

First Corinthians

The Corinthians letters together make up Paul's largest body of correspondence to any single Christian community.

Because of the length of 1 & 2 Corinthians, we can piece together quite a bit about the church there – and its problems. Paul actually wrote to the Corinthians church at least four times. We'll get to how we know this in a minute.

He visited Corinth at least three times. From Corinth he wrote the Thessalonian letters, probably Galatians, and Romans.

Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia. It's location allowed for it to have two ports. One on the Adriatic Sea and one on the Aegean Sea. So, with many people from many destinations passing through, it was an ideal place for evangelism.

Likewise, there were a great many cults represented there. One of the major attractions was the temple of Aphrodite, which boasted of 1,000 temple prostitutes.

In those days there was a saying that depicted a life of debauchery – to live like a Corinthian.

Acts 18:1 – After this(Athens), Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Aquila & Priscilla seem to be people of some means, as they traveled a bit themselves. We find them here in Corinth, in Ephesus, and even in Rome.

Historically, we know that the Roman Emperor Claudius issued an edict in the year 49 commanding all Jews to leave Rome. Interestingly, they were told to leave because of the turmoil being created by “Chrestus”, which we believe to be Christ.

Priscilla is often called Prisca, and is twice named before her husband – which in that day would tend to indicate that her role in the church was greater than her husbands.

There has been some scholarly debated that the word we translate as tentmaker was used to depict a leatherworker at that time. Either way, both were important trades, and highly valued.

V. 5 – When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

So time has already passed in Corinth. Paul was working as a tentmaker along with Aquila and Priscilla, but now he is devoting his full attention to preaching.

Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half. As best as we can figure out, it was actually longer. The year and a half referred to when Paul stood before the Roman proconsul.

V. 12 – While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

V. 13 – “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”

Historically, we know that Gallio served as proconsul for a brief period of time – 51 to 52. From this event, we can estimate a fairly accurate time line of Paul’s journey. Paul had already been in Corinth a year and a half.

Well, the proconsul really wasn't interested in the matter. So, then we have ...

Acts 18:18 – Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul stays in Corinth – the Greek says for a sufficient time. We gather this was in the early months of 52, or 53.

As stated, scholarly research has determined that Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians. As far as we can tell, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth before he wrote what we call 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 5:9 – I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

Scholars call that letter referenced in 1 Corinthians 5:9 – letter A (Scholars aren't very original sometimes!).

Then we have what we call 1 Corinthians, but scholars call – Letter B.

1 Corinthians as we know it was written while Paul was in Ephesus, around the year 55.

Shortly after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, it appears that someone in Corinth questioned Paul's authority and right to be called an apostle. Upon hearing this, Paul made a visit to Corinth, and his reception wasn't that great. He left, and wrote what he called a painful letter.

We find reference to this in the following verses from 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 2:1 – So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. ²For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? ³I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have

made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. ⁴For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

2 Corinthians 7:8 – Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— ⁹yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.

This painful letter is called – Letter C.

When Paul was in Macedonia in the year 56, Titus returned from a visit to Corinth. He informed Paul that his letter was well received and the Corinthians wished to be reconciled to Paul. He then wrote what is called a thankful letter. This is what we call 2 Corinthians and it is known as Letter D. It was written in Macedonia around the year 56.

There remains one other scholarly issue concerning 2 Corinthians. Basically, is it one letter, or a composite of two or more. We will address that when we get to it.

1 Corinthians is generally accepted as one complete letter.

What was the occasion for 1 Corinthians? Divisions.

The Corinthian Christians were divided over several issues. The major issue was concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit – which were better, which were more important?

There are a number of other issues, and when we read 1 Corinthians carefully, we can see that Paul is addressing a series of questions from the Corinthian Christians.

1:1 – Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

It seems Paul was often defending his position as an apostle, and he makes the bold statement right from the start of this letter.

Who was Sosthenes? Remember, in Acts 18 Paul is brought before the Roman proconsul. The Jews (Non-Christians) had brought him there on charges of polluting their religion. Sosthenes was the leader of the Jewish synagogue at that time, and he became a Christian.

Acts 18:17 – Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

By mentioning Sosthenes right from the start, it is possible that Sosthenes actually writing the letter as Paul dictated it.

V. 2 – To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We read ‘church of God.’ Literally in the Greek it reads ‘assembly of God.’ The Greek word we translate as church meant an assembly of various peoples – ekklésia.

He says they are sanctified – literally made holy. Then he has – called to be his holy people. Some translations have ‘called to be saints.’ The word we translate as saints meant to be sacred – or set apart to be used by God.

To those made holy in Christ Jesus and called to be set apart for God to use.

Paul uses his customary grace & peace. Grace was unmerited kindness. We haven’t earned God’s kindness, God has given it freely – Grace.

The peace he wrote of was a peace of mind, and that peace of mind comes from being a recipient of God’s Grace.

After his greeting he now gives a customary thanksgiving.
What letter doesn't have a thanksgiving? (Galatians).

The thanksgiving here in 1 Corinthians is a little ironic in that later in the letter he will be quite critical about some of these things.

V. 4 – I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

For the second time already in this letter Paul uses 'in Christ' and not 'through Christ.' To be in Christ is to be a new creation.

V. 5 – For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—

This was a point of division amongst the Corinthians which will be addressed.

V. 6 – God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

As I mentioned earlier – spiritual gifts was a dividing point.

V. 8 – He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, Paul gets down to it.

1:10 – I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

Let's consider Chloe. The Greek doesn't have Chloe's household or even Chloe's people. The Greek has – those of Chloe.

Now, in verse 16 we have the household of Stephanas. The Greek does say household. What does this tell us?

Chloe was probably a slave. She didn't have a household. Those of Chloe were probably also slaves.

Stephanas was free, he had a household.

I only say this to show that the church in Corinth was truly an eclectic group, just as the Greek word for church would imply.

However, there was trouble, as will see. Furthermore, the divisions were not only theological, but perhaps divisions of class, as well.

The most immediate divisions, as we will see, were divisions over different teachers.

1:12 – What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas/Peter”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

We don't know if Peter had actually visited Corinth. However, what was happening is that people were following preachers and teachers, like some do today. Some, it seems, looked beyond that and would say ‘I follow Christ.’

V. 13 – Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Not even an apostle could stand in the place of Jesus. These Gentile converts, who were recently pagans, believed that deities could inhabit people, so there was some confusion.

Indeed, we believe that THE deity can inhabit us, so you can understand how these recent pagans lifted up the teachers and preachers.

1:14 – I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

The believers would be baptized, but it wasn't Paul's practice to baptize them – yet had baptized a few.

Of Crispus we have in **Acts 18:8** – Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

Gaius is mentioned in Romans 16:23 as Paul's host.

Of Stephanus, Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 16:15** – You know that the household of Stephanus were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people.

Now in case someone might think that Paul was depreciating baptism, he adds:

V. 17 – For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

So it wasn't that baptism was not important, it was just that Paul's ministry was to preach the good news.

Remember, the word Gospel did not refer to a book – it meant good news.

In Acts 18 we are introduced to Apollos.

Acts 18:24 – Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

So, Apollos is portrayed as a good man. Some scholars believe he was the person who wrote the book of Hebrews. Paul mentions him as one of the people that the Corinthians were divided on.

Now, it was not written in a way that would suggest that Apollos personally led a division, and I don't believe he did. But, Acts 19 tells us that he preached for some time in Corinth. Appollos was a learned man. Was he the unknowing leader of a wisdom party in Corinth?

We can't say, but some scholars think so. At any rate, Paul now outlines a refute on relying on wisdom.

The Greeks loved wisdom and wisdom debates.

V. 18 – For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Paul writes about the message or word of the cross in many of his letters. It wasn't about a crucifixion, it was about the good news that through the death of Jesus, God was reconciling the world to himself.

The cross means redemption. That's foolishness to people who have rejected the cross, but to us it is the power of God.

Paul often appeals to Scripture, and does so here. He uses a combination of Isaiah 29:14 and Psalm 33:10.

1:19 – For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

V. 21 – For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

This can be a difficult verse to unravel.

Humanity at large has failed to come to know God through human wisdom. The language suggests that God, in his wisdom, did not allow for human wisdom to bring them to God. Instead, God wants us to come to God through faith.

People trusting in their own wisdom will miss God. People trusting in the wisdom of others will miss God. What we see and what we experience can lead us towards the truth, but ultimately truth must be accepted through faith.

I don't think Paul would suggest, however, that we don't think for ourselves. It is just that human wisdom, knowledge, and logic alone cannot bring us to God.

We have the following from Jesus in Mark 8 & in other gospels ...

Mark 8:11 – The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign?”

The Greeks did love wisdom, and philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Paul speaks of this now.

1:22 – Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles

Jesus, however, is both the sign/power of God and the wisdom of God.

V. 24 – but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

1:26 – Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

Is Paul putting them down? No, he knows them. Most of them were slaves or hand to mouth day laborers. They weren't from rich and/or powerful families. Many of them were not even educated.

V. 27 – But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

Salvation does not come from who we know or what we have, or by what we have achieved. Salvation comes from what God has done for us.

V. 30 – It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

The NIV reads – It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.
That could almost sound like predestination.

The NRSV is better and it reads – He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus

Paul mentions three things in verse 30 – righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Righteousness means that God approves of us. God doesn't approve of sin, but through Christ God approves of us.

Holiness is often translated as sanctification. The words mean the same thing but in the Greek language it was understood as a process, not an achievement. We are holy and becoming holy.

Redemption was the word used for the payment for a slave's freedom. We were slaves to sin and death, we have been purchased out from that.

So, let's boast about it!

Chapter 2

As we can clearly see by what Paul has been writing already in chapter 1, one of the factions/divisions was the wisdom group. These new Christians knew just enough about spiritual gifts to be dangerous. They knew wisdom came from God, and it was a gift.

It was if they were saying that wisdom is a gift from God and we've got it and you don't, so we are better than you.

The first part of verse one goes with the last verse of chapter 1.

1:31 – Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2:1 – And so it was with me, brothers and sisters.

Here what Paul is saying – “Some of you folks are bragging about wisdom, I'm just going to brag on Jesus.”

Now he adds a bit of sarcasm.

V. 1b – When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul is not discounting the resurrection in his theology, and I believe he had it in mind when he said – and him crucified. He will speak of the resurrection later in this letter.

V. 3 – I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

When considering this verse, some look to the Book of Acts and see that Paul came to Corinth from Athens where he did not have much success. Others say this refers to his ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Maybe that’s what he was referring to, but I think he is simply emphasizing his humble attitude. After all, Paul was far more educated than probably all of the Corinthian Christians. He didn’t arrive there relying on his educational pedigree.

V. 4 – My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

Make no mistake, he is addressing the wisdom party people. There is a reason for this emphasis.

Paul will now make the point that true wisdom that comes from the Spirit would not cause divisions.

2:6 – We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

The mature – other translations have perfect. The Greek word is *teleios*, and while it could mean perfect, it usually meant complete. He is talking about those who have the

Spirit of God within them. While sanctification is a lifelong process, in a spiritual manner we are complete when God's Spirit dwells within us.

V. 7 – No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

God's wisdom is hidden in the sense that it cannot be obtained by merely observing the world. Scripture tells us that the natural world can point us towards God, but it doesn't help those who do not seek God.

God's wisdom is above what humans can perceive apart from God.

Isaiah 55:8 – “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Keep in mind that at the heart of this hidden wisdom is the gospel itself. It has been God's plan from the beginning.

V. 8 – None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—

He is quoting from Isaiah 64:4.

Now he writes that the source of true wisdom within us is God's Spirit.

V. 10 – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

So, no one can know the deepest thoughts of anyone else if the other person doesn't share them.

We can know the thoughts of God because God does share them through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. This is what he says in verse 12.

V. 12 – What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Remember, there was a wisdom party, and that is who he is addressing.

V. 13 – This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

Paul is not talking about speaking in tongues – which he will later in this letter. He uses a different word here that simply meant spiritual. The 'words' in 'spirit taught words' is implied in the Greek.

What might Spirit taught words be?

Love. Grace. Forgiveness. Mercy.

V. 14 – The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Some people think Spiritual things are foolish. Things like Love, grace, forgiveness and mercy.

V. 15 – The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for,

“Who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”^[d]

But we have the mind of Christ.

He is quoting from Isaiah 40:13.

A person filled with God’s Spirit, and led by God’s Spirit, cannot be judged by a non-spirit filled person.

Perhaps they will be judged – oh they are acting foolishly.

But, they’re judgment would be wrong.

Who can know the mind of God? We can because we have the mind of Christ!

Chapter 3

In chapter 2, Paul had written about the spirit of God that wants to dwell within us. Remember what he wrote in **1 Cor. 2:6** – We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

The words we translate as mature can also be translated as complete. When we live by the Spirit we are mature and complete (yet still moving forward).

With that verse in mind, we now look at 3:1.

3:1 – Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.

People who seek to divide the church are worldly, not spiritual. The spirit of the world is a spirit of division. Most early Christians, like many Christians today, ascribe the works of the Spirit to things like miracles, prophecy, tongues. But Paul believed in a moral application, as well.

Indeed, we cannot love like Jesus without the Spirit, nor can we forgive and perhaps not even serve without the Spirit.

And Unity is certainly out of the question without the Spirit.

V. 2 – I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

Needing milk instead of solid food. They hadn't gotten past the very basic fundamental teachings of The Way. Many Christians today are still there. They believe in the Resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins, but any application of the Holy Spirit to their own lives in order to bring about change is foreign to them.

Jealousy & quarrels are not spiritual, but worldly.

Are you not acting like mere humans? - Literally, living/walking according to man.

Are we living like ordinary people, or supernatural people? If we have the Spirit of God within us, then there ought to be something different about our lives.

3:4 – For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

“are you living like regular people?” When we divide, we are worldly, not Spiritual.

3:5 – What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

Paul seems to single out Apollos more. Remember he had mentioned Cephas in chapter 1. Appollos, Like Paul, had spent considerable time in Corinth, so people who were dividing would be more divided amongst the two.

The word we translate as servants is diakonos (dee-ak'-on-os). It is the same word that will be translated as deacons in Philippians. In Philippians it is used to describe a particular position in the church. Here in Corinth, such a position within the church was probably not yet held by members of the church.

V. 6 – I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul shows his humility here. He, like Apollos, is merely a servant in God's field. They are co-workers, each performing a necessary task. God is the one who produces the harvest.

A good lesson for us – do our part in kingdom building and trust God. You may never lead someone to Christ, but you may play an active part of someone's path to Christ.

Paul had just used an agricultural metaphor. Now he uses a construction metaphor.

3:10 – By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Some maintain that Paul is calling out someone who is building upon what Paul started. I don't necessarily see that here. He could just be advocating caution for those that would come after Paul. Besides, Jesus is the one true foundation.

Whether Paul is writing about false teachers in Corinth at that time, or the possibility of future false teachers, the point remains – our faith must be grounded in Christ alone.

V. 12 – If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

The list that Paul gives as building materials is simply metaphorical. Obviously, gold, silver & costly stones represent the better things to build with. There is no in between. He goes from the costly to the useless.

Likewise, there is no in between when it comes to kingdom work – it is either useful for kingdom building or it is useless.

Divisions are useless.

The Day in verse 13 is the day of judgment. Fire is a depiction of judgment throughout the Old Testament.

The Roman Catholic Church looks to verse 15 as support for their doctrine of purgatory. Others see this as a judgment on the work of Christians, not a judgment on the Christians themselves.

Take, for example, the division in the UMC. One, or both resulting denominations after a split may falter. One could then say they were built with cheap materials and have been burned up in the fire of judgment. However, that does not mean that those individuals Christians have been judged in such a manner.

The next verse is well known, but keep in mind its context. Paul is talking about something being built. The church, yes, but something is being built within each of us.

3:16 – Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

In Jewish thought, God would build a temple in the last days to be God's dwelling place. In Christian thought, we are living in the last days and God is building God's temple in each of us.

How's the construction going for you? I pray that we are caring for and building on the temple inside of us.

Paul now abruptly returns to his attack on the wisdom party. Perhaps the one who was 'destroying God's temple' in verse 17 was a member of the Apollos faction who was leading people astray. Once again Paul contrasts the wisdom of people and the foolishness of God.

3:18 – Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness” (Job 5:13); ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” (Psalm 94:11).

The Corinthians had been boasting about their allegiance to particular teachers. But the teachers belonged to them, not they to their teachers. Don't settle for just one teacher.

Most here at Bible Study enjoy or like my teaching, but you read and listen to others. This is what Paul is trying to stress, all good teachers are from God.

V. 21 – So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas^[c] or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Instead of being of Apollos or of Paul, they were of Christ who is of God.

Chapter 4

Paul has finished his criticism of the divisions in Corinth, and now he turns his attention to the responsibilities of the teachers.

V. 1 – This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.

An interesting word is used for servant, and it's the only place Paul uses it. The word literally meant an under rower, or the person who mans the oars from the lower deck. Usually these were slaves, certainly subordinate to the others on the boat.

The implication here is that the teachers were entrusted with the mysteries of God, yet subordinate to God/Jesus in every way. They do what God tells them to do.

Do we believe that our pastors are doing what God tells them to do?
Would pastors be criticized less if we believed this?
Would pastors be criticized less if they saw themselves in this manner?

V. 2 – Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful

I believe that Paul is making the point here that the teachers should see themselves as an under rower – so as to prove themselves faithful with the trust that God has given to them.

Standing under such a divine responsibility, Paul is not moved by the opinions of others.

4:3 – I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

This is an interesting passage. Note that Paul is saying that a clear conscience is not enough. You can have a clear conscience and still be wrong. It is God who judges even those with a clear conscience. So, abide in Christ so that God's Spirit will abide in you.

4:6 – Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

Much has been written about this verse, especially ‘don’t go beyond what is written.’ What is Paul referring to? Written where? Scripture.

We have the benefit of the New Testament, which, of course, they did not have. Be careful about some novel or new teaching that has people excited. Don’t go beyond what is written.

If you don’t go beyond what is written, and the teacher does not go beyond what is written, then there is nothing to get puffed up about because it comes from God, not men.

V. 7 – For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

If they did receive wisdom, they received it from God, so why boast in themselves?

What do you have that you did not receive? Any strengths and gifts we have, we have from God.

In case anyone doesn’t think that Paul would use sarcasm, take a look at the next verse.

4:8 – Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!

In this cutting statement, Paul is saying that the Corinthians feel so self-reliant that they are acting like wealthy people who already have all that they need, instead of people who have so much to gain from Christ.

They were not living as people under the authority and submission to God’s will.

Paul is saying - Hey that sounds good to me! I wish it were true so that I could live that way too!

Life in Christ brings peace of mind and soul, but never forget to carry the cross of Christ. What might that look like? Consider the following ...

4:9 – For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

The Corinthians were acting like they had achieved it all, and were already reigning with Christ. However, in the here and now there is work to be done, and at what cost!

Verse 13 is powerful, and is translated well. Are we willing to be seen as scum and garbage for the sake of Jesus Christ?

4:14 – I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. ¹⁵ Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

Paul is not asking that they use father as a title. Some denominations use this verse as a basis for calling their male clergy father.

The Corinthians were Paul's converts, and he feels a special kinship to them.

The word we translate as guardians, or instructors, is paidagógos, who was actually a trusted slave. Paul's relationship was far greater than that!

V. 16 – Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

This is not pride or ego at work. Paul is not trying to be some kind of cult leader. He doesn't want to take the place of Jesus. What he is doing is showing them that we humans can live a life of Christian discipleship. Paul had taught them what to believe, now, by his example, he is teaching them how to live.

In the next verse he mentions Timothy. Writing to Timothy he wrote in **1 Timothy 4:12** – set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

This is what Paul was doing by asking them to imitate him.

4:17 – For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

We know from Acts 16 that Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Timothy, who's life would have imitated Paul's, would be a fine example for the Corinthians.

4:18 – Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

Many translations have in verse 18, puffed up instead of arrogant. The Greek is actually puffed up, inflated. It referred to one's ego, a lack of humility.

The kingdom of God is a matter of power. In the Greek it is *dunamis*, which we get dynamite.

Much of the practice of Christianity focuses on words preached, read or prayed. All of that would be useless without the power of God behind it. That power of God is available to all through the Holy Spirit.

V. 21 – What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

Christians read these words of Paul and some think to themselves – you go Paul! I wonder, however, how many Christians would accept such talk from their pastor.

Chapter 5

Paul has addressed the problem of divisions, especially those of the wisdom party. In chapter 5 he moves on to an issue of sexual immorality.

V. 1 – It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife.

The Greek actually says – a man has his father's wife, but we know what was implied. It seems that a man was living his step mother. Presumably, his father had died. This was forbidden in Jewish law (Leviticus 18:8). The man was most likely a pagan convert, so Paul says that even the pagans don't tolerate. Such a relationship was forbidden by Roman law.

5:2 – And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?

And you are proud – the word we translate as proud is the same word we had in chapter four that we translated as arrogant. It means puffed up.

Let's put this into context. This man was a pagan who was in a relationship with his step mother. Someone from the church shares the good news, and he accepts. The people become happy and proud that he now has accepted Christ as his savior. But, no one suggests that he get out of the relationship.

We can replace all sort of behavior and see that this still happens today. What do we do? Do we remove people from our fellowship?

Let's consider the rest of this chapter to learn more about this.

5:3 – For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this.

Wait a minute – Didn't Jesus tell us not to judge others?
This is the cry we hear so often in our pluralistic society. Actually, what Jesus said was were words of caution about how we judge.

Matthew 7:2 – For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Sure, we judge right from wrong, but we must use caution in how quick we are to judge. Think about it, pray about it.

5:4 – So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

We have the word flesh which in the Greek is sarx. Remember what it meant? Our sinful human nature. Paul isn't looking for the death of this man, but the death of his sinful nature.

We know this because he then adds, “So that his spirit may be may be saved.” What Paul is suggesting, and we will gather more of it in this chapter as we move on, is that they treat him as an outsider, a non-Christian. But remember – this meant they minister to him with the gospel!

Paul doesn't want them to reject him as a soul in need of saving, he wants them to treat him as an unrepented sinner.

What does hand him over to Satan mean? Remove him from the church.
Don't allow him to worship?
Maybe, we don't know, but certainly treat him as an unsaved person.

5:6 – Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

Paul used this same analogy in Galatians 5:9.

A little yeast mixes into and changes the nature of a lot of dough. Likewise, a little ungodliness mixes into and changes the nature of a whole lot of Christians.

How far are we to take this?

We must balance truth and grace. Too much truth is too little grace. Too much grace is too little truth.

Continuing with this bread metaphor, Paul writes ...

5:7 – Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Paul adjusts the bread metaphor to one related to the Jewish Passover. In preparation for Passover the Jews would carefully remove all hints of yeast from their homes and would use unleavened bread. They would then sacrifice a Passover Lamb.

Paul's metaphor puts the Corinthian Christians in the place of the Passover bread. They must clean out all of the old yeast and be something new.

Put another way, why would they allow sin that Christ had died for to continue to be so flagrantly practiced?

Are we guilty of this?

5:8 – Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul is not telling them to observe the Passover. He does seem to be telling them to always be ready to celebrate the truth. The truth of Christ's sacrifice, of the destruction of sin's power, and even the truth of God's Spirit within us to bring about repentance in us.

If we are going to celebrate the forgiveness of our sins by the blood of Jesus, then we must reject sin, not celebrate it.

5:9 – I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

Christian communities were never meant to be lived in isolation. However, Christian communities should be noticeably different than the world that surrounds them.

Are churches today noticeably different from the world? Do we tolerate the same behaviors within our membership that is practiced in the world?

5:11 – But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

Now remember, he had just told them that he wasn't talking about the people of the world. Likewise, when he says not to even eat with such people, he is talking about within the context of the church.

Some denominations have a closed communion table, and this is one of the verses in which they say gives credence to such a stance.

Paul wrote similar things in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. And in **Jude 1:12** we have – These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm

5:12 – What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

Paul has been clear that he isn't talking about non-believers. So, he asks rhetorically what he has to do with judging outsiders. Maybe this is why Paul didn't mention the woman involved in the relationship with her husband's son. Based on what we have read, she most likely was not a Christian.

With a second rhetorical question, Paul tells them that they do have a responsibility to judge the actions of fellow believers.

5:13 – God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”

Quoting from many verses in Deuteronomy.

1 Corinthians 6

In chapter 5, Paul was writing about how we are to judge the actions of fellow church members, but that we are not to judge people outside of the church. That discussion leads to the next topic, legal matters amongst the believers.

It appears that this was a problem reported to Paul, and so he addresses it here.

In these verses we should note two things.

He wasn't talking about criminal charges,

Paul was not advocating for some permanent legal status for some church court.

He was talking about civil matters.

6:1 – If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people?

Your translation may have saints. That's what the Greek says. Quite literally, sacred ones.

Keep in mind, while there may indeed remain discrepancies in the courts today, back then corruption in the legal system was rampant. The wealthy always had the advantage, as bribes were commonplace.

Also, Paul is not advocating that Christians ignore the ruling of the courts. Not his point here.

V. 2 – Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

Paul doesn’t explain this powerful idea, and the Bible doesn’t give much explanation, either. In Revelation 2:25-26, Christ is quoted as saying that those who conquer and keep His word until the end will be given a share in his authority over the nations.

Daniel 7:22 says that judgment will be given to the saints of the most high. In Jewish literature not found in our Old Testament, it states that the saints will stand above the angels.

So some sort of messianic rule will be given to the saints in glory. Whatever the future of the saints will actually look like, Paul’s point is that they were living as incompetent to make small decisions in the here and now.

Remember Paul in the first several chapters addressed the wisdom party – those people who believed they possessed wisdom as a gift from God and thought that they were better than others. Listen to how Paul works that into this issue of civil cases.

V. 4 – Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

That last statement is such a powerful statement. The witness of the church in America is horrible. Churches fighting over everything – and this in front of unbelievers!

V. 7 – The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

Paul’s concern was not with the justice system. His concern was that the Christians in Corinth had not learned to live with the mindset of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

The very fact that Christians were taking other Christians to court over trivial matters showed that they were already defeated. By who? By Satan.

What were they going to court for? We don't know – but the court system was actually a form of entertainment in those days – and it has come full circle today.

Verse 8 points to the corrupt system of justice in those days.

6:9 – Or do you not know that *wrongdoers* will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the *sexually immoral* nor *idolaters* nor *adulterers* nor *men who have sex with men*

Wrongdoers – The Greek word is *adikos*. It means unjust. It points to those taking advantage of others through the justice system. Now, he adds other sins to the unjust. In other words – you who take advantage of others are right there in this group of sinners.

Sexually immoral – from *porneia*, this word is *pornos*. It could mean two things: a fornicator or it could also mean a man who prostitutes himself. The implication – hey you men (because it would have been men) who are taking others to court just to make money, you are prostituting yourself.

Idolaters – Referring back to their pagan ways. In other words – you haven't changed since you were a pagan.

Being a Christian – a real Christian – will bring about changes in us.

Adulterers – Exactly what it says.

Men who have sex with men – Some translations have homosexual. The KJV has “nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.” The KJV has two separate meanings because in the Greek it is a compound word, which was common in the Greek.

First off, some will say that the Bible says nothing of homosexuality because the words is not found in the Bible. Correct, however, the word homosexual did not exist, but the compound word used is arsenokoites – (ar-sen-ok-oy'-tace).

Some claim that this word was used to denote a man who had a young male lover. It is true that the words would be used in that context in some ancient Greek writings, but it was not used exclusively in that manner.

The word is a combination of male and bed. Literally – a man who lies in bed with another man.

So, was Paul ignoring same sex relationships between women? No, he was writing in this particular instance to men who were taking other men to court for frivolous matter. So he uses the example of men to make his point.

Your sin of not having the mind of Christ, you sin of perverting justice, is like a sin of laying with another man.

Now don't go thinking that Paul is putting that sin above any others. He wasn't. Let's continue.

6:10 – nor *thieves* nor the *greedy* nor *drunkards* nor *slanderers* nor *swindlers* will inherit the kingdom of God.

Thieves – From klepto. A thief.

Greedy – Let's not think we've escaped this list. The Greek word – (pleh-on-ek'-tace) – literally meant 'one desirous of having more.'

According to Paul, and the Bible, when we feel unsatisfied with what we have, it is a spiritual problem.

Drunkards – Just as it says.

Slanderers – Some translations have revilers or 'are' abusive. Revile means to 'criticize in an abusive or angrily insulting manner.' That's the meaning of the Greek word.

When we insult others, we are guilty of sin equal to the sins we most revile.

Swindlers – Someone who was aggressively greedy, going after other people’s money.

V. 11 – And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

“That’s what some of you were.” Which one’s? Probably all of them fell into one or more of those sins. Doesn’t matter who fell into which one, they were less than holy.

They were:

Sanctified – Consecrated. Made holy. Set apart for God.

Justified – declared righteous. We usually think of justification first, then sanctification. The syntax of the Greek was much different, and being made right comes first, and sanctification is then a continual process.

Both justification and sanctification take place through the Holy Spirit. We cannot be right with God, not used by God, without the Holy Spirit.

Christian teaching about God’s grace can create some questions for believers, especially new believers as those in Corinth were. Questions about what is and what is not acceptable behavior. On one hand, Scripture tells us (Paul tells us) that Christians are not subject to the law. We’re free to eat what we want. We’re free to not observe ancient festivals and holidays.

Plus, if we are in Christ we are washed of our sin and declared righteous, justified. We are saved. So, why not continue to do what we want?

6:12 – “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

Quotation mark weren’t used in the ancient Greek. They are put in to show that Paul was using a common expression, perhaps quoting some from Corinth. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. For those who have been justified and sanctified, even sin cannot separate us. If that is so, why not keep on sinning.

Because sin is not beneficial to us.

Christian liberty is not an excuse for poor behaviors or attitudes.

Whether or not a certain behavior will send me to hell is not the question a Christian needs to ask. The question we need to ask is – will my behavior help me, or help others?

6:13 – You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Again, Paul may be quoting an argument from some of the Corinthians. Some scholars call this the Libertine party. He’s addressing sexual immorality. The Corinthians were saying – hey the stomach is made for food, so I give it food. Likewise, we were created for sexual relations so what harm?

Besides that, Christians weren’t bound by the Old Testament food laws, so why be bound by the Old Testament sexual purity laws?

In Paul’s response Paul is saying – the stomach and food are temporary, and God will destroy them both. In other words, we will all die and we all stop eating. Feeding our stomachs is not the ultimate purpose of who we are.

Then Paul elevates the importance of our bodies. The body is more than the stomach and more than sexual organs. The bodies of those who serve Jesus are meant for a greater purpose. Indeed, our bodies are meant for the Lord.

Even more amazing than that – the Lord is meant for our body! The body is where Christ wants to dwell.

To emphasize the glorious state we are called to live in, Paul adds ...

6:14 – By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

Paul now explains the closeness of this mystical union between our bodies and Christ. He is still addressing sexual immorality. His understanding is rooted in the union between a husband and wife, of which both Genesis and Jesus said that they become one flesh. He quotes Genesis 2:24 in verse 16.

6:15 – Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

God’s idea of human sexual relationships was not just for procreation. Sexual relationships are for more than fulfilling sexual appetites. In God’s plan they also serve to unite two people together as one. There is supposed to be a spiritual element to sexual relationships.

Like a husband and wife who share a spiritual connection, Christians are supposed to share a spiritual connection with Christ.

6:18 – Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.

We were born into and grew up in a world heavily influenced by Judeo Christian morals. Such morals were foreign to the Greeks. In the ancient world of the Greeks, prostitution, adultery, homosexuality were normalized, accepted. So, these new Pagan converts had trouble seeing such practices as any big deal.

The strategy for dealing with such sin was to flee from it! The word that we translate as flee can mean that, but it also means to shun it.

According to this verse, sexual sin is different from other kinds of sin because it – in a very spiritual way – inflicts self-harm. The effects of sexual sin are spiritual, as well as physical.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul referred to the entire Christian community as God’s temple. Here, every member has that distinction.

6:19 – Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

So, the idea that what we do with our bodies doesn't really matter is false. Our bodies is where the Holy Spirit resides. Our bodies are temples – holy places.

Besides that, Paul adds that these are not really our bodies anyway. They were purchased away from sin into the redeeming power of God.

Chapter 7

It is obvious through a careful reading of the text that the Corinthians had written Paul with questions. In 7:1 he mentions a letter from them. In other places he simply writes, 'now concerning.' This indicates that he is responding to their questions.

In chapter 7 he is responding to some questions about marriage and celibacy, which would naturally come after a section about sexual immorality.

Verse 1 is translated in various ways –

7:1 (NRSV) – Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.”

To touch a woman was an Old Testament euphemism for sexual relations.

7:1 (NIV) – Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”

So, here Paul is quoting from their letter. Obviously some in Corinth were advocating celibacy. And now we have Paul's response.

7:2 – But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

Obviously, with most of the Corinthians Christians coming from a Pagan background, celibacy wasn't working out too well for them!

Some translations simply have 'have' instead of 'have sexual relations.' Again, what he was speaking of was implied.

Paul is speaking about marriage as God's plan for the place of sexual relationships.

So, this verse is saying – since sexual relations are happening outside of your marriages, you should be having sexual relations with your wives, and wives with your husbands.

7:3 – The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

This verse stands in complete opposite of the statement proposed by some of the Corinthians. They said – “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” Paul says – married people should be having sexual relations with each other.

Otherwise, the temptation for sexual immorality would be too great.

Now, just as people think Paul only says that a woman should submit to her husband (he doesn't. In Ephesians he says they should submit to one another), here he talks of an equality between husbands and wives.

7:4 – The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

This was then, and is now, radical stuff! In those days, and in some cultures even today, a wife's body was thought to be the property of her husband. Indeed, in some cultures men weren't capable of committing adultery, only women.

That's why when Jesus encountered the woman caught in adultery in John 8, no mention is made of the man by the people who accused her.

But in Christian thought, both the husband and wife are so closely connected in marriage (spiritually, not just physically), that they become one person (Genesis 2:24). Therefore, as one, they have mutual authority over each other's bodies. This is mutual submission.

This is radical in our modern American culture, as well. There are many who would reject the suggestion that a woman – or man – does not have absolute autonomy over their own body. First off, in the previous chapter we were told that they aren't even our bodies, they belong to God. Here, husband and wife have mutual control over one another.

Marriage, in Christian thought, is supposed to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the redeemed. In the church, the redeemed surrender to Jesus. In marriage, a husband and wife surrender to one another.

For religious purposes, the Jews and some pagan cults, believed that sexual intercourse brought ritual impurity upon a person. In the following verse, Paul addresses that thought.

7:5 – Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

New Testament love is defined by self-sacrifice, neither spouse has the justification to force themselves upon the other. That's what this verse tells us, but it also tells us that neither is justified in withholding sex completely.

In marriage, both husbands and wives should be motivated by love and respect for one another.

7:6 – I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷ I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Verse 6 has been debated – does it qualify the verses before it or the verse after? Many believe that verse six is prefacing his remarks in verse seven.

“I wish that all of you were as I am.” – Just how was Paul? Paul was apparently unmarried and celibate. He saw – at least in his life – that the absence of a need for marriage and sex was a gift.

In the following verses, Paul will describe the advantages of singleness for those who are in Christ.

It is important to note that Paul calls this a gift, but as he will explain in chapters 12 & 13, possessing one gift does not make one better or holier than the one who possess another gift.

7:8 – Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

In verse eight, Paul is not saying it is preferred or not preferred, only that it is good. In other words, if they are fine with it, then it's fine.

In verse nine, most modern translations have added ‘with passion’ on the end because some were interpreting that the burning Paul wrote about was hellfire. Not so. The word meant burn with desire, but is translated as burn, so passion or desire has been added.

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

Paul says that this is from the Lord. He was familiar with the teachings of Jesus, even though the gospels had not been written. Also, from Acts and from what we will read in 2 Corinthians, we know that he encountered Jesus more than once.

Jesus' teaching, as recorded in the gospels include un-chastity as grounds for divorce.

Do note, that this is not just a command to wives, but to husbands, and it was usually husbands who did the divorcing. In fact, it was always the husband except in the case of the very rich or politically connected. So, in the context of their day, Paul was lifting the place of women up yet again by commanding husbands not to divorce their wives.

But as we consider these difficult verses about divorce – keep in mind the context. Paul is answering questions. Questions about celibacy in marriage, and about sexual relations in marriage. The divorces he is writing about were most likely happening in the Corinthian church because one partner wanted celibacy and the other did not. This is the context. This is probably why Paul does not mention ‘except for un-chastity.’

Faithfulness in marriage was not the issue, the issue was sexual relations, or lack thereof, in a marriage.

7:12 – To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

Again, context. Pagans were converting to Christianity, but sometimes just a husband or just a wife would convert. This caused some concern. What do I do about my pagan husband, or my pagan wife? They aren’t living with the same moral constraints that I am living under. What do I do?

Note what it says and what it does not say. If the unbelieving spouse is willing, then they must not divorce. What if they were unwilling? Paul will address this in verse 15, so don’t take this verse out of context.

7:14 – For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

This verse has caused a lot of debate over the centuries, but again, consider the context. Pagans are converting, and often one spouse would convert and the other had not or would not. When we consider context, we cannot overlook verse 16, which we will get to in a minute.

Paul is saying that the believer is not stained or made unholy by the unbelieving spouse. They are made holy in the sense that they are one with their spouse, and their spouse is holy.

Likewise their children are not unclean because they have a holy, set apart, parent. Now, we don't have Paul to quiz. If so, we would ask when do the children become accountable? But, we will have to use reason and prayer for that answer.

This is not saying that the spouse has somehow become saved. Salvation cannot be borrowed, inherited, or willed to another.

So, did Paul say that divorce was out of the question? Consider the next verse.

7:15 – But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is *not bound* in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

This is a verse of some debate, obviously. Paul says that the brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances. Bound to what? Bound to the marriage? That is what it seems to be saying.

Some believe this to even be saying that the brother or sister is not bound to remain single after the marriage is ended.

But does add a hopeful note, however.

7:16 – How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Perhaps the Christian spouse can lead the other to accept the gift of salvation. Paul doesn't make the promise that it would happen, but that it would be possible.

Having talked about marriages between believing and unbelieving spouses, Paul now moves into other areas of life.

1 Corinthians 7:17 – Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

Don't read this as Paul saying that no one needs to better themselves. This verse and the following verses can lead to this interpretation. Keep in mind that Paul believed, as did the first Christians, that Jesus' return was coming in their lifetime.

What we can learn from this is that God can use us in whatever station in life that we are. In fact, we don't even need to change all of our relationships. Perhaps, there are some we should, but maybe not. Maybe God wants to use us in the situation or relationship that we are in. We find that answer through prayer.

The first opportunities for discipleship, service, and obedience are right where we are.

Expanding on the idea that they should stay in whatever situation that they were in, Paul adds some verses that may seem strange and out of place, perhaps better suited for Galatians.

7:18 – Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.

If you were with us when we studied Galatians, you know that circumcision was a point of debate amongst the Jewish Christian leaders. Some were angry at Paul for his stance that non-circumcised men need not become circumcised. He reiterates his stance here.

But what about uncircumcision? Yes, it was really a thing 2,000 years ago. It came about because of the tension between the Roman and Jewish culture. Roman culture often included public baths, or competing in the nude at sporting events. In such a situation, men could not very well avoid the judgments of others.

In a way, these verses relate to the modern term body shaming. Paul says for them to stay as they were, regardless of what others think.

7:19 – Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. ²⁰ Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Keeping God’s commands is what counts. Wait a minute, Paul. Weren’t there over 600 of those laws in the Old Testament, and wasn’t circumcision one of them?

Paul is referring to the commands of Jesus.

John 15:12 – “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

1 John 4:21 – And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

We’ve talked a little in the past about slavery in the Roman world, but before we go on, let’s explore it a little more in depth. Modern use of the term slavery brings up images of racism, chains, kidnapping, and abuse. In the ancient world, however, the concept included a much wider range of ideas – ideas like service, obligation, debt.

Don’t get me wrong, it could still be a hard life, but differed greatly from north American slavery. In the Roman world, many slaves had sold themselves into slavery. With starvation as a leading cause of death, three meals and a place to sleep wasn’t a bad deal. It was also a way to pay off debts.

Slaves weren’t confined to a particular farm and watched over by guards, as we think of in America. Others were born into slavery, and some were, indeed, brought into slavery from other countries who had lost a war to Rome.

Many slaves were trusted, and some even served in professions such as a doctor or an accountant.

Slavery was a fact of life in the Roman world. It is estimated that over half of the people who lived in the Roman Empire were slaves. In Corinth during the days of Paul, over a third were slaves, and over a third were former slaves. Many former slaves, while legally free, continued to work for their former masters alongside of others who were still slaves.

Nonetheless, slaves were classified as property and had limited rights. Former slaves had more rights than slaves, yet less rights than Roman citizens.

Early Christianity was socially and religiously unique in that it recognized slaves, women, and all ethnicities as full and equal persons. Also, unique to Christianity was the claim that all people, without exception, were loved by God and invited into the kingdom of God. As a result, the early church consisted of many slaves, women, and ethnic minorities.

7:21 – Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

Some say that Paul is being ambiguous about slavery. Don't let it trouble you, but if you can gain your freedom then do so.

When Paul says, 'Don't let it trouble you,' he is talking about their social status. Social status is nothing Christians should care about. If we are in Christ, if we are brothers and sister in Christ, then don't let your position in life bother you.

God wants to use each of us where we are in life. However, if we are able to better our situation in life, then by all means do so.

7:22 – For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

How can we be the Lord's freed person and the Lord's slave at the same time?

We are freed from slavery – from slavery to sin.
We are slaves to Christ and his righteousness.

Romans 6:17 – But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Romans 6:22 – But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Not slavery to rules and laws, however.

Galatians 5:1 – It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

The Apostle Peter wrote:

2 Peter 2:19 – people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.

This is our human condition. Addiction is slavery. Many people are enslaved to certain behaviors. Sin is slavery.

Only the Spirit of God gives us the power to break free from the chains of slavery. Therefore, if we will be a slave to whatever masters us, let us be slaves for righteousness, for God.

7:23 – You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.

Some believe that Paul is speaking to those who would sell themselves into slavery for the sake of paying off debt, therefore is speaking about debt. Good advice, but probably not what he is writing about here.

Taken in its context, it is most likely that Paul is repeating the idea that God is our true master. We should not let the ideas or teachings of others enslave us. Remember the whole ‘I belong to Apollos or I belong to Paul’ verses. We all belong to God.

7:24 – Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Keep in mind that Paul believed that Jesus was to return at any time. Therefore, don't go changing a whole lot of things, because there isn't the time.

But there is a lesson here for us. Our status in life does not affect our relationship with God. God is the same, and makes the Spirit available, to anyone in any station or situation in life. We don't need to change any of that in order to experience God more completely.

7:25 – Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

I'm reading from the NIV. The ESV has, 'about the betrothed.' The actual Greek does read as virgins. In the Scriptures, the word virgin is often used to describe young, unmarried women. The context here, however, indicates that Paul is writing about young men engaged to young women.

7:26 – Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

There's always been debate as to what Paul is referring to when he writes about the present crisis, or present distress. Some say it points to some localized persecution that they were facing.

Most, however, believe that it refers back to Paul's thoughts about the return of Jesus, and the end of the age.

Why are not the women addressed in verse 27? Keep in mind, that marriages were often arranged. Most women didn't go looking for a husband.

7:29 – What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

This can be a confusing passage. First of all, Paul just wrote about the relationships between husbands and wives, and now he says those who are married should live as they are not. What is going on here?

To understand this, let's consider the word we translate as time in verse 29. The Greek word usually used for time was kronos. If one were to ask what time is it, they would have used kronos. That is not the word that is used here.

The words used for time here is kahee-ros', which meant an opportunity, or a season. In our modern language we might say something like, 'the time is now!', or 'the time is right.'

Basically, Paul is saying that Christians should have a single minded devotion to the things of God and not on worldly affairs. The world and all that is in it is transient, but the things of God are what will last.

Consider again the last of this passage: those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

Paul knows that concerns of family, marriage, work, life in general, often pull us away from the things of God.

He continue this thought in the following verses.

7:32 – I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Don’t forget the context. Many of these married pagan converts to Christianity were married to a spouse who had not converted. This was stressful on the marriage. With such a stressful marriage, it would be difficult to serve the Lord.

Unfortunately, serving the Lord is still a point of contention between many spouses today. One spouse thinks the other spouse spends too much time serving in some capacity with their church.

Paul did not want to restrict them from marriage (verse 35) but he did want them to be able to give their undivided devotion to the Lord.

What are the things in our lives that prevent us from giving our undivided attention to the Lord. This is not saying that parenting, working, being in a relationship keep us from giving our attention to the Lord.

Indeed, Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5 to have the same mindset as Christ in our relationships. So, in those relationships, what are the things that keep us from doing that? This is at the core of what Paul is saying in this passage to the Corinthians.

The next verse, 36, has been interpreted two different ways over the years. Some older translations have it as if Paul were writing to Fathers about their daughters. Taken in the context of what we already have, it is most likely that he is talking to men who are engaged or betrothed to be married.

7:36 – If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. ³⁷ But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. ³⁸ So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

The Corinthians, like Paul, were living under the assumption that Jesus' return was imminent. Some of them were wondering – why get married if this was the situation. Paul puts their minds at ease by telling them being single is fine. Being married is fine.

Paul finishes this long section about whether unmarried people should marry by addressing one more group – widows.

7:39 – A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. ⁴⁰ In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

In almost all cases, under normal circumstances, only death should end Christian marriage. Here, he is addressing widows. We know that the early church took special care of their widows, and a question may have been posed to Paul about the widows.

Paul writes that the widows are free to marry, but only to one in the Lord. So, remember he had addressed Christians married to an unbelieving spouse. That happened because pagans were converting to Christianity, but often not both spouses. We can infer from this teaching towards the widows that when a Christian chooses to marry, they should marry a Christian.

In the culture of his day, widows were in a different position in life than were the young women, referred to as virgins in some translations. Unlike the young women, widows were not under the authority of their fathers, therefore, as Paul states in verse 39, they were free to marry anyone they chose.

Writing to the unmarried in general, Paul would write in **2 Corinthians 6:14** – Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

Verse 40 echoes Paul's words earlier when he stated that he wished all could be as he was – unburdened with the worries of marriage. As he stated before he does so here, as well, that this was his opinion.

Chapter 8

Remember, as we move through 1 Corinthians, or most of Paul's letters for that matter, we are reading Paul's answers to either questions from the Corinthians, or problems reported to Paul from certain Corinthians.

One of those problems or concerns that they had brought to Paul's attention was the matter of eating meat that had been offered up to an idol.

This seems rather strange to us, certainly this is not something that you and I will have to deal with in our culture, so why bother studying it? We study it because there are some very important principles laid down in this section.

So, what was the issue? In those days the priests would make their living in the meat markets. This was true for the pagan priests and for Jewish priests, as well. Although, the Jewish priests would often actually have sell theirs to the pagan priests to sell because of Jewish laws pertaining to blood and dead animals.

You see, people would bring their animal to a priest, pagan or Jewish, and the priest would officiate at a sacrifice of that animal. The people would leave the animal, and the priest sold the meat. It's how they made a living.

Some of the new pagan converts were wondering about this. Hey, my family needs some meat, and so and so has some good prices, but I know where those animals came from, so what do we do?

8:1 – Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

It seems as if Paul was quoting something from the Corinthians in verse 1. Maybe they had written him about this whole issue of meat sacrificed to an idol and added something like – hey we know we’re right, we have knowledge just like everyone else.

Paul will write more about love in this letter, and he writes a lot about love in many of his letters. First, however, he says that knowledge puffs up. It certainly can! When someone likes to tell others how smart they are – even if they are smart – they’re puffing themselves up!

Ever hear someone say about someone else – they don’t know half as much as they think they do. Well, Paul says something similar in the next verse.

8:2 – Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

In the world of psychology there is something called the Dunning-Kruger Effect. It applies to people who have a small amount of knowledge about a certain subject yet who have become over confident about how much they really know. Hey, there are plenty of people like that with all subjects, and certainly with matters of Christianity.

Paul is telling them that some in Corinth were this way, they were inflating what they actually knew, basing it on their own wisdom, not on the wisdom of God.

8:3 – But whoever loves God is known by God.

Paul continues to bring love into the discussion of meat offered to idols. Why? It has to do with how we respond to people and their concerns about what might be right or wrong. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul wrote that the truth should always be spoken in love. This is what he is implying here.

8:4 – So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.”

Paul seems to be, as he often does, quoting some Corinthian argument. When he writes that there is no God but one – Paul is referring back to Jewish prayer called the Shema (listen obediently). From Deuteronomy 6.

8:5 – For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”),⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Many gods and many lords – there are, indeed, many things that people worship and subject themselves to. Many things of which we live under their power. Nevertheless, there is only one God and Lord.

While he does not mention the Holy Spirit here – he does in plenty of other places – note how he connects God the Father and Jesus the Lord as one and the same. One God from whom all things came, one Lord from whom all things came.

Remember how Paul kept bringing love into his opening remarks about this subject? It has to do with our attitude towards those weaker in their faith than we might be.

8:7 – But not everyone possesses this knowledge.

What knowledge? The knowledge that idols are nothing, they represent nothing.

8:7 – But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

Strange as it may seem to us in our American culture, the belief in many gods was not a trivial concept in the ancient world. It was for the pagans a fundamental of life. Therefore, many converts to Christianity had been deeply involved in idol worship before their conversion.

Paul is recognizing that it was difficult for newer Christians in that culture to think of idols as imaginary beings. When they were presented with food that had been part of a pagan ceremony, their conscience tells them that they were participating in idolatry. So, when they ate it they were violating their conscience.

8:8 – But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

Food is just a thing. Things are morally indifferent. Paul is not thinking about kosher requirements for the Jews at this point, just food in general. Eating one thing, and not another, in and of itself does not matter to God.

But let us not forget – love.

8:9 – Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

This is an extremely important verse for all Christians to understand. New Christians, or Christians weak in their faith, are like little children. They watch us and see our actions, but they may not fully understand our actions.

For example. I know that many of you enjoy wine or other spirits (I see you on Facebook). If I were to go to a local restaurant and have a beer or a glass of wine with a meal, there is nothing morally wrong with that.

However, if a weak Christian, and in particular one with a proclivity towards alcoholism, sees me drinking alcohol with my meal, then it could be damaging to them.

They could reason – well the preacher was doing it so it must be ok.

One might say – hey, that's not fair, do I really have to be aware of all of my actions and how my innocent actions might be perceived?

YES! That is where the love comes in.

Paul goes on to explain.

8:11 – So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

The careless use of our freedom can become a stumbling block to others. Eating the meat in question was not a sin, but to do so in a way that would cause another to stumble was a sin.

When we sin against others we do sin against Christ. Jesus told us in Matthew 25 that whatever we did or did not do towards others we did and did not do towards Christ.

8:13 – Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Please note what this is and what this is not saying. This is not a call for Christians to be vegetarian. If that is your choice, that's fine, but no one should use this verse as a basis for being a vegetarian.

But do use this verse as a basis to modify our behaviors because we love others – and that is the point.

Last week we concluded at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 8. You may remember that chapter eight dealt with the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. Basically Paul said that an idol wasn't anything real, so it didn't matter.

But, then he wrote about the freedoms we have as a Christian.

1 Corinthians 8:9 – Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Sure, they had the right / freedom to eat that meat, but they should consider how others might perceive it, and how they may be led to worship an idol.

The implication for us is to use caution with our rights and freedoms as a Christian. To remember that our actions may be misinterpreted. So, we should always consider others and act out of love.

Here in chapter nine, Paul writes about the rights he has given up for the sake of the Christian community. To start this section he begins, in verse 1, with several rhetorical questions, which the answer was, of course, yes.

1 Corinthians 9:1 – Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.

Was Paul's apostleship under attack at Corinth at that time? This would certainly be part of the reason and focus behind 2 Corinthians. When we read Paul's letters, he does seem to spend a bit of time defending his position as an apostle, and as a spokesperson for the church/for Jesus.

The truth be told, most pastors of a church of any time could spend time defending themselves. Many people reject the truth, and will reject those who proclaim the truth. Paul was certainly no exception.

And from our study of the early chapters of this letter, we know that some were already divided in their support of different church leaders.

Now, Paul will ask a series of questions about his right as an apostle. He is leading up to the idea that, as a minister of the gospel, and as an apostle, he could ask for support so that he would not have to work outside of ministry to support himself.

Then he will remind them that he has not asked for these things.

The point? - Paul practices what he preaches. Remember, in chapter 8 he asked them to put their rights aside for the good of others, and Paul was already doing that.

9:4 – Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

Paul starts off in verse 4 by asking doesn't he have the right to receive support for food and drink since he is an evangelist. The answer would be, of course, yes.

Verse five mentions other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Seems like a strange order – wasn't Cephas/Peter, an apostle?

First, Other Apostles – This includes a larger group than twelve. In the Book of Acts, an apostle referred to anyone who had seen the resurrected Jesus. Some of those called apostles in the New Testament include: Barnabas; Apollos; Timothy; Sivanus, and even Epaphroditus (who founded the church in Colossae).

So, Paul starts with a generalization, then sort of climbs the ladder of importance. Next would be the Lord's brothers. Who were the brothers of Jesus?

Mark 6:3 – Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph/Joses, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Cephas, or Peter, was certainly an apostle, but is mentioned last in verse 5 because of his stature, especially so in Corinth.

We know Peter was married because in Mark 1, Jesus healed his mother in law.

What verse five tells us is that early church leaders were paid, or compensated, in some manner.

In verse six Paul mentions Barnabas as the other one who did not receive compensation. He is including Barnabas as an apostle.

Acts 14:14 – But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd ...

Now Paul offers some arguments in defense of his right.

9:7 – Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?

Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4. In other words, while the ox is working, let it feed from the fruit of its labor.

Did God not care about oxen? Of course God does. The implication seems to be from Paul, if God cares for the well-being of oxen, how much more God must care for us, which is what Paul seems to say next.

9:10 – Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

Both the plowman and the oxen do their work so that they can share in the harvest. It is the same for all who labor. And, by implication, Paul had labored amongst the Corinthians.

Keep in mind, this comes following the section where Paul spoke about giving up their rights to eat the meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. So, the bigger picture is giving up our rights for the greater good of the church.

9:11 – If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

There may have been talk amongst the Corinthian Christians – as Christian communities have often done – that Paul/an evangelist was only after money. Paul's argument is that he sacrificed for the betterment of the Christian community.

The end of verse twelve is powerful, and begs a question: we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

The question – what are we willing to put up with for the sake of the gospel?

Paul is not saying that those who did receive compensation were wrong, in fact he clarifies that in the following verses.

9:13 – Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

Remember last week I spoke about how even the Jewish priests made their living off of what was being brought for sacrifice. The justification and call for this is found in Numbers 18 and Deuteronomy 18.

Deuteronomy 18:1 – The Levitical priests—indeed, the whole tribe of Levi—are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the food offerings presented to the LORD, for that is their inheritance.

And it wasn't just from the meat that they made their living.

Deuteronomy 18:4 – You are to give them the first fruits of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep.

Ultimately, for Paul, Jesus was the final authority.

9:14 – In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

The Lord has commanded. Keep in mind that the gospels had not yet been written. So, how did Paul know the essence of what Jesus said several places, including what would become known as **Luke 10:7** – Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.

How? Well, Paul had spent time with people who had known and traveled with Jesus, including Peter and other disciples.

Also, from Scripture we know that Paul encountered Jesus at least three times.

The Damascus road as recorded in Acts 9, 22 & 26.

The Temple trance as recorded in Acts 22.

Paul's vision in prison recorded in Acts 23:11.

These are what was written down. So, it could be very possible that Paul encountered Jesus other times, as well.

9:15 – But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast.

Is Paul glorifying himself? Is he being prideful?

No, as the following verses will show, Paul feels free to boast about preaching the gospel without payment because that is the only thing that he can actually offer up. He was compelled to preach, but not compelled to do so without compensation. So, that was his offering.

Do you get excited about your offering to the Lord?

9:16 – For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

Paul did not preach as a volunteer, he was a servant of the Lord. Remembering his words from 1 Corinthians 7:22, Paul was Christ's slave.

9:18 – What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

This is not an arrogant, self-serving boast. It is a joyful claim that he is sacrificing something that he is not required to give. God did not command Paul to turn down compensation for his ministry. In fact, he showed that God expects ministers of the gospel to be compensated.

Paul does so willingly and that in itself is its own reward.

Do we willingly sacrifice, and derive joy from our sacrifice?

The following verses are well known, but often people forget the context. That context is what are we willing to joyfully give up / sacrifice for the Lord.

If you haven't already picked up – you will here. Freedom and slavery are two key words for Paul.

9:19 – Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

What an example of love. He belongs to no one but voluntarily serves all others as a slave in the prayerful hope to win them to Christ.

9:20 – To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

Does this mean that Paul pretended it was necessary to follow the law to be saved when he was around people with those beliefs? No, but it does mean that Paul continued to participate in worship in the synagogues while preaching Christ there.

He continued to voluntarily submit to some Jewish customs and traditions. He did this without altering the gospel message that faith in Christ is the only way to be right with God.

Paul could have opted out of participation with the Jewish religious system. He was free from it. Instead, he remained involved without compromising the gospel. So, he was sacrificing his own rights and freedoms – which is the point of this entire chapter so far.

9:21 – To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

How did Paul live outside of the law? First, by simply living with Gentiles. By eating their foods. By working alongside of them. In Philippians 3 Paul said that he has been a Hebrew of Hebrews. For such a person to live outside of the law showed a tremendous amount of faith in the Grace of God, and showed the sincerity of Paul's teachings.

Yet, Paul adds that he was still under the authority of Christ. That law would have been the law of self-sacrificing love for God and for others.

Jesus said in **Mark 12:30** – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

You and I are called to be under this same law. So, in the context of chapter 8 and 9, that law would tell us that it is more important to consider the needs of others than to demand whatever we think we are entitled to.

9:22 – To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.

Who were the weak? Context! This ties in with his remarks made in chapter 8.

1 Corinthians 8:9 – Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

9:22 – To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

For the sake of the gospel. Paul is clear about his motivation. He exists to serve God by serving the mission of Christ – to win as many as possible.

Paul places greater value on the mission of Christ than he does on his personal rights.

He does mention one benefit— sharing in the blessings of the gospel with those who believe. Paul was not doubting his salvation by saying that I may share in its blessings. He knew that faith in Jesus was the key to salvation.

Just the fact that he could rejoice with others in God's great gift was his reward.

Paul now launches into the use of some sports metaphors. Remember, context. This chapter has been about the sacrifices we make, setting aside our freedoms for the sake of Jesus Christ. Using the following metaphors, Paul's emphasis is the discipline of sacrifice.

Do we have a discipline of sacrifice?

9:24 – Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

The Isthmian games were held every two years in Corinth (the year before and the year after the Olympics). So, the Corinthians would have been well familiar with these metaphors.

Verse 27 seems odd to us. Why would he be striking a blow to his own body?

The KJV reads – But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.

The NRSV read – but I punish my body and enslave it.

The ESV reads – But I discipline my body and keep it under control.

The ESV may be the best into English. The Greek word we translate as striking a blow – punish – discipline is *hupópiázó* (hoop-o-pee-ad'-zo) and while technically it meant to give a black eye, it was used as an euphemism for self-discipline.

We don't make use of it as an euphemism anymore, so it seems strange to us.

So, Paul is talking about self-discipline and self-control in his discipleship. It is only through self-discipline (which is a fruit of the Spirit) that we will be able to make the sacrifices that we need to make.

Chapter 10

Paul now gives a warning to the Christians in Corinth. The God who disciplined the Israelites in the wilderness for their sin is also their God. Paul will warn them about the possibility of being disciplined by God, especially for the sin of idol worship and sexual immorality.

10:1 – For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

Paul begins this section by pointing out the blessings the Israelites received. When Paul says that they were all under the cloud, he is referring to the guidance that the Israelites received.

Exodus 13:21 – By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

Paul also mentioned the passing of Israel through the Red Sea upon dry ground. Both of these signified God's direction for and leadership of the people.

For you and I, we don't have the cloud but we do have the Holy Spirit.

10:2 – They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

What does it mean that they were baptized into Moses?

Paul is talking in a spiritual sense here.

The Israelites were able to leave Egypt because of Moses, who was the mediator between God and the Israelites. In other words, if not for Moses, none of them would have ever escaped Egypt.

Therefore, their escape, indeed, their lives, were tied to Moses. They got out of Egypt because Moses got out of Egypt.

The idea of the baptism is this – Moses provided the escape from slavery to Egypt. In the Christian world, Jesus provides the escape from slavery to sin and death. We escape sin and death because Jesus escaped sin and death.

Paul just talked about baptism in a spiritual manner. Now, the spiritual link is made with communion.

10:3 – They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

The spiritual food for the Israelites refers to the manna, which is found in Exodus 16. Their spiritual drink was the water that flowed from the rock, found in Exodus 17. Paul identifies that rock as Christ. Again, we are reading something spiritual here.

The Father and the Son are one (along with the Holy Spirit), therefore as God/Christ/Spirit provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, so does Christ/God/Holy Spirit provide for us now.

Paul has tied together in a spiritual way our sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism to the experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness. Now he gives a word of caution.

10:5 – Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Just as the ancient example of Communion and baptism did not save the Israelites from punishment for disobedience, neither will Holy Communion or Baptism save us.

10:6 – Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.”

Paul warns them to take seriously the example of the Israelites. It seems that the Corinthians misunderstood something many Christians still misunderstand today. Our freedom in Christ – the freedom from following the Old Testament laws – does not mean that we are free to indulge in sinful desires without fear of consequence.

Paul’s quote from Exodus 32 refers to the famous story of the golden calf. Remember that thousands died as a consequence of their idolatry.

Paul is making a point that God still takes sin seriously. He continues with Old Testament examples.

10:8 – We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousands of them died.

The example here comes from the Book of Numbers 25, when the Israelite men indulged in sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab as part of their worship of Moab gods.

Idol worship in Scripture was often associated with sexual immorality. In Numbers 25, the sexual acts were a part of the idol worship, and such was the case for many pagans in Corinth, which most of the Christians there had been.

Like in the Book of Numbers, Paul warns them that God could step in again and discipline the people.

10:9 – We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.

This is referring to the story of the bronze serpent from Numbers 21. The people were questioning God and questioning Moses’ authority. Just as God disciplined the Israelites for sexual immorality and for idolatry, he disciplined them for not listening to the one God appointed to lead them.

Closely related to not listening to the one who was to lead them was grumbling about their spiritual leadership.

10:10 – And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

Again, this referees back to the Book of Numbers. Was there grumbling in Corinth over Paul’s leadership. Certainly, unfortunately, grumbling has been a part of the church since its beginning.

We must be careful about our grumbling. Not just in the church, but in all of life. Grumbling is often not more than gossiping. Paul speaks often about the sin of gossiping.

Jesus spoke about it, as well.

Matthew 12:36 – But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

10:11 – These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!

Paul maintains that if we continue to sin – and in this context refusing to live sacrificially is sin – if we continue to sin we may fall. Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines those that God loves.

And sin is unavoidable. That’s what the next verse tells us.

10:13 – No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Some translations have trials instead of temptations. The Greek word could mean either one. Temptation is probably the best for this context.

This verse is telling us that temptation is part of life. Consequently, unfortunately, our desire to what is godly is not as strong as our desire to sin. The Good News is that overcoming any temptation is possible.

None of us are uniquely tempted. As Paul says, our temptations are common among people.

Yet, even when we are tempted God is faithful. In other words, even when we are tempted God still loves us and because God loves us God will provide a way of escape.

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Ephesians 6:10 – Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Armor of God).

2 Timothy 1:7 – The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.