers is a warm description of the unity of the church as a family.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH (VERSE 2)

Paul will spend most of this letter pastoring the problems of the Corinthian church. But first he reminds them of what and who they essentially are by the nature of God's gracious calling. They are identified by four qualities:

- (1) First, they are the church of God. (The founding and geography, history and background are found in the introductory first study). They are the 'ekklesia'. This word became the characteristic way of describing believers. From its secular background the word means an assembly of people. Ekklesia translates the O.T. word for the 'assembly' or 'the congregation' (cf. Acts 7:38). For our- immediate needs we can say that the church is that assembly of people called together by God, and built upon Jesus Christ the true foundation (Matt. 16:18, 1 Cor. 3:11). It is the people of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who are the body of Christ. Paul spells out the unity, gifts and nature of this people in the progression of the letter.
- (2) The local church of God at Corinth is the microcosm of the macrocosm - the local manifestation of that people of God who universally call on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord. To call on the name is to use the name of Yahweh in faith and worship (Gen. 4:26, 12:8, etc.).
- (3) The people of God are those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus'. Sanctified is a perfect participle indicating that the people of God are already sanctified. The word has the idea of being set apart for God's use and being therefore holy. This holiness is not attained by believers doing it, but in Jesus Christ who cleansed and washed his people in the cross and in the application of his finished work by the Holy Spirit. See 6:11, cf. I Peter 1:2, 2:9f, Heb. 10:14, 11 Thess. 2:13.
- (4) The people of God are called to be saints. This again is God's call and the vocation of all the people of God. The saints are those set apart by God, and should be seen in the light of Daniel 7:22-27.

BLESSING OR GREETING (VERSE 3)

Grace is God's love going out to do us good for our sakes, in spite of what we are and what we deserve. Freely and unsolicited, God bestows on us all of his gifts, making us his sons and the heirs of all his covenant promises.

The church at Corinth was formed out of grace. Many of their problems came from forgetting grace and living against it. To know grace is to know peace - peace with God, ourselves and with each other. It is in grace that we each stand now - and continuously (Rom. 5:1-5).

All of this comes from the God of all grace, the gracious Father who has shown himself in Jesus Christ, and who, by that same grace, has brought forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross, as Lord.

2. THANKSGIVING FOR THE BOUNTY OF GRACE (VERSES 4-8)

Paul is thankful to God for the working of grace in the Corinthian believers. It is by grace that they are saved (Ephesians 2:8-10, 11 Tim. 1:9-10, Titus 2:11, 3:3-7, etc.), and Paul specifies that it is by grace that they are *endowed* and *sustained* for the life of faith.

- (1) By grace they (we) are *enriched* in Christ. This enrichment is in 'every way' (v.5a), in everything that is under discussion, in all that they possess, so that by grace we lack nothing for the Christian life. Grace is total. See Ephesians 1:3, Romans 8:32, 11 Peter 1:3ff, I Cor. 15:10, 11 Cor. 12:9, Gal. 5:2-6, 1 Cor. 4:7.
- (2) By grace they (we!) were endowed I with all speech and and all knowledge' (v.5b). Speech ('logos') is more than 'utterance', or ecstatic talk, as it includes thought as well as the expression of that in language. It has content, for it relates to knowledge. Knowledge is that apprehension of truth which comes by the revelation of the Spirit. It means knowing God and seeing the world with a knowledge which flows from that relationship. Speech is the outflow of such knowledge (e.g. as on the day of Pentecost - Acts 2:11 - where the Spirit of truth communicated the truth of Christ's Lordship to the disciples - leading them into all the truth -hence their bearing witness to the truth. John 15:26-27, 16:13, Acts 1:8).

Such speech would include speaking in tongues, and prophecy, (14:1ff) or the utterance of wisdom and knowledge (12:7). Much attention is given to this phenomenon in the Corinthian letters (8:1, 7, 10, 11, 12:8, 13:28, 14:6, 11 Cor. 2:14, 4:6, 6:6, 8:7, 10:5, 11:6). The problem was that it became divorced from grace and love, and led to exaggerated individualism and elitism (8:1, 11, 13:1-2).

- (3) This endowment of grace was the endowment of spiritual gifts to the church. 'Charis' grace and (v.4) 'charismatic', gifts of grace (v.7). The gift of grace is Christ himself who gives the gift of the Spirit, and incorporated in the gift are the gifts for ministry (Ephes. 4:7ff, etc.).

The gift of the Spirit is the confirmation of the testimony of Christ. This testimony would be Paul's preaching Christ crucified, which itself is the living testimony of Christ himself (II Tim. 1:8, Rev. 19:10, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14, 17). The testimony is validated in the believers by the Spirit.

- (4) Grace sustains (vs.8-9). The gift of the Spirit is the foretaste and the guarantee of the good things to come, while the gifts lead us on to that end, i.e. 'the day of our Lord'. The Bible describes this climax of history in **numerous ways**, but here it is the revealing of Christ, the Christ who reigns now as Lord, to be acknowledged as Lord by all (Phil. 2:9-10). Having been justified once for all, and purified by the judgement of God's grace in the cross of Christ we cannot be accused in him, and our justification will be ratified and seen to sight (Romans 8:31-34).

The guarantee and confidence of this is **the God who calls, does what he says**, is utterly faithful, continues his work to the end, and we all share together in the fellowship of his people, through the fellowship of the Son (II Tim. 3:11-13, 1 John 1:6-7).

3. SUMMARY

As we shall soon see, there was dissension, factionalism and rivalry in the Corinthian church. Paul begins his letter by reassuring them in his thanksgiving for the work and power of God's grace in their lives, personally and corporately. Grace is the power which melts rivalries and is the source of true unity for those in the fellowship of Christ. They were living against this grace, having forgotten what and who they were with its ensuing destructive results. It will be back to grace, seeing the true nature of love and power, so that knowledge and the gifts of the Spirit will be used for the unity of the church.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 1:10-31

As brethren of the one fellowship in Jesus Christ who had been richly embraced into the people of God through God's sheer grace, the church at Corinth was living against what it was. This contradiction was splitting the church into parties. Such 'taking a stand' was the vice of all Greek history. E. M. Blaiklock says: 'Faction inhibited the coherence which might have preserved Greek freedom in the threat of Macedon, and later of Rome.' (*Paul and the Corinthians*, Tyndale Paper, May 1973). Such black and white mental attitudes, often based on a pseudo claim for wisdom, affected the Corinthian church. Such worldly wisdom always divides the church (e.g. Galatia), having a false view of knowledge, power, and status (as also at Colossae) which has forgotten, or begun to forget the true nature of the Kingdom of God.

In the verses that follow, Paul as a wise pastor seeks to restore the situation with not mere pragmatic advice, but a coming back to the true nature of things. As he sees people aligning themselves with particular ministries, he shows the true nature of ministry, and reaffirms the way of true wisdom and power which all flows from the God of all grace.

1. ELITISM AT CORINTH (1:10-17)

The elitism was a form of superiority stemming from an individualism focussing on the realm of gifts, especially in the area of speculation or knowledge and speaking power. The gifts of knowledge and speech which they had been given became a form of human achievement and status. Paul deals with it by an appeal for unity in verse 10, a description of the rivalry in verses 11-12, and a testimony of the nature of his ministry in verses 13-17.

(i) The Appeal for Agreement (*Verse 10*)

Paul's appeal or exhortation is based first on the nature of their relationship, viz. the fact that they are brethren. Compare verse 1, 'our brother...', verse 2, 'called to be *saints together...*' verse 3, 'God *our Father...*', and in verse 9 where the church consists of those 'called into the *fellowship* of his Son...'. This is a family where God is Father and all are brothers in Christ, to one another, and to Paul.

Secondly, the call for agreement has its authority of 'the name of our Lord...It is through Christ that all are related and that Paul has authority

for building them up in unity (II Cor. 10: 8, 13: 10)

Negatively the appeal is that there be no 'dissensions' (lit. '*schismata*', rending, tearing to pieces). This has not yet happened in the sense of the church being torn apart, but the divisions were internal - real and hurting.

Positively the appeal is '*legete*' - *to be* saying the same thing. Their disunity was a matter of mind and opinion. They were saying different things and holding different opinions (Phil. 2:5).

(ii) THE NATURE OF THE DISAGREEMENT (VERSES 11-12)

Chloe's people or her household is unknown (see Study One) but a personal report came about contentions and strife in the church (*erides*, II Cor. 12:20, Rom. 1:29 - 'strife' - quarrelling) which split them into groups and factions. This kind of elitism has a thrust for superiority in it, a drive to be shown to be right and a disdain for the others who don't act or see it your way. Each group had its own slogan, or catchword, which centred in three personalities who became the focal point of dimension, and actually caused four rival groups.

- (a) *The Paul Group*. This implies that there were those who stood with Paul against the others. Probably they exaggerated and thus falsified his views.
- (b) *The Apollos Group*. Apollos, after being instructed by Priscilla and Aquila, came to Corinth subsequent to Paul's founding the church. Acts 18:24 tells us that he was a learned Jew from **Alexandria**. It has been suggested that his particular style of teaching, and his eloquence may have attracted partisans. But Paul makes no difference between them, as we shall see in 3:6-9, but insecure people will pit one minister against the other not only to divide, but also to take personal advantage of the situation.
- (c) *The Cephas Group*. Cephas is Aramaic for Peter. We have no evidence as to whether Peter actually visited Corinth. Some think it probable by reason of the existence of the party. However, it could well be that this group were similar to the Judaizers who came to Galatia, posing as representatives of the Jerusalem apostles, questioning Paul's apostleship and imposing Jewish laws on the Gentile believers (Gal. 2, cf. Acts 15:5). 'We are dealing here with fundamental problems that touch not only the structure of the Corinthian church, but the history of primitive Christianity as a whole.' (C. K. Barrett's Commentary, p.44).
- (d) *The Christ Group*. In the elitism of Corinth, while some may have professed their allegiance to this or that group, others set up the non-party, party! 'Others may profess their allegiance to this or **that apostle - my allegiance is to Christ alone.**'

(iii) Paul's Testimony to the Nature of Ministry (Verses 13-17)

Paul now uses the nature of his ministry as an apostle to demonstrate the falsity of party personalities, in particular by showing where the real power of the Gospel originates and the true wisdom of that power. He does this in three ways:

(a) The Gospel is Christ - not Paul (or Any Other Man): V.13.

Following on from those who said they belonged to Christ, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions. This Christ is not shared out, parcelled out, or divided. Some think this may mean that by their divisions Christ has been divided up. But it seems better to see it as saying, 'Christ is not divided, but **you are behaving as if he were.**' But Christ is one (12:12, cf. II Cor. 10:7).

Paul is the servant of Christ. It is Christ who redeems by his unique action of the cross and into Christ's name - person, authority - that we are baptized (Acts 2:38, 8:16, Romans 6:3, Matt. 28:19, 1 Peter 3:21).

(b) Paul Puts Baptism in Its Right Perspective: Vs. 14-16.

Except for the early converts at Corinth Paul did not baptize. Crispus was the, head of the synagogue (Acts 18:8), and Gaius is best identified with Romans 16:23, and was host to Paul -and the whole church (not to be confused with the man spoken of in Acts 19:29, of Macedonia, or in 20:4, of Derbe). Stephanas was the head of a household and in 16:15 is given deference because of his ministry to the Christian community.

Is Paul disparaging the ordinance or sacrament of baptism? From 12:13 we can see he assumes that all were baptized (cf. Romans 6, etc.) . Others in the church probably baptized later converts., after Paul had baptized the first. But baptism could be turned into a cult or a new legalism, or attached to personalities who gave it an added significance beyond the gospel.

(c) A Preacher of the Gospel: V.17.

This is what Paul is about - to preach - which is the essence of his apostleship. This is why he was *sent (aposteilen)*, and this itself would call people to repentance, faith, baptism.

The preacher's gospel centres in the cross of Christ, this he proclaims; this works its own power, is not dependent upon the wisdom or communication skills of the preacher. If it were, then the cross is overshadowed, and so it dwindles to nothing and its significance is lost.

2. THE WISDOM OF GOD AND MAN'S WISDOM (1:18-25)

Now Paul gives more detail of the content of his preaching. The party factions bear witness to an overvaluing of man's wisdom, and in that overvaluation, a failure to understand the true nature of the gospel.

Paul states his argument in verse 18, then proceeds to affirm it by showing the failure of the world's wisdom and the victory of God's wisdom.

(i) The Folly and Power of the Cross (Verse 18)

'Perishing' and 'saved' are both present **participles, meaning that both are a process.** But the process is of those in **either state.** The Scriptures teach that we are saved (crisis), we are being saved (process of the saved), and we will be saved (the eschatological consummation of the salvation). The same process is true of those perishing. Cf. Romans 1:16, 18, 9:22, 13:11, and more.

Those on the way to destruction find the cross stupid and therefore reject

it, whereas those who have been saved (liberated, redeemed, restored, etc.) know the cross to be a present, operative, effective power -now.

(ii) The Failure Of the World's Wisdom (Verses 19-20)

'Wisdom', both God's and man's, is a study of its own (see NCPI's Living Faith Study No. 35, and other relevant articles in Bible Dictionaries, etc.). Wisdom is not in itself evil, nor is the human gift of reason or intellect to be disparaged. All of us philosophize in one way or another, and God is 'the only wise God', in whose image we are made. Wisdom is knowing God and his creation, and living in it. Because of man's rebellion he rejects God and re-rationalizes the world and his place in it. This is the wrong use of the powers he has. 'True wisdom is knowing things as they are, and knowing how to live in them, and to live in them with knowledge and discernment.' (G. C. Bingham) Because of man's ego-centred view of things he cannot see the wisdom of God, but rather fights it and vaunts himself against it, but by his intellectual powers and religious ritual (see Romans 1:19ff).

Paul's quote from Isaiah 29:14 (33:18f, cf. **Psalm 33:10**) predicts the overthrow of man's wisdom. The verse speaks of its judgement, the judgement which is effected by the word of the cross.

Verse 20 means that where the cross is preached the wisdom of man cannot stand (Psalm 2). This wisdom is divided into three categories:

- (a) *The wise man*. It is the vice of all shallow philosophy that it breeds pride. Greek philosophy was disputations, and it is the temptation of the debater to score points, to sacrifice truth to rhetoric and to exalt language above real thought. God puts this arrogance to flight.
- (b) *The scribe*. This may well be the wisdom of the world using Scripture to substantiate its view, and so systematizing God so that theology is used against him, e.g. John 5:37-47. This is humanistic as well as legalistic (Col. 2:8-23, Gal. 4:3, 8-10).
- (c) *The debater of this age*, i.e. 'aeon' - cf. Galatians 1:4. This present world system. The debater is the one who examines the affairs of the system and argues his points. 'There have always been people who think that they are ready with everything when they understand their own time which they deem important above all.' (F.W. Grosheide's Commentary, p.46).

(iii) The Victory of God's Wisdom (Verses 21-25)

God's wisdom relates to his creation (Psalm 104, Prov. 16:4, Gen. 1:31), which has to do with God's plan or purpose for man and the creation. (Ephesians 1:3-14.) This wisdom is redemptive and has been communicated to man through the prophets (Luke 11:47f). It is the wisdom of the God of truth and grace, it is simple and childlike yet characterized by sacrifice and holiness. Paul shows its victory in the following terms:

- (a) It is God's wisdom that the world (*kosmos*) should not know him through an alien and false wisdom. Man can only know him by a wisdom which dissolves their 'evil eye' in saving them. This is by the folly of preaching the cross.
- (b) The stumbling block and folly is the power of salvation.

God's wisdom is contrary to what fallen man would invent, and so is offensive and idiotic (cf. Mark 8:11, Num. 14:11, 22). By the world's view of things it could not 'see' the signs which pointed to Christ (especially in John's Gospel).

- (c) God's wisdom and power is in the folly and weakness of the cross. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8:22ff, and Paul tells us that wisdom became incarnate in Christ Jesus (v.30, cf. Col. 1:19, 2:3). This wisdom is not like the politics of man (Matt. 20:25-28), so that it is in the 'weakness' of love that Christ overcomes the world, defeating the evil, strength and wisdom of man. (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:33, Col. 1:13, 2:15). Thus the gospel of the cross is in itself the power of God and it works that power (Rom. 1:16).

Note how this affects the view of wisdom, power, apostleship, gifts, and ministry at Corinth.

3. PRACTICAL APPLICATION (1:26-31)

Paul now proves what he has said in the preceding verses by reminding us of the circumstances in which people are called. In a sense he is saying: 'See what I mean in regard to yourselves?' 'The thought of the contradiction God's method offers to the wisdom of men is illustrated by the kind of people he has called to be his own.' (L. Morris's Commentary, p.47)

- (1) *What kind of people were they?*
 - (a) *They were called and chosen.* 'Call' goes back to verses 1 and 24 and relates to the circumstances in which they were called, yet shows that these had nothing to do with God's choosing and election (Romans 8:33).
 - (b) *The Gospel's power is not in any way dependent on the strength or status of men* (Rom. 5:6-8). 'Wise' according to the flesh (v.26), i.e. human nature affected by sin. 'Mighty', a term for people in places of human authority or strength. 'Noble' applies to family and indicates those of noble rank. The world regards these insignificant nobodies as 'foolish', 'weak', 'low' and 'despised'. 'Even things that are not' summarizes that these people simply did not count because the things that are, are the significant ones in the world.
- (2) *Foolishness and weakness more powerful than wisdom and power.* Once there was no church at Corinth - now by God's weakness and power a people of God lives. This is 'to bring **to nothing**' (v.28) the wisdom and power of the world, i.e. 'to render it idle' or 'inoperative'.
- (3) *This takes away man's vaunting of himself,* which has been his problem, his power, and his wisdom, bringing man into confusion, alienation and death. and restores man to his creaturely glory before God whom he worships. (Verses 29-30. Gal. 2:21, 6:14, Ephes. 3:20f, Rom. 3:27.)
- (4) *It all comes from God* (verse 30) and is a gift.
 - (a) 'Life'. True life (John 10:10, 1 Peter 3:7b, John 4:14, 7:38, 17:3, Prov. 4:23, Luke 15:32, etc.).
 - (b) 'Wisdom'. The cross shows us the nature of God, and reveals

what he has always been. 'True wisdom is not to be found in eloquence, or in gnostic speculation about the being of God; it is found in God's plan for the redemption of the world, which, for all its own wisdom, had fallen away from God, a plan that was put into operation through the cross.' (C. K. Barrett, p. 60).

- (c) '*Righteousness*'. The wisdom of God judged our evil in Christ through the cross. Hence we are accounted righteous, declared free and acquitted from all guilt (Romans 1:17, 3:24, 10:4, 4:3, Gal. 3:6, cf. Gen. 15:6, Jer. 23:6).
- (d) '*Sanctification*'. See note on verse 3, cf. 6:11. We are made holy through the cleansing action of the cross (Heb. 9:14, 26, 10:14, 1 Peter 1:2, 2:9-10, II Thess. 2:13, John 17:19, Ezek. 36:25, Zech. 13:1, 1 John 1:7).
- (e) '*Redemption*'. All these things are the direct consequence of Christ's self-offering for men. He bore the penalty of sin, suffered its wages, and freed us from its penalty, pollution, and power.

There can be no boasting of self-achievement, men, gifts, wisdom, power, etc., so all the Corinthian divisions are based on a wrong view of God, his grace, his gifts and his redemption.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 2

The apostle continues to apply the practical implications of his assertions concerning the nature of true wisdom, especially as this pertains to ministry. He continues to do this till the end of chapter 4. Having shown the work-out of God's wisdom and power in their own lives (1:26-31) Paul now shows it from the simple testimony of his own mode of preaching.

We could call this chapter the wisdom of the Spirit.

1. DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND POWER (2:1-5)

Paul tells us first, *what his proclamation is*: 'The testimony of God'. Second, *what the substance* of that proclamation is: 'Christ ... crucified'. Third, Paul tells of *his own disposition* in proclamation, which can be summed up in 'weakness'. Then fourth, we have *the effects* of his preaching, a demonstration of the Spirit in *power*. And fifth, such proclamation evokes rightly placed faith which is the *consequence* of Paul's testimony.

(i) What His Proclamation Is

It is 'the testimony of God' - verse 1. (Some MSS have 'mystery of God'.)

These are both similar Greek words, but if Paul's preaching concerned the mystery of God this would still tell us that it had to do with the revelation of God's open secret for the creation, hence his 'wisdom', cf. Ephes. 3:7-13.)

‘Testimony of God’ can mean Paul’s ‘testimony about God’, or the ‘testimony borne by God’, i.e. to Christ crucified, or even the ‘testimony initiated by God’. Whatever, it is all linked, because true proclamation concerning the things of God is never mere information ‘about God’, because ‘men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’ (1 Peter 1:20f), which means that such testimony is the very activity of God himself (I Thess. 2:13, Ephes. 6:17, cf. Heb. 4:12, James 1: 21, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Tim. 4:5, etc.). True proclamation is ‘prophetic, (Acts 2: 17-18), i.e. the immediate word of God, ‘Living oracles’ (I Peter 4:11, cf. Rev. 19:10).

The word of God has no need of reliance upon ‘lofty words or wisdom’, i.e. wordy cleverness -those outward or inward means by which men may commend their case with effective language and power of argument (i.e. technique, knowledge and methodology).

Note:- Paul did obviously use speech and arrangement skills in his preaching, (2:16, 12:8) but this flowed from his knowing the wisdom of God, which is that of Christ and the power of his weakness.

(ii) The Substance of Proclamation

Verse 2 tells that it was nothing except the crucified Christ. ‘Crucified’ is a perfect participle, and is emphatic, which means that the action of the cross is a past event having enduring consequences, and by reason of its power and finality is foremost in preaching (1:17, 18, 24, Gal. 3:1).

This preaching is not antiquarian, nor is it sentimental and moralistic, but so preaching it that people are confronted with it in its judgement and grace.

Some have contended that Paul’s emphasis on the cross is in consequence of his attempt to marry the gospel with Greek philosophy (Acts 17:16-34). But Paul is not contrasting his emphasis in Corinth with other places, but with the approach and emphasis of other preachers in Corinth.

Paul determined to ‘know’ this, i.e. for Paul this was all there was, he wanted to know this in himself and to have it as the basis for all his preaching and ministry, and the fountain for teaching ‘the whole counsel of God’.

(iii) Paul’s Disposition - in His Weakness (Verse 3)

He was not an impressive speaker (II Cor. 10:1, 10). His fear and trembling came from the awareness of the offence of the cross to his hearers, as well as the ecstasy and awe in preaching it (II Cor. 5:11, 12:9). But it is in this disposition that Paul could not refrain from preaching the cross, and in this disposition the power of the cross was evidenced.

(iv) The Effects of Such Preaching (Verses 4-5)

‘In demonstration of the Spirit and power’.

Paul’s preaching is not a ‘sales pitch’, but a showing forth a proof -that showed the truth of his message. This manifestation is both objective (it is manifested) and subjective (it brings conviction - 1:17, 18, Acts 1:8, Rom.:16, 15:19 11 1 Thess. 1:5).

The Effects are seen in verse 5, i.e. consequences. 'That', i.e. this is the purpose of such preaching. The cross evokes faith - it works trust by showing the reconciling and trustworthy God. **Those who believe know it was not** the preacher, the manipulation, or human persuasion, but the work of Christ himself.

'Preaching that depended for its effectiveness on the logical and rhetorical power of the preacher could engender only a faith that rested upon the same supports, and such faith would be at the mercy of any superior show of logic and oratory, and thus completely insecure.' (C. K. Barrett's Commentary, p.66)

2. THE REVELATION OF WISDOM BY THE SPIRIT (2:6-13)

Paul is not rejecting wisdom as such, but only the wisdom of man, or the world; which is an alternate and contrary wisdom to that of God's wisdom. Reasoning based on man's wisdom asks what I wish to believe and to do. In this bind it takes God's wisdom in the cross, brought by the Spirit of wisdom and truth for man to see and to know true wisdom (Isaiah 11:2, Ephes. 1:17f).

(i) Knowing Wisdom (Verses 6-3)

(a) *It is Unlike the Wisdom of this Age.*

As we have seen, this is an evil wisdom, marked by rebellion against God (Gal. 1:4, John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11, 11 Cor. 4:4, Ephes. 2:2, 6:12, Rev. 12). The rulers 'of this age' (see note on 1:20) can be described as demonic (with a Satanic wisdom) and anti-God. They are characterized by the politics of supremacy and power (Matt. 20:25f).

This age has already been judged in the cross, therefore it has been defeated and will come to naught (John 12:31, Col. 1:13, 2:15, II Peter 3:12, Rev. 18-19, I Cor. 15:25).

Being in this prejudiced mind-set the world rulers could not (because they would not) see the wisdom of God's plan to glorify his creation, they rejected and crucified 'the Lord of Glory', i.e. 'the glorious Lord'. Jesus is this because

- (1) As the true Son he reflects the Father's glory.
- (2) The Father gives the Son all of his glory 'to go to the cross - his hour.
- (3) The Father is glorified in the cross by the Son.
- (4) The Son has been glorified and as a man reigns now as the glorious Lord.

(b) *Those Who Receive the Wisdom of God.*

Paul calls this 'the mature', 'the perfect', or 'the full-grown' (Vincent). Who are the mature? Are they a separate group who have remained out of the immature squabbles of the Corinthian church? Some would think so, and compare them with those who are behaving as carnal men in 3:1-4. Are there, then, two groups of Christians? But this was already a problem at Corinth which Paul is seeking to heal.

The word 'mature' is the Greek word *teleioi*, from *telos* which also carries the strong meaning of goal. Hence those who are mature have reached the goal (I John 4:12). Have some Christians reached the goal and others not? Is there one message for those who have **and another for those who have not?** Yet Paul preached the same message to both.

Those who are 'mature' may well be those who have come to the goal of Christ crucified - **the wisdom and power of God.**

Now in verse 6 Paul says that to these he goes on speaking. It could well be that those who move into the kind of things that the Corinthian believers had moved into will not appropriate the wisdom of God in a continuing sense. Then they would be behaving as children who will not grow up (13:11, 14:20, Col. 1:28, Ephes. 1:17ff)

(c) God's Wisdom is for Our Glorification.

Being secret and hidden, it cannot be discovered by man's wisdom, but by the

Spirit this is the wisdom imparted through the cross. To these it is a revealed, or open secret - they have ears to hear in the new age of Messiah (4:1, 13:2, 14: 2, 15:51, Col. 1:26f, Ephes. 1:9-10, 3:9).

'Before the ages' (cf. Titus 1:2, 11 Tim. 1:9), 'before eternal ages', i.e. prior to creation God's wisdom was our glorification as his sons (Romans 8:18-25, Ephes. 1:5-6).

(ii) Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit (Verses 9-13)

Now Paul explains how the wisdom of God, which has to do with his gracious redemptive plan for our glorification, is made known to us through the Spirit.

(a) What We Cannot Imagine, God has Revealed: Vs. 9-10a.

Paul is showing the mystery character of the message preached. The passage quoted, while not word for word, is reminiscent of Isaiah 64:4, 65:16-17, and is a compilation of both. Paul stresses certain expressions found in both passages. The sense has to do with the plan of salvation - now this wisdom is revealed. 'In his wisdom, God has prepared for his own good things as the mind of man has never conceived.' (Barrett's Commentary, p.73)

It is for those who 'love him' that God has prepared this, not for those who have a puffed-up knowledge (8:1). Such love comes from the wisdom and power of the cross (I John 4:19), revealed by the Spirit bringing us to maturity (verse 6).

(b) The Spirit of God Communicates the Wisdom of God: Vs. 10b-12.

'God is Spirit' (John 4:24), i.e. he is person. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, being the Spirit of the Father and the Son. He is also God the Holy Spirit. This one who is intimately one in love and will with God, penetrates and searches in his knowing of God. Thus the Spirit of creation, who spoke by the prophets, was with Jesus of Nazareth, engaged in the cross and resurrection, reveals the truth -true wisdom - to us. (Cf. John 16:8-15)

Paul illustrates this by the way in which only the 'person' (spirit) of a man knows himself. Being created in God's image, man is spirit, and in his selfconsciousness can know himself (cf. Prov. 20:27).

The purpose of the Spirit's revelation is that we might know the indescribable things that God has freely given us by his Spirit. These things pertain primarily to the ultimate matters of glorification, yet Paul also refers to all the gifts which are given to the church for this end.

(c) The Teaching of this Wisdom: V. 13.

The revelation of the wisdom of God is by the **Spirit and by the Word** of the cross. Understanding the dimensions of this is also by teaching that comes by the Spirit.

'We impart this' may refer to Paul and his colleagues, or to all who engage in this. Applying it to himself it shows us the nature of Paul's apostleship in the Corinthian controversy.

The ministry of teaching is 'interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (Gen. 40:8, 11 Cor. 10:12). This means that through spiritual words people can understand with their minds what they already know by experience. It is a 'putting together' of spiritual things.

3. THE UNSPIRITUAL MAN AND THE SPIRITUAL MAN (2:14-16)

(1) The Unspiritual Man.

This is the natural or psychical man, i.e. the person devoid of the Holy Spirit (Jude 19, John 3:3, 5, 6). As with Nicodemus, we can have an intellectual comprehension of spiritual things, but lack a spiritual comprehension. This person (Romans 8:5-8) cannot 'discern' or spiritually 'investigate' them.

(2) The Spiritual Man.

This is the man who has the Spirit (Gal. 6:1, 1 Cor. 12:13. One man as spirit can be spiritual by the Spirit - Rom. 8:9). This person can discern ('judges'). He cannot be discerned by those who do not have the Spirit because he is living in a different order, and, furthermore, having been judged by the Lord in the cross, the judgement of the world does not count (4:3f).

'For' (verse 16, quoting Isaiah 40:13) if man of himself cannot know God's mind, no one can fathom us or discern us. But by the Spirit the mind of Christ who is the wisdom of God is communicated to us. Hence John can say, 'We know all things', i.e. all we need to know, and this innately, by the anointing we have (I John 2:27, Phil. 2:5, Col. 2:2-3).

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 3

This chapter deals with those who have a carnal understanding of apostleship and ministry, then leads on to the nature of the church as the dwelling of God. For the people of God to behave childishly and carnally with their conceits and factions is to bring God's judgement for destroying what is his. That which ultimately lasts through the fire of judgement is love. All that is not love is burned up. Therefore, don't be childish any longer because if God has given us all things freely of his grace in Christ, such boasting is vain.

1. A CARNAL UNDERSTANDING (3:1-4)

In pointing out the wrong understanding that the Corinthians have of the Christian life and ministry, as well as their wrong living, Paul identifies with them by addressing them affectionately as 'brothers'. Their understanding and practice was 'of the flesh' or carnal.

(i) They Could Not be Addressed as Spiritual Men

For 'spiritual man' see Study No. 4, cf. 2:15. This is the man who has the Spirit. The person without the Spirit is the 'natural man' who does not understand, nor can understand the wisdom of God, and 'does not belong to Christ' (Rom. 8:9).

The Corinthian brethren had received the Spirit (1:6-7, 12:13) and they manifested the gifts of the Spirit. But because of their human weakness (*sarkinois*, cf. Rom. 7:14) and their natural spiritual babyhood Paul could not speak to them as spiritual men, i.e. he had to adjust his message to suit their condition, for **which they were not blameworthy**. Therefore he fed them accordingly (v.2).

(ii) Spiritual Men Behaving Carnally

The word used for 'of the flesh' in verse 3 means deliberately fleshly. (The flesh is that whole realm of human nature characterized by rebellion and the wisdom of this world.) They were spiritual men who deliberately delayed spiritual growth because of a deliberate emphasis on the flesh.

There are **not two circles** or grades of Christians. He **who has not the Spirit** is the natural man. Man *in the flesh* is not a believer (4:18, Rom. 8:5-8).

For the spiritual man to deliberately pursue the flesh is a contradiction in terms (e.g. a 'fleshy-spiritual') which neither Paul nor the Word of God countenances. There is no allowance for it (6:9, Rom. 8:13, Gal. 5:21, 6:7f).

The Corinthian believers therefore were spiritual men. At the first they had been babes in a whole new world, now they had pursued a man-centred spirituality where they preferred their divisions and fights, egging each other on with their boasting of gifts and powers. These things are the opposite of love which alone builds up and matures, giving a disposition to grow in wisdom (I Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5:12ff).

2. PAUL AND APOLLOS (3:5-9)

From the carnal understanding which the people had of Paul, to the true relationship between them.

(i) They are Servants of the Lord (*Verse 5*)

Paul does not ask 'who' they are, but 'what', taking attention away from their own personalities to see their functions.

Some might expect the answer to the question in verse 5 to be 'Nothing,' i.e. they are of no account. But they are servants (a *diakonos* was often a waiter who did the bidding of his master). Servanthood is not demeaning: it is the nature of God to serve his creation and his children continuously; Jesus the Son serves his Father with filial obedience, and those who cry 'Abba, Father' are the sons who freely serve their Creator-Redeemer-Father. This is the nature of the Kingdom (Mark 10:15, 42-45). Paul's servanthood is seen in II Corinthians 4:5, 5:9, 11:20, etc. Therefore neither Paul nor Apollos are self-serving, name-making or Kingdom-building. They are responsible to God as his stewards (4:1).

As servants of the Lord, people came to faith and 'believed' (aorist) by the Lord's wisdom in the cross - the word which brings faith (Rom. 10:17).

(ii) Each Has a Ministry (*Verses 6-9*)

- (a) Both evangelized (v.5).
- (b) Paul planted, being the first evangelist in Corinth. It was his commission to go where Christ had not hitherto been preached (Rom. 15:20, Acts 18:1ff).
- (c) Apollos comes later (Acts 18:24 -19:1). Both planting and watering are necessary for growth (9:7, Matt. 15:13).
- (d) God gives the growth - it is his work and **the way of the Kingdom** (Mark 4:26-29). God accepts the labour of both, working by them.
- (e) They work as one (v.8). To be 'equal' is to be one. Both worked in partnership, not in competition, nor as rivals. Their wages are not their success, but their labour. The reward is in the preaching free of charge (9:18).
- (f) The 'field' is God's. From this field a fruitful harvest is grown by the power of God's word (Mark 4:1ff).

From a field, Paul changes the metaphor to a building which, as we shall see,

is the people of God, a house, and the dwelling of God himself.

‘Fellow workers for God’ speaks of being two yokefellows serving God together, **which is true. Yet the** text also favours the reading that together they work with God, sharing in his work, as co-workers with him in the fulfilling of his plan. This shows the dignity of servanthood.

3. HOW WE BUILD (3:10-17)

The people of God being a building spurs Paul into an excursus dealing with *how* one builds. He returns to the nature of the building in verse 16.

(i) The Foundation and the Building (*Verses 10-11*)

Paul’s commission from God is to be a master-builder. This is according to ‘grace, (*charis*), i.e. it was by God’s grace that he was called, and in the strength of grace that Paul fulfils his commission. The master-builder is the one who superintends the project. His major concern will be the footings or the foundation. There can be no choice of foundation, because Christianity is Christ who is the wisdom of God and the power of God (Matt. 16:18ff). This foundation Paul has laid (Galatians 1:7, 1 Peter 2:5).

Upon the foundation laid comes the super-structure. The quality of material is axiomatic, and it is with this that the church at Corinth is concerned now.

(ii) The Super-Structure (*Verse 12*)

Already Paul has warned about taking care how each man builds, (v.10b) which seems to refer to the other builders at Corinth. They can use inferior and flammable materials, or they can use quality, permanent materials. One is worthy of the foundation, the other a discredit.

(iii) The Testing (*Verses 13-15*)

‘The Day’ is ‘the Day of the Lord’, or ‘that day’, referring to the day of judgement, when Christ appears at the climax of history (I Thess. 5:4, Heb. 10:25, Acts 17:31).

This will be a day of disclosure and revelation, when the truth will be known (4:5, Luke 8:17, Romans 2:16, 14:10-12).

It will be revealed with fire. Fire tests and refines away the rubbish (I Peter 1:7). Fire consumes all that is perishable and non-lasting (II Thess. 1: 8, cf. Isa. 4:4, 31:9, 66:24, Matt. 3:12). It is the fire of God’s holiness; the fire of God’s pure, dynamic love (I John 1:5, 4:16). It is by this fire that the universe is purged, becoming a new creation in **which only righteousness dwells** (II Peter 3:11-13, cf. Rev. 21:1-4).

(iv) What is Manifested?

The precious building materials of verse 12. That which builds up and lasts, according to this epistle and the rest of the Scriptures, is love. (8:1-3, 13:8, 13, 2:9, 16:21-22, John 13:34f, 17:3, 21, Col. 1:20, 3:14, Ephes. 1:9-10). A more

detailed study of this will be made in Chapter 13. Love is all, for 'God is love'. All flows, in creation and redemption, from that love and the new creation will be one in the unity of love.

Therefore worldly wisdom and worldly power, the cause of factionalism and superiority, is 'of the flesh', unlove, and will not see the distance, or stand in the gaze of him 'who loved us and gave himself up for us'.

4. GOD'S TEMPLE (BUILDING) IS HOLY (3:16-17)

Paul now continues from verse 9.

The word used for temple here is naos, which is the shrine itself or the sanctuary. In the O.T. the tabernacle is the tent of meeting where God dwells and makes his presence known (Exodus 25:8). This is where God meets his people (Exodus 29:44). Jesus calls the temple his Father's house (John 2:16, Luke 2:49). In John 2:13-22 Jesus claimed that his body outmoded the temple, he being the real temple. By his sacrifice and the removal of our guilt we enter the sanctuary into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19f).

Now the people of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are corporately the dwelling of God himself, and are his building and temple (Ephes. 2:18-22, 1 Peter 2:5).

Being holy, the temple is consecrated or set apart for God. To deliberately follow the flesh, playing games with the gifts of God is to 'destroy' or 'corrupt' what especially belongs to God.

To be destroyed by God is not to be annihilated, but to lay oneself open to grave judgement.

5. SUMMARY (3:18-23)

In these summary verses Paul reaffirms what he has already said, enlarging on it slightly, but in application reinforcing all that believers have through God's grace.

(i) The Action Needed (Verse 18)

Sin is deceitful, covering itself up so that we can be very 'spiritual', yet conceited (Heb. 3:13, Gal. 6:3, 7). This world's wisdom, by its very nature of pride and self-justification, is self-deceived (2:6, 6:9, 15:33).

Seeing these things are so, seeing as you do the nature of God's wisdom and power, and how he works through his servants, become what worldly wisdom regards as foolish so that indeed you may become wise, i.e. as a spiritual man live consistently with what you are!

(ii) The Reason, Restated (Verses 19-20)

Now Paul expresses it in the sharpest terms. What the world regards as wisdom cannot know what God is about, or the true nature of things, and hence is stupid. See Psalm 2:4 and context.

This is not merely Paul's opinion, as it is confirmed by the Scriptures. (Job 5:13, Psalm 94:11, cf. Romans 11:35.) This means that while worldly wisdom is

brilliantly ‘cunning’, can rationalize that black is white and white black, yet God catches them in their own boxes because they have to live in his true universe of Grace, and the word of the cross powerfully demolishes their arguments (11 Cor. 10:3-6). God knows that worldly wisdom is empty, vain, and futile (Ecclesiastes ‘Vanity of Vanity’, 2:9-26).

(iii) The Reinforcing of the Word of Grace (*Verses 21-22*)

With all this said, the Corinthian catchwording and personality cult is vain, This is because in Christ, and through his pure grace, God has made us heirs of all things no matter which man ministers (Ephes. 1:3ff, Rom. 8:32, 11:29). We are God’s sons, so heirs (Rom. 8:17). We inherit the promise made to Abraham to inherit the world (Rom. 4:13, cf. Matt. 5:5, Rev. 5:10). This is in accord with the creational mandate (Gen. 1:26, 28, Psalm 8:6-9) now restored and renewed through Christ’s obedience to the Father.

He concludes by referring to Christ’s eternal Sonship and submission to the Father. Such submission does not mean inferiority, but is one of being and function (11:3).

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 4.

In this chapter Paul winds up his treatment and answer to those whose arrogance and divisiveness arose out of, or reflected the church's relationship with its leaders.

1. STEWARDS RESPONSIBLE TO GOD (4:1-5)

In these verses Paul deals with those who pass their judgement on the leaders, including himself, showing how he thinks of it and telling that it is God to whom he is finally responsible. This means that it is God's judgement that matters. He does this by showing that the leaders are stewards **responsible to God (verse 1-2)**, that men's judgement counts for little alongside God's (verses 3-4), and an application to leave all judgement to whom it belongs (verse 5).

(i) How They Should Be Regarded (*Verses 1 -2*)

The 'Us' in verse 1 refers to Paul and Apollos, and maybe Cephas. They are to be regarded as:

(a) *Servants of Christ*. The word used here is not the same as in 3:5 (*diakoves*) but one used by Paul only in this place (*huperetes*). 'It applied originally to an 'under-rower', i.e. one who rowed in the lower bank of oars on a large ship. From this it came to signify service in general, though generally of a lowly kind, often service with the hands.' (Morris' Commentary, p.74). Therefore servants of Christ, like their master before them do not arrogate themselves or their office to the heights of superiority, as was the tendency at Corinth.

(b) *Stewards of the mysteries of God*. The definition of steward (*oikonomos*) given in the Lexicon of Grimm-Thayer is worth quoting in full: 'the manager of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward, manager, superintendent ... to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not of age.' Whether he was a free man or a slave, he occupied a responsible position between the householder and his household.

The term 'steward' depicts God as the Father-householder, and the church as the household, with his servants who care for the Family and are responsible to the Father for their work (I Tim. 3:15, cf. Luke 16:1-9, Matt. 24:14).

The stewards' responsibilities are with the 'mysteries of God'. As we have seen, these mysteries are not dark, unexplained enigma, but the wisdom of God now made known. These mysteries are God's open secrets concerning his plan for

creation the glorification of man, and his purpose to unite all things in Jesus Christ 2:1, 7, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51, Romans 11:25, 16:25, 11 Thess. 2:7, Col. 1:26f, 2:2, 4:3).

Paul and Apollos are teachers of these revealed truths, such teachers are underlings of Christ and stewards of another's goods. They are required to be faithful in the teaching of God's revelation, and to act in accord with their master's bidding. This is the key of their stewardship.

(ii) To Whom They are Responsible (Verses 3-4)

Being stewards of God it is to God that they must give account. Therefore the judgements and assessments of men are of small importance to Paul. He is not aware of anything against himself, i.e. literally 'a knowing with' in the sense of having a guilty secret - a guilty conscience. Yet the conscience can all too easily be sedated, or engage in self-justification. Furthermore we know that the conscience is a judgement-maker which can be rightly or wrongly informed. Therefore it is not our conscience that judges, but God's, and nothing but God's judgement can ultimately satisfy our conscience.

Paul does not pass judgement upon himself. No *man is* qualified to act as his own judge, nor as his brother's judge (Romans 14:4, 2:1, 19f). It is God who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5) through the judgement of the Cross (Romans 8:1ff), therefore having been judged, Paul (and all those in Christ) is not judged by any man's assize.

(iii) Application (Verse 5)

'Therefore' brings the application. As the judgements of men presuppose that process of sifting and examination with a view to reaching a verdict, all of our judgements are premature, having been reached 'before the time,'. 'TIME' is in capitals; it will not be untimely, but *the* day of finality - the day of the Lord, and the coming of Christ (11:26, Acts 17:30f, Romans 2:16, 1 Thess. 4:16, 11 Thess. 2:8).

Paul has already spoken of this time being one of disclosure (3:13). The darkness often has the ethical connotation of evil deeds (e.g. John 3:19-21) and shame. With the coming of the Son of man in glory the truth and the light will be seen. All the unlove actions and attitudes we have repressed and covered will be exposed as they will have no place **in a morally renewed universe (Psa. 139:11-12, Rev. 20:11-15)**.

The Pharisees sought the praise and glory of men, bringing them under the power of the world system (John 5:44, 12:43, Romans 2:29).

The elitism, partisanship, and superiority attitude of the Corinthians moved into judgement of others because they were affected by the judgements of others, because they were not living as those freed by the judgement of God to be transparent in their service of God.

2. WHAT HAVE YOU THAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE? (4:6-7)

(1) Paul wants his readers to Learn from the example of himself and Apollos.

In the foregoing verses Paul has applied the nature of true power, wisdom, preaching, ministry, etc. to himself and Apollos. Now he says 'learn by us', i.e.

by our example.

They must not exaggerate the importance of such teachers as Paul and Apollos; they must not be puffed up and conceited; they must not go beyond what is commanded them; they need to recognize that whatever they have and are, they owe entirely to God's gracious activity.

(2) To live according to Scripture.

Some have suggested that because there is no exact or explicit **quotation** from the O.T. here that Paul is referring to other writings than the Scriptures as we have them.

To live according to Scripture means 'nothing beyond what stands written'. What Paul teaches here is in accord with Scripture, and by watching Paul and Apollos they will learn the Scripture's truth about judgement, grace and subordination.

Being puffed up was their problem (4:18f, 5:2, 8:1, 11 Cor. 12:20, cf. Col. 2:18). This meant that they were against one another, and involved in an evil partiality.

(3) See rightly.

See what a true servant is. It is only inflated pride when they fancy they are being humble before a leader. 'For who sees anything different in you?' i.e. 'Who makes you different and regards you as superior to your neighbour?' The answer is, 'Nobody! You only imagine such an image.' Their argument rested on the idea that in following one or the other leader this gave them an upper position in contrast to the supposed inferiority of others. No one gave them a preference like that.

To see rightly is to see that everything they have is a gift from a gracious Lord, whether faith, salvation, the Holy Spirit, or the rich diversity of spiritual gifts (cf. Ephes. 2:8-10, 4:7ff, James 1:5, etc.). Their boasting stemmed from a basic insecurity concerning the origin of their gifts, thinking they had possessed these things in their own right.

3. PAUL'S IRONY (4:8-13)

The Corinthians are prepared to sit in judgement on their leaders and put everyone in their place. They do this from self-imagined heights of power and in sharp contrast to the trials of the apostles, who, in the eyes of the world, are non-entities.

(i) The Supposed Grandeur (Verse 8)

'Filled' is a word used in connection with being full of food, satiated and satisfied (Acts 27:38, cf. Matt. 5:6).

'Rich' by their own achievements. Even if they agreed that God had given this to them. It would include spiritual gifts. But they considered it was because of themselves that they had these riches.

'Kings' who 'reign'. The aorist suggests that they had already entered their kingdom and they were a 'success'. It needs to be seen what they did have in 1:4ff, and that God's people do have all they need in Christ to reign in life. (Ephes. 1:3, Rom. 5:17). But with them such reigning had become infatuation, not

seen as the reign of grace (Rom. 5:21), and unlike Christ's reign as the Servant King who gave his life a ransom (Mark 10:45). Their 'already' was their self-sufficiency.

(ii) The Reign of Apostles (*Verses 9-13*)

The irony of Paul as he shows the trials of the apostles, in comparison with the honour of the Corinthians, makes it evident that they reign in weakness, rejection, and suffering.

The apostles are a 'spectacle' (*theatron*) in **the theatre of the world** displayed to angels and men. Barrett says they are 'Presented to the world like the wretches brought on at the close of a display in the arena, men who are already condemned to death and are sure to perish by combat with one another, or with gladiators, or with wild beasts' (Commentary, p.110). See 15:32.

Their being 'fools for Christ's sake' (II Cor. 5:13) shows the apostles' mode of ministry is incompatible with the world's wisdom and system (3:18, 10:15). Their weakness is in fact their strength, while the strength of the Corinthians is their folly and weakness (II Cor. 12:9, 13:4, 10:4). Christ overcame the world in the weakness of the cross which is the power of God, whereas the strength of the Corinthians will evaporate in mere talk (4:19).

From verse 11 onwards Paul's irony drops as he gives a plain account of the life of an apostle. We need to keep in mind that unlike the modern idolatry which measures life by 'success', these were the sufferings of men filled with the Holy Spirit. See II Corinthians 4:7-12, 6:4-10, 11:23-33.

'To the present hour' reveals that these things were particularly acute at the time of writing. Up to this point the apostle's story has no 'happy ending'. Paul's practice was to work with his hands manually, and not to accept his rights (Acts 18:3, 20:34, 1 Cor. 9:6, 12, 15-18, 11 Cor. 11:9, 12:13, 1 Thess. 2:9, 11 Thess. 3:8). The Greek culture with its philosophical teachers would despise a teacher doing such work.

Like Master, like servants. John 15:18ff. Verses 12b-13 recall Jesus' teaching on the nature of the Kingdom of God and the children of the Kingdom (Matt. 5:11f, 38-48, cf. Rom. 12:14, 13:1-10). Here there is to be no demanding of rights - rather they 'conciliate', i.e. speak kindly in order to -reconcile.

They are regarded as 'refuse' and 'offscouring'. Refuse has the meaning of scapegoat as it comes from the idea of sacrificial cleansing. 'Offscouring' or 'scum' has a similar meaning and is linked with sacrifice. This could mean that such persons perform a vicarious service to the community. Leon Morris suggests that because such removal of refuse had the effect of cleansing, both 'refuse' and 'offscouring' have the derived meaning of 'propitiatory offering', i.e. that offering which cleanses men from their sin. (Morris' Commentary, p.82). As this could be applied to human sacrifice, then the apostles had become the scapegoats of the world. This, too, was how Jesus was regarded and as *the* goat of escape he carried into oblivion the sins of the world.

This then is the reign of the apostles, who in all these things are more than conquerors (Romans 8:36-37).

4. PAUL AND HIS CHILDREN (4:14-21)

The personal appeal of Paul comes as a father to his children. We see that

what we are reading is a *real letter* and not a theological dissertation written in detached propositions. This accounts for the change of mood **felt in the letter as Paul secures** his relationship with those he fathered in the gospel.

(i) Paul the Father (Verses 14-15)

To admonish is the character of a father (Romans 15:14, Col. 1:28, 3:16, I Thess. 5:12, 14, 11 Thess. 3:15). Paul holds this peculiar relationship because **through the** gospel he brought them to birth. This he did; not in his own right but in Jesus Christ through the gospel. Nor is it to mean that Paul was taking the place or the authority of *the* Father (Matt. 23:9).

The ‘countless guides’ were *paidagogous* (pedagogues), i.e. not teachers, but slaves, who, under the direction of the father, superintended the welfare of the children. But a father stood in an entirely different relation, even if the *paidagogos* loved the child. This puts Paul in a special relationship of deep affection and special leadership responsibility, as is seen in the following.

(ii) Imitate Your Father (Verses 16-17)

(Cf. 11:1, Gal. 4:12, Phil. 3:17, 1 Thess. 1:6, 2:14, 11 Thess. 3:7, 9). This is not so much an appeal for personal attachment but the appeal to imitate him as he imitates Christ, because behind the life of the apostle is a reflection of the crucified Lord.

So that they could imitate him Paul had sent Timothy to *remind* them of his ways because they appear to have forgotten. This is borne out in the following verses.

(iii) Paul’s Fatherly Authority (Verse 18-21)

There were those who were ‘arrogant’, i.e. puffed up. While Paul was in Corinth there may have been the strong-minded ones who he prevented from running wild. Now with his absence they had launched out and had tried to bolster their position with the assertion that Paul would not again be visiting the city. Their assertion would have been strengthened by Timothy’s coming instead of Paul, because it could be interpreted to mean that Paul had not dared to face them.

Paul candidly explains why his coming has been delayed with the development of time (16:5-9). But his reason is that he is not a free agent, but one under authority.

The arrogant found their power in their eloquence, but Paul says, in effect, that much talking counted for little in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the main theme of the Synoptic Gospels and most frequent in Jesus’ teaching (e.g. Luke 11:20). Paul also preached the Kingdom (6:9-10, 15:24, 50, Acts 21:25, etc.) which is always the action of God’s gracious reign. This is a different world from that of human power.

How Paul should come to Corinth depends upon the attitude of his children.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 5:1-13 - 6:11

IMMORALITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

This brings us to the second section of the letter.

The puffed-up attitude of the Church at Corinth may well have affected their attitude to sexual morality. The purity of God's grace is the best antidote to immorality, and while they had known and experienced grace, now, through not remembering, pride had grown. So Paul deals not merely with the case of immorality in the church but also their indifferent attitude to it.

1. IMMORALITY AND ARROGANCE (5:1-2)

(1) The situation was known.

The opening words of the chapter imply that the moral laxity at Corinth was known. The purity of the church was being disgraced.

(2) The case of immorality was serious.

PORNEIA. In Greek this strictly means traffic with a prostitute, but in the N.T. it means unchastity and sexual deviation of almost any kind. The nature of the particular sin is not clear. Being a personal letter the readers would have known the circumstances, therefore there was no need to be more descriptive. Probably the man was living with his stepmother, and his father may have been dead. Whatever the actual details - such as was forbidden (Leviticus 18:8, 22:11).

It was the kind of immorality that even the loose morality of Corinth took exception to. This does not mean that it did not happen in pagan society (e.g. Romans 1:19ff), but it was offensive.

Was this an example of the Corinthian believers' libertinism? (6:12, 10:33). With an emphasis on spirituality and a disregard for their bodies, did this imply that they were free to do as they chose with their bodies? (6:12, 15:12ff). This was dualism.

(3) Their attitude was arrogant.

A superior attitude governed them. If they had **mourned the behaviour of one** of the brethren they would have done something about it. They would have removed him from the fellowship.

2. THE DISCIPLINE REQUIRED (5:3-5)

(i) Paul Gives His Judgement (Verse 3)

The Greek here is not easy to translate. Paul is writing from Ephesus, so that he is not physically there. But Paul not only prays for his churches, but works along with them (Acts 20:18f, II Cor. 11:28). He is present in spirit (also verse 4, cf. Col. 2:5). Spirit is not opposed to body, rather it means that by his relationship with these people he is personally with them. 'Spirit' is an aspect of Paul's personality.

In this personal involvement Paul makes a decision and gives his judgement (*kekrika*).

(ii) The Church Must Make a Judgement (Verse 4)

Paul will make his contribution and he is giving them his convictions to reflect and act on.

Assembled together they, with Paul, are under the authority and power of Christ, so that the power of the reigning Lord is behind the assembled church (Matt. 18:15-20). Being assembled in the Name, they are to hand over with the power.

(iii) The Discipline Required (Verse 5)

- (a) First, whatever delivering a man to Satan means, it includes being cut off from the fellowship of Christ with his people. Verses 2, 7, 13.
- (b) **Satan is the instrument of God's judgement.** See I Timothy 1:19f. His authority is limited, and is all with a view to the man's ultimate salvation.
- (c) **The people of God rested** on the defeat of Satan through the action of Christ's cross and resurrection (1S:24 -27, Phil. 2:10f, Col. 2:15, etc.). Does this mean that to go back into the world is to come back under Satan's power?
- (d) **Its purpose is the destruction of the flesh.** This can mean death (Acts 5: 5 -10, 8:8-11, 1 Cor. 11:30). It can mean sickness or physical suffering (II Cor. 12:7). Or it can mean a person's sinful drives, 'the flesh' being human nature characterized by sin (Rom. 7:5, 8:13). Flesh does not necessarily mean the body, and the Bible knows of no final salvation of the spirit apart from the body.
- (e) **Its purpose is remedial.** The judgement is for the purpose of the power of the 'flesh' being destroyed so that the person who has in one sense been saved may know its accomplishment on the day of judgement. To be cut off from the people of Christ is to be cut off from the riches of Christ, which brings loss, the accusation of Satan and its consequences, and the chastisement which may bring a person back into the reality of grace and holiness.

(iv) An Excursus on Church Discipline

Church discipline of a similar kind is also dealt with in II Corinthians 6: 6f, II Thessalonians 3:6, 14.

The above passage is a very graphic way of speaking with which Paul gives expression to his authority and cooperation with respect to the sentence to be executed.

Discipline of the ecclesiastical kind which speaks of excommunication begins with a negative view. To make the negative aspect the starting point would be incorrect, since discipline must be first seen in the framework of deep concern for the church, for preserving her along the way of life. That does not eliminate the aspect of punishment, but it does illumine its significance.

‘Grace is the origin of discipline; thus it fills it with the perspective of salvation.’ (G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*). See II Samuel 7:14f, Revelation 3: 19, cf. Psalm 118:18, Hebrews 12:5f, 13.

‘The Church must guarded and protected against dangers, since she is so weak and vulnerable; and discipline is directed to repentance. This directedness to a goal is the decisive starting point for all reflection and discipline, and it constitutes a pointed protest against allowing discipline to deteriorate. A moralistic discipline may not be allowed to darken the splendour of grace and mercy; otherwise, the meaning of empowerment is lost due to a lack of appreciation for the teleology of discipline.’ (G. C. Berkouwer, *ibid.* p-365).

Note II Timothy 2:25, 1 Corinthians 14:25.

3. THE BASIS OF DISCIPLINE (5:6-8)

(1) *Paul is now concerned about the purity of the church.* To allow evil will send the whole rotten, therefore it is a perilous situation to boast about. Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20f, Galatians 5:9.

(2) *To cleanse out the old leaven is taken from the passover.* Before the feast the old leaven was removed from the prior to the feast being celebrated. Exodus 12:6, 15, 29, 39, Deuteronomy 16:3.

(3) *The command rests on what has happened and what they are.*

(a) They are already unleavened - clean in Christ (Rom. 6:11-14, 19, Col. 2:20-3:14). Therefore live accordingly.

(b) God has provided the sacrifice (Gen. 22:11). This is Christ the Lamb of God who has taken away sin (Ephes. 5:2, Matt. 26:28, John 1:29, Heb. 7:27, 9:14, 10:5, 1 Peter 2:24).

(4) *Celebrate the festival.* This is the consequence. V.8, ‘therefore’. It harks back to the passover, but alludes to the Lord’s Supper where Christians offer their thanksgiving for what has obtained through the complete, once-for-all sacrifice. This is the source of a cleansed conscience and the new dynamic for holiness.

4. CORRECTION OF A MISUNDERSTANDING (5:9-13)

(1) *Paul’s previous Letter had been misunderstood.* (See Introduction for ‘Previous letter’.) This was not Paul’s first attempt to clean up the situation

at Corinth. Some have wondered whether the Corinthians may have deliberately misunderstood. However, they had taken Paul the wrong way.

(2) *They are not to live in a Christian Ghetto.* See Mark 2:15, John 17:14-18, Hebrews 2:11f, I Corinthians 9:19ff.

(3) *It has to do with deliberate sin in the church,* i.e. those who bear the name Christian, but deny it by their morality. This is the same principle as in verse 5, and the eating includes the church meal, as well as private entertainment (10:16-21, 11:17-34).

(4) *The sphere of judgement.*

(a) We are warned in places like 4:1-5, cf. Romans 2:1, 14:4, 10, 13 against judgement. The judgement here is not of the censorious kind, but church discipline.

(b) God is the Judge of those outside the church including the woman in verse 1. (Deut. 17:7, 19:19, 22:21, 24, 24:7.)

The application of these details to the modern scene is not easy. But the main point of not tolerating evil in the church is clear, and of permanent relevance.

CHAPTER 6:1-11

LAWSUITS, CONTENTIONS, AND GRACE

Paul's dealing with judging in the concluding verses of chapter 5 brings him to deal with another problem which he had to confront in the Corinthian church. He comes back to the problem of immorality in verse 12, but first there was the disgrace of litigation and contentions over rights in the family of God. Paul **deprecates these things** on two grounds.

(a) They should be able to settle their own disputes internally.

(b) They should not be needing to assert their rights anyway.

1. GOING TO COURT WITH A BROTHER (6:1-6)

(1) *To 'dare' to go to court is a shameful state of affairs.* It is an insult to God and to the church. The 'unrighteous' means non-Christian and the 'saints' means Christian (v.6). To speak of the Roman courts as unrighteous does not imply that they were unjust but rather that they operated on a value system foreign to that in the people of God (cf. Romans 13:1-7, and Acts 18:12-17 where Paul faces a Roman Proconsul).

(2) *if Christians are to judge the world they should be competent to decide between themselves.* Verse 2 may appear to follow awkwardly from 5:12. But there it was that censorious, critical judgement by Christians of the world, which they are not given the right to take. Here the judgement is that of the last day. Daniel 7:22, cf. Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30, Rev. 20:4, 2:26, 3:21, Psalm 49:14. This means that the people of God who inherit the Kingdom share in the judgement with Christ. This includes the judgement of angels, good and bad. Isaiah 24:21, II Peter 2:4, Jude 6, cf. II Corinthians 12:7.

'Just as we find a law of mediation in the ministration of grace from man to

man although the Lord remains supreme, so we find the same law of mediation in the final ministration of justice, the believers judge the world including the angels, yet the Lord is always supreme. In what this judging consists, in promulgating or confirming the verdict or in otherwise assisting, we must leave until the great act takes place.' (Osiander, quoted in Lenski's Commentary, p.238.)

However, there is a very strong principle involved here and in the present it means that those who know the wisdom of the Spirit and share in the life of the world to come, now, should have the grace to decide between themselves.

Verse 5 implies that there should be those gifted by the Spirit who have the wisdom to make judgements in disputes between the brethren.

2. LAWSUITS ARE SELF -DEFEATING (6:7-8)

By the very insistence upon personal rights and the insistence on having these rights vindicated in a secular court, this shows that all is lost and they are defeated. The need for a third party is a demonstration of selfishness, brothers defraud brothers, and the brothers defrauded attempt to have their vindication proved by 'the politics of man': this is defeat.

Paul says it is better to 'lose'. Cf. Matthew 5:39-42, Romans 12:14-21. This is the way of God's wisdom and the power of his Kingdom.

3. A TRUTH TO BE REALIZED (6:9-11)

(1) *The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God.* That defrauding one another was a practice leads Paul on to these words, which are also linked with the whole moral laxity and presumption of the church.

The inheritance of the Kingdom is future. Through the securing of the Kingdom of God in the victory of the cross men enter the reign of God through the gift of forgiveness, repentance and faith, and by the Holy Spirit they are regenerated. The Kingdom is yet to be consummated when the victory of the cross will be finally worked out, and up to the climax of history. Then God will be all in all (15:24-28) and by the victory of righteousness there will be no place for evil.

It is then that the children of the Kingdom finally inherit the Kingdom. Matthew 5:5, cf. Romans 4:13, 8:11, 22. It is to acquire possession (Gen. 15:7). The salvation which Christ brings is from our sins (Matt. 1:21, Rom. 6:1-23). To persist in sin, to allow that there can be such a thing as a carnal Christian is to be deceived by sin and so misled (15:33, Gal. 6:7, Luke 21:8), persuading ourselves that God cannot mean his moral demands seriously.

This truth needs to be realized.

(2) *That the people of God are cleansed from sin.* The Corinthian Christians had not been all of the things listed. But these **things had characterized some of their lives in one** aspect or more.

- (a) 'Washed', i.e. cleansed, purified. Acts 22:16, Heb. 1:3, 9:14, Psalm 51:2, 6-9, Zech. 13:1, 1 John 1:9. It is first the objective purifying of sin through Christ judging and 'deterging' it, then secondly the fact and the experience of that act being brought to the conscience by the Word and the Holy Spirit.

-
- (b) 'Sanctified'. Not a developing thing here, but again completed by the sacrifice of Christ. See 1:2, 8, cf. Heb. 9:26, 10:16.
 - (c) 'Justified', i.e. acquitted fully and finally at the seat of judgement, through the judgement of God's wrath on all our guilt in Christ. See 1:8, cf. **Romans 3:21ff.**
 - (d) 'In the Name...' i.e. the whole **work is in the** power, the authority and the grace of the cross, which overleaps sin, evil powers, death, and alienation.
 - (e) 'In the Spirit...' i.e. What is objectively accomplished once for all in history without our effecting it except by our evil, the Holy Spirit communicates, reveals, works, and effects in our lives, by bringing it all to us, with the love of him who accomplished it. This is the true baptism. Romans 8:4f, 14:17.

This truth being realized and appropriated to faith is the dynamic springboard for holiness, obedience and love. Note how the apostle teaches his erring children - not with moralism, not with sentimentality, not with squeamishness, but by coming back to the judgements by the Holy God who in his grace has taken sin so seriously that he has acted upon it by damning it.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 6:12 to 7:24

1. SHUN IMMORALITY (6:12-20)

Verses 9-11 bring Paul back to the problem of sexual immorality. Already he has dealt with the specific case of incest in Chapter 5, (has diverged to deal with lawsuits) and now in propounding the general principle comes to the root of the trouble.

(i) The Trouble Involves the Nature of Christian Freedom (*Verse 12*)

Paul does not denounce the phrases used in Corinth. No more were they bound to the traditions, taboos and legalistic philosophies of law (9:1,10:23, Gal. 4: 8-11, 5:1, Col. 2:16-23, Mark 7:19, Heb. 10:18, etc.).

But Paul's qualified agreement to the words themselves does not concur with their conclusions, and he gives two reasons:

- (a) Not all things are helpful. See 10:23, 8:1-3, 12:7. Love is the character of true freedom. True freedom is not freedom to do one's own thing. It is from this individualism that Christ frees in order that we may freely do the will of the Lord, and his will is that we love our neighbour as ourselves.
- (b) 'I will not be enslaved to anything'. Paul uses a play on the word lawful, or power, here, i.e. 'all things are in my power, but I will not be brought under the power of any'. This deals with the enslavement the self and one's desires as well as to a harlot (Rom. 6:16, Gal. 5:13, 1 Pet. 2:16). Thus in the name of 'freedom' one can be ensnared, and such licence is not more, but less liberty.

(ii) The False Reasoning (*Verse 13*)

The reasoning is gnostic and ascetic in nature, i.e. it lauds the spiritual to the disparagement of the physical. Disparagement of the material can lead to moral indifference concerning the actions of the body.

The reasoning goes:- 'Whatever I eat passes into my stomach and there is broken down into its constituents; and, in due course, at death, my stomach will be dissolved into its elements. It is God Himself who has ordained both the process of digestion and the dissolution of the body at death; how can we think it a matter of eternal consequence that we should eat this or that food.'

'Body' (*soma*) is much more than body tissue, or a complex of organs of which the stomach is one. *Man* is a whole, (Gen. 2:7), and God will raise the body (I Cor. 15:12).

Paul shows their reasoning to be fallacious. It may have substance for dietary purposes, but not when carried over into sexual relationships. The last part of verse 13 shows that the body belongs to the Lord, and his service (Rom. 6: 12 13 19 12:1).

(iii) Paul's Reasons

(a) *we are united to Christ.*

The Lord has given himself for the body and it is intended that the two should be permanently united, both in the weakness and suffering which the believer shares with Christ in this age (II Cor. 6:10, 12:9f), and in the new world in which the believer will be transferred (15:51, 11 Cor. 5:1-5, Phil. 3: 21, 1 John 3:2f).

(b) *Sexual intercourse is an act of the whole person.*

It is both physical and spiritual as well as a passing over of one person into the other.

It may be questioned whether the distinction in verse 18 is valid. Calvin says: 'My explanation is that he does not completely deny that there are other sins, which also bring dishonour and disgrace upon our bodies, but he is simply saying that these other sins do not leave anything like the same filthy stain on our bodies as fornication does.' (See note 4)

(c) *Our bodies are the abode of the Spirit of God.*

In 3:16 Paul speaks corporately of the church, where the life of the whole **community is threatened** by immorality. Now the same is true on a personal level. The Spirit brings the cleansing and holiness of Christ 6:11, and as cleansed we are not to defile the Spirit's shrine. Therefore we are not proprietors of our own bodies, we are made for Christ not other masters, and we have no right to bestow our bodies where we will.

(d) *We were bought with a price.*

By the redemption of Christ we were freed from self and sin. Romans 3:24, 5:17, Galatians 3:13, 4:5, 5:1, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18. The redemption is the act of ransoming. Cf. Exodus 6:6, 13:13, Ruth 4:4ff, Psalm 103:4, Isaiah 53:1, etc.

(e) *We are to glorify God in our bodies.*

This underlines the sin of immorality, and amplifies the glory of man. Roms 3:23, 1 Corinthians 11:7.

(iv) The Seriousness of Sexual Sin

Why is this treated with more seriousness than other sins? Are there gradations of sin? A quick look at both Testaments will show that some sins are more serious than others, and that different sins incur a different punishment, e.g. Sin with a high hand and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Man and woman being created in the image and glory of God accounts for the seriousness of murder, which is striking at God's image (Genesis 9:6).

Sexual sin is a perversion of that image. It is always linked with idolatry. Judges 2:17, Isaiah 1:21, Ezekiel 6:9, 16:30-32, Hosea 4:12f, 9:1, Colossians 3: 5, Matthew 5:27-30.

Linked with this is that sex has to do with the closeness of relationships. Unlike other sins it is more irrational and infects the whole of relationships including the family, children, the church, society as a whole. Thus it requires discipline and judgement, e.g. Exodus 32.

2. BEHAVIOUR WITHIN MARRIAGE (7:1-7)

Coming to Chapter 7 Paul deals with marriage and related questions which would have come to him via the letter from Corinth. Leon Morris points out the importance of estimating what Paul says in the situation at Corinth. 'There was in antiquity a widespread admiration for ascetic practices including celibacy. Some, at least, of the Corinthians shared in this. Paul makes every concession to their point of view. He agrees that celibacy is "good" and he points out some of its advantages. But he regards marriage as normal'. See 11:11 (Comm., p.105).

- (1) *Verse 1 would be a quote from the letter.* Calvin points out that this quote does not logically imply 'It is not a good thing, that is, it is a not good, evil, sinful thing, for a man to touch a woman.'
- (2) *In Verse 2 Paul is seeing marriage in the light of the perversions and pressures in Corinth.* It may imply that there was already immorality in the situation, and in the midst of these things Paul not merely sees marriage as a preventative to sin, but in marriage sexual pressure is less likely to come in the wrong way.
- (3) *The relationship in marriage is not to be merely 'spiritual'.* Conjugal rights are equal, reciprocal and loyal. To 'refuse' one another means to 'rob' one another. Any attempt by one partner to spiritualise marriage is to rob the partner. If there is to be abstinence then it must be by agreement and for a limited time which minimizes danger. This is in order to concentrate on prayer. 'Self control', i.e. the lack of it is incontinence - the irrepressible desire for sexual expression.
- (4) *Does verse 6 refer to verse 2 or 5b?* It seems best to take it that if you do practise abstinence in this way it must only be for a limited period of time.
- (5) *Each has a gift.* Verse 7. One expresses obedience by being married, **the other** by refraining. This gift is a 'charisma', and while some have the gift of celibacy, those who lack it should marry, and there will be compensatory gifts.

3. THE UNMARRIED AND WIDOWS (7:8-9)

This continues the answer to the quote in verse 1.

It is probable that Paul was a widower as it was unusual for Jewish Rabbis to remain single. He is not making a directive that they should be like him, but advises them in their best interests to remain as they are. See verses 28 and 35.

(Note, life can be rich both within the married state and unmarried.)

If the gift of singleness is not given and they 'burn' then it is not sinful to marry. To burn does not mean that they flare out in lustful acts, but that they can be consumed with inward desire, even if they don't yield to it.

4. TO THE MARRIED (7:10-11)

Lest what Paul has written in the preceding verses should put pressure on those married to dissolve their marriages, he then brings the explicit word of Christ concerning the lasting and loyal nature of marriage (Mark 10:2-12). This reverts back to the creational structure of marriage. We need to remember that Paul is also dealing with an ascetic and 'super-spiritual' view of marriage.

5. MIXED MARRIAGES (7:12-16)

- (1) *'To the rest'* (v.12), i.e. to those Christian with non-Christian spouses.
- (2) *Paul's words are not traceable to any explicit teaching of Christ* as in verse 10. But Paul's apostleship means that he does not speak any less authoritatively than in verse 10.
- (3) Where the unbelieving spouse consents to live with a Christian, the Christian should not divorce the partner, i.e. on the grounds that their faith makes them spiritually incompatible.
- (4) On the other hand if the unbelieving partner cannot cope with a believing partner and will not accept a Christian spouse but wishes to separate, then the Christian is not bound, i.e. to a mechanical relationship.
- (5) *'God has called us to peace'*. It is God's will that people live in harmony. This would not be the case if the Christian partner separated on religious grounds. It can also mean that if the non-Christian partner wishes to separate, then to let them go would be better than his/her staying and fighting it out. The phrase can be translated *'For God has called...'* or *'But God has called...'*
- (6) *Verse 14 gives reason for not divorcing from a non-Christian spouse.* The unbeliever is 'consecrated' through the believer. Verse 16 shows that such consecration does not 'sanctify' the unbeliever in the same way that a believer is 'washed' (6:11) or is a 'saint'.

The clue to understanding it is the antipathy to marriage at Corinth as well as the fear that the unbeliever makes the marriage 'unclean'. Paul's statement about the children of such a marriage being 'holy' clinches the argument. This means that the children of a believing parent belong to the Lord and are incorporated in the holy covenant. See Romans 11:13-16. Apostolic teaching is based in the Old Testament (Col. 2:11-12) and while teaching against any 'mechanical' view of holiness, at the same time knows nothing of the 'individualism, of Westernization (Gen. 17:10, 14, 23, 26, 34:15, 24).

(7) *Another reason for not separating is given in verse 16.* The sanctification of the believing spouse may lead to the salvation of the unbeliever. This influence must not be underestimated. Cf. I Peter 3:1-6, and compare Acts 16:11-15 with Philippians 1:1-2.

6. LEAD THE LIFE GOD GIVES YOU (7:17-23)

(1) *Verse 17 lays down the principle,* which is reaffirmed again in verses 20 and 24. It underlines what is said in the previous verses, and in the following examples.

Paul has asserted the freedom of the Christian (6:12, etc.). This freedom is worked out in the concrete realities of life. True freedom is not found in playing the power politics of the world, but in trusting the Father of the true Kingdom, doing what he says and availing oneself of the opportunities which he provides.

The life which the Lord assigns, and in which he calls, refers mainly to the situation or condition in which a man was when converted. It is in this context that freedom is worked out and lived out without revolutionary conspiracy, etc.

(2) *Circumcision (verses 18-20).*

- (a) This particularly Jewish rite which originally was a sign of God's covenant grace, became the means of obtaining grace and was sometimes made an imposition on Gentile Christians. See Acts 15 and Galatians 2:11-21, 5:1-12. Paul rejects this addition to grace.
- (b) On the other hand there had been times of syncretism and worldly pressure put on the Jews and they sought to remove their circumcision (see I Maccabees 1:11-15, Apocrypha).
- (c) Circumcision is also regarded as something of the heart, inward and not outward. Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Romans 2:28f, Philippians 3:3, Colossians 2:11.
- (d) Hence physical circumcision (or we can add, any other Levitical ceremonial ordinance) is not the thing (Galatians 5:6, 6:15, Colossians 3:11). Circumcision will not commend us to God, nor will uncircumcision. But the circumcision of the heart, the cleansing of the heart by the Spirit makes us new creations in Christ (Gal. 6:15) and brings a willing obedience to the will of God (Jer. 31:31ff, Heb. 10:11-25, Rom. 5:5, 6:17).

(3) *Slaves and freemen (verses 21-23).* Many at Corinth were slaves (1:26). The slave if freed should accept his freedom, yet both slave and freeman are servants of Christ as their liberating Lord. Both freeman and slave are freemen in Christ.

What sort of freedom is this? We answer: true freedom! God himself expresses his freedom as Father-Creator in serving his creation and his children. Jesus, the true Son, showed that true freedom is found in servanthood (Matt. 20: 25-28, John 10:17f). Jesus accepted the physical and creaturely necessities laid upon human life (Gal. 4:4) and in his freedom turns the impositions and restrictions of the world into opportunities for service and love.

This is true freedom.

(4) *Freedom came at great cost (verse 23)*. See notes on 6:20.

‘The’ new life springs out of the sense of-debt to Christ. The regenerating power of forgiveness depends upon its cost: it is the knowledge that we have been bought *with a price* which makes us cease to be our own, and live for him who so dearly bought us, (James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p.151). This being so we are not to become slaves of men as in 6:15 and 7:21b.

(5) *our obedience must be rendered in the place where God has found us (verse 24)*.

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 7:25-40

1. TO THE UNMARRIED (7:25-35)

(1) *‘Now concerning..’* This again follows on from verse 1 and is another matter on which the Corinthians had asked a specific question.

‘Unmarried’ in v.25 equals virgins. Usually it refers to females but can also include males.

For the authority of Paul’s opinion see note on 7:12.

His advice is that an unmarried person remain in the state that they are in, and this also applies to those married. He means that in view of the circumstances there is good sense in remaining single, but there is no church discipline on the issue, and no sin in marrying.

(2) *The reason is seen in verses 26 and 29*. Paul calls this ‘the impending distress’ and that ‘the time has grown very short.’ (Romans 13:11f).

- (a) This can be taken to mean the ‘eschatological woes’ preceding the second advent of Christ, which anticipated suffering by Christians. Therefore in view of this ‘present necessity’ a change of state may be more trouble than good (Mark 13:7f, 17).
- (b) It is taken by others to indicate the trouble and opposition that a Christian always encounters. Leon Morris says the language is too strong for this. (Comm., p.116).
- (c) We also know that the whole of the period from Christ’s ascension to his parousia is characterized by periods of intense distress. ‘These things’ in Mark 13:30, cf. Revelation 12.

This could be one such time in Corinth, the nature of which we have no details.

(3) Paul's word to live 'as if not' (verse 29-31 seems best interpreted from verse 31b. 'Although' does not mean living by pretence or in stoic apathy. It can be noted that marriage is not part of the permanent order of things. Therefore do not be *absorbed* in any of these things. Paul no more forbids laughter than he does marriage, e.g. 7:2-5. Yet even the marriage order which is a creational order will pass away when creation comes to its climax and goal (Mark 12:25).

(4) Paul's concern is that his readers be free from anxiety, as such anxiety impairs devotion to the Lord (verses 32-35).

- (a) The married man or woman can be divided in loyalty and therefore anxious. We could read it: 'The prime misfortune of the married man is not that he is married and involved thereby in a relationship rooted in the material world, but that his mind is divided' (C. K. Barrett's Comm., p.180).
- (b) Again these words need to be seen in the light of verses 26 and 29. Marriage in such circumstances may add to the anxiety for the welfare of spouse (and family).
- (c) The state of being unmarried if one does not have the gift of continence can also cause anxiety (7:1-2, 5, 7, 9).
- (d) Again the state of the unmarried may be little better than the married. Barrett points out how the unmarried in verse 32 can be '*anxious* about the affairs of the Lord'. Such anxiety should not be. Cf. Matthew 6:25-34, 1 Peter 6:7, Philippians 4:11, Romans 5:1, 8:15. We are to please God without anxiety (Romans 8:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 4:1). Therefore Barrett suggests that Paul's criticism is of the ascetic tendency concerning marriage, so that those who decry marriage (7:1) are not in fact rising above but falling below the Christian standard.

'The drift is clear: if you avoid marriage you avoid encumbrances, and you can devote yourself to the Lord's work without incurring problems, difficulties, and anxieties which married people incur. But this is no rule, and indeed seemliness may be transgressed by celibacy as well as by marriage' (ibid. p.182).

2. BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ONE'S BETROTHED (7:36-38)

(1) Paul repeatedly qualifies a statement pointing towards the advantages of celibacy by saying that marriage is not to be despised.

(2) There is difficulty in defining who 'he' is, and who is the 'betrothed'. Some take him, the man, to be the father of the girl, meaning that to withhold marriage from a girl of marriageable age would have been to court disaster, especially in Corinth.

The 'betrothed' is taken as a virgin, and the phrase in verse 36 seems to mean 'if she passes the stage of being fully developed' (about 20 years of age). Here the girl would be the daughter of her father and if she has **not the gift of continence** he should allow her to marry.

(3) Some think Paul is referring to spiritual marriages of the Gnostic or

ascetic kind where a couple went through a form of marriage, but they lived together more as brother and sister. From spiritual motives they abstained from sexual intercourse, i.e. they sought union of spirit but not of bodies. For these Paul says it is right to marry if the strain is too great.

(4) Another interpretation that the R.S.V. takes is that it is a man and his fiancée, i.e. betrothed. Being an engaged couple they may be in doubt about marriage (because of the influence of the ascetic party). To renounce marriage may seem to be a fine spiritual act, but in some circumstances it may be unfair to the girl and impossible to the man.

3. WIDOWS (7:39-40)

(1) See Romans 7:2. A woman (or a man) is bound in marriage while the partner (who, in this instance would be a Christian) lives.

(2) This shows that the Jewish law of Levirate marriage does not apply among Christians.

(3) The widow must remarry 'only in the Lord'. I.e., as a member of Christ's body she lives under her Lord. See I Timothy 5:14. Because of the difficulties of mixed marriages (7:12-16), a widow exercising her responsibility in a second marriage would be wise to marry a Christian.

(4) Marriage is permitted but not necessarily advisable.

(5) The last part of verse 40 is a touch of irony from Paul. Cf. verse 25 and 2:16.

4. CONCLUSION

Paul's advice to remain single needs to be seen from the 'impending distress, that they faced at Corinth. Also we could add that allowing for the very mixed up and often sordid relationships that many of his readers had come from (6:9-11), Paul may be attempting to re-orientate these people. But there were the semiGnostic practices of the Greek world who imposed their 'spiritual' views onto the church, leading them to 'forbid marriage' (I Tim. 4:1-5). But in I Timothy Paul concludes with 'everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' (cf. I Timothy 6:17).



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTERS 8 AND 9

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The notes on the introduction to this letter list five major problems which existed in the church at Corinth: division, morality, secularism, worship, and death. (Notes, page 3.)

Already Paul has dealt with divisions which focused around leadership and he has confronted the problem of immorality in the church. However, the basic fault runs through all the pragmatic problems of the church, resulting in a recurrence of the same faults as they relate to different problems.

*‘The church was composed almost exclusively of the waterfront proletariat of the town which, as well as being a centre of world trade, was famous throughout the Roman empire for its innumerable temples, and notorious for its proverbial immorality. It had for its background every kind of superstition, magic, and mystery cult, but not by any means enlightenment.’ (Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus means Freedom*, p. 62).*

In chapters 8-10 Paul, in facing the problem of idolatry and the eating of food offered to idols, explicates the true nature of freedom, particularly as this relates to the weak and the strong in the church.

2. TRUE KNOWLEDGE (8:1-3)

One of the main sources of trouble at Corinth was the place given to knowledge **and the primacy** given to this over love (e.g. *13:2, 4:7*). The question of food offered to idols (verse 1) appears to have been a theme raised in their letter to Paul (cf. *7:1*). The food was used for sacred purposes (see *10:28*). It was an accepted social practice to participate at meals in a temple or in some place associated with a god. Also most food sold in markets had been sacrificed in a temple, given to the priests, and then sold by priests to the public.

This put Christians in a predicament. Such food was prohibited to Jews (see also Acts *15:20*), but the people with ‘knowledge’ at Corinth claimed the Jewish argument had no validity (Paul deals with this again in *10:14-33*).

(1) *Paul agrees that they possessed knowledge* (verse 1). The Corinthian **argument seemed** to say, ‘all of us have enlightened knowledge about the illusion of idolatry, we are freed by the Gospel, by this authority we should be able to enjoy the consequences of it.’

(2) *Deficient knowledge*. Their knowledge may have been that of ‘spiritual

enlightenment' (13:1ff), or it may have been merely a collection of speculated information about God and the faith (see I John 2:4).

But all knowledge without love 'puffs up', i.e. it is conceited, a means of power, and superiority. Knowledge can be proud that it knows so much.

This is not true knowledge (verse 2). It is not true knowing. True knowledge cannot be separated from love (Ephes. 4:15, 25, John 17:3). To be known by God is to know his love so that such a person loves God (Gal. 4:9, 1 John 4:7, cf. I Cor. 13:12, 14:38, 11 Tim. 2:19).

(3) *It is love which builds up the people of God.* A self-regarding knowledge is incompatible with love and destructive (3:9, 10, 14, 10:23, 4:3-5, 12, 17, 26. Cf. I Thess. 5:11).

3. KNOWLEDGE OF IDOLS (8:4-6)

(i) The Illusion of Idols

'An idol has no real existence'. In the O.T. they were often called 'nothings', i.e. they are impostor gods and therefore have no authenticity. The idols would represent the gods, and demons made use of idolatrous rites. (10:20f, cf. Deut. 6:4, Isa. 44:8, 45:5). Paul's 'so called' has to do with their unreality, because the ancient world's belief concerned a thick population of gods with a natural home in heaven, who from time to time appeared on earth.

(ii) The Many Gods and Lords Exercised Lordship

E.g. Isaiah 26:13, Deuteronomy 10:17.

(iii) There is One God, the Father

This is as opposed to Greek philosophical monotheism, and the gods of speculation. This recognition is not based on speculation, but upon revelation, and especially the act of God in history in Jesus Christ.

God's Fatherhood identifies him as the Father-Creator. There is no dualism in the creation, all creation comes from him, and our destiny is found in serving him. The Gospels make it abundantly clear that Jesus Christ revealed God's Name and that his name is essentially 'Father' (Luke 10:21-22, John 14:6-11, 17:1-26, cf. Ephes. 1:3ff, 3:14-15). This Fatherhood relates firstly to the unique Son and then also to the sons (Matt. 3:17, Luke 3:38, Acts 17:24-29). To call the many idols 'God' means that they should be called 'Father'.

(iv) There is One Lord, Jesus Christ

Again in comparison with the many lords who enslave, this One is Lord of all creation. He is the Mediator of creation. The basis for this is found in Genesis 1:26 and explicitly stated in John 1:1-14, Colossians 1:15f, 2:6. Jesus the man is Lord through his liberating redemption (Phil. 2:5-11, Col. 2:6, Acts 2:36, Col. 2:15). **It is through Jesus Christ that** God is perceived in action.

(v) The Point Is:

While the heathen divided the creation up between many gods who each had their own sphere of operation, in fact the one God is the Father of all creation, and he is known through the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

4. THE WEAK AND THE STRONG (8:7-13)**(i) The Weak**

They are weak in conscience. Verses 7, 10, 12, cf. 9:22, Romans 14:1, 2, 21. His conscience was over-scrupulous, and this scrupulosity rests on error which in turn affects his 'knowledge'. Yet his faulty knowledge goes on affecting his conscience.

This problem was in not being able to shake off the feeling that the idol was real and therefore to eat food offered to such realities would be disobedience. Romans 14:23. Idols defile the conscience by making one unclean, the idols themselves being unclean (Ezek. 36:25).

(ii) Food Has No Merit

This truth is borne out in verse 8. Cf. Romans 14:14, 17, Mark 7:19,

Colossians 2:20ff, I Timothy 4:4, 6:17. Paul agrees that food does not commend us to God, but also corrects it by stating that neither are we saved because we have strong liberal views on it. The truth of this is based upon God's Fatherhood of the entire creation (verse 6).

(iii) The Strong

By this knowledge they forgot their weaker brothers.

Their liberty (authority) could be a **hindrance**.

The consequence of this is illustrated in verse 10. The argument being, 'If I do this won't the weaker brother be encouraged (lit. 'built up', v. 1).' True as this seems, it really means that the brother will act against his conscience and therefore sin.

The result is that the weak is built up only for destruction, and he is destroyed because the strong acts out of knowledge rather than love. To sin against a brother is to sin against Christ. Matthew 25:40, 45, Acts 9:4f.

(iv) Application (Verse 13)

The emphasis has been on the importance of a *brother*, Paul is not worried about false impressions given of Christian truth. Love is the principle in all action, so that true freedom is being free not to do what you are free to do.

5. THE RIGHTS OF AN APOSTLE (9:1-14)

This chapter carries over the discussion raised in Chapter 8, because it could be that what he has said there will arouse opposition of the kind that questions his authority as an apostle, i.e. the argument being that a true apostle would not allow himself to be restricted in this way. But Paul shows that for the sake of the gospel, and those whom he seeks to win for the gospel, he will renounce his rights, i.e. liberty.

(i) Paul, Apostle of Freedom (*Verses 1-3*)

Paul's authority as an apostle was challenged, and here it may be that his contenders would say if he did not exercise his freedom as an apostle, then it did not exist. He gives two grounds for his apostleship.

- (a) He has seen the Lord. Cf. 15:8. In Acts 1:22 we are told this qualifies an apostle (Gal. 1:1, 16).
- (b) The results. The existence of the church authenticates his apostleship (II Cor. 10:13-18, 12:12). They are his work (3:6f, 10, 4:15). As such they are a visible token of something which already exists.

Paul's freedom is exemplified in such passages as Romans 8:2, Galatians 2: 19ff. All this, and what he says in the following, is Paul's 'defence' (apologia, Acts 22:1, 25:16, Phil. 1:7, 16) to those locally, or visitors, who want to put Paul to the test of his apostleship.

(ii) The Right of Freedom and Support (*Verses 4-7*)

The word for 'right' is 'authority'. The authority of those with 'knowledge' (Chapter 8) exercised in love is a fine thing. He has that right to eat and drink, and to have this by the support of the church (Gal. 6:6). That Paul and Barnabas had not made use of this right may have caused their apostleship to be questioned (II Cor. 11:7-11). Paul grounds his argument upon reasonable commonsense and good human example in **verse 7**.

The right of marriage is also that of an apostle (verse 5). It says, 'be accompanied by a 'sister as wife', i.e. a Christian woman. Presumably the other apostles and the Lord's brothers took their wives with them. There is no other evidence that these travelled, but it must have been certain for Paul to mention it.

Cephas is singled out because he and his wife may have visited Corinth. The Cephas party may have originated through this (1:12).

(iii) Support of the Law for Use of His Rights (*Verses 8-12a*)

Paul turns to the O.T. law for stronger grounds, and quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4, where the animal takes mouthfuls of the grain it is standing on. The only interpretation of these words that is not forced is the primary application of them; God is not concerned with oxen but with men. Importantly, the context of Deuteronomy 25:4 deals with human relationships, and it could be that Paul's quotation of these words is not at variance with their original meaning, i.e. it might figuratively refer to human beings. Whatever it is, the law for oxen extends beyond oxen.

Therefore the Christian worker, be he sowing or reaping, has the right to live by the fruit of the Gospel, and this is especially so of the church founded by Paul.

(iv) The Command of Christ (*Verses 12b-14*)

Paul does not make use of his rights in his concern not to put any barrier in the way of the gospel. This is the enduring of love (13:7) and a basic motive of Paul's ministry (verse 23). Potential converts may be put off by seeing themselves being obligated to finance the evangelists. But more important was Paul's consistency with the Gospel of free grace and sacrificial love.

Paul vindicates the rights of preachers by the universal practice of the priesthood sharing in the sacrifices, and that Jesus recognised this. Matthew 10: 10, Luke 10:7, cf. I Timothy 5:18.

Hence Paul builds a progressively strong argument for the use of his authority, and his freedom.

6. PAUL'S REFUSAL TO USE HIS RIGHTS (9:15-18)

(i) He Refuses His Rights in Order to Glory (*Verse 15*)

He is in no doubt about his rights, but does not claim them and does not want to establish them in the future. The sentence breaks down under Paul's strong emotion.

(ii) Being Under Orders, Preaching is no Credit to Him (*Verse 16*)

Cf. Jeremiah 20:9, Philippians 3:12.

(iii) Paul's Reward (*Verses 17-18*)

If Paul had volunteered he has a reward from the churches and God, because he would be doing them a service. But he is not a free working contractor who hires out his labour. God has acquired Paul and he works as God desires- therefore he is in no position to claim payment. The gospel is to be proclaimed without charge. **Matthew 10:8, 11** Corinthians 11:7.

Paul's reward is the privilege of doing it freely, in the free service of God where he sees the gospel of pure grace flourish and grow. Therefore 'his highest pay is to serve without pay'.

7. ALL FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL (9:19-23)

The issue now broadens out further than simply being paid for the gospel. Paul has moved a long way from the freedom and responsibility in Chapter 8. Paul is free, therefore he cannot become the slave of men (7:23), but he freely makes himself a slave to all (II Cor. 4:5). His purpose is for the sake of the gospel and that more will embrace that gospel,

(i) To the Jews, a Jew (Verse 20)

Paul by birth already was a Jew (Phil. 3:5, II Cor. 11:22). Being freed from his Judaism and its law, by the Gospel (Phil. 3:1-11), he could now freely identify with those who were involved in the system of law. He attested to the law's fulfilment (Rom. 10:4). Based on 8:8, this freed Paul not to have to compromise, nor to be offensive to his kinsmen by race.

(ii) To Those Outside the Law, as One Without Law (Verse 21)

Paul is not compromising, nor is he anti-law. To be under the law of Christ is to be under the law of love, love being the essence of the law. Gal. 6:2, Rom. 8:2, 13:8ff, Mark 12:31, John 13:34f.

But as he is free from the condemnation and tyranny of the law through the Gospel, Paul can identify with those who do not have the law (Rom. 2:14).

(iii) All Things to All Men (Verse 22)

The weak, are the weak in conscience (8:7-13, Romans 14 and 15). He seeks to bring these to maturity. The verse speaks of the principle of Paul's love. This is the principle of incarnation demonstrated by Christ himself. Matt. 1:23, John 1:14, 3:16-17, Phil. 2:5-11, Heb. 2:10ff.

(iv) Paul's Motivation (Verse 23)

Paul's whole conduct is determined by the gospel. This is what mattered. The gospel is not under his control and he wants to share in its ultimate blessings.

8. TO SHARE IN THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL (9:24-27)

These verses run on from verse 23 where Paul shows how he disciplines himself so that he can share in the reward of the Gospel. This is in comparison with the immodest claims of the Corinthians. Paul's confidence is not in himself, but in the gospel (Rom. 8:38ff). His reference to the games is to illustrate that entry in the race does not guarantee winning. Self-control is what is needed to win (Gal. 5:23, cf. II Tim. 2:5). His ministry is not mindless and he guards against the fantasy of success. His body is not an enemy, but it must serve the right master. The blessings Paul seeks are the *full entry* into the world to come, and to make a *full reward* (3:10-15, 11 John 8, 11 Peter 1:10-11, Phil. 3:10f). True freedom exercises responsible love, is not presumptuous, but knows 'there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.'

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 10

Chapter 8 has raised the question of eating food offered to idols. Paul agrees with the Corinthians that idols are nothings, but says that consideration must be given to the brother who does not understand this. Then in Chapter 9 the apostle branches out to examine the voluntary disuse of privilege and freedom for the sake of all men, which is also for the sake of the gospel. However, the Corinthian view of freedom was not the same as Paul's. It suffered from a presumption that did not take idolatry seriously. The presumption was not only based upon their 'knowledge' and elitism, but also upon a false sense of security. Using ancient Israel as an example, this chapter warns of the danger of presumption, rebuking complacency, and concludes with a practical application of what it means to live in true freedom.

1. A WARNING FROM THE PAST (10:1-5)

The chapter links with 9:27 by 'for' (*gar humas....*), and goes on to show that high privilege of itself is no guarantee. 'Our fathers' is a linkage of these Gentiles with the children of Abraham, showing the integration and oneness of Jew and Gentile in the covenant people of God (I Peter 2:9-10, Rom. 4:1, 11:17-21, Ephes. 2:11-22, Gal. 3:14, 29). The fivefold repetition of 'all' gives strong force to the warning of verse 5, for these 'all' participated in three great redemptive events.

(i) Salvation from Egypt (*Verse 1*)

This is a reference to the Exodus when all knew the protection of the shekinah cloud of God's presence and the power of the Lord in opening the sea for them as they fled from the pursuing Egyptians. Exodus 13:31, 14:21f, Psalm 105:39.

(ii) Baptism into Moses (*Verse 2*)

This is inseparable from the exodus itself. Some scholars say there is evidence that some of the Jews regarded the events of the Red Sea as a baptism. However the analogy with Christian baptism does not consist in their getting wet (actually it was the Egyptians who got wet!), but they shared in the destiny of the leader and came under Moses' authority (Exodus 14:31).

(iii) The Sustaining of God's Redemption (Verses 3-4)

Supernatural' food and drink is 'spiritual' (see RSV margin).' The word can refer to a person or thing who is the agent of the Holy Spirit (9:11, 12:1, 14:1, 15:44, 46, Rom. 1:11, 7:14, 15:27). This not only means that there is no separation between spiritual and material, but that the food and drink were provided by the action of the Spirit (e.g. Psalm 104:27-30).

The **food** refers to the manna (Exodus 16:4ff, 14-18). The quails were provided in the same way (Exodus 16:12-13).

The **drink** refers to the water which came from the rock at Meribah (Exodus 17: 6, Numbers 20:7-13). The Rock is 'spiritual', therefore it is not allegorical, nor is it a mere representation of Christ, but rather the scene of his activity. Cf. Romans 7:14. Note the transfer of Yahweh as a Rock, to Christ (Deut. 32:15, Psa. 18:2). This is a reference to Christ's pre-existence, and to his following them wherever they went. See John 6:31.

(iv) The Point Made: (Verse 5)

The things which stand out in the foregoing verses are:

- (a) The entire nations participated in the events.
- (b) The benefits were spiritual in character.
- (c) The benefits all came from Christ.

There is a link in the verses with the Christian ordinances or sacraments which had become a source of presumption for the Corinthians. The point is only two made it to the promised land (Numbers 14:16, 22f). To be 'overthrown' means to be spread out, a reference to strewn corpses in the wilderness which is God's judgement. In fact this came by Israel's unbelief and Calvin comments: 'If God did not spare them, he will not spare us, for our situation is the same as theirs.'

2. THE WARNING APPLICATION (10:6-13)

This is an 'awful warning to us' (v.6, cf. 9:27), and has to do with idolatry and its perverse consequences. There are five things which we are warned against, then an explicit statement of Paul's purpose.

(i) Not to Desire Evil (Verse 6)

The reference is to Israel's desiring the flesh-pots of Egypt (Numbers 11:4-34). Evil desire is a form of covetousness or lust which in itself is a form of **idolatry and** a source of rationalization which spawns further idolatry. Colossians 3:5, cf. Romans 1:19ff.

(ii) Idolatry (Verse 7)

The reference is to Exodus 32:6 where the people ate and drank idolatrous meals, and rose up for 'amorous play'. The Corinthian 'knowledge' which was based on the truth that there is only one God, led to indifference to idols (8:1ff, 11).

Idolatry always leads on to the next perversion.

(iii) Immorality or Fornication (Verse 8)

The Israelites involved themselves with Moabite women. Numbers 25:1, 9 says 25,000 perished, but this general figure given by Paul may be linked with the 3,000 who perished with the golden calf (Exodus 32:28).

The principle is explicated in Romans 1:19ff.

(iv) Testing God (Verse 9)

Israel challenged the Lord and his ability to provide the food they needed instead of waiting in faith for his provision (Numbers 21:4ff, Psalm 78:18, 95:5). To tempt God is forbidden (Deut. 6:16, cf. Matt. 4:7).

Corinth was testing God by their presumption of seeing how far they could go in their idolatry, i.e. do all these things and *see* what happens.

(v) Complaining (Verse 10)

This was a frequent occurrence in the wilderness, but probably refers to Numbers 17:5. Cf. 14:2, 36, 16:11, 41, 19:2ff. To complain is to murmur, or whinge, which was also part of the Corinthian scene between the parties and brought its judgements (11:3, 5:5, cf. Exodus 12:23, 11 Sam. 24:16).

(vi) The Explicit Statement of Paul's Purpose (Verse 11-13)

- (a) The 'end of the ages' is a big subject. History can be seen as the culmination of all the ages. The age of the Spirit is the breaking in of the new age (Heb. 6:4) which has come by the decisive events of the Cross and Resurrection. 'With Christ has broken in the end phase of the delimited age of world.' (Cullman, quoted from Barrett, p.228). What has happened in past ages is a warning to us who live in the fulfilment of these things.
- (b) Paul's purpose is quite clear in verse 12. No presumption.
- (c) The Corinthians have nothing to brag about as though they had some exceptional temptations. But when these temptations or testings come then together with it God will provide the way of escape, if they will see it.

3. THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY WITH IDOLATRY (10:14-22)

Coming to the conclusion of chapters 8 and 9, as well as the verses above, Paul comes to the heart of the problem, first in verse 14, by saying that it is not enough to merely have 'knowledge' about idolatry, but they are to avoid it. Paul bases his argument upon the inconsistency of the fellowship Christians have in Christ and that of idolatry.

(i) The Nature of Christian Fellowship (Verses 16-18)

- (a) *Participation in the blood of Christ.*

This is the cup of blessing (11:23-26, cf. Mark 14:22f). A technical Jewish term for the thanksgiving offered over the wine drunk at the conclusion of a

Jewish meal. 'Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, who givest us the fruit of the vine.' In the Passover meal this cup Was the third of the four that were drunk.

'Participation' is 'communion' from the Greek word *koinonia*, i.e. a common sharing in the benefits conferred.

(b) *Participation in the body of Christ.*

Verse 17 can be translated and punctuated differently so that 'because' can link back to the argument of verse 16 or it can mean that the one loaf is as the one body all share in fellowship. The 'Body of Christ' is not Christ's *flesh* (cf. Col. 1:22), but is the community of Christ as one with him (12:27, Rom. 12:5). 'To eat the loaf means to share (with others) in that company of men which, through its union with Christ, has by anticipation entered upon the new age which lies beyond the resurrection' (Barrett, p. 233).

To share in the cup and loaf is to feast on 'spiritual' food and drink (verses 3-4). It is to appropriate the benefits of Christ's victory (by faith), and to participate in the unity of the body. That the bread is mentioned before the wine maybe because of emphasis and because as yet there was no invariable liturgical form. However, the point of the argument is that the Supper is a real participation, so likewise are idol feasts, and the two are incompatible.

(ii) Clarification of This is Made by the Analogy in Verse 17

All were partners together in the benefits of the altar. (a) Priests, Lev. 10:12-15, and (b) non-priests. 1 Sam. 9:10-24.

(iii) Conclusions

- (a) While idols are nothings (8:4) there is more to them than the Corinthians allowed.
- (b) Demons are frequently linked with idolatry. Psalm 106:37, Isaiah 65:11, cf. LXX Deut. 32:17. Demons gain power by the legalistic systems, the mystique of ritual, or the emotionalism and debauch associated with idol worship (Gal. 4:3, 8-11, Col. 2:8, 20-23).
- (c) Therefore idolatry is not empty, but positively evil and only a clean break from it is consistent or possible. Isa. 65:11, 1 Cor. 12:3, 6:18.
- (d) The warning in verse 22 means that God's holiness cannot be presumed upon, i.e. even if we think we are strong do we suppose we can play fast and loose with God and get away with it? Gal. 6:7, Exodus 20:4-6.

4. LIVING IN TRUE FREEDOM(10:23 - 11:1)

This is the practical outcome of the whole question raised initially in Chapter 8.

(i) Free for the Good of the Neighbour (Verses 23-24)

i.e. the weaker brother, and the building up of the community. Romans 14:20, 13:5.

(ii) Don't Be Over-Scrupulous (Verses 25-27)

Paul recognizes that nothing is evil in itself (cf. Psalm 24:1, Rom. 14:14, 17). Therefore don't nit-pick.

(iii) Consider the Conscience of the Other Man (Verses 28-30)

Whose conscience is this? The pagan? The weak Christian? Hard to see a pagan's conscience being bothered by it, therefore it is best to take it as a fellow guest, a Christian brother who points this out.

Difficult to see how the last part of verse 29 and verse 30 follows the argument. It seems best to see it as Paul justifying the abstention by the strong, and that he should give no occasion for speaking evil in the church as it matters little what we eat.

(iv) Putting it all Positively (Verses 31 - 11:1)

- (a) God's glory is primary.
- (b) Don't be a stumbling block, rather aim to win all for the gospel.
- (c) This is the pattern of Christ. Phil. 3:17, 1 Thess. 1:6, 11 Thess. 3:7, 9.



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 11

It is evident from 12:1ff that Paul was asked a question by the Corinthian church about the exercise of spiritual gifts. This opens the wider issue of the community and its worship. Paul has heard of practices in the assembly which trouble him, therefore before moving to the exercise of gifts Paul deals with two abuses which marred the church. The two dealt with in chapter eleven are,

- (i) The relationship between men and women in the church (vs. 2-16), and
- (ii) The straightening out of abuses in connection with the Lord's Supper (vs. 17-34).

1. MEN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH (11:2-16)

(i) Introduction: The Traditions (*Verse 2*)

This verse may be a reference to the letter from the Corinthians (7:1). These traditions contained the central facts and truths of the Gospel, including moral conduct which had been imparted orally. See verses 17, 23, 15:1, 3, Romans 6:17, 11 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6. We may assume that the oneness of male and female in Christ would be a basic element in Paul's early preaching (cf. Gal. 3: 28). However, as with other of the Corinthian characteristics, the 'emancipated woman' was flouting the conventions, and at a deeper level the creative unity in diversity of male-female distinctives was being blurred. The basic question, then, is what is the relationship between men and women, especially in Christian worship?

As we shall see, the answer is found not merely in societal conventions but in the creational order of things which will deal with the basic question of authority, interdependency, function, equality, and responsibility.

(ii) Headship

The foundation is put in verse 3. Headship at base has to do with authority and leadership. The discussion is difficult because of man's rejection of authority and the emotional problems associated with it. Yet creationally the Bible speaks of an hierarchy of authorities (e.g. Rom. 13:1).

Christ has headship over every man, Christian or no, by reason of man's creation through Christ and his redemption in Christ, even if he has not submitted to

that authority (8:6, cf. Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:1ff, Matt. 28:18, Acts 2:36, 10:36, etc.). No one would dispute that Christ is head of his bride the Church (Ephes. 1:22, 5:21ff). His authority is seen in his servanthood, as also in his protecting rule.

The head, or authority of a woman (wife) in like manner is her husband. As Christ is one with his church, his body, so here.

The basis is Christ's submission to the Father. The Son is what he is by his relationship with the Father (John 5:17). His subordination to the Father is seen in 3:23, 15:28. Yet when Jesus says 'I and the Father are one', and, 'the Father is greater than I,' there is no contradiction because the subordination does not mean inferiority or inequality. It is an authority of function.

(iii) The Man Praying or Prophesying

This would be in the assembly, not privately in the home. For the gift of prophecy see notes on 12:10, etc. Jewish males always prayed with their head covered and in Greek society the practice was for both men and women to pray with their heads uncovered (see Leon Morris' Comm., p.152). This means a distinctive practice for Christians, as Paul says that for a man to cover his head is to dishonour or shame his head.

The second occurrence of 'head' in verse 4 may refer to (a) His physical head as in the first occurrence. (b) Christ, the head of every man (verse 3), or (c) Both, i.e. (a) and (b), but if we link it with verse 7 and II Corinthians 3:18 the man with unveiled head reflects the glory of Christ. 'If (like Moses) he were to wear a veil and conceal his head he would rob his own head of its chief function of reflecting the glory of Christ, and he would at the same time rob Christ of the glass in which his glory is reflected' (Barrett, p.250).

Whatever - it is to dishonour his manliness as one created through Christ, and only under his yoke does he know his true identity.

The reason for a man not covering his head is made in verse 7a. This is based on Genesis 1:26, cf. 9:6, and especially 5:1-2 where the male and female are called 'Man'.

(iv) The Woman Praying or Prophesying

She is to cover her head. Not to do so is to dishonour her head, i.e. her femininity and her husband (verse 5). The point is reinforced in verse 6 where Paul is in effect saying, 'If the woman regards it as a shame for her head to be shorn, **let her understand that it is equally** a shame to have her head uncovered.' For a woman to be unveiled, according to Oriental custom, depicted a woman of questionable morality; to have the head shaven was often the punishment of an adulterous wife.

Again the reason given is in verse 7b. Woman stands in relation to man as nothing else in all creation does, therefore she glorifies man in the glory of her femininity, i.e. in her high place as woman.

(v) The Order of Creation is the Basis*(a) The Hierarchy of Creational Orders (Verses 8 and 9)*

The woman is taken from the side of man and only so can she be bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, and so one flesh. Genesis 2:20-25. Thus in this way both the man and the woman know vocational fulfilment.

(b) Male and Female - Complementary (Verses 11 and 12)

They are not *opposite* sexes, but interdependent and complementary. 'And all things are from God' means this is how things are, this is how God made them, and nothing can alter these facts.

(c) The Angels (Verse 10)

'Veil' is the word 'exousia', translated 'power' or 'authority'. This means that the covering on her head is a sign of a woman's authority. Ramsay gives this explanation: 'In oriental lands the veil, is the power and the honour and the dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect. She is not seen; it is a mark of thoroughly bad manners to observe a veiled woman in the street. But without the veil the woman is a thing of nought, whom any one may insult ...'(Quoted from Leon Morris' Comm, p.154.)

'*Because of the angels*' is difficult of precise interpretation. The angels are authorities in the creational order and also serve us, and are guardians (e.g. Heb. 1:14). Maybe the uncovered head of the woman in worship diverted the men's attention away from worship, but the angels submit and do the Lord's bidding with awe.

(vi) The Testimony of Nature (Verses 13-14)

Romans 1:26-27 speaks of sexual acts which are 'against nature', cf. 2:14, 27, 11:21, 24, Galatians 4:8, Ephesians 2:3. We are expected to have some sense of the created order of things, things which distinguish, in this case, between male and female. There are exceptions to these things, but they are local and temporary. A woman's hair is longer than a man's, and distinctively so. Thus a man with long hair depicted a male prostitute, and moreover, it was an affront to his masculinity. A woman's long hair is 'her glory', i.e. the thing which distinguishes her as a woman. Note it 'is given', and is her 'authority'. What is required for a woman's covering is a hairdress that distinguishes her from a man. (See. F.S. Grosheide's Comm. p.260-1).

(vii) The Churches are under Paul's Authority (Verse 16)

What he has said is universal custom and he has no intention of engaging in a contentious word battle.

For fuller discussion see *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis, p.99f; *The Role & Purpose of Man & Woman*, G. C. Bingham, p. 15-39; *Man, Woman, & Sexuality*, Living Faith Study No.46, G. C. Bingham,

2. CONTRADICTIONS AT THE SUPPER OF THE LORD (11:17-22)

Paul continues to correct disorders in the assembly at Corinth, and in verses 17-34 not only confronts contradictions which occurred at the Supper of the Lord, but also expounds the way of participation in the church meal. First the contradictions - as verse 17 shows, instead of the holy communion being a meal which built up the community it was spoiling it, and for the following reasons.

(i) The Divisions (*Verses 18-19*)

These are schismatic ('divisions'). In 1:10ff they were party cliques, here they appear to include class distinctions. Cf. James 2:1-4.

Paul partly believes it only because **it was so scandalous**.

There were '*hairesis*' ('factions'). See Galatians 5:20. But these cause the genuine, i.e. those whom God approves, to stand out from the rest. These are the ones who behave in a consistently Christian manner.

(ii) They Contradict the Meaning and Nature of the Supper (*Verses 20-22*)

'*Lord's Supper*' means that it is his meal, he is the host, it is in his memory, and under his authority. But when the better off started at once, without waiting for the poor, with gluttony, etc., it contradicted the meal in whose honour it was celebrated.

Note the occasion included the ordinary meal. It was a love feast (11 Peter 2:13, Jude 12); each brought their own food, but this was a travesty of love.

1. REITERATION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MEAL (11:23-26)

(i) The Source (*Verse 23*)

This was written prior to any of the gospels, therefore it is the earliest account of the Lord's Supper. Paul says he received the teaching 'from the Lord'. Because the 'I' is emphatic it could be that it came direct from the Lord, i.e. by revelation. Or, Paul may mean that he received the tradition as it was passed on orally, e.g. 15:3, 11:2.

(ii) The Context (*Verse 23*)

i.e., the betrayal which is not merely a chronological statement, but refers to the action of God himself. The context is the cross, sacrifice, not a commonplace occasion, but the passover meal, commemorating a former exodus. Cf. Exodus 12.

(iii) The Bread (*Verses 23b, 24*)

The original Passover meal was meant to strengthen the Israelites for their march from the land of slavery to the land of promise. Jesus' language is sacrificial (Heb. 13:11). He sees himself as the Passover Lamb (5:7). Note the elec

tric atmosphere when Jesus, instead of saying, 'This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Egypt,' says his death would deliver from a worse bondage than Egypt.

It is 'For you'. What happens to his body is vicarious.

'*Remembrance*' means that we are to go on to repeat the feast which succeeds the passover. The original passover was a memorial of the mighty works of God (Exod. 12:14). It is a remembrance of faith and a realizing anew, as we are prone to forget.

(iv) **The Cup (Verse 25)**

See Matthew 26:27f, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20. Jesus links this with the Covenant promise which includes the forgiveness of sins. Jer. 31:34, cf. Exod. 24:8, I Cor. 15:3f. To drink is to enter into, or participate in the good of that covenant forgiveness (10:17).

(v) **The Significance (Verse 26)**

It is a proclaiming of the gospel of forgiveness. The eating and drinking is not a mere passion play. 'The certainty that with the bread we also eat and drink the body of Christ lies not in the eating and drinking as such, nor in faith, but in the receiving of these qualified signs from Christ.' H. N. Ridderbos.

It is the meal of life until Christ eats it with us in the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 26:29). Thus it is an eschatological meal (15:25, cf. Rom. 9:25, Luke 21: 24).

4. EATING AND DRINKING ARIGHT (11:27-34)

(i) **Unworthy Participation (Verse 27)**

Body is linked with blood, therefore Christ's flesh is not physically present, and it is not referring directly to the church. But by their division and greed the Corinthians were unworthy of, or contradicting what they were, and also contradicted the purpose of Christ's sacrifice (8:12).

(ii) **What the Participants Should Do (Verses 28-29)**

'*Examine*' a word meaning to test, often used in discerning the difference between metals; here it takes us back to being 'genuine' (verse 19).

It is not only **their gluttony, but** their failure in love prevents them seeing the unity of the church as the Body of Christ. Therefore they need to discern - see what it is they share in.

(iii) **Consequences of not Discerning (Verses 29-31)**

It brings judgement. It is Christ's body, the temple of God which is being harmed (3:16f, cf. 14:10, 11 Cor. 5:10). To abuse the Lord's Table brings guilt, the pain of being and living against what we are, and the serious consequences of

broken relationships.

If the Lord's people 'distinguish themselves' (rather than 'judge'), i.e. discern who we really are, then we will not be the objects of judgement (v. 31). Yet God's chastenings enable his people to escape the condemnation of the world.

(iv) Concluding Application (Verses 33-34)

All this is the practice of love, and sharing in the love feast - with the Lord.



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 12

Paul continues with the ordering and function of the Christian assembly as it meets for worship. Already he has spoken about the role of men and women, and has given instruction covering proper regard for one another at the Lord's Supper.

It was in the worshipping congregation that opportunity afforded itself for the display of special gifts, of which the Corinthians were proud. (1:5-8, 4:8.) The theme relates to the general problems of elitism and division in the church and continues on from 11:17-34. But now Paul faces the spiritual problem which most protruded itself at Corinth:- Who were the truly spiritual? Was it those who had the most demonstrative gifts? Chapters 12-14 puts the gifts in the right perspective and shows their true purpose in the unity of the church.

1. THE FUNDAMENTAL TEST (12:1-3)

(i) "Spiritual Gifts"

Again, verse one links up with their letter to Paul. (See 7:1, 8:1, 15:1 and introduction page 2) The gender of 'Spiritual Gifts' is indeterminate as it can refer to things or persons. It means persons who are 'spiritual' i.e. have the Spirit and exercise the powers of **ministry which have their source in the Holy Spirit.**

(ii) Pagan Ecstasy

'When you were heathen'. That state is no more. (6:9-11, cf. Eph. 5:8, 1 Thess. 1:9)

The idols are dumb. See chapter 10, cf. 1 Kings 18:26-29, Ps. 115:4-8, Is. 46:7, Hab. 2:18f. They were totally unable to answer.

The main point: that under the ecstasy of idol worship they were carried away and seized by demonic powers, 10:20, or if not demonic, then certainly by highly emotionalistic and irrational phenomena.

(iii) The Comparison and Touchstone

Verse three comes back to answer the point raised - verse one. Neither Paul nor his hearers doubted other spirits inspired ecstatic speech. Paul does not attack Christian ecstasy, but he does show how to test true from false.

'*Accursed*' = anathema. Leon Harris says "a word which meant originally

'*something laid up*', i.e. laid up in a sacred place. So it came to mean that which was given to a deity. Since what is thus given is totally lost to the giver, the word came to have the meaning of 'that which is destroyed'." (Comm.p. 167) e.g. Joshua 6:18, 7:1.

Who would be saying 'Jesus be cursed!?' Could be Christians who were resisting the trance coming upon them? A more helpful interpretation could be to link it with I John 4:1-3, where the docetists denied the *human* life of Jesus. Thus those crying 'Jesus be cursed' could be those who separated the historical Jesus from a 'spiritual' Christ.

Therefore to ascribe Lordship to Jesus, i.e. to the flesh-bearing, human Jesus, the genuine Holy Spirit is distinguished from spirits which minimize or deny the human, natural, or even weak Jesus.

The following verses expound the rich diversity of gifts which flow in the one body as also showing that inspiration that does not spring from or point to the Lordship of Christ is not true.

2. THE UNITY SPIRIT AND DIVERSITY OF GIFTS (12:4-11)**(i) The Nature of the Gifts (Verses 4-6)**

The gifts of the Spirit are described in three ways.

(a) '*gifts*' verse 4, i.e. *charismata*.

This denotes their source which is God's grace. To understand Charismata we must understand charis. All of God's action is charis - See Eph. 1:6, 2:8-10, 2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 2:11. It is God's action in creation and redemption. The charisma is the life of Christ. cf. I John 5:12, Romans 6:23. 'If the life of Christ is really accepted as the *charisma*, then all the elements of his life, as we know them, will be manifested in the gifts. We may say that the aggregate of the gifts (i.e. their worship and service) is the total life of Christ ...' (*The Giver: The Gifts: The Giving*, G.C. Bingham L.F.S. No 3)

This life is brought by the Spirit of grace. The main point that the gifts

are shared out among Christians. Their origin never lies in the receiver, but in God's grace, therefore there is no room for rivalry or superiority. (4:7)

(b) *'service' verse 5 diakonia, i.e. ministries.*

This points to the way in which the gifts are used in practice, and are the expression of willing action.

(c) *'working' verse 6 i.e. energemata - outworkings, operations.*

This is God's power in action. The goal of the gifts is in the fact that something actually happens, viz. a person is helped, the church strengthened.

This action is trinitarian. It is in diversity, and not uniformity.

(ii) All to Common Profit. (Verse 7)

The Spirit is visiblized in the variety of these operations. It is to each', but not individualistically. All this is a showing of Christ by the Spirit.

(iii) The Variety of Gifts (Verses 8-11)

The diversity is now illustrated.

(a) *The Word of Wisdom.*

See note on 1:19-25, page 11. An utterance which solves a difficulty, or silences an opponent, given in a specific situation. e.g. 1 Kings 3:16-28, Is. 11:2ff, Acts 6:10, Eph. 1:17, Col. 2:3.

(b) *The Word of Knowledge.*

Knowledge without love puffs up (8:1, 10, 13:2. See note on 1:5 page 6.) Knowledge is the Spirit given power to grasp the principles which wisdom embodies and to communicate that in practical and living situations.

(c) *Faith.*

This is a believing, a dependency, a trusting in the God of grace. Faith is a gift. (Eph. 2:8-9, Phil. 1:29, Rom. 10:14ff.) The Christian is saved, by such faith and lives by faith. (Rom. 1:16f) Here 'faith' is that strong-conviction that God will do what he has promised. (Matt. 17:20, Mark 11:22ff, Rom. 12:6)

"The gift of faith is nothing less than 'fides miraculora', the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in order to accomplish the will of God despite all natural resistance, and above all, the power to triumph over a world at enmity with God." (Joseph Broock, quoted by Arnold Bithlinger *Gifts ,and Graces*, page 32)

(d) *Gifts of healings.*

The Gospels and the Acts-give many examples of healings. e.g. Paul heals in Acts 14:8ff. This is a sign of **the new** age or the power of the Kingdom manifesting itself in the present and **emphasizes the Biblical concern for the** whole person. e.g. Luke 6:19, 8:44, Mark 3:10, Acts 5:16 etc.

(e) *Working of Miracles.*

The word for miracle is powers - 'dunamewn', or mighty works. Linked and Scriptures with signs and wonders, but not to be thought of as magic, or the overcoming of the 'laws of nature'. In contrast to the preceding gift these powers touch not only healing but cover a wide range of deeds of every kind. (John 14:12, Acts 4:29f, 19:11, 9:36-42, 20:7-10, 16:18, 19:12, 16:26, 28:3f.) These signs often confirmed the word.

(f) *Prophecy.*

Contains two elements. (1) Foretelling, (2) Forthtelling. The prophet speaks the word of another. Exodus 7:1f. Prophecy is always by the Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21. It testifies of Christ. 1 Peter 1:10-12, Rev. 19:10. So the prophet is God's spokesman. Amos 3:7. Joel speaks of all God's people being prophets. 2:28f. cf. Acts 2:17f. In 14:24f the prophet speaks a word from God into a concrete situation, cf. Acts 19:6.

(g) *Discerning between Spirits.*

This would be a check and balance for prophecy. i.e. between divine, human and demonic powers. (12:3, Acts 5:3, 13:16, 16:17f, James 3:14, 17, 1 John 4:1.)

(h) *Various Kinds of Tongues.*

This is the ability to speak in a language that the speaker has not learned, that he does not understand, and that is incomprehensible to the hearer. See 14:7-11, cf. Acts 10:46, 2:11-13.

(i) *Interpretation of Tongues.*

This is the ability to give the sense of what has been said in tongues, when this has been exercised in the assembly. It is a translation or a commentary of what has been said in tongues, hence an interpretation. Like the other gifts it is also an exercise in faith. See 14:13, 5.

(iv) *All from the Same Source* (Verse 11)

This would be Paul's main purpose. Note the emphasis throughout verses 4-11 on the 'same Spirit' meaning that he is the Spirit of Unity. The unity he gives is a rich variety, and as the One who gives is triune in unity so with the gifts.

He gives 'as he wills'. It is all of grace. It is not by merit or superiority, neither do we manage the distribution. **Therefore there is no** place for boasting of inferiority.

This leads Paul on now to think of the nature of the church itself.

3. THE ONENESS OF THE BODY (12:12-13)

(i) The Body of Christ (*Verse 12*)

The analogy of the human body with a corporate group of people (e.g. the State) was frequently used in the ancient world.

Paul says we are all living limbs of one body, but he does not say the church *is like* the body of Christ, but it is the body of Christ, cf. verse 27. Christ is head of his people, 11:3, 12:3, and he is also a unity with his *people*. Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:18 etc.

(ii) Baptism into the Body by the Spirit (*Verse*

‘For’ to **tell us how** we are made members of the body.

‘**Baptism**’ is aorist, indicating its once for all event. In Romans 6:3ff baptism signifies visibly that we have been incorporated in Christ’s historical judgement on sin in the cross. Water baptism is the appropriation of this, being linked with repentance and faith. cf. Gal. 3:27.

‘**By one Spirit**’ can also be translated ‘in one Spirit’. The act of receiving the Spirit is expressed in different terms. e.g. The Spirit coming upon, falling upon, receiving, baptism, filling. Matthew 3:11, cf. Luke 3:16, Acts 1:3-8, speak of being baptized in the Spirit. Therefore the Spirit into which men are baptized is himself effectual and dynamic in baptizing them into the one body. Thus all together by the same Spirit are all one person in him, and those so baptized have drunk (aorist also) of the one life-giving Spirit. e.g. John 4:10.

4. THE DIVERSITY OF THE BODY (12:14-26)

(i) Each Member Belongs to the One Body. (*Verses 14-16*)

The "body" used here is the analogy of the human body. There is no place for being disgruntled with the distribution of the gifts by glancing covetously at those with seeming superior gifts. None are *less* part of the whole body and all make up the whole.

(ii) Variety is Indispensable. (*Verses 17-20*)

One organ or limb of a body cannot function without the other organ or limbs. All are necessary.

(iii) It is an Indissoluble Fellowship. (*Verses 21-26*)

The arrogant members cannot reject members of itself, as each member needs the rest. Those parts of our human bodies which we may normally conceal, are given special attention. Corinth needs reminding that the way of grace is reversal of the way of the world. Thus the weaker and humbler members **should not** be despised but given the greater honour. This is how God has treated us all. (Romans 14:1, 15:1, Phil. 2:1-11.)

5. THE HIERARCHY OF GIFTS(12:27-31)

(i) This is a Practical Application

'Body' in verse 27 has no article and can be translated 'you are a body of Christ'. It may mean that the Corinth assembly is a microcosm of the macrocosm, yet verses 28-31 seem to speak of the church universally. Cf. verse 12. Cf. Ephesians 1:22f.

(ii) Apostles

Means being sent, sending men to preach (Rom. 10:15, 1 Cor. 1:17, 11 Cor. 12: 17). Original apostles were the twelve called by Christ and sent out (Mark 3: 14f). Paul was an apostle who, like the twelve, was qualified by his seeing the Lord. The apostles' doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42) is the making clear, or crystallizing of the events of Christ in the light of O.T. prophecy. Yet apostles are also wider than these (I Cor. 15:5, 7, II Cor. 11:5, 12:11). In his Institutes Calvin says that God calls forth apostles 'as they are needed at different times'. (IV/3/4.) They may be itinerant, and be founders of congregations.

(iii) Prophets

See notes on verse 10.

(iv) Teachers

See list in Ephesians 4:11 where they are linked with Pastors who as shepherds feed the flock with the word of God. See Acts 18:24f, I Corinthians 3:6, Romans 12:7, 11 Timothy 4:2, James 3:1. Their function is to make known to peoples' minds what they already know by experience.

(v) These Three Ministries Form a Unity

See break between Ephesians 4:11 and 12. It seems **these three build up the body for its** ministry which consists, in part, of the following gifts:

- * Workers of miracles, healers, see verses 9, 10.
- * Helpers, i.e. gifts of support, giving defence and succour. Not clear, but maybe like deacons.
- * Administrators, as giving direction, i.e. as in the steering of a ship. A technical term in the field of banking and referred to the chief accountant. A manager.
- * Various tongues, see verse 10.

(vi) The Answer to Questions in Vs. 29-30 is Definitely, "NO"

(vii) Priority (Verse 31)

This is stated because such a high priority was placed upon the lower gifts.

The higher gifts are those of prophecy.

Then beyond all this and what Paul has said he will show a way that transcends all that he has said.



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 13

Some have thought chapter thirteen is a digression away from Paul's argument dealing with spiritual gifts. However, after his word to seek the higher gifts of prophecy, etc., in 12:31, Paul comes now to show what all the gifts are for and how they are to be used. A false polarization is sometimes made between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit with ensuing debate as to what is the most important. Chapter 13 shows that the gifts are meant to be the means of expressing love in concrete action, and a quick glance at the description of love in 13:4-7 and Galatians 5:2f will show that the Spirit's harvest in the believer is that of the Gospel or of Christ himself.

Paul will return to the use of the gifts in chapter 14, but in chapter 13 he shows the relationship of the gifts to love and the poverty of the gifts without love.

1. GIFTS WITHOUT LOVE ARE USELESS (13:1-3)

(i) Tongues Without Love (*Verse 1*)

The tongues of men (ordinary human speech) is linked with 'but also with angels', joining speaking in tongues to the language of angels whose speech is normally not understood by men. Rev. 14:2f, II Cor. 12:4. (This is a gift given to men 12:10, 14:2, 14:18, a gift which Paul himself used.)

The *noisy gong - clanging* symbol may be a reference to pagan worship, i.e. the noise may have been intended to call the god's attention or to drive away demons, or a means of exciting the worshippers.

The point is that such praise or speaking is a meaningless and contradictory exercise which gives a caricature of the gospel when used without love.

(ii) Prophecy, Knowledge and Faith Without Love (Verse 2)

‘Prophecy’ is one of the highest gifts, and no mere contentless sound. See notes on 12:10, 14:1. This is linked with ‘mysteries’, i.e. the open secret of the gospel concerning his redemptive purpose in creation and history, 2:7, 4:5, 15:25, Ephes. 1:9f, Rom. 11:25, 16-25, etc. In the same bundle is ‘knowledge’, cf. 12:8, which as Leon Morris says, ‘sometimes has a meaning not unlike our science’. (Commentary, p.182)

Faith is that gift spoken of in 12:19, cf. Mark 11:23, i.e. that which makes what seems impossible, possible.

Now Paul says we may have all these things, but without love it is worthless. We may be proud of our exhibitionism, but in truth we are nothing.

(iii) Religious Zeal, Without Love (Verse 3)

This zeal, which is in fact imitation love, has two aspects:

(a) Service.

‘If I give away all I have’. True love is no mere words, cf. I John 3:18. Yet there can be a giving of things in which there is no giving of self, and where, in fact, it is a giving for the name of self even if it is for self’s god. A literal translation is ‘To convert all my possessions into bits of bread for the hungry’. Religious self zeal may do this.

(b) Martyrdom.

If this is for my ‘glory’ (see RSV margin) then it is already without love. ‘If in some great cause I give myself up to the most painful of deaths but have no love, even this is a discredit to me.’ See Romans 10:1ff.

‘To gain nothing’ means that if it is not of love then it contributes nothing ultimately, and therefore we cannot share its blessings. 3:10-15, 9:23, 11 Peter 1:11, 11 John 8, Revelation 14:13.

2. THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (13:4-7)

These verses are a description of what love is, and also they tell us what love does not do. Giving, as we have seen above, is not always loving, but loving is always giving.

(i) It is Patient and Kind

This is its character. To be patient is to be ‘long minded’, i.e a love which does not run out. It is a love which waits and still loves. This is its breadth. ‘God is love’ and we are told over and over in Scripture of his ‘long suffering’, e.g. 11 Peter 3:9, 1 Peter 2:23, etc. The quality of love is its kindness, which is not mere pity, but the concrete action of going out to do another good for his own sake. ‘Love is the deed which meets the need’ (G. C. Bingham).

(ii) What Love Does Not Do

(a) *Not jealous or envious*, i.e. of other's gifts, of the party they belong to, for my recognition and status. This is the attitude of dissatisfaction and opposition to the success of others.

Love is generous.

(b) *Not boastful*. This is linked with (a). It is a bragging of one's own achievements over and against the brethren. 'My gifts,' 'my party,' etc.

Love is a humble spirit.

(c) *Not arrogant*, literally a blowing - puffed, conceited, so it exaggerates the facts. 4:6, 18, 19, 5:2, 8:1ff. Always a danger with 'gifted' people.

True love rests in God and is satisfied.

(d) *Not rude*, i.e. unseemly - pushing oneself over others, e.g. in Corinth at the Lord's Supper (9:17ff). Has no sense for the feelings of others and acts in a disorderly manner (14:40).

Love is thoughtful and courteous.

(e) *Does not insist on its own way*, i.e. on its rights (10:24).

True love has no rights.

(f) *Not irritable*, i.e. touchy, *provoked* to anger. This only happens when we claim to have rights.

Love is unprovokable.

(g) *Not resentful*, does not put evil down to anyone's account. It keeps no score of wrong or of hurts. Paraphrased: 'does not file away injuries done to one for further reference.' This is well illustrated in Fr. James Broderick's little sketch of Pope Paul IV: 'He never forgot such incidents, which was one of his fundamental weaknesses. He might bury the hatchet for a time, but he gave the impression of always carefully marking the spot.' (W. G. H. Simon Commentary, p.129)

Love forgives, taking the evil into itself and disposing of it.

(h) *Does not rejoice at wrong*, i.e. *adikia* - *unrighteousness*, either in the pleasure of censoriousness or in the superiority of seeing another fail.

Love rejoices in the right, i.e. the truth, when it prevails.

(iii) What Love Does (Verse 7)

(a) *Bears all things*, covers everything (I Peter 4:8). Love takes into itself the faults and failures of others in much the same way as Christ bore our sins, destroying them in his love. I Peter 2:24.

(b) *Believes all things*: it never ceases to exercise faith, confident that where the world's evil reached its zenith, there love defeated it in the Cross. Thus love can believe in the face of pessimism.

(c) *Hopes all things*. It knows that in the end it will prevail and so sees the desired goal completed.

(d) *Endures all things*. It takes the hurts and rejections and does not react, but in more love. It neutralizes evil, and is never conquered.

3. LOVE IS ALL (13:8-13)

(i) Love Never Ends

I.e. it never fails, in all things love goes on, (cf. Ephesians 6:24 'love undying'), hence love is eternal. It is the true thing in the universe. 'Love is the power of this world which already as such is the power of the world to come' (Traeltsch, quoted by Barrett, p.305). The Cross demonstrates that love never fails under pressure. Therefore it is love which builds the work of the future. See again I Cor. 3:10-15.

(ii) The Transient Usefulness of the Gifts

The gifts of prophecy, tongues, knowledge, etc., are the instruments of love, which contribute to the final new world of love, i.e. the 'perfect' - the *teleion*, the totality, the goal and completion. But when that completion comes the gifts will be redundant, having served their purpose. 'They are, so to speak, scaffolding for the building.

The building, love itself, or love's outcome, maturity, is what matters.

Perhaps Paul is saying gifts are for the primary stages, but love's maturity (i.e. perfection in love) is the ultimate. In this perfection we not only see God, and all things, but we 'know as we are known' (G. C. Bingham, LFS. No. 1, p.20).

(iii) Finish with the Childishness (an Illustration in Parenthesis)

In verse 11 Paul is saying in effect all this playing with and competition with gifts and parties is childish in the light of what we are really about. They overvalued the gifts, but love matures us and teaches us to put away childish ways.

(iv) Meanwhile and Then (*Verse 12*)

Corinth was famous for producing looking glasses, but few Christians would have been able to afford a mirror of good quality. Hence eternal things are still indistinct. At the consummation it will not be a different knowing, but a completion of knowledge. Our knowing and salvation depend not upon our knowing, but on God's knowing us (Gal. 4:9).

(v) The Greatest is Love (*Verse 13*)

While here faith and hope are present with love, but they serve love. Gal. 5:5-6, 11 Cor. 5:14, 1 Thess. 1:3, 1 Peter 1:8, 1 Cor. 2:9f, Rom. 5:5, 11 Thess. 2:16. God is love. He plans in love, and creates out of love. By love he sustains his creation, 'which is full of the love of the Lord', and he redeems it in love. We are made to know love and to love. It is as we love that we live. Therefore love is all.

4. LOVE THE MODE OF THE SPIRIT

This is a concluding remark on the relationship of the gifts with their function

tion in the church. In chapter 12 the gifts are linked to grace, and the common good. In chapter 14 they are joined with the upbuilding of the church. In chapter 13 the graces do not 'seek their own'. They exist for the service of the body into which they have been baptized. Therefore every description of love in this chapter when placed against the background of the 'Corinthianism' can be comparably highlighted.

† † † † †

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 14

This chapter has two main sections:-(a) Speaking in tongues and prophesying, verses 1-25, and (b) Order in worship, verses 26-40. We see that the purposeful goal of the Spirit is the edifying or building up of the church through the graces or gifts given. This is the highest expression of spiritual gifts.

1. PROPHECY IS GREATER THAN TONGUES (14:1-5)

(i) The Goal

In accord with chapter 13 it is the pursuit of love which is fully consistent with the exercise of the gifts. These gifts are to be striven for (verse 1, cf. 12:31), but it seems that there was an exaggerated emphasis given to tongues, and this may have retarded the appreciation of the importance of prophecy. However, tongues is also a gift not to misprize (verse 5).

(ii) Tongues

See references in 13:1, 12:10, 30.

The Greek word is 'glossolalia'. 'Glossa' does not merely mean using the tongue as if it were a rolling of the tongue, or babbling. 'Glossa' in Greek is used of both language and tongue. See 13:1, cf. Acts 2:11, 10:47, 11:17.

Hence to speak in a tongue is to utter 'mysteries in the Spirit'. (on 'Mystery' see notes on 13:2, etc.). This means that by the Spirit the language communicates hidden truths, which when interpreted are similar to prophecy (cf. verse 27).

To speak in a tongue or tongues is to communicate with God who inspires it.

This is a way of speaking to God which is beyond human comprehension. It also edifies the speaker, i.e. it is a constructive building up of the person who so prays.

With these positive qualities Paul points out that the value of tongues is limited by the failure of the congregation to understand what is said.

(iii) Prophecy

See references 13:2, 12:10, 29, etc. It is the means given by God **through the Holy Spirit** of speaking directly through men to men, e.g. I Peter 4:11.

Prophecy 'upbuilds' (verse 3). In verse 4 it is translated 'edifies'. The word literally means 'the building of a house'. See 3:9ff, cf. Ephesians 1:9-10. Thus because it is understood and comes as a word from the Lord, prophecy builds up the quality and strength of the church.

Prophecy does this through 'encouragement'; someone who is called alongside to help and so lends a hand, leads on, comforts. Prophecy also brings 'consolation', a word meaning to calm and to pacify.

Therefore 'he who prophesies is *greater* (verse 5). Tongues is good because it builds an individual up, but prophecy is the better servant in building up the church and so greater (Mark 10:43f). Upbuilding, as we shall see, is the theme of the chapter. The ultimate criterion for a gift is: Does it **build up the church**?

2. UNDERSTANDING MAKES FOR BUILDING UP (14:6-12)

(i) Tongues are of no Benefit to the Church Unless Accompanied by Intelligible Communication

This is the drift of verse 6, which Paul illustrates in verses 7-8, where he con-pares speaking in tongues with musical instruments, and in verses 10-11 with foreign languages. Unless we understand the tune, or the message conveyed by the sound then it cannot help, but only confuse. Likewise unless we understand the language of the person speaking, then the speaker is to us as a foreigner (i.e. in Greek, Barbarian. Greeks and Romans placed all those whose talk they could not understand into this category.).

Paul makes his point in verse 9. If the message spoken does not enter the ears and minds of the hearer so as to be understood, it conveys no meaning - cf. 9:26. It is aimless words signifying nothing.

(ii) What Builds Up the Church?

(a) '*Revelation*', i.e. 'apocalypsis', literally means unveiling. The veil that hides what God is doing from our eyes is lifted. This can come through visions (Joel 2:28f, Acts 2:16-17, 16:9, etc.) or dreams (Acts 10:17), and is often linked with prophecy. It is the medium of God's revelation of himself and his plan for history, and brings instruction, guidance, and comfort to the people of God, e.g. Acts 27:23f.

(b) *This is linked with knowledge, prophecy and teaching* (see 12:28, etc.).

All these activities are part of the one and too rigid a distinction between them

need not be made. The revelation comes as knowledge, is prophetic, and is true teaching; being the word of God.

It is the word of God **which leads the** people of God, e.g. **I Peter 1:22 - 2:3**, building them up, therefore the over-riding consideration in each case, for every gift, is its service in equipping the church.

3. TONGUES ARE USEFUL WHEN SUPPLEMENTED BY INTERPRETATION (14:13-18)

(i) The Application of Verse 13 is Unmistakable

‘Therefore’ from the previous verses. Interpretation will connect tongues with prophecy and teaching, making it edifying. The gift of interpretation can be asked for.

Paul is not knocking the gift of tongues. Verse 18.

(ii) Mind Words - Spirit Words

Created in the image of God, man is spirit. The natural man has not the Holy Spirit, but the regenerated man has the Spirit and therefore prays by the Holy Spirit with his spirit (Ephes. 5:18). Thus ‘my spirit’ (verse 14) is linked **with ‘pray with the Spirit’** in verse 15. However, this prayer which expresses itself in tongues is unfruitful. for the mind, i.e. the mind produces nothing, or contributes nothing in the process, thus it is unable to ‘instruct others’.

Mind words, or praying with the mind is no less spiritual, and is not to be thought of as not coming from the Holy Spirit, e.g. Romans 8:26, cf. Ephesians 5: 18-20, where prayer and worship instruct the congregation.

(iii) Edifying Prayer

The ‘outsider’ in verse 16 would be a simple listener, i.e. **one who is outside** this particular activity (see RSV margin). It does not need to be taken as a non-Christian (cf. verse 23). To ‘bless’ is a prayer of thanksgiving (10:16), and the outsider is built up by such a prayer only if he can say ‘Amen’ to it. Thus Paul shows in verse 19 that true prayer is to be expressed in the true freedom of not doing one’s own thing. Both tongues and prophecy are gifts, but to be edifying tongues need interpretation.

4. TONGUES AND PROPHECY AS SIGNS(14:20-25)

(i) The Concern Here is for Outsiders and Unbelievers (Verse 23)

The church was not ‘closed shop’. These are not in an intermediate state of membership. It may refer to a person as in verse 16 ‘outsider’, and the ‘unbeliever’ would be one who is not of their number, a non-Christian. Thus it could be identified as an unbelieving outsider.

Hence in verse 20 Paul says they should adjust their scale of values to make mature judgements, particularly in their consideration of people who will not understand, cf. 13:11.

(ii) Tongues as a Sign

The quote in verse 21 is from Isaiah 28:11f. Originally it would refer to the Assyrian foreign invaders of Israel for judgement. In the wider picture it could mean the preaching of the Gospel to Jews by Gentiles. Romans 11:11, 25ff. Tongues is a sign which hardens unbelievers. On the other hand when Gentiles spoke in tongues it was a sign to the Jews that they had received the Spirit and that God had incorporated them into the whole people of God. Acts 10:44ff, 11:17.

The effect of tongues on unbelieving outsiders will be to harden, they regarding the people as crazy. Therefore it is a sign for unbelievers.

(iii) Prophecy as a Sign

This is a sign for believers, remembering that a sign is that which points to the reality. Prophecy is a speaking of the word of God, a bearing witness to Christ so that the outsider is convicted, cf. John 16:8. He is brought to account, i.e. meaning judgement, and takes responsibility for his actions. The word of God penetrates the deceptions of sin (Heb. 4:12), he meets the living God in his people, and worships him. E.g. Zechariah 8:20-23, Acts 2:37.

5. HARMONY IN THE ASSEMBLY (14:26-33)**(i) All Contribute**

Verse 26 speaks of the church, its coming together (it is still the church when it is not come together), and the ministry of each one. The contribution of each is by the graces of the Spirit. Each believer was to feel himself a vital and responsible participant in the congregation's life. Again it has as its goal the building up of the church.

(ii) Paul Does Not Disdain to Include Speaking in Tongues. But With Three Qualifications

- (a) Not more than three.
- (b) That they take turn. If many spoke, interpretation impractical.
- (c) With an interpreter. Without an interpreter they are to be quiet and the prayer will be self-edifying.

(iii) There Are Principles for Prophecy

(a) *They are to take turn.* Only two or three at a time, and one by one, not all at once. All may not necessarily take part, but all could. This would not be a 'human' decision, but by the freedom of the Spirit.

(b) *It was subject to the congregation.* This is seen in verse 29 where 'others' may be prophets who did not prophesy on this occasion, or the remainder of the assembly (I Thess. 5:21, 1 John 4:1f, I Cor. 12:3). This means that discussion followed prophecy. None can plead that he must continue speaking under the compulsion of the Spirit, as they are to be subject to one another (verse 32).

(iv) The Harmony

This is rooted in God the Spirit who is not chaotic, but the God of peace (i.e. activity in the symphony of grace). The threefold use of 'fall' in verse 31 underlines the nature of this harmony, and its goal.

6. WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY (14:33B-36)

The role of women in the assembly has already been dealt with in 11:2ff (see notes). The reference to the love and subordination has also been discussed in 11:5, but would refer here probably to verses like Gen. 3:16, cf. I Peter 3:1-6. The picture appears to be women who were disruptive, perhaps in the weighing of prophetic utterance. These would be married women who should sort things out at home, cf. Acts 21:9, 1 Tim. 2:11f. The **'to speak in church'** has been differently interpreted, because from chapter 11 Paul has acknowledged that women pray and prophesy in the assembly. Thus 'to speak' (*lalein*) could be taken to mean that women are not to speak in tongues in church which could be offensive and disruptive. Or may be the feminine passion for talk at Corinth gave rise to heated argument between husband and wife in the church.

Calvin's word is apt here: 'The discerning reader should come to the decision, that the things which Paul is dealing with here, are indifferent, neither good nor bad; and that they are forbidden only because they work against seemliness and edification.'

The Corinthians have no monopoly on the gospel (verse 36). It would be ridiculous to think that all the rest were wrong, and they alone right.

7. CONCLUSION(14:37-40)

Paul is summing up on chapters 12-14 for the last time. He has shown that as the Spirit is united to Christ so the various gifts of the Spirit are committed to the building up of the *body* of Christ. 'The triune God is the source, love is the way, and the upbuilding of the church is the goal of the spiritual graces.' (Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, p.302.)

Those who have the Spirit will recognise the authority of Christ. Paul is not quoting Jesus Christ, but he has the mind of Christ. Paul does not recognise as spiritual or inspired the person who does not acknowledge the authority of Christ. I Thess. 5:19ff, I Cor. 2:10f, 12:3.



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 15:1-34

This chapter deals with the resurrection. From the standpoint of the whole, (while keeping in view the problems of the Corinthians), this chapter is the crux of the whole book. It could be argued that many, if not all, the problems of this church came from a deficient view of the meaning of the resurrection - the hyper spirituality, the triumphalism, immorality, gnosticism, emphasis on ecstasies and a superior attitude to idolatry. It seems that the Corinthians believed in a resurrection, that Christ was raised, but it was a spiritualised impression that affected much of their behaviour. It bypassed the fact of a whole resurrection. If it is only a carnal longing for a conquest of the grave, and Christ is a model for this, 'we had better take to anthroposophy' (Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, p. 67). Hellenistic religions had models of gods who went into death & hell and returned from the dead. What Paul stresses is that it is the *crucified* Messiah who conquered death, and that this man rose. At Corinth they had been taught and believed in the resurrection of Christ, yet failed to see that this demonstrated a whole resurrection for them. Some were saying 'there is no resurrection of the dead'.

Paul, then, deals with this erroneous opinion held by some. He shows its presuppositions and its consequences, making this chapter the most expressly doctrinal one of the letter.

1. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST - THE BASIS (15:1-11)

(i) Paul Goes Back to Basic Christian Proclamation (*Verses 1-2*)

To '*remind*' them is to draw attention to something and to make plain something which they should never have forgotten (11:24f, cf. Gal. 1:6, 3:1, etc.). These were 'the terms' or the pattern and content of his preaching, which they 'received', i.e. they obeyed the message and believed in repentance and faith. To 'stand' in this gospel is to live in the good of it (Rom. 5:2). But to 'believe in vain' is to believe in an empty way, and to take that salvation for granted (cf. 11 Cor. 6:1-3, Heb. 12:14-17).

(ii) The Origin of Paul's Preaching (*Verse 3a*)

He says he 'received it' (cf. 11:23). In Galatians 1:11ff Paul stresses that he received his message by revelation from Christ himself (Acts 26:12-20). He did not 'confer with flesh and blood', yet his message was substantially the same as the other apostles. Paul's information regarding Jesus' resurrection appearances probably came from a variety of trustworthy oral traditions.

(iii) The Content of Paul's Message (Verses 3b-4)*(a) Christ Died for Our Sins.*

See Romans 5:8. It means that Christ died on our behalf in order to deal with our sins. (Gal. 4, Rom. 8:3).

This is the heart of the Gospel, the redemption planned before the foundation of the world and announced by the prophets from the beginning of time. E.g. Gen. 3:15, Psalm 2, 22, 69, 110, etc., Isa. 42:1-4, 53:1ff, etc., cf. Luke 24:44ff, Acts 2:23, etc.

(b) He was Buried.

Christ's being placed in the tomb emphasizes the fact of his death. The Hellenistic Corinthians needed reminding that his body was buried.

(c) Raised on the Third Day.

'Died' and 'buried' are aorist, but 'raised' is perfect tense, thus emphasizing the finished acts of death and burial, but that what has happened in the resurrection remains in force.

Resurrection demonstrates the power of Christ's death. It is 'Christ crucified' who is raised, not a spiritual Christ. Jesus Christ saw no corruption by death, but in death, death was put to death. Acts 2:31, Rom. 1:4, Heb. 1:9, 7:16, 1 Peter 3:18.

The O.T. Scriptures which are quoted in the N.T. re Jesus' resurrection are Psalm 16:10, cf. Isa. 54:17. But the whole principle of victory over sin and death and the enemies is the thrust of the O.T., e.g. Isa. 53:10-12, Psa. 2:8-9, Psa. 22:1, 27, 72:19, 97:4. Paul says resurrection was the hope of Israel. Acts 23:6, 24:15, 21, 26:5, 8.

(iv) Christ's Appearances to Others (Verses 5-7)*(a) Cephas.* Peter was known in Corinth (1:12, 9:5).

(b) The Twelve. The original apostles, witness of the resurrection qualified Matthias to replace Judas.

(c) Five hundred together. May be that in Matthew 28:16ff. Otherwise it is mentioned only here. Paul's insistence on most of them still being alive shows confidence in their testimony. 'Death' for these is sleep, death having lost its sting. Verse 18, 20, 51, 1 Thess. 4:13-15.

(d) James. Probably the Lord's brother, head of the church in Jerusalem.

(e) All the apostles. The customary **use in this letter being more** than the twelve.--- See note on 12:28. 'All' means to Paul, 'with the exception of me.'

(v) Christ's Appearance to Paul (Verses 8-22)

'Last of all' could lean in time, but also of least importance. Compared with the other apostles Paul sees himself as born without due gestation in the

apostolic family. This is reinforced in verse 9 ('For') **by the total unworthiness to be** an apostle due- to his determination to exterminate the church (Acts 8:1, 3, 9:1-2, 22:4f, 16:9ff, Gal. 1:13). His being 'least' is from the point of view of election, not conceding to any inferiority as an apostle. II Cor. 11:5, 11. Gal. 2:11.

Paul puts the appearance of Christ to him on the Damascus road on the same level as the other resurrection appearances, though late in time (Acts 9:1ff).

Paul's unworthiness is matched and beaten by God's grace so that his career as a persecutor only serves to emphasize more clearly what is true of all Christians (Rom. 5:20f, Ephes. 1:1-10). His obedience comes from grace (Rom. 6:14) and all of his action comes from the same source. Paul is not ashamed of what he is. He would not be doing what he was doing, but for grace.

In verse 11 Paul comes back to his main point. Whoever it was who preached, it was the message of the one who died, was buried, and was raised. And they accepted it. Now Paul will draw the consequences of this.

2. IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION(15:12-19)

The Greeks had a belief in the 'immortality of the soul'. The body was at best an encumbrance, and a prison for the spirit, with no place in their thought for the restoration and glorification of the whole person. Hence they denied the resurrection of the body and 'some' in the church of Corinth still held this view.

Paul with the Jews believed in and looked for immortality (Rom. 2:7). Yet this is not innately man to have immortality, which only God has, man having it only in dependency upon God (I Tim. 6:16). But immortality is linked with the whole person and with the total regeneration of the creation. Already we are raised to new life in Christ, having died to the judgement of sin in the Cross. Romans 6:5-8, 11 Cor. 5:15, Gal. 2:19f, Col. 3:1-4, etc. The dead in Christ will not see death. John 11:25, cf. Heb. 2:9. The Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead will also raise our bodies (Rom. 8:11, 22-23). This renewal and glorification is a current affair (II Cor. 3:18), the Spirit being the guarantee of 'what is mortal being swallowed up in life' (II Cor. 4:16 - 5:10).

The denial of the resurrection of the dead involves the denial of the resurrection of Christ (verses 12-13). As Paul explains later in verses 21 and 22 the resurrection of Christ cannot be treated as an isolated event. If our bodies do not share in the future life then Christ cannot have risen, for his body is no different from ours. Paul sees the whole of us incorporated into this one Man.

If some of the Corinthians drew a wrong consequence from verse 13 and consequence from verse 13 and conclude that Christ had not been raised, then a whole series of other facts would follow of which the Corinthians would cry out: they are not true.

If Christ has not been raised then the whole Christian scheme of things is delusion. There can be no 'justification' (Rom. 4:25), and our brethren have died in their sins, and perished. All this would leave Christians pitiable and hopeless, for there can be no future without the resurrection, death and sin having in them the last word,

3. THE COSMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE RESURRECTION(15:20-28)

(i) Christ the First Fruits (*Verse 20*)

The fact of the resurrection is stated with simplicity and assurance which alters the whole situation from being 'pitiable'. The resurrection is placed in the big picture of things, in a universal context which has to do with the whole work-out of history.

The 'first fruits' is an O.T. figure which anticipates the full harvest (Lev. 23:10f). It is a pledge of the ultimate offering of the whole. Because Christ has been raised the resurrection of the remainder is assured. It is all part of the one harvest.

(ii) The Two Humanities (*Verses 21-23*)

Paul is talking of mankind in Adam and mankind in Christ. Cf. Romans 5:12ff where death enters the world by one man and death by sin. Sin and death affect and infect the whole race. In Adam the whole of mankind is not only summed up but activated, indicating the solidarity of the race. Romans 5:19, cf. Gen. 2:17.

Romans 5:18-21, 6:3, 5-10 have it that the whole corporate, Adamic, sinful humanity was judged in the death of Christ. In that death sin was defeated and therefore death too. Those who are in Christ are raised to new life (Rom. 5:21, 6:4, 11) and ultimately this includes the 'redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23, Phil. 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2). Verse 22 makes verse 21 more precise as both interpret each other.

Verse 23 shows that the 'harvest' (verse 20) is at Christ's 'coming' - his parousia. Those who are Christ's shall appear with him, their resurrection will be seen; these are 'those who belong to Christ,' i.e. his elect. Cf. I Thess. 4:13ff.

(iii) The Consummation of Christ's Reign (*Verses 24-27*)

Verse 24 shows that the final harvest ushers in the telos - the end, i.e. the consummation of God's purpose for his creation, and its goal. Currently the risen Man reigns as Lord, having defeated the enemies in the Cross. As Lord of history (e.g. Rev. 5, Matt. 28:19f, Psalm 2, 110, Ephes. 1:19ff) Christ is about subduing the rulers, authorities, and powers by the gospel (through the agency of the Spirit-filled body, the Church). Death, whose power is broken by the Cross (Heb. 2:14-15, is finally **brought to naught by the power of the Cross** (II Tim. 1: 10, Rev. 20:14) and to this Man all creation is subjected (Phil. 2:9-11). The quotation from Psalm 8 shows that the creational mandate is fulfilled by man, through the Man, the second Adam.

(iv) God - Everything to Everyone (*Verse 28*)

The Son fulfils his mission on behalf of the Father.

Oscar Cullmann says: 'Here is the key to all N.T. Christology. To speak of the Son has meaning only in reference to God's revelatory action, not in reference to God's being. But precisely for this reason, Father and Son are in this action really One. As of the logos, so also of the Son of God we can now say: He is God in so far as God reveals himself in the saving events.' (Barrett's Commentary, p.361)

'Everything to everyone', i.e. 'All in all'. Verses 54-57, Romans 11:36, this in the reign of God seen in its holy love, and serene goodness.

4. THE RESURRECTION AND PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR (15:29-34)

(i) Baptism on Behalf of the Dead *Verse 29*

These were a kind of proxy or vicarious baptism. Paul does not approve or disapprove the practice, and we know that baptism was a proclamation of death and resurrection. We acknowledge strange happenings at Corinth, yet there is no evidence for vicarious baptism prior to A.D. 50 and this was a practice of the heretic Marcion. The most probable interpretation is that there were people at Corinth who became Christian and for a variety of reasons died before being baptized. There is no question of people being made Christians by baptism, but friends of these unbaptized believers proclaimed the covenant sign in being baptized on their behalf.

Paul does not establish the practice, but the point is: What sense would this be if the dead are not raised?

(ii) Why Preach if No Resurrection? (*Verses 30-32*)

Paul boasts of the Corinthian conversion from paganism, and sees it as worth many deaths (cf. Phil. 4:1). This dying every day is the jeopardy of death he stands in to bring the gospel of the Cross (cf. II Cor. 4:10). His reference to fighting wild beasts at Ephesus, is not recorded elsewhere in the N.T. and may be a metaphorical but real encounter with the adversaries of the Gospel. Acts 19:23-40, Romans 16:4, 11 Cor. 11:23ff. Only Christian hope can make sense of such experiences: take away this hope and moral standards collapse. Isaiah 22:3, cf. I John 3:3.

(iii) Resurrection and Moral Behaviour (*Verses 33-34*)

The quote is not from the O.T. but from Menander's lost comedy 'Thais' (See Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, for similar practice of Paul.). The fact is that their behaviour was deteriorating by their lack of conviction in the resurrection as we have already seen is the Corinthians problem. It led to moral indifference and a false spirituality which in a sense sedated them. This is a dangerous tendency. Therefore Paul urges them to 'Come to your right mind', i.e. regain sobriety, for this stupor brings a lack of real knowledge of God (Mark 12:24).



FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 15:35-58

Before we come to the text, an introductory quote from Frederick Dale Bruner's, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* will help set the background for the verses before us. 'The "transeschatological" mentality in Corinth (see I Cor. 4: 8) probably led to a minimizing of the *bodily* resurrection in the interests of the greater and already fully accomplished resurrection or exaltation of the soul through the new experience of the Spirit. Such an emphasis would harmonize with the Corinthians minimizing of the body, the natural, and the human in the interest of what was considered the spiritual, the supernatural, and the divine.' (p. 302)

As we have seen in the earlier verses in this chapter, the Corinthians did not deny the resurrection of Christ. But some had problems with the resurrection of the dead. Their Hellenistic assumptions gave them a negative and indeed very limited view of the body, which contributed to a spiritualizing of the resurrection.

Now Paul answers (in verse 35) what could be taken as objector's questions to Paul's position regarding the bodily resurrection. But the apostle uses the question as the jumping off point for the next stage of his exposition.

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF SOWING (15:35-41)

(i) 'How Are the Dead Raised?' (Verse 35)

Having shown the inescapable necessity for the resurrection Paul now faces the rationalistic objection of 'How?', i.e. how can bodies which have disintegrated be raised again? And what kind of body could arise from this decomposed rubbish?

Paul shows the worthlessness of such questions, especially as they began from the wrong standpoint. 'You foolish man' (verse 36).

(ii) The Principle (Verse 36)

Paul's principle is the fact of transformation can only come through death and revivification. See John 12:24, cf. Mark 4:30.

'Comes to life', i.e. 'quicken', is a passive implying that it is enlivened by God's action and this wherever seed is sown and dies. The seed sown perishes in the form it is sown to come to life in continuity with what it was, but in a new form.

(iii) The Illustration from Nature (Verses 37-41)

- (a) The variety of seeds: Sowing, germination, and growth are the same whatever seed one thinks of.
- (b) The variety of bodies, i.e. human, animal, heavenly and earthly bodies. Here variety reigns, and this is how we are to understand the resurrection body.

(iv) Conclusion

Paul's argument is:- God can give to every seed its own body. The whole creation shows God's power to build bodies out of different kinds of materials, and substances. Is it then, impossible for the God who creates the variety of bodies to change our present bodies into a spiritual, or resurrection body, greatly glorified from its present form?

2. THE SPIRITUAL BODY(15:42-49)**(i) Resurrection Means Transformation (Verses 42-44a)**

'So', i.e. it is along the lines of the previous verses that the resurrection is to be understood. The new body, though identifiable with the old, is also distinguished from it by its transformation.

'Perishable' means corruptible, i.e. the body's subjection to decay. Of itself it is not eternal, and it bears the death-dealing nature of sin. Romans 8:10, cf. I Kings 2:2, Psa. 89:48, Eccles. 9:5, Isa. 38:10, Psa. 102:23f, I Sam. 14:14, etc.

'Imperishable' means incorruptible. It is eternalized, i.e. the body. Cf. Revelation 21:4, etc.

'Dishonour' (*atimia*), a word sometimes used of loss of rights of citizenship. By reason of sin, death can be an expression of shame for man who is the image and glory of God. Death is degrading.

'Glory', i.e. a body of Glory, like Christ's glorious body, the glory of our sonship, e.g. Romans 8:21.

'Weakness', i.e. its powerlessness, defeated by death, unable to resist death's power.

'Power', the body which has been transformed has defeated death, and turned death to life.

'Physical'. This may be a misleading translation of the word *psuchikon* in verse 44a. It means man as a 'living soul' (Gen. 2:7, or as it is used in 2:14, the natural man). We take it to mean man as he was created from the dust of the earth and breathed into by God to become a whole, living being.

'Spiritual', this does not mean a kind of spiritualizing which devalues the body. The spiritual body is the body animated and renewed by the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit indwells the regenerate now (Rom. 8:11). By the Spirit Christ is shaped up in us (Gal. 5:22). It is the Spirit who is now changing us from one degree of glory into another (II Cor. 3:18). In the end this task is complete either through death or at the appearing of Christ so that by the Spirit the body is glorified. The spiritual body stands in the full light of the destruction of death. This is the transition from perishability to imperishability, etc.

(ii) The First Adam and the Last Adam (Verses 44b-49)

Paul's point in verse 44b is that just as there is a natural life body, so too there is a transformed spiritual body. This answers the question raised in verse 35, and is based on the creation of man with a view to Christ.

(a) First Adam

This is man as created from the dust in Genesis 2:7. He is 'the living being', i.e. 'physical' of verse 44b. This man is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and had children in his own image (Gen. 5:3). Adam then is the progenitor of the race, and his characteristics are stamped on the race. Paul says, 'we have borne the image of the man of dust' (v. 49), meaning we bear it habitually, so that it is our perpetual state. It needs emphasizing that there is no debasing or rejection of the body in Scripture - man, in the totality of his existence, is summoned to the service of the Lord (6:13, 20, Rom. 12:1ff, etc.). It is precisely because of the lack of dualism in Scripture and the high value placed upon God's creation, that God's purpose is to renew and eternalize what he has created. The 'physical' was first.

(b) Second Adam

Paul sees two humanities. The second he encloses in Christ. Verse 45 is Paul's base for saying there are two bodies. Christ, the second Adam, is a 'lifegiving Spirit'. Christ is the beginning of a new race of men. The first Adam was a living soul by creation, the last Adam came to be a life-giving Spirit by the resurrection. Through the redemptive action of the Cross the Spirit not only takes on the character of Christ, but as from the resurrection the Spirit conforms man to the family image of the last Adam and will finally bring this to completion in the resurrection of the body. This is the Christ who came from heaven (John 3:13, 6:51, etc.). As glorified Christ Jesus gives us the Spirit (John 6:63). Thus we are born from above by the Spirit (John 3:1ff).

The passage is showing that the 'physical' is created with a view to the 'spiritual'. The spiritual body does not come into being unless there be a natural body. This was God's creative purpose, that we be conformed to the image of his Son (Ephes. 1:3ff, Phil. 3:21, Rom. 8:29).

3. THE ASSURANCE OF VICTORY (15:50-58)

This section draws the argument to a close as Paul shows that resurrection is accompanied by transformation and that death with its cause is defeated through the outworking of Christ's Cross.

(i) Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God (Verse 50)

This means 'to receive the inheritance', a great theme in Scripture. See for example Ephesians 1:18, Matthew 5:5. Believers, regenerate by the Spirit already have entered the Kingdom, the Spirit being the down-payment of the full inheritance (Col. 1:13, 11 Cor. 1:22). To 'inherit' means to possess what is promised, (6:10, Gal. 6:7-10, 5:21, etc.). Here the meaning is that that which is perishable cannot inherit the imperishable. 'Flesh and blood' is a way of referring to life here and now (e.g. Gal. 1:16, Heb. 2:14), pointing to two of the most important constituents of the physical body which are particularly subject to decay. This statement excludes all crude ideas about resurrection, and is saying that both those who have already fallen asleep as well as those still living at Christ's parousia must alike be transformed and provided with an imperishable body to live in an imperishable Kingdom.

